



presents

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

Sponsored by the Jessie Ball DuPont Religious, Charitable, and Educational Fund

**By John A. Tuell
Director, Child Welfare-Juvenile Justice System Integration Initiative
CWLA**

(Contributing Authors: George Hattaway and Kerrin Sweet)

Introduction

One of our nation's greatest tragedies is the abuse and neglect of our children. Government's fundamental responsibility includes protecting its most vulnerable citizens. Sadly though, more than 1,000 children nationwide are dying each year as a direct result of abuse and neglect, and tens of thousands are committing delinquent acts and growing up to be violent criminals as a result of this maltreatment (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 2006). It is clear that federal, state, and local governments and communities are not sufficiently and effectively handling this responsibility.

In 2004, there were just over 872,000 substantiated cases of abuse and neglect in the United States (Child Welfare League of America [CWLA], 2006). Of this total, Florida reported a remarkably troubling 129,914 substantiated victims of abuse or neglect (CWLA). It was the second consecutive year in which Florida ranked first in the country for substantiated victims of maltreatment (CWLA). A child in Florida is abused or neglected every four minutes, and this translates to just over 10,000 Florida children abused or neglected each month. Today, there are more than 43,000 children in Department of Children and Families' custody in the state of Florida.

Not surprisingly, Florida also ranked first in the country for the number of maltreated African American youth in out-of-home care during 2004 (CWLA, 2006). Research recently conducted within Florida by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) reveals that the percentage of females in the juvenile justice system who have substantiated histories of maltreatment approaches 60–70% (Patino, Raviora, & Wolf, 2006). And in 2005, at least two Florida children died every week from abuse or neglect at the hands of parents or caretakers.

As disturbing as these official figures are in describing the human tragedy, they mask the real toll of child abuse and neglect in Florida. Children who survive abuse or neglect carry emotional scars for life. Though the majority of these children demonstrate a remarkable resiliency and can grow up to be productive adults, credible research reflects that abused and neglected children are nearly one-third more likely to be arrested for violent crimes later in life (Spatz, Widom, & Maxfield, 2001). These youth are 59% more likely to commit delinquent acts than non-maltreated youth (Spatz et al.). Additionally, research confirms that these youth experience an increased likelihood of problems with mental health, substance abuse, and educational deficiencies (Spatz et al.). We must take ownership of this problem, fully acknowledge the consequences, and develop collaborative, multi-system solutions to prevent child abuse and neglect and interrupt the costly trajectory—in human and financial terms—of these children toward a lifetime of delinquency and adult criminality.

[A Closer Look: Research Clearly Defines the Problem](#)

The research presented in CWLA's work, *Understanding Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency: From Research to Effective Program, Practice, and Systemic Solutions* (Wiig, Widom, & Tuell, 2003), provides undeniable evidence that victims of childhood maltreatment often enter the juvenile justice system and become tomorrow's serious and violent offenders. As previously stated, children who are abused and neglected are not only more likely than other children to commit delinquent acts as adolescents and crimes as adults, but they are also more likely to experience a range of mental health, substance abuse, occupational, and educational deficiencies during adolescence and adulthood.

In an effort to isolate the specific impact of abuse and neglect by controlling for other factors, Dr. Cathy Spatz Widom and Michael Maxfield (2001) constructed a cohort of individuals who had been abused and neglected as children and compared them to otherwise similar individuals who had no official record of abuse or neglect. By studying the subsequent arrest records and controlling for other demographic risk factors, Widom and Maxfield found that being abused and neglected almost doubles the odds that a child will commit a crime as a juvenile. Including the Widom and Maxfield study, there have been four regional prospective studies of this relationship. Despite differences in geographic region, time period, age of youth, definition of child maltreatment, and assessment technique, all provide evidence of a documented relationship between childhood victimization and some form of delinquent behavior. CWLA's *Understanding Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency* (Wiig et al., 2003) further elucidates the findings from the four regional studies.

Other researchers who have extensively interviewed extremely violent offenders are convinced that severe abuse or neglect was a defining influence in these violent offenders' lives. Dorothy Lewis and Jonathan Pinicus (1988) interviewed 14 of 37 juveniles facing death sentences in 1986 and 1987. Their work revealed that only one of those interviewed had not suffered childhood family violence and severe physical abuse.

