

Intro:

Welcome to the NCJA Podcast. Listen to lively discussions with a variety of guests about promising criminal justice practices and programs worth taking a closer look at, hear interesting ideas from around the country on a variety of important and timely topics, and learn how you can adjust or adapt your [inaudible 00:00:26] grant program for improved success. Thanks for joining us. We hope you enjoy.

Anica Stieve:

Hello everyone and welcome to another episode of the NCJA podcast. Today, we're excited to bring you part two of a two-part series on Juvenile Assessment Centers. This episode is a companion to our March episode, which was called Overview of the National Assessment Center Model, with executive director of the National Assessment Center Association, Molli Barker Cook. You can listen to that episode first, or go back and listen afterward for more context. In that episode, Molly filled us in on the key components of the assessment center framework and its implementation from a national perspective. Today, we will zoom in taking a closer look at the Juvenile Assessment Center serving youth and families in Arapahoe County, Colorado. We are excited to introduce you to two guests who are instrumental in JAC operations, Sarah Troy and Kaelie McNeilley. Thank you both for being here. Let's introduce you to our listeners. Sarah, will you start please with a brief introduction and your role in the JAC?

Sarah Troy:

My name is Sarah Troy. I'm the executive director of the Juvenile Assessment Center, and we serve the 18th and 23rd judicial districts in Colorado, which is actually Arapahoe, Douglas, Lincoln and Albert counties. So a pretty big area in Colorado. I've been with the JAC for almost 18 years, started as the school liaison and have held many different roles in the organization since that time.

Anica Stieve:

So thank you, Sarah, for that introduction. And moving on to you, Kaelie.

Kaelie McNeilley:

Hi, I'm Kaelie. I am a secretary of the 18th JAC's board, as well as a former client.

Anica Stieve:

Well, we're very excited to have you both here today to help us understand more about the Assessment Center. Let's begin with just some general basics. So what is the history of the Juvenile Assessment Center and how did you both become involved in this work? Sarah, do you want to kick us off?

Sarah Troy:

Sure. Our Juvenile Assessment Center opened its doors in 2000, so we're actually celebrating our 25th anniversary this year, which is really exciting. So we've been doing this work for quite a while. We actually initially opened our doors just to work with law enforcement transports or those youth that were coming

into contact with law enforcement, and it was really designed for a couple different reasons. One, it was to have a safe place and a single entry site for juveniles when they had come into contact with law enforcement. And then on top of that it was to provide screening and assessment services to all of those young people that were coming through our doors in an effort to better understand what they were going through, what services we could possibly recommend them, but on top of that, to also be able to provide that information to not only parents and guardians, but also to the court, to the district attorney's office, to public defenders, guardian ad litem, really just anyone that was involved in that young person's life.

We really wanted to make sure that everybody had all of the information needed in order to make recommendations about things like treatment or even bond or something along those lines. So we really started doing just that, that law enforcement type work. I would say around 2009, we started having some ideas about branching into the prevention world and really expanding what we were doing and hoping that we were maybe catch young people before they entered the system, and so we started what we now call our community assessment program around that time. I would say that it was kind of a bit of a slow start and that was mainly based on location. We were trying to run prevention programming out of a detention center setting, and it just didn't work in the way that we had hoped. And so I would say the program really kind of became what it was and blossomed into the program that it is now around 2016 when we were able to move that program into a community-based setting.

And so the prevention program is really aimed at just what I said, keeping young people out of the system as much as possible. Both juvenile justice and child welfare is really kind of what we are focused on. And so that program is really focused on taking referrals from schools, child welfare, really kind of anywhere that you might preventatively work with a young person. We do still work with some youth who are involved in the system within that program, but it's pretty minimal and I can talk a little bit more about that as we get into the podcast, but that is really kind of the history. We started out working with law enforcement youth and we branched into the prevention world and now we're serving both kind of sets of young people and it's been a great kind of addition to be able to do that.

Anica Stieve:

It's great to hear how you adapted as needs changed over time. Kaelie, do you have anything to add about the history of the Juvenile Assessment Center and can you tell us about how you became involved in this work?

