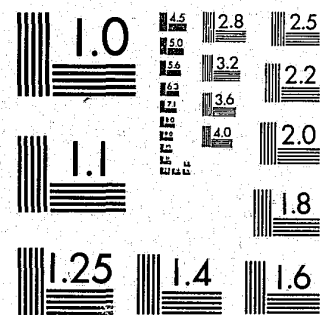


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5/15/81

**STATUS**

**OFFENDERS**

**INTAKE AND**

**DIVERSION PROJECT**



**INTENSIVE PROBATION**

**PROJECT**

Preliminary Evaluations

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ACQUISITIONS

X LOUISVILLE/JEFFERSON COUNTY, KY.  
Department for Human Services

X STATUS OFFENDER INTAKE AND DIVERSION PROJECT  
Preliminary Evaluation

December, 1978

Prepared by:

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STATUS OFFENDERS INTAKE & DIVERSION PROJECT

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## INTRODUCTION

An issue currently being debated in professional and legal circles across the country is that of the "status offender." For the purpose of this evaluation, status offenses are defined as Runaway, Beyond Control, and Truancy (non-busing related). At issue is the question of whether or not the Juvenile Court should have legal jurisdiction over the status offender (commonly referred to as the PINS or CHINS youth in other jurisdictions). Many states, including Kentucky, have initiated legislation demanding separation of these youths from the public offender in juvenile institutions. Some states have even passed legislation removing this youth from the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court. The rationale for this legislation claims that these youths can more appropriately be handled by community resources outside the juvenile justice system without the stigma attached to court processed public offenders.

Aside from this philosophical issue, there were several practical problems faced by the Intake Department. The intake workers are responsible for screening cases and making a determination as to whether the case should be processed further and handled by the Court, or should be counseled and closed. Ideally, the intake worker should have sufficient information regarding the case to make a proper decision, and should have the time and resources available to channel those "counseled and closed" into appropriate service agencies. However, because the intake staff were faced

with very high caseloads, juveniles who ought not to have been in the Court system were being processed formally, and many of those "counseled and closed" were receiving no assistance in dealing with the problems for which they were referred.

It was felt that inappropriate handling and lack of sufficient follow-up had the greatest impact on the status offender. Most status offenses concern intra-familial dynamics and tensions and not real criminal activity.

In response to these problems and needs, a separate intake unit for status offenders was proposed. The goal of such a unit was to divert as many status offenders as possible from the formal juvenile justice system, and instead, provide families with supportive services to allow them to deal with the problem themselves.

A grant from the Federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (through the Kentucky State Crime Commission) for the establishment of a separate Status Intake Diversion Unit (SID) was originally awarded in March, 1977. Matching funds for the project were from Jefferson County Government's Department for Human Services (formerly known as Metropolitan Social Services Department). The original grant was provided for three intake staff and was limited to youths charged with ungovernable behavior.

Because of a need to expand the project, the original grant ended in December, 1977 and a new grant, starting in January, 1978, was awarded. The new grant provided for two additional intake workers and the inclusion of runaways and truants as appropriate referrals for the project.

## METHODOLOGY

The primary methodology of this evaluation involves an examination of the program's objectives and the extent to which they have been met. Because the objectives for the project were changed for the two grant periods, the main focus of the evaluation is on the 1978 program, although some information from the 1977 period is included.



## SECTION I

### The Goals and Objectives

The original goal of the project in 1978 was to divert 800 status offenders from the formal juvenile justice system, but in mid year this goal was revised downward to 600 status offenders per year. From January through August, 1978, a total of 283 status offenders entered the SID program. However, for 60 of these status offenders, a formal petition was later filed and the case entered the court system. If these numbers for eight months are projected over a 12 month period, there would be 424 total SID cases of which 90 cases would have a formal court petition taken. Thus, in a year's time, the SID project will have diverted 334 status offenders from the juvenile justice system. The program, therefore, has fallen short even of its revised goal.

The other goal of the SID project was to reduce, by 25 percent the number of status offenders handled formally. Preliminary figures for the first eight months of 1978 indicated that this goal has not been reached either. In 1976, a total of 528 ungovernable behavior and runaway cases were handled formally. (Truancy cases have been excluded because of the large fluctuations in truancies associated with busing). In 1977, which includes about nine months of the first SID grant, there were 507 ungovernable behavior and runaway cases handled formally. Preliminary figures for the first eight months of 1978 indicate that the number of runaway and ungovernable behavior cases handled formally was 343. If this is projected out over 12 months, then in 1978 the total will be 514.

