

# Employment & Training Institute

## **Identifying Milwaukee Youth in Critical Need of Intervention Lessons from the Past, Measures for the Future**

by

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In creating the Milwaukee County Youth Initiative, County Executive David Schulz publicly stated his concerns about the problems of youth in Milwaukee. "In Milwaukee," he charged, "we have to confront the fact that we have literally dozens of programs involving disparate agencies all addressing problems of youth...and they're not working." The Youth Initiative Committee made significant recommendations for altering the delivery of county social services and targeting "multiple problem" families in Milwaukee zipcode areas 53204 and 53206.

As part of its work evaluating programs developed by the Youth Initiative, the Employment and Training Institute of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee was asked to identify those families most in need of county social service intervention. Specifically, Dr Howard Fuller, Director of the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services, requested a critical assessment of outcomes for children served by the county systems. What has happened, he asked, to children we have served or attempted to serve in the past? And what measures can be used to insure accountability for new county and school intervention strategies aimed at Milwaukee County children and their families?

This report examines the outcomes of previous county intervention for high-risk youth populations and describes the harsh reality of what a lack of effective intervention has meant later for these youth and our community. The goal of this research is to identify those children most at risk and to provide measures of accountability which can be applied to government and private programs aimed at assisting these children and their families. Five target groups of youth are identified as possible priorities for county and school pilot interventions.

## **Cycle of Poverty, Neglect and Delinquency**

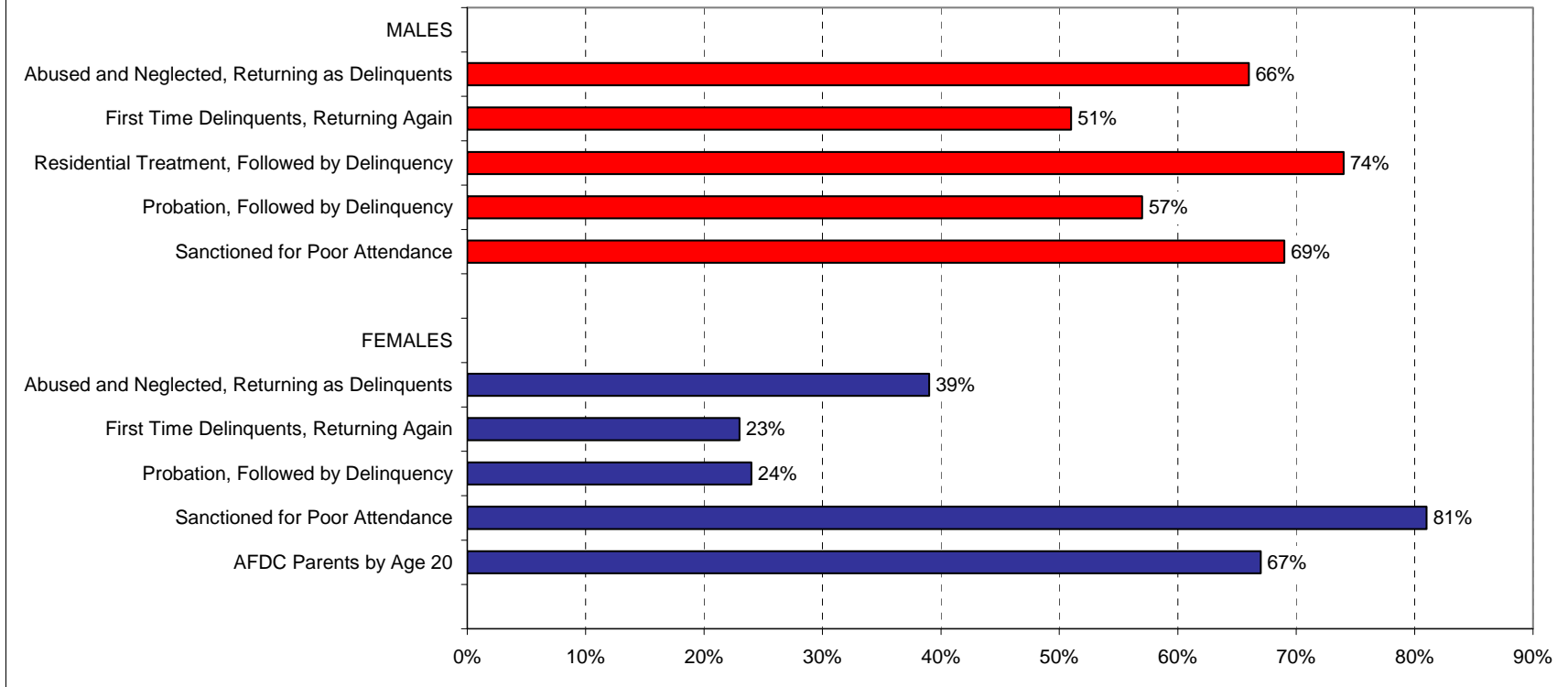
Evidence suggests that most children who arrive at Children's Court will never escape from a cycle of poverty, abuse, neglect and subsequent delinquency. Most children appearing in court are also in the welfare system; most are on AFDC and many have been in county social service systems. Two-thirds of boys who appear at Children's Court for the first time as Children in need of Protective Services (CHIPS cases) will return as delinquents after they reach age twelve. For boys appearing at Children's Court for the first time as delinquents, almost half will return at least once more as delinquents. For those assigned to care ordered by the court, the picture is even bleaker. Three-fourths of boys assigned to group homes or residential treatment centers return one or more times as delinquents, and over half of boys assigned to probation return again.

