FAMILY-ENGAGED

CASE PLANNING

A Practice Guide for Transforming Juvenile Probation

THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children and youth by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

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FAMILY-ENGAGED CASE PLANNING

This practice guide helps juvenile justice agencies institute family-engaged case planning, a new model for the initial stage of the juvenile probation process that significantly improves the odds of young people succeeding on probation and beyond.[1] Family-engaged case planning, a major departure from standard probation practice in most jurisdictions, is a significant part of the Annie E. Casey Foundation's larger vision for transforming juvenile probation.[2] Probation agencies that successfully implement the model reposition probation officers from "fixers" of delinquent youth to experts on youth development who work in partnership with young people and their families and communities to achieve long-term success.

Under this case planning model, the probation officer conducts early and intensive activities to build relationships with the young person on probation and the family members and other supportive adults in the young person's life. Probation officers, who regard family members as experts on their own children, recognize the skills and assets that families possess and treat them as essential partners in forging the probation plan.

By making it their priority to engage, inform and solicit input from families, and by focusing the probation plan on goals that young people and their families believe are important, probation officers demonstrate early on that probation's purpose is to foster young people's success. Probation officers then dedicate themselves to promoting youth development — including strengthening basic support and opportunities that include access to positive role models, healthy recreational outlets and constructive activities — and addressing young people's treatment needs. The goal is to have a positive influence on youth, the likely reason probation officers initially chose their profession, rather than days centered around surveillance, compliance monitoring and paperwork.

This new model and the Foundation's larger vision for transforming juvenile probation are necessary to align probation with powerful evidence[3] that has emerged about adolescent behavior and brain development and about what works[4] to address delinquent conduct.

The experience of sites in the Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative® (JDAI®)[5] and elsewhere has shown that case planning can sometimes amount to no more than court-ordered conditions reiterated in a case planning document. While many jurisdictions have begun to center the case planning process around the findings of risk and needs assessment instruments, this approach often relegates the interests and strengths of youth and the wishes of families to secondary tasks.

A DISCONNECT BETWEEN FAMILIES AND JUVENILE JUSTICE AUTHORITIES: ONE PARENT'S PERSPECTIVE

"The pervasive culture of blame and shame that families often encounter in juvenile justice systems creates another significant barrier to family partnership. Rather than viewing families as partners, too often system staff view families of youth in trouble as being inherently dysfunctional and operate out of two-dimensional understandings of the realities of these families' lives. This bodes ill for any kind of respectful collaboration."[6]

— Liane Rozzell, *The Role of Family Engagement in Creating Trauma-Informed Juvenile Justice Systems*

Under this new model, probation officers formulate case plans through a collaborative process with young people and their families. The case plan identifies a limited number of clear and achievable goals that reflect the interests of the young person; aligns with the wishes of the youth's family; and addresses potential barriers to the young person attaining personal growth, positive behavior change and long-term success. The plan is based on strengths and is personalized to the young person's interests and talents, providing tailored opportunities for the young person to build skills and foster connections to positive adults in the community. The plan becomes a road map for the youth and family to understand what is expected, offering milestone markers for measuring progress, celebrating accomplishments in ways that keep the young person motivated and assessing setbacks and adjusting the plan accordingly.

This practice guide is based on the early adoption of family-engaged case planning by New York City and other jurisdictions. The new approach described here requires significant effort and dedication from leaders, supervisors and line staff in juvenile probation agencies and from their colleagues in other juvenile justice agencies. While transformation efforts must be rooted in core values such as racial and ethnic equity and positive youth development, the necessary procedural

UNDERLYING VALUES

OF FAMILY-ENGAGED CASE PLANNING FOR PROBATION TRANSFORMATION

The practices described in this guide are rooted in a set of underlying values.

MISSION CLARITY. The new model assumes that the purpose of probation is to promote long-term personal growth and foster positive behavior change among youth who pose significant risk for serious offending. Successful implementation requires consensus about probation's purpose among the probation agency staff, judges, prosecutors, juvenile defenders and other system partners.

COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIP. Family and community members have a greater and longer-term effect on the young person than any probation officer, given the short-term nature of probation. Young people have difficult circumstances to navigate during and after their term of probation and need a support network beyond what probation can offer. The new model is dependent on probation departments and the juvenile justice system as a whole viewing and treating family members and communities most affected by the system as essential and respected partners at both a case management and system reform level.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN RACE, ETHNICITY, GENDER AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION. It is essential that youth of color, girls and LGBTQ youth — and their families — are treated fairly and respectfully by probation staff and service providers who are trained in and held accountable for issues related to equity and inclusion. Organizational culture needs to foster an open reckoning with the legacy of systemic racism, the distrust of public systems in communities of color and related issues.

RESEARCH-INFORMED AND DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE INTERVENTIONS. The model is premised on:

- probation being limited to youth who pose a significant risk for serious offending without more guidance and support;
- developmentally appropriate interventions being used to encourage positive behavior change, including incentives for good behavior; and
- youth at lower risk for rearrest being diverted from formal system processing.

FOCUS ON RESULTS. Getting probation right means setting clear and meaningful outcome goals for the probation system as a whole and holding probation agencies and their court and community partners accountable for achieving them.

changes must be tailored to the structure and capacity of the local jurisdiction. Success will require extensive and ongoing training on the core elements described in this guide.

Implementing family-engaged case planning and pursuing the larger probation transformation agenda require hard work. However, these changes are necessary for any jurisdiction seeking to follow the evidence[7] and achieve the best outcomes for young people, their families and communities. With this guide, the Foundation hopes to encourage local juvenile probation agencies to develop and implement new case planning procedures that will help propel a transformed system of juvenile probation.

This overview of the critical ingredients for successfully implementing family-engaged case planning begins with a summary of the Foundation's vision for transforming juvenile probation, highlighting the relationship between case planning reforms and the other elements of the probation transformation agenda. Section two explains the importance of strengthening probation agencies' efforts to engage and partner with families. The third section presents the core elements of the family-engaged case planning model. The final section spells out ways of adapting family-engaged case planning to the culture and customs of the local jurisdiction.

The Foundation's Vision for Getting Probation Right

Transforming Juvenile Probation: A Vision for Getting It Right,[8] the Foundation's 2018 report on reimagining probation, sets the context for this practice guide. Both the report and practice guide are rooted in adolescent development and brain research, cite evaluations and academic studies and acknowledge innovative efforts in JDAI sites and elsewhere to reinvent probation as a strategic and targeted intervention for young people who pose a significant risk for serious offending without more guidance and support.

