



ADVOCASEY

DOCUMENTING PROGRAMS THAT WORK FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES

A PUBLICATION OF THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

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VOLUME ONE

NUMBER THREE

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PAGE 2: REFORMING CHILD WELFARE

By Douglas W. Nelson

There is perhaps no more difficult social enterprise than making wise decisions about helping children who have been abused and neglected. At a minimum, child welfare professionals are responsible for removing kids from harm's way, deciding when they can return home safely, and, if that is not possible, placing them in a permanent new family. While making these life-altering decisions, child welfare systems must provide kids who have been traumatized — both by family crisis and by removal from their homes — with safe and stable foster care. Moreover, federal legislation, good practice, and the best interests of children demand that all of these steps be taken with all deliberate speed.

Not surprisingly, child welfare agencies sometimes make bad decisions — an admission that does not excuse negligence or incompetence, but does acknowledge such daunting challenges as assessing the strengths and limitations of families, the potential of individuals and families to change (for better or for worse), and the nature of individual parent-child relations. Data to inform these assessments are invariably incomplete, and social workers — often insufficiently trained or rewarded for their responsibilities — operate in an environment of vast demand for services, finite public resources, and limited communication with other public and private agencies serving vulnerable children and families.

Despite the inherent difficulty of child welfare work, there is a growing body of evidence that we can do a better job of protecting kids, strengthening their families, and expeditiously moving children toward permanence — generally reunification or adoption. In the Spring 1999 issue of *ADVOCASEY*, for example, we featured a story on Iowa's statewide effort to devolve child welfare resources, decision-making authority, and accountability to the community level.

The results of this “Decategorization” project included the local development of innovative prevention and treatment services, which in turn led to improved outcomes for children and families.

The current issue of *ADVOCASEY* begins with a report on two sites that participated in Family to Family, a Casey Foundation initiative to reform child welfare systems. In Cleveland, Family to Family made remarkable progress in recruiting foster parents in the neighborhoods where at-risk children live. A key feature of the initiative is that foster families are trained to become a resource for and a partner with birth parents — working to assure that birth families remain constructively connected with their kids and, where possible, are prepared for a safe reunification.

CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES WILL NEVER ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS AS LONG AS THEY SEEK TO DO SO ALONE — AS AN INDEPENDENT SYSTEM ISOLATED FROM GENUINE PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILIES, KIN, NEIGHBORHOODS, PRIVATE AGENCIES, AND OTHER HUMAN SERVICE SYSTEMS.

The Family to Family effort in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, achieved dramatic results at the front end of the child welfare system through sharp reductions in the number of children placed in care. By providing flexible and responsive in-home treatment

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and support services, Family to Family has sought to provide fragile families with the services they need most, when they need them most.

For the relatively small number of children who have little likelihood of reunification or adoption — generally older kids who often require intensive services — long-term family foster care is frequently the best option. Unlike most large philanthropies, the Annie E. Casey Foundation has a direct-service arm, called Casey Family Services, that provides such care and other child welfare services. This issue's report on a recent follow-up study of young people served by Casey's foster care program documents the importance of stability, continuity of care, and individualized support in assisting young people in the transition from adolescent custody to independent young adulthood.

Perhaps the most durable theme to emerge from these stories and the Casey Foundation's longstanding efforts to improve public systems serving disadvantaged children and families is this: Child welfare agencies will never achieve their goals as long as they seek to do so alone — as an independent system isolated from genuine partnerships with families, kin, neighborhoods, private agencies, and other human service systems. Although this new way of doing business has not been successful everywhere, nor wholly successful anywhere, many communities and states taking this difficult path have made enormous strides.

Douglas W. Nelson is the president of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and head of New York City's Special Child Welfare Advisory Panel.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, one of the founders of United Parcel Service, and his siblings, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother.

MORE FOSTER FAMILIES, FEWER CHILDREN

By Patrice Pascual

“What do they look like, the people who hurt their kids?” Joyce Wattlington asks a group of ten or so prospective foster parents gathered in a Cleveland neighborhood. Wattlington is a Cuyahoga County social work supervisor and the creator of “Foster Aware Parties,” a kind of snacks-and-sodas gathering modeled after Tupperware parties. But instead of plastic cups and measuring bowls, the topic here is troubled neighborhood families.

Like a smart game show host, Wattlington knows where the answers will lead, and she has a plant in the audience. At their previous meeting, the group spilled their thoughts about why kids end up in foster care, shaking their heads while sharing stories of parents gone wrong. Some admitted the child protection system has brushed their own families — a jailed cousin lost his kids, or a friend is raising the children of her drug-addicted daughter. But those people were familiar, and it was easy to see they were headed for trouble.

This time, they look around self-consciously — everyone seems so solid, is there really a failed parent among them? Then a lone person — someone who blends with the crowd but once lost her kids to the government — stands to tell her story. It’s like testifying in church. She tells of evil habits, then a transformation, and finally redemption as she regained the custody of her children. She had to work hard for that privilege, and her listeners know it.

Prospective foster parents have lots of questions, and the birth parent, who is paid \$50 to share her story, can refuse to answer any that cut too deep. The exchange is intended to teach potential foster parents to respect a birth parent before they take charge of someone else’s child. Since foster parents in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, are expected to work with birth parents, they better face up to their feelings now.

Forty-five minutes later, the meeting breaks. Instead of getting snacks, participants use the time to swarm the birth parent. “People just want to touch her,” Wattlington says, “and tell her how proud they are” of the way she’s turned her life around.

The recruitment and training of foster care families in Cuyahoga County has been in overdrive for the past four years, and though hundreds of people attend these orientations each year, administrator Terri Ali says “there’s never a dry eye in the house” when a birth parent shares her story. Bucking every trend, Cuyahoga increased its number of neighborhood foster homes from 501 in 1992 to 790 in 1997. That’s a lot of tears.



While the prodigal parent creates a powerful image, Ali and Wattlington argue that something more profound is happening in these gatherings, something that can benefit the lives of hundreds of thousands of foster kids across the country. The two social workers are adherents of “Family to Family,” a national child welfare reform movement spearheaded by the Annie E.

ENTERING CARE

Casey Foundation. It is built on the idea that local relationships and community support can help keep families together, and provide more stability for those children who ultimately need a home apart from their parents. Family to Family principles support the job that government must do in protecting children and enforcing laws, but hold little faith that overtaxed institutions can solve complex family problems. The initiative incorporates years of critical thinking and



data analysis on the more than 500,000 American kids in foster care — two-thirds of whom are black or Hispanic, nearly 45 percent of whom enter care as babies or toddlers, and nearly all of whom are neglected rather than abused.

The report that follows looks at foster care reform in Cuyahoga County and Anne Arundel County,

Maryland, another jurisdiction where Family to Family principles have taken root. “Experience in Family to Family suggests that achieving enduring reform in the child welfare system is difficult, but can be accomplished,” concluded independent evaluators from the Research Triangle Institute and the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina.

From Crisis, Opportunity

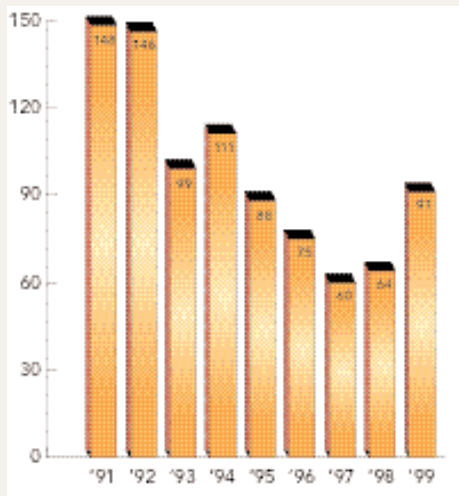
During the planning of Family to Family in the early 1990s, the Casey Foundation, together with community leaders and child welfare professionals nationwide, focused on the biggest challenges in protecting children and supporting families: the number of children at risk of abuse and neglect was growing; the supply of foster families was critically low and dropping; foster kids were isolated, housed far from familiar schools, churches, and friends; birth parents weren’t receiving needed or promised services; neighborhoods didn’t trust social workers or administrators who only visited during crises; and beleaguered agencies couldn’t measure the effectiveness of their own efforts.

“There was a basic sense of what wasn’t working,” recalls John Mattingly, a senior associate at the Casey Foundation and Family to Family’s initiative manager. “The large caseloads, enormous cynicism, short life-span of agency leaders. It leaves everyone feeling, ‘This agency doesn’t care.’”

For much of the 1970s and ’80s, the demand for foster care exploded as cheap drugs, recession, and crumbling cities pounded away at urban family life. Systems were awash with cases. Everywhere, foster care seemed out of control.

In 1980 Congress passed the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act, declaring “family reunification” the goal for most kids in care. The intentions were good — birth parents would receive well-orchestrated social services and earn back the custody of their kids. But states were left with troublingly broad mandates, and the law’s commitment to responsible reunification of children and families turned out to be more rhetoric than reality.

BY THE NUMBERS

FEWER CHILDREN ENTERING
OUT-OF-HOME CARE IN
ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY

In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, the number of children entering out-of-home care decreased by 39 percent between 1991 and 1999.

Source: Anne Arundel County Department of Social Services

Services for birth parents — including drug treatment and family counseling — faced continuous funding cuts, particularly at the federal level. A five-year study detailed in the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* found that 57 percent of reported children who were kept out of foster care — under the hollow expectation that their families would receive comprehensive social services — were harmed again. Congressional Quarterly reported that in 1981, the ratio of spending on foster care to other child welfare services was 2 to 1. By 1992, the ratio was 8 to 1. For years, kids languished in “emergency” care.

What was clearly needed, says Mattingly, “was a dramatic change in child welfare systems,” a goal that might sound laughable to anyone who has looked

closely at the many programs, agencies, and personalities that drive child welfare from one jurisdiction to the next. But Mattingly, a former executive director of Children’s Services in Lucas County, Ohio, and currently a member of New York City’s Special Child Welfare Advisory Panel, has done that work, and he’s not laughing.

Principle Meets Practice

In 1992 the Casey Foundation launched Family to Family as a pilot program in five states: Alabama, Maryland, New Mexico, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. Over three years, each site received grants of \$2.5 million to develop networks of foster homes in the very neighborhoods where children were being removed. Social workers would be trained to know and cultivate the neighborhood’s local support systems, often churches and school programs, and thus avoid taking children from their homes unless it was truly necessary. The goal for children who were removed would be to place them in permanent and stable homes as soon as possible, with outside adoption only sought when family reunification was deemed impossible.

The approach appealed to Judith Goodhand, executive director of the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services from 1992 to 1998. Like many child welfare administrators, she took over the agency after the ugly departure of its former director. The department, which serves 6,000 children in Cleveland and surrounding towns, was being threatened with an ACLU lawsuit for case mismanagement, and there had been “tremendous” worker turnover. Family to Family’s strategies — for working with birth parents, building support for front-line workers, and shortening children’s lengths of stay — addressed real problems facing her agency and offered a sense of hope.

“It wasn’t new, radical stuff,” Goodhand recalls thinking when she heard of Family to Family, but “when you have a demoralized agency, you have to give people a vision of what can be.”

The Role of Data

The Casey Foundation provided funding that enabled Lynn Usher, professor of public welfare and administration at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, to build evaluation into every aspect of the initiative, providing Goodhand and other Family to Family grantees with 21st century tools for measuring caseloads, outcomes, and other child welfare data. State agencies, perpetually in trouble with Congress and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for being unable to count the kids in care, generally measure their foster care population with a “snapshot,” says Usher. Such a snapshot can tell you who is in care at the moment, but it misses the children who pass through the system quickly and overrepresents those in care the longest. “This isn’t to minimize the fact that there are too many children who have long lengths of stay,” Usher says, but not knowing their caseload prevents administrators from making good decisions.

