

## *Chapter Four: Quick and Easy References*

- Truancy Case Management Handbook: Advice from the Field
- 10 Things A School Can Do To Improve Attendance
- How Can A School Achieve High Levels Of Parental And Community Involvement?
- Alternatives To Juvenile Detention
- Joint Efforts To Improve School Attendance
- School Attendance Tracking: Challenges And Effective Practices



**NCSE** | National Center for School Engagement

# **Truancy Case Management Handbook: Advice from the Field**

**National Center for School Engagement**

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## Table of Contents

|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>METHODS.....</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>ADVICE FROM THE FIELD.....</b>  | <b>3</b>  |
| <b>PROGRAM DESCRIPTIONS .....</b>  | <b>5</b>  |
| JACKSONVILLE, FL. TRUANCY ARBITRATION PROGRAM.....                                     | 5         |
| HOUSTON TRUANCY REDUCTION DEMONSTRATION PROJECT.....                                   | 7         |
| THE AT RISK YOUTH PROGRAM, KING COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT, JUVENILE SERVICES DIVISION..... | 10        |
| TLC FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES, INC., OLATHE, KANSAS .....                              | 14        |
| CALIFORNIA SCHOOL ATTENDANCE REVIEW BOARDS.....  | 15        |
| ISANTI COUNTY, MN TRUANCY PROBATION OFFICER PROGRAM .....                              | 17        |
| PROJECT RESPECT TRUANCY REDUCTION PROGRAM, PUEBLO, CO .....                            | 20        |
| <b>SUCCESS STORIES.....</b>  | <b>23</b> |
| ANTHONY.....   | 23        |
| TYRELL .....   | 25        |
| JOSH .....   | 27        |
| JEREMY .....   | 28        |
| AMY .....  | 30        |
| MARK.....  | 32        |
| MALAYA .....   | 34        |
| AZIZA .....  | 35        |
| SUE: THE POWER OF A HOME VISIT.....  | 36        |
| DYLAN .....  | 37        |
| RANDY .....  | 38        |
| LACY.....  | 39        |
| MARISSA .....  | 41        |
| ALEX.....  | 43        |
| ANGELA .....   | 44        |
| BAILEY.....  | 45        |
| NIKITA.....  | 47        |
| TONY.....  | 49        |
| TRACY.....   | 50        |
| NAOMI.....   | 52        |
| BRIAN.....   | 54        |
| <b>TONY: CONTRACT EXAMPLE .....</b>  | <b>56</b> |

## Methods

Around the country, school administrators, counselors and teachers, juvenile court personnel and community members are working to start or improve truancy reduction programs. Although there is no single best model, a key component of many successful programs is the case management that helps to reveal and surmount the underlying challenges to routine school attendance. In the Fall of 2005, The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) solicited contributions in the form of program descriptions, general advice, and specific case studies of successful students from two groups of case managers. First, as part of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's (OJJDP) Truancy Reduction Demonstration Program Evaluation, case managers for three of the funded programs were asked for their contributions. Second, NCSE posted a solicitation on the truancy listserv<sup>1</sup> for anyone who would like to contribute. A format outline accompanied both requests and is reproduced in Appendix A. As a result of these inquiries we received program descriptions and general advice from seven programs operating in seven states. Case managers who work for these programs submitted twenty-two case studies.

This Truancy Case Management Handbook is intended to help case managers learn what is working for their colleagues to aid them in improving their own practice. The Handbook is organized into three sections. "Advice from the Field" is a summary of key recommendations and insights gleaned from the submissions, and is the only substantive part of this report written by NCSE staff. Points included in this section were

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<sup>1</sup> In order to subscribe to the listserv, go to [www.schoolengagement.org](http://www.schoolengagement.org), click on the tab called Join Our Network, and follow the directions to sign up for the listserv. All are welcome.

made by at least two, and generally more, of the case managers. “Program Descriptions” includes basic information about how each program operates, and a general advice section written by a program leader. “Case Studies” includes each of the twenty-two case studies. While remaining loyal to the meaning and intent of each contributor, each piece has been edited for grammar and clarity, and, in order to protect the confidentiality of the students and their families, students’ names are changed and case managers’ names deleted from the individual stories. We would like to thank the following case managers and program directors for taking the time to contribute to this document:

