



Child Law Practice

Vol. 29 No. 4

June 2010

Helping Lawyers Help Kids

JUVENILE JUSTICE UPDATE

Community-Based Solutions for Delinquent Youth: A Guide for Advocates

by Judy L. Estren, Esq. with Kristin Winokur, Ph.D.

James

James is 12 years old and is a small child. He looks maybe 9 or 10. He is in sixth grade after repeating third grade twice. A lonely child, James lives in a neighborhood of subsidized housing with his grandmother and four siblings. His father is nonexistent and his mother is incarcerated on several drug charges. His uncle, recently released from prison, also lives in the home.

James walks home from school one afternoon. No one notices him. No one ever notices James. He goes into the nearby Winn Dixie. He didn't have lunch or breakfast and is hungry. James pockets a Snickers bar, looks around the store, and walks away. Once outside, while pulling the candy bar from his pocket, he is approached by a security guard and is later arrested by the local police for a misdemeanor petit theft.

Upon being arrested and processed into the juvenile detention center, James at some point kicks a detention officer. Although James is 12, he barely stands 4'7" tall and weighs just 85 pounds; but, James now has a new felony charge. Yes, kicking a detention officer is a third degree felony battery on a detention facility worker.

The situation repeats itself and by the time James gets to court for his first arraignment, he faces three charges: one misdemeanor and two felonies. Thus begins James's lifelong journey into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. James is ultimately adjudicated delinquent and ordered confined at the department of juvenile justice (DJJ). He is placed in a secure state facility many hours away from his grandmother, further estranging him from his family. As James grows older, he becomes institutionalized and commits more offenses within the system, ultimately resulting in direct filing him to the adult system by age 15.

Could this scenario have gone differently? Absolutely! Today, community-based alternatives to preadjudication juvenile detention and institutionalization exist that are proven effective in empirical research. Had James had community-based alternatives to detention at his disposal, his life may have been saved. He may have been another kid simply taking a candy bar because he was hungry. The worst crime James ever committed was hitting and kicking a much larger security guard in a jail. James is no angel. No, in fact, James is a problem child. But, if given an opportunity, James may not have grown up in detention and jail.

Advocating for Community-Based Programs

As a lawyer representing youth in court, be sure you know about community-based programs available to youth before taking a case. For your advocacy to be complete, you must become an expert—not only in the rules of evidence, litigation techniques, and courtroom efficacy—but also on:

- mental health issues and treatment options;
- family issues and services available within the family's community;
- substance use/abuse and treatment options;
- educational strengths and weaknesses; and
- alternatives to traditional educational practices.

With this expertise, you can help your youth clients through the juvenile justice system and ensure they get the best services possible. When you are well-versed in community-based programs and services, you can begin to match programs to each client as the case develops.

Program Contacts

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JDAI information: [www.aecf.org/
MajorInitiatives/JuvenileDetention
AlternativesInitiative.aspx](http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/JuvenileDetentionAlternativesInitiative.aspx)

The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

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OurPrograms.aspx](http://www.amikids.org/OurPrograms.aspx)

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EBA Community-Based Programs:
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our_programs/](http://www.evidencebasedassociates.com/our_programs/)

Although jurisdictions differ in how they refer and/or sentence youth to a community-based agency or program, it begins with you, the attorney, having knowledge of the available programs. This advocacy takes a lot of partnering with the prosecutor and the agency's representative (in many states, the agency will be the DJJ). When you are appointed to represent a youth, you should begin advocating for the youth by working with the juvenile probation officer and the prosecutor for a recommendation by DJJ to work toward placement into a community-based program. If the youth is adjudicated delinquent, you should then advocate for the youth, predisposition, for the program that best suits the youth's risks and needs.

This does not mean you should forgo the advocacy of "defense." It means you must be prepared when a child is found "delinquent" and faces sanctions or placement into a juvenile detention facility to do everything possible to keep that youth in a place close to his/her home. You must be familiar with the best possible services that meet your client's needs and risks.

Effective Community-Based Services: A Guide for Lawyers

The following overview highlights community-based programs and services throughout the country. These programs are known to be effective in diverting delinquent youth from juvenile detention facilities and a future life of crime. This guide offers a quick overview. For more detail, consult the resource boxes.

Lawyers in communities where community-based programs exist should seek them out, meet their staff, get more details on how they serve youth in their communities, and be prepared to advocate for their use with their youth clients. Lawyers in communities without such programs

can educate other practitioners and policymakers in the community about them and their benefits.

