

Establishing a Continuum of Accountability-Based Sanctions for Juveniles: Allegheny County's Experience

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Soon after the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) began disseminating its "Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders" in 1993 (Wilson and Howell, 1993), several local jurisdictions received OJJDP grants to serve as real-world "test sites" for implementing the strategy. The Allegheny County Juvenile Court in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania was one of them.

The resulting 3-year initiative—known locally as the Accountability-Based Community Intervention or ABC Project—committed an already highly innovative and successful juvenile court services system to a thorough reassessment of its approach to young offenders, and to the development and implementation of a whole series of community-based intervention programs emphasizing individual accountability within a system of graduated sanctions.

Apart from its programming achievements in Allegheny County, several of which will be described below, the ABC Project yielded a number of lessons that could be useful to

communities attempting to rethink and redesign their treatment of young offenders in light of the Comprehensive Strategy.

A HEALTHY CONTINUUM

Although there are many elements in the Comprehensive Strategy, in the main the approach calls for (1) a carefully calibrated continuum of available intervention programs, so that there is an appropriate response to all kinds of offenses and offenders, and (2) a system of escalating sanctions within that continuum that is capable of holding juveniles accountable for repeated wrongdoing (Howell, 1995). A healthy continuum of interventions would include all of the following:

- ◆ **Immediate Interventions** for most first-time offenders, many minor repeat offenders, and some serious but nonviolent offenders—in other words, for the vast majority of young people who appear in juvenile court. Examples are mediation, peer jury, mentoring, restitution and community service programs.

- ◆ **Intermediate Sanctions** for juveniles who continue to offend following

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immediate interventions, for those involved in drug trafficking, and for some violent offenders. Examples would include community-based day/evening reporting centers, local residential treatment programs, intensive probation, electronic monitoring, substance abuse treatment programs, and short-term “weekend” detention programs.

◆ **Secure Corrections** programs for the small minority of serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders who threaten public safety and can neither be effectively treated nor held fully accountable without a period of incarceration. While secure corrections traditionally has meant large, centralized, congregate-care “training schools” with few real services for young offenders and no links with the communities they come from, the expert consensus now strongly favors smaller secure facilities that provide intensive counseling, education and training and are not so remote as to rule out family contact and gradual community reintegration.

◆ **Aftercare** programs providing treatment, supervision, monitoring, and transitional support to offenders returning to their old neighborhoods following out-of-home placements.

With this ideal continuum of interventions as a model, Allegheny County’s first task was to see how it

measured up—that is, to determine where its existing selection of services and sanctions for young offenders was distributed along the continuum, to assess critical gaps and bottlenecks, and to devise workable, cost-effective ways to address them. As will be seen, however, such a self-

assessment, if it is sufficiently thorough, candid, and wide-open—if it looks past official statistics, schematic charts, and program descriptions to get a sense of the way things really work, and from the file clerk’s as well as the court director’s point of view—can do more than merely generate the preliminary information needed to guide system reform. It can help to build top-to-bottom consensus for and commitment to that reform.

**PRELUDE:
SYSTEM ASSESSMENT**

Much of the first year of the ABC Project was devoted to just such an assessment of Allegheny County’s juvenile court services. Conducted by staff of the National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) under contract with the local court, the assessment went far beyond examining previously available information, generating its own small mountain of new data from surveys, interviews, and follow-ups with hundreds of individuals inside and outside the court system. The assessment featured five main components:

◆ **Data Review:** A preliminary review and analysis of all available statistical information on Allegheny County, its characteristics, capacities, and needs, and the characteristics of

its delinquent and at-risk juvenile population—including Uniform Crime Report data, census data, child well-being indicators from various sources, and year-by-year juvenile court statistics on aggregate referrals, charges, dispositions, etc.

◆ **Task Force:** The formation and periodic convening of an ABC Task Force consisting of 45 influential community leaders—not only juvenile court judges, administrators and supervisors but also the Chief of the Pittsburgh Police, the Allegheny County District Attorney, the local U.S. Attorney, and high-level representatives of the mayor’s office, the public schools, social services agencies, neighborhood development organizations, and other key institutions in the area—to provide guidance, advice, information, and feedback to project organizers. (See “Sample Task Force Roster.”)

