Juvenile Evening Reporting Centers: A Research Note on an Emerging Practice

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Abstract
Placing youth in detention centers has the potential to generate negative educational and behavioral consequences. Recognizing this problem, scholars and juvenile justice policy makers and practitioners have searched for viable alternatives during the past two decades. One alternative promoted by the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative is the evening reporting center (ERC). Although promoted as a promising practice, little is known about the ERC’s operational design and effectiveness. This research note explores the ERC through site visits at seven locations across the United States. Data from the site visits are integrated with evidence-based literature to provide suggestions for examining the need for the ERC, creating a model design, and evaluating the program.

Keywords
juvenile detention, diversion, after-school programming, incapacitation

In the U.S. Supreme Court case of Schall v. Martin (1984), the Court held that the use of preventive detention for a juvenile charged with a criminal act is constitutional. This landmark case enabled states to increase the application of detention for juveniles (Hemmens, Steiner, & Mueller, 2004). In 2009, a total of 318,000 delinquency cases involved preadjudication detention, an increase of 29% from 1985 (Puzzanchera, Adams, & Hockenberry, 2012). Preadjudication detention for juveniles historically has been justified and utilized either as a public safety measure to isolate violent offenders from society or to ensure a youth appears in juvenile court (Lawrence & Hesse, 2010). Interestingly, most youth detained prior to their court hearing are not violent. Only 31% of detained youth in 2009 had committed a crime against a person as their most serious offense, whereas property and public order offenders represented 60% of the detention population (Puzzanchera et al., 2012). The large number of youth receiving detention for relatively minor offenses, along with

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potential harmful effect of juvenile confinement, has motivated some scholars to question the extent of detention placements and seek alternatives.

Overuse of detention is criticized due to potential behavioral consequences and opportunity reduction. Approximately two thirds of juvenile detainees have some type of mental disorder (Grisso, 2004), and detention aggravates many existing mental conditions, which may increase the need for continued treatment following detention (Kashani et al., 1980). Confinement also puts youth at risk of physical and sexual assault (Review Panel on Prison Rape, 2010). In addition, incarcerated youth experience 2 to 4 times the suicide rate of youth in the community (Holman & Ziedenberg, 2006; Parent et al., 1994), and the estimated prevalence of suicide over a lifetime ranges from 11% to 33% for detained youth (Bhatta, Jefferis, Kavadas, Alemagno, & King, 2014).

Youth in detention also face potential educational setbacks. Time spent in detention is time away from the traditional classroom. Detention centers additionally face substantial challenges in providing high-quality education, such as varying lengths of offender confinement, differing academic needs and learning problems, interruptions caused by court processes, and limited funding to hire experienced educators (Holman & Ziedenberg, 2006; Koyama, 2012). Many youth in detention who receive remedial education during their confinement do not reenter school following release or quit shortly after returning to school (LeBlanc & Ratnofsky, 1991). Holman and Ziedenberg (2006) note that the life paths of youth who are confined in juvenile detention diverge from those of their peers and that long-term effects include negative employment experiences and unfavorable economic outcomes.

Research further indicates that recidivism rates increase for juveniles who have been in detention. Using data from Sacramento County, California, Lubow (1999) observed that reductions in the proportion of detention referrals sent to secure custody corresponded with decreases in reoffending. A study conducted in Arkansas of juveniles who had spent time in juvenile detention found that prior confinement was a more reliable predictor of recidivism than possession of weapons, being a gang member, or parental problems (Benda & Tollett, 1999). Some claim that this increased likelihood of offending, which runs counter to the purpose of juvenile detention, is the result of delinquent youth negatively influencing one another when put in close contact (Dishion, McCord, & Poulin, 1999). Finally, the cumulative financial costs of detaining juveniles can be considerable. Estimates of the per diem costs of secure detention range from US$87 to US$620 per day (Correctional Association of New York, 2010; Holman & Ziedenberg, 2006).

Because juvenile detention is laden with serious risks, alternatives have been developed and implemented in an effort to reduce the number of youth in confinement. The Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation has brought attention to the problem of excessive juvenile preadjudicatory detention and has led juvenile justice offices across the country in implementing reform measures. The core goals of JDAI are to “eliminate the inappropriate or unnecessary use of secure detention, minimize re-arrest and failure-to-appear rates pending adjudication, ensure appropriate conditions of confinement in secure facilities, redirect public finances to sustain successful reforms, and reduce racial and ethnic disparities” (JDAI, n.d.).