Many funding organizations, such as the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the MacArthur Foundation, have begun to funnel more grant dollars and initiatives to states and projects that emphasize alternatives to preadjudication detention, as well as postadjudication community-based services. Although many of these initiatives began more than 15 years ago, they have taken time to evolve and succeed.

Foundation-Supported Programs

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiatives (JDAI)¹ has brought growth and creative opportunities to areas nationwide. Through these initiatives, youth who were traditionally held in detention pretrial and precommitment are being referred to community-based placements. As a result, more youth are being served within their communities at the front end of the system, providing them a greater chance to succeed and be diverted from the system.

The MacArthur Foundation's Models For Change,² initially funded in Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, and Washington, DC, has made a substantial impact on state agencies and the juvenile justice system as a whole. Models for Change has expanded into 12 other states with programs addressing disproportionate minority contact in the system, juvenile indigent defense, and mental health issues.³

Corporation-Supported Programs

Many national corporations working

with troubled youth, some for more than 40 years, have led efforts to create community-based services and programs. Evidence-based programs of three of these national organizations—Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Inc., AMIkids, Inc.SM, and Evidence Based Associates, Inc.—are highlighted below (consult the box below for program locations, total youth served annually, and community-based programs operated by each organization).

Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Inc. is a national leader in helping youth and families succeed. Founded by philanthropists Jack and Ruth Eckerd in 1968, Eckerd is a private nonprofit organization serving youth through a range of behavioral health and child welfare programs in 9 states (*see Program Details box*). Eckerd provides services for youth in foster care, youth committed to the delinquency system, and private pay youth (youth served via parental and/or guardian payment rather than a state placement).⁴

Three notable Eckerd community-based programs are:

Eckerd Community Supervision Program (ECSP), located outside Dallas, Texas, is an alternative to secure detention for nonviolent youth ages 10 to 17. The program enables youth to remain in their homes and addresses their complex mental, emotional, and behavioral needs while they await disposition. Youth are primarily referred through the courts, as part of their court order before adjudication and as an alternative to residing in secure detention. The most common risk factors among youth served by ECSP are:

- substance abuse,
- antisocial peers, and
- school problems.

The program serves 48 youth and the

average length of stay is 1.9 months. One year after treatment, 83% of the youth are in school and/or are working, and 76% have not been convicted or adjudicated for another offense. More than three-quarters of the youth served reported being satisfied with the services received based on the Eckerd Youth Well-Being Instrument (EYWI), administered one year after completing the program.⁵

Eckerd Community and Home Outreach Program (ECHO), in Hammond, Louisiana, is a skill-building, mentoring, and in-home monitoring program for youth ages 10 to 20. The program helps youth stay at home, in school, and crime-free by using a team approach. The program serves as a diversion from the system, and features individualized treatment plans and a network of community support resources. Most youth are referred to the program by public agencies. The primary risk factors among youth served

by ECHO are:

- early delinquency onset (before age 13),
- antisocial peers,
- school problems, and
- substance abuse.

ECHO can accommodate 36 youth, and the average length of stay is four and a half months. One year after treatment, 67% of the youth are in school and/or are working, 74% have not been convicted or adjudicated of another offense, and 79% reported satisfaction with services received at ECHO.⁶

Eckerd Redirections Program (ERP), in Tallahassee, Florida, provides intensive in-home treatment to youth and their families to address antisocial behavior while improving family functioning. Evidence-based and empirically-supported treatment tech-

Program Detail

Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Inc.

Program Locations: Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Tennessee, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Rhode Island, Texas, and Vermont

Youth Served Annually: 12,000

Community-Based Programming: Private Academies for At-Risk Youth, Day Treatment Programs, Alternatives Day Schools, Early Intervention and Prevention Services, In-Home and Community Interventions, Aftercare/Post-Placement Reintegration Programs, and Child Welfare Services

AMIkids, Inc.SM

Program Locations: Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia

Youth Served Annually: 6,000

Community-Based Programming: Infinity Alternative Schools, Day Treatment Programs, Residential Treatment Programs, and In-Home Family Services

Evidence-Based Associates, Inc.

Program Locations: Florida and Washington, D.C.

Youth Served Annually: 1,500

Community-Based Programming: Multi-Systemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, Brief Systemic Family Therapy, and Multidimensional Therapeutic Foster Care

niques, such as Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), are used to achieve positive outcomes. Risk factors among those served by ERP include:

- early delinquency onset (before age 13),
- antisocial peers,
- school problems,
- and parental deviance.