For Ohio’s Terri Ali, caseload data became a way to show potential neighborhood partners that community child protection could pay off in unexpected

that,” Ali said. “But every time you move a school-age child from home and that child goes to a different school, the resources go with that child.”

In Anne Arundel County, Maryland, where caseworkers and supervisors can simultaneously review a child’s case history from different computers, child welfare director Ed Bloom holds conference calls to ask tough questions about placement decisions for children and families in crisis. It’s often late in the day, and everyone is exhausted and tense. Still Bloom asks, have all efforts been made to place the child with a caring family member instead of an outside family?

In one case, Bloom recalls, “supposedly the father had never seen the child, and mom was incarcerated. ‘Well, how did she support herself?’ ” Bloom asked the caseworker. A check of child support records, maintained by another department, showed that the child’s father had paid support fully and on time; he could take custody. Technology is helping departments to stay true to Family to Family principles, and make the extra effort to rely on families first.

Successfully implementing Family to Family also requires coordination among various agencies that



ways. When she sat down with a public school superintendent, data revealed that when children were removed from their home and neighborhood, local schools took a financial hit. “We just didn’t think of

FAMILY TO FAMILY IS BUILT ON THE IDEA THAT LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT CAN HELP KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER, AND PROVIDE MORE STABILITY FOR THOSE CHILDREN WHO ULTIMATELY NEED A HOME APART FROM THEIR PARENTS.

often have poor histories of sharing information. “There’s a lack of respect [for child welfare work] on the part of other agencies — from juvenile justice, mental health,” says Bloom. Judith Goodhand agrees:

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WHAT DATA CAN DO

"YOU HAVEN'T SEEN OUR NAME IN THE PAPER MUCH," says Larry Houseman, assistant director of administration for Anne Arundel County's child welfare agency. Since child welfare coverage typically means tales of horrific suffering or worker incompetence, staying out of the paper is no small accomplishment. But it's more than luck, argues Houseman. Each month, 400 or so referrals are screened by intake workers, 200-plus investigations are put in motion, and that work, plus much more, is rigorously tracked in a computerized database. Technology has made the casework transparent. It would be very difficult for a kid in this county to fall through the cracks.

While child welfare director Ed Bloom was computerizing casework early on, Family to Family pushed its application to new heights. Just as Family to Family requires that people who rarely work together in traditional foster care — say birth parents and foster parents — form a team in support of a child, so it demands cooperation among other initially awkward partners: information technology staff and social workers.

"We started with Casey in '93, and it took a year-and-a-half for me to understand what they were talking about," says out-of-home care coordinator Chris Seipp. "Program people don't think that way [about data]. Once we realized what kinds of information we had to capture ... we could talk about, 'Where are these kids? Where do they go?' That was real exciting."

With encouragement from Casey, Seipp and others worked with their agency's information technology staff to design reports that reveal case trends in real time. Seipp learned SPSS, a sophisticated statistical software that allows her to show caseworkers that the information they gather about kids and families doesn't just sit on a shelf. Intake workers even spend less time doing interviews, says systems analyst Gail Bozek, now that database forms are efficiently organized.

It was Seipp's good fortune that agency head Ed Bloom believes in the power of the microchip, and that Bozek and systems manager Steve Sandbank understand social work. A former caseworker, Sandbank says program knowledge is more valuable than all the "pretty code" an outside consultant could write. He's spent plenty of time with state

and federal contractors who are trying to create a one-size-fits-all child welfare database. Such projects seem to vanish into the ether.

This system is a far cry from the data-capturing efforts in most states, which are reported to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to generate federal statistics about kids in care. Because states aren't managing cases, they can afford to issue data reports three months in arrears. At the local level, that delay is unacceptably long — those numbers represent kids in crisis who need agency help.

Houseman adds that many agencies are "afraid to death of technology" and are happy to do no more data collection or analysis than what the states or the feds require. For a cost of about four percent of its child welfare budget, "we think we get a better return," he says.

A DATABASE TOUR

The first page begins, innocuously enough, by asking for the child's name, address, and birth date. Data field upon data field follow, the electronic questions become more insistent. Who is the child's mother? Who is making the complaint? Is this an emergency case? Once the questions are completed, a child will be entered in the county's child welfare database. It goes on record that someone — a teacher, a neighbor, an aunt — thinks this child is being neglected or abused.

If it's an emergency, the intake worker sends an urgent e-mail to the child protection staff and follows up with a phone call. If there's the possibility of sexual or serious physical abuse, medical staff at a 24-hour support center may receive an electronic alert too, as will police, who have an office on site. They can each access the database to see whether the child, or the person suspected of hurting him, has been reported before. And a quick check of available foster homes shows that, if necessary, the child can be placed in a home close to his school. All this can happen even before a child protection worker gets into his car.

And at the end of the day, the system will generate a letter to the complainant, telling them the disposition of their call. And Ed Bloom and his staff will be able to see every decision along the way. "Most organizations don't know where they are or where they're going," says Larry Houseman. "We know."

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“At the very heart of child protection is a child being hurt,” she says. And when it happens, especially when it hits the papers, there’s a tendency to point fingers: “Who screwed up — which agency?”

Creating New Relationships

A key Family to Family strategy is to create a child-centric team including foster parents, birth parents, social workers, and neighborhood support systems. Caseworkers, often beleaguered and egregiously underpaid, have to work closely with people they may not like — in particular, birth parents. “Some workers come in because they love kids,” says Dorothy Boyle of Anne Arundel. “It’s not that they love families.”

In traditional foster care, says Joyce Wattlington, “we act like that parent has simply stopped existing. It’s easier to take the kids than confront the parent.”

In Family to Family, caseworkers learn to build the relationship between foster and birth parents on the child’s behalf. “Within the first week, you get the whole family team together and say, ‘We’re working toward reunification.’ It puts the biological parent immediately at ease,” says Anne Arundel case manager Camber Parker. Parker then has to send an emotionally

mixed message to the foster parent: “I continue to reiterate, ‘take care of the child as if he is your own, but then be really happy [when he is returned to his birth parent].’ ”

For foster parents who are anxious about the child’s well-being after reunification, the transition back to the birth families is difficult. “We want the child to go back home, but we worry many nights about their safety,” said Emily Pinkney, a therapeutic foster parent in Maryland. A “therapeutic” parent is trained to foster the most needy kids, and one of her wards, a 10-year-old girl, had to be rocked by Pinkney every day for an hour. “Where are they going get this?” Pinkney asks. “It really worries you.”

Foster parents might also be on the receiving end of a birth parent’s anger, which Joyce Wattlington says is often a cover for her shame. “Many times she is angry with you because you are doing her job.” But Wattlington says foster parents need to recognize that the child must see his birth parent given respect. “You’ve got to have that dialogue. If you don’t want to, you don’t need these kids in your home.”

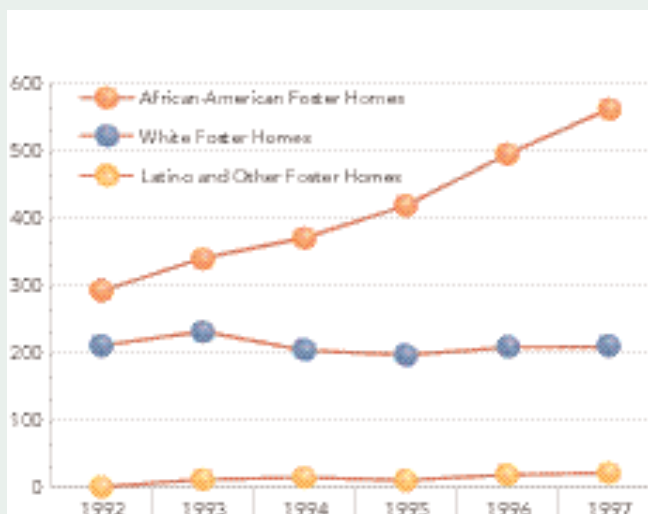
That faith in families gives hope to Gloria Hopkins.

BY THE NUMBERS

MORE FOSTER FAMILIES FOR CUYAHOGA COUNTY

Between 1992 and 1997, the total number of licensed foster homes in Cuyahoga County increased by 58 percent — from 501 to 790.

Source: Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services



Gloria's Story

Hopkins gave birth her now 6-year-old son, Sied, on her way out of prison. She was in for drugs, and had a 15-year habit by the time she was 30 years old. She couldn't find housing — the HUD list was miles long — and her parents already had custody of her older boy, who was 8.

A friend of a friend in jail was willing to take the baby, which sounded like a good idea. When Hopkins was released, she visited him on and off for a while, but the visits trailed off when he was a toddler, and Hopkins began to feel she had little to offer him. Fast forward to last spring, when Sied was 5. Hopkins got a call saying her boy had been neglected, sexually abused, and left alone in the dark for days by his caretaker. Social workers tracked her down through child support payments, which she made from her job assembling cable components. And because Family to Family was in place, Gloria Hopkins won the opportunity to become a mom. She swears she's ready.

"I have my own place now," she said. "I've been clean for six years." The judge overseeing Sied's case wouldn't let her waltz into his life, but Anne Arundel social worker Rachel Black put her in contact with the couple who took him into foster care. Hopkins won visiting rights, and takes her son to her home every weekend.

"When I first started to pick him up, I'd say, 'Can I do this? Can I do that?'" to the foster parents. "They said, 'You're his mom.'" She was amazed that she had any say in how her son was raised. "I didn't know it went like that." The parents even agreed on a punishment strategy for the 6-year-old: He is disciplined by sitting in the "naughty chair," not by being hit. Hopkins is proud to have thought up that approach.

Shared strategies and information make a child's life a lot easier, says Joyce Watlington. "The foster parent needs to know what kind of hair product to use, his lotion, the cereal he likes." It also gives the foster parent a chance to see the birth parent as caretaker, and the child to see many adults working together on his behalf.

Hopkins is waiting until the judge decides she can take full custody of her son. She's not sure how she feels about the latest change in federal law, the 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act that moves to terminate a parent's custody after a child has spent about a year in care. She wants other parents to have the chances she does, but knows it's hard for a child to wait around. She's glad to have Sied in her life. "He is smart and he forgives me," she said. "He doesn't want to leave me."

Growing Families

Foster care systems in Family to Family's pilot cities haven't found nirvana, and two pilot sites did not maintain the model after a change in leadership. But through evaluation data, Family to Family adherents say they can prove they are onto a better way to serve fragile kids and families. (The formal evaluation of Family to Family is online at www.unc.edu/lynnu/f2fintro.htm.) Like other child welfare programs, the agencies participating in Family to Family struggle with huge staff turnovers; they face the risk that a new director or governor will derail the new practices; and they work hard to retain trained foster parents who don't get enough support. They are also victims of their own success: A cut in caseloads almost certainly means cuts in an agency's future funding.

Judith Goodhand has left her post in Cleveland and is helping other agencies learn about Family to Family. Los Angeles has a pilot program under way; New York and others are interested. She cautions them all that Family to Family's success must be demonstrated to many stakeholders: community and neighborhood organizers and residents, political leaders, and related social welfare agencies. "As long as any reform stays within the walls of an agency, it's very fragile," she says.

