



Robert F. Kennedy  
**Children's Action Corps**  
RFK National Resource Center  
for Juvenile Justice



## DEVELOPMENTAL REFORM IN JUVENILE JUSTICE:

# Translating the Science of Adolescent Development to Sustainable Best Practice

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## INTRODUCTION

The goals, practices, policies, outcomes, and operations of the juvenile justice system and its affiliated youth-serving partners should be informed by the growing body of research and knowledge about adolescent development. The research that was effectively synthesized in the 2013 National Research Council report recognized that adolescents differ from adults in three important ways:

- **Adolescents are less able to regulate their own behavior in emotionally charged contexts.**
- **Adolescents are more sensitive to external influences such as the presence of peers and the immediacy of rewards.**
- **Adolescents are less able to make informed decisions that require consideration of the long term.<sup>1</sup>**

These adolescent characteristics provide the foundation for the adoption and implementation of developmentally informed practices, policies and procedures that have proven effective in achieving the primary responsibilities of the juvenile justice system, which include accountability, prevention of re-offending, and fairness and equitable treatment. Unfortunately, and all too frequently still in current practice, the goals, design, and operation of the juvenile justice system are not informed by this growing body of knowledge.

As a result, the outcomes are more likely to be negative interactions between youth and justice system officials, increased disrespect for the law and legal authority, and the reinforcement of a deviant identity and social disaffection.<sup>2</sup> The challenge going forward includes increasing the numbers and array of system practitioners who understand and embrace the research findings and implications; adopting systemic youth and family intervention practices across the spectrum of key decision points directly impacting the primary goals of the juvenile justice system; and creating and maintaining quality assurance methodologies that ensure fidelity to these principles and practices.

Upon closer examination of the origins of the research over the past decade, there is evidence of significant changes in brain structure and function during the period of adolescence<sup>3</sup> that has resulted in a strong consensus among neuroscientists about the nature of these changes. Much of this work has resulted from advances in magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) techniques that provide the opportunity to safely track the development of brain structure, brain function, and brain connectivity in humans.<sup>4</sup> The evidence suggests that the three previously highlighted cognitive tendencies are linked to the biological immaturity of the brain and an imbalance among

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Scientifically, adolescence has no precise chronological onset or endpoint. It refers to a phase in development between childhood and adulthood beginning at puberty, typically about 12 or 13, and ending in the late teens or early twenties. Generally speaking, when referring to an adolescent the focus is on those persons under age 18.

<sup>4</sup> Steinberg, L. (2009). Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice. Annual Review Clinical Psychology, Vol. 5, 459-485.

<sup>1</sup> National Research Council. (2013). Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.  
<https://doi.org/10.17226/14685>

developing brain systems. Simply stated, the brain system that influences pleasure-seeking and emotional reactivity develops more rapidly than the brain system that supports self-control. This fact leaves adolescents less capable of self-regulation than adults.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, both the seriousness and likelihood of offending are also strongly affected by influences in youths' environment — peers, parents, schools, and communities.

Another key aspect of the research findings from *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach* has significant implications for initial juvenile justice system responses and the consideration of alternatives to formal processing and diversion opportunities. Specifically, the research shows that for most youths the period of risky experimentation does not extend beyond adolescence, ceasing as identity settles with maturity.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of youths who are arrested or referred to juvenile court have not committed serious offenses, and more than half of them appear in the system only once.

## SUPREME COURT CASE LAW

Three landmark United States Supreme Court decisions in the past dozen years that involved the criminal culpability of juveniles have been informed by this research. In each of the cases, the Court drew on the adolescent brain development research to conclude that “adolescents, by virtue of their inherent psychological and neurobiological immaturity are not as responsible for their behavior as adults.”<sup>7</sup> In *Roper v. Simmons* (2005), the Court opined that adolescents' diminished blameworthiness makes it inappropriate to sentence them in ways that are reserved for those who are deemed fully responsible for their criminal acts. Thus, the Court abolished the death penalty for juveniles. In *Graham v. Florida* (2010), the Court remarked in its majority opinion about the maturation in late adolescence of brain regions important for behavior control, and thus banned the use of life without parole for juveniles who are convicted of crimes other than homicide. Finally, in *Miller v. Alabama* (2012), the US Supreme Court found it unconstitutional for a state to mandate life without parole for juveniles and noted in the majority opinion once again that the adolescent neuroscience reflected immaturity in high order executive functions such as impulse control, planning ahead and risk avoidance.

In all three of these transformative decisions, the Court cited *amicus curiae* briefs filed by the American Psychological Association, the American Psychiatric Association, and Adolescent Psychiatry, among others, which summarized the current research on adolescent brain development and connected it to the legal issues confronting the United States

Supreme Court. It is this recent history of litigation before the highest court that serves to cement the impact of the research in our everyday approach and successful practice toward the goals of the juvenile justice system. The Court's rulings and reliance on this research tend to undermine any notion that the research merely suggests a pendulum swing in a direction of change that will eventually swing back. In fact, it can be argued that the Court's rulings provide a constitutional framework grounded in developmental neuroscience which must guide policy and practice development and implementation of reforms in the juvenile justice system. In combination with other research that applies the foundation of this understanding to treatment and where interventions and practices with juvenile offenders achieve successful reductions of re-offending and improve positive youth development, it is apparent that the future of successful juvenile justice systems must be fundamentally driven by this research.

## HISTORY OF REFORM

As our juvenile justice system policy makers, leaders, practitioners and key partners address the critical enhancement and reformation of the juvenile justice system it is instructive to briefly retrace the history of the approaches to juvenile justice reform. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, through its *Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice Initiative*, published *Sustaining Momentum: Assessing and Mitigating Threats to the Fourth Wave of Juvenile Justice Reform*<sup>8</sup> in 2015. This publication, used as a framework to facilitate a Town Hall meeting at the 9th Annual *Models for Change* National Conference in December 2015, briefly articulated the characteristics of the historical “waves of reform.”

