

ANNOTATION:

Report on a private foundation pre-sentencing Family Group Conferencing program for juveniles who have pled guilty and/or been found guilty of offenses including vandalism, assaults, armed robbery, arson and drug-related problems. Conferencing was an elective option for the referred youth rather than being mandatory.

DIVERSION: Net widening was avoided through the placement of the program within the justice system sequence: all of the conference-referred cases would ordinarily receive a sentence from the court, most likely including at least probation if not more extensive sanctions. 77% of the cases that were conferenced were placed instead on a good behavior bond as a result of the conference agreements, resulting in a high rate of immediate diversion from further penetration into the system.

RECIDIVISM: two separate studies examined recidivism issues in the program.

(1) a sample of 71 conferenced cases were followed for 12 months after conference and compared to a similar sample of probation cases. There were no significant differences in the rate of re-offense for these two groups.

(2) In comparison to a sample of 100 probation youths, 37% of the probation youths received “further sentencing orders for re-offending” compared to 21% of the conferenced youths.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT: attendance by professionals and other community members at conferences averaged 4.9 persons per conference, including school teachers, counselors, youth workers and other community professionals already connected to the family in some way, in addition to the mandated attendance of the police informant and the youth’s legal representative. Many of these persons chose to become the “key person” in providing support to the youth as a follow up to the conference plan.

COST was determined to be similar to the cost of already existing dispositions.