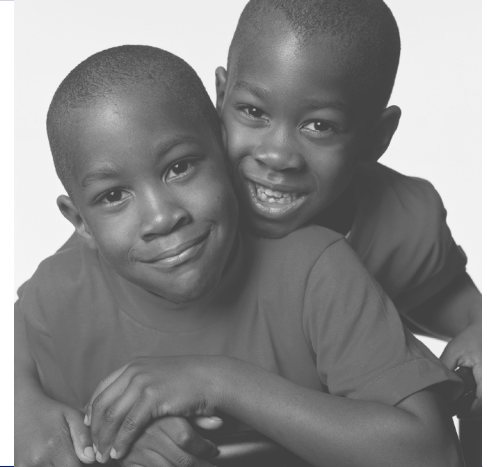


CLAIMING CHILDREN



FEDERATION OF FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH ... FALL 2000

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Doug Dodge served as a consultant for this issue.

Children with Mental Health Needs and the Juvenile Justice System

Barbara Huff, Family Member, Virginia

I do not have a child who has spent time in the juvenile justice system. But, over the years I have listened to the stories of courageous families who have experienced the pain and anguish of having a child arrested and sentenced. Their stories have touched me deeply. And, they continue to remind me of how much work there is left to do in ensuring that all children receive the help they need to live safe, productive, and satisfying lives.

This issue of *Claiming Children* comes at a time when too many children with mental health needs and their families are finding themselves involved with the juvenile justice system. Young people with mental health needs, after the first year of high school, have an arrest rate of 25 percent — in comparison to the 8 percent figure for youths in the general population (National Longitudinal Transition Study, 1994). And, the arrest rate continues to climb steeply; 58 percent of youth with mental health problems who graduate from high school and 73 percent of those who drop out

will be arrested within three to five years of leaving the school system. Of those youths, the vast majority are male and African-American. What is even more distressing are the trends we have witnessed during the past decade — more youth transferred to adult criminal courts, longer sentences for juveniles, and lower minimum ages at which juveniles can be prosecuted as adults.

Once an out-of-home placement is made by the juvenile justice system, few youngsters receive the mental health treatment they require. Many of these youngsters have co-occurring substance abuse problems that complicate the issue. Even more troubling are the effects of the system on the child — too many leave the juvenile system with more serious mental health issues than they had when they entered it.

This special issue of *Claiming Children* is dedicated to those individuals who are committed to ensuring that preventive approaches are in place to protect children with mental health needs from entering the

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Children with Mental Health Needs and the Juvenile Justice System (continued from page 1)

juvenile justice system. It highlights appropriate procedures and treatment that are available in the event that a young person finds him- or herself in the system. As the articles in this issue show, families are playing a vital role for their children at all stages in the process — from first encounter with the juvenile justice system, to incarceration, to reentry into society. Families working together with concerned and caring service providers are giving these youth hope.

As an organization, we must advocate for services for all of our children — especially those who are most at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system. We must be vigilant in speaking out for legislation that will protect children who find themselves in the juvenile justice system. And we must continue to stress the importance of families in this process. We must provide family members with reliable information about the process and how their participation can influence outcomes.

Following is a quote from a parent whose child committed suicide while in jail. Her words underscore the importance of family involvement and serve to remind us all of the power of family voice:

“Systems need to value young troubled youth as worthwhile human beings. The system needs to facilitate the families with strategies and strengths to take control of their own lives. The system needs to listen to families. Families need to be offered hope and sincere involvement. Why? Because the system is a temporal part of their lives — only the family will be there forever.”

Juvenile Justice System: Mental Health

Liz Ryan, Advocate, District of Columbia

A significant number of youth in the juvenile justice system have mental health disorders. Although little hard data are available, current studies indicate there is a lack of screening, assessment, and treatment of children with mental health problems. Without treatment, youth with mental health disorders are at high risk of suicide or becoming repeat offenders.

Recent studies reveal:

- As many as 60 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system have mental health disorders, and as many as 20 percent have a severe disorder, according to the National Coalition for the Mentally Ill.
- The rate of mental health disorders among youth in the juvenile justice system is consistently higher than among youth in the general adolescent population, the National Mental Health Association reports.

Under the Justice for Juveniles Initiative, a federally-funded joint project of the GAINS Center and the National Mental Health Association, assessments were conducted during 1998 which showed that:

- There is a lack of awareness in communities about the high prevalence of youth with mental health issues in the juvenile justice system.
- Many youth are not screened for mental health issues and, therefore, go undiagnosed and untreated.
- Few services exist to address the mental health needs of youth in the juvenile justice system.

Some states have recognized the unmet mental health treatment needs of children in the juvenile justice system. For example, the Texas Youth Commission reports that only 40 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system with identified mental health needs are receiving mental health treatment. The Texas Youth Commission also reports that children with mental health disorders stayed in detention an average of 5.7 months longer than children without mental health disorders who had committed the same offenses.

For additional information, see the web site of the Juvenile Court Centennial Initiative:
<http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jcci/>



Mental Health Services for Youth in Juvenile Justice Systems

Trina Osher, Family Member, Maryland

For more than 25 years, federal law has protected children and youth who come in contact with the juvenile justice system. Federal law has recognized the state’s obligation to address young peoples’ developmental needs by requiring that children be separated from adults and by taking a rehabilitative rather than a punitive approach to the treatment of juvenile offenders.

Recent Proposed Legislation Has Not Adequately Addressed Core Issues

Several bills were introduced in the last session of Congress to provide states with additional money for prisons, investigations, and prosecution of juveniles. For the most part, these would have set the clock back 25 years by reversing or weakening essential protections established in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. Harmful provisions included:

- Amending the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) to allow schools to cease educational services to students with disabilities who carry a firearm to school.
- Placing children at risk of great harm by allowing “incidental” contact with adult inmates in the state system and allowing children as young as age 13 to be placed in cells with adult inmates in the federal system.
- Eliminating requirements that states address the disproportionate confinement of minority youth.

Alternative Model Legislation Made No Progress

Several Senators introduced bills that were designed to provide federal assis-

tance to states to serve children in need of mental health and substance abuse services who come in contact with the juvenile justice system. These bills would have:

- Allowed states to use Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Block Grant funds for mental health screening and to provide mental health services, as well as for projects that provide “coordinated” mental health service programs for at-risk youth.
- Allowed states to use federal dollars for training law enforcement and juvenile justice personnel on linkages to community-based mental health services and substance abuse treatment programs.
- Required the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to conduct a comprehensive study of all the mental health services being administered to juveniles in the justice system.
- Required states to submit plans for providing needed mental health services to juveniles in the justice system.

