

THE LINK

CONNECTING JUVENILE JUSTICE AND CHILD WELFARE

INTEGRATING FAMILY-FOCUSED APPROACHES IN JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM

By Ryan Shanahan

Introduction

The idea of engaging the families of young people who are incarcerated makes sense to most people working in juvenile justice. Yet, all too often, the resources and strengths of families are not taken into account when a young person is involved with the justice system. How do staff at juvenile justice facilities typically engage family? Do they see the family as important to the success of individuals in their care? How do incarcerated youth characterize the support they receive from their loved ones? What would be different if staff talked about the strengths of youth’s families and not just their perceived shortcomings? Do staff approach families—or even the subject of families—differently when they know that young people are more likely to succeed if they maintain strong connections to their social supports?

Family Justice, an independent nonprofit organization recently incorporated into the Vera Institute of Justice as the Family Justice Program (www.vera.org/news/family-justice-program-joins-vera), created the Juvenile Relational Inquiry Tool (JRIT) in 2009 to help facilities address these and other similar questions. Family Justice designed the tool to help juvenile justice staff build rapport with youth and identify people who can provide support while they are incarcerated and when they return to the community. The U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention¹ funded this initiative. The tool is modeled after an instrument for adult corrections called the Relational Inquiry Tool (diZerega & Shapiro, 2007).

Although conducted with a small sample, the JRIT pilot had promising results. At a time when juvenile justice

departments nationwide are recognizing the importance of keeping youth connected to their communities, staff are welcoming the tool as an addition to case management and a concrete step toward reform.

Family Justice developed the JRIT through a two-step process: a planning stage and a pilot. This article discusses how the tool was developed, youth and staff responses from the pilot, and the value of using the tool to ask about the family—broadly defined to include social supports—in juvenile facilities.

Setting the Groundwork for the Pilot

In creating the JRIT, Family Justice sought to develop an easy way for facility staff to discuss with youth the strengths of their support systems. The project focused on the following research questions:

- What questions should staff ask youth about their families?
- What are the implications for safety (for staff and youth) when facilities expand youth’s access to their social supports during incarceration?
- Which staff should be asking questions about family and support?
- What parameters are necessary to help staff engage youth in a supportive, strength-based way?

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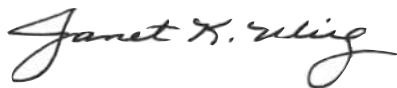
DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

The two feature articles in this issue are quite different in their scope, one having to do with an approach and policy regarding family engagement for youth and the other with a broader policy perspective that calls attention to our eternal quest for systems integration. We know how important family relationships can be to support rehabilitation goals for youth in correctional facilities. The article, "Integrating Family-Focused Approaches in Juvenile Justice Reform," describes a tool developed by VERA's Family Justice Program with the support of OJJDP. This tool helps juvenile justice staff work with youth to identify the strengths and resources of their families to support youth while they are incarcerated and when they return to the community. The other article, "The Behind the Cycle (BTC) Network: Making Connections to Reorient Policy Priorities," reminds us how a lack of systems integration contributes to the cycle of incarceration, particularly for the poor and people of color. From our vantage point working with youth, we see also how this lack of systems integration gives rise to the intergenerational nature of that cycle. The BTC Network, comprised of a multidisciplinary network of individuals and organizations, is a developing effort committed to promoting more integrated solutions to address the cycle of incarceration and the social and economic conditions that feed it. I urge you to read both of these articles with a view as to how they fuel our efforts to improve outcomes for youth.

CWLA's very capable Government Affairs Division has contributed to this issue, as is usual, a good policy update of relevance to all of us. I refer you to the article, "Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PL 111-148)," which summarizes the health care legislation signed by President Obama March 23, 2010.

