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Children who commit crimes at a tender age are at risk. The risk that they will grow into criminal lifestyles increases when there are family, school and social problems. This is not new information but when Clark County set out to develop a program to help these kids we could not find a model. The Special Intervention Program (SIP) is our own model.

SIP brings a multi-disciplinary approach to working with minor or first offenders. It involves the Juvenile Court, schools and social services agencies working together to provide early intervention for kids and their families. The program provides the best of what we have always provided with new and creative approaches to delivering services. We know from experience that this is what it takes to make a difference when faced with so many challenges. Most of the kids referred to SIP are having problems both at home and in school. The majority are from single parent families. For over 50% one or both parents are chemically addicted. Well over 30% struggle themselves with addictions. Many have been sexually abused. In

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15% of the cases a parent has been incarcerated or is currently in prison or jail. 15% have gang affiliations. And this is by no means a complete list of the challenges these minor first offenders face. It is serious indeed when being identified as an offender seems almost secondary to other problems. These are not cases where keeping an eye on the situation is good enough. These kids are not going to out grow their problems.

Programs like the SIP can make a difference. The early results of our program are very encouraging. In my 13 years with the Juvenile Court, no program has had more support or positive feedback from schools, counselors, law enforcement and parents. Although it is too early to measure the impact the program may have on long term recidivism, I can tell you that over 85% of the youth referred to this program have completed successfully. This is 30% better than the department average in any other probation program!

We believe three things are key to our success:

#1 We have expanded the role of probation counselors beyond their traditional roles with emphasis on intensive case management.

#2 Intervention is accomplished in coordination with the family, the

youth's school, and others having an interest in the youth.

#3 An unprecedented level of youth advocacy. Every case has an advocate responsible for supporting the youth, family and others in seeing the caseplan through to success. This is not an "office job". These staff work with kids in their homes, at their schools and in the community.

Numbers and results are important, but they take on a whole new meaning when you know the kids. In concluding my testimony I want to share two SIP stories.

Amy, is 15 years old. She has a long history of out of home placements and has run away many times. She has been sexually molested and diagnosed with depression, anxiety and post traumatic stress disorders. Amy's criminal activity progressed from shoplifting to stealing a car within a period of three months. She had been out of her home for six months when she came to SIP. She was failing in school and using drugs. Since her referral she has completed drug treatment and is now in aftercare. She is attending an alternative school and a vocational program and doing well. It has been almost a year since her last offense. Amy returned home recently and is proud of her progress and sobriety.

Mark, is an 8th grader currently attending his 27th school. For most of his 13 years he was abused physically by alcoholic parents. He was referred to SIP, suspended from school and threatening suicide. All prior interventions had failed. Mark, is now in foster care which has provided him with the first real stability he has ever known. He has joined a boxing club. This requires that he maintain above average grades and train two hours per day. Last month Mark won the 1992 Golden Gloves Championship in his division. He is earning A's and B's in school. His self esteem has improved and he has probably experienced more success in the past five months than in his entire life.

Two years ago Amy and Mark would have received little in the way of real help. Today no youth are served better. Nothing else makes sense.