



New York State Juvenile Justice

PROGRESS TOWARD SYSTEM EXCELLENCE

JANUARY 2014

SUMMARY

New York State's juvenile justice system has seen significant improvements in community safety, coordination, data-driven decision-making, and outcomes for youth ages seven to 15 in just a few short years as the result of collective visioning and action.

Results clearly demonstrate progress toward improved outcomes for both youth and communities.

Between 2010 and 2012, across the state¹:

- Juvenile arrests were down by 24%
 - Juvenile admissions to state placement were down 28%
- Between December 2010 and June 30, 2013 the number of youth in state custody declined by 45%**

CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

In 2011, transformational change was needed in order to dramatically reform the New York State (NYS) juvenile justice system.

The NYS juvenile justice system had a history of being...

Ineffective: Despite state annual placement costs that were among the highest in the nation, the vast majority of youth detained in the juvenile justice system eventually went on to become adult offenders²

Inefficient: Over 60% of youth were rearrested within two years of release from state custody³

Unsafe: State facilities were under investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice for brutal conditions of confinement

At the same time, the system was poised for reform due to...

Momentum: Multiple factors underscored the timeliness, urgency, and potential for change. Both Governor Andrew Cuomo and NYC Mayor Michael Bloomberg had publicly made the case for juvenile justice reform

Great work to build upon: There were numerous promising reform efforts around the state, though not aligned toward common goals

Evidence: There was a trend toward embedding evidence-based practices in various localities and parts of the system, but they were largely isolated from one another

In the face of these challenges and opportunities, several juvenile justice leaders in New York saw the potential for system transformation. Stakeholders across sectors increasingly believed that success would require collective action to drive systemic reform in a rapidly changing, resource-constrained environment.

The NYS juvenile justice system is comprised of a highly complex network of public and private agencies, nonprofit organizations, and courts, with unique policies and procedures at both the state and local levels. It also includes myriad connection points to other public systems, such as education and mental health. Multiple players and systems interact with youth at different points along their journey.

Improving outcomes for youth and for communities, therefore, required a coordinated, strategic effort toward a shared vision and common goals. It was clear that cross-sector leadership would be necessary to catalyze the effort and have the credibility and authority to effect real and lasting reform.



REFORMING THE NYS JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM A COLLECTIVE IMPACT APPROACH

Collective impact offered a potential framework and approach to drive this reform effort. Highly structured, cross-sector collaboratives that have achieved substantial impact on a large-scale social problem share five key conditions that distinguish collective impact from other types of collaboration:

- A common agenda
- Shared measurement systems
- Mutually reinforcing activities
- Continuous communication
- The presence of backbone infrastructure

Leaders in the NYS juvenile justice system knew that something profoundly different needed to be done and believed that collective impact offered an approach for significant change. For the first time, there was a commitment to taking a state-wide, cross-system view of juvenile justice reform.

Today, driven by a dedicated group of stakeholders representing a broad spectrum of constituencies from across the system and around the state, transformational results are already being achieved.

HOW IT WAS DONE

The statewide collective impact planning process included data-driven analysis, extensive interviews with stakeholders, and benchmarking of effective practices across New York State and the nation.

The resulting strategic plan, *Safe Communities, Successful Youth: A Shared Vision for the New York State Juvenile Justice System*⁴, was released in July 2011. The collaborative, facilitated process included the following:

Steering Committee: This group included key leaders from across the state and the juvenile justice system, as well as other related systems. There was active participation by senior leadership from city, county, and state agencies; private nonprofit organizations, such as voluntary agencies and Legal Aid; the advocacy community; the judiciary; law enforcement, and the New York City Department of Education.

Shared Vision: The Steering Committee agreed upon a powerful and straightforward shared vision for system excellence: **Across New York State, the juvenile justice system promotes youth success and ensures public safety.**

Work Groups: The Steering Committee established two Work Groups to identify the existing continuum of services for youth and to probe deeply into the available data on the current system.

Action Steps: The Steering Committee identified a set of 10 critical near-term action steps (see Appendix B) in order to launch the work rapidly and with great urgency, with the goal of putting in place the structures and approaches necessary to assure the system was safe, accountable, fair and effective. These action steps were organized along three key themes:

1. Assuring quality system governance, accountability, and coordination
2. Implementing an effective continuum of services based on best practices, and
3. Collecting and sharing data to make information-driven decisions and policy

Strategic Planning Action Committee (SPAC): To ensure effective implementation of the strategic plan, the SPAC was formed and includes leaders from various agencies, organizations, and courts from across the state. The SPAC is co-chaired by the designees of the Governor and the Chief Judge (see Appendix A).