Kaelie McNeilley:

Yeah, so nothing really to add about the history of the assessment center, but I can tell you a bit about how I got involved. Mollie Barker Cook was the former executive director for the 18th JAC. She had reached out to the youth branch of State Advisory Group for OJJDP while I was working with a friend on a toolkit. He passed that information along and her and I had coffee, talked about my experience. I had gone through the law enforcement side of the program, and she ended up asking if I would be willing to serve on the board. And naturally, I was thrilled and I've been around ever since.

Anica Stieve:

Amazing. That's great to hear that you can bring both your current professional experience, I believe you said you're in finance when we talked before, and also your lived experience to the role, so you both mentioned two different tracks or programs that are encompassed in the Juvenile Assessment Center. Can you, Sarah, just talk us through the core components of each of the programs just to make that a little clearer for our listeners? You said the law program and the community assessment program?

Sarah Troy:

Yeah, so the law enforcement program is really just that. It is really designed to work with just youth who've come into contact with law enforcement, so that program is really only accessible by law enforcement officers and not to the general public. In the state of Colorado, the youngest age you can be charged with a crime is age 10, so that program is really focused on ages 10 through 17. Obviously once you're 18 you're in the adult system, and so that's kind of why that cutoff is there. So that program is accessible by law enforcement in two different ways. So any youth who's taken into custody that has committed or allegedly committed what we consider a detention-eligible offense, we are screening that youth to determine whether or not detention is the right place for them. Just because they allegedly committed a higher level charge doesn't mean that we're automatically going to put them in detention, and so one of our roles is to screen them using a statewide detention screening tool to determine whether or not they are going to go into detention.

So if they do screen in, they are transported directly to our detention facility by law enforcement and we provide the intake at the detention center. If they do not screen into detention or the reason they came into contact with law enforcement wasn't a detention eligible offense to begin with, we have law enforcement transport them to our community-based location. And no matter what location they go to, the process is looking fairly similar. We are doing all of the things that you would think about putting them in the system, maybe setting them up for court, those sorts of things, but the real kind of meat of what we do and what we really like to focus on is that screening and assessment process. So they're going through screening tools, they're going through an assessment, and we're really trying to get as much information as we can out of that young person to really make, like I said, those kinds of recommendations to the court and provide the court and all the different professionals with as much information as we possibly can.

The other program, the community assessment program is really designed, like I said, to be preventative, and it is open to all school-aged youth is what we say. So anyone kindergarten through senior year has access to that program. The majority of the referrals that we receive are coming from our school districts. I would say they are a top referrer. Outside of that, we take referrals from child welfare, from Medicaid, from hospitals, other youth serving organizations. We also work with some of the lower level courts because not all of those youth have to be transported through the law enforcement program if it's at a lower level offense, but we still want to be able to provide screening and assessment for that court if

necessary so they can come through the community assessment program as well. That program is appointment-based, so it's not a walk-in, it's not a transport situation.

We outreach referrals and we schedule appointments for them to come in, and we have a couple different locations in the community in order to provide that service. And again, screening and assessment is the big piece of what we're doing on that program as well. We want to provide screening, we want to provide high level assessment, and we want to be able to connect them to services or resources in their community.

Anica Stieve:

That's great. Speaking of the two programs and the assessment processes, who is it that's conducting those assessments and how do the strengths of the young person factor into that process?

Sarah Troy:

We have our law enforcement program staff and we have our community assessment program staff, and it looks a little different between both programs. The staff within the law enforcement program are conducting the entire intake, so they're the ones that are going to be setting that youth up for court. They're the ones that are going to be providing the screening, and they're the ones that are going to be providing the assessment process utilizing motivational interviewing. Those are bachelor's level staff that are working with those youth. Typically, those are staff members who have degrees in social work, psychology, criminal justice, things of that nature, and really wanting to work within the system and really wanting to work with youth specifically. The community assessment program is actually a clinical program, so the staff within the community assessment program have clinical degrees, so licensed social workers, psychologists, things of that nature.

