

Implementation and Outcomes of an Innovative Front End Juvenile Justice Reform Initiative

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Abstract

Purpose The current study describes the successes and challenges experienced during the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Mobile Response Team (JJMRT) initiative in Albany, New York. This initiative represented a collaborative effort by local police, probation and three local non-profit community agencies to better identify the needs and risks of youth at time of arrest to ensure the needs of the youth were appropriately met.

Methods A combination of qualitative and quantitative data were used to describe the organization, implementation, and impacts of the JJMRT on the local juvenile justice system. Qualitative data consisted of interviews conducted with members of each of the organizations involved in the JJMRT initiative. Quantitative data was collected from the JJMRT intake forms and was analyzed descriptively.

Results Findings suggest this initiative had a limited impact on the juvenile justice system response to youth upon arrest, but that the initiative was successful in facilitating increased awareness of the perspectives and duties

of each of the different agencies involved in the local juvenile justice system.

Discussion While the JJMRT initiative had limited success in achieving its stated goal, a number of lessons were learned. First, the results highlight the importance of applying the risk-need-responsivity model at the earliest point possible, as the screening conducted by JJMRT before youth were officially arrested resulted in the discontinuation of about a quarter of youth arrests and in turn allowed for the avoidance of formal processing. Second, a growing body of research argued for the inclusion of social workers in the juvenile justice process in a fashion similar to that of the JJMRT. While the results of the current study suggest the inclusion of social workers facilitated increased communication among juvenile justice stakeholders, it also resulted in at least short term tensions as all involved adjusted to new roles and responsibilities.

Keywords Criminal justice policy · Juvenile justice · Juvenile offenders · Needs assessment · Risk assessment

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Introduction

Juvenile justice practitioners and policy makers in jurisdictions across the United States have increasingly reviewed how low-risk juvenile offenders were processed due to concerns that involving low-risk offenders in the justice system led to further system involvement (Abrams, 2013; Benekos, Merlo, & Puzanchera, 2013; Bontrager Ryon, Winokur Early, Hand, & Chapman, 2013; Rivers & Anwyl, 2000). Of particular importance to this movement was an increased emphasis on screening of youth at the time of arrest and the development of Juvenile Assessment Centers (JACs). While JACs were developed and

implemented in jurisdictions across the country, most of the efforts to evaluate JACs were limited to jurisdictions located in Florida (Dembo & Brown, 1994; Rivers & Anwyl, 2000; Walters et al., 2005). The current study extends research on programs guided by the JAC model by describing the development and evaluation of the Juvenile Justice Mobile Response Team (JJMRT) in Albany County New York.

The JJMRT initiative was developed by the City of Albany Police Department (hereafter Police) in collaboration with Albany County Probation (hereafter Probation) and three local non-profit community service agencies. The JJMRT initiative was grounded in the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC) model, which sought to improve the screening of youth processed by the juvenile justice system so the needs of youth could be adequately identified and addressed (Dembo & Brown, 1994; Rivers, Dembo, & Anwyl, 1998). The JJMRT was not a traditional JAC for reasons described in later sections, but was designed to meet similar goals such as increased use of pre-arrest diversion programs, increased use of formal diversion, and decreased use of pre-arraignment detention. Similar to JACs, the JJMRT was founded on collaboration, bringing together the Police, Probation, and three local service agencies to help inform decisions at the very first stage of a youth's interaction with the juvenile justice system.

The findings of the current study highlight a number of successes and challenges experienced during the implementation of the JJMRT. Specifically, this initiative was successful in bringing together groups from different parts of the juvenile justice system, bridging the interests of partner agencies by utilizing a risk assessment tool at the time of arrest, and matching the system response with each youth's risk level. As is typical when attempting large-scale changes, the implementation of this initiative experienced many challenges related to the balancing of interests, data collection, and assessment (Dadich, Stout, & Hosseinzadeh, 2015; Mulvey & Iselin, 2008; Rivers et al., 1998). The following discussion provides an overview of the JJMRT and highlights the successes and limitations of its implementation as the initiative sought to assure that the juvenile justice system response to youth matched youths' level of risk.

Juvenile Justice and Juvenile Assessment Centers

Initiatives such as JACs and the JJMRT represent a return to the principles on which the American juvenile justice system was founded. The juvenile justice system was developed with the welfare and best interest of children in mind, and as such separated youth from adult criminals, provided guidance rather than punishment and provided an environment in which youth could be reformed (Platt,

1977). While the goal of the juvenile court remained consistent, rising juvenile arrest rates throughout much of the twentieth century were associated with increasingly punitive attitudes and the enactment of harsher penalties (Benekos et al., 2013; Frazier, Bishop, & Lanza-Kaduce, 1999). As a result of this shift, more youth were processed by the juvenile justice system, putting them at greater risk of further and deeper involvement in the justice system (Bontrager Ryon et al., 2013).