One concept to emerge from JDAI is the evening reporting center (ERC). The ERC as originally envisioned by Cook County, Illinois, aims to “provide structure and supervision to youth during the ‘high crime’ after-school and evening hours from 3:00 to 9:00 PM” (DeMuro, 1999, p. 19). According to DeMuro (1999), the ERC is “an alternative to detention program designed to provide intensive supervision to youth who would normally be held in secure pretrial custody. The goal is to ensure that youth return to court for their scheduled court date with no new law violations” (p. 20). Although ERCs have been implemented in over 20 jurisdictions, little is known about how they operate and whether they are effective due to the lack of an empirically based literature covering this topic. The ERC currently exists as a concept but with no clear overarching model and core principles. Thus, it may be that the ERC is envisioned and structured differently across jurisdictions where it exists.
This research note explores the potential of the ERC to contribute effectively to the juvenile justice system. Data from site visits at juvenile ERCs are described and discussed. This information is then used to offer suggestions for developing an overarching ERC model and providing directions for assessing the value of the juvenile ERC.

Current Project

Seven ERC sites out of 23 ERCs known to the researchers were selected for this study. A list of ERCs was made available by representatives of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, who oversee the JDAI activities. Locations were chosen to provide representation from each region of the country as well as various population levels. Sites I and II were located in the western United States; Sites III, IV, and V were located in the Midwest; and Sites VI and VII were located in the eastern United States. The specific city locations of the ERCs are not disclosed to protect the confidentiality of participants in the study. Each ERC has operated for multiple years to allow for implementation and initial assessment of all necessary administrative, staffing, and program components.

Data for this study were collected during 2011 and 2012. At each site, open-ended interviews were completed with the ERC coordinator and at times other available administrators and staff. The interviews were structured so that information was collected relevant to the four broad questions below:

1. Why is the ERC needed and what are its goals?
2. What are the core features of the ERCs design and operation?
3. What challenges have the ERC faced and how have these challenges been addressed?
4. How is the ERC being evaluated?

The researchers received tours of the facilities and when possible reviewed policy and procedure manuals and other program documents. On-site observations were conducted for at least 2 hours at each site.

Findings

Goals and Need

In some way, each site noted that a primary goal of the ERC is to reduce the number of youth exposed to confinement in detention. Several secondary goals were noted, such as increasing appearances at court, enhancing public safety, and reducing recidivism. The Site VII coordinator expressed the broadest vision of the ERC which included (a) getting kids to show up for court, (b) making sure kids do not reoffend while going through the ERC process, (c) getting kids to court with an individualized service plan, (d) assisting with job readiness, and (e) connecting ERC youth with broader community services. Although providing some type of treatment or care was listed by all site coordinators as a necessary part of the ERC, most did not believe youth had enough time to reap long-term benefits from the relatively short stays in the ERC.

The need for the program was expressed in its ability to fill roles not met by other existing programs. The ERC was uniformly described as a “step down” from detention, basically a place in the community that controls the activity of high-risk youth—although not to the security level of detention—but also permits youth to remain home at night. Several sites noted that placing youth offenders on electronic monitoring exclusively as a mechanism for reducing confinement is inadequate, considering that the youth cannot be closely watched under such types of supervision and thus are at greater risk to commit crime than if admitted into an ERC. House arrest was deemed a potential detention alternative, but the coordinators questioned whether families could have the same level of control and influence over the youth as the ERC environment. There was also
general agreement that other programs like drug courts, cognitive–behavioral groups, and counseling sessions occurring in the evening hours are inadequate to fulfill the protective role of the ERC, especially since those programs do not meet every weeknight and do not emphasize security to the same degree.

**Core Features**

The ERCs indicated that youth of various risk levels could be admitted. Three sites admitted medium- to high-risk offenders, two sites admitted low- to medium-risk levels, and two sites admitted low- to high-risk levels. Site coordinators stressed that although multiple risk-level youth might be admitted, there is conscious effort to give lower risk offenders throughout the system the least restrictive alternative to detention available. The exact distribution by risk level in each ERC was not available from the coordinators. In addition, five sites indicated that youth were selected for the program based partly on a separate detention assessment instrument, which added items for seriousness of the offense and prior failures to appear. Five ERC sites admitted youth who were of pre- and postadjudication status and two admitted preadjudicatory juveniles exclusively. Postadjudicatory youth were most often probation violators awaiting a court hearing but not considered serious enough for detention.