We purposely created that to be a clinical program so that the assessment was going to be a bit more in-depth in an attempt to get them connected to services as quickly as possible. We still connect youth and families to services within the law enforcement program, but it's typically going through a court process or it's just kind of identifying the need for services, whereas the community assessment program, the goal was really to make sure we were getting them connected to those services on the front end in hopes of keeping them out of the juvenile justice or child welfare system. I think that the positive piece of an assessment is a really important part of what we do. We're really trying to find those strengths or those protective factors in every assessment that we do. It really is important we feel like to identify those protective factors and reduce the risk and factors.

It helps young people develop skills and resources to effectively manage adversity. We really want to kind of lift up those things that they might be interested in from a positive standpoint. If they are not involved in pro-social activities in their community, what are they interested in? What can we actually look to get them involved in? Because we all know that involvement in pro-social activities is going to decrease your risk factors in the community, so being able to not only identify those through an assessment process, but also make those connections to positive pro-social activities, mentoring, anything that might be seen as a

protective factor or something positive in the community is really important to us. And it's really important to all of the stakeholders and professionals that we work with as well.

Anica Stieve:

Thank you. That's really helpful to hear about how you all conceptualize the individual nature of tailoring service plans and connecting young people to the services that will make the biggest impact. So we're curious how the JAC functions in school settings. What are the most common reasons a young person may be referred through a school that you all are seeing?

Sarah Troy:

So most of our work with the schools actually happens through the community assessment program. As I said, they're our top referrers, so that makes sense. The most common reasons that somebody would be referred from a school are things like truancy, disciplinary infractions, maybe a change in behavior or even a change in presence. Is this normally a happy-go-lucky kid who's now presenting a little differently when they come into the school building? Has there been a change in academic performance? Is there familial conflict, right? Sometimes we get referrals from schools where the parent has come in and asked for help and maybe the school's not really seeing the kind of negative behaviors that a parent is, but the parent went in asking for help. So we're very embedded in our schools here. We work very closely with them. We do a lot of assessments in the schools actually. We cover a very big area in Colorado and we're not easily accessible to everybody within our service area.

Sometimes it could be a 20 to 25-minute drive, and we don't always want to put that on the parent to get to us. Again, there could be an issue with transportation or we don't always want them to have to spend gas money to get here when we can come to them, so we go out to the schools a lot. That tends to be a safe space for a lot of youth and families, so we go out there. As long as we can have a private space and they're willing to give us that area to be able to do that assessment, we do a lot of assessments there. Historically, we've also had co-located staff. We've had collaborative grants with our school districts and had clinicians that were employed through us but based out of the school and so they were there to be able to do that screening and assessment process right away. That's something that we don't currently have, but we have talked about possibly bringing back with some collaborative grants if they become available again.

Anica Stieve:

It's really encouraging to hear that schools are so involved and that so much engagement is happening at the school level with the assessment centers because we know that as you've said, that's where prevention can really be impactful. You mentioned briefly that's really important for your stakeholders, and so I wanted to get into stakeholders a bit because this is obviously a multidisciplinary sort of model that really requires a lot of stakeholder engagement and support. I was wondering if you both could share an example of great successes regarding stakeholder engagement. Maybe Kaelie, if you want to start us

off with that, and then any tips for gaining or maintaining that support. And similarly, any challenges you may have experienced throughout that process.

Kaelie McNeilley:

I would say that the JAC is pretty lucky with our stakeholders. I mean, we bring a lot of them to the board, so we have law enforcement representatives, we have DA representatives, we have a judge on the board, myself with lived experience, Department of Human Services. We really like to just have all of them or a representative in the room for each meeting, and that really, it helps make sure that we are taking care of all of the stakeholders and that we have their opinions, their needs in mind in every board meeting.

Anica Stieve:

Thank you. I love prioritizing representation in the room. We know that better decisions are made and people understand the work more fully when that's the situation, so I think that's great. Sarah, do you want to talk us through some successes and challenges that you've had? And I know that you've been lucky with stakeholder engagement. It's very impressive, especially on the law enforcement side. I think your law enforcement support is really outstanding, but if you'd like to share any successes or challenges that you've had, that would be great.

