



JOHN JAY COLLEGE  
CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK  
OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

# Process Evaluation of the Chicago Juvenile Intervention and Support Center

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**April 2011**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study was made possible by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation to Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. The material for the study was compiled and analyzed in 2008 and 2009 when the author was a researcher at Chapin Hall. The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago.

The author remains appreciative of the efforts of several of his former colleagues at Chapin Hall who participated in study interviews and helped to organize the research literature and other background material, including Ada Skyles, Elissa Gitlow, Jan DeCoursey, and Brianna English. The author is also grateful to the Chapin Hall communications staff that edited the original text. The text in this publication, however, was subsequently revised and edited. Thus, Chapin Hall is not responsible for its content.

All opinions or conclusions presented in this report are those of the author and do not reflect those of Chapin Hall, the University of Chicago, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, or the MacArthur Foundation.

Finally, the author would like to thank all the Chicago practitioners and policymakers who were interviewed for the study, especially the staff and leadership of the Juvenile Intervention and Support Center.

## CAUTION

This report describes Chicago's Juvenile Intervention and Support Center as it was operating in 2008. The program undoubtedly changed and evolved between that time and the time of this publication, and the findings of this study may not accurately describe the Chicago JISC program today. This report, however, is an accurate reflection of the challenges the program faced during its initial years of operation. The author hopes that the findings of the study retain value for other jurisdictions that may be planning to open similar screening and assessment centers for juvenile offenders.

## RECOMMENDED CITATION

Butts, Jeffrey A. (2011). *Process Evaluation of the Chicago Juvenile Intervention and Support Center*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice.



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# J EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Young offenders face a wide range of individual, family, and environmental obstacles. Determining the best response to any one youth requires a customized program of prevention, rehabilitation, and public safety resources. The City of Chicago's Juvenile Intervention and Support Center (JISC) uses a collaborative approach to providing services and supports for youth from several South Side neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup> Young people are taken to the JISC by police for screening and assessment and to be either: (1) diverted and sent home, (2) "station adjusted" and referred to case management services, or (3) moved on for juvenile justice processing.

To the extent that the JISC represented a new approach for dealing with young offenders in Chicago, the non-diverted, station-adjusted youth referred to case management are its primary clients. Such youth have often been arrested for delinquent offenses, or they have been referred to the JISC as a result of technical violations (e.g., failure to appear in court). Police officials offer the youth station adjustments and case management because their current offenses and prior records do not merit prosecution, but they do appear to need some type of intervention. As long as they cooperate with case managers and complete a program of voluntary services and activities, they can avoid further involvement with the justice system.

The Chicago JISC is similar to programs in other jurisdictions, often called "juvenile assessment centers." Before implementing the JISC, Chicago officials researched the concept of juvenile assessment centers and visited programs around the country, including the original centers in Florida. The City officials hoped to design a process that would ensure an effective response for young offenders, while keeping as many youth as appropriate from becoming ensnared in the justice system. Several strategies for community intervention and youth services were central in the development of the JISC. The most essential frameworks included: (1) early intervention, (2) interagency service coordination, (3) graduated sanctioning, (4) community justice and problem-solving justice, (5) restorative justice, and (6) positive youth development.

One year after the JISC opened its doors, and with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the City of Chicago asked researchers to review the operations of the JISC and to conduct a process evaluation of its policies and practices. One of the main goals of the study was to assess the readiness of the JISC for a more detailed outcome or impact evaluation. During 2007 and 2008, researchers visited the JISC numerous times, reviewed an assortment of documents and reports about the program, and interviewed a wide range of individuals involved in its design, operation, and management.

The study focused on issues identified by previous research on juvenile assessment centers, including program funding, design and target population, agency partnerships, governance and staffing, and data systems and policies governing the sharing of client information. In addition, the researchers explored whatever topics were suggested by their interviews with local officials. Based on their review, the study team came to the following conclusions:

- By the third year of operation, the JISC was seen as a successful program. Many administrative challenges had been met through the leadership of City officials. The long-term success of the program, however, depended on its ability to deliver meaningful services and supports for youth and families.
- Unlike juvenile assessment centers in other cities, which have sometimes lapsed into simple referral mechanisms for providers in the mental health and drug treatment sectors, the Chicago JISC was built around the concepts of restorative justice and positive youth development. This innovative approach was one of the best features of the JISC but also one of its biggest challenges.
- To fulfill its core mission, the JISC required access to a broad menu of services, supports, and opportunities for youth and families. Many of these resources cannot be purchased from professional service providers. They come into existence only through the recruitment and organization of individual volunteers, neighborhood groups, and allied partners, including small-business owners and the faith community. The City needed to invest in these efforts if the JISC was to succeed over the long term.

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1 This report uses the present tense to describe the operations of the Chicago JISC, but readers are advised that the research was conducted between 2007 and 2009 and some aspects of the program have likely changed.



- The success of the JISC also depended on the City’s continued management of the inevitable incompatibilities between police and social services. Their different views regarding the issues facing at-risk youth and what constitute the most effective solutions for those issues must be handled on an ongoing basis.
- Even three years into operation, serious disputes remained over the mission of the JISC and the potential it had to “widen the net” of intervention by bringing non-serious offenders into the justice system, but the partner agencies aired these disputes successfully, and it is unlikely that such problems will go unnoticed in the future.
- The administrative structure and information management capacity of the JISC appeared to be sufficient for the program to participate in a future outcome evaluation.
- The primary challenge facing the JISC was the lack of depth and diversity in the resources it was able to offer to youth and families.

# J INTRODUCTION

Juveniles arrested for criminal violations are not a single, homogenous group. They face a wide range of individual, family, and environmental obstacles, and they would benefit from varying sanctions, services, and supports. Determining the best response to an individual youth cannot be the sole responsibility of public safety officials. Law enforcement agencies are concerned with public safety and the severity of criminal behavior, but most youth arrested by police have not committed, and may never commit, serious or violent crimes. Among juvenile arrests in Chicago in 2005, for example, the top five offenses were drug-abuse violations, simple battery, various non-Index offenses (e.g., criminal trespass), disorderly conduct, and larceny-theft (Herdegen 2006). A youth's involvement in such behavior might be a relatively harmless mistake made by a still-developing adolescent, or it could be the first sign of trouble by a future career criminal. How are the police and the courts to distinguish among these possibilities?

The Chicago Juvenile Intervention and Support Center (JISC) is an attempt to bring greater consistency to such decisions. The JISC provides preventive services and supports to young people from Chicago's South Side neighborhoods. Youth selected by the JISC for case management services have been arrested for delinquent offenses or technical violations, such as failure to appear in court. They are usually young first-time or second-time offenders, and as long as they voluntarily complete a program of services and activities, they can avoid further involvement with the justice system and the stigma of adjudication.

After a lengthy process of planning and program development, the JISC opened its doors to clients in March 2006. One year later, the City of Chicago, with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, invited researchers to conduct a process evaluation of the program. The goal of a process evaluation is to document the conceptualization, design, and operations of a program. Process evaluations help social programs prepare for outcome evaluations that measure their effectiveness and success with clients. During 2007 and 2008, researchers visited the JISC numerous times, reviewed documents and reports about the program, and interviewed a wide range of individuals. Interviews were conducted with the leaders and staff of public agencies, including the Office of the Mayor of the City of Chicago, the Chicago Police Department, the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services, the Chicago Public Schools, the Cook County Circuit Court, the State's Attorney's Office for Cook County, the Office of the Cook County Public Defender, the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department, and the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Interviews were also conducted with private, nongovernmental organizations, including the Sinai Community Institute and the Community Justice for Youth Institute.

# J THE PROGRAM SETTING

Chicago's Juvenile Intervention and Support Center (JISC) is a pre-court diversion program that provides preventive services and supports for "station adjusted" (informally handled) youthful offenders. Police officials offer station adjustments to youth whose current offense and prior record do not seem to merit prosecution and referral to juvenile court. By successfully completing the voluntary services provided through the JISC and by keeping out of trouble with the police, a young person has an opportunity to avoid the stain of adjudication and a chance to grow up without the burden of a court record.

The Chicago JISC serves youth from the regions of the city designated by the Chicago Police Department as districts 2, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 21. These communities on Chicago's South Side contain numerous thriving and diverse neighborhoods, but they also include some of the most distressed areas of the city, including North Lawndale, Englewood, Pilsen, and Little Village. According to the Chicago Police Department, the total population in the communities served by the JISC was nearly 800,000 as of 2006. Residents of these areas reported more than 40,000 crimes that were serious enough to be counted in the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Crime Index, including 145 homicides, 507 criminal sexual assaults, and 4,702 robberies. Of course, the vast majority of these crimes were committed by adults, but the scope of offending suggests that juveniles in these neighborhoods are likely to face severe obstacles and risks.

Launched by the City of Chicago in 2006, the Juvenile Intervention and Support Center is an attempt to create a new approach to justice for the city's young people. The JISC is a multiagency collaboration involving law enforcement agencies, juvenile probation officials, prosecutors, children and youth services, public schools, health care providers, neighborhoods, and families.

Juvenile Intervention and Support Center



3900 South California St., Chicago, IL

Youth and families have their first contacts with the JISC at a facility on Chicago's South Side, but the JISC is not a building. It is a process. The goal of the process is to identify delinquent youth as soon as possible after they begin to violate the law and to implement services and supports that lower the chances of future crime.

The JISC responds to the delinquent acts of Chicago teens to prevent their further involvement with the juvenile justice system. It does this by assessing the circumstances of each youth and family and, where appropriate, involving them in a case management process that identifies services they may need (e.g., family counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, and anger management). Beyond services and treatment, however, the JISC process tries to connect youth with positive supports and activities that might prevent them from committing additional crimes. Case managers work to engage each youth and family in an array of resources that provide positive experiences, including physical activity and sports, educational assistance, training and employment connections, participation in civic or community affairs, and experience with forms of personal expression such as music and the arts.

According to officials from one of the key partners in the JISC, the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services (CYS), the JISC process was designed to create more effective interventions in the following ways:

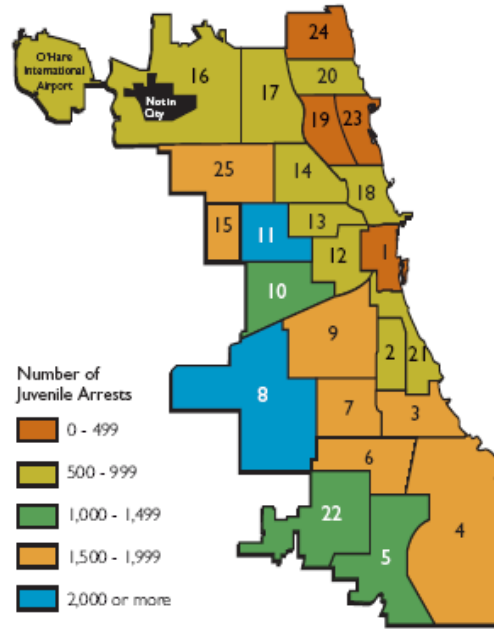


# J

- Identifying and leveraging the strengths and capabilities of youth and families
- Encouraging youth and families to assume responsibility for their futures and to take control of their lives
- Actively involving families and community members in all aspects of service planning and delivery; ensuring that families have access, voice, and ownership
- Working with youth at the times of day when most delinquent acts occur (i.e., after school and early evening)
- Revising strategies rather than blaming clients
- Linking youth with opportunities and supports in addition to services
- Linking families with services, supports, and opportunities that are appropriate for their specific needs
- Developing new resources when existing resources are inadequate
- Developing individualized discharge plans after consulting with youth and family members
- Ensuring that supports are in place to sustain the family after discharge
- Monitoring the effectiveness of JISC efforts and enhancing statistical information with input from families

Prior to the opening of the JISC, approximately 8,000 juveniles were arrested each year in the neighborhoods served by the program. Some offenses were serious enough to warrant immediate referral to the Cook County juvenile court system. Others were best handled within the family without any further contact with law enforcement or social services. Many arrests, however, fell between the two extremes. They were serious enough to merit intervention, but not serious enough to warrant formal justice involvement. The in-between cases were the main reason the City of Chicago launched the JISC. City officials estimated that 2,000 of the youth arrested each year in the areas served by the JISC would be appropriate for the preventive services offered by the JISC, if there were sufficient resources available to meet their needs.

