



# JAIBG

Juvenile Accountability Incentive  
Block Grants Program

## BULLETIN

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### From the Administrator

If accepting the consequences of one's behavior characterizes a responsible individual, promoting personal accountability is the responsibility of a just society. In enacting the Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grants (JAIBG) Program, Congress sought to encourage States to hold delinquent youth responsible for their offenses through accountability-based sanctions.

This Bulletin, one in a series of JAIBG Best Practices papers, provides an overview of graduated, community-based sanctions that seek to restore the broken bonds between the juvenile offender and the victimized community. This is essential, for, as the author observes, it is not sufficient that offenders be called to account for their offenses; they must also realize the consequences of their misdeeds and accept responsibility for them.

It is my hope that this Bulletin will advance that end.

Shay Bilchik  
Administrator



## Developing and Administering Accountability-Based Sanctions for Juveniles

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*This Bulletin is part of OJJDP's Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grants (JAIBG) Best Practices Series. The basic premise underlying the JAIBG program, initially funded in fiscal year 1998, is that young people who violate the law need to be held accountable for their offenses if society is to improve the quality of life in the Nation's communities. Holding a juvenile offender "accountable" in the juvenile justice system means that once the juvenile is determined to have committed law-violating behavior, by admission or adjudication, he or she is held responsible for the act through consequences or sanctions, imposed pursuant to law, that are proportionate to the offense. Consequences or sanctions that are applied swiftly, surely, and consistently, and are graduated to provide appropriate and effective responses to varying levels of offense seriousness and offender chronicity, work best in preventing, controlling, and reducing further law violations.*

*In an effort to help States and units of local government develop programs in the 12 purpose areas established for JAIBG funding, Bulletins in this series are designed to present the most up-to-date knowledge to juvenile justice policymakers, researchers, and practitioners about programs and approaches that*

*hold juvenile offenders accountable for their behavior. An in-depth description of the JAIBG program and a list of the 12 program purpose areas appear in the overview Bulletin for this series.*

### Overview

Through the JAIBG program, Congress seeks to encourage the development and administration of sanctions that are "accountability based" for juvenile offenders. What sorts of sanctions programs are covered here? What is meant by "accountability"? At the most basic level, of course, the term is clear enough: being held accountable for an offense means being made to answer for it, being held responsible. In that sense, any system that is set up to ensure that no offenses go unpunished can be said to be accountability based. Reforms that tend to increase the chances that juvenile offenders will face some sort of individualized consequence as a result of their wrongdoing, reduce delays between offenses and sanctions, and improve the system's capacity to monitor its charges and enforce its orders are all accountability reforms.

But there is more to accountability than that. In juvenile justice circles, the term in recent years has become increasingly associated with the “balanced approach” to juvenile court/probation practice, under which, in addition to protecting public safety and rehabilitating offenders, the juvenile justice system must “respond to illegal behavior in such a way that the offender is made aware of and responsible for the loss, damage, or injury perpetrated upon the victim” (Maloney, Romig, and Armstrong, 1988). It is necessary but not sufficient, in other words, that wrongdoers be “called to account” for their wrongs. Additionally, they should be made to recognize what they have done and feel the obligation that arises from their behavior.

A community-based sanctioning program promotes accountability more effectively than one that is conceived, designed, and operated elsewhere because it tends to strengthen rather than sever the damaged bonds between the offender and the victimized community. Indeed, this potential benefit is recognized in the implementing legislation for the JAIBG program, in which Congress included a special authorization for the use of grant funds to contract with private, nonprofit entities and community-based organizations to provide accountability-based sanction programs and services.

A system of sanctions cannot effectively hold juvenile offenders accountable unless it is swift, sure, coherent, and consistent. As a practical matter, that calls for a continuum of sanctions that are appropriate for different kinds of offenders and offenses. Along that continuum, sanctions must be graduated—that is, they must escalate as offenses recur and become more serious. Accordingly, in issuing guidelines regarding “policies and programs that ensure that juveniles

are subject to accountability-based sanctions for every act for which they are adjudicated delinquent” (for purposes of determining State eligibility for receiving an accountability-based sanctions formula grants award under the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended), OJJDP has indicated the following:

The notion of accountability-based sanctions is captured within a system of graduated sanctions . . . . A model graduated sanctions system includes the following:

- Immediate sanctions within the community for first-time, non-violent offenders.
- Intermediate sanctions within the community for more serious offenders.
- Secure care programs for the most serious or violent offenders.
- Aftercare programs that provide high levels of social control and treatment services.