Girls fare somewhat better than boys but still show a 32% delinquency rate for first time CHIPS cases and a 23% return delinquency rate for first time delinquents. Additionally, two-thirds of the girls who have recently been on AFDC become parents and remain on AFDC as parents. Not surprisingly, these children have problems at school as evidenced by their high sanction rates under Learnfare.

## **Courts Become the Primary Decision-Maker and Dispenser of Social Services**

Few social services are provided directly by the Department of Social Services (DSS). With the exception of ongoing protective services, most activity is focused on investigation and documentation of reported child abuse and neglect. The worst cases are referred to Children's Court where the Court decides what placement is appropriate. DSS then becomes responsible for managing the placement. Few opportunities for intervention or prevention have existed at DSS. Consequently, the limited services which are available through DSS are concentrated on the worst cases which wind up at Children's Court. Only recently, with the advent of a series of Youth Initiative pilot projects, has prevention and intervention with at-risk families been made a priority.

**Children's Court Cases in Zip Codes 53204 and 53206  
Percent of Population At-Risk of Having Future Problems**



## **A Family-Based Intervention Model**

The Youth Initiative pilot projects are designed to fundamentally change the present system. The pilot projects are designed to reduce administrative restraints and to enable county workers, community agencies and school staff to target families and youth most in need and to provide specific services to them. The emphasis of the pilot projects is service delivery. Along with this service emphasis, it is essential that the selection of clients to be served is based on clearly defined at-risk target groups. Expected outcomes must also be established early in the planning process so that staff and policy makers understand the measurable impact these new family-based interventions will have in the next year, the next three years, and the next five years.

