

Utah's Pivot in Juvenile Justice

Since 2017, Utah's Division of Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) has been pioneering an evidence-based approach to reform and is reinvesting in Utah's juvenile justice system.



Philosophy Change

Research in adolescent brain development and public safety has shown that the formal involvement of youth in the justice system, especially juvenile incarceration, results in:

- Developmental issues
- Increased likelihood to reoffend
- Increased likelihood that youth offenders will return to jail
- Greater expense to taxpayers

Outcomes improve dramatically when social and behavioral interventions begin early, ideally before the law is involved.

The evidence is clear: youth are best served in their homes, schools and communities.



Policy Change

Policy changes to support reform and reinvestment thus far include HB 239 (2017), 404 (2019), 384 (2020), 262 (2020), and other efforts. These policy changes share a common thread: they place limits to entering and remaining in the formal system (courts and detention).



Practice Change

As reliance on the "deep end" of the formal system decreases, changes must occur, including an increased focus on the Youth Services Model, in which front-end services are accessible without court or law enforcement involvement. These services include:

- Assessment and screening
- Family engagement
- Skill-building programs
- School liaisons
- Mentoring
- Counseling/therapy
- Parent education
- Crisis support services, including residential
- Employment programs



Partnership

Reform and reinvestment requires collaboration and partnership among courts, schools, law enforcement, and agencies working to serve youth at home, in schools, and in communities.

Juvenile Justice Reform and Reinvestment is working in Utah

So far, we have seen:

