

Understanding the Impact of Background Experience from Staff in Diversion Programs: The Voices of a Community-Based Diversion Program

Authors : Ana Magana

Abstract : Youth are entering the juvenile justice system at alarming rates. For the youth of color entering the system, the outcomes are far worse than for their white counterparts. In fact, the youth of color are more likely to be arrested and sentenced for longer periods of time than white youth. Race disproportionality in the juvenile justice system is evident, but what happens to the youth that exit the juvenile justice system? Who supports them after they are incarcerated and who can prevent them from re-offending? There are several diversion programs that have been implemented in the US to aid the reduction of juvenile incarceration and help reduce recidivism. The program interviewed for this study is a community-based diversion program (CBDP). The CBDP is a pre-filing diversion non-profit organization based in South Seattle. The objective of this exploratory research study is to provide a space and platform for the CBDP team to speak about their background experiences and the influence their background has on their current approach and practice with juveniles. A qualitative, exploratory study was conducted. Interviews were conducted with staff and provided oral consent. The interview included six open-ended, semi-structured questions. Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. The aim of this study was to understand how the influence of the participant's backgrounds and previous experiences impact their current practice approaches with the CBDP youth and young adults. Ecological systems theory was the guiding framework for analysis. After careful analysis, three major themes emerged: 1) strong influence of participant's background, 2) participants belonging to community and 3) strong self-identity with the CBDP. Within these three themes, subthemes were developed based on participant's responses. It was concluded that the participant's approach is influenced by their background experiences. This corresponds to the ecological systems theory and the community-based lens which underscores theoretical analysis. The participant's approach is grounded in interpersonal relationships within the client's systems, meaning that the participants understand and view their clients within an ecological systems perspective. When choosing participants that reflect the population being served, the clients receive a balanced, inclusive and caring approach. Youth and young adults are searching for supportive adults to be there for them, it is essential for diversion programs to provide a space for shared background experiences and have people that hold similar identities. Grassroots organizations such as CBDP have the tools and experience to work with marginalized populations that are constantly being passed on. While articles and studies focus on the reduction of recidivism and re-offending it is important to question the reasons behind this data. For instance, there can be a reduction in statistics, but at whose expense. Are the youth and young adults truly being supported? Or is it just a requirement that they are completing in order to remove their charge? This research study can serve as the beginning of a series of studies conducted at CBDP to further understand and validate the need to employ individuals with similar backgrounds as the participants CBDP serves.

Keywords : background experience, diversion, ecological systems theory, relationships

Conference Title : ICJJ 2018 : International Conference on Juvenile Justice

Conference Location : Vancouver, Canada

Conference Dates : August 09-10, 2018