

## **At-Risk Youth and Family Projects Update: Marion County Early Intervention Team Shows Excellent Early Results**

### ***Key Findings***

The Marion County Early Intervention Team (EIT) program provides a multidisciplinary team to clients in juvenile delinquency cases as early as possible, usually before the initial hearing. The project is ongoing, but this interim evaluation shows several positive outcomes: a small decrease to case length, a small decrease in the number of cases approved for filing at the initial hearing, and a large decrease in secure detention throughout the case. The decrease in detention is large at the initial hearing, and compounds as the case continues, with only 3% of EIT cases involving detention at disposition.

### ***Background: At-Risk Youth and Family Projects***

Starting in 2021, the Commission has been seeking pilot proposals to assist Indiana's at-risk youth and families. Specifically, the proposals sought must improve Indiana's family and child welfare system and/or the juvenile delinquency system, or proactively prevent involvement with these systems. Four such programs are now running, with several others in various stages of development.

One such project was submitted by the Marion County Public Defender Agency. This submission proposed the creation of an Early Intervention Team (EIT) for juvenile delinquency cases, consisting of a dedicated attorney with support from a paralegal, as well as a social worker. This team represents juvenile delinquency clients primarily at the initial hearing. But importantly, the representation process starts prior to this hearing by meeting with clients and their families and preparing to advocate for the least restrictive options at the initial hearing. The primary goal of this program was to reduce the number of juvenile delinquency cases approved for filing and the number of youths in secure detention.

### ***EIT Program Evaluation***

The EIT program is evaluated by comparing against a convenience control sample composed of two non-EIT groups. First, pre-program data was collected in January and February of 2022 prior to the implementation of the EIT in March 2022. Tand second, there are also non-EIT cases after the implementation of program when the EIT is not available for a particular initial hearing (due to scheduling or other

reasons), or the client already had an attorney at the Marion County Public Defender Agency. The results presented here compare the EIT clients to the clients that for any of the above reasons were not represented by the EIT.

Due to various personnel changes and some difficulty in hiring, the EIT has had different team members throughout the program. The team always had an EIT attorney, who was usually assisted by a paralegal, and at various points also had an EIT case manager, an EIT social worker, or a non-EIT social worker who assisted in a limited capacity. In the results presented here, all these categories were collapsed together, but in future analyses with more data available these different compositions may be possible to compare against one another.

The foregoing results include cases that opened starting in 2022 and closed by May 2023, excluding cases with very incomplete data. This sample consists of 228 cases in the EIT program, and 254 cases outside of the EIT program (with some cases excluded from individual analyses due to missing data). We were primarily interested in comparing the EIT and non-EIT groups, but several covariates were included to control for differences between the EIT and non-EIT groups due to the lack of random assignment in the sample.<sup>1</sup>

### *Case Length*

One potential benefit of the EIT is that cases may be processed faster, due to additional information provided by the EIT to the court, changes in client behavior due to services provided by the EIT, or other mechanisms. We evaluated this possibility first by comparing the average time from the initial hearing to case closure. The difference was small but statistically credible<sup>2</sup>, from 78 days in the non-EIT data to 73 days in the EIT data. However, this average is somewhat skewed by outliers with long case lengths, so we also compared the percentage of cases that closed under 60 days. This difference was also statistically credible, with 43% of the EIT cases closing in this period, compared to 36% of non-EIT cases.

---

<sup>1</sup> In particular, juvenile delinquency history, whether the charge was a felony, detention status prior to the initial hearing, and whether the petition status was disputed at the initial hearing were important predictors of most outcome variables.

<sup>2</sup> “Statistically credible” here means that the Bayesian 95% highest density interval excludes the possibility of no difference between groups. I.e., the statistical analysis provides evidence that the observed differences are “real” and not merely random, even after controlling for the relevant covariates. It is analogous to the frequentist term “statistically significant.”

