3-2000

The Community Assessment Center Concept

US Department of Justice

U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

OJJDP
John J. Wilson, Acting Administrator
March 2000
JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN

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Communities across the country are searching for more effective and efficient methods to identify and intervene with juveniles at risk of becoming tomorrow's serious, violent, and chronic offenders. There is a recognition not only that the juvenile justice system could better serve youth and families, but also that the system has many inefficiencies. Finding a solution to these systemic problems is difficult and complicated because serious violence and delinquency are often the result of more than one risk factor. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP's) Program of Research on the Causes and Correlates of Delinquency has demonstrated that delinquent youth often face multiple risk factors and that, as risk factors accumulate, higher levels of delinquency and other problem behaviors result (Browning and Loeber, 1999). Consequently, youth with these problems are often involved in several different systems (e.g., juvenile justice, mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment) that may not adequately communicate with one another. The Community Assessment Center (CAC) concept, which complements OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders (Wilson and Howell, 1993), addresses these problems by bringing together fragmented service delivery systems in a collaborative, timely, cost-efficient, and comprehensive manner.

The purpose of this Bulletin is to inform juvenile justice practitioners and other youth service providers about OJJDP's work in developing and demonstrating a CAC model and to increase awareness about some of the challenges associated with its implementation. OJJDP's CAC model has four key elements that, when implemented properly, have the potential to positively impact the lives of youth and divert them from the path of serious, violent, and chronic delinquency:

- **Single point of entry.** CAC's provide a 24-hour centralized point of intake and assessment for juveniles who have come or are likely to come into contact with the juvenile justice system.
- **Immediate and comprehensive assessments.** Juvenile justice practitioners and community-based youth service providers affiliated with the CAC make initial broad-based and, if necessary later, more indepth assessments of juveniles' circumstances and treatment needs.
- **Management information system (MIS).** Through the use of an MIS, CAC's manage and monitor youth, ensuring the provision of appropriate treatment and rehabilitation services and avoiding duplication of services.

From the Administrator

Juvenile offenders face a broad array of adverse risk factors, ranging from family disruption to negative peer influence. As the number of these risk factors increases, so does the probability of a youth's subsequent involvement in delinquency. Accordingly, we should not be surprised that those youth who are at greatest risk of becoming serious, violent, and chronic offenders are often involved with several youth-serving systems.

If we are to prevent a career path to criminality for juvenile offenders, we need to develop approaches that are designed to improve communication and collaboration and that lead to more integrated and effective cross-system services.

The Community Assessment Center (CAC) concept provides an opportunity to implement this type of approach in a cost-effective way as part of a community's comprehensive and strategic plan to prevent and control delinquency.

It is my hope that the information this Bulletin provides will help juvenile justice and other youth-serving professionals to understand how the CAC concept works and to consider the benefits its adoption might provide in their communities.

John J. Wilson
Acting Administrator

- **Integrated case management.** CAC staff use information from the assessment process and MIS to develop recommendations, facilitate access to services, conduct followups, and periodically reassess youth.

Risk Factors That May Increase the Likelihood of Delinquent Behavior

Many variables correlate with delinquency, and as risk factors increase so does the likelihood of delinquent behavior. Among these factors are:

- Birth trauma.
- Child abuse and neglect.
- Ineffective parental discipline.
- Family disruptions.
- Conduct disorder and hyperactivity.
- School failure.
- Learning disabilities.
- Negative peer influences.
- Limited employment opportunities.
- Inadequate housing.
- Residence in high-crime neighborhoods.

History

In July 1995, OJJDP convened a focus group composed of individuals from the juvenile justice field to review potential CAC programs in operation around the country. The participants explored the potential benefits and possible disadvantages of CAC's. Because Florida was one of the first States to develop assessment centers, that State's experience was a primary, though not exclusive, topic of discussion. While the focus group felt positively about the assessment center concept, they stressed caution on several key issues (discussed later in the Bulletin), including due process, "net widening" (i.e., inappropriately bringing more youth into the juvenile justice system), and overrepresentation of minorities. The focus group also concluded that too little was known at the time to determine the level and type of support communities would require to develop a successful CAC.

Following the focus group meeting, OJJDP issued *Community Assessment Centers: A Discussion of the Concept's Efficacy* (OJJDP, 1995), a concept paper identifying the key elements of this innovative approach for reaching youth in need of prevention and intervention services and for allocating, delivering, and monitoring these services. OJJDP also sponsored a factfinding report in January 1996 to continue the CAC program development process. This effort included a mail survey to approximately 300 juvenile justice and youth service contacts nationwide and extensive telephone networking. The factfinding process identified approximately 20 possible CAC programs, but only 9 programs operating at the time were found to exhibit several of the key elements of the OJJDP CAC model cited above (Cronin, 1996).

In fiscal year 1996, OJJDP announced a new initiative to explore the efficacy of the CAC concept. The CAC initiative is a demonstration effort aimed at implementing and evaluating OJJDP's CAC model. Four communities were selected to be part of the CAC demonstration effort. Denver, CO, and Lee County, FL, were chosen as "planning sites" to develop new CAC's, and Jefferson County, CO, and Orlando, FL, were selected as "enhancement sites" to improve their current assessment centers. The facilities in the two enhancement sites, called Juvenile Assessment Centers (JAC's), were not fully consistent with OJJDP's CAC model. The purpose of the grant was to assist these two centers to modify their operations to become more consistent with OJJDP's concept. As part of this initiative, a 2-year independent evaluation grant was awarded to the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD). In addition, the Florida Alcohol and Drug Abuse Association (FADAA) was selected to provide training and technical assistance to the four CAC grantees.