Juvenile Arrests in 2005:  
Chicago Police Areas and Districts



Source:  
Juvenile Arrest Trends—2000-2005. Chicago Police Department, Research and Development Division, June 2006.

A process evaluation is not an outcome evaluation. An outcome evaluation is used to test whether a program produces the client outcomes it says it does. A process evaluation documents how a program conducts its day-to-day business. It assesses the conceptualization, design, delivery, and measurement of client interventions before those interventions are subjected to a more rigorous outcome evaluation. To employ the medical metaphor of treatment dosage and patient response, it could be said that a process evaluation investigates whether a treatment is being delivered as intended, while an outcome evaluation tests whether patients get better after receiving treatment.

To prepare for an outcome evaluation, the JISC must be able to measure the intensity of services for each youth and family and to assess the fidelity of each service plan. In other words, do the services and supports offered through the JISC make sense, given the program's expressed "theory of change" (i.e., that young offenders respond best to early, informal interventions that are consistent with restorative justice and positive youth development)?

To participate in an outcome evaluation, the JISC would need to be capable of generating detailed, individual-level data about screening, case management, and referral as well as subsequent service contacts, the duration of services, and the diversity of services for each youth, including the extent to which each youth and family participates in the various opportunities and supports managed directly by the JISC, its contractors, or other community-based groups. For an outcome evaluation, the program would need to produce long-term youth outcome measures (e.g., the prevalence of new arrests or new court contacts in the 12, 18, or 24 months following JISC intervention).

A process evaluation is helpful in establishing whether these necessary data elements can be collected reliably and consistently, and whether the same data elements could be available for a suitable comparison group. In a process evaluation, researchers ask critical questions about a program's activities and the availability

of important data. Before a process evaluation is completed, this information is rarely available. Even senior program officials are usually not able to answer key questions in enough detail to allow a researcher to ascertain whether a program is ready to engage in an outcome evaluation. Without an effective process evaluation, an outcome evaluation would be unlikely to generate findings that would be considered conclusive. Even the most sophisticated statistical techniques cannot make up for an evaluation design that fails to measure service intensity accurately. Unless service intensity can be monitored, a program is simply a "black box" of undifferentiated causes that may or may not be related to a program's expected effects, even if those effects (e.g., behavior change) may appear impressive out of context.

## Process Evaluations versus Management Studies

The tasks and activities required for a process evaluation are similar to those used in management studies. Both investigations involve the collection of program documents, interviews with program staff, and an examination of data systems. Their purposes, however, are quite different. The goal of a management study is to answer questions about the efficiency of an organization's business practices. These questions might include the following:

- Does the agency have effective leadership?
- Does the agency have appropriately trained staff?
- Does the agency demonstrate effective communication, internally and externally?
- Are the partners and subcontractors involved with the agency appropriate, and do they have the skills and capacities necessary to perform?
- Does the agency have sound contracts or memoranda of agreement to establish an appropriate division of labor with its key partners?
- Does the agency have mechanisms in place to track expenditures?
- Is the information system adequate to maintain core operations?



These questions are about the effectiveness of agency operations and the organization's administrative acumen. They do not address the impact of agency efforts on clients, nor do they generate information about the appropriateness of the program's basic approach. An agency could be expertly administered but ineffective due to shortcomings in its theory of change. A program based on a bad or misplaced theory of change might be operated efficiently but fail to have a measurable impact on outcomes.

To use an extreme (and even silly) example, an agency could assert that the best method of reducing youth recidivism is to teach all young offenders how to play poker. The program might be run quite efficiently. It might provide all youth with playing cards, chips, and betting instructions, and it might do so in a very cost-effective manner, using trained staff and well-managed contractors. Someone, however, eventually has to ask the question, "Does poker playing really reduce recidivism?" The task of an evaluator is to answer that question with statistical precision.

A management study may address the client-related processes of an agency, but it does so in a descriptive way. Investigators in management studies usually accept the reports of agency officials at face value. When a program manager describes the range of services provided to clients, it is often beyond the scope of a management study to test the accuracy of the description. A process evaluation, on the other hand, is explicitly designed to investigate the accuracy of normative program descriptions, because the central goal of the process evaluation is to measure program activities as they really are, rather than as agency leaders would like to characterize them.

## Methods Used in the Study

In 2007 and 2008, researchers met with the Chicago Police Department, Children and Youth Services, and JISC staff to discuss the general plan of the process evaluation. They toured the facility several times and were introduced to the components of case processing—intake, screening, and case management. Interviews

were conducted with various individuals identified by the research team or through referrals made during interviews. Each of the following people was interviewed at least once during the study.

(Note: The affiliations listed were accurate at the time of the study interviews.)

- John Adams, Sinai Community Institute
- Megan Alderden, Chicago Police Department
- Kathleen Bankhead, Juvenile Justice Division, Cook County State's Attorney
- Mary Ellen Caron, Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services
- Ginny Caufield, Balanced and Restorative Justice, Cook County Juvenile Court
- Cathy Kolb, Chicago Police Department
- Evelyn R. Cole, Sinai Community Institute
- Earl Dunlap, Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center
- Cheryl Graves, Community Justice for Youth Institute
- Robert Hargesheimer, Chicago Police Department
- Errol Hicks, Chicago Police Department
- Lori Levin, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
- Christopher Mallette, Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services
- Mike Masters, Office of the Mayor
- Mark Myrent, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
- Jim McCarter, Juvenile Justice Division, Cook County State's Attorney
- Peter Newman, County Circuit Court
- Azim Ramelize, Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services
- Judith Rocha, Sinai Community Institute
- Mike Rohan, Juvenile Probation and Court Services, Cook County Juvenile Court
- Angela Rudolph, Office of the Mayor
- Larry Sachs, Chicago Police Department
- Steven Terrell, Chicago Police Department
- Dianne Thompson, Chicago Police Department



- Cynthia Williams, Sinai Community Institute
- Paula Wolff, Chicago Metropolis 2020

The researchers also reviewed a wide range of documents from the JISC and from the various agencies involved in its development. These documents included reports, meeting notes, interagency memoranda, intake and screening forms, outreach material describing the program and outlining its mission, newsletters, pamphlets on services offered, flow charts, arrest report forms, station adjustment forms (formal and informal), victim-offender conferencing paperwork, counseling referral forms, peer jury paperwork, Sinai Community Institute spreadsheets, and a guide on balanced and restorative justice. Finally, researchers reviewed various management information systems used by the Chicago Police Department, the Sinai Community Institute, the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services, and the JISC itself to understand what information was collected on youth and what role such information played (and was intended to play) in the operation of the center and the processing of individual cases.

# J THE JISC PROCESS

When a young person arrives at the JISC building on South California Street in Chicago, he or she has probably just been apprehended and/or arrested by Chicago Police Department (CPD) officers and taken to the JISC by car. Escorted by patrol officers, the youth enters the JISC building through a side door adjacent to the parking lot. While one of the arresting officers fills out an arrest report and other required paperwork, the youth is most likely secured with handcuffs to a booking bench, a wooden bench that is bolted to the floor and the wall. After 30 to 60 minutes, the patrol officer leaves the JISC, and the youth is escorted to the second floor of the building to be fingerprinted and photographed. The youth then waits in a secure area of the JISC, which is a small waiting room with ceiling-mounted fluorescent lights, hard plastic furniture, and a large plexiglass window that allows CPD officers to observe the waiting youth. The room has nothing else in it. There are no reading materials and no television. Youth are required to remain seated unless given permission to stand or move.

They youth may wait in the secure area for an hour or even several hours, depending on the time of day and the backlog of cases in need of further processing. At some point, a detective comes to take the youth to an office to begin the intake process. The intake detective asks a series of questions while filling out an assessment form that organizes the facts pertinent to the intake decision. During the interview, the detective notes the situation surrounding the youth's arrest, the severity of the offense, the youth's criminal background, and whether any warrants exist from previous arrests.

The assessment form provides an easy way to list the information gathered from name checks, arrest reports, and the computer check. Felonies and misdemeanors are listed separately to assess each youth's criminal history. The officer then assigns a risk level by checking or not checking a series of boxes that characterize the youth's arrest history. Using the assessment form, the officer has the discretion to determine if the youth poses a low, medium, or high risk. The tally of the assessment form is not absolute, but

if an officer decides to handle the case in a way that is not consistent with the results of the assessment form, the decision must be reported and explained to a supervisor.

In cases involving serious offenses or multiple prior offenses, youth may be transferred to secure detention. If detention is not considered appropriate, but the youth has been charged with relatively serious offenses or has an extensive arrest record, the case will likely be referred to juvenile court for further legal processing. The remaining youth, the non-detained and non-referred cases, are eligible for station adjustment and case management services.

A station-adjusted youth who is referred to case management has to wait once again in the secure area on the second floor of the JISC building until a parent or guardian arrives and consents to meet with staff from the Sinai Community Institute (SCI). The officers try to accommodate the youth if he or she needs to use the restroom or becomes hungry; however, no activities are provided. One CPD officer, when asked about the stark environment of the waiting area, endorsed its punitive qualities, stating that "We have to let them know that when they're arrested, there are certain rights they lose. Remember how this feels so that next time you won't do what you did to come in here."

After the parent or guardian arrives, a CPD officer brings the youth to the first floor of the building and speaks with the family in an office off the lobby. The officer describes the arrest and then explains that the juvenile is being adjusted and referred to case management rather than facing formal charges and a court hearing. A worker from the case management agency, SCI, meets with the youth and parent, explains case management, and invites the parent to consent to the program. If the parent refuses, the CPD detective returns and explains that the matter will be referred to the State's Attorney's Office. If the parent or guardian consents to the station adjustment and agrees to participate in case management, the SCI worker begins to interview the youth and parent and conducts additional assessments in order to



prepare an individualized family service plan. At that point, the CPD officers are finished with the case. Officers keep track of how long youth are at the JISC (when they enter the building, when they go upstairs, when they enter and leave the secure area, and when they leave the JISC with a parent). Ideally, the entire process is completed within six hours.

If a youth and family cooperate with SCI and successfully complete the goals of the service plan, their case will be closed. Some families, however, agree to cooperate but then walk out of the JISC building and disappear. Clearly, some people who pick up youth from the JISC never intend to complete the service plan; they just want to get out of the JISC building as quickly as possible.

