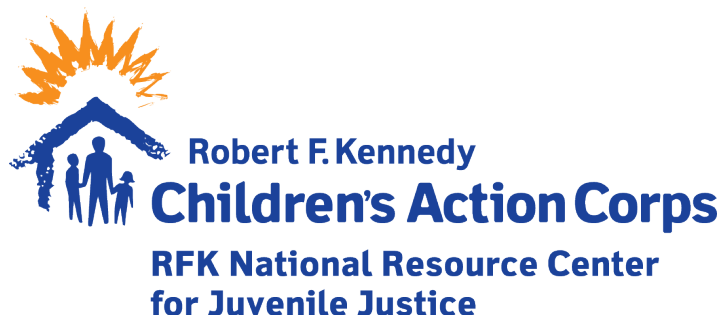


# From Conversation to Collaboration:

## How Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Agencies Can Work Together to Improve Outcomes for Dual Status Youth

By the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, a member of the Models for Change Resource Center Partnership



Alicia was born to an incarcerated mother and spent her early life in and out of placements with family members, many of whom proved to be abusive. By the time she was ten years old, she had been sexually abused and forced into prostitution. Foster home placements were unsuccessful and Alicia was eventually placed in, and moved between, group homes. Due to her constant running away from placements and frequent altercations with group home staff, she became involved with the juvenile justice system. She quickly escalated within the system, as both child welfare and probation workers were challenged to address her troubling behaviors and needs.

Despite the concurrent involvement of both systems in Alicia's life, child welfare and probation workers did not coordinate their efforts or collaborate on case plans for this youth, and Alicia was clearly disinterested in working with either agency. Her harmful and dangerous behaviors continued, and workers within both systems had significant concern that she would continue the generational cycle of incarceration.

When Alicia was sixteen years old, she became among the first to experience a new approach developed by the child welfare and probation agencies in her county. These agencies engaged in a collaborative process to develop coordinated approaches to assessment and case planning for youth they had in common. The county experienced many "firsts" on Alicia's case: the first joint report submitted by child welfare and probation to the court; the first time a community-based organization was asked to do an independent needs assessment and evaluation with service recommendations; the first time the court allowed for a response other than a warrant for Alicia's running away.

Most importantly, after meeting with a cross-system team committed to working together, a probation representative from the county noted that it was the first time Alicia *"really invested herself in her own 'plan,' as opposed to her usual 'you're going to do whatever you want anyway' attitude that has prevailed until now."* Alicia is now over eighteen, has not been arrested, and is making use of extended foster care services for both housing and education. She continues to communicate with her social worker, who reports that Alicia is the most stable she has ever been. Those working with her are now optimistic that she can break the cycle of incarceration and believe that *"this really could be a happy ending."*

**Although youth and families  
often cross agency lines,  
workers rarely do.**

Alicia is one of a significant number of youth who come into contact with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. They are known as **dual status youth**.

Many counties and states across the country have identified this population of youth within their systems, recognized their unique needs, and have undertaken profound changes to better serve them. With assistance from the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, led by Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, and its framework for system coordination and integration, these

jurisdictions have transformed the culture and practices of their youth-serving agencies with respect to meeting the needs and addressing the challenges of dual status youth.

In each instance, change required collaboration between agencies, sometimes between people who have not worked together before. Although youth and families often cross agency lines, workers rarely do. Child-serving systems traditionally operate in silos, with both physical and cultural separation from one another. To realize meaningful change, child welfare and juvenile justice agencies, along with other stakeholders, must develop a shared understanding of why new approaches to working with dual status youth are necessary and a shared commitment to the value of what can be realized. This paper provides background that informs that understanding, examples of what can be achieved, and guidance for beginning the collaborative conversation.