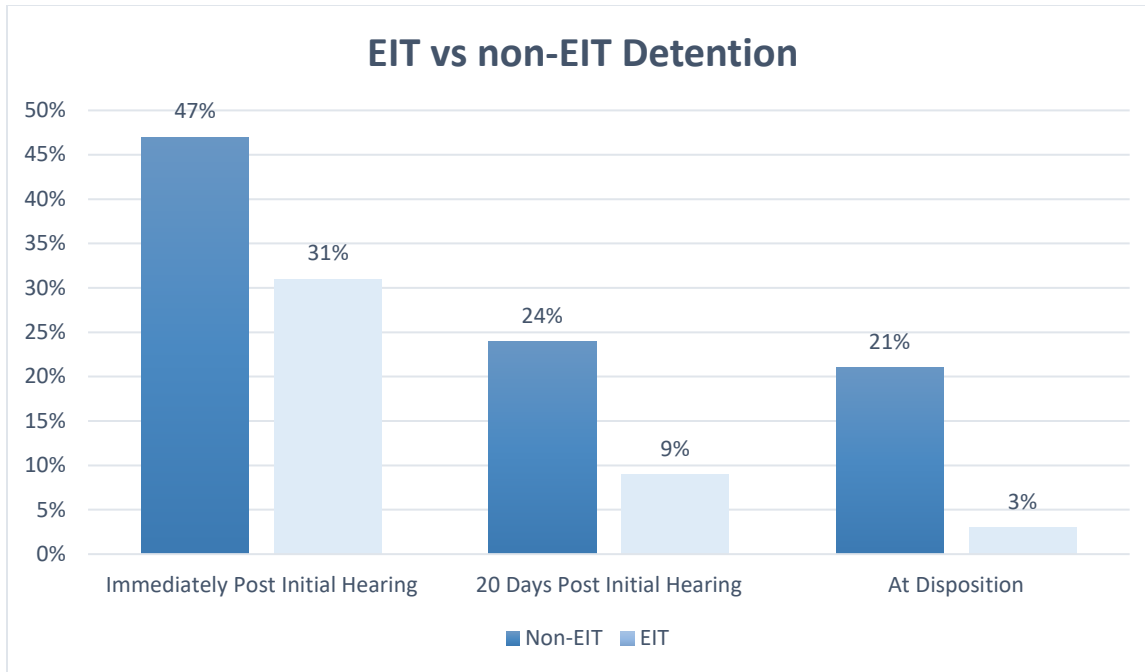
### *Petition Status After Initial Hearing*

Another area of potential benefit for the EIT involves the approval of petitions to file the juvenile delinquency case immediately following the initial hearing. There was a small effect, with 85% of non-EIT cases being approved, vs 81% of EIT cases. This effect was not statistically credible, but with the larger final data set may reach statistical credibility. It is also possible that EIT cases that are not approved differ importantly from non-EIT cases that are not approved (e.g., more informal adjustments or more final non-approvals) and these differences may be possible to detect with more data.

### *Detention*

The final important area of impact for the EIT was to reduce client detention throughout the case. We evaluated this outcome at three time points: immediately following the initial hearing of the case, 20 “court days” (weekdays excluding holidays) following the initial hearing, and immediately following the disposition of the case. All three of these measures are dichotomous (detained or not detained) measures of secure detention at the time point in question. A client might still have some kind of supervision (e.g., probation in the case of the disposition time point) but as long as the client is not held in secure detention, the result is recorded as “not detained”.

The effect associated with the EIT on detention is large and statistically credible at all three time points measured. Moreover, the size of the effect (proportionally to non-EIT rate) increases significantly over the length of the case, suggesting that the initial work done by the EIT continues to yield results over time. Specifically, the rate of detention immediately following detention decreases from 47% to 31% for EIT clients, at 20 days following the initial hearing it decreases from 24% to 9%, and at disposition it decreases from 21% to 3%. These results indicate strong evidence that the EIT has met its goal of reducing the number of youths in secure detention.



### *Conclusion*

The Marion County Early Intervention Team project was intended to reduce the number of juvenile delinquency cases approved for filing and the number of youths in secure detention. These interim results show very strong evidence that the team has met its goal in terms of youth in secure detention. More data is required to definitively determine if the goal of reducing the number of cases approved for filing has been met, though current results trend positively. And finally, there is also evidence that the EIT program has a small positive effect on case length. In short, this interim analysis provides evidence that the Marion County EIT program has been successful. And as the program continues through 2024 yet more evidence may accrue, and more nuanced and complicated questions about the program’s benefits may be answered.