

Justice Breakout Talking Points

Introduction and background

First, I'd like to tell you a little bit about my role and why I am part of this breakout session today. I work for a company called Mathematica and we conduct public policy research. We have been contracted by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to conduct a study called the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies project or NextGen for short. NextGen is part of OPRE's [Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio](#), which seeks to rigorously evaluate the "next generation" of employment strategies for individuals with low income, and is partnering with the Social Security Administration on select evaluations. The project explores the programs' design and operations, cost, and effectiveness at improving participants' employment, earnings, and other outcomes related to economic self-sufficiency and well-being. I am helping to lead an evaluation that is studying whether IPS is an effective employment strategy specifically for adults with previous justice involvement. We call this sub-study IPS for Adults with Justice Involvement or IPS-AJI. As part of this study, we have partnered with six mental health centers in Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Illinois and some of their staff have joined this breakout session as well and will be able to share their first-hand experience serving adults with justice involvement. Today I am going to tell you a little about the people who have enrolled in the study and what we have learned about working with justice-related organizations to engage clients with justice involvement in mental health and IPS.

NextGen is a random assignment evaluation, we are using random assignment so we can effectively understand the impact of IPS on study participants, all other factors being equal. For the study, the six participating mental health centers employed a staff person known as a research coordinator to recruit potential participants from their communities. The research coordinator uses a computer program to randomly assign study participants to either a group that can receive IPS services (in addition to all other services typically offered) at their center or a group that can receive mental health and other case management services but not IPS. For the study we were looking for participants who had some kind of justice involvement in the past year- this could include spending time incarcerated, being ordered to probation or parole, or an alternative sentence at a specialty court like a mental health or drug court. We started enrollment for the study in June 2021 and will be ending enrollment next month, June 2024.

So, what does our study population look like so far? 68% of study participants are male and their average age is 36. Study participants are somewhat evenly split between black (41%) and white (47%). 73% have at least a high school diploma and 94% have previous work experience. In terms of justice involvement, 95% had been convicted of a crime, and most convictions (76%) were for non-violent offenses. 95% were ever incarcerated with the average total time incarcerated of 4.5 years. 66% were under court-ordered supervision at the time of study enrollment. 64% of study participants were unstably housed when they enrolled in the study. By unstably housed we mean they were living in emergency or temporary housing, group homes, halfway houses, or living with friends or relatives and not paying rent. In terms of mental health, NextGen study participants were most likely to have mood disorders like bipolar or major depressive disorder or other disorders such as anxiety, trauma, or substance use. Some NextGen participants (13%) had schizophrenia spectrum or other psychotic disorders, but this is far less compared to other studies about IPS which had anywhere from 45 to 63% of participants with schizophrenia or other

psychotic disorders.

How to reach out and engage/collaborating with justice partners

Now I'd like to talk a little bit about how research coordinators reached out and engaged with people with justice involvement to recruit them for the study and get them enrolled in mental health services at their centers. The biggest thing we learned is that this task was not as straight-forward as we initially assumed, even for mental health centers that already had existing connections with justice organizations in the community. Some challenges we faced:

- Staff from mental health centers needed to establish buy-in with higher-ups at justice facilities so that they would allow research coordinators to both meet with their clients or inmates and also encourage their client-serving staff to make referrals to the study. Also needed to establish buy-in with the client-serving staff directly as they tended to be busy with day-to-day tasks and need a nudge to understand the added benefits of IPS and mental health services.
- We thought working with jails directly would be a good way to get referrals but research coordinators faced challenges with being able to make in-person visits due to COVID-19 restrictions initially and later other illness outbreaks, staffing shortages throughout all levels of the facilities, and lock-downs. We also found that even if research coordinators were able to engage with potential participants while they were incarcerated there was a lot of uncertainty around release dates and it was difficult to get in touch with potential participants after they were released.
- Another issue that came up is when a justice involved individual was ready to enroll in services, but the mental health center had a waitlist or an extensive intake process that took multiple meetings to complete. "Strike while the iron is hot" is a central IPS principle but it seems particularly important for justice involved individuals as they have many competing priorities after being released including probation and court supervision requirements. One of the centers participating in the study adjusted their intake process to allow clients to start receiving services quicker because of challenges they were facing with getting adults with justice involvement enrolled in the study and their center.

We also developed successful strategies for engaging folks with justice involvement and getting referrals for the study.

- One strategy we found success with was having research coordinators co-locate in probation offices or other justice related agencies. Research coordinators were given an office where they could spend a day and meet with clients to tell them about the study, the services offered by the mental health center, and IPS. This was helpful for clients because they could learn about additional services while at their regular appointments, instead of having to come in separately. It also built trust with the justice related agencies because they saw a consistent person from the mental health center regularly showing up and engaging with their clients.
- Related to the co-location strategy- research coordinators also marketed IPS and mental health services as a way to meet basic needs (such as medication management and housing)

and to meet immediate financial obligations such as restitution, court fees, and fines if the participant is able to quickly find a job by working with an IPS specialist.

- Finally, another strategy that worked well for research coordinators was looking for referrals internally at the mental health centers, that is, finding clients with recent justice system involvement who were being served by the mental health center but had not yet been recruited for or enrolled in IPS-AJI.

Staff and Participant perspectives

So far, I have spoken a bit about the study and the study population as well as challenges and strategies for engaging adults with justice involvement in IPS. I want to end by sharing some perspectives from center staff and study participants. Based on interviews we conducted with participating mental health center staff and study participants we learned that both mental health center staff and justice-involved clients see value in IPS-AJI.

- Staff most values the partnerships the mental health centers developed with justice organizations. In some communities there can be a disconnect between the justice system and mental health centers. Staff at our participating centers felt like participating in the study and doing intentional outreach to justice organizations helped them establish or formalize working relationships with stakeholders in the justice system. These relationships will help them to better provide services to the community even after the study ends.
- Participants most valued having “a champion in their corner”.
 - “I’ve learned to have more confidence in myself. I’ve learned through my [IPS specialists].”
 - “I didn’t think I had anything noteworthy on a resume. [IPS] helped me realize some strengths I had.”
 - “They motivate me more. I feel better about things and the direction things are going whereas, beforehand, I felt like I was just spinning my wheels and hitting brick walls. Now it feels like I’ve got someone on my side at least that is working with me and giving me other ideas and will help me.”

DISCUSSION:

Working with employers/job development:

- Establish trust
- Ban the box
- Skills must match employer’s needs
- Job shadows
- Untapped talent

Community Resources

- VR doing intake appointment at parole and probation offices and direct referral to VR
- Connect with probation and parole offices and keep in touch, invite the to IPS team meeting or

- mental health treatment team meeting.
- Connect with Social Security Admin about entitlements.
- Connect with agencies that work directly with re-entry or justice involved individuals such as half way houses.
- AA or social groups
- Local steering committees
- Physicians handing out referrals for resources
- Facilitate communication between different case managers. Explain how their roles align.
- Develop Resource Guide for housing, transportation, food, healthcare
- Connect with families and other support people
 - Share success stories
 - Ask clients, "Who are your supports?"
 - Identify other self-help programs
 - Peer supports
 - Ask "What about churches?"
 - "Who are your positive and who are your negative influencers?"
 - Invite family and support people to meetings
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