Sarah Troy:

Absolutely. I mean, I think just to kind of echo too on what Kaelie said, the stakeholder engagement that we have is paramount to us even surviving as an assessment center. We could not do this work without our stakeholders, and in fact, we became an assessment center because of our stakeholders. It was all of them getting together in a room and saying, "This is something that our community needs. This is something that we all want, and we need to make that happen." So Kaelie was right on. We have so many stakeholders that are on our board, but we also work with so many stakeholders who are also not on our board. I think it's really important for us that we're able to have that increased partnership. Increasing stakeholder engagement is always something that we're looking at, creating new partnerships and new collaboration. It's really important. We feel like because of that, consistency in the delivery of our services and the things that we're doing to adapt to changes in the community and in society in general has really helped us continue that really high-level stakeholder engagement.

We really want to make sure we're doing what we can for them. With that, we have that buy-in from stakeholders. I think that's a huge success of what we have, right? I think meeting their opinion, wanting their opinion and having them be a part of the process has just further created this high level of engagement from our stakeholders. I think that having that many stakeholders also can increase your funding and it can increase your presence in the community. It can create the education about what you're doing in your community, and so we're very, very fortunate to have the high level of stakeholder engagement that we do, but I think every time I talk to somebody about starting an assessment center or maybe even an assessment center that's brand new, that's always the big question that people have is how do you get stakeholder engagement and how do you get people wanting to come to the table, not

only for funding, but also for partnership. And I think it's really important to note that I think sometimes you have to prove your worth a little bit, right?

People are going to sometimes be a little hesitant to come to the table or want to work with you if they don't really understand what you're doing or what your impact can be in a community, and so for us, I think it's really important that we're able to show that impact and kind of prove our worth a little bit. I think it was very much a marathon and not a sprint to be able to get to that point, and so I always caution assessment centers to just take your time. It really takes some time to get that stakeholder engagement and to really be able to have that really great partnership and collaboration. We're 25 years in, so we've been doing this for a while and I think it speaks volumes to the amount of stakeholder engagement we have, but it can definitely take some time to get to that point.

Anica Stieve:

Similar to popular sayings like it's a marathon, not a sprint, somebody once told me that you have to make the work visible, and I think that's really the essential point of what you said around proving your worth a little bit. Just by making the work visible, communicating impact, and showing people. Sometimes people can be skeptical just based on the fact that they aren't familiar with something or they're not familiar with your program or your organization, and so making the work visible in a way that people can see and is tangible, including inviting stakeholders to board meetings or to be part of the group or engaged in some way I think can be really beneficial. Speaking of board engagement, Kaelie, as a board member, what do you see as the primary role of the JAC board and how does the board support the center and its staff?

Kaelie McNeilley:

I mean, I would say similar to many boards, we have to be responsible for the financial sustainability of the organization. Also making sure that the staff have everything that they need to be able to do their jobs, and I mean, I would say that I could probably speak for the board when I say that one of the things that the employees need to be able to do their job is the peace of mind, knowing that they're going to be able to take care of their financial responsibilities. So ensuring that their pay range is within the market average and ensuring that we are able to give them cost of living increases while still maintaining sustainability for the organization.

Anica Stieve:

Speaking of funding and sustainability, how is the JAC funded, and has the funding landscape changed since the center opened?

Sarah Troy:

Yes. Funding, so we actually have quite a bit of funding. We try very hard to diversify our funding. I think it can be broken up a little bit between programs. I don't want to say they have two completely different sources of funding, but it can definitely be broken up a little bit depending on what program we're talking about. The law enforcement program, again, that's how we started. That was the whole point of the

assessment center when it opened in 2000, and so law enforcement agencies are a big contributor to that program being able to run efficiently. I think we have 24 different law enforcement agencies within our service area and they all pay in. They all provide funding to us on a yearly basis, and a lot of that is dependent on how often they use us, how many transports they're bringing us, those sorts of things. But they all pay in for them to drop off youth and to transport youth to us.