Transforming Juvenile Probation makes the case that surveillance-oriented probation does not work to reverse delinquent behavior. At its best, probation offers court-involved youth who would otherwise be confined the chance to remain in the community and participate in constructive and therapeutic activities. Despite the dedication and admirable intentions of probation professionals, probation often pulls young people — even those with first-time or low-level offenses — deeper into the system without offering the support and guidance that would put them on the right path and reduce the likelihood of rearrest.

Probation is the most common disposition by far for young people who enter our nation's juvenile justice systems, with more than a quarter million young people placed on some form of probation every year.[9] But its fundamental structure and approach lead to practices that are counterproductive

or at odds with the evidence. Probation also plays a large role in perpetuating the vast and continuing overrepresentation of Black, Latino and other youth of color in juvenile justice systems. The core recommendations offered in *Transforming Juvenile Probation* introduce significant structural changes and redefine the role of the probation officer in fostering youth success:

- **Ensure that probation caseloads are small and limited to appropriate youth.** Juvenile courts and probation agencies should substantially expand the share of cases diverted from the formal court system. Expanding the use of diversion means that smaller, more appropriate caseloads will let probation officers focus their time and energy on supporting youth who pose significant risk for being arrested for serious offenses. The desired result is stronger relationships between probation officers and youth and families than has been possible with larger caseloads.

- **Stop imposing long and standardized lists of probation rules.** Most juvenile courts impose a long list of standard conditions of probation requiring young people to memorize and adhere to many rules that are unrelated to their individual needs or circumstances. The top priority of the family-engaged case planning model is for probation officers to form a collaborative relationship with young people and their family members to jointly develop a set of meaningful, individualized goals.

- **Provide predictable and calibrated consequences — but never confinement — in response to technical violations of probation and noncompliance.** Instead of threatening and imposing confinement when youth on probation break rules or fail to meet expectations, probation agencies should offer constructive and proportionate responses to problematic behavior, allowing youth to remain at home and keep working to complete probation successfully. The practice of confining youth for rule violations — or even threatening youth with confinement — is ineffective and harmful and can unravel the progress achieved in the case planning process, damaging probation officers' relationships with young people and their families.

- **Incentivize goal achievement and positive behavior.** Despite research showing that youth are more likely to respond to rewards and incentives for positive behavior than they are to punishments and sanctions for negative behavior, most probation agencies continue to rely primarily on the threat of confinement or other sanctions to promote compliance with court-ordered conditions. When probation officers can offer young people a robust selection of incentives for positive behavior — for example, paid jobs and internships, popular recreational activities, loosening of behavior restrictions and reduced duration of probation — they have a powerful tool to encourage goal accomplishment and keep young people focused on success.

- **Address racial and ethnic inequities.** An underlying value of probation transformation is a commitment to recognizing and offsetting structural, institutional and systemic racial and ethnic inequities. Determined and strategic action to address these inequities is imperative for probation

agencies, given probation's role as the most common disposition for youth who enter the juvenile justice system. Unless probation leaders seize the opportunity to improve the trajectory of young people facing the most systemic barriers to a positive adulthood, mistrust will continue to hamper the efforts of probation officers to forge constructive partnerships with young people of color and their families.

- **Collaborate with community partners to promote positive youth development.** All young people need adult guidance and opportunities to explore their interests, build new skills, develop their talents and gain a sense of belonging and connection to others.[10] Such opportunities should be part of every case plan. When probation agencies forge relationships with community leaders and local organizations where young people live, probation officers can then tap these assets as they develop individual case plans.

- **Measure results.** If probation agencies are to fulfill their potential for improving young lives and promoting community safety, they must identify measurable goals, collect outcome data and hold themselves accountable for achieving concrete results consistent with their mission.

If implemented well, alongside other core elements of probation transformation and connected to the larger vision and underlying values, the family-engaged case planning model described here can have substantial and immediate benefits for improving youth and community safety outcomes.[11]

2

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT IS JOB ONE

The ties between young people and their family members and other supportive adults, even when damaged or strained, are essential for healthy development. Young people's strongest connections are with their families and communities. While public systems can play a helpful role in building healthy futures for disconnected young people, the most powerful and lasting influences come from their families and communities.

When probation officers positively engage with parents and other supportive adults in a young person's life, the youth is more likely to succeed.[12] Decades of practice indicate that the relationships probation officers develop with young people and their families typically are more important to a youth achieving success than whatever case planning tool a probation officer or agency might use.

What Is Family Engagement?

Perhaps the best definition of family engagement comes from Justice for Families, an organization made up of and led by family members of youth involved in the justice system. Justice for Families describes family engagement as "a meaningful partnership with families and youth at every level of the agency and system...[where] families are truly valued, and when they are appreciated as experts and critical stakeholders in the shaping of positive outcomes."[13]

Family engagement goes beyond interacting with, informing, requiring information or explaining things to families. Rather, family engagement involves true partnership. It requires probation personnel to seek advice and opinions from families, honor and respect their insight and perspective and treat them as essential participants in the development of their children's case plans and the oversight of their children's experience on probation.

"Family engagement is a mindset," Justice for Families explains. "Family engagement begins with a fundamental belief that all families care for their children, have strengths that can be built upon and can be engaged and empowered. Family engagement is not about one single policy or practice or program, rather it lives in the culture of an organization and its evidence is seen in how families are treated and partnered with at a systemic level."[14]

Why Is Family Engagement So Important?

A wide variety of family-focused intervention strategies have proven effective in stemming delinquent conduct.[15] Strengthening probation's capacity and commitment to partnering with families is critical because parents and other family members exert a substantial influence on the behavior of their adolescents.[16] They will remain important in their children's lives long after the young person's term of probation and involvement in juvenile court. Providing families with the assistance they may need to support their children's success through strong and respectful partnerships is required for probation agencies to meet their goals. Collaboration with family maximizes young people's odds of success and minimizes their likelihood of getting in trouble.

Probation's Current Approaches to Families Are Often Insufficient

Unfortunately, probation officers often have fraught relationships with parents and other family members. In a significant share of cases, probation officers exclude parents and family members from the case planning process. For instance, in a survey of probation officers in selected JDAI

jurisdictions, fewer report involving family members in developing their children's case planning (72%) than talking with family members about conditions of probation (83%).[17] (Conditions of probation are the terms young people must comply with to stay in their community, such as submission to random drug testing and home searches.)