All of the ERC sites emphasized that the ERC should not be viewed as a stand-alone option that is, other programs outside the ERC were considered necessary for youth to maximize their potential for success. As Site V coordinator observed, “the ERC recognizes the need for youth to attend other programs for their best interests, and it works with other schedules to ensure effective supervision and programming are delivered to positively assist youth.” All coordinators agreed that the ERC should bend and give priority in most cases to other programs and services that more directly target the needs of youth when scheduling conflicts arose.

The average length of stay at the ERC sites ranged from 15 to 41 days. Since many youth are placed at the ERC before adjudication, the timing of adjudication hearings can play a significant role in the total amount of time spent at the ERC. The sites followed a rolling admission process and thereby did not have cohorts of participants. Site V was the only ERC with a specified program of activities which youth were expected to complete within a given time frame. At Site V, all program activities were expected to be completed within a 20-day period. Successful completion of the ERC experience was identified by all but one site as a youth having no new law violations during the time spent at the ERC. The maximum youth capacity for the ERCs ranged from 7 to 24 individuals.

Staff responsibilities at the ERCs were primarily supervision related; additional responsibilities included transportation, group facilitation, and communicating with parents and court personnel. In addition to the ERC coordinator, an average of three additional staff worked at the ERCs, although positions varied across sites regarding full- and part-time status. Most ERCs utilized some type of security mechanism. The most common were pat down searches and the use of metal detectors and a couple of sites had security cameras installed. A few sites kept doors locked to prevent outside entrance but left the doors unlocked from the inside.

Most of the sites operated on weekdays within the hours of 3:00 p.m. to 8 p.m. Site II required youth to attend the ERC between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. through the week and 8–5 on Saturday. Site I also required attendance on Saturday for a community project between 8 a.m. and 2 p.m. Site V required ERC youth to engage in community service on one Saturday while in the program. The youth at the ERCs are engaged in a variety of educational and life skill activities. Most sites exposed the youth to at least 2 hours of tutoring. Other activities included job readiness training, computer skill development, arts and crafts, anger management, cognitive instruction, and a vast array of special topics covered by guest speakers. Recreation time was also offered at each ERC site, which included physical activities like basketball and wrestling, chess, and making music recordings.
With the exception of one ERC, both males and females were admitted. Four sites noted that females were separated from males during most programming and activities, although few sites articulated a clear gender-specific approach to the females. Though not all sites had specific age criteria for eligibility, the typical age range of ERC youth was between 14 and 16. As might be expected, racial and ethnic makeup varied by geographical location. For example, Sites III and IV in the Midwest had over 90% Black youth, Sites I and II in the western United States consisted primarily of Hispanic youth, and Site VI in the eastern United States had a slight majority of black offenders and a third were white.

**Challenges**

The ERC sites encountered a variety of challenges in implementing and sustaining their facilities. Finding and sustaining funding was the most commonly mentioned challenge across sites. Financial limitations posed obstacles to support facilities and equipment, hiring and maintaining staff, transportation, and providing quality food services. Three sites specifically noted that dependence on grant funding presented tremendous pressures, and Site VII stated that it was funded by five different sources, which required five separate financial reports, posing unique burdens on time. Site VI noted that it had to close for 8 months in 2009 due to financial reasons.

System-level resistance was identified as a challenge at a few sites, with Site VII expressing the greatest resistance. The ERC coordinator at Site VII stated that ERC staff would expend energy and effort into developing case plans that were ignored by juvenile office workers. ERC staff were apparently telling youth one set of things, which were contradicted by juvenile office case managers. A few sites noted that during the initial development of the ERC some judges posed resistance to providing referrals to the ERC instead of putting youth in detention. All these sites noted that judges eventually became receptive to the ERC concept and supportive of it.

Other challenges noted at the ERC sites were getting female referrals and finding activities for girls in the program, staff turnover that caused temporary disruptions to programming, and minor technological limitations that prevented the use of electronic equipment. Site II in the western United States identified a lack of Spanish-speaking staff as a barrier to efficient service delivery. In the early development of the program, a few sites noted that locating suitable facilities and space for the ERC was an obstacle, but all sites believed they currently had adequate space to function effectively.