*“Until you can really define, from executive management down to line staff, the goals and shared values that you are trying to achieve...shared values about how children should be treated, and especially this population of children...I don’t know how you solve anything. Because otherwise you are trying to change policy and procedure without changing what drives policy and procedure.”*

Laura Garnette, Deputy Chief Probation Officer, Santa Clara County Probation Department

## Why focus on dual status youth?

Recent research has established a link between childhood maltreatment and later delinquent and criminal behavior. A well-known longitudinal study found that being abused or neglected as a child increased a person’s likelihood of arrest as a juvenile by 59 percent, as an adult by 28 percent, and for a violent crime by 30 percent.<sup>i</sup> In addition, a retrospective look at juvenile offenders and adult criminals in several states and counties reveals that a large percentage have experienced child abuse and neglect as well as involvement in the child welfare system.<sup>ii</sup>

Dual status cases are not only notable for their prevalence, but also for their complexity. Practitioners in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems are well aware of the challenging and resource-intensive nature of dual status youth cases. Research confirms that dual status youth are younger at the time of their first arrest, have higher rates of recidivism, are detained more often and for longer periods of time, experience more frequent placement changes, are more likely to experience school failure, and generally have more extensive mental health needs than youth who do not touch both systems.<sup>iii</sup>

Research also suggests that dual status youth often do more than simply “touch” the juvenile justice system. A study conducted in Illinois revealed that foster youth are more likely to experience formal processing in the juvenile justice system, which can lead to deeper involvement.<sup>iv</sup> Notably, the Illinois study concludes that: “Since youths coming to the juvenile justice system from child welfare are

disproportionately likely to be African-American, this bias in decision-making contributes to disproportionate minority contact.” Ultimately, deeper system penetration results in increased individual and system costs and in most cases does not provide better outcomes for youth.

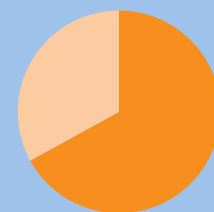
In addition to experiencing poor outcomes within the juvenile justice system, dual status youth experience particularly poor outcomes in adulthood when compared to youth involved in only one system. A study from Los Angeles County revealed that almost two-thirds of youth who were involved in both the child welfare and juvenile probation systems had a jail stay within four years of exit from juvenile systems. That 64.2 percent rate is considerably higher than the adult recidivism rate for juvenile probation only youth (47.6 percent) and former foster care only youth (25 percent).<sup>v</sup> Additionally, the study found that dual status youth were far more likely to be heavy users of public systems, less likely to have high educational attainment, and less likely to be consistently employed.

These findings raise serious concern about how effective traditional approaches may be with this population. In order to develop new, more cost-effective, and more successful approaches, system partners must agree to begin the work of collaboration.

#### *King County, Washington:*

A study in King County, Washington (Seattle is the county seat) provides an excellent example of the challenges many localities face with dual status youth.

**PREVALENCE:** A staggering **67 percent of youth** referred to the juvenile justice system in King County in 2006 had at least some history of contact or involvement with the county’s child welfare agency. Dual status youth, particularly those with a history of legal activity/placement in child welfare, were shown to have started their delinquent careers a year or more earlier than youth without child welfare involvement.



**RECIDIVISM:** Within two years of their first offense, 70 percent of dual status youth with a history of legal activity or placement in the child welfare system had been referred back to the King County juvenile justice system, more than double the 34 percent rate of recidivism within two years for youth with no history of involvement with the child welfare system.

**COSTS:** Dual status youth who experienced out-of-home placements had an average of 12 placement changes during the study period (including AWOL events when the youth went missing). Such changes are disruptive for the youth involved and the cost to the system is tremendous: researchers estimated that the placement costs for one hypothetical dual status youth over the course of 27 months are approximately \$38,000, which quickly multiplies into the millions of dollars across the whole system.

*Source: Doorways to Delinquency, 2011<sup>vi</sup>*

## How can collaboration help?

When facing the challenges of the dual status youth population, increasing coordination and integration between systems can provide greater opportunities to prevent the entry or continued movement of a youth through the juvenile justice system. Yet even when agency staff recognizes the need to collaborate, there can still be many barriers and few incentives. Organizations are often very invested in their current way of working and frequently have deeply entrenched beliefs about system partners. This can result in the staff from one agency expecting the “other system” to simply deal with the issue instead of working together.

