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Adult and Young Adult Reentry Project Grants: Differences in Service Offerings and Implementation Challenges

Given that arrest rates are highest among young adults ages 18 to 24 and then decline sharply with age (Snyder, Cooper and Mulako-Wangota 2017), young adults may require different models of reentry and employment services than adults older than 24. Through its investment of $242 million in Reentry Project (RP) grants between 2017 and 2019, the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL),

Study background

Chief Evaluation Office
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This issue brief is part of a study funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Chief Evaluation Office that explores the implementation and impact of the Reentry Project grants. DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA) awarded a total of 116 grants in 2017, 2018, and 2019. These grants aimed to improve employment and public safety outcomes and reduce recidivism for individuals previously involved in the criminal justice system.

Employment and Training Administration (ETA), aimed to help both adults and young adults involved in the justice system successfully reintegrate into their communities, prepare for, find, and maintain long-term employment, and avoid further justice involvement (U.S. DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). Eligible organizations could apply for grants to serve either justice-involved adults ages 25 and older or justice-involved young adults ages 18 to 24. The same organization could submit two applications, one for each population.

Key findings from RP grantee survey

- From 2017 to 2019, DOL awarded a total of $118 million across 64 adult RP grants and $124 million across 52 young adult RP grants.

- More young adult than adult RP grants (17 versus 8grants) were awarded to intermediaries serving multiple sub-grantee locations compared to community-based organizations serving a single location.

- While both adult and young adult grantees relied heavily on referrals from criminal justice system partner agencies, a higher proportion of young adult CBO grantees than adult CBO grantees indicated that community outreach efforts were their largest referral source (29 versus 15 percent) and a lower proportion of young adult CBO grantees reported word-of-mouth as their largest source of referrals compared with adult CBO grantees (9 versus 19 percent).

- Analysis of grantee survey and qualitative data suggest that adult and young adult services may differ in four key areas: (1) positive youth development components (2) legal services for child support and diversion, (3) educational services and requirements, and (4) program length.

- Young adult grantees reported the following challenges significantly more often than adult grantees: recruiting participants (94 versus 52 percent), engaging and retaining those participants throughout the course of service delivery (96 versus 77 percent), and placing participants in employment (88 versus 64 percent).
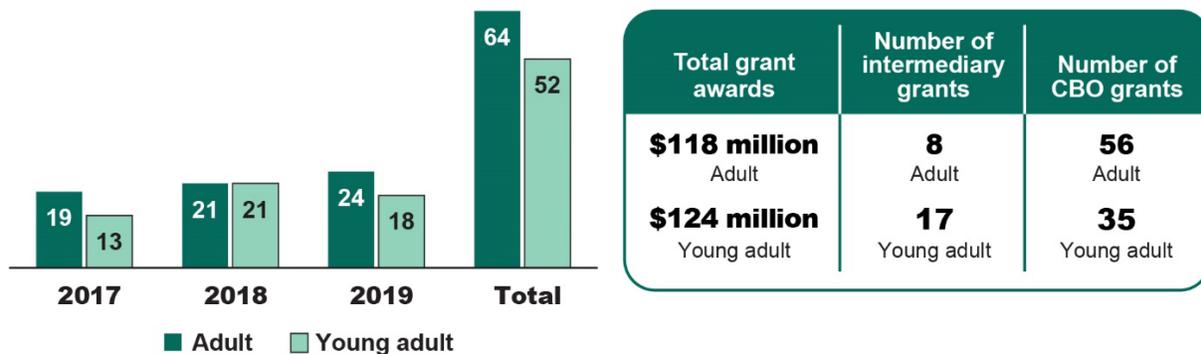
Using data collected as part of the RP Grants Evaluation, this issue brief describes the differences and similarities between adult and young adult grantees in terms of the services they offered and the

implementation challenges they reported. The analysis draws on quantitative data from a survey of all 116 organizations that received RP grants. Data from the grantee survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics as well as chi-squared tests to determine whether differences across grant types were statistically significant.[i] The brief also draws on in-depth qualitative data—including from grant applications, clarifying telephone calls conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic and virtual site visits conducted in early 2022—from a subset of nine grantees that received both adult and young adult grants. The qualitative data are not representative of all grantees but provide anecdotal evidence to support results from the survey.

