

68021

**AN ASSESSMENT OF YOUTH
SERVICE SYSTEMS IN
CONNECTICUT TOWNS:
A SUMMARY**

**SPONSORED BY
THE CONNECTICUT PLANNING COMMITTEE
ON CRIMINAL ADMINISTRATION**

**CONDUCTED BY
THE INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD**

**Charles W. Dean, Ph.D., Director
Howard A. Parker, Ph.D., Asst. Director**

68021
OJJDP

I. Introduction

This document summarizes the results of a study of community-based services for youth in trouble with the law in Connecticut. The project was funded by the Connecticut Planning Committee on Criminal Administration and the research was conducted between March 15 and September 30, 1975 by the Institute for Social Research of the University of Hartford. The more extensive report from which this summary is taken may be obtained from the CPCCA. Although the nature of the funding limited the time available for the study, the ISR-Hartford staff shall continue to be available to discuss this summary or the final report.

The project included four parts, each of which is summarized below.

The first of the summaries describes the results of a survey of community-based services for youth in trouble with the law in each of the 169 Connecticut towns. The compilation of an accurate list of agencies proved to be a substantial task and revealed that the network of services appears to be far less tangible than originally thought. This part of the study afforded information regarding the nature of the Youth Service system, including statistical information on the patterns, perceptions and needs of the responding agencies.

The second summary appears as section III of this report and reviews a study of youth services in three Connecticut towns - Enfield, Norwich, and Waterbury - selected by the CPCCA. An analysis designed to tap network relationships was conducted, with each agency being queried regarding its relations with other agencies in the same town.

Section IV summarizes the results of a public opinion survey in the three towns. The survey explored the perception and awareness of a random sample of the public regarding the availability and adequacy of youth services in each town.

The last part of the study, summarized in section V, involved the examination of a small sample of "most needy cases" in each of the three towns. It was assumed that a close look at the services provided for the most difficult youngsters would reveal gaps in services that could affect all youths. The emphasis in this last study was upon tracking each "problem" case through the maze of local youth services.

II. State-wide Survey of Community Based Services in Connecticut Towns

The state-wide survey was, by far, the most problematic and time-consuming part of the research. While the proportion of returns was too low to support a claim that the respondents were representative of all youth-serving agencies, there were enough responses to permit a statistical overview of almost 100 agencies. An equal number did not respond and could not be reached by phone. Another 141 cases responded by completing the first page of the survey instrument and requesting to be included in a registry of services for youth in trouble with the law.

Youth Service Agencies are not easily identified: Early on, it was learned that preparing a mailing list of agencies serving youth in trouble with the law was a major research task in and of itself. This required introducing a preliminary step in the process that involved key professionals in all 169 towns. This resulted in deleting approximately 13% of the agencies on

other registries and adding an equal number that had not been included. It could be said that there was 26% error in the initial list compiled from all available registries. Another 15% could not be located by mail or by phone calls made on three separate days. The population of agencies to be studied is probably closer to 400 than the 800 this study started with. Of those, there are probably no more than 300 agencies specifically serving children in trouble with the law as a primary target group.

Youth services are not easily amenable to objective study: It must be recognized that youth agencies are not objects that can be easily located, identified, studied, and measured objectively in a survey. As the preceding paragraphs indicate, locating and identifying them is a major problem, but studying and measuring their activity and productivity is even more difficult. To a certain extent, youth services are intangible. Some of the most effective services are provided by some who do not see themselves as youth service agencies or persons and others who do not want to be identified as an agency serving delinquent youth. This was brought out more clearly in the three town study, but the reasons agencies gave for non-responses to the survey suggest that many youth agencies do not think of themselves as serving delinquents. Even agencies funded to serve problem youth at times do not want to be identified this way. This is commendable in that the agencies presumably would not treat their clients as problem cases, but it complicates this kind of research as well as administrative evaluation by funding sources. Some agency personnel insisted that informality is a requisite to effectiveness. There is a hint of anti-establishment feeling among many youth workers and a verbalized resistance to structure and to record keeping. In-depth studies focusing on specific activities of smaller

numbers of agencies are likely to provide more and more useful information.