With this issue, I am announcing the departure of the Juvenile Justice Division staff (John Tuell, Sorrel Concodora, and me) from CWLA. As most of you know, the Division has received support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation since it began its work in 1999. For the last several years, the Division has received support for its work on Models for Change, the Foundation's systems reform initiative underway in 16 states. As of July 1st, the Foundation's grant is moving to the RFK Children's Action Corps which has recently formed a juvenile justice collaborative with the RFK Center for Justice and Human Rights. We will move as well to continue our work on Models for Change and promote the many systems integration tools developed with the support of CWLA during our tenure. We would like to thank CWLA for hosting our work; CWLA's Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee for all of its support and expertise; and all of you for following and being a part of our efforts. We hope that you will continue to support the systems integration goals at CWLA and with us into the future.

Sincerely,



Janet K. Wiig

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CONNECTING JUVENILE JUSTICE
AND CHILD WELFARE

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CWLA is the nation's oldest and largest membership-based child welfare organization. We are committed to engaging people everywhere in promoting the well-being of children, youth, and their families, and protecting every child from harm.

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(from page 1)

In partnership with the Arizona Department of Juvenile Corrections, the Ohio Department of Youth Services, and the Michigan Bureau of Juvenile Justice, Family Justice developed and piloted the tool in these demographically and geographically diverse jurisdictions, representing young men and women as well as the spectrum of minimum to maximum security.² These sites were also selected because of their strong leadership and commitment to reform.

Family Justice applied a participatory action research (PAR) model, which studies have shown results in more sustainable change than traditional research approaches do (see Why PAR?). Each site formed a work group with a cross-section of staff, including top management positions at the facility, front-line workers, mental health staff, security staff, parole, and community liaisons. The work group members provided guidance about site-specific needs and concerns and communicated with the rest of the staff about the progress of the initiative. Collecting data locally allowed researchers to receive, process, and convey information to work group members as they laid the framework for the pilot. Work groups at each site generated a list of potential JRIT questions and considered the procedural issues of when, where, and with which youth the researchers would pilot the tool—and who would ask the questions.

During work group meetings, conversation often returned to how staff could use information the tool would gather. Staff suggested that facilities could add people identified as social supports to visitation lists or that staff could encourage youth to write them letters. But some staff members raised concerns that if people who are not immediate family were identified, those individuals might jeopardize facility and youth safety. Staff shared their apprehension about encouraging young people to stay in contact with people who might be negative influences—or in worst case scenarios, past abusers. Though the group did not resolve this issue, facility administrators seemed confident that the benefits of knowing who young people wanted to contact outweighed the potential harms. Work groups also discussed ways staff could continue the conversations started while using the JRIT, to help youth think about positive and negative influences in their lives.

To capture a broad range of opinions, researchers incorporated the work groups' suggestions about the tool in a survey that each group member distributed to five colleagues ($n = 84$). In their survey responses, staff reported that families offer emotional support for youth primarily through letters, visitation, phone calls, and giving them a sense of belonging. One-quarter of respondents

²The facilities chosen were the Black Canyon School for Girls, the only facility for young women in Arizona; the Scioto Juvenile Correctional Facility, a mixed facility that houses two units for young men (reception and a parole revocation program) and Ohio's only unit for young women; and the W.J. Maxey Boys Training School, Michigan's only maximum-security facility for young men.

also mentioned that families support young people by holding them accountable for their attitudes and behavior. When asked what kind of questions the tool should include, staff were most interested in learning about the roles youth see themselves playing in the family, their responsibilities, and future plans or goals. This feedback was incorporated into the JRIT early in the pilot process.

Researchers interviewed young people at each site ($n = 35$). More than three-quarters said that they had been asked questions about their family or friends while incarcerated. Many young people stated that the conversations often focused on the challenges their families face and said it would be good to also talk about what is going *well* for their families. All of the youth described examples of support they receive, including visits from family members, writing and receiving letters, and phone calls from family members. Many respondents also said that their family can be encouraging and inspirational. As one girl said, "To a lot of girls in here, family is the most important thing."