The first reform was the creation of a system of justice for juveniles that was separate from the criminal justice system — a late 19th century recognition that youth were dependent, still growing, and therefore could be guided. The court would be the kindly parent, or serve as *parens patriae*, and direct youth away from crime by meeting the youth's needs. However, by the 1960s our nation's courts concluded that this model failed to provide what it promised. This approach was therefore replaced by a second-wave of reform which is usually highlighted by the 1960's United States Supreme Court *In re: Gault* due process decision, which recently (May 2017) reached its 50 year milestone in law. The *Gault* case law afforded all juveniles the same rights as adults when faced with prosecution, defense attorneys, pleadings, and procedural rules. It is important to note that the system retained its core commitment to rehabilitation through this period of change.

<sup>5</sup> National Research Council. (2012). Report Brief, *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/14685>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Steinberg, L. (2009). Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice. *Annual Review Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 5, 459-485.

<sup>8</sup> Models for Change. (2015). *Sustaining Momentum Assessing and Mitigating Threats to the Fourth Wave of Juvenile Justice Reform*, Town Hall Forum. Chicago: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. <http://modelsforchange.net/publications/793>

The third wave of reform came in the period covering the latter part of the 1980s and continued throughout the 1990s. This period of change was in response to a national rise in youth violence that created a strong desire for punitive responses and led to public outcry and multiple legislative reforms.<sup>9</sup> In nearly all 50 states, laws were changed to respond to youth with penalties that were harsher, often involving high volumes of cases transferred or waived to the adult criminal court. While leaving intact due process requirements, it significantly undermined the rehabilitative objectives of the juvenile justice system. In the past decade, with the research confirming that many of those laws, policies and accompanying practices had not produced greater public safety or improved outcomes for youth, many have been reformed again. These more recent changes have been informed by the developmental research about adolescents which has brought us to the so-called fourth wave of juvenile justice in today's policies and practices.

As indicated above, the primary responsibilities or aims of the juvenile justice system are to hold youths accountable for wrongdoing, prevent further offending, and treat all youth with fairness and equity. Within that framework, the research strongly supports that focusing on the positive social development of youth can enhance and assure the protection of public safety. An examination of these responsibilities reflects their compatibility with the developmental approach to juvenile justice.

**Accountability** – It is imperative that our juvenile justice systems provide an opportunity for youths to accept responsibility for their actions and make amends to individual victims and the community. This focus ensures that offenders are answerable for wrongdoing, particularly in cases in which there is harm to person and/or property. Among the research-supported best practices in this area are restorative justice, peer/youth courts, community service, and cognitive skill building. The effective methods for accountability do not include those that mimic the adult criminal justice system (e.g., “lengthy confinement, control and condemnation”<sup>10</sup>). While monitoring and supervision may be included in the juvenile justice and court system response, to be effective in protecting public safety it must be accompanied by opportunities for youth to address their accountability through the research-supported best practices.

In fact, additional research reviews reveal very important findings that should further inform future practice reform in accordance with the accountability responsibility. First, deterrence-oriented programs that focus on discipline, surveillance, or threat of punitive consequences (e.g., Scared

Straight-type programs, boot camps, and intensive probation supervision) on average have no effect on recidivism and may actually increase it.<sup>11</sup> Second, many “therapeutic” programs and services oriented toward facilitating constructive behavior change have shown very positive effects - even for serious offenders.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, juvenile offenders with moderate or high risk for reoffending should be “subject to the minimal level of supervision and control consistent with public safety and be provided with appropriate, effective therapeutic services;” and furthermore, “subjecting juvenile offenders to punishment beyond that which is inherent in the level of control necessary for public safety is likely to be counter-productive to reducing recidivism.”<sup>13</sup> When combined with the current research on adolescent development, these best practice approaches actually have a much higher likelihood of achieving the goal of youth accountability within our juvenile justice system.

**Preventing Reoffending** - The best practice approach to reduce reoffending includes the commitment to the use of structured decision-making instruments that inform professional judgement at key decision points (e.g., risks-needs-responsivity [RNR] tools). In the case process this includes referral/intake, diversion or alternative responses, adjudication, disposition and case planning.<sup>14</sup> These scientifically validated tools and instruments can identify whether a youth is at low, moderate or high risk to reoffend. At the referral and intake processing decision point, this may provide a critical opportunity to divert the youth from formal involvement in the juvenile justice system. Given the fact that most low risk offenders are not likely to reoffend and formal involvement in the system may actually increase the likelihood to reoffend, the systematic use of these risk screening tools provides a positive opportunity to prevent reoffending through diversion or alternative responses to formal involvement in the juvenile justice system. Further, RNR assessment tools (e.g., SAVRY, YASI, YLS-CMI, etc.) may be used to assess for the specific needs of the youth in identified domains (family, peers, behavioral health, education, etc.) and permit a more effective matching of treatment and programmatic interventions that will ameliorate the risk to reoffend. If implemented well, the use of RNR tools effectively target specific evidence-based interventions (e.g., specific therapeutic interventions such as aggression replacement therapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy) that reduce

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> National Research Council. (2012). Report Brief, Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/14685>

<sup>11</sup> Lipsey, M. (2009). The primary Factors That Characterize Effective Interventions with Juvenile Offenders: A Meta- Analytic Overview. *Victims and Offenders*, Vol. 4, 124-47.

<sup>12</sup> Lipsey, M.W. & Cullen, F.T. (2007). The Effectiveness of Correctional Rehabilitation: A Review of Systematic Reviews. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, Vol. 3, 297-320.

<sup>13</sup> Lipsey, M.W., Howell, J., Kelley, M. & Chapman, G. (2010). Improving the Effectiveness of Juvenile Justice Programs: A New Perspective on Evidence-Based Practice. Washington, DC: Georgetown Public Policy Institute.

<sup>14</sup> Tuell, J.A. & Harp, K.L. (2016). Probation System Review Guidebook, 2nd Edition. Boston: Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps. <http://rfknrcjj.org/resources/probation-system-reform/>

reoffending and produce fiscal returns relative to their costs/youth.

**Fairness and Equitable Treatment** – The third aim requires that youth are treated fairly through the assurance that due process laws and procedures are protected for every youth and family involved in the juvenile court process. Fundamentally, this includes equal certainty that all youth have access to and are represented by properly trained defense counsel and that all youth have an opportunity to participate in the juvenile justice system proceedings. The fairness standard also applies to the practice of swift justice. An adherence to standards and timelines for case processing is critical in that the juvenile justice process is designed to teach offenders that illegal behavior has consequences and that anyone who violates the law will be held accountable. Youth who must wait a significant period of time between offense and consequence, often for the convenience of the system process and actors, may not be able to sufficiently connect the two events so as to serve as an effective deterrent. Practically speaking, if the juvenile justice process is not timely, many youth will experience prolonged uncertainty which can negatively impact trust and a sense of fairness. If a youth does not perceive the juvenile justice system to be predictable and fair, then the system's goal of changing behavior is less likely to be achieved.<sup>15</sup> Ensuring that youth perceive they have been treated fairly and with dignity contributes to several important features of prosocial development, including moral development, belief in the legitimacy of the law, and the legal socialization process generally.