Juvenile offenders should move along the continuum through a well-structured system of phases that addresses both their needs and the safety of the community. At each level of the continuum, offenders should be subject to more restrictive sanctions if they continue in their delinquent activities (Wilson and Howell, 1993).

The above graduated sanctions approach, in combination with an array of prevention and risk/needs assessment strategies, makes up OJJDP’s Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders (Comprehensive Strategy). First set forth in a 1993 publication of the same name and further elaborated on 2 years later in OJJDP’s *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* (Howell, 1995), the Comprehensive

Strategy provides basic guidelines for establishing a continuum of prevention, early intervention, and graduated sanctions programs that are research based, data driven, and outcome focused. OJJDP provides strategic planning assistance to its Comprehensive Strategy sites through a partnership with the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and Developmental Research and Programs, Inc., reviewing current trends, strategies, and outcomes and delivering up-to-date information on prevention and graduated sanctions to training and technical assistance recipients.

An accountability-based juvenile justice system, then, would be one in which sanctions are (1) surely, swiftly, and consistently attached to wrongdoing; (2) imposed with the goal of repairing harm to individual victims and the community to the greatest extent possible and, more generally, with an eye to teaching, reforming, and reconciling as part of an individualized treatment plan; (3) perceived to proceed when possible from the community in which the juvenile offender lives; (4) flexible and diverse enough to fit a variety of situations and types of offenders; (5) sufficiently graduated to respond appropriately to each succeeding offense; and (6) effective in reducing recidivism among juvenile offenders.

In this broader view, “accountability” embraces community, system, and individual accountability. A real commitment to meaningful, appropriate, flexible, and consistent sanctioning, after all, imposes a whole new set of expectations and demands not only on the offender but also on the juvenile justice system.

It imposes, above all, the obligation for the system to hold itself responsible for outcomes; to develop the means to track juveniles through the

system effectively; to give system practitioners appropriate access to up-to-date information about offenders' backgrounds, court involvement, treatment received, and current obligations; to monitor program performance, costs, and recidivism rates; and to devise a carefully calibrated continuum of responses to juvenile crime. For the community, accountability means an end to "exporting" delinquent children to outside institutions—and the beginning of accepting a share of the responsibility for supervising, teaching, and supporting development of needed social competence.

## Key Elements of Effective Programs

In recent years, legislatures in a number of States have begun to reconsider the basic missions and purposes of their juvenile justice systems, turning away from the traditional offender-centered, treatment- and rehabilitation-oriented philosophy that has dominated the field for the better part of a century and toward an approach that emphasizes additional social goals, including the protection of the public and the promotion of individual accountability. In fact, at the end of the 1997 legislative sessions, 17 States had amended their juvenile court purpose clauses to emphasize this balanced approach to juvenile justice (Szymanski, 1998). Of these, Pennsylvania provides a particularly instructive example of an attempt to rethink a juvenile justice system "from the purpose clause down."

In 1995, a revision of the fundamental purpose clause of Pennsylvania's Juvenile Act discarded traditional "supervision, care, and rehabilitation" language and replaced it with a new requirement that juvenile courts "provide balanced attention to the protection of the community, the imposition of accountability for

offenses committed and the development of competencies to enable children to become responsible and productive members of the community." The State's Juvenile Court Judges' Commission then held a series of conferences to explore the implications of the change. One product of the conferences was a publication intended for "broad distribution . . . at the community level," acknowledging that the change implied "new roles for judges, juvenile justice system professionals, crime victims, communities, and juvenile offenders" (Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, 1997).

Among the elements of the new accountability-based juvenile justice system role outlined by the Commission were the following:

- To regard crime victims and the community, in addition to juvenile offenders, as clients.
- To make community restoration and victim reparation by offenders a priority.
- To ensure that offenders understand the impact of their crimes.
- To develop community service options that are valued by communities and crime victims.
- To educate the community on its role.

The role of the community in an accountability-based system, according to the Commission, includes the following:

- To provide opportunities for valued community service and paid work experience for offenders.
- To provide assistance to crime victims, their families, and their support systems.
- To assist offenders in completing obligations by providing support.
- To share responsibility for monitoring offenders.