Youth services are not clearly defined: The newness of the emphasis on youth services, the recent reorganization of youth services at the state level, the addition of many new roles (e.g., Y.S.B.'s, Juvenile Advocates etc.), and the implicit general dissatisfaction with previously existing services all contribute to the lack of a clear-cut definition of what youth services are--or are supposed to be.

Lack of definite guidelines can be problematic: A certain amount of free wheeling may be necessary at this stage. Guidelines and structure might become problematic if applied prematurely. Still without some parameters and minimum requirements, the proclivities and personalities of agency personnel, the politics of the local community, and the pressure of public opinion may outweigh youth needs in shaping decisions regarding allocation of resources and shaping programs. Especially at a time when local resources are extremely scarce and becoming more scarce, new state and federal funds might be used to continue existing services rather than provide the new services for which they were allocated.

Agencies tend to resist evaluation research: The reaction of the agencies to the survey ran from an immediate complete response with favorable notes to a letter asking "What the do you think you're doing?" The most consistent complaint was that the agencies are surveyed to death. One prominent agency head, in a meeting where this was discussed, presented three detailed forms he had received in one week. At this rate it is possible

he could have received over 150 a year. Yet, of the reasons for not responding given by 179 agencies that either returned the second mailing or were interviewed on the telephone, 162 or over 90% of the agencies did not check this response. Subsequently, when relationships permitted this type of questioning, agency heads were asked how many surveys they had received in the last 30-60 days. No statistics were kept, but most had received none, and none had received more than three. Many of the youth agencies and their personnel are new and are working their way into their communities. They are not accustomed to the inconveniences of periodic evaluation. The lack of structure resulting from newness and from a need to be able to respond to the unpredictable demands of youth seriously complicates the records keeping task which in turn complicates the evaluation task. Correcting this situation will require a combination of assistance, training, encouragement, and coercion.

Most of the responding agencies offer some form of counseling services:

While the data are not conclusive, the type of service most commonly provided seems to be in the area of counseling. This is not as clear as it may seem for "counseling" is such a general term that often it includes other types of service. Still, there is little indication that other types of services are available at any level approaching the level of counseling services.

Agency responses perceive youth problems as institutional problems: Agencies

perceptions of their clients' most common and most serious problems were similar. In each case, they pointed to the lack of meaningful participa-

tion of their clients with the basic social institutions. There was little evidence of religious contact. Problems were most frequently thought to be in the area of family, economic, school, and recreation. The proportion of agencies indicating that their clients major problem was internal/psychological or even behavioral was surprisingly small. This included drug and alcohol use. These data suggest that one of the more promising approaches to dealing with youth in trouble with the law is to arrange for meaningful and satisfactory participation in some institutional structure such as family, religion, school, work, or recreation.

Responding agencies reported low proportions of minority staff and lower levels of services weekends: Responding agencies reported small proportions of minority and youthful staff. Although minorities tend to be overrepresented in the population of youth in trouble with the law, only four agencies had Spanish speaking staff. Almost half reported no Black staff. One-third had no staff under 25 years of age. Only one-third indicated their services were available on weekends.

Agencies resist classifying clients: Some of the problems of this research resulted from positive characteristics of the agencies. They seem to actively avoid explicitly classifying and labeling their clients. While labels may be helpful to researchers, there is a large and growing body of evidence that indicates labeling has a strong, negative effect on people, especially youth. There seemed little evidence of thinking in terms of labels.

Much of the activity that was often brought out in meetings and interviews did not come through in statistics. Many of the people contacted have their home phones listed and are on-call constantly. Most people in this field seem busy. Appointments were not easily arranged, and meetings were sometimes changed or interrupted by emergencies. Crisis intervention is a fundamental part of a youth service network, but by its nature, is extremely difficult to report or measure. One worker had two sixteen year olds sleeping in automobiles and eating with families of friends. The worker maintained contact but could do little more than provide an occasional meal at her home. Youth services often involve basics such as providing food, shelter, medical care, and human warmth. This is not brought out in this type of study.