The overwhelming majority of youth thought questions about their support networks should be asked a few weeks or months after intake, once they had settled in at the facility. More than half of the young people interviewed said the tool should be administered more than once, implying that things might change for people while they are incarcerated. Most youth said that staff members they see regularly and whom they can trust should administer the JRIT.

To complement the opinions of staff and youth, Family Justice assembled a national advisory board with experts in the juvenile justice field. Members included academic partners, representatives from each of the participating juvenile justice departments, and other advocates of strength-based, family-focused policies and practices (see sidebar). The board analyzed the data to help create a pilot version of the JRIT.

Piloting the JRIT

Based on the preliminary data, Family Justice tested a pilot version of the tool at each site and trained facility staff on the program's strength-based, family-focused approach to juvenile corrections, how to administer the tool, and the importance of filling out the self-report assessments after completing each JRIT. The assessments sought to gauge the perceived rapport between a young person and a pilot tester before and after using the tool and how the instrument could be useful in the youth's care and reentry planning.

During the pilot phase, 11 staff members at three facilities completed tools with 33 youth. The types of staff members chosen to pilot the tool represented a wide range of juvenile justice professionals, including social workers, case managers, direct-care and front-line staff, psychiatrists, and psychology associates.

The JRIT has eight questions. Many questions include probes—follow-up questions that help staff be more conversational and less formal. The questions elicit discus-

sion about the support available to youth and give them an opportunity to think about their transition back into the community. The pilot version also had an opening and closing script to describe the tool in context. The national advisory board believed the script could be helpful to staff who talk infrequently with youth about their families.

Youth's Responses to the JRIT

Most of the support that the youth reported came from immediate family. The tool also identified the breadth of support youth receive; almost all of the individuals who completed the tool described examples of support they received from outside their household.

The JRIT starts by asking youth, "What are your goals? How does your family support your goals?" To gather information about social supports beyond the family as traditionally defined, questions include "Who could you call at 2 A.M. and know they would pick up the phone?" and "If you could make a team of helpful family and friends, who would you include on your team?"

In describing their support "team," all youth who completed the tool listed traditional or extended family members, and about half of them also referred to other key people, such as friends, relatives of friends, or church figures. Youth often included facility staff members on their ideal team of helpful people, a testament to the important role staff play in the lives of incarcerated youth.

After the youth had completed the pilot, researchers held a focus group at one facility to learn about how they experienced the tool. The young people's responses made clear that families and other social supports are important to their success. They said this discussion was different from other conversations with staff about family and concluded that the tool could help staff learn about them and help them learn about themselves.

Staff Responses to the JRIT

Overall, the staff had positive responses about the tool's value in building rapport. Most staff believed that the youth answered questions openly and honestly.

Administering the tool took an average of 15 minutes. Most staff had met with the young person during the week before completing the tool; for most participants some relationship existed prior to the pilot. Most staff (30) had already discussed family and friends with the youth being interviewed. Some staff (19) thought the previous discussions had been similar to the questions on the JRIT. Nine considered earlier discussions different and one staff member did not respond.

After completing interviews, many staff members reported increased openness between the youth and themselves. In most cases, staff said that using the tool either "somewhat" or "really" improved their understanding of the young person. More than half of the participating staff members reported that their level of understanding of the youth changed. A majority of staff (28) responded that they thought the tool would be helpful for reentry planning.

One staff member said that by completing the tool with a young man who had been on his caseload for a few months, he learned about an uncle who could serve as a support for the youth. Another staff member said she thought the questions would be helpful in day-to-day conversations with youth. She said she was eager to use the tool with every individual on her caseload.

Comments differed depending on how soon staff finished and returned the completed tools. Those who submitted the tools early had mostly positive remarks:

- "Questions were concise and to the point. Youth was able to stay focused. It wasn't too long where he would have lost interest in what we were doing. Youth appeared to want to talk more when it was over."
- "Questions were to the point; youth appeared comfortable and willing to talk."

