Juvenile probation programs evaluated

- Christian County Extended Day Program
- Peoria County Anti-Gang and Drug Abuse Unit
- Winnebago County Day Reporting and Assessment Centers

A team from the Center for Legal Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield evaluated juvenile probation programs in Christian, Peoria, and Winnebago counties. This On Good Authority is a summary of these process and initial impact evaluations, which were funded by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority using federal Anti-Drug Abuse Act funds established under the Byrne Formula Grant. The evaluations provide descriptions of the three programs and examine implementation issues.

Christian County Juvenile Probation Extended Day Program

The Christian County Probation Department began accepting juveniles into its extended day program in October 1997. The program is designed to extend expanded probation supervision and services to minors and require their accountability. It attempts to reduce the risk of reoffending among participants and help them avoid institutional placement.

Juveniles eligible for the program must be between 12 and 17 years old, have at least one prior delinquency adjudication, have a current offense involving violence or drugs, and be classified as needing maximum supervision. Program participants are required to attend school or a high school equivalency degree program, and participate in “moral reconation” therapy and life skills training. The program provides access to mental health and substance abuse assessment and counseling services through contracts with local service providers. At the time of the evaluation, a certified teacher was being sought for tutoring services.

Moral reconation therapy is a treatment method designed for clients resistant to treatment. The treatment program is designed to assist the participant’s development of moral reasoning to induce more socially acceptable decision-making. The improved decision-making is intended to enable the juveniles to display socially acceptable behaviors and reduce reoffending. Life skills training addresses self-esteem enhancement, decision-making, personal control, and interpersonal communication. The training focuses on the concept that social skills may be taught, but maintenance and utilization of acquired skills needs reinforcement if they are to be remembered outside the classroom. Both the moral reconation therapy and the life skills training are
programming is based upon materials
to provide constructive activities for
in dealing with day-to-day interactions
program in an effort to assist participants
nine to 11 weeks, was added to the
anger management curriculum, lasting
juvenile into the program.

The evaluators also found space was
a problem. The probation department
appeared to have outgrown its location
in the courthouse. Compounding the
problem was the lack of space for moral
reconation therapy and life skills training
groups. Group sessions were conducted
in space provided by the sheriff’s
department in a building that housed the
county jail. Unfortunately, the environ-
ment was not conducive to open and
serious discussion. At the time of the
evaluation, negotiations were under way
to find additional space either within or
outside the courthouse.

Peoria County Anti-Gang and
Drug Abuse Unit

The Peoria County Anti-Gang and Drug
Abuse Unit (AGDAU) uses organized
intervention methods to facilitate
supervision and treatment alterna-
tives for juvenile probationers
involved in gang or drug-related
activities. Juveniles may enter the
program as part of their original
disposition or as a
modification of an
existing probation
case. Probation staff
use a screening
instrument that attempts to assess the
extent of the juveniles’ drug and/or gang
involvement using a scoring system. A
score of 30 points or higher results in a
conference with the probation staff,
parents, and the juvenile. The program
requirements are explained and both the
juvenile and parents are asked to sign an
agreement stating they will follow the
program rules. Finally, it is left to the
discretion of the court to order partici-
pation in the program. Evaluators interviews indicated that there were some juveniles ordered into the program without the assessment, conference, and agreement in place.

AGDAU began accepting juveniles into the five-phase program in October 1997. Program participants are required to complete each phase, in turn, within a six-month time period. The first phase, Planning and Movement Control, includes a needs assessment and intensive monitoring. The second phase, Counseling, Treatment, and Programming, provides anger management programming, drug treatment, alternatives to gang involvement, and other resources as determined by the needs assessment. The third phase, Community Outreach, requires the participants to complete community service work as assigned by the court or the probation staff. Next is the Re-Assignment phase, which is designed to prepare the program participant to return to the standard probation caseload. Finally, the Tracking and Discharge phase ensures that all conditions of AGDAU participation have been met prior to a successful discharge from the program.