It is also important to highlight the research and data that reflect the disproportionate numbers of minorities involved in the juvenile justice system, particularly in the deeper end of system involvement (e.g., detention, correctional placements) and that perceptions of unfairness have been corrosive to minorities, their families, and communities. Each juvenile justice system must be dedicated to examining this circumstance and where relevant must create policies and practices that seek to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. These diligent efforts can ameliorate the effects of disadvantage and discrimination by reducing unnecessary involvement and confinement within the justice system.

## HALLMARKS FOR TRANSFORMATION

In response to the 2012 National Research Council Brief, the Executive Director of the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice (RFK National Resource Center) was privileged to serve as a member of the Subcommittee to create a Prioritized Plan to Implement a Developmental Approach in Juvenile Justice Reform (within the Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education of the National Academy of Sciences). The subcommittee members were contributing authors for the *Implementing Juvenile Justice Reform: The Federal Role* report, published in 2014, which identified seven hallmarks of a developmental approach to juvenile justice. These seven hallmarks (described in greater detail in Sidebar #1) include:

- **Accountability without criminalization**
- **Alternatives to justice system involvement**
- **Individualized response based on assessment of needs and risks**
- **Confinement only when necessary for public safety**
- **A genuine commitment to fairness**
- **Sensitivity to disparate treatment**
- **Family engagement**<sup>16</sup>

The identification of these hallmarks helps to organize the opportunities to achieve the key aims and responsibilities of the juvenile justice system around research-supported methods of practice at each key decision point in a youth's case. They form the foundation of a necessary training curriculum for all juvenile justice system professionals and affiliated stakeholders. Upon recommended completion of adolescent development training, there should be a standard evaluation by which every youth-serving practitioner, manager and leader demonstrate their knowledge, aptitude, and proficiency. The RFK National Resource Center's experiences in delivering training and technical assistance related to probation and dual status youth to jurisdictions across the country for more than a decade have helped to further clarify the set of policies and practices that comport with the adolescent development hallmarks. When successfully interwoven throughout the key decision points and among all of the relevant practitioners in policy and practice, a state and/or local jurisdiction may have in place a successful, replicable and sustainable framework for positive juvenile justice system performance and youth outcomes.

<sup>15</sup> National Center for State Courts. (2011). Model Time Standards for State Trial Courts. <http://ncsc.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/ref/collection/ctadmin/id/1836>

<sup>16</sup> National Research Council. (2012). Report Brief, Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/14685>

## SIDEBAR #1

### HALLMARKS OF A DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO JUVENILE JUSTICE

- **Accountability without criminalization:** Adolescents need opportunities to accept responsibility for their actions and, where appropriate, to make amends to affected individuals and communities. However, given that adolescence is a transient period, when youth are involved in the justice system, measures should be taken to fully preserve the youth's opportunities for successful integration into adult life.
- **Alternatives to justice system involvement:** Interventions that aim to prevent re-offending often are more effective if services needed by adolescents are provided within the community and not through the justice system, as long as accountability is also achieved when appropriate. Well-designed community-based programs are more likely than institutional confinement to facilitate healthy development and reduce recidivism for the majority of youth who come to the attention of the juvenile justice system.
- **Individualized response based on assessment of needs and risks:** Individualized assessment of the treatment and intervention needs of the adolescent, as well as the risk of subsequent reoffending, helps to match needs appropriately to levels of supervision and services.
- **Confinement only when necessary for public safety:** Even when youth are adjudicated as delinquent, alternatives to confinement often serve the goals of the system. This does not mean that all services need to be provided outside of residential placement, which is necessary for some adolescents from a public safety perspective. Studies have shown, however, that confinement of juveniles beyond the minimum amount needed to deliver intensive services effectively is not only wasteful economically but also potentially harmful, and it may impede prosocial development.
- **A genuine commitment to fairness:** Treating youth fairly and ensuring that they perceive they have been treated fairly and with dignity contribute to several important features of prosocial development, including moral development, belief in the legitimacy of the law, and the legal socialization process generally.
- **Sensitivity to disparate treatment:** As perceptions of unfairness have been corrosive to minorities, their families, and communities, jurisdictions' efforts to reduce racial/ethnic disparities are extremely important and can ameliorate the effects of disadvantage and discrimination by reducing unnecessary involvement with and confinement in the justice system.
- **Family engagement:** A positive family experience is a central feature of positive youth development, even for system-involved youth. The juvenile justice system has the opportunity and responsibility to encourage family involvement whenever possible, including interactions with law enforcement, court proceedings, service delivery, intervention, and reintegration, in order to produce successful outcomes and to reduce reoffending.

## TRANSLATING THE SCIENCE INTO PRACTICE

The RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice has developed the Advancing Best Practice in Youth Justice Seminar (see sidebar #2, next page). The curriculum focuses on a set of practices connected to effective system reform that embrace the tenets and principles fundamental to implementation of a developmental approach to youth justice. Additionally, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) adopted a resolution in July, 2017 which endorsed a set of juvenile probation practices that conform to the current knowledge of adolescent development and adolescent brain development.<sup>17</sup> The following segments of the curriculum, consistent with the NCJFCJ resolution, can serve as an organizing and guiding mechanism for a state or local jurisdiction to translate the science of the developmental approach to practice within their juvenile justice system and maximize the likelihood for improved system performance and youth outcomes:

