

Hello Everyone,

My name is Nikki Duran and I am a Family Services Supervisor in the Burlington District Office. I supervise the Juvenile Services Team and previously was a worker on this team for nearly 4 and a half years. The Burlington District Office has 5 identified juvenile services workers and collectively our team currently holds 108 cases averaging about 25 cases per worker with me as the supervisor holding 3 cases myself. These 108 cases are made up of the at-risk cases, specifically CHINS-C youth deemed to be beyond parental control, CHINS-D which are youth experiencing truancy, as well as youth engaging in delinquent behaviors, and youthful offenders. When the need arises, the juvenile services team also carries child protection cases.

When young people are placed on juvenile probation they are court ordered to complete juvenile probation conditions. These conditions are created to repair the harm of the incident and for the youth to engage in treatment specific to them and their identified risk areas. Workers complete a YASI (Youth Assessment Screening Instrument) with youth to identify these risk areas. Successful discharge from juvenile probation is achieved when youth complete these treatment recommendations prior to their probation term expiring.

Due to our team of Juvenile Services workers having to support multiple case types, some of which we are the legal guardians for, the over 18 year olds often gets less case management support than would be ideal due to the impossible task of workers to triage all of the things they are responsible for to ensure child safety. In practice, youth between the ages of 18-22 do need more than our current capacity allows. The day-to-day work with these young adults expands beyond just monitoring their probation conditions. Many of the youth we serve have complex needs including support in finding safe and supportive long-term housing, substance misuse treatment, mental health treatment, opportunities to increase supportive peer connections, and educational / employment opportunities to support them as they continue into adulthood.

Unfortunately, our community struggles to have adequate resources to support these young adults. Often, youth need to wait for identified individual counselors, and due to waitlists, if a youth is not consistent in their treatment and misses a session or two, the provider will close the referral and move on to the next person on the waitlist. Due to their age and often times other circumstances like some I have previously mentioned, youth 18-22 often miss appointments and need to be re-referred to services. The staff supporting these youth do their best to partner with the youth and support them in engaging in their treatment however ultimately it is on the youth to engage in the services needed to successfully complete their probation.

Outside of waitlist, there are also limited resources to begin with that specialize in supporting youth in treatment for specific offenses. Currently, the state of Vermont does not have specific programming to target concerns for firearm violence, a resource desperately needed to address

the safety issues in our community, and many times, the community resources we typically access to support these youth and families decline providing services due to the risk to staff. This leaves youth who desperately need support, connection, and treatment, in their same environment without the resources to make a change and reduce their risk.

There are also very limited providers with the training to engage young people in treatment related to harmful sexualized behavior. There are often waitlists for this service for our youth which impacts their ability to get the treatment they need to successfully discharge from probation.

In addition to support, these youth also need accountability. Over the last several years, there have been multiple cases in which a youth on juvenile probation have not been successful in engaging in their court ordered probation conditions and treatment. Despite workers best efforts to engage these youth we have at times needed to file violations of probation due to lack of engagement in their probation conditions. While filing these violations allows an opportunity for the youth and court parties to discuss why they are not able to be successful, there isn't any additional accountability filing these violations can offer in the juvenile delinquency docket. For some youth it serves as a motivation to engage, however others choose to wait out their probation term without additional consequences for not engaging in their probation conditions. This does a disservice to the youth, any identified victims, and the community at large as the hope of juvenile probation is have young people engage in treatment to reduce their likelihood of causing harm in the future.

The individuals who provide case management to these young people do so because they care about the youth and their community. This work includes long hours, a level of intensity that most people do not experience as we sit with youth and families in their toughest moments. This work is done best with strong relationships and an ability to engage young people in tough conversations. Sometimes though, this is not enough to have youth be successful on juvenile probation and there does need to be a consideration for how the system can best provide these young people with not just support, but also accountability.

Thank you for your time and I appreciate you considering my testimony. I hope this gives you a better insight into the work family services workers devote to this population every day.

-Nikki Duran