To move beyond such barriers and the typical skepticism that can accompany a new initiative, leaders must clearly communicate the value of collaboration and the benefits of coordination between agencies. Jurisdictions that have undertaken collaborative initiatives addressing dual status youth report important gains such as:

- A deeper level of understanding between systems
- Greater awareness of assets and limitations of each system
- A developing sense that dual status youth are a shared responsibility

Often these discoveries signal a shift in organizational culture. This shift is essential for the development and implementation of new practices rooted in coordination and integration. When jurisdictions begin to work in a coordinated fashion, the systems find that they are more easily able to:

- Streamline processes
- Make necessary information available to relevant parties
- Identify opportunities for alternatives to formal processing
- Ensure the use of appropriate and valid evaluations
- Produce cohesive case plans
- Successfully engage youth and families in their own case plans
- Make effective use of scarce resources
- Promote decision making that is fair, equitable, and developmentally appropriate

Ultimately, when systems that have historically operated in isolation from one another come together to serve the youth they have in common, there is an increased ability to access expertise and resources that best meet the needs of dual status youth. This can result in more effective responses to these youth, increasing the likelihood of steering them away from the juvenile justice system as well as linking those involved with the most effective services and treatment.

## How can a jurisdiction begin to collaborate?

Using the framework provided in the *Guidebook for Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare System Integration and Coordination*, and the technical assistance approach outlined in *Dual Status Youth – Technical Assistance*

*Workbook*, numerous jurisdictions and the youth and families within them have realized the benefits of collaboration. Beginning to collaborate, or enhancing existing collaborations, starts by bringing individuals together to educate one another about their roles, mandates, resources and expertise, and to collectively explore solutions to shared challenges. Collaboration simply begins with a conversation.

**The following two counties provide examples of how multi-system conversations have provided the starting point for a transformative process.**



*King County, Washington*

The work to create a collaborative model for system integration in King County began with a one-day symposium for leaders of youth-serving systems. These leaders came together out of a shared frustration with what was perceived as a failure to effectively work together on behalf of dual status youth. Among the attendees were representatives from a wide range of agencies at both county and state levels. From among these leaders an executive steering committee was formed and began to meet regularly to provide an ongoing opportunity to educate and explore new ideas as a multi-system team.

With the support of expert facilitation, a dialogue between systems began, resulting in the drafting of a charter to guide a strategic planning process for systems integration. Within the initial dialogue, primary goals were jointly developed and a structure for oversight and leadership was established. New protocols for coordinated case planning, an information-sharing guide, cross-system training, and education integration are just some of King County's accomplishments derived from this initial multi-system conversation.



*Santa Clara County, California*

To communicate the new collaborative effort in Santa Clara County, officials invited the broader community of stakeholders to a "kick off" event that educated attendees about the needs of dual status youth and introduced the commitment by all involved agencies to addressing them together. Early in the initiative, cross-system participants worked to develop a list of guiding values, which became the basis for an interagency memorandum of understanding (MOU). This MOU articulates an ongoing collaborative commitment to improving outcomes for dual status youth.

As a result of this commitment and the investment of time and effort by staff and agency leaders, Santa Clara County has developed innovative approaches to case processing, joint assessment, and joint case planning for dual status youth, including the development of a specialized unit jointly staffed by child welfare and probation.

## How can agencies start the conversation?

As strategies aimed at initiating collaboration are put into action, it is important to acknowledge that participants each have unique professional orientations, training, and experience. Stakeholders from child welfare, juvenile justice, education, mental health, and law enforcement agencies, as well as youth and parent representatives, bring vital perspectives to the process of reform. Establishing a safe and encouraging environment for candid communication, respecting each point of view, is essential to launching the necessary conversations and then finding commonalities from which to build collaborative approaches.