◆ **Interviews:** One-on-one interviews with each of the individual members of the ABC Task Force as well as other local community leaders, regarding delinquency issues in Allegheny County, the quality of the juvenile justice system’s response, and suggestions for improvements.

◆ **Survey:** A detailed written survey of all Allegheny County Juvenile Court personnel, including judges, administrative workers, intake staff, district probation officers, and attorneys and other professionals employed in the prosecutor’s and public defender’s offices, eliciting information from over 150 respondents on the availability and effectiveness of various juvenile court interventions in Allegheny County and the need for additional interventions.

◆ **Follow-Up:** Subsequent individual and group interviews with more than 50 survey respondents, both

to validate survey results and to gather further information on court procedures, special programs, and the strengths and weaknesses of the court's existing interventions.

ABC Project organizers emerged from the assessment process with a formidable body of information about recent trends in Allegheny County, not all of it reassuring. For instance, it appeared from juvenile court and crime reporting data as well as interviews that, while the court's caseload had not increased dramatically in recent years, the typical offenses with which it had to deal had clearly grown more serious and violent, straining the system's resources and intensifying concerns about community safety.

A troubling percentage of referrals to the court—particularly those in which charges were serious—involved African-American juveniles. Offenses committed by juvenile females were becoming more common and more severe. There were indications of a surge in local gang activity. And there had been a marked increase in the number of Allegheny County juveniles being placed in state-operated secure facilities. At the same time, juvenile court staff interviews revealed significant doubts and misgivings regarding the effectiveness of the existing mix of disposition options for local offenders and frustration with what were perceived to be inappropriate placements due to the lack of alternatives.

In a narrow sense, all this represented so much raw information on the system's efficiency, its capacity to sanction offenders meaningfully, and

SAMPLE TASK FORCE ROSTER

- ✓ **Court Decisionmakers:**
*Administrative Judge
 Juvenile Court Judges
 Director of Court Services
 Juvenile Court Supervisors
 Administrative Personnel
 Public Defenders
 District Attorney
 Assistant District Attorneys*
- ✓ **Mayor's Office**
- ✓ **Police Department**
*Community-Oriented
 Policing Liaison*
- ✓ **Local Public Schools**
*Principals
 Administrators
 Office of Multicultural
 Education
 School Security*
- ✓ **Child Welfare Officials**
- ✓ **U.S. Attorney**
- ✓ **Private Treatment/Service Providers**
- ✓ **Community Development Organizations**
- ✓ **Neighborhood Youth Groups**
- ✓ **Faith-Based Outreach Organizations**
- ✓ **Local Chapters of National Organizations**
*Urban League
 YMCA
 Boys and Girls Clubs*
- ✓ **Victim Rights/Victim Services Organizations**
- ✓ **Behavioral/Health Care Representatives**
*MH/MR
 Drug & Alcohol*
- ✓ **University Representative**

so on—to be sifted by a special planning subcommittee of the ABC Task Force and used in the fashioning of an “action plan” that would target unmet program needs, organizational deficiencies, and gaps in the continuum

of sanctions available to the juvenile court. (See “Growing Your Own Program and System Enhancements.”) But it should be noted that a high-profile assessment of a complex, historically-rooted system does much more than simply supply information.

In the case of the ABC Project, detailed surveys, individual and group interviews, and follow-ups with juvenile court staff served as a kind of introductory advertisement for the reform project, a way of broadcasting the news that change was in the works, and of enlisting the ideas and support of those who would be needed in the effort. Assessment served, in effect, as a recruiting device for the project, gradually drawing to it all those with a sincere interest in reform.

The way in which the ABC Project assessment was conducted also helped to clear away some of the trench-level skepticism that can drag down lofty-sounding reform schemes. From the beginning, great care was taken to demonstrate to those contributing to the assessment that they were really being heard. No court employee was ignored, no point of view overlooked, and no criticism treated as out of bounds. Survey participants who seemed to feel strongly about certain issues or to have unique perspectives, traditional or insurgent, were actively pursued and interviewed in depth. All comments were carefully compiled and returned to their sources for amplification and correction. And anything in the form of a staff suggestion was duly passed on to those with authority to act on it.

