



Youth Development

Poverty and the Pipeline to Prison

While opportunities for getting into trouble abound for all children, growing up in poverty contributes to a greater likelihood of involvement in crime and violence. Studies show that children living in extreme, persistent poverty are more likely to engage in delinquency, especially serious delinquency.

In communities with concentrated poverty and high levels of chaos and disorganization, residents are often unwilling to intervene when children engage in antisocial or unlawful acts. Unemployment in high-poverty urban areas gives way to a proliferation of drug trafficking, firearms, and gang violence among youths and young adults.

By the time they reach adolescence, many poor minority youths already are on a path to delinquency that began many years prior. Children with needs or problems that go unaddressed because of unjust economic policies and priorities, as well as failures in the healthcare, early childhood, education, and child welfare systems, find that there is one child-serving system that always remains open to them: the juvenile justice system.

The benefits of prevention and intervention are clear. For every child diverted from a lifetime of crime, we not only save a child, we save between \$1.3 and \$1.5 million.



“Poverty is the worst form of violence.”

—Mahatma Gandhi

There has never been a more dangerous time for poor children and families. Funding for Head Start, health care, foster care, and food stamps are threatened. There is a critical shortage of affordable housing. Preschoolers are expelled. Five-year-olds are handcuffed and removed from school for temper tantrums. High stakes accountability testing and zero tolerance discipline policies are driving many poor and minority students out of school. High school graduation rates for Black and Latino students hover around 50 percent. Children who are pushed out or drop out end up on the streets, in trouble, or involved in the juvenile justice system. Incarcerated children suffer horrendous abuses and atrocities while in the custody of juvenile facilities.

The pressures and risks of today's world are difficult enough for children in stable families, communities, and schools with sufficient income and services to meet all their needs. For hundreds of thousands of underserved, poor, and minority children and families, these pressures and risks can be insurmountable.

To stay on the path to successful adulthood, children need significant support and protection, including: strong families; early development and education; quality health and mental health care; good schools; healthy communities; constructive peer relationships; after-school and summer programs; and positive role models. Parents, community and faith leaders, service providers, policy makers and others must meet our children's needs for support and guide them in navigating the risks of childhood. It is our job to protect our children.

But far too many poor minority children are without protection. Single mothers struggle with two and three jobs just to provide the basics of clothing, food, and shelter for their children. Parents face enormous odds in affording or providing the measures that will protect their children

from delinquency, while cash-strapped schools, communities, and states are unable to provide adequate funding for quality after-school, mentoring, prevention, and other youth programs. Unemployment in high-poverty urban areas gives way to a proliferation of drug trafficking, firearms, and gang violence among youths and young adults. Children desperate for a sense of belonging will find it wherever it is available. When the doors to churches and community programs are all too often closed, they find it on the streets. With little or no protection against the risks, children are left to fend for themselves.

The result? An accumulation of disadvantages, from birth onward, that puts these children at great risk of entering the juvenile justice system or adult criminal justice system. They are pulled into a “cradle to prison pipeline” that diminishes their chances for college and meaningful work and makes it much more likely that they will follow a trajectory to prison or even premature death. Children with needs or problems that go unaddressed because of unjust economic policies and priorities, as well as failures in the healthcare, early childhood, education, and child welfare systems, find that there is one child-serving system that always remains open to them: the juvenile justice system. Here in the richest nation on earth, we ignore and neglect the needs of our most vulnerable children until they have done something that lands them in trouble with the law. Then we snap to attention, readily handing children over to a penal system that all too often makes matters even worse.

Neglecting the needs of our children until it is too late is not only immoral, it is utterly unnecessary. We know what works. We can change the lives and futures of our at-risk children.

This chapter examines the factors that contribute to youth delinquency and incarceration and

how these factors are exacerbated by poverty, the many ways we fail to protect at-risk children, the value and cost effectiveness of prevention, and what we can and must do differently to guide our children to productive futures. In a society that increasingly insists that children be accountable on multiple fronts, we are denying them the resources they need to live up to that accountability. Demanding accountability from our children while refusing to be accountable to them is tantamount to criminal neglect.¹

A Look at the Past Year

The past year produced mixed results for at-risk youth and threats posed by the pipeline to prison. Early in the year, the U.S. Senate turned its attention to the gun industry and a proposal to provide it unprecedented legal immunity from civil lawsuits by victims of gun violence. The deliberations produced three major victories in the passage of amendments that would have: (1) renewed the 10-year-old Assault Weapons Ban, due to expire in September 2004; (2) closed the “gun show loophole” in federal law that allows guns to be sold at private gun shows without federally required background checks; and (3) required child trigger locks on handguns sold in the United States. These three common sense measures, however, were enough for the gun lobby to kill the underlying bill. The immunity bill made a comeback in 2005 and passed the Senate, this time with a child safety lock amendment in place, but attempts to pass other common sense measures were unsuccessful. The bill passed the House in October 2005 and is fully expected to be signed into law.

Several other federal policy initiatives had important ramifications for the “cradle to prison pipeline.” Both the House and Senate have drafted legislation that purports to address gang violence. Unfortunately neither house has proposed solutions that would actually reduce and prevent gang violence in communities. The emphasis has been upon punitive measures and a “lock-em-up” mentality, which the data show simply does not work to reduce crime. Child advocacy and juvenile justice groups nationwide have opposed these measures because of provisions that would make it more

likely that children would be prosecuted as adults in the federal system. A large coalition of organizations oppose these bills because of their harmful impact on youth, juvenile justice policy, immigration rights, mandatory minimum sentencing, the imposition of the death penalty, and civil rights.

The landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Roper v. Simmons*, handed down on March 1, 2005, abolished the death penalty for individuals whose crimes were committed when they were juveniles. The decision created a critical distinction between the way we treat juveniles who commit crimes and the way we treat adults. Christopher Simmons was sentenced to death for a murder he had committed at the age of 17. The Court cites three differences that set juveniles apart from adults: (1) juveniles’ susceptibility to immature and irresponsible behavior; (2) their own vulnerability and comparative lack of control over their immediate surroundings; and (3) the reality that juveniles are still struggling to define their identity. The Court defines all three as mitigating factors proving that children who committed crimes while under the age of 18 should not be punished in the same way that we punish adults.

Testimony presented before the House in July 2004 detailed more than 15,000 children, some as young as seven, who had been improperly incarcerated because there were no mental health services available in their communities. Congress responded by passing, and the President signed, the Mentally Ill Offenders Treatment and Crime Reduction Act. This new law stipulates that resources for mental illness assessment and treatment, including community-based resources, be made available to both adult and juvenile offenders.

This year, as in previous years, advocates worked hard to convince Congress of the continual and critical need for funding juvenile prevention and intervention programs that help keep youth out of trouble and engaged in their schools and communities. Since 2002, these programs have been cut nearly 40 percent, including programs such as mentoring, substance abuse prevention and treatment, mental health assessment and treatment, gang prevention and intervention, community service, and intensive family-based interventions

STORIES FROM THE STATES

Jeremiah Program Offers Hope

Dynese Martin was two months pregnant with her second child when she sought help from the Jeremiah Program, a Minneapolis-based non-profit that provides transitional housing and support services to single mothers and their children. The program sets high standards for success. Clients are expected to have completed their education goals, be employed in a full-time career job, and have acquired life skills to be self-sufficient. Clients' children are prepared for school success and can take pride in their mother's accomplishments. "I had to jump through hurdles to get into this program," said Dynese. "I get a lot of help. I'm creating lasting childhood memories for my kids."



for both at-risk youth and system-involved youth. Funding for juvenile justice programs continued to decline at both the federal and state levels over the last four years, threatening many critical programs for America's youth.