Those who made their submissions in the last weeks of the initiative had less positive remarks:

- "Some of the questions were awkward in wording and I had to use the probes. However, I think the probe questions often differ [from] the original questions."
- "We already know this stuff about our youth and following the script made it feel forced."
- "I want to know more about some of her responses, but felt limited with the questions."

This last comment speaks to some staff members' desire to learn more. It is important to note that the tool was designed to complement existing case-management practice. It is intended to start a discussion that can be revisited during incarceration.

A stark contrast existed between those staff who had positive comments and those who had negative comments. Almost all of the negative feedback about the initiative came from staff who returned pilot tools late in the allotted time for project completion. Supervisors had to pressure some of these individuals to complete their tools. This led researchers to wonder whether the delay indicated that individuals had not bought into the project.

Discussion

Many factors contribute to any decision to implement a new policy or procedure in a juvenile correctional facility, including the projected impact on safety and well-being of staff and incarcerated individuals, changes in work responsibilities, and any additional funding or resources required. This initiative took such factors into consideration and set out to create a tool that would make a positive impact on the facilities' culture by improving the way staff talk with youth about their families.

Work with youth requires communication about families. Rather than limit such communication to formal processes of visitation and monitoring phone calls and letters, facilities may benefit from another approach. Staff understand that families are important to the success of individuals in their care. Youth in juvenile justice facilities

describe the support they receive from loved ones as essential to their coping abilities while incarcerated and to their vision of success when they go home. Young people interviewed after completing the JRIT responded positively to the questions' emphasis on their strengths and their families' strengths. They recognized a difference between the tool's questions and those usually asked about their families.

Staff know that families play a role in a young person's successful transition back to the community. After training from Family Justice, staff generated idea about encouraging family involvement and expressed commitment to making greater efforts to stay in contact with family.

Still, most facilities lack a systemic way to identify and access those families' strengths. Another challenge for facilities is to broaden the definition of family in ways that gain access to the largest support network possible without jeopardizing safety. These changes require a shift in institutional culture—and that may be the biggest challenge in doing this work.

Throughout the initiative, facility staff were reluctant to broaden their policies to help youth stay in touch with people who were not part of their immediate family. Nevertheless, facility administrators welcomed using the JRIT, and most facility staff found that the tool prompted beneficial conversations. Young people seemed happy to have conversations about their social supports in truthful, meaningful ways when they felt they could trust the staff member asking the questions.

Given that job descriptions vary widely among sites, it is difficult to say with confidence which staff, by position, should administer the tool. But the initial response suggests that staff in a variety of positions can effectively administer the tool and that each facility can tailor the process to meet its needs.

Ideally, questions about family would be accompanied by a shift in organizational culture so that focusing on social

networks and their strengths becomes the norm. This could include changing policies on visitation, reviewing case-management forms, and providing more opportunities for staff at all levels using structured tools and methods to talk with youth about their support systems. Eventually this could create an atmosphere in which staff talk openly and often with youth about their families without the need for forms or tools because it is so ingrained in the culture of the facility and department. In the meantime, the JRIT is a user-friendly step toward engaging young people and their families to focus on their strengths.

Ryan Shanahan is a Senior Program Associate at the Vera Institute of Justice.

Jennifer Onofrio contributed to this article.

Why PAR?

Family Justice applied a PAR model to incorporate the voices of as many parties as possible. PAR has been found effective with marginalized or vulnerable populations (see Dupont, 2008; Fine & Torre, 2006; Sullivan et al., 2005). At the core of this approach is the goal of achieving a democratic atmosphere between researchers and participants, so research is not being enacted "on" a group, but instead, learning is mutual (O'Brien, 2001). The JRIT research design was markedly different from what is traditionally practiced in juvenile justice facilities in that it included the people most affected by the research—incarcerated youth and front-line staff (Dupont, 2008). Researchers used the PAR approach because it is an iterative, reflective process that can empower participants through their role in developing and directly applying what they learn to organizational change.