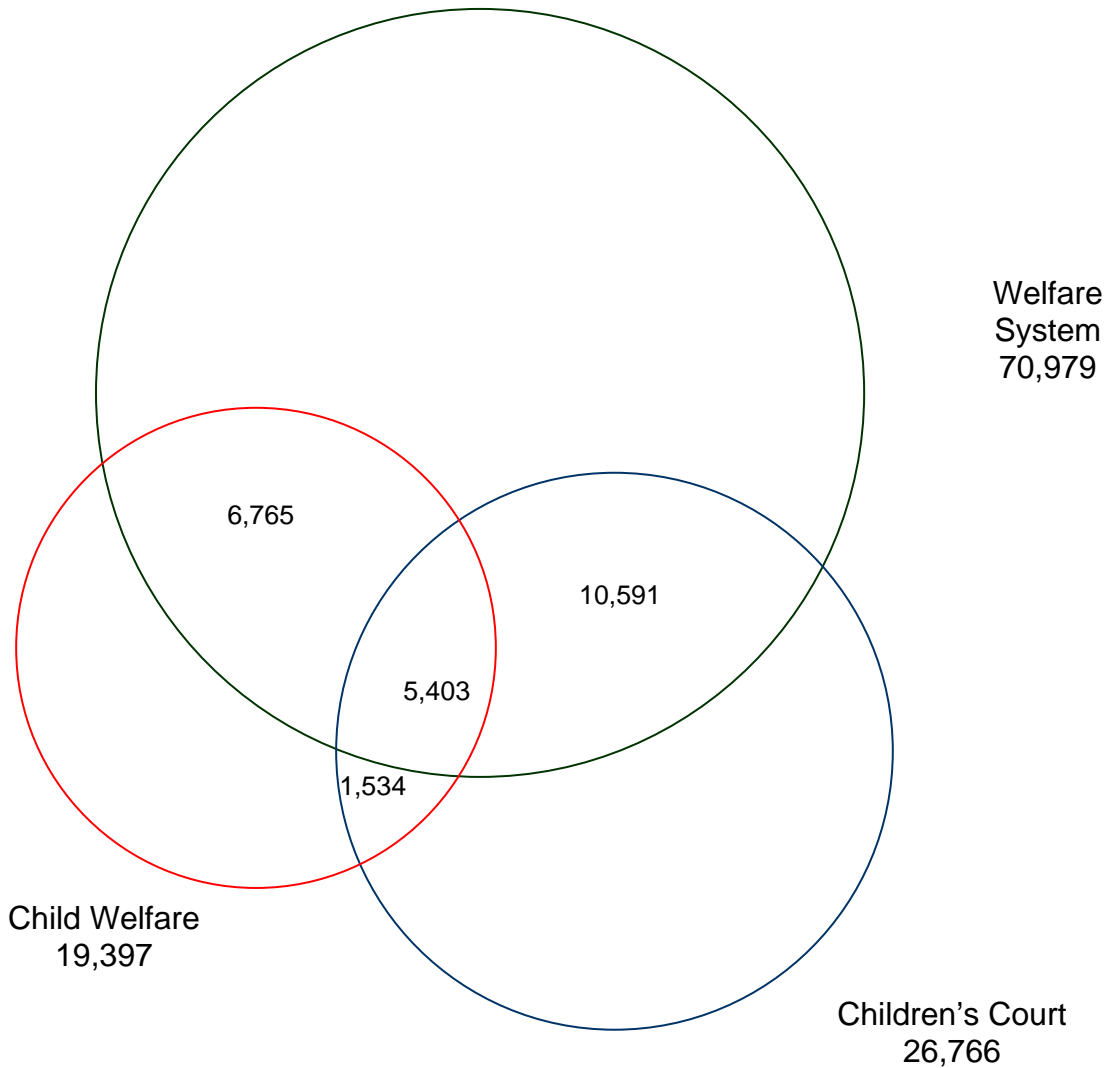
## **Families Frequently Appear in Several of the County Social Service Systems**

In 1989 and 1990 the Employment and Training Institute constructed a combined database and provided extensive analysis of the client populations in four county systems: county Child Welfare system, Children's Court, the Combined Community Service Board (CCSB), and the Income Maintenance system (Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Food Stamps, and Medical Assistance). This database was constructed to assist the county in tracking clients through the various systems within Milwaukee County during the operation of neighborhood pilots in zipcodes 53204 and 53206 and to track a comparison group in other city zipcodes for evaluation purposes. Because the database is historical, it also provides valuable predictive information on target groups most able to benefit from intervention and in the development of outcome-based goals for county pilot projects.