After three follow-up calls and two unannounced home visits, the case management staff at SCI sends a certified letter to the family saying that their continued lack of cooperation has resulted in the matter being returned to the police and the State's Attorney's Office. The SCI staff member fills out a form explaining why the case should be closed. An SCI social worker reviews the form and passes it on to the director for review, at which point the case is closed. When a family fails to follow through with SCI, the police department notifies the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, and a prosecutor may decide to reinstate the original charges against the youth, in keeping with the deferred prosecution procedures agreed upon by the State's Attorney's Office and City officials.

Before implementing the JISC, a number of Chicago officials researched the concept of juvenile assessment centers and visited other programs around the country. The City hoped to design a process that would ensure an effective response for young offenders while maintaining vigorous diversion standards. Several strategies for community intervention and youth services were central in the development of the Chicago JISC. The most essential frameworks include (1) early intervention, (2) interagency service coordination, (3) graduated sanctioning, (4) community justice and problem-solving justice, (5) restorative justice, and (6) positive youth development.

## Early Intervention

The JISC was designed to achieve a basic but often neglected goal of juvenile justice—to respond immediately and effectively to the first delinquent acts in order to prevent future crime and avoid the costs of repeated delinquency. Members of the public often believe that early intervention is a principal function of the juvenile justice system, but it is actually rare for large cities to pursue early intervention seriously. The first, second, or even third delinquent act by a young person is often ignored by juvenile authorities.

One reason for this apparent lack of action is that a vast majority of youth engage in at least some illegal behavior before adulthood. In fact, one in three juveniles commits at least one serious act of property crime or violence before age 18 (Thornberry and Krohn 2003:100–101). Responding formally to all instances of delinquent behavior would be extremely expensive. Thus, the justice system refrains from taking action until a youth exhibits persistent delinquency. Another reason why justice officials often fail to act in response to a first criminal violation is that bringing youth into the juvenile justice system is risky. The stigma and negative self-identity associated with legal sanctions may cause youth to engage in more illegal behavior, not less (Bernburg and Krohn 2003). Because of this risk, as well as the need to maintain sound public policy regarding diversion from the

justice system, it is important to avoid drawing youth into the legal system unnecessarily.

Due to these legitimate concerns, most communities wait to intervene aggressively with delinquent youth until they have been arrested several times. At most, first-time offenders may be offered informal, noncoercive referrals to social service agencies. This is rarely effective, however, because of a third reason why communities fail to intervene at the onset of delinquency: Most communities simply have very little to offer youth and families in need of preventive services and supports, especially the type of resources that would be accepted and used by voluntary clients. Lacking an array of appealing resources, communities usually fail to intervene during the formation of delinquent behavior. Yet, this is probably when intervention is most effective. The best time to intervene in any antisocial or destructive behavior is early, as soon as it appears. Arguing for early intervention is easy; implementing it is hard.

## Interagency Coordination

In the past decade, jurisdictions across the United States have tried to increase cross-agency coordination. The chronic absence of effective coordination among service agencies has long been one of the most potent barriers to preventing and reducing juvenile crime (Howell 1995; Rivers, Dembo, and Anwyl 1998; Lipsey and Wilson 1998; Lipsey 1999; Cocozza and Skowrya 2000; Slayton 2000; Jenson and Potter 2003). Traditionally, human services agencies were established to provide specific programs (e.g., substance use/abuse intervention, sex offender treatment, education support, mental health treatment), and each agency worked individually with its own particular client population. The resulting interventions were often inefficient and ineffective, and jurisdictions found it difficult to identify and work with youth who presented co-occurring disorders involving mental health problems, family problems, substance abuse, educational deficits, and other social problems (Peters and Bartoi 1997; Peters and Hills 1997). In response, many states made intra- and interagency





collaboration a priority (National Criminal Justice Association 1997; Rivers and Anwyl 2000).

## Graduated Sanctions

The operative philosophy of the JISC is also consistent with the graduated sanctions approach (Howell 1995). Grounded in both research and common sense, graduated sanctioning ensures that there is at least some response to each instance of illegal behavior as juveniles begin to violate the law. Jurisdictions that embrace this approach develop a full continuum of sanctions, including immediate sanctions for first-time offenders, intermediate and community-based sanctions for more serious offenders, and secure/residential placement for those youth who commit especially serious or violent offenses. Such approaches can introduce a greater degree of consistency in how youth within and across jurisdictions are sanctioned. More important, they can promote justice solutions that rely on the demonstrated effectiveness of rehabilitation and treatment, and that emphasize responsiveness, accountability, and responsibility as the cornerstones of an effective juvenile justice system.

## Community Justice and Problem-Solving Justice

Many components of the juvenile justice system have begun to adopt the framework of “community justice” and “problem-solving justice.” Community justice refocuses the nature of justice-system intervention. Each incidence of criminal behavior is viewed within the context of the community in which it occurs. Professionals within the justice system work to develop relationships with community leaders and other residents to understand why crime happens and to prevent future occurrences. These concepts have inspired several important program innovations in the criminal justice system, including community policing, community prosecution, and community courts (Rottman and Casey 1999; Connor 2000; Karp and Clear 2000).

Problem-solving justice is an old idea in the juvenile justice system, but in recent years it has become a compelling framework in criminal justice as well. Rather than simply identifying offenders, weighing the evidence against them, and imposing punishment, the problem-solving perspective calls upon the justice system to use the processes of investigation, arrest, prosecution, and sentencing to solve problems in the community. This shifts the focus of the justice system to the well-being of families and communities instead of the culpability of offenders.

Problem solving has long been the mission of the juvenile justice system and one of the key reasons for the development of juvenile assessment centers. One influential statement in support of community justice and problem-solving justice was made more than a decade ago by two administrators for the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. In their Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders, Wilson and Howell (1993) suggested that the juvenile justice system would be more efficient and effective if it emphasized community-based approaches. Their ideas were echoed by the members of the federal Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (1996).

## Restorative Justice

Another important shift in juvenile justice practice is the growing emphasis on restorative justice, an alternative framework for legal intervention, replacing or at least counterbalancing retributive justice. Retributive justice ensures that each offender suffers a punishment in proportion to the harm inflicted on the victim of the offense. Restorative justice provides a means for each offender to correct that harm, or at least to compensate the victim, even if the victim is the general community.

Several well-known program models are associated with the restorative justice movement, but the most popular are victim-offender mediation and family group conferencing. The number of these programs has





increased sharply during the last 10 years, and research suggests that they may offer an effective alternative to traditional court processing (Bazemore and Umbreit 1995; McGarrell, Olivares, Crawford, and Kroovand 2000). Restorative justice principles are also endorsed explicitly in Illinois State law. The “Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 1998” changed the purpose of juvenile justice in Illinois law to the pursuit of a proper balance between offender accountability and victim or community restoration.

### Positive Youth Development

Finally, the design of the JISC was shaped by an even more innovative approach—positive youth development (PYD). Positive youth development suggests that the goal of youth programs should be social attachment rather than behavioral control. Instead of focusing on problem avoidance and risk reduction, communities should help young people to establish a sense of identity, usefulness, and belonging. It is a simple notion. All adolescents need the experiences that youth in wealthy communities take for granted, including caring relationships with pro-social adults, the opportunity to play organized sports, self-expression through music and the arts, after-school employment, and civic engagement through group membership.

The PYD framework emerged from several decades of efforts to create an alternative to the once-prevailing view of adolescence as a thicket of problems and deficits (National Research Council 2002). Positive youth development is a comprehensive way of supporting the factors that facilitate a youth’s growth and successful transition to adulthood. Its concepts of are an attempt to answer critical questions, such as “What forces help youth to achieve productive and healthy adulthoods?” and “How can families and communities bring those forces to bear in the lives of individual youth?” The central purpose of PYD is action. While the term “adolescent development” describes the topic of scientific investigation in which researchers generate knowledge about the processes of individual growth and maturation, the term

“positive youth development” represents the various methods, techniques, and practices used to apply scientific knowledge about adolescent development in agency and community settings (Pittman, Irby, and Ferber 2000).

Despite broad public support for these concepts, positive youth development is not often used to design interventions for young offenders. The JISC is an attempt to do so. Implementing a PYD approach for young offenders requires a broad range of interventions and strategies. Directing services and supports toward the type of youth outcomes suggested by PYD means connecting youth with positive adult relationships, possibly through mentoring programs. It means expanding contacts between juvenile offenders and positive peer role models, perhaps with peer jury programs. It also means providing youth with educational supports; work experience; civic engagement; and safe, productive opportunities for physical activity and personal expression through music and the arts (Butts, Bazemore, and Meroe 2010).

Almost by definition, the resources necessary to support a PYD approach have to be local and small scale. Large bureaucracies cannot implement PYD strategies independently; they have to harness the power of volunteers, local businesses, neighborhood groups, and community organizations. Developing and sustaining these resources is difficult and time consuming. If local governments try the shortcut of buying solutions from professional service providers, they usually end up with more bureaucracy and standardized services rather than with genuine community-based resources and opportunities for youth.

## J SIMILAR PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

The Chicago JISC is similar to other efforts to centralize delinquency prevention and diversion services. Jurisdictions across the country have started a variety of similar programs in an attempt to provide earlier screening and assessment of youth, to identify young offenders with special needs, and to provide more timely interventions (Cocozza and Skowrya 2000; Rivers and Anwyl 2000). Often called “juvenile assessment centers” (JACs) or “community assessment centers” (CACs), the programs are designed to provide systematic and consistent assessment of youth referred to the juvenile justice system and to accelerate the delivery of preventive services. Their underlying goal is to provide an empirical basis for decision making regarding young offenders (Rivers and Anwyl 2000).

Advocates for JAC and CAC programs see them as a means of identifying and eliminating gaps in services, facilitating integrated case management, improving communication among agencies, increasing the community’s awareness of youth needs, and providing more appropriate interventions and better outcomes for youth (Oldenettel and Wordes 2000). There have been very few evaluations of JACs, but the literature generally suggests that the programs may reduce the time and resources necessary for law enforcement to process the youngest and least serious juvenile offenders. Studies also indicate that the presence of a JAC can lead to increased information sharing and collaboration among justice and social services agencies, increased numbers of youth referred for preventive services, and a broader use of diversion for youth. As always, however, the positive features of JAC programs have to be weighed against their potential negative characteristics, including the possibility that the programs aggravate net widening, as law enforcement agencies react to expanded interventions by expanding the type of youth they are willing to arrest (Cronin 1996; Cocozza, et al. 2005; Castrianno 2007).

The first known JAC opened in Florida in 1993, partially in response to a rash of highly publicized juvenile crimes that were damaging the tourist industry (Cronin 1996). In 1995,

relying heavily on the Florida JAC experience, the administrator of the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) issued a brief report that examined the JAC concept (Bilchik 1995). The report described the results of focus groups that were held to discuss the JAC concept and its implementation in Florida. It also considered whether the JAC model could reduce the systemic barriers encountered by juvenile justice agencies as they worked to implement the OJJDP’s Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders (Wilson and Howell 1993).

The report recommended that future JAC programs incorporate several key program elements, including a single point of entry for youth referrals, immediate and comprehensive assessments for youth, the use of management information systems capable of monitoring each youth’s progress through multiple treatment programs and across multiple systems, and a well-integrated case management process. Five concerns about the JAC model were discussed as well, including the dangers of labeling young offenders, the potential for breaches of client confidentiality, the risk that expanding the JAC model could widen the net of justice system responsibility, the difficulties of achieving true interagency coordination, and the possible risks to youth rights and due process (Bilchik 1995). However, the 1995 report recognized that the JAC concept was a promising strategy, and the Justice Department announced that it would begin a demonstration project in 1996. Assessment centers began to spread across the United States soon thereafter.

