

JUVENILE JUSTICE MOBILE RESPONSE TEAM INITIATIVE
FINAL REPORT

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About the Center for Human Services Research

The Center for Human Services Research (CHSR) is a research department within the School of Social Welfare at the University at Albany. CHSR has over 20 years of experience conducting evaluation research, designing information systems, and informing program and policy development. CHSR studies cover a wide range of topics including family services, education, health behavior and services, early childhood and youth development, and juvenile justice. Rigorous research and evaluation methods, strong collaborations with project partners, and accurate and objective information are hallmarks of CHSR's work. For more information about CHSR, please visit www.albany.edu/chsr

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In 2011, the Albany Police Department (APD) launched an innovative initiative designed to prevent juvenile justice system involvement for low-risk youth. The project involved the creation of a Juvenile Justice Mobile Response Team (JJMRT) composed of the Albany County Department of Probation and three community agencies (Parsons Child & Family Center, Equinox, and Trinity Alliance). Youth arrested by the APD were screened by Probation using a risk assessment tool and assessed by Equinox and Trinity. The team then made joint recommendations to the APD regarding how the system should respond to the youth. The Center for Human Services Research was asked to evaluate JJMRT's implementation and outcomes over the course of the 14-month initiative. Key findings include:

- The JJMRT was successful in discontinuing arrests and diverting some youth from involvement in the juvenile justice system. More than 20% of arrests of all assessed youth were discontinued by APD supervisors.
- A greater percentage of arrests were discontinued following a Facilitated Planning Session designed to clarify agencies' roles, and project goals and outcomes.
- While the pre and post-evaluation revealed few changes in the APD's response to arrested youth, additional information gathered in the assessments informed arrest and outcome decisions.
- The APD followed the JJMRT recommendation in 91% of the cases, suggesting a shared vision in the response to arrested youth.
- The data revealed that most youth arrested by the APD are moderate or high-risk. This suggests that decisions being made on the street about whether or not to arrest youth were already preventing low-risk youth from entering the system.
- Regular meetings of project partners enabled improvements to be integrated into the program; this included the implementation of an expedited appearance ticket.
- Relationships among partners were strengthened, but challenges such as information sharing remained.
- Recommendations for future practice and next steps include:
 - Ongoing training and convening of participants to reinforce project goals and clarify partner roles
 - Formal establishment and periodic review of policies and protocols
 - Consideration of the culture and practices of all participating agencies
 - Train police officers and/or supervisors to systematically assess risk on their own

Overall, this team approach to youth shows that the Albany Police Department's response to juveniles was already well aligned with juveniles' risks and with the perspectives of community agencies. This evaluation provides essential information for the project partners to best align response to youth arrested by the APD and further build on the promising idea of a front-end system collaborative approach.

Overview

In 2011, the Albany Police Department was awarded a grant from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) to pilot a program designed to prevent juvenile justice system involvement of low-risk youth who had committed minor offenses. The Albany Police Department (APD) created a Juvenile Justice Mobile Response Team (JJMRT) designed to meet three objectives:

- Increase the use of pre-arrest diversion programs
- Increase referrals to informal diversion at Albany County Probation, thereby reducing referrals to family court
- Decrease the use of pre-arraignment detention

The JJMRT collaboration involved the Albany County Department of Probation (Probation) and community partners: Equinox, Trinity Alliance, and Parsons Child & Family Center. The Center for Human Services Research conducted an evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of the initiative.

Implemented in August 2012, the JJMRT was designed as a front-end system reform initiative. Upon arrest of a juvenile, the APD notified a probation officer as well as Parsons Child & Family Center, which dispatched two assessment workers (one from Equinox and one from Trinity). The team met with the juvenile at the APD. The probation officer then administered the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) Pre-Screen, a validated risk assessment instrument, to gather information about the youth's risk factors reflecting legal history, family, school, community and peer relationships, alcohol and other drugs, mental/physical health, aggression, attitudes, and skills. Through conversation with the youth and his/her parent or guardian, the community assessment workers gathered additional information on the youth's risks and needs to help determine the most appropriate response to his/her alleged actions. Where pre-appearance detention was considered, Probation also administered the Albany County Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI). The team then convened to make a joint recommendation to an APD supervisor for the final determination. Possible recommendations included:

- Discontinuation of the arrest and possible referral of the youth to a social worker with the APD
- Maintenance of the arrest, and the youth given an appearance ticket to Probation or transported directly to family court or detention (if the arrest occurred after court hours).

