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*Youth Opportunity Center  
A New Model to Deliver Shelter Care and Supportive Services*

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## **Executive Summary**

Prior to December of 2022, Marathon County Social Services utilized two agencies, Marathon County Sheriff's Office, and PSG, to deliver "Shelter Care" and "Report Center" services to youth", both of which were funded in large part by Marathon County tax levy. Shelter Care provided accountability for youth through consequential out of home placement, whereas the report center provided services for youth such as educational groups, community service work, homework assistance, and social skills development.

Following the closure of the Youth Shelter facility, a portion of the funds previously allocated to the Sheriff's Office to support operations was transferred to the Department of Social Services to support an alternative delivery model for Shelter Care-like services for youth under court orders. After considerable investigation into various models to deliver these services, including the release of a formal request for proposals, the Department of Social Services will be implementing a pilot program, The Youth Opportunity Center in 2024. This program will aim to address the gap left by the closure of the Youth Shelter facility as well as the discontinuation of programming through PSG's report center.

This white paper outlines the service model transition from the traditional model of shelter care for at-risk youth in Marathon County to the re-integration of accountability and prevention services through the establishment of the Youth Opportunity Center.

## **Background**

Marathon County, like many counties, faces the challenge of providing the most beneficial support for at-risk youth who require additional supervision and guidance. Traditional shelter care models can be financially burdensome and do not consistently provide optimal solutions. Additionally, the capacity of accountability and development services in meeting the diverse needs of these youth is often constrained. The Youth Opportunity Center aims to address this issue by offering an individualized and cost-effective alternative.

The Youth Opportunity Center is designed to provide a safe and nurturing environment, that is accountability focused. This program will serve moderate to high-risk youth aged 12-17, providing positive behavioral change opportunities and personal growth resources. This proposal seeks to address the increasing need for alternative care models that avoid costly out-of-home placements, prioritize connection and family involvement, and offer cost-effective solutions with enhanced oversight. In alignment with the Federal Policy of Families First, our endeavor is to proactively address the evolving needs of families and youth within the community.

## **Youth Opportunity Center Overview**

The Youth Opportunity Center will focus on the following key objectives:

1. **Safe and Nurturing Environment:** Provide a secure and caring environment where youth can feel safe and supported in their journey toward rehabilitation and personal development.

2. **Accountability:** Emphasize personal accountability and responsibility through structured daily programs and activities.
3. **Positive Behavioral Change:** Promote positive behavioral change through mentorship, skill development, and targeted interventions based on Youth Assessment & Screening Instrument (YASI) assessments.
4. **Personal Growth/Education:** Offer resources and opportunities for personal growth, education, and skill-building. The Youth Opportunity Center aims to support the educational needs of participating youth by fostering a conducive environment that prioritizes academic growth and regular school attendance. This objective aligns with promoting educational success and reducing truancy among enrolled youth.
5. **Family Involvement:** Facilitate family meetings and involvement when appropriate to ensure that the individualized needs of each youth and family are addressed within a structured and supportive environment.
6. **Community Engagement:** Encourage community service projects, teach practical skills, provide educational resources, and offer activities in music, arts, and pro-social recreation to foster engagement and personal development.

## **Capacity**

The Youth Opportunity Center is designed to accommodate a maximum of 10 youths concurrently, thereby allowing a tailored and intensive approach to their developmental and well-being needs. The capacity is based on a comprehensive evaluation of the youth population within the purview of Youth Justice, spanning the past two years, identifying individuals who could potentially derive benefit from the services offered by the Youth Opportunity Center. Moreover, staff examined historical data, specifically focusing on unduplicated youth placed at the shelter home and those who have availed services from the report center.

## **Program Structure**

Youth may be court-ordered to attend the Youth Opportunity Center daily, Monday through Friday, to instill accountability and provide a structured routine. By focusing on accountability, mentorship, skill development, informal education support, and personalized interventions based on YASI assessments, the Youth Opportunity Center has the potential to yield more effective and lasting behavioral changes in the youth it serves, reducing the likelihood of reoffending.

