

Wisconsin Council on Children and Families  
**Youth Initiatives E-Newsletter**

Issue No. 52  
Jim Moeser  
January 2, 2012

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Welcome to the WCCF Youth Initiatives e-newsletter. Feel free to forward these messages to any other interested parties, and encourage others to sign up for this and/or other WCCF mailing lists at <http://capwiz.com/wccf/mlm/signup/>. Questions or suggestions, contact the author at [jmoeser@wccf.org](mailto:jmoeser@wccf.org).

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**Special Note: The Budget Strikes Youth Aids Again**

In addition to an approximately \$10 million reduction in Youth Aids funding as part of the 2011-13 budget bill, the bill required the Department of Administration to “lapse” (essentially find savings) of over \$174 million. That plan was released the afternoon of December 23 - a coincidence perhaps that it was released on a Friday afternoon before a holiday? In any case, out of a budget of around \$1 billion (yes, that’s a “b”) in the Department of Corrections, their “lapse” amount overall is \$9.46 million - **BUT NEARLY \$4 MILLION OF THAT IS COMING BY CUTTING YOUTH AIDS FUNDS TO COUNTIES**, even though the Division of Juvenile Corrections (DJC) accounts for only around 15% of the overall DOC budget. These reductions in Youth Aids funds will have a harmful impact on the ability of counties to sustain the progress they have made in effectively developing community-based alternatives that get youth back on track and provide community safety. And unfortunately, this ratchets up what is sometimes viewed as competition between the counties and DJC as the level of collaboration has continued to grow. While I do not pretend to fully understand the DOC budget, one does have to wonder why such a big portion of the DOC lapse has been pushed to Youth Aids.

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## 1. Can we find a Way to make it Happen? Return 17-year olds to Juvenile Court.

Thanks to the work of Wisconsin Watch, produced by the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism, a series of articles appeared in various media outlets in December bringing to light again the problems with 17-year-olds being dealt with in the adult system. The longer story, titled [Minor Offenders, Major Consequences](#), by Julie Stroup does a very good job of summarizing where we have been and where we need to go to ensure justice for Wisconsin youth. A cornerstone of the story is the advocacy of Vicky Gunderson who continues to lead the way in fighting for appropriate intervention and services for youth in honor of her son Kirk who tragically committed suicide while being held in the La Crosse County jail. There is no doubt that had Kirk been held in a juvenile facility and received appropriate services his tragic death could have been avoided. Unfortunately the cost of returning all 17-year olds to the juvenile system has stymied progress on this issue, but work is continuing to find other ways to ensure community safety while at the same time providing safety and more developmentally appropriate services for 17-year olds.

## 2. Models for Change: Knowledge Briefs with a lot of knowledge in them!!

The MacArthur Models for Change site has recently added some excellent [Knowledge Briefs](#) on some critical issues in the juvenile justice world – if you have not already seen them, check them out:

- Can Risk Assessment Improve Juvenile Justice Practices?
- Are Minority Youths Treated Differently in Juvenile Probation
- Mental Health Services in Juvenile Justice: Who pays? Who gets paid for?
- Does Mental Health Screening Fulfill its Purpose?
- Is There a Link between Child Welfare and Disproportionate Minority Contact in Juvenile Justice?
- How Well is the Child Welfare System Serving Youths with Behavioral Problems?
- Harnessing Capacity the Capacity for Change
- How Can We Know if Juvenile Justice Reforms are Worth the Cost?
- A Summary: Rethinking Juvenile Justice

## 3. Applying [Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative \(JDAI\)](#) Principles to Juvenile Justice System Change

As the Annie E. Casey Foundation evolves from a detention-based reform effort to promote overall system improvements, more and more sites around the country are finding that the principles that were used successfully for detention reform can form the basis of positive system changes as well. Core strategies of gathering and utilizing good data to drive policy decisions, increasing community collaboration, establishing fundamental goals and principles, being transparent about change, and measuring outcomes can lead to changes such as being more strategic about which youth need interventions and supports, reducing

DMC, engaging more community support for youth and families, finding other sources of funding and in-kind support for youth services, and more.

