

The NILE Report

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From the President's Desk

This issue of the NILE Report is focused on our youth. One of the most heartening examples of youth habilitation is occurring in Missouri under the guidance of the Missouri Division of Youth Services. They take what should not have to be called *groundbreaking steps* toward youthful offenders in a time when we are calling for harsher treatment and warehousing of children. But, yes, they emptied their 2,500 offender detention center and developed a protocol in dormitory style living that includes education and job training— that's groundbreaking. Take time to read Marian Wright Edleman's story on the success of Missouri's approach to juvenile justice.

We often opine on how children become involved in criminal activity, and over the years some researchers have hypothesized that there is a direct correlation between childhood maltreatment and delinquency. NILE conducted the first study in a Mid-south county to test this hypothesis. The conclusion of the Pathways study concluded that indeed there is a significant relationship between maltreatment and delinquency. There are still many questions to answer, particularly about those youth who committed delinquent acts but had no history of maltreatment. Part I of this NILE Report series introduces some of the statistical observations and as well as qualitative analyses from focus groups beginning with the professionals who come in contact with young people on a regular basis.

And lastly, *Mothers of the NILE* hosted their first major Annual "Cultivating a Just Society for Our Youth" Dinner. The guest speakers from the Children's Defense Fund and Highlander Center focused on the "Cradle to Prison Pipeline" and generated discussion among the surprised guests who enthusiastically joined in on the subject. The guests were urged to put their knowledge of the problems and solutions into action. Let us hear from you if you know of programs that work in reducing maltreatment and juvenile crime.

Yours "*In Pursuit of Justice*"
Veronica F. Coleman-Davis



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MISSOURI'S HUMANE AND SENSIBLE APPROACH TO JUVENILE JUSTICE*

Marian Wright Edelman

At younger and younger ages, children and teens who go through the juvenile justice systems of many states are condemned to long terms at large youth detention centers and adult prisons only to languish in cells surrounded by thick walls and razor wire. Too often they are locked down for long periods of the day with no real opportunities for rehabilitation, treatment or education. Many youth become more hardened criminals while incarcerated, and at the end of their sentences they are released into communities that don't have adequate resources to reintegrate them. It is a disgrace that what I've just described is largely what passes for juvenile justice in many states and municipalities throughout our nation. But there is a better way.

Mark D. Steward, Founder and Director of the Missouri Youth Services Institute, and his colleague, Pili Robinson, are lights on the horizon of urgently needed nationwide juvenile justice system reform. Mark previously served as Director of the Missouri Division of Youth Services for over 17 years until retiring in July 2005 after 35 years of service in this field.

His approach to youth development is a sharp departure from most conventional methods of incarceration, instead using a rehabilitative and therapeutic youth program. Missouri's juvenile recidivism rate, with only eight percent of those incarcerated coming back into juvenile custody and 8 percent going into Missouri's prisons, has been one of the best success stories in the country.

As a result of the state applying new thinking to its approach to juvenile justice and over-

hauling its entire system, Missouri has been copied by other jurisdictions for its success in rerouting troubled, adjudicated children and teens onto successful life paths. First it eliminated its huge, rural detention facility that warehoused 2,500 young people. In its place, Missouri established 33 residential facilities and 11 day treatment centers in five regions. These aren't just smaller prisons; they are designed to provide a dormitory atmosphere for groups of no more than 12 children and teens. Under this system, no one is more than two hours away from their home and community services.

The key to Missouri's success is its focus on the development of each individual child or youth in a positive environment. We were all impressed when Pili Robinson described their methods at the Children's Defense Fund's National Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Summit in September 2007. When you walk into a Missouri juvenile detention facility, there are no cuffs or shackles, no cells, no bars; there are no isolation rooms and no correction officers.

What you find instead are youth counselors and team leaders in a dorm-like environment with bunk beds, pillows, couches and carpets, and young people wearing their own clothes, explained Robinson. "We allow kids to be themselves and take them back to being kids," he said, noting that many children are forced by their harsh environments to grow up too fast.

Education and job training are essential components of the program. There are two facilities located on the campuses of women's

Missouri— continued on p.6

Pathways From Maltreatment to Delinquency

Part I

(A NILE Study)

Families involved in dependency and neglect cases are thought to provide a looking glass into the future of children who might engage in delinquent behavior. In a first of its kind study in the Mid-South, researchers posed the hypothesis that “there is a direct correlation between maltreatment and delinquency”.

Data were collected by randomly sampling juvenile court dependency & neglect and delinquency records. The researchers were able to trace the development of children through their 18th birthdays. In the Dependency group, data were collected prospectively from the child’s first maltreatment complaint. The Delinquency group, while not a control group, provided a retrospective look at a child’s history in order to determine if maltreatment was present as a risk factor.

The study looked at multiple factors, such as age, gender, race, family structure and size, number of complaints, number of changes in placement, type of placement, and nature of delinquency charges (from low severity to high severity) in order to determine if there was a significant relationship between childhood maltreatment and delinquency.