The past year also has seen the continuation of an alarming trend in schools across the country: the increased criminalization of misbehavior once handled within the community or in the principal's office. Younger and younger children are referred directly from school into the juvenile justice system, raising critical questions about the role of education professionals as well as law enforcement and juvenile justice system officials. Authorities in St. Petersburg, Florida, shackled *both the wrists and ankles of one five-year-old child* and removed her from school after she had quieted down from a 30-minute temper tantrum. The line between schools and the juvenile justice system is becoming increasingly blurred, pushing more children into the pipeline to prison.

Poor Children and Delinquency

While opportunities for getting into trouble abound for all children, growing up in poverty contributes to a greater likelihood of involvement in crime and violence.² Studies show that children living in extreme, persistent poverty are more involved in delinquency, especially serious delinquency.³ In communities with concentrated poverty and high levels of chaos and disorganization, resi-

dents are often unwilling to intervene when children are engaging in antisocial or unlawful acts.⁴

Risk Factors Accumulate Over Time

By the time they reach adolescence, many poor minority youths already are on a trajectory to delinquency that began many years earlier. Poverty magnifies risks and disadvantages that intersect, overlap, and accumulate over time. Moreover, this accumulation of risk factors makes it even more likely that children will become involved in delinquency and crime. One study showed that a 10-year-old exposed to six or more risk factors is 10 times as likely to commit a violent act by age 18 as a 10-year-old exposed to only one risk factor.⁵

Health Care: Poor and minority children experience profound disadvantages in prenatal and childhood health care. Having a teenage mother is a strong predictor of later delinquency,¹⁴ and a Black child is almost twice as likely as a non-Hispanic White child to be born to a teenage mother.¹⁵ The percentage of Black babies born with a low birth-weight, putting them at risk for a range of postnatal complications, is twice that of White babies.¹⁶ A low birthweight child is more likely to experience educational disadvantages that can persist into early adulthood.¹⁷ Lead poisoning presents a heightened risk for poor and minority children. Black and Latino children living in older housing (pre-1946) are more likely to have elevated blood lead levels than White children living in comparable

housing—22 and 13 percent compared to 6 percent.¹⁸ And adolescents with childhood elevated blood lead levels report higher levels of delinquency and anti-social behavior.¹⁹

Early Childhood Development: As children grow, early development and education are critical to their continuing success and protection against future delinquency. One long-term study shows that at-risk toddlers not enrolled in a quality childcare and development program were five times more likely to become chronic law-breakers as adults.²⁰ Yet Head Start serves only about half of all eligible children. Only 25 percent of Latino and 35 percent of Black three- to five-year-olds are able to perform three out of four basic reading and math skills.²¹

Juvenile Delinquency and Detention: A Snapshot of Contributing Risks

- Being born to a teenage mother is a strong predictor of later delinquency.⁶
- At-risk toddlers not enrolled in a quality childcare and development program were five times more likely to become chronic law breakers as adults.⁷
- A lack of parental involvement and interaction with children may increase children's future risk of violence.⁸
- Abused and neglected children are 1-1/2 to six times as likely to be delinquent and 1-1/4 to three times as likely to be arrested as an adult.⁹
- Adolescents with childhood elevated blood lead levels report higher levels of delinquency and anti-social behavior.¹⁰
- High school dropouts are almost three times as likely to be incarcerated as youths who have graduated from high school.¹¹
- The likelihood that children of incarcerated parents will someday become incarcerated themselves is five to six times higher than for their peers.¹²
- In 2003, two-thirds of the detention facilities in 47 states held youth who did not need to be in detention as they waited for mental health services.¹³

Education: High school dropouts are almost three times as likely to be incarcerated as youths who have graduated from high school.²² Research shows that students who are suspended or expelled are more likely than their peers to drop out of school altogether.²³ Yet, despite a decrease in school violence, zero tolerance discipline policies continue to increase the number of suspensions and school-based arrests. Poor and minority students are much more likely to experience lower quality teaching that can contribute to poor academic performance and suspension. Under the Bush Administration's No Child Left Behind Act, schools in poor communities without the resources to comply with its unfunded mandates are penalized when their children do not meet annual goals. Rather than addressing the achievement gap for poor and minority children, these policies increase their risk of dropping out and subsequent delinquency.

Family Stability: The crushing weight of poverty destroys families and communities. Economic hardship and stressful life events are associated with a lack of parent-child involvement and attachment.²⁴ This in turn increases children's future risk of violence.²⁵ Single mothers struggling to hold their households together economically have little time or emotional stamina for nurturing and guiding their children. Generational cycles of abuse, neglect, and substance abuse continue unchecked without funding or resources for community-based mental health and substance abuse programs. Children with parents in prison are five to six times more likely than their peers to be incarcerated themselves.

Child Welfare: Poverty is the single best predictor of child abuse and neglect. Children who live in families with annual incomes less than \$15,000 are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected than children living in families with annual incomes of \$30,000 or more.²⁶ Abused and neglected children are 1-1/2 to six times as likely to be delinquent and 1-1/4 to three times as likely to be arrested as an adult.²⁷ Poverty and child abuse or neglect interact in different ways. Cases of neglect, which represent the majority of maltreatment cases, are most likely to be linked to poverty since neglect is often tied to a family's lack of resources. Poverty also may add stress to a family's

life and create a strong sense of social isolation. The poverty rate for Black and Hispanic children is far higher than it is for non-Hispanic White children. Thirty-four percent of Black children were living in poverty in 2004, as were 29 percent of Hispanic children, and 11 percent of non-Hispanic White children.²⁸

Mental Health: Frequently children end up in the juvenile justice system because their parents cannot afford or cannot access the mental health services and treatment their children need. The U.S. General Accounting Office reported thousands of families relinquishing custody of their children to the juvenile justice system so they could receive treatment.²⁹ Studies have reported that as many as three-fourths of the youth who are incarcerated have a mental health disorder and about one in five has a severe disorder.³⁰

Substance Abuse: Research shows that poverty increases the risk that youths will engage in substance abuse and crime.³¹ According to Columbia University's National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, four out of five juveniles arrested in 2000 were substance-involved, meaning they were under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they committed their crime, tested positive for drugs at the time of their arrest, were arrested for

committing a drug or alcohol offense, reported substance abuse problems, or shared some combination of these characteristics.³² In 2000, an estimated 1.3 of the 1.6 million juvenile cases referred to juvenile court were substance-involved.³³

The Juvenile Justice System

Without adequate protections, children can become involved in the juvenile justice system. Poor children are at a distinct disadvantage since their families cannot afford the quality legal representation that their more privileged peers retain to stay out of the system. Whether their contact with the system is limited or protracted, it can have far-reaching and, all too often, extremely negative effects. In many states, detained and incarcerated children are warehoused in large facilities and receive a bare minimum of education and other services. Exacerbating this is the fact that poor children committed to the juvenile justice system lose Medicaid eligibility, and thus medications or other treatments are often discontinued. This can have devastating effects for children with mental health problems.

The juvenile justice system evolved more than a century ago in an attempt to avoid the very abuses

STORIES FROM THE STATES

The Van Curen Family

Mark and Cheryl Van Curen live in Zaleski, Ohio (pop. 500), and are raising five children—Brandy (17), Jessica (14), Brandon (13), Diedra (10), and Whitney (7). The two youngest girls are the children of Mark's deceased sister who, along with her boyfriend, died of carbon monoxide poisoning after passing out from heavy drinking in a van left running in a closed garage. The girls were toddlers at the time.

Mark works from 3:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday for a refuse-hauling company. He then works on Friday and Saturday from 10:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m. for the local police department.