The other big piece of funding for our law enforcement program is through our contract with CYDC or the Colorado Youth Detention Continuum. So in statute, CYDC is who is identified as the screener role. So I mentioned earlier that we have a state-mandated detention screening tool that we utilize, and in statute it says that CYDC is responsible for that. However, in kind of your larger service areas or your metro areas like us, we have to be available 24/7 and we have to be able to screen hundreds of kids a year, and that's just not really feasible for a CYDC to take on. They definitely do that in some of our smaller rural areas in Colorado, but in your larger judicial districts, they contract with their assessment centers to be able to provide that screening. It's a much easier thing for them, right? We're already 24/7.

We can do that for them with no issue, so we get funding from CYDC as well. Another big supporter of the law enforcement program. We also get funding from our district attorney's office. That funding goes to both programs. We do some statute-required screening for diversion, and we also work with youth who are coming through on summons through the district attorney's office, so they pay as well. Child welfare pays for both programs a little bit. School districts all pay, right? They want to be able to have this available to their youth for free or to all their students for free, and so they pay in a little bit every year. We also bill Medicaid for some of the work that we do on our community assessment program with that clinical work. We also have grants. We write grants to support the program as much as possible. And as a nonprofit, of course we do fundraising and donations as well, but I definitely think it has changed over the years.

When we first started, it really was just law enforcement, it was that CYDC contract, and I believe a little bit was coming from child welfare at the time. So we really have worked to diversify that funding a little bit and obviously with the expansion of the community assessment program, it required us to have to expand our funding, and so we've really tried over the years to find all the kind of funding that will work. Writing grants is a fantastic thing and I love being able to do that, but it's also really important that we have funding coming in from our partners and our stakeholders as well. It just increases that collaboration and that partnership that we want to make sure that we have.

Anica Stieve:

I want to emphasize one thing that you said around grants versus funding from partners. That's really important and the distinction there is critical. You all have done a really amazing job as you explained, diversifying your funding portfolio, and one of the things that's so impressive when I first started learning about your JAC is the amount of funding that's coming directly from partners. It's a testament to the work that you're doing and the impact that it has, and I know some folks struggle with getting partners on board. You can build a relationship and you can get someone to engage, but then when you ask for funding



directly, people are a little bit more hesitant. So I was just wondering if you could talk a little bit more about how you've really achieved everyone buying in financially.

Sarah Troy:

Those funding sources that we had to get buy-in from partners in collaboration are going to be your schools. That's going to be child welfare, the district attorney's office, and I think it goes back to a little bit about what I was saying earlier about proving our worth. I do believe that there was quite a bit of work that we did for free for a while just to show the community and our partners what we could do and what we wanted to do and why it was important to us. And I think being able to see some success for our partners and our stakeholders was a really important piece of that conversation. We also have tried to be as creative and innovative as we possibly can with our partners and in ways that we think could increase our funding, but also maybe decrease some of the workload they have, right? Find a better investment or a bigger investment for our partners and stakeholders.

I think one example of that is with child welfare, there's a lot of calls that come into a hotline. Anyone who works with young people are going to know that, right? There's a lot of calls that come into a hotline, and not all of those calls are actually going to meet the threshold of child protection, but that doesn't mean that there isn't some sort of a need that family may have or some sort of resource that they may benefit from. And so we've really worked with our child welfare departments to say, "Hey, send those referrals to us. We would be happy to outreach and screen and assess those youth and connect them to services in the community in hopes that they don't come back through your system."

So we want child welfare to see that that's a great use of their funds to be able to pay us to do something that they would love to do, but maybe don't have the staffing or the time to do. So I think it's just really important that we try to be creative and innovative when we're looking at those partnerships and how we can better use the funds that they have that we feel like could be helpful for us.

Anica Stieve:

And from a sustainability standpoint, that's where the leverage really comes in, right? Because you are helping them leverage their capacity in a more meaningful way. That takes us to a really nice lead in to a question about successes. So what are some of JAC's greatest successes? We would love to know if you collect any data on impact or how you assess whether the program is working.

