



Altarum

Berrien County – Juvenile Justice Mental Health/Substance Use Delinquency Prevention Grant: Final Evaluation Report

Title II Category: Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention

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Executive Summary

The Altarum Institute provided support to the Berrien County Trial Court, Family Division as they implemented a Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Title II Grant intervention¹, awarded by the state of Michigan. The objective of the Court's intervention was to provide training in evidence-based interventions to law enforcement and school personnel in the Benton Harbor community in order to improve services to youth and families and ultimately decrease the number of delinquency petitions coming from Benton Harbor. This report outlines the program's approach and the final evaluation results.

Project Overview

Through this grant, the Court offered specialized, evidence-based behavioral health and de-escalation training to law enforcement officers and school staff within the Benton Harbor, Michigan community. They provided evidence-based Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) trainings to the Benton Harbor Public Safety Department and the Benton Township Police Department and Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) training for school staff. These trainings are designed to provide education on early identification of potential behavioral health challenges and knowledge of available resources, including referral sources, prior to youth involvement with the juvenile justice system to impact the disproportionate number of delinquency petitions coming from the Benton Harbor area.

Evaluation

Throughout the grant period, from February 2022 through September 2023, data was collected on trainings conducted in the county. The evaluation assessed participant knowledge prior to and following trainings and the delinquency petition rates of youth in the Benton Harbor community.

Results

Over the course of the project, a total of 51 individuals completed training on at least one of the evidence-based models. Assessments and data collection varied across the three trainings, and the sample size of the data remained small. The evaluation was unable to attribute any changes in delinquency petitions or changes in youth mental health to the program.

Conclusion

Due to grant implementation challenges outlined in the report, the evaluation assessed overall change in knowledge and competency to identify and address mental health issues in youth but was ultimately unable to attribute any changes in delinquency petitions or changes in youth mental health to the program. Although data were not available for the current evaluation, future work could also examine the youth receiving referrals for and participating in mental health services in the community and increase youth mental wellness.

¹ The OJJDP Title II Formula Grants Program provides funding to support state and local efforts to plan, establish, operate, coordinate, and evaluate policies and projects, directly or through grants and contracts with public and private agencies for the development of more effective education, training, research, prevention, diversion, treatment, and rehabilitation programs in the area of juvenile delinquency as well as juvenile justice system improvement efforts.

Introduction and Background

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) and the Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice (MCJJ) administers the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Title II Formula Grants Program to support local efforts to prevent and address juvenile delinquency as well as improve the juvenile justice system. MDHHS and MCJJ contracted with Altarum Institute (Altarum) to provide technical assistance (TA) and evaluation support to Title II grant recipients.

In 2022, MDHHS and MCJJ selected the Berrien County Trial Court, Family Division as one of the Title II program grantees and funded the Court to provide training in evidence-based interventions to law enforcement and school personnel in the Benton Harbor community in order to improve services to youth and families and ultimately decrease the number of delinquency petitions coming from Benton Harbor. The Berrien County Trial Court, Family Division operated its Title II grant from February 2022 through September 2023. Altarum provided TA and evaluation services to the Court during this timeframe. This report describes the Court's Title II grant program and its evaluation goals, methods, results, and recommendations.

Program Background

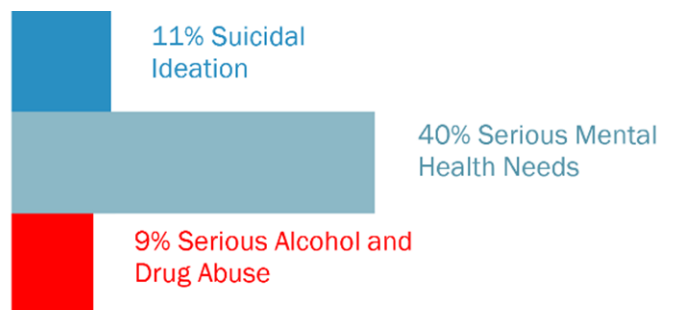
The Berrien County Trial Court, Family Division works with youth who are actively involved in the juvenile justice system and their families. According to 2020 U.S. Census data, there are 13,316 youth aged 10–16 living in Berrien County. The Benton Harbor community, part of Berrien County, has faced several challenges in recent years related to juvenile justice rates and social determinants that have been shown to impact youth delinquency rates. Of youth in Berrien County that have received a formal delinquency petition², just under half (48.3%) have been from the Benton Harbor area. A significant portion (45.42%) of the Benton Harbor population has income levels below the federal poverty line, and several of its public schools are among the lowest ranked in the state.