## **How does this fit within the continuum of care we currently have:**

The Youth Opportunity Center offers a distinct approach to addressing the needs of at-risk youth in Marathon County. The Youth Opportunity Center service delivery model is a departure from the more traditional model of shelter care service delivery and sanctions; focusing on accountability, mentorship, skill development, and individualized programming based on the YASI. This personalized approach sets it apart from existing program delivery models in the county and offers a proactive solution, striving to minimize the need for costlier and more disruptive measures. Presently, there is no comparable service delivery model available within Marathon County or the surrounding area that offers the comprehensive blend of structure, education, and connection that is envisioned to be provided by the Youth Opportunity Center.

The implementation of the Youth Opportunity Center fills a gap following the aforementioned closures in available services for at-risk youth and would leverage collaboration with various stakeholders to enhance its effectiveness and overall impact. Through this initiative, the county aims to provide an unparalleled level of structure, supervision, education, and community connection to empower and uplift its vulnerable youth population, while simultaneously reducing the necessity for out-of-home placements or maintaining youth in low level placements within our community.

### **Partnership with NCHC and Positive Alternatives Group Home:**

The Youth Opportunity Center has the potential to significantly complement and enhance existing services provided by collaborating partners, such as North Central Health Care (NCHC) and Positive Alternatives, for youth who may benefit from additional supervision, structured activities, and specialized support.

In collaboration with our NCHC partners, the Youth Opportunity Center could provide additional supervision and structured programming for youth who may receive youth Comprehensive Community Support (CCS) services through NCHC in conjunction with Youth Justice. This supplementary support enhances the existing services, ensuring a more comprehensive and well-rounded approach to meeting the needs of these youth. The Youth Opportunity Center can provide a structured environment that complements mental health interventions, fostering personal growth, and reinforcing positive behaviors learned through CCS services.

For youth currently in the group home setting who may complete an alternative school day or have unstructured days, the Youth Opportunity Center can break up their routine by offering structured activities. This arrangement supplements their day, providing an opportunity for delivering complimentary services, skill-building, and engagement while addressing gaps in their schedule, which can at times lead to higher levels of care to provide the daytime supervision that is needed.

### **Supporting Biological and Foster Families:**

The Youth Opportunity Center can offer support to families whose youth require supervision due to challenging behaviors. By providing a structured and supervised environment, it assists biological and foster families facing difficulties in managing the behavioral needs of youth without necessitating placement outside of the home or in higher levels of care, which would be more costly.

The Youth Opportunity Center will complement and extend the services of existing organizations, like NCHC and Positive Alternatives. By providing additional supervision, structured activities, and specialized support, the YOC will enhance the continuum of care for youth receiving services from these organizations. This approach aids in addressing the multifaceted needs of at-risk youth and their families while reinforcing positive behaviors, and personal growth within a structured and supportive environment.

### **Staffing Structure:**

Staffing a youth center open from 10 am to 6 pm, Monday through Friday, requires careful planning to ensure adequate coverage and a positive environment for the youth. Staffing would be provided as follows:

### **Roles and Responsibilities:**

- **Lead Youth Justice Social Worker:** The lead MCDSS Youth Justice Social Worker will be responsible to oversee the daily operations, plan activities, and manage staff, reporting back to the Youth Justice Supervisor and Child Welfare Manager.
- **2 LTE Youth Workers:** MCDSS will hire 2 LTE youth workers, who will interact directly with the youth, provide guidance, and organize and lead activities.
- **Maintenance/Janitorial Staff:** The facility is currently maintained due to other functions in the building by county facility staff. Primary cleaning of the Youth Opportunity Center will be done by the Youth Opportunity Center staff and youth, aiding in learning the responsibility of safe and sanitary environments and responsibility for your own environment. Costs for cleaning supplies is covered in the grant received.