The decline of youth involvement in violent crime during the mid-1990s was associated with a shift back to rehabilitative practices. To better assure youth were rehabilitated, many jurisdictions incorporated screening and assessment processes upon initial arrest of youth and expanded the availability and coordination of resources available to youth offenders (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Benekos et al., 2013; Mulvey & Iselin, 2008). Such efforts were exemplified by JACs, which typically utilized an assessment tool and a coordinated response among juvenile justice practitioners to prevent future delinquent behavior (Dembo & Brown, 1994; Walters et al., 2005). The objectives of JACs often included the development of a comprehensive assessment of the juvenile's needs; improved case management and treatment; more efficient use of law enforcement, juvenile justice, and treatment resources; avoidance of unnecessary detention of juveniles; enhanced information sharing across agencies; and improved monitoring of system performance (Dembo & Brown, 1994; Walters et al., 2005). These goals were often met through the use of assessment tools and coordinated care efforts that included representatives from the juvenile justice system and social support services.

Utilizing efficient and effective screening and assessment processes during the earliest contact with the juvenile justice system was key to identifying the level of risk a youth offender presents, and responding with appropriate interventions that match that risk (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Bontrager Ryon et al., 2013; Dembo et al., 1998; Mulvey & Iselin, 2008). Efforts to develop or improve screening procedures utilized a variety of classification systems; the most influential was the risk-need-responsivity model (RNR) developed by Andrews and co-workers (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Assink et al., 2015). The RNR model was rooted in three principles: intensive levels of treatment should be reserved for higher risk offenders, programs should focus on offender needs that are functionally related to criminal behavior, and the style and mode of intervention should be matched to the offender's learning style and ability (Andrews et al., 1990; Andrews & Bonta, 2010). This model also suggests professionals should take into account the individual's current circumstances when determining the most appropriate treatment (Andrews et al., 1990; Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

To determine the risk and needs of an individual, the RNR model assesses eight domains found to predict criminal or delinquent behavior: history of antisocial behavior, antisocial personality pattern, antisocial cognition, antisocial peer affiliations, family circumstances, performance at school or work, leisure activities involved in and substance use issues (Andrews & Bonta, 2010). Each of these domains can be classified as static or dynamic. Static factors represent things that cannot be changed through treatment such as the individual's demographic characteristics or their prior offense history (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Assink et al., 2015). Dynamic factors include the individual's current physical and mental health, substance abuse issues, and exposure to violent behaviors (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Assink et al., 2015; dos Santos, Alberto & Marques, 2016). Discussions of the RNR model also refer to dynamic factors as "criminogenic needs," meaning these factors influence whether an individual perceives criminal activity to be favorable and rewarding (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews, Bonta, & Wormith, 2011). While the RNR model recognizes the importance of static factors, greater importance was assigned to dynamic factors because "criminogenic needs" can potentially be addressed with intervention strategies (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Assink et al., 2015; Haqanee, Peterson-Badali, & Skilling, 2015).

In addition to an emphasis on greater use of efficient and effective screening processes during youths' initial contact with the criminal justice system, JACs emphasized coordination of care by multiple agencies as a means to improve intervention efforts. Such multi-agency efforts often included law enforcement agencies, treatment centers, child welfare agencies, and school systems that provide a range of services to youth (Dembo & Brown, 1994; Walters et al., 2005). This was important because many youth processed by the juvenile justice system had diagnosable mental health disorders or substance use issues that contributed to their delinquent behavior (Kapp, Petr, Robbins, & Choi, 2013; Mallet, 2014; Noyori & Moon, 2010; Welch-Brewer, Stoddard-Dare, & Mallet, 2011). In support of this, research found the most successful and effective JACs utilized multidimensional models that identified and addressed the variety of youth needs not being met that resulted in their involvement in the juvenile justice system (Rivers & Anwyl, 2000; Walters et al., 2005).

The collaboration of multiple agencies at a system point traditionally handled solely by the police was not without its challenges. As recognized by Dadich et al. (2015), organizational changes implemented within local juvenile justice systems require an understanding of the complex terrain in which juvenile justice practitioners work. This terrain includes government and non-profit social service

agencies. While all of these agencies have the common goal of helping youth, the guiding philosophies and strategies used to accomplish this goal may vary substantially. This diversity of philosophies and strategies can lead to difficulties during the implementation of changes; these difficulties may include lack of formal service protocols, lack of informal relationships and structures, high case-loads, staff turnover, and timeliness of decisions and communications (Kapp et al., 2013; Mallet, 2014; Rivers & Anwyl, 2000; Rivers et al., 1998). Of these challenges, information sharing was highlighted as the most vital, but also the most controversial due to concerns about sharing sensitive information (Kapp et al., 2013; Mallet, 2014). Indeed, this was an issue experienced by the JJMRT that will be further addressed in the discussion section.