The initial analysis showed that many families were active in more than one of the county's systems. The following graph shows this phenomenon for the population of teenagers born from 1967 to 1977. Sixty percent of Children's Court cases are also found in the 1986 to 1990 welfare files; 26% of Children's Court cases are in the Child Welfare system; and 20% of Children's Court cases are in all three systems.

# MILWAUKEE COUNTY YOUTH IN CHILDREN'S COURT, CHILD WELFARE OR THE WELFARE SYSTEM

YEAR OF BIRTH 1967-77



Child Welfare includes all youth in active and closed cases, as of July 1990.  
Welfare System includes all youth in the AFDC/Food Stamp files, 1986 through 1990.  
Children's Court includes all youth at Children's Court up to July 1990.

## **Predictive Factors to Identify Families Most in Need of Services**

Previous analysis has focused discussion on identifying "multiple problem" families and youth at risk as those cases active in three or more county systems. The limitation of this approach is that activity in more than one system may be procedurally required and may provide only a retrospective definition of at risk families rather than a predictive one. For example, a family which has been in the social service system for child abuse or neglect will out of necessity wind up in Children's Court if the case is deemed serious enough for consideration of change of custody. Subsequently, the court may recommend treatment or counseling for one or more of the children. The family will also be recorded in the county's Income Maintenance system if the family is poor and receiving AFDC, food stamps or medical assistance. The fact that a family is or has been in all four county systems (social services, Children's Court, CCSB, and Income Maintenance) is helpful information for a neighborhood worker assigned to the family but may not be the best indicator of which families to serve or when the service intervention should occur.

## **Who Is Most At-Risk? Who Should Be Served?**

The goals and outcomes of county pilot projects need to be well defined at the outset so that staff, evaluators and policy makers can fairly judge the impact of the new model of providing services. We have previously defined possible comparison groups and outcomes which can be used to evaluate the goals of pilot projects over time.

The following analysis examines the experience of youth who were born in 1971, had been referred to Children's Court for protection or delinquency, and lived in zipcodes 53204 and 53206. By 1990 these youth had reached maturity. The importance of this analysis is that it

provides important predictive information as to which subpopulations of youth, without appropriate intervention, are likely to become delinquents, repeat delinquents, teen parents, requiring public assistance, older youth with school attendance problems, or children placed out of their home.

1. Abused and neglected boys of ten often become delinquent.

- 64% of boys first referred to Children's Court as Children in need of Protective Services (CHIPS cases) subsequently appeared again as delinquents.
- 66% of boys referred to Children's Court specifically for abuse or neglect became delinquent.

2. Many delinquent boys continue to return as delinquents.

- 51% of boys who first entered Children's Court as delinquents had repeat appearances for delinquency.
- 57% of boys placed on probation their first time at Children's Court had repeat appearances as delinquents.
- 74% of boys in group homes or residential treatment centers returned again as delinquents.

3. A portion of girls return as delinquents but fewer than boys.

- 23% of girls who were first time delinquents subsequently returned again as delinquents.
- 32% of girls who were first time CHIPS cases returned as delinquents.
- 39% of girls referred to Children's Court specifically for abuse or neglect returned as delinquents.
- 24% of girls placed on probation their first time at Children's Court returned as delinquents.

4. Most of the population in Children's Court is poor. A comparison of Income Maintenance cases for 1986 to 1990 with Children's Court cases reveals:
  - 76% of boys were in the welfare system and 65% in AFDC families.
  - 86% of girls were in the welfare system and 73% in AFDC families.
5. Girls previously in Children's Court are likely to later become young parents receiving AFDC in Milwaukee County. Of females who were in the Children's Court system:
  - 88% were in the welfare system sometime between 1986 and 1990, and 73% were on AFDC.
  - 67% of those on AFDC had become parents by 1990.
  - 73% who became teen parents on AFDC were sanctioned under Learnfare.
6. School performance is also a problem. The only county indicator of performance of the youth population in school is a child's status in Learnfare if the teen is receiving AFDC and required to attend school. While the AFDC Learnfare code is not currently a reliable indicator of school attendance, it does identify some of the teens who are having attendance problems. Of teens born in 1971, in the Children's Court system, and also monitored under Learnfare for school enrollment and attendance:
  - 81% of girls (mostly teen parents) received Learnfare sanctions.
  - 69% of boys (mostly teen parents) received Learnfare sanctions.
7. Each year many children are placed out of the home.