FFCMH Position

The Federation is concerned about improving community safety. Children and youth who are detained or incarcerated must have appropriate mental health services to assure their rehabilitation and ensure the safety of the communities to which they return. However, the Federation especially is concerned that children and youth not be punished for actions that are the result of their mental or emotional disorders. These vulnerable individuals and their families must get necessary treatment, services, and support while in juvenile justice facilities and after their release to help

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Congressional debate during the past two years concerning juvenile crime bills has failed to address the mental health needs of youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

Although the Department of Justice reports that juvenile arrests have declined since 1994, each year more than two million children and youth under the age of 18 are arrested. More than 100,000 are in juvenile detention and correction facilities on any given day. The Department of Justice reports that 73 percent have mental health problems and estimates that more than 60 percent also may have substance abuse disorders.



Children and youth who come in contact with the juvenile justice system should have vocational and independent living skills training, education and/or special education, health and mental health services, social services, and substance abuse treatment. Their families should have training and support to ensure these youth continue to function responsibly after they are released.

There is evidence to suggest that providing community-based services and support to children and youth with mental health needs is a preventive measure that promotes public safety and reduces recidivism for youth who do come in contact with the police.

Mental Health Services in Juvenile Justice Systems (continued from page 3)

them live safely and responsibly in the community.

Tax dollars need to be spent on:

- Providing prevention, early identification, and effective intervention for all children, including those with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders.
- Supporting families to ensure that all children receive the care, love, and guidance they need to become responsible adults.
- Making mental health and other rehabilitative services available for children and youth when they do come in contact with the juvenile justice system.

Congress should enact juvenile justice legislation that:

- Designates funds for prevention, early intervention, and rehabilitation services.
- Protects the rights of children and youth and ensures their health and safety while under the jurisdiction of juvenile justice authorities.
- Continues to require states to address the disproportionate confinement of minority youth.
- Ensures that the mental health needs of all children and youth in the juvenile justice system are identified and promptly and appropriately addressed.

Getting Special Education Services for Incarcerated Youth

Carolyn Cooper, Family Member, California

When my son became involved with the juvenile justice system, I began a campaign to get him the special education services he required. He had an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) at the time of the arrest. In addition to a learning disability, he required medication for a mental health problem. Although my son was shot and killed shortly after his release from prison, I want to share with other families what I learned so they might better advocate for their own children.

- Call an emergency IEP meeting. Do not wait for the school to call the meeting.
- Be present at the IEP meeting. I recommend having an advocate and/or an attorney present with you.
- Make sure the IEP team understands that the child is entitled to special education services, even while incarcerated. Also, if the child is placed out of the county, make sure the school district realizes that it is still responsible for implementing the IEP. If necessary, contact the State Department of Education to provide the necessary legal requirements for this.
- Include a reentry transition component in the intervention plan. Youth are very vulnerable during this period and need

appropriate supports and services.

- Explain to your child the importance of naming you (the parent) as his or her advocate. If the child is over 18 years of age, then he or she must put the request in writing. This allows you to lobby and advocate on behalf of your child.
- Do not justify the crime at the IEP meeting and refrain from showing any anger over the situation. Keep focused on making sure the IEP is appropriate and that it is implemented.
- Stay involved. Keep in close contact. Stay abreast of what is going on with the IEP. If you cannot visit the prison or facility, continue to stay involved by asking questions — for example, “How many hours is the child spending in a classroom environment?” and “What is the child doing educationally?” If it appears that the child is not doing much — or nothing at all — reconvene the IEP team. If necessary, be prepared to contact the Department of Education and file a grievance regarding the denial of IEP services.
- Push to get a mental health assessment for your child as part of the process.
- Encourage your child to follow the IEP plan.



Understanding the Juvenile Justice System

Douglas C. Dodge, Federal Official, District of Columbia

The juvenile justice system can be difficult for parents to understand and navigate. This article is intended to help parents by providing a basic discussion on how the system is generally organized and how a juvenile's alleged delinquent offense is typically handled.

Stage 1: Arrest

Although there are several sources of referral to the juvenile justice system, the process usually begins with an arrest by a law enforcement officer. Law enforcement officers also have the authority, in the case of a minor offense, to warn and release a youth. This is often what happens.

Key Points for Family Involvement

- Go to the police station when a child is arrested or is an alleged witness. Demand to participate in any interrogation of your child.
- Be present at the detention hearing and be prepared to let the court know how you will supervise the child and cooperate with the court to meet release requirements set by the court.
- Cooperate with the lawyer on all aspects of the case.
- Insist that the lawyer develop an alternative dispositional plan and participate in the development of that plan if your child is an adjudicated delinquent.
- Cooperate with any placements and insist on being a part of the planning for treatment.
- Work closely with aftercare authorities and community-based agencies to assure a positive transition of your child back into the community. Participate in the aftercare planning.
- Take advantage of skills training that will improve your ability to work with your child's mental health and/or disability related needs.

A youth taken into custody may be taken to the police station for questioning. If there is probable cause to believe the youth was involved in the offense, he or she will generally be booked. Another alternative is for police to take the youth to the court or detention center and turn him or her over to court intake workers (probation officers) to begin the court process.

If the youth is taken to a police station for interrogation, he or she must be informed of the right to have a lawyer present during questioning. Depending on the jurisdiction, the youth might also have the right to talk to a parent or have a parent present during the interrogation. However, in many instances youth are taken to police stations for questioning as witnesses, in which case they are not entitled to a lawyer.

A parent's availability and willingness to come and pick up the child can be helpful in this process. Because a child with mental health problems is particularly vulnerable in the context of police station questioning, it is very important for parents to go there and demand that the youth only be questioned in their presence. This demand may or may not be honored. If the police do not honor this request, many courts will not allow any incriminating statements to be admitted at the adjudication hearing. If parents are permitted to be present, they also should make sure the youngster does not make any incriminating statements that can be used against him or her during the adjudication hearing.

Stage 2: Intake

Intake workers have several options for dealing with an arrested youth. They can divert the youth, release the youth to his or her parents with a summons to return to court for an initial hearing, or detain the youth pending a judicial hearing.

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Some say the juvenile justice system is not a system at all — rather, it's just several different components that are loosely related. A comprehensive definition of the juvenile justice system includes law enforcement, the court system, and other components leading to the point at which a juvenile leaves a commitment facility and transitions back to the community where he or she will receive aftercare services. It really depends on the jurisdiction and state statutes as to how the system is organized and how well the components work together.