Even when probation officers do involve family members in case planning and other aspects of their children's cases, interactions are often strained. In 2014, a team of University of Pittsburgh scholars concluded: "In juvenile justice, there is little doubt that parents and service providers both see current efforts at parental involvement as inadequate. Focus groups reveal that parents perceive being blamed for the youth's problems, regarded as obstacles and insufficiently involved in crucial decision-making and planning processes during disposition, placement and preparation for aftercare."[18]

HOW DO FAMILY MEMBERS FEEL ABOUT THEIR TREATMENT BY THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM?

"At every stage of the juvenile justice system, when critical decisions are being made about how a young person will be treated, families are either excluded outright or not provided with the information or tools necessary to actively participate in proceedings dominated by legalese and jargon. Where families try to participate, they are far too often disrespected, disregarded and blamed for their child's involvement in the system. Making matters worse, youth themselves are similarly excluded from the decision-making process. These barriers to participation frustrate parents and family members at every stage of the juvenile justice process."[19]

— Justice for Families, *Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice*

Common Obstacles to Effective Family Engagement in Juvenile Probation Cases

In recent years, many probation agencies have begun taking steps to strengthen their family engagement efforts. This shift in philosophy toward establishing close family partnerships as a top priority for juvenile probation cases represents the first critical step in adopting the family-engaged case planning model.

Placing a higher priority on family engagement is only a beginning. Even when they make a concerted effort, probation officers typically find it difficult to forge meaningful partnerships with

families. Therefore, the second critical step to embracing the family-engaged case planning model is to appreciate and understand the common obstacles that can make forging close and constructive connections with family members difficult:

- **Lack of trust.** When they begin reaching out to families, many probation officers find that family members are difficult to reach and reluctant to speak openly. Too often, probation officers conclude that families are unwilling or unable to engage, and they move on to develop the case plan without meaningful family input. In many cases, however, family members' initial lack of trust and buy-in is based on negative experiences they have had with the justice system. They see little reason to trust that the system has their children's (or their own) best interests at heart. Often, family members are suffering with trauma, embarrassment, shame, fear or exhaustion or are simply overwhelmed. Given these realities, family members may not jump at the chance to engage in deep and open conversations with their children's probation officer.

WHY DOES ESTABLISHING TRUST WITH FAMILIES POSE A DIFFICULT CHALLENGE FOR JUVENILE PROBATION?

"I still think that we're a system, so there's a lot of mistrust. And we need to be aware of that and validate the families that have a reason to mistrust in many ways. And, also, understand and respect that the parent is still the parent. Just because the kid made a poor decision and is on probation doesn't give us complete authority. I think sometimes we get stuck in compliance mode, and we need to take a step back from that."[20]

— Probation supervisor, Pierce County, Washington

- **Concerns and fear about racial inequities.** The lack of trust between families and probation officers is often heightened by tensions stemming from unfair policies and practices, discriminatory treatment and inequitable opportunities and outcomes that have systematically privileged white people and disadvantaged people of color. The most glaring characteristic of America's juvenile justice system is its disproportionate representation of youth of color.[21] Many young people of color reside in neighborhoods that are patrolled far more heavily by police than majority-white neighborhoods. Most young people in these communities, and most adults too, understand — from personal experience, in many cases — that the country's policies and practices, including those within the justice system, treat people of color far more harshly than their white peers.

Race holds a central place in our society's deepest and most persistent patterns of social inequities, exclusion and divisions, and it continues to play a defining role in one's life trajectory and outcomes. A complex system of racial bias and inequities is deeply rooted in our country's history, culture and institutions.[22] Regardless of the good intentions or honorable attempts of any individual probation officer, this awareness of systemic racism — exacerbated by lack of trust with government agencies — makes families reluctant to partner with probation and court personnel. This may be true whether or not the staff or leadership of the probation agency reflects the demographics of the communities it serves. Such reluctance is more likely if probation officers lack awareness of their own implicit biases or an understanding of the role of culture in working with youth and families of color.

- **Trauma.** Recent research makes clear that young people who become involved in the juvenile justice system are far more likely than other youth to have suffered trauma in their lives, defined as an experience that "threatens a person's life, safety and well-being, overwhelming the sufferer's ability to cope."[23] A recent study found that half of all young people in Florida with system involvement had suffered four or more types of trauma, compared to just 13% of young people in the general population.[24] Recent research shows that experiencing serious or frequent trauma during childhood — for example, witnessing violence, being separated from a parent due to incarceration, experiencing hunger or homelessness and suffering harsh treatment from law enforcement — can disrupt healthy brain development and cause serious difficulties. As a result, both youth and their families who have suffered trauma can be ill-prepared for, and may be retraumatized by, their interactions with the justice system.

- **Indecipherable language and procedures.** The juvenile justice system's rules, procedures and jargon-filled vocabulary can make it difficult or impossible for family members to participate in (or even follow) discussions about their children's cases.

- **Practical barriers to family participation.** Families of court-involved youth often face a variety of logistical challenges that make it difficult to participate in the case planning and court processes, such as lack of transportation, expensive child care, housing instability, multiple jobs and inflexible or unpredictable work schedules.

- **Problematic court and probation practices.** Longstanding court and probation practices can exacerbate these obstacles to family participation and partnership. Family members are frequently required to attend probation meetings or court hearings during work hours. Meetings are often scheduled at probation offices, requiring child care accommodations for other children and a significant and sometimes costly commute, rather than in families' homes or in nearby locations. Probation orders frequently require families to pay significant sums for fees, penalties and restitution orders, which increase the strain on family finances.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL FAMILY ENGAGEMENT?