As we gain clarity from this research regarding the connection between maltreatment and delinquency, it is equally critical we understand that childhood abuse and neglect are associated

with a demonstrated increased risk of crime and violence, but this relationship is neither inevitable nor deterministic. Through more coordinated and integrated work from the child welfare, child protection, juvenile justice, and affiliated youth serving systems (e.g., mental health, substance abuse, or education) we can reduce the risk of the troubling trajectory toward a life of delinquency and adult criminality.

Juvenile Crime and Delinquency

In Florida during fiscal year 2004–2005, the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice (FL DJJ) handled 150,687 delinquency referrals and 95,263 individual youth. According to the department, judges committed 8,992 juveniles to residential treatment programs. While these figures reflect a moderating decline that has mirrored the national trend over the past 10 years, it is of significant note that females now represent more than 25% of the offenders in the juvenile justice system, more than double their representation 10 years ago (Patino, Raviora, & Wolf, 2006). In Florida, this particular population segment permits us to clearly see the scope of the maltreatment and trauma impact in the juvenile justice system. Almost one out of every three youth referred to the FL DJJ is a female (Patino et al.). Nearly 50% of the girls in the FL DJJ moderate and high-risk residential programs have been sexually abused; more than 60% have been physically abused, and that same percentage have witnessed domestic violence in their homes (Patino & Krisberg, 2005). Currently, the overwhelming “treatment” response to this population of delinquent female youth is to lock them up. Florida's juvenile justice system currently detains a higher percentage of underage girls than 46 other states, despite the girls’ traumatic backgrounds (Patino et al.).

Every day, youth in Florida’s juvenile justice programs—male and female—are in need of critical mental health services, substance abuse treatment, crisis counseling, and medical treatment, yet providers across the state lack the resources to meet the needs of the youth they are committed to serve. Further confirming the multi-system needs of Florida’s system-involved youth, Claudia Wright, the former director of Gator Team-Child, the juvenile law clinic at the University of Florida Levin College of Law in Gainesville, offered an observation: “Almost all of the children we represent have at least three kinds of cases: delinquent, in which the child has exhibited some behavior that has attracted the attention of law enforcement; dependency, in which the child has been the victim of abuse, neglect, or abandonment by his family or the state; and education, which involves some kind of failure in school, usually academic or disciplinary.”

The problem is exacerbated by per diem rates that are essentially the same as in 1994 when the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice came into existence. Private providers, who make up 80% of Florida’s juvenile justice delivery system, serve the majority of the youth referred to the department. Also at the core of this ineffective system is that fact that the child welfare and juvenile justice systems do not effectively coordinate on the issues that are central to intervening more effectively on behalf of the youth and families that experience this myriad of problem behaviors. These issues include data collection, information sharing, resource coordination, separate mandates and operating policies and procedures, and coordinated case management and planning.

These providers and juvenile justice professionals faced with scarce resources are struggling to effectively respond as today's youth—particularly those with abuse and neglect histories—are presenting more complicated treatment needs and higher levels of behavioral problems. While more data is needed to fully understand the scope of the problem in Florida, it is known that many of the youth served in Florida's juvenile justice system have coexisting mental health and substance disorders. These multi-system youth and their families are indeed compounding the challenges facing our youth-serving systems.

In view of the connection between maltreatment, delinquency, and the plethora of associated negative outcomes for these children and youth, Widom and Maxfield (2001) suggested that special attention be paid to abused and neglected children with behavior problems. These children and youth show the highest risk of later juvenile and adult arrest, as well as violent criminal behavior.