The Necessity of Planning

Planning is key to the development of any new initiative. The CAC program is no exception. If fully implemented, a CAC could result in significant changes to a community's juvenile justice system and service delivery system. Given the potential impact of this initiative and the numerous issues to consider, communities must engage in a communitywide planning process before implementing a CAC. The following examples provide some of the planning lessons learned by the organizers of the CAC's in Denver, CO, and Lee County, FL.

Planning Groups

As one of OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy sites, Lee County understands the important roles of prevention, early intervention, and graduated sanctions. In fact, the initial idea of implementing a CAC came from Lee County's Comprehensive Strategy planning group, which consists of a broad spectrum of representatives from local government, law enforcement, the judiciary, the State

Reasons To Develop an Assessment Center

The following reasons for developing an assessment center were cited by key leaders in the four demonstration sites. No single community faced all of these problems. This list presents many of the system deficiencies and crime issues that might prompt communities to implement OJJDP's CAC concept.

- Gaps in services.
- Lack of communication among agencies.
- Poor mental health services because of Medicaid cuts.
- Confusion about how the system works.
- Inadequate funding to serve the needs of juveniles and their families.
- Public concern for increased incidents of violent juvenile crime.
- Increases in the amount of time law enforcement spent on juvenile cases.
- Increases in violent juvenile crime in the late 1980's and early 1990's.

"In 1989 alone, I had more kids on my dockets for shooting people than I had the first 9 years I served on the bench all added together."

"The system is a big joke to kids. We messed it up. It's our turn now to try to clean it up."

Source: Interviews with key leaders of the four demonstration assessment centers conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency as part of its evaluation of OJJDP's CAC initiative.

attorney's and public defender's offices, child welfare and juvenile justice agencies, the community, and other service-providing organizations. As was the case in planning their Comprehensive Strategy activities, Lee County organizers found that information gathering is a critical step in planning a CAC. Information must be collected at both the national and State levels to learn about promising programs outside the local area. In addition, it is important to conduct a community evaluation to determine what programs (e.g., substance abuse, after-school, mentoring) are needed and appropriate for the community. Given some of the political struggles the Lee County planning group members faced over the funding and location of their CAC, they also stressed the critical role of the media in developing or hindering a community consensus for new programs. Planning groups must work with the media to ensure that community residents understand the potential programmatic benefits of a CAC. It is also important to address, early on, any concerns raised by community members.

Based on their experience with the collaborative effort of the Denver Juvenile Justice Integrated Treatment Network, Denver planners understood the importance of involving all the key justice system players. Denver's planning process used a Planning Design Team (PDT) composed of approximately 30 individuals from the multiple agencies/organizations involved with Denver's youth. The PDT included juvenile court judges, probation officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and community service providers. One interesting lesson from Denver's experience was that the PDT's consensus-based approach to decisionmaking enhanced the cohesiveness of decisionmakers. All participants present at a given PDT meeting had to agree with the decision at hand before they could proceed to the next agenda item. If consensus could not be reached, a subcommittee was usually assigned to resolve the issue, which would be voted on again at the next PDT meeting. Although it proved challenging at times, the consensus-based approach ensured that all the participants shared in the decisionmaking process.

Facilitators

A second method employed in both Denver and Lee County that proved to be extremely beneficial was the use of an outside facilitator to assist in the planning process. Specifically, facilitators helped to establish and, more important, enforce the planning group's rules. When there were deadlines to meet or tasks to accomplish, the facilitator helped ensure that the group remained on task. Denver planners also noted that using an outside, unbiased facilitator helped them confront some of the difficult issues that arose during planning. For example, the facilitator was able to raise issues of resource sharing more easily than could the members of agencies involved in the process.

The planning sites experienced many challenges when they began implementing the CAC plan. Lee County's greatest barrier was the political struggle in the community involving individuals who were concerned about the scope and the size of the planned CAC. It was also difficult to find a site for a new CAC facility that all parties would approve. However, these barriers were overcome and Lee County's permanent CAC facility is scheduled to open by late 2000. Although Denver CAC organizers had originally intended to begin operations in January 1999, they opened their doors in May 1999. Denver CAC program managers found that many activities, such as developing their own assessment instruments, hiring staff, and training staff across multiple disciplines, took much longer than anticipated and contributed to the delay in opening their site.

