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Audit Follow-Up Report #9, December 2005

Juvenile Community Justice

Sarah Landis, Senior Management Auditor

Strong management and innovation are evident at DCJ's Juvenile Division with audit recommendations implemented.

Background

The Multnomah County Auditor's Office issued the audit report *Juvenile Community Justice: Strengthen Management Practices and Clarify Priorities* in August 2003. The objective of the audit was to assess management effectiveness after the implementation of extensive reform and restructuring efforts. Specifically, the audit sought to determine whether probation services were as strong as they needed to be to support detention reform and whether staffing resources were effectively assigned.

The audit found Juvenile Community Justice to be well-managed overall. We found a few areas where management practices needed strengthening and provided a number of recommendations to enhance what was already a substantially effective organization.

- We found that morale could be improved, particularly in a rapidly changing and resource restricted environment.
- On the probation side, we found that improvements could be made in more equitably distributing probation counselors' workload, monitoring

counselors' caseload for quality, and prioritizing high risk cases.

- In detention, we recommended that the division work to improve the management of their on-call staffing pool and optimize staffing levels based on workload demands.

The County accepted the recommendations and agreed to implement them as part of their ongoing improvement efforts.

Scope and Methodology

The objective of this follow-up audit was to determine the extent to which DCJ has implemented recommendations from the original August 2003 audit. We limited the scope of the follow up to the recommendations around prioritizing high risk cases and improving management practices around workload and quality assurance in Counseling Services. The Department provided extensive documentation of their work to address the recommendations and we felt that, given its centrality to the division's mission and the recent restructuring that has occurred, we would focus on the Counseling Services recommendations.

To review caseload (number of cases) and anticipated workload (expected number of contacts), we drew a snapshot of each Juvenile Court Counselor's (JCC's) caseload from the Juvenile Justice Information System (JJIS). We also reviewed Monthly Counseling Reports, DCJ Research and Evaluation reports on the recent reorganization and workload analysis, and information provided by the department as part of our annual follow-up survey. Finally, we interviewed the Counseling and Court Services manager to ask about changes in practice.

This audit was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Results

In an effort to respond to budget cuts and to improve progress toward its mission and goals, the Juvenile Division initiated a major reorganization in November 2003, 3 months after our audit was issued. The goals of the reorganization are summarized as follows:

- Move youth cases more quickly through the system to more closely link consequences with the youth's behavior.
- Provide high quality services and ensure a seamless transition from the Court to probation.
- Focus resources on high and medium risk youth, keeping low risk youth out of the system.
- Enhance the quality of care in treatment programs and increase funding opportunities.

Prioritize Higher Risk Youth Implemented

As described in the goal statement above, the department has committed to serving youth who are assessed as high or medium risk to reoffend. Lower risk youth are served informally or with a warning letter from the department. A one-day check on all active cases with a risk level assigned in the JJIS system indicates that there

are fewer low risk cases on Counselors' caseload than there were in the 2001 snapshot we took during the original audit. However, this produced a large number of cases with no risk level assigned, which is likely due to a technical glitch that does not require counselors to type the assessed risk level into the risk level field.

We reviewed the monthly Counseling Services Activity Reports between January 2002 and October 2005, which contain details about the number of cases in each risk category for the month. We found that the percentage of cases that were determined to be low risk dropped from 35% to 17% during this time. DCJ management stated that most current low risk cases are ones that have been reassigned from a higher risk level earlier in their probation stint rather than those that began as low risk.

Fully Implement Case Audit/Review Implemented

Juvenile Services has more fully implemented its case audit and review procedures as recommended in the audit. They assigned a temporary supervisor who does not have management responsibilities to conduct case audits and reviews with counselors on their entire caseloads. Records are now kept to document the process, and the Counseling Services Manager intends to continue in-depth analysis of each case to ensure that contacts and counseling is of a high quality.

Establish a Workload Management System Partially implemented

We found that some discrepancies continue to exist among counselors' caseloads, although we did not determine what factors led to these differences.

The department has conducted a workload study and continues to analyze its workload regularly. In addition, improvements in the case audit and review practices have lead to better, more in-depth analysis of the quality of counselor's interactions with youth. Management states that this quality control is more important than finding an ideal caseload size.