Thus, there has been no real decline in the number of status offenses handled formally, much less a decrease of 25 percent.

One of the sub goals of the SID project was to provide temporary residences when necessary for target youth outside their natural home for a short time (30 day maximum) to serve as a "cooling off" period for the child and his family. In the first eight months of 1978, a total of 15 project youths spent a total of 265 days in temporary shelter. The mean length of temporary shelter was 17.7 days. However, three of these youths were in temporary shelter for considerably longer than 30 days. The following placement resources were utilized: Shelter House I, seven youths; Boys Haven, two; Spring Meadows, five; and Alternate Placement, one. In 1977, 12 youths were placed in temporary shelter arrangements for a total of 87 days. Shelter House I was used as a placement resource for ten of these youths, while the Home of the Innocents and Spring Meadows were each used by one youth.

Several of the sub goals and objectives make reference to recidivism rates and levels which should be achieved for the project youth. Because an insufficient period of time has elapsed to properly conduct a recidivism study, these objectives cannot be examined at this time.

Numerous quantifiable performance objectives were established for the SID program, which will be examined in detail. In order to test most of the objectives, a one-third random sample of the SID cases were examined.

A. TO PERFORM PERSONAL INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND CHILDREN WITHIN 48 HOURS OF RECEIPT OF REFERRAL.

This was done in the vast majority of cases. In 1978, face-to-face contact within 48 hours was made in 280 of 283 cases or 98.9 percent of the cases. Similarly, in 1977, the 48 hour criterion was met in all but one case.

B. TO MAKE A DETERMINATION IF THE CASES SHOULD BE HANDLED FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY WITHIN 15 DAYS.

The basic purpose of this objective was to assure that those cases which needed to be brought to the attention of the Court would be properly diagnosed within a reasonable period of time. From a review of the records, it appears that a presumption was made to handle the case within the SID Unit until such time as it was necessary to take a petition. In 1978, in the one-third sample, a petition was taken in 19 cases. In only seven of these cases was a petition taken within 21 calendar days (15 working days). In the other 12 cases, the length of time before the case was taken to Court exceeded 21 calendar days. The mean length of time prior to the taking of a petition was 37.5 days.

In the 1977 sample, there were 14 cases in which a petition was taken and in six of these cases, the length of time exceeded 21 calendar days. The average length prior to the taking of the petition was 31.7 days.

C. TO PROVIDE CRISIS INTERVENTION COUNSELING ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS TO 600 STATUS OFFENDERS (Limited to three sessions).

Table 1. Total Contacts in Active Status by Year

NUMBER CONTACTS ACTIVE STATUS					
1978 Sample			1977 Sample		
Contacts	No.	%	Contacts	No.	%
1-3	36	52.2	1-3	35	41.7
4-6	19	27.5	4-6	37	44.0
7-9	6	8.7	7-9	9	10.7
10+	8	11.6	10+	3	3.6
TOTAL	69	100.0	TOTAL	84	100.0
Mean	5.1		Mean	4.3	

A brief perusal of one-third of the SID cases revealed no clear distinctions between what would be called a crisis intervention counseling session and other kinds of contacts. The above table is based on total contacts. As can be seen, at least one contact occurred with every case. In 1978, the number of total contacts, while the case was active, exceeded three in nearly half of the cases; while more than three contacts were made in nearly 60 percent of the 1977 cases.

D. TO TERMINATE DIRECT SERVICES FROM THE SID UNIT WITHIN 15 DAYS IN 90% OF THE CASES.

Table 2. Total Days Active by Year

CALENDAR DAYS ACTIVE					
1978 Sample			1977 Sample		
D A Y S	No.	%	D A Y S	No.	%
Less than 7	5	7.2	Less than 7	3	3.6
8-14	15	21.7	8-14	11	13.1
15-21	24	34.8	15-21	22	26.2
22-28	11	15.9	22-28	21	25.0
29-35	6	8.7	29-35	16	19.0
36+	8	11.6	36+	11	13.1
TOTAL	69	99.9	TOTAL	84	100.0
Mean	23.5		Mean	25.3	

The above table illustrates the length of time active for the 1977 and 1978 SID samples. The 15 working days in the objective is the equivalent of 21 calendar days. In 1977, over half of the SID cases were active for more than three weeks. In 1978, an improvement occurred, but still more than a third of the cases were active longer than 21 calendar days. The objective therefore was not adhered to.