### *Collaborative Leadership*

As youth-serving agencies often face the steady stream of immediate crises, it is frequently a challenge to incorporate time and attention to the nurturance of important professional partnerships. This can lead to a fragmentation of effort among the very well-meaning service professionals that undermines accomplishment of goals, objectives and outcomes that benefit the youth and families we serve. With varying missions and mandates, it is also frequently easy to argue for this separatist practice to continue even as we fail as a community of service practitioners to realize positive outcomes. The underlying premise for a developmental approach to juvenile justice system reform (e.g., less capacity for self-regulation, heightened sensitivity to peer pressure, and less ability to make judgements that require future orientation) provides the strongest case yet for system partners to find common ground around which a strong collaborative foundation can be built. With this strong scientific basis, our professional practitioners can collectively recognize that during this period of adolescence, our youth actively engage in risky decision-making in relation to authority at home, in school and in the community. This development impacts susceptibility to the use of drugs and alcohol when offered by peers. It impacts how youth interpret and process trauma, stress and violent situations. It often also impacts youth's ability to learn. Therefore, if we are going to successfully ameliorate the risk to reoffend and provide opportunities for positive behavior

<sup>17</sup> National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (2017). Resolution Regarding Juvenile Probation and Adolescent Development. [http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/Fnl\\_AdoptedProbationPolicyResolution\\_7-2017\\_1.pdf](http://www.ncjfcj.org/sites/default/files/Fnl_AdoptedProbationPolicyResolution_7-2017_1.pdf)

## SIDEBAR #2

### RFK NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER TRAINING INSTITUTE

The RFK National Resource Center offers a variety of on-site training opportunities addressing critical topics in juvenile justice. We bring experts and experienced facilitators to you, ensuring that all vital leaders, staff, and stakeholders have the opportunity to attend. Each curriculum is based on well-established frameworks for reform that have been applied in numerous jurisdictions throughout the nation, while also incorporating current research and emerging best practices. We work with you to identify your jurisdiction's unique goals for the training and we then adapt the curriculum to meet those goals. Our approach to training strikes a balance between the traditional presentation of essential information with interactive discussions and facilitated activities aimed at applying the information to each individual jurisdiction. As a result, participants conclude the training well-informed and poised to begin taking action immediately. Below are several examples of training we offer that directly apply the research on adolescent development.

#### Advancing Best Practices in Youth Justice Seminar

This interactive seminar provides a comprehensive yet succinct overview of the key best practices in the field of juvenile justice in order to promote awareness and change at all levels of the policy, practice and service continuum. The curriculum is based on more than a decade of field experience in Probation System Review and Dual Status Youth reform and is informed by the seminal research from the National Research Council synthesized in the 2013 publication entitled *Juvenile Justice Reform: A Developmental Approach*. Additionally,

the curriculum benefitted from the input and expertise of the RFK National Resource Center's Probation System Reform Practice Network, a select group of experienced leaders and practitioners from across the country who have championed reform within their local jurisdictions. This 1 ½ day seminar provides an opportunity for the leaders of your state or local system to collectively learn about research-based best practices that incorporate the best understanding of adolescent development. The seminar initiates or builds upon the valuable process of identifying policy and practice opportunities within systems to align with national best practices that can improve both youth outcomes and system performance.

#### Dual Status Youth: Improving Outcomes for Youth Involved in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Training Initiative

The Dual Status Youth Training Initiative aims to increase knowledge among child welfare, juvenile justice and other youth-serving system leaders, practitioners and stakeholders about best practices to improve dual status youth outcomes and to expedite the development and implementation of new or enhanced dual status youth policies and procedures. The two-day curriculum includes principles and practices that have proven to promote coordinated and integrated multi-system practices and shared accountability. The training is based on the Framework for Dual Status Youth Reform, which is detailed in two influential RFK National Resource Center publications released in 2013, the *Dual Status Youth - Technical Assistance Workbook* and the *Guidebook for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration: A Framework for Improved Outcomes, 3rd Edition*. Additionally, the curriculum benefitted from the input and expertise of the RFK National Resource Center's Dual Status Youth Practice Network, a select group of experienced leaders and practitioners from across the country who have championed dual status reform within their local jurisdictions. As a

result, the training has a strong focus on meeting the training, education, and planning needs of those doing the work on the ground in order to foster collaborative achievement of best practices and system approaches.

#### Probation System Review Training

The RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice has pioneered an analytic approach that can be used in partnership with state and local jurisdictions to enhance probation department and juvenile justice system performance. This approach is detailed in the *RFK National Resource Center's Probation System Review Guidebook, 2nd Edition (2016)* and forms the basis for the Probation System Reform Training. This 1 ½ day training provides an opportunity for the leaders of your state or local system to learn about the key areas of probation system practice and policy that must be examined and aligned with national best practices in order to achieve optimal youth and system outcomes. The training curriculum engages the participants in understanding the four key elements of examination which include 1) Administration, 2) Probation Supervision, 3) Intra- and Interagency Work Processes and 4) Quality Assurance. Participants will not only learn about the methods, tools and resources available to examine their probation system within these four elements but they will engage in facilitated conversations that allow them the chance to identify which areas of their practice are best aligned with research-based principles and which areas have room for improvement. The curriculum was informed by the expertise of the RFK National Resource Center's Probation System Reform Practice Network, a select group of experienced leaders and practitioners from across the country who have championed reform within their local jurisdictions.

For more information on the RFK National Resource Center Training Institute, please visit [www.rfknrcj.org](http://www.rfknrcj.org).

change, cognitive skills development, and stability within a home environment, we simply will not be able to do that alone or in a professional vacuum. Further, what is recognized nearly universally by seasoned and novice practitioners alike is supported by the following two examples of the characteristics of the youth that touch our juvenile justice system:

- **As many as 80% of youth with child welfare and juvenile justice involvement have active trauma symptoms that require targeted mental health treatment to ameliorate the risk of reoffending and to increase the likelihood of a stable response to interventions (e.g., system monitoring and placement stability).<sup>18</sup>**
- **In a meta-analysis of 161 studies addressing juvenile offending and primary risk factors, parenting behaviors**

**emerged as the strongest predictor of juvenile delinquency; followed by educational issues, negative peer influence, and substance abuse.<sup>19</sup>**

These are but a couple of examples of the research and data that help solidify our understanding that the vast majority of the youth and families we serve are experiencing challenges in multiple domains.

