



## JUVENILE JUSTICE

### 2006 Community Commitment Issue

### AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHANNEL POSITIVELY – THROUGH DIVERSION, ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT – THE LIFE PATH OF YOUTH WHO ARE LIKELY TO COME INTO CONTACT WITH THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

About 100,000 children a year in Florida are referred into the juvenile justice system. Seventy percent are boys. While African-American youth make up 22% of Florida's youth population, they constitute 38% of youth arrested, 47% of youth held in secure detention, 41% of youth placed on probation, 48% of youth incarcerated, and 51% of youth transferred to adult court. Proportionately, girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice referrals. Between 1998-99 and 2003-04, the admission of girls increased by 10%.

About 10% of all referrals concern violent offenses against people, with this statistic declining over the last several years. Some indicators suggest that the system may be increasingly used to handle misbehavior. First, 19% of referrals are related to incidents that take place in schools such as disorderly conduct, non-aggravated assault, petty larceny, violation of community controls, and miscellaneous violation of drug laws. Second, between 1999 and 2004, violation of probation referrals increased 69%, disorderly conduct referrals increased 22% and contempt of court referrals increased 30%. Also, a third of children are placed in residential custody for felony offenses; another third are in for misdemeanors, and the last third are in for non-law violations of probation.

Florida has the third largest population of children in confinement among the fifty states. It is among 19 states with an increase in juvenile commitment rates between 1997 and 2003 a period of declining juvenile crime. About 11,000 children each year get committed to Florida's network of public and privately owned residential facilities. On any given day, about 6,500 children are in these facilities. Average length of stay is 9 months. When released, most are then put on probation or conditional release programs for an additional six months. These programs are designed as supervisory in character rather than rehabilitative. These programs do not receive sufficient funding to effectively connect youth to their families and communities through family engagement and support activities, educational services, or employability opportunities. Each year, 57% of the children leaving residential programs are re-arrested, about 40% are re-adjudicated within 12 months, and about 29% get re-committed. In Fiscal year 2006 of 158 programs reviewed, 16 were found to be highly effective and 28 were found to be effective by Florida's Department of Juvenile Justice. Florida has taken very positive steps through the "What Works Initiative" to increase the use of evidence-based best practice in the care of juvenile offenders. Also, "Redirection" a pilot program to address "non law" violations funded by the legislature since FY 2004/2005, is designed to provide a community-based option to the court for youth violating probation or aftercare. Family focused evidence-based practices are the interventions required. Federal studies suggest that 60-75% of incarcerated youth have a mental health disorder and more than 50% have a substance abuse problem. In a survey conducted by the Department of Juvenile Justice, 63% of the youth reviewed had a diagnosed mental health disorder and/or high risk behaviors including substance abuse.

Nationally, best practice has been to adopt evaluated, evidence-based, interventions designed to rehabilitate and get children back as assets to their families and neighborhoods. The best known of these are the intensive family and cognitive therapies such as, "Brief Strategic Family," "Functional Family Therapy" or "Multi-systemic family therapy" as well as county-level "systems-of-care" programs such as "Wraparound Milwaukee". Independent living programs have also emerged into the national discussion as have community-based services. It is also becoming good practice to track long term employment and education outcomes instead of just recidivism.

Sources: For Florida's statistical data, see: "2005 Outcome Evaluation Report", February 15, 2005, Justice Research Center, Tallahassee, Florida; "2004-5 Profile of Delinquency", Florida Department of Juvenile Justice; February 2005 "No Child Left Behind in Juvenile Justice Education: A Report to the Legislature, Florida Department of Education, Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services; "Program Accountability Measures (PAM) 2005, "School-Related Referrals, Office of Research and Planning, Department of Juvenile Justice, Tallahassee, April 2006. For best practice information see "Mental Health Treatment for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: A Compendium of Promising Practices," National Mental Health Association, 2005. For national data comparing Florida to other states, see "Juvenile Offenders and Victims 2006 National Report", Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.