In summary, the juvenile justice system in the United States has undergone a series of dramatic changes since its introduction. This system was founded upon the ideas of rehabilitation but became increasingly punitive over time. The introduction of JACs represent a return to the rehabilitative roots of the juvenile justice system, as they assure that the risks and needs of youth were identified by a multi-agency team before being introduced to the juvenile justice system. In doing so, JACs were able to determine whether youth would be best served by local community agencies in substitution of or in addition to more punitive actions. The next section describes the JJMRT initiative, which was grounded in the JAC model.

Juvenile Justice Mobile Response Team

The JJMRT was an interagency collaboration developed and implemented by juvenile justice stakeholders in the city of Albany, New York to reform the front end of the local juvenile justice system. This initiative used the JAC model and was grounded in the principles of RNR with special attention provided to the screening of youth at the time of arrest to best ensure that the intensity of the system response matched the youth's risk of future delinquent activity. The specific aim of this initiative was to prevent low-risk youth accused of committing minor offenses from becoming further involved in the juvenile justice system. To this end, the JJMRT was designed to meet three objectives: increase the use of pre-arrest diversion, decrease the number of referrals to Family Court through the use of increased referral to diversion at Probation, and decrease the use of pre-arraignment detention.

The JJMRT was developed by the Police, who worked in collaboration with Probation, and three local community agencies to implement an initiative based on the JACs. This strategy was used instead of developing a traditional JAC due to funding constraints. The community agencies

were selected for participation in the JJMRT initiative because of their active involvement in the treatment of at-risk youth in the City of Albany and because each had a long history of collaboration with the Police and Probation. A coordinator with extensive experience in mental health counseling and juvenile justice was identified from one of the community agencies to assure that the JJMRT was implemented with fidelity. The Center for Human Services Research at the University at Albany was contracted for an evaluation of the initiative and provided support with data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings.

Figure 1 depicts a flowchart of the JJMRT operation. Upon arrest of a juvenile, a probation officer and two assessment workers from the community agencies were dispatched to the police station where they met with the juvenile and their family to conduct an assessment of the youth's areas of risk and need. The probation officer then administered the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) pre-screen. The YASI is a tool used by jurisdictions across the country for the assessment and case management of youth populations. In accordance with the principles of RNR, the YASI pre-screen assesses an individual's static and dynamic risk factors, as well as protective factors that may keep the youth from engaging in further delinquency. The domains of the YASI reflect an individual's legal history, family, school, community and peer relationships, alcohol and other drugs, mental/physical health, aggression, attitudes, and skills (Baird et al., 2013; Partners, 2011). The pre-screen consists of a subset of the full YASI assessment that measures risk of recidivism based upon a combination of 33 static and dynamic items determined to have the strong predictive power (Partners, 2011; Savignac, 2010). Even though the pre-screen was much shorter than the full assessment, evaluations of the pre-screen instrument determined it achieved a sufficient level of predictive accuracy (Baird et al., 2013; Partners, 2011; Savignac, 2010). Probation has used the YASI since

2000 to determine risk and protective factors for the purposes of case planning and intervention plans. An innovation of the JJMRT was the inclusion of other actors in the case planning process, which was traditionally the sole responsibility of Probation. Incorporating the YASI into the JJMRT screening facilitated case planning discussions among Probation and the social service providers by highlighting areas of risk and need. Importantly, an innovation of the JJMRT was to utilize this screening at the point of arrest, whereas traditionally it was used at the point of Probation intake.

Another important innovation of the JJMRT for the local juvenile justice system, was the additional information collected by the community agency workers. In speaking with the youth and their family, the community agency workers collected information about the youth, including the specific nature of the alleged crime, any services the youth was currently receiving, and the youths' interests. This additional information was helpful when combined with the YASI pre-screen because it identified specific criminogenic needs and specific protective factors as opposed to the broader domains identified by the YASI pre-screen. The additional information facilitated discussions of available treatment options so that the needs of the youth could begin to be met as quickly as possible. Treatment options included informal and formal intervention strategies.

After administering the YASI pre-screen and conversing with the youth and their family, the JJMRT discussed possible options before presenting a recommendation to a police supervisor for determination of an appropriate outcome. Possible recommendations of the JJMRT screening included: discontinuation of the arrest with no further action taken, discontinuation of the arrest with the youth referred to a social worker within the police department, continuation of the arrest with the youth referred to Probation for diversionary services, continuation of the arrest