### **Staffing:**

- **Lead Youth Justice Social Worker:** This worker is already employed with DSS and would receive an additional \$1 per hour, consistent with our lead worker policy. The additional dollar an hour totals \$2,080.00 and funds to pay this come directly from the grant dollars received. Should the Youth Opportunity Center no longer be a running program in Marathon County, the lead worker position would dissolve.
- **2 FTE LTE youth workers:** These staff will be primarily assigned to the center Mon-Fri 10 am-6 pm. The rate of pay for these two staff is projected to be \$176,980 (salary+benefits) annually. The cost is covered by the funds transferred to DSS from the Sheriff's Office to secure shelter-like services.
- During peak hours or as needed to manage behaviors, an additional staff (current DSS social worker) will be assigned to assist at the Youth Opportunity Center to handle increased traffic and youth/family needs. This does not result in additional costs to the department.
- DSS Youth Justice Social Workers will be utilized as substitute staff to cover absences or unexpected needs.
- **Interns/Volunteers/Community Partners:** Interns as well as community partners and volunteers will be utilized for support and to provide educational and community opportunities to the youth.
- The Lead Youth Justice Social Worker will complete periodic reviews of the staffing model based on feedback, attendance patterns, and program success to determine if modifications are needed.

### **Employee Training and Development:**

- Youth Opportunity Center workers will be provided training on working with youth, conflict resolution, first aid, safety protocols, emergency procedures and other specialized skills necessary for the job.

### **Operations Plan – facility and non-personnel costs.**

- The Youth Opportunity Center will operate out of the vacant shelter space which is owned by Marathon County. The secure detention facility is connected to this building and therefore the space is already being maintained.
- Costs associated with the Youth Opportunity Center are covered by 2 primary funding sources: (1) Tax levy (\$322,925) transferred to the Department of Social Services from the Sheriff Office, intended to fund alternative shelter care and support services to high needs youth within our community and (2) Youth innovation grant funding dollars received.

### **Cost and benefit analysis:**

#### **Historical Service Model Delivery Cost**

- Shelter Home operation by Sheriff's Office – approximately \$500,000 annually
- Report Center contract – approximately \$120,000 annually
- Historical Total – approximately \$620,000 annually
- Projected Annual cost under Youth Opportunity Center model - \$312,630.

**Funding Sustainability:** It is important to note that the Youth Opportunity Center Pilot Program does not seek additional tax levy funds. Instead, the program leverages funds already allocated to the Department of Social Services. As part of piloting this delivery model, staff will also evaluate the opportunity to incorporate Youth Opportunity Center services into the CCS plans for individual qualifying youth, which could further reduce operational costs and enhance sustainability.

**Alleviating costs to Families:** A significant aspect of the Youth Opportunity Center is its potential to alleviate financial burdens on families. Traditional shelter care and secure detention often come with associated costs for families, most notably placement fees. Under the revised delivery model, the financial burdens on families will be reduced or eliminated.

**Non-fiscal Impacts:** The nature of this service delivery model suggests improved outcomes for youth and families. Family meetings and family engagement are core components of the program, which should strengthen family bonds, help youth remain in or reintegrate into their communities, and provide a more holistic support system. Should the pilot of this delivery model prove successful using the Key Performance Indicators below and it be continued, further consideration of long-term success measures may be valuable.

**Alternative Strategy to Increasing Level of Placement:** The Youth Opportunity Center's service delivery model may serve as an alternative strategy to address supervision concerns that might otherwise result in a youth being moved to a higher level, more costly, placement. The average cost of care in a group home is \$367.39 per day. If the Youth Opportunity Center prevents two children from requiring this level of care, it would equate to a cost savings of \$267,910, annually. Similarly, preventing two youth from requiring residential level care for a year translates to a savings of \$448,161.60, annually.