The planning process is an essential element of successful program implementation, especially for programs aimed at systems change. Although the process can be long and arduous, program managers

Guiding Principles of OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders

The Community Assessment Center concept builds on the principles outlined in OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders. These principles were established to guide communities' efforts to prevent delinquent conduct and reduce juvenile involvement in serious, violent, and chronic delinquency:

- **Strengthen the family** in its primary responsibility to instill moral values and provide guidance and support to children.
- **Support core social institutions** such as schools, religious institutions, and community organizations in their efforts to develop capable, mature, and responsible youth. A nurturing community environment requires that core social institutions be actively involved in the lives of youth. Community organizations include public and private youth-serving agencies, neighborhood groups, and business and commercial organizations providing youth with employment, training, and other meaningful economic opportunities.
- **Promote delinquency prevention** as the most cost-effective approach to dealing with juvenile delinquency. When children engage in "acting out" behavior such as status offenses, the family and community, in concert with child welfare agencies, must respond with appropriate treatment and support services. Communities must take the lead in designing and building comprehensive prevention approaches that address known risk factors and target youth at risk of delinquency.
- **Intervene immediately and effectively when delinquent behavior occurs** to successfully prevent delinquent offenders from becoming chronic offenders or committing progressively more serious and violent crimes. Initial intervention efforts, under an umbrella of system components (police, intake, and probation), should be centered in the family and other core institutions. Practitioners should ensure that an appropriate response occurs and act quickly and firmly if the need for formal system adjudication and sanctions is demonstrated.
- **Establish a system of graduated sanctions** that holds each juvenile offender accountable, protects public safety, and provides programs and services that meet identified treatment needs.
- **Identify and control the small group of serious, violent, and chronic juvenile offenders** who have committed felony offenses or who have failed to respond to intervention and nonsecure community-based treatment and rehabilitation services.

Goals of an Assessment Center

The following list is a compilation of the goals cited by key leaders in the four demonstration sites. Although the stated goals of each assessment center reflected the particular circumstances of its community and no single assessment center cited all of these goals, this list from the community leaders highlights assessment center objectives in the areas of law enforcement, services and treatment, and case processing.

- Reduce law enforcement time devoted to juveniles.
- Create a central booking and receiving facility specifically for juvenile offenders.
- Collect good clear information about juveniles' needs.
- Accelerate juveniles' access to treatment.
- Pool resources from different agencies.
- Provide referrals to parents and children.
- Develop a facility to hold dependency juveniles awaiting placement.
- Expedite court proceedings by providing better information to defense attorneys and prosecutors.
- Provide early intervention services for troubled juveniles.
- Develop a single point of entry for assessing and referring juveniles.
- Facilitate cooperation and communication among the agencies.
- Expedite processing of juveniles through the system.
- Streamline the current fragmented service delivery system.
- Provide courts with better tools and information.

"Striking when the iron is hot, that's usually when families are most willing to try to deal with issues."

"Create a one-stop shop: a single point of entry where cops and other community points could access; where all kinds of resources that were needed would be there; and kids would get hooked up with those resources before going back into the community."

Source: Interviews with key leaders of the four demonstration assessment centers conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency as part of its evaluation of OJJDP's CAC initiative.

who make communitywide planning efforts a priority are better able to overcome the political and programmatic challenges presented to them.

Conceptual Elements

Single Point of Entry

Many youth and their families are besieged by multiple problems and needs. Rather than providing a system of coordinated care, however, service providers often operate independently of one another and lack knowledge about the involvement of their clients and their clients' families with other services. Youth often enter the same system repeatedly, but through different doors, such as child welfare organizations, juvenile justice agencies, or various treatment programs. For these youth and their families, accessing appropriate services requires navigating a maze of caseworkers, intake workers, and counselors.

The idea of providing a 24-hour centralized point of intake and assessment for juveniles who have come or are likely to come into contact with the juvenile justice system is consistent with OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy. The Comprehensive Strategy identifies two separate target populations: juveniles at risk of involvement in delinquent activity and juveniles who have already committed delinquent acts. In addition, it stresses the importance of integrating prevention and early intervention activities with local police, social service, child welfare, school, and family preservation programs.

Ideally, CAC's can address the needs of both at-risk and delinquent youth by coordinating the services of various agencies/organizations involved with youth through a "one-stop shop." By providing a single point of entry, a CAC can reduce duplication of services, promote system efficiency, and facilitate access to services for youth and families. The CAC's one-stop shop could better serve youth and families by eliminating the system's current maze of caseworkers and improving system efficiency.

It is important to note, however, that it may not be practical for some communities to have a physical single point of entry—that is, a single facility at which to conduct intakes and assessments. In such cases, a "virtual" single point of entry could be established wherein all youth receive the same assessment and case management procedures from the same or different agencies at several locations. Information gathered by one service provider would be shared with other service providers via an integrated MIS. In addition, consistent assessment and case management services would be provided to youth, but could be conducted by the same or different agencies at various locations. The virtual single point of entry must seek the same goals as the physical single point of entry: reducing duplication, promoting efficiency, and enhancing community accessibility.

It became apparent during the first year of the CAC initiative that establishing a single point of entry, be it physical or virtual, for both delinquent and at-risk youth is a challenging task. In fact, neither of OJJDP's enhancement sites is currently providing a true single point of entry for all delinquent and at-risk youth.

The Orlando JAC serves as a single point of entry for the majority of arrested youth in Orange County (police have the discretion to bring arrested youth to the JAC). The JAC also serves some but not all at-risk youth. Tables 1 and 2 and figure 1 identify the demographic profiles, criminal charges, and release decisions of juveniles booked at the Orlando JAC, which has a truancy center, a secure short-term drug and alcohol treatment center, and a diversion program collocated on its site. These programs are not integrated with regard to assessment and service delivery, however. The Orlando JAC is moving toward the virtual model by partnering with a local nonprofit agency that provides mental health and case management services to dependent (abused and neglected) youth.

