

ORANGE COUNTY COURT DIVERSION

NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER, 2010

DIVERSION ENHANCEMENT ASSESSMENT PLAN (DEAP)

Overview of the DEAP Grant:

Vermont Association of Diversion Programs (VACDP) recently applied for and received a three year grant from the VT Children and Family Council for Prevention Programs to implement a statewide initiative, referred to as DEAP

The DEAP initiative is focused on 16 and 17 year olds who have been charged in court for a criminal act. Its primary goals are to:

- Increase resilience and decrease minor delinquent and criminal offenses among youth diverted out of the court system;
- Increase the number of youth diverted out of the court system; and
- Increase successful completion of Court Diversion contracts.

Oversight and Evaluation:

VACDP hired a statewide coordinator, Jon Kidde, to staff the initiative. He works closely with Diversion Directors and case managers to support implementation of DEAP. The Univ. of VT 's Research Partnership is working collaboratively with VACDP to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.

Staff Training:

A key component of the DEAP is the administration of the Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI) to youthful offenders referred to Diversion. Diversion Directors and case managers attended four days of training on how to administer the YASI.

Understanding Effective Interventions:

DEAP incorporates the following three principles of intervention that support effective change in behavior:

- **RISK PRINCIPLE:** The amount and degree of intervention matches the risk of the individual to re-offend. Risk can be predicated and the intensity of intervention should match risk level; e.g. high risk requires intense intervention and low risk requires minimal intervention.
- **NEED PRINCIPLE:** Interventions should target the needs that contribute to criminal behavior. Interventions that target needs that are both *related to criminal behavior* and *changeable* have the greatest impact on reducing re-offense.
- **RESPONSIBILITY PRINCIPAL:** Interventions should be responsive to personal characteristics of the client. In order to ensure the greatest benefit, interventions should be matched, or *responsive*, to the individual's interests and abilities.

Putting the Principles Into Practice:

- **Intake:** During the intake interview with youthful offenders from court, Diversion case managers will conduct a conversational style interview to obtain pertinent information about the youth in 10 key domains: legal history, family, school, community/peers, alcohol/other drugs, mental health, aggression/violence, attitudes/skills, and employment/free time. Information obtained in the interview helps case managers better understand the level of risk, needs relating directly to offending, and what interventions the client might be most responsive to.
- **Assessment:** The information gathered during the intake interview will be entered into a validated web-based assessment instrument (YASI). The YASI generates a risk level for the youth (e.g. low, moderate or high) and highlights domains that contribute to their risk to reoffend, as well as domains that support the client's strengths. This helps us to understand the appropriate level of intervention for the client, and target the needs that are contributing to the offending and are changeable.
- **Diversion Contracts:** Case managers will share an overview of the relevant information obtained in the intake interview and from the YASI assessment with the Review Board. The Review Board will use the information to guide the conversation and approach with the client, and for finalizing contract conditions. Review Boards will be encouraged to engage the client in identifying, developing and prioritizing contract conditions that support positive behavioral changes. For low risk youth, contract conditions may be minimal other than those that address the harm to an individual or community. In addition to repairing the harm, contract conditions for moderate and high risk youth may address criminogenic needs that do not immediately appear to be directly related to the charge, but are related to the youth's pattern of offending.