



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

## RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice E-Newsletter

### New Resource - Now Available!

#### New Brief Describes a "Student First" Educational Approach for Justice Involved Youth



##### "Student-First" Approach: A Paradigm Shift for Professionals Working with Children and Young People Involved with the Juvenile Justice System

By Leigh Mahoney and John Mick Moore

###### A STUDENT-FIRST APPROACH

A young person's primary focus during the early phase of life is to learn—largely in the classroom, but also at home, in the community, with friends and family, from observation and at times, from mistakes. However, most youth involved with the juvenile justice system are not described as students or viewed as learners. Instead, they are identified by institutional terms such as clients or residents, or worse, pejorative ones such as suspects, criminals or delinquents. This reference point is about more than mere language. It represents a significant, albeit subtle, shift in expectations and priorities. When these words are used to describe this population, the primary role of "learner" is not recognized, and the emphasis is not on expectations of educational/vocational success. Instead, the focus is on their need of security, their potential for harm, and their likelihood of recidivism.

While these are all important considerations, if this population is to be empowered to become independent citizens, capable of supporting themselves and their families, those who work with them must approach them as students first—students who have made mistakes, students with challenges, students in need of assistance. Like all students, they are learning, to manage a still-developing set of executive functions and sense of self. In addition, though, many of these students also grapple with disabilities, disadvantage, and/or the inequities brought on by disproportionately harsh responses to their transgressions. None of these should diminish their right and opportunity to access an education and career.

###### Terminology Matters

There is a growing tendency to use the term "learner" rather than "student" to reflect an awareness that learning happens everywhere and is not confined to traditional schools—often a wise and appropriate observation. The choice to use "students first" to describe this approach is a deliberate one, intended to bring to those young people require learning environments, whether in the classroom, in the field or on the job, that are formal, thoughtful, and well-developed. Learning, on the other hand, is an inductive, organic process that can occur anywhere, anytime with the learner and can happen whether an instructor is present or not.

The term "students" not only expresses a more direct connection to formal learning but also emphasizes the need for a responsible adult who serves as an advisor, mentor, instructor or teacher. While learning, and the learner, are of utmost importance to any educational/vocational endeavor, the term "student" reminds us of our responsibilities to that learner's growth and preparation for an independent adulthood, irrespective of justice involvement.

Education is a vital component of every young person's development toward adulthood and often is the key protective factor against a variety of disadvantages. Why, then, does it become a secondary consideration when a youth becomes justice-involved, a time when it might be most crucial? In *"Student-First" Approach: A Paradigm Shift for Professionals Working with Children and Young People Involved with the Juvenile Justice System*, Leigh Mahoney and John

"Mick" Moore offer a critical view of the many ways that decision-making on educational issues, from placement and transitions to disability and discipline, can positively impact outcomes for youth who are justice-involved. This brief offers professionals a general overview and a reflective framework through which to view their own opportunities to consider these children and young people as "students first."

To access this brief, please [visit our website!](#)

### Recent Events

#### Dual Status Youth Training Session Held During CWLA's National Conference

At this year's Child Welfare League of America's National Conference entitled "Advancing Excellence in Practice and Policy: Building Resilience in Changing Times," RFK National Resource Center Associate Executive

### We're on Twitter!

RFK Children's Action Corps and RFK National Resource Center are on Twitter! [@RFKChildren](#)

Follow us on [twitter](#)

### Have You Scheduled an On-Site Training in Your Community?

[Contact us now](#) to ensure your jurisdiction has the opportunity to learn how to best address critical topics in juvenile justice.

The [Training Institute](#) brings experts and experienced facilitators into local jurisdictions, ensuring that all vital leaders, staff, and stakeholders have the opportunity to benefit from the experience. Our curriculum utilizes well-established frameworks for reform that have been applied in numerous jurisdictions throughout the nation, while also incorporating current research and emerging best practices. The training approach balances traditional presentation with dynamic discussions and facilitated activities aimed at applying the information to each

Director Jessica Heldman and RFK Dual Status Youth Practice Network member Melissa Blom presented a special session on Dual Status Youth. This session, one of the Child Welfare League's Training Institute Sessions, provided participants with a full day of information and activities aimed at supporting them in initiating dual status youth reform in their jurisdictions. The child welfare system leaders and practitioners in attendance heard about the RFK National Resource Center's pioneering Dual Status Youth Framework, and how Child Welfare Division Director Melissa Blom implemented this framework in her Wisconsin county.