**Internal v. External Delivery Model:** Internal program management to begin the pilot program allows for better control over costs, allocation of resources, and financial oversight. The

Department of Social Services did complete an RFP process to determine if a contracted provider was available to run this type of alternative service model. The cost proposed by the external provider to deliver services under this alternative model was \$411,506.00, not including space/location costs. After due consideration, staff believe we can more effectively manage costs of this delivery model with internal staff. Moreover, by adopting an interval service delivery model, we believe we can more closely monitor progress, adapt to changing circumstances, and maintain a stronger connection with youth, families, and community partners, ultimately delivering better results for all stakeholders. The total dollar amount estimated to run the Youth Opportunity Center from March 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024, including start-up costs, staffing, and supply needs is projected to be \$260,525.00 of which all is currently budgeted.

### **Program Objectives - Key Performance Indicators and Success Metrics**

During its pilot phase, the delivery model will undergo a comprehensive evaluation process aimed at assessing its effectiveness, impact, and adherence to outlined objectives. The evaluation will focus on key performance indicators (KPIs), described below, including measures related to safety, accountability, behavioral change, family and community support, rehabilitation outcomes, and prevention of out-of-home placements. Monthly reports detailing program activities, participant progress, challenges, and achievements will be submitted to the Child Welfare Manager and Director for continuous oversight and assessment. Additionally, quarterly reports will be presented to the Social Services Board. At year-end, a report will be presented to the County Board, summarizing the outcomes, successes, challenges, and future recommendations.

As referenced above, should the delivery model pilot be successful and the model continued, additional assessment of long-term outcomes may be valuable. The youth receiving services via this delivery model often come from complex backgrounds with various challenges, including behavioral issues, trauma, and social difficulties. Behavioral change and personal growth in these individuals typically necessitate a comprehensive and sustained approach, which may take time to observe given the need for building trust, establishing new habits, and fostering positive relationships within a structured environment. Similarly, the center's effectiveness in preventing out-of-home placements and reducing recidivism rates may require a considerable period to demonstrate tangible results due to the complexity of the issues being addressed and the individualized nature of the interventions provided.

#### 1. Accountability

- **KPI:** At least 80% of the youth will engage in daily programs and activities.

#### 2. Positive Behavioral Change

- **KPI:** Reduction in risk factors and increase in protective capacities of youth and caregivers as measured by the YASI.

#### 3. Personal Growth/Comprehensive Development:

- **KPI:** Youth report feeling supported, valued, and nurtured to acquire new skills within the Youth Opportunity Center environment, as well as key stakeholders in the youth's life identifying areas of personal growth in the youth.

#### 4. Family Engagement

- **KPI:** Of youth who are ordered to attend the Youth Opportunity Center, at least 50% of those youth's families/support network will be attend Youth Opportunity Center related activities, including family meetings, or participating in program-related events.

#### 5. Evaluate the Impact on Reduced Recidivism Rates

- **KPI:** Regularly monitor and analyze the relationship between the duration of Youth Opportunity Center participation and subsequent recidivism incidents.

#### **Conclusion:**

The establishment of the Youth Opportunity Center in Marathon County represents a forward-thinking model to deliver services to at-risk youth in a cost-effective, family and community centered, and accountable manner.

# Youth Opportunity Center



A New Model to Deliver  
Shelter Care  
and Supportive Services



# Service Model Approach



## Traditional Shelter:

Expensive

No Programming/Skill development

Sanctions and Out of home placement



## Service Model Change Approach:

Cost-effective alternative

Accountability, Mentorship, Skill development, targeted interventions based on YASI assessment.

No out of home placement- youth returns home every day.

# Empowering Futures

Federal  
Families First  
Prevention  
Services Act

Comprehensive  
blend of  
accountability,  
structure,  
education, and  
connection

Seeks to  
collaborate  
with various  
stakeholders  
to enhance its  
effectiveness  
and overall  
impact.

Minimize the  
need for  
costlier and  
more  
disruptive  
measures.

# Streamlining Operations: Service Closure and Financial Reallocation

## Oct 2020

- Report Center services ended
  - provided services for youth such as educational groups, community service work, homework assistance, and social skills development.