But even if the object was to generate interest, insight, and engagement rather than mere data, the

assessment did yield a great deal of information that would have been difficult to get in any other way. For example, it was essential at the outset to get a detailed, realistic picture of the existing continuum of interventions in Allegheny County, so that project planners could begin to pinpoint gaps and weaknesses. Accordingly, in the initial survey of court personnel, respondents were presented with a long list of the types of interventions appropriate in various situations—mentoring, day treatment, boot camps, and so on, from one end of the spectrum to the other—and asked to indicate the extent to which each was locally available and effective, and to add comments.

Obviously, the mere *existence* of such programs in Allegheny County would have been easy to verify, just by consulting a juvenile court services program roster. But some intervention programs exist fully on paper, while barely casting a shadow on the ground. Others really operate, but are sluggish, underfunded, or too limited in size or scope to have any effect. There are

programs that are accessible to some populations, but not others. There are programs that simply don't seem to work. And even programs that *do* work may lack credibility among those with the power to make use of them. None of this information is likely to be readily available from official sources, program descriptions, budgets, etc.; it must be dug out.

RETHINKING YOUR MISSION

Armed with the results of the assessment of Allegheny County's juvenile court services, a planning subcommittee of the ABC Task Force identified 15 program- and system-enhancement tasks that appeared to be called for during the second year of the project. Most were highly specific, focusing on localized "gaps" in the available continuum of sanctions, as measured against an ideal accountability-based system. But in order to accomplish the most general of the tasks conceived by the planning subcommittee—to articulate a new mission for juvenile court services

reflecting the "balanced approach" to juvenile justice, as called for by a 1995 revision of the fundamental purpose clause of Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act—the ABC Project convened a strategic planning retreat, in which court services staff members would reexamine their beliefs about their role in the community, their ultimate objectives and the strategies they should use to achieve them.

Why a new mission statement? Or, more to the point, why assemble a large and disparate group representing all levels of personnel to *discuss and debate* a new mission statement—rather than simply issuing one? Like the year-long assessment that preceded it, the ABC Project's strategic planning retreat was emphatically a "top-to-bottom" event: a total of 26 administrators, supervisors, probation officers, and clerical and support staff participated, in addition to NCJJ staffers and an experienced external facilitator. They spent two full days in exercises and sometimes heated small- and large-group discussions, attempting to

The Mission of the Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Department

To reduce and prevent juvenile crime; promote and maintain safe communities; and improve the welfare of youth and families who are served by the court.

The principle beliefs supporting this Mission are:

- That the disposition of juvenile offenders always takes into account the best interests of public safety.
- That juvenile offenders be held accountable for the harm they cause to individuals as well as the community at large.
- That the primary objective of treatment is to improve and develop the juvenile offender's competency skills.
- That community residents and organizations be actively engaged by the court in a cooperative effort to seek solutions to juvenile crime.
- That excellence in the quality of court services requires sensitivity to the racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of the client population.
- That victims are an integral part of the justice system and should have their rights protected during all phases of the court proceedings including the right to be heard, notified, and restored.

hammer out a consensus view of the mission of the juvenile court services department that could be distilled into a single page of text. But both the process and the product were of much more than symbolic value.

A good, clear mission statement can literally “guide the way to reform” of a juvenile justice agency (Bazemore, 1992). For the agency’s individual staff members, it can set new goals and reorder priorities. For administrators, it can create new standards for evaluating effectiveness and defining success.

For the public to which the agency is answerable, it can alter, clarify and set limits to expectations. But its value as a reform instrument is largely lost if a new mission statement is simply promulgated from above, without the detailed internal discussions that contribute to a wider understanding, acceptance, and embrace of the changes it is intended to stimulate.

Moreover, if there is no acknowledgement of conflicts and airing of views regarding the connection between general aspirations and day-to-day operational routines—between, say, the desirability of community service dispositions for juvenile offenders and the actual form that such service will take, sanctions for noncompliance, supervision, staff scheduling, etc.—it is likely that the aspirations will soon be forgotten by everyone involved. Because all points of view were represented at the ABC Project’s strategic planning retreat, and because the debates over ends *and* means were open and unrestrained, the event can be said to have served as a kind of “constitutional convention” of Allegheny County’s juvenile court services system. As such, it had the power to commit the system as a whole to reform—a power that, as a practical matter, is not invested in any one individual or group of administrators, no matter what their formal authority.