In 1989, 2,655 cases in Children's Court came from zipcodes 53204 and 53206. In two-thirds of the cases the child returned home either with no sentence made (1,296) or on probation (407). But in the remaining one-third of cases (941) the child was placed out of the home, with a relative (255), in foster care (258), in a juvenile correctional facility (119), or in a group home or residential treatment center. CHIPS cases were much more likely to result in out-of-home placements with 50% or 595 out of 1,174 placed out of the home. For delinquency cases, 15% or 216 out of 1,451 cases resulted in out of home placements.

### **Putting a Plan into Action that can Make an Impact**

As the pilot projects in zipcodes 53204 and 53206 are put in place, staff and administration need to clarify project goals, specific populations to be served and the service outcomes expected. Policy makers expect visible impacts on zipcodes 53204 and 53206 compared to nearby zipcodes not in the pilots. Selection of goals and the populations to be served need to be sensitive to political expectations of immediate and longer term payoffs.

To make a visible impact on the populations in zipcodes 532-4 and 53206, the limited resources of the pilot project staff need to be targeted to one or two groups most likely to have more problems without intensive intervention and most likely to benefit from intervention. Furthermore, effective intervention strategies require intensive services for these families and a reduction in the number of cases assigned to staff. Without effective targeting, the limited staff and resources of the pilots may be quickly dissipated by the shear volume of child protective service cases in 53204 and 53206.

We have presented five target groups based on commonly discussed goals for the pilots together with an estimated number of children in these groups and their likelihood of having additional problems. To attempt to serve all five groups may be impossible with the resources currently available. There are some strategies which may be helpful in most effectively targeting county resources in order to have a visible impact on the 53204 and 53206 population within a year or two.

While Milwaukee County staff can likely identify many strategies for outcome-based interventions, a few examples are listed below:

- Target only males most likely to be subsequent delinquents.
- Narrowly define target groups to a manageable number. For example, focus only on 12-year olds who are CHIPS cases (estimated 90 children) and likely to become delinquent.
- Effectively monitor the very expensive residential treatment center population which has a high recidivism rate.
- Place special emphasis on first time delinquency cases put on probation in 1991, to reduce subsequent delinquency.
- Limit school collaboration to middle schools to target cases likely to become repeat delinquents.
- Target family preservation efforts on reunification of children in out-of-home placements where there has been no transfer of custody.

Tangible results can be seen within a year for some of these target groups while others will take much longer. Certainly, decisions on intervention strategies need to consider when impacts will be visible to policy makers and the administration. Early intervention with abused and neglected children to decrease the likelihood of future delinquency can begin at almost any age, but the measurable results will only begin to appear after a child reaches the age of twelve. While intervention may be most effective when done at the pre-school level through Head Start programs, for example, measurable gains only appear much further along in the child's development.

Commonly discussed goals are outlined below together with descriptions of possible target groups. The recommended measure for evaluation of the pilots over time is the Children's Court computer system which is for the most part very accurate and far superior to the DSS Simple computer system. The Children's Court computer system has also been in place since 1980 and provides valuable historical data which can be used for planning and evaluation purposes.

