

King County, Washington Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention, Juvenile Division

Juvenile Detention Safety and Security Analysis

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

The purpose of the *Juvenile Detention Safety and Security Analysis* report is to present findings and recommendations related to safety and security practices in King County’s juvenile detention facility.

The Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD) identified the benefit of an assessment conducted by an external contractor, which resulted in DAJD publishing an RFP and subsequently contracting with Development Services Group, Inc., (DSG) to provide an independent analytical assessment of safety and security.

Between Dec. 12, 2022, and Aug. 31, 2023, DSG, and partners Hyzer Group, LLC, and Rolluda Architects, Inc., collected, reviewed, and analyzed DAJD policies, procedures, training modules, and reports; data related to the facility’s youth population, behavior incidents, behavioral responses, and use-of-force events; and data related to staff demographics, tenure, training, turnover, and salaries. We also conducted 60 in-person and remote interviews of DAJD staff and administrators, young people in detention, other King County interested parties, and juvenile detention center leaders in seven peer jurisdictions.

As a result of this data collection and analysis, the DSG team identified more than 20 major findings, including both strengths and areas for improvement. We also formulated eight major recommendations and six additional recommendations that we believe can increase the detention facility’s safety and security.

Major Findings

DSG identified many strengths related to safety and security. The strengths include the facility’s location near the court, capable detention staff and senior managers, a strong team of support staff (e.g., teachers; nursing, medical, and mental health professionals), youths feeling safe and valued in the facility, staff feeling satisfied with their salaries and assigned shifts, well-run defensive tactics training, and incorporation of a developmental (non-punitive) approach to working with the youths (see Table E.1).

Along with the many strengths, DSG’s analysis identified several areas for improvement, mostly related to the “us versus them” dynamic that exists between senior management and detention staff, lack of sufficient structure and order in day-to-day operations, insufficient daily programming for youths, and a need for more mentoring, coaching, and supervision for new staff.

E.1. Major Findings: Strengths and Areas for Improvement

| Strengths | Areas for Improvement |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most youths report feeling safe in the facility.• Most youths report having a staff member who cares about them.• The new Jail Management System is readily accessible and easy to navigate.• Staff are generally happy with their salaries and benefits.• Most staff who work with the youths report enjoying this work.• The defensive tactics training is well run and helpful for new staff.• DAJD directors have experience in other systems, understand the role of trauma, and embrace a developmental approach to juvenile justice.• The facility has capable management and capable staff at all levels, including new Juvenile Detention Officers with sports coaching experience.• Strong medical, nursing, mental health, and psychiatric teams as well as a dedicated team of teachers support youths and staff.• The building is new and clean.• The facility is close to court, which makes getting youths to court far safer and easier. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A strong “us versus them” dynamic exists between detention staff and management.• Daily operations lack sufficient structure and order.• Youths do not receive enough programming.• Staff do not receive enough supervision or mentoring.• Experienced staff are unlikely to choose shifts requiring them to work directly with youths.• Too many youths are held for too long at the facility.• Staff do not implement the behavior management system consistently.• Several architectural concerns adversely affect safety, security, and functionality.• Unresolved maintenance issues adversely affect safety, security, and functionality.• Clarity is lacking about how the <i>Care & Closure</i> plan will affect staff.• Incidents reports in 2022 document occasions when unit staff did not anticipate and prevent risky situations that eventually led to assaults on staff.• A pattern of blaming others, rather than owning these challenges, appears prevalent within the facility. |

Recommendations

DSG has eight major recommendations to improve safety and security in King County’s juvenile detention facility.

1. **Increase the structure and predictability of youths’ daily movements and activities.**

A residential program cannot provide a therapeutic or trauma-informed environment without also providing structure and order, which create a sense of safety and a feeling of security among the youths. The facility must establish more order, structure, and predictability in day-to-day operations. Every shift should conduct daily operations and implement the behavior management system in the same way. Predictability in the schedule and in rule enforcement constantly reinforce that the staff are in charge. Youths

should be assigned seats on the units, and they should ask permission to get up. Seating arrangements should keep youths somewhat separate from each other and all facing in the same direction. Staff must place themselves where they can effectively monitor the youths. Direct supervision requires both visual and auditory monitoring, which is accomplished by placing staff correctly.

2. **Make a concerted effort to improve management-staff relationships, especially between Juvenile Detention Officers (JDOs) and administrators.** As noted in Table E.1, the facility is staffed by qualified professionals at all levels. However, a significant “us versus them” dynamic exists between management and staff. The issue is not the capability of the individuals who fill the various positions, but rather the strained relationships. There is a strong need for better communication and trust. One characteristic of a healthy and successful program is management’s ability to create a safe, caring, and supportive culture that helps both youths and staff grow to meet their full potential. Management must articulate this vision and model behaviors through highly visible actions, so all staff are clear about what they are collectively trying to accomplish. We recommend substantially increasing the amount of time managers spend with the young people and staff on the floor; fostering open communication within every level and across all levels; forming a staff advisory committee charged with providing ideas for improving facility conditions, youth safety, and staff well-being; and creating opportunities to highlight the successes, contributions, and ideas of JDOs, supervisors, and support staff, including teachers, nurses, and mental health staff.
3. **Ensure that experienced supervisors spend most of their time coaching and supervising JDOs.** The youths’ success at the detention center relies heavily on the JDOs. Corrections supervisors must spend most of their time on the units coaching and supervising JDOs, especially the new JDOs. An examination of duties for the supervisors is needed, with the goal of freeing up their time so they can provide the ongoing training, mentoring, and supervision that staff currently lack. The supervisors need time on the units as well as time to meet regularly one-on-one or in smaller groups. In addition, the supervisors should perform formal yearly evaluations. Leadership should consider assigning a specific supervisor to each JDO, thereby creating teams consisting of a supervisor and several JDOs. The purpose of these teams would be to facilitate supervision and increase staffing consistency on the units. Additionally, supervisors in some jurisdictions partner with other supervisors, working as two-person teams. King County facility leadership could consider adopting this strategy as well.
4. **Make youth programming a priority.** Findings from interviews with youths, staff, senior managers, and peer jurisdictions, as well as research on best practices, all support the use of robust programming for young people in secure residential settings. Programming needs to be a top priority and supported by the entire staff. It also must be implemented consistently and predictably. Managers and staff should form a