In the past several years, Berrien County has experienced an increase of younger youth (ages 10–14) entering the juvenile justice system with significant mental health problems. However, these youth received little to no mental health treatment.

Data collected in 2021 from 166 MAYSI-2³ assessments on youth who had delinquency petitions are shown in Figure 1 and demonstrate the mental health needs within this population. Forty percent (40%) of youth with delinquency petitions reported mental health needs that warranted follow-up. Just over one in ten were in the warning level for suicidal ideation (11%), and 9% indicated serious alcohol and drug use.

Understanding the multitude of challenges faced by the county along with the commitment to addressing the high rates of youth delinquency, the Berrien County Trial Court, Family Division formed a team to design an intervention that could aid in

Figure 1. Results of MAYSI-2 Youth Assessments, 2021



² A petition is a document filed in juvenile court alleging that a juvenile is a delinquent or a status offender and asking that the court assume jurisdiction over the juvenile or that an alleged delinquent be transferred to criminal court for prosecution as an adult. <https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/>

³ The Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument – Second Version (MAYSI-2) is a brief behavioral health screening tool designed especially for juvenile justice programs and facilities. It identifies youths 12 through 17 years old who may have important, pressing behavioral health needs. Its primary use is in juvenile probation, diversion programs, and intake in juvenile detention or corrections.

recognizing, treating, and meeting the behavioral health needs of youth as early as possible, resulting in fewer youth entering into the juvenile justice system.

Program Description

The Berrien County Trial Court, Family Division developed an intervention to offer specialized, evidence-based behavioral health and de-escalation training to law enforcement officers and school staff within the Benton Harbor, Michigan community. The intervention aimed to provide education on early identification of potential behavioral health challenges and knowledge of available resources, including referral sources, prior to youth involvement with the juvenile justice system. The project goal was to train law enforcement officers who serve the Benton Harbor community and school staff such as school counselors, behavior intervention specialists, and teachers in an early screening tool and evidence-based interventions to respond to youth behavioral health needs.

The Berrien County Trial Court, Family Division identified the Benton Harbor Public Safety Department and the Benton Township Police Department to offer training in evidence-based Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT)⁴ and Mental Health First Aid (MHFA)⁵ models. These trainings are designed to support the skills one needs to reach out and provide initial help to someone who may have a mental health or substance use problem and/or are experiencing a crisis.

The Court also included specialized training for school staff (e.g., school counselors, behavior intervention specialists, and teachers) in the Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) model⁶. These interventions were designed to impact the disproportionate number of delinquency petitions coming from the Benton Harbor area by providing front line workers the tools for early identification of and intervention with youth with mental health and substance use issues.

CIT

The Berrien County Court, Family Division selected the CIT training due to the success of the model in equipping law enforcement with the knowledge and skills to respond to citizens with mental illness. Two CIT trainings were conducted with local law enforcement by a certified instructor. The first training was conducted in April 2022 and was completed by three officers. A second training was conducted in October 2022, which an additional three officers completed.

MHFA Training

Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training⁷ is an evidence-based program developed by the National Council for Mental Wellbeing that aims to improve participants' knowledge and change their perceptions around mental health and related issues, including both acute and chronic problems. One MHFA training was conducted with officers serving Berrien County in May 2023 by a certified instructor. The 12-hour training course focused on building understanding and confidence of participants in their ability to respond to individuals experiencing mental health problems.