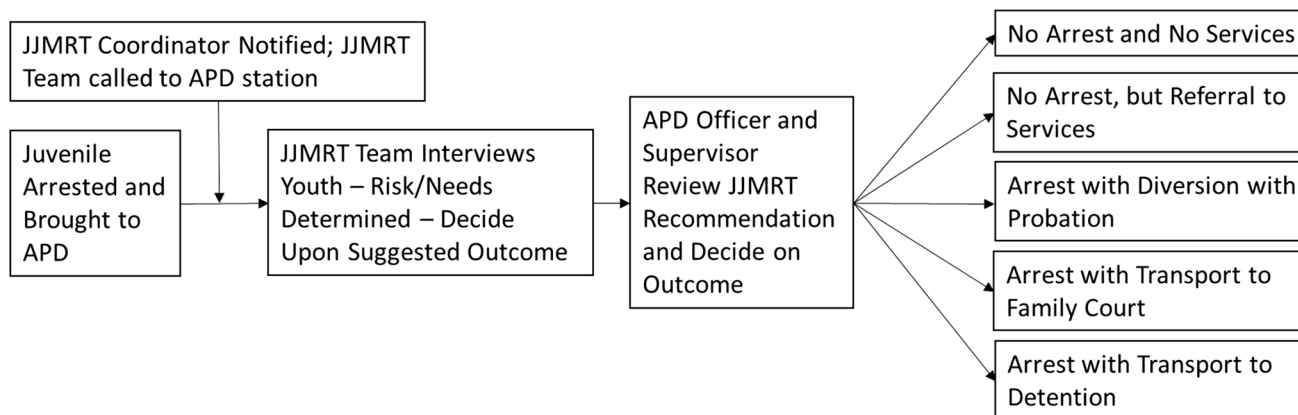


Fig. 1 Flow Chart of JJMRT operations

with the youth transported directly to family court or a detention center (if the arrest occurred outside of court hours). Where detention was considered, the probation officer administered the Albany County Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI). The RAI is a consensus based instrument developed to objectively inform the decision to detain a youth pending his/her first court appearance (Salsich, 2009). The RAI was used by juvenile justice practitioners in Albany since 2007 to inform youth detention decisions. Further, the use of the RAI for youth arrested outside of court hours was an innovation of the JJMRT as it provided an additional screening that had not been conducted in the past.

While the JJMRT was based on the JAC model, it is important to recognize two features of the JJMRT that distinguished it from a traditional JAC. First, most JACs operated 24 h a day and were housed within a unique office set apart from the police department (Rivers & Anwyl, 2000; Silverthorn, 2003; Walters et al., 2005). Due to a combination of union requirements and limited funding, only arrests that occurred between 8 a.m. and 12:00 a.m. were eligible for JJMRT assessment, and the assessments occurred at the police station. Even though the JJMRT met in a police station, the assessment team conferred with the youth and their family in a semi-private room. The team then made their recommendation to the police, presenting the supervisor with the reasons for their decision. The remainder of this paper describes the successes and challenges experienced during the implementation of the JJMRT.

Current Study

The current study represents an evaluation of the JJMRT initiative. The evaluation sought to address the following questions:

- (1) Did the collaborative process embedded in the development of the JJMRT have an impact on interagency communication and relationships?
- (2) How did JJMRT recommendations match with level of risk?
- (3) What potential benefits and challenges may be experienced during the implementation of a JAC-based initiative when human capital resources are abundant, but financial resources are limited?

This evaluation was conducted during and after the implementation of this initiative; the analyses and results are thus divided into two sections. The first section describes the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the JJMRT, while the second section provides a descriptive overview of the recommendations of the

JJMRT. The discussion section connects themes from each of the analytical sections to highlight the challenges experienced and the impact of the initiative on the local juvenile justice system.

Data and Methods

Data collection took place during a twelve-month period and incorporated information collected during interviews with members of the JJMRT initiative and from the JJMRT intake forms. Interviews were conducted with individuals from the Police, Probation and the community agencies at baseline and 6 months into operation. Baseline interviews were conducted with 42 staff and administrators shortly after the start of the initiative; follow-up interviews were conducted with 36 individuals. Interviewees reflected the organizational partners involved with the JJMRT, including police officers, JJMRT responders from Probation and the community agencies, and management and supervisors from each agency. Only responders from Probation and the community agencies who had participated in at least one JJMRT assessment were interviewed in the follow-up period. This was not a criterion for police officers as we wanted to understand the perspective of all officers, regardless of whether or not they had arrested a youth who was assessed by the JJMRT. This decision was made because the JJMRT involved non-law enforcement agents in arrest procedures traditionally handled by the police alone and therefore potential impacted the work load of all of the police officers as all had equal probability of arresting a youth who would be screened by the JJMRT. Most of the interviews were conducted with line staff within each organization, but this was especially true for the Police because of the larger number of officers relative to JJMRT responders (see Table 1). All interviewees were assured anonymity; most interviews were between 30 and 45 min in length. The SUNY Albany Institutional Review Board reviewed all data collection procedures.

A semi-structured interview instrument was used, which established consistent direction and scope for the interviews while allowing interviewees the opportunity for unstructured responses (see McCracken, 1988; Patton, 2002). Interviewees in the baseline and follow-up periods were asked about their understanding of the JJMRT initiative, the role of the various partner agencies and of the individual responders from those agencies, the juvenile assessment process, and challenges to project success. Additionally, interviewees were asked during the follow-up period about how the relationships between their agency and each of the partner agencies had changed since the implementation of the JJMRT. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the informants and were transcribed.

