APPAM 2018 Fall Research Conference Paper – Patrick Hart and Caroline Hugh

Scholars and policymakers have long recognized a link between neighborhood conditions and violent crime (see, for instance, Robert Sampson’s work on Chicago). More recently, the link between young people’s exposure to trauma and their long-term outcomes (Persyn 2016, Fowler et al. 2009) has been increasingly recognized, as well as the potential of positive adult and peer relationships as protective factors against justice system involvement (Heller et al. 2015; Drinkard et al. 2017). Given this backdrop, several research, policy, and program initiatives have focused on improved community-based services and opportunities as a strategy to reduce involvement with the criminal justice system. But while the evidence of a link between neighborhood conditions and violent crime is strong, the assessment of comprehensive neighborhood-based approaches as crime reduction strategies has been more limited. This paper describes the early implementation of such a neighborhood-focused approach through the Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII).

One of the CJII focus areas is prevention – lowering the odds that young people ever interact with the criminal justice system. The central piece of the prevention strategy is the creation of Youth Opportunity Hubs – place-based multi-service coalitions that both increase the number and improve the quality of services offered in systematically marginalized communities. ISLG anticipates that Youth Opportunity Hubs will decrease interaction with the justice system through increased positive peer and adult connections, as well as increased pro-social opportunities for young people. This paper will examine the first year of implementation of the Hubs, including provider selection, contracting, and early program administration. The paper will examine Hub case studies of partnership building; care coordination and referral; and the interplay between different services offered (e.g., education, employment, legal assistance) and the overall goal of reduced justice system involvement.

The paper will also discuss ISLG’s use of performance metrics and data in Hub oversight. All five Hubs submit quarterly performance data on participant experiences across the Hub. Key metrics include volume and characteristics of participants, dosage, referral to and use of specific wraparound services, and program completion. Thus, ISLG has access to current information on participants as well as the Hubs’ efforts at coordination/collaboration. ISLG analyzes these data quarterly and uses them to adjust program implementation, keep DANY informed of progress, and provide feedback to the Hub providers. This paper will discuss lessons learned from these data and present case studies to contextualize key differences among Hub program models. It will also discuss how data have informed changes in the program model and present focus areas for Hub implementation moving forward.

These initial findings form the basis for recommendations to the youth/prevention field specifically as well as for collaborative efforts more broadly. The paper will also touch on the robust evaluation of the Youth Opportunity Hubs (which includes process and outcome evaluations and a cost-benefit analysis) and the timeline for future research findings.