Despite the growing popularity of community assessment centers, there has still been very little rigorous analysis of their effectiveness. Most available information about JAC-style programs is descriptive, including program descriptions and practitioner recommendations. A search of the literature suggests that 20 programs have been investigated by independent researchers in recent years. Nearly all the previous studies, however, were process evaluations. Only one outcome evaluation has



been published. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) studied four programs involved in an OJJDP demonstration initiative between 1997 and 1999 (Wordes and Le 2000). The study employed a quasi-experimental design and could not generate true evidence of program impact. Nevertheless, the findings were generally supportive of the JAC model.

The NCCD study involved two operating assessment centers and two in the planning stages. The analysis included an examination of program records, staff interviews and surveys, reviews of assessment services, and a measurement of recidivism using automated records. Researchers addressed the environmental context of the JAC programs and described their procedures for establishing client eligibility; their case-processing methods; the range of intervention programs they offered; their organizational linkages and relationships; and youth outcomes, including recidivism.

Regarding the latter, the study compared the prevalence of recidivism among youth involved in the JAC programs with youth from a matched comparison group. Experimental youth (JAC) and comparison youth (non-JAC) reoffended at about the same rate, although the JAC youth had more rearrests for property and status offenses, while comparison youth had more rearrests for violent offenses. Involvement in a JAC program also appeared to be associated with a slower rate of subsequent recidivism. Among the youth who eventually reoffended, fewer JAC youth (46 percent) reoffended within the first three months than did non-JAC youth (77 percent). In one program, the researchers compared the recidivism of youth according to whether they were assessed fully. Matched on race, sex, age, and offense type, the findings suggested that assessed youth were slightly less likely to recidivate than were nonassessed youth (41 percent versus 45 percent). The authors noted, however, that the findings should be interpreted with caution due to problems with data sources and case matching (Wordes and Le 2000).

The NCCD study resulted in several key inferences about JAC programs and their effectiveness:

- Intensive community involvement and collaboration is critical to the success of JAC programs, and achieving such collaboration sometimes requires the involvement of outside facilitators.
- Key program design elements such as ensuring a single point of entry for delinquent youth and colocating services are difficult to integrate and may not be feasible in all programs or in all instances.
- The use of structured client assessments and systematic case processing is important for implementing integrated case management approaches.
- The use of an interagency management information system is a powerful incentive for integrating services, but developing real-time, cross-system information is expensive and technically challenging, and it entails risks to client confidentiality.

It was clear to the NCCD researchers that access to integrated data is critical for meeting program operational goals as well as ensuring sound evaluation outcomes (Oldenettel and Wordes 2000; Wordes and Le 2000). The study also confirmed that launching a JAC program presents many challenges. Partnering efforts are often complicated by turf issues; net widening is nearly always a significant concern; it is difficult to reconcile the competing functions of services and public safety in one program location; and the availability of a JAC program does not necessarily help to reduce minority overrepresentation.

## Funding

According to the research literature, funding is nearly always a challenge for programs like the JISC. Few assessment centers have been supported exclusively through federal grants awarded directly to the program (Cocozza et al. 2005). As in Chicago, the programs are most frequently funded through a combination of federal, state, and local funds (Cronin 1996; Cocozza et al. 2005; Clark 2007; Silverthorn 2003). In at least one instance, an assessment center was able to fund its programs with resources from a Community Service Block Grant (Cronin 1996). In another instance, the staff of a center was funded through local parks and recreation budgets (Villarreal and Witten 2006). Other creative funding arrangements have included private grants and in-kind donations of space and equipment from community-based agencies (Cronin 1996). Since the early days of the assessment center concept, foundation funding has been especially rare (Cronin 1996).

### The Chicago Experience

The Chicago JISC experienced its share of difficulties due to funding issues. As early as 1999, City officials saw an opportunity to launch a new screening and referral program using money available through the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant administered by the U.S. Department of Justice. The funding was to be awarded to the state of Illinois and passed on to the city through the interagency Juvenile Crime Enforcement Coalition and the Chicago Police Department (CPD). The intricacies of the funding mechanism added to the complications that would later emerge around the strategy and mission of the program.

When the JISC was very close to opening, some officials were reportedly surprised to learn that much of the federal funding awarded to the City had already been spent to renovate the police building on South California Street, and the program's security arrangements were already finalized. According to City officials, initial conflicts over program funding were due at least partly to misunderstandings. Because of the

complicated nature of interagency efforts and the fact that one of the key players, the Department of Children and Youth Services (CYS), was a relatively new City agency, finalizing the operational plan for the JISC took longer than expected. The partner agencies spent several years debating the structure and service approach to be used by the new program. The Mayor's Office became concerned that the City could lose the federal funding if the approved (and even extended) budget period for the program expired before the JISC itself opened.

To expedite the development of the JISC and to start the flow of federal expenditures, the CPD was authorized to use much of the initial grant to renovate the building in which the JISC was to be housed. Later, some critics believed that CPD had spent so much of the federal grant on the building that there was little money left for staffing and service delivery. These decisions, made for practical reasons, had unfortunate consequences for the stability of the JISC and the strength of the interorganizational collaboration required to design and operate the program.

There were also numerous issues related to funding as the JISC began to receive referrals. The Sinai Community Institute, the organization contracted to provide case management services to JISC youth, experienced long delays in receiving compensation due to CPD contracting requirements. Misunderstandings continued to occur about who was in control of case management. When the City's Children and Youth Services agency was officially included in JISC operations, it wanted to alter the case management system in ways that CPD officials did not support or understand. This added more complexity to the existing funding issues. Tensions over funding were highest during the year leading up to the opening of the JISC. By the second year of program operation, most budget issues had been resolved through the leadership and persistence of City officials, principally those at Chicago Public Schools, the Department of Children and Youth Services, and the Chicago Police Department.



## Program Design and Target Population

In every previous evaluation of centralized assessment centers similar to the JISC, researchers have discussed the importance of matching the program design to the target population. Although programs like the JISC vary in how they define their target populations, they generally take two forms (Cronin 1996). Slightly more than half the programs serve youth arrested for less serious offenses and those not considered appropriate for secure detention. Some programs even provide services to noncriminal youth, including those referred for truancy. Just under half of all JAC programs serve a broader range of youth, including some arrested for serious offenses but often excepting cases involving violent offenses. The Chicago JISC handles a wide range of youth, including some headed for court referral and detention, but its case management component mainly targets youth charged with nonviolent offenses (i.e., those involving no gun charges), youth with few prior offenses, and youth whose current offense and prior record are not severe enough to justify secure detention or court referral.

The design of JAC programs similar to the JISC is often based on the needs of the target population, as identified by screening and assessment. The program elements most frequently discussed in the evaluation literature are youth screening and assessment; the case management process; the program's source of referrals; the degree to which participation in services is mandatory; procedures for client follow-up; and the role of sanctions, consent, and parent involvement. In the majority of programs previously studied, initial screenings were conducted by police (Cronin 1996; Cocozza et al. 2005). In some programs, however, case management or counseling staff worked with their law enforcement partners to conduct screenings and to assess each youth's appropriateness for referral to the program (Cronin 1996; Castrianno 2007).

In most programs, full assessments are conducted whenever a youth is identified during the initial screening as being in need of a full

assessment. The comprehensiveness of these assessments and the tools used to conduct them vary. In all programs, however, case managers or counseling staff, rather than police officers, conduct the full client assessment. In some programs, families are included, but in others, only the youth is present (Cronin 1996). Some programs similar to the JISC are either unable or are not designed to conduct full assessments. These programs generally serve a more limited population (Villarreal and Witten 2006; 18th Judicial District Juvenile Assessment Center 2007; Wordes and Le 2000).

Case managers provide referrals to outside services in almost all assessment centers similar to the JISC, and nearly all such programs follow up with youth to ascertain their actual level of participation. If an assessment center does not involve outside service providers, it is usually because the program itself is operated by a service provider. A smaller number of assessment centers do not provide any referrals for services but instead conduct an initial screening that merely determines whether youth should go to court or be diverted (Castrianno 2007).

Nearly half of all programs similar to the JISC require youth to participate in services when referred. Seven of 20 programs examined in previous studies included some mechanism to ensure that noncompliant youth received sanctions, including being referred back to the traditional juvenile justice process for prosecution (Cronin 1996; Cocozza et al. 2005; Villarreal and Witten 2006; Castrianno 2007). However, only four of the programs rigorously tracked service participation by youth after they had been referred to outside providers. Three of these four programs worked with youth who were mandated to participate in services (Cocozza et al. 2005).

### The Chicago Experience

The station-adjusted youth referred to Sinai Community Institute (SCI) case management are the core clients of the JISC, in that the JISC represents an alternative approach for dealing with young offenders in Chicago. When the first





executive director of the JISC started in 2006, approximately 5 to 8 percent of youth arrested by the CPD and delivered to the JISC were station adjusted and referred for SCI services. That percentage soon rose to between 15 and 20 percent. There is no predetermined number of youth that can be referred to case management, but the JISC philosophy suggests that, whenever a youth can be feasibly and safely returned home and whenever the case does not involve a serious or violent charge, then the youth is appropriate for station adjustment and case management.

The JISC process involves some obvious contradictions. To put it very simply, there are two options for working with troubled youth accused of relatively minor offenses. One option is to connect the youth with case managers, social workers, and community agencies in an effort to turn them around and get them back on a path to healthy development and future citizenship. The second option relies on the justice system to ensure accountability and control youths' behavior. The justice system demonstrates to youth that police, prosecutors, and judges have the power to inflict punishment and that illegal behavior results in loss of liberty.

Like other aspects of the juvenile justice system, however, the JISC seems to embrace both choices without true fidelity to either. The JISC's stated mission is to use social services to prevent future criminal behavior and to engage youth in community supports and opportunities that bind them to conventional social structures. When youth come into the JISC, however, they are immediately handcuffed, fingerprinted, and photographed before spending up to several hours in what amounts to a holding cell. Youth receive mixed signals. Of course, security issues are a real concern for staff at the JISC. The case managers and social workers employed by SCI do not often see the risks faced by CPD staff during the intake and screening process. For example, one CPD official relayed the story of a 13-year-old boy brought to the JISC and found to be in possession of a pair of brass knuckles equipped with a hidden blade several inches long.

As a precautionary measure, therefore, every youth is treated initially as if he or she might have a weapon. Every youth is patted down and searched. Many are handcuffed to the bench in the intake area. CPD officers point out that, without handcuffs, a distressed person could become panicked or enraged, endangering anyone in the room. When people are placed in custody, their mental state changes, and their reactions are unpredictable. According to one CPD officer, "It is impossible to know everybody's personality. This is why they are secured to a bench during questioning. It is for their safety and for the safety of others."

What CPD officers do not acknowledge is the impact these security policies have on the rest of the JISC process. A few hours after being handcuffed to a bench, a youth who ends up receiving a station adjustment and a referral to SCI will be asked to sit in a room just yards away from the secure holding area and engage in an assessment with a case manager. The assessment requires the parent and youth to participate in an open and frank discussion about their issues with family, peers, and school. In a matter of hours and within the same small building, the JISC process demands that youth go from a lock-up environment to a therapeutic milieu, and they are expected to cooperate fully with the staff in each setting.