That sounds like a good reason to get outside.

Patrice Pascual is deputy director of the Casey Journalism Center for Children and Families at the University of Maryland's College of Journalism.

FAMILY TO FAMILY TOOLS

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has developed a series of publications on the experiences of the Family to Family Initiative in rebuilding foster care. The intent of these Family to Family tools is to provide child welfare agencies with a successful model of foster care that is neighborhood based, family focused, and culturally sensitive. Written by child welfare administrators and other national experts, the 17 Family to Family tools are:

Recruitment, Training, and Support: The Essential Tools of Foster Care

The Need for Self-Evaluation: Using Data to Guide Policy and Practice

Strategic Communications: Media Relations for Child Welfare

Building Support for Innovation Inside Child Welfare Agencies

Building Community Partnerships in Child Welfare

Part One: Building Partnerships with Neighborhoods and Local Communities

Part Two: Team Decisionmaking: Involving the Family and Community in Child Welfare Decisions

Part Three: Walking our Talk in the Neighborhoods: Partnerships between Professionals and Natural Helpers

Part Four: People Helping People: Partnerships between Professionals and Natural Helpers

THE INTENT OF THE FAMILY TO FAMILY TOOLS IS TO PROVIDE CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES WITH A SUCCESSFUL MODEL OF FOSTER CARE THAT IS NEIGHBORHOOD BASED, FAMILY FOCUSED, AND CULTURALLY SENSITIVE.

The Challenge of Drug Abuse in Child Welfare

Part One: Back from the Brink: Women, Crack, and the Child Welfare System

Part Two: Working with Drug-Affected Families: Training for Child Welfare Workers

Part Three: START: A Child Welfare Model for Drug-Affected Families

Collaboration for Change

Part One: A Model for Public and Private Child Welfare Partnership

Part Two: Partnerships between Corrections and Child Welfare

Shortening Children's Stay in Temporary Care

Part One: Policies and Practice

Part Two: Innovative Programs

Building Support for Child Welfare's Frontline Workers

Part One: Safety First: Dealing with the Daily Challenges of Child Welfare

Part Two: The Resiliency Workshop: A Tool to Lessen Burnout in Child Welfare

The Casey Foundation has also produced two short booklets and a 12-minute video about the initiative. All of the tools and booklets are available online at <http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/tools.htm>. You may also call or write to:

Family to Family Initiative
The Annie E. Casey Foundation
701 St. Paul Street
Baltimore, MD 21202
Phone: 410.547.6600
Fax: 410.547.6624

THE GRADUATES

THE CASEY

By Kristin Coffey

“Mary”¹ was 13 years old when her father murdered her mother. The teen was placed with her older half-sister, who could not cope with the traumatized youth.

“George” was 12 when he was removed from his birth family because of abuse and neglect. Severely learning disabled, he spent much of his adolescence in a residential facility for troubled youth.

“Karen” was first placed in foster care at age 10. By the time she was 14, she had lived in three foster homes and a residential treatment center.

“Bob” had three “blown” foster home placements by age 14. He then spent the better part of two years in and out of psychiatric hospitals and shelters.

Failed by adults who were responsible for their care, these four young people have more in common than troubled childhoods and family instability. Overcoming long odds, each of the former foster kids is today a productive young adult. Mary, for example, recently graduated from college and teaches rock climbing and other outdoor skills. And George, now 24 and living on his own, holds two jobs — one in a hospital records department and the other as a medical dispatcher.

These young people also share another characteristic: Each found stable family foster care after their referral to Casey Family Services, the direct-service arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Currently offering a range of services to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect, Casey Family Services was established in 1976 to provide long-term foster care for children who had little likelihood of reunification with their birth families or adoption.²

To help assess the effectiveness of its long-term foster care, Casey Family Services recently completed

a follow-up study of youth who had been served by the program. Among the study’s key findings: Casey “alumni” have higher rates of high school completion and employment, and a lower rate of teen pregnancy than young people who participated in comparable studies of public and private foster care. The alumni study also affirmed some of the key principles of quality foster care. “When you look at how our youngsters are doing,” says Raymond Torres, executive director of Casey Family Services, “you find that stability, continuity of care, and individualized help have provided a positive experience for children who have been removed from their families of origin.”

“An Opportunity to Live Within a Family”

For a majority of the nation’s more than 500,000 children in out-of-home care, foster care is a temporary experience that lasts until they can return safely to their birth families. About one-quarter of these children return to their birth families within six months, and about two-thirds within two years. There are, however, many children in foster care who will neither be reunified with their families of origin nor adopted. These kids are generally older, often have had multiple placements, and frequently require more intensive services for emotional and behavioral disorders. For such children, long-term family foster care is often the best alternative.

“We try to provide these kids with an opportunity to live within a family,” says Maria Rodriguez-Immerman, director of the Bridgeport Division of Casey Family Services. “Even if the kids will never be adopted or go back home, at least they can benefit from the nurturing, the caring, the supervision, and the development of values and moral principles that happen when a child grows up in a family.”

Included in the Casey study were foster care alumni who met the following criteria: They were over the age of 18, had been with the agency for at least a year,

¹ Not her real name.

² For additional information about Casey Family Services, see its 1998 *At A Glance*, available without charge, or visit the agency’s Web site at www.caseyfamilyservices.org.



AMONG THE STUDY’S KEY FINDINGS: CASEY “ALUMNI” HAVE HIGHER RATES OF HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION AND EMPLOYMENT, AND A LOWER RATE OF TEEN PREGNANCY THAN YOUNG PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATED IN COMPARABLE STUDIES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE FOSTER CARE.

and had been out of care for at least a year. Of the 209 alumni who met these criteria, 161 were located and 115 agreed to participate. The results of the study were based on case histories, a written questionnaire, and face-to-face interviews. “We are a little restricted in what we can do from an analytic perspective, because the study has a limited sample size,” says Ben Kerman, research associate at Casey Family Services. “However, we still have a very rich database, and we are learning from the numbers and from what the alumni told us made a difference for them.”

Like many children served by public child welfare

systems, the Casey alumni entered care with “extensive special needs, disappointments, and hurts,” according to the study. In 86 percent of the cases, there was a family history of abuse and neglect, “which often began early and continued for lengthy periods of time.” Fifty percent of the children had medical problems, 42 percent performed poorly in school, and 24 percent had prenatal or neonatal problems. “You are talking about youngsters who started out life with some physical difficulties, some medical difficulties, and some difficulties engaging in school early on,” says Raymond Torres.

The adult development outcomes — “the ultimate gauge for success in Casey care,” in the words of the study — were encouraging. The rate of high school completion for Casey alumni was 73 percent, compared to 60 percent of children participating in other follow-up studies. Sixty-eight percent of the Casey alumni were working full time or part time, compared to 48 percent. And 68 percent of the alumni delayed parenting beyond the age of 23, compared to 40 percent. “We thought these three areas were significant,” says Raymond Torres. “If our youngsters are able to complete high school, find employment, and delay parenting, they are in a better position to move toward self-sufficiency.”

The study also found that Casey alumni were actively engaged in community activities. Eighty percent of the alumni interviewed had some informal community involvement — for example, participating in a neighborhood watch program. Moreover, 15 percent were regularly volunteering to serve in youth organizations, soup kitchens, and other community groups.

Another finding was that about three-quarters of the alumni said they felt “secure, nurtured, and challenged constructively” by their foster families and social workers. Such positive feelings are reflected in the exceptional 61 percent of Casey alumni who were still in contact with their former foster families. “Our

understanding,” says Raymond Torres, “is that nationally about 20 percent of youngsters who depart from foster care remain in contact with their foster parents.”

Of course, not every Casey placement is successful nor every child outcome positive. Twenty-nine percent of the Casey alumni reported that they had been arrested at least once since turning 18, compared with 32 percent of young people in comparable follow-up studies. Eleven percent of the alumni, according to the study, “said they used alcohol or drugs to help forget about their problems.”

Stability and Support

Children referred to Casey Family Services often have had multiple foster care placements, which can make them hardened and distrustful. In the alumni study, many of the youth reported that stable relationships with the same foster family and social worker made a substantial difference in their lives. “We try to promote stability in the foster home and stop the movement,” says Joy Duva, associate director of Planning and Policy for Casey Family Services. “This means providing a range of supports to both the foster parents and the child.”

The supports include comprehensive training for foster parents, frequent meetings with a social worker to discuss issues and progress, respite care that provides occasional relief from the demands of foster parenting, contact with other foster families for mutual support, and conferences to increase knowledge and skills in raising children with special needs. “Casey has provided training on behavior management, relationships with the children’s biological family, all types of training,” says foster parent Myrna Ortiz. “A recent workshop was on the Mandt system,” which teaches foster parents and others how to handle aggressive and uncooperative behavior.

A key support is a team approach to developing a

child’s treatment plan and monitoring progress. Teams generally consist of the foster parents, a biological relative (a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or sibling), the Casey social worker, the state social worker, the therapist, and any other significant person in the life of the child — a mentor, a tutor, or a teacher. Depending on age and other factors, the child can be part of the team. “It is a wonderful way of collaborating and really keeping all of the issues of that child very present at the table,” says Maria Rodriguez-Immerman. “Everyone works together to

FOSTER PARENTS RECEIVE A RANGE OF SUPPORTS FROM CASEY FAMILY SERVICES, INCLUDING COMPREHENSIVE TRAINING, FREQUENT MEETINGS WITH A SOCIAL WORKER TO DISCUSS ISSUES AND PROGRESS, AND CONFERENCES TO INCREASE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS IN RAISING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS.



help the child accomplish his or her goals in life.”

The importance of developing children’s independent living skills — both well before and after they reach the age of 18 — was also confirmed by the alumni study. Each year, approximately 25,000 youth nationwide “age out” of foster care, and many of them are unprepared for adult living. The federal Independent Living Program helps older foster children earn a high school diploma, participate in vocational training or education, and learn daily living skills. “Unfortunately,” says Anthony Maluccio, a professor of social work at Boston College and a member of the Casey Family Services Board of Managers, programs that encourage independent living “tend to pay attention to young people as they get close to the point of discharge, rather than earlier, which is when most parents try to help their kids with preparation for life — not at age 17 and a half.”

Casey Family Services begins teaching independent living skills at the point of placement. Casey social workers work with children and foster parents to provide age-appropriate experiences that help children assume greater responsibility for their own care and well being. As foster children head into their late teens, they become involved in more specific programs around budgeting, employment, or higher education. “Helping children to transition from foster care to independence is a life-long process that we believe needs to start as soon as the child comes to our agency,” says Raymond Torres.

Providing support to children after they reach the age of 18 is another critical element of the successful transition to independent living. These services include helping with job training and college costs, and providing support to foster families to whom college-age children can temporarily return. “As an agency, we are available during that transition time, just as we are for our own kids,” says Joy Duva. “We

don’t say to our own kids at 18, ‘Well, goodbye. You can do it now,’ because we know kids can’t. They need that ongoing support.”

Costs and Benefits

As a privately endowed agency, Casey Family Services has the flexibility and resources to design and deliver high-quality services for children in its care. But what is the relevance of such care to public child welfare systems? While most public agencies would agree with the principles and practices of Casey care, they lack the resources to provide such comprehensive services.

In response, Anthony Maluccio suggests that policymakers and practitioners take a broader view of the costs and benefits of foster care services. “When you consider that many of the kids in foster care in some public agencies will engage in behavior that leads to their being placed in institutions for delinquent young people or in psychiatric facilities, the ultimate cost is much greater than it would be if we were able to provide the kind of ongoing supports that agencies like Casey are providing,” says Maluccio.