working group dedicated to developing and accomplishing specific goals and objectives for increasing meaningful, age-appropriate, and engaging programming opportunities. This working group should meet regularly and ensure that continual progress is being made toward reaching these goals.

5. Establish a process for collaborating with judges, prosecutors, and defense attorneys to find a solution to the issue of youths being kept in secure detention a long time.

Detention is not appropriate for long-term stays. DAJD leadership should advocate for youths who are in secure detention during extended periods. The rules of the court should be examined to identify policy solutions for reducing lengths of stay. A committee composed of judges, prosecuting attorneys, defense attorneys, and facility administrators (as well as probation officers and representatives of the Department of Children, Youths, and Families) should be formed and should meet regularly to explore meaningful ways of addressing the problem. While solutions are being developed, administrators may want to consider creating a unit specifically for youths who have received longer-term stays. The unit should deliver enhanced services specifically addressing these youths' needs and use a behavior management system more appropriate for young people with long-term stays.

6. Ensure that administrators provide clear and timely communication about the *Care & Closure* process, and advocate for staff throughout this process.

Communication about the *Care & Closure* process, including what it means for all staff positions, should be clear, consistent, and up to date. It is important for staff to know that administrators "have their backs." This support could mean that administrators advocate for the facility to remain open, emphasizing its importance in the community, or that they advocate for staff to be considered for other county positions if the facility closes. Administrators should determine the staff's options, and they should continually communicate with them about these options and about the status of *Care & Closure*.

7. Provide additional training in anticipating, preventing, and de-escalating crises.

Staff would benefit from additional training in the early identification and prevention of crises, including training in recognizing activators (also known as "triggers") or stressors. Staff should ask each day, "If each youth in my charge were to act out today, what would be the likely precipitating factor?" Being proactive (i.e., anticipating the reasons youths may act out and mitigating potential violent behaviors by offering support and positive alternatives) should reduce the number of behavioral interventions and make the facility safer.

8. Improve the restorative justice process after significant youth misbehavior.

We recommend the reinstatement of Restoration Hall, with supervisory safeguards to prevent misuse. Facility administrators should ensure that this hall is used in ways that

will not be considered seclusion. Also, measures should be in place to ensure that youths do not act out on purpose to go to Restoration Hall.

Additional recommendations include the following:

9. Assign someone in a leadership position to ensure that maintenance issues are addressed quickly. The facility has experienced an unusually high number of physical problems for such a new building (e.g., inoperable locks, malfunctioning doors, flooded units, showers that do not drain), and there are significant delays in completing work orders. The maintenance issues and delays in addressing them adversely affect safety, security, and functionality as well as staff morale. DAJD should consider hiring contractors if the issues cannot be resolved in a timely manner by using the current process.

10. Improve the data collection, use of data, and quality assurance measures. Only 15 percent of non-supervisory staff believe data are used to improve their performance. A large quantity of data is already being collected and tracked by the Juvenile Division. Increasing the use of these data and collecting additional, relevant data can help the facility track positive changes as they occur and enhance buy-in among staff for policy and procedure changes. To reduce data entry errors and facilitate analysis, we recommend several changes, including check-the-box formats for all data elements and variables that require yes/no responses.

11. Enable youths and staff to share some meals together. By eating together, youths learn to share and talk during meals, acquire life skills, and build relationships. Staff should discuss the benefits of integrating staff–youth meals into the monthly schedule and develop a plan to share with facility administrators. During the meals, staff and youths could discuss issues on the units and ideas for addressing them.

12. Provide staff with comprehensive cultural competency training. Everyone working in the facility should receive comprehensive cultural competency training to ensure that all professionals interacting with youths understand implicit bias, cultural sensitivity, and equity-centered, trauma-informed care. Instruction should include modules on effective communication strategies, to help staff bridge potential cultural and generational gaps.

13. Develop and implement inclusive policies and practices. Policies and practices should help to ensure that biases are constantly challenged, and that staff grow continually in cultural competency; positive culture change should be ongoing.

14. Enhance staff training in responding to identity-specific trauma activators or stressors. Cultural nuances heavily influence how trauma manifests and how it is experienced. It is crucial for staff to receive training in detecting and responding to trauma stressors that are identity specific (e.g., related to race, gender identity, culture, ability).