In addition to sharing information across disciplines, both providers will conduct assessment and case management services using the same protocols. Through this linkage, the Orlando JAC hopes to increase the sharing of information between the juvenile delinquency and the dependency systems and reduce duplication of services to youth involved in both systems.

The Jefferson County JAC is a nonsecure facility that serves at-risk youth referred by school officials or resource officers and arrested youth who are not detainable. Tables 3 and 4 provide demographic profiles and criminal charges of juveniles brought to the Jefferson County JAC. It has a liaison from the district attorney's office and also mental health, human services, and school programs collocated on its premises. At this time, Jefferson County officials do not believe that bringing detainable youth under the aegis of a physical or virtual single point of entry is appropriate for their community. JAC partners believe a physical single point of entry would be impractical because of Jefferson County's size and the time that would be required for police officers to transport youth to a single location. However, county officials are discussing future expansion and considering implementing several assessment centers in the county that would serve both at-risk and detainable youth. Ideally, these assessment centers would be linked via an integrated MIS.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Youth Booked at the Orlando JAC, 1998

Characteristic	Percentage of Cases (N=8,942)
Race	
African American	52
Caucasian	34
Latino	13
Other	1
Sex	
Female	25
Male	75
Age	
11 or younger	3
12 to 14	27
15 to 16	43
17 or older	27

Source: Department of Corrections, JAC Intake Database

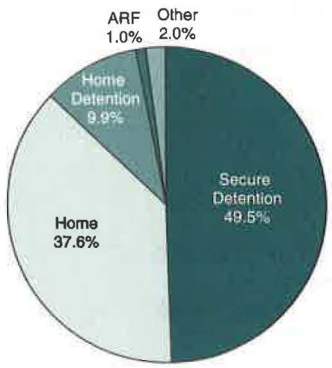
Given the challenge of implementing a CAC, communities must thoroughly analyze whether a virtual or physical single point of entry is appropriate and feasible. Factors such as the jurisdiction's size, the state of the current information system's infrastructure, and the level of community support must all be considered. However, if a community decides to implement OJJDP's CAC model, program managers can take several steps to facilitate the process. First, all partners working with the CAC should help define the specific target population(s)—within the categories of delinquency and nondelinquency—the assessment center will serve. Once a target population is identified, communities must develop a strategy for reaching and serving those youth. Communities must plan to ensure that they reach the appropriate youth and families and have adequate resources to serve them. Typically, certain youth, such as those referred by law enforcement, are much easier to reach given the established policies/protocols for their entry into the juvenile justice system. Because OJJDP's concept advocates serving nondelinquent youth as well, similar referral mechanisms must be established to ensure the service of at-risk youth. Examples include establishing a referral process through the school system, a hotline where parents can call to refer their own children, or referral protocols through social services.

Table 2: Most Serious Charge of Cases Booked at the Orlando JAC, 1998

Most Serious Charge	Percentage of Cases (N=8,942)
Felony	
Person	8
Weapon	1
Property	12
Drugs	5
Other	1
All felonies	**27**
Misdemeanor	
Person	7
Property	16
Drug	5
Disorderly	7
Other	7
All misdemeanors	**42**
Court order or detention order	**31**

Source: Department of Corrections, JAC Intake Database

Figure 1: Release Decisions for Youth Brought to the Orlando JAC, 1998



Source: Department of Corrections, JAC Intake Database

Immediate and Comprehensive Assessments

OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy stresses the importance of both risk and needs assessment to an effective juvenile justice system. OJJDP defines these two types of assessments as follows: "Risk and/or custody assessments are used to decide the level of supervision or type of placement, while needs assessments help determine the specific program interventions to be delivered within the designated custody/supervision level" (Howell, 1995, p. 199). Risk assessments help communities maintain public safety, use resources efficiently, and treat youth equitably and appropriately. Needs assessments, on the other hand, increase consistency in assessing problems and provide results that can serve as a foundation for a service plan. Ultimately, accurate risk and needs assessments, in combination with effective, integrated services, help ensure positive outcomes for at-risk and delinquent juveniles.

OJJDP's CAC concept outlines an innovative and cost-effective method for integrating the assessment processes used by various systems (e.g., juvenile justice, mental health, child welfare). Through this assessment process, CAC's can give service providers access to multidisciplinary perspectives on a youth's needs.

Table 3: Demographic Profile of Youth Brought to the Jefferson County JAC, 1998

Characteristic	Transport (N=680)	Referral (N=485)	All (N=1,165)
Age (average)	15.6	14.9	15.3
Gender			
Male	60%	69%	65%
Female	40	31	35
Race			
White/Non-Hispanic	64%	78%	70%
Hispanic	28	12	22
Other (Asian/Black)	6	4	5
Missing	2	6	3

Source: JAC Access Database

Assessment centers can help coordinate efforts among the various treatment providers and case managers involved with multiproblem youth. CAC's also provide the opportunity for the immediate assessment of youth. Typically, a youth who is arrested but not detained does not receive a needs assessment until much later in the process, if at all. Under the CAC model, an assessment is provided at the time of arrest. Finally, OJJDP believes that the enhanced coordination achieved through CAC's could reduce duplication of assessment services. Under the status quo, for instance, a youth is often assessed by both the juvenile justice and social service systems, but without communication between these systems. Under the CAC model, the youth and his or her family will receive better coordinated assessments.