The ERP can serve 18 youth/families and the average length of stay is 3.6 months. The program has achieved an 86% completion rate, and 79% of the youth have reported satisfaction with services received.⁷

AMikids, Inc.SM (AMikids) is a national network of community-based, nonprofit programs for troubled youth. It has operated since 1969, with 56 programs in eight states (*see Program Details box*).

AMikids' continuum of care includes:

- community-linked residential programs with programming for troubled kids as an alternative to juvenile secure detention;
- day treatment programs for low- and moderate-risk youth and those transitioning from a residential setting in a structured, community-based environment;
- Infinity Alternative Educational Schools (discussed below);
- WINGS (Women in Need of Greater Strength) programs for troubled girls and their babies; and
- In-Home Family Services for youth and their families.⁸

*AMikids Personal Growth Model*SM (APGM) is an evidence-based treatment approach that combines behavior

modification, education, and mental health treatment to improve the lives of troubled kids. APGM incorporates evidence-based modules designed to reduce recidivism, improve program completion rates, promote educational gains, and provide effective and qualified staff.⁹

Three notable AMikids community-based programs include:

AMikids Donaldsonville, in Donaldsonville, Louisiana, is one of eight day treatment AMikids programs in Louisiana, and one of 29 AMikids day treatment programs nationally. The typical youth served at AMikids Donaldsonville is male, African American, and has a prior record of at least two adjudications and early onset delinquency (average of 13.5 years). Despite these risk factors, AMikids Donaldsonville graduates achieved educational gains, with significant increases in math, reading, and writing grade equivalency levels. In 2007, AMikids Donaldsonville had a 69% completion rate and 86% of the youth remained crime free for one year after completing the program.¹⁰

AMikids Family Services, in Live Oak, Florida, uses the evidence-based Functional Family Therapy (FFT) model to serve adjudicated youth and their families. FFT is a well-established, community-based intervention that uses a family-centered approach to treating youth with violent, criminal,

*Seventy-nine percent
of the youth graduating
from the program
[AMikids Family Services]
remained crime free
one year after completing
the program.*

behavioral, school, and/or conduct problems.¹¹ In 2007, 82% of the youth entering the AMikids Family Services program successfully completed it. Most of those completing services were male and African-American, with an average of three prior convictions when they entered the program. Most had begun their involvement in the delinquency system at an early age (13 years). Seventy-nine percent of the youth graduating from the program remained crime free one year after completing the program.¹²

AMikids Infinity Schools are alternative schools that partner with local school districts to provide an approved educational setting for elementary, middle, and high school students. Students entering Infinity Schools are:

- at risk for dropping out of school,
- dramatically behind in class standing,
- chronically absent or tardy from school,
- disruptive and have attitudes that prohibit others from learning,
- transferred from special programs such as juvenile justice placements, and
- identified as special needs.

During fiscal year 2007-08, 501 students completed AMikids Infinity Schools. The average youth served by Infinity Schools was male, African American, and 14 years of age at the time of enrollment. Students who completed services showed educational gains in math, reading, and writing, with some individual schools achieving gains more than two and a half grade level equivalents.¹³

Evidence Based Associates, Inc. (EBA), based in Charleston, South Carolina, has partnerships with

providers in Florida and Washington, D.C. to deliver community-based services to delinquent youth. EBA uses evidence-based models, such as Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), Functional Family Therapy (FFT), Brief Systemic Family Therapy™ (BSFT), and Multidimensional Therapeutic Foster Care (MTFC) (see box at right). EBA works with individuals, agencies, and policymakers to identify the most effective programming by assessing the risk and protective factors in the community and/or school, while also determining the population most in need of services.¹⁴

EBA's Florida Redirection Project is a comprehensive, community-based alternative to residential commitment for delinquent youth. Beginning in 2004, the Florida legislature funded a pilot program targeting the growing number of juvenile offenders sentenced to residential incarceration for non-law violations of probation. The pilot project was designed to divert, or redirect, non-law violators from residential placement to community-based MST and FFT services, based upon the presenting problems and needs of the youth. The family-centered interventions are delivered over relatively short periods, between three to six months, representing a significant cost savings to states compared to traditional juvenile incarceration.¹⁵

