Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP™)

Overview of the SPEP™ Process

Updated: 9/27/2022

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What is SPEP?

The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP™) is a validated, data driven evaluative tool for determining how well an existing program matches to research evidence for the effectiveness of reducing the recidivism of juvenile offenders. Full implementation of SPEP allows juvenile justice systems to evaluate their service array, focus service-related data collection on features related to the expected effectiveness of those services, and develop deeper partnerships with providers as part of a service optimization effort.

SPEP was created by Dr. Mark Lipsey with Vanderbilt University in the early 2000s, and further defined by Dr. Gabrielle Chapman with the introduction of a rating instrument, feedback process, and life cycle. SPEP is based on a meta-analysis of over 700 studies, both experimental and quasi-experimental, spanning over thirty years. Dr. Lipsey's team has collected all of the research investigating the effectiveness of interventions for reducing the recidivism of juvenile offenders that uses adequately controlled research designs and can be located with vigorous searching. A wide range of descriptive information about the characteristics of those studies and statistical information about the magnitude of their effects on recidivism have been assembled into a database and analyzed to identify the program features most strongly associated with reductions in recidivism. The database is routinely updated and new studies continue to be added.

Through the data and research, Dr. Lipsey was able to discern key characteristics that, on average, are most strongly associated with reductions in the re-offense rates of youth. To be effective, a service must use a therapeutic approach aimed at internalizing behavior change; it cannot focus on external control or deterrence. Additional program components that increase effectiveness include the type of service delivered, the quality of service delivery, the amount of service delivered (dosage/duration), and the risk levels of the youth served. Using the SPEP rating scheme, these characteristics can be evaluated to determine approximately how effective a service, on average, will be in reducing recidivism. SPEP allows for both brand name services (e.g., Functional Family Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy, Aggression Replacement Training) and provider-developed, home grown services (e.g., skill building, group counseling) to be linked to the large body of research on program effectiveness. Once linked, SPEP can be used to compare the key characteristics of a specific program to the characteristics research has shown to be effective for reducing recidivism. The goal of this evidence-based tool is to drive sustainable performance improvement for programs that serve the juvenile justice population; *all while fostering and building a culture of partnership, education, and transparency, which are the three pillars of SPEP.*
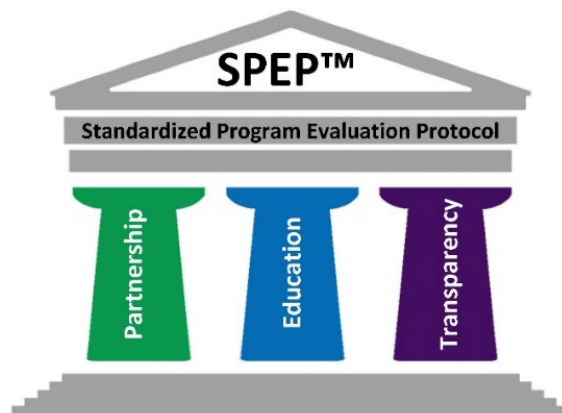
Why SPEP?

It is important to note that SPEP is not a one and done tool; it is a continuous performance improvement process. SPEP is not an audit tool or a "gotcha" game. The purpose of SPEP is to inform service improvement to reduce recidivism, not to grade a provider, program staff, or facility. SPEP is not an effort to make everything brand name. The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) seeks to work with the programs already in place to enhance the services currently being provided. SPEP is becoming a national evaluative tool, as it has been implemented in many states (e.g., Florida, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Iowa) and jurisdictions (e.g., Milwaukee County, San Diego); SPEP has also been implemented in Australia.

DJJ has made an investment to implement and sustain evidence-based and evidence-informed practices in Virginia. SPEP leverages what is currently working in our system to support and strengthen existing practices. SPEP will compare the characteristics within programs and services offered to DJJ youth to the research in an effort to determine how the services may be optimized to maximize their effectiveness in reducing juvenile recidivism. SPEP encapsulates a quality assurance approach and process to drive sustainable performance improvement for juvenile justice programs. Ultimately, SPEP will help provide positive outcomes for our youth, our families, and the communities we serve.