Understanding the Juvenile Justice System (continued from page 5)

It is very difficult for a parent to have a child involved in the juvenile justice system. It is doubly difficult when the child has special needs that probably have not been met in other systems. The most important thing is to be there for your child no matter how frustrated or angry you have become as a result of their behavior. A parent's willingness to continue working with and supervising a youth may make all the difference in the world when it comes to the decision on detention or whether a child will receive an out of home placement.

ing. In many cases, intake workers also file the formal charges, usually called a petition. In other jurisdictions, information on the case is turned over to the prosecutor's office for the decision on what, if any, charges to bring.

Prosecutors have the authority to dismiss the case, divert the youth to a diversion program, file formal charges in juvenile court, or in some jurisdictions, if the charge is serious, file in adult court. Cases will be dismissed if the prosecutor finds that there is insufficient evidence or if the case hinges on evidence/statements that were taken under circumstances that violate rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. However, prosecutors will typically file charges in the case even if there is some evidence of unconstitutional action by the police. It is then up to the youth's attorney to file motions to suppress the evidence.

Stage 3: Detention

The detention hearing is a critical stage of the process because youth who are detained have a much higher chance of being incarcerated if they are found to have been involved in the offense. Another reason to avoid detention is that it makes it more difficult to develop the defense case.

It is very important for parents to provide information to the child's lawyer and the court to emphasize how the youth will be supervised if released, and how the parents will cooperate with any conditions of release pending the adjudication hearing. The presence of parents at this hearing is absolutely essential.

The juvenile who is formally charged and detained or who comes to court for the first time after being released on a summons is entitled to a lawyer. The lawyer may be hired by the parents or appointed by the court, if the parents are eligible for this service. Parents should not waive this right or allow their

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Definitions

Adjudication: The hearing at which a judge hears witnesses, receives evidence, and makes a finding about whether the youth was involved in the offense.

Aftercare: Aftercare is the period after out-of-home placement where a juvenile is still under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system. A youth on aftercare is generally supervised and may have several requirements that he or she must meet (e.g., attending school, staying away from delinquent peers).

Delinquent offense: A delinquent offense is an offense that if committed by an adult would constitute a crime under the laws of that jurisdiction.

Disposition: This term can be used to refer to how a case is resolved. However, for the purposes of this article the term is used to refer to a court's sanctions placed on a youth found to be involved in a delinquent offense.

Diversion: Diversion is a process that may take place at the arrest, intake, prosecutorial, or court level. It refers to the youth's movement out of the system, avoiding further penetration into the juvenile justice system. It may or may not include referrals for treatment and it may or may not have requirements for treatment associated with the process.

Incarceration: Refers to the court's commitment of a juvenile to a secure community-based or juvenile correctional facility.

Parents: In the context of this issue, this term is used broadly and includes non-parental care givers.

Residential facility: A residential facility is usually a staff secure community-based facility where a juvenile is placed by court order. The juvenile resides there and in many cases receives educational and other services. Many jurisdictions place juveniles in out-of-state residential facilities when they have special needs or when the jurisdiction does not have sufficient residential beds.



Understanding the Juvenile Justice System (continued from page 6)

child to waive this right, even if the youth is going to plead guilty. A competent lawyer can have a significant impact on the outcome by developing and advocating for a dispositional plan. Parents should insist that the lawyer develop such a plan with their input. They also should discuss their child's needs with the lawyer. It also may be necessary to meet with service providers to develop the plan.

Stage 4: Adjudication

At the adjudication hearing or trial the youth is entitled to be represented by a lawyer, to call witnesses, to cross examine the prosecution's witnesses, and to introduce any relevant evidence that may establish his or her innocence. The youth is not required to testify at this hearing. The decision about whether he or she does should be based on the lawyer's assessment of all the circumstances of the case.

Stage 5: Disposition

If, after the adjudication hearing the youth is found to have been involved in the offense, the court generally sets a date for a disposition hearing. Prior to this hearing, the probation staff will develop a predisposition report that provides background information on the youth and makes a recommendation to the court on the appropriate disposition. It is very important for the lawyer for the youth and the parents to develop their own disposition plan. It is important that they both advocate for the youth at the disposition hearing. Parents should definitely be at this hearing. They should be prepared to provide information on their willingness to work with the child and probation so the child can receive the least restrictive disposition.

The judge has several options available in providing a disposition for a particu-

lar youth. The judge's decision will be based on the severity of the offense, the offense history, and the youth's response to any prior placements. The judge can place the youth on probation, order that he or she do community service or pay restitution to the victim, place the youth in a nonresidential community-based program such as day treatment, place the youth in a community-based residential program, or commit the youth to the division of juvenile services. The judge also may order the youth to undergo treatment if there is a substance abuse or mental health problem.

Parents should advocate for the appropriate treatment services and participate in any and all treatment planning. Parents also should participate in that treatment.

Stage 6: Placement

If a youth is placed in a residential facility or secure facility, planning and managing their reentry back into the community is critical. Parents should advocate to be involved in the reentry planning process and enlist community-based agencies that can help provide services to the youth. At the very least, parents should work with the aftercare workers to identify helpful community-based agencies that can address any specialized needs of the youth, such as substance abuse treatment, mental health services, and special education, as well as services such as employment training and placement.

Parents should continue to work with the aftercare staff and service providers. In addition, parents may enhance reentry by taking advantage of opportunities to enhance parental skills related to fostering a good relationship with their child and applying effective discipline.

Because many jurisdictions lack services or there is little cooperation or coordination between juvenile justice, mental health, substance abuse, and other providers, this can be one of the most frustrating aspects of the juvenile justice system. Moreover, many jurisdictions still rely on out-of-state placements for children with special needs, which makes it very difficult for parents to participate in the child's treatment.

A parent does not have to do this alone. They should enlist the support of advocates and representatives from community-based agencies and public mental health and substance abuse agencies.



Getting Your Child a Lawyer in the Juvenile Justice System

Mary Bissell and Jill Ward, Advocates, District of Columbia

Navigating the juvenile justice system can be confusing and frightening for any family. Difficulties can be especially acute for parents whose children have serious emotional disturbances or other mental health disorders.

If your child becomes involved in the juvenile justice system, it is important to understand that the presence of a parent is not always enough to protect a child's legal rights. Further, parents should never try to legally represent their own child.

A lawyer can play a vital role in helping both the child and his or her parents navigate the juvenile justice system. A lawyer can ask for special services for the child, particularly for a child with serious emotional disturbances and other special needs. Lawyers also can get information about the child and his or her special needs to the judge early in the process.