This report presents findings from the evaluation of the JJMRT. The initiative ran for 14 months, beginning on August 13, 2012 and concluding on October 31, 2013. Data are from three sources:

- Interviews with individuals from each of the collaborating agencies
- Case records maintained by the APD
- Information collected on the JJMRT Intake Form, a data collection tool developed specifically for the project

The report is divided into four sections. First, we summarize findings from the baseline and six-month interviews, to assess the implementation process. Second, we discuss data on the risk factors of assessed youth, the outcomes of the assessments, and the recommendations of the JJMRT and decisions of the Albany Police Department. Third, we compare the outcomes of youth arrested prior to the initiative with those arrested during the initiative. Finally, we offer a set of conclusions and recommendations.

Implementation Process

Interviews were conducted shortly after the project began and approximately six-months later. The interviews addressed the following areas:

- Participants' understanding of the JJMRT initiative and agency roles
- Team composition and individual roles
- The juvenile assessment process, from start to finish
- Interagency relationships, at the individual and agency levels
- Challenges to project success

A total of 42 individuals from the collaborating agencies were interviewed at baseline; 36 individuals were interviewed at the follow-up. We interviewed police officers; JJMRT responders from Probation, Equinox, and Trinity Alliance; and supervisors and upper management from each of the collaborating agencies, including Parsons Child & Family Center.¹ The interviews were confidential; most were about 30-45 minutes in length.

At baseline, there was widespread recognition that the JJMRT represented a significant change to the approach of the juvenile justice system, by including Probation and community agencies in arrest and detainment decisions that had previously been made solely by the APD. Many police officers were skeptical about whether Probation and the community partners had meaningful contributions to make to the arrest and detainment decisions. This skepticism seemed rooted in a belief that the community agencies did not understand what officers did and why certain decisions were made.

Similarly, community agency participants voiced concerns and confusion about the specific roles of each agency in the assessment process. Many participants, especially from the community agencies, felt they would benefit from a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and those of others. In spite of the role confusion, most of those interviewed were optimistic about building relationships and collaborating with others in the interest of best serving youth involved in

delinquency. Likewise, although participants expressed concerns about the length of the assessments and information sharing, they were confident that these issues would be resolved as everyone became more familiar with the assessment process. This finding 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.

Therefore, after submitting a report on the baseline interviews to all partners, the project manager, with input from the partners, created a set of instructions to iterate clearly how information was to be recorded, and a set of guidelines was developed to document and instruct the assessment process. Individuals from each of the collaborating agencies also participated in additional trainings, and bi-weekly meetings involving each of the agencies provided additional opportunity for questions and discussion to address any ongoing or new concerns. A notable change that arose out of these meetings was the creation of an expedited appearance ticket (EAT) in December 2012. The EAT was created in response to the concern about 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 are seen within 1-3 days rather than the more typical timeframe of 5-7 days. These improvements in communication and role clarity resulted in a concrete policy change.

Findings from the six-month follow-up interviews suggested that the above changes had addressed many but not all program challenges. Participants indicated that the assessment process was running more smoothly, that interagency relationships had developed or been strengthened, and that the roles of the community agencies were more clearly defined. However, some responders from the community agencies expressed concerns about the limited nature of their role and sought greater responsibility to connect youth and families to services and receive more information about

¹ For more information on the interviews please see Juvenile Justice Mobile Response Team: Findings from Baseline Interviews, Research Brief Fall 2012, and Juvenile Justice Mobile Response Team: Findings from the Six- Month Interviews, Research Brief Spring 2013.

Implementation Process, Continued

the outcomes of assessed youth. This is a notable finding given that many responders indicated that the youth they assessed were primarily moderate or high-risk and needed to be held accountable for their actions while also receiving needed services. These issues and barriers to information sharing (including legal protections of confidentiality) remained a concern among many of those interviewed.

Preliminary findings from the six-month follow-up interviews were presented at a Facilitated Planning Session in May. The session was organized by DCJS who wanted to ensure the collaborating agencies were clear about their roles in the project and were able to meet project goals, particularly regarding the increased use of pre-arrest diversion programs. During the session, the group developed a list of priorities and discussed strategies to address ongoing challenges. Subsequent meetings involving each of the agencies provided further opportunity for strategizing, specifically regarding information sharing, the role and capacity of the community responders, and ways to harness community partner skills. Concrete changes arose out of these discussions, including the development of a set of questions to more formally guide interviews with youth and a resource guide that listed the services available to youth and families in Albany County.

