

## **Building Bridges to Better Outcomes for Children: The Link between Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare.**

The Child Welfare League was awarded a generous grant from the Jessie Ball duPont Foundation to expand the current Florida juvenile justice coalition to help child welfare and juvenile justice systems build a unified platform of public education, advocacy and legislative reform to affect public policy and to improve outcomes for Florida's children.

CWLA and the Children's Campaign, Inc. are excited by this project as it offers an unprecedented opportunity to elevate the work we have done in Florida to a new level by establishing linkages and cooperation between child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The result will be to provide children with enhanced case management and coordination of services that will enable them to achieve improved outcomes in life.

### **Purpose:**

#### **1. Stemming the inappropriate flow of children from child welfare into the juvenile justice system.**

There is a problematic disconnect between child welfare and juvenile justice with large numbers of at-risk children flowing from one system to the other or being served simultaneously.

Many times the child welfare and juvenile justice systems operate separately, frequently driven by mission statements, statutory mandates, funding allocations, and service plans that discourage collaboration. The plan is to change this "silo" mentality.

This project's purpose is to change how the child welfare and juvenile justice systems perceive each other and operate, both in the provision of services and in the ability of the two systems to prevent children from penetrating the juvenile justice system.

Ultimately to provide children with enhanced case management and coordination of services that will help stem the inappropriate and unnecessary flow from the child welfare system into the juvenile justice system.

## **DESIGN**

We plan to establish linkages and cooperation between child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The people and organizations who lead child welfare and community-based care - inclusive of state administrators - working in close collaboration with juvenile justice practitioners and policy makers.

### **Initial Steps include:**

- Forming a combined Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Collaborative, modeled after the successful Juvenile Justice Coalition, to engage stakeholders to address the gaps in linkages between child welfare and juvenile justice. This undertaking will more than double the size of the current reform effort.
- Forming and convening a Florida Systems Integration Executive Committee from the ranks of the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Collaborative, including leadership personnel from youth-serving agencies and organizations that can provide oversight, direction, and decision making in the next stage of this initiative.
- Forming and convening a Florida Systems Integration Stakeholder (FSIS) committee, including the above mentioned Executive Committee members, which would include major agencies, governmental entities, and community groups working for Florida children and youth being served by both systems.
- Engaging the legislature, providers, and the combined Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Collaborative in an awareness campaign that highlights the connection between the two systems and the need for a collaborative approach. This will require extensive in-person meetings with key agency personnel, policy makers, legislators, judges, law enforcement, state attorneys, public defenders, and service providers.

- Disseminating the solid body of research that confirms the connection between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency and establishes the necessity of a more coordinated and integrated system.
- Building grassroots understanding and support for reform by using our improved electronic technology to provide immediate information, updates and alerts, and by coordinating listening forums in North Florida, Central Florida and South Florida to bring key leaders together in facilitated settings.
- Engaging the media on this issue by meeting with the editorial boards of major newspapers in Florida, placing media stories, and disseminating information to key media stakeholders.

George Hattaway will be CWLA's Project Leader working with the Children's Campaign. He will be meeting with policy-makers, providers, and key leaders to bring the juvenile justice and child welfare systems together at the same table. This will involve forming and convening an expanded Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Collaborative, which will meet regularly, and to act as the driving force to move the work forward.

Organizing and managing the Collaborative and meeting with other leaders and policy-makers in both the juvenile justice and child welfare fields.

He will be CWLA's point person on all matters related to this project, and will set the stage for the expert consultation of CWLA Senior Consultant, John Tuell, who has led CWLA's systems integration work at other sites across the country.

John Tuell's expertise is in juvenile justice. He came to CWLA in 2001 as the director of our newly formed Juvenile Justice Department. He served in that capacity for three years before focusing more of his time on consultation, specifically on the intersect between child welfare and juvenile justice.

John will be the content expert for the systems integration piece and will be engaged in helping the newly formed Collaborative to work through the practical and technical challenges that will be presented in aligning the two systems for the benefit of vulnerable children. His knowledge, writings, and facilitation work focuses on overcoming barriers around information

sharing, blending of funding from the two systems, cross-training and co-location of program staff, and implementation of evidence-based programs. John has been involved with CWLA in conducting system integration work in four different jurisdictions across the country. Connecticut; King County Washington; Baltimore City, Maryland; and Los Angeles County, California.

## **Outcomes**

At the end of the year, what will have changed for children and youth in Florida? Or, “What is our ultimate end goal, and how long will that take?”

We expect significant, foundational progress in year one. We will have formed and regularly convened an expanded Child Welfare Juvenile Justice Collaborative and related committees.

Together, and in tandem with the ongoing juvenile justice reform effort, we will have solidified our long-term, mutual goals in the form of a strategic plan.

The two systems of care will be actively engaged in dialogue with each other, breaking down barriers and challenging preconceived notions around their inability to work together, and developing a set of protocols for moving forward.

Long-term, our goal is to bring the two systems together in a way that builds stronger bridges and better outcomes for the children and youth under their care.

At a broad level, this means creating and institutionalizing permanent linkages between the two systems.

It means working to overcome some deeply ingrained beliefs and methods of work, and introducing ways that will better meet the needs of our children.

It may mean blending funding streams to better accomplish common goals and developing shared information systems.

However, perhaps even more importantly, it will also mean changing the cultures within these two systems so they are more seamless in their goals for the protection, safety and well-being of the children in “their” care.

That is the global perspective.

At the level of an individual child known to the child welfare system it translates to a very different and important level of detail. It will mean that when a child in foster care is arrested for the first time, a team representing both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems will rally around him or her, rather than abdicate responsibility and consider the child a failure. Through combined efforts, this team may then ensure the counseling and support and other services—perhaps the provision of a mentor and tutor—that end up preventing further delinquency and that contribute to greater school success, increased pro-social behavior, reduced substance abuse and other positive outcomes over the entire course of that child’s life.

How we achieve our goals through this project will vary from our other systems integration work based on the unique circumstances of Florida. But every indicator we have seen in developing this proposal tells me we can get there, spurred by an initial and critical investment from the duPont Fund.