Adult and young adult grant awards

Of the 116 community-based organizations (CBOs) grants and intermediary grants awarded between 2017 and 2019, 52 grantees aimed to serve young adults and 64 grantees targeted adults (Exhibit 1). DOL awarded RP grants to intermediary organizations that aimed to serve a larger number of participants by operating a program model that was consistent across multiple subgrantee locations. DOL also awarded grants to CBOs that served a smaller number of participants in a single location. Intermediaries received grants as high as $4.5 million whereas CBOs were awarded up to $1.5 million. Based on grant applications, more young adult grantees received intermediary grants compared with adult grantees. In particular, 17 of 52 young adult grantees (33 percent) received intermediary grants compared to only 8 of 64 adult grants (13percent). According to the grantee survey, young adult intermediary grantees had an average of 4.3 subgrantee locations and adult intermediary grantees had an average of 5.3 subgrantee locations.

Exhibit 1: Number and size of adult and young adult RP grants awarded each year

	Total grant awards	Number of intermediary grants	Number of CBO grants
Adult	$118 million	8	56
Young adult	$124 million	17	35

Source: Grantee applications and grantee survey (N=64 adult grants and 52 young adult grants).

Notes: Adult grantees serve justice-involved adults ages 25 and older; young adult grantees serve justice-involved young adults ages 18-24. CBO=community-based organization. RP=Reentry Project

Outreach and referral sources

Both adult and young adult grantees used a range of outreach strategies to engage potentially eligible individuals in their programs, according to the grantee survey and qualitative interviews. When asked to identify their three largest referral sources[ii], CBO grantees of both types most often reported probation and parole officers (Exhibit 2). Both types of grantees relied heavily on referrals from criminal justice system partner agencies with nearly half (48 percent of adult CBO grantees and 49 percent of young adult CBO grantees) reporting that as their largest referral source. However, a higher proportion of young adult CBO grantees than adult CBO grantees indicated that community outreach efforts were their largest

referral source (29 versus 15 percent) and a lower proportion of young adult CBO grantees reported word-of-mouth as their largest source of referrals compared with adult CBO grantees (9 versus 19 percent).

Exhibit 2: Sources that provided the largest number of referrals among adult and young adult CBO grantees as reported by grantees
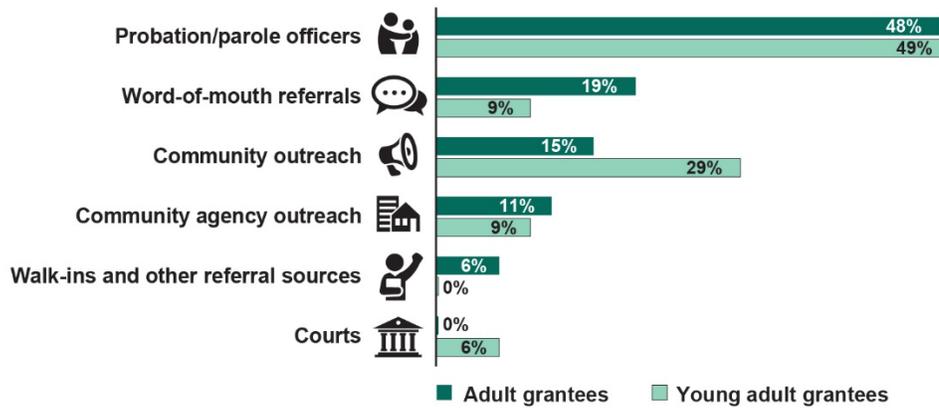
Source: Responses from 2017 to 2019 CBOs receiving adult grants (N=54) and young adult grants (N=35) in the grantee survey from the questions asking, "Which of the following is a source of referrals to your RP program?" and "Of the referral sources you identified, which has provided the largest number of referrals to your RP program?"

Notes: CBO=community-based organization. Grantees could report more than one referral source, so percentages can add up to more than 100 percent.