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Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PL 111-148)

On March 23, President Obama signed the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (P.L. 111-148) into law. The following week he signed the reconciliation bill (H.R. 4872) into law, which made various amendments to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA). This landmark legislation will expand coverage to millions of Americans who are currently uninsured, including many children. The law will also provide immediate relief to the uninsured, financial benefits to those who may be insured but may not be able to afford prescriptions and other needed services, and protection for consumers against abuses of the insurance industry. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) analysis total reductions in the number of uninsured will reach 1 million in 2012, 19 million in 2014, and 32 million by 2019.

There are various provisions in the bill that take effect right away and offer immediate relief for current and prospective consumers. Seniors, for example, will be provided a \$250 rebate to help cover the costs of prescription drugs once they fall into the gap known as the “donut hole”. Under the new law, the tax code is amended to provide a tax credit to small employers (nonprofits and for-profits) who pay for at least half of the health insurance premiums for their employees; Within 90 days of enactment, states are allowed to create temporary high risk pools to provide immediate access to insurance for those who are uninsured because of a pre-existing condition. In addition the new law increases and extends the adoption tax credit and adoption assistance program through 2011 and makes the credit refundable.

The law seeks to protect consumers by barring health insurance companies from imposing pre-existing condition exclusions on children’s coverage. Furthermore, group health plans and health insurance issuers offering group or individual health insurance coverage cannot rescind coverage

once the enrollee becomes sick or establish lifetime limits. Effective this year insurers are banned from establishing unreasonable annual limits (in 2014 insurers will be prohibited from establishing any annual limits). Finally, the law creates a new independent appeals process so that consumers have access to an effective internal and external appeals process when appealing coverage determinations.

Many of the safety nets that vulnerable children and families depend on are expanded in the new law. Beginning in September, new health plans and certain grandfathered plans will be required to allow unmarried, childless adults up to their 26th birthday to remain on their parents’ insurance policy. In order to ease the financial burden associated with doctors’ visits, new plans will be required to cover preventive services (including evidence-informed preventive care and screenings) and immunizations without copays, deductibles, or other cost-sharing requirements.

Currently, states have the option to extend Medicaid coverage to youth who have exited from care, but effective January 1, 2014, the new law requires Medicaid coverage to be expanded to include former foster youth up to age 26. Caseworkers will be required to include information regarding their health care needs while in transition and thereafter (specifically coverage options and health care power of attorney resources) in all transition plans for youth exiting care.

The legislation provides funding for Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) through 2015 (it was originally set to expire in 2013), continues the authority for the program through 2019 and requires states to maintain eligibility standards for children in Medicaid and CHIP through 2019. Children currently covered by CHIP between 100% and 133% of poverty would be transitioned to Medicaid coverage in 2015. Currently there is a vast variation amongst states with respect to Medicaid eligibility. The new law

expands Medicaid to 133% of federal poverty level (\$14,404 for an individual or about \$29,326 for a family of four in 2009), meaning states must at least consider individuals eligible up to this level. Medicaid and CHIP rules that require states to establish a five-year waiting period for lawfully residing adults will not change as a result of the new law, with state option to waive the waiting period for children and pregnant women. In order to assist states with a financial burden accumulated by the newly eligible enrollees, the new law provides full federal financing (FMAP) for those newly eligible for Medicaid for 2014-2016; 95% FMAP for 2017; 94% FMAP for 2018; 93% FMAP for 2019 and 90% FMAP for 2020 and beyond.

Another significant benefit for child welfare is the new dedicated federal funding stream to support home visitation programs. The law authorizes \$1.5 billion over five years to carry out this new grant program. While these grants are designed to fund a range of evidence-based home visitation programs for young children and families, priority funding would be dedicated to evidenced-based

models with promising and new approaches being eligible for up to 25% of the grant funds.