Table 1 Interview participants from each agency

Agency	Baseline			6 Month follow-up		
	Line staff	Supervisors/upper management	Total	Line staff	Supervisors/upper management	Total
Albany police department	21	4	25	17	3	20
Albany county probation department	3	2	5	4	2	6
Community partners	7	5	12	8	2	10
Total	31	11	42	29	7	36

Extensive notes were taken for interviews that were not recorded. Data analysis followed the grounded theory method (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) whereby the data were examined for similarities and differences and coded as themes emerged.

The information for the recommendation portion of the evaluation was collected from the JJMRT intake forms, a data collection tool developed specifically for the initiative. The JJMRT intake form provided information on the alleged offense, demographic characteristics, YASI pre-screen and RAI scores (when applicable), current services and service referrals, the recommendation made by the JJMRT to the Police, and whether the Police supervisor followed the recommendation. The recommendation portion of this evaluation assessed whether decisions to maintain arrests, referrals to service, referrals to Probation, and referrals to Family Court or detention matched youths' risk levels, as determined by the YASI Pre-Screen.

Results

Results of the process and recommendation portions of the evaluation describe different aspects of the JJMRT initiative and therefore are presented separately. The process portion examines the implementation of a systems change initiative, while the recommendation portion describes the demographic characteristics of youth assessed by the JJMRT and what responses were deemed appropriate based upon the risks and needs of assessed youth.

The Process Study

Interviews were conducted to identify the success and challenges experienced during the implementation of the JJMRT and discern areas where changes were needed to improve the operation. Baseline interviews were characterized by widespread recognition that the JJMRT initiative represented a significant change to juvenile justice practice in Albany, as interviewees from all agencies highlighted

the importance of including Probation and the community agencies in juvenile arrest and detainment decisions previously been made solely by the Police. There was, however, some uncertainty expressed by the Police about whether the other partners had meaningful contributions to make to these decisions. Specifically, a few officers expressed concern about whether the involvement of the other agencies would cause decision making to be "inefficient." For example, one officer said he could "solve my problems without them." This skepticism was rooted in a belief that the community agencies did not understand what officers did or how officers made their decisions.

Similarly, community agency participants voiced concerns and confusion about the specific roles of each agency in the assessment process. Many of the community agency participants felt they would benefit from a better understanding of how their roles and responsibilities fit with those of the other agencies. Despite this confusion, most of those interviewed were optimistic about building relationships and collaborating in the interest of best serving youth. In the words of one responder, "It's nice to be able to work with another agency as a team on something, and now you're building relationships with this other agency."

Likewise, although participants expressed concerns about the length of the assessments and information sharing, they were confident these issues would be resolved as everyone became more familiar with the assessment process. This suggested a need for additional training on JJMRT protocols and procedures, and clarification of the roles and contributions of each of the agencies to the assessment process.

After presenting these findings to all partners, the project manager, in collaboration with management from the partner organizations, created a set of instructions that clearly defined how information was to be recorded and how the assessment process was to be documented and conducted. The project manager also initiated additional trainings and bi-weekly meetings involving each of the agencies to provide additional opportunity for discussion of ongoing or new concerns. A notable change that arose out of these meetings was the creation of an expedited

appearance ticket (EAT). The EAT was created in response to concerns that youth whose offense and risk factors necessitated an arrest and who needed services in place quickly but whose actions did not warrant an immediate court appearance or detention. With an EAT, arrested youth referred to diversion with Probation were seen within 1–3 days rather than the typical timeframe of 5–7 days. Improvements in communication and role clarity thus resulted in a concrete policy change.

Follow-up interviews suggested that changes addressed many but not all program challenges. For example, many of the community agency workers expressed uncertainty about the goals of the project during the baseline interviews and their role in the initiative. During the follow-up interviews, however, many participants indicated the assessment process was running more smoothly than at baseline, that interagency relationships had developed or been strengthened, and that the roles of the community agencies were more clearly defined. As one respondent noted, “I think we are at a point now where everybody has the focus of the main function of this. It just took a while to get there.”

Some responders, however, specifically from the community agencies, continued to express concern about the limited nature of their role and sought greater responsibility to connect youth and families to services, to follow-up with them, and to receive more information about the outcomes of assessed youth. For example, one responder said, “we still need service providers to follow-up with them [the youth and family] ...I think the follow-up is pretty much the most important part of the program, otherwise you don’t know if the family is getting to those appointments or need something different.” These issues and barriers to information sharing (including legal protections of confidentiality) remained a concern among many of those interviewed.

This team approach to youth entering the juvenile justice system revealed challenges when individuals from different systems (social service and juvenile justice) work together to inform decisions typically made by police officers. This approach also raised important considerations in the decision to arrest and process youth through the juvenile justice system. The description of the recommendation portion of this study further explores the results of the risk assessment and system response.