E. TO MEET OR EXCEED THE STANDARDS FOR FOLLOW-UP CONTACTS IN 95% OF THE CASES.

Table 3. Achievement of Follow-Up Contact Standards by Year

FOLLOW-UP CONTACT STANDARDS					
1978 Sample			1977 Sample		
	No.	%		No.	%
Standard Met	45	93.8	Standard Met	52	82.5
Standard Not Met	3	6.3	Standard Not Met	11	17.5
Not Applicable	21	*	Not Applicable	21	*
TOTAL	69	100.1	TOTAL	84	100.0

\*Percentages exclude those where follow-up was not applicable.

Table 4. Total Contacts in Inactive Status by Year

NUMBER CONTACTS INACTIVE STATUS					
1978 Sample			1977 Sample		
CONTACTS	No.	%	CONTACTS	No.	%
None	14	20.3	N		
1-3	39	56.5	None	21	25.6
4-6	12	17.4	1-3	34	41.5
7+	4	5.8	4-6	22	26.8
Unknown	0	-	7+	5	6.1
			Unknown	2	-
TOTAL	69	100.0	TOTAL	84	100.0
Mean	3.5		Mean	3.5	

As the table above illustrates, the standard on follow-up contacts was frequently exceeded. For nearly one-fourth of the 1978 cases, more than three contacts were made.

F. TO HANDLE 50% OF ALL STATUS OFFENDERS INFORMALLY (without judicial intervention).

It was noted previously that in the first eight months of 1978, a total of 343 ungovernable behavior and runaway cases were handled formally. During this same period of time, 319 ungovernable behavior and runaway cases received informal handling (including SID). Therefore, in the first eight months of 1978, 48.2 percent, or nearly half of these cases were handled informally. However, these figures do not include truancy cases, nearly all of which were handled formally.

When truancy cases are included for January through August of 1978, formal status offenses numbered 505 or 61.1 percent and informal status offenses totaled 322 or 38.9 percent for January through August of 1978. The objective, therefore, was not reached.

G. TO REFER 100% OF THE YOUTHS ENGAGED IN THE PROGRAM TO APPROPRIATE COMMUNITY RESOURCES.

In January through August, 1978, there were 283 total youths handled by the SID Unit. During this same time, referrals to community resources numbered 262. Thus, a referral was made in 92.6 percent of the cases. For the 1977 cases, a referral was made 98.4 percent of the time.



H. TO MAINTAIN FOR EACH WORKER A MAXIMUM CASELOAD OF 15 ACTIVE CASES.

Each month, each worker is required to turn in a summary activity sheet. In order to test this objective, these monthly activity reports were examined for the first seven months of 1978.

During this period of time, one worker reported having 19 active cases in one month. At no other time was the limitation of 15 cases exceeded. In fact, over three-fourths of the reports listed five or fewer active cases per worker.

I. TO ENGAGE YOUTHS IN ONE VOLUNTARY COUNSELING SESSION PER WEEK.

J. TO PROVIDE ONE VOLUNTARY FAMILY COUNSELING SERVICE TO THE YOUTH AND THE FAMILY PER MONTH.

These objectives have not been tested because, as was noted previously, it was not possible to easily distinguish what constituted a counseling session as called for in these two objectives. Please note Objective C, Page 6 which examines total contacts.

K. TO MAKE ONE FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT WITH EACH CLIENT PER WEEK.

Table 5. Weekly Face-to-Face Contacts by Year

WEEKLY FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT					
1978 Sample			1977 Sample		
	No.	%		No.	%
YES	65	94.2	YES	80	95.2
NO	4	5.8	NO	4	4.8
TOTAL	69	100.0	TOTAL	84	100.0

The above table indicates that this objective was met about 95 percent of the time in both 1978 and 1977.

L. TO MAKE AT LEAST ONE HOME VISIT DURING THE COURSE OF THE CASE.

Table 6. Home Visit During the Course of the Case by Year

HOME VISIT MADE					
1978 Sample			1977 Sample		
	No.	%		No.	%
YES	64	92.8	YES	74	88.1
NO	5	7.2	NO	10	11.9
TOTAL	69	100.0	TOTAL	84	100.0

The table above illustrates a home visit was made in about 90 percent of the cases.

## SECTION II.

### Population Characteristics

The purpose of this section is to detail the characteristics of the youths who have been served by the SID Project. The figures shown are based on a one-third random sample of the cases which entered the program from April, 1977 through June, 1978.

