

# Contextual determinants of family-driven care implementation in juvenile justice settings

## **Background:**

Young people involved in the juvenile justice system often struggle with serious mental health and substance use issues, but they rarely get the help they need. Research shows that involving families in a young person's care can lead to better outcomes, like improved mental health and fewer repeat arrests. To support this, an approach called Family-Driven Care (FDC) was developed to give families more say in decisions about their child's treatment. Although many juvenile justice systems, including Georgia's, have made changes to better include families, actually putting FDC into practice has been difficult due to issues like lack of trust between families and the system, limited resources, and unclear guidance. This study looked at what helps or hinders the use of FDC in Georgia's juvenile justice agencies by surveying and interviewing staff. The goal was to better understand how to successfully involve families in youth behavioral health care moving forward.

### **Key Takeaway**

Strong leadership, staff training, and supportive workplace culture are essential for successfully involving families in youth behavioral health care within the juvenile justice system.

## **Methods:**

### **Data Collection:**

- 140 juvenile justice staff in Georgia completed an online survey about family involvement practices.
- 16 staff members participated in follow-up interviews to explore their experiences in more depth.
- Participants included staff from different roles and locations (urban and rural).
- Surveys and interviews focused on how Family-Driven Care is used in their agencies.

### **Analysis:**

- Statistical modeling was used to find which workplace factors were most strongly linked to better use of Family-Driven Care.
- Patterns across different agencies to see what helped or blocked the implementation of family-focused practices was analyzed.
- For the interviews, structured method were used to identify common themes and insights shared by staff and combined both the survey and interview findings to get a fuller picture of what's needed to successfully engage families in youth behavioral health services.

## **Top Factors That Support Family-Driven Care Implementation in Juvenile Justice**

**Leadership Support**

**Staff Training**

**External Partnerships**

**Family Involvement**

**Ease of Implementation**

**Overcoming Barriers**

## **Findings:**

- Staff reported moderate use of Family-Driven Care (FDC), with average scores of 3.73 for FDC principles and 3.44 for specific strategies (on a 1–5 scale).
- Agencies were more likely to adopt FDC when leaders prioritized family involvement and when there was a strong, supportive workplace culture.
- FDC strategies were more commonly used when they were easier for staff to carry out. Challenges included complex systems, limited family engagement, and staff feeling under-resourced or unprepared.

## **Discussion:**

This study highlights how important leadership, training, and workplace culture are in helping juvenile justice agencies involve families in youth behavioral health care. While many staff support the idea of Family-Driven Care, not all agencies are equally prepared to put it into practice. The findings suggest that to improve family engagement, agencies need to invest in supportive leadership, make family involvement a clear priority, and offer practical training and tools. Addressing these areas can help more young people get the care they need with the support of their families.

## **Citation:**

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