Because of the way his sister died, Mark does not tolerate alcohol use in their family. But he says that young people in the area are very prone to drinking and drugs because there is nothing else for them to do.



Mental Health Care for At-risk Children: A National Crisis

At the request of Rep. Henry A. Waxman and Sen. Susan Collins, the Special Investigations Division of the House Government Report Committee surveyed every juvenile detention facility in the United States to assess what happens to youth when community mental health services are not readily available. *(In 1998, Rep. Waxman formed the Special Investigations Division of the minority staff to conduct investigations into issues that are important to the minority members of the Government Reform Committee and other members of Congress.)*

This report, the first national study of its kind, presents the results of the survey. It covers the period from January 1 to June 30, 2003.

- **Two-thirds of juvenile detention facilities hold youth who are waiting for community mental health treatment.** These facilities are located in 47 states. In 33 states, youth with mental illness are held in detention centers without any charges against them. Youth incarcerated unnecessarily while waiting for treatment are as young as seven years old.
- **Over a six month period, nearly 15,000 incarcerated youth waited for community mental health services.** Each night, nearly 2,000 youth wait in detention for community mental health services, representing 7 percent of all youth held in juvenile detention.
- **Two-thirds of juvenile detention facilities that hold youth waiting for community mental health services report that some of these youth have attempted suicide or attacked others.** Yet one-quarter of these facilities provide no or poor quality mental health services, and over half report inadequate levels of training.
- **Juvenile detention facilities spend an estimated \$100 million each year to house youth who are waiting for community mental health services.** This estimate does not include any of the additional expense in service provision and staff time associated with holding youth in urgent need of mental health services.

taking place in many juvenile facilities today. The creation of a separate justice system for children not only acknowledged that we should hold children accountable for wrongdoing differently than we do adults, it also represented the belief that we should never give up on children, and the hope that even the most wayward youths can be rehabilitated to become productive citizens. During the late 1800s and early 1900s, each state and the District of Columbia established its own juvenile court so that now there are 51 different juvenile justice systems in place. The federal government contracts with the states and the District of Columbia to house juveniles who are committed under federal law.

Children Are Abandoned to the System

Today, state juvenile justice systems are immensely overburdened and enormously underfunded. Ongoing budget cuts at both the federal

and state levels have closed programs vital to impoverished communities and schools. These programs keep children out of trouble and out of the juvenile justice system, providing mentoring, after-school opportunities, substance abuse prevention and treatment, mental health screening and treatment, gang prevention and intervention, and more. At the same time, an alarming increase in the prevalence and severity of zero tolerance discipline policies is reducing children to case numbers and disproportionately penalizing minority children. News headlines are filled with stories of elementary school children carted off to the local juvenile facility for misbehavior. Notably, these stories occur most often in high-poverty, high-minority schools. These children need individualized services, not handcuffs and jail. But services are not available.

The result is a disturbing reality. The only thing our nation guarantees any child is a detention or prison cell *after* they get into trouble. Research has conclusively shown that prevention

and intervention work, yet policy makers are still fixated on increasing funding for incarceration—the most expensive and least effective option available for at-risk youths—and decreasing funding for effective prevention. Yet only 25 percent of the youths incarcerated have committed a violent offense.³⁴ (Moreover, as Figure 2 shows, juvenile arrests for violent crime have steadily decreased over the past decade.) A recent report showed that two-thirds of the detention facilities in 47 states hold youth who do not need to be in detention as they wait for mental health services. Over a six-month period in 2003, nearly 15,000 incarcerated youth, some as young as seven, were held in hundreds of juvenile facilities across the country because mental health services were not available in their communities.³⁵

While only a small percentage of children have committed violent offenses, we are incarcerating children because we literally do not have effective alternatives in place—hardly in keeping with the original intent of the juvenile justice system. According to a report from the American Bar Association: “[I]ncreasingly, it is not so much the criminality of the behavior but the lack of alternatives for children with severe emotional and behavior problems, children who have been expelled from school, and children whose families cannot provide adequate care that brings them into the juvenile justice system.”³⁶

Clearly, the lack of available services for poor children who need them creates an enormous disadvantage and makes it much more likely that they will be incarcerated than children from families with resources. Statistics also demonstrate the racially disparate application of many laws, particularly drug laws. For those charged with drug offenses, Black youths are 48 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Hispanic White youths. For violent offenses, Black youths are nine times more likely to be incarcerated than are non-Hispanic White youths.³⁷ Among youth with no prior admissions, Latinos are 13 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Hispanic Whites for drug offenses. For violent offenses, Latinos are five times more likely to be incarcerated.³⁸

Children may receive a more punitive disposition than they might otherwise if their parents are not

involved or are unable to leave work to accompany them to court, since there is no advocate to assure the court that they will monitor the child's progress and conditions of release. In addition, sentencing patterns have been shown to have a racially disparate impact due to many factors. Studies show that, given the same behavioral symptoms, more Black youths than non-Hispanic White youths are incarcerated, and more non-Hispanic White youths than Black youths are placed in mental health institutions.³⁹ As Ed Latessa, a criminologist at the University of Cincinnati notes, “[I]f your family has money, you get psychiatric intervention...if they don't, you get the prison psychologist.”⁴⁰

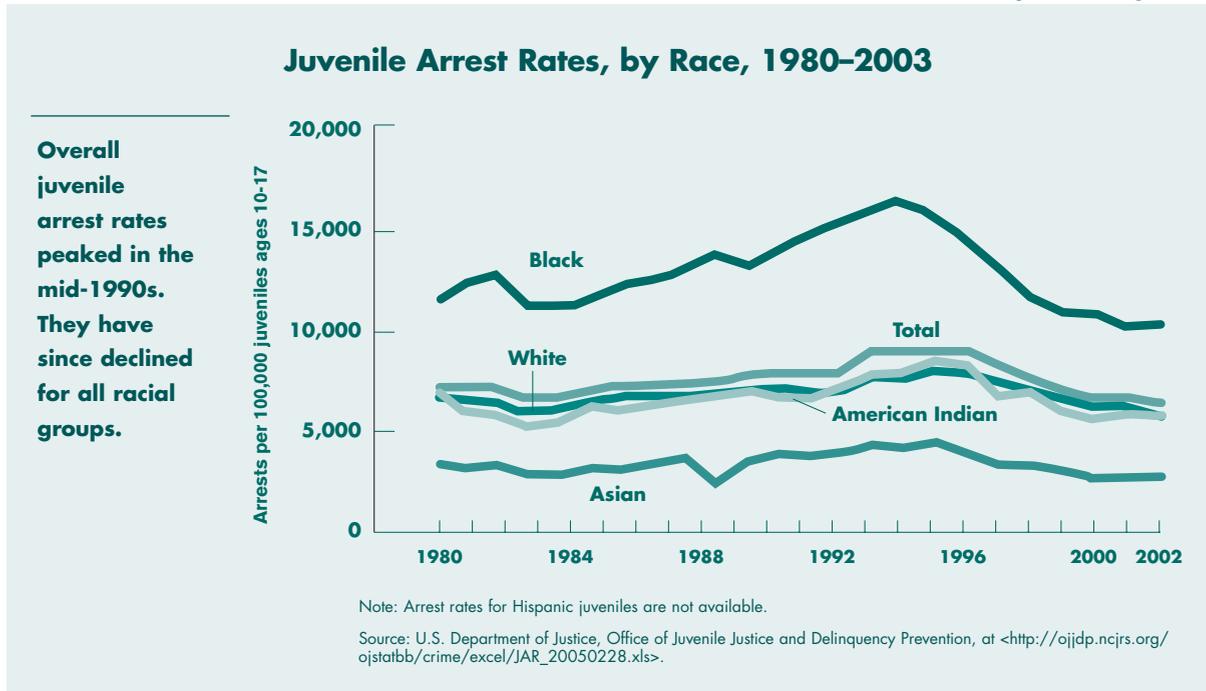
Children Are Abandoned Within the System