If my child is arrested, what should I do?

If you are notified that your child has been arrested, you should ask authorities where your child is being held and ask to see the child immediately. If the police will not allow you to see your child, take a written letter of protest to the location where your child is being held. Make sure you tell the judge and the child's lawyer, if one already has been appointed, that you have not been able to see your child.

All children are entitled to have a lawyer represent them. Children, just like adults, are entitled to speak with a lawyer before answering any police questions. When you see your child, remind him or her not to talk to the police without a lawyer — even if the child is innocent or if the police have promised to go easy if he or she talks.

Finally, do not ask your child whether or not he or she has done what he or she is charged with doing. If you do, you may have to testify against your child later in court.

How do I make sure my child gets a lawyer?

Sometimes a lawyer has already been appointed before the child's first hearing with the judge. However, it is usually the case that when the child first meets with the judge (often called a hearing), the judge will ask the child (or the parents of the child) if the child wants a lawyer. Parents should always answer "yes" (or make sure the child answers "yes") to this question, even if they think the child is innocent or that the charge is not serious.

At this point, the parents also should tell the judge if they plan to hire their own private attorney for the child. If they cannot afford a private attorney, parents should ask the judge to appoint an attorney to represent their child.

In rare cases at the child's first meeting with the judge, the judge will not ask the parent if the child needs a lawyer. If this happens, the parents should wait until the judge is finished talking, stand up and identify themselves as the child's parents, and respectfully ask the judge to appoint a lawyer to represent their child.

Should I talk to the lawyer appointed for my child?

It is essential that parents meet with the child's lawyer as soon as he or she is appointed. Inform the lawyer about the child's mental health history and specific special needs. Also, direct the lawyer to teachers, therapists, and other adults who are familiar with the child's

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A lawyer can play a vital role in helping both the child and his or her parents navigate the juvenile justice system.



Getting Your Child a Lawyer in the Juvenile Justice System (continued from page 8)

history and who might be able to testify in court about the child's situation.

Parents need to make sure that the lawyer gives the judge accurate, specific information about the child's mental health history so the judge can better understand the child and the circumstances related to the alleged offense. Information about the child's previous history also should encourage the judge to order appropriate treatment and services for the child and to arrange for the child to be supervised carefully if he or she is detained in a juvenile institution.

Where can I find out more information about getting a lawyer for my child?

For more information about how parents can make sure a child with a serious emotional disturbance obtains a lawyer in a juvenile justice case, Children's Defense Fund recommends that you call your local public defender service, the organization that represents juveniles charged with crimes. If you have trouble locating the public defender service nearest you, you can contact the National Legal Aid and Defender Association at (202) 452-0620 for a list of providers in your area, or log on to its web site at www.nlada.org.

Your state's protection and advocacy system also might be helpful. Connect with your state protection and advocacy agency by calling the National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems, Inc. at (202) 408-9514, or checking the protection and advocacy web site at www.protectionandadvocacy.com.

If parents would like to find out more general information about children with serious emotional disturbances in the juvenile justice system, consider the following resources:

- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's new publication *Youth with Mental Health Disorders: Issues and Emerging Responses*. To obtain this April 2000 issue of the *Journal of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention*, parents should call OJJDP's Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse at (301) 519-5500. The publication can also be downloaded from the OJJDP's web site at www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/.
- The David and Lucille Packard Foundation's publication, *The Future of Children: The Juvenile Court*, available at <http://www.futureofchildren.org>.

Things To Tell Your Child

If your child is stopped by police, he or she should:

- Be polite and respectful.
- Give the officer **only** his or her name and address.
- Request that the officer contact his or her parent(s).
- Explain that he or she would like to speak with a lawyer.
- Keep silent when he or she is asked any questions by police.

Parents must put any anger or desire to "teach the child a lesson" aside and make sure that their child is represented by a lawyer.

Project Hope

Dianne L. DePippo, Service Provider, and Kisha Whittfield, Family Member, Rhode Island

In this new millennium, a time of paralyzing rates of violence as we have witnessed in Rhode Island, we have implemented a strength-based, family-driven approach to bridging the punitive and rehabilitative functions of the Rhode Island Training School (RITS) with the handholding of community support as the youth transition back into their community and back into their family. Utilizing staff as family members first and professionals second underscores the success in our program as a truly family-friendly approach to service provision. Project Hope is federally funded to assist the state juvenile corrections facility in discharge planning for incarcerated youth.

The program is staffed by parents or immediate family members of youth who are or who have been incarcerated at the training school or who have struggled with the impact of the juvenile system in their lives. These tireless advocates augment the comprehensive case management support the families receive. We have integrated case management qualifications and services into the functions of our Family Service Coordinators. These coordinators bring to this program their personal experiences and their professional experience or related education.

The role of our Family Service Coordinator
(continued on page 12)

“Over the past year, I have been a member of Project Hope’s community planning team as a parent advocate. The most powerful impact I feel I have had has been the ability to empathize with the parents of the youth who are incarcerated. When I introduce myself, I disclose to them that I have been in their shoes. The parent starts to relax and feels supported by a fellow parent who truly understands how they are feeling. I am so grateful for the life experience (as painful as it has been at times) that has provided me with the strength, insight, and wisdom needed to continue on this journey of advocacy to improve our systems of care and bring true meaning to family-centered practice.”

Cathy Ciano, RI

A Parent’s Story

Cathy Ciano, Family Member, Rhode Island

I am the parent of a 19 year old boy who has struggled with emotional and behavioral challenges for the past 10 years. He became involved in the juvenile justice system.

From the first time my son was arrested, through the time he spent in detention awaiting a court hearing, through the whole maze of the court process, as well as the time he spent incarcerated, I knew I needed to stay as informed as possible to be clear on what was happening.

Based on my experience, here are a few recommendations to consider when attempting to find out information concerning your child.

- Parents need to have strong communication and advocacy skills. I have learned to never take the word of one person if you are questioning the validity of the information being shared.
- Always follow up on promises that are made by even the most well-intended professionals. Social workers, probation

officers, teachers, administrators, counselors, and so on, are sometimes overwhelmed and may not always follow through on what they’ve agreed to do. Parents need to be their own case managers to ensure that plans are put into action and that people are held accountable for what they have committed to.

- Documentation and keeping your information as organized as possible is another way of gaining clarity when communication begins to break down. I have learned how important it is to keep track of who told you what, and when the conversation took place.
- Familiarize yourself with the chain of command in any system with whom you may be involved. Know your rights and know that there is almost always another step to take when you are not satisfied.
- Most importantly, trust your instincts as a parent. You know your child better than any professional who may touch their life.