- To assist in holding the juvenile justice system accountable for fulfilling its responsibilities related to offender accountability.

The Commission also described aspects of the new role of offenders ("to participate in activities that increase empathy with crime victims") and of victims ("to provide information, throughout the juvenile justice process, about the financial, physical, and emotional impact of the crime") and suggested various accountability-related objective performance measures—including the proportion of victims choosing to participate in the juvenile justice process, the amount of restitution paid, and the number of community service hours worked.

## Exemplary Programs

When it comes to translating accountability to the realm of the day-to-day dispensing of juvenile justice, many jurisdictions merit study, but few whole systems stand out as models for replication. Nevertheless, a number of individual juvenile justice programs in operation across the country—some experimental and some well-established, some small- and some large-scale, some little-known and others much-studied—have succeeded in involving crime victims and the community at large in the justice process, improving the overall consistency and effectiveness of the system's response to juvenile offending, and bringing home the message of accountability to individual offenders.

Examples of such programs are arranged below according to their place in a continuum of sanctions, beginning with those appropriate for the least serious cases and proceeding to those that serve the most serious. Contact information for these programs is provided later in this Bulletin, under "For Further Information."

## Immediate Interventions

Immediate interventions are appropriate for most first-time misdemeanor offenders, many minor repeat offenders, and some nonviolent felons—in other words, for the vast majority of young people who appear in juvenile court (Wilson and Howell, 1993). Too often in the past, the juvenile justice system's response to the bulk of these offenders has been, in effect, no response: diversion that entailed no real conditions or consequences, "probation as usual" without meaningful supervision from the system, or "backdoor" handling without victim or community input. This sort of inattention to accountability at the system's entry level, however understandable as a matter of resource allocation, contributed to the widespread public perception that the juvenile courts were inexcusably callous to victims, negligent of public safety, and indifferent to justice. Worse, it broadcast precisely the wrong message to delinquents themselves.

## Diversion

Diversion is best viewed not as diversion from the juvenile justice system but rather as diversion to appropriate services where the formal intervention of the juvenile justice system is not necessary or required. One way to make sure that diversion is not an inappropriate "nonresponse" in a given case is to open up the diversion process and involve community members in diversion decisionmaking and in monitoring and enforcing diversion agreements.

Residents of a neighborhood threatened and disrupted by a young offender are unlikely to take the matter lightly, slight the concerns of victims, or lose sight of the fact that wrong has been done. At the same time, the wrongdoer is, in a very real sense, one of their own: neighbors may have information and

insight into the offender's character, background, and needs—not to mention incentives to turn him or her around—that professionals remote from the community may lack. Moreover, just by acknowledging and confronting the problem posed by the offender in their midst, neighborhood residents may be contributing to its solution.

This is part of the thinking behind the Community Accountability Boards used by the Thurston County (Washington) Prosecuting Attorney's Office; the Juvenile Conference Committees set up by the New Jersey Superior Court's Family Division; the Youth Commissions, Youth Aid Panels, and Youth Diversion Committees operating in a number of Pennsylvania counties; and other similar programs in Montana, Texas, and elsewhere across the country (Kurlychek, 1997). Each of these programs involves citizen volunteers in the diversion of juveniles charged with minor offenses. Generally, the offender must admit wrongdoing in order to participate and signal a willingness to cooperate in the diversion process. Often, the other parties involved (victims, police, parents) must also agree to the diversion.

Citizen volunteers in the diversion process typically receive some training in juvenile justice system operations, dispute resolution, victim/witness issues, and other matters. Sometimes an effort is made to ensure that volunteers fairly reflect a given community's racial and ethnic diversity and/or that both young people and adults participate. Volunteers generally meet with and review the cases of only those offenders who reside in their own communities. After reviewing the facts surrounding a case, they essentially enter into a "contract" with the offender—an agreement to keep the matter out of court under certain conditions, which may

include a formal apology; direct restitution to the victim; community service; a curfew; participation in drug awareness, motor vehicle safety, or other specialized programs; weekly or monthly progress reports for a definite period; regular contact with designated community organizations; school attendance; or job search activities. Procedures for reviewing and monitoring each contract are adopted, and clear sanctions are prescribed for contract violations.