**Evaluating the ERC**

The primary means of evaluating the success of the ERC was a simple output measure of whether the youth made it through the ERC without receiving a law violation prior to their next court date. Using this criterion, “success” rates ranged from 77% to 97%. With the exception of Site VII, no ERC site had data to show that ERC youth had better outcomes than other youth. The ERC program at Site VII was evaluated by a local university, which found that youth in the ERC fared better than detention alternative youth in an electronic monitoring program, although differences were rather small. For example, 1.5% of the ERC youth failed to appear at their court hearing, whereas 5% of youth on electronic monitoring failed to appear. In addition, 13.5% of the ERC youth were detained during their involvement in the ERC, whereas 18.7% of electronic monitoring youth were detained. No sites had data to compare the impact of the ERC on crime rates, although reducing recidivism was rarely stated as an ERC goal.

Impressions of youth were examined by four sites, and two sites asked parents about their feelings toward the ERC. While the sites reported that the youth and parent responses were generally positive, no reports were available to statistically examine these impressions. Site VI noted that it keeps
track of youth behavior after completion, although no reports existed which compared the post-ERC experiences of these youth with others. In addition, no evaluative information was available at any site regarding the effects of separate programs administered through the ERC on outcomes. Finally, no analysis existed to examine social development and psychological functioning during and after the ERC experience.

Discussion

The ERC is a program promoted by the JDAI as a promising mechanism for diverting youth away from confinement in detention facilities. Diversion programs are typically aimed at steering first-time, low-risk youth away from the juvenile system in the early phases of processing (Porpotage, 2003; Zimmerman, 2011). The ERC is rather unique in that it aims to divert those close to receiving preadjudicatory detention not away from the system itself but away from confinement in detention specifically. For this reason, the ERC should be viewed as a specialized diversion program and not automatically categorized with traditional diversion programs that aim to shield a person from the system altogether. Diversion programs have shown some successes, such as improved judicial processing, increased offender respect for the justice system, and lower recidivism (Herman, 2002; Patrick, Marsh, Mimura, & Perkins, 2004; Seyfrit, 1987). On the other hand, diversion programs have also produced racial discrepancies in juvenile justice systems and can be hampered by inadequate family support, negative peer socialization, and underutilization of community resources (Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, 2011). At this point, the ERC has not been established as an evidence-based practice simply due to a lack of evaluative research. Nonetheless, the ERC has tremendous logical appeal because it attempts to identify youth who might otherwise go to detention if the ERC did not exist and spare those juveniles the potentially criminogenic experience of incarceration.

One potential problem for ERCs is that diversion programs can lead to net widening. Net widening occurs when youth who otherwise would have received no or little programming are put into a program meant to address more serious delinquency (Frazier, Richards, & Potter, 1983). Is it truly the case that detention-bound youth are admitted into ERCs, or is the ERC pulling in youth who would have been placed in an alternate program (or possibly no program) before the arrival of the ERC? This is a question that could not be answered at any of the research sites. The sites which had a separate detention assessment, in addition to the typical risk-of-reoffending assessment, could make a stronger argument that detention-bound youth are being admitted, but hard data to justify the need for offender placements in the ERC were not available. In other words, the separate detention assessment instruments were not backed by rigorous validation procedures.

The ERCs incorporate an incapacitative strategy that aims to prevent ERC youth from committing additional crime by isolating them from criminal opportunities during after-school hours, which are thought to be the most criminogenic time periods (DeMuro, 1999). Although youth certainly commit crime during typical ERC operational hours (i.e., 3 p.m.–8 p.m.), this is not the only time span during which youth engage in delinquency. Gottfredson and Soule’s (2005) recent analysis of the timing of juvenile crime indicates that the traditional belief that youth crime is most likely to occur after school is misplaced. They found that violent and property crime is more likely to occur before and during school, and drug use is more likely to happen on the weekend. Interestingly, most ERCs did not have a weekend supervision component, which is a problem when trying to prevent juvenile drug crime. Statistics on after-school crime are likely to vary somewhat across locations, but there was no evidence at the ERC sites that crime is significantly higher during ERC operating hours. Also, it is not known if the ERC youth are more or less likely than others to displace their criminal activities to other times. Overall the impact that the ERC can have on crime committed by detention-bound but not detained youth is still very questionable.
The ERC’s incapacitative strategy also presents the risk of negative socialization among participants. More specifically, there is a potential contamination effect from grouping delinquent youth together. Differential association and social learning theorists maintain that youth often learn behaviors from their peers (Akers, 1997). Research strongly suggests that programs which enroll both high-risk and low-risk offenders are in serious jeopardy of increasing the criminal behavior of the low-risk youth (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Latessa, Listwan, & Koetzle, 2014). This has become known as the “risk principle” in correctional treatment literature (Latessa et al., 2014). Thus, the fact that four ERC sites are admitting low risk of reoffending youth is troubling. These ERC programs could be generating greater delinquency for some offenders opposed to reducing it. In addition, the inclusion of low-risk offenders in a program designed for more serious youth runs the risk of net widening.