Abuse within the walls of juvenile facilities is horrifyingly rampant. The 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Protection Act (JJDP) provides most of the federal funds for the improvement of state juvenile justice systems. In order to receive funding, states must comply with four core protections:

- *Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders.* States may not hold in secure detention those youths who have committed status offenses, such as truancy or running away. These are offenses that may only be committed by juveniles. *Delinquent* offenses, by contrast, are those offenses that would be crimes if committed by an adult.
- *Adult jail and Lock-up Removal.* Juveniles may not be detained in adult jails except for very limited exceptions just before or after court hearings, or in the event of travel emergencies.
- *“Sight and Sound” Separation.* If children are placed in an adult jail, there must be both a sight and a sound separation between them and adults, to prevent any physical assault or psychological abuse.
- *Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC).* States are required to assess and have a plan for addressing the disproportionate confinement of minority youth in all secure facilities.

Many states have made dramatic improvements in their juvenile justice systems, but lawsuits claim-





ing abuses abound. In May 2005, the state of Mississippi entered into a consent decree with the U.S. Department of Justice for failure to comply with three of the four core protections. Despite numerous lawsuits and sanctions over the years, Mississippi continues to violate the JJJPA. Children are incarcerated for status offenses like running away. Documented abuses include spraying children with chemicals, leaving children hog-tied, and forcing them to eat their own vomit.⁴¹ Tragically, Mississippi is not the only state where such horrors have occurred; numerous states have been documented for abuse of juveniles, including California, Connecticut, Florida, Maryland, Nevada, and New York.

America is failing at-risk children in two very significant ways. First, we are pushing poor and minority children into a pipeline to prison by ignoring their critical needs until it is too late. The increasing criminalization of childhood offenses unnecessarily clogs the juvenile justice system; many programs and services for poor children and families that would keep children out of the juvenile justice system are underfunded or simply not present in the impoverished communities that most urgently need them.

Second, far too many incarcerated children are subjected to horrors and abuse within the very

juvenile justice system designed to care for and rehabilitate children and return them safely to their families, communities, and society. Young people are not rehabilitated in detention; they are learning to be better criminals and, in some cases, horribly mistreated and even abused. Upon returning to their communities, their chances for success are often worse than when they went in.

The safe return of incarcerated children is far from guaranteed, and too many states fail to provide effective re-entry services so that youths can successfully integrate back into their schools and communities. The need for re-entry services for youthful offenders is just beginning to get much needed attention at the state and federal levels. Without re-entry services, youths are at greater risk for dropping out of school, failing to find jobs, and ending up back in the juvenile justice or even criminal justice system, caught up in a vicious cycle of economic disparities and delinquency.

The Failure to Prioritize Prevention

Prevention saves lives and money. It pulls poor and minority children out of the “cradle to prison pipeline.” It saves enormous amounts in the long run, yet can generate higher costs in the short run.

Thus, garnering the political will among elected officials on two-, four-, and six-year electoral cycles to invest in prevention for at-risk youths is an ongoing and difficult challenge.

Failures in Funding Priorities

Funding for prevention and intervention programs targeted to at-risk youth has come under severe attack in recent years. The Administration's 2006 federal budget request reflected a one-year cut of nearly 50 percent to juvenile justice funding, comprised of cuts to several funding streams. This drastic reduction would further undermine the ability of states to fund programs that keep children out of trouble and out of the juvenile justice system. Since 2002, funding for federal juvenile justice prevention and intervention programs has been reduced by nearly 40 percent.

Federal funding streams support a host of prevention and intervention strategies. Title V, the Community Prevention Grants Program, funds collaborative, community-based delinquency prevention efforts to reach youth in high risk situations before they make poor choices. Title V is the only federal juvenile justice funding stream that is used purely for prevention. Funding under Title V can be used for many preventive services, ranging from pre/postnatal strategies (such as home visitation by nurses and preschool/parent training programs) to youth development initiatives involving the use of mentoring, after-school activities, tutoring, truancy, and drop-out reduction. All have been shown to reduce delinquency.⁴²

The Administration proposed for 2006, the third year in a row, to eliminate the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG), a program that enjoys wide and bipartisan support in Congress and emphasizes accountability and services for youth in the juvenile justice system. JABG programs include counseling, restitution, community service, substance abuse treatment, mental health assessment and treatment, and school-based violence prevention. JABG funds highly regarded research-based programs such as Multi-Systemic Therapy, a comprehensive and proven effective program in reducing delinquency and recidivism among at-risk youth.

Effective law enforcement, such as the Community Oriented Policing Services Program (COPS), complements and supports prevention and intervention efforts for at-risk youth. The cornerstone of community policing is building relationships with community members so that an effective collaboration between law enforcement and community members takes root and increasingly contributes to community stability and safety. The active involvement and concern of community members, sometimes referred to as "collective efficacy," is critical to sustained crime prevention, particularly in low-income communities.⁴³ All of these programs strengthen the core capabilities of law enforcement agencies and have greatly improved their ability to fight and prevent crime. Yet budget cuts are forcing layoffs of state and local officers. While massive increases were proposed for homeland security and defense spending, the Administration asked state law enforcement to take on more and more responsibility with less and less funding.

The combination of devastating cuts to critical prevention and intervention programs as well as community law enforcement is a recipe for disaster for poor children, families, and communities. We spend on average three times as much per prisoner as per pupil. But we don't spend money when and where it can actually make a difference in the lives of poor children and families.

Failures in Policy Priorities

Despite what we know about the value of prevention, and in addition to the funding cuts that are diminishing the reach of programs we know work, many of our policies simply do not substantively support violence prevention. Child and youth deaths from gun and gang or group violence is a crisis nationwide. Yet common sense gun safety legislation is considered political suicide by a majority of policy makers. And far too many policy makers promote "tough on crime" policies that provide convenient sound bites but do little if anything to actually deter and reduce community violence. Since crime and community violence occur at higher levels in poor and minority urban areas, it is poor children and families who are most



Youth Development – Table 1

Homicide has become the dominant manner of gun deaths among children and teens. In 1979, 45 percent of firearm deaths were homicides; by 2002, this had risen to 64 percent.

Firearm deaths, by manner and by race, persons under age 20, 1979–2002 (excludes legal intervention)

	Manner					Race				
	Total	Homicide	Suicide	Accident	Unknown	Black	White	American Indian, Alaska Native ¹	Asian, Pacific Islander ¹	Hispanic ²
1979	3,710	1,651	1,220	726	113	929	2,700	—	—	—
1980	3,749	1,743	1,214	689	103	944	2,739	—	—	—
1981	3,589	1,660	1,213	604	112	944	2,569	49	27	—
1982	3,332	1,498	1,207	550	77	811	2,450	55	23	—
1983	2,962	1,238	1,150	504	70	739	2,155	42	25	—
1984	3,030	1,289	1,114	552	75	716	2,238	44	32	—
1985	3,169	1,322	1,256	519	72	850	2,241	42	36	—
1986	3,349	1,513	1,293	472	71	938	2,337	43	31	—
1987	3,400	1,573	1,281	467	79	1,117	2,199	28	54	—
1988	3,974	1,953	1,387	543	91	1,458	2,405	76	53	—
1989	4,384	2,367	1,380	567	70	1,694	2,563	50	76	—
1990	4,935	2,852	1,476	541	66	2,047	2,753	47	87	748
1991	5,329	3,247	1,436	551	95	2,297	2,878	60	91	883
1992	5,353	3,336	1,426	501	90	2,359	2,834	55	105	924
1993	5,715	3,625	1,460	526	104	2,600	2,925	51	139	977
1994	5,793	3,579	1,565	512	137	2,559	3,024	75	135	993
1995	5,254	3,249	1,450	440	115	2,153	2,898	73	130	1,005
1996	4,613	2,836	1,309	376	92	1,976	2,475	64	98	817
1997	4,205	2,562	1,262	306	75	1,687	2,357	59	102	748
1998	3,761	2,184	1,241	262	74	1,416	2,197	60	88	661
1999	3,365	1,990	1,078	214	83	1,301	1,934	57	73	605
2000	3,012	1,776	1,007	193	36	1,149	1,762	44	57	568
2001	2,911	1,771	928	182	30	1,128	1,695	49	39	518
2002	2,867	1,830	828	167	42	1,112	1,639	52	64	581
Total	95,761	52,644	30,181	10,964	1,972	34,924	57,967	1,175	1,565	10,028