## Victim/offender interaction

One vital accountability-promoting factor that is often missing from diversion programs, even those in which community members participate, is victim-offender interaction. There is no more direct way of encouraging and enabling juvenile offenders to recognize the human consequences of their actions than by making them listen to, acknowledge, and explain themselves to those they have harmed. Properly structured and supervised victim-offender conferencing, whether part of the formal court disposition process or otherwise, can also have significant benefits for victims. In the quarter of a century since the first Victim-Offender Reconciliation program was established in Kitchener, Ontario (Amstutz and Zehr, 1998), more than 150 cities and towns in the United States and Canada have undertaken similar efforts (Bazemore and Day, 1998).

The Victim Offender Mediation program in Austin, TX, one of four evaluated by Mark S. Umbreit and colleagues during 1990 and 1991 (Umbreit, Coates, and Kalanj, 1994), presents a typical example. Established in 1990 through the joint efforts of the Travis County (Texas) Juvenile Probation Department and the Travis County Dispute Resolution Center, the program receives referrals from the local juvenile court in cases involving property crimes, misdemeanor assaults,

and certain kinds of intrafamily victimization offenses. If both the offender and the victim agree to participate, a mediation session is scheduled and the probation officer and victim service officer brief the mediator—either a trained volunteer or a staff mediator from the Dispute Resolution Center.

During the first part of the meeting, the victim is given an opportunity to express feelings directly to the offender, and the offender is allowed to attempt to explain his or her actions and motives. The second phase of the meeting involves reviewing the victim's losses and developing a plan for repaying/restoring the victim to the greatest extent possible.

Umbreit's evaluation found that, of the cases mediated in 1991, 98 percent resulted in successfully negotiated restitution agreements. Fifty-three percent involved financial restitution, 40 percent involved community service, and 7 percent involved personal service restitution. The evaluation also revealed that 85 percent of victims and 92 percent of participating offenders reported satisfaction with the mediation process and its outcomes (Umbreit, Coates, and Kalanj, 1994).

A broader, more inclusive, and flexible variation on victim-offender conferencing is family group conferencing. Although only recently introduced in this country (through the efforts of justice professionals from Australia and New Zealand, where the practice originated in a Maori conflict resolution ritual), family group conferencing enlarges the circle of accountability by bringing more participants to the table.

Those involved include not only the offender and the victim, but the families and supporters of both, unrelated adults whose opinions matter to the offender or who can give voice to the community's view of the offense, and other community residents who

represent both indirect or secondary victims of the offense and potential resources toward the reintegration of the offender (Umbreit and Stacey, 1996). Proponents of family group conferencing assert that the technique is capable of producing all the benefits one could ask of a sanction in an accountability-based juvenile justice system: a powerful stimulus to personal accountability, victim empathy, and remorse; a format within which to begin the process of repair and reconciliation; and the makings of an ad hoc network of resources to assist in the offender's reintegration into the community—all in one.

Several communities in Minnesota have begun experiments with family group conferencing in recent years (Bazemore and Day, 1998). "Circle sentencing"—a somewhat similar extrajudicial process in which offenders, victims and their advocates, and other community members come together to attempt to reach a consensus regarding a rehabilitative plan for the offender and an approach to healing the victim and the community—has also been introduced recently in several Minnesota counties (Pranis, 1997). Through its field-initiated research program, OJJDP is currently funding the evaluation of a similar program in Marion County, IN. This program brings together the offender, his or her victim(s), and supporters of the victim(s) for a conference to discuss how the offender can make amends and restore justice to the community. A unique feature of this program is its focus on offenders age 14 and younger.

### **Other approaches**

A number of other, more conventional interventions for entry-level juvenile offenders either tend to promote accountability or can be designed and implemented with accountability-promotion in mind.

Mentoring, teen court, and probation supervision programs all can incorporate a special emphasis on offenders' personal responsibility and obligation to victims. Programs that attempt to modify behavior directly can also emphasize accountability.