A National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) Special Project Bulletin, *When Systems Collide: Improving Court Practices and Programs in Dual Jurisdiction Cases* (Siegel & Lord, 2004), makes a compelling case for coordinated multi-system screening and assessment, case assignment, case flow management, case planning and supervision, and interagency collaboration. In the bulletin, Siegel and Lord outline five areas in which child welfare and juvenile justice agencies can work to coordinate and improve their services for dual jurisdiction youth. These include:

- **Screening and assessment:** Siegel and Lord (2004) point out the need for routine screening by the child welfare and juvenile justice systems for dual involvement on intake, which could take place through sharing automated databases or establishing interagency liaisons. “This screening then needs to be followed up with the notification of the other agency when dual involvement is confirmed. An example of best practice in this area includes utilization of the Structured Decision Making model (Wiebush et al., 2001)” (Siegel & Lord). This model uses a research-based risk assessment that classifies families according to their likelihood of continuing to abuse their children. This assessment assists workers in their case management decisions and helps direct resources to those most in need. Siegel and Lord suggest that both agencies embrace a similar method of assessing risk and need and that courts receive reports from both child protection and probation that summarize their respective assessments.
- **Case assignment:** In the area of case assignment, Siegel and Lord (2004) highlight “one family/one judge” calendaring. According to the report, “In dual jurisdiction cases, a single judge [who hears all matters related to a single family] will be much more likely to have a complete understanding of the family’s court history.” A similar strategy could be taken with dual jurisdiction youth, in which a judge is specially trained to handle dual jurisdiction youth. Siegel and Lord recommend the implementation of dedicated dockets. If a court reserves a block of time on their court calendar specifically for dual jurisdiction cases, it would enhance the ability of all parties across agencies to attend and participate.
- **Case flow management:** The third area for improved coordination and collaboration of the child welfare and juvenile justice agencies is case flow management. Effective case flow management practices should help to avoid delays in dual jurisdiction matters. Such practices

include joint prehearing conferences in which all parties involved in a case meet in advance of court proceedings to solidify their efforts and plans. Additionally, Siegel and Lord (2004) suggest that courts combine dependency and delinquency hearings to ensure that different agencies are coordinating their efforts, sharing information, and complying with court orders.

- **Case planning and supervision:** The fourth area, case planning and supervision, may come in the form of interagency liaisons. Wiig, Spatz Widom, and Tuell (2003) provide us with the example of Wraparound Milwaukee, which employs care coordinators who perform strength-based assessments, assemble child and family teams, conduct plan-of-care meetings, help determine needs and resources with youth and families, identify services, arrange for community agencies to provide specific services, and monitor the implementation of case plans. Wraparound Milwaukee also includes a child and family team that is actively involved in case planning and is composed of family members, relatives, church members, and friends, as well as systems people, such as probation or child welfare workers.
- **Interagency collaboration:** Lastly, interagency collaboration includes ways in which agencies can pool, blend, or decategorize funding, implement cross-training, improve information sharing, and establish interagency agreements and protocols for dual jurisdiction cases (Siegel & Lord, 2004).

Current Situation

Florida has seen the state's child welfare agencies evolve over the years from Health and Rehabilitative Services to the Agency for Persons with Disabilities, then to the Department of Children and Families and to the Department of Juvenile Justice. With these changes in name have come substantive reforms. These well-intentioned reforms have created agency "silos" in which individual agency mandates have driven the activities in isolation from critical other youth serving agency partners. These divisions have created fragmented efforts to address child protection, mental health, and health needs for these youth and their families. Further complicating the fragmentation are the failed efforts to coordinate with the Florida Department of Education and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.

Currently in Florida, departments and youth serving agencies are funded through countless federal, state, and local government channels, as well as through private sources. Programs and services in each department and agency often have a unique set of standards, rules, and requirements governing and prescribing how funds may be used and who is eligible to receive them. This construct has created additional barriers to the provision of comprehensive and coordinated services to children and families. The historical method of intervening on behalf of these multi-system youth and families has not included effective multi-disciplinary case planning, case management, decisionmaking, and resource allocation determinations. Often the result is "failing out" of one youth serving system and into another, where the process of assessment and intervention begins anew—frequently without regard for previous efforts. While it is of little consolation, Florida is not alone in the fragmented method of service delivery for these most troubled youth and their families.

