



SEED: A DIVERSION PROGRAM FOR YOUNG ADULTS

An Alternative
to Incarceration

HEARTLAND
ALLIANCE

EQUITY.
OPPORTUNITY.
FOR ALL.

ICJIA

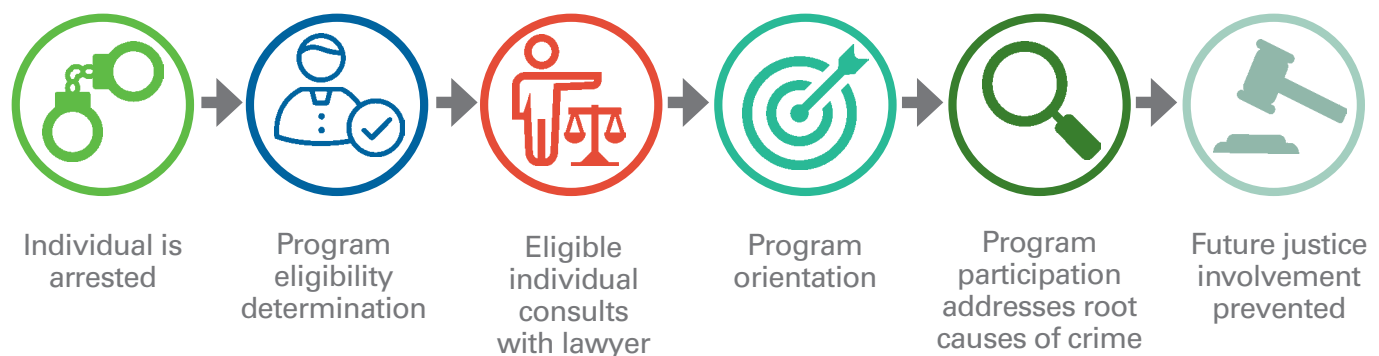
Table of Contents

Issue	3
Program.....	3
Evaluation	4
Findings and Recommendations.....	4
Conclusion.....	6
Acknowledgments.....	6

HEARTLAND ALLIANCE
EQUITY. OPPORTUNITY. FOR ALL.

Issue

Diversion programs have emerged as an alternative to the traditional criminal justice system, particularly for non-violent offenses. Typically, [diversion programs](#) offer individuals charged with a crime an alternative to incarceration through engagement with a program or service that seeks to address some of the root causes of the crime, such as substance use disorders (SUDs), a lack of kinship or social connections, limited career or education pathways, or unaddressed mental health issues, including trauma. The graphic below shows the general strategy of diversion programs.



Program

The Supporting Education and Employment Development (SEED) program is a 13-month pre-plea deferred-prosecution program, which aims to serve emerging adults, aged 18-26, charged with Delivery or Intent to Deliver in Cook County, Illinois. Eligibility may also be expanded to 27- to 30-year-olds on a case-by-case basis. SEED is an adaptation of [The Choice is Yours \(TCY\) program](#), which was based in Philadelphia and targeted emerging adults as well.

Throughout the course of the program, participants engage in educational programming, as well as job training, placement, and support based on the individual's needs and goals. Additional supports include case management and cognitive behavioral interventions. Case managers guide participants through the program and provide linkages to supportive services. Regular court calls ensure that participants are making progress toward graduation. Upon successful completion of all program requirements, participants graduate and their cases are dismissed.

Evaluation

The goal of this study was to evaluate the implementation of the SEED program between May 2021 and June 2023. This goal was achieved through a partnership between the Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance (IMPACT) and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA). There were several components to the evaluation, including an analysis of program data representing 173 participants, a participant survey¹ with 86 non-unique responses, interviews with 20 SEED participants, and interviews with 14 SEED staff and key stakeholders. The following is a brief summary of evaluation findings and recommendations.

Findings and Recommendations

Findings and recommendations from each piece of the evaluation are listed in the following sections. Some recommendations may require external funding and support.