While the formal, written documents that were the products of the strategic planning process do reflect the basic principles of the “balanced approach” to juvenile justice—in particular, the importance of individual accountability for delinquent acts, of preserving public safety while attempting to reclaim delinquents, and of allowing victims and the community at large to have a role in the process—they were arrived at independently, through honest discussion, debate, and compromise. That is to say, they were locally made and, as a result, are now locally “owned.”

The strategic planning process need not be concerned solely with abstract principles and remote goals; it can have immediate and lasting practical effects as well. In part to reflect the shift in priorities emerging from the strategic planning conference sponsored by the ABC Project, a comprehensive revision of Allegheny County’s manual of juvenile court services policies and procedures was

THE BLOOMFIELD-GARFIELD COLLABORATIVE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

The ABC Project put together the Bloomfield-Garfield Collaborative Internship Program, a working partnership between the award-winning Community Intensive Supervision Project (CISP) and a neighboring community development group, under which selected probation “graduates” are given the opportunity to work for construction contractors engaged in remodeling and renovating housing in the neighborhood, pay restitution to their victims out of their internship earnings, and receive job mentoring, real-life work experience, and in some cases permanent employment in the process.

While offender accountability to victims—in the form of financial restitution—is a central contractual obligation of participation in the internship program, it is not the only such obligation, and not the only form of accountability promoted thereby. Prospective interns sign three-to-six-month contracts undertaking not only to work and pay restitution while in the program, but to continue their schooling and to keep themselves drug- and alcohol-free at the same time. In return for their physical work—literally restoring the community they have offended—they receive tangible help. A number of neighborhood institutions contribute services to the program—a local drug and alcohol program does the drug-testing; a bank provides checking and savings accounts as well as financial guidance and workshops to interns; health centers, a neighborhood job center, local police, the area high school, a paint supplier and a hardware chain all participate. As such, the program helps to create a kind of web of local accountability, in which the obligations of juvenile offenders are interlaced with and supported by matching community responsibilities. The result is not just more productive, more “connected” ex-delinquents, but more community ownership of local delinquency problems.

undertaken by a specially appointed working group consisting of line officers, supervisors, administrators, and NCJJ staff. The revision involved not only codifying principles into routines, but also clarifying the connections between the two. Using a group scenario-writing technique known as the "Playscript" method (Matthies, 1961), the group attempted to connect the *who*, *what* and *how* of any given case with the *why*. Thus, long after its completion, the strategic planning process continues to have an impact on the way the day-to-day work of the juvenile court services department is done.

GROWING YOUR OWN PROGRAM AND SYSTEM ENHANCEMENTS

Apart from the general strategic planning effort involving representatives of the whole system, the work of the ABC Project during its second year was done by a number of small "task groups," each consisting of selected juvenile probation officers, supervisors, and members of the ABC Task Force, and each entrusted with the job of developing a response to one of the organizational problems or gaps in programming revealed by the first-year assessment. The activities of the task groups were coordinated and overseen by NCJJ staff, but they were given enough leeway to devise their own approaches to the problems for

which they were responsible, to consult experts, to seek special training, etc., with the understanding that the end-product of their work would be a tangible model or strategy capable of being implemented during the third year of the ABC Project.

It was acknowledged from the outset that the ABC Project's third-year program implementation funding would not be adequate to cover every new program or enhancement that the task groups could suggest. Why then involve so many small groups in the planning and development process? In part, it was expected that the "struggle" among competing ideas and recommendations would tend to promote quality, to sharpen and stimulate the thinking of the individual task groups, and ultimately, through a kind of "natural selection," bring about the emergence of the "fittest" and most promising program proposals from the pack of also-rans. No task group wasted its time. All focused on real problems, devised workable strategies for dealing with them, and in the process gathered and disseminated useful information. But some task groups' ideas generated more in-house enthusiasm and momentum than others.

For one reason or another, they seemed to suit the terrain better. Dollar for dollar, they appeared likely to have the most overall impact on the system's effectiveness, to form the most advantageous fit with existing programs and services, and to be the most easily sustainable

beyond the term of the ABC Project's funding. Implementation decisions for the third year of the project were made by the court director, but his job was made easier by the process that generated the program options to be considered.