Initial SPEP Implementation in Virginia

Virginia SPEP Launch
DJJ initiated a contract with Vanderbilt University for SPEP training, implementation, and technical assistance in 2019. In the fall of 2019, the Quality Assurance (QA) unit coordinated three webinars to introduce DJJ staff and community stakeholders to SPEP. A soft launch of SPEP was presented during the November 2019 Virginia Juvenile Justice Association (VJJA) Fall Institute in Richmond, Virginia. Conference attendees were able to receive information on the research behind SPEP directly from Dr. Lipsey, as he served as the keynote speaker. Additionally, Dr. Chapman presented on the SPEP process during two breakout sessions. DJJ staff and community stakeholders were invited to a kickoff event to officially launch SPEP in Virginia, which was held on December 11, 2019.

Advisory Board
As part of the SPEP implementation, an Advisory Board was strongly encouraged by Vanderbilt to oversee the implementation and continuing operations. The Board is sponsored by the Chief Deputy Director and chaired by the QA Manager. Members include representatives from the QA unit, Behavioral Services Unit (BSU), Research unit, Practice Improvement unit, DJJ's Division of Education, Community Programs, and community stakeholders to include the Regional Service Coordination (RSC) agencies, a Community Placement Program (CPP), and a dual residential and community provider. The first Board meeting was held on December 11, 2019. Board meetings are scheduled to meet quarterly in March, June, September, and December.

Initial Training
DJJ identified the QA, Practice Improvement, and Diversion units as the first cohort of DJJ staff to participate in the first Level I SPEP training. The initial training session occurred in December 2019 facilitated by Dr. Chapman. The next training step was to practice the classification process with the pilot sites. However, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the

continuation of training was temporarily placed on hold. In the fall of 2020, Dr. Chapman reinstituted the DJJ cohort's training through a linkage with SPEP implementation specialists with the Evidence-based Prevention and Intervention Support (EPIS) team at Penn State University. The following virtual activities were facilitated by EPIS to enhance the DJJ's Level I SPEP training:

- A two-hour booster training on the SPEP lifecycle on October 21, 2020;
- Shadowing from August 2020 to November 2021: The DJJ training cohort observed the EPIS team's implementation of a SPEP cycle with Adelphoi Village (a private provider of juvenile services in Pennsylvania) through monthly meetings. The observations included a review of service descriptions, quality interviews, and report review meetings. Within a week or two of each meeting, the cohort participated in a follow-up meeting with the EPIS team to debrief and gain more insight into the SPEP process.
- Mock data review: In June 2021, the EPIS team met with the DJJ training cohort to review mock data for Aggression Replacement Treatment (ART) services and describe how the data are obtained, processed, and utilized in the SPEP cycle.
- Close out: In January 2022, the DJJ training cohort had a final close out meeting with EPIS.