An Interview with Judge Glenda Hatchett

Neal Mazer, Service Provider, California



From the beginning of her juvenile court career, Judge Hatchett demonstrated innovative leadership coupled with a deep understanding of youth, their families, and their community.

She understood the complex and interwoven problems at the root of juvenile justice issues, and appreciated that there were no “quick fix” solutions. Consistently, she demonstrated a conviction that good results can only be attained when youth are surrounded by strong communities — parents, professional and nonprofessional providers, and unofficial caregivers such as mentors — united by the commitment to success for all children.

Neal Mazer interviewed Judge Hatchett, keynote presenter for the Federation’s 2000 Conference.

What do you think are the most important factors in helping youth who are troubled or troubling achieve success?

The heart of our work needs to be strong families. Too many families throughout the United States are overwhelmed by poverty, inadequate health care, and limited access to services. Without addressing these underlying barriers, we won’t be able to help our youth. We must shore up these families, and give them the strength and skills they need to be successful.

Families all too frequently have not been able to get the help they need. They and their children have not had access to the right counselor and/or therapist, and their children have not had the right medications. There are so many pieces of the system that must be fixed.

What are your thoughts concerning the practice of putting troubled youth with other troubled youth?

Incarceration is absolutely inappropriate for children and youth with mental health needs. All too frequently, systems are using the juvenile justice facilities as warehouses. The youth who are placed there fail to get the help they need. I believe everything should be done that can be done before incarceration is considered.

Most often, youth come into the juvenile justice system because other systems have failed. There are not enough quality treatment centers. Social services have not intervened early enough, and there is limited educational support. The result is that youth inappropriately end up in the juvenile justice system where they have little contact with the positive role models that are so necessary for healthy growth. This is why I have been a strong proponent of mentoring programs.

What are your thoughts about mentors?

Much education is necessary so that people in the community can learn about how they can help others. There are many people who want to help but don’t know what they can do. They don’t know what a powerful role they can play as a mentor. We need to help build the bridges within our communities that link people, train them, and support them. People working together for a common goal are at the heart of the strong communities so essential for lasting change.

What can parents do to assure that their children get the educational and mental health support they need?

Parents need to be vigilant. Many don’t have the resources, and many do not know what their rights are. The sad result is that kids get squeezed out of the

While still young and rising quickly in her career, Judge Hatchett chose to leave corporate life and become Georgia’s first African-American chief presiding judge of a state court. This move made her the department head of one of the largest juvenile court systems in the country, Fulton County (Atlanta), Georgia.

“It is critical that our children and youth — and their families — believe that they can fly and touch the sky. Sadly, too many have lost their hope. Our job as community members who care is to put our arms around them and to tell them that we believe in them. Working together, we can create magic.”

Judge Glenda Hatchett, GA

(continued on page 12)



Parents have a critical role, but carry an enormous burden. Being in the company of others who understand, and who are fighting the same battles, can minimize the burnout that results from long struggles.

Judge Glenda Hatchett, GA

Before his release, a 17-year-old young man received a Community Planning Team meeting. At that meeting he stated that he wanted and needed employment, wanted to further his education, and was interested in mentoring young adolescents at risk for entering the juvenile justice system. The team brainstormed and collaborated with the youth. A stipend position was authorized for the youth to volunteer in a youth group comprised of at-risk youngsters. The team also authorized a stipend for the youth to obtain clothing and to support him through the application process at the community college.

Interview with Judge Hatchett (continued from page 11)

educational system, hang out on the streets, get recruited by drug dealers and gang leaders, and get into trouble.

Youth need to be in schools where they are getting all of their needs met. Parents are the ones who can make a difference and assure that their children are getting the help they need. However, given the realities that most parents face, they often need help to remain vigilant. They need training so they know their rights and know how to best interact with providers and systems like education, social services, mental health, and juvenile justice. In addition, they need the support of advocates.

No one can do this alone. Support groups can help. The reality is that they will get worn down by “the system.” Parents have a critical role, but carry an enormous burden. Being in the company of others who understand, and who are fighting the same battles, can minimize the burnout that results from long struggles.

Project Hope (continued from page 10)

nators is to help families and youth navigate their way through the system of care. The Coordinators support, advocate, and link families with resources in addition to acting as a liaison between the correctional facility, the community, service providers, and the family. Our Coordinators check in with families to support and monitor their needs (to assist with barriers or problems) almost daily to help avert further juvenile justice involvement.

Families — An Important Resource

Our Coordinators reflect the diversity of families with whom we work, and parallel their experiences. In other words, they have “walked the walk.” This

How do you think your new role as the first courtroom TV judge focusing on young adults can be used as an effective platform for change?

When I was on the bench I had lots of power, which I used wisely. I held people in contempt when they failed to take appropriate action, and I ordered changes as necessary to assure that the needs of the youth in my court were fully and effectively addressed.

I hope that judges will become more aggressive and hold systems and people responsible and accountable. Judges have the capacity to make a difference and to truly make things happen. They can use their position as powerful and respected members of the community to bring people together, develop a consensus regarding necessary action, and help implement change. I believe that my new role will give me a strong platform to speak out and help other judges understand the critical role they can play.

shared history cultivates a foundation for a deeper level of trust, intimacy, and acceptance. Our youth in our correctional facilities are offered services and support tailored to meet their needs as they define them.

All evidence thus far supports fostering a true helping relationship with families for families. We work to support the entire family and wrap individualized services that are unique to their needs around the family. As a result of our collaborative efforts, our families are better prepared to navigate the systems whose services they must utilize. And, more often than not, the families feel that they will succeed in this journey.



Juvenile Justice Facility Checklist Available to Families

Chris Siegfried, Advocate, Virginia

The National Mental Health Association together with help from the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, has developed a checklist to assist families and other children's advocates in evaluating their local juvenile justice facilities. The checklist can help families and other advocates gauge the adequacy of health and mental health services for young people with serious emotional disturbances as well as the protection of rights, the provision of education services, and the extent to which force is used on young people.

Family members and advocates are encouraged to make appointments with local and state juvenile justice officials and open the dialogue about the care and services available for children with emotional and behavioral problems. They should ask for opportunities to walk through local facilities; ask questions; and speak with staff, treatment professionals, children, and their families. The information gathered from the checklist can be used to initiate community planning, to inform funders and policy makers about needs, and to prompt juvenile authorities to improve linkages and develop greater support services for families whose children are incarcerated.