Often the initial conversations about collaboration happen between child welfare and probation agencies. Work in jurisdictions across the country has revealed some common trends and beliefs held among these lead agencies. These fall into four primary categories that present challenging but essential starting points for conversation between child welfare and juvenile justice departments – goals, roles, privacy, and capacity. The following grid illustrates these commonly held perspectives and what is likely to be gained by sharing them.

	Juvenile Justice Perspective	Child Welfare Perspective	What Is Revealed Through Conversation?
<b>Agency Goals</b>	<i>“Our goal is to protect communities and hold youth accountable, but also to redirect young offenders and achieve positive change for them and their families.”</i>	<i>“Our goal is to keep children safe from abuse and neglect, preserve and strengthen families, and ensure children have permanent homes.”</i>	When agencies communicate their goals and missions, participants often discover that they share fundamental values of ensuring safety and providing youth with the best opportunity to develop with the support of family and permanent, positive connections.
<b>Agency Roles</b>	<i>“Juvenile justice agencies are seen as ‘a hammer’ used to force youth into behaving better. However, our role is to provide the appropriate level of involvement based on identified risks and needs. Not every kid should be involved with the juvenile justice system.”</i>	<i>“Our role is to work with the family to ensure that parents take the steps necessary to provide a safe home for their children or to find an alternative safe home if that can’t be provided by their family. We do not have the same ability to ensure that youth follow-through with expectations and are accountable for their actions. However, without this, many kids repeatedly get into trouble and endanger their future.”</i>	This conversation often reveals the need among child welfare agencies for support in managing the behaviors of the youth in agency care. However, juvenile justice agencies seek to ensure that youth and families do not become immersed in the system unnecessarily or to an extent that causes more harm than good. This can begin to forge an understanding between agencies of the value of partnership as well as the realistic and necessary limitations of each agency.

<p><b>Privacy/ Information Sharing Policy</b></p>	<p><i>"We need to know more information about the dual status youth in our system in order to make the best decisions about them."</i></p>	<p><i>"We need to know what is happening in our client's delinquency case and what resources are available to him or her. We also have to be careful about the information we share because of legal restrictions and possible negative consequences for the youth and family."</i></p>	<p>When participants begin talking about information sharing, it often becomes clear that juvenile justice decision-makers may not have the full picture about why a youth has acted out or what his or her needs might be. Similarly, social workers are often not notified that their clients are engaging in delinquent behavior. Detailed discussion around providing relevant information can lead to important new practices in cross-system collaboration, communication and improved decision-making.</p>
<p><b>Capacity/ Agency Budget &amp; Staff Time</b></p>	<p><i>"New practices and protocols are sure to add to my team's workload and deplete our budget."</i></p>	<p><i>"My team's budget and time is strapped too."</i></p>	<p>One thing most agencies can agree upon is that their budgets are tight and that their workers do not have the capacity for additional work. However, cross-system conversations reveal that there are opportunities to consolidate and streamline processes when systems work together on dual status youth cases. These youth and families often present the greatest needs and therefore demand the greatest resources from agencies. Coordinating efforts can result in more effective work with the families, ultimately reducing their time in both systems.</p>

## Conclusion

The prospect of agencies working together can seem challenging. However, candid conversations between agencies can help them better define obstacles and work together to overcome them. Through shared understanding, each agency is better able to see itself as a part of the solution. Ultimately, collaboration provides a foundation for sustainable changes that help jurisdictions achieve their potential for better serving dual status youth, their families, and their communities.

***"Hands down, this is the most rewarding work I have done in my 25 years in the probation field. For the first time, there are solutions being generated for very complex issues that are working and benefiting the very youth who have traditionally had the worst trajectory in our system."***

Laura Garnette, Deputy Chief Probation Officer,  
speaking about Santa Clara County's Dual Status Youth Initiative.



## About the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice

The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice is led by Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps and is supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, as part of its Models for Change Resource Center Partnership.

