

QUEST Futures: A Juvenile Mental Health Initiative

QUEST Futures is a juvenile mental health initiative that seeks to establish a comprehensive, coordinated response to youth with mental illness involved in the juvenile justice system in Queens, New York.

Overview

Launched by the Center for Court Innovation in collaboration with key justice and mental health agencies in New York City and State, QUEST Futures – a program component of Queens Engagement Strategies for Teens (QUEST) – aims to reduce re-offending by young people with mental illness in the justice system by:

- Providing an alternative to detention for young people in the early stages of their delinquency proceedings and an alternative to placement for adjudicated youth;
- Increasing the capacity of the justice system to link these young people to community-based treatment in lieu of confinement; and
- Engaging young people and their families in effective community-based services that will improve functioning of both the youths and their families.

QUEST Futures works with young people on both a mandated and voluntary basis and at all stages of their delinquency cases. Family Court judges may order young people to have a mental health evaluation and participate in treatment as a condition of remaining in the community while their cases are pending. Voluntary participants may be identified through a mental health screen at the QUEST program or referred by their attorneys or the Department of Probation.

How It Works

Youths who have pending cases in the Queens Family Court or are on juvenile probation and who screen for at least one mental health disorder are eligible for QUEST Futures. At intake, a mental health professional meets with the youth and parent/guardian to introduce the program and answer questions. The youth then receives a comprehensive assessment for mental health disorders. To participate in the program, youths are required to have parental consent and support of at least one parent, legal guardian, or other primary adult caregiver throughout the program.

Once admitted to QUEST Futures, the youth participates in on-site individual and group psychoeducational sessions covering topics such as depression, suicide, emotional intelligence, coping skills, and consequential thinking. Case managers link youths and families to community-based behavioral health providers and other services and monitor their progress in weekly contacts with service providers. Monitoring includes tracking attendance and engagement at treatment sessions, school, and other services, as well as reporting to the court on mandated matters.

QUEST Futures also provides links to community-based services, such as individual or family therapy, inpatient or outpatient substance abuse treatment, public assistance programs, academic support programs, job training, and employment

referrals. Additionally, with its open-door policy, QUEST Futures staff are also available to provide support to youths and their families on a daily basis. QUEST Futures remains involved with youths and families for as long as the case is pending or the youth is on juvenile probation, and voluntary services can continue for up to 60 days after the case is resolved. Through this comprehensive approach, QUEST Futures serves as a resource to all players in the justice system and a bridge between the justice and mental health systems.

Results

The Center for Court Innovation conducted a rigorous evaluation of QUEST Futures, using a quasi-experimental design that compared program participants to young people in similar alternative-to-detention programs who flagged for mental health concerns on a validated screening instrument. Key findings include:

- *Recidivism*: One year after alternative-to-detention enrollment, QUEST Futures participants averaged significantly fewer

total re-arrests and felony re-arrests than the comparison group. QUEST Futures participants were also significantly less likely to have at least one felony re-arrest.

- *Juvenile Delinquency Case Outcomes*: QUEST Futures participants were significantly less likely than the comparison group to receive a community-based probation disposition sentence but significantly more likely to receive other community-based dispositions like adjournment in contemplation of dismissal, conditional discharge, and dismissal.

Examples of compliance monitoring protocols, scripts, forms, and other program materials, including information-sharing protocols and consents, can be obtained from the Center for Court Innovation.

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