To contribute to a better understanding of the costs and benefits of foster care, Casey Family Services is currently working with the University of North Carolina and the state of Connecticut to conduct a study that compares the services and outcomes of Casey Family Services and those of the public system. “Our interest is not to be critical of the state,” says Raymond Torres. “Our interest is to be able to gauge whether, in the final analysis, we are paying more or not for our services. And even if we are paying more, but our kids are doing better, then that raises an ethical and values issue that we will all have to grapple with.”

Kristin Coffey, a former communications associate with the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is a freelance writer and editor.

"QUITTING A BEEF"

By Rose Gutfeld

The abduction and shooting death of 12-year-old Darryl Dayan Hall in January 1997 shocked Washington, D.C., a city that had grown accustomed to gang-related violence and murder. As police searched for the killers, and city and national leaders publicly deplored the bloodshed, residents of the neighborhood where Hall lived braced for the inevitable violent retaliation.

Hall's killers eventually went to prison, but the retaliation never came. Instead, soon after Hall's death, a dozen or so young men from the two rival gangs involved met for a mediation session — and chicken dinner — in the office of social activist Robert L. Woodson, Sr. The youths were unarmed, though they wore bulletproof vests. Cell phones connected each side to armed back-up outside, in case the meeting proved to be a police setup. The session began with a prayer, and, by mutual agreement, there was no swearing, no interrupting, and no use of the "N" word.

The meeting and those that followed marked a watershed in the history of the Benning Terrace housing complex, where the gangs, or "crews," operated. The long-warring factions agreed to a truce. Over the following months, a dilapidated, violence-ridden complex, where residents were afraid to leave their apartments, was transformed into a peaceful, well-managed development, where children now run and laugh on the way home from school. Young men who were on track for prison or early death renounced violence and are now gainfully employed as housing administrators and electricians and carpenters.

"People feel a sense of relative calm and peace around there now," says the Rev. Richard C. Corbin, Sr., pastor of the First Rock Baptist Church in Benning Heights and a former military officer. In the past, he said, "I found the Benning Terrace combat

zone more threatening than the one I knew in El Salvador."

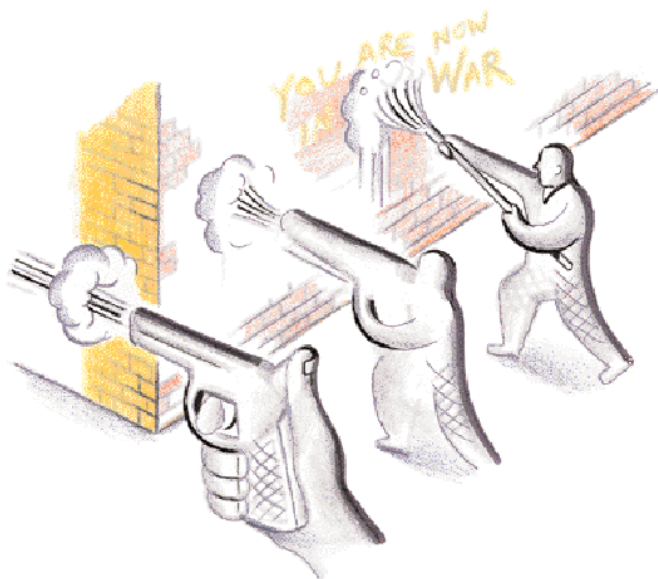
With its transformation, Benning Terrace also stands as a striking demonstration of a "violence-free zone," an initiative of the nonprofit National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise, which Woodson founded. In setting up a violence-free zone, the center acts much like a venture capitalist: It provides seed money — in this case, training and management assistance, as well as capital — to promising "start-ups." In a violence-free zone, the start-ups are groups that have "trusting relationships with the at-risk population," says Woodson, "and, consequently, the credibility" to help restore peace to violence-plagued neighborhoods.

Woodson is convinced that efforts to effect permanent social improvement must be led by local groups — people who understand a neighborhood's problems and who are known and respected by its residents. "We go into the community and look for people who are solving problems," says Woodson, who contends that inner-city residents often are not given sufficient credit for knowing how to improve their own situations. "The solutions can't be external."

"The Street Game"

In Benning Terrace, the center identified a promising local organization: the Alliance of Concerned Men, a group of African-American men who were already working with at-risk youth in the area. The alliance members understood the problems of the neighborhood and could serve as role models for troubled young men: Tyrone Parker, president of the alliance, had served time for bank robbery and lost a son to street violence. Another member had been addicted to drugs.

Benning Terrace, a 275-unit public housing development in Washington's Southeast section, was a



"WE GO INTO THE COMMUNITY AND LOOK FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE SOLVING PROBLEMS. THE SOLUTIONS CAN'T BE EXTERNAL."

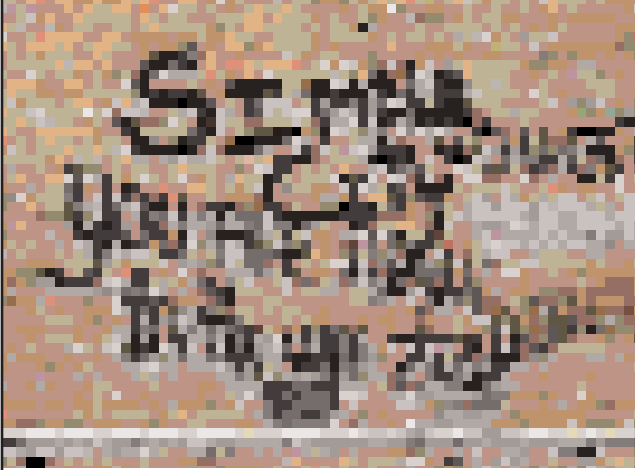
tough environment for the work of the center and the alliance. According to a September 1998 Howard University study, the 1997 median income of Benning Terrace households was \$6,156, with six out of ten households listing public assistance as the major source of income. When David Gilmore, the District of Columbia Housing Receiver and a key player in the revival of Benning Terrace, visited the development for the first time in 1995, his driver felt so threatened that he refused to enter. Gilmore initially put a portion of the development on the list of public housing projects to be razed.

At the time of Darryl Hall's death, the two rival gangs operating in Benning Terrace were the Circle Crew and the Avenue Crew. In 1996 there were six homicides in Benning Terrace, with three others in each of the two previous years, according to the Howard study. Woodson, who had been working with the Alliance of Concerned Men and other groups as he looked for a community in which to demonstrate his initiative, took Hall's death as a sign. "God has selected a neighborhood," Woodson remembers thinking.

Arthur "Rico" Rush, an alliance member, recalls that the night he heard about Hall's death, he could not sleep and telephoned Tyrone Parker, who also was awake. Together, they went into the neighborhood and began talking with — and listening to — members of the crews. "Nobody trusted us at first," says Rush, who said the alliance won over the crew members by approaching them "on their own level. We did not judge them. We were from the street ourselves. No one had approached them with an open mind before."

Working with Woodson's National Center, the alliance told the young men that they would help them find a new way of life and end the community's cycle of violence. Such help could include training in life skills — for example, getting drivers' licenses and opening bank accounts. Alliance members also told the young men that they would help them find jobs and get into drug-treatment programs.

But before any of this could happen, the warring parties of Benning Terrace would have to put down their guns and agree to a truce. At the initial meeting in Woodson's office, the two crews arrived in separate vans that had been supplied by a Maryland car dealership, where one of the alliance members worked. Fearing a setup, several leaders of the gangs stayed



A DILAPIDATED, VIOLENCE-RIDDEN COMPLEX, WHERE RESIDENTS WERE AFRAID TO LEAVE THEIR APARTMENTS, WAS TRANSFORMED INTO A PEACEFUL, WELL-MANAGED DEVELOPMENT.

away, sending underlings who could report back. The mentors listened to the young men talk about the violence in their neighborhood and how it was claiming younger and younger lives. Asked how the “beef” between the two groups had started, no one at the table could remember. Everyone at the meeting agreed that Hall would want the groups to put down their weapons.

By the end of the first meeting, according to Woodson, it was agreed that there would be no retaliation for Hall’s death. After subsequent meetings over the next few weeks, the two sides agreed to the truce. Rather than warring crews, the groups became the Concerned Brothers of Benning Terrace.

Many of the people involved say they were struck

by how readily the young men turned away from their violent lives. “The easiest part was getting people to put down their guns,” says Woodson. “...No one they respected had ever asked them to do it.”

Thomas Derrick Ross, a former crew member and drug dealer who participated in the initiative and now works as a housing manager for the District Housing Authority, says he wanted to leave “the street game” when he saw younger kids getting involved. But he says that he “couldn’t fathom” a way out of the only life he knew. “There was no way to stop on your own,” he explains. “If you stop by yourself, you get killed.”

“Monumental Importance”

Although stopping the bloodshed was a huge step, it was only the first one. Peace, Woodson knew, would not endure unless the former gang members also had access to jobs and life-skills training and received continued support and encouragement from their mentors.

Fortunately for him and Benning Terrace, help on the jobs front was provided by Housing Receiver Gilmore, who read a newspaper article about the efforts to produce a truce and called Woodson to ask how he could help. Gilmore attended a mediation session in Woodson’s office, where the crew members asked what Gilmore would do about the graffiti that lined the walls of the development. Gilmore replied that he would not remove the graffiti, which consisted of tributes to friends and relatives who had died in the street violence, but that the young men themselves could do the job. “They took me up on the offer in a stunning way,” he says.

Gilmore agreed to pay 35 young men \$6.50 an hour to remove graffiti. The job itself, slated to last six months, was completed in much less time, and some

of the men moved on to landscaping work. Others got training from Housing Authority staff members and apprenticeship positions with building trade unions. Ross, the former drug dealer, ultimately completed a management training program at Catholic University before getting a full-time position with the Housing Authority.

As the original work team moved on, other neighborhood residents took their places. Gilmore said the Housing Authority now employs around 150 such people at Benning Terrace and two other sites in the District, where he is working on violence-free initiatives with Woodson’s center.

Gilmore describes his participation in the transformation of Benning Terrace as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. “If I don’t do anything else of significant importance in my life, I will already have done something that from my perspective is of monumental importance,” he says. “I have participated in saving hundreds of kids’ lives.”

Gilmore also removed Benning Terrace properties from the list of buildings slated to be destroyed, a move that spared taxpayers an amount he estimates is “easily in the millions of dollars.” Peace has brought other savings as well, including the money that no longer is spent on emergency medical care, victims’ burials, and overtime by Housing Authority police.

With the Housing Authority providing the jobs, Woodson and the alliance focused on life skills and encouragement. Many of the young men and women had never had Social Security cards or shoes other than sneakers. Others were not involved in raising their children. The alliance helped the young people clear up legal problems and obtain high school equivalency degrees. The mentors also assisted in negotiating peace treaties when groups from other neighborhoods came in and started causing trouble.



A FORMER CREW MEMBER AND DRUG DEALER SAW NO WAY OF LEAVING “THE STREET GAME” ON HIS OWN: “IF YOU STOP BY YOURSELF, YOU GET KILLED.”

Around the end of 1997, the alliance received a grant from the Housing Authority that enabled its members to quit their jobs and do alliance work full-time.

