Alternative Programs in Criminal Justice

Pre-Charge Dispositions
If a case is sent to a pre-charge program and the offender successfully completes the program, then the offender’s criminal record indicates no arraignment and no conviction.

Brattleboro Community Justice Center
This is known as “Justice Alternatives.” It is, generally, for first-time offenders and focuses on harm done. Victims are involved in the process, and the goal of the program is for offenders to take responsibility for the crime and understand its impact. The structure of the program varies and can include a Restorative Conference which is a facilitated. The offender must be willing to take responsibility, and there is a $50 fee.

Youth Services ~ CRAFT
This program is for repeat offenders who are charged with “low level” offenses (DC, RT, UT) and there is an indication of substance abuse. The offender must voluntarily agree to participate in the program and must be willing to engage in treatment. The offender signs a contract and agrees to a treatment plan drafted by community members and overseen by the PreTrial Monitor PTM). The PTM meets regularly with the offender for at least 120 days to check progress; if the offender is successful in the program and does not accumulate any new criminal charges, then there will be no arraignment and no conviction. There is no cost for this program.

Pre-Charge Screening
The pretrial monitor (PTM) will contact individuals arrested or cited for certain offenses and offer them the opportunity to participate in the voluntary pretrial Risk Assessment and a Needs Screening (mental health and substance abuse). The PTM will not discuss the current criminal case and the assessment cannot be used to prove guilt against the individual. If the case is filed in court, the judge may also use the Risk Assessment and Needs Screening in determining bail and condition of release orders. This screening process has no impact on whether or not a charge is filed (unless the PTM asks the WCSAO to put the case into CRAFT); the offender will still be charged, arraigned, and potentially convicted.

Post-Charge
After the WCSAO files a charge in court, there are programs which are outside the typical criminal justice system which may be offered.

Diversion
The Diversion Program at Youth Services is, generally, for first time offenders only. The offender must be willing to take responsibility, and a pre-acceptance meeting is always required. If accepted by Youth Services and the offender, then the offender will meet with a Diversion Board (5-8 community members) to explain the behavior, supply information about self, and receive a “contract” from the board (which may require community service, restitution, drug/alcohol assessment, and/or other education). If the offender completes the Diversion contract, then the criminal case is dismissed and, in two years, the entire offense may be expunged from the offender’s record. If the offender fails to complete the Diversion contract, then the case is automatically returned to criminal court for prosecution. There is a $175 fee for the program.
Brattleboro Community Justice Center

The “Reparative Panel program” is a community-based response to crime and may be offered to offenders with no convictions or several convictions – depending on the circumstances. Offenders meet with a Reparative Panel and victims (when possible). The emphasis in restorative justice is on the harm that has been created. Panels are comprised of 5 community members who work with the offender to develop and oversee the completion of mutually agreed upon activities intended to meet the goals of the program. Goals include learning about the impact the crime has on the victim and community, making amends, and learning ways to avoid re-offending. Participants typically meet with the panel once a month for four months. Victims, if they participate, may share their experience, ask questions, and explore reparations. An offender who participates in this program will have a conviction for the crime on their record. There is no fee for this program and, if the sentence is only reparative board, there are no court costs for the conviction.