Collaboration is not merely a concept; rather it is a dynamic and detailed set of connected actions. It is not accomplished episodically, but routinely through the development and adoption of policies, procedures and protocols that are effectively overseen by the persons who comprise the collaborative partnership. According to research on

<sup>18</sup> Grisso, T. & Vincent, G. (2014). Trauma in Dual Status Youth: Putting Things in Perspective. Boston: Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps. <http://rfknrcj.org/resources/trauma/>

<sup>19</sup> Ryan, J., Williams, A., & Courtney, M. (2013). Adolescent Neglect, Juvenile Delinquency and the Risk of Recidivism. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, Vol. 42(3), 454-465.

collaborative practices, if the appropriate people are “brought together in constructive ways and with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization and the community.”<sup>20</sup> Among the documented sustainable benefits are:

- **Buy-in**
- **Trust building**
- **Elimination of turf issues**
- **Access to more & better information**
- **Better opportunity for substantive results**
- **Generation of new leadership**
- **Community and/or organization empowerment**
- **System operations improved systemically**

The principle findings of the research on adolescent brain development and the accompanying neuroscience on adolescence can be used to compel our youth-serving partners to understand that without such systematic collaborative practices, our juvenile justice system will fail to achieve our mandates and vision far more often than is acceptable for the youth and families we serve.

### ***Risks-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) Tools***

After more than two decades of research that confirmed the efficacy of scientifically validated structured decision making tools to screen and assess for risk to reoffending, there is still a significant gap between the research and practice. In view of the neuroscience of adolescents, instead of basing sanctions solely on the offense, a more effective approach is to assess each youth’s risk for reoffending and reserve the most intensive monitoring and interventions (including both therapeutic services and sanctions) for those at highest risk. In addition, evidence suggests that the best results come from matching services to youths’ specific “dynamic risk factors”—that is, risk factors that can be changed, such as substance abuse, poor school achievement, or lack of parental monitoring. Further, with a strong commitment to the RNR tools, juvenile justice system practitioners can more effectively target positive youth development opportunities that focus on increasing competency and cognitive skills development.

There is considerable literature that provides guidance, instruction and examples to the field regarding the selection and implementation of a RNR tool and approach. This guidance delineates a number of pre-implementation steps that are critical to success within a jurisdiction. These include:

- **Development of a policy related to the implementation of the selected validated tool**

<sup>20</sup> KU Center for Community Health and Development. Community Toolbox: Section 11. Collaborative Leadership. <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/leadership/leadership-ideas/collaborative-leadership/main>

- **Development of protections regarding the collection and sharing of information**
- **Development of youth and caretaker interview scripts**
- **Development of a disposition template which includes recommendations to the court**
- **Development of a case plan format for documenting the youth’s case plan while on probation.**<sup>21</sup>

A growing number of jurisdictions that have effectively implemented and sustained fidelity of RNR practices have evidence that the approach has significant positive impact on juvenile justice system performance and protection of public safety. The improved system performance is demonstrated by the increased diversion of low-risk offenders from formal involvement in the juvenile justice system and the exchange of relevant information among prosecutors, public defenders and judges that permit more timely case processing and informed dispositions. The positive impact on public safety is reflected in the reduction of recidivism and corresponding improvements in cognitive skills and positive youth development.

### ***Trauma Screening & Treatment***

The growing awareness of the effect of trauma has led to the need for interventions that take into account the relevance of trauma in the lives of youth with behavior problems and potential involvement in the juvenile justice and related youth-serving systems.<sup>22</sup> The first step to identify appropriate interventions is the identification of youth for whom trauma-based treatment is necessary. Consistent with the field’s concerns, a recent Attorney General’s Report has urged all child-serving organizations to “train their staff to identify, screen, and assess children for exposure to violence”.<sup>23</sup> Together with trauma-based interventions, methods to specifically screen and assess youth for trauma-based concerns are critical to improving the likelihood for successful behavior change and amelioration of risk to reoffend.

The point of emphasis is not merely to acknowledge that youth have high likelihood of trauma events in their life, made higher by those in the child welfare and juvenile justice system, but also the routine need to identify active trauma symptoms. This practice requires a systematic approach to screening through the use of a validated instrument; expedited availability of clinical assessment where the risk indicates need; targeted,

<sup>21</sup> Vincent, G., & Guy, L. (2012). Using Risk Assessment to Meet Needs and Reduce Recidivism. Models for Change Innovation Brief. Chicago: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

<http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/356>

<sup>22</sup> Grisso, T. & Vincent, G. (2014). Trauma in Dual Status Youth: Putting Things in Perspective. Boston: Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps. <http://rfknrcjj.org/resources/trauma/>

<sup>23</sup> Report of the Attorney General’s National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence. (2012). Washington DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. <https://www.justice.gov/defendingchildhood/cev-rpt-full.pdf>

evidence-based treatment interventions with appropriately licensed clinicians; and training of youth-serving staff to appropriate methods of interaction and recognition of trauma responses.

There are indeed many agencies that are becoming trauma-informed and implementing the best practice of trauma screening. This should be done with an understanding of the entire trajectory a youth may travel into and within the systems as a result of identified trauma symptoms. The RFK National Resource Center's Dual Status Youth Practice Network<sup>24</sup> has developed a comprehensive three-system graphic<sup>25</sup> depicting the potential role trauma plays in accelerating the path of youth deeper into system involvement. With elevated attention to the principles of practice articulated in the Attorney General's report, the education, child welfare and juvenile justice systems each have a unique opportunity to interrupt this negative trajectory and create the best opportunities for successful outcomes.

### **Alternative Responses / Diversion**

An abundance of credible research supports the need for early screening and appropriate diversion for low risk youth and reveals that low risk youth are unlikely to reoffend if there is no intervention.<sup>26</sup> However, when low risk youth are mixed with high risk youth, this can create a contagion effect and can actually increase the risk that youth will reoffend. Further studies identified that unnecessary involvement in the juvenile justice system can also increase recidivism as demonstrated by the fact that youth who were put on probation were 12 times more likely to be arrested as an adult as those youth who aren't put on probation.<sup>27</sup>

Research confirms that aggression and delinquent behavior is near normative behavior as evidenced by the fact that 8 in 10 males will have police contact in their life while only 1 in 10 will have an arrest for a violent offense. Self-reports by juvenile males in the general population reflect that 1 in 4 boys between the ages of 15-16 report they have committed a serious violent act in the previous year. Although committing delinquent acts is a fairly normal behavior for adolescent males, it becomes important to separate the low risk of

reoffending youth from those who will become chronic/life offenders. These chronic offenders follow a trajectory where they begin to act out at a very young age (emotional volatility, behavior issues, etc.) and continue until it peaks at age 10-12 and never comes back down.<sup>28</sup> In addition, the severity of a youth's offense is not significantly related to the future pattern of offending.<sup>29</sup>

These research findings create a solid foundation for effectively holding youth accountable while addressing their underlying criminogenic needs, ensuring that scarce resources within the formal juvenile justice system are used efficiently, and reducing the development of future delinquent behavior by diverting low risk youth from the consequences of negative system involvement.