Woodson and the alliance ended the mediation sessions in Benning Terrace with hugs and took the young people to basketball games. The two groups also hold what has become an annual awards dinner. “We celebrate every little success,” says Woodson, who raised money to buy suits the young men could wear to the dinner. He has taken groups on white-water rafting expeditions and on trips to visit community activists in cities where the National Center is working with other groups. With obvious pleasure, Woodson recently showed a visitor a gift: a piece of wood signed by every member of the Concerned

20	<p>Brothers and Sisters of Benning Terrace, the name the group adopted after women joined.</p> <p>After a while, some of the mediation sessions started being held in the neighborhood, in Rev. Corbin's church. As the young people became involved in community service work, the older men made clear to their younger counterparts that they would be there for them no matter what. "Even if some kid falls by the wayside," says Parker, "we are there to pick him up."</p> <p>The leaders and the young people at Benning Terrace have provided aid and inspiration to National Center initiatives in other District neighborhoods and other cities. In the District's Park Morton and Garfield Terrace neighborhoods, for example, a peace initiative helped end violence between warring groups of young women. Nationwide, the center also has established violence-free zones in Hartford, Indianapolis, Dallas, San Antonio, and Los Angeles. In 1997 the Annie E. Casey Foundation granted \$750,000 over three years to the National Center as matching support for replication efforts.</p> <p>"Moral Decisions"</p> <p>Three years after Darryl Hall's death, Benning Terrace gives no physical sign that it was once a combat zone. Well-manicured lawns are lined by flower beds, windows are intact, walls are painted and graffiti-free. Children play outside and wave happily at a passing car.</p> <p>At the Housing Authority office where he now works, former drug dealer Thomas Ross handles call after call on a speaker phone while working with colleagues in his office and on his computer. He expresses pride that Benning Terrace has become a good place to live. He also speaks of the emotional and psychological stress of the huge change he has</p>	<p>made in switching from his life in the street to the life he has now. "Quitting a beef is not like quitting a job," says Ross.</p> <p>Perhaps an equally harsh reality is that a single violence-free zone cannot magically cure all of the ills of Benning Terrace and the surrounding neighborhood after years of neglect and decline. "People are still poor," says Rev. Corbin, noting there are still too many adults without good jobs and children growing up without their fathers. As in other neighborhoods across the country, drugs remain a problem, as does teenage pregnancy. And finding jobs for young people will be that much harder in the next economic downturn.</p> <p>Still, no one involved in the transformation of Benning Terrace expresses fear that the young people already in the program will turn back from their new direction, even if faced with an economic recession or a new drug epidemic. "When you change the moral decisions that these kids make, I don't care what comes along," says Woodson. "Those kids will never go back to those lives."</p> <p>Gilmore agrees, but warns, "We could lose Benning Terrace again" if future generations do not get the same opportunities and guidance as the Concerned Brothers and Sisters. "This has to be an ongoing activity," he says.</p> <p>And Thomas Ross says he worries about the younger children of the development, who see the example set by him and others but who continue to be exposed to violent lifestyles at school and elsewhere. "Will they do what we do now," he asks, "or will they do what we did then?"</p> <p><i>Rose Gutfeld, a former reporter for The Wall Street Journal and editor for Congressional Quarterly, is a freelance writer who lives in Chevy Chase, Maryland.</i></p>

JUVENILE JAILHOUSE ROCKED

By Bill Rust

REFORMING DETENTION IN CHICAGO,
PORTLAND, AND SACRAMENTO

THE JDAI APPROACH TO
PRETRIAL DETENTION:
SECURE CUSTODY FOR
DANGEROUS YOUTH AND
LESS RESTRICTIVE SUPER-
VISION FOR KIDS WHO
POSE LITTLE RISK OF
REOFFENDING OR FLIGHT.



Each year hundreds of thousands of kids charged with delinquent acts are locked up in juvenile detention facilities. Between 1987 and 1996, the number of delinquency cases involving pretrial detention increased by 38 percent. Nearly 70 percent of children in public detention centers are in facilities operating above their design capacity. And according to a new report from the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), secure detention “was nearly twice as likely in 1996 for cases involving black youth as for cases involving whites; even after controlling for offense.”¹

Of the many troubling facts about pretrial juvenile detention perhaps the most disturbing one is that many incarcerated youth should not be there at all. These are the kids who pose little risk of committing a new offense before their court dates or failing to

appear for court — the two authorized purposes of juvenile detention. “When you talk to judges, prosecutors, or anyone involved in the juvenile justice system,” says Bart Lubow, senior associate at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, “many of them say things like, ‘We locked that kid up to teach him a lesson.’ Or, ‘We locked him up for his own good.’ Or, ‘We locked him up because his parents weren’t available.’ Or, ‘We locked him up to get a mental health assessment.’ None of these reasons are reflected in statute or professional standards.”

In many jurisdictions, the problem of arbitrary admissions to detention is compounded by an absence of alternatives to either locked confinement or outright release. Moreover, inefficient case processing by the juvenile justice system unnecessarily prolongs a young person’s stay in confinement and increases overall detention populations, often to dangerous and unhealthy levels. According to Jeffrey

¹ *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*, Howard N. Snyder and Melissa Sickmund, September 1999.

Butts, a senior research associate at the Urban Institute who directed the OJJDP Delays in Juvenile Justice Sanctions Project, almost half of the nation’s large jurisdictions take more than 90 days to dispose of cases — the maximum time suggested by professional standards of juvenile justice.

The inappropriate use of secure detention poses hazards for youth, jurisdictions, and society at large. Research indicates that detention does not deter future offending, but it does increase the likelihood that children will be placed out of their homes in the future, even when controlling for offense, prior history, and other factors. “Children who are detained, rather than let go to their parents or released to some other kind of program, are statistically much more likely to be incarcerated at the end of the process,” says Mark Soler, president of the Youth Law Center. “If they are released, and they stay out of trouble, judges are more likely to let them stay released when it comes to disposition. If they are locked up until disposition, judges are more likely to keep them locked up afterwards.”

For taxpayers, the financial costs of indiscriminately using secure detention are high. Between 1985 and 1995, the operating expenses for detention facilities more than doubled to nearly \$820 million — a figure that does not include capital costs and debt service for constructing and remodeling detention centers. For public officials, the cost of overusing detention can include expensive and time-consuming litigation for overcrowded and inadequate conditions of confinement in their facilities.

“The Least Favorite Kids in America”

In December 1992 the Annie E. Casey Foundation launched the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Based in part on a successful detention reform effort in Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Florida, JDAI sought to demonstrate that communities could improve their detention sys-

tems without sacrificing public safety. The Casey Foundation awarded grants to five urban jurisdictions,² each of which pursued four major objectives:

- to reach consensus among all juvenile justice agencies about the purpose of secure detention and to eliminate its inappropriate or unnecessary use;

“EVERY MEASURE WE HAVE SUGGESTS THAT IN CHICAGO, PORTLAND, AND SACRAMENTO, JDAI ACHIEVED SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS IN DETENTION ADMISSIONS AND SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN THE CONDITIONS OF CONFINEMENT. AND THERE WERE NO INCREASES IN EITHER FAILURE-TO-APPEAR RATES OR PRETRIAL CRIME RATES.”

- to reduce the number of alleged delinquents who fail to appear in court or commit a new offense;
- to use limited juvenile justice resources in a more efficient manner by developing responsible alternatives to secure confinement rather than adding new detention beds; and
- to improve conditions and alleviate overcrowding in secure detention facilities.

Three JDAI sites completed the initiative’s implementation phase — Cook, Multnomah, and Sacramento

² Cook County, Illinois; Milwaukee County, Wisconsin; Multnomah County, Oregon; New York City; and Sacramento County, California.

counties — and each had notable achievements in detention reform. “Every measure we have suggests that in Chicago, Portland, and Sacramento, JDAI achieved significant reductions in detention admissions and significant improvements in the conditions of confinement,” says Barry Krisberg, president of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) and primary author of the final evaluation of JDAI, scheduled for release in early 2000. “And there were no increases in either failure-to-appear rates or pretrial crime rates. In fact, JDAI seemed to make things better, because kids were now getting better pretrial supervision.”

Despite the fairly straightforward case for improving pretrial detention policy and practice, reforming detention systems has proven very difficult. One reason is that diverse and autonomous juvenile justice agencies have to learn to work together in new ways. Another is that public safety and other politically

charged issues embedded in detention reform are sensitive topics and sometimes immune to rational debate. A third reason is that adolescent youth who are charged with a crime, particularly kids of color, do not naturally attract public sympathy or attention. “These are the least favorite kids in America,” says Mark Soler.

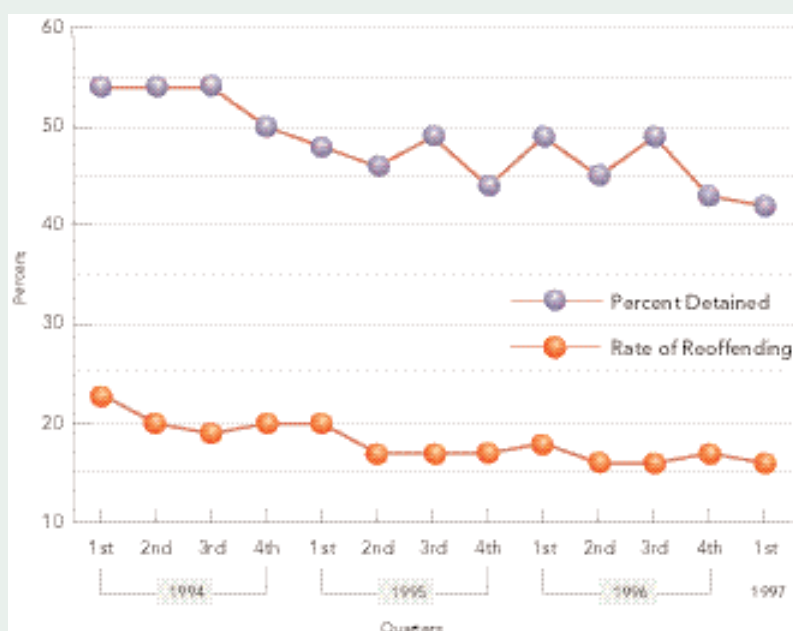
The report that follows is organized around JDAI’s key detention reform strategies: collaborative planning and decision making, objective admissions practices, case processing innovations, and alternative programs. Also discussed are the sites’ efforts to improve the conditions of confinement in detention centers and to reduce the disproportionate number of minorities incarcerated there. For more detailed analyses of the JDAI strategies and related topics, please refer to the Casey Foundation series *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, which began publication at the end of 1999 (see page 35).

BY THE NUMBERS

REDUCING DETENTION AND REOFFENDING IN SACRAMENTO COUNTY

JDAI seeks to demonstrate that jurisdictions can reduce the unnecessary and inappropriate use of secure juvenile detention without compromising public safety. In Sacramento, there have been decreases in both the percentage of alleged delinquents who were detained and the rate of reoffending by youth who were released to a parent or placed in an alternative program.

Source: Sacramento County Juvenile Justice Initiative Database



Collaboration: “A Gut Check”

Perhaps the most critical JDAI strategy was the commitment to collaborative planning and decision making among the agencies that constitute the juvenile justice system — the judiciary, prosecution, defense bar, police, probation, and others. One reason collaboration was essential is that the term “juvenile justice system” is something of an oxymoron. The agencies involved in it have a high degree of fiscal and operational autonomy as well as differing cultures and constituencies. The judiciary, for example, has an obligation to remain independent, and the roles of prosecutors and defense attorneys are, by definition, adversarial.