The individual task groups did not work on their assigned problems in a vacuum. On the contrary, during the ABC Project's second year they conducted workshops for their colleagues, sponsored community forums, gave presentations, circulated reports, proposals and concept papers, and brought home new perspectives from professional conferences, site visits, and outside consultants—not only spreading information but stimulating a vigorous system-wide exchange of ideas in the process. Even apart from the final products to which all this planning and development activity pointed, the local juvenile court services system reaped a number of interim benefits, the most tangible of which were in the area of training and staff development:

- ◆ The task group entrusted with developing appropriate interventions for female offenders, in partnership with a local women's shelter and the county child welfare office, convened a two-day training workshop for probation supervisors and staff with young women on their caseloads, exploring the links between female juvenile offending and physical and sexual abuse, and providing instruction on detecting signs of abuse, reporting responsibilities and procedures, etc.

- ◆ The gang interventions task group organized a two-day system-wide symposium on developing effective responses to gang involvement on the part of local youth.

Because every system has an existing "continuum of interventions," implementing the Comprehensive Strategy is never a matter of starting from scratch.

MAKING PROBATION WORK

Probation supervision is by far the most common juvenile court disposition, in Allegheny County as elsewhere. As a “sanction,” however, traditional probation often does little to promote individual accountability. There are a number of reasons for this—a probation officer’s contacts with an offender may be infrequent and insignificant, for example. When an offender is seen, he may appear “out of context”—disconnected from the milieu in which he lives and the influences that shape him. Even where there is meaningful contact and intelligent oversight, probation too often lacks teeth. Juveniles inclined to test the system soon learn that, even when they’re caught, no real consequences follow from their failure to live up to the conditions of their probation—that, as a practical matter, there is nothing the system can do to them, short of imposing the sort of long-term commitment that is necessarily reserved for only the most serious cases.

As a result of the ABC Project, Allegheny County has taken two concrete steps to boost the “accountability content” of the probation sanction. First, it significantly expanded its *school-based probation program*. And second, it established a *short-term probation sanction unit*.

With program implementation funding from the ABC Project and other sources, Allegheny County expanded the coverage of its school-based juvenile probation program from 9 to 21 local schools. The program places probation officers into permanent offices in the county’s schools, and assigns each one a caseload—usually from 25 to 30 probationers—consisting solely of students currently enrolled at the school where the office is located. Probation officers see their charges every day—as opposed to once or twice a month in a traditional probation office—and can easily monitor their progress in school, their peer relationships, their day-to-day conduct and attitudes, any pressures they may be under, etc. School-based probation officers typically become involved in the life of the school as well, taking part in teen courts, truancy programs, and parent-teacher meetings, serving as volunteer coaches, and participating in crime prevention education projects. Because they work so closely with their probationers, both literally and figuratively, school-based probation officers have more opportunities to bring home the message of accountability, and to hold their probationers to it. And as probationers who step out of line soon discover, school-based probation officers can conduct intake interviews right on the spot, and begin the process of imposing consequences immediately.

However, without the capacity to impose swift, sure, nontrivial, attention-getting consequences for probation violations, no probation sanctioning system can be effective. Allegheny County’s establishment of a special 22-bed probation sanctions unit for juveniles, using a residential facility previously devoted to other purposes, was a direct result of urgent ABC Project recommendations. The decision allows local juvenile court judges to impose structured residential placements of up to 60 days on probation violators. It was a critically needed mid-level sanctioning option, and one that sends a strong message to juveniles regarding the seriousness of their probation obligations.

◆ A two-day training workshop on victim-offender mediation was held for all juvenile court services staff.

◆ Probation supervisors and administrators attended a two-day workshop on improving case management practices based on a critical assessment of existing case management procedures commissioned by the risk and needs assessment task group.

◆ Selected probation supervisors who had attended a week-long “train the trainers” program in Nevada returned to provide fundamental skills training to recently hired probation officers thereby instituting an in-house training capacity.

EXPANDING AND ENHANCING THE CONTINUUM

Because every system has a history, a set of characteristic strengths and weaknesses, and an existing “continuum of interventions”—whether or not the jumble of available services and sanctions for young offenders has ever been envisioned that way locally—implementing the Comprehensive Strategy is never a matter of starting from scratch.