### **Graduated Response / Sanctions**

A strong system of "graduated responses" – combining sanctions for violations and incentives for continued progress – can significantly reduce unnecessary incarceration, reduce racial and ethnic disparities, and improve successful probation completion rates and other outcomes for youth under supervision. The Center for Children's Law and Policy (CCLP) produced the Graduated Responses Toolkit, originally published in 2016, that provides expert guidance, tools, and resources for state and local jurisdictions seeking to implement a system of graduated responses that includes a balanced focus on sanctions and incentives.<sup>30</sup>

There is compelling evidence that the juvenile justice system and its partners should incorporate this practice at key decision points affecting the trajectory of the youth into and out of system involvement. In the most recent federal census of youth in residential placement, which took place in 2013, one in four youth in detention were incarcerated for technical violations of probation or court orders.<sup>31</sup> In many jurisdictions, technical violations represent one of the leading reasons for admission to detention or out-of-home placement. Youth of color are often overrepresented among youth incarcerated for this reason. Juvenile courts, probation officers, victims, and other juvenile justice stakeholders want youth to comply with terms of probation and other court orders, and youth should comply. However, officials often resort to incarceration

<sup>24</sup> The RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice has brought together experienced leaders and practitioners from across the country that has championed reform within their local jurisdictions and provides the opportunity to develop leadership, enhance models, and develop additional resources, tools and guidance to accelerate systems improvement nationwide. More information may be retrieved about the work of the Practice Networks at: <http://rfknrcjj.org/about-us/practice-networks/>.

<sup>25</sup> Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice. (2016). The Trajectory of a Traumatized Youth: A Three System Perspective. <http://rfknrcjj.org/resources/trauma/>

<sup>26</sup> Lipsey, M. (2009). The primary Factors That Characterize Effective Interventions with Juvenile Offenders: A Meta- Analytic Overview. *Victims and Offenders*, Vol. 4, 124-147.

<sup>27</sup> Gatti, U., Tremblay, R.E. & Vitaro, F. (2009). Iatrogenic Effect of Juvenile Justice. *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, Vol. 50, 991-998.

<sup>28</sup> Farrington, D.P. (1995). The Development of Offending and Antisocial Behaviour from Childhood: Key findings from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, Vol. 6(36), 929-964.

<sup>29</sup> Mulvey, E.P., Steinberg, L., Piquero, A.R., Besana, M., Fagan, J., Schubert, C.A., & Cauffman, E. (2010). Longitudinal Offending Trajectories Among Serious Adolescent Offenders. *Development & Psychopathology*, Vol. 22, 453-475.

<sup>30</sup> Center for Children's Law and Policy. (2016). Graduated Responses Toolkit: New Resources and Insights to Help Youth Succeed on Probation. Washington, DC. <http://www.cclp.org/graduated-responses-toolkit/>

<sup>31</sup> Sickmund, M., Sladky, T.J., Kang, W., & Puzanchara, C. (2017). Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement. <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>

to respond to violations when other interventions could have held youth accountable without exposing them to the negative effects of confinement.<sup>32</sup>

For example, probation officers can develop a partnership with school officials to implement a Positive Behavioral Intervention in Schools (PBIS) initiative to address nearly inevitable instances of disciplinary events for court-involved youth that would be available as an alternative to the filing of a formal probation violation; or court/probation officials could adopt a graduated responses/sanctions grid that more systematically guides reactions to behavioral transgressions and provides opportunities to improve the youth's judgement skills when confronted with the circumstances that led to the current behavioral concern. Additionally, the institutionalization of incentives to reward or encourage positive behavior has a significant research foundation confirming improved responsiveness. It is a "cardinal tenet of our justice system that punishment should be proportional to the offending behavior and evidence is now available from many criminal justice and youth-serving contexts that using incentives more frequently than sanctions is most likely to achieve behavior change."<sup>33</sup>

### **Positive Youth Development**

Yet another practice that can be directly informed by the research about adolescent development involves commitment to the concepts related to positive youth development (PYD). This approach erodes the deficit based approach that dominates many of our juvenile justice and probation system paradigms for case management and acknowledges that youth are capable of stabilizing maladaptive behaviors if they can be attached to a variety of social resources that facilitate healthy development. In the past decade, concentrating on positive youth development goals has provided the juvenile justice system with a compelling framework for service delivery, especially in cases involving younger juveniles and those charged with less serious crimes. The PYD essentially asserts that reducing offending means not simply restricting opportunities to offend but expanding opportunities to grow. The practices associated with an effective PYD approach support development of more mature patterns of thinking, reasoning, and decision-making.<sup>34</sup> During this period of adolescence, youth are highly susceptible to the acquisition of the kinds of skills and relationships they will draw on to meet the demands of adult life.

There are a variety of implementation frameworks that have emerged during the last decade and while there are some differences in the approaches, PYD shares three basic assumptions:

1. Focus on strengths and assets rather than deficits and problems. Keeping youth away from drugs, criminal activity, premature sexual behavior, and other risks does not, by itself, prepare youth for a productive future. PYD frameworks emphasize the building of youth assets, or the skills and competencies that will allow youth to take on new roles as they transition from childhood to adulthood.
2. Strengths and assets are usually acquired through positive relationships, especially with pro-social and caring adults. Relationships and interactions between youth and trusted adults are one of the key mechanisms through which healthy development occurs. Relationships with pro-social peers can also facilitate development, but positive relationships with adults are the primary focus of PYD.
3. The acquisition and development of youth assets occurs in multiple contexts and environments. Schools, workplaces, community organizations, social programs, and neighborhoods are all part of a youth's natural environment and all offer opportunities for the acquisition of developmental resources<sup>35</sup> (e.g., mentoring, cross-age tutoring, community development projects, career opportunities, etc.).