Parents may be irate by the time the assessment occurs. When the assessment begins, they may have been waiting in the JISC lobby for three to four hours, at which point a case manager meets with them to obtain consent to implement a Youth Assessment and Screen Instrument and other individualized assessments. The goal of the assessment phase is to obtain as much information as possible about each youth and family. If the parent asks for the family assessment to be postponed until another time, the three most important consent forms are completed, and a home visit or an appointment at a neutral location is scheduled. The goals of the entire process are to complete the appointment within 24 hours, to triage cases effectively, and to implement the individual service plan as soon as possible.



The SCI service plan is a key component of the JISC. The initial service plan meeting includes the parent or guardian in order to provide the case manager with a full understanding of each youth's situation, especially if the juvenile is nonresponsive. If, during the initial assessment at the JISC, the family indicates that more immediate intervention is necessary, SCI will work to put supports in place right away.

The goal of case management is to employ a wide range of strategies and engage youth in a variety of services and supports that reduce the chances of future criminal behavior and subsequent justice involvement. One of the initial stated principles of the JISC was to build its efforts with youth around the frameworks of restorative justice and positive youth development. The youth development approach and strength-based approaches that cultivate a youth's existing strengths or talents, in particular, were very innovative ideas for Chicago's juvenile justice system.

SCI staff work to build on the strengths of each youth by asking a series of questions about the youth's daily activities and then determining what services and supports might be appropriate. For example, a juvenile arrested for "tagging" walls might be referred to an art program. A youth interested in athletics may be connected with programs offered by the local park district.

In deciding on referrals, case managers are especially concerned to find services and opportunities that are local and safe. The case manager makes the initial contact with a program, ensuring that there is space available, and then follows up to make certain the young person attends the initial appointment and begins services. The case manager gives the program as much information as possible about the youth. If transportation is an issue and there is no alternative, the case manager may even transport a youth to the various program sites involved in the service plan. If there is gang involvement or if the youth lives in a known gang area, the SCI staff consider areas in which the juvenile can safely travel.

When warranted, of course, SCI refers families to counseling. If the situation calls for consistent and long-term treatment, families are referred to providers outside of SCI. Choosing the best resources for every client remains an individual decision. Case managers try to develop their own relationships with outside providers; at the same time, they inform each other about the resources they use.

Case managers try to find services that are accessible to the family. If there is a relatively inexpensive option—for example, a YMCA membership—SCI will often offer resources to cover the fee. Case managers look for services that families will be able to maintain. Still, two years after the opening of the JISC, few people involved with the program were entirely satisfied with the type of community-based resources available. Case managers at SCI reported that sometimes very few options were available for clients beyond the traditional menu of school-based programs, family counseling, and anger management programs.

The development of new resources for youth remained difficult in part because the JISC was controversial among some youth professionals in Chicago. Many people working in the youth advocacy community were opposed to the idea of the JISC because published accounts of efforts to implement similar centers in Florida were often quite negative, indicating that the model had failed to meet expectations, partly due to the reduced discretion of patrol officers responsible for making initial decisions regarding individual youth.

Some youth advocates involved in the evolution of the JISC were concerned that the program would contribute to net widening. These community members feared that the mere presence of the JISC as an alternative to traditional police processing might increase the willingness of police, schools, and social services to involve young offenders in the justice process. Ironically, these advocates could view the range of interventions offered to JISC youth as a risk because a rich and diverse array of resources could encourage police to make more arrests and to bring more youth through the JISC process.



These concerns may have been allayed somewhat by the fact that the number of youth referred to the JISC actually declined during its first two years of operation.

Even after the JISC had been open for more than a year, some staff at JISC partner agencies believed the program was not identifying young offenders early enough or providing sufficient interventions. According to one worker, by the time youth were referred to the JISC, many of them had needed intervention for some time. Some youth were arrested at school for troubling incidents that took place weeks or months earlier. In other cases that resulted in JISC referrals, students may have simply been at the wrong place at the wrong time and could have become involved in an incident almost accidentally. If case managers had been immediately on hand, some of these youth might have been handled differently and might not have required further justice processing.

The foundational concept behind the JISC was to take youth who would have traditionally been station adjusted at individual station houses within various police districts and bring them to one place where there could be a more thoughtful evaluation that might distinguish between youth who needed more formalized juvenile justice involvement and those who did not. The JISC process is a drastic improvement over the old station-house process of writing down the names of juveniles, talking with them about making better choices, and then sending them home and hoping for the best. With the JISC, youth and their families have access to case management services designed to follow their progress more closely and to help youth stay out of trouble.

Unfortunately, the original description of the JISC left the issue of what type of services should be included fairly ambiguous. The CPD worked with a consultant to construct a specific JISC screening instrument that was supposed to indicate what services would be appropriate, but there was little clarity regarding the application of the screening and what would be done when needed services were not available.

It was never easy to describe the JISC model because much of the actual intervention depends on the decisions made by case managers and their success in actually involving youth in various services, supports, and opportunities. What exactly happens with JISC youth once they begin case management? According to one worker at SCI, sometimes case management involves referring youth for particular services, “but a lot of times we just work with them, make sure they are going to school ... and we work with the family, we document that we went to the school and worked with the school to get the youth back in, or we go with mom to sign papers at the school.” Such a characterization of case management may be accurate, but it is also one of the reasons that CPD staff continued to be skeptical of SCI well after the center opened. According to some CPD officials, case management appeared to be a euphemism for inconsistent and ad hoc interventions provided in an uncoordinated fashion and with little documentation of the program’s activities or effects.

Despite these criticisms, most of the Chicago practitioners and policy makers interviewed for this study remained very supportive of the JISC in theory. Several people involved in the program, including some CPD officers, envisioned the JISC as a community-oriented and family-friendly place where parents could simply walk in with their children if they were having trouble supervising them or managing their behavior. In fact, by 2008 the JISC was seeing about 200 families per year on a walk-in basis.

In an even more desirable situation, CPD officers could encourage clients to seek help from the JISC voluntarily. The ideal scenario might involve an officer who has some experience with a family and believes that a youth is at risk of justice involvement. Rather than making an arrest, the officer could encourage the youth and family to go to the JISC. Perhaps the officer could even agree to meet them there and then facilitate the youth’s entrance into the JISC process, but without making an arrest and without fingerprinting and





booking. The youth could still be connected with the resources made available through the SCI case management process.

According to another CPD official, however, using the JISC as a walk-in center for neighborhood families could have unintended consequences. Parents who were unable to access other resources for their troubled youth could end up reporting them to the police simply in an effort to get them under control and back on track. It would be up to the JISC staff to warn parents that involving their children in the justice system even informally entails risk.

Eventually, the JISC might be a place for parents and kids to get real help with services. More than two years after it opened, however, few people interviewed for this study were convinced that the JISC was able to offer the full range of resources and supports once envisioned. Most observers believed much work remained.

Finally, several people interviewed for this study worried about the strength of the JISC approach if the CPD and the State's Attorney's Office were unable to act in concert in cases of noncompliant youth. As mentioned earlier, when a youth failed to follow through with the JISC service plan, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office decided whether to prosecute the youth on his or her original charges. JISC youth were most likely referred to SCI case management in the first place, however, because their offenses were not serious enough to warrant prosecution. Thus, the State's Attorney could be unlikely to file charges, even if the youth had failed to comply with case management. Were this fact to become widely known in the community, of course, it could undermine the strength and integrity of the JISC. Facing the same circumstances, other youth programs, such as teen courts, sometimes arrange for mandatory prosecution agreements in cases of noncooperating youth so that parents and youth know that failure to participate will result in court proceedings (Butts, Buck, and Coggeshall 2002).

## Agency Partnerships

Agency partnerships have been a central concern in nearly all previous studies of assessment centers similar to the JISC (Cronin 1996; Coccozza et al. 2005; Harrison and Gisseman 2006 2007; Villarreal and Witten 2006; Clark 2007; Silverthorn 2003). Partnerships during the planning process frequently involve key juvenile justice figures such as prosecutors, defense attorneys, juvenile court judges, and court staff as well as law enforcement agencies. At least half the programs previously described by researchers involved partnerships that included State and City government leaders, public health officials, child and family social service agencies, mental health providers, drug treatment agencies, and public schools. Approximately one-fourth of the programs involved child protection agencies (Cronin 1996; Coccozza et al. 2005; Harrison and Gisseman 2006, 2007), while legal aid organizations and local community organizations such as the United Way, the Chamber of Commerce, and community foundations were sometimes involved but less frequently than the more mainstream youth-related agencies (Catrianno 2007).

The agency partnerships developed by juvenile assessment center programs are almost always contentious. Partners disagree about policies and methods of practice, guidelines for distributing clients and jobs, the extent (or lack) of collaboration with surrounding communities, and the nature of their respective roles and responsibilities (Cronin 1996; Coccozza et al. 2005; Wordes and Le 2000). Some centers similar to the JISC have involved outside mediators in their efforts to find acceptable solutions to complex problems related to partnerships and collaboration. Other programs have found that strong leadership, clear role expectations, and simply having more time for interaction are helpful in addressing partnership tensions (Wordes and Le 2000).



## The Chicago Experience

Forming effective partnerships was always a critical challenge for the Chicago JISC. The center was designed as a multiagency partnership, but there were many interorganizational issues that had to be resolved before the process could operate smoothly. Major partners included the Chicago Police Department, the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services, the Chicago Public Schools, the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, and the Cook County Department of Juvenile Probation. However, the degree of involvement of the different partners varied. Some agencies were more central in the design and development of the center than others. For example, CPD staff prepared the federal grant proposal that made the JISC possible. This allowed the CPD to take a leading (some would say controlling) role in the development of the center.

The original proposal that funded the JISC named the Chicago Department of Human Services as the lead service provider. Soon after, however, most City programs for children and youth were combined to form a new agency, the Department of Children and Youth Services (CYS). The new agency accepted responsibility for the social services component at the JISC, and the first executive director of the JISC was a CYS employee. By the time the JISC opened its doors in 2006, the CPD and CYS were viewed as the principal partners. Some critical problems, however, had still not been solved. In particular, the uncomfortable presence of CPD's security procedures throughout the JISC process had not been addressed effectively, despite repeated attempts by City officials to resolve the issue.

The JISC building inspired other concerns that affected the partnership. A number of officials interviewed for this study noted the challenges involved in placing the JISC in a police department building on Chicago's South California Street. One City staff member observed that, "Although we really try not to call it a police station, the families recognize the building as a police station, and as much as we try to explain that it's not, it's hard to break

down that image, or that label, in their minds ... they talk about it that way."

In order to succeed, the JISC needed to be a collaboration among organizations. Many professionals involved in the program expressed a fear that the central role played by the CPD could limit the effectiveness of the JISC. Leaders of community organizations involved with the program expressed respect for individual police officers, but they also acknowledged that they did not have a positive relationship with the department as a whole. It was partly due to these concerns that the designers of the JISC wanted social services to play a strong role in the program. In particular, case management at the center was to be a social services function and not a police department operation.

Some observers believed that the Chicago Police Department saw the JISC primarily as an opportunity to improve the efficiency of case processing. Before the opening of the center, CPD officers took juvenile offenders to any one of many different locations throughout the city for booking and processing. This resulted in lengthy delays, as the arresting officer(s) had to wait for designated juvenile officers to review and process each case before they could return to patrol duties. Under the centralized system enabled by the JISC, officers were able to bring youth to a single location, use a computerized processing station to prepare their paperwork and file the initial arrest report, and then turn the youth over to the JISC process and get back onto the street more quickly. The presence of the JISC allowed for much quicker turnaround and much less downtime for officers. In fact, CPD officers making juvenile arrests were under a mandate to spend as little time as possible at the JISC. One police official described CPD efforts to get arresting officers back on the street quickly as a "top priority" of the department. In 2008, CPD officers estimated that it took 45 minutes for an arresting officer to process a youth at the JISC and return to patrol duty. This was far quicker than at traditional station houses, where an officer might be off the street for more than two hours (see sidebar).