Future studies, to be most effective should be preceded by more intensive planning and preparation: Much more ground-work needs to be done relative to definitions prior to a second study. The agency director's name needs to be used. Introductory letters from state and local officials and Juvenile Courts should precede the study. The information sought should be reduced considerably. Local government and political leaders should be apprised of the study. The study should take at least 12 months, and data should not be collected only in the summer. A more thorough pretest is needed. The study should be backed by an in-depth study of randomly selected agencies. Such a study can be done successfully and could be beneficial periodically, if not routinely. The data of this study are helpful in the short-run, and the experience of this research should enable subsequent studies to go well beyond this one.

III. Three Towns' Study of Youth Services

The three towns studied offer contrasts in the nature of their youth service systems: How delinquent acts are defined by the police vary with the community. Further, variation also exists in the determination of what leads to referral to the juvenile court.

The Norwich Police tend to define delinquency more broadly than the other two communities; classifying a broader range of acts as delinquent and also refer more youth to the Juvenile Court.

In Enfield delinquency is more narrowly defined and the referral rate is low: The presence of a juvenile advocate office within the Police Department and the presence of a juvenile review board in Enfield probably contribute to keeping the referral rate down. In addition, there is a greater tendency to use services outside of the community where needed, which leads to using referral to the juvenile court as a last resort.

Waterbury Police define delinquency somewhat narrowly and there is a modest referral rate to the juvenile court. This very likely reflects the fact that the police define delinquency more narrowly, and that greater reliance is placed on local services. This is not done through a coordinating group such as a juvenile review board but rather on an agency to agency basis with the police. Although we lack concrete data on this point, it is probably true that the police place greater reliance on parents and other local community groups to deal with the problem prior to referring a youth for adjudication. Waterbury is a town made up of a wide range of ethnic groups, who seem to have maintained many elements

from their culture. Family solidarity and family responsibility for one another is strong in many of these groups and the police undoubtedly feel some confidence in relying on them to deal with the problem.

Variation in referral rates by town is paralleled by a variation in commitments to DCYS by the juvenile court: Commitment rates in Enfield relative to the number referred to the court are high. Norwich commitment rates relative to the number referred to the court are about average for communities its size. This is largely a function of how the court views existing youth services in the community. In Enfield the court has mixed feelings about community agencies and tends to view commitment to them as the end of the process as far as the community is concerned. Hence, there is a high incidence of commitment. In Norwich the court has fairly high levels of confidence in community facilities and has far better access to them than do the Police. Thus, they use the resources frequently. Greater access to facilities by the court than by the Police may be a protective device used by the agencies to prevent overloading of facilities. The high rate of apprehension of youth by the Police in Norwich leads to a wariness on the part of local agencies to allow liberal access to their facilities by the Police. Waterbury commitments by the court are relatively low and again probably reflect the courts confidence in local agencies. They therefore use local services liberally.

Another factor operating in the three towns is the degree of coordination of services: There is no juvenile review board in Waterbury, and for that matter, there is no Youth Service Bureau. Accordingly, a given youth's history of agency service in the community is not known. The courts very

likely realize this and feel that local community resources may not have been exhausted. Hence, they feel more inclined to try some local resource. In Enfield, the court is aware of the existence of the juvenile review board and the Youth Service Bureau, as well as a Police Juvenile Advocate. A child previously referred to these services is seen as having exhausted local services. Therefore, commitment is a natural recourse.

There is little doubt that the existence of juvenile review boards and Youth Service Bureaus enhance contact between agencies and promote some degree of coordination of services: Enfield is the best example of this. Norwich has recently established both such facilities and it is too early to accurately assess their impact. There is some indication, however, that greater contact between agencies is being established and that some coordination of youth services is maintained. Close watch should be kept of the new Youth Service Bureau in Waterbury, although the prognosis for its achieving the same results as in the other two towns is not good. The historical pattern of delivery of youth services in Waterbury is such that cooperation and coordination of services is antithetical. The new Youth Service Bureau Director would do well to become well versed in the history of these services before undertaking any plans for providing coordination among agencies.