SPEP Learning Community
Virginia has created a SPEP Learning Community to allow all SPEP Specialists to come together to share expertise, collaborate with each other to increase SPEP skills, and stay up-to-date with SPEP in Virginia. The first Learning Community met in January 2021 to establish the meeting structure, expectations, and activities. The Learning Community is a recurring monthly meeting that promotes ongoing SPEP engagement and team building. All SPEP Specialists are expected to participate in and/or facilitate meetings to the greatest extent possible in an effort to maintain engagement and connection to SPEP in Virginia.
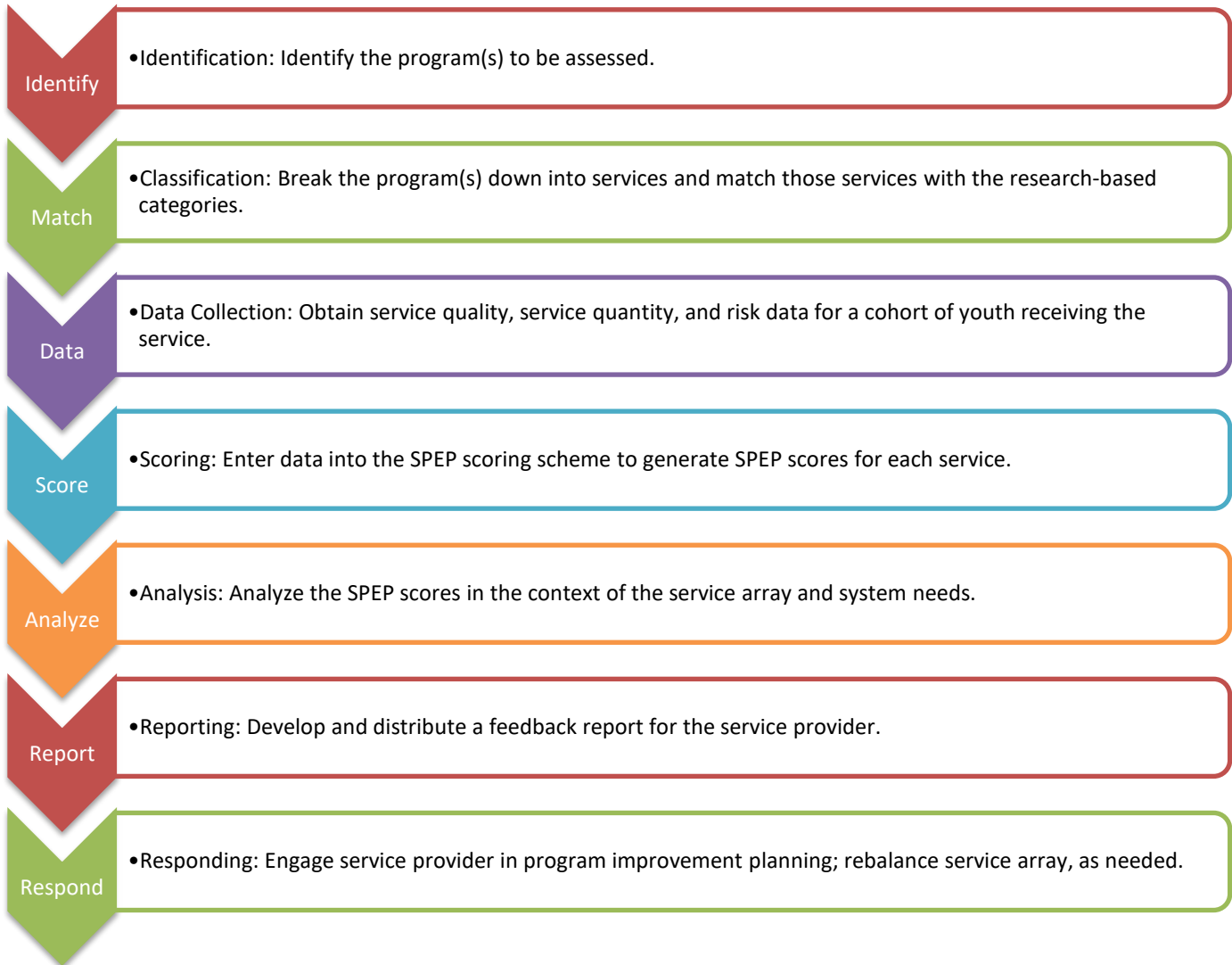
SPEP Pilot Process
During the virtual training process, the QA unit received approval to move forward with the SPEP implementation at the pilot sites. QA facilitated a virtual provider panel with Dr. Chapman, Pennsylvania, and Delaware to give insight into the SPEP process from a provider standpoint; the meeting was attended by various DJJ, CPP, and RSC staff. Initially, the plan was to have three pilot sites to include two residential programs, Merrimac and Virginia Beach community placement programs (CPPs), and one community provider, Tidewater Youth Services Commission (TYSC). Unfortunately, many services provided by TYSC were temporarily suspended or reduced during the pandemic, impacting their ability to be a SPEP pilot site due to the low number of youth served. Therefore, the DJJ training cohort was divided into two groups of seven to begin the SPEP cycle at Merrimac and Virginia Beach CPPs in April 2021. The initial classification meetings were held in person in May 2021 for both CPPs with Dr. Chapman participating virtually. Service descriptions were finalized and all services were classified by July 2021. The SPEP teams identified the services that would go through the SPEP review process in September 2021. Quality Measures interviews and data collection were completed in October 2021. Scoring and reports were completed by March 2022. Each SPEP team met with the CPPs in person in April 2022 to review the reports and begin the continuous quality improvement (CQI) planning process. SPEP Service Optimization Plans were developed and finalized with the CPPs in May 2022.