¹ Data for American Indian/Alaska Native and Asian/Pacific Islander not available for 1979-1980.

² Persons of Hispanic origin can be of any race. Hispanic data not available prior to 1990. From 1990 to 1996, a small number of states with small Hispanic populations did not include Hispanic identifiers in their reporting to the federal government.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, CDC WONDER, at <<http://wonder.cdc.gov/mortSQL.html>>, accessed December 2004; and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, WISQARS, at <<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars/>>, accessed December 2004. Calculations by Children’s Defense Fund.

harmful by these policy failures.

On September 13, 2004, the Administration and Congress allowed the 10-year-old federal Assault Weapons Ban to expire, returning semi-automatic military style machine guns to the streets of our cities and communities. Semi-automatic

assault weapons are the guns of choice for criminals. They are designed for one reason and one reason only: to kill the maximum number of human beings as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Gun deaths have declined since the ban went into effect in 1994. From 1983 through 1994,

child and teen deaths from firearms increased *every single year*—while from 1994 to 2002 (the latest year for which data are available), there was a decrease *every single year* in firearm deaths among children and teens. Since 1994, child and teen firearm deaths have decreased 50 percent. Renewing the assault weapons ban will do nothing to infringe upon legitimate hunting and self-protection purposes of the citizenry. More than two-thirds of citizens, virtually every major law enforcement organization, and more than 900 police chiefs supported renewing the ban. Yet even with that level of support, our political leaders allowed it to expire, bowing to the enormous power of the gun lobby.

Though child gun deaths continue to decline, they are still unacceptably high. Firearms are the second leading cause of death among 10- to 19-year-olds. From 1979 to 2003, approximately 100,000 children and teens were killed by firearms. Children are twice as likely to be victims of violence as adults and more likely to be killed by adults than by other children. The firearm death rate for Black males ages 15 to 19 is almost four times that of non-Hispanic White males in the same age group.

Common sense gun safety legislation—banning assault weapons, requiring child safety locks, and requiring criminal background checks of *all* purchasers of guns—saves lives and does not impinge upon lawful gun rights.

There is a link between gun violence and the easy access to firearms that exists in the United States. One study found that regardless of storage practice, type, or number of firearms in the home, the presence of firearms is associated with an increased risk of homicide and suicide in the home.⁴⁴ The rate of firearm deaths among children under 15 is far higher in the United States than in 25 other industrialized countries *combined*. This is the result of public policies that must change if comprehensive crime prevention efforts are to succeed.

Facts—Not Hype—Should Inform Response to Violence

Responding effectively to group and gang violence is a similarly challenging issue for policy

makers. Since public safety is arguably the number one concern of most citizens, the majority of elected officials promise that they will “crack down” on crime and criminals. This is effective, yet empty, rhetoric. The reality is that “tough on crime” policies like harsher prosecution and sentencing laws have proven ineffective in reducing crime. State crime comparisons show there is no positive relationship between the severity of a state’s laws and decreases in violent crime.⁴⁵ The prevalence of crime in any given community is more closely related to economic indicators such as employment, housing, and residential stability. Nevertheless, “smart on crime” policies that emphasize prevention, treatment, and services are a tough sell. As Jeffrey Fagan, a national criminal justice expert and professor at Columbia University, notes, “It’s counterintuitive to say that punishment backfires. It’s hard to get the public to understand.”⁴⁶

One of the biggest challenges in selling “smart on crime” policies noted by Fagan is the prevalence of hype and misinformation about actual levels of violent crime across the country. Because of the media coverage surrounding the details of more heinous yet isolated crimes, the actual frequency of crime is either lost or overlooked. As stated in a report by the Justice Policy Institute:

While most experts readily advance the need to reduce high levels of violent crime, including serious gang crime that exists in some communities and neighborhoods, the current phenomenon of presenting gang-related crime or violence as a growing “national crisis” requiring federal legislation, new mandatory minimums... misrepresents the national crime picture.⁴⁷

Policy makers who propose highly punitive, yet ineffective, responses to gang crime often make sweeping statements about purported and dramatic increases in gang crime in recent years. These statements may reassure fearful constituents that “something” is being done about violence, but they do not reflect the reality of crime rates and trends. Consequently, such extreme positions confound an objective analysis of what we can do to *genuinely and comprehensively* reduce and prevent group and gang violence.



In fact, both of the measurements utilized by the U.S. Department of Justice in measuring crime on an annual basis, the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) and the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), show that violent crime is steadily decreasing. According to the UCR, violent crime decreased 32 percent between 1995 and 2004.⁴⁸

The Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) produces the NCVS, a highly detailed analysis of crime incidents reported by a nationally representative segment of the U.S. population. The most recent analysis by BJS of the NCVS echoes the findings of the UCR, showing that violence by perceived gang members declined 73 percent between 1993 and 2004.⁴⁹

The House passed a highly punitive gang bill in 2005 that is a prime example of the difficulties involving public perception and crime prevention. One of the bill's provisions makes it easier to prosecute juveniles as adults in the federal system. Yet established research shows that prosecuting young people as adults does not reduce youth crime. Instead, it increases youth crime. Jails and prisons are crime schools. Young people prosecuted as adults are more likely to re-offend, and to re-offend more quickly and more seriously, than youths who remain in the juvenile justice system.⁵⁰

Moreover, research shows that, in comparison to youth held in juvenile facilities, young people incarcerated with adults are five times as likely to be sexually assaulted by other inmates, twice as likely to be beaten by staff, 50 percent more likely to be assaulted with a weapon, and eight times more likely to commit suicide. A similar gang bill is under consideration in the Senate. Child advocacy and juvenile justice groups around the country have uniformly condemned these two bills as harmful to children and ineffective public policy for reducing group and gang violence.

In response to the passage of the House bill, H.R. 1279, the Federal Advisory Council on Juvenile Justice urged Congress to reject the transfer of juveniles to adult court, citing the large body of contradictory research, the critical need for judges to have discretion when sentencing juveniles, and the disparate impact of transfer on minorities, particularly Native Americans.⁵¹

The Benefits of Prevention and Intervention

We do know what works to prevent youth delinquency and reduce violence. Collaborative and comprehensive approaches to community violence that create working partnerships between law enforcement and prevention/intervention groups work. Prevention and intervention programs keep children from getting into trouble and pull children out of trouble. These programs also save lives and enormous taxpayer costs. For every child diverted from a lifetime of crime, we save between \$1.3 and \$1.5 million, a conservative estimate since potential cost benefits such as better salaries and reduced public service costs outside the justice system are difficult to measure.⁵² To put these savings in another context, this means that a program that costs \$10,000 per child, and has a success rate of only one in 100, still saves us more by serving 100 children and saving *only one* child than it would cost to lose that child to a lifetime of crime. Our public policies must be responsive to research and evaluation findings on the value of prevention and intervention.