Backbone Staff: The state provides staff to support the SPAC, designated and funded by the NYS Office of the Deputy Secretary for Public Safety, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS).



RESULTS

By the fall of 2013, just two years after the inaugural meeting of the SPAC, nearly all of the 10 critical near-term action steps (see Appendix B) had been accomplished or were in progress, ensuring significant gains in governance, accountability, and coordination; an effective continuum of services based on best practices, and information-driven decisions and policy. These changes have been complemented by structural reforms and fundamental shifts in practice. Major results have been seen in all of the following categories:

“Because we worked together on developing values and goals that everybody agreed to, people are now more inclined to act on those values. There is now a shared sense of why we’re doing things and, where we want to drive the system to be. The process of having sat at the same table and gotten to know one another has really changed our work and the level of trust we have in each other.”

*Gladys Carrion, former Commissioner
Office of Children and Family Services*

New and Stronger Relationships Across the System

According to multiple stakeholders deeply involved in the effort, establishing relationships where they hadn’t existed before has been perhaps the greatest achievement to date. With these relationships has come the development of a unifying common agenda. Many highlight the importance of now having a regular venue for discussion of important and timely issues related to juvenile justice, strengthened by a shared sense of purpose and collective direction.

The collaboration built over the course of the statewide collective impact planning process has had other impacts as well. These include greater competitiveness by NYS in federal grant applications, closer working relationships among state agencies that were not previously collaborating, and new productive relationships between local communities and state leadership.

Deeper Knowledge of Programs and Services

As a result of the collaborative strategic planning effort, a live online searchable database of the continuum of services and providers available for justice-involved youth across the state is now operational and broadly accessible⁵. The database provides users with a menu of all available program options that can be sorted by location, service type, juvenile justice processing stage, risk and needs profile, as well as other characteristics.

The compilation of programs and services marks the first time the state has generated any comprehensive list of local programs and services for justice-involved youth. This resource serves two key purposes. First, the database allows individuals — parents, youth, community members, judges, and others — to search for local programs and services. Second, it allows policymakers to analyze the continuum of services to understand better if they are comprehensive and to identify if there are gaps.

Significant Policy Changes: The Close to Home and Raise the Age

Ultimately, both relationships and unity around a common agenda helped to lay the foundation for agreement on significant policy change. The Close to Home initiative, signed into law by Governor Cuomo in 2012, represents a collaborative effort between New York City and New York State to ensure more appropriate placements for justice-involved youth who come from New York City, increasing the efficiency of the system as a whole. The legislation was designed to keep youth in or close to their home communities to receive the services and support they need. In addition to being consistent with national best practices for improved youth outcomes, the Office of Children and Family Services estimates that Close to Home will save the state and city a total of \$12 million by 2015.⁶ While not directly a result of the state juvenile justice reform planning process, development of the Close to Home legislation and its successful adoption were deeply rooted in the planning process. The level of trust and confidence built, as well as the common set of goals established, laid the groundwork for both the negotiation and the successful implementation of Close to Home. And now, the widespread success of other juvenile justice reforms have paved the way for New York to finally plan to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18. Governor Cuomo, in his 2014 State of the State Address said, “Our juvenile justice laws are outdated. Under New York State law, 16 and 17 year olds can be tried and charged as adults. Only one other state in the nation does that; it’s the state of North Carolina. It’s not right, it’s not fair – we must raise the age. Let’s form a commission on youth, public safety and justice and let’s get it done this year.”

Commitment to Data-Driven Decision-Making

A critical need identified in the state planning process was access to better, real-time data across the system in order to drive more effective decision-making. For the first time, performance metrics are now publicly available⁷, capturing a wide range of data, including juvenile arrests, racial breakdown of arrests, cases under probation supervision, average lengths of stay in detention, and family court processing time. Data is available for New York State, New York City, and the 57 counties outside of New York City.

Previously, this data had rested in many different entities and agencies, and had never before been pulled together in one place. This data provides a starting point for analysis and discussion, prompting and informing conversations about the outcomes of the juvenile justice system statewide and serving as an empirical tool to drive policy change. Access to better data has also helped to improve the quality of programs and services.