Principles of care advocated on the checklist include:

- All young people entering juvenile facilities should be immediately screened for health, mental health, and substance abuse disorders.
- All young people placed in secure facilities should have a comprehensive assessment conducted by a treatment team within one week of admission.
- Individualized treatment or service plans should be developed by a treatment team that includes the youth's family. Plans should be appropriate for

the youth's age, gender, culture, and developmental status.

- To prevent victimization in juvenile facilities, smaller, disabled and vulnerable youth should be housed separately from those who are older, stronger, and more aggressive.
- Only qualified mental health professionals should provide treatment to incarcerated young people.
- Control techniques — such as restraint, seclusion, and confinement to a room — should be used only in response to extreme threats to life or safety, and only after other less restrictive measures have been tried and failed.
- All incarcerated youth have the right to safe, sanitary, and humane conditions of confinement. They also have the right to education, exercise and recreation, legal counsel, medical and mental health care, contact with their families, protection from harm, and access to appropriate grievance procedures.
- All staff in juvenile facilities should be trained in suicide prevention, risk recognition, appropriate crisis response, behavior management and de-escalation techniques, and referral.
- Adequate educational services, including special education services and supports, should be provided to incarcerated youth. Transitional services and planning should be available for older youth.
- A discharge or transition plan should be developed with the youth's family before any young person leaves a juvenile facility.

For copies of the checklist, contact the NMHA Information Center at (703) 684-7722.

The National Mental Health Association and the Federation are encouraging families and other children's advocates to find out more about what actually goes on inside juvenile justice facilities. Many juvenile justice systems simply aren't equipped to care for young people with special needs. Facilities are often overcrowded and understaffed. Correctional workers sometimes lack training to provide the kind of help that young people and their families need.



The Safety Network: A Family-Centered Sex Offender Treatment Program

Sue L. Smith and Anna M. McLaughlin, Family Members,
Georgia

Within the Georgia Parent Support Network there is a commitment to change the system one child at a time. The “Family Centered Sex Offender Treatment Safety Network” is the result of our experience with one child.

Background: A Child Named Joey

Sue Smith, executive director, received a call from the state hospital, which had received a call from the juvenile court. “There is this child,” the call started. Several months before, this young man, Joey, had been charged as a sexual offender. Under Georgia law this mandates a sentence to a youth detention facility (jail for children). Joey suffered with mental retardation (Full Scale IQ 40) and was not capable of understanding his crime. In detention he was being victimized. Marquis Beaszler and Ron Koon from the state mental hospital had heard of a program in Connecticut for adult sex offenders that required the released offender to be watched 24 hours a day in the community. Could we try this with children and would it work?

Meetings began with the juvenile court. A court judge informed the Georgia Parent Support Network staff that the child was very sweet, but he had reservations that this could work because the child’s mother was limited. At the detention facility, the child would not come out from under his cot because he was afraid that he would be further victimized. Anita (Joey’s mother) would make appointments and then not be there when staff arrived. We also began to wonder if this could work.

Georgia Parent Support Network staff members finally met all parties at a court hearing. It was made clear that we were there to help release Joey back into the

community under the care of his mother. Home visits began. Anita, as it turned out, was not limited. She was a licensed nurse and volunteered at the literacy center in her neighborhood. Anita was very protective of Joey and knew no way to fight the adversarial system that had taken her child.

Before we requested the release of a sex offender we had to be sure that we had covered all concerns from the community, the family, the court, and the victim’s family. We contacted the victim’s family, identified ourselves, and asked them to join us in watching the offender. They agreed, as they wanted to ensure their child’s safety while being sure that our offender received the services he needed. We mapped the neighborhood, marking potential victims. We enlisted school personnel, bus drivers, Joey’s preacher, and his Sunday school teacher. We all met at Anita’s home. Additionally, there were many family members and friends of the family who became involved. Together, we developed the first community plan.

From this plan, Joey’s contract was written. The central part of a Safety Network is the contract. The contract clearly defines each person’s role: the community members, the primary caregiver, and the offender. Given Joey’s IQ, his portion of this contract was very basic. Other provisions included those for community members and primary care givers.

Once we had signed the contract, Joey was allowed to come home. Before we could approve this, however, we had to develop a schedule. We needed to know who was going to be responsible for him and when and where he would be at any given time. The contract made it clear that the Safety Network Coordinator

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The Georgia Parent Support Network (GPSN) is a grass roots organization founded in 1989 by parents of children with mental, emotional, and behavioral challenges. From the original founding members, the organization has grown to more than 3,000 members. GPSN, through a parent-to-parent model, provides advocacy and support to families whose children are mentally ill, emotionally disturbed, or behaviorally challenged.



The Safety Network (continued from page 14)

must approve any change from the arranged schedule. We began to stop by where he should be, as defined by his schedule. We joined the family with the common goal of keeping Joey safe, resulting in keeping the community safe. It is our belief that in times of crisis people call someone they know, someone they trust, and someone on whom then can depend. That is why we maintain daily contact.

Because the goal of a Safety Network is to turn over the responsibilities of running the network to the network members, we worked intensely on the education component with the family to help them understand what it means to be a sex offender and what security is needed to ensure a safe community. This was done through daily contact, but also through Network meetings. These meetings were held every other week in the beginning. As Safety Network members became familiar with their roles, the meetings took place once a month. The goal of these meetings was not only to educate all members of the Safety Network but also to provide them with the tools they needed to continue the Safety Network on their own.

As we developed the Safety Network, we discovered that we needed to provide a normalized environment for the child. We were adding pressure to an already explosive situation. We began to look for coaches and mentors to provide the needed surveillance while providing normalized activities. (Since then, when we have been unsuccessful at providing this in the community, we have provided it through the Case Coordinator.) We saw this child twice a week for two months. Our meetings often took the form of an outing.

As the situation stabilized, we began to step down services. Eventually, we phased the services out. Networks always are begun with the ultimate goal

of phasing out of a family, because no one needs a “service” to watch him or her for life. This was a gradual process, beginning with a reduction in phone contact to every other day and once a week face-to-face contact. It was necessary to closely monitor the changes in stress within the family to determine if the reduction of support was detrimental. We tried to get the family to replace staff with natural supports from their Safety Network. Once we reached a plateau where reduced contact was no longer stressful for the child or family, we moved into weekly phone contact, with twice a month face-to-face contact. Throughout this process we continued to hold Safety Network meetings, but we worked on the Safety Network structure more than education at this point.

Once Joey and his family had worked through the stages of the Network, they were ready for graduation. This was a big day and a hard day for them. Staff still remain available to the child and the family after graduation and they can contact us as often as they want. Additionally, we call them at least once a month to follow up for a period of three months.