"The most important condition for family engagement is safety — feeling physically and emotionally safe and feeling safe from retribution or sanctions resulting from engaging honestly. It makes a difference if a family member is present because that person is compelled to be there (will suffer a serious consequence for not appearing) or because that family member is an active and persistent advocate for the child. Even if families are compelled, it makes a difference if family members are greeted warmly and treated with respect rather than being considered the root cause of their child's situation and treated with disdain. It matters if professionals value the family's input and make that evident as they interact with family members."[25]

— Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, *Safety, Fairness, Stability: Repositioning Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare to Engage Families and Communities*

Steps to Ensure Effective Family Engagement

Family engagement begins on the first day of each probation case and continues throughout each young person's period of probation. Probation agencies should consider the following steps to plant the seeds for consistent and close collaboration with family members. For more, see the Foundation's Family Engagement Guidance Framework.[26]

1 Use a broad definition of family that includes all adults with a commitment to the young person's well-being.

2 Give families a meaningful voice in framing and overseeing the probation case plan.

3 Build a family-centric culture throughout the probation agency and the larger juvenile justice system.

STEP 1 

Use a broad definition of family that includes all adults with a commitment to the young person's well-being. As Justice for Families has written, "partnering with families cannot be limited to just parents and legal guardians. Instead, the definition of family should remain broad...It is not the role of the system to define who a family is. Families and especially youth should be given the opportunity to define this for themselves."[27] Therefore, probation officers and their community-based partners should seek out siblings, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins and other family members, as well as other adults with significant ties to the young person whom the young person considers to be family.[28]

STEP 2 

Give families a meaningful voice in framing and overseeing the probation case plan. Beginning with the first meeting, the probation officer (or intake officer, if the local probation department separates the initial investigation function) should brainstorm with the young person and family members to identify an achievable goal that all agree would be beneficial. This is called a common-ground goal. Then, through continued discussions, the probation officer should work with family members and the youth over the four- to six-week case planning period[29] to determine which general objectives should be prioritized in the case plan (possibly, academic attendance or performance, peer affiliations, use of free time, family interactions, substance abuse or anger management). Once the general focus areas of the case plan are identified, family members should have a say in selecting a sequence of specific goals for the youth to achieve in each chosen area. Later, as the process moves forward, probation officers should convene regular family-team meetings (see page 25) to assess progress or to intervene if the young person experiences setbacks or begins deviating significantly from the case plan.

STEP 3 

Build a family-centric culture throughout the probation agency and the larger juvenile justice system. Probation agencies and juvenile courts must establish welcoming environments for families — for example, creating family-friendly waiting rooms, helping with transportation and child care and revamping any practices (location and timing of meetings, imposition of fines and fees, restitution rules and more) that can undermine the likelihood of constructive engagement. They should develop and fund peer mentor or family navigator programs that connect family members to peers with experience as parents of youth on probation. Agencies and the courts should prepare and distribute easy-to-follow materials about the probation and court processes. Probation agencies should implement family-team decision-making processes to ensure family members have a meaningful voice in critical decisions about their children's probation experience.

Finally, as part of their commitment to engaging and empowering families and to treating family members as essential partners, probation agencies should pursue related reforms such as:

- making family engagement a central focus in hiring and appraising performance by staff;
- providing probation officers with extensive training in motivational interviewing and race equity (see Section 4 for more detail);
- adopting and monitoring specific agency-wide goals for effective family engagement, and publicizing the agency's progress; and
- giving families a voice in the probation department's overall policies and practices by creating a family advisory council, conducting family surveys, inviting family members to participate in policy discussions and more.

3

STAGES OF THE FAMILY-ENGAGED CASE PLANNING MODEL

The family-engaged case planning model proceeds in three stages: 1) getting the case planning process off to a productive start; 2) assessing needs and exploring opportunities; and 3) developing the case plan.

Stage One: A Productive Start

To maximize the odds of success, the probation officer should meet as soon as possible with the young person and their parents or guardians. This first meeting should focus almost entirely on building trust and a strong relationship with the youth and the important adults in the young person's life.

- **Engagement as top priority.** The probation officer should ask engaging questions and employ other motivational interviewing techniques to sound out the family members about their concerns and

their ideas. The officer should listen to the youth and family far more than they dictate answers or pronounce solutions. More importantly, they must create an atmosphere of warmth, respect and emotional safety in their conversations with family (see sample engaging questions).[30]

- **Clear explanation of the process.** The probation officer also should devote time to answering questions and providing information — using accessible, nontechnical language, allowing youth and their families to understand the court process and the language the court uses, as well as the expectations, parameters and timelines of probation. While the probation officer should ensure that the youth and family understand the rules and conditions in the young person's court order, it is critical that those conditions not be the focal point of this first meeting. At this point, relationship building and active listening should be the officer's main goal.

- **Identification of an aspiration.** In the first meeting, the probation officer should start to identify what motivates and feels important to the young person. By asking for at least one thing the youth likes to do and one dream the youth has for the future, the officer is laying the foundation to individualize the case plan and make the adults in the young person's life aware of the youth's larger hopes. The probation officer should create time and space for the young person to think about this and refrain from judging the youth's aspiration. Later, time will be spent getting to know more about the young person's strengths (see Stage Two).

- **Selection of a common-ground goal (or goals).** Rather than seeking to make decisions quickly and impose rules, restrictions or requirements beyond those imposed by the court, the probation officer should end the first session by working with the young person and family to identify an initial short-term goal or two that all parties agree would be beneficial and includes some simple, achievable and measurable tasks. An example of this kind of goal is the young person getting to school on time every day for a week. Establishing this common-ground goal, even if it seems small, will help begin the collaborative process on a positive note and demonstrate how goal setting can proceed in a constructive and nonthreatening manner (see sample case plans).[31]

- **Immediate response for the most serious cases.** In cases where there is an immediate and verifiable safety concern, the probation officer should craft a safety plan to reduce the likelihood of the youth committing harm. Options might include assigning a credible messenger mentor (a specially trained adult mentor whose background is similar to the young person's) to engage the youth on a daily or near-daily basis or requiring attendance at a day reporting or evening reporting center. (See page 20 for a description of New York City's credible messenger program.) In consultation with the youth and family, the probation officer should reassess these interim steps over the course of the case planning period.

Stage Two: Deeper Exploration of Needs and Opportunities

Instead of imposing a case plan based solely on a list of standard conditions handed down by the juvenile court judge or the findings of a deficit-focused risk and needs assessment, probation officers who use the family-engaged case planning approach will spend four to six weeks after the initial meeting working intensively with the young person and family. (Four to six weeks is common in social services because it takes time to build rapport and explore resources. Any shorter period would not allow the probation officer to individualize the plan; any longer would be inconsistent with probation terms being short in duration.) During this period, the probation officer will seek to get to know the strengths of the youth; better understand the young person's situation; identify and engage all family members and other supportive adults in his or her life; and concentrate on a handful of priority goals and interventions that will become the primary focus of the probation case plan.

