

Background

Stationhouse Adjustment Programs have existed in the state of New Jersey since 2005 when Attorney General Peter C. Harvey “mandated” their use by New Jersey law enforcement agencies. According to Harvey, the Stationhouse Adjustment process “allows police officers to resolve minor disputes without the need to file a complaint with the court. The goal is to effectively supervise our young people so that they make better decisions to avoid criminal offenses. We also expect this process to give victims of minor offenses a quick remedy.” There are two specific goals of any Stationhouse Adjustment program. The first goal was to give juveniles who were accused of minor crimes an alternative (or diversion) in order to avoid an arrest. The second goal is to link juveniles with people or activities to build appropriate, community-minded behavior. Avoiding arrest is important because criminologists know that an arrest, even as a juvenile, can dramatically change the career options and life path of a juvenile. However, the second goal is even more important; if the juvenile’s behavior can be modified, and the current arrest and perhaps many subsequent arrests can be avoided, a lifetime of delinquency can be eliminated, a reduction in overall crime rates can occur, and a safer environment may result.

At the time of the mandate, there was little disagreement that a Stationhouse Adjustment program would benefit both juvenile offenders who committed minor crimes and the victims of their crimes. However, two obstacles existed. First, the mandate was not followed by funding to support such a program. As such, some larger municipalities had enough funding to run such programs, but smaller municipalities did not. Second, the scope of the minor offenses that were eligible for diversion into a Stationhouse Adjustment program was very narrow and limiting. As such, the number of juveniles that were eligible for diversion was not enough to make a big enough impact on the crime rate. As a result, the mandate for Stationhouse Adjustment program remained, but many departments didn’t actively engage in Stationhouse Adjustment activities.

Over the last 10 years county prosecutors across that state started to think about how to utilize the Stationhouse Adjustment program in order to reach more juveniles. With the continuation of limited funding, they focused on a clause that allowed prosecutors to expand the circumstances upon which a Stationhouse Adjustment could be considered. Instead of offering a Stationhouse Adjustment only for municipal offenses (offenses lower than 4th degree) that were not related to CDS (Controlled Dangerous Substances), diversion could also be offered for sexting, low-level 3rd and 4th degree offenses, and CDS related to marijuana and marijuana paraphernalia. This new, expanded program is called “Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment.” In July 2014, the Atlantic County Prosecutor’s Office issued directions to Atlantic City and Pleasantville Police Departments about the new Enhanced Station House Adjustment program. In September 2014, the Atlantic County Prosecutor’s Office and Fellowship of Churches signed a Memorandum of Agreement whereby the Fellowship of Churches agreed to start implementing the diversion program for both Atlantic City and Pleasantville juveniles in the 4th quarter of 2014 (Oct 1 – Dec 31). Specific diversion activities are selected by the Fellowship of Churches Chaplain based on the type of delinquent act that was committed by the juvenile. The options for diversion will include sexting workshops, a variety of counseling programs, and community service activities.

Statement of the aims and objectives of the project

The primary goal of this project is to evaluate the Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment program that started in Atlantic City and Pleasantville last year. The program will have completed two quarters of reporting (6 mo of data) by March 2015 and three quarters (9 mo of data) by June 30, 2015. Based on the results of the evaluation I will:

1. make recommendations for the next year of the program;
2. make a recommendation to the Prosecutor about applying for federal funding upon completion of the program; and

3. prepare a manuscript for publication based on the pilot results of the Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment program.

Background work already accomplished

The Atlantic City/Pleasantville Municipal Planning Board is one of 7 boards that were created and supported by the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General to reduce juvenile violence and make some of New Jersey's most unsafe locations safer. Each Municipal Planning Board works in its local community to reduce violence, but also meets 2-3 times per year to share their local experiences and learn from each other. My position on the Atlantic City/Pleasantville MPB has given me the unique opportunity to learn about the different ways that Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment programs work around the state. I have also developed strong relationships with the Atlantic City and Pleasantville Police Departments and the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office.

In terms of the evaluation, specifically, I have:

- researched the original 2005 Stationhouse Adjustment mandate as well as the existing Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment programs that have developed around the state.
- started to gather some empirical articles that evaluated Stationhouse Adjustment programs as well as other juvenile diversion programs in other states.
- created the data collection instruments that both police departments as well as the prosecutor's office will need to complete in order for me to evaluate the program. (See Supplementary Materials section for these documents.)