The Recommendation Study

The primary goal of this portion of the evaluation was to ascertain whether system responses matched the needs and risks of arrested youth. Over a twelve-month period, 155 youth arrest events were eligible for a JJMRT screening,

but only 99 (about 64 %) of the eligible arrests were assessed by the JJMRT. This relatively low rate of assessment resulted from three factors. Thirty-two eligible arrests were excluded because the initiative was characterized by a “soft roll-out” during the first 2 months of implementation, during which time only arrests made by juvenile detectives were assessed by the JJMRT. This was done to ensure that potential issues with implementation could be addressed before including the much larger number of patrol officers. Another 14 eligible arrests were not included because the youth and/or family refused to participate in a JJMRT assessment. The specific reason/s for refusals was not officially recorded by the JJMRT. The remainder of the non-assessed arrests occurred outside of JJMRT hours of operation, and deferral of the arrest for assessment was deemed inappropriate by the arresting officer due to the circumstances of the situation, such as a high risk of recidivism.

The demographic characteristics of youth arrested during the first 12 months of the JJMRT initiative are shown in Table 2. About three-quarters of the arrested youth were male; the average age of arrest was about 14; about 80 % of the arrests were of African Americans. Statistics from the 2009–2013 American Community Survey 5-Year estimates indicated that the Albany population aged 10–17 was about 23 % non-Hispanic white, 59 % non-Hispanic black and 18 % Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). These statistics indicate that a disproportionate number of minority youth were arrested, but data limitations prevented further exploration of this issue. Albany County

Table 2 Characteristics and recommendations of arrested youth

Racial composition	
Black	124 (80 %)
White	11 (7 %)
Hispanic	14 (9 %)
Other	6 (4 %)
Sex	
Male	118 (76 %)
Female	37 (24 %)
Age	
Twelve or younger	11 (7 %)
Thirteen	36 (23 %)
Fourteen	48 (31 %)
Fifteen	56 (36 %)
Sixteen or Older	4 (3 %)
Recommendation	
Arrests discontinued	22 (14 %)
Appearance tickets	97 (63 %)
Family court/detained	36 (23 %)
Total	155

juvenile justice officials recognize this disparity and are currently working with state and local juvenile justice agencies to address issues of racial disproportionality in the juvenile justice system through participation in the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Helpdesk, 2016).

A major contribution of the JJMRT was the application of the principles of RNR through the implementation of a screening procedure at the point of arrest. Traditionally, youth were not assessed for risk and need until they were formally arrested and processed by the Police and sent to Probation for intake where the YASI pre-screen was administered. The JJMRT intake form built upon this framework by incorporating the YASI pre-screen into the intake process, thereby assuring the fullest possible screening was administered at an earlier point in the process. The final recommendation of the JJMRT members for whether to uphold the arrest or pursue an alternative option was based upon the full array of information collected by the Probation officer and community agency workers.

Results in Table 3 shows how the risk levels as determined by the YASI pre-screen matched with the recommendations the JJMRT members made to the Police supervisor. The team recommended arrests be discontinued in about 23 % of cases, most of whom were identified as low or moderate risk. Of these, seven arrests were discontinued without referral to services, while another 16 recommendations were made to discontinue arrest with a service referral to the Police social worker.

While a substantial number of arrests were discontinued as a result of the JJMRT intake, a much larger proportion were recommended for continuation of the arrest. The most common recommendation associated with a continued arrest was diversion with Probation, which was used for 57 of the 76 continued arrests (75 %). A breakdown of the statistics by risk level further highlights this, showing this recommendation was given to 59 % of the youth classified as low risk, 63 % of the youth classified as moderate risk

and 53 % of the youth classified as high risk. It should be noted that the majority of youth identified as high risk had their arrest continued and were referred to either diversion (53 %) or family court/detention (37 %). Overall, this indicates harsher responses were reserved for youth who indicated high risk levels based on the assessment instrument.

In addition to better assuring arrest decisions were reserved for youth at higher risk of recidivating, the JJMRT also helped to identify services that would address the reason(s) why youth arrested regardless of risk level. Services recommended included mental health counselling, financial assistance for participating in organized recreational activities, substance abuse treatment, mentoring, assistance with school, help finding employment or family counselling. While it is possible youth would have eventually been recommended to such services, the JJMRT helped to identify needs for particular types of services earlier than was traditionally the case. Further, the inclusion of community agency workers on the JJMRT helped to connect youth with available services so their behavior could be modified immediately upon their entry into the juvenile justice system. Recommended services were often offered by agencies other than those represented by the community agency workers who took part in the JJMRT screening due to the specific risk and needs of arrested youth.