SPEP Life Cycle

SPEP Life Cycle
This life cycle was developed by Vanderbilt University to outline the steps of the SPEP review.

Identify
- Identification: Identify the program(s) to be assessed.

Match
- Classification: Break the program(s) down into services and match those services with the research-based categories.

Data
- Data Collection: Obtain service quality, service quantity, and risk data for a cohort of youth receiving the service.

Score
- Scoring: Enter data into the SPEP scoring scheme to generate SPEP scores for each service.

Analyze
- Analysis: Analyze the SPEP scores in the context of the service array and system needs.

Report
- Reporting: Develop and distribute a feedback report for the service provider.

Respond
- Responding: Engage service provider in program improvement planning; rebalance service array, as needed.

This life cycle is more representative of the evaluative process in Virginia (preparing to SPEP through completion of the continuous quality improvement process).

Preparation → Classification "Unpacking" → Quality Measures Interview → Data Collection Amount & Risk → Score and Analyze → Feedback Meeting & CQI Planning → CQI Follow-up

SPEP Process

Identify Partnerships

DJJ will utilize the SPEP tool in partnership with providers to evaluate those services delivered to DJJ-involved youth via contracts directly with DJJ (e.g., CPPs, detention reentry) or through the regional service coordination (RSC) model and/or Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act (VJCCCA), as well as those services directly facilitated by DJJ staff. DJJ leadership and the SPEP advisory board will guide the order and priority of services to go through a SPEP review.

Classification Process

Once a provider has been identified to partner with the SPEP team for a SPEP review, the lead SPEP Specialist will coordinate a brief SPEP introductory meeting. The lead SPEP Specialist will send the provider this *SPEP Overview Guide* and request copies of the provider's manuals, protocols, policies, activity schedules, brochures, logic models, outcome data, monitoring reports, and other documents pertaining to services to provide the SPEP team with a baseline of information on the program and services offered.

The first step in the *Classification* process of SPEP is to identify the distinct services provided to the DJJ youth in each program. For programs that consist of multiple services, this means that the individual, distinct services must be unpacked and separately identified. Each service is then classified or matched to one of the SPEP service types identified in the research. Beyond identification of a program's services for SPEP, this process can provide an opportunity for relationship building between system and provider staff, as well as a chance for the system to get an accurate view of the provider's service array. The lead SPEP Specialist will coordinate a date and time for a *Classification Interview* with provider staff and the SPEP team to "unpack" the program and all of the services they offer to DJJ-involved youth. During the interview, the SPEP team will pose questions to gather information on the provider, type of youth served, staff training and credentials, activity schedules, and service implementation (e.g., goal of the service, facilitator, duration, intensity, format, completion). It is preferable that the provider staff being interviewed be staff who are well versed in the program and all services offered. Multiple staff may participate in order to provide a comprehensive overview for the SPEP team. The duration of a Classification Interview will depend on the array of services offered by the provider. Community providers with only a few services may take 2-3 hours, whereas residential providers may take 6-8 hours.

The SPEP team will utilize the information to develop a *Provider Description* and *Service Descriptions* for each service offered. The draft descriptions will be shared with the provider for feedback and finalization. Once service descriptions are finalized, the SPEP team will meet to *Classify* the services by determining if the services are therapeutic and align with the SPEP meta-analysis research, and subsequently match the services to the SPEP service categories. Additionally, the SPEP team will determine if the service is a *Primary Service* (a service provided to all or most youth), *Qualifying Supplemental Service* (a service that cannot stand alone but acts as an enhancement of the primary service), or an *Other Service* (a service that is neither a primary or supplemental service or services without sufficient research). Lastly, the SPEP team and provider will collaborate to determine which services will continue through the SPEP review process; generally, it recommended that three to five primary services be prioritized to be evaluated. The SPEP team should consider services provided to the majority of DJJ youth, service types that have the greatest potential for reducing recidivism, provider and stakeholder preference, and services that are required by contract or policy when determining which services to SPEP. Following the determination, the lead SPEP Specialist will send the *SPEP Classification*

Determination Memo to the provider.