² This number does not include arrests for juvenile offender offenses, unlawful possession of marijuana, or arrests on warrants, all of which have prescribed arrest outcomes and would therefore not be eligible for a JJMRT assessment.

³ This number excludes seven youth where the computer system was down.

Characteristics and Outcomes of Assessed Youth

During the nearly 14-month period that the JJMRT operated, the APD made 191 juvenile arrests,² of which 117 were assessed by the JJMRT; an additional 18 assessments were attempted. The program had a “soft roll-out” within the first two months of implementation, during which time only detective scheduled arrests were assessed. Excluding these first two months, assessments were attempted or completed with 78% of all arrested youth. Many of the non-assessed youth were arrested outside of the JJMRT hours of operation (Monday-Friday, 8:00am-midnight), and the APD felt that the arrests could not be deferred for assessment due to the circumstances of the situation (i.e. the risk of re-offense).

Assessments: YASI Pre-Screen and RAI

We examined the scores of the YASI Pre-Screen administered to all youth and the Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI) which was completed when detention was considered. **Figure 1** shows that most of the youth scored moderate or high-risk on the YASI Pre-Screen.³ The YASI Pre-Screen scores indicated that more than 50% of youth had risk factors in the domains of legal history, family, school, community and peer relationships, mental/physical health, aggression, and/or attitudes. **Table 1** shows the RAI scores compared with the YASI Pre-Screen Score. Thirty percent (n=35) of youth were administered the RAI, and most scored between 3 and 8, suggesting that an alternative to detention was warranted. However, it is notable that most of these youth scored high on the YASI Pre-Screen, indicating that they had a large number of identified risk factors.

FIGURE 1. YASI PRE-SCREEN SCORES

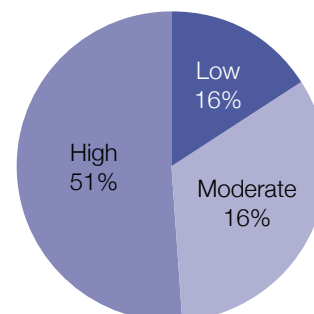


TABLE 1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YASI PRE-SCREEN AND RAI SCORES

YASI Pre-Screen Score	RAI Score*					
	Score less than 3		Score of 3 to 8		Score Higher than 8	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Low	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Moderate	0	0%	4	100%	0	0%
High	2	6%	20	65%	9	29%
Total	2	5%	24	65%	9	24%

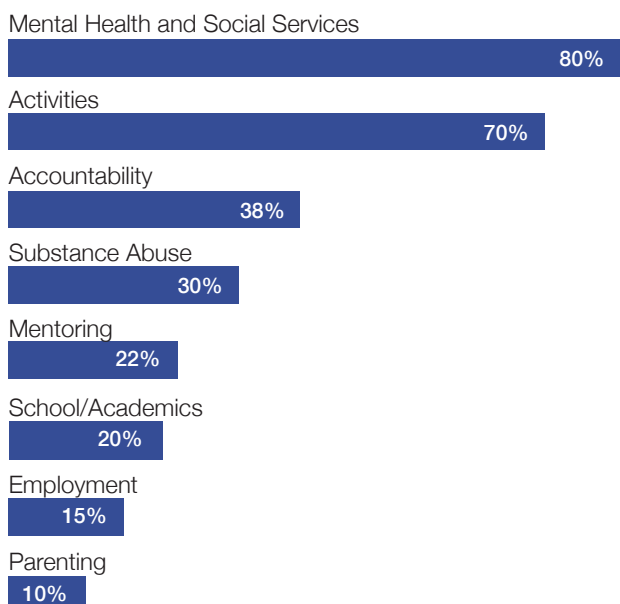
* Youth who score higher than an 8 on the RAI are recommended for detention

Assessment Results

As part of the assessment process, community responders spoke with youth and their parent/guardian about the youth’s risks and their needs for services.

Figure 2 shows the types of services that were discussed with youth.

