



YOUTH ASSESSMENT CENTERS IN IDAHO

The Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections (IDJC) and the National Assessment Center (NAC) Association are proud to present eight new Youth Assessment Centers across each judicial district in the State of Idaho. These valuable resources will promote better outcomes for Idaho's youth through prevention efforts to divert youth from juvenile justice and child welfare systems.



Youth Assessment Centers

What Are They?

As defined by the National Assessment Center Association (NAC), Assessment Centers “aim to prevent and divert youth from juvenile justice and child welfare systems through a single point of contact which identifies underlying issues contributing to concerning behavior and partners with youth and families to access individualized services and/or resources.”



What Do They Do?

Youth Assessment Centers use validated screening and assessment tools to conduct in-depth interviews with youth and their families to determine risk factors, trauma, safety needs, mental health, family issues, substance use, lack of basic needs, human trafficking, etc. Information gathered through these tools helps centers partner with youth and families to develop an individualized plan of care with warm connections to community resources. Centers develop formalized relationships through Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with community partners to help meet the identified needs of youth referrals.

Assessment Centers are designed to accept referrals from a broad range of community stakeholders including law-enforcement, child-welfare agencies, schools, self-referrals and other community organizations to promote a no-wrong-door point of intake.

Assessment Centers in Idaho

In spring 2022, the Idaho Legislature appropriated the Idaho Department of Juvenile Corrections \$6.5 million to establish Safe Teen Assessment Centers in Idaho. IDJC partnered with the National Assessment Center (NAC) Association to undertake training Idaho to the best-practices framework and assisting with the development of a competitive grant application for these funds. The NAC is a national organization that “guides a partnership of assessment centers that advance best-practice through advocacy, education, technical assistance and community engagement.”

In June 2022, IDJC made eight (8) individual Safe Teen Assessment Center awards to grantees in each judicial district across Idaho, with two (2) in District five (5) with projects initiating on July 1, 2022. Grantees charged with establishing these Youth Assessment Centers have worked diligently under a 12-month timeline to meet the implementation deliverables outlined in the grant application including: defining a target population based on local-level data, obtaining a building, hiring and training of staff to Assessment Center 101 model, developing policies and procedures, establishing an Advisory Board, form development, selecting validated screening and assessment tools and training staff to those tools, developing formal MOAs with community stakeholders for referrals to centers and referrals for services from centers, data system selection and implementation, marketing,



and more. Due to the intensive nature of implementing an all-new service, the NAC typically advises members that establishing assessment centers according to best-practices typically can take anywhere from 2-3 years to be fully implemented. Youth Assessment Center grant projects established through this grant have 12-months to achieve all of the deliverables outlined in the grant application.

To date, five Youth Assessment Center grant projects have launched and started serving youth, achieving all of the aforementioned deliverables in just six-months. The other three grant projects are anticipated to start serving youth spring 2023, but by the latest, June 30, 2023.

It is anticipated that as centers follow the NAC framework and best-practices and develop relationships in their communities that youth will be served and volume will continue to increase as centers demonstrate efficacy, gain community trust and refine processes, policies and procedures.

“If we don’t work with young people early-on, they will likely return with new circumstances that leave them and us with less productive options.”

- National Assessment Center (NAC) Association

What’s Next for Assessment Centers in Idaho?

Over the project period (July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023) Assessment Center projects will receive ongoing support and assistance from the National Assessment Center (NAC) Association as members of the national association and through monthly Technical Assistance with the Executive Director of the NAC, Molli Barker Cook. This expertise will help guide projects to ensure alignment with national best-practices and assistance in applying the framework in Idaho.

Idaho is unique and as such each project’s plan is representative of their individual community and its needs. Under the NAC framework, there are two types of Assessment Centers: Tier One (screening administered in-house and refer to community providers for assessment) and Tier 2 (screening and assessments performed in-house). Of the eight Assessment Center grant projects, three centers will be Tier Two and five will be Tier One.

Community support will be integral to these projects and their ongoing success. Stay tuned throughout the year for additional updates!

“Adolescents make bad decisions all the time. Kids that are just showing normal adolescent behavior, we want them, the kids and their family, to be able to access resources without coming into the criminal justice system which can have negative impacts for them in the future.”

- Alison Tate, Ada County Juvenile Services Director

How are Assessment Centers Different than Crisis Centers?

Assessment Centers provide screening, assessment and connections to community based-resources for youth in their community. Youth presenting to Assessment Centers may be dealing with family conflict, insufficient housing or food insecurity, behavioral health issues, and more. As such Assessment Centers utilize validated screening to determine immediate need and identify need for further assessment. Once the assessment is complete, centers partner with youth and family to connect to community-based resources to address the needs identified. Assessment Centers are not operational 24/7/365, though they often have expanded business hours to ensure sufficient service for their community population.

Crisis Centers are a 24/7/365 placement option for youth who are actively experiencing a behavioral health crisis such as self-harming, suicidality, etc. Each episode of care is no more than 23 hours and fifty-nine minutes. Youth presenting to crisis centers will work with behavioral health professionals to de-escalate the current crisis, receive a medical screening, screening and assessment and linkages to community providers for ongoing treatment needs.

While Youth Assessment Centers and Youth Crisis Centers share similarities, they serve different functions in their community with Assessment Centers serving as a prevention resource to address youth needs earlier on while Crisis Centers help to stabilize youth in the midst of a behavioral health crisis. Both Assessment Centers and Crisis Centers will add to the array of services available to youth and their families in Idaho.

“The challenges the youth experienced 15 years ago during my time as a school resource officer has increased exponentially. As law enforcement interacts with our youth, the Assessment Center will provide more options for us to guide the juvenile toward meaningful, local services and support.”

- Tony Manu, Bannock County Sheriff