Table 4: Most Serious Original Charge of Random Sample of Transport Cases Brought to the Jefferson County JAC, 1998

Most Serious Charge	Percentage of Cases (N=323)
Violent and weapons	9
Property	32
Drug	17
Traffic	12
Technical or status	8
Other	22

Source: JAC Access Database; Jefferson County DA Database

The CAC model advocates that communities strive to achieve the following assessment goals:

- **Develop consistent policies and procedures.** To obtain immediate and comprehensive assessments, the key agencies and organizations participating in the CAC must agree to implement consistent policies and procedures. The CAC concept does not require that one agency assess every youth. It does, however, recommend that all agencies and organizations evaluating youth use uniform assessment procedures, tools, and training.
- **Select appropriate assessment tools.** One of the most important decisions for a community is the selection of the assessment tools to be used by the CAC. To ensure suitable service referrals and treatment, the CAC must use assessment tools that appropriately identify a youth's problem areas and risk and protective factors,[1] are reliable, and have been validated as appropriate for the target population. A variety of factors must also be addressed when selecting appropriate assessment tools for a CAC. For example, communities must consider the characteristics of the target population, the number of assessment staff available, the amount of time staff will have with each youth, and the purpose of the information obtained (i.e., screening, prescriptive, or diagnostic purposes).
- **Define the scope of the assessment process.** Acknowledging jurisdictions' limited time and resources and the differing needs of youth, the CAC concept does not propose that all youth served by a CAC receive a comprehensive, in-depth assessment. Rather, it advocates that every youth receive an initial broad-based screening to identify whether more indepth assessments are needed. This initial assessment should cover a wide range of subject areas, including, but not limited to, substance abuse, mental health issues, school problems, family relationships, and peer relationships. This initial evaluation would not cover these topics in depth but would identify potential problem areas. If a problem is revealed, a more comprehensive assessment pertaining to that specific area could be conducted. By weeding out youth who do not require indepth assessments, OJJDP's CAC model attempts to achieve the most cost-effective and least intrusive assessment process. More important, the CAC assessment process is driven by a youth's needs, not driven by funding streams or the agendas of individual agencies.

These are just a few of the challenges communities will confront when attempting to choose appropriate assessment tools.

Each of OJJDP's four CAC sites is continuing to address assessment issues. Until recently, the centers in both Jefferson County and Orlando have used their own "homegrown" assessment tools rather than standardized tools. However, Orlando service providers recently began using several different standardized assessment tools shown to be both reliable and valid. Orlando's greatest challenges in adopting these standardized tools were the expense involved and the limited time available to spend with each youth. As a result, staff are working to find or develop a preliminary screening tool to identify youth who require a more extensive assessment. During the first year of the project, Jefferson County program managers recognized the need for a structured reassessment process. As a result, they are currently evaluating the assessment tools used at the JAC and developing a protocol for the reassessment of youth. Lee County managers are developing their assessment process with the assistance of the local academic community. Finally, Denver CAC

[1] Protective factors are qualities or conditions that might mitigate a juvenile's exposure to conditions that put him or her at risk for delinquency. Positive relationships with family members, teachers, and friends are examples of protective factors (Wilson and Howell, 1993).

personnel are working to ensure that the tools they choose are culturally appropriate and assess a youth's and a family's strengths.

Management Information System

To effectively monitor a youth's progress through multiple treatment programs, possibly in different systems, CAC's need an infrastructure that supports integrated case management. The CAC concept advocates developing a comprehensive and integrated data system, rather than simply collocating offices. Ideally, an integrated MIS would be the cornerstone of the single point of entry and assessment process. However, the first year of OJJDP's CAC program has shown that creating a fully integrated data system supported by multiple agencies is expensive and challenging and thus may not be feasible for all communities.

At a minimum, a CAC must have an internal database to manage information on the youth it serves. The CAC should also have some level of access to the information systems of related agencies, if not directly, then through an intermediary employed by the related organization. A CAC's MIS should accomplish two tasks:

- **Linking data from multiple agencies.** The CAC's MIS should contain case-specific data including prior contact information so that professionals performing assessments and designing treatment plans will be aware of previous intervention attempts. There should also be some method of notifying service providers of other referrals or updated assessments of youth currently being served. By acting as a clearinghouse for service providers within the community, the assessment center provides a means to further coordinate service delivery and maximize limited resources. For example, the MIS has the potential to identify gaps and redundancies in services and track the prevalence of risk factors such as gang involvement. In addition, an MIS promotes accountability within the juvenile justice system and among service providers by allowing the CAC to monitor the progress of youth in various programs. The system must also include safeguards to protect the privacy of youth and their families.
- **Monitoring trends.** Regardless of a system's level of integration, it is important that a CAC's MIS be capable of monitoring trends in its own operations and services and also in the local juvenile justice system. Most current programs have little readily available data—other than anecdotal information—on overall program effects on detention, diversion, case filings, and case processing. CAC programs should develop, at a minimum, data systems and reporting procedures to routinely track trends in their own caseloads that could have a positive or negative effect on the juvenile justice system (such as rates of referrals to detention or proportions of youth receiving diversion recommendations, by age and ethnic group). Programs implementing a fully integrated MIS would also be able to track trends in the juvenile justice system that might affect the CAC or result from its activities. Programs might also strive to generate more information that would be of use to policymakers, such as comparative data on the number, characteristics, diversion rates, and dispositions of CAC-eligible youth who do and do not receive program services.