## The JISC Saves Enough Police Work Time for Nearly 5 Full-Time CPD Officers

2 ½ hours	Average time a CPD officer is “off the street” to process a juvenile arrest in areas of Chicago <u>without</u> a JISC program
45 minutes	Average time an officer is “off the street” to process a juvenile arrest at the JISC
1 hour, 45 minutes	Officer work time saved for each juvenile arrest processed at the JISC (i.e., 2 ½ hours minus 45 minutes)
5,600 arrests	Annual number of juvenile arrests processed at the Chicago JISC (as of 2008)
9,800 hours	Estimated annual number of CPD officer work hours saved by processing juvenile arrests at the Chicago JISC (i.e., 1 hour and 45 minutes multiplied by 5,600)
2,016 hours	Annual work hours of a CPD officer (i.e., 168 hours per month multiplied by 12)
4.9 officers	Estimated number of full-time officer positions potentially created by the availability of the JISC per year (i.e., 9,800 hours divided by 2,016 hours)

Note: Figures for “off-street” time were derived by asking working CPD officers to estimate the time required to process juvenile arrests in various police districts. These estimates were not verified by actual measurements.

According to police officials, however, the department was always in support of bringing greater consistency to screening and assessment decisions made at the JISC. In fact, the CPD developed new juvenile screening procedures specifically for the JISC. A centralized and closely coordinated screening and referral process made sense to nearly everyone, at least in the abstract. However, centralization also reduces discretion, and it may add inconvenience for some decision makers. After the implementation of the JISC process, some CPD officers missed the degree of latitude they once enjoyed in deciding how to respond to individual youth. According to one officer, as soon as the JISC opened, it was clear that CPD leadership and the State’s Attorney’s Office were going to be far more involved than before in determining individual case outcomes. Before the JISC, officers themselves often decided whether a youth was to be referred to juvenile court, adjusted, deferred, or diverted. The expansion of people and organizations involved in case-related decision making was not always welcome.

In the view of other City leaders, the increased transparency and consistency of case processing and case management for young offenders was exactly the point of starting the JISC. When the JISC first opened, and before the Department of Children and Youth Services had assumed its prominent role, CPD staff had continued the screening and referral practices it had always used for juvenile arrests. For many (even most) youth arrested for relatively minor offenses, this meant a referral to one of the local service providers that had long-term associations with the CPD. The choices available for minor offenders were extremely limited, and CPD officers were not encouraged to look for resources outside the established comfort zone.

Soon after the JISC opened, the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services stopped the CPD case management process. Instead, the Sinai Community Institute (SCI) was contracted to handle all case management services for JISC-involved youth. Naturally, this meant that fewer youth would be referred to



other providers, including some with long-term relationships with the CPD. This change created conflict between the key JISC partners. Previously, the CPD had used a printed directory of local service providers to identify available programs for arrested youth. When Sinai became involved, the CPD forwarded this directory to them and suggested that SCI workers might want to interview the existing agencies and continue to make use of their services.

From the perspective of the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services, however, the essential mission of the JISC was to expand the pool of resources beyond those already used by the CPD. In a true case management system, the case manager (in this context, SCI) serves as a broker and recruiter of service providers and is not simply a referral mechanism. JISC officials described SCI's responsibility as connecting every youth with whatever services and supports were appropriate, whether or not such services were already provided by an existing agency or even by SCI itself. In particular, the JISC philosophy required more resources designed to engage and support the strengths of youth rather than merely to identify and treat their deficits.

In the view of some CPD officials, the JISC philosophy sounded appealing, but pursuing a drastic expansion of resources could result in less accountability. They worried that SCI and its network of providers would not communicate with the CPD about case outcomes. When asked about this criticism, the managers of some nonprofit agencies in Chicago agreed with the CPD assessment, but they viewed limited data sharing with the CPD as a virtue rather than a defect. The mission of prevention services, they argued, is to serve youth and families and to advocate their interests. One of the principal goals of prevention programs is to keep youth from becoming more deeply involved in the justice system. If an agency informed police officers about each and every development in a youth's case, they could jeopardize that youth's future success. In the view of service providers, it is necessary to place an informational barrier

between the social services sector and the law enforcement sector.

The Chicago Police Department actually agreed with this view. Placing a "firewall" between the CPD and case management was, in fact, a critically important feature of the JISC process. Police officials did not want highly detailed information about the youth referred for case management, but they also didn't want to operate completely in the dark. CPD officials asked that the department receive some form of case outcome summary for each youth. However, community members were fearful of how the CPD would use any case-specific information it obtained.

The issues surrounding case management and information sharing are a key to understanding the tensions that existed between the organizational partners involved in the JISC. From the very beginning of the JISC, some service providers were seen as closely allied with the CPD, while others were seen as partners of the Sinai Community Institute and the Department of Children and Youth Services. Some CPD staff believed that their providers had been moved aside and were beginning to suffer from reduced referrals, while SCI was protecting its own network of service providers. Until a case-tracking information system could begin to generate reliable data about the patterns of youth referrals and case outcomes, these suspicions would continue to fester, making interagency cooperation more difficult.

In the view of some local agencies, on the other hand, the effort to design and launch the JISC may have been chaotic and sometimes contentious, but even these conflicts had immediate benefits. According to one experienced youth worker, the quality and extent of communication among the CPD, the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services, the Sinai Community Institute, the Chicago Public Schools, and community-based programs during the development process was very helpful. Inter-organizational communication is essential in making collaborative centers like the JISC successful. The traditionally negative atmosphere and lack of effective communication



among youth-serving systems in the city had often prevented endeavors like the JISC in the past. Partner agencies would clash about mission and strategy, some would then leave, and everyone would end up with even less motivation for the next time collaboration was required. Open communication was seen as a critical feature of the JISC development process. According to this argument, the more open and transparent quality of the debate was actually quite productive.

For example, the implementation of the JISC gave City officials a reason to review other areas of policy and practice related to youth. Coordination between the CPD and the City school system had not always been effective. During one JISC development meeting, a CPD official described how his agency received numerous calls from the Chicago Public Schools, often for incidents that the CPD believed should be handled at the school, either through school-based discipline or alternatives such as the peer jury program. The CYS learned that the school disciplinary code did not provide principals and teachers with enough discretion. School personnel could react either by calling the police or by not reporting the incident—there was no middle ground. As part of the JISC development process, CYS reached out to local high schools and was able to begin a useful dialogue on the matter.

Local decision makers tried to incorporate the views of several key groups as the JISC designed its case management approach. Researchers, juvenile justice professionals, and community members met to discuss strategies, with the objective of building better interagency relationships and exploring best practices. Those involved believed that effective case management was essential to the success of the JISC. One person interviewed for this study even characterized the case management function as the best way to avoid net widening.

Many people involved in the design and launch of the JISC shared the concern that its introduction could transform the purposes of station adjustments. If police began to increase the numbers of youth they apprehended simply

in order to refer them for preventive services, this would definitely widen the net of intervention. Seeing that the newly centralized process was more efficient, CPD officers might begin to bring youth into the system on lesser offenses for which, before, they might simply have issued a warning, in part to avoid the delays and paperwork associated with an arrest.

Community representatives called for increased accountability and transparency in police processing, arguing that even station adjustments could become cumulative burdens for youth. If youth accrue numerous station adjustments, it will not matter if they are just 13 years old and charged with minor offenses; they will be more likely to go to court and more likely to be prosecuted. Thus, youth who live in a neighborhood served by the JISC may be more at risk of court involvement, simply because a record of station adjustments at the JISC may propel them into the justice system more quickly. For this reason, some youth services professionals argue that arresting youth and taking them to the JISC may not always be the best way to support youth and families, even though the JISC was designed to do just that.

### **Governance, Management, and Staffing**

Of the 20 previous program evaluations reviewed for this study, 14 included a discussion of governance issues, 15 investigated the effects of program staffing, and nearly half addressed the dynamics of the co-location of services. A board of representatives from community-based and government agencies governed the majority of the programs reviewed. Programs were managed by community-based agencies specializing in mental health or managed care (Cronin 1996; Coccozza et al. 2005; Clark 2007; Wordes and Le 2000). Approximately 20 percent were managed by City or County lead social service agencies, and one was managed by the juvenile justice system (Cronin 1996; Harrison and Gisseman 2006; 18th Judicial District Juvenile Assessment Center 2007; Castrianno 2007; Wordes and Le 2000; Silverthorn 2003).





The size of assessment centers similar to the JISC varied by community and was often dependent on program design, target population, and the size of the community itself. The programs were most frequently staffed by a combination of community-based social service agencies and law enforcement. Social service agencies provided intake, assessment, and case management services. Law enforcement provided escorts, security, and initial screenings (Cronin 1996; Coccozza et al. 2005; Villarreal and Witten 2006; Castrianno 2007; Clark 2007; Silverthorn 2003).

Other staff might include school system staff, substance abuse workers, City and/or County social services, juvenile justice personnel, and interns and/or volunteers. Approximately 40 percent of programs were staffed by school officials, including truancy specialists, academic information specialists, and/or clinical service workers. Substance abuse workers were less common, although they were present in approximately 30 percent of the juvenile assessment centers studied previously (Cronin 1996; Coccozza et al. 2005; Harrison and Gisseman 2006, 2007; 18th Judicial District Juvenile Assessment Center 2007). City and/or County social services; juvenile justice personnel, including the district attorney; and student interns were involved in some of the assessment centers examined by researchers (Cronin 1996; 18th Judicial District Juvenile Assessment Center 2007; Wordes and Le 2000).

Staffing issues are often complicated by the diverse institutional and work cultures of the various agencies that cooperate to design and operate the programs (Wordes and Le 2000). Tensions between law enforcement and service providers were mentioned in some studies. Colocation of services was noted in almost half of the programs studied previously. Several assessment centers were colocated with diversion programs (Wordes and Le 2000; Silverthorn 2003). In a few programs, assessment centers were attached to substance abuse facilities (Wordes and Le 2000) or colocated with truancy centers. (Cronin 1996).

In some cases, researchers observed that the general public did not understand the distinction between the staff of the juvenile assessment center and the staff of the agency providing colocated services. However, the blurring of these lines was not seen as problematic and was often seen as evidence that collaboration and colocation were functioning well (Cronin 1996; Wordes and Le 2000).

### The Chicago Experience

The JISC structure was complicated from the very beginning. The federal grant that launched the center specifically authorized the City's Juvenile Crime Enforcement Coalition to exercise oversight, and its members quickly assumed a supervisory role over JISC operations. Yet, there was a separate oversight board as well as a board of directors for the JISC. The executive director appeared to be answerable to all three bodies, creating redundancy and confusion. There were also several organizational charts during the early phases of JISC operations. One chart portrayed the JISC using CPD's mission, goals, and objectives; another used the CYS mission and goals; a third relied on the goals and objectives of the Juvenile Crime Enforcement Coalition. The charts were not integrated, but all were circulating at the same time, causing considerable confusion.

