



## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

A product of the Status Offense Reform Center (SORC), Notes from the Field is a series profiling jurisdictions that have undertaken status offense system change.

### *What is a status offense?*

Status offenses are behaviors that are prohibited under law only because of an individual's status as a minor, including running away from home, skipping school, violating a curfew, drinking under age, and acting "incorrigibly." They are problematic, but noncriminal in nature.

### *What is SORC?*

SORC provides policymakers and practitioners with tools and information to create effective, community-based responses for keeping young people who engage in noncriminal behavior out of the juvenile justice system. The Center is a project of the Vera Institute of Justice and is supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation's *Models for Change* Resource Center Partnership.

## Illinois

POPULATION: 12,882,135

YOUTH POPULATION: 3,065,948

MAIN COMMUNITY MAKEUP: Urban/Suburban/Rural

### The Call to Action

Illinois began working to reform its status offense system during the late 1970s, in large part as a response to the 1974 passage of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJJPA). At that time, there was no state policy governing police response to youth alleged of status offenses. As such, in many localities across the state police officers would refer youth alleged of status offense behaviors to court rather than to service providers. As a result, these non-delinquent youth quickly became involved with the juvenile justice system. The introduction of the JJJPA, however, provided the state with an opportunity to rethink the role of juvenile courts in responding to status offenses.

### The Change Process

Upon passage of the JJJPA, there was a debate in Illinois over who was best suited to respond to youth alleged of status offenses. On one side were youth service organizations, contending that these youth and their families ought to receive services within their communities and not be subject to court appearances and possible detention. On the other side were some parents who welcomed the disciplinary role of the juvenile courts and law enforcement officers who viewed detention as a safety measure. As a result of this debate, the reform process started with a pilot program to test what a community-based approach would look like.

This pilot program was authorized by the governor's office in 1976 after the Youth Network Council brought then-Governor Thompson's attention to the harmful consequences of juvenile justice institutions on youth and their families. Thompson charged the Illinois Law Enforcement Commission to work with youth service agencies to establish a community-based response to status offenses, which included a 24/7 immediate crisis response system as well as support services intended to divert youth alleged of status offenses from court. The pilot program was well-received by youth, families, and law enforcement officials alike.

In 1980, Governor Thompson organized a statewide Task Force on Special Services to Troubled Youth charged with recommending both policy and practice reforms. Their recommendations yielded two key legislative changes. First, the Juvenile Court Act was amended,

redefining status offenders as Minors Requiring Authoritative Intervention and redirecting them to the Comprehensive Community-Based Youth Services (CCBYS) system, a statewide network of 33 community-based youth service providers modeled after the pilot program, which was authorized and funded under the Children and Family Services Act.

### **The Model**

The CCBYS system, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (DHS), works with youth between the ages of 11 and 17 who are at moderate to high risk of becoming involved in the child welfare and/or juvenile justice systems with the ultimate goal of keeping them within their communities and with their families. DHS contracts with multiple service providers across the state to provide a 24-hour crisis intervention response system and 24-hour temporary housing services, among other services. When these local agencies receive referrals the CCBYS system, they are required to respond within 15 minutes either by phone or in person. It is important to note that any concerned adult can make a direct referral to CCBYS.

In 2013, nearly half of all referrals to the CCBYS program came through local law enforcement, including municipal or county police and sheriff's departments, and probation; 16 percent were referred by schools and afterschool programs; and 26 percent were referred by family members or the youth themselves.

Upon receiving a referral, CCBYS agencies conduct an assessment using the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) and develop a case plan with the youth and his or her family that includes desired outcomes and goals. This plan is then signed by the youth, members of his or her immediate family, and the case worker. The local agency then manages the case and offers individualized services directly or by referral until the youth has successfully completed his or her plan. When referrals to outside providers are made, the agency still maintains responsibility over the youth's progress. CCBYS expects cases to be completed within 60 to 90 days of their intake as short-term service provision has been found to be the most effective intervention for status offenders. Reasons for extending the duration of any case beyond 90 days must be documented. Three months after program completion, the CCBYS agency contacts the youth to determine whether his or her circumstances are still stable, and the agency will re-open the case if additional services are required.

## Monitoring Progress and Ensuring Success

DHS sets the program standards with which all CCBYS providers must comply. Referred youth must be entered into the state's database within 72 hours of initial contact, and the YASI assessment must be administered to determine whether a youth is moderate- to high-risk and therefore eligible for services. This approach helps to guarantee that agencies do not focus their services on low-risk youth. Within 15 days of assessment completion, agencies are required to start a case plan. A final YASI assessment must be completed 60 to 90 days after a youth is enrolled in the program to gauge the effectiveness of service provision and determine whether the youth's risk level has decreased as a result of services. These standards, and careful tracking of them, provide for uniformity throughout the system and assure agencies that they are working with the appropriate population for an appropriate length of time. To ensure that young people and their families are receiving the best available services, DHS rebids CCBYS contracts every three to five years. As a result of this rebidding process, further consolidation of organizations has occurred and subcontracting has become more common, which means that the state does not have to monitor as many smaller agencies.

## Outcomes

In 2013, CCBYS programs served nearly 7,000 youth, nearly half of whom reside in Chicago and Cook County. The CCBYS system has proven successful and cost-effective. Notable outcomes include:

- Forty-eight percent of youth were referred by law enforcement organizations, while sixteen percent were referred by educational institutions.
- Eighty-eight percent of youth involved with the CCBYS system either reunite with their families or enter an alternative long-term living arrangement that has been approved by the family.
- More than three-quarters of youth served by this system achieve the goals laid out in their individualized case plans, while fewer than 5 percent become wards of the state or get moved to secure confinement.
- The decreased use of the court system has led to cost savings for the state. For example, the annual cost per youth in Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) residential placement in 2013 was \$100,000, and many of these youth remain in placement for several years. Additionally, it costs \$4,200 to house a young person in an Illinois detention center for only two weeks. Meanwhile, the annual cost for youth in CCBYS services was only \$1,878 in 2013.

## Reflections

*Effective change occurs in stages:* Illinois's successful reform of its status offense system was in large part due to the government's multi-stage approach. The first step in this process consisted of a localized pilot program that espoused a community-based response to status offenses. When this approach was well-received by stakeholders, there was increased buy-in for a statewide and legislatively mandated community-based system.

*Identifying the appropriate youth population requiring services is necessary:* CCBYS agencies take advantage of YASI, an assessment tool that determines the risk level of specific youth, at multiple steps during the service provision process. In this way, agencies ensure that they continuously work primarily with moderate- to high-risk youth who are most in need of their services. In addition, agencies can keep track of which interventions were most successful and effective in particular situations and how participants' risk levels changed as a result.

## Related Resources

Check out the following resources related to Illinois's status offense system reform at <http://www.statusoffensereform.org/library>:

- FY15 Comprehensive Community-Based Youth Services Program Standards
- CCBYS Logic Model
- CCBYS Fact Sheet
- CCBYS Brief
- List of all CCBYS providers in the state
- Maps of the CCBYS provider communities