During its first year, the Jefferson County JAC designed and implemented a new MIS, which has been operational since July 1998. The system is an internal database combining human service, criminal justice, and referral data. Although links to other systems do not exist at this time, the JAC system is configured to allow certain data points to be merged if, for example, the State of Colorado achieves its goal of creating a statewide database on all juvenile delinquency cases. Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant (JAIBG) funds have been allocated to create a countywide database for municipal, county, JAC, and district attorney data, to be operational by mid-2000.

The Orlando JAC staff's experience with information systems also reveals a great deal about some of the challenges sites may confront when developing an integrated MIS. These challenges are exacerbated by the large number of cases in a jurisdiction of Orlando's size. Currently, the Orlando JAC has six distinct databases at its facility. Although the appropriate JAC staff have access to each database, it is often difficult to match a youth across systems because each system assigns the youth a different identification number. In addition, because of insufficient staff time, not all records are being entered into some of the databases, requiring a continuing dependence on paper case files. Orlando is currently working to resolve these issues. In January 1999, the JAC began using an identification number for each youth assessed and plans to incorporate this identifier into each database. Orlando is also examining the feasibility of integrating the JAC's multiple systems during the second phase of the project.

During year two, Lee County staff are working to develop a comprehensive MIS to capture demographic data and extensive information on the needs of youth who will enter the CAC. They believe this information will help direct youth and their families to appropriate services. The plan also includes links to other agencies involved with Lee County youth to allow for reporting on trend data and tracking of youth through the entire juvenile justice system.

Integrated Case Management

OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy stresses the importance of an effective case management system. Integrated case management is crucial to coordinating and

Comments on the Issue of Confidentiality

The following quotations from key leaders in the four demonstration sites provide a sampling of opinion about the issue of confidentiality.

"Once the famil[y] become[s] a matter of public interest, then all the agencies of the public who have something to offer that family should share that information. Otherwise, we're working at cross-purposes."

"Everyone is afraid of being sued, but I say somebody who is dealing with this family needs to know what the situation is."

"I think there are going to have to be some intergovernmental agreements on what can be shared."

"We don't disclose everything—still have State confidentiality laws to comply with."

"I don't see the DA's getting more information as being conducive to treating children. I see it being used as ammunition against the child."

Source: Interviews with key leaders of the four demonstration assessment centers conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency as part of its evaluation of OJJDP's CAC initiative.

Examples of Management Information Systems Data Elements

The following examples of management information systems data elements were presented in OJJDP's *Guide for Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* (Howell, 1995). This is not an exhaustive list, and communities should adapt it to their specific needs. Access to many of these data elements must be based on a right-to-know and a need-to-know basis.

1. Intake and Assessment Information

Client Demographics

- Name
- Birth Date
- Sex
- Race
- Address
- Phone Number
- Social Security Number
- School Name (if any)
- School Address
- Contact Person at School
- School Phone Number
- Employer's Name (if any)
- Address of Employer
- Phone Number of Employer

Parents/Guardian and Siblings

- Parents/Guardian Names
- Relationship to Client
- Address
- Phone Number
- Employer
- Work Phone
- Marital Status
- Sibling Names
- Sibling Ages

Offense History

- Disposition Date
- Committing Offense and Date
- Adjudicated Offense(s)
- Offense(s) Charged at Arrest (if different from adjudication)
- Detention at Arrest
- Current Placement Status
- Number of Prior Delinquency Referrals
- Prior Adjudicated Offenses and Dates

Risk Assessment

- Date of Assessment
- Age at First Adjudication
- Number of Prior Arrests
- Current Offense
- Number of Prior Out-of-Home Placements
- History of Drug Usage
- Current School Status
- Probation Status
- Number of Runaways From Prior Placements
- Number of Grades Behind in School
- Level of Parental/Caretaker Control
- Peer Relationships

Needs Assessment

- Date of Assessment
- Basic Living Situation
- Primary Family Relationships
- Alternative Family Relationships
- Emotional Stability
- Peer Relationships
- Substance Abuse
- Victimization
- Intellectual Ability
- School Adjustment
- Employment
- Vocational/Technical Skills
- Transportation
- Health/Hygiene and Personal Appearance
- Runaway History
- Victims of Abuse/Neglect
- School Status
- Truancy History
- Prior Placements

2. Client Progress in Program

- Phase Completion Dates
- Services Received—type and date
- Academic Gain
- Rules Violation—type and date
- Program Sanctions—type and date
- Living Arrangements
- Arrests—type and date
- Risk and Needs Reassessments
- Staff Assigned

3. Termination

- Date of Termination
- Reason for Termination
- Legal Status
- Living Arrangement
- School Status
- Employment Status
- Assessment of Progress

4. Followup Data (6 months and/or 12 months following termination)

- Date of Followup
- Number of Arrests
- Number of Adjudications/ Convictions
- Legal Status
- Living Arrangement
- School Status
- Employment Status

monitoring the many services that a youth may receive. In essence, the case manager (or case team) is the critical link between comprehensive assessments and effective integrated service delivery. Case managers should keep in mind the following CAC concept recommendations:

- **Develop individualized, flexible, and responsive treatment plans.** Under OJJDP's CAC model, the case manager develops individualized treatment plans based on the results of the assessment(s), aided by input from other systems (via the MIS) and clinical professionals, if necessary. The treatment plan identifies multiple system intervention priorities and includes both short- and long-term goals. To ensure that youth actually access services, plans for followup and methods of tracking youth through the system must be included. This could be accomplished via an MIS or through personal followup by the case manager.