For instance, the Bethesda Day Treatment Center in West Milton, PA, provides something more than therapy to the minor juvenile offenders it sees for up to 55 hours per week, insisting upon personal accountability and active efforts to atone. The Bethesda approach begins with strict discipline within the program—backed by stiff sanctions for rule violations—combined with the consistent refusal to accept "the false posture of innocence" that negates personal responsibility (Sweet, 1991). All working-age program participants are required to work, and 75 cents of every dollar they earn goes to victim restitution, court costs, and fines. Face-to-face conferences with individual victims—centered around formal, written acknowledgments of responsibility and requests for forgiveness—are also required whenever possible. According to one recent study, Bethesda's clients, though assessed at the time of intake as having a greater risk of rearrest, did not recidivate at higher rates than other day treatment clients (Jones and Harris, 1997).

### **Intermediate Sanctions**

Intermediate sanctions are appropriate for juveniles who continue to offend following immediate interventions, offenders involved in drug trafficking, and some violent offenders who need supervision, structure, and monitoring, but not necessarily institutionalization (Wilson and Howell, 1993). While the system's response to offenders at this midlevel must be more serious and intensive—challenge outdoor programs, intensive probation,

electronic monitoring, short-term weekend detention, and so on—the accountability component of the sanctions employed may be similar to those used at the entry level. Emphasis on acknowledgment of personal responsibility, insistence on various forms of reparation, victim and community involvement in the corrections process—all these are vital and appropriate in the sanctioning of intermediate-level offenders.

The Community Intensive Supervision Project (CISP) in Allegheny County (including Pittsburgh), PA, offers a good example of an intermediate sanctions program centered around accountability. CISP is a nonresidential supervision and treatment program that serves male repeat and drug offenders in four high-crime Allegheny County neighborhoods. The CISP approach emphasizes highly structured supervision and scheduling (including electronic monitoring), required school attendance followed by attendance at a neighborhood reporting center, drug and alcohol testing, intensive family involvement, tutoring, job skills training and employment services, and programming designed especially for African American males.

What is unique about CISP, however, is the extent to which it has managed to embed itself in some of the neighborhoods in which it operates. By locating its reporting centers in the neighborhoods whose delinquent sons it serves; by staffing the centers with potential role models from those same neighborhoods; by making a much-needed contribution to those neighborhoods in the form of useful, reliable, routine community service work; and perhaps most of all by involving neighborhood development groups, businesses, churches, and other indigenous leaders and institutions in directing and devising that work, the program has

succeeded in positioning its reporting centers as valuable local resources.

As part of their participation in CISP, young offenders work within their own neighborhoods, painting homes, registering voters, recycling telephone books, tutoring children, cleaning vacant lots, removing graffiti, and shoveling snow for businesses and churches—not occasionally but regularly and not for the sake of symbolism or in token of remorse, but because it is work that needs to be done. The intangible benefits of this approach are significant, enabling young offenders to discharge their obligations to the community while in turn encouraging the community to value and accept responsibility for offenders.

Like many sanctions programs in recent years, CISP has also incorporated victim awareness and restitution elements into its program. (One creative restitution initiative involving CISP is described below under “A System of Accountability-Based Sanctions: The Allegheny County Experience.”) Unfortunately, many jurisdictions have discovered that, while it is easy to order an indigent or unemployable offender to pay restitution, it is much harder to create a practical structure under which restitution actually happens on something other than a sporadic basis.

The statewide Utah Juvenile Court has developed a practical solution to this problem in the form of a work restitution fund. Established by State law in 1979, the fund—which is underwritten by juvenile court fines—allows juveniles who are otherwise unable to pay restitution to earn money by doing public service work. Communities can arrange service projects that suit their individual needs—bus cleaning, graffiti removal, library work, park clearing, small-scale construction, and so on—with projects sponsored by

both the public and private sectors. The offenders’ earnings are paid directly from the fund to the victims.

Not surprisingly, restitution has become an increasingly common and effective sanction for juvenile offenders in Utah. In 1988, nearly a third of all petitioned delinquency cases resulted in some form of restitution arrangement. Restitution paid to victims of juvenile crime in Utah rose from less than \$250,000 in 1980 to more than \$550,000 in 1990, and by the end of that period, it is estimated that as much as two-thirds of the restitution ordered by the Utah Juvenile Court was being collected and returned to victims (The Administrative Office of the Courts, 1991).