Continuously Evaluate Program Dosage and Participant Needs

SEED program participants come from various backgrounds and have differing needs based on their histories. For those already employed or in school, SEED services may feel too intensive and require participants to take time away from those obligations. Evaluating and adjusting SEED services, when possible, based on an individual participant's level of need, may be beneficial, while also ensuring the program's fidelity to the original model.

“I had those things [employment and education] already in place. I came more to just learn lessons about how to improve my life...I know there were other people who didn't have a job, or needed help with other things, and know that staff was able to provide extra support and resources for them. And I know that everything was at no cost to the participants, so I think that for those who need those things, it was a good service.”

– Participant

Balance Virtual and In-Person Services

Participants noted physically commuting to the SEED office was a challenge due to its location in Chicago, as well as the timing of SEED services during business or class hours. However, staff and stakeholders felt in-person services brought strong benefits to participants that could not be replicated in a fully virtual environment. SEED program and implementation staff should balance virtual and in-person service delivery, considering participant input when possible.

¹Due to data quality issues, only general trends in participant responses were assessed.

Findings and Recommendations

(continued)

“It was rough at the beginning because, like I said, I did have a full-time job. I had to actually show up once a week, the whole 30 days. It was a bother.”

– Participant

“[On challenges of SEED] You know, the remote aspect of it, the disconnected aspect. Typically for these types of courts, the case managers would be in court when the participant comes, and there’s a benefit to that, you know, that interaction, both before, during, and after court...so I think the court remote piece...participants probably love it, I imagine. But they’re not sure what they’re missing.”

– Stakeholder

Ensure Appropriate Funding and Staffing

Based on staff and participant feedback, SEED is successful in supporting participants to achieve goals, in part due to the efforts of case managers and program staff in motivating participants and ensuring their buy in. However, stakeholders indicated uncertainty of long-term funding for the program. SEED was noted to be expensive, made even more challenging in that employment services cannot be billed to Medicaid as treatment-based programs can. Stakeholders and participants also felt more staff were needed for the program to keep up with increasing caseloads.

“I feel like the program needs more staff, cause [staff] are the best, and they just have so much stuff to do. And sometimes like I feel like they fall behind or like, forget something, and it’s because they don’t have enough help.”

– Participant

“I mean, I think it’s sustainable in the sense of the service. There is capacity to do the work. I don’t know with the funding where that is. Yeah, it’s an extremely expensive program, relative to other court programs and operations. So, I guess, concern would be financial.”

– Stakeholder

Conduct Future Evaluations

This evaluation began with a plan to use Salesforce software for program data collection. Due to staff turnover and the complexity of data collection, however, this plan was postponed. By revisiting the original Salesforce plan and hiring a data specialist to help implement the plan, future evaluations could include the assessment of the short-term and intermediate outcomes described in the logic model, prevent some of the data quality issues experienced during this evaluation, and alleviate the burden on staff who assist with data collection.

Conclusion

Overall, results of this evaluation show that despite some operational challenges, SEED was implemented smoothly. However, interviewees did indicate there were opportunities for program refinement and additional evaluation. Longer term evaluation of SEED and its effects on both participants and the criminal justice system will take time and requires tracking participants beyond the immediate end of the program.

Acknowledgments

Authors: Anita Thomas¹, Emilee Green², Callie Kaplan¹, Jessica Reichert²

¹Social IMPACT Research Center at Heartland Alliance

²Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority

~~We would like to acknowledge the contributions of participants in this study, Karlos Lloyd and the SEED team, Justice Advisory Council, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, Illinois Department of Human Services, Suniya Farooqui (IMPACT), Kevin Pedraza (IMPACT), Ryan Maranville (ICJIA), and Jackie Gilbreath (ICJIA).~~



SEED:
**A DIVERSION
PROGRAM
FOR
YOUNG
ADULTS**

**An Alternative
to Incarceration**

HEARTLAND ALLIANCE
EQUITY. OPPORTUNITY. **FOR ALL.**