This structure has contributed to practice that fails to coordinate, effectively communicate, and utilize shared reservoirs of service and program resources. This fractured system also undermines mechanisms that permit accountability for the desired and mandated outcomes. For the customers of these agencies, it is extraordinarily difficult for an individual to navigate the layers of bureaucracy and access appropriate assistance. As one agency director for a local service provider explained, “I discovered that a lot of agencies didn’t know what the other agencies did.... Everybody worked independently of each other doing what they thought was best for the clients.”

As we confront the well-documented special needs of maltreated youth, the fragmented service delivery system is further complicated by the absence of multi-agency focus on effective prevention and early intervention measures. This combination is occasionally lethal and frequently results in the unnecessary movement of dependency and foster care youth into the delinquency system. Absent the requisite level of multi-system coordination, Florida’s maltreated youth proceed on a trajectory toward increased frequency and seriousness of delinquent acts and an increased likelihood of criminal conduct as an adult. These acts come at a great human and financial toll for Florida and its residents.

Another obstacle to appropriately attending to the needs of youth that move from dependency to delinquency is the lack of data to effectively capture the number or percentage of dual jurisdiction youth. In addition, the risk profiles and prevalent youth and family characteristics are not captured. The absence of tracking and analysis of critical data precludes youth serving agencies from identifying emerging trends in dual jurisdiction cases. Failure to formulate data collection protocols and information utilization procedures undermine effective policy development and opportunities to create coordinated allocation of resources.

Not unlike many other states, Florida experiences additional barriers that undermine effective treatment for dual jurisdiction youth and their families. Supported by commentary from numerous experienced Florida youth serving professionals, these include:

- **Duplication of services and the corresponding duplication of funding resources:** A Department of Children and Families (DCF) caseworker noted a real-life and all-too-frequent example in which DCF would place a youth in a residential substance abuse treatment placement. Due to failed coordination, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is not informed and does not participate in the case planning and oversight. Upon failing out of this placement, DJJ initiates efforts to replace the youth in residential substance abuse treatment without knowledge—and often with a long wait for funding availability—of the prior failed efforts. As another caseworker noted, “Given that there is a finite amount of money for services in the area of child welfare and juvenile justice, the first thing that we need is a commitment from both sides to form partnerships as service providers, rather than remaining in competition for this finite pot of money.”
- **Confidentiality and failure to share vital information:** Caseworkers, probation staff, and juvenile court jurists face these perceived—and sometimes real—barriers to information sharing on a frequent basis. As one juvenile court judge noted, “The caseworker told me that

she could not give me the information I requested to make a decision because it was confidential.”

Fortunately, the state of Florida has begun to recognize that the maltreated children who are most likely to become juvenile offenders make up a critical population, one that has been invisible for far too many years. Additionally, some current Florida-specific research helps to highlight the magnitude of the problem with at least one of the subpopulations that are poorly served among the traumatized youth entering the juvenile justice system.

In 2006, the National Center on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) published a study entitled *A Rallying Cry for Change: Charting a New Direction in the State of Florida’s Response to Girls in the Juvenile Justice System* (Patino et al.). After interviewing 244 girls in Florida’s Juvenile Justice System, NCCD found that “offenses against family, family history problems, ineffective parental supervision, or abuse by family were factors for more than 70% of girls in residential and 64% of girls in nonresidential programs.” The study also reports that “one in four (27%) of the girls reported being abused by their parents and by a nonparent” and “half (50%) reported their parents had been reported to DCF for abusing or neglecting them. Of those girls whose parents had been reported to DCF, 58% had been in at least one non-DJJ out-of-home placement, including foster care.”

Florida’s Office of Program Policy and Government Accountability (2006) recently reviewed 90 case files of girls in Florida’s juvenile justice residential programs and found that “68% have experienced physical or sexual abuse or neglect and 90% of the girls live with limited or inadequate parental control.” It is also important to note that the National Center on Crime and Delinquency found “the most common elements of the ‘pathways’ that played a role in the delinquent behavior for girls in residential programs were emotional factors, family issues, and youth drug abuse. While girls may have a multitude of needs, these commonalities across the girls are dominant issues regardless of DJJ program level and JAIS risk level to re-offend.” As has been noted earlier in this report, national research findings indicate similar outcomes for maltreated male children.