Another form of an accountability-promoting work component that is suitable for some offenders at the intermediate and entry levels is surrogate victim service—that is, service rendered to a class of victims rather than to the offender’s own victim. This interesting variation combines the flexibility and other administrative virtues of community service sanctioning with some of the teaching and healing potential of a victim restitution sanction. For example, in Dakota County, MN, near Minneapolis-St. Paul, Crime Repair Crews composed of low-risk offenders will repair property damage caused by crime within 48 hours of receiving a call from a victim or victim’s advocate. Local police and sheriffs responding to complaints of criminal property damage—for example, broken windows, graffiti, or damage from vandalism—leave Crime Repair Crew cards with victims. If they choose to call the number on the card, the victims get prompt service at no cost. Offenders get a chance not only to see first hand the aftermath of a crime, but to do something about it.

## Secure Corrections

Secure corrections programs are for the small minority of serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders who threaten the public safety and can be neither effectively treated nor held fully accountable without a period of incarceration. While secure corrections traditionally meant large, centralized, congregate-care “training schools” with few real services for young offenders and no links with their home communities, expert consensus now strongly favors smaller secure facilities that provide intensive counseling, education, and training and that are not so remote as to rule out family contact and gradual community reintegration (Wilson and Howell, 1993).

Although secure placements limit some options for promoting accountability among juvenile offenders—particularly those that involve service to and interaction with the community—a number of other creative possibilities remain. Impact of Crime on Victims, a California Youth Authority (CYA) program for its wards, is an innovative systemwide attempt to cultivate a sense of personal accountability, victim awareness, and empathy among incarcerated offenders. Established in 1984, the program now combines an educational curriculum—35 to 60 hours of experiential learning over 6 to 12 weeks, conducted by specially trained CYA instructors—with in-person presentations from crime victims and victims’ advocates.

Thousands of CYA wards have completed the course. The classroom component consists of readings, audiovisual materials, and interactive teaching strategies. It covers a number of crime-specific topics, beginning with property crime and progressing through domestic violence, crimes against the elderly, child abuse, sexual assault, assault, robbery, drunk driving, drug dealing, and gang violence before concluding with homicide (Lowe, 1996).

In-person visits from crime victims, survivors, and victims’ advocates are frequently vivid and emotional scenes. In the words of one guest panelist, whose daughter and grandson were brutally murdered by a former CYA ward, “I have the feeling that those who have heard my message will remember it” (O’Hara, 1996). In fact, one study concluded that the program has a positive impact on participants’ empathy for victims (Pedersen, 1996). A limited study of the Victims Awareness program operated by the Washington State Department of Corrections, which was modeled on the CYA program, indicated that those who had completed the program were less likely to recidivate and more likely to fulfill restitution obligations than those who had not (Stutz, 1994).

It should be noted that the Impact of Crime on Victims program is overseen by CYA’s highly active Victim Services Division, which also performs a number of other services essential to the operation of a victim-sensitive accountability-based juvenile justice system—including direct victim notification, education, and outreach; restitution collection and disbursement; and maintenance of a centralized database to track confidential victim information.

Opportunities to hold even the most serious and violent offenders accountable should not be neglected. The Capital Offender Program at the Texas Youth Commission’s Giddings State Home and School works exclusively with juvenile murderers, assigning them to 16 weeks of twice-weekly, 3-hour group psychotherapy and role-playing sessions designed in part to bring home to them the enormity of their responsibility. Part of the treatment involves offenders imaginatively reenacting their crimes, but in the role of their victims. They are even left alone in a darkened room to

simulate their victims’ deaths. The program, which has been in operation for 10 years, has been found to reduce the likelihood of rearrest for a violent offense within a year of release by 53 percent and to have a statistically significant impact on violence-related rearrest for at least 3 years following release (Stone, 1996).

## A System of Accountability-Based Sanctions: The Allegheny County Experience

Although it may be supported by academic research and guided by insights derived from small-scale pilot and demonstration programs, accountability reform under the JAIBG program will take place, if at all, only in real-world juvenile court systems—places where maneuvering room is limited, inertia is strong, and compromise unavoidable. For that reason, the recent experience of Allegheny County (Pittsburgh), PA, may be all the more instructive to juvenile justice professionals. Allegheny County was competitively selected by OJJDP to receive an Accountability-Based Community (ABC) Intervention Program grant in 1993. What followed was a 3-year effort to develop workable, cost-effective accountability-based sanctions out of the materials presented by a busy, well-established urban court system. A brief sketch of the methods, successes, and failures of the County’s ABC Project can inform other jurisdictions embarking on system accountability reform.<sup>1</sup>