Engagement of Local Communities

As a result of this work, local communities are now engaged in system reform in dramatically different ways. In 2013, eight Regional Youth Justice Teams were launched and began to meet in regions around the state. The design of these teams is the result of a Work Group recommendation to solicit ongoing input from localities and to create a formal mechanism for feedback. Initiated by the SPAC, a statewide RFP was released to launch these teams, sending a clear message to the regions that their input was important to state-level decision-making.

Empowerment of New Stakeholders

The state planning process represented a new era in terms of who was brought to the decision-making table. Local community-level leadership, the judiciary, private providers, and community advocates were intentionally and substantively invited to participate. There had previously been no regular structure to engage these important voices in state-wide juvenile justice conversations. The planning process created a space for these stakeholders to be heard, feel valued, and actively participate. They brought important new perspectives to the process, which has ultimately resulted in broader alignment and better results.

Exponential Leverage of Original Investment

An original \$140,000 of philanthropic investment has leveraged hundreds of thousands of public dollars from state and federal sources. This complements the millions of public dollars working in greater alignment and with a consistent vision toward juvenile justice system reform, representing more than a six-fold degree of leverage of the direct dollars alone. Resources include the following:

“Helping government facilitate and implement fundamental system reform is something that foundations should strive for. If private funders want to get the biggest bang for their dollars, this type of profound and sustainable commitment to change is worthy of investment.”

*Emily Tow Jackson, Executive Director
The Tow Foundation*

- Staffed backbone support dedicated to guiding the SPAC and moving the effort forward. Additional significant commitment of staff support from across multiple agencies
- Countless hours of time dedicated to SPAC and Work Group participation by leaders from within and outside the juvenile justice system as co-chairs and participants
- Greater alignment of public dollars to support more effective and evidence-based practices
- Nearly \$900,000 in public dollars provided to support the statewide collective impact planning process, development of performance measures, and establishment of a new comprehensive juvenile justice services database

Lead investment came from the New York State Juvenile Justice Advisory Group (JJAG), following its mandate to direct both state and federal funding toward improving system outcomes.



USING COLLECTIVE IMPACT FOR SYSTEMS CHANGE

KEY ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESS

Convene Appropriate Levels of Authority

This effort has relied upon the convening power of senior-level system leaders. The SPAC is co-chaired by the Governor’s representative and a high-level member of the judiciary. Members of the committee include state, county and local commissioners and directors. Access to key decision-makers allows reforms to be initiated and move forward quickly from the SPAC.

Emphasize Continuous Communication

As the effort has unfolded, new stakeholders have emerged and people have cycled in and out of various leadership positions. Enormous emphasis has been placed on bringing new participants up to speed on both content and relationships. Commitments to being inclusive and making sure that participants know the importance of continuous feedback loops have been essential to the continuity of the work, even as the players change.

Ensure Work Gets Done Between Meetings

This effort has relied upon backbone infrastructure, both in formal staffed roles and in more ad hoc staff and volunteer allocations of time from multiple agencies to ensure that work progresses between meetings. Seeing clear and tangible progress along the way has served as an important tactic to keep busy stakeholders engaged and to continue to demonstrate that meetings are a good use of their valuable time. As a result, SPAC meetings have not struggled with attendance.

Recognize the Critical Role of Public/Private Funding Partnerships

For this collective impact effort, early private philanthropic investment was critical, as it provided “seed” or “risk capital” before state dollars could be allocated. The ability to quickly access philanthropic dollars allowed for momentum to continue while time-consuming state procurement processes unfolded. Ultimately, the effort has been sustained with state and federal funding, significantly leveraging the original investment.

“Innovating in public policy requires engaging across boundaries, with each stakeholder playing to their strengths. In government we have the authority and the capacity to act, but philanthropy can be a catalyst for change and generate momentum that ultimately benefits the public.”

Thomas Abt, NYS Deputy Secretary for Public Safety

The initial statewide collective impact planning effort was funded with support from an anonymous donor and seven private foundations: David Rockefeller Fund, New York Community Trust, Open Society Foundations, Pinkerton Foundation, Prospect Hill Foundation, Public Welfare Foundation, and The Tow Foundation. Public dollars were committed from the Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) and the NYS Juvenile Justice Advisory Group (JJAG). Sourcing funds from this broad range of funders was intentional and grounded the work in both credibility and neutrality.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the single most important element in New York’s recent successes has been a mutually reinforcing dynamic that has emerged in the state’s juvenile justice reform efforts. Each step forward serves as a springboard for the next. Recent movement has begun toward establishing a statewide center for best practices and exploring new financing models. Held together by a common vision for system excellence, this culture of reform is fueled by contributions from all of the system leaders, advocates and other stakeholders. And momentum is strong for continued reform for years to come.