Although Wisconsin has made progress in the last decade on lowering the number of youth in short and long-term confinement facilities, building sustained support and changing the “culture” of county-based juvenile justice systems will take more work. Watch for more information about potential JDAI efforts in Wisconsin.

#### **4. A Resource for Reducing Disproportionate Minority Contact**

OJJDP has recently created a virtual [DMC Resource Center](#) that is accessible to policy-makers and practitioners to find more information about successful DMC reduction strategies and programs. Through leadership from Lindsay Draper, WI Office of Justice Assistance, and the work of a number of county level folks, Wisconsin is being viewed as being more proactive than other states in moving from simply gathering data to actively promoting systemic changes that can be sustained over time and can have a broader impact on reducing DMC than more limited programmatic interventions.

#### **5. Do Youth in the Juvenile Justice System get the Health Care they Need?**

The American Academy of Pediatrics recently released a report on [Health Care for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System](#), focusing primarily on the over 2 million youth who are confined each year in either short-term detention or longer-term juvenile facilities. These are often youth who have had at best inconsistent access to quality health care as they are growing up, and more often than not enter the system with a variety of physical and mental health concerns that can and should be addressed while the youth is in placement. The reports serves as a foundation for stronger advocacy for funding services for youth in custody but also helps highlight some of the community-based preventive care that these youth often have missed – for a whole host of reasons. It is clear that investing in health care (including behavioral health care, dental care, as well as traditional physical health care) pays off in the long run, so the report provides some basic recommendations about how those investments should be made.

#### **6. The Next Step in Eliminating Life without Parole for Youthful Offenders?**

The US Supreme Court has agreed to take up [two new cases](#) in which young juveniles (age 14) were involved in crimes that led to a life without parole sentence. Recall that through prior cases (*Graham v. Florida*, *Roper v. Simmons*) the court has ruled that offenders under the age of 18 cannot be executed and that youth under 18 in non-homicide cases should not be subject to life without parole. Some have interpreted the more recent decision to imply that life without parole for a youth at any age involved in a homicide is acceptable constitutionally, but the language of these decisions was not as conclusive, leaving open the possibility that there are other distinctions courts should make based on age, development, and culpability in a particular offense. After all, could the Supreme Court actually rule that someone as young as 10 or 11 or 12 – or in these cases as well as the *Wisconsin v. Ninham* case age 14 – should be subject to a life without parole sentence? There is an excellent

[summary of these cases](#) and the issues involved through the State Bar of Wisconsin – nice job by Joe Forward!

## 7. OJJDP to Host Webinar on Evaluation and Performance Measurement

On January 19, 2012, at 2 p.m. E.T., the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) will host, "[Assessing Project Performance: Building Blocks of Evaluation and Performance Measurement](#)." Learning about evaluation will help practitioners integrate the best available evidence with their existing expertise and considerations in their work with delinquent and at-risk youth. This Webinar will teach participants [basic concepts and key terminology related to evaluation and performance measurement](#). It will also provide a basic explanation of logic models and why they are useful. (information from JuvJust, OJJDP).

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## YOU CAN LIKE THE WCCF VISION 2020 FACEBOOK PAGE

One of WCCF's key initiatives has been our Vision 2020 effort -- with an ambitious goal of eliminating childhood poverty by the year 2020. Certainly these tough economic times have seen children in Wisconsin "go the other way", with an increase of nearly 42,000 more children falling into poverty in 2009 than in 2008. And, the news for 2010 does not look to be much better. Stay abreast of some of the economic and policy decisions that will impact children and families in the coming years and lend your support to the Vision 2020 effort by joining the Vision 2020 Facebook page.

## HELP WCCF ENSURE THAT EVERY CHILD IN WISCONSIN GROWS UP IN A JUST AND NURTURING FAMILY AND COMMUNITY.

While WCCF survives mostly on foundation grants, as much as 20% of our budget (more in some areas than others) depends on contributions and donations coming from individuals. Please consider making a donation. [DONATE NOW.](#)

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And, don't forget to bookmark the WCCF blog at <http://www.wiskids.blogspot.com/>. Bookmark it and check it regularly for updates on issues critical to Wisconsin's Children and Families.

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