FIGURE 2. TYPES OF SERVICES DISCUSSED WITH ASSESSED YOUTH



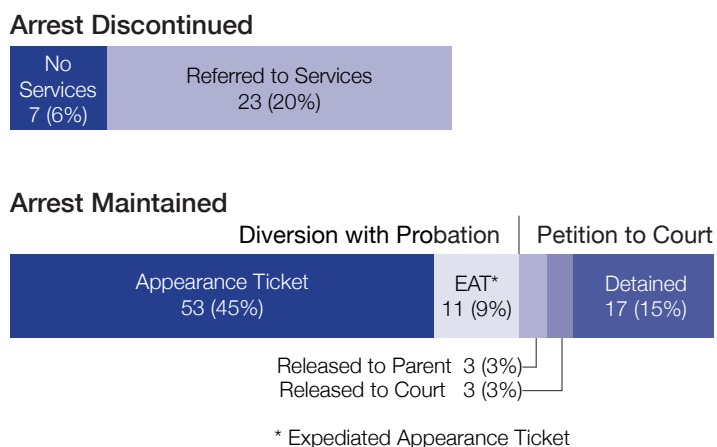
Mental health and social services, and activities were most often discussed with youth, followed by accountability. These areas reflect many of the risk factors identified by the YASI Pre-Screen, suggesting that discussions about services with youth and their families were tailored to youths’ risks. One exception was school and academic services which were discussed with a relatively low percentage of youth, although frequently identified on the YASI Pre-Screen. However, community responders reported that many of the services recorded under activities had academic components that responded to these needs.

JJMRT Arrest Recommendation

We analyzed recommendations from the JJMRT regarding the arrest outcomes for assessed youth (Figure 3). Overall, more than 25% of arrests were discontinued. More than half the youth were recommended for diversion with Probation; 12 youth were recommended with an expedited appearance ticket.⁴ Over 20% of youth were recommended for petition to court; 15% of youth were recommended for detention.

⁴ One of these youth was petitioned to court.

FIGURE 3. JJMRT RECOMMENDATION



* Expedited Appearance Ticket

Characteristics and Outcomes of Assessed Youth, Continued

Next we compared JJMRT Arrest Recommendations before and after the collaborating agencies participated in the Facilitated Planning Session (**Figure 4**). As discussed earlier, this session which occurred in early May, was designed to address DCJS’s concerns that the partners remained unclear about the JJMRT goals and that few arrests had been discontinued with or without services with the APD. The analysis demonstrated that after the Facilitated Planning Session, the JJMRT recommended a greater percentage of arrests be discontinued (9% vs. 46%).

FIGURE 4. JJMRT RECOMMENDATION: ARRESTS DISCONTINUED PRE-POST FACILITATED PLANNING SESSION



JJMRT Recommendation and YASI Pre-Screen Scores

We compared the level of risk as measured by the YASI Pre-Screen with the JJMRT Recommendation. Overall, the level of risk was strongly related to the JJMRT recommendation. Over 70% of youth who were recommended to have their arrest discontinued scored low or moderate on the YASI Pre-Screen. The risk levels of youth recommended for diversion with Probation varied. All but one youth who were recommended for detention scored high on the YASI Pre-Screen.

Police Action

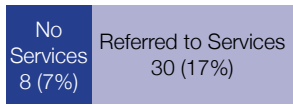
We examined police actions for assessed youth (**Figure 5**) and compared JJMRT recommendations with the APD actions. The police discontinued 24% of arrests. Following the JJMRT recommendations, the APD maintained most of the arrests of youth. More than half the youth were sent to diversion with Probation; 16⁵ youth were issued an expedited appearance ticket. Over 20% of youth were petitioned to court; 16% were sent to detention.

We also compared Police Actions before and after the collaborating agencies participated in the Facilitated Planning Session (**Figure 6**). The analysis demonstrated that after the Facilitated Planning Session, the police discontinued a greater percentage of arrests (11% vs. 40%).

⁵ One of these youth was petitioned to court.

FIGURE 5. POLICE ACTION

Arrest Discontinued



Arrest Maintained

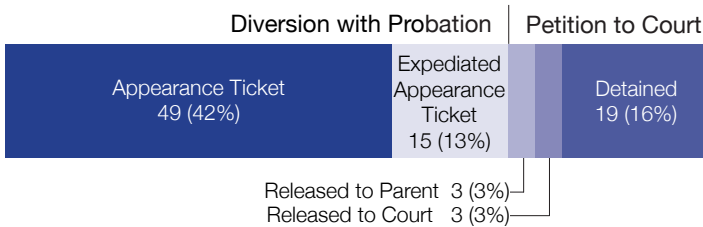


FIGURE 6. POLICE ACTION: ARRESTS DISCONTINUED PRE-POST FACILITATED PLANNING SESSION



Police Action and YASI Pre-Screen Scores

We also examined the relationship between youths’ risk levels and the police actions. Akin to the findings presented on the relationship between risk and JJMRT recommendations, most youth who had their arrest discontinued scored low or moderate on the YASI Pre-Screen. The risk levels of youth sent to diversion with Probation varied; all but two youth who were sent to detention scored high on the YASI Pre-Screen.