Program staff includes two juvenile probation officers who report to the supervisor of AGDAU. The supervisor reports to the chief juvenile probation officer. The officers share a caseload of about 40 program participants. Originally, the plan was for the officers to jointly supervise 100 juveniles, but it was determined that such a caseload was unrealistic given the level of supervision required for each case. In addition, the officers found that six months was not enough time to complete the five program phases.

Schools in the Peoria County area have adopted a no-tolerance policy regarding gang affiliation, which has complicated interaction between school officials and AGDAU staff. Students identified as being affiliated with a gang can be suspended from school for up to one year. If program staff contact school officials to check on program participants, they are effectively identifying those students as being gang-affiliated and putting them at risk for suspension. Because AGDAU staff believe it is beneficial for the juveniles to remain in school, they are careful not to identify students as AGDAU participants, or they communicate only with school officials who will not automatically suspend students who are affiliated with a gang.

W innebago County's Day Reporting Center and Assessment Center

The Winnebago County Day Reporting Center and Assessment Center are the result of growing concern over the high rate of juvenile incarceration and the need to streamline processing of juvenile arrestees. The day reporting and assessment centers share the same facility.

The Day Reporting Center is an alternative to incarceration, providing educational, vocational, and other social programming. In addition, mental health and substance abuse treatment is available to program participants. Juveniles eligible for the day reporting program must be adjudicated delinquent for a forcible felony or an offense that can be waived to adult court, must be classified under the Strategy of Juvenile Supervision (SJS) as in need of casework control or limit setting, and must be ordered by the court to participate in the program.

The Assessment Center is open weekdays from 8 a.m. until 10 p.m. as a holding facility for law enforcement to drop off arrested juveniles for processing.
extensive renovation. One advantage of the new location was its proximity to the local detention center, which made it easy to transport youths to detention. On the other hand, due to the remote location, transportation was necessary to drive participants to many activities. The detention center shares its van with program staff, but detention staff must transport juveniles between the detention facility and the courthouse. Use of the van by program staff, therefore, was limited to hours when court was not in session.

The educational programming component changed over time. Initially, day reporting participants were assigned to a local alternative school. At the end of the school day, at 1 p.m., the students and teacher would report to the center and continue their educational programming. However, program staff felt that the alternative school was not making a positive contribution to daily programming, and that participants would benefit from remaining in a traditional school atmosphere. Consequently, the relationship with the alternative school was terminated.

Another issue involved the expansion of the eligibility criteria to include juveniles classified under SJS as in need of selective intervention. This modification was made to increase the number of juveniles attending programming in an effort to stabilize class size. Each class was scheduled to accommodate 24 juveniles for six months. As a result of the eligibility change, program staff were able to modify the classes to accommodate 16 juveniles for four months. This model still allowed 48 juveniles to participate in a 12-month period. To maintain consistent class sizes, the program began allowing juveniles to enter the program as needed, rather than waiting for a new class period to begin.

Finally, nonparticipation by parents in group sessions with their children was a problem. Program staff had no means of enforcing this condition of the program. Staff attempted to reduce nonparticipation by eliminating excuses for nonattendance, such as transportation and child care.

Recommendations
The evaluators made several recommendations for improving the three juvenile probation programs, including:

- Planners in each county should search for ways to encourage staff stability and to institutionalize the positive contributions of current staff.
- Program administrators and staff should develop clear policies regarding sanctions associated with program violations. Program participants and parents should be informed of the consequences of program violations and notified when such sanctions are applied.
- Each program is encouraged to examine additional ways in which positive behavior or success can be acknowledged or rewarded and publicized to parents and others with responsibility for the juveniles.
- Program personnel are encouraged to examine all possible mechanisms for encouraging greater parental participation. New initiatives, such as support groups for parents, might better address parents’ needs and interests.