### System assessment

Any large-scale effort to reorient a local juvenile justice system in the direction of accountability must be

<sup>1</sup> For more information, see Patrick Griffin’s 1999 article, *Establishing a Continuum of Accountability-Based Sanctions for Juveniles: Allegheny County’s Experience*, a copy of which is available from the National Center for Juvenile Justice at 412-227-6950.

preceded by a thorough, candid, and wide-open system assessment. Much of the first year of the ABC Project was devoted to just such an assessment of Allegheny County's juvenile court services. Conducted by the National Center for Juvenile Justice, in periodic consultation with an ABC Task Force consisting of 45 influential community leaders, the assessment went far beyond examining previously available information, generating copious amounts of new data from surveys, interviews, and followups with hundreds of individuals inside and outside the court system. In the process, the assessment not only generated the preliminary information needed to guide reform, it helped to build top-to-bottom systemwide consensus for and commitment to that reform.

### **Planning and development**

A planning subcommittee of the ABC Task Force then identified 15 program- and system-enhancement tasks for the second year of the project. Most were highly specific, focusing on localized gaps in the available continuum of sanctions, as measured against an ideal accountability-based system. Each such gap was addressed by a small task group consisting of selected juvenile probation officers, supervisors, and members of the ABC Task Force, who worked on developing a response over the course of the year. To accomplish the most basic of the tasks conceived by the planning subcommittee—to articulate a new mission for juvenile court services, based on accountability principles—the ABC Project convened a strategic planning retreat, in which a top-to-bottom cross-section of court services staff members met to reexamine their beliefs about their role in the community, their ultimate objectives,

and the strategies they should use to achieve them.

### **Expansion and enhancement of the continuum**

The planning and development activities undertaken in the second year of the ABC Project bore fruit during the third year in a variety of new intervention programs, expansions or enhancements of existing intervention programs, and formal revisions of policies and procedures that could alter the trajectory of the system for years to come. Among the significant and lasting accomplishments of the ABC Project in Allegheny County are the following:

**Creating opportunities for accountability.** Rather than simply demanding accountability, the ABC Project sought to enable it by putting together the Bloomfield-Garfield Collaborative Internship Program. Under the program, a working partnership between the community-based intensive probation program CISP and a neighboring community development group, selected probationers are given the opportunity to work for construction contractors engaged in remodeling and renovating housing in the neighborhood. Prospective interns sign 3- to 6-month contracts undertaking not only to pay restitution while in the program, but to continue their schooling and to keep themselves drug- and alcohol-free at the same time. In return for their physical work—literally restoring the community they have offended—they receive job mentoring, real-life work experience and, in some cases, permanent employment, and other tangible help.

A number of neighborhood institutions contribute services to the program—a local drug and alcohol program does the drug testing; a bank provides interns with checking

and savings accounts, financial guidance, and workshops; and health centers, a neighborhood job center, local police, the area high school, a paint supplier, and a hardware chain all participate. In this way, the program helps to create a web of local accountability, in which the obligations of juvenile offenders are interlaced with and supported by matching community responsibilities. The result is not just more productive and connected ex-delinquents, but more community ownership of local delinquency problems.

**Boosting the accountability element in probation.** As a result of the ABC Project, Allegheny County has taken two concrete steps to boost the accountability content of the probation sanction. First, it significantly expanded its school-based probation program, from 9 to 21 local schools. The program places probation officers in permanent offices in the county's schools, so they see their charges every day and can easily monitor progress in school, peer relationships, day-to-day conduct and attitudes, pressures, and so forth. Because they work so closely with their probationers, both literally and figuratively, school-based probation officers have more opportunities to convey the message of accountability and to hold their probationers to it.

No probation system can be said to be accountability based, however, without the capacity to impose swift, sure, nontrivial, attention-getting consequences for probation violations. As a direct result of urgent ABC Project recommendations, Allegheny County established a special 22-bed probation sanctions unit for juveniles, using a residential facility previously devoted to other purposes. The decision allows local juvenile court judges to impose structured residential placements



of up to 60 days on probation violators. This was a critically needed midlevel sanctioning option and one that sends a strong message to juveniles regarding the seriousness of their probation obligations.