RAI and JJMRT Recommendation and Police Action

The presentation thus far has highlighted the relationship between youths’ risk levels on the YASI Pre-Screen and the JJMRT recommendation and police action. Additionally, the RAI is administered to all youth for whom detention is being considered. As noted earlier, the RAI was administered to 35 youth. About half of all youth assessed with the RAI were not recommended for detention by the JJMRT or ultimately sent to detention. Ten youth who scored between 3 and 8 (suggesting an alternative to detention was warranted) were recommended for and brought to detention; a closer look at these youth revealed that all scored high on the YASI Pre-Screen, and all but one received a score of six or greater on the RAI.

A comparison of the outcomes of all JJMRT assessed youth revealed that the police action followed the JJMRT recommendation in 91% of the cases.⁴ The results indicate that the JJMRT and the police were most often in agreement about the appropriate response to youth who were arrested by the APD. However, the findings thus far do not speak to any changes in the outcomes of youth arrests across the pre and post-JJMRT time periods. In the next section, we discuss the characteristics and outcomes of youth arrested before and after the implementation of the JJMRT.

⁴ There were ten cases where the police overrode the JJMRT’s recommendation. Seven of these cases were upward overrides, and three were downward overrides. Notably, in two upward overrides where the youth were sent to detention, it was later determined that the RAI scores were miscalculated at the time of assessment.

Characteristics and Outcomes of Youth Arrested Pre-Post JJMRT

Program Outcomes

As noted earlier, the JJMRT was designed to increase the use of pre-arrest diversion programs; increase referrals to informal diversion at Albany County Probation, thereby reducing referrals to family court; and decrease the use of pre-arraignment detention. Specifically, the following outcomes were expected:

- 10% of juvenile delinquency cases would be referred to pre-arrest diversion programs without attaching sanctions for failure to comply with social services programs
- Referrals to informal diversion at Albany County Probation would increase by 20%, thus decreasing agency requests for formal presentation to family court by 20%
- The use of pre-arraignment detention would be reduced by 20%

The findings presented above show that 24% of youth had their arrest discontinued; most (17%) were referred to pre-arrest services, and 7% were not referred to services. Thus, this outcome was met and even exceeded.

Method

To assess outcomes pertaining to the utilization of diversion, family court, and detention, required an analysis of data before and after the implementation of the JJMRT. Accordingly, data from the APD were analyzed for identical one year time periods:

Pre-JJMRT: August 13, 2011-August 12, 2012

Post-JJMRT: August 13, 2012-August 12, 2013

Characteristics of Youth Pre-and Post-JJMRT

The data revealed the following:

- In the pre-JJMRT period, the APD arrested 183 youth; in the post-JJMRT period they arrested 155 youth.^{5,6}
- Youth in both time periods were overwhelmingly male and black, and on average, about 14 years of age.
- Approximately 80% of arrests in the pre and post-JJMRT time periods were for person and property crimes.
- Overall, youth arrested in both time periods were similar in demographics and the types of offenses they allegedly committed.

Risk factors of youth cannot be compared, as the YASI Pre-Screen was not done on arrested youth in the pre-JJMRT period.

Study Limitations

Our ability to compare the outcomes of youth arrested before and after the JJMRT was inhibited by limited data and changes in policy and procedures across agencies. Data kept by the APD prior to the implementation of the JJMRT did not allow for a reliable disaggregation of referrals to diversion and requests for formal presentation to family court. Furthermore, Probation retains the final decision of whether to maintain a referral to diversion by the police department or to refer the case to the county attorney for petition to family court. In the spring of 2012, this decision was impacted by a change in policy that required Probation to refer the case if the victim wished to see the case pursued to court. Thus, even if the data were reliably available from the APD, any changes in the percentage of referrals to diversion and requests for petition to family court cannot be attributed solely to the JJMRT.

⁵ These figures do not include arrests for juvenile offender offenses, unlawful possession of marijuana, or arrests on warrants, all of which have prescribed arrest outcomes and would therefore not be directly impacted by the initiative.