Program Expansion

Our program worked for Joey. We began to adapt it for other children we had heard about. We found a sex offender workbook and now have the children complete it as part of their Network obligations. We identified sex offender group therapy for the children to attend. Moreover, we get thorough psychosexual evaluations on children to determine if they are at risk, and how high of a risk. We began to develop relationships with judges, probation officers, therapists, and school personnel that have allowed us to continue to develop the program on an individual basis for each child.

Our individualized approach is what has helped make this program a success. There are only two absolutes in any Safety Network: The child must be watched 24 hours per day by a Safety Network member, and the family has the final word. To date, 448 youngsters have been served by this program.



Wraparound Milwaukee: Effectively Working with Delinquent Youth and Their Families

Bruce Kamradt, Service Provider, Wisconsin

From its inception, Wraparound Milwaukee has worked with youth in the juvenile justice system who have mental health needs and are being placed in residential treatment centers, psychiatric hospitals, or correctional facilities. When Wraparound Milwaukee was initiated, nearly 400 Milwaukee County children, 60 percent of whom were delinquent, were placed in residential treatment facilities for lack of a better alternative.

Wraparound Milwaukee has utilized several key components of care to meet the

needs of these youth and their families in the community. The cornerstone of the system is the Child and Family Team. The Child and Family Team consists of those individuals who are providing support to the family. These may include other family members, relatives, church members, neighbors, teachers, treatment providers, a probation worker, or the family's Care Coordinator. The Child and Family Team is the vehicle that drives the individualized Care Plan.

The Care Coordinator helps facilitate the Child and Family Team. The Care Coordinators perform the strength-based assessments, help assemble the Child and Family Team, and — based on the needs identified at the Child and Family Team meeting — help the family develop an individualized Plan of Care. Working with small caseloads of one worker for eight families, the Care Coordinator helps arrange for formal and informal services for the child and family. Whether providing karate lessons to build self-esteem, arranging for a mentor as a tutor and role model for the child, arranging outpatient counseling to help with anger control, finding a life coach to help a child learn skills necessary to find a job, or providing respite services so a parent(s) can have some time away from home — whatever the identified need is, it is arranged by the Care Coordinator with active participation by the child and parent.

The other program components that are key to Wraparound Milwaukee are the availability of a 24-hour Mobile Urgent Treatment Team, the Provider Network System, and advocacy services from Families United of Milwaukee. Every child/family is enrolled with the Mobile Urgent Treatment Team, which can provide crisis intervention services wherever the child is. The 12-member team of psychologists and social workers of-

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Wraparound Milwaukee is part of the Milwaukee County Human Services Department and its Mental Health Division. In 1994 Milwaukee County received a five-year \$15 million grant from the Center for Mental Health Services-Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Branch to initiate systematic reform in the community.

Since Wraparound Milwaukee Entered My Daughter's Life

Christine E., Family Member, Wisconsin

My 15-year-old daughter Kimberly has been in Wraparound Milwaukee for the past year. Kimberly has a history of depression and has made several suicide attempts. She has been in the juvenile justice system for multiple thefts, has a history of truancy from school, and failed seventh grade. There have been other traumatic events in our lives, including violence and abuse.

Since Wraparound Milwaukee entered our lives, things have changed. My Care Coordinator has listened and been there to meet our needs. She arranged through our Child and Family Team for Kimberly to get into a unique alternative school program. We are now in family therapy and have learned that much of her anger is the result of feeling abandoned by the murder of her brother. Our family now has a mentor, and Kimberly attended a youth camp this summer.

Kimberly has been staying away from bad influences. She is getting A's and B's in school. But most important, she has turned 15 and is happy about it. She stated recently, "This is the first year I am not hurting or want to harm myself."



Wraparound Milwaukee (continued from page 16)

ten can prevent a child from having to be removed from the home by effectively defusing a crisis at home or school. The Provider Network includes more than 200 providers in the community who offer a range of over 70 services on a “fee-for-service basis.” This means there is a fixed price for each type and unit of service. Vendors apply to provide for one or more services, which include everything from day treatment, individual, and family therapy, to respite care, mentors, transportation, in-home treatment, housing, etc.

Families United of Milwaukee is the parent advocacy component of Wraparound. It ensures that parents have an active role in the planning process and that their needs are being heard and met. But the parent advocates of Family United also are there to provide support groups and family gatherings, and to identify community resources and many other services for families.

Managed Care and Wraparound

Wraparound Milwaukee also is unique because in serving children and families it has evolved into a special type of public managed care entity. It offers families a unique type of health plan by pooling funds through case rates paid by child welfare and juvenile justice and monthly capitation payments for each Medicaid enrolled child.

After all funds are pooled and decategorized, Wraparound Milwaukee can use them to cover any service that families need. That has been a particularly good “selling point” to the juvenile court judges. Whether a delinquent youth or a nondelinquent youth, the court now can order enrollments into Wraparound Milwaukee with an array of alternative community service options in addition to residential treatment. The flexible court order allows a Care Coordinator working with the family to determine if a child should move

into out-of-home services or stay at home, for how long, and with what services.

The Delinquent Population in Wraparound Milwaukee

Currently, there are more than 325 youth in Wraparound Milwaukee who are adjudicated delinquent and who suffer from an emotional/mental health problem. Engaging delinquent youth is handled no differently than other youth in Wraparound. The assigned Care Coordinator does a strength-based assessment to learn about the child and family strengths and assets. Families are actively involved as being capable and the most knowledgeable about their children’s needs. A good Care Coordinator listens to the family’s assessment of needs and, together with the family, formulates an individualized treatment plan. This plan must include clear, measurable goals and outcomes for the child.

A Success Story

The following is a case example of Wraparound’s work with a delinquent youth.

Mark originally had been recommended for transfer to a correctional institution in a state juvenile corrections facility. That order was “stayed” and he was ordered by children’s court into Wraparound. Mark and his family had strengths, including good motivation to accept help, an interest in school and sports, a good sense of humor, and an ability to make friends. The comprehensive range of services Mark received covered many aspects of his life domains. He was enrolled in and successfully completed a special outpatient treatment program for sexual offenders. He was matched with a mentor who got him involved in an after-school recreation program and doubled as a tutor to help him with school work. He and his family were involved in family counseling that has made a stronger family unit. Mark has committed no new offenses and is doing well at home and in the community.