In Allegheny County, for example, once the system had been thoroughly assessed, it appeared that

many of the essential elements of a healthy continuum were already in place. In some instances, the importance of an existing program or service to the effectiveness of the whole system had only to be recognized and acknowledged. Other existing programs needed more capacity or resources to do the jobs assigned to them, or special enhancements to enable them to take on new tasks. Only in a relatively few cases were entirely new programs necessary.

Some of the planning and development activities undertaken in the second year of the ABC Project

bore fruit during the third year in entirely new intervention programs, with their own target populations and their own distinct places in the continuum of available sanctions. Others resulted in the expansion or enhancement of existing intervention programs. Still others brought about formal revisions in policies and procedures, as well as informal changes in institutional outlook, that could alter the trajectory of the system for years to come.

A partial listing of the significant accomplishments of the ABC Project in Allegheny County would include the following:

◆ **Minority providers forum:** In order to facilitate networking and strengthen ties between the Allegheny County Juvenile Court and minority service providers, the ABC Project sponsored a providers forum attended by 70 community service representatives.

◆ **External assessments:** The ABC Project arranged for expert assessments of the Allegheny County Juvenile Court's capacity and performance in the areas of case management, aftercare, minority youth programming, and staff training.

◆ **Job skills program:** The ABC Project put together a working partnership between a community-based intensive probation program and a neighboring community development group, under which probationers receive job mentoring, real-life work experience, and in some cases permanent employment from construction companies doing housing rehab work for the community group. (See "The Bloomfield-Garfield Collaborative Internship Program.")

◆ **Mentoring:** The ABC Project contracted with an established community-based social service agency to create *Cycle Breakers*, an intensive life skills mentoring program that attempts to reduce recidivism among adolescent males returning to the community from institutions.

◆ **Programming for African-Americans:** As previously noted, one pressing area of concern revealed by the ABC Project assessment was the disproportionate confinement and court-involvement of African-American juveniles in Allegheny County. A special subcommittee of the original ABC Task Force was formed to study the minority overrepresentation problem, a "cultural competency" assessment of the court system was undertaken by outside consultants, and a consensus emerged that Allegheny County was critically lacking in culturally relevant interventions for African-American offenders. New programming was needed. Eventually, a faith-based African-American community organization emerged with a viable programming idea—and its own sustainable, post-project funding sources—and the result is *Issachar House*, a community-run, community-staffed secure group home for teenage African-American males just starting on the road to delinquency.

◆ **Female offenders programs:** Concern over the marked increases in female delinquency revealed by the ABC Project's first-year assessment, and the subsequent planning, development, and information-disseminating activities of the female offenders task group, resulted in the establishment of a day treatment program as well as a residential program for female

offenders. The former program features intensive supervision, individual, family and group counseling, job and education assistance, life skills training, and parenting education for nonviolent first-offenders, probation violators, house-arrest detainees, and others for whom an alternative to secure placement is appropriate. The latter provides a more highly structured, three-to-six-month program for delinquent females.

◆ **Changes in probation:** The ABC Project expanded the Allegheny County Juvenile Court's school-based probation program from 9 to 21 local public schools. In addition, as a result of an assessment and recommendations made by the ABC Project, the court system increased its capacity to impose immediate, short-term detention as a sanction for probation violations by 22 beds. (See "Making Probation Work.")

◆ **Aftercare:** ABC Project assessments of the system's aftercare capacity and performance resulted in the establishment of a comprehensive aftercare plan that ensures aftercare services for all juvenile offenders returning to Allegheny County from institutional placements. (See "Aftercare in Allegheny County.")

ORGANIZATION AND EVALUATION

The process briefly sketched out above—from system assessment to strategic planning to focused development to program implementation—was extraordinarily complicated, involving literally years of work on dozens of sub-projects by hundreds of individuals in and out of the local court system.

AFTERCARE IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY

ABC Project planners attempted to maximize the impact of the funds they had to work with, first by filling unmet needs with existing programs wherever possible. A prime example of this approach involved aftercare, which assessors had identified as a critically neglected area of the continuum in Allegheny County. Experts consulted by the aftercare task group pointed to several existing Allegheny County programs that could easily be expanded to provide aftercare services—notably CISP, the neighborhood-based intensive probation program, and Allegheny Academy, a private day treatment program, as well as several others that were capable of providing structure to juveniles released from more secure commitments.