Qualitative data from the subset of nine organizations with both types of grants reinforced the use of similar outreach and recruitment strategies for both adults and young adults, but at least three specifically discussed the use of a subset of strategies that were targeted to one population or the other. For example, one grantee reported during a site visit that they recruited individuals for both the young adult and adult programs from the correctional system, workforce boards, community action agencies, drug treatment clinics, homeless shelters, and public benefits organizations. However, they also recruited young adults from community colleges, alternative schools, and charter schools. Another grantee mentioned conducting young adult outreach presentations at local high schools. A third grantee reported success reaching young adults through text messages. During a clarifying call before the pandemic, the grantee administrator indicated that texting seemed to work better than any other outreach tactic and had been effective to the point of being overwhelming for staff working with young adults.

Service offerings and approaches

Regardless of the target population, both types of RP grants required two core service components: (1) employment-focused services and (2) case management and legal services (U.S. DOL 2017, 2018, 2019). Employment service models had to incorporate one of the following approaches: registered, industry-recognized, or pre-apprenticeships, work-based learning, or career pathways (U.S. DOL 2017, 2018 2019). Grantees typically proposed the same general service delivery models for both age groups (Exhibit 3) and offered a similar set of services.[iii] Results from the grantee survey and analysis of qualitative data, however, highlight ways that services were reported to differ among adult and young adult grantees in four areas: (1) positive youth development (2) legal services, (3) educational services and requirements, and (4) program length.

Exhibit 3: Typical sequence of RP services
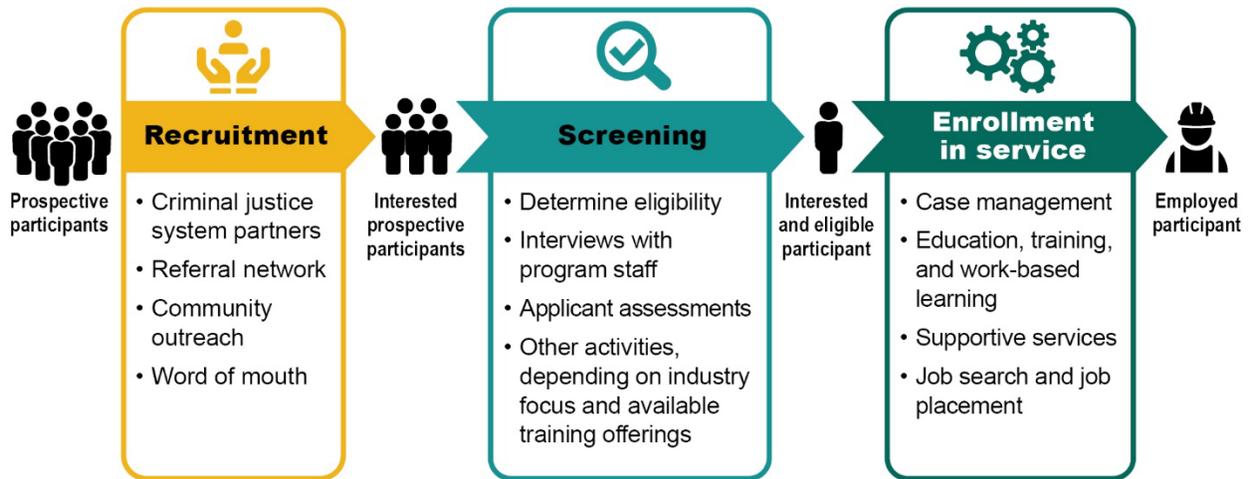
Source: Geckeler et al. 2022.

Note: RP=Reentry Project

Positive youth development[iv]. Over half (54 percent) of young adult CBO grantees reported offering positive youth development components in their case management model, compared to only 11 percent of adult CBO grantees.[v] This pattern is mirrored in qualitative data collected from the subset of nine grantees with both adult and young adult grants.