  Treatment plans must be flexible and responsive to youth's needs and should be reassessed at regularly determined intervals. Reassessment should be based on the youth's recent behavior, progress in meeting objectives, and newly identified needs. Changes in the youth's environment and in available resources should also be considered. Finally, putting mechanisms in place to monitor the provision of recommended services will help ensure that each youth receives appropriate treatment.

- **Define criteria to determine levels of case management.** The demonstration sites provided valuable insight into the case management process of CAC's. For example, just as only some youth will require indepth assessments, not all youth require intensive, long-term case management. Further, large caseloads paired with limited resources often necessitate a tiered approach to case management. Where this is the case, the CAC must define set criteria for determining specific levels of case management. As with the assessment process, these policies and procedures must be agreed upon by all agencies and organizations involved with the CAC, including probation. In addition, policies must define differing levels of case management and oversee the distribution of cases among agencies and organizations to avoid duplication of services.

During the first year of the project, Jefferson County staff recognized that they had no structure or protocol for case management and worked to improve and formalize their case management procedures. They worked to incorporate structured decisions into the case management process when appropriate, and cases are now assigned to staff based on the youth's offense. Both short- and long-term case management is provided, and caseloads for long-term case managers are limited to 40 cases.

Currently, Orlando's JAC provides intensive case management to youth who display two or more mental health problems. Previously, intensive or targeted case management was available only to Medicaid-eligible youth. However, there were many youth in Orlando who could potentially benefit from intensive case management but were not eligible for Medicaid. As a result, during the first year of the project, Orlando program managers enhanced the JAC's integrated case management services by adding four master-level case managers to provide intensive case management to youth who were not eligible for Medicaid.

Potential Problems

While the evaluation of the CAC program is not yet complete, OJJDP continues to believe that CAC's can potentially provide a more effective way of addressing juvenile crime. At the same time, OJJDP recognizes that communities implementing this approach could confront several problems. These problems include a lack of due process, "net widening," the unavailability of needed youth services, the possibility of stigmatizing youth, and increasing overrepresentation of minorities. OJJDP has tried to address these concerns, each of which was thoroughly discussed at both the initial focus group on assessment centers and the evaluation advisory board meeting in 1997. While recognizing the validity of such concerns, OJJDP believes they can be resolved. If communities are aware of potential problems, they can attempt to minimize or avoid these problems by addressing them early in the CAC development process. Below is a brief discussion of each concern, along with suggested ways for communities to address them.

Due Process

Some individuals are concerned that assessment centers may pose a threat to youth's due process rights. First, before a needs assessment is conducted, CAC's require the youth to sign a consent form. Ideally, a parent is present, but unfortunately, this is often not the case. Some youth advocates question a young person's ability to understand the consent form or to comprehend the benefits or possible negative consequences of consenting and, therefore, question the CAC's legal authority to obtain consent without parental involvement or the presence of counsel. Second, information gathered at assessment centers is often more extensive than has been collected in the past. Some question how this information will be used in the future, especially if it could incriminate youth or be used to impose harsher sanctions. Finally, under OJJDP's CAC model, information/data on a youth would be entered in an MIS to be shared with other agencies/organizations involved with the youth on a right-to-know and need-to-know basis. Many are concerned about who will have access to this information and for what purposes.

Communities establishing CAC's can take a variety of steps to avoid infringing on juveniles' due process rights. First, defense counsel should play an active role in the assessment center from the very

Comments on the Issue of Due Process

A majority of the key leaders from the four demonstrations sites stated that due process was not a problem in their community. The following quotations provide a sampling of opinion about this issue.

"I don't see that they [juveniles] need legal representation if they have parental involvement."

"They [law enforcement officers] must 'Mirandize' a kid before asking any questions or taking a confession; they don't always do it."

"If we [juvenile justice practitioners] [don't] have the right to walk up to them [juveniles] on the street and demand to know this kind of information, then we don't have the right to demand it about them just because they are at the assessment center, so we have to be very careful about what we make mandatory."

Source: Interviews with key leaders of the four demonstration assessment centers conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency as part of its evaluation of OJJDP's CAC initiative.

beginning. This includes involvement in the planning process and also ongoing involvement as a member of the assessment center's oversight committee or governing board. Next, communities should educate themselves about their State statutes and case law regarding youth's ability to provide consent, especially in cases where parents are not present. Although the ideal CAC policy would require parental consent prior to any assessment, year one of the project demonstrated that this is not always possible, given the time restrictions on juvenile justice agencies. One alternative is to assess youth at a later date, once parental consent is given; however, many practitioners believe immediacy is critical to conducting sound assessments. Communities must also be fully cognizant of the laws governing youth's ability to waive their right to counsel. Finally, various protections and security features can be integrated into the MIS to prevent inappropriate access, and memorandums of understanding can be used to clarify appropriate sharing of information among agencies.