It is also important to recognize that two important pieces of federal legislation provide further impetus for improved coordination of the Florida child welfare and juvenile justice system.

In November 2002, the re-authorized Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention) was signed into law. The act includes provisions that encourage the development of programs that provide treatment to juvenile offenders who are the victims of child abuse or neglect, and to their families, in order to reduce the likelihood that such juvenile offenders will commit subsequent violations of law. The act also says that states must establish policies and systems to incorporate relevant child protective services records into juvenile justice records for purposes of establishing and implementing treatment plans for juvenile offenders.

Additionally, in June 2003 amendments to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2004) were enacted that included a provision requiring state data reports to include the number of children and youth under the care of the

state child protection system who are transferred into the custody of the state juvenile justice system.

Finally, it is notable that a CWLA survey (2002) found that approximately three-quarters of responding juvenile justice agencies had policies, procedures, or regulations supporting collaboration with child welfare agencies for juvenile offenders who were victims of maltreatment. Only 12%, however, had a program or practice that was specifically designed to serve juvenile offenders identified as previous victims of child maltreatment. This finding is yet another piece of evidence that obviates the need within the current landscape for Florida stakeholders to advance the cause of the *Building Bridges to Better Outcomes for Children: The Link Between Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare* initiative.

Promising National Initiatives

Despite this troubling underachievement on behalf of these traumatized victims, there are some positive examples of reform efforts underway in numerous states and local jurisdictions. These examples pave the way for the work of stakeholders to improve the lives of Florida's children and families.

Since the spring of 2004, a leadership group in King County, Washington, representing juvenile justice and child welfare systems has met on a regular basis to examine and improve the way they work together on behalf of King County children and youth. The King County Systems Integration Initiative, governed through a charter agreement, has been established as a permanent planning and service coordination body. The goal is to disrupt the path from child maltreatment to delinquency and improve outcomes for children, youth, and families through greater multi-system integration and service coordination at both the individual case and system levels. Its successes have included:

- an interagency policy and protocol that details joint policy and procedures regarding how juvenile court probation and the state child protection agency work together in support of dual status youth and their families;
- the development of a Resource Guide for Information Sharing, a critical document that provides a resource for legal, policy, and practice matters regarding the exchange of case-related information necessary for joint case assessment, planning, and integrated service delivery; and
- development and implementation of multi-agency training for personnel to increase familiarity and develop relationships that support shared responsibility and services.

Los Angeles County, California, has also embraced this level of effort and organizational construct to impact the area's dual jurisdiction youth. CWLA is working with the jurisdiction to improve the process of information exchange, case planning and supervision, and case management across the multiple youth serving systems. Building on a statute mandating a joint protocol enacted in the 1990s, Los Angeles County is in the final stages of adopting a revised cross-system protocol to improve the outcomes for these dual jurisdiction youth.

In South Dakota, a group of leaders convened a Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Records Committee to conduct a legal and policy analysis that would support the construct of draft legislation that improved the manner in which records were shared across these systems (including mental health and substance histories) at key decision points in the juvenile justice system. CWLA assisted in the facilitation of this effort and draft legislation has now been provided to the SD Juvenile Justice Council for approval for consideration at the 2007 South Dakota legislative session.

In Colorado, HB 1451 was passed into law in 2004 calling for the development of collaborative management policies and procedures on behalf of multi-system youth and families. CWLA is providing technical assistance to several Colorado counties who have begun the task of organizing leadership and developing initial memoranda of understanding that identify specific target populations impacted by these new procedures as required by the statute.

These are but a few of the developments that have grown from the same type of mobilization recently convened in Florida.

Where actual data is available to confirm the cross-over and dual jurisdiction population, it is clear that we are identifying a significant portion of the juvenile justice population with previous histories of maltreatment and the corresponding plethora of treatment and service needs. The states of Vermont, Utah, Rhode Island, and New Mexico, and King County, Washington (complying with aforementioned Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act reporting requirements), have reported percentages ranging from 25 to 64% for delinquent youth with child protection histories (CWLA, 2006).