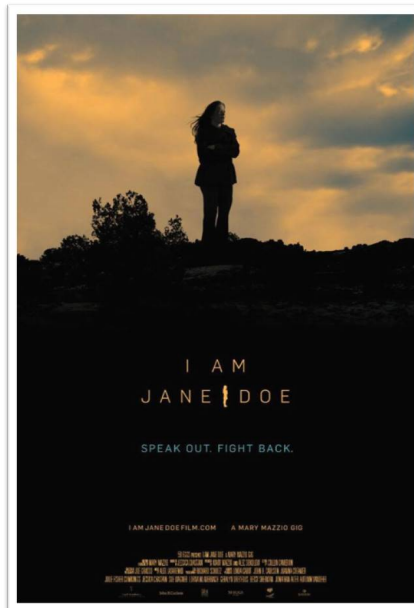
Co-presenters, Melissa Blom and Jessica Heldman, with RFK Children's Action Corps CEO, Edward Kelley.

The RFK National Resource Center is grateful for the partnership with CWLA that led to this fantastic opportunity to train child welfare professionals on how to help their young clients avoid the negative consequences of entry into the juvenile justice system.

### Screening of *I Am Jane Doe* a Success

Approximately 50 people attended a community screening of the award-winning documentary, *I Am Jane Doe*, on April 10th in Springfield, Massachusetts.

Called "a gripping legal thriller" (Esquire); "a powerful call to action" (The Los Angeles Times); and "viscerally emotional" (The Washington Post), *I AM JANE DOE* chronicles the epic battle that several American mothers are waging on behalf of their middle-school daughters, victims of sex trafficking on Backpage.com, the classified advertising website that for years was part of the iconic Village Voice.



*Several days prior to the screening, Backpage.com was seized and shut down by the FBI, a victory for these girls and others across the country.*

The screening was preceded by comments from several members of the Hampden County Coalition to Identify & Prevent Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, who co-sponsored the event with RFK Children's Action Corps and help explain the scope of CSEC locally. RFK Children's Action Corps is grateful for the support of the American Legion Child

individual jurisdiction. As a result, participants leave both well-informed and poised to begin taking action immediately.

*The Training Institute includes the following programs:*

**Dual Status Youth: Improving Outcomes for Youth Involved in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice** ([Learn More](#))

**Dual Status Youth: Implementing and Sustaining Reforms** ([Learn More](#))

**Advancing Best Practices in Youth Justice Seminar** ([Learn More](#))

**Probation System Review Training** ([Learn More](#))

**Multi-System Information & Data Sharing** ([Learn More](#))

Our training staff and consultants look forward to talking with you to discuss how we can meet your jurisdiction's unique training needs!

To learn more about the Training Institute, please visit our website:

[rfknrcjj.org/training-institute/](http://rfknrcjj.org/training-institute/)

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### How Can We Serve Your Community?

To find out how the RFK National Resource Center can support reform in your community using proven frameworks for technical assistance, please [Contact Us!](#)

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### Visit Our Online Resource Library!

All of our publications and tools are made available on our website

Welfare Foundation, Philosophy, Inc.'s Hope & Grace Fund, and the Springfield Sheraton, Monarch Place for helping make this event possible.

## On The Ground

### Dual Status Youth Reform Efforts Advance in North Dakota

On April 18-19, RFK National Resource Center staff and consultants conducted the fifth of six site visits to Bismarck, North Dakota as part of the statewide Dual Status Youth Initiative. This penultimate site visit provided the opportunity to explore the findings and recommendations produced by several hard-working subcommittees. The members of these subcommittees have dedicated extensive time and effort over the past year to better understanding North Dakota's dual status youth and to designing effective approaches to improving outcomes for them. The state is poised to realize significant success in addressing the myriad of needs of these vulnerable youth.

This most recent visit also provided the opportunity to share the developments related to the Initiative with the Lt. Governor of North Dakota, Brent Sanford and the Governor's General Counsel, Leslie Oliver. The work of the Dual Status Youth Initiative is well aligned with a number of the Governor's Strategic Initiatives. The North Dakota Dual Status Youth Initiative participants and the RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice are grateful that the Governor's Office is interested and supportive of this endeavor and we look forward to working together to achieve the best outcomes for this important population of North Dakota youth.

### Spreading Probation System Reform Efforts throughout the Country

The RFK National Resource Center has recently concluded its Probation System Review projects in Clark County, Nevada and Lancaster County, Nebraska. The final reports of findings and recommendations in both jurisdictions were well received and supported new opportunities to enhance and install policies and practices that will accelerate these jurisdictions' paths to improved youth outcomes and system performance. We applaud the efforts of the multi-disciplinary leadership, probation staff and stakeholders in each jurisdiction as they partnered with our consultant team to make the review process meaningful and impactful. The RFK National Resource Center will be concluding its Probation System Review in Fairfax County, Virginia next month. We are optimistic that each of these efforts will lead to sustainable and improved probation and juvenile justice system performance and improved youth outcomes.

To learn more about our site-based work, please [visit our website!](#)

to support jurisdictions undertaking reform, with or without technical assistance. Our Online Resource Library is designed to provide a 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: [rfknrcjj.org/resources](http://rfknrcjj.org/resources)

## Quick Links

[Who We Are](#)  
[Our Work](#)  
[Contact Us](#)



## 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 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](http://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](http://www.rfkchildren.org).