The offender rehabilitation literature, which includes after-school programs, indicates that providing more directed and guided treatment delivery and structured offender supervision leads to better outcomes (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Latessa et al., 2014). Accordingly, ERCs should operate within structured environments where youth have limited time to freely socialize with other ERC participants. If ERC youth have opportunities to listen to the stories of other youth and plan activities beyond the ERC’s boundaries, the ERC experience could be quite detrimental for many juveniles. Most ERC coordinators were skeptical that ERC programming could have a long-term treatment effect on youth behavior, so the benefits of structure and direction are more likely to be experienced in staving off potential negative outcomes, such as keeping youth from learning criminal attitudes and behaviors from each other.

The limited evaluation data for the ERC is a cause for concern. A fundamental aspect of evaluating the appropriateness of any program is first establishing its need (Mears, 2010). A few sites articulated that the unique need of the ERC is that it provides enhanced monitoring and isolation of youth during high-crime hours. Instead of operating a distinct ERC, there is the potential to achieve the same result by adding increased monitoring within existing community programs. For example, cognitive programs aimed at dealing with high-risk youth could be coupled with more extensive and structured home confinement. Comparisons of the benefits of programs with greater attention to monitoring youth and the ERC would be instructive. It is possible that the need for an ERC will vary considerably from one jurisdiction to the next.

The ERC is more difficult to evaluate than other programs considering that it has a unique diversionary function and has no core operational basis which is consistent across ERCs. For example, the drug court literature has established a set of core features from which process evaluations can be structured (Hills, Shufelt, & Cocozza, 2009). Right now, output evaluations are all that are possible for the ERC. Process evaluations are impossible because core principles and practices have not been solidified to determine if they are in place across ERCs. The major criterion of success at the ERCs was whether the youth made it to his or her adjudication hearing without committing any new offenses. By this measure of success, the ERCs studied are performing very well. The only experimental evaluation of the sites showed that ERC youth fared marginally better on failures to appear and detention admission while at the ERC than juveniles under electronic monitoring.

ERC sites are encouraged here to partner with researchers to examine multiple outcome measures and study post-ERC behavior to explore the possibility of negative effects and limitations. For example, lack of family support has been a barrier to diversion programming, and it could be that the ERC experience is not only hindered by family issues but potentially creates family problems due to added strain regarding time commitments. Thus, an ERC site could create measures of family stress, family support, family communication, and family conflict to explore the broader effect of ERCs on family life. Two sites gathered information from parents but did not appear to process and analyze the information in a systematic way. In addition, long-term assessments of the impact on family were not conducted beyond the duration of ERC participation.
Measures of youth development have been used in after-school program evaluations and could be integrated into ERC evaluations. For instance, Gottfredson, Soule, and Cross (2004) examined youth development in after-school settings with measures like belief in conventional rules, positive values, goal direction, decision-making skills, commitment to education, and attachment to prosocial adults. Whether or not the goal of the ERC is to reduce long-term delinquency, it is critical for outcome studies to incorporate self-report and official measures of delinquency to examine potential harmful effects from the program experience.

In addition to examining the attitudinal and behavioral effects of the ERC, it is important to analyze the costs associated with operating it. Finding and sustaining funding was the most common challenge noted across sites. ERCs are typically one of several juvenile justice programs, all of which are competing for a share of a pool of relatively limited and finite resources. Any positive results emanating from the ERC must be weighed against such costs as facility maintenance, personnel, equipment, transportation, and food services; and juvenile justice policy makers should explore whether cheaper options exist to achieve the same or better results at lower costs.