Sarah Troy:

The biggest successes for our agency as a whole have been our expansion and our growth, being able to move into the prevention field a little bit and really give back in the community in ways that they need. I really think that's an important part about assessment centers. What does the community need? And so I think our growth has really added to that. I think over the years too, there's going to always be a little bit of change when it comes to screening and assessment simply because you have to adapt to things that are happening in the community and things that are happening in society as a whole. So really making sure that we are changing up or adding to our screening and assessment process to ensure we're meeting

the needs of the community in the present time. Really important piece of what we do, I think. As it relates to tracking our successes or our outcomes, we do anonymous surveys.

We complete anonymous surveys with our youth that come through as well as the parents that come through on the community assessment program. It's really important for us that they're telling us how we did. We don't want to just know how we think the programs are going. It's really important that the clients have some say in that, and we make it anonymous so that they will hopefully be as honest as possible with us about their experience with our program. And so we ask things like how safe they felt while they were here. Did the staff take into consideration what's going to happen next? Did they feel like they had some sort of a say in that? We want to know if they felt like they could openly talk to us. With parents, we want to know if they feel like they're better informed about their child's behavior. Do they feel like there's some hope in their ability to get help?

We look at a decrease in their stress and frustration from the beginning of the appointment to the end of the appointment. We also track resource engagement between both programs. So when we're making recommendations for youth to get involved in services or resources in their community, we have a case management process on the back end where we ensure that they got connected to that. We do that through talking with the youth and the parent, but also talking with the agency that we referred them to. And so it's really important for us to see if they followed through, and we have pretty high engagement rates, which is really great. I think that tells us a lot about the connections that we're making for resources and services in the community for young people. It's really high, and I think it's important to note that it doesn't have to mean that if we recommended three different things that they followed through with all three things.

Sometimes there's a hierarchy there. If basic needs are a thing for this family, we want to make sure that they get access to that. Nobody's going to be engaged in mental health or substance abuse services at the level they may need if they don't have enough food to eat at home or at their own house. So we really want to make sure that we're kind of looking at that hierarchy and whether or not they got engaged. And so with that, we can stay involved with the family for as long as they may need to make sure they're accessing whatever resources and services we've identified as a need for them in their family.

Anica Stieve:

Thank you for that, and I really appreciate the conversation around success or program impact being nuanced, and that it looks different for everyone that is involved in your program. Kaelie, did you have any comments on successes or how you've modified things or improved things over time at the assessment center?

Kaelie McNeilley:

I mean, I would kind of second what Sarah was saying in that the growth has been very important. I mean, adding the community assessment program on top is just, it's a huge deal. I'm very excited about it still. It didn't exist when I went through the JAC, so things that were appearing at school for me could have

minimized the lifetime impact of my decisions, if that makes sense. I ended up in DYC, and that could have been prevented had the community assessment program existed. And just something that I like to share, it's completely anecdotal, but my time in corrections really did show me that everyone that is going through there has some sort of trauma, and being able to address that before it gets to the point where a youth commits a crime is a big deal. You can just prevent it right up front by making sure that their needs are met. And not only is it preventing system involvement. If we're just looking at the system side, that's great for systems, but for that kid, it really does give them a better shot at having just a fulfilling life.

Anica Stieve:

Absolutely. So given both of your experiences, when folks are thinking about new programs to create or to replicate from elsewhere and best practices to implement in their state, what are the key things that you want people to know about assessment centers?

Sarah Troy:

Assessment centers should be in every community in some capacity. I just think what they look like and how they operate could differ given that every community is different, the needs of every community are different. I think I feel like whenever I have this conversation with people who don't work in this field, I think one thing I always say to them is I think it's so important because we as a society should actually be really interested and invested in keeping as many young people out of the system as possible, and we're not going to do that by just continuing to arrest and arrest and arrest without figuring out why the arrest is coming.

What is causing that young person to get into trouble in the community, at home, at school? What do we need to implement in order to keep that from continuing to happen? The law enforcement program does such an amazing job of screening and assessing youth and providing that information to the courts and to the different professionals to say, "Hey, it really is crucial that this young person get access to mental health services or substance abuse services or family counseling," or whatever it may be, depending on that young person and their family.

