

# Reintegration Program for Juvenile Offenders: The Case of Panabo City

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative case study examined the development, implementation, and challenges of reintegration programs for juvenile offenders in Panabo City, Philippines. Through key informant interviews with five program implementers, the study explored how local government units operationalize Republic Act 9344 (Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006) through community-based rehabilitation initiatives. Using thematic analysis based on Creswell's framework, three major themes emerged: program development driven by policy alignment and multi-stakeholder collaboration; implementation through needs-based interventions and community-based strategies; and persistent challenges including resource limitations, inadequate family support, and behavioral adjustment difficulties. Findings revealed that successful reintegration requires coordinated efforts among the City Social Welfare and Development Office, Philippine National Police, Department of Social Welfare and Development, NGOs, and community stakeholders. The program's three-year structured plan emphasizes individualized interventions, vocational training, and psychosocial support. However, implementation faces significant barriers including budget constraints, limited facilities, social stigma, and emotional adjustment issues among youth participants. The study demonstrates that effective juvenile reintegration transcends punitive measures, requiring sustained commitment to rehabilitation, adequate resource allocation, and community acceptance. These findings contribute to understanding how local governments can develop responsive juvenile justice systems that balance public safety with children's rights to rehabilitation and social reintegration.

**Keywords:** juvenile justice; reintegration programs; children in conflict with law; community-based rehabilitation; Republic Act 9344; Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

The persistent issue of juvenile recidivism presents significant challenges to community safety and impedes the effectiveness of reintegration programs globally (Moffitt et al., 2011). In the Philippines, this concern is particularly acute in urban centers like Panabo City, where high numbers of youth engage in various criminal activities despite multiple intervention attempts over the years (Alampay & Elmes, 2023). Current rehabilitation efforts appear insufficient to effectively address the complex needs of young offenders and prevent future criminal behaviors.

Panabo City has responded to these challenges through comprehensive programs implemented by the Youth Development Office and City Social Welfare and Development Office. These initiatives encompass educational programs, livelihood training, counseling, and reintegration support designed to provide alternative life pathways for vulnerable youth (Panabo City Information Office, 2024). The city's approach emphasizes skills acquisition and psychological support to foster positive behavioral change among juvenile offenders.

Reintegration programs serve as crucial interventions for juvenile offenders in Panabo City, equipping them with essential life skills, educational support, and psychological counseling to facilitate successful societal transition. These programs specifically address root causes of delinquent behavior including poverty, inadequate guidance, and limited educational opportunities while promoting constructive alternatives (Respicio, 2021). Despite these comprehensive efforts, significant obstacles persist, including societal stigmatization, insufficient family or community support, and limited employment opportunities for individuals with criminal records.

The Local Social Welfare and Development Office has formalized the city's commitment through Executive Order No. 159, Series of 2023, establishing a council to track program success and advance collaboration between allied groups. This initiative aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, emphasizing the importance of effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

This study examines how Panabo City implements Republic Act 9344 (Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006) through community-based approaches tailored to local contexts. The research addresses critical questions about program development, implementation strategies, monitoring mechanisms, and persistent challenges in rehabilitating juvenile offenders.

This study employs two complementary theoretical perspectives to examine juvenile offender reintegration: Developmental Systems Theory (Overton, 2015) and Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework (Lerner et al., 2015).

Developmental Systems Theory posits that human development emerges through complex, interdependent interactions among biological, psychological, and environmental factors (Overton, 2015). This perspective recognizes that juvenile behavior is influenced by multiple contextual layers including family, social environment, community, and educational institutions. Applied to juvenile reintegration, this framework emphasizes the necessity of multi-level interventions that address the interconnected systems affecting youth development. The theory supports structured intervention programs that consider these complex dynamics for effective service delivery.

The PYD framework promotes strengths-based approaches that focus on youth potential rather than deficits (Lerner et al., 2015). This perspective emphasizes positive growth, skill development, and emotional well-being as foundations for successful rehabilitation. PYD principles guide program design by prioritizing the cultivation of positive attributes among youth offenders, recognizing their capacity for change and growth. This approach aligns with restorative rather than punitive justice models, supporting interventions that build competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring among participants.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This qualitative case study employed an exploratory approach to examine the reintegration programs implemented in Panabo City. The case study methodology enabled in-depth investigation of complex real-life situations within manageable scope (McCombes, 2023), allowing comprehensive understanding of program dynamics within their specific context.