The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice offers expert technical assistance, consultation and training to state and local jurisdictions and private youth serving agencies. Our training and consultation staff has a long history of field-based practical and technical assistance experience working with state and local leaders, policy makers and practitioners to positively impact desired practice and policy enhancements and reforms.

Our primary areas of focus include:

- dual status youth and multi-system integration and coordination
- probation and court system review
- information and data sharing
- collaborative leadership and management
- system mapping
- policy and protocol development
- data collection, performance measurement, and outcome development
- intra- and inter-agency work process analysis

Please visit [www.rfknrcjj.org](http://www.rfknrcjj.org) and [www.rfkchildren.org](http://www.rfkchildren.org) to explore further resources and to contact us with questions or requests for assistance.

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## About the Models for Change Resource Center Partnership

The Resource Center Partnership works to advance juvenile justice systems reform across the country by providing state and local leaders, practitioners, and policymakers with technical assistance, training, and the proven tools, resources, and lessons developed through the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice initiative.

The Partnership is anchored by four complementary, connected Resource Centers that address four important issues in juvenile justice:

- Mental health: The Mental Health and Juvenile Justice Collaborative for Change, led by the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice. For more information, visit: [cfc.ncmhjj.com](http://cfc.ncmhjj.com)
- Stronger legal defense for indigent youth: National Juvenile Defender Center. For more information, visit: [njdc.info/resourcecenterpartnership.php](http://njdc.info/resourcecenterpartnership.php)
- Appropriate interventions for youth charged with non–delinquent—or status—offenses: The Status Offense Reform Center, led by the Vera Institute of Justice. For more information, visit: [www.statusoffensereform.org](http://www.statusoffensereform.org)
- Coordinated systems of care for young people involved in both the juvenile justice and child protective systems: The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, led by RFK Children’s Action Corps. For more information, visit: [www.rfknrcjj.org](http://www.rfknrcjj.org)

The Partnership also includes a strategic alliance of national experts and organizations representing state leaders, mayors, judges, law enforcement, prosecutors, corrections professionals, court personnel, and justice reform advocates. These partners further enrich the tools, best practices, and training offered by the Centers and provide direct connections to professionals working in juvenile justice.

For more information about the Models for Change Resource Center Partnership, visit: <http://modelsforchange.net/resourcecenters>

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<sup>i</sup> Widom, C. S., & Maxfield, M. G. (2001, February). *An Update on the “Cycle of Violence.”* National Institute of Justice: Research in Brief. Available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/184894.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Wiig, J. K. & Tuell, J. A, with Heldman, J. K. (2013). *Guidebook for Juvenile Justice & Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition.* Boston: Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps. <http://www.rfknrcjj.org/images/PDFs/Guidebook-for-JJ-and-CW-System-Coordination-and-Integration-Cover.pdf>.

<sup>iii</sup> Herz, D., Lee, P., Lutz, L., Stewart, M., Tuell, J., & Wiig, J. (2012). *Addressing the Needs of Multi-System Youth: Strengthening the Connection Between Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice.* Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, and Boston: RFK Children’s Action Corps.

<sup>iv</sup> Ryan, J.P., Chui, Y., & Williams, A. B. (2011). *Knowledge Brief: Is there a link between child welfare and disproportionate minority contact in juvenile justice?* Models for Change: Systems Reform in Juvenile Justice. Chicago, IL: John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

<sup>v</sup> Culhane, D., Byrne, T., Metraux, S., Moreno, M., Toros, H., and Stevens, M. (2011). *Young Adult Outcomes of Youth Existing Dependent or Delinquent Care in Los Angeles County.* Available at [http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/PriorityAreas/FosterYouth/Downloads/Hilton\\_Foundation\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.hiltonfoundation.org/images/stories/PriorityAreas/FosterYouth/Downloads/Hilton_Foundation_Report_Final.pdf)

<sup>vi</sup> Halemba, G. & Siegel, G. (2011). *Doorways to Delinquency: Multi-system Involvement of Delinquent Youth in King County (Seattle, WA).* Pittsburgh: National Center for Juvenile Justice.