Since some of the provisions in PPACA become effective immediately, the Obama Administration has been working with states to reduce barriers to implementation. For example, some states are currently weighing the option to create a temporary high risk pool for the uninsured in their state. States may choose whether and how they participate in the program but must express their interest in participating in the temporary high risk pool program established by the new health insurance reform law to Health and Human Services (HHS). One positive effect of the new law was recently seen in Arizona where Governor Brewer had proposed to eliminate the entire CHIP program in June. Fortunately, the maintenance of effort requirement in the new law requires states to maintain their Medicaid and CHIP eligibility requirements through 2019. CWLA will continue to track and provide updates as the law is implemented throughout the country. For more information on PPACA, click on www.cwla.org/advocacy.

The Behind the Cycle Network: Making Connections to Reorient Policy Priorities

By Catherine Beane

America's criminal justice system is marked by what has been described as a "cycle of incarceration": a clearly discernible pattern of disproportionate numbers of the poor and people of color, particularly young men of color, entering into and cycling through the criminal justice system. This cycle of incarceration is deeply embedded in communities across America plagued by concentrated poverty, inadequate education, substance abuse, racial tension, unemployment, insufficient housing, and poor health outcomes. And all too often, one's life opportunities after incarceration are so limited that recidivism is the inevitable outcome.

As many in the child welfare community know from first-hand experience, a wealth of social science research demonstrates the profound connections that exist between intergenerational cycles of incarceration and inadequately addressed social and economic conditions. Indeed, living in poverty—particularly in areas of concentrated poverty—puts multiple stressors on families and communities and triggers individual, family, social, and community risk factors for court involvement while failing to support many of the protective factors that might counterbalance those risks. These stressors and their corresponding criminal justice outcomes are exacerbated by the overburdened and underresourced education, health care, child welfare, housing, and employment systems that have come to be viewed as "typical" in low-

income communities and communities of color. These connections are so profound that one commentator has remarked, "The national approach to solving social and economic problems in low-income communities of color in the United States has essentially become one of massive investment in a criminal justice apparatus that imposes punishment at record levels while draining resources from community-strengthening investments" (Mauer, 2006, p. 84).

Despite these clearly identifiable connections, many advocates, researchers, academics, direct service providers, and policymakers operate in disciplinary silos when it comes to criminal justice. Some rarely discuss issues with peers outside of their own areas of training and expertise, others are not aware of the connections between their issues and criminal justice, and still others simply are not comfortable with the language and culture of lawyers or the criminal justice system. This situation is exacerbated by other factors: competition for limited resources; a dearth of incentives and models of success to guide collaboration across disciplines; institutional barriers such as conflicting roles and responsibilities (e.g., a defense attorney's ethical obligations to clients); and institutional inertia and risk aversion. Combined, these factors inhibit the building of consensus and trust and impede opportunities to chart a different course around chronic and systemic barriers. Additionally, the experience of many collabora-

tions within disciplinary silos suggests that staffing of and organizational support for the collaborative itself is critical to success—that without someone staffing the collaborative, conducting outreach, and providing opportunities for engagement, potential benefits are not fully realized.

Concerned about these issues, and recognizing that efforts to reform police, prosecution, court, and corrections policies (although *incredibly* important) do little to stem the flow of people of color and low-income individuals into the system on the front end, criminal justice advocates from the Open Society Institute’s Justice Roundtable began in 2007 to reach out to colleagues in social justice and human service sectors. Their purpose was simple: create an opportunity for interdisciplinary dialogue, information sharing, and problem solving between the criminal justice and juvenile justice advocates who work “within the cycle” and colleagues in education, health care, child welfare, youth development, housing, and employment who work “behind the cycle” (BTC). What was found in this process was a dynamic energy and enthusiasm for cross-sector collaboration. Beyond dialogue and identifying linkages, the representatives of some 70 organizations who participated in working group meetings in 2007 and 2008 and the 300 people who participated in the BTC National Summit in December 2008 wanted a strategy for collaborative action. Consider a few of the many voices that were heard:

I’ve been working on criminal justice policy issues for years. I want to see a change in how we approach these issues—not just a piece-meal approach to putting out fires, but a more integrated, cohesive strategy to these interrelated issue areas.