The number of females entering the SID program exceeded the number of males. Two-thirds of the participants were white and one-third were black.

The average age was slightly less than 15 years. About a third of the youths were 16 years old or older upon entering the program. The youngest juveniles served were 11 years old.

Forty percent of the SID youths resided with one parent while slightly more than a fifth were living with a parent and step-parent. More than a fourth of the population was living with both parents.

Family income information was unavailable for about one-fourth of the cases examined. Based on the remaining three-fourths of the of the cases studied, the average family income was slightly over \$10,000. While over a fifth of the youths were from families with incomes below \$5,000, about one-fourth were from families with incomes exceeding \$15,000. In fact, fifteen percent of the sample studied were from families with incomes of \$20,000 or above.

About one in nine of the SID participants were withdrawn from school.

The vast majority of the status offenders served by the SID

program had been referred for ungovernable behavior. However, clear distinctions among the three status offense categories were not always apparent as running away from home and truancy are frequently associated with and indicative of ungovernable behavior.

Table 7. Summary Description of Characteristics

	%	Mean
Male	43.8	
Female	56.2	
White	66.7	
Black	33.3	
Mean Age		14.7
Age 13 & Under	19.3	
Age 14	20.7	
Age 15	28.0	
Age 16	22.0	
Age 17	10.0	
Living w/Parent & Step Parent	22.7	
Living w/Single Parent	40.0	
Living w/Both Parents	28.7	
Living in Other Arrangement	8.7	
Mean Income		\$10,239
Income Below \$5,000	21.2	
\$5,000 to \$9,999	35.4	
\$10,000 to \$14,999	18.6	
\$15,000 +	24.8	
Receiving Public Assistance	18.4	
Withdrawn from School	11.3	
<u>Reason for Referral</u>		
Runaway	11.8	
Truancy	3.3	
Ungovernable Behavior	85.0	

### SECTION III.

#### Impressions and Recommendations

The most obvious impression of the SID project is that it has fallen short of its goal. The total number of status offense cases handled by the project and, therefore, the status offenders diverted from the formal juvenile court process has been disappointing.

Aside from the low number of cases, another impression of the project is that it is not quite operating according to design. Specifically, the project appears to be more involved in counseling and longer "treatment" than was envisioned. The length of time in active status is one indication of this. Another indication is the number of contacts in both the active and in the inactive phases. A further indication is the length of time that frequently occurred before a case was finally handled formally with a petition being taken. The attitude of project personnel that cases should be handled formally only as a last resort is commendable. However, this attitude appears to be leading workers to hang on to cases much longer than is really feasible and beyond the point at which they can be handled in an informal manner.

Two basic recommendations can be made about the project. First, the basic procedural philosophy needs to be re-emphasized. In succinct fashion this philosophy can be stated as follows:

It is not the intent of the project to provide long-term counseling or problem-solving but rather to stabilize the family situation to the point that a referral to appropriate services have an opportunity of success.

The second recommendation is that the project staff be reduced by one. For whatever reason the project is simply not generating the number of referrals envisioned. If the number of referrals cannot be greatly increased, then it appears that the project can handle its current caseload with fewer staff. This recommendation is based on two factors. First, a slight reduction in frequency of contact, consistent with the philosophy outlined in the above recommendation, should free workers to handle more cases. The second and most important rationale for this recommendation is based on the number of cases handled in 1978, as compared to 1977.

In 1977, there were three staff members for the project. In the nine months of the project's existence in 1977, there were a total of 250 cases handled by the project. This works out to an average of 27.8 cases opened per month. The project supervisor handled one half of a caseload in 1977, thus the SID staff handled an average of 11.1 new cases per month per worker.

During the first eight months of 1978, the total new cases numbered 283 for an average of 35.4 cases per month. The project supervisor carried a partial caseload in 1978 as well as in 1977. At the rate of four and a half case workers in 1978, the average number of new cases per month was 7.9 cases. If the supervisor were excluded, the average for 1978 would still have been only 8.9 cases per month.

If there had been one less case worker, or three and a half workers handling cases, the average in 1978 would have been 10.1



new cases which would have still been a lower rate than 1977. In 1978, there was 66.7 percent increase in SID staff but only a 27.3 percent increase in cases.

Unless the caseload drastically increases, it appears that the cases generated by the project can be handled by one less worker.

**END**