

REENTRY OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES: A PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Topic

In this brief video, Meri Viano, consultant for Justice for Families, provides tips for planning and supporting youth with disabilities and families with community re-entry following incarceration.

Relevance of Topic to System-Involved Youth

Meaningful family engagement benefits everyone involved with the juvenile justice system. When families are engaged in revising policies and practices in juvenile justice and related systems, there are several positive results for youth, families, and the community. For example, youth and families are more likely to engage and remain engaged in services, and youth are less likely to participate in future criminal behavior leading to incarceration. When families are engaged, staff report feeling happier and more satisfied with their jobs and are less likely to leave the job due to high stress (burnout).

Relevance to Youth with Disabilities

Youth with disabilities are at greater risk of involvement with the juvenile justice system and are less likely to have their needs met by the system. Family engagement has benefits for all young people but is especially important for youth with disabilities (YWD). Families are able to support YWD with advocating for their needs, and this leads to fewer YWD being placed in care outside their homes. Family engagement also helps reduce harm and trauma for those in systems settings and leads to less restrictive treatment settings for youth. When families are engaged, youth involved with the justice system are more likely to successfully re-enter the community following incarceration.

Recommendations for Creating Systems Change

- Assess the degree to which policies, programs, and practices effectively engage families.
- Work across systems within your community to ensure that youth leaving detention or other forms of placement have identification, medical records, school records and other documents necessary for successfully navigating life in the community.
- Provide initial and on-going information to families about specific techniques and structures. This information can include daily schedules, communication tools, emotional regulation tools, and other effective strategies used in the facility. Information about how to use these strategies in the home and community setting should also be provided.
- Collaborate closely with school systems to ensure appropriate credit transfer, credit recovery and other school-based supports that youth will need for successful reentry into the school setting.
- Work specifically on a trauma-informed stress management plan for families, so that they will learn to recognize and respond to trauma triggers and responses without calling upon law-enforcement.
- Consider developing a respite program so that youth and families have a safe mechanism for breaks and re-grouping when challenging issues arise.
- Fully engage families and young people in co-creating transition plans and conditions of probation or aftercare.





Learn More

Justice for Families- [Families Unlocking Futures Report](#)

Juvenile Justice Information Exchange: [Key Issues: Re-Entry](#)

Youth Re-Entry Task Force of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Coalition: [Back on Track: Supporting Youth Re-Entry](#)

Presenter Information

Meredith (Meri) Viano is a consultant for Justice for Families (J4F), a national organization committed to ending the youth incarceration epidemic. J4F is founded and run by parents and families who have experienced the juvenile justice system with their children. As a parent of young adults with developmental and mental health disabilities, Meri supports families through leadership, training and advocacy. Meri's areas of expertise include mental health policy, LGBTQ policy, working with police departments and family- and youth-driven voice and advocacy across multiple systems. To learn more about Meri and J4F, go to [Justice for Families website](#)