Focus Groups: The Professionals

Focus groups were drawn from 8 professions that regularly come into contact with young people. They were: Public School Employees (teachers and guidance counselors), Juvenile Court Child Protective Service Workers, Juvenile Court Auxiliary Probation Officers, Mental Health, Law Enforcement Officers, Social Workers and Advocates (Administrators), Case Workers/Social Work-

ers (frontline), and Medical doctors.

There were common themes expressed among these groups as they considered the risk and protective factors leading to delinquent behavior. Those themes can be summarized as parent focused, child focused, institution focused and systemic focus.

Part I of our series will provide parent focused issues from the professionals perspectives and a general discussion of the overall statistical findings.

Parenting

Poor parenting skills were major factors noted by all professionals in discussions of child development and delinquent conduct. The second major factor focused upon the pathogenic problems, which includes drug/alcohol abuse, and mental health problems. Each group pointed out that the inability of the parent to provide a family structure, and discipline was a major risk factor for delinquency.

Some of the specific problems included the lack of supervision, transient (nomadic) housing patterns, no set time to eat, go to bed, do homework, go to school and for many the belief that all you have to do is clothe and feed your child in order to be a good parent. The lack of parental bonding and involvement in the child’s life expresses itself when child gravitates toward gangs, or shares feelings with teachers and other relative strangers in looking for love and acceptance. Some children exhibit hostility or act out in school and other inappropriate ways while some hide their anger.

Drug abuse by parents creates a vicious cycle as the quest for drugs leads to neglect, no financial resources for necessities, ultimate bitterness of the children subjected to the cycle.

If the child is difficult because of biogenetic issues such as hyperactivity, mental retardation, or other learning disability, persons with limited parenting skills are severely challenged. Some parents are afraid of their children, and some get fed up with their kids and take them to juvenile court for help. This is true even for two parent families, especially when health insurance is exhausted.

Many of the at-risk families have no father in the home or a constantly changing father figure, as in the case of mother having children with multiple men. Too often, the child's interest and needs are secondary to the parents and the child comes to believe he is the problem. One example given was that of the mother who won't allow the child to visit his father because he has a girlfriend and in the reverse the father who withholds financial support because the mother won't let him visit with his child. Domestic violence and divorced relationships present situations that parents handle poorly. Their lack of control presents poor role modeling that ultimately leave the child angry, feeling insecure, unsafe and likely to repeat those behaviors in adulthood.

The focus groups recommended parent education and training but, as some pointed out, it is unreasonable to expect the current short term programs to change 20 years of bad habits. Other suggestions included home-based intervention, drug addiction treatment, employment for parents, and utilizing schools for after school programs and mentors for parents.

Statistical Analyses:

The study applied standard statistical analyses, including regression analyses to determine the relationships among differing types of maltreatment, their frequency, duration and severity in relation to the types of delinquencies committed, if any.

Statistical analyses showed that maltreatment matters and that although the majority of children who are maltreated do not become delinquent, there is a statistically significant relationship between maltreatment and delinquency. In both the Dependency and Delinquency samples, the highest rates of offending occurred in Low Severity category offenses. Regression analysis predicted that Physical Abuse was the most significant predictor for Low Severity, High Severity and Total delinquency offenses across all models. Results also indicated that children maltreated before age 12 exhibited higher rates of total

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Table 16- Correlations

		Total Dependency Neglect Complaints	Total Delinquent Charges	Total Status Offenses	Total Traffic Offenses
Total Dependency Neglect Complaints	Pearson Correlation	1	.072*	.203**	.081**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.019	.000	.008
	N	1062	1062	1062	1062
Total Delinquent Charges	Pearson Correlation	.072*	1	.362**	.400**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.019	.	.000	.000
	N	1062	1062	1062	1062
Total Status Offenses	Pearson Correlation	.203**	.362**	1	.298**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	1062	1062	1062	1062
Total Traffic Offenses	Pearson Correlation	.081**	.400**	.298**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.000	.000	.
	N	1062	1062	1062	1062

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results in the Table to the right show that there is a relationship between total dependency complaints and total delinquency charges (r=.072). The strongest relationships, however, occur between status offending (runaway, habitual disobedience, truancy) and dependency and neglect.

Missouri— continued from p.3

colleges for adjudicated girls who go to a residential program where they receive full-time mentoring. While attending high school, they slowly transition directly into college life. Instead of being locked down and locked in, the youth throughout the system participate in community service projects at nursing homes and food banks and take field trips to places like Washington, D.C., and Boston. They sponsor Career Days, Multi-Culture Festivals and their own Olympics.

Much of the rehabilitation involves working through youth peer groups and does away with the mode of adults preaching down to them. The youth are taught leadership skills and how to facilitate group sessions. Staff members are trained to facilitate teams of 12 and are prepared to meet the needs of each youth, making referrals to family therapy and substance abuse counseling generally unnecessary.

The Missouri Division of Youth Services also has created a seamless case management system so that once a youth is adjudicated, one case worker follows him and his family throughout his entire stay in the system facilitating the eventual reentry of the youth into his community. Significantly, this system comes with a considerable cost savings. The annual cost for detaining a youth in Missouri is less than half of what other states pay.