Christian Anderson - Isanti County, MN

Stephanie Bartholomew – Olaith, KS

Yolanda Champion – Jacksonville, FL

Shelley Grant – Jacksonville, FL

Susana Herrera – Houston, TX

Barbara King – Seattle, WA

David Kopperud – CA

Terri Martinez-McGraw – Pueblo, CO

Adam Myers – Seattle, WA

Dawn Nannini – Seattle, WA

Kari Simpson – Olaith, KS

Jan Solomon – Seattle, WA

Jeremy Crowe – Seattle, WA

## Advice from the Field

The recommendations made by the various contributors to this handbook are remarkably similar. Even though the case managers work in different communities and within different program structures, they largely agree about how to work most effectively with families to promote school attendance. The following is a summary of advice given by our contributors, and lessons readily apparent from the case studies. Each suggestion included in this list was made by two or more contributors. Additional ideas, reported by just one case manager, appear in the individual testimonies. One point on which respondents do diverge is that of suggested case load. However, since managers agree that some students need much more assistance than others, the reported differences may have to do with the mix of students served. Several contributors note that an ideal case load for intensive service provision includes 20-30 families, but case managers can handle more cases if truancy is being identified and addressed early.

The following recommendations are grouped by topic area:

### *Program structure:*

- Involve community agencies in the process of program development.
- Early intervention works best and is the most cost effective as well.
- House case managers in the school if possible to promote close contact with students.
- Take the time to build relationships with community agencies.

### *General strategies:*

- Make lots of referrals.
- Follow-up is critical.
- Understand the community and the culture from which students come.

- While a high school diploma should be goal for most students, recognize that for some, the best option may be a GED.

*Relationships with families and students:*

- Always include families.
- Promote communication within family.
- Home visits are invaluable for uncovering underlying challenges the student faces.
- For each of the students about whom case managers wrote, there exist significant challenges regarding home life, mental health issues or both.
- Listen.
- Be consistent.
- Be respectful.
- Try not to pass judgment, and focus on the family's strengths.

*Warnings:*

- Do not do so much for a family that you become a crutch.
- Show students you are friendly and you care without being overly familiar.

# Program Descriptions

## Jacksonville, Fl. Truancy Arbitration Program

### 1. General Program Background Information:

a.) The following information is for the Jacksonville, Fl. Truancy Arbitration Program (TAP) based at the State Attorney's Office. The program director is Shelley Grant and the case manager is Yolanda Champion.

b.) TAP provides services to parents and students. All families receive case management. The case manager has the capacity to monitor attendance, conduct home and school visits and to assist the family in any other way possible. TAP also can pay for the family to receive counseling, recommend for the child to receive tutoring or for the parent to receive parenting classes. The case manager can also link the family to other social services if needed.

c.) We serve children who have reached the age of 6 years old or will be turning 6 years old by Feb. 1<sup>st</sup> of any school year, but have not reached the age of 16 (6-15 years old). For the 2004-2005 school year, gender is just about evenly split with 47% male and 53% female. Thirty-eight percent of the students are white, 57 % are African American, and 6% are of another nationality. The majority of the students are on free or reduced lunch which indicates low incomes.

d.) I try to go out in the field at least 2 ½ days a week to do home visits. When I'm not in the field, I'm on the phone with my students' parents, and they inform me why their child didn't attend school that day or a day within that week. I normally have 200-250 cases open at a time. The cases that are high risk receive intensive case management which includes phone calls, home visits, and school visits or conferences as needed. When visiting parents, I'm there for about an hour and sometimes longer depending on the situation. In Jacksonville, parents of truant students may be arrested for educational neglect. Parents are typically held in jail during one school day following an arrest. I try to help the parents on my caseload avoid arrest, but if they do not cooperate and their child's attendance does not improve, I have no choice but to recommend prosecution.

### 2. Your advice to case managers:

a.) What to do...examples

i.) Advise case managers to try and keep their case load at 70-75 cases and this way you are able to be more effective in working with your parents, by being able to monitor more frequently, before a case becomes high-risk. This might also allow you to spend time with families focusing not only the bad, but also the good, because these parents need that extra support person with a good listening ear.

ii.) Forming relationships with community agencies plays an important role in reducing truancy. If you can get your School Superintendent, Sheriff's Office, State Attorney's Office, and social service agencies involved, then citizens may see less crime being committed by juveniles (specifically daytime residential burglaries) and fewer dropouts from your school system.



The schools must first identify the truant child and then proceed with an initial school based intervention and, if proven unsuccessful, refer the case to the appropriate agency (ex. agency that work with kids who are ungovernable and can be held accountable for their own actions or to the State Attorney's Office, where the parent can be held accountable). The State Attorney's Office is here to intervene in trying to get that parent involved in their children's schooling. The Sheriff's Office's patrol officers can pick up all the truants that they see during school hours and deliver them to nearby middle or high schools or truancy centers. The personnel there can contact the parent to come and pick that student up. The parent is being made aware that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. Counseling services come into play to address ungovernable behavior and if a parent feels family counseling would be beneficial. With everyone collaborating and coming together as one, at risk children return to school and delinquent activity decreases.