SBIRT Training

The Berrien County Court, Family Division grant lead met with the newly appointed superintendent of the Benton Harbor school district in early 2023 and was successful in gaining school leadership buy-

⁴ CIT is a specialized, 40-hour program for law enforcement officers, which utilizes robust community partnerships to improve the outcomes of encounters with people living with behavioral health challenges. [Crisis Intervention Team \(CIT\) Programs | NAMI: National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)

⁵ Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour course designed to teach an individual how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorder. [Mental Health First Aid](#)

⁶ SBIRT is a 1.5-3-hour training and is a comprehensive, integrated, public health approach to the delivery of early intervention and treatment services for persons with substance use disorders, as well as those who are at risk of developing these disorders. [Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment \(SBIRT\) | SAMHSA](#)

⁷ Mental Health First Aid is an 8-hour course designed to teach an individual how to identify, understand, and respond to signs of mental illness and substance use disorder. [Mental Health First Aid](#)

in to train their support staff in SBIRT. The estimated number of school support staff that could be trained was 45. The Berrien Court grant lead connected the school district with an expert from Western Michigan University's School of Social Work to schedule and conduct the SBIRT training⁸. The SBIRT training was conducted in the last month of the funding period on September 22, 2023.

Evaluation

Beginning in February 2022, Altarum worked with the Berrien County Trial Court, Family Division to design a plan to meet their grant requirements and outline the evaluation goals and activities, key questions, inputs, process and outcome measures, and procedures for data collection, analysis, and reporting. The design for this evaluation was refined based on the availability of data to determine whether the program achieved its intended impact.

Evaluation Methods

The goal of the evaluation was to explore the potential impact of the trainings completed through the program on participant knowledge and the delinquency petition rates of youth in the Benton Harbor community. Output and outcome metrics, as developed by the Court and Altarum, were measured from February 1, 2022 through September 30, 2023. A series of trainings was held for law enforcement and school staff to better equip them with the knowledge and skills to address mental health situations among youth in the Benton Harbor community. Each training was evaluated using pre- and post-knowledge scores from participants to examine any changes in knowledge and awareness of mental health risks, tactics to intervene in crisis situations, and strategies for addressing negative behaviors through a family-centered, holistic approach. The Court also collected data on the number of MAYSI-2s administered and youth experiencing critical cases.

Training Data

The Court experienced difficulty collecting pre- and post-training data, which limits the ability of the evaluation to demonstrate training impact. Six law enforcement officers participated in CIT training. Only three officers completed the training pre- and post-test surveys. Eight law enforcement officers completed the MHFA training, and only four completed pre- and post-test surveys.

Data collection for the SBIRT training for school support staff improved slightly. A total of 37 support staff from Benton Harbor school district were trained in SBIRT. Nineteen pre- and post-test surveys were returned; however, only 10 individuals submitted both pre- and post-data for the analysis.

⁸ SBIRT is a 1.5-3-hour training and is a comprehensive, integrated, public health approach to the delivery of early intervention and treatment services for persons with substance use disorders, as well as those who are at risk of developing these disorders. [Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment \(SBIRT\) | SAMHSA](#)

Secondary Data

Youth Delinquency Petition Data

Over half of the juvenile delinquency petitions received by Berrien County are from youth residing in Benton Harbor. Wanting to provide this community with an opportunity to benefit from the early screening and intervention strategies, the grantee defined and tracked three youth delinquency metrics: number of delinquency court petitions for Benton Harbor youth, MAYSI-2s administered, and total youth with a critical case after screening. The aim of capturing this data was to show the relationship between the intervention and training on the number of critical cases experienced by youth in the juvenile justice system. These metrics were tracked and reported to Altarum on a quarterly basis by the grantee, beginning February 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023. There was a total of 264 delinquency court petitions for Benton Harbor youth and 220 youth who experienced a critical case after completing the MAYSI-2 screening. Analysis of these metrics was conducted on a quarterly basis and included in reports shared with the Berrien Court grant team. Given the very low number of law enforcement officers and school personnel trained in the evidence-based models, it was not possible to attribute any changes in these metrics to the grant program.