Evidence-Based Approaches That Work

Research and evaluation demonstrates the effectiveness of many treatment-oriented, research-based, and focused family interventions for at-risk youth, such as:

- *Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST)* – Multi-Systemic Therapy is an intensive home-based intervention for chronic, violent, or substance abusing juvenile offenders, ages 12 to 17. Trained therapists work with the youth and his or her family. The program emphasizes addressing the causes of delinquency. Services are delivered in the youth's home, school, and community settings. There is an average of 60 hours of contact over a four-month period. Chronic juvenile offenders who graduated from intensive family MST therapy were one-third as likely to be rearrested within four years (22 percent) as the graduates of indi-

In 2002, the number of children and teens killed by firearms – 2,867 – would fill 114 public elementary school classrooms.



Firearm deaths of children and teens, by age, manner, and race/Hispanic origin, 2002

	Under age 1	Ages 1-4	Ages 5-9	Ages 10-14	Ages 15-19	Total under age 20
All races	10	61	71	274	2,451	2,867
Accident	1	11	14	34	107	167
Suicide	0	0	0	86	742	828
Homicide	9	49	55	150	1,567	1,830
Undetermined intent	0	1	2	4	35	42
White	4	42	45	174	1,374	1,639
Accident	1	9	10	26	69	115
Suicide	0	0	0	73	632	705
Homicide	3	33	35	71	649	791
Undetermined intent	0	0	0	4	24	28
Black	6	17	18	83	988	1,112
Accident	0	2	3	6	36	47
Suicide	0	0	0	9	78	87
Homicide	6	14	13	68	865	966
Undetermined intent	0	1	2	0	9	12
American Indian, Alaska Native	0	1	3	7	41	52
Accident	0	0	1	1	2	4
Suicide	0	0	0	1	17	18
Homicide	0	1	2	5	20	28
Undetermined intent	0	0	0	0	2	2
Asian, Pacific Islander	0	1	5	10	48	64
Accident	0	0	0	1	0	1
Suicide	0	0	0	3	15	18
Homicide	0	1	5	6	33	45
Undetermined intent	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic*	0	17	17	38	509	581
Accident	0	3	3	2	13	21
Suicide	0	0	0	10	88	98
Homicide	0	14	14	26	402	456
Undetermined intent	0	0	0	0	6	6

*Persons of Hispanic origin can be of any race.

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Injury Control and Prevention, WISQARS, at <<http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/wisqars>>, accessed December 2004. Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

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vidual therapy (71 percent). MST saves \$28.33 for every dollar spent.⁵³

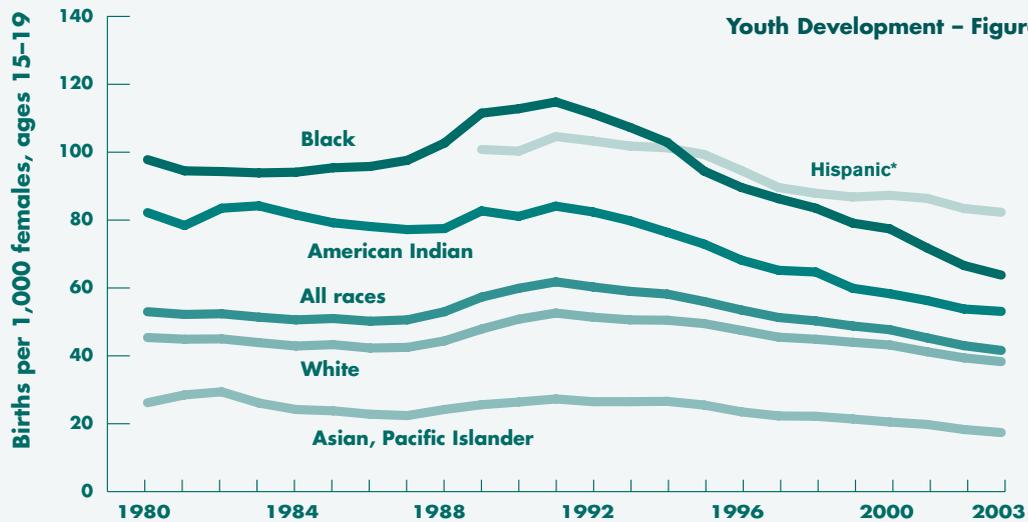
- **Functional Family Therapy (FFT)** – Functional Family Therapy is a prevention/intervention program targeting youth ages 11 to 18 at risk for or engaged in delinquency, violence, substance use, or conduct disorders. Services generally require anywhere from 8 to 26 hours of direct service time per youth and can be conducted on an outpatient basis or as a home-based model. The program has an average of 12 home visits per family. Rates of offending and foster care or institutional placement have been reduced at least 25 percent and as much as 60 percent. Youths whose families received FFT

were half as likely to be re-arrested as the youths whose families did not receive FFT (26 percent vs. 50 percent). FFT saves \$28.81 for every dollar spent.⁵⁴

- **Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)** – Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care is an alternative to group residential placement for high-risk and chronic juvenile offenders. Youth are placed with two trained and supervised foster parents for six to 12 months, and the youth's parents participate in family therapy. Boys randomly assigned to treatment foster care averaged half as many new arrests as the boys placed in group homes (2.6 arrests vs. 5.4 arrests). MTFC saves \$43.70 for every dollar spent.⁵⁵

Trends in Teen Birth Rates, 1980–2003

Despite the fact that teen birth rates are at their lowest since the 1970s, the United States still has the highest rates of teen pregnancy and births in the western industrialized world. According to the National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, the concerns about these numbers are manifold. Teen mothers are less likely than other teens to complete high school and go on to college and are more likely to require public assistance. The children of these young mothers also suffer. Children of teenage mothers have lower birth weights than babies born to older mothers, are more likely to perform poorly in school, and are at greater risk of abuse and neglect. The sons of teen mothers are more likely to end up incarcerated, and daughters are more likely to become teen mothers themselves.



*Persons of Hispanic origin can be of any race. Hispanic data prior to 1989 not available.

Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, *National Vital Statistics Report*, Vol. 54, No. 2, "Births: Final Data for 2003" (September 8, 2005), Tables 4 and 9; and National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, "General Facts and Stats," at <http://www.teenpregnancy.org/resources/data/genfact.asp>.