Six of the nine grantees reported incorporating a positive youth development component in their service model. The six grantees described aiming to foster positive youth development by addressing risk factors specific to youth, such as anti-social behavior, impulsivity, association with delinquent peers, and low academic achievement. For example, one grantee's statement of work indicated that "the program model takes into account young people's mood swings, acting out, traumas, impulsive behaviors, and lesser emotional regulation." Grantees that included positive youth development components highlighted their strategies to address these risks by encouraging participation in pro-social activities, setting high expectations, increasing social support, and fostering positive peer interaction. To support youth development at program entry, three grantees reported conducting a more extensive risk assessment of the young adults' reentry environment. For example, during a clarifying call, one grantee described that its young adult risk assessment focused on a participant's living environment and family support to help staff identify difficult living situations as early as possible. Three other young adult grantees emphasized the importance of engaging families throughout the program to support positive youth development [see box].
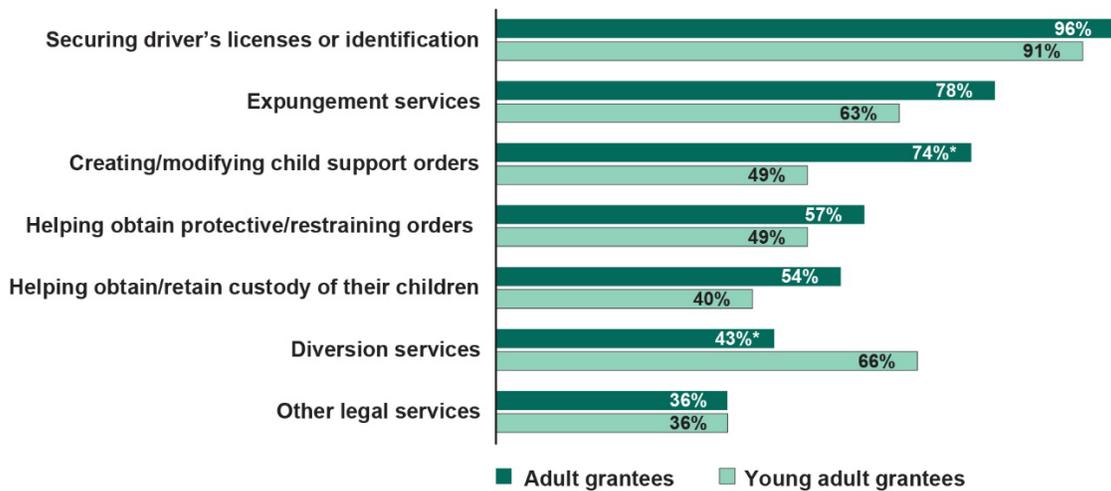
Engaging families to support positive youth development:

Three grantees with a positive youth development component emphasized the importance of understanding home life and engaging families when working with young adult participants. A staff member at one of these grantees recalled, "When we started with youth development, we noticed that it started with the home life. If the parents aren't well, then there are problems, so we try to extend services to families and parents."

Legal services. Grantees appeared to tailor legal services to the population being served. According to the grantee survey, adult CBOs offered child support assistance significantly more often than young adult CBOs (Exhibit 4). Specifically, 74 percent of adult CBO grantees offered legal services to help adult participants with the establishment and/or

modification of child support orders, compared to only 49 percent of young adult grantees.[vi] Qualitative data did not shed light on this difference, although participants ages 25 and older may more often be parents than participants 18 to 24 years old. Young adult CBO grantees, on the other hand, were significantly more likely to offer diversion services[vii] (these services aim to redirect youth from the justice system through programming, supervision and supports[viii]). Survey data also showed that 66 percent of CBO grantees serving young adults offered diversion services compared to 43 percent of CBO grantees serving adults. Both differences were statistically significant at the 0.05 percent level. A majority of both adult and young adult grantees offered assistance securing driver's licenses or identification (96 percent of adult grantees and 91 percent of young adult grantees) and expungement services (78 percent of adult grantees and 63 percent of young adult grantees).

Exhibit 4: Percentage of adult and young adult CBO grantees who reported offering the following legal services

	Adult grantees	Young adult grantees
Securing driver's licenses or identification	96%	91%
Expungement services	78%	63%
Creating/modifying child support orders	74%*	49%
Helping obtain protective/restraining orders	57%	49%
Helping obtain/retain custody of their children	54%	40%
Diversion services	43%*	66%
Other legal services	36%	36%

Source: Responses from 2017 to 2019 CBOs receiving adult grants (N=54) and young adult grants (N=35) in the grantee survey from the questions asking, "Which of the following services are offered as part of the RP program?"