By acknowledging the research, federal statutes, and data and utilizing examples of success and lessons learned by other state and local jurisdictions, Florida's political leadership, youth serving professionals, and citizens have the opportunity to save Florida's maltreated children from the tragic cycle of violence that is the outcome for far too many of the state's already traumatized and disadvantaged youth and their families.

[Responding to the Challenge - Florida Is Poised to Take Action](#)

CWLA has been awarded a grant from the Jessie Ball DuPont Religious, Charitable, and Educational Fund titled *Building Bridges to Better Outcomes for Children: The Link Between Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare*. The initiative is working to mobilize and organize leadership in Florida to promote improved coordination and integration of key youth serving agencies and service providers concerning the youth and families that populate the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Further, the initiative will provide consultation and technical assistance to juvenile justice, child welfare, and relevant youth serving organizations and agencies regarding the need for an integrated approach to programs and services across the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The long-term goal of this effort is to develop improved cross-system coordination and integration through implementation of reformed statutes, policies, procedures, protocols, and

practices. The result will be to provide children, youth, and their families with enhanced opportunities to achieve improved outcomes in life—with a particular focus on the maltreated youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system.

In the course of this work, the child welfare system can serve as an early warning system for identifying children who demonstrate conduct and behavioral problems and are at an increased risk for entering the juvenile justice system. This may mean including a dimension beyond protection, removal, and reunification; involving more individualized assessments of children's needs; and focusing on long-term outcomes and overall child well-being. For the juvenile justice system, efforts could include identifying at-risk younger siblings for support and deterrence; joining the child welfare system to address early-onset offenders; and helping garner prevention and early intervention resources. Both systems could identify those cases of concurrent involvement so they can share caseloads, coordinate case planning, or take other relevant steps to coordinate their efforts. Increased integration and cooperation between the two systems might also involve the increased use of child welfare histories in the disposition planning for juvenile delinquents and the development of improved treatment programs for juveniles who have been victims of child abuse and neglect as directed by the aforementioned language of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 2002 (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention).

Through the *Building Bridges to Better Outcomes for Children: The Link Between Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare* project, Florida has been offered a unique opportunity. CWLA has reached out to Florida's key child welfare and juvenile justice stakeholders in an effort to forge critical partnerships, develop a strategic plan, and move forward with the implementation of much-needed communication, coordination, and collaboration to improve the outcomes for Florida's maltreated children. The response since March 2006 has been incredible. An impressive array of leaders in Florida's child welfare and juvenile justice systems have signed on to this child welfare-juvenile justice initiative and have met to engage in dialogue and share their knowledge in order to develop the aforementioned achievable strategic plan and implementation. As we move forward in 2007, these experienced and knowledgeable Florida stakeholders will be called upon for continued guidance and expert analysis as this magnanimous effort gains momentum.

By working together the child welfare and juvenile justice systems can move beyond their separate and distinct mission statements, legislative mandates, funding allocations, and service plans in order to reduce the duplication of resources and services, unnecessary out-of-home placements, costly incarceration, higher rates of recidivism, and risk of victimization for Florida's citizens and communities.

Florida's citizens support this work. Polling by Bruce Barcelo for the Children's Campaign (2003) found that "84% of frequent voters polled believed that investing in children today would reduce the need for prisons tomorrow." This position is informed by the fact that Florida ranks second in the country, behind only California, in the number of children residing in juvenile detention and correctional facilities. "Eighty percent of frequent voters said they wanted tax dollars spent on recreation, education, crisis intervention, and counseling instead of juvenile prison beds. Most notably, 89% wanted more prevention and treatment services while only 9%

favoured more punishment” (Barcelo). By engaging the work of this initiative, Florida leaders and legislators can respond to the desires of their constituents.

A Call to Action

Florida constituents and segments of leadership have made progress. However, Florida is well behind the curve in understanding the scope of the problem (in terms of data) and developing the coordinated and collaborative protocols, policies, and service delivery system that will improve outcomes for these multi-system youth and their families. As a result, too many Florida youth fail out of affiliated youth systems and penetrate deeply into foster care replacements and juvenile justice residential and correctional facilities. There has never been a better time than now for elected leaders at the local, state, and federal levels to invest in a comprehensive, research-driven plan to reduce or eliminate abuse and neglect in high-risk families and thereby reduce crime, mental health impact, substance abuse, and educational impairments. There are too many documented stories of preventable tragedies occupying the state’s print and television media for Florida not to take action on behalf of this disadvantaged population of Florida youth.

