



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

RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice E-Newsletter

On the Ground

Executive Director to Travel to China to provide Technical Assistance

We are pleased to announce our involvement in an exciting technical assistance trip to the People's Republic of China to meet with China's Supreme People's Court (SPC) on November 8-9. The trip will include a team of five juvenile justice experts, including RFK National Resource Center Executive Director John Tuell, led by the Honorable Leonard Edwards, retired judge and past-President of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). The two days in the Shenzhen province will include presentations, meetings and discussions with Chinese justice system experts and practitioners designed to export a greater understanding of best practice within our juvenile justice systems. The primary objectives include contributing to China's juvenile trial reform and the development of the rule of juvenile law and the connection of governmental and institutional experts to accelerate a best-practice approach to juvenile justice reform in China. The trip is sponsored and organized by the Dui Hua (meaning "dialogue" in Chinese) Foundation, a nonprofit humanitarian organization that seeks clemency and better treatment for at-risk detainees through the promotion of universally recognized human rights in a well-informed, mutually respectful dialogue with China.

3rd Annual Juvenile Probation Reform Academy Held in New York City

The RFK National Resource Center, in partnership with the Council of State Governments and the American Probation and Parole Association, held the 3rd Annual Juvenile Probation Reform Academy in New York City on August 30-31. Thirty-nine juvenile probation leaders from twelve individual counties and/or states attended the two-day event. The event provided instruction to probation and parole directors and managers on the core principles demonstrated by research to reduce recidivism and improve other outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. Working within their jurisdictional

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Just Released!

Developmental Reform in Juvenile Justice:

Translating the Science of Adolescent Development to Sustainable Best Practice



DEVELOPMENTAL REFORM IN JUVENILE JUSTICE

Translating the Science of Adolescent Development to Sustainable Best Practice

By John A. Tuell, with Jessica Heldman and Karl Harp

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.

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, not all too frequently fall in current practice, the goals, design, and operation of the juvenile justice system are not informed by this growing body of knowledge.

National Research Council (2013). *Adolescent Development and the Development of the Juvenile Justice System*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

As a result, the outcomes are more likely to be negative (increased recidivism between youth and justice system officials, increased desistance for the law and legal authority, and the reinforcement of a chronic identity and social disaffection). The challenge going forward includes increasing the numbers and range of system practitioners who understand and embrace the research findings and implications, adopting systemic youth and family involvement practices across the spectrum of age decision points directly impacting the primary goals of the juvenile justice system, and creating and maintaining quality assurance methodologies that ensure fidelity to those 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 adolescence¹ 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.² The evidence suggests that the three previously highlighted cognitive tendencies are linked to the biological immaturity of the brain and an imbalance among

¹ See, for example, Casey, et al. (2008) and Casey, et al. (2009).
² See, for example, Casey, et al. (2008) and Casey, et al. (2009).
³ See, for example, Casey, et al. (2008) and Casey, et al. (2009).
⁴ See, for example, Casey, et al. (2008) and Casey, et al. (2009).

We are proud to present an important NEW publication

teams, participants developed action plans that included strategies for applying this research to their own agencies and identified methods to conduct analyses of their agency policies, practices, and performance improvement when they returned home.

From the Field

5 Ways Juvenile Court Judges Can Use Data

The National Center for Juvenile Justice, with support from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, has developed an issue brief highlighting the ways juvenile court judges can use data to improve court functioning and youth outcomes. This helpful brief features RFK National Resource Center Dual Status Youth Practice Network member Hon. Sheri Roberts, Chief Judge, Alcovy Judicial Circuit Court, Georgia. [Click here](#) to learn more.

Applying Principles of Adolescent Development in Delinquency Proceedings

The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, the National Juvenile Defender Center, and the State Justice Institute recently partnered to develop a new bench card, titled *Applying Principles of Adolescent Development in Delinquency Proceedings*. The bench card provides guidance to judges to ensure that courtroom procedures reflect the important principles of adolescent development. The RFK National Resource Center is pleased to note that this resource is dedicated to the late Judge Willie Lovett, who was a treasured member of our Dual Status Youth Practice Network. To access this resource, please [click here](#).

In the Media

Getting Restorative Justice Approved By Your State Political Body Is Worth the Trouble

Op-Ed by Sen. Dave Marsden (D-Virginia)
Featured on the Juvenile Justice Information Exchange: [JJIE.org](#)

A Transformative Shift for Juvenile Justice

By Feather O'Connor Houstoun (senior adviser to the Wyncote Foundation)
Featured in Governing Magazine: [Governing.com](#)

Center a Safe Place for Kids in Domestic Violence-Related Situations to Cool Down

By Jessica Blackburn (University of Arizona journalism student)
Featured in the Arizona Daily Star: [Tucson.com](#)

About Us

Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, led by Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, uses proven models, frameworks, tools, resources and the best available research to serve local, state, and national leaders, practitioners and youth-serving agencies to improve system performance and outcomes for youth

entitled *Developmental Reform in Juvenile Justice: Translating the Science of Adolescent Development to Sustainable Best Practice*. This resource is written to support the continued transformation of our nation's juvenile justice systems in a manner that adheres to its primary responsibilities while effectively incorporating the research-based knowledge about adolescent development into practice. Using this knowledge, the practice brief also lays out a set of research-based best practices and approaches that are fundamental to a state or local jurisdiction's efforts to maximize the likelihood for improved and sustainable youth outcomes and system performance.

[Visit our website](#) to read more!

Visit Our Online Resource Library!

All of our publications and tools are made available online to support jurisdictions undertaking reform, with or without technical assistance. In an effort to enhance that support, we recently updated our website to provide a more user friendly experience for accessing our practical and informative resources, as well as presentations and materials from our events.

To access all of our Resources, please visit:

rfkncrj.org/resources

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involved with the juvenile justice system. RFK National Resource Center focuses primarily on youth with prior or current involvement in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (dual status youth), the review and improvement of juvenile probation systems, and the use of a model framework to address the state and national laws and policies governing the exchange and sharing of data, information, and records for youth and families. To learn more about us and how we can serve your jurisdiction, please visit www.rfknrcjj.org.

Every Child Deserves a Childhood

Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps is a private, non-profit licensed child welfare agency providing community-based services, education, foster care and adoption, residential treatment, and juvenile justice programming to individuals and families in crisis. Our programs are focused on helping children and adolescents deal with past hurts, develop self-esteem, and have a chance for a brighter future as contributing members of society. All that we do at RFK Children's Action Corps is based on the belief that every child deserves the chance to lead a happy, healthy, and productive life. For more information and to get involved, visit www.rfkchildren.org.

Models for Change Resource Center Partnership

Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice is part of the *Models for Change* Resource Center Partnership, established by the MacArthur Foundation to advance juvenile justice reform efforts throughout the country. To learn more, visit modelsforchange.net/resourcecenters.

