

Reducing Juvenile Crime

Mental health problems are represented across the juvenile justice system:

- A 2001 study among a random sample of U.S. youth within the juvenile justice system found mental health problems in 45.9% of youth in probation, 67.5% of incarcerated youth, and 88% of youth adjudicated to residential treatment centers. (Lyons, Baerger, Quickley, Edrich & Griffin, 2001)

Youth with mental health needs are at greater risk of being arrested:

- Of all children enrolled in the Mountain State Family Alliance System of Care project, 47% have a diagnosis in the disruptive behavior category, which includes oppositional-defiant, conduct disorder and disruptive behavior disorder. (Sample of 853 children served—reported by Marshall University Evaluation Team, September 2004.)
- At intake, 34% of children receiving intensive care coordination in MSFA showed status offenses or delinquency reported in the problem list or found in the progress notes. 16% had police contact, had committed a crime that would warrant police contact, or were on probation. (Sample of 258 children served—reported by Marshall University Evaluation Team, June 2004.)

Systems of Care reduce the behaviors that get youth in trouble. National studies suggest that effective Systems of Care reduce juvenile violations of the law: In the national evaluation of youth followed for 30 months in 22 System of Care communities, including the Mountain State Family Alliance:

- There was a steady decline of youth in juvenile probation, from 24.7% to 19.5%; and a reduction of youth who had been incarcerated, from 15.5% to 11.3%. (n=77)
- Delinquent Behavior Scores (as reported by parents/caregivers and measured by the Child Behavior Checklist) fell from clinical to non-clinical range between intake and 30 months. (n=110)

(CMHS National Evaluation of Communities Funded in 1999 & 2000, Aggregate Data Profile Report, July 2004.)

What West Virginia Families have to say:

“I took over care of my nephew after the state took custody of him and he ended up in the juvenile justice system. The judge was sitting there going, ‘Okay do we lock him up or do we send him out of state to a mental health facility?’ I stepped in and convinced the judge to give me a chance.

With MSFA’s help I was able to take that series of ‘baby steps’ and work closely with the judge, probation officer, teachers, social workers and case managers, so I could give my nephew the stability and help he needed until he returned home to his parents’ custody.

Two years later, he is a high school graduate and training to serve his country in the armed forces.”

- Cabell County caregiver

WV’s Juvenile Justice Guiding Principles mirror the System of Care approach

West Virginia’s planning body, or State Advisory Group, is charged by executive order and legislation with developing statewide planning capacity for improving WV’s juvenile justice system. This body participated with the Division of Criminal Justice Services staff in developing the WV 2003-2006 Juvenile Justice Strategy for funding delinquency prevention and other projects, with commitment to:

- Status offenders being helped in their own communities, surrounded by supportive persons and caregivers;
- Prevention and early intervention, combined with services, as keys to combating delinquency;
- Viewing children and their families as a total unit, with services accessible to the total family;
- Cross-system linkages at the state and local level to effectively improve the juvenile justice system; and
- Responsible, flexible and accountable programs which meet individual needs.

(Source: Coordinated Plan for Preventing & Reducing Juvenile Crime in West Virginia 2003-2006, WV Division of Criminal Justice Services)

A comprehensive, statewide System of Care for West Virginia’s at-risk youth may be the key to implementing this shared vision.

The Mountain State Family Alliance partnership and providers of community services include: WV-DHHR Office of Behavioral Health Services, IWV-DHHR Bureau for Children & Families, IWV Division of Juvenile Services, IWV Department of Education—Office of Special Education, IRegion 2 Family Network, IMarshall University—Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine/Robert C. Byrd Center for Rural Health, IRegion 2 Children’s Summit, IGovernor’s Cabinet on Children & Families, ICounty Family Resource Networks, IRiver Park Hospital, IBraleay & Thompson, Inc., IPrestera Center for Mental Health Services, IWestbrook Health Services, IAlliance for Children, IWV Youth Advocate Program, IChildren’s Home Society, IKVC, Inc., IStepping Stones, Inc. I Pressley Ridge I Golden Girl, Inc. I Cammack Children’s Center I Additional private service providers & faith-based groups