Despite their autonomy, juvenile justice agencies are also highly interdependent. In Cook County, for example, the county board of commissioners has legal responsibility for operating the juvenile detention center. The judiciary, on the other hand, decides which kids are sent there. Historically, such mutual interests were an insufficient inducement for Chicago’s juvenile justice agencies to work together. “There was no collaboration prior to ’94,” says Michael Rohan, director of the county’s Juvenile Probation and Court Services Department. “There were limited relationships between the agencies and players.”

The collaborative environment was better in Sacramento, where juvenile justice agencies had worked together to address overcrowding in the county detention center, and in Portland, where the juvenile justice system was responding to a lawsuit over conditions of confinement in the juvenile lockup. Yet even in these jurisdictions, individuals and agencies still had a tendency to focus narrowly on their particular role in detention rather than on the overall system. “People have been doing things the same way for so long that getting them to reexamine the way you do business in juvenile court is very difficult,” says Ingrid Swenson, a public defender in Multnomah County.

The Casey Foundation’s JDAI grants, \$2.25 million over three years for each site, were small compared to the budgets of the juvenile justice agencies in the three counties. The funds did, however, provide the opportunity for key stakeholders concerned about kids and their community to look at their system collectively, question one another, and, in the words of Talmadge Jones, former presiding juvenile court judge in Sacramento County, “examine whether our detention policies made real sense.”



Such an examination prompted tough discussions within the collaboratives on such politically and emotionally charged issues as community safety, rights of the accused, and the most efficient use of public dollars. “We had some arguments, and we had some people storm out of meetings,” recalls Michael Mahoney, president of the John Howard Association, a Chicago nonprofit organization that advocates for correctional reform. “But we kept it together.”

A fundamental task of the collaboratives was to learn more about the kids in detention, what they were charged with, and how long they stayed. “We really didn’t know who was in detention or why,” says Rick Jensen, coordinator for the Detention Reform

Project in Multnomah County. The challenge of learning more about a jurisdiction's detention population was invariably hampered by inadequate and fragmented data systems. "There was not an integrated management information system in 1994," says Michael Rohan of Cook County. "Every department in the juvenile justice arena had a separate database."

Once the sites had a better picture of their detention populations, members of the JDAI collaboratives were in a better position to start "asking the 'why' questions," says Bart Lubow. "Why is this group here? What are they charged with? What public policy purpose does that serve?"

Although the legal basis for secure detention is narrow — to assure that young people appear in court and do not commit another offense — locked facilities are used for a broad range of purposes. One unauthorized use of pretrial detention is punishment — "a bite of the apple" — aimed at deterring future offending. There is little evidence that such an approach is effective and a great deal of research on the negative consequences of juvenile incarceration, particularly in overcrowded facilities. "Imposing punishment before a kid has been adjudicated is not legitimate," says Amy Holmes Hehn, the chief juvenile prosecutor in Multnomah County, "and I don't think it's constitutional."

Another unauthorized purpose of secure detention is its use as a 24-hour-per-day, seven-day-per-week dumping ground for children who have been failed by overburdened mental health and child welfare systems. In *Reforming Juvenile Detention: No More Hidden Closets*, Ira Schwartz, dean of the School of Social Work at the University of Pennsylvania, and William Barton, an associate professor at the Indiana University School of Social Work, write: "When families, neighborhoods, schools, and other programs no longer wish to deal with troubled children, the detention center is the one resource that cannot turn them away."

The struggle to reach consensus on the appropriate

uses of pretrial detention forced members of the JDAI collaboratives to confront their philosophical and factual assumptions about detention. "It was doing a gut check on actual practices," says Cook County's Michael Rohan. "Had we somehow gotten to a point where we were holding kids who didn't need to be held?"

Admissions: "Yes or No?"

To make the consensus about pretrial detention operational, the JDAI sites had to develop objective policies and practices for admitting youth to secure confinement. As with the other detention reform strategies, each site developed its own tactics that reflected local values and conditions. "The fundamental issue about admissions," says Bart Lubow, "is changing arbitrary, subjective decisions to ones that are rational and objective and that make sense relative to the public policies you are trying to accomplish."

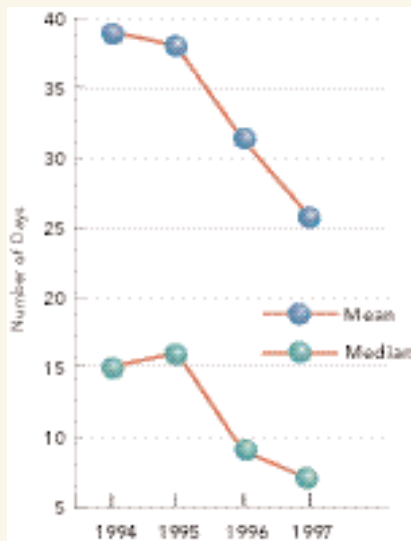
Eligibility Criteria. State or local admissions criteria define a jurisdiction's detention policy for police, judges, and intake staff at detention centers. "Admissions criteria are a cornerstone to any kind of detention reform, but they seem to be frequently overlooked," says Frank Orlando, director of the Center for the Study of Youth Policy at Nova Southeastern University Law School and a retired judge who led the detention reform effort in Broward County, Florida.

In 1989 the Florida state legislature adopted eligibility criteria for secure detention that were initially developed in Broward County. These guidelines limited locked detention to situations "where there is clear and compelling evidence that a child presents a danger to himself or the community, presents a risk of failing to appear, or is likely to commit a subsequent law violation prior to adjudication."

The legislation also specifically prohibited the use of secure pretrial detention for punishment or administrative convenience. In other words, young people charged with serious offenses could be detained, as well as youth who commit low-level

BY THE NUMBERS

IMPROVING CASE PROCESSING
IN MULTNOMAH COUNTY



More efficient case processing is an administrative strategy to reduce unnecessary delays in each step of the juvenile justice process. The goal is a better system of juvenile justice, not just a quicker one. Multnomah County, a jurisdiction with a national reputation for prompt courts, has used a variety of techniques to reduce further case processing time for detained youth.

Source: Multnomah County TJIS Database

offenses and have other charges or a record of failing to appear in court. All others — including kids charged with status offenses, traffic violations, and low-level misdemeanors — were to be given a court summons and returned to a parent or guardian, or delivered to a local social service agency. In the first three years after Florida’s legislative detention reforms, annual admissions to secure detention statewide decreased by 13 percent.

Like many states, California has a somewhat vague detention admissions statute that, in the words of one JDAI participant, “would admit a ham sandwich to detention.” To develop more specific eligibility criteria for Sacramento County, the Juvenile Justice Initiative (the local JDAI effort) looked at detention guidelines throughout the country, then developed its own criteria to determine who should be brought to juvenile hall. “Based on offense and some other factors, we provided a one-page check sheet for law enforcement officers out in the field,” says Yvette Woolfolk, project coordinator for the Juvenile Justice Initiative. “It helps them decide if they should bring that minor in for booking, or if that minor can be cited and released back to the parents.”

Buy-in from local law enforcement was an essential part of developing the eligibility criteria. John Rhoads, then superintendent of the Sacramento Juvenile Hall and currently chief probation officer in Santa Cruz County, recalls police concerns that no guideline could cover every contingency in the field. “If you ever feel in doubt with anybody, go ahead and bring him,” Rhoads responded. “We won’t argue with you. We’ll do our regular intake, and maybe we’ll release him. But at least you got him out of the area, and we’ll do what we have to do.”

Objective Screening. “Risk-assessment instruments,” or RAs (pronounced “rays”), help probation officers, detention officials, and judges make objective decisions about detaining young people charged by police with delinquent acts: Who should be released to a parent or guardian? Who needs more formal supervision but could be served by an alternative program in the community? Who is a risk to public safety and needs to be locked up?

Before JDAI, the screening process for detaining kids in Cook County was haphazard. “Probation officers would be called by a police officer and asked to detain young people,” says William Hibbler, a former

presiding judge in the county's juvenile court and currently a federal judge. "The problem was that there were no objective standards for saying, 'Yes' or 'No.' If the officer was persuasive enough, the child would be locked up. If there was not room or the officer was not that persuasive, the child would not be locked up."

To make the detention screening process less arbitrary, each site developed RAIs that measure such variables as the seriousness of the alleged offense and the youth's prior record, probation status, and history of appearing for court. Administered by probation or detention-intake staff, RAIs classify whether a particular child is a low, moderate, or high risk to reoffend

"WHEN AN ARREST FOR AN ALLEGED OFFENSE IS FOLLOWED BY MONTHS OF INACTION BEFORE DISPOSITION, THE JUVENILE WILL FAIL TO SEE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO EVENTS. ANY LESSON THAT MIGHT BE LEARNED ABOUT ACCOUNTABILITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IS LOST."

or fail to appear in court. The RAI score, in turn, helps determine the appropriate level of supervision a young person requires.

As jurisdictions gain experience with their screening instruments, they continue to adjust them. "If failure-to-appear rates are too high, analysis can indicate which factors deserve higher points," writes Judge Orlando in a monograph on admissions policy and practice. "Similarly, if rearrest rates are extraordi-

narily low, it probably means that the system is too risk averse."³

Multnomah County is on the third version of its RAI and working on a fourth. "We've been pretty happy with the risk-assessment instrument that we developed," says Portland prosecutor Amy Holmes Hehn. "It still needs some work and some tweaking, but our reoffense rate for kids that are out of detention, awaiting trial, is pretty low. I think it's in the 13 percent range. And our failure-to-appear rate is really low. It's about 7 percent."

Rick Lewkowitz, the chief juvenile prosecutor in Sacramento County, also believes his county's RAI is "working fairly well." Yet he cautions against the "robotic" use of the screening instrument. As an example, he cites a first offense for a residential burglary, which might score relatively low on the RAI. The arresting officers, however, had information that the burglary was gang related and its purpose was to acquire guns. "It's such a serious offense and serious circumstances," says Lewkowitz, "that public safety requires [secure detention]."

Case Processing: "A New Way of Doing Business"

More efficient case processing is an administrative strategy to reduce unnecessary delays in each step of the juvenile justice process — arrest by police, referral to court intake, adjudication (judgment), and disposition (placement). For detained youth, prompt case processing reduces the time individual juveniles stay in secure detention and, consequently, overall detention populations. Efficient case processing also provides benefits in pretrial cases that are not detained. "When an arrest for an alleged offense is followed by months of inaction before disposition, the juvenile will fail to see the relationship between

³ "Controlling the Front Gates: Effective Admissions Policies and Practices," Frank Orlando, Vol. 3, *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

the two events,” writes D. Alan Henry, executive director of the Pretrial Services Resource Center, in a monograph on case processing. “Any lesson that might be learned about accountability and responsibility is lost.”⁴

In Cook County, nearly 40 percent of the alleged delinquents who were issued summonses in 1994, rather than detained, failed to appear for their court dates. One reason for this high rate was the typical eight-week interval between issuing a summons and the actual court date. By collectively analyzing the problem and discussing possible solutions, the JDAI project in Chicago made a few, relatively simple changes in case processing that reduced failure-to-appear rates by half.

One improvement was an automatic notification system that included written and telephone confirmation of court appearances. “It sounds so simple,” says probation director Michael Rohan, “but it helped us.” Another change was reducing the time between issuing a summons to a juvenile and his or her court appearance. “When a young person leaves the police station, those who are not detained know that they have to be in court three weeks after their arrest date,” says Judge Hibbler. “They’re given that date right there by the police department.”