Nevertheless, it is interesting and instructive to note that this was not an “easy” reform. In fact, local administrative reactions to the aftercare assessments were particularly sharp and defensive, and appeared to rule out change. Months later, however, after the “outsiders” had gone home, the county issued a “Comprehensive Aftercare Plan for Institutionalized Youth” that essentially embodied their recommendations. What had seemed out of the question in the face of direct criticism had become, after a cooling-off period, the obvious course to take. Now *all* juveniles released to the county from institutions receive a minimum of 90 days of aftercare supervision as a matter of course—with no substantial new hiring, facility, or other program start-up costs incurred.

Any attempt at whole-system reform in a real-world setting will be similarly complex. For that reason, it is essential to have what the National Center for Juvenile Justice provided to the ABC Project: a full-time, independent project coordinator to oversee the assessment, planning, and implementation processes and keep them moving forward, monitor the many participants and facilitate communications among them, identify and untangle snags, arrange support where needed, act as a liaison with consultants and outside experts, convene key actors where appropriate, and otherwise ensure that the overall effort is organized and coherent. The coordinator should be familiar with the local community and its problems, and should have credibility with juvenile justice professionals, but should not be beholden to any of the key stakeholders for a job. Other courts seeking such services could tap local

colleges and universities for assistance.

At the conclusion of the ABC Project, an outside evaluation was conducted by Caliber Associates. On the basis of a site visit and interviews with key local stakeholders, the evaluators prepared a “case study” report describing the project and measuring its outcomes against the basic program objectives defined in the initial OJJDP solicitation, as well as the more specific targeted objectives elaborated by ABC Project planners themselves.

The report concluded that most of the objectives in both categories were successfully met; that the participants themselves saw the ABC Project as a success; and that the practical result of the project was a more varied and flexible continuum of juvenile interventions in Allegheny County, as well as a number of other

benefits related to improved case management practices, increased staff training capacity, etc. (Wright and Nugent, 1998).

CONCLUSION: CHANGE, AND ITS LIMITS

The ABC Project did not succeed in creating a “model” juvenile court services system in Allegheny County. For instance, due to a combination of bad luck and personnel changes, ambitious efforts to create a state-of-the-art management information system—one that would enable Allegheny County to track juveniles through the system, share up-to-date information among various agencies, and monitor program costs and outcomes—came to little in the end. Other changes recommended by the Comprehensive Strategy were not accepted locally, and could not simply be imposed.

While the expert consensus stresses the need for objective, “risk-focused” case classification methods (Howell, 1995), for example, ABC Project planners encountered a strong commitment to traditional, experience-based, person-to-person methods of assessing the risks and needs of young offenders, and a corresponding skepticism regarding the necessity of assessment instruments to do the job.

Efforts to develop an assessment instrument for Allegheny County met with little enthusiasm among probation officers. The task group entrusted with exploring this area during the planning and development phase of the project strayed far afield, effectively shifting its focus away from

classification methods and onto the reform of case management practices. It may be that special factors make face-to-face assessment more workable in Allegheny County than elsewhere, or that this is an area in which researchers and practitioners are irretrievably at odds. In any case, there cannot be a federally approved, "one-size-fits-all" model of juvenile justice reform, and would-be reformers who refuse to adapt themselves to the local terrain are unlikely to succeed.

If the reform effort wrought by the ABC Project in Allegheny County was not complete, however, it can still fairly be called comprehensive. It succeeded in stimulating significant change, directly and indirectly, in individuals, in groups, and in institutions. It altered not merely programs and policies but the culture of juvenile court services, the relations between the "old guard" and the "young Turks," and the outlooks and priorities of many of the people who make the system work. These intangible reforms may prove to be its most important and lasting accomplishments.

For further information regarding the ABC Project, contact Doug Thomas, National Center for Juvenile Justice, 710 Fifth Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15219-3000, (412) 227-6950 or Jim Rieland, Director of Juvenile Services, Allegheny Court of Common Pleas, 3333 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15214, (412) 578-8210.

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