As a result of the DuPont Fund support, Florida stakeholders making up the previously mentioned coalitions have endorsed the goals of the *Building Bridges to Better Outcomes for Children: The Link Between Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare* initiative. However, to ensure success and the appropriate level of commitment required to achieve these new reforms, there must be a statewide mandate for the staffing and fiscal support required to complete this comprehensive study and analysis of barriers and obstacles to improved system coordination and integration. CWLA’s experiences in working with numerous other state and local jurisdictions throughout the country over the past six years have informed the need to address and resolve these interrelated issues comprehensively in order to achieve necessary and critical reforms.

The following principles guiding the development of action strategies are supported by CWLA and endorsed by Florida’s key child welfare and juvenile justice leaders. These principles serve as the guidelines for initial efforts of the *Building Bridges to Better Outcomes for Children: The Link Between Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare* initiative:

- **Communication, coordination, and collaboration:** It is necessary for Florida to uphold the position that our most vulnerable children are the shared responsibility of many agencies, individuals, and institutions within our communities. The fragmentation of departments, agencies, and programs serving children must be overcome. At a minimum, the Executive Branch needs to establish a Children’s Cabinet where the various agencies are required to attend and where the governor provides leadership to enable the various agencies to work together in the best interest of all children. Serious work must be undertaken to create a continuum of needed services rather than current barriers to collaboration. This effort will maximize use of resources and improve outcomes for children and families.
- **Stability:** It has been demonstrated that having caseworker stability results in good outcomes for children. Our child protection system is plagued with high turnover, which severely limits

good outcomes for children. In a recent Wisconsin study (Small, Reynolds, O'Connor, & Cooney, 2005) successful case outcomes dropped from 75% to less than 30% when a child had to deal more than one case manager in a 12-month period. From exit interview data we know that turnover is driven by high caseloads and excessive data entry and paperwork. Florida needs to lower caseloads to 20 or below across the state and focus on tracking a limited number of child well-being indicators to allow increased face-to-face work with clients.

- **Continuum of services:** Adequate funding must be provided for child protection and child welfare services and the early intervention system of services and programs within the juvenile justice system. Florida needs a continuum of effective prevention and intervention services to divert youth from delinquent behavior and interrupt the trajectory toward chronic and serious offending behavior.
- **Proven effective and evidence-informed practice:** Florida must utilize the most up-to-date research and best practices to design and deliver a comprehensive, multi-system, and community-based system of care that has the greatest opportunity for successfully serving dual jurisdiction children and families.
- **Focus on prevention:** There must be a focus on prevention-oriented services and supports. Programs that effectively reduce child abuse and neglect also reduce poor educational outcomes and the likelihood for future substance abuse, subsequent involvement in delinquency (often violent in nature), and adult criminality.

CWLA has developed tools and resources that will assist Florida in improving cross-system coordination and integration through the implementation of reformed statutes, policies, procedures, protocols, and practices. The study and analysis Florida must engage will require state and local staffing and expertise to effectively examine the following issues and put forward recommendations for reform:

- Data collection, management, and performance measurement (e.g., establishment of governance for data collection; identification of necessary aggregate data reports; development of procedures for use of reports; and examination of the development of an integrated information sharing system).
- Inventory and assessment (e.g., inventory of program and fiscal resources, common screening, and assessment instruments; identification of key decision points and decisionmakers; review of “best practices” or “evidence-based strategies”; and identification of potential for blending funds across key youth serving systems).
- Legal and policy analysis (e.g., examination and analysis of statutory, regulatory, formal, and informal policies, procedures, and protocols; clarification of laws, regulations, and policies that impact systems collaboration and information sharing [federal and state]; and identification of data sharing and confidentiality impediments to determine capacity to share information across systems).

Upon completion of this analysis, prioritized action strategies will be finalized for all program, service, and administrative components of reform to include the development of funding mechanisms necessary to support integrated approaches. CWLA and its Florida partners will then utilize best practice to ensure an effective implementation of the action strategies for reform that includes a process for outcome evaluation.