In Sacramento County, the wheels of justice also ground slowly for young people who were issued a summons but not detained. In some cases, two months might pass before the Probation Department called an alleged delinquent for an informal interview. County law enforcement officers were particularly concerned about kids who did not qualify for detention under the new eligibility criteria yet needed immediate attention. In response, the Sacramento County Juvenile Justice Initiative established an accelerated intake program, which enabled the Probation

Department to respond to such cases in 48 hours.

Another case processing innovation in Sacramento, the Detention Early Resolution (DER) program, applied to youth who were held in juvenile hall for routine delinquency cases. By California statute, detained cases must be adjudicated within 15 days, with disposition ten days later. The day before a trial, the prosecution, defense, and others review the case and often resolve it through plea bargains instead of going to court. What about advancing the pretrial date? asked the county’s chief juvenile prosecutor. This would reduce the amount of time kids spend in detention as well as the number of routine cases for which attorneys have to prepare fully.

To make the DER program work, a paralegal in the district attorney’s office promptly assembles police reports, statements by witnesses, and related evidence, then distributes them. Complete and immediate discovery allows defense attorneys to assess whether charges against their clients are sustainable. The district attorney’s office is required to make its best plea offer. And timely probation reports are prepared that enable prosecutors, defenders, and judges to make informed decisions about resolving the case.

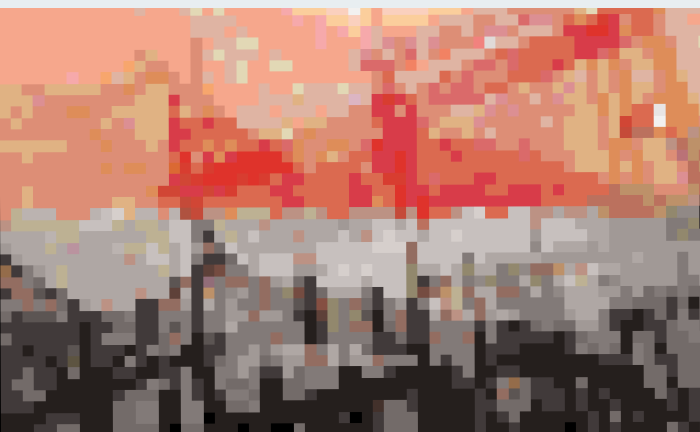
Since the adoption of the DER program, the time for routine cases from first court appearance to disposition has been reduced from 25 days to five days. “That has lightened the trial schedule load,” says Yvette Woolfolk, Sacramento County project coordinator, “and attorneys are better prepared for the more serious cases that they know are going to trial.”

One way that Multnomah County improves case processing and reduces the unnecessary use of detention is through a process called Pretrial Placement Planning. When juveniles charged with delinquent acts are detained, the arresting police officers complete their reports the same day. The following morning, staff from the Department of Community Justice, the county’s probation department, distribute police reports, RAI scores, and discovery to the defense

⁴ “Reducing Unnecessary Delay: Innovations in Case Processing,” D. Alan Henry, Vol. 5, *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

attorney and prosecutor. At an 11:30 a.m. meeting that same day, representatives from probation, prosecution, and defense discuss the risks of reoffending or flight posed by the youth and possible detention alternatives. “We never discuss the case,” says Rick Jensen. “We only discuss the kid’s level of risk and viable options to detention.”

At a 1:30 p.m. detention hearing, the Department of Community Justice makes a recommendation for either outright release to a parent or guardian, more structured supervision through a detention alternative program, or secure detention in the county’s juvenile home. The district attorney or defense may dissent from the recommendation, but in almost every case the court accepts it. And usually by 3:30



p.m., the alleged delinquent is on his way to the appropriate pretrial placement.

“It couldn’t have happened unless the prosecution, the defense, the probation agency, and the judges were willing to work together on a new way of doing business,” says Bart Lubow. “And unless they all could see that they all win.”

Detention Alternative “Jewels”

A key concept of JDAI is that “detention” is a continuum of supervision — not a building — that ranges

from secure custody for dangerous youth to less restrictive options for kids who pose little risk of reoffending or flight. The three basic alternatives to detention are: home confinement with frequent unannounced visits and phone calls by probation officers or surrogates from nonprofit agencies; day reporting centers that provide more intensive oversight and structured activities; and shelters serving runaways, homeless children, and other youth who need 24-hour supervision.

In the early 1990s, Chicago — poet Carl Sandburg’s “City of the big shoulders” — had one of the largest secure detention facilities in the country but no alternative programming for alleged delinquents. “The decision used to be either you locked them up or you sent them home,” says Judge Hibbler.

Today, Cook County has a range of detention alternatives that have reduced overcrowding in the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center and provided a more cost-effective way of preventing kids from getting into trouble before their court appearances. The programs, which include home confinement and shelters, have served more than 10,000 children since 1994. According to the Probation Department of Cook County, the average success rate of these programs — defined as the proportion of juveniles who remain arrest free during their term of placement — is more than 90 percent, with some programs having rates of more than 95 percent.

The “jewel” of Chicago’s programs, according to Judge Hibbler, is the evening reporting center, a practical, community-based alternative that focuses on minors who would otherwise be detained for probation violations. Initially implemented by the Westside Association for Community Action (WACA) network, Chicago’s six evening reporting centers operate from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. — hours when working parents are not at home and kids are most likely to get into trouble.

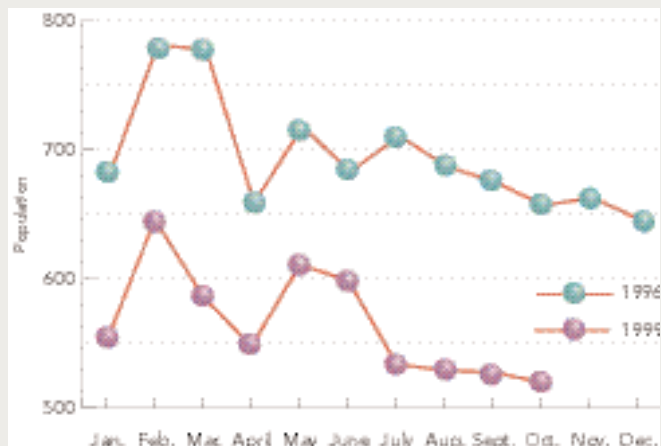
Offering a range of educational and recreational

BY THE NUMBERS

COOK COUNTY JUVENILE TEMPORARY DETENTION CENTER AVERAGE POPULATION, 1996 AND 1999

Although the massive Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in Chicago has a rated capacity of 498 beds, its daily population frequently topped 700 in the mid-1990s. More objective, rational admissions standards, combined with the development of responsible alternative programs, have contributed to substantial reductions in the facility's average daily population.

Source: Cook County Juvenile Probation and Court Services Department



opportunities, the evening reporting centers provide transportation and a meal — both of which are occasions for informal counseling. “One of the things that’s missing in the lives of so many youth,” says Ernest Jenkins, chief executive officer of the WACA network, “is a meaningful relationship with an adult who really cares and really reaches out and shows that young person that he or she is important.”

Chicago’s evening reporting centers have served some 3,800 youth, 92 percent of whom were arrest free during their tenure in the program. Paul DeMuro, a former juvenile justice administrator and currently a private consultant, notes the importance of weaving juvenile justice institutions into the fabric of neighborhoods where the youth live. The evening reporting centers, says DeMuro, have been “well accepted by judges and probation and the community.”

In downtown Portland, a magnet for runaways and homeless youth, the police were annually arresting some 1,500 juveniles for minor offenses and taking them to the county’s detention center. Because they did not meet the state’s eligibility criteria for deten-

tion, the youth were soon released, wasting the time of police and intake staff, and ignoring the underlying needs of the children.

An imaginative public-private partnership in Multnomah County led to the establishment of the Youth Reception Center at Portland’s Central Police Precinct. Operated by New Avenues for Youth, a non-profit social service agency, the center is open 24 hours per day, seven days a week. “Kids are triaged so their immediate needs such as shelter and food and medical attention and clothing are arranged,” says project coordinator Rick Jensen. “Then the following day or so, the youth is provided a case manager to get the kid back home and back into school or treatment.”

In Sacramento County, about 80 percent of the young people diverted from secure detention are placed in the Home Supervision Program. Targeting low-risk youth, the program restricts young people to their homes unless accompanied by a parent or guardian. Probation officers make daily visits to ensure compliance with home detention policies. Depending on a variety of factors, moderate-risk

youth may be required to wear an ankle bracelet with a tracking transmitter and to remain at home at all times unless granted permission by the court. “Ankle monitoring,” says prosecutor Rick Lewkowitz, “is very difficult to violate and not get caught.”

One challenge posed by new detention alternatives is the likelihood that they will end up serving kids for whom the programs were not intended — “widening the net” in the jargon of juvenile justice and child welfare reform. One could argue that in an urban environment with many unmet needs and limited resources, a variety of kids could potentially benefit from structured supervision. On the other hand, a community committed to keeping the detention population within bounds must exercise some disci-

OVERCROWDED DETENTION CENTERS ARE DANGEROUS AND UNHEALTHY PLACES WITH HIGH RATES OF INJURIES TO JUVENILES AND STAFF.

pline in the use of alternatives to secure confinement. “If you open up ten alternative spots, you’re never going to get precisely ten reductions in detention,” says Paul DeMuro. He believes that six or seven reductions in confinement for every ten new alternative spots is a more realistic expectation.

Conditions: “We’ve Come A Long Way”

Conditions of confinement in detention centers and the appropriate use of detention alternatives are inextricably linked. Overcrowded detention centers are dangerous and unhealthy places with high rates of injuries to juveniles and staff. In the words of a young woman detained in Sacramento, “When there are too many girls in here, we get all up in each others’ faces.”

On the other hand, if a jurisdiction can manage its detention population, it is possible to provide professional care for young people who should be locked up. “The kinds of treatment kids get in detention can have an impact on them for a very long period of time, either positively or negatively,” says Mark Soler of the Youth Law Center. “There are situations where kids have developed good values or have come into contact with role models in detention. There are situations where they have gotten into educational programs that may be the best they have ever had.”

Committed to the belief that jurisdictions have a constitutional obligation to provide reasonable care and custody for detained youth, the Casey Foundation required periodic inspections of its grantees’ detention centers by independent assessment teams. “Facilities in the sites remained remarkably open to this ongoing scrutiny and responded by making significant improvements in conditions and institutional practices,” writes Susan L. Burrell, an attorney with the Youth Law Center and author of a monograph on conditions of confinement.⁵

At the beginning of JDAI, Multnomah County was under a federal court order for operating a detention facility that did not meet constitutional standards of care. The county replaced the old detention center with an attractive new facility that has a rated capacity of 191 beds. The changes in the Donald E. Long juvenile home, however, were not merely cosmetic. The facility reduced its traditional reliance on locked room time for disruptive youth, some of whom had mental health problems and were almost always isolated behind closed doors. In addition to engaging mental health professionals in special programs for kids with behavioral problems, the detention center enhanced its education programs, improved training

⁵“Improving Conditions of Confinement in Secure Juvenile Detention Centers,” Susan L. Burrell, Vol. 6, *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.

for staff, and introduced a behavior management program that rewarded positive behavior by young people.

Perhaps the largest improvements in conditions of confinement were made in Sacramento County's Juvenile Hall. In the early 1990s, the detention center was badly overcrowded, and the staff maintained order by relying heavily on lock downs and pepper spray, a painful chemical agent that causes temporary blindness, choking, and nausea. The detention center's staff members "were at war with their kids," says Paul DeMuro, a member of the Sacramento inspection team.