The JISC executive director was placed in the unenviable position of trying to stitch together two completely different units of City government (CPD and CYS) that had two completely different missions and cultures. Compounding these difficulties was the fact that the JISC had become operational before the two units had an opportunity to come together to form a shared vision for it. The CPD opened the police and intake components before CYS had the service provision component in place. In addition, both departments were authorized to commit JISC funds and resources, but they were not organized to do this in a collaborative manner. The lack of coordination led to difficult interactions between CPD and CYS, and between the JISC director and other JISC staff.



The location of the Chicago JISC also presented many challenges. During the earliest discussions, the plan was to locate the facility in a north side neighborhood, but many of those involved strongly opposed that location. Local residents, in particular, did not want a program for juvenile offenders in their community. Rather than fight the community, City officials chose a South Side neighborhood. That site, however, introduced other complexities, as mentioned earlier. The central problem was that the building chosen was an existing police station in need of renovation. By the time the JISC actually opened, the CPD was seen as the owner of the program, and it was unclear how the social services and case management function would be integrated. One key person interviewed for this study believed that the CPD always intended to continue using its own network of service providers and that its search for new providers was not entirely genuine.

After the JISC opened, the presence of nonpolice personnel inside a police building was a continual source of misunderstanding. Tensions sometimes boiled over in incidents that appear trivial in retrospect. For example, during the first year of operation, several framed portraits of CPD leaders were suddenly removed from the front hallway. Many officers assumed that the JISC executive director (an employee of CYS rather than of CPD) had requested their removal. After a period of morale-damaging rumors, it was discovered that the order to remove the portraits had come from the CPD itself, which was awaiting the arrival of new replacements, but the officers working at the JISC had not been informed.

Another issue concerned the labeling of the parking space reserved for the JISC executive director. Some CPD officers placed great value on the proximity and visibility of their parking spaces. Parking was ordinarily reserved for top officials, and their titles were sometimes displayed on their respective spots. The executive director of the JISC was to receive a parking place near the front door, but labeling the sign with the words “executive director” became problematic, as it suggested that a non-

CPD person was in charge of a CPD facility. Resolving the dispute consumed an inordinate amount of time and energy.

Other conflicts focused on the efforts being made for the center’s clients. Some officials at CPD worried that the range of services available through CYS and its contractor, SCI, was not sufficient for the youth involved with the JISC, but the police often felt excluded from conversations and planning related to youth interventions. If the available services were not comprehensive and flexible enough to meet the individual needs of youth, then the JISC model could ultimately fail, and the CPD worried that it would be blamed for the failure.

Other organizational challenges related to the flow of information between CPD staff and other staff at the JISC. Although CPD officers and the JISC executive director worked in the same location and on the same general tasks, the executive director, as a civilian, had limited ability to disseminate information directly to CPD officers. Even distributing a newsletter or memorandum about JISC operations was considered a violation of CPD protocol—disregarding the chain of command—if it was done by a civilian. Only the onsite CPD lieutenant was authorized to provide such material to CPD officers.

Some problems stemmed from confusion over the sponsorship of the center. When the JISC first opened, it was easy to see why members of the community might have viewed it as just another police program. First, it was located in a former station house with the words “Police Station” carved in stone over the entrance. Next, upon entering the building, visitors walked down a hallway decorated with those framed portraits of uniformed police commanders. The JISC staff who first greeted visitors were also uniformed CPD personnel. The civilian personnel were located upstairs or in offices not otherwise accessible to visitors. The entire operation was focused on physical security and control and was staffed by uniformed police. Why would visitors think the JISC was anything other than a police station?



The City administration approved the presence of civilians at the JISC, but CPD argued that for security reasons, uniformed officers should be visible at all times at the front desk. One CPD leader pointed out that the sign in front of the building still described it as a police station and police services needed to be accessible. All parties agreed that having multiple agencies in the same building was desirable, but CPD stressed that it was important for the police presence to be paramount.

Most of these issues were raised during early discussion about the design of the JISC, but when the building opened, the problems had not been addressed effectively. One participant who was involved very early in the development of the JISC noted that, even in 2008, there was still “ambiguity about who is in charge. Is it the executive director, or is it CPD? There is still tension there. Who makes decisions about the program?” According to this observer, any effort to resolve such tensions would have to involve the mayor’s office. “Sometimes an external party has to step in and nudge [the players] back into place.” The strong leadership of the JISC executive director and the visible commitment to the JISC by key stakeholders at CPD and CYS eventually led to improved relations between the two organizations. Once there was more of a shared understanding of the JISC, some of the more contentious issues could be addressed.

Some of challenges faced by the JISC have been related to the various levels of government involved in juvenile justice policy in Chicago. One city official admitted that the JISC was affected by a long-standing “City/County problem.” In other words,

Why isn’t the City talking with the County as they work to figure out the detention center issue? How can we support them in building a network [of services]? Why aren’t we talking with Cook County and the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice to figure out how to pilot something in the City of Chicago for kids who come back from a DJJ [Department of Juvenile Justice] facility? Why can’t we talk with the County about how to support the needs of kids in detention or the kids who have been released when their cases are still open and they need supportive services?

The involvement of private agencies further complicated matters. The Sinai Community Institute is a 501(c)(3) and part of the Sinai Health Systems. When SCI was first approached to work with the JISC, it had been providing management services in the Chicago area for more than 20 years. In 2006, the SCI staff was asked to serve only as technical advisors for the JISC. The City planned to hire case managers, and SCI was asked to conduct case management training. The training took place over three months, after which SCI received a request to hire the staff for actual case management work at the JISC. Eventually, SCI became deeply involved in the design and operation of the JISC case management process. Yet many important decisions about program design and staffing had already been made. It was difficult for the SCI staff to know which features of the JISC were already established and which features were open to modification.

The line staff at SCI originally consisted of social workers, case managers, and youth advocates. The social workers were primarily supervisors, but they provided services as well, often by conducting individual counseling and anger management groups. The case managers conducted youth and family assessments and oversaw the development of service plans. The youth advocates worked directly with youth and families to make sure the service plans were implemented properly. Case managers performed the initial assessments (the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument and SCI assessments) at the JISC, often on the youth’s first day of contact with the center. Once all assessments were completed, an SCI youth advocate would begin to work with each youth and family. The advocates conducted home visits and implemented the Individual Family Service Plan. Youth advocates often worked with 30 or more cases each, but the initial goal was for each advocate to have responsibility for no more than 20 to 25 cases.

During the early phase of JISC operations, there were often conflicts between the case managers and the youth advocates. Some of the conflicts were inevitable. Youth advocates earned lower





salaries, yet they performed many of the same tasks as the case managers. Tensions grew as the JISC caseload began to increase. The youth advocates believed that case managers spent a lot of their time in the office, just “waiting for referrals,” while the advocates were feeling overwhelmed with ever-growing caseloads and duties that took them into some of Chicago’s most disadvantaged homes and neighborhoods. The conflicts were soon resolved by eliminating the distinction between case managers and youth advocates. Instead, all direct line SCI staff at the JISC were designated as case managers.

Several city officials involved in setting up the JISC acknowledged in interviews that many of the initial challenges were organizational and structural. Despite serious conflicts during the early phases of designing the center, however, one leader in City government observed that, at some point, most of the people involved realized that it was time to “let go of the past” and instead to focus on creating a useful organizational structure for a program that would eventually come to exist. By the second year of operation, the JISC had much more defined roles for all the agencies involved in its operations and a much clearer understanding of the proper roles of the board, the advisory board, the JISC executive director, the leadership of CYS, and various officers and leaders of the CPD.

## Data and Information Sharing

The emergence of juvenile assessment centers occurred during a time of rapid technological innovation. During the 1990s and 2000s, social agencies of all types were becoming accustomed to the use of integrated information systems. Law enforcement systems, juvenile justice systems, and, indeed, all human services enterprises operate more efficiently and effectively when client data are integrated across agencies and when client outcomes can be monitored at the individual, programmatic, and jurisdictional levels. Yet access to such data inevitably raises concerns about data management and the uses to which such data could be put beyond program operation. In some

communities where officials have tried to implement assessment centers similar to the JISC, worries about information sharing and data privacy were severe enough that key agencies ended up withdrawing from the programs (Cronin 1996). The data issues raised in previous studies may be different from the ones faced by programs today, but many of the core considerations, such as the construction of integrated databases and procedures for information sharing, remain relevant.

Youth-serving agencies are always concerned about the legal issues related to information sharing and client privacy, including the issue of net widening, but access to reliable and actionable information is critical for system impact. Many programs ask clients to sign consent forms acknowledging their participation in the assessment process and their awareness of the program’s tracking of information, in order to ensure that clients understand their rights to privacy but that data about their service participation may be used in future court proceedings (Cronin 1996). Most juvenile assessment center programs require parents to sign such consent forms, and some require youth to sign as well (Clark 2007; Cronin 1996). Even when signatures are required, however, previous studies have noted that program staff are sometimes concerned that youth and parents do not fully understand the implications of consent. Assessment centers like the JISC have sometimes formed interdisciplinary teams to monitor problems arising from the collection and use of client information.

## The Chicago Experience

According to city officials, the Chicago JISC handled approximately 3,000 youth in its first six months of operation. Initially, there were no systematic efforts to track the participation of these youth in the case management and services provided by the JISC. Within a year, however, the creation and distribution of data about JISC clients had become a major concern for all the organizational partners. As was true with other elements of the JISC process, the partners from law enforcement and social



services often found themselves on opposite sides of the debate.

From a law enforcement perspective, it was essential to track the involvement of each youth in JISC-related services and to apprise the State's Attorney's Office of any case in which a youth refused to comply with JISC requirements. Not only did the police department wish to hold youth accountable for their agreements to participate in the program, but CPD officials believed it was important to track participation and outcomes in order to respond effectively in cases in which a youth is rearrested following a referral to the JISC. Officers reviewing the new charge would need to know that the youth had been diverted previously, and their decision to divert a second charge could depend on the youth's level of cooperation after the first charge. In addition, the CPD wanted to know exactly what mix of services, opportunities, and supports had been offered to a youth, not only to plan future interventions for that particular youth but to assess the overall effectiveness of the services and programs available.

From a social services perspective, however, diversion means diversion. If the JISC process was constructed to give youth another chance and to spare them the stigma of involvement with the justice system, then as soon as the youth and parent sign the consent form and begin to work with SCI case management, they are social services clients and not juvenile offenders whose movements must be monitored by the police. If the youth and families involved in case management knew that their behavior was being reported back to the police and that their cooperativeness would affect future decisions made by CPD and the State's Attorney's Office, they would be far less likely to trust the SCI staff. It would also be harder for them to see the services and supports offered by the case managers in a positive light.

These basic differences in perspective complicated efforts to create useful information about JISC operations and client outcomes. After two years of operation, people working with the JISC on a daily basis were still not

entirely clear about just what type of data could be shared with others outside their own agencies. All the partner agencies agreed that some client processing information should be readily accessible so that problems and issues could be identified quickly and addressed effectively. Yet, according to one staff member of a JISC-related agency in early 2008, sometimes it was still not clear "what information can go where, and who can have access to what."

In interviews conducted for this study, several City officials emphasized that the police did not need to see comprehensive individualized information about the progress of each JISC-involved youth, but they did need to know whether a minor complied with services or not, and they did need to know whether the youth and family were sincerely engaged or if they simply "went through the motions." The police also wanted basic information about youth within 90 days of referral to SCI. Whenever there was a possibility that the State's Attorney's Office might want to file charges in a case following noncompliance with the JISC process, that filing had to happen quickly. Further, having some details about a youth's progress could impact future processing for youth picking up new charges. For youth arrested on new charges, the police should be able to determine how the youth responded to any prior diversion opportunities. Did the youth actively participate? Would it be foolish to try diversion again?