APPENDIX A

Agencies currently represented on the Strategic Planning Action Committee (SPAC):

- Broome County Probation Office
- Center for Court Innovation
- Correctional Association of New York
- Council on Children and Families
- Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
- Division of Criminal Justice Services
- Legal Aid Bureau of Buffalo
- NYC Administration for Children's Services
- NYC Criminal Justice Coordinators Office
- NYC Department of Probation
- NYS Association of Chiefs of Police
- NYS Association of Counties
- NYS Deputy Secretary for Public Safety
- NYS Deputy Secretary for Human Services
- NYS Judicial Institute
- NYS Juvenile Justice Advisory Group
- Office of Children and Family Services
- Office of Probation and Correctional Alternatives
- Orange County Department of Social Services
- Schenectady County Probation Office
- State of New York Police Juvenile Officers Association
- The Tow Foundation

APPENDIX B

NEW YORK STATE JUVENILE JUSTICE STRATEGIC PLANNING ACTION COMMITTEE NEAR-TERM ACTION STEPS

ASSURE QUALITY SYSTEM GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND COORDINATION

- 1. Ongoing Coordination:** Evolve Steering Committee into a Strategic Planning Action Committee (SPAC), with devoted staff from the Governor's Office, Division of Criminal Justice Services and Office of Children and Family Services.
- 2. Multi-Stakeholder Input:** Evolve the existing Work Groups to establish an ongoing role in providing regular feedback and guidance to the SPAC.
- 3. Performance Measures:** Finalize agreement on a set of high-level system outcomes and performance measures.
- 4. Ongoing Input from Localities:** Develop a plan to implement local interagency advisory teams.
- 5. Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish regular mechanisms to gather feedback where necessary, and share emerging plans and strategies for system reform with key stakeholders around the state.

IMPLEMENT AN EFFECTIVE CONTINUUM OF SERVICES BASED ON BEST PRACTICES

- 6. Analysis of Continuum:** Conduct analysis of current continuum of providers across the state, and assess relative to juvenile delinquency.
- 7. Performance Contracting and Quality Standards:** Implement and effectively utilize uniform performance-based contracting and quality standards for public and private providers.
- 8. Financing Models and Oversight Structures:** Conduct analysis of potential financing models, oversight structures, and case jurisdiction responsibilities.
- 9. Support for What Works:** Establish an interactive, best practice clearinghouse to expand the capacity of the state to adopt both research-driven and evidence-informed practices.

COLLECT AND SHARE DATA TO MAKE INFORMATION-DRIVEN DECISIONS AND POLICY

- 10. Data Infrastructure and Analysis:** Establish the data infrastructure and analytical capacity necessary to improve outcomes.

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1. NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS): Uniform Crime Reporting and Incident-Based Reporting (UCR/IBR) System, Probation Workload System, and DCJS-Office of Court Administration (OCA) Family Court JD/DF Case Processing Database. NYS Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) detention and placement databases.
2. State of New York Juvenile Justice Advisory Group, "State of New York, 2009-2011: Three-Year Comprehensive State Plan for the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Formula Grant Program," <http://criminaljustice.state.ny.us/ofpa/pdfdocs/jju3yearplan2010.pdf>.
3. Susan Mitchell-Herzfeld, Vajeera Dorabawila, Leigh Bates, and Rebecca Colman, "Juvenile Recidivism Study: Patterns and Predictors of Reoffending Among Youth Reentering the Community from OCFS Facilities and Voluntary Agencies," PowerPoint presentation at the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, April 27, 2010.
4. <http://www.nysjjag.org/Safe%20Communities%20Successful%20Youth%20Full%20Version.pdf>
5. <http://www.nysjjag.org/JJContinuumWeb/JJContinuum.jsp>
6. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/05/nyregion/program-keeps-troubled-new-york-youth-close-to-home.html?pagewanted=all>
7. <http://www.nysjjag.org/our-work/performance-metrics.html>