## Dec. 2022

- Marathon County Shelter facility closed.
  - Utilized for short term placement needs for transitions and consequence, where no programming was provided

## 2023

- County board transferred a portion of the funds to DSS to provide an alternative to shelter care.
  - \$322,925 is the total dollar amount available from tax levy for an alternative shelter model

# Who does this serve?

## Who:

- 12–17-year-old youth, in the Youth Justice system, who are moderate and high-risk according to their YASI assessment, who are:
  - Not abiding by their court ordered conditions
  - Require a higher level of accountability
  - Require additional supervision to maintain in their home environment
  - Require additional supervision to maintain a lower level of placement (foster home)

## How Many:

- Up to 10 Marathon County youth at a time
  - allows for appropriate supervision and a personalized and intensive approach to meet their needs.

## When:

- Court Ordered
- Monday – Friday 10am-6pm

# Collaboration and Enhancement of continuum of care

## Biological and Foster Families

- Assists families facing difficulties in managing the behavioral needs of their youth without having them placed outside of the home or in higher levels of care and more costly settings.

## NCHC – CCS Services

- Additional supervision and structured programming for youth who may receive youth Comprehensive Community Support (CCS) services through NCHC in conjunction with Youth Justice.
- Provide a structured environment that complements mental health interventions, fostering personal growth, and reinforcing positive behaviors learned through CCS services.

## Positive Alternatives Group Home

- Additional services, skill-building, and engagement while addressing gaps in their schedule, which can at times lead to higher levels of care to provide the daytime supervision that is needed.

# Program Objectives – Key Performance Indicators

## 1. Accountability

- At least 80% of the youth will engage in daily programs and activities.

## 2. Positive Behavioral Change

- Reduction in risk factors and protective capacities of youth and caregivers.

## 3. Personal Growth/Comprehensive Development:

- Youth identify feeling supported, valued, and nurtured to acquire new skills within the YOC environment, as well as key stakeholders in the youth's life identifying areas of personal growth in the youth.

## 4. Family Engagement

- Of youth who are ordered to attend the YOC, at least 50% of those youth's families/support network will be actively involved in YOC-related activities, including attending family meetings, or participating in program-related events.

## 5. Evaluate the Impact on Reduced Recidivism Rates

- Regularly monitor and analyze the relationship between the duration of YOC participation and subsequent recidivism incidents.

# Financial Impact and Sustainability

## Historical Service Model Delivery Cost

- Shelter Home operation by Sheriff's Office: \$500,000 annually
- Report Center contract: \$120,000 annually
- Historical Total: \$620,000 annually

Projected Annual cost under Youth Opportunity Center model: \$312,630

## Funding Sustainability

- No additional tax levy funds are sought.
- Evaluation of incorporating Youth Opportunity Center services into CCS plans for individual qualifying youth may further reduce operational costs.

# Financial Impact and Sustainability

## Internal v. External Delivery Model

- An external provider proposed a cost of \$411,506.00; internal management estimated at \$260,525.00 (March 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024, including start-up costs, staffing, and supplies)

## May prevent higher-level placements, resulting in significant cost savings.

- Prevention of group home placement: \$267,910 (2 youth, annually)
- Prevention of residential level care: \$448,161.60 (2 youth, annually)

## Alleviating Costs to Families

- Traditional shelter care and secure detention often incur costs for families, including placement fees.

## Non-fiscal Impacts

- Improved outcomes for youth and families.
- Strengthens family bonds and facilitates community reintegration.