### **Participants**

Five key informants were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in program management and delivery. Participants included an Assistant City Legal Officer (Male, 37, 4 years' experience), Youth Development Officer III/OIC (Male, 31, 6 years' experience), CSWDO Assistant Department Head

(Female, 59, 36 years' experience), CADO Department Head (Male, 59, 6 years' experience), and Population Program Officer II (Female, 42, 20 years' experience). Selection criteria emphasized demonstrated knowledge and experience with program design, implementation, and management of reintegration initiatives.

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## Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews lasting 60-90 minutes served as the primary data collection method. The researcher-developed interview guide contained open-ended questions addressing three main areas: program development processes, implementation strategies, and challenges encountered. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes provided additional contextual information.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2017) systematic approach involving raw data compilation and organization, reading through data for familiarization, coding data into manageable segments, identifying and interpreting themes, and drawing conclusions and recommendations. Validation of findings occurred through peer debriefing with research advisers and member checking with participants.

## Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board. All participants provided written informed consent with assurance of confidentiality and voluntary participation. Participants could withdraw at any time without consequence. Interviews were conducted in private settings to ensure comfort and confidentiality.

## Trustworthiness

The study employed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework for establishing trustworthiness. Credibility was ensured through sustained engagement, verbatim transcription, and peer debriefing. Dependability was maintained through comprehensive audit trail of methodological decisions. Confirmability was achieved through triangulation and reflexive journaling to minimize bias. Transferability was established through detailed contextual descriptions for applicability assessment.

## RESULTS

### Program Development

Three major themes emerged regarding program development in Panabo City's juvenile reintegration initiatives.

**Policy and Legal Framework Alignment.** The reintegration program was developed in direct alignment with Republic Act 9344 mandates, formalized through local executive order. As IDI 1 stated: "For the LGU to develop the reintegration program, we base it on the mandate of the national government." This approach ensures legal compliance while balancing public safety concerns with children's rights to protection and rehabilitation.

**Stakeholder Involvement and Inter-agency Collaboration.** Program development involved extensive collaboration among multiple stakeholders. The City Social Welfare and Development Office served as the primary coordinator, working with the Philippine National Police, Department of Justice, Department of Social Welfare and Development, NGOs, and local experts. IDI 1 emphasized: "The participation of stakeholders and collaboration among different agencies are very important because they combine all the knowledge and resources that can help in reintegration."

**Needs-based Program Design.** The program operates on a structured three-year plan tailored to address individual circumstances. As IDI 1 explained: "Our goal is to ensure that the program's objectives are truly aligned with the needs of juvenile offenders. We do that using what we call our 3-year plan." This approach emphasizes aftercare support, livelihood assistance, and rehabilitation activities customized to each child's specific needs.

### Program Implementation

Implementation strategies revealed three key themes that characterize how the reintegration program operates in practice.

**Program Entry Process.** Participants enter primarily through court orders, followed by referrals from CSWDO and PNP. IDI 2 noted: "Participants of the program are identified based on the order of the court. We strictly follow the orders of the court as it is also our basis in identifying those who are qualified for the rehabilitation and reintegration program."

**Needs-based Tailored Intervention.** The program ensures individualized support through quarterly consultations and assessments. IDI 2 stated: "The LGU Panabo implements the reintegration program through quarterly meetings. We conduct assessments and evaluations to identify needs and improvements."

**Community-based Implementation Strategies.** Implementation begins with securing financial resources for livelihood programs and aftercare assistance. IDI 2 emphasized: "The strategy used for implementing the program starts with securing finances since this is needed for training or livelihood efforts."

### Implementation Challenges

Three major challenges emerged from the analysis of program implementation experiences.

**Resource Limitations.** Budget constraints significantly impact program delivery. IDI 4 stated: "A major resource limitation affecting the program is the budget. It is the most important to sustain the program." Limited funding affects facilities, staffing, and the ability to provide consistent services.

**Lack of Family and Community Support.** Family resistance and community opposition create barriers to successful reintegration. IDI 4 noted: "Sometimes, the family do not agree to rehabilitate their child or to send their child to an efficient process to make them better individuals."

**Behavioral and Emotional Adjustment.** Juvenile offenders face significant emotional challenges. IDI 4 observed: "Some children feel scared or embarrassed, afraid they might make mistakes again. These are what they usually feel after rehabilitation."

The findings reveal that Panabo City's reintegration program represents a comprehensive effort to operationalize national juvenile justice policies within local contexts. The alignment with Republic Act 9344 provides legal foundation while allowing flexibility for community-based adaptations. This approach reflects international best practices emphasizing rehabilitation over punishment (UNODC, 2013).