The RAI results in Table 4 further speak to the risk levels of youth assessed by the JJMRT. The RAI was only administered to youth who were considered for detention due to the severity of their infraction or their risk level, as determined by the YASI pre-screen. The RAI was administered to thirty-one youth, most of whom were identified as high risk by the YASI pre-screen (Table 4). While the RAI was only used to assess a subset of the youth screened by the JJMRT, the inclusion of the RAI assessment provided an additional check based on the principles of RNR and assured detention was reserved for those youth as the

Table 3 Relationship between the YASI pre-screen score and JJMRT recommendation

YASI pre-screen score	Options available if arrest discontinued				Options available if arrest continued			
	No arrest; no services		No arrest; referral to services		Arrest, diversion with probation		Arrest with family court or detention	
	Count	Percent of total youth arrests	Count	Percent of total youth arrests	Count	Percent of total youth arrests	Count	Percent of total youth arrests
Low	4	24	3	18	10	59	0	0
Moderate	1	3	9	30	19	63	1	3
High	1	2	4	8	26	53	18	37
System down	1	33	0	0	2	66	0	0
Total	7	7	16	16	57	58	19	19

Of the 155 youth processed by JJMRT, 14 were recommended for detention

Table 4 Relationship between YASI pre-screen score and RAI scores

YASI pre-screen score	RAI score less than 3		RAI score between 3 and 8		RAI score higher than 8		NA/No RAI	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent
Low	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	100
Moderate	0	0	3	10	0	0	27	90
High	1	2	20	41	7	14	21	43
System down	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	100
Total	1	1	23	23	7	7	68	69

RAI scores higher than 8 were automatically recommended for detention

highest risk of recidivism. In combination with the results of Table 3, this suggests the Police were reserving arrests for youth who were at greater risk of further delinquency. This issue is explored further in the conclusions and recommendations section, as it may be a reason for the low proportion of arrests discontinued by the JJMRT.

At the end of the intake process, the recommendations made by the JJMRT were given to the Police for final approval. Results of analyses not shown revealed that 92 % of the recommendations made by the JJMRT were agreed upon by the Police. Results for the remaining cases show the police sought a more severe response in five cases and a less severe response in two cases. Overall, this suggests the Police, Probation, and the community agency workers agreed upon the appropriate recommendation for youth, thus illustrating the positive changes to interagency collaboration discussed in the follow-up interviews.

Summary of the Results

Overall, the results of the recommendation portion of the evaluation of the JJMRT indicate limited success of the JJMRT in its stated goal of reducing the number of youth formally processed by the juvenile justice system. This does not indicate the program failed as 23 youth arrests were discontinued as a result of JJMRT, which prevented the arrested youth from being exposed to the potentially harmful impacts of unnecessary involvement in the juvenile justice system. Further, the greater application of the principles of RNR and improved screening identified many of the arrested youth as medium or high risk, which provided stronger evidence that their behaviors would be better corrected by further system involvement. Indeed, the action taken by the police most often matched the recommendation of the team, which was influenced by the results of the risk assessment instrument. Additionally, findings from the process portion of the evaluation identified latent improvements to the local juvenile justice system, as many stakeholders reported enhanced relationships among

juvenile justice practitioners and increased awareness of the perspectives and duties among those involved.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The current study expanded research on JACs by describing the implementation and outcomes of the JJMRT initiative in Albany, New York. The evaluation of the JJMRT focused on assessing changes in juvenile justice practices that occurred due to the incorporation of Probation and local community agencies in arrest decisions traditionally made solely by the police. The findings suggest the better use of screening and application of the principles of RNR by the JJMRT resulted in at least a few youth being diverted from the juvenile justice system and stronger justification for formal processing for other youth. While the results do not present strong evidence that the JJMRT accomplished its stated goal of considerably reducing the number of low-risk youth processed by the juvenile justice system, the findings speak to the various successes and challenges experienced by the JJMRT that may inform the implementation of similar programs in other jurisdictions.

One of contributions of the JJMRT to the reform of the local juvenile justice system related to improvements in screening. Probation had used the YASI pre-screen prior to the implementation of the JJMRT, but this meant that youth had to be formally arrested and processed before being screened. The implementation of the JJMRT facilitated the screening of youth at an earlier stage and in turn helped to assure that the juvenile justice response matched youths' assessed risks and needs. Given the literature showing the utility of risk assessment instruments and the importance of matching the juvenile justice system response with youths' risk, the practice of determining risk level at the time of arrest is an innovation that deserves further attention and evaluation (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Bontrager Ryon et al., 2013; Dembo et al., 1998; Mulvey & Iselin, 2008). This is particularly important in New York, which is on the cusp of raising the age of criminal

responsibility (Creelan & Soffiyah, 2014). This change will result in greater numbers of youth being processed by the juvenile justice system and necessitating a system response in accordance with their level of risk.

A second contribution was the improvement of communication among juvenile justice stakeholders in Albany County. A growing body of research argued for the greater inclusion of social workers in the juvenile justice process, which was a key part of the JJMRT (Abrams, 2013; Peters, 2011). The primary benefit of the JJMRT was that it created opportunities for formal and informal information sharing and relationship building among law enforcement and local community agencies by increasing the number of opportunities for face to face discussions. The community responders were recognized as having a unique ability to determine the needs of youth and families and to recommend appropriate recommendations and services. Findings from the interviews revealed that agency staff would have preferred an expanded role in connecting youth and families to services and following up with them.