# Operations Plan



## Staffing/Volunteers

Lead YJ Social Worker  
2 FTE-LTE staff  
DSS Social Workers  
Interns/Volunteers/  
Community Partners



## 2 primary funding sources

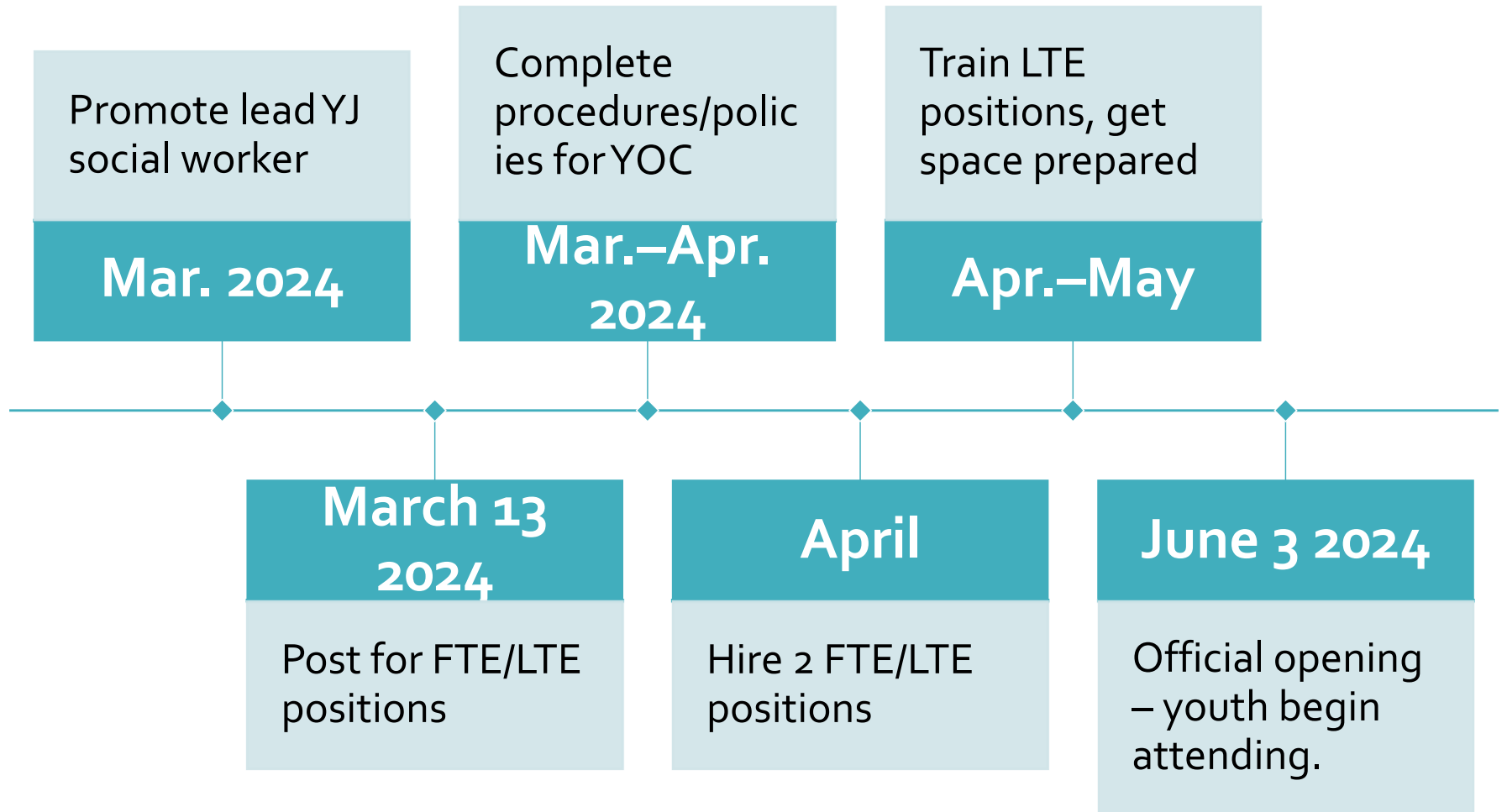
Tax levy monies that were transferred to the Department of Social Services  
Youth innovation grant funding



## Location

Current vacant shelter facility.

# Implementation Plan





# THANK YOU

Share Ideas and Connections!  
Christa Jensen – Director  
Mike Nelson – Child Welfare Manager  
Becky Bogen- Youth Justice Supervisor