It's really important that somebody is able to take that information and implement that in order to address what's happening with that young person. The last thing we want is for a young person to get involved in the system and then never be able to leave it. It's really not a good place for anybody to be. I think on the flip side of that, it was also really important for me and for previous executive directors to really have a conversation about how we keep kids out of that system. We know that youth are always going to be arrested in some capacity. There's always going to be a need for that, but we need to prioritize and look at ways to keep youth out of the system as well. And I really think that's where our passion for the prevention side of things came as well. We can still do that screening and assessment.

We can still get as much information as possible, but instead of being able to hand off that information to a court or professionals, we can have that conversation with parents or guardians about why that service would be really helpful in order to address whatever might be happening in that person's life. So I think

that the need or the takeaway that people should have about assessment centers is that there's a need for that in both worlds, right? There's this need with this law enforcement side of things and working with youth who have entered the system, as well as this passion and need to keep youth out of the system.

Anica Stieve:

Thank you. And Kaelie, you shared a little bit about what's important to you based on your experience, but what are some of your key takeaways that you want people to know about assessment centers?

Kaelie McNeilley:

I would say pretty much what Sarah said, these should exist in every community. We should be doing everything that we can to prevent kids from going into the system and making sure their needs are met. I mean, I feel like it's something that we owe to the kids that are growing up in this world.

Sarah Troy:

One thing that's really important to kind of note as well is that assessment centers really are supposed to be that expertise about services and resources in the community. That is one of our jobs, is to know what's available for youth and families. And so we really take that very seriously. We have all of our staff going out and doing site visits, finding out about the resources in the community, adding them to our list. It's kind of like a preferred provider network if you want to use that term, but it really is our job to be able to know what services exist in the community, because otherwise, if we're just referring youth and families to one or two resources, we're really not connecting them to the best service for them and their needs. And I know most assessment centers across the country also do the exact same thing. It's really important that we are kind of the expert in the field as it relates to knowing what's in the community.

Anica Stieve:

Thank you so much for bringing that up. I think one thing that oftentimes happens is folks are very busy. People get into a habit of always calling Sarah over at this organization or always calling Kaelie to help with these services. But when you actually have an agency that specializes in the expertise of knowing what's available, you're much more likely to have a better warm handoff, a better fit for what services are actually needed and what is actually going to work for the young person and family. So I think that's a really great point, to remind folks that this also reduces workload on school staff, on law enforcement because they can just be, and the community that refers, right? They can just be referring young people and then they can know that you all and your staff are going to leverage your expertise and knowledge of the services in the community to find the best fit for them. And then not everyone has to be carrying that burden.

Sarah Troy:

A great way to say that. Absolutely. And I think it also helps with service fatigue. I think we want to make sure that we're connecting them to the right service at the right time, because if young people, or adults,

for that matter, if they have to continue to look for different services every few months because something isn't working, you run into service fatigue. And people are just not going to want to continue to go through that. And so being able to identify the right service at the right time is just crucial, especially as you're talking about young people.

Anica Stieve:

Any final thoughts to share with our listeners?

Sarah Troy:

I think the only thing I would add to this is that if you're listening and this assessment center model is something that you're interested in implementing in your community or you want more information, please make sure you're reaching out to the National Assessment Center Association through Molli Barker Cook, who was the previous podcaster on this topic. I think she does such a great job of really talking through what an assessment center can be in each community and really looking at the process and what it could be. I think it's a really important conversation to have, so please make sure you're reaching out if that's something that you're interested in in your community.

Kaelie McNeilley:

I was definitely thinking of the framework. I mean, that's a huge resource for anyone that's interested in an assessment center. I mean, it really does go through the best practices and the most important things and all of the different potential configurations of an assessment center, incredible resource. And the other thing is too, I mean, people don't have to reach out directly to Molli. There's lots of knack networking opportunities as well, and she can also connect you to someone else that really does currently work with a similar model to the one that you're looking for.

Anica Stieve:

Thank you. Thank you for your work.