MAYSI-2 Data

The Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument-2⁹ is a self-report screening tool developed specifically for use in juvenile detention centers. Detention center staff are trained in how to use the tool, which is administered within two days of youth admission to a facility. There are five subscales validated for both girls and boys: alcohol/drug use, depression-anxiety, anger-irritability, somatic complaints, and suicide ideation. A sixth scale, Thought Disturbance, was established specifically for boys, while a seventh scale including Traumatic Experiences, contains variations for both genders. Each of these scales has two cut-off scores, which offer indicators compared to other youth in the juvenile justice system nationally. A caution cut-off score indicates when youth have a high value that suggests a need for clinical attention. The Berrien County Court, Family Division aimed to use the complete MAYSI-2 assessment and scales to evaluate the impact of their program may on youth by combining quantifiable changes in MAYSI-2 assessment scores for youth with qualitative satisfaction data for youth in Berrien County. Quarterly reports on the number of screenings administered were provided to the evaluation team beginning February 1, 2022, through September 30, 2023. A total of 453 MAYSI-2 screenings were administered to youth in the juvenile justice system. However, the County was unable to share MAYSI-2 scores with the evaluator for analysis.

Evaluation Results

This section includes the key findings generated from the evaluation team's analysis of available data regarding the project's implementation and outcomes achieved during the grant.

Improvement in Knowledge and Competency

Over the course of the project, a total of 51 individuals completed training on at least one of the evidence-based models. Results for each training are outlined below.

CIT

Two CIT trainings were delivered during the evaluation, with six law enforcement officers completing the course. Three participants completed pre- and post-training surveys at the end of the first

⁹ The Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument – Second Version (MAYSI-2) is a brief behavioral health screening tool designed especially for juvenile justice programs and facilities. It identifies youths 12 through 17 years old who may have important, pressing behavioral health needs. Its primary use is in juvenile probation, diversion programs, and intake in juvenile detention or corrections.

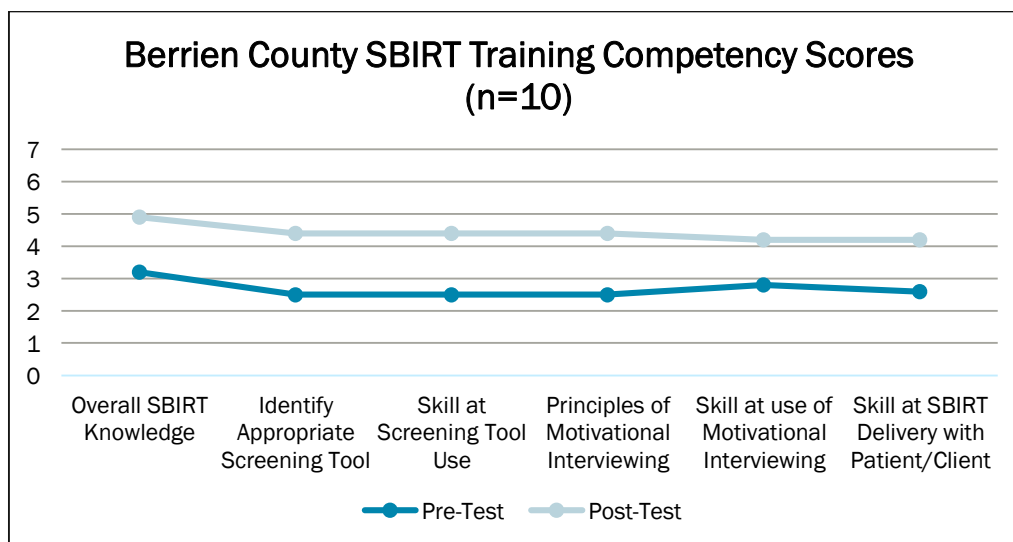
training; the survey was not administered for the second training. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the statement that the training had increased their knowledge in areas relevant to their work. Of the three assessments available, there was a 15% increase in participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with that statement from before to after the training.