Even when the partner agencies could agree on a basic approach to information, simple counting problems complicated the issue. CPD and SCI approached the same data differently. CPD counted each incident separately. If a youth was arrested and taken to the JISC on four separate occasions, CPD counted that as four referrals. On the other hand, SCI counted youth and not criminal incidents. Given the same scenario, SCI may note the four arrests, but their workers would consider the youth as one referral. Because CPD maintained all juvenile records citywide, the official performance measures for the JISC used the CPD counts, but the workload measures for the JISC often used the SCI count.



Of course, there were numerous coordination problems, from concerns over who got access to what information and when, to basic decisions about youth identifiers, measuring family involvement, sibling data, and so forth. There were many issues with data collection as well. During the early phases of the JISC, SCI relied on paper reports for much of its data collection. The police department was far more automated and accustomed to having greater data resources. CPD collected weekly data, whereas most agencies collected and reported monthly numbers.

Due to the efforts of CPD and CYS, the JISC made considerable progress in the development of management information systems during 2008. As part of the development of the JISC, the City began working on an integrated data system, known as CitySpan, which was to be implemented across many City agencies. CPD agreed to enter basic data about each JISC referral into CitySpan; SCI would then enter data about its case management and service delivery efforts in the same system; and from this combined database, City officials would be able to run comprehensive reports about the characteristics of each case, the youth's participation in services, and relevant case outcomes. Questions remained, of course, about whether the information in CitySpan was adequate and whether it captured the items that would be needed for future evaluation work. The JISC partner agencies continued to have discussions about the design and operation of information systems well into 2008.

Even with an integrated information system, there were data elements that CPD would not allow SCI to see, and there were data elements under the control of SCI that CPD could not access. The goal of the CitySpan system was to bring together information from the law enforcement and the social services sectors without allowing either side to have complete access to all information maintained by the other. For example, SCI was willing to share summary information about cases but not highly detailed information. CPD officers could know whether a youth was progressing satisfactorily

through the JISC process, but they might not know exactly which services a youth received. Similarly, CPD tracked several core data elements for each youth referred to the JISC, but only some of those elements were to be shared with outside agencies. City officials believed that an increase in the extent of information exchanged would result in more positive outcomes for youth. If CPD were able to use a shared data system to ascertain that a youth was already involved with a certain agency, officers might use their discretion to continue that service and decline to refer the youth to court immediately.

The SCI staff also worked to improve the reliability of the agency's information. Key events about every case involving a JISC-referred youth were tracked using spreadsheets that the SCI executive director maintained. Reports based on this information could be generated routinely to assess whether the agency's goals were being met and to monitor the status of each case. At case closure, the SCI spreadsheet would indicate why the case was closed (e.g., noncompliance, refusal of service, lack of participation, hospitalization, relocation out of service area, or detention). This summary information could then be entered into the CitySpan database.

Although it is difficult to assess data systems from a distance (this study did not have direct access to any data from agency information systems for this project), the data systems used to support JISC operations appear to be growing stronger. Through the concerted efforts of the key partner agencies, disputes about the proper role of data and information appear to have been largely resolved, and the JISC program may have an adequate base of client information with which to begin a formal evaluation of client outcomes.

To many of those involved in Chicago's youth policy environment, bringing social services into a close partnership with law enforcement is quite innovative. While there is usually broad support for prevention programs that serve all youth (e.g., Chicago's "After School Matters"), there is often less support for programs serving young offenders. One long-time participant in city affairs expressed deep concern about the decision-making climate in Chicago.

Unfortunately, when we talk about youth, we tend to focus on [primary] prevention programs and having cops in school so kids can see the police. We never talk about the kids who [have already been arrested]; people don't like to talk about that population. Sometimes I see that the opportunity is there, but I don't know if people fully comprehend the opportunity. I hate to say this, but I don't think the [City] administration thinks about kids who are already involved in the juvenile justice system. We, the City, tend to think about kids only in one way—kids who need after-school or summer activities. That's the only way we think about this ... We like to splash around in the shallow end of the pool, but we don't like to play in the deep end.

The JISC is decidedly not a police program, but the police were very involved. Some officials from the Chicago Police Department viewed the JISC as a bold departure, but others saw it as an extension of already familiar methods. One police official pointed out that CPD was always engaged in some level of social service and that it had long partnered with people in the community. Yet, the same official admitted that there is often an "us/them thing" going on in the police department's interaction with communities. Such attitudes often complicated efforts to coordinate the procedures of law enforcement with the tasks and goals of social services. Another city official asserted that, in developing the JISC, the goal was to respect all parties for their unique contribution. "Leave law enforcement decisions to law enforcement and social service decisions to social service providers. Let's respect the judgments of the professionals involved on both the law enforcement side and the social service side. We are here to work together."

Based on this review of JISC operations and interviews with the staff and leaders of various offices and organizations involved with the JISC, the research team reached a number of conclusions and recommendations about the future of the JISC and the feasibility of conducting a formal outcome evaluation of the program. These conclusions and recommendations included the following:

## Program Design, Governance, and Staffing

- The JISC program was developed in a complex environment. Key organizational partners often held different views about the program's mission, structure, and funding. By 2008, however, there was a clear consensus about the purposes of the JISC and the principal strategies for accomplishing its mission.
- Among the managers and workers involved in the JISC, concerns remained about the organizational configuration of the program, its potential for unintended consequences, the insufficient array of community-based resources available for youth and families, and the policies governing data sharing. These concerns needed to be identified and addressed by City leaders.
- The most serious challenge to the future success of the JISC was the mixed message it sent to the community. The JISC was designed as a provider of diversion services for young and often first-time offenders. Yet the JISC process for youth began inside a police station, where officers are responsible for a wider range of offenders, including many youth headed to juvenile court. The security environment necessary to handle potentially serious offenders permeated the building and affected the demeanor of the staff, thus preventing the full development of an effective diversion-oriented culture.
- To provide effective diversion for youth who are station adjusted and referred to case management, the City must find some way to separate them earlier from the more security-oriented features of the JISC process. The physical environment and social space experienced by youth at the JISC should be a central part of the program and should reflect and reinforce its guiding philosophy—namely, the concepts of restorative justice and positive youth development.



- To ensure that the JISC process provided services, supports, and opportunities for youth that were consistent with its guiding philosophy, all staff associated with the JISC (whether from CPD, Children and Youth Services (CYS), the Sinai Community Institute (SCI), or any other agency) should be fully, and continuously, trained in positive youth development and restorative justice.

## Resource Issues

- City officials should reexamine their initial plans for the JISC and restore the program to its original goals and purposes—i.e., to provide a broad range of services, opportunities, and supports for youth and their families using the guiding frameworks of restorative justice and positive youth development.
- The agencies involved in the JISC partnership worked hard to develop resources for youth, but the range of these resources still fell short of expectations.
- The services and resources available to youth were not as comprehensive and diverse as needed to fulfill the original vision for the program—namely, to approach young offenders and their families from a restorative justice and positive youth development perspective.
- Too much responsibility for intervention rested with the SCI case management staff. The initial vision was that case managers would perform screening, referral, and monitoring functions, while interventions and opportunities for youth would be implemented by a network of service providers and community organizations, both voluntary and contractual. After two years, that network remained inadequate.
- Resources for JISC youth were constrained by funding shortages but also by the limited vision of City leaders, agency officials, and program staff that often looked no further than professionalized, reimbursable interventions in their search for solutions to the city's youth crime problem.
- To build an effective network of services, supports, and opportunities for youth in the communities served by the JISC, the City needed to engage in the protracted community organizing necessary to develop the type of volunteer-based neighborhood supports suggested by the foundational concepts that led to the JISC.

## Data and Information Systems

- The data systems used to support JISC operations appeared to be growing stronger. Information systems maintained by the Chicago Police Department, the Department of Children and Youth Services, and the Sinai Community Institute appeared to be sufficient for conducting an outcome evaluation of the JISC.
- Before it would be appropriate to evaluate client outcomes, however, the linkages between the data systems of CPD, CYS, and the Sinai Community Institute needed to be fully established and tested in an actual, operational context, and the range of variables contained in those systems had to be assessed by independent, external researchers to determine whether the available information was sufficient for a high-quality outcome evaluation.

## Agency Partnerships

- Despite long-standing divisions, most of the interagency issues surrounding the JISC were resolved successfully during its first year of operation, due to the strong leadership of the JISC executive director and the persistence of several key officials in the Chicago Department of Children and Youth Services, the Chicago Police Department, and the Mayor's Office.
- The conflicts and differences between the partnering agencies were inevitable due to the mission of the JISC and the position it occupied between the sectors of law enforcement and social services.
- Agencies from law enforcement and those from social services always see their task environments differently. The organizational culture of a police department favors command and control, efficient case processing, individual-level data, and a hierarchical approach to decision making. Social service agencies operate in a less-controlled, more turbulent environment in which staff are inadequately trained and poorly compensated and often see part of their job as protecting clients from a justice system whose motivations they do not completely share or trust.
- The continued success of the JISC depended on effective management of the inherent incompatibilities between law enforcement and social services. These differences may never be eliminated, but they must be acknowledged and managed.





## Recommendations to Facilitate Formal Evaluation

- The JISC process must be improved in a number of ways before it would be wise for the City of Chicago to evaluate its client outcomes in an outcome or impact evaluation.
- The services, supports, and opportunities provided for each JISC youth should be determined by fully developed and truly individualized intervention plans, and not be allowed to deteriorate into a one-size-fits-all approach in order to accommodate the resource limitations of existing providers.
- The range of interventions and supports available for JISC youth must be consistent with the restorative justice and youth development frameworks that were the original inspiration for the JISC program model. The resources offered initially through the JISC process were not diverse enough to support the mission.
- The JISC must be able to document the exact mix of services, supports, and opportunities delivered to program youth during whatever period of time the youth successfully participate in JISC-related activities.
- The record of service delivery activities and program participation by individual youth must be stored in a database that draws upon a wide range of key data elements available from CPD, CYS, and SCI.
- Some combination of individual-level outcomes (arrests, court referrals, prosecutions, placements, school attendance, and so forth) must be available in a consistent fashion for all former JISC youth through at least the first 12 months following case closure, regardless of whether the case was terminated successfully or unsuccessfully.
- Arrangements must be in place to track the same combination of individual-level outcomes (or at least a key subset of those outcomes) among a comparison group of youth who are similar to those involved in the JISC. It must be possible to track the outcomes for comparison-group youth for up to 12 months following some type of event that is arguably similar to case closure for JISC youth.

The Juvenile Intervention and Support Center may have changed the way Chicago responds to young offenders who commit nonviolent crimes. Through its efforts to develop and operate the JISC, the City inspired a new, broadly shared philosophy: namely, that the most effective response to young offenders does not always require referral to court, prosecution, and incarceration. Instead, young offenders can be attached to resources that engage them in pro-social activities, positive relationships, and structured experiences that prevent future crime and lower their chances of becoming more deeply involved in the justice system.

After the JISC program opened in 2006, a large number of individuals and agencies in the City of Chicago worked hard to solidify the new collaborative relationships that made the JISC possible. That work continued even after the first two years of operation. Yet, the program appeared to be establishing itself as an innovative diversion process for young offenders.

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