⁶ This includes 24 youth in the post-JJMRT period whose arrests were ultimately discontinued.

Outcomes of Youth Arrested Pre- and Post-JJMRT

The data allowed for an analysis of the number of youth who were given an appearance ticket (either with a referral to diversion or to family court), or who were brought directly to family court or detained. **Table 2** shows the outcomes of the youth arrested in the pre and post-JJMRT periods.⁷

In the pre-JJMRT period, 81% of arrested youth were given an appearance ticket. In the post-JJMRT period, only 62% of youth were given an appearance ticket, and an additional 14% of youth had their arrest discontinued. Approximately 20% of youth arrested in each period were brought directly to family court or detention. It is notable that the percentage of youth brought directly to family court or detained did not change over time. Recall that the police followed the JJMRT recommendation in 91% of the assessments. This indicates that the decisions of the JJMRT and the police were often the same and therefore suggests that, prior to the implementation of the JJMRT, the police were making appropriate decisions in the detention of youth.

Given that 14% of arrested youth had their arrest discontinued, the strength of the JJMRT appeared to be in keeping youth from penetrating the criminal justice system. Presented with the additional information gathered by the JJMRT (i.e. the YASI Pre-Screen score and the community responders' conversations with youth and parents/guardians), APD supervisors discontinued the arrests of a number of youth, and many were referred for services with the APD social worker. This additional information appeared to be vital in the arrest and outcome decisions.

TABLE 2. OUTCOMES OF YOUTH ARRESTED PRE- AND POST-JJMRT

Time Period	# of Youth Arrests	Arrest Discontinued		Appearance Ticket		Family Court/ Detained	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Pre-JJMRT*	183	N/A	N/A	148	81%	35	19%
Post-JJMRT	155	22	14%	97**	62%	36	23%

* Data are from case file reviews.

** 17 of these were Expediated Appearance Tickets.

⁷ Data kept by the APD prior to the implementation of the JJMRT did not allow for the disaggregation of family court, detention, and type of detention (secure vs non-secure); this precluded a more refined comparison of these specific outcomes overtime. The Albany County Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) maintains data on youth admissions to secure and non-secure detention, but a case by case comparison of data from the APD and the DCYF in the post-JJMRT period revealed discrepancies, suggesting inconsistencies in the measurement and recording of information across agencies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The JJMRT was developed to prevent juvenile justice system involvement for low-risk youth who have committed minor offenses. The JJMRT was successful in discontinuing arrests and diverting some youth from involvement in the criminal justice system. More than 20% of arrests of all assessed youth were discontinued by APD supervisors.

The data also revealed that most youth arrested by the APD are moderate or high-risk. This suggests that decisions being made on the street about whether or not to arrest youth were already preventing low-risk youth from entering the system. The JJMRT recommendations that the arrests of most low-risk youth be maintained and sent to diversion with Probation further suggests that the police were making appropriate decisions to arrest youth. The data from the pre and post-JJMRT periods showed little difference in the percentage of youth who were brought directly to family court or detained, further suggesting that the APD was making appropriate decisions on the outcomes of arrested youth.

The JJMRT was unique not only in utilizing a risk assessment instrument at the point of arrest but also in involving individuals from community agencies in the arrest decision. The implementation of an expedited appearance ticket to diversion at Probation grew out of the project and remains available to the APD going forward.

The JJMRT created opportunities for informal information sharing and relationship building among law enforcement and community agencies. The community responders were thought to have a unique ability to determine the needs of youth and families and to recommend appropriate services. However, agency staff would have preferred an expanded role in connecting youth (whether arrested or not) and families to these services and following up with them. There was some question about the value of the contributions made by community responders in informing arrest decisions.

The fact that discontinued arrests increased as a result of the Facilitated Planning Session speaks to the value of training and convening participants to reinforce project goals and clarify partner roles. Policies and protocols need to be formally established and revised as needed.

In going forward, it may be possible for police officers and/or supervisors to be trained to systematically assess risk on their own. Future efforts should also consider the culture and practice of all participating agencies. The JJMRT was available from 8am to midnight five days a week; although the APD is a 24/7 agency, all of the participating agencies did not have this availability.

Limited and inconsistent data precluded a more refined comparison of outcomes in the pre and post-JJMRT periods. These issues are clearly recognized by Albany County and not isolated to the JJMRT. Further juvenile justice reform efforts in Albany County such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) are considering this issue.