In combination with the appropriate use of RNR approaches, case management plans can incorporate PYD opportunities into the strategies that strengthen cognitive skills and positive assets which help to ameliorate risk in the priority domains for treatment and intervention.

### **Case Processing Timeline Standards**

In a brief entitled *Delays in Youth Justice*, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention stated, "Delays in the processing of youth through the justice system can have negative results not only for the youth themselves but also for their families and communities. Improving the timeliness of the justice process is far more than a technical matter for managers and judges; it is a critical part of policy and practice in ensuring the juvenile justice system fulfills its basic mission."<sup>36</sup>

Recently in Idaho, leadership recognized the importance of effective and efficient case processing. As a result, all of the state's judicial districts came together to develop revised

<sup>32</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2011). No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration.

<http://www.aecf.org/resources/no-place-for-kids-full-report>

<sup>33</sup> Center for Children's Law and Policy. (2016). Graduated Responses Toolkit: New Resources and Insights to Help Youth Succeed on Probation. Washington, DC. <http://www.cclp.org/graduated-responses-toolkit/>

<sup>34</sup> Schubert, C.A., & Mulvey, E.P. (2014). Issue Brief: Programs that Promote Positive Development Can Help Young Offenders Grow Up and Out of Crime. Chicago: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. <http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/695>

<sup>35</sup> Butts, J., Mayer, S., & Ruth, G. (2005). Focusing Juvenile Justice on Positive Youth Development. Chapin Hall Center for Children, Issue Brief 105. <http://www.chapinhall.org/research/brief/focusing-juvenile-justice-positive-youth-development>

<sup>36</sup> National Institute of Justice & Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2014). Delays in Youth Justice. Justice Research. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/237149.pdf>

standards and practices for timeliness of their juvenile court processes and procedures. The qualitative research findings on successful adoption of adherence to these improved practices highlighted two common themes:

- **Success in addressing court delay requires leadership in the form of a court culture that is committed to case management, and**
- **Routine and shared communication is vital for any successful case management system, no matter how automated that system may be.**

These revised practices require collaboration from the key system actors and include judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, court administrators, and court/probation department staff at a minimum.

### *Family Involvement and Engagement*

The active engagement and involvement of families, which by definition must include the nuclear, single parent and extended family units, must 1) be based on their strengths and assets, and 2) must provide for an active role and partnership in the development, implementation and management of comprehensive treatment plans for their children. Adolescent youth rely on the family, the primary natural support, to provide guidance, instruction and nurturance no matter the level of dysfunction and our efforts must seek to enhance and not supplant that support system in both the short- and long-term. Principles for success in this endeavor are informed by the *Family Involvement in Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System* monograph<sup>37</sup> and reflect that all services are child-centered, family focused, community-based, multi-system and collaborative, culturally competent and offered in the least restrictive/intrusive setting as possible (See Sidebar #3). Given that family members are involved with professional staff as a result of an instant moment of crisis or with histories of challenges and/or dysfunction, the establishment of a partnership or effective working relationship can be daunting.

However, the research is clear that absent the meaningful engagement and involvement of families in our planning and interventions there is a decreased likelihood of achieving the positive outcomes we seek for our youth. In fact, the research reflects that when working together with families and reaching agreement on action plans, the court time and costs are reduced and families more rapidly avail services.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, when families are partners in case conferences there is a greater degree of familial involvement in the

<sup>37</sup> Models for Change. (2009). *Family Involvement in Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System*. Chicago: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. <http://www.modelsforchange.net/publications/238>

<sup>38</sup> Walker, J. M. T., Wilkins, A. S., Dallaire, J. R., Sandler, H. M., & Hoover-Dempsey, K. V. (2005). Parental Involvement: Model Revision through Scale Development. *Elementary School Journal*, vol. 106(2), 85-104

## SIDEBAR #3

### PRINCIPLES OF FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN JUVENILE JUSTICE:

- Effective and authentic family involvement supports the principles and practice of balanced and restorative justice and engages the family and juvenile justice system together with the youth in repairing the harm and moving the youth to become a competent and responsible community member.
- Family involvement is predicated on the recognition that the family is a child's primary emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual resource.
- Families are involved by the inherent nature of their role, and the quality of their involvement hinges on a dynamic interaction of personal and environmental factors.
- All families will act in the best interest of their child, and fulfill their role, when they have the knowledge, skills, and supports necessary to provide ongoing and developmentally appropriate guidance and interaction.
- Where families are unable to act in the best interest of their child, this should be seen as a complex phenomenon that the family would choose to counteract, if an avenue to do so presented itself.
- Positive family engagement involves a discrete set of approaches and services that systems can provide to families to assist them in meeting their family's needs, including in helping them make the best use of system and community resources.
- A juvenile justice system committed to family involvement ensures that there are flexible and authentic opportunities for families to partner in the design, implementation, and monitoring of their child's plan, as well as juvenile justice system policy, program, and practices which support responsive, effective outcomes for youth.

management of the case and it serves to detach youth from problematic peers.<sup>39</sup> Further, when youth participated in family group conferencing there was an increased desistance in their delinquent behavior over a 24 month period.<sup>40</sup> In its oversimplified form, leaders can be guided by the following self-analysis inquiries of our system practices:

- **At each decision-making point, is there is an opportunity for the family to have meaningful, informed and authentic input?**
- **Do families have access to resources (workforce personnel and service interventions) supportive of their involvement, including family peer advocates?**
- **Does juvenile justice staff receive family involvement and engagement training and resources?**
- **Is there a process in place for all families with youth involved in the juvenile justice system to provide input regarding their experiences and to evaluate the capacity of the system to support their involvement?**

In 2016, the Annie E. Casey Foundation published a guiding publication entitled *Engaging Parents, Developing Leaders: A Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Nonprofits and Schools*<sup>41</sup> which details a process for a rigorous self-assessment of family engagement practices. As public agencies and their community-based and non-profit partners collaborate to develop routine family involvement and engagement practices, this resource could be valuable in developing a strategic plan to achieve the positive outcomes we seek in this area of focus.