In general, all three communities have a proud range of services that are available to problem youth but they are areas that need strengthening: The distribution of these services for various need categories is not adequate in all communities, however. Local officials felt that family

counseling, with an emphasis on families of problem youth, and crisis intervention are two areas that should be expanded. A greater number of crisis intervention services may be one of the keys to success in Enfield. How these increased services are to be offered and under what agencies are questions that planners should carefully consider. Intensive therapy facilities are in short supply in Norwich and are contracted for outside of the community in Enfield. These facilities are available in Waterbury, but on a limited basis. More such services probably could be utilized, but there is a serious question as to the type of agency in which they should be housed and how they should be dispensed. Greater understanding and coordination between agencies who need these services should be established before any expansion in these areas is contemplated. Mere expansion will not assure use. The disparity in training between referral agencies and the intensive therapy units plus differences in perception of how therapy should be dispensed produces much tension between these types of agencies. Reduction of this tension is necessary before any meaningful gains can be made in this service area.

A greater concentration on developing coordination between agencies may be the most important factor on which planners should concentrate: These efforts at coordination should not extend only to local agencies but should include state agencies as well. There is an indication that local agencies harbor some resentment toward state agencies and this should be dispelled.

Finally, a uniform system of records keeping should be developed for all youth serving agencies: A simple, standardized data form could easily be developed that would simplify the process of recording information for the agencies and would allow the planner access to necessary statistical data.

IV. The Community Opinion Survey

This portion of the study gathered information regarding how residents in Enfield, Norwich and Waterbury viewed the problem of juvenile crime in their communities and how they viewed the agencies that dealt with juvenile offenders.

Respondents in all three towns exhibited a great deal of concern over the amount of juvenile crime in their towns: The greatest concern was registered in Norwich (89%) and the lesser amounts in Waterbury (74%), and Enfield (78%). Strangely enough though, few residents in Norwich felt there was very much juvenile crime in their town (27%). Whereas in Waterbury a much larger percentage of residents felt there was an appreciable amount of juvenile crime (66%).

Residents in all three towns tended to agree that the reasons for juvenile crime could be traced to the family environment of the juvenile: The highest percentage of respondents indicated that lack of parental responsibility was a major factor (46%).

Slightly more than 50% of the respondents in the towns were aware of juvenile crime in their neighborhoods and cited vandalism as the most

common type of offense: Breaking and entering was the second most cited offense. About half of the residents in each of the towns felt that the offending juveniles came from their neighborhoods.

Most residents in each of the three towns felt that juvenile offenders were either never caught or were let go with no penalty if they were caught (74%): In general, more blame was placed on the court for this state of affairs than was placed on the police. In fact, in Norwich 77% of the respondents felt that the police were doing a good job. The percentages indicating favorable police performance were lower in Enfield (58%) and Waterbury (51%), although these percentages are still quite high. More Waterbury residents were concerned about the courts than in the other communities. Sixty seven percent felt the courts were doing a poor job. In Enfield and in Norwich only about half of the respondents felt the courts were inadequate.

There was general agreement in all communities that more patrols would improve the effectiveness of police in dealing with the problem: A smaller percentage in all communities also felt that the police should be tougher on juveniles (15%) and a similar percentage of respondents (15%) felt that the police should be less aloof. In all three communities there was a great deal of agreement that the juvenile court should be tougher (81%).

In general, youth service agencies in all three towns are not highly visible to the citizenry: Friendship House in Enfield had the highest visibility (38%) of any agency. The Youth Service Bureau in Norwich was recognized by 23% and the YMCA-YWCA of Waterbury was recognized by 20%. Other agencies in

the three towns were recognized by 16% or less of the respondents. Needless to say, this does not reflect a high awareness of agencies in any of the communities studied.

Respondents in all three towns felt that Drug Education, parent-child relations and recreation were prime activities in which youth service agencies should be involved.

A small percentage of the respondents had direct knowledge of youth who had been in trouble with the law and who had been involved with a youth service agency (35%): In general, these youth had been children of friends or acquaintances. Forty one percent of these respondents felt that the juvenile had gotten some help and forty five percent felt they had gotten no help at all. Less than ten percent of the respondents felt that the agencies had given any appreciable assistance to the youth in question. Over all agency awareness is low in the communities and where some experience with an agency exists opinions of the service rendered are not high.