Programs Proven Successful

Additional successful interventions include early childhood, prevention, and school-based programs such as:

- *Nurse Home Visitation* – Nurse Home Visitation provides intensive visitation by nurses during a woman's pregnancy and the first two years after birth. Nurses support the development of the child as well as the parenting skills of the parents. In a 15-year follow-up, both the mothers and their children who had received home visitation had lower criminal outcomes than those not participating in the program. Nurse Home Visitation saves \$3.06 for every dollar spent.⁵⁶
- *Mentoring* – Mentoring evaluations have focused largely on the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America Program (BBBSA). Mentoring programs are invaluable community-based efforts, linking at-risk youths with adults who serve as role models and are trained to know when to refer youths to other community resources for needs they cannot address. The length of participation can last from several months to several years. Mentoring programs save an average of \$5.29 for every dollar spent.⁵⁷

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy analyzed the “bottom line” cost benefits of prevention and early intervention programs for youth and made general findings that are highly instructive for public policy choices with scarce resources:

- Investments in effective programs for juvenile offenders have the highest net benefit, saving \$1,900 to \$31,200 per youth.
- Home visiting programs that target high-risk and low-income mothers and children can return from \$6,000 to \$17,200 per youth.
- While net benefits are low, many substance abuse prevention programs are cost-effective because they are relatively inexpensive.
- Few programs are effective at reducing teenage pregnancy.
- Some programs are *neither beneficial nor cost-effective*. These include juvenile boot camps, and

juvenile parole and “scared straight” programs that take juvenile offenders to visit adult prisons.⁵⁸

Effectively Reducing and Preventing Community Violence: The “Boston Miracle”

The proliferation of guns and deadly group and gang violence among youths and young adults, particularly in poor inner city neighborhoods, is unacceptable. The human toll this violence exacts upon children, families, and communities simply cannot be overstated. In communities all across this country, children have witnessed friends and neighbors shot intentionally, accidentally, in schools, sitting in their cars, and even through the walls of their own living rooms. Parents, children, community and faith leaders, and elected officials are overcome with grief at each new tragedy. Yet, as detailed above, many policy makers seem more intent on approaches that sound tough and effective but in reality will do little or nothing to stop the violence that plagues communities, most of which is concentrated in impoverished neighborhoods in large cities.⁵⁹ Communities, families, and children deserve better.

One approach has been proven to work. Operation Ceasefire, which originated in Boston in 1996, is considered a national model for effective and dramatic youth and gang violence reduction. In one year, after record high levels of youth homicides, the youth homicide rate in Boston (for ages 15 to 24) dropped by two-thirds. This happened because a broad coalition of federal, state, and local governmental agencies, nonprofit community service organizations, businesses, religious leaders, parents, and resident stakeholders came together and agreed on one thing—the killing of young people by young people must stop.

Through nearly two years of comprehensive discussions and strategic planning, the working group developed and implemented the three main components of “Operation Ceasefire,” a coordinated city-wide strategy to deter youth and gang firearm violence:

1. Law enforcement identified violent groups (such as drug crews) and gangs and held meetings with them. Research had shown that these groups and gangs, a very small percentage of youth, were



responsible for the clear majority of violent crime. Law enforcement communicated to group and gang members that the violence had to stop and that the consequences for violence would be swift, sure, and applicable to an entire gang. They promised that they would offer protection and help to everyone and would target any group committing an act of violence. Little enforcement was actually necessary; it was focused on the most violent groups and was repeatedly marketed to other groups as evidence that violence would not be tolerated. *This element reversed the street pressure in which groups egged on their members to commit violent acts.*

2. Community and faith leaders sent a loud, clear, and consistent moral message to gangs, as fellow community members, that the killing was wrong and must stop. Participants and evaluators reported that the message was effective even with the most hardened offenders. *This element made the position of the community clear, validated the position of law enforcement, and made it impossible for violent offenders to believe that they had community support for violence.*

3. Working with community partners, the city built a network of extensive services, targeted first at the core group of members of violent groups and gangs. These youths and young adults, in effect, “moved to the front of the line” for services. *This element focused help on violent offenders who would take it.*

The results of this transformational initiative have been called the “Boston miracle.” They occurred without substantial new funding and within a few months of the first face-to-face meetings with violent groups and gangs. A similar program in Indianapolis, evaluated by academics from the University of Michigan, produced nearly identical results. The same kind of impact has been seen in Minneapolis; Stockton, California; High Point and Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Portland, Oregon; and Rochester, New York. Rochester adopted the model in 2003 and experienced a 70 percent drop in the homicide rate among Black males ages 15 to 30 by the end of 2004. Based on the Rochester success, New York is moving Operation Ceasefire to Buffalo, Syracuse, Albany, Newburgh, and Nassau County.

Jurisdictions across the country are paying close attention to this model as the only comprehensive violence prevention strategy that has shown such significant results in reducing gang and gun violence, allowing poor families and children to feel safe in their neighborhoods.

Successful Juvenile Justice System Reforms

Comprehensive juvenile detention reform is underway in many state and local jurisdictions

STORIES FROM THE STATES

Dreaming of Success

Jackie Chipilinski, wearing a t-shirt bearing the message “fearless,” displays a common theme of adolescence as she contemplates her future dream of studying physical therapy at a local college. Tiffany Russell, attends an alternative high school for children who receive services for anger and other behavioral issues and wants to study cosmetology at Hocking College when she graduates. Robby Swaro, plans to join the army when he graduates from Trimble High School in 2006. All three live in Glouster, Ohio.



around the country. These reforms affirm the original intent of the juvenile justice system: to provide care, services, and rehabilitation for young offenders. It is clear that at-risk youths have much better outcomes when their needs are assessed and treated in the least restrictive environment possible. When incarceration is necessary for public safety reasons, smaller facilities near youths' homes and communities are highly preferable to large facilities hundreds of miles away.

It is equally clear that youths need to know that someone cares about what happens to them and is invested in helping them to change. So many poor children end up in the juvenile justice system because they lack supports at every level. What happens to them there is critical. For far too many, it is the last stop before the adult criminal justice system. As Mark Steward, Director of the Missouri Department of Youth Services and its exemplary juvenile programs, explained, "[W]e put [the kids] in a safe and stable and supportive environment, some for the first time in their lives... With us they have an opportunity. Send them to a typical training school, where staff intimidate them and they have to fight to survive, and they've got no shot."

Providing a National Model

The state of Missouri is widely considered to have the best juvenile correctional system in the nation. Missouri closed its youth prisons in 1983 and divided the state into five regions so that confined juveniles would remain within driving distance of their homes. Each region has two facilities, housing no more than 40 youths each. One serves as a day treatment clinic to prevent the escalation of criminal behavior. The other is a lockup for more serious offenders. Instead of punishment, the state focuses on intensive individual and family counseling, academic and vocational education, and behavior modification.

While many states are adding mental health treatment as an occasional service, Missouri infuses mental health into every aspect of its correctional programs. Comprehensive treatment services include case management, family therapy, residential care, juvenile court diversion, intensive case super-

vision, school-based day treatment, and follow-up services to ensure a successful transition back to their communities.

From the first day they enter a juvenile facility, Missouri youth spend virtually every moment with a team of about 10 other teens. They eat together, study together, and live together, all under the supervision of two trained youth specialists. Any time a youth is troubled about anything, he or she can call a meeting of the team to discuss the problem and work out solutions.

Missouri is also remarkable for the way that it handles restraint of youths who become violent. They do not use "hog ties" or handcuffs. Youth are almost never held in isolation. Instead, they rely on their team framework. Only a staff member may authorize a restraint and once they do, the youth is physically restrained by members of his team until he regains his composure. This unorthodox method has shown remarkable results in the 15 years since its implementation by Director Mark Steward. There have been neither serious injuries from restraints nor lawsuits or complaints by parents. Serious fighting among youths is almost non-existent.

Missouri's success has not come at the expense of the budget. In 2002, the Missouri Department of Youth Services (DYS) spent \$103 per youth, while Louisiana spent \$270 per youth, Maryland spent \$192, and Florida spent \$271. All three states have youth recidivism rates dramatically higher than Missouri. Recidivism rates are measured differently in different states so comparisons are difficult, but Missouri arguably has the lowest recidivism rate in the nation. Seventy percent of youth released in 1999 avoided re-offending within three years. Missouri has disproved traditional concerns that public safety will be compromised if services and treatment are emphasized over incarceration.

Pursuing Detention Alternatives

In early 1998, the juvenile detention center in San Bernalillo County, New Mexico, reached an unmanageable high of 143 teens. Stackable bunk beds were added to the center to accommodate the overflow. Tensions rose for youth and staff alike.