Quality of Services

For all services moving forward with a SPEP review, the lead SPEP Specialist will coordinate a meeting date and time for the SPEP team to meet with the provider to conduct the *Quality Measures Interviews* to ascertain how well the provider supports and monitors the quality with which the services being assessed are delivered. Each service will require one Quality Measures Interview, which takes approximately 1-2 hours. The interview includes four components: Written Protocol – the existence of a written protocol that describes the intended services and the way it is to be delivered; Staff Training - staff delivering the service have the qualifications appropriate for providing the service and have been trained in the service being delivered; Staff Supervision – written processes are in place to monitor staff adherence to the written protocol and quality of service delivery; and Organizational Response to Drift – written processes are in place and used to take corrective action when there are significant departures from the written protocol or lapses in quality of service delivery. The lead SPEP Specialist will send the *Quality Measures Interview for the Provider* prior to the meeting so staff are aware of the interview questions. The provider should identify staff for the interview who are well versed in the service, either through facilitating the service and/or providing oversight of the service. The SPEP team will also request copies of available manuals or written protocols (with any reviews and revisions), staff training policies, confirmation of initial staff training and booster trainings, sample performance evaluations, policies for response to service delivery drift, documentation of fidelity monitoring, and any client (youth and family) feedback. Following the interview and submission of documents, the SPEP team will review all information received and score each question. The scores will be rated as a low, medium, or high for the final *Quality of Service Delivery* component.

Data Collection

The lead SPEP Specialist will also request the provider submit data on each service utilizing a standardized *SPEP Data Template*. Depending on the service, this may be a generic template or a template designed for the specific service (e.g., Aggression Replacement Training). The template will collect youth specific data regarding demographics, program admission date (if applicable), service start and end dates, total weeks of service, total hours of service, Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) overall risk score at service start, and session topics (if applicable). A full SPEP evaluation requires dosage (total number of hours in service), duration (total weeks in service), and risk level (within 90 days prior to the service start date) for a minimum of ten youth who participated in the service during the identified cohort timeframe. Alternatively, a SPEP-Informed Approach may be utilized when this data does not exist; however, a full rating will not be possible.

The data collection is a collaborative effort. The provider will initially provide the lead SPEP Specialist with a list of youth who participated in the service. The SPEP team will then compile the youth demographics from DJJ's electronic database based on the provider's list, if available. Additionally, any session information captured within DJJ's electronic database will also be entered into the spreadsheet by the SPEP team. The lead SPEP Specialist will send the provider the template with the identified youth for the SPEP cohort and the provider will complete the service specific fields. Once received back from the provider, the SPEP team will enter YASI risk data to complete the data collection. The SPEP team will then compare the service data to the targets for dosage and duration as delineated based on the SPEP service category. The final scores will be used for the *Amount of Service* and *Risk Level of Youth Served* components.

SPEP Review Summary

The lead SPEP Specialist will develop a *SPEP Review Summary* or a *SPEP-Informed Review Summary*, as applicable, for

each service. The SPEP Review Summary will include an overview of the provider, description of the service, a summary of each SPEP component (service type, quality of service delivery, amount of service, and risk level of youth served) with recommendations for improvements, the Basic Score and Program Optimization Percentage (POP) Score, and follow-up SPEP activities. The **Basic Score** compares the service to other intervention services found in the research, regardless of service type. It should be used as a reference for the expected overall recidivism reduction when compared to other service types. The **POP Score** is a percentage score that indicates where the service is compared to its potential effectiveness if optimized to match the characteristics of similar services. The POP Score is the more meaningful score for providers as it represents how close the service is to its potential for that service type. For example, a POP Score of 55% would indicate that the service is running at 55% of the potential effectiveness for recidivism reduction that has been found for a similar type of service. The scores are calculated using a rating scheme developed by Vanderbilt University. The scores will also be added to a **SPEP Score Card**, an easy reference to readily identify the scores for each service. Once the summary is finalized, the SPEP team will meet with the provider to review the findings and begin discussion on how to optimize services.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Planning