The Redirection Project began in three Florida counties—Dade, Broward, and Escambia. These counties had high juvenile commitment rates for non-law violations of probation. At first, only low-risk, nonviolent and misdemeanor offenders were admitted to the program. Services later expanded to serve moderate- and high-risk clients diverted from residential care to redirection services. After successful first-year outcomes of the pilot study, provider locations expanded to include programs in 19 of Florida's 20

Evidence-Based Therapeutic Services

Functional Family Therapy (FFT)

FFT is a community-based intervention that uses a family-centered approach to enhance protective factors and reduce the risk factors in the family. FFT targets youth with violent, criminal, behavioral, school, and/or conduct problems. Trained FFT therapists have a caseload of 10 to 12 families, and the intervention involves approximately 12 visits with the youth and their family over a 90-day period.

Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST)

MST is a family-based treatment model delivered in a community setting. Targeted at youth with serious behavioral problems, MST focuses on improving the family's capacity to overcome risk factors for delinquency and strengthen protective factors for delinquency. It promotes the family's ability to monitor and discipline their children and replace negative peer associations with pro-social relationships. Trained MST therapists have a caseload of four to six families. The intervention typically lasts between three to six months.

Brief Systemic Family Therapy™ (BSFT)

BSFT™ is a community-based intervention designed for children and adolescents ages six to 17 who are exhibiting or are at risk for developing behavior problems, such as substance abuse, conduct disorder and delinquency. BSFT seeks to improve family functioning and relationships, thereby facilitating the prevention, reduction, and/or treatment of youth behavior problems. BSFT trained therapists deliver services over 12 to 16 family sessions, based on the severity of the familial situation. Services are provided in community locations convenient to the family, including the family's home.

Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)

MTFC is a unique alternative to group or residential treatment, incarceration, and hospitalization for youth with a history of severe mental health problems, antisocial behavior, emotional disturbance, and/or delinquency. Families are recruited from the community, trained, and closely monitored to provide MTFC youths with treatment and intensive supervision at home, in school, and in the community. Interventions focus on clear and consistent limit setting, positive reinforcement, relationship building, and separation from negative peer influences.

Sources: Barnoski, R., S. Aos and R. Lieb. *Evidence-Based Juvenile Offender Programs: Program Description, Quality Assurance, and Cost*. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, Doc. No. 07-06-1201, 2007; University of Miami. *What is BSFT™* Miami: Miller School of Medicine, 2009. January 20, 2010 <http://bsft.org/art/what_is_bsft.>; Chamberlain, P. and S.F. Mihalic. *Blueprints for Violence Prevention, Book Eight: Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care*. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 1998.

judicial circuits. Redirection services were recently enhanced by adding BSFT™ and MST-Psychiatric programs (see box above).¹⁶

During fiscal year 2006-07, 585 youth and families received redirection services. Sixty-seven percent of youth/families successfully completed the program. Those who did not com-

plete services were removed because the youth or family was not engaged in the program (50%). The average client served by the Redirection Project was male, Caucasian, and 16 years old when admitted to the program. Nearly three-quarters of the youth served by the Redirection Projects had prior adjudications for violent or property felony offenses.¹⁷

The Florida legislature's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) recently evaluated the Redirection Project and found it achieved significantly better outcomes than a comparison sample of youth completing juvenile residential commitment programs. Outcomes showed that youth served were less likely to be arrested than their counterparts who were placed in residential facilities, and the reduction in arrests was greatest for serious violations. The probability of an arrest for a violent felony was 48% lower for youth in Redirection Projects than the residential comparison group. OPPAGA results showed the Redirection Project increasingly reduced violent felonies over time, thereby increasing public safety.¹⁸

National Resources for Juvenile Advocates

The National Juvenile Defender Cen-

Agency Cooperation Key to Serving Juvenile Offenders

Juvenile justice and child welfare agencies that serve troubled youth must recognize that change must occur within the system before we can effectively treat youth instead of sending them to jail. As highlighted in a recent *New York Times* article,* New York City's mayor has merged the department of juvenile justice with its child welfare agency. Delinquent youth who are not considered dangerous will now receive a range of in-home programs offered through the child welfare agency instead of being held in juvenile detention centers. If more mayors, governors, legislators, and advocates would step up to the plate, like New York's mayor, maybe our kids would have a chance.