Note: An asterisk (*) indicates the differences that were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. CBO=community-based organization

Educational services and requirements. While there were no statistically significant differences in educational service offerings among adult and youth adult grantees based on the grantee survey, at least three of nine grantees included in the qualitative analysis for this brief emphasized a stronger focus on educational services and requirements in young adult programs. Although educational services were offered to both populations, these three grantees designed their educational components differently for each group and strongly emphasized education for young adult participants. For example, two grantees required young adults to obtain a high school equivalency degree before entering the job search stage of their programs. Adults could also earn a high school equivalency degree but doing so was optional. One of the grantees also noted that adults frequently chose not to pursue a high school equivalency degree.

Program length. The grantee survey did not gather data on the anticipated length of the program, but at least three of the nine grantees serving both age groups indicated during clarifying calls that young adults often received services for a longer period than adults (the other six grantees did not discuss program length). These grantees indicated that adults are more likely than young adults to enter the program with specialized skills, a greater ability to focus and prioritize work, and more immediate and pressing goals, such as meeting the basic needs of their families and children. The three grantees also reported that adults
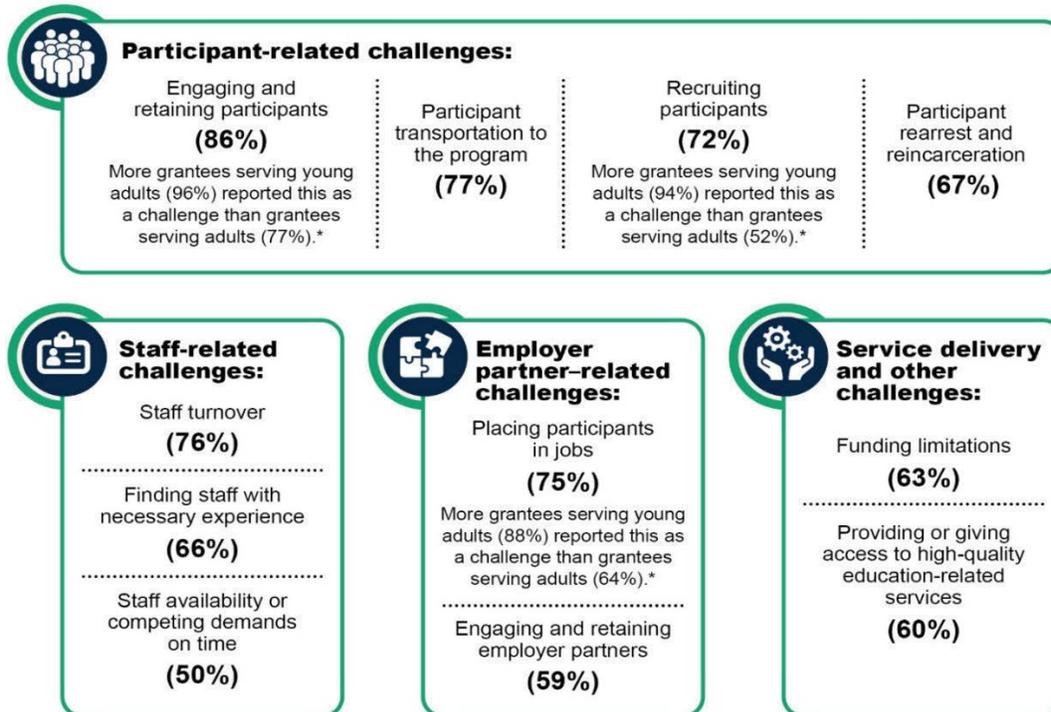
generally moved through the program and gained employment more quickly than young adults, who often attended training to obtain certifications. Yet another grantee noted that young adults tended to be slower to find employment either because they had more to learn or had a harder time staying engaged throughout the program. A different grantee, however, reported that adult participants who had been incarcerated for an extended period required more technology training than others.

Grantees' perceived challenges in serving adults and young adults

All grantees, including both CBO and intermediary grantees, reported in the grantee survey the challenges they faced related to participants, staffing, employer partners, and service delivery (Exhibit 5). Common perceived challenges among both adult and young adult CBO grantees included participant transportation needs (77 percent); participant rearrest and incarceration (67 percent); staff-related issues such as turnover (76 percent), finding qualified staff (66 percent) and competing demands on staff (50 percent); engaging and retaining employer partners (59 percent), as well as providing high quality education-related activities (60 percent); and managing funding limitations (63 percent).