MHFA

One MHFA course was delivered during the evaluation, which was completed by eight law enforcement officers. Both pre- and post-test surveys were administered to capture changes in knowledge; however, no scores were recorded or reported by the grantee. Participants were given the standardized Adult Mental Health First Aid Evaluation – First Edition, to provide overall course satisfaction data. Four evaluations were completed. These individuals reported satisfaction with the training, with an average score of 4.0 out of 5.0 for all questions. With limited data and no assessment scores, a complete analysis could not be conducted to determine the correlation between the training, subsequent service provision, and mental health response among youth in the community.

SBIRT

SBIRT training was conducted with 37 Berrien County school support staff. A total of 19 pre- and post-test surveys were administered; however, not all were usable for analysis. Six pre-tests had no post-test match, three post-tests had no pre-test match, and four tests had no names or identifiers on the document to enable matching. This left the evaluation team with 10 complete surveys for analysis. Of the pre- and post-test surveys completed, 60% of the respondents reported increased knowledge across all training topics, with average scores improving from 43% before the training to 63% following the training. These participants also self-reported higher competency levels on the subject matter after participating in the training. Pre-test scores indicated a low level of material knowledge, with an average score below 3 on a 5-point scale. Post-test scores indicated an overall knowledge increase of 1.7 points, with an average self-reported competency of 4.5.

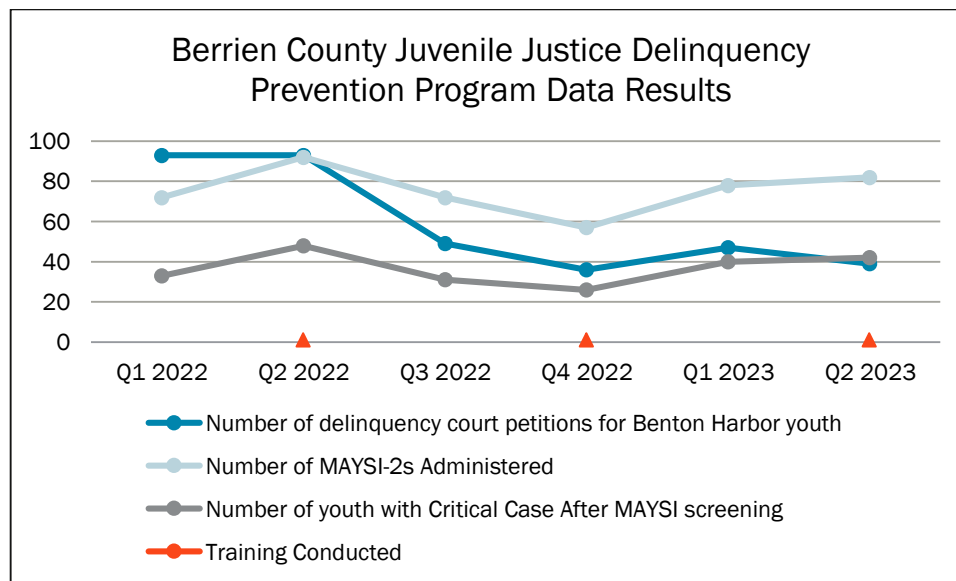


The late administration of the SBIRT training at the end of the funding period combined with a small number of matched surveys limited the ability of the evaluation to attribute improvements in

knowledge and competency to services provided in the community and any changes in delinquency petitions or youth mental health.

Results of MAYSI-2 Analysis

A total of 453 MAYSI-2 screenings were administered to youth in the juvenile justice system during the program period. The initial evaluation plan outlined the collection of MAYSI-2 scores in partnership with the number of screenings administered, court petitions, and critical cases. However, these data were not reported to the evaluator, limiting the ability to establish a relationship between the trainings and mental health and juvenile delinquency among Berrien County youth. The graph below shows the data trends for these metrics. Although favorable trends in the metrics can be seen, no attribution to the grant program can be made due to the very low number of training participants and survey responses and the occurrence of SBIRT training in the last month of the grant.