Statement of the Procedures/Methodology/Timeline

In May and June:

- I will work on collecting Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment data from the prosecutor's office for the 4th quarter of 2014 and the 1st quarter of 2015. In addition, I will meet with the court officer assigned to look up each juvenile to verify her methods of defining reoffense and the way she runs the reports. We will also discuss how to create a comparison group from juveniles who were detained during the same time period for similar acts, but did not take the SHA option. This will allow me to compare SHA and non-SHA juveniles and track their reoffending. I estimate this will take a full day per week for one month (~ 32 hours).
- I will also work on creating a formal literature review that will be used for a grant application, if we choose to apply for external funding to support the program. If we do not apply for external funding, the literature review will be used for the manuscript. I estimate this will take ~30 hours.

In July:

- I will work with the prosecutor's office to collect the Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment Program data for the 2nd quarter of 2015.
- I will also work to schedule meetings and meet with the police department liaisons, chaplains who are delivering the diversion program, and prosecutor's office staff to gain a better understanding of how the program works in Atlantic County from the time the juvenile is detained until the time when s/he has completed the diversion program and the outcome is reported. As such I will observe and discuss the process by which the police department contacts the chaplains and the way that information is communicated from one to the other. I will interview the police officers to determine how they decide which acts qualify for SHA and the chaplains to determine how they make decisions about which program the juvenile should complete. I will review their notes and documents to determine how they record the successful

or unsuccessful completion of the program. I anticipate these observations, alone, will take 40-80 hours.

In August:

- I will complete the data analysis and write up the report for the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office. I estimate this will take ~16 hours.
- I will also work on the manuscript that will accompany the project. If enough data are collected and meaningful results are obtained, I will plan to send out the manuscript by the end of the summer. However, I suspect that 9 months from the start of the program will not be enough time to determine if the program is effective. The full program evaluation has data collection points as far out as 24 months from the start of the program. I suspect that I will need at least 12 months of data collection to properly determine if juveniles who are diverted from the system by way of the Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment program actually remain out of the system for a significant period of time. I estimate this will take the ~2-3 full weeks of work.

Importance or Value

If successful, the Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment Program in Atlantic County could be expanded from Atlantic City and Pleasantville to other municipalities in Atlantic County. It is expected that this program will increase the number of Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustments that occur. An increase in Stationhouse Adjustments should produce measurable outcomes such as a decrease in the number of juvenile arrests, a decrease in the number of cases heard by the juvenile court, and an increase in the safety of juveniles. All of these are positive outcomes for the juvenile and for the community. Although more difficult to measure, one possible outcome of this Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment program is a brighter future for juveniles and a healthier and safer community for residents of Atlantic County. Without a program evaluation, the potential benefits of this program remain unknown. Evaluating the Enhanced Stationhouse Adjustment program in Atlantic County can provide concrete evidence about whether or not the program is working here. Conducting the evaluation and publishing the results can also expand the knowledge in the field and provide me with pilot data to complete the evaluation at 12 and 24 months out. The results from the evaluation could also be used as the basis for a grant application, should the prosecutor's office decide to go forward with the program.

Further Research or Study

As mentioned above, I will complete a manuscript and submit that for publication. I will also write a report for the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office. Depending on the success of the program, subsequent publications are also possible, albeit down the line. Furthermore, it is possible that these pilot data could be used to submit for a federal grant, but that decision would not be solely mine. I plan to complete the 12, 18, and 24 month evaluation, regardless of whether or not the prosecutor's office wishes to apply for federal funding. It is important to evaluate the program to determine if it should become a permanent program in Atlantic County.

Outcome

I do plan to submit an article for publication. The timing of that publication will depend on the amount of data that are collected within the first 9 months. If there are enough important findings from the 3, 6 and 9 months of data collection, I will plan to publish this summer. If not, the literature review and methodology will be completed this summer and I will hold off on publishing until more data are added to the dataset. I plan to publish in a journal like *Justice Policy Journal* or *Criminology & Public Policy*. Regardless of the timing of the manuscript submission, I will present the findings of the 3, 6, and 9 month evaluation at the American Society of Criminology in Washington, DC in November 2015. I will also present at the Day of Scholarship in March 2016.