*Bosman, Julie. "City Signals Intent to Put Fewer Teenagers in Jail." *The New York Times*, January 20, 2010.

ter (NJDC) in Washington, D.C., created in 1999, has led numerous state-wide and national reforms. The NJDC and its regional centers serve as an advocacy clearinghouse for juvenile advocates, as well as a training consortium for the juvenile defense attorney. The NJDC has eight regional centers. To locate your regional center, visit www.njdc.org.

The NJDC has assessed states' juvenile justice systems, focusing primarily on youths' access to the courts and their due process rights after entering the system. Assessments have been conducted in Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. Recommendations based on the assessments have called for changing systems, services, and processes.

After NJDC conducted the initial state assessments, it further expanded its resources to include tools for practitioners to help juvenile clients. In spring 2009, NJDC published *The Role of the Juvenile Defense Counsel in Delinquency Court*, a valuable tool for juvenile defenders and a resource guide for juvenile advocacy.¹⁹ This guide not only assists the practitioner with case preparation and courtroom advocacy, but also with placement advocacy, including community-based placements.

So Why Do We Still Have Kids Behind Bars?

With the wealth of knowledge, depth of experience, and range of organizations that help troubled youth, why do we still have so many kids sitting behind bars? Why are so many kids living their teenage lives behind the institutional door? And, what does it take to make change actually happen?

We have programs, dedicated advocacy groups, and funding partners, but something is lacking: the philosophy that juveniles can be kids, these kids have troubles, and their troubles need help. We cannot simply put our troubles behind lock and key and hope they will change. We have to create change starting at the state and local level and build up to the national level. The

Juvenile Advocacy Resource

"*The Role of Juvenile Defense Counsel in Delinquency Court* is a policy paper that describes the critical and unique role of the juvenile defender as aligned with the American Bar Association's *Model Rules of Professional Conduct*, the *Institute for Judicial Administration/American Bar Association's Juvenile Justice Standards*, and the ABA Standards for Criminal Justice. This document reflects best practices as defined by the field—frontline defenders, social workers, academicians, and other juvenile justice advocates working in our nation's juvenile delinquency courts every day. The goal of the piece is to educate judges, prosecutors, probation officers, and other juvenile justice professionals about the importance of the juvenile defender's responsibility to advocate for the client's expressed interests."

—National Juvenile Defender Center, 2010

community-based programs described in this article provide a snapshot of evidence-based programs throughout the country that are working creatively to meet the needs of troubled youth and to keep them out of the juvenile justice system and a future life of crime.

Your advocacy on behalf of youth in court is critical to reshaping how our communities and our nation handle troubled youth. Consider the outcome if James had had an advocate who stepped up and identified his underlying needs, took time to find local programs that could address those needs, and advocated aggressively for them in court, instead of allowing him to be sent to juvenile detention. Be that advocate who says there is a better way to help young clients who get in trouble. Be that advocate who seeks proven community-based alternatives that truly help youth stay out of trouble and address their needs.

Judy L. Estren is a member of the Florida Bar and is currently serving as the Vice-President of Support Services of AMIkids, Inc. SM following a career in youth advocacy with the Public Defender's Office of the Sixth Judicial Circuit in Florida. Ms. Estren has also served an integral role in state and national child advocacy forums.

The author thanks the following for their help, support and collaboration in creating this article: The Justice Research Center, Tallahassee, Florida; Kristin Winokur, Ph.D.; Julie Blankenship, MSW; Dawn Jenkins; Sherri Ulleg; and Laurie R. Garduque, Ph.D., MacArthur Foundation.

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New Online Clearinghouse: State Child Welfare Policy Database

Child Trends, with support from Casey Family Programs, has launched the State Child Welfare Policy Database to provide information on child welfare laws, procedures, and agency guidance for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Database can help elected officials, administrators, advocates, practitioners, researchers, and other stakeholders keep current with the policies that protect our nation's most vulnerable children.

The site can be navigated by state or by topic. You can learn about your state's expenditures on child welfare services, policies for relatives and "kin" caring for children involved in the child welfare system, benefits and services provided to foster youth after age 18, and much more. In addition to the traditional Web version, the site is designed to be compatible with your mobile device, allowing for easily accessible information on the go.

Visit the State Child Welfare Policy Database at:

www.childwelfarepolicy.org/pages/map.cfm

ABA Child Law PRACTICE

www.childlawpractice.org

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CLP is published monthly by the **ABA Center on Children and the Law**, a program of the ABA's Young Lawyers Division, 740 15th St., NW, 9th Fl., Washington, DC 20005-1022.

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