The multi-stakeholder collaboration model demonstrates recognition that juvenile rehabilitation requires coordinated efforts across legal, social welfare, educational, and community sectors. This aligns with Veloso's (2015) findings that successful juvenile justice systems require inter-agency coordination. However, the dependence on multiple agencies creates coordination challenges that can strain limited resources.

The needs-based, individualized intervention approach represents a significant strength, consistent with developmental systems theory which recognizes the unique circumstances affecting each child's trajectory. The three-year structured plan provides continuity while allowing flexibility for individual progress. This contrasts with one-size-fits-all approaches that fail to address diverse needs among youth offenders.

Resource limitations emerge as the most critical barrier, affecting all aspects of program delivery. This finding corroborates McCall et al. (2022) who identified similar constraints across Philippine child protection systems. Without adequate funding, even well-designed programs cannot achieve intended outcomes. The lack of facilities, trained personnel, and consistent programming undermines rehabilitation efforts.

Family and community resistance represents a complex social challenge requiring cultural shift beyond programmatic interventions. The stigma attached to juvenile offenders creates additional barriers to reintegration, as noted by Respicio (2021). This suggests need for community awareness campaigns and family engagement strategies to build supportive environments for youth reintegration.

The emotional and behavioral challenges faced by participants highlight the importance of trauma-informed approaches. Anderson (2019) and Williams and Harper (2020) emphasize that addressing psychological needs

is essential for preventing recidivism. The program's recognition of these needs represents progress, though implementation appears constrained by resource limitations.

## **Implications for Practice**

### **Strengthen Multi-agency Coordination**

Local governments should formalize coordination mechanisms through regular inter-agency meetings, shared databases, and integrated case management systems. Clear delineation of roles and responsibilities can reduce duplication while ensuring comprehensive service coverage.

Moreover, in the article of Tersona and Lagura (2025), it is stated that there should be a high level of servant leadership, with empowerment and stewardship as key strengths. This knowledge is especially important for those implementing the Panabo reintegration program. By stressing empowerment and stewardship, program leaders can create a supportive environment that improves reintegration efforts. However, the lower authenticity score indicates a potential area for development, implying that training programs should focus on improving authentic leadership attributes to improve program outcomes.

### **Enhance Resource Mobilization**

Alternative funding sources including private sector partnerships, national government grants, and international development assistance should be explored. Cost-sharing arrangements among agencies can maximize resource utilization.

### **Develop Community Engagement Strategies**

Systematic community awareness campaigns can reduce stigma and build support for reintegration. Family counseling programs and parent education initiatives can strengthen home environments for returning youth.

### **Invest in Capacity Building**

Regular training for program implementers on trauma-informed care, adolescent development, and evidencebased interventions can improve service quality. Professional development should address both technical skills and emotional support capabilities.

### **Implement Robust Monitoring Systems**

Standardized assessment tools, regular outcome tracking, and feedback mechanisms can inform program improvements. Data-driven decision-making ensures interventions remain responsive to changing needs.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study's focus on implementer perspectives provides valuable insights but lacks direct input from program participants and their families. Future research should incorporate youth voices to understand their experiences and needs. Longitudinal studies tracking participant outcomes over time would provide evidence of long-term program effectiveness.

The single-city focus limits generalizability, though detailed contextual description enables transferability assessment. Comparative studies across multiple localities could identify common challenges and successful strategies for broader application.

Future research should examine cost-effectiveness of different intervention components, optimal program duration, and factors predicting successful reintegration. Investigation of cultural factors influencing family and community acceptance would inform culturally responsive interventions.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that effective juvenile offender reintegration requires comprehensive, coordinated efforts that extend beyond punitive measures. Panabo City's program represents genuine commitment to

rehabilitation despite significant resource constraints and social barriers. The alignment with national policy provides legitimacy while community-based implementation allows local adaptation.

Success depends on sustained multi-stakeholder collaboration, adequate resource allocation, individualized interventions, and community acceptance. The challenges identified—particularly resource limitations and social stigma—require systemic solutions beyond program-level interventions.

The findings contribute to understanding how local governments can develop responsive juvenile justice systems balancing public safety with children's rights to rehabilitation. As juvenile crime continues challenging communities globally, Panabo City's experience offers valuable lessons for developing contexts facing similar constraints.

Ultimately, this research reinforces that reintegration is not merely a system but a human endeavor grounded in patience, care, and faith in young people's capacity for change. Investment in juvenile rehabilitation represents investment in community futures, breaking cycles of crime and creating pathways for productive citizenship.

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