The provider, in collaboration with the lead SPEP Specialist, will determine which recommendations from the SPEP Review Summary will be implemented to optimize the service's effectiveness to reduce recidivism. The lead SPEP Specialist will collaborate with the provider to develop the **SPEP Service Optimization Plan** and identify the SPEP component(s) (service type, service quality, amount of service, and risk level of youth served) to focus optimization on and create goals and action steps and determine the staff responsible, target completion dates, and outcome measures. Thereafter, the lead SPEP Specialist and provider will have **Quarterly CQI Meetings** to review progress on the goals and action steps. Generally, the recommendations/goals should be implemented within 12 months, though some recommendations/goals may be completed sooner.

Subsequent SPEP Cycles

Following the satisfaction of the SPEP Service Optimization Plans, the lead SPEP Specialist, in partnership with the provider, may begin a new SPEP review cycle. The subsequent SPEP review may include a review of the same services that have already gone through a SPEP review to determine enhancements to the service, a review of services that have not yet been reviewed, or a combination of both. For services that are being re-reviewed, the data timeframe will be based on the first Quarterly CQI Meeting or any time thereafter.

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Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice
Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol (SPEP™)
Pre-Visit Checklist for the Service Provider

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In preparation for your upcoming SPEP review, we recommend gathering or preparing the materials listed below for discussion and review.

Service Type: The Classification Interview consists of a series of questions to "unpack" the provider/program structure and gain a clear understanding of the types of services offered to DJJ-involved youth. Refer to the SPEP Service Type Categorization form for additional information on service classification categories.

- ➢ Service Identification: Identification on any services that youth with specific needs, a certain diagnosis, gender, risk level, and/or supervision status are grouped together for treatment purposes. This information will be utilized for "unpacking" or determining what services are components of the program.
- ➢ Daily Schedule: A sample schedule of daily activities for each service.
- ➢ Description: A brief description of each service or program component.
- ➢ Target Population: Identification of the type of youth appropriate for each service or program.
- ➢ Manual/Policy/Protocol: Any written policies, protocols, manuals, or how-to guides for delivering the service.
- ➢ Staff: Supervisory and/or managerial staff who oversee the program operations and service delivery should be present to provide information on the services. Additionally, staff who deliver the service through direct interaction with youth may be present (or readily available) to provide information on the service and delivery, and answer any questions that may arise during the interview.

Quality of Service: There will be one Quality Measures Interview for each service going through the SPEP process. Each interview will take approximately 1-2 hours in order to gain a clear understanding of the service implementation.

- ➢ Written Protocol: The service manual or protocol that identifies session topics and instructs staff on how to deliver the service. Policies and practices on matching the service to individual youth needs. Copies of the manual and policies will be requested.
- ➢ Staff Credentials: The minimum education requirements for staff delivering the service. Provide information on prior experience, certification, and licensure requirements. Dates and verification will be requested.
- ➢ Staff Training: Training policies. The type and amount of training (initial and ongoing) received by each staff that delivers the service. Dates and verification will be requested.
- ➢ Supervision: Written information on procedures to monitor adherence to delivery of service and other aspects of quality. Procedures for corrective action when there are significant departures from protocol or where lapses in quality are identified.
- ➢ Data Collection: Staff should be present who have practical knowledge of the program, including what data are collected. Information on how data and client feedback processes are used to inform services.

Service Amount: Data will be needed to compare each youth's actual dosage and duration within the service to the optimal amount of dosage and duration, as determined by research.

- ➢ List of youth who received the service during a specific timeframe designated by the SPEP team. This becomes the data cohort.
- ➢ Contact Hours/Dosage: The actual number of contact hours for each youth in the cohort.
- ➢ Total Weeks/Duration: The length of time in the service for each youth in the cohort.

Risk Level: The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) risk level will be collected to ascertain the risk level of youth served.

- ➢ The YASI overall risk level of each youth in the cohort.