Outcomes for all youth participating in Wraparound Milwaukee have been encouraging. For delinquent youth in the juvenile justice system, the use of residential treatment placement has dropped more than 60 percent from an average of 220 to less than 90 youth in placement. The use of psychiatric hospitalization has dropped 80 percent. Clinical outcomes — as measured by the Child and Adolescent Functional Assessment Scale (CAFAS) and used to measure changes in the youth’s functioning at home, at school, and in the community — have improved. Of particular significance to the juvenile court has been the reduction in the average number of charged offenses for the year prior to enrollment in Wraparound Milwaukee during enrollment and one year after disenrollment from the program.



Police Youth Bureau

Nick Severt, Police Officer and Family Member, North Dakota

The Bismarck, North Dakota, Police Youth Bureau (PYB) is a unique program that has been in existence for almost 25 years. The program strives to help youth avoid legal and social problems that face them and to be responsible in dealing with problems when they do become involved in juvenile justice issues.

PYB focuses on prevention, diversion, and education. By becoming involved with youth early and holding them accountable and applying consequences, they are given skills that help them avoid more serious problems in the future.

Referrals come from juvenile court, families, and the schools. After successfully completing the program, approximately 80 percent of the youngsters do not re-offend and most do not need to go through Juvenile Court. Last year, PYB handled approximately 51 percent (2,676) of the juvenile citations issued in the area.

How the Program Works

The PYB is a division of the police department and is headed by a police lieutenant. The staff consists of seven youth workers (mostly licensed social workers), two police officers, two part-time crisis workers, and two office assistants.

During the intake stage, the youth and parents work with the youth worker to address any issues that contributed to the offense. The youth and family often are dealing with other issues in the home, school, or community. It is our philosophy that if these issues are not addressed, it is likely that problems will continue.

Consequences are tailored individually for each youth and their particular circumstances. The youth worker monitors the youth's progress. One program we use is the restitution program. The juvenile offender is required to make pay-

ments to replace or repair damage that he or she has caused. The case is kept open until the youth has completed the consequences. If there are issues that should be addressed by other agencies, referrals are made.

Additional PYB programs include:

- Minor in Possession and Marijuana Education classes. These classes focus on educating juvenile offenders on the effects of substances and on the skills that they need to avoid engaging in this type of behavior.
- Outreach Program. This is an activity-based intervention that is mixed with counseling efforts. Youth engage in wilderness outings that include canoeing, backpacking, camping, horseback riding, and mountain biking. A police officer usually participates in these outings as a role model. The outings show youth that there are fun things to do in the community that allow them to earn respect, develop confidence, learn new skills, and receive recognition for positive leadership.

Police officers work closely with other community agencies to address youth problems. A youth worker also is assigned to each school in the area to work with youngsters on campus. The youth worker also serves as a liaison between the police and school.

The many services provided by PYB include:

- Organizing a community gang task force.
- Having available (24 hours a day) a youth worker to assist schools, parents, and youth in crisis.
- Serving on school crisis teams.
- Making training and educational presentations.

The Bismarck Police Youth Bureau fills a special place in the community by helping youth avoid problems, assisting area agencies deal with youth issues, intervening early in crisis situations, and helping at-risk youth make good choices.

Police officers participate with youth in activities, allowing them to get to know an officer on a more personal level and in a positive setting.



A Message From the President, Gail Daniels

On behalf of the Board of Directors for the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (FFCMH), welcome to our 12th Annual Conference, to be held on December 1-3, 2000 at the Renaissance Hotel in Washington, DC. Our theme this year is "*Juvenile Justice and the Mental Health System: Improving Services and Supports for Children, Youth and Families.*" We are very excited to feature **Judge Glenda Hatchett** as our keynote speaker.

As with all of our conferences, this year we put serious thought into the subject matter that we would address. Our topic is of special interest to us when we reflect that within the 3,000 juvenile justice placements across our nation; 60 percent are children and youth with mental health or co-occurring mental health and substance abuse problems.

We knew that we were taking a risk when we sent out the Call for Papers to address this enormous and complex issue. This is an issue that results from our children and families living in a complex, technical society that often is, in many ways and for many reasons (both past and present), restless and hectic.

We also wanted to work toward breaking the stigma around the incarceration of our children and youth with special mental health needs, and to make an effort to better understand that sometimes fearful system which falls under the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

We were gratefully encouraged and inspired by the response of presenters from across the country who answered the call with creative proposals on cultur-

ally competent, community-based programs and services that are founded on strong youth and family-professional partnerships.

When we connect the presentations into one picture, we are given the vision, from beginning to end, of proactive prevention activities, appropriate incarceration practices, and effective transitions back to the family and the community.

Appreciation is extended to the FFCMH Conference Program Committee, Ad Hoc Plenary Committee, and FFCMH staff members for their time and expert advice. Thanks go out to the youth, families, professional service providers, and agencies for their enthusiasm and willingness to enhance our conference with their proposals and presentations. We wish to acknowledge our hostess organization, Mississippi Families as Allies.

Most certainly, we want to thank in advance all of the participants who plan to join us at this year's great family reunion. Our mission can only be accomplished when we come together as a united family. Therein lies our strength.

Plan Now!

The 13th Annual Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health Conference is scheduled for November 29 to December 2, 2001. It will take place at the Renaissance Washington, DC Hotel. For information, visit the web site at: www.bcfamily.com

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Youth Speak Out!

Juvenile Justice

Angela Nelson, Youth Advocate, Illinois

We as adults in a violent society need to understand that when we solve our problems with violence and are entertained on a daily basis by violence our children, as young as five and six, will do so as well. In my opinion, no child in this society will ever get justice in any courtroom as long as the government bombs other countries to solve their problems, Hollywood continues to make one violent movie after another, and children grow up in homes where domestic violence exists. Until we can stop saying “this does not happen in our neighborhood,” as if the other neighborhoods are not as important, and we realize that violence is reaching all of our children and all of our neighborhoods, violence will continue to progress and produce more violent children.

Would you consider lowering the legal age of smoking or drinking? So why is it that we continue to let legislators lower the age when children are put in jails and put on death row? I know some of you are probably thinking, “these kids committed horrible crimes and they should be tried as adults.” Now this is the kind of thinking that will land your own kids in adult jails. I’m not 100 percent sure, but I do not believe most of the parents who have children who have committed such crimes thought that their children were capable of doing so. When looking at your little angels, remember you never know what Ninja Turtle he or she may think they are when they are out and about trying to make their way through an unjust society.

“Once we as adults start solving our problems without violence, so will our children.”

Angela Nelson, IL

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1101 King Street, Suite 420 • Alexandria, VA 22314