A. **EXPLORING THE CASE FROM MULTIPLE ANGLES.** To continue building trust and to learn more about the young person's circumstances, the probation officer will meet at least weekly during the case planning period with the young person and family members, including at least once alone with the child and once with just family members. In these meetings, the probation officer will gather several types of information, all of which will inform the critical decision regarding focus areas for action in the probation case plan. Specifically, the probation officer will:

- **Assess for strengths.** Rather than focusing first and foremost on identifying and addressing the young person's risk, needs and problems, the probation officer must take time during the case planning period to identify the positives in the young person's life. These may include personal qualities (skills, interests, constructive activities and long-term aspirations and goals); love and support from family; and positive connections with other caring adults (such as teachers, coaches, clergy, employers and mentors). Whether the probation officer uses a strengths-based assessment tool or gathers this information through simple give-and-take conversation with the youth and family, assessing for strengths is critical. This approach serves both to motivate the young person and family to fully participate in the case planning process, and to identify activities that can be included in the case plan for the young person to build skills and foster positive connections. Experience shows that all youth and families possess strengths; identifying and building on those strengths are critical to young people's success.[32]

- **Review the risk and needs assessment to identify needs and challenges.** Recent research on risk and needs has clearly documented that the likelihood of rearrest is closely correlated with several risk factors related to delinquency that can be identified through carefully designed and validated assessment instruments. These instruments should not serve as the sole or primary

basis for selecting case plan goals, and care should be taken not to exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities by overreliance on these instruments. Yet the information provided by the risk assessment should certainly help inform the selection of goals in the probation case plan.

- **Identify triggers for problem behavior.** As part of their conversations during the case planning phase, probation officers should seek to review the behavior cycle that has led to delinquent or problematic behavior. How exactly is the young person getting in trouble? What is going on before and during these incidents? What are the common themes and circumstances? In these conversations, the probation officer should work with the youth and family to identify the dynamics that seem to be a factor in all or most episodes. Factors could include: a need for resources, self-medication with substances, problematic peers, frustration with school, angry interactions with family, unsupervised idle time, reactions to bullying or threats from other youth, gang pressures or inability to remain calm in stressful situations. After identifying

According to the Stages of Change Model,[33] adults generally go through these five stages when trying to change habits or behavior:

1	2	3	4	5
Pre-Contemplation: not yet acknowledging a need for change	**Contemplation:** beginning to recognize the need for growth but not yet ready to take concerted action	**Preparation/ Determination:** getting ready to change behavior	**Action/Willpower:** changing behavior	**Maintenance:** maintaining the new behavior, with expected challenges and slip ups over time

Youth may follow these stages, too, but they are not mini-adults and may not follow them in a linear manner. Rather, they are adolescents experiencing rapid development in areas such as decision-making skills. Officers should be knowledgeable enough about adolescent development to adapt their plans to where young people are.

the recurring themes from these incidents, the probation officer, youth and family should synthesize them into a list of common triggers that might be targets for intervention and action in the case plan.

- **Weigh the young person's readiness.** The priorities, goals and activities in the case plan are designed to help the youth achieve personal growth and positive behavior change but not set the youth up for failure by requiring significant actions that the youth is not ready or motivated to achieve. To set young people up for success, probation officers should be mindful of their readiness to participate. Do they agree with the goal? Do they believe they are capable and have the support necessary to succeed? What are the barriers to meeting the goal? For example, if a young person has missed school for four months, an immediate goal of attending school on time every day is unrealistic but could be achieved over a longer period with incremental goals and support.

In forging the case plan and updating it over time, the probation officer must consider the young person's stage of change in each focus area. The goal must be to help the young person progress along the stages in each priority goal, but never to set the youth up for failure by requiring significant actions that the youth is not ready or motivated to achieve.

B. **BROADENING AND DEEPENING THE ALLIANCE WITH FAMILY MEMBERS.** After the initial meeting, probation officers must continue spending time with family members to build rapport, cultivate trust and gain a deeper understanding of the families' beliefs, desires, strengths and needs. Specifically, probation officers should:

- **Reach out to additional family members and other supportive adults.** The probation officer should work closely with the youth and family members to identify what is called a circle of care, which includes those who care for and offer support to the young person. (See New York City sidebar on page 20 for more detail.) As the Urban Institute advises in its 2019 *A Handbook for Implementing Research-Informed Practices in Juvenile Probation,* probation officers should "let youth define who their caregivers or supportive adults are, and work with them to involve adults in their lives who will support their success over the long term."[34]

- **Sound out family members' thoughts and feelings about their child's case.** Building from the initial meeting, probation officers must continue reaching out to family members, meeting with them and using those meetings to understand family members' thoughts, feelings, values, desires and fears. What do family members want to see included in the probation case plan? What support do they think their child needs to succeed? How ready and willing are they to support the various interventions and case plan goals under consideration? As noted above, at least once during the case planning phase, the probation officer should meet with family members

without the youth present to learn about any concerns family members might wish to discuss privately.

- **Meet families where they are.** Probation officers should pause before imposing solutions that are at odds with families' beliefs or values. There will be times when family members don't agree with an intervention the probation officer believes is a high priority, based on a risk or needs assessment or from their own observations. When this occurs, the probation officer should engage family members in open conversation, strive to understand the reason for the hesitation or concern and then work with family members to build support and individualize the plan as needed instead of simply proceeding with the intervention.

- **Connect family members to peer mentors (sometimes called family advocates or family navigators) and other sources of support.** Increasingly, juvenile courts and probation agencies are recognizing the value of connecting family members with other adults who have had children in the juvenile justice system. Based on their experience, these peer mentors offer family members valuable guidance, support, information and reassurance. Juvenile courts can also offer informational workshops for family members and can develop and distribute clear, jargon-free materials to help family members understand juvenile probation and the larger juvenile court process.

"Families identified peer support as an important and powerful strategy for empowering each other and ensuring their effective participation in their children's care and supervision."[35]

— Justice for Families, *Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice*

- **Seek to identify any pressing needs or challenges facing the family.** As they get to know families and earn their trust, probation officers should ask family members about any circumstances that might be contributing to the young person's behavioral issues or might interfere with the family's ability to fully participate in the probation process and support their child's success. Are they facing severe financial pressures, housing instability or other immediate unmet needs such as food insecurity? Is anyone in the family suffering with serious health or mental health problems or other pressing challenges? In many cases, family members will be reluctant to disclose these kinds of personal issues, at least initially. However, through active listening and respectful interactions, plus support and encouragement from peer mentors, the probation officer may earn the confidence of family members and bring challenges out in the open where they can be addressed.