We should stop spending a fortune on large traditional, non-therapeutic, correctional facilities and then releasing youth back into our communities with little done to address their rehabilitation, treatment and education needs. It makes infinitely more sense to support juvenile rehabilitation programs like the Missouri Division of Youth Services, which have high rates of success turning troubled children into productive citizens. We hope that more states and municipalities get that message soon.

*Article from www.childrensdefense.org/cradletoprison
Learn more about CDF's Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign at: http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/R?i=3Dp4n7IW0M1GyE_fx9Q8OQ.

Give children a jump start
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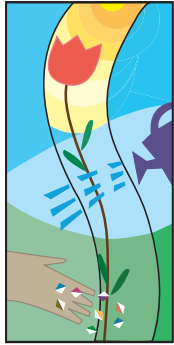
Pathways-continued from p5

delinquency and were more likely to engage in High Severity delinquency. The statistical analyses for the Delinquency group showed that those who were not maltreated had higher rates of offending than those who were maltreated. Nonetheless, there was a significant relationship between the incidence of maltreatment and commission of Low Severity delinquent offenses.

Some issues requiring further study include: Need to understand the factors involved in delinquent offending among those children who had no official record of maltreatment. Without control groups, the researchers were unable to test the racial, economic, family structure, and agency court referrals against the sampled cohorts.

While the eight focus groups of professionals provided a rich context and support for the quantitative data, additional work can be done with the focus group material collected including hosting future focus group discussions. Part 2 in the series will cover the thoughts of incarcerated youth and parents of incarcerated youth on the causes of delinquency. ■

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Mothers of the NILE

Mother's Day Dinner Leaves the Community Full of Hope

By Tracy S. Gailes

It wasn't the perfectly seasoned chicken, the fluffy rice dishes, the warm rolls topped with butter, or the moist desserts that made the *Mothers of the NILE* Mother's Day Dinner a success, but the powerful discussion and the feeling of optimism that followed. Lissa McLeod, an organizer from the Children's Defense Fund and Elandria Williams from the Highlander Center delivered a unique, engaging, enlightening presentation. The name of their talk was *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*®, an initiative of the Children's Defense Fund.

After hearing the shocking disparities of incarceration among races, the crowd of over 100 people was prompted to join in with their perspectives and ideas on the subject. The audience willingly participated in this unexpected and captivating forum on how and why our children are caught in the pipeline to prison. Some of the causal issues discussed were a lack of parental involvement and resources such as mental and medical healthcare or access to food and shelter. The role of religion was raised.

While all did not agree that the solution was grounded in Christianity, many more acknowledged spiritual perspectives should not be totally disregarded. An eloquent gentleman stood and asked that he speak about the roles of the Black males in the community. He

came from the "it takes a village to raise a child" perspective. He vocalized that there is a dire need for Black men to be involved in their children's lives as well as in the community.

Our responsibility to the child as a village is to alleviate the pressures that lie so heavily upon Black youth. Some youth are dealing with parental responsibilities. Some youth deal with violence in their schools and neighborhoods. Some deal with disrespect from teachers and/or peers. Some have nothing to look forward to. As a village or sound community, we must work together and devise feasible solutions and put them into action.

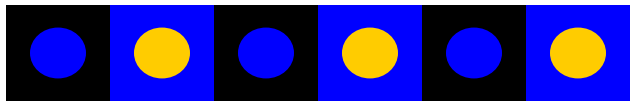
Education and training is so important. It is necessary to educate and train parents and children. It is necessary to educate the entire community so that we are knowledgeable about the problems we face and better equipped to devise solutions. Individuals who attended this community event had the rare opportunity to have fellowship with their neighbors and to hear the facts about our youth. We were able to enlighten and inspire one another. We were able to network so that we may continue our community work beyond the forum. Those who came witnessed a positive stride in the right direction.

Tracy S. Gailes is a Research Assistant at the National Institute for Law & Equity (NILE)



Mission:

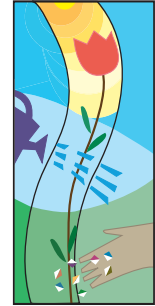
Through research, programming and advocacy, the NILE seeks to raise public understanding and discussion about the criminal justice system and policies that impact us as a society.



Look for *Mothers of the NILE* Back to **Basics Luncheon Series** to resume in October.

Sign up for notices by emailing us at MothersoftheNILE@aol.com

Mothers of the NILE



Our Vision: To cultivate a just society.

Our Mission: To reduce the numbers of children entering the Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems.

Our Core Values:

Knowledge

Self-directed life long learning which demands the acquisition of factual information that empowers us to action.

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Truthfulness with self and others allowing the best solutions to present themselves.

Respect

Accepting your uniqueness and that of others in a non-judgmental manner and recognizing all contributions to the group.

Courage

Drawing from the inner strength of your convictions and converting it into voiced directions or actions.

Advocacy

Supporting, speaking and/or acting on behalf of those that need support or cannot speak or act for themselves.

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