Conclusions

Scholars of juvenile justice and corrections know that promising and well-meaning interventions do not always render good policy (Cullen & Gilbert, 1982; Latessa et al., 2014; Rothman, 1980). The ERC has the good-intentioned aim of reducing juvenile detention populations and thereby limiting harmful effects stemming from the detention experience. There is some indication that youth who enter ERCs are avoiding detention, but it is unclear whether these youth would have experienced detention prior to the ERC’s existence. Net widening, an age-old nemesis of correctional programming, could once again be revisiting us. There is also no conclusive empirical indication that the incapacitative function of the ERC is actually yielding public safety gains by reducing juvenile crime during the so-called “peak” hours of criminal activity. Quite simply, the lack of rigorous, evaluative research prevents any positive or negative assessment of the ERCs potential to be a worthwhile juvenile justice practice.

ERC proponents have yet to develop an ERC model with core principles and practices to guide its design, implementation, sustainability, and evaluation. The limited ERC literature has focused on the ERC as a concept emphasizing its diversionary and incapacitative goals. Each ERC in the study provided youth with programming, although the ultimate aim of this programming is uncertain. ERC site coordinators do not believe major rehabilitative gains can be made during the relatively short time span of ERC involvement, so the programming goal is not to reduce recidivism. Educational tutoring was a consistent programmatic practice across the ERCs. Educational assistance should help youth with their school work during the school year, although educational gains that might increase a youth’s prosocial opportunities in the future may be offset if exposure to other delinquent youth at the ERC leads to the acceptance and adoption of antisocial attitudes and behaviors. Life skill classes were common across ERCs. Unfortunately, life skill programs are viewed as ineffective in reducing criminal behavior and are perhaps only serving the function of occupying the participants’ time (Latessa et al., 2014). ERC coordinators should consider working closely with other juvenile justice programs to determine if activities can be designed to complement treatment experiences the youth are receiving elsewhere, such as in cognitive–behavioral classes.

Scholars and juvenile justice policy makers and practitioners should join forces to review the evidenced-based literature on effective juvenile correctional policies and practices and have meaningful discussions to identify the need for the ERC and the specifics of an overarching ERC model. Identifying the need for the ERC is the first and most important step in this process. Determinations of need should focus on the size of the population of youth at risk for detention, the
distribution of crime across time to identify if significant peak hours exist, and the availability and quality of alternative options striving to accomplish the same goals as the ERC.

The second step is to come together and develop a clear, evidence-based design. An ERC model can be developed by integrating existing research on other juvenile programs into its design. For example, empirical evidence demonstrates the importance of quality staff supervision in effective after-school programs. Naturally, a key ERC design component should be developing structured guidelines for supervision and training staff to monitor youth interactions and activities. Drug courts utilize the delivery of incentives and sanctions as a core practice to increase compliance behavior. An ERC model should also incorporate incentives and sanctions to direct youth behavior in appropriate ways. Other strategies of juvenile drug courts that may apply to the ERC are building partnerships with community organizations, steering interventions toward the holistic and development needs of youth and their families, engaging families as valued partners, and establishing meaningful relationships with local schools (U.S. Bureau of Justice, 2003). The risk principle of effective correctional programming notes that combining low-risk and high-risk youth often has negative consequences for the low-risk offenders. Thus, an ERC policy should clarify that only high-risk youth identified through a validated risk assessment instrument can be admitted into the ERC. The joint discussions and efforts of academics, policy makers, and practitioners will easily lead to the identification of several additional principles and practices that can be incorporated into an overarching ERC model. However, it is absolutely critical that the ERC administrators and program directors first establish clear mission statements, goals, and objectives for their ERCS so that core principles and practices can be implemented to successfully achieve specific aims.

The final step is to create strong evaluation criteria and methods. It is important to approach ERC evaluation holistically rather than focusing unilaterally on whether youth attend their court hearing without a new offense or detention placement. This short-term measure deserves attention, but it cannot be the only measure. Evaluations must also consider the ERC’s impact on future criminal behavior and how it affects juveniles’ ability to receive and benefit from other types of programming that directly target criminogenic needs. Further, evaluations must compare the costs of operating the program against any benefits identified.

The ERC is a relatively new juvenile justice concept and its future as an effective intervention is not yet known. Hopefully this research note will inspire discussion about the ERC and lead to critical examinations to develop a better understanding of its potential value.

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