

Overview

Transition-Age Youth in Justice initiative utilizes innovative technology and collaborative care to help vulnerable youth break the justice cycle by accessing mental health, housing, and employment services.

Challenge

Sonoma County faced a critical challenge with Transition Age Youth (TAY) involved in or at risk of entering the justice system. High rates of homelessness, mental health crises, and substance use among TAY contributed to cycles of justice system involvement. Many of these youth struggled with unstable housing, lack of access to services, and missed court appointments, further entrenching them in the justice system. This population's unique needs required a comprehensive approach to break the cycle of recidivism and provide long-term stability.

Solution

In response to these challenges, Sonoma County launched the Transition Age Youth in Justice Project. This initiative focuses on delivering comprehensive support through a cloud-based collaborative care plan and mobile app, allowing youth to access vital services such as housing, mental health support, employment, and court appointment reminders. By leveraging technology, including integration with the United Way 2-1-1 database, the project enables appointment tracking, and secure document storage for youth. The mobile app, accessible on smartphones, provides real-time notifications and reminders for court and probation appointments, helping to reduce missed appointments and justice events. Community partners such as United Way, TLC Child and Family Services, along with Sonoma County Safety Net departments contribute to the effort by offering expanded mental health and substance use services, as well as critical gap services like housing support, employment assistance and driver's education.

Innovation

The Transition Age Youth in Justice pilot stands out as an innovative solution among California counties due to its creative integration of technology and service delivery. By developing a mobile application that offers court notifications, secure document storage, and appointment management, the project introduces

a forward-thinking, client-centered approach. The app allows youth to access services beyond traditional office hours, facilitating continuous support through features like SMS reminders for court appointments and other critical appointments scheduled by the youth or their care team. This level of technological sophistication and user autonomy is not commonly available in similar programs across counties.

Additionally, the collaborative nature of the initiative, bringing together government, technology partners like IBM, and community organizations, exemplifies the project's innovative spirit.

Results

The pilot program for the Transition Age Youth in Justice pilot has already demonstrated significant success within its first six months. The program achieved measurable outcomes, with 58% of participants successfully housed, 32% connected to employment, 30% receiving mental health services, and 14% enrolled in school or continuing education. The project also reduced adverse justice events, with a 9% reduction in warrants issued and arrests, a 15% reduction in housing loss, and a 7% reduction in the loss of food assistance. By addressing both immediate needs and long-term barriers, such as transportation and employment, the initiative has made tangible improvements in the lives of its participants, while also reducing justice events and increasing stability for at-risk youth.

Replicability

The Transition Age Youth in Justice Project is a replicable model that can serve as a best practice for other California counties facing similar challenges with their TAY populations. Its use of cloud-based technology and mobile tools can easily be adapted by other local governments seeking to improve service delivery and accessibility for vulnerable youth. Moreover, the project's success in reducing justice system involvement and improving housing stability, may inspire other counties to replicate the model with federal or state funding, to support technology infrastructure and collaborative care plans.

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