Three specific types of challenges, however, were reported significantly more often among young adult grantees than adult grantees (Exhibit 5). Compared with adult grantees, young adult grantees more often reported challenges with recruiting participants (94 versus 52 percent) as well as engaging and retaining those participants throughout the course of service delivery (96 versus 77 percent). [ix] Placing participants in jobs was also reported as challenging by significantly more young adult grantees (88 percent) than adult grantees (64 percent). [x]

Exhibit 5. Perceived challenges in implementing the grant program, as reported by the grantees

Participant-related challenges:

Engaging and retaining participants **(86%)**
More grantees serving young adults (96%) reported this as a challenge than grantees serving adults (77%).*

Participant transportation to the program **(77%)**

Recruiting participants **(72%)**
More grantees serving young adults (94%) reported this as a challenge than grantees serving adults (52%).*

Participant rearrest and reincarceration **(67%)**

Staff-related challenges:

Staff turnover **(76%)**

Finding staff with necessary experience **(66%)**

Staff availability or competing demands on time **(50%)**

Employer partner–related challenges:

Placing participants in jobs **(75%)**
More grantees serving young adults (88%) reported this as a challenge than grantees serving adults (64%).*

Engaging and retaining employer partners **(59%)**

Service delivery and other challenges:

Funding limitations **(63%)**

Providing or giving access to high-quality education-related services **(60%)**

Source: Grantee surveys (N=113), grantees serving adults = 61, grantees serving young adults = 52

Note: Percentages represent the share of grantees that marked each challenge as either somewhat or very challenging in the grantee survey.

An asterisk (*) indicates the differences that were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level.

CBO = community-based organization

Findings from qualitative data from the subset of nine grantees serving both adult and youth adult populations highlight factors that, according to the grantees, are associated with these challenges. Young adults were reported to face unique barriers to reentry, according to eight of the nine grantees. Five grantees indicated during clarifying calls or site visit interviews that young adults tended to be less motivated than adults. They reported that many young adults lacked the patience necessary to start at the bottom of the career ladder and work their way up. One grantee also mentioned during the site visit that many young adults wanted to start businesses but did not recognize the knowledge, effort and resources needed to achieve that goal. Finally, even though adults and young adults appeared to confront similar problems with transportation, housing, food security, and health, one grantee mentioned that these challenges were particularly acute for young adults who lived in unstable housing situations. Staff from three grantees reported spending more time and attention working with and trying to maintain contact with young adult participants than with adult participants.

Given their stage in life, young adults ages 18 to 24 might benefit from different or unique approaches to reentry services compared to adults 25 years and older. The RP implementation report provides further details on some of the differences presented in this brief about adult and young adult grantees and their approaches to implementation. Given reported differences in the needs of participants of different ages and the challenges they face in reentry, data suggest that grantees recognize the importance of age-appropriate strategies for supporting young adults and adults during their transition back into society.

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[i] The evaluation team surveyed CBOs that provided services directly to participants and intermediary grantees that funded other organizations (subgrantees) to provide direct services. Although subgrantees were not surveyed, intermediaries provided information on their behalf. Of the 116 grantees invited to complete the survey, 114 completed the survey. Some grantees elected not to answer all questions in the survey. The percentages in this brief represent the affirmative answers from the grantees that answered a given question. Grantees were invited to fill out a survey for each grant they received, therefore a grantee with multiple types of grants or multiple grants across years completed multiple surveys.

[ii] Only CBO grantees were asked about referral sources in the survey.

[iii] See Geckeler et al. 2022 and Lewis and Stein 2022 for more details on service delivery models and specific service offerings.

[iv] Positive youth development is an intentional, prosocial approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances young people's strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities, fostering positive relationships, and furnishing the support needed to build on their leadership strengths (https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development, accessed 10/11/2022).
[v] Only CBO grantees were asked questions about their service offerings in the survey.

[vi] $\chi2(1) = 6.00$, $p = .01$.
[vii] $\chi2(1) = 4.21$, $p = .04$.
[viii] For more information on diversion programs, see https://youth.gov/youth-topics/juvenile-justice/diversion-programs (accessed 9/6/2022).

[ix] Recruiting participants, $\chi2(1) = 26.88$, $p = .00$. Engaging and retaining participants, $\chi2(1) = 15.87$, $p = .00$
[x] $\chi2(1) = 9.86$, $p = .01$.