NEW YORK CITY

FAMILY-ENGAGED CASE PLANNING

In 2011 and 2012, with support from the Casey Foundation, New York City trained more than 150 juvenile probation officers in the early development of the family-engaged case planning model. Since then, probation leaders in the city have introduced innovative ways to sustain and enhance the model.

- **CIRCLE OF CARE AND INFLUENCE.** Developing and actively using a circle of care and influence is central to New York City's case planning process. When probation officers map this in collaboration with the youth and family members, it helps uncover sources of support, such as extended family, friends, neighbors, clubs, service providers and social or religious organizations. If the young person lacks a strong support network, probation officers seek to identify other family members or other caring adults who might take an active role in the probation process. The New York City approach to mapping the circle includes identifying and adding any individuals or relationships that are negative influences or sources of anxiety.

- **PARENT PEER SUPPORT.** In late 2013, following six months of planning between probation leaders and families of young people on probation, New York City established funding to provide peer coaches who have personally experienced the system with a child or loved one. The peer coaches are on site at the family court probation offices from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, to help families navigate the juvenile justice system and connect with supportive programs and resources. Coaches are also available during evenings and weekends to support parents in crisis situations. Today, jurisdictions across the country are designing and implementing similar programs that are well received by staff and family members.

- **CREDIBLE MESSENGER MENTORS.** Credible messengers are specially trained, paid adult mentors who have lived through similar experiences and understand the support and services that youth in justice systems need. In New York City, young people on probation supervision are matched with credible messengers through an alternative-to-placement program called AIM (Advocate, Intervene, Mentor) and through community-based providers that run Arches Transformative Mentoring programs. The Urban Institute has evaluated New York City's credible messenger program, finding it effective in reducing recidivism and generating positive youth development outcomes.[36]

- **ONGOING TRAINING AND SUPPORT OF STAFF.** Probation leaders tailor and align training and coaching efforts with changing technology and needs. New staff are trained, and existing staff get refresher trainings.

C. **SELECTING FOCUS AREAS FOR THE PROBATION CASE PLAN.** Through the close connection and partnership that he or she has forged with the young person and family, the probation officer should seek to identify a handful of top concerns on which the probation case plan should concentrate. Specifically, the focus areas of the case plan should seek to build on the young person's strengths and aspirations; connect the youth to community-based organizations, positive adults in the community and opportunities that focus on positive development; avoid triggers that have led to problem behavior in the past; and provide targeted interventions to address delinquency-related risk factors identified in the young person's risk and needs assessment.

- **How many focus areas should be selected?** Typically, the probation officer will identify a great many needs, issues and opportunities for every young person assigned to probation. The youth may test positive for marijuana, for example, or engage in binge drinking, associate with peers who skip school, have a gang affiliation, earn poor grades, suffer with depression or anxiety issues, fight frequently with a sibling, anger easily, endure a learning disability, have a history of domestic abuse and neglect or carry a feeling of deep loss over the death of a family member or friend. The young person may have an interest in art or music, sports, drama or computers. The youth might want to get a job to earn money or to join a club. The list goes on. However, as a rule, *case plans should concentrate on three to five main areas — those most likely to help the young person avoid offending in the short term* and achieve success in the long term. Moreover, the case plan should address these goals in stages, so young people concentrate only on two or three key goals at any one time.

- **How are choices made?** In making this choice, the probation officer should look in five domains:

  1. What are the young person's strengths, assets, short-term goals and long-term aspirations? What does the youth think is needed and that they want to work on?

  2. What has been getting the youth in trouble?

  3. What delinquency-related risk factors were identified by the risk or needs assessment and seem important for the youth's progress toward long-term success?

  4. What, if anything, does the family need to better support the young person's success?

  5. What do the youth and family think of each focus area under consideration? Do they agree that the focus area is relevant and important? Are they ready, willing and able to work toward progress in each given area?

WHAT TO DO

WHEN A YOUTH OR FAMILY ARE NOT READY TO TACKLE AN IDENTIFIED RISK FACTOR

As they contemplate which goals and action steps to include in young people's case plans, probation officers will have to balance a variety of considerations. In some cases where probation transformation has not yet permeated the court process, young people's probation court orders might include conditions that they are not yet ready to address and that may or may not be essential for their long-term success.

The New York City Department of Probation offers the following example in its training:

"Josh is not ready to tackle his marijuana use, as he believes that smoking marijuana calms him down. The plan is to discuss with Josh on a regular basis his goals and aspirations and how the marijuana use may interfere with those goals. (Alternatively, the plan is to discuss with Josh on a regular basis the situations that lead him to smoke marijuana to learn his patterns.) Once Josh decides that smoking marijuana is detrimental to his future, we will discuss what is needed to get him to abstain from smoking. Josh understands that the court expects him to abstain from smoking marijuana immediately and that if he continues to smoke, he would be risking an order of the court to file a violation of probation."

Over time, probation transformation will succeed only when judges and all other system players agree that standard conditions such as requiring marijuana abstinence in all cases where the young person tests positive for marijuana are counterproductive. Yet exploring the effects of marijuana use and setting goals to minimize or eliminate it may well be an important part of the probation process for many young people. The key is that every young person must be treated as an individual, with the response to marijuana or any other concern suited to the youth's own needs, goals and circumstances.

Source: "Case Planning: Balancing a Stages of Change," excerpted from the New York City Policies and Protocols for Probation Case Planning.[37]

- **What should the balance be among the focus areas selected?** The case plan should strike a balance between addressing identified needs and building on existing strengths, while connecting youth to positive ongoing support in the community. More specifically, the case plan must include at least one focus area that is concentrated on positive youth development — for example, a developmentally appropriate opportunity to build skills and foster positive connections with adults in the community — and that is important to and motivating for the youth and family. Finally, it is critical to give the family a big say in determining what is important, first working on areas where youth and family are already motivated. As trust grows, the group can work on addressing areas the probation officer believes are important but faced initial resistance or discomfort from the youth or family.

Stage Three: The Plan

Once consensus has been forged on the general goals to be pursued in a young person's probation case, the next challenge for the probation officer is to draft a case document that will serve as a blueprint for the young person's probation experience. The case plan requires the probation officer to break the action plan down into a sequence of clear and achievable goals. In consultation with the young person and family members, the probation officer delegates responsibilities to everyone involved to help assure the young person's success, as seen in the sample case plans. At every meeting until the close of the case, the probation officer should review the plan with the young person and family and adapt it, as necessary.