Florida will be able to create a well-coordinated and effective youth serving system that utilizes:

- a thoughtful multi-system screening and assessment of youth and family needs;
- well-coordinated and improved agency and judicial decisionmaking so that comprehensive case plans can be developed and implemented collaboratively;
- coordinated case management and oversight to ensure youth and family connection to appropriate and evidenced-based services;
- fiscal and program resources effectively without unnecessary duplication and waste; and
- the interruption of youth trajectories deeper into delinquency and correctional systems for Florida's most disadvantaged youth and families.

It is time for Florida to seize this opportunity and take leadership in addressing the multi-dimensional treatment needs of these most disadvantaged of Florida's youth and end the tragic and costly human and financial toll for the state's children, youth, families, and communities.

Draft

References

- Barcelo, B. (2003). *Child welfare / juvenile justice partnership initiative: Preserve the continuum of options for Florida's youth*. Tallahassee, FL: Children's Campaign Inc.
- Child Welfare League of America. (2002). *Raising the level of awareness between child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency: Results of an online survey*. Retrieved January 24, 2007, from <http://cwla.org/programs/juvenilejustice/jjdsurvey.htm>. Washington, DC: Author.
- Child Welfare League of America (2006). *Child abuse and neglect*. Retrieved January 24, 2007, from http://ndas.cwla.org/data_stats/access/predefined/home.asp?MainTopicID=1. Washington, DC: Author.
- Fight Crime: Invest in Kids. (2006). *Protect kids, reduce crime, save money—Prevent child abuse in Ohio*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. *Fast Facts*. Retrieved January 19, 2007, from www.djj.state.fl.us/Research/Trends.html. Tallahassee, FL: Author.
- Florida Juvenile Justice Association. (2006). *At the breaking point: The crisis facing Florida's juvenile justice system, our youth, our services, our communities*. Tallahassee, FL: Author.
- Lewis, D., Pincus, J., Bard, B., Richardson, E., Prichep, L., Feldman, M., & Yeager, C. (1988). Neuropsychiatric, psychoeducational, and family characteristics of 14 juveniles condemned to death in the United States. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 145(5), 584-589.
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2002). *The juvenile justice and delinquency prevention act*. Retrieved January 19, 2007, from <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/about/jjdpa2002titlev.pdf>. Washington, DC: Author.
- Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability. (2006). *Effective community programs could reduce commitments of girls to residential programs (Report 06-13)*. Retrieved January 19, 2007, from www.oppaga.state.fl.us/reports/pdf/0613rpt.pdf. Tallahassee, FL: Author.
- Patino, V. & Krisberg, B. (2005). *Reforming juvenile detention in Florida*. Retrieved January 19, 2007, from www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2005_fla_reform_JDet.pdf. Oakland, CA: National Council on Crime and Delinquency.
- Patino, V., Raviora, L., & Wolf, A. (2006). *A rallying cry for change: Charting a new direction in the state of Florida's response to girls in the juvenile justice system*. Retrieved January 19, 2007, from www.nccd-crc.org/nccd/pubs/2006july_florida_girls_report.pdf. Oakland, CA: National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

- Siegel, G., & Lord, R. (2004). *When systems collide: Improving court practices and programs in dual jurisdiction cases*. Retrieved January 19, 2007, from <http://ncjj.servehttp.com/NCJJWebsite/pdf/dualjurisdiction.pdf>. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- Small, S.A., Reynolds, A.J., O'Connor, C., & Cooney, S.M. (2005). *What works, Wisconsin: What science tells us about cost-effective programs for juvenile delinquency prevention*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin–Madison.
- Spatz Widom, C., & Maxfield, M. (2001). *An update on the “cycle of violence.”* Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2004). *The child abuse prevention and treatment act*. Retrieved January 19, 2007, from www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/laws_policies/cblaws/capta03/capta_manual.pdf. Washington, DC: Author.
- Wiig, J., Spatz Widom, C., & Tuell, J. (2003). *Understanding child maltreatment and juvenile delinquency*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

Draft