## Quality Assurance / Improvement

When implemented with a full understanding of adolescent development in each individual area and interwoven effectively among our collaborating systems, the practices referenced above will result in achieving the aim of the juvenile justice system: 1) holding youth accountable for wrongdoing, 2) preventing further offending and thereby protecting public safety, and 3) treating all youth with fairness and equity. However, during this transformational journey of our juvenile justice system and its partners, reliance on anecdotal evidence to claim victory is completely insufficient. The oft ignored practice of developing an effective quality assurance or quality improvement capacity is essential to create or bolster the tangible and substantial outcomes, measures and benchmarks for each key system practice area. The quality assurance system must be developed and informed by a routine set of data collection, management and reporting policies and procedures. These practices must be woven into job expectations and individual system performance evaluations and cemented by cross-system agreements where necessary.

While challenging, there are certainly examples in state and local jurisdictions where this capacity has been developed successfully. One such example was documented in the report on the Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana experience in which their local data environment evolved from one that had very limited internal automated data resources and expertise, to one that became a dynamic data driven and quality assurance model.<sup>42</sup> In another example from Louisiana, detailed in *Sustaining the Momentum of Probation System Reform in Jefferson Parish*,<sup>43</sup> the author highlights the most recent results of ongoing tracking of the impact of system performance and youth outcome reforms undertaken in Jefferson Parish. The practice brief identifies the key principles of sustainability that have contributed to the continued success of their reforms. The technical assistance guidance that supported this achievement is captured in two articles<sup>44</sup> authored by Gene Siegel, a noted data analyst and researcher. These quality assurance mechanisms and gains in capacities for measurement of our system performance and achievement of outcomes do not always rely on significant fiscal investments.

<sup>39</sup> Weigensberg, E.C., Barth, R.P., & Guo, S. (2009). Family Group Decision-making: A Propensity Score Analysis to Evaluate Child and Family Services at Baseline and after 36 Months. *Children and Youth Services Review*, Vol. 31, 383-390.

<sup>40</sup> McGarrell, E., & Hipple, N. K. (2007). Family Group Conferencing and Re-Offending Among First-Time Juvenile Offenders: The Indianapolis Experiment. *Justice Quarterly*, 24(2), 221-246.

<sup>41</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2016). *Engaging Parents, Developing Leaders: A Self-Assessment and Planning Tool for Nonprofits and Schools*. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/engaging-parents-developing-leaders/>

<sup>42</sup> Siegel, G. (2014). *Becoming a Data-Driven Juvenile Justice Organization: The Calcasieu Parish Experience*. National Center for Juvenile Justice. <http://www.ncjj.org/Publication/Becoming-a-Data-Driven-Juvenile-Justice-Organization-The-Calcasieu-Parish-Experience.aspx>

<sup>43</sup> Ryals, J., Jr. (2015). *Sustaining the Momentum of Probation System Reform in Jefferson Parish*. Boston: Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps. <http://rfknrcjj.org/resources/probation-system-reform/>

<sup>44</sup> Data Planning in the DSY Initiatives Initial Suggestions; and, How to Improve Data Capabilities in Dual Status Youth Initiative Sites: Key Principles and Examples. Both available at: <http://rfknrcjj.org/resources/data/>

## Summary / Conclusion

The goals, practices, policies, outcomes, and operations of the juvenile justice system and its affiliated youth-serving partners should be informed by the growing body of research and knowledge about adolescent development. As noted in the Introduction, our challenge moving forward requires an intentional focus on increasing the number of system practitioners who understand and embrace the research findings and implications, who translate this research to systematic and sustainable practices across the spectrum of key decision points connected to the primary goals of the juvenile justice system, and who create and maintain quality assurance methodologies that ensure fidelity to these principles and practices. Fortunately, the experiences of field-based technical assistance and training initiatives – informed by juvenile justice leaders and stakeholders – have resulted in a synthesizing of the hallmark principles of adolescent development upon which we may structure a set of identifiable and interwoven practices that provide a pathway to excellence on behalf of our nation's youth and families involved in the juvenile justice system.

The start of that journey for each juvenile justice system and its leadership is the required completion of adolescent development training for each practitioner, manager, and affiliated stakeholder leader with an accompanying evaluation of their demonstrated knowledge, aptitude, and proficiency upon completion of this core competency. The transformation can then continue by focusing on an identified set of field-tested practices connected to effective system reform. The identified practice areas can serve as an organizing and guiding mechanism for a state or local jurisdiction to translate the science of the developmental approach within their juvenile justice system and maximize the likelihood for improved system performance and youth outcomes. As detailed in this brief, these practice areas include:

- **Collaborative Leadership**
- **Alternative Responses / Diversion**
- **Risks-Needs-Responsivity**
- **Positive Youth Development**
- **Case Processing Timeline Standards**
- **Graduated Response/Sanctions and Incentives**
- **Trauma Screening & Treatment**
- **Family Engagement**
- **Quality Assurance**

Within each of these practices, there exists a wealth of research, training and technical assistance opportunities that supports a variety of methods, approaches, programs, services and clinical interventions that increase the likelihood for positive achievement. With so much to guide juvenile justice systems toward the kind of transformation or improvement in these targeted areas, it seems incumbent upon us to evaluate our performance against these hallmarks and evidence-based practices. Each day we do not scratch and scramble to improve, our efforts may unwittingly increase the harm caused to one youth's future or most certainly fall short of what we should expect of ourselves and our systems.

Through our extensive Probation System Reform and Dual Status Youth technical assistance work in the field over the past fifteen years, staff at the RFK National Resource Center has witnessed an encouraging willingness among state and local jurisdictions to examine their operations and performance and take on challenging reforms. A growing number of juvenile justice systems, probation departments, and critical stakeholders (e.g., judges, prosecutors, defense counsel, etc.) are becoming more engaged in the development of refined policies and practices connected to adolescent development that demonstrate improved rates of recidivism across all risk classifications and improve other critically important measures of positive youth development. We fervently hope that this brief, supported by a variety of our training and technical assistance methods, provides additional impetus and guidance for even more juvenile justice system leaders to translate the adolescent development research into an effective set of sustainable practices. We believe there is a responsibility to accelerate our progress toward achieving the vision articulated by the man for whom our National Resource Center is named when he said "We envision a world where strong families and communities nurture and cherish their children to be contributing members of society, so that every child in this country live as we would want our own children to live."<sup>45</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Address by Robert F. Kennedy delivered at the Seattle World's Fair on August 7, 1962. <https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/ag/legacy/2011/01/20/08-07-1962.pdf>