In addition to the legal aspects of obtaining consent, the process by which consent is obtained is also critical. For instance, in no way should a youth feel compelled to consent. *A Call for Justice,* published by the American Bar Association, states: "[W]aivers of counsel by young people are sometimes induced by suggestions that lawyers are not needed because no serious dispositional consequences are anticipated—or by parental concerns that they will have to pay for any counsel that is appointed" (Puritz et al., 1995, p. 7). Policies and procedures should work to ensure that youth understand their rights and are not coerced into waiving them. Language on consent forms should be age appropriate, and reading comprehension and language barriers should be carefully considered. Staff training to ensure policies are followed is also critical.

Net Widening

Another concern that often arises when discussing CAC's is the possibility they will produce "net widening"—expanding the number and types of youth brought under the supervision of the juvenile justice system. OJJDP views net widening as a problem if youth are improperly identified or youth are inappropriately brought into the juvenile justice system. The CAC model intends that only youth appropriate for justice system intervention or referral to services will become involved. High-risk (nondelinquent) youth should receive services or referrals from the CAC, but should not be brought under the jurisdiction of the juvenile justice system. OJJDP does not view bringing appropriate youth in for preventive services as widening the net of the justice system but rather as keeping children in need from "falling through the cracks" of the service delivery system. Further, if more youth are brought in on delinquency charges because patrol officers have more time to enforce the law, then the net has not been widened, just strengthened.

Comments on the Issue of Net Widening

The following quotations from key leaders in the four demonstration sites provide a sampling of opinion about the issue of net widening.

"Before cops would drive down the road with blinders on. It took 3 hours out of your day to deal with a kid. Cops didn't want to stop kids. Now, when they know they will be in and out of my office in under 3 minutes, the officers are bringing them."

"Haven't seen any data that it has happened. More likely kids are charged less with the JAC team here because [previously] officers would more likely . . . charge the kid so they [could] get him/her off their hands."

"If you can figure out how to get enough of your systems involved, then I think net widening becomes less of an issue because you're talking about kids that ought to be in one of those systems anyhow."

Source: Interviews with key leaders of the four demonstration assessment centers conducted by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency as part of its evaluation of OJJDP's CAC initiative.

Gaps in Services

The CAC should ensure that youth are appropriately identified for a particular service. If more youth are identified as in need of services, communities must ensure that these additional services are available. Ongoing assessments of the community's resources would identify any service gaps in the system.

Stigmatizing Youth

Some also warn that at-risk youth who are brought to the assessment center may be stigmatized by the process, negatively affecting how others see them and/or how they see themselves. This concern can be partially addressed through some basic aspects of the CAC's design. For example, sites must consider the creation of a nonsecure processing system and protocol whereby youth not accused of delinquent acts can be brought to the assessment center in a manner that protects them from negative labeling and avoids contact with delinquent offenders. This nonsecure process can be used for status offenders, dependent youth, or high-risk youth demonstrating inappropriate behaviors. In addition, controlling the access to and use of the records in the MIS is an important component of controlling for possible stigmatization. If youth are prosecuted on delinquent charges, CAC records of prior nondelinquent incidents must not be used against them.

Overrepresentation of Minorities

A final concern involving CAC's is the issue of potentially increasing the overrepresentation of minorities in the juvenile justice system. As noted in OJJDP's report *Disproportionate Minority Confinement: 1997 Update:* "Additional research has consistently substantiated that minority overrepresentation has not been limited to confinement in secure facilities; it also is significant at each of the major decision points in the juvenile justice system process (e.g., arrest, detention, prosecution, adjudication, transfer to criminal court, and commitment to secure facilities)" (Hsia and Hamparian, 1998, p. 1).

Assessment centers can address the potential overrepresentation of minorities at several points in the assessment process. First, the proportion of minorities being referred to the CAC must be examined. If a disproportionate number of minorities are brought to the CAC, the problem can be partially addressed by establishing sound and objective referral protocols for law enforcement agencies and the community to follow. Communities must also consider whether assessments are culturally appropriate and ensure that access to services is not dependent on race, class, or related factors. Selection of appropriate assessment tools and procedures is, therefore, very important. Staff should be trained to administer assessments appropriately, to understand cultural differences, and not to perpetuate or exacerbate the problem of the overrepresentation of minorities in the juvenile justice system.

Also, any assessment tools that are used should be tested for racial disparity in outcomes before they are implemented.

Conclusion

In conclusion, CAC's can be an integral component in local communities' efforts to develop OJJDP's Comprehensive Strategy to reduce serious, violent, and chronic juvenile crime. Although the CAC concept is promising, the ultimate impact of these programs is still to be determined. NCCD is currently conducting an intensive evaluation, containing both process and outcome components, of each of the four sites chosen for the demonstration program. NCCD will evaluate whether the CAC's in each site were implemented as intended; whether the four key elements of the OJJDP CAC model were adequately addressed; what impact the CAC's had on recidivism, detention, and arrest rates; and whether the sites were successful in enhancing families' access to services. To conduct the evaluation, NCCD is interviewing youth and families participating in the CAC's, surveying most JAC staff and other agencies regarding the implementation and impact of the assessment center, reviewing case files of youth processed at JAC's, and using data collected in the MIS to evaluate youth's prior case history, services accessed, and recidivism rates.[2] The evaluation will address each of the issues and potential problems listed above, including the use of appropriate assessment tools, the impact on due process and consent, net widening, availability of services, and the overrepresentation of minorities.

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[2] The CAC in Lee County, FL, is currently in the planning stages, and only qualitative data on the planning process have been collected there.

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