A. **SMART GOALS.**[38] Rather than focusing only on generic and broadly defined goal statements, which are often confusing and not meaningful to youth, the probation officer will develop a set of smaller, more tangible SMART goals that are:

- **Specific** — Goals must be discrete and well defined, giving the young person a clear understanding of what is to be achieved. Rather than a generic goal to "do better at school," a specific goal would be to "improve my grades to a B average by the end of this semester by devoting two hours a day to schoolwork at home."

- **Measurable** — Goals must be quantifiable and concrete, with a clear benchmark that leaves no question or room for doubt about its accomplishment. How many days of school will the youth attend this week? How much money will he or she earn toward restitution this month? What share of homework assignments will be completed and turned in on time?

- **Attainable** — Goals must be within the reach of the young person — in other words, he or she has shown the skills, opportunity, motivation and necessary sources of support to complete the goal successfully.

- **Relevant** — Goals must be connected to the priorities or focus areas upon which the youth and family have agreed.

- **Timely** — Goals must be anchored in a time frame and should ideally be achievable within a relatively brief period that sustains the young person's interest and motivation. For instance, the young person may have a goal to graduate from high school and go on to college. But the SMART goal will focus only on the immediate next steps in that journey, such as getting a good grade this term in biology and math.

B. **SHARED RESPONSIBILITIES.** For every SMART goal added to a young person's case plan, the probation officer, youth and family members should agree on their respective responsibilities in making sure the goal is achieved. Under this model, the probation officer becomes an active participant in the plan, demonstrating a commitment to the young person's success and enhancing the partnership with the youth and family. Likewise, identifying tasks for family and other members of the circle of care helps assure that the young person receives all available support, creates a greater sense of engagement and increases commitment to the process.

C. **CLARITY ON RULES, INCENTIVES, CONSEQUENCES AND EXPECTATIONS.** The case planning process should spell out a set of graduated and proportionate responses, including rewards for positive behavior and consequences for problematic behavior. Once the case plan has been created, the probation officer should make copies available to the young person and family. The probation officer should record progress at every meeting with the young person, updating and tailoring the case plan as needed. At each step, the officer should provide the youth, family and other circle of care members with an opportunity to review and comment on the revised goals and responsibilities. The case plan is a living document and focal point for shared action to maximize the young person's likelihood of success on probation.

- **Rules and conditions.** With support from their direct supervisors and probation department administrators, probation officers should seek to eliminate long lists of standardized rules and conditions in probation orders. When judges insist on including such conditions, probation officers should discuss with the youth and family the challenges of meeting any of the court's expectations and the potential risk of an early violation of probation. Any rules within the case

A FAMILY-TEAM APPROACH

In recent years, reform-minded probation agencies have increasingly relied on a family-team approach to probation cases. In the City of St. Louis, Pierce County in Washington state and other jurisdictions, meetings are convened regularly for the young person to discuss all elements of his or her case with the circle of care.

The first of these family-team meetings should take place at some point during the initial case planning period. Ideally, these meetings should be convened and led by a community-based organization, with the probation officer participating as an equal member of the young person's team. Meetings should be held in the community, not the probation office.

During the meetings, family-team members should discuss the young person's case, forge consensus on any changes to the case plan goals and review each party's responsibilities to help the young person achieve the goals.

After this meeting, the probation officer should convene family-team meetings periodically to review the young person's progress, or, as needed, to work together to address behavior issues or lack of progress.

plans that young people, probation officers and families create together should be customized and relevant to the individual, imposing only conditions necessary to address identified risks related to public safety, not a generic or standard list.

- **Incentives.** Given the powerful evidence showing that young people are far more motivated by rewards than sanctions, probation officers should work with the young person and family to identify opportunities and incentives the young person values. The prospect of realizing them will help encourage young people to meet expectations and achieve goals in the case plan. These incentives can range from eased curfew restrictions to passes to recreational or entertainment events, job opportunities, enrichment activities and — ultimately — a chance for the young person to shorten the period of probation. The case plan should spell out which rewards will be made available for reaching each specific milestone.

- **Graduated consequences and problem-solving to address challenging behavior, with no confinement for technical violations of probation.** As with rewards and incentives, the case planning process should clearly spell out the consequences youth will face for not meeting expectations or violating a rule. Ideally, the plan will spell this out with a response grid that describes a narrow range of alternative responses for different types of infractions. Whenever possible, probation officers should address technical violations in a measured way — for example, by scaling back privileges or tightening curfews. When a young person begins to engage in a pattern of problematic behavior, the probation officer should convene a family-team meeting to review the case with the young person and circle of care, including counselors and service providers familiar with the young person's case. Formal probation violations should be used only as a last resort. As the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges[39] (as well as other leading national juvenile justice organizations) has argued, confinement should never be imposed as a sanction for technical violations.[40]

- **A finish line.** As the final element of the case planning process, the probation officer should let the young person and his or her family know what to expect about the duration of the probation term: roughly six months but sometimes up to a year based on the young person's choices to complete identified goals and adhere to behavioral expectations. But even if a jurisdiction's policy calls for a longer period of probation, youth and families must know how long their probation terms are expected to last, what they can do to shorten the term and how much longer the period of probation will last if they fail to meet expectations.

4

KEYS TO ADAPTING THE FAMILY-ENGAGED CASE PLANNING MODEL TO LOCAL JURISDICTIONS

Jurisdictions that decide to embrace family-engaged case planning must tailor it to the culture and customs of the local jurisdiction. Successful implementation will require buy-in from supervisors and line staff within the probation agency, as well as judges, other system stakeholders and the community. Success will also require extensive and ongoing training, along with several other critical ingredients described below:

Local Champions

Jurisdictions that decide to embrace family-engaged case planning must identify and cultivate a cadre of local champions, including judges. (Refer judges to *The Role of the Judge in Transforming Juvenile Probation: A Toolkit for Leadership* by the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges.[41]) The jurisdiction should form a workgroup or innovation team to provide critical implementation support:

- by generating the necessary buy-in from staff at all levels of the probation agency and from the court and other system partners; and
- by adapting the philosophy and core principles of the case planning model to fit the local context.