Director Tom Swisstack established a steering committee of top officials from probation, prose-



cution, the public defender's office, and juvenile court to tackle the question of how to reduce the number of youths in detention. An extensive review of existing procedures revealed several problems. First, probation agreements contained so many conditions it was extremely difficult for youths to stay free of violations. This led to a frequency of probation revocations that landed youths back in detention. Moreover, youths picked up on "bench warrants" for not showing up for court dates would then be held over until the rescheduled court date.

San Bernalillo County implemented a series of reforms, including assessment and redesign of probation agreements to increase positive incentives and make violations less likely; institution of a system of established and graduated sanctions to decrease the frequency of probation violations; a new system for assisting youths in attending court dates and providing second chances for reasonable excuses; and the creation of an out-patient mental health clinic that provides counseling and medication for court-involved youth. In four years, the population of the San Bernalillo County Detention Center dropped from 143 to 63, a decrease of 56 percent. With a positive and systematic approach to change, the county has proven that alternatives to detention work and benefit all parties involved, especially youths.

Reducing Disproportionate Minority Confinement

One of the four core protections under the JJJPA requires states to create a strategy to address disproportionate minority representation in the juvenile justice system. Between 1983 and 1997, the youth detention population in the U.S. increased 47 percent, but youth of color accounted for 80 percent of this increase. Although they represent just 34 percent of the U.S. adolescent population, minority youths represent 62 percent of the youth in detention.⁶⁰

Multnomah County, Oregon, has focused on reducing racial disparities in its juvenile court system, and the county has proven remarkably successful. In 1990, Latino youth were more than twice as likely to be detained as non-Hispanic White youth

and Asians. Blacks and Native Americans were detained at rates that were 47 to 60 percent higher than non-Hispanic White youth. The county instituted several reforms including a new risk assessment tool to help in determining which youths should be detained, the hiring of more minority staff in probation, and additional staff to assist public defenders in effectively advocating for their low-income clients, many of whom were minorities.

Between 1995 and 2000, Multnomah County reduced the likelihood that an arrested youth would be detained to 12 percent for Blacks and 11 percent for Latinos, versus 9 percent for non-Hispanic Whites.⁶¹ During the same period, the number of juveniles arrested for violent crimes dropped 24 percent, and the number of juveniles arrested for property crimes dropped 40 percent. The total crime rate for youth dropped 26 percent during this period, proving that jurisdictions can reduce racial disparities, make more modest use of detention, and still not compromise public safety.

Addressing the Unique Needs of Girls in the Juvenile Justice System

Girls are the fastest growing population in the juvenile justice system and their treatment must be gender-specific. The Pace Center for Girls, Inc. (Practical Academic Cultural Education) is a school-based program that serves as an alternative to incarceration. The success of the PACE Program is based on two key factors: a focus on understanding the relationship between victimization and female juvenile crime, and a strength-based approach that focuses on the unique potential of each girl, not the mistakes or poor choices she may have made. Components of the PACE program include academic education, individualized attention, gender-specific life management skills, mental health treatment, parental involvement, community volunteer opportunities, and a three-year comprehensive follow-up program.

For more than 15 years, PACE has advocated for fundamental changes in how we address the needs of girls in the juvenile justice system. PACE offers training and technical assistance that helps providers develop and implement gender-responsive programs or systems designed to assist girls at risk

or involved in the juvenile justice system. The mission of PACE is to provide girls and young women an opportunity for a better future through education, counseling, training, and advocacy.

Meaningful juvenile justice system reform is at work in various jurisdictions. These initiatives prove that the vast majority of at-risk youth do much better when they are referred to effective detention alternatives within their communities,

and their multiple needs are assessed and comprehensively treated. Detention alternatives have been implemented without increases in either costs or crime rates, and in fact, many jurisdictions have seen decreases in both. Youths, families, and communities are well served when alternatives to detention are developed and implemented to address the multiple and comprehensive needs of system-involved youth and their families.

Recommendations for Moving Forward

Acknowledging and understanding the many dangers that young people face today as they make the journey to adulthood are key steps in creating a society where every young person has the love, support, and resources he or she needs to become a productive adult. We must address the various risk factors that contribute to youth delinquency, particularly within the exacerbating context of poverty, and we must look for the least restrictive way to provide help and assistance to at-risk youth within the context of public safety. Most importantly, we must realize the effectiveness and value of prevention and intervention.

At the same time, we cannot ignore that there is a small percentage of youths who commit violent offenses. These youths must be held accountable and receive the services and treatment they need for successful rehabilitation. But we must maintain perspective about what works to address root causes of delinquency and crime in the face of the fear that is generated anew whenever a newsworthy incident of violence involving youths or young adults occurs. It is critical to bear in mind that both violent youth crime and school violence have been steadily decreasing for the last decade.

The Children's Defense Fund believes our nation has the resources and knowledge to prevent every at-risk youth from embarking upon a lifetime of crime and that we also have the capacity to divert all youths who have engaged in delinquency. To do so will require a comprehensive commitment to the values of prevention and rehabilitation at all levels of decision-making. Key recommendations include:

All key players, including policy makers and government, judges, law enforcement, probation officers, youth services, educators, child-serving systems, community and faith leaders, parents, and all concerned citizens, must:

- Understand the myriad risk factors that contribute to and cause juvenile delinquency from birth on, including disadvantages in prenatal and health care, early childhood education, child welfare, education, mental health, and income and job opportunities.
- Acknowledge that these factors have a disparate impact on poor and minority youth.

All key players in youth policy and programmatic decision-making must:

- Commit to reducing the risk factors in a systematic and comprehensive way. This is clearly an enormous and highly complex task but youth delinquency will not be reduced in a vacuum.
- Change the contributing risk factors if we are to truly promote positive youth development for all young Americans.

Research shows that prevention and intervention work and save money. We must:

- Commit to and adequately fund prevention and intervention programs.
- Incorporate an underlying emphasis upon prevention into our public policies that affect at-risk and court-involved youth.

Research must drive policy, not the other way around. We must:

- Demand that our elected officials provide solutions to public safety problems that address the

Youth Development

root causes of crime and violence and that take into account the plethora of research that addresses these root causes.

- Have the courage to speak the truth, however politically unpopular, and realistically pursue policy supports for violence prevention and common sense gun safety.

We must learn from and replicate systemic reform efforts at the state and local levels, such as those occurring in Missouri, Bernalillo County, and Multnomah County.

- Pursue meaningful comprehensive juvenile justice system reform.
- Use incarceration only when necessary for public safety.
- Aggressively stamp out the abuse of juveniles within detention facilities.
- Ensure youths entering the system have their needs comprehensively assessed so that they receive appropriate and quality educational services as well as mental health and substance abuse treatment. Also provide them with re-entry support and planning as they reintegrate into their families, communities, and schools.

Preventing youth delinquency and promoting positive youth development requires the cooperation and collaboration

of all child-serving systems and programs. CDF has begun an initiative that will focus on this goal. To do this, we must:

- Identify successful child-serving systems across the country and articulate commonalities in their strategies for success. Also identify jurisdictions that have created successful integrative services and collaborations between systems.
- Generate recommendations for building a seamless network of child-serving systems so that we can truly leave no child behind. This will lead to policy recommendations with grassroots foundations, and our policy recommendations will support ongoing systemic and programmatic reform.

Youth of today face enormous challenges. For poor and minority youth, the challenges are exacerbated and so is their need for comprehensive prevention and intervention programs. While the root causes of juvenile delinquency are extremely diverse and complex, the approach we must take is straightforward. Prevention works and research on established programs and child outcomes proves this. What we need is the political will to provide the support and resources for preventing delinquency and rehabilitating delinquent youths. Prison is not a foregone conclusion for any child. We must not give up on any child.



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