**Adapting and remodeling existing programs.** ABC Project planners attempted to maximize the impact of the funds available by filling unmet needs with existing programs wherever possible. A prime example of this approach involved aftercare, which assessors had identified as a critically neglected area of the continuum in Allegheny County. Experts consulted by the aftercare task group pointed to several existing Allegheny County programs that could easily be expanded to provide aftercare services—notably CISP, the neighborhood-based intensive probation program; Allegheny Academy, a private day treatment program; and several others that were capable of providing structure to juveniles released from more secure commitments. Now all juveniles released to the county from institutions receive a minimum of 90 days of aftercare supervision as a matter of course—with no substantial new hiring, facility, or other program startup costs incurred.

**Fostering community accountability.** The ABC Project tried in other ways to recruit local community institutions into the effort to reclaim young offenders, with substantial results in the form of several new community-based intervention programs. For example, the ABC Project sponsored a providers forum attended by 70 community service representatives. One of the problems aired at the forum was the disproportionate confinement and court-involvement of African American juveniles in Allegheny County. After the forum, a faith-based African American community organization came forward

with the idea for Issachar House, a community-run, community-staffed secure group home for teenage African American males just starting on the road to delinquency.

Another program that owes its startup to ABC Project funding is Cycle Breakers, an intensive intervention and mentoring program run by a community-based social service agency under contract with the juvenile court. Cycle Breakers attempts to reduce recidivism among adolescent males returning to the community from institutions. The ABC Project was also instrumental in the creation of two community-based intervention programs for female juvenile offenders.

Although the ABC Project made significant progress, it did not by any means succeed in creating a model accountability-based system in Allegheny County. For instance, ambitious efforts to create a state-of-the-art management information system for Allegheny County eventually foundered. Consequently, a crucial piece of the accountability puzzle—the ability to track juveniles through the system, share up-to-date information among various agencies, and monitor program costs and outcomes—is still missing. Nevertheless, the project left an impressive record of achievement and serves as an instructive example for system reformers in other jurisdictions.

## Conclusion

In creating funding incentives to promote accountability in juvenile justice under the JAIBG program, Congress offered State and local governments a general direction rather than a roadmap, a central organizing principle rather than a set of specific instructions to be followed always and everywhere. The idea was not to replicate a one-size-fits-all program

all over the country, but to provide communities with resources and flexibility to meet their own special needs. Nevertheless, from the structure of the legislation as a whole—not only the various “purpose areas” for which funding is authorized, but the eligibility requirements for program participation as well—the outlines of the reformed juvenile justice system to which Congress is pointing are unmistakable.

Ideally, all of these interrelated changes to be accomplished in the various program purpose areas, important as they are in and of themselves, will add up to something more—something like a culture of accountability: in which the young shoulder responsibility for their wrongs, but communities embrace responsibility for their young; in which victims and the endangered public feel that the juvenile courts are fundamentally fair, attentive to their legitimate needs, and answerable for their safety; and in which the individuals and institutions that make up the juvenile justice system never lose sight of their accountability to the public at large.

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## For Further Information

### ABC Project

National Center for Juvenile Justice  
710 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219  
412-227-6950

**Bethesda Day Treatment Center**  
P.O. Box 210  
W. Milton, PA 17886  
570-568-1131

### Capital Offender Program

Texas Youth Commission  
Giddings State Home and School  
P.O. Box 6000  
Giddings, TX 78942  
409-542-3686

### Community Intensive Supervision Project

519 Penn Avenue, Second Floor  
Pittsburgh, PA 15221  
412-243-6886

### CYA Impact of Crime on Victims Program

California Youth Authority  
Office of Prevention and Victims Services  
4241 Williamsborough Drive, Suite 214  
Sacramento, CA 95823  
916-262-1392

### Dakota County's Crime Repair Crews

Dakota County Community Corrections  
Judicial Center  
1560 West Highway 55  
Hastings, MN 55033  
612-438-8288

### OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention  
State Relations and Assistance Division  
810 Seventh Street NW.  
Washington, DC 20531  
202-307-5921

### Utah's Juvenile Restitution Program

Administrative Office of the Courts  
230 South 500 East  
Salt Lake City, UT 84102  
801-578-3800

### Victim-Offender Mediation Program

Travis County Juvenile Court  
2515 South Congress Avenue  
Austin, TX 78704  
512-448-7000

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