Experience shows that to maximize staff buy-in and overall success, each jurisdiction should develop its own case planning policies, rather than just adopting — without tailoring — policies from other jurisdictions. The workgroup or innovation team, which should include probation officers and supervisors and representatives of affected youth and families, will play an extensive role in that process and in earning and sustaining the support of peers within the probation department and in other partner agencies.

STAFF ENGAGEMENT

IN RAMSEY COUNTY, MINNESOTA

The Juvenile Services Case Planning Workgroup in Ramsey County, Minnesota, played a critical role in the site's family-engaged case planning training and implementation.

"If probation officers don't see other officers involved in the planning and implementation process, they won't trust it or think it is in their best interest. The workgroup members are champions for the work. They help to show their peers that shifting away from a transactional approach with youth and families and toward a more relationship-based, transformational approach is good for the kids, the families, the communities AND the staff."

– Roy Adams, Juvenile Probation Supervisor, Ramsey County

"The workgroup made a lot of the decisions about what the case planning process will look like in Ramsey. We needed to give up some of our power and collaborate with staff, which is what we are asking staff to do with families and young people. We wanted our staff to experience a collaborative process, from training to implementation."

– Kimberly Stubblefield, Assistant Deputy Director,
Ramsey County Community Corrections, Juvenile Services

Strategic Staff Training

Staff need both specific training that supports the implementation of this model (including train-the-trainer opportunities anticipated by the Casey Foundation) and a broader training curriculum that covers key themes, such as:

- **Youth and family engagement.** Define what authentic engagement looks and feels like at both the case and policy levels.
- **Racial equity and inclusion.** Cover the importance of race-conscious strategies to counteract systemic racism and implicit bias in the youth justice system.
- **Trauma.** Learn about trauma — what it is, how to recognize it, its relationship to structural inequities and how it may affect behavior.[42]
- **Adolescent brain development.** Understand that young people's brains are still forming, with a proclivity toward risk taking, reward seeking and peer influence.
- **Positive youth development.** Explain the value of building on young people's strengths and providing them with opportunities for skill building and positive relationships.
- **Purpose of probation.** Convene a conversation among probation leaders and staff, community partners and affected families and youth, among others, that seeks to establish consensus on the role of probation and the values that should drive probation practice.

Collaborative Process for Devising Local Case Planning Protocols

To effectively implement family-engaged case planning, each jurisdiction must develop a set of clear but flexible protocols to guide probation officers in a new and very different way of operating. The process for developing these protocols is critically important. Rather than being imposed on staff, the protocols must be crafted through an inclusive process that incorporates feedback from probation officers and their supervisors. Early in the training process, a small group of probation officers should begin using the protocols on a trial basis. They should then be invited to report their results and experiences, with their feedback incorporated into the revised protocols. The feedback process should then be repeated at various points. By employing an iterative process, the probation department can work through resistance and build buy-in during the development of new protocols.

Integration With Existing System Tools and Procedures

In addition to crafting protocols for the case planning process itself, jurisdictions adopting the family-engaged case planning model must address and overcome potential conflicts with existing procedures, policies and tools already employed by the local justice system. For example, local leaders in New York City had to integrate the new case planning process with the existing electronic data system and risk assessment instrument. Solutions to these challenges can be highly technical and complex, involving sophisticated software coding and data systems integration. They are, however, necessary to ensure that the new case planning process does not create unreasonable demands on probation officers and other probation staff.

Quality Assurance and Sustainability

In keeping with the probation transformation's focus on accountability for results, jurisdictions working to adopt family-engaged case planning should establish concrete agency-wide goals and clear expectations for individual probation officers, and they should commit themselves to collecting information to determine how well those goals and expectations are being met. Participating jurisdictions should consider the following practices:

- Track basic statistics to determine if probation officers are completing the case plan process.
- Regularly review a random sample of cases to assess the quality of the case plans and to determine how well probation officers are following recommended procedures.
- Convene meetings with supervisors and line staff to discuss problem areas and identify opportunities for continuous improvement.
- Survey or hold focus groups with families and youth to gather their perspectives on the case planning process and assess the levels of engagement, collaboration and clarity.
- Review data on violations of probation, detention associated with probation violations and out-of-home placements to determine if the new case planning procedures are helping achieve the goals of probation transformation.
- Survey probation line staff to identify challenges in completing and using the case plan to promote behavior change and youth success.
- Interview judges to identify perceived problems and concerns with the case planning process.

CONCLUSION

"Doing family-engaged case planning is critical, and it isn't enough. We needed to go further; we needed to develop and nurture mutually engaged relationships with families at all stages of probation and in all areas of system reform planning and implementation."

— Ana Bermúdez, Commissioner, New York City Department of Probation

Many respected experts and organizations — including the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the Urban Institute, the Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and the Council of State Governments Justice Center — are advocating for fundamental reforms in juvenile probation, including improvements to case planning.

Of all the elements in the Casey Foundation's vision for probation transformation, the family-engaged case planning model offers perhaps the greatest opportunity for near-term improvements. When adopted effectively and wholeheartedly, family-engaged case planning ensures that probation officers' focus will be devoted primarily to relationship building, family engagement and youth development, not surveillance; goal setting for the future rather than rule compliance for today; and engaging and partnering with families to motivate youth rather than enforcing court conditions.

At the same time, probation leaders and their court partners must understand that the other core elements of the probation transformation agenda are also critically important. Improvements achieved through family-engaged case planning will be limited without parallel progress on reforms to expand diversion for reducing probation caseloads, to forego long or standard lists of probation conditions, to foster positive youth development through meaningful community partnerships, to end the practice of confining youth for probation rule violations, to limit periods of probation and more. By pushing probation officers to become advocates for the young people on their caseloads from day one, to engage families as true partners and to craft case plans oriented toward goals that young people and their families value, the family-engaged case planning model can serve as a catalyst for broader reform efforts — smoothing the path toward progress in meeting related challenges and sparking a virtuous cycle of continuous improvement.

TRAINING AND IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS AND OTHER RESOURCES

The following training tools and resources are designed to support jurisdictions in implementing the new model for family-engaged case planning.

1. Sample Engaging Questions
Available at https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-familyengagedcaseplanning-questions-2022.pdf

2. Checklist for Case Planning Process
Available at https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-familyengagedcaseplanning-checklist-2022.pdf

3. Sample Family-Engaged Case Plans
   – Introduction to Sample Plans
   – Three Sample Plans
Available at https://assets.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-familyengagedcaseplanning-samples-2022.pdf

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