While many involved in the JJMRT felt that relationships among the collaborating agencies were strengthened, concerns were expressed about ongoing challenges to information sharing among partners. This was not unique to the JJMRT, as research suggested differences in philosophies among social service and juvenile justice practitioners may impede collaboration efforts (Kapp et al., 2013; Rivers & Anwyl, 2000; Rivers et al., 1998). Such communication issues may be overcome by providing clearly defined roles for all partners prior to project implementation. It is also important to confront and strategize ways early on to address the challenges of collaboration between agencies serving vulnerable populations where confidentiality protections limit the amount of information that can be shared and with whom it can be shared.

According to Dadich et al. (2015), organizational changes implemented within local juvenile justice systems require an understanding of the complex terrain in which juvenile justice practitioners work, which includes the interests of government and non-profit social service agencies. This was reflected in a frequently referenced criticism of the JJMRT that insufficient thought was given to the anticipation or addressment of potential challenges prior to the implementation. For example, while the Police Department is a 24/7 agency, the other agencies did not have this availability, thereby affecting the number of youth who could be assessed. More thorough training and discussion prior to implementation may have elicited agencies' different expectations of what the initiative could reasonably be expected to achieve. The clarification of these expectations early in the development of JJMRT would have enabled a more collective understanding of the

JJMRT and the ways in which barriers to information sharing could be addressed, as well as the expanded role desired by the community agencies.

Rivers and Anwyl (2000) suggested the effectiveness of juvenile justice reform initiatives such as the JJMRT could vary during the early stages of development. Data limitations precluded an analysis of outcomes of youths arrested prior to the implementation of the JJMRT, but the results presented in the current study suggest promise for such strategies. Specifically, improved application of the principles of RNR, especially improved screening, identified a considerable number of youth as low or moderate risk which helped to validate the decision to discontinue arrest in approximately one quarter of the cases processed by the JJMRT. While this was a relatively small proportion of the total arrests, this helped to reduce some pressure on the local juvenile justice system, as resources that would have been used for these youth were able to be shifted to youth whose actions warranted further juvenile justice system involvement. Additionally, the more intensive screening conducted by the JJMRT helped to identify the fuller range of risks and needs of the processed youth, which meant that more targeted behavioral correction strategies could be implemented.

It is also important to note that approximately two-thirds of youth arrested by the Police were moderate or high-risk, suggesting that street-level arrest decisions were already preventing low-risk youth from entering the juvenile justice system. In response to this finding, the Police are considering the possibility of developing a screening instrument to be used by officers on the street. The implementation of such an assessment would assure that screening occurs at the earliest stage possible and would provide an additional check that arrest was warranted and not based solely upon anecdotal data.

While the JJMRT embraced the JACs' objectives of utilizing an assessment tool and a coordinated system response to identify and respond to youth with varied levels of risk, the case management and information sharing components of the JACs proved to be a challenge. This challenge was not unique to the JJMRT, as prior research indicated information sharing was the most vital and most controversial component of multiagency initiatives (Kapp et al., 2013; Mallet, 2014). The information collected by the Probation officer and the community agency workers was key to influencing Police supervisors from continuing the arrest of some youth, but long-term case management and follow-up with youth was beyond the scope of the initiative.

It is also important to highlight how the features of JJMRT that distinguished it from traditional JACs may have impacted the results. Other JAC initiatives operated out of offices independent of law enforcement agencies and operated 24 h a day (Rivers & Anwyl, 2000; Silverthorn,

2003; Walters et al., 2005). While none of the JJMRT members indicated any kind of intimidation about meeting at the police station, a few expressed concerns about the privacy of the space in which the assessment took place. Further, it was possible the youth arrested outside of JJMRT operation hours would have benefited from participation. Given that most of the evaluations of JACs were limited to initiatives in Florida and the limited success of the JJMRT, we suggest further research into the effectiveness of JACs.

While the results of the current study help to highlight some of the successes and limitations that may be experienced during the implementation and evaluation of initiatives guided by the JAC model, the analyses were limited in a few ways. The primary weakness of the current study was the inability to move beyond a descriptive analytic approach due to data limitations. In a related vein, the current study was unable to explore whether the differences among the low, moderate and high risk groups were significant. Finally, it is unclear the extent to which the results of the current study are unique to Albany, as the JJMRT initiative has yet to be replicated in other jurisdictions.

Research on initiatives guided by the principles of RNR such as JACs, suggests great promise in reducing the involvement of youth with the juvenile justice system and in matching an appropriate response to youths' risk level (Haqnee et al., 2015; Walters et al., 2005). More research on their effectiveness is needed given the resources required to implement such system-wide changes. Future evaluations should remain cognizant of the potential for limited success during the early stages of development and consider that the success of such initiatives may be indirect through processes such as the development or strengthening of relationships among law enforcement and community agencies.

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