

## Overcoming Siloes for Justice-Involved Foster Youth in Illinois

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*The Government Performance Lab (GPL) awarded pro bono technical assistance to the State of Illinois to improve outcomes for youth involved with both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Through rapid identification of foster youth when offenses are committed, intensive care coordination across systems, and more timely access to proven therapeutic interventions, the project has helped Illinois test a new approach to serving high-risk, multisystem-involved young people.*

**The Challenge:** In Illinois, approximately 700 new young people annually experience simultaneous involvement with the foster care system and juvenile delinquency system. These justice-involved foster youth often exhibit symptoms of traumatic stress and demonstrate high levels of truancy, increased behavioral health challenges, and low likelihoods of achieving permanency in a family setting. As in many jurisdictions, it is difficult to swiftly arrange coordinated services and supports for these youth because the child welfare system is managed by the state while the juvenile justice system is decentralized across city police departments, county-run juvenile probation offices and detention centers, and the state's juvenile corrections facilities. Many youth and their families struggle to navigate across systems and access services to help them holistically address their complex needs. More than half re-offend within two years, and most will spend substantial time in costly group living arrangements; on average, an annual cohort of 700 youth experiences 1,300 arrests per year and 230,000 days spent in congregate care throughout their time in foster care.

**The Project:** The GPL worked with the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ), Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), and local probation departments to improve outcomes for youth involved in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. By catalyzing systems reform and investing in community-based treatment capacity, the project aimed to achieve outcomes across three dimensions:

1. Improving placements by safely serving youth in families and communities in lieu of institutional care (such as residential treatment centers and group homes);
2. Reducing recidivism by preventing youth from future delinquency, criminal behavior, and incarceration; and
3. Enhancing youth wellbeing through developing strengths and positioning the youth for successful transitions to adulthood.

This project strove to achieve these outcomes through three main activities:

- **Streamline the identification process of justice-involved foster youth:** Illinois DCFS recognized a multi-week lag – an average of 90 days – between involvement in the juvenile justice system and formal reporting in the child welfare agency. Handwritten reports were faxed to a central office, requiring manual transcription into a state computer database, and caseworkers might not hear about an arrest until a foster family or provider remembered to call. Through this project, the department streamlined data collection and

referral mechanisms to create a live state-wide list of all dually-involved youth. Today, it takes fewer than three days for DCFS to be notified when a young person crosses over between the foster care and juvenile justice systems, and there are new processes in place to quickly match the youth to services.

- **Implement family-centered care coordination to streamline service delivery:** Typically, a dually-involved youth is assigned a state-level child welfare case manager and a county-level probation officer; historically, there was little coordination between the two, with service needs determined primarily by clinical professionals and referrals based on pre-determined, inflexible treatment programs. This project established coordination among multiple private providers to facilitate the smooth delivery of services and handoffs across providers and systems. Coordinated through a trained facilitator, service planning is now tailored to each youth and planned with input from youth, their families, DCFS caseworkers, probation officers, clinicians, and other professionals involved with the families. With low caseloads (10-to-1), these facilitators can also assist in identifying a permanent home for the youth to avoid residential institutionalization, the type of facility most of these youth currently reside in for long periods of time.
- **Provide specialized service capacity to address complex needs of dually-involved youth:** Through this project, Illinois expanded the availability of behavioral therapies and family-based alternatives to group care with specific capabilities for addressing the complex needs of dually-involved youth. Such services include evidence-based treatments, family therapy, psychotherapy, academic support, pro-social activities, substance abuse treatment, and career and employment support.

**The Innovation:** In addition to improving support for justice-involved foster youth in Illinois, the project spearheads several new features. In particular, the project:

**1. Partnered with a coalition of community providers to maintain a central list of justice-involved foster youth and share performance data across providers**

The Conscience Community Network (CCN) is a partnership between the state and a coalition of six service providers. The staff of five at CCN manages providers and coordinates care by using data as a primary lever: each week, they share performance data on outcome metrics such as frequency of meetings, progress on goals, and enrollment in therapies. Providers who rank lower are connected to those who rank higher to learn how to improve their performance in real-time. Frontline staff from all six providers also regularly meet to share best practices and brainstorm solutions to barriers to care. Additionally, CCN is responsible for sourcing and maintaining a state-wide list of dually-involved youth, matching them with a care coordinator, and referring them to appropriate services.

**2. Developed and tested a new approach for serving families involved with multiple systems**

The state empowered a coalition of providers to drive assigned case professionals from the child welfare and juvenile justice systems towards better information sharing, service planning, and ongoing data tracking to improve outcomes for the cohort of dually-involved youth. Holding one vendor responsible for multisystem outcomes creates an accountability structure that helps

ensure that no youth falls through the cracks. The project offers valuable lessons for serving complex populations involved with other systems.

### **3. Incorporated Pay-for-Success mechanisms without an external investor**

The project's original financing incorporated third-party funds through a Pay for Success model. Due to delays in project implementation, DCFS decided to directly fund the project, but it incorporated the performance measures and payments from the original PFS agreement into the revised contract with CCN.