Challenges, Limitations, and Recommendations

The evaluation team encountered several challenges and limitations when conducting the evaluation. One of the largest barriers was missing or incomplete data from the trainings. There were no training knowledge scores reported to the evaluation team from the MHFA training. In addition, the SBIRT training produced 19 surveys but only 10 respondents completed both a pre- and post-survey that could be matched for data analysis. Part of the challenge with obtaining these scores was that the surveys were administered as hard copy instruments that did not contain identifiers that would have enabled pre- and post-survey matching. No assessment on the impact of knowledge change on long-term outcomes like mental health and delinquency petitions could be tracked given the gaps in data and the small respondent sizes.

The Berrien County Court, Family Division experienced challenges during grant implementation. There was a high rate of turnover with school support staff and law enforcement officers and their leadership during the grant period. This resulted in the grant lead having to re-establish relationships with leaders of the schools and law enforcement agencies and obtain buy-in from new leadership

multiple times throughout the course of the grant. Officers and school personnel also had conflicting priorities about how best to serve youth, which increased the time needed to create and execute unified goals and delayed the trainings. Challenges also arose from low school engagement during the summer months, as school staff and youth were away and not present in the community.

The experiences of the Berrien County Court, Family Division highlight the importance of planning and partnership-building prior to intervention implementation to help ensure grant success. Lessons from the grant team’s planning and implementation phases are outlined in a separate “Lessons Learned Brief.” The table below summarizes recommendations from the Lessons Learned brief.

Recommendations for Successful Approaches to Community-based Training Interventions

Coordinate partners early on, including the planning phase and execute formal agreements that include the strategy for operationalizing the approach and how to achieve the common vision.

Build relationships that are long-lasting and can withstand the preparation and implementation stages of interventions to show long term impact.

Think creatively and develop innovative approaches to bring evidence-based training to staff on the ground supporting youth – crisis intervention techniques and mental health awareness skills can be woven in through annual trainings in way that could support law enforcement officers without further burdening their schedules.

Ensure messaging around options to offset costs and incentivize training participation are clearly conveyed and adjusted to fit with what would create the greatest benefit or impact to all participating partners.

Focus on communication and consistent, regularly scheduled contact among partners.

Conclusion

The objective for the Berrien County Court, Family Division Title II grant was to provide training to law enforcement officers and school support staff that would equip them to address mental health and substance use risk factors that play a role in youth risk for juvenile justice involvement and interactions with law enforcement. Their work aimed to improve responses to youth crises identification and referral to necessary mental health services rather than defaulting to arrest or juvenile petition with the Court. The original evaluation was designed to demonstrate whether training officers and staff can impact delinquency petition rates and referral rates to alternative services. However, due to grant implementation challenges, the evaluation was revised to assess overall change in knowledge and competency to identify and address mental health issues in youth. Altarum worked with the grant team and third-party trainers to collect training and juvenile delinquency petition data. A small sample size and limited data prevented Altarum from being able to attribute any changes in delinquency petitions or changes in youth mental health to the program.

For future similar programs, more time and focus can be spent prior to applying for the grant and at the beginning of the grant period to identify and obtain buy-in from partners, adapt training format and schedule for the target participants, and clarify expectations regarding project roles and responsibilities. As more officers and school staff become trained in identifying and addressing youth

mental health issues, additional research can be conducted to examine any relationship between training completion, enhanced services provided to youth, and the degree to which youth have their mental health needs addressed earlier, potentially averting their involvement with the juvenile justice system. Although data were not available for the current evaluation, future work also could examine the number of youth receiving referrals for mental health services in the community, any increases in youth participating in mental health services, and increased youth mental wellness.