Even advocates don’t see all the links. In our own discussion, we’re from different disciplines and we don’t see all the connections, or we don’t prioritize them as highly as other fires that are burning. We need to break down our advocacy silos. All of these issues need translating—people need to understand the impact of incarceration.

We need a framework. We need to start thinking about a new frame on the issues.

By some definitions, insanity means that you keep doing the same thing but expecting a different result. But to change the outputs, you have to change the inputs. We’ve got to do things differently.

The BTC Network and the concept of an “integrative approach to justice” have become the vehicles for this collaboration and action.

The BTC Network

BTC is a multidisciplinary network of individuals and organizations united by common concerns about the disproportionate impact of America’s criminal justice system on the poor and people of color and by a common vision of safe, fair, and equitable communities in which all are able to thrive. We share the belief that profound connections exist

between incarceration and inadequately addressed social and economic conditions and that investing in the healthy development of individuals, families, and communities—particularly those at greatest risk for court involvement—will more effectively achieve public safety goals. BTC’s multidisciplinary network thus links disciplines such as law, education, and health in a united effort to better understand the social context underlying America’s criminal justice and corrections policies and to promote more integrative solutions to these interrelated issues.

Concretely, BTC provides a forum for advocates, researchers, service providers, and academics to break out of disciplinary silos, share information, develop collaborative approaches, and promote a more integrative approach to justice. BTC intentionally mobilizes stakeholders, experts, and policymakers from a range of disciplines and issue areas to impact social policy by focusing on the front end of the criminal justice continuum—*before* a person becomes court involved—where social and economic issues converge to increase risk and to fuel intergenerational cycles of incarceration.

BTC and an integrative approach thus provide an organizing principle or framework that enables each agency, system, and sector within the broader field of domestic policy to work toward the common goal of supporting the healthy development of individuals, families, and communities. The policies and programs that most effectively accomplish this common goal are those that promote protective factors and decrease risk for delinquent or criminal conduct, thereby achieving the positive criminal justice outcomes of enhanced public safety and decreased incarceration. Building on this multidisciplinary infrastructure, BTC uses public education, policy advocacy, media outreach, and community engagement strategies to reframe the policy debate about public safety and to reorient criminal justice policies and policymaking paradigms away from failed, ineffective “tough on crime” tactics toward a more integrative approach.

BTC seeks in essence to bridge divides among criminal justice, juvenile justice, youth development, housing, health care, education, child welfare, faith, and social justice communities and among academics, advocates, service providers, funders, and policymakers and to marshal these otherwise disconnected stakeholders to address the range of social and economic issues that converge at the front end of the criminal justice continuum to increase risk of court involvement. BTC’s efforts are distinct from but complementary to the networks and campaigns that currently exist to address the needs of vulnerable youth (e.g., the Campaign for Youth and Child Welfare League of America’s Juvenile Justice Integration Project) and to support reforms within the juvenile justice system (e.g., the Campaign for Youth Justice), the adult criminal justice system (e.g., sentencing disparities between crack and powder cocaine and eyewitness identification and forensic evidence reforms), and the corrections systems (e.g., Justice Reinvestment and Reentry initiatives).