John Rhoads, then superintendent of the facility, clearly recalls the day that DeMuro and Mark Soler of the Youth Law Center made a preliminary report on their findings: "Paul DeMuro started out saying, 'This is a clean and well lit facility, but....' And then they went on to list a host of issues in their minds that we needed to address. My staff and I were taken aback and somewhat angry over this assault on our beautiful institution."

Although temporarily stung by the report, Rhoads and his staff set out to make every improvement that was within their power. There were more than 30 specific issues to address — including meals, mental health services, and educational opportunities — but the underlying problem of the Sacramento County Juvenile Hall was its punitive culture. "Everything," says Rhoads, "was based on negative sanctions."

One element of changing that culture was the adaptation of a behavior modification program developed at New York City's Spofford Juvenile Detention Center. The program, which basically awards points for good behavior and deducts them for bad, enables kids who do well in school, clean their room, and stay out of trouble to redeem their points for sodas, snacks, and other small items and privileges. "All the kids understood it," says Bart Lubow. "And it works."

By retraining staff, increasing mental health resources, and making other changes, Rhoads and his staff were able to turn around Sacramento's Juvenile

Hall. "It had really changed from a prison-like environment to a place that was really a youth-oriented facility," says Mark Soler.

The Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, occupying two adjoining buildings on the west side of Chicago, is a massive facility with a total capacity of 498 beds. After many years of below-capacity operation, the facility consistently began to exceed its rated capacity in the early 1990s, with daily detention populations frequently topping 700. Other problems with the detention center included frequent lock downs and "some hitting of kids," says Paul DeMuro. Because of the facility's size, "the line staff were left to their own devices to do what they wanted to do."

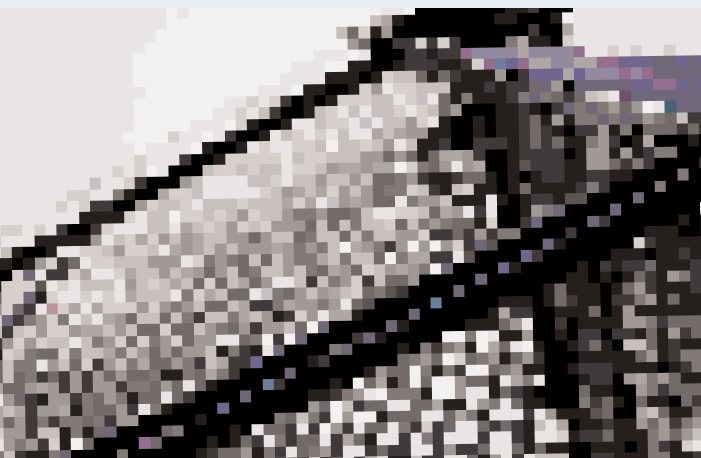
About the time JDAI began its implementation phase, Cook County recruited a new superintendent for the detention center, Jesse Doyle, a detention reform advocate and a former administrator at

"THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE ABOUT ADMISSIONS IS CHANGING ARBITRARY, SUBJECTIVE DECISIONS TO ONES THAT ARE RATIONAL AND OBJECTIVE AND THAT MAKE SENSE RELATIVE TO THE PUBLIC POLICIES YOU ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH."

Spofford. According to inspections by the Youth Law Center, Cook County made significant improvements in such areas as mental health care, training and supervision of staff, and the physical plant itself. There were also reductions in overcrowding. In 1996 the average daily population at the detention center was 692. For the first ten months of 1999, that average was 565.

The likelihood that Cook County's detention center

has room for further improvement is suggested by a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) on June 15, 1999. The lawsuit charges that the facility is overcrowded, understaffed, and chronically mismanaged. The result, the ACLU charges, is “a frightening, punitive, and dangerous environment for youths.”



Although the courts will ultimately decide whether the conditions of confinement in Cook County are constitutional, several JDAI consultants and participants from Chicago say that the ACLU lawsuit more accurately reflects the conditions of several years ago, rather than the present. “I think we’ve come a long way on the conditions,” says Michael Mahoney of the John Howard Association.

Disproportionate Confinement: “Limited Success”

A disproportionate number of minority youth are held in secure detention nationwide. African-American children, for example, who constitute about 15 percent of the population under age 18, made up 30 percent of the juvenile cases processed and 45 percent of the cases detained in 1996. “The degree of minority overrepresentation in secure detention far exceeds the rates of minority offending,” says Bart Lubow.

The disproportionate confinement of minorities is the cumulative consequence of individual decisions

made at each point in the juvenile justice process — from the practices of police officers, who make the first decision about releasing or locking up kids, to the assessments of probation officers, judges, and others who determine the risks posed by a youth. “At each stage of the juvenile justice process, there’s a slight empirical bias,” says Jeffrey Butts of the Urban Institute. “And the problem is that the slight empirical bias at every stage of decision making accumulates throughout the whole process. By the time you reach the end, you have virtually all minorities in the deep end of the system.”

The causes of this bias are often “very subtle,” according to NCCD’s Barry Krisberg. Many detention decisions, for example, are based on perceptions of the fitness of families and the strengths within communities — perceptions that in some cases may be true and in others false. “If you think there are no assets, your default [decision] will be, ‘Well, bring the kid to juvenile hall, and we’ll figure out what to do,’ ” says Krisberg. “If you’re operating in a community where you think there are a lot of resources, a lot of help, a lot of care, you’re going to do something very different.”

Although none of the JDAI sites can claim victory over the problem of disproportionate minority confinement, there is evidence of progress. The objective screening measures in Multnomah County, for example, have changed the odds that minority youth who arrive at court intake are more likely to be admitted to secure custody than white children. “Kids of color, particularly black kids, are coming to the doors of our system at higher rates than they should be,” says prosecutor Amy Holmes Hehn. “But it appears to us that when they get here, the decision making is pretty even handed in terms of bias.”

Sacramento County has also made decision making about detention more equitable once young people arrive at juvenile hall. In addition to using objective screening measures for detained youth, the Sacramento Juvenile Justice Initiative instituted

training programs to help eliminate personal and institutional bias in decision making. “There is no longer that growing impact on minority youth going through our system,” says Gerry Root, director of planning and public information for Sacramento Superior Court. “It’s no longer a cumulative effect at each decision point through our system.”

The difficulty that officials, agencies, and communities have in frankly addressing the issue of disproportionate minority confinement would be hard to overestimate. The combustible mixture of race, crime, and justice makes the topic a disconcerting one that many people would rather not discuss. Yet participants in all of the JDAI sites are convinced that such dialogue is essential. “What you have to do, and we’ve had limited success,” says Michael Rohan of Cook County, “is challenge every policy and every program by virtue of open discussion. Is there any inadvertent or inherent bias [in the system]?”

“The Big Picture”

One of the major challenges of JDAI — or any initiative aimed at reforming a complex public system — is sustaining the collaboration of agencies and individuals that is essential to success. Collaboration is time consuming, and individual agencies often cede a measure of their own discretion in the interest of the common good. “There are a lot of down sides [to collaboration] if you are just looking at it from a very narrow view,” says Sacramento County prosecutor Rick Lewkowitz. “But in terms of the big picture, everybody benefits. The system benefits, and the kids and public benefit.”

The challenge of leadership — which in a collaborative environment is less about being the boss and more about presenting a vision, keeping people focused, and moving forward — becomes particularly acute as members of JDAI governing bodies naturally rotate on and off over time. Chicago’s Michael Rohan says he is particularly proud that the reform effort was “not driven by one personality or one

force. It’s pretty much shared values throughout our juvenile justice system. That’s what’s made it work.”

For public defender Ingrid Swenson and her colleagues in Multnomah County, institutionalizing detention reform — “to make it part of the way we do business” — has been a major goal. “For the most part, I think that has happened,” she says.

One setback for Multnomah County was statewide legislation that made it mandatory for youth charged with some 20 different offenses to be tried as adults and to be detained automatically for approximately 100 days before trial. Although these juveniles could not be released to a parent or an alternative program, Multnomah County has applied its screening instrument to them and found that many posed little risk of flight or reoffending. Reflecting on Oregon and other states, Judge Orlando says: “We’re still detaining a lot of kids around the country based on legislative mandates, as opposed to what data and research prove is more effective and saves the public a lot of money.”

Perhaps the biggest challenge of JDAI was the simple reality that in the 1990s encouraging rational debate about detention policy and practice was to



invite charges of being “soft on crime.” In his 1996 book *Killer Kids*, New York City juvenile prosecutor Peter Reinhartz made the absurd accusation that JDAI “is designed to ensure that every offender has

PATHWAYS TO JUVENILE DETENTION REFORM

TO DOCUMENT THE INNOVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF SITES in the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation recently began publishing a series of monographs called *Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform*. Written by administrators, researchers, and other juvenile justice authorities, 11 of the volumes focus on key components of detention reform. A report on replicating the Broward County reforms statewide and a journalist’s account of JDAI are also included in the series.

The *Pathways* volumes are:

Overview. *The JDAI Story: Building a Better Detention System* by Rochelle Stanfield

1. *Planning for Juvenile Detention Reforms: A Structured Approach* by David Steinhart

2. *Collaboration and Leadership in Juvenile Detention Reform* by Kathleen Feely

3. *Controlling the Front Gates: Effective Admissions Policies and Practices* by Frank Orlando

4. *Consider the Alternatives: Planning and Implementing Detention Alternatives* by Paul DeMuro

5. *Reducing Unnecessary Delay: Innovations in Case Processing* by D. Alan Henry

6. *Improving Conditions of Confinement in Secure Juvenile Detention Centers* by Susan L. Burrell

7. *By the Numbers: The Role of Data and Information in Detention Reform* by Deborah Busch

8. *Ideas and Ideals to Reduce Disproportionate Detention of Minority Youth* by Eleanor Hinton Hoytt and Brenda V. Smith

9. *Special Detention Cases: Strategies for Handling Difficult Populations* by David Steinhart

10. *Changing Roles and Relationships in Detention Reform* by Malcolm Young

11. *Promoting and Sustaining Detention Reforms* by Robert G. Schwartz

12. *Replicating Detention Reform: Lessons From the Florida Detention Initiative* by Donna M. Bishop and Pamala L. Grisett

For additional information about the *Pathways* series or the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, contact:
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the maximum opportunity to victimize New York.” And in Sacramento, a local television news reporter found it troubling that JDAI opposed the “inappropriate use of juvenile detention.”

Such comments reflected a public policy and media environment that was extremely hostile to juvenile justice reform. Although juvenile crime, including violent crime, has been declining since 1993, the juvenile justice system has been subjected to unprecedented attacks, particularly for its alleged inability to cope with a new generation of so-called “superpredators.” Helping to demonize young people, particularly children of color, and to persuade lawmakers to pass increasingly harsh juvenile justice legislation, the superpredator turned out to be a mythological creature. “[I]t is clear,” write the authors of *Juvenile*

Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report, “that national crime and arrest statistics provide no evidence for a new breed of juvenile superpredator.”

In Chicago, Portland, and Sacramento, the juvenile justice agencies have come together to deal with the real issues in detention — community safety, objective appraisals of the risks posed by alleged delinquents, a range of alternatives to meet their varying supervision needs, and the most effective use of limited public resources. “We need to make sure we are intervening appropriately with the right kids at the right level,” says Amy Holmes Hehn. “And we need to try to use data to drive that decision making, rather than just whim or emotion or gut reaction.”

Bill Rust is the editor of ADVOCASEY.



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