## POSSIBLE YOUTH POPULATIONS TO BE SERVED BY PILOT PROJECTS

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TARGET GROUP #1:	Males ages 10-12 who were or are CHIPS cases but not delinquent.
GOAL:	Delinquency prevention.
EST. YOUTH IN 53204/53206:	260
RISK LEVEL:	64% chance of becoming a delinquency case.
WHEN IMPACT CAN BE SEEN:	1-2 years
SCHOOL COLLABORATION:	Middle school

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TARGET GROUP #2:	Males ages 12-16 who are first time delinquents.
GOAL:	Delinquency prevention.
EST. YOUTH IN 53204/53206:	382
RISK LEVEL:	51% chance of repeat delinquency.
WHEN IMPACT CAN BE SEEN:	1-2 years
SCHOOL COLLABORATION:	Middle school and high school

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TARGET GROUP #3:	Girls ages 12-14 in Children's Court and recently on AFDC.
GOAL:	Pregnancy prevention, delinquency prevention.
EST. YOUTH IN 53204/53206:	291
RISK LEVEL:	25% of first time delinquents are likely to become repeat delinquents; 33% of first time CHIPS cases are likely to become delinquents; and a 67% chance of becoming a teen parent.
WHEN IMPACT CAN BE SEEN:	1 - 4 years
SCHOOL COLLABORATION:	Middle school

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TARGET GROUP #4:	CHIPS out of home placements
GOAL:	Reunite children with family, where appropriate.
EST. YOUTH IN 53204/53206:	595 each year
RISK LEVEL:	Males have a 40% chance and females a 15% chance of returning as delinquency cases
WHEN IMPACT CAN BE SEEN:	1 year
SCHOOL COLLABORATION:	Elementary school

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TARGET GROUP #5:	Males in group homes or residential treatment centers
GOAL:	Reduce incidence of future delinquency
EST. YOUTH IN 53204/53206:	93 each year
RISK LEVEL:	74% chance of subsequent delinquency
WHEN IMPACT CAN BE SEEN:	1 year
SCHOOL COLLABORATION:	Assistance in reentry to MPS

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**Youth in Children's Court from Zipcodes 53204 and 53206**  
**By Year of Birth and Type of Case at First Appearance**  
 (All First Appearances, 1979 through July 1990)

<u>Year of Birth</u>	FEMALES			MALES		
	<u>Total</u>	<u>CHIPS</u>	<u>Delinquent</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>CHIPS</u>	<u>Delinquent</u>
1990	4	3	0	10	10	0
1989	32	28	0	39	35	0
1988	55	53	0	51	47	0
1987	59	55	0	60	56	0
1986	65	62	0	80	75	0
1985	68	66	0	78	78	0
1984	66	64	0	65	59	0
1983	72	68	0	77	75	0
1982	71	71	0	85	79	0
1981	76	74	0	84	80	1
1980	60	53	1	78	72	3
1979	64	64	0	101	94	3
1978	54	46	5	82	74	6
1977	65	55	10	139	113	25
1976	80	49	27	153	72	80
1975	101	39	54	221	97	123
1974	141	63	71	313	90	218
1973	149	66	79	343	82	255
1972	185	72	110	395	93	300
1971	176	60	113	398	78	317

Note: CHIPS and delinquency cases may not equal the total cases because of other seldom used codes for family cases which are not included here.

**Sentences of All 1999 Children's Court Cases in Zipcodes 53204 and 53206**

	<u>53204</u>	<u>53206</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
NO SENTENCE	491	805	1296
NO TRANSFER OF CUSTODY			
PROBATION AT HOME	156	197	353
INTENSIVE PROBATOIN	35	29	64
CHILD AT HOME	42	60	102
FOSTER CARE	63	195	258
GROUP HOME	0	6	6
RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT CENTER	6	2	8
WITH A RELATIVE	24	173	197
CONCURRENT SUPERVISION, DSS			
SUPERVISED CUSTODY AND PROBATION	38	62	100
TRANSFER OF CUSTODY			
CHILD AT HOME	7	4	11
FOSTER CRE	17	47	64
WITH A RELATIVE, DSS CUSTODY	13	45	58
ETHAN ALLEN	34	67	101
LINCOLN HILLS	7	11	18
MISC.	<u>7</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>19</u>
TOTAL	940	1715	2655