**b.) What not to do...example**

i.) Do only what is necessary for a family because when you go above and beyond, they become dependent on you and it is hard to get them out of that frame of mind. You don't want them to feel as though they need a crutch to lean on to get them through situations. They need to be taught to handle some situations on their own.

## **Houston Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project**

### **General program background**

The Gulfton Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project was funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to reduce truancy through early identification, assessment and intervention, improve juvenile and parental accountability, and increase community awareness and education concerning truancy.

The Project provides a comprehensive truancy reduction and prevention program for the Gulfton Community. Services include:

- Comprehensive Public Awareness and Education Outreach Campaign
  - Provide bilingual truancy awareness/prevention presentations to student and parent groups and area businesses and apartment managers
  - Promote the Youth Watch Campaign, distribute truancy posters and conduct community trainings on truancy laws and reporting truant youth
  - Publish articles on truancy laws and consequences in local bilingual newspapers
  
- Early Identification, Assessment and Intervention Case Management Services
  - Home visitation program conducted by Houston Police Officers for early intervention with truant youth and their families
  - Identify related needs of truant youth and families and provide referrals to social services
  - Implement an incentive program for participating students
  - Provide semi-monthly educational workshops to participating students
  - Provide a university campus tour for participating students
  
- Juvenile and Parental Accountability for Truancy
  - Promote public awareness of the laws and consequences of truant behavior
  - Increase parental involvement by collaborating with the target school's Parental Involvement Specialist
  - Issue warning notices and truancy citations and refer participating students to the Juvenile Accountability Court Program

The project strategy is implemented in three phases: Attendance, Referral and Enforcement. The uniqueness of the strategy allows law enforcement, school officials and city employees to collaborate to reduce truancy through early identification, assessment and intervention, as well as improve juvenile and parental accountability. The Truancy Reduction Project has also implemented a comprehensive public awareness and outreach campaign designed to educate the general public about truancy laws at social service provider and business organization meetings, and community events, in addition to providing truancy awareness and prevention presentations. The Gulfton Truancy Reduction Demonstration Project is operated by the City of Houston Mayor's Anti-Gang

Office and has developed a partnership between the Houston Police Department, the City of Houston Municipal Courts, and the Houston Independent School District.

Houston's Gulfton neighborhood is a densely populated 3.2 square mile apartment community where a majority of its residents are immigrants. Gulfton consistently has one of the highest crime rates in the city according to the Houston Police Department. The crime concerns of Gulfton residents include crimes by juveniles, gang violence, violent crime, robbery, drug trafficking, alcohol related crimes, prostitution, and property crime. While crime overall is decreasing in the Gulfton area, crimes attributed to juveniles, such as theft and vandalism, remain consistent. In addition, socio-economic, cultural and community risk factors all contribute to truancy among youth who reside in the Gulfton neighborhood. Most Gulfton parents face economic difficulties, language and cultural barriers, and limited opportunities for acculturation. These challenges can make complying with compulsory education laws a low priority. In addition, parents are not always aware that compulsory education laws exist.

The target population for the prevention component is all school-aged Gulfton youth and their parents/guardians. The initial target population for the intervention component was 250 eighth and ninth grade youth enrolled at Jane Long Middle School and Robert E. Lee High School and their parents/guardians who reside in the 77081 zip code. Currently, its services are limited to 250 ninth grade students. The majority of participating students are Spanish speaking and have immigrant backgrounds. Their ages range from 15 to 19. During the 2005-2006 school year, approximately 20 to 25 ninth grade girls received intensive case management services. The Gulfton Truancy Reduction Project assists students with a variety of issues ranging from high-risk gang involvement and victimization, to a lack of parental supervision and provides family support services.

The Project Coordinator spends an average of 25-30 hours a week providing case management services. Twenty to twenty-five females receive approximately 3-6 hours of intensive case management services a month depending on their individual needs.

#### **Advice to case managers or those setting up case management programs**

The ideal case load depends on the level of truancy and the issues affecting the student. One case manager can serve 30 to 40 students if the students are considered "early intervention" and exhibit a low level of truancy. If students are "late intervention" and exhibit high levels of truancy, a single case manager should focus on no more than 20-30 cases.

It is important to form relationships with community agencies. To begin, case managers and program coordinators should attend functions and meetings in their community and network with other attendees. Networking is especially important in order to build a referral base for your clients. Case managers should familiarize themselves with the services in the area and how each agency can complement the program and vice versa.

Parents and families should always be included in the process of working