Changing the Frame: Reorienting the Policy Debate Toward a More Integrative Approach to Justice

Success is dependent upon broadening the conversation. The response to the problems is always more criminal justice. We need to create a political, public environment that can generate a broader understanding of what we need to do. (Policy advocate, BTC working group meeting, 2008)

It is our duty to find those programs that work, to support them, to make sure that they get the attention they deserve and *to make sure that Americans understand that we can all be safer if we support smart crime prevention*. . . . [W]e need to be aggressive in combating both crime as well as the causes of crime. Neglect, apathy, and insufficient attention to prevention are among those causes. Without a proactive focus to prevent crime by addressing its causes, a reactive, expensive focus only on one side of the ledger is not going to benefit the American people. (Mariano-Florentino Cuellar, special assistant to the president for Justice and Regulatory Policy)

At the heart of the BTC Network is an effort to shift the way people think about crime prevention and the way people expend limited resources to ensure public safety. Misguided, expensive, and ineffective “tough on crime” strategies have caused astoundingly negative consequences for individuals and communities, including high rates of incarceration, incarceration of disproportionate numbers of African Americans and Latinos, and the criminalization of poverty. There is a growing recognition among policymakers of the limitations of criminal justice approaches that prioritize policing, prosecution, and prisons over investments in the kinds of programs and services that would better enhance public safety by addressing the underlying root causes of crime. The financial crisis gripping the American economy has exacerbated these existing problems, severely impacting the ability of policymakers to balance budgets and maintain needed public services in the face of shrinking revenue and escalating criminal justice and corrections costs. Indeed, incarceration projections, fiscal realities, and political dynamics are converging with a growing body of evidence regarding the diminishing public safety returns of America’s incarceration practices to set the stage for reconfiguring criminal justice policy.

Against this backdrop, the concept of an integrative approach to justice issues is gaining traction in many corners of the policy arena. For example, the White House Office of Urban Affairs (OUA) describes in its guiding principles the need for the federal government to

break from the siloed approach to urban policy development—where each facet of policy operates independently from all others—and replace it with an interdisciplinary approach that appreciates the interdependent nature of issues affecting urban communities. The president’s urban agenda will pro-

mote cross-cutting plans to revitalize urban areas, considering housing, transportation, energy, labor, education, and criminal justice policy as a system rather than independent of each other.

OUA’s Interagency Working Group has launched three initiatives that “embody both a holistic and integrated approach to urban policy—an approach that appreciates that local and regional leaders often pursue interdisciplinary approaches to the highly complex and interrelated issues in their communities.” Of particular note is the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, which seeks to coordinate “[f]ederal policies and programs to design a holistic effort that will maximize life outcomes for low-income children no matter where they live [by] align[ing] federal housing programs (e.g., Choice Neighborhoods) with federal education programs, health services, and public safety initiatives.”

These White House efforts provide a model of an integrative approach “in action” that could potentially be replicated at state and local levels. In the face of the severe budget challenges facing state governments across the country, some advocates have begun to take steps in this direction. For instance, criminal and juvenile justice advocates in California met in February with representatives of education, social work, labor, women’s rights, and other organizations to deepen their understanding of issues and to explore opportunities for cross-sector collaboration as they navigate that state’s budget crisis. In Illinois, recognizing the profound impact of current budget cuts to education, health care, human services, and public safety, the Responsible Budget Coalition has brought together diverse organizations “committed to building the support needed to solve Illinois’ budget crisis, prevent harmful cuts to essential public services, save jobs, eliminate the state’s long-term structural deficit, and make taxes fairer.”

As these examples make clear, an opportunity for transformational change exists—a moment in time that lends itself to fundamental, positive change with respect to the way criminal justice policy decisions are made and the way in which government invests limited public resources. This is a moment of significant challenge and opportunity. The stakes have never been higher, with regard to both the devastating impact that America’s criminal justice policies have on low-income communities and communities of color and the budgetary implications of continued use of incarceration as a primary means of addressing crime. BTC’s concept of an “integrative approach to justice issues” and its focus on multidisciplinary collaboration represent two of the keys to transforming the ways in which these policy decisions are made.

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Reference

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