There is disagreement among the towns regarding the way tax moneys should be spent relative to juveniles: Only in Norwich did a majority of the respondents indicate that they felt tax moneys should be spent for juvenile jobs as opposed to adult jobs (52%). In both of the other towns the majority of respondents felt that tax moneys would be better spent on adult jobs.

When asked specifically to state how they felt taxes should be used to reduce juvenile crime, the highest percentage of respondents indicated that the money should go for recreational facilities (34%), parent education (16%), and juvenile jobs (16%) were the next most highly endorsed categories.

V. Most Needy Cases Study

The study of a selected, difficult group of juveniles provides a unique perspective of community based youth services: While keeping definitions constant from town to town was difficult, tracking these cases through the youth service systems indicated significant differences in community reactions. Without planned intervention, the normal pattern is to refer each case to the juvenile court. Yet a town (Enfield) that has a mechanism like a review board and that aggressively seeks services other than those provided by the state agency can avoid this pattern. The optimum point of intervention appears to be at apprehension.

One of the distinct characteristics of the community that handles its own difficult cases is the degree to which the police are a part of the youth services network and participate in decisions: It would be easy to attribute the differences in the number of local referral efforts by local agencies to personalities i.e. a tough police chief in one town and a service oriented police officer in another but this would not be a real explanation. The most effective diversion program would have to provide services and a deflecting body at the strategic point of apprehension.

The agencies with the most or least involvement with difficult youth are not predictable from their funding source or stated purposes: Catholic family services, the YMCA in Waterbury both were heavily involved with a large proportion of these cases while other organizations funded with delinquency oriented funds were relatively uninvolved.

The consistent direct referrals of these cases by the police to the court appears to be the single most consistent pattern in the study. The fact

that this is not true in all towns suggests that this would be a strategic point to increase resources. The court sometimes referred the youth back, indicating that the referral might have been handled within the community without involving the court in the first place. Court personnel showed every indication that they would support and encourage the handling of as many cases as possible in the local system.

There seems to be a significant difference in the extent to which some local agencies, especially police are willing to extend themselves in terms of effort or risk taking: A Juvenile Court referral is a no-risk action for the police. While it may be questionable and problematic, it is easily understandable. Any diversion will have to provide an equally acceptable alternative to the policeman.

Police will not follow alternate referral patterns until they are an institutionalized part of their community: Thus, the establishment of a diversionary program supported by local government officials, approved by the police, and involving key community people seems requisite to dealing with those more difficult cases without, as one worker put it, "turning them over to the pros", or adjudicating them delinquent.

There was little evidence of lateral referrals of these youth among local youth agencies: There were no lateral referrals in Norwich and Waterbury and none in Enfield except to or by the juvenile advocate and the review board. These youngsters, almost by definition were considered too problematic to be handled locally.

Willingness to refer, a mechanism for referral and availability of needed services are all requisite to dealing with these difficult cases at a local

level: One of the original purposes of this part of the study was to see if tracking these more difficult youth might not reveal gaps in local referral services. In Enfield, out of town resources were used and workers there said they could usually find needed professional and clinical services when they were needed. Providing room and board was a greater problem for them than procuring clinical services. In dealing with this group there are three major variables. The first is the willingness to use a resource other than the court. The second is a mechanism for making an alternative referral. The third is the services that are required for those that are referred. If one of the towns can find non-DCYS, out of town resources for half of their most needy cases, while neither of the other towns made any non-DCYS, out of town referrals, the availability of local services is not the major problem so much as referral procedures.

A more objective method of selecting cases to be studied might be more productive: For example, if all DCYS referrals from selected towns were compared, quite different results might emerge. This would implicitly involve reviewing juvenile court decision-making and would involve a whole new set of variables.

Sixteen and seventeen year old youth seem to have less services available than younger clients: One worker said her blood turned to ice water when a sixteen or seventeen year old walked through the door. After the sixteenth birthday the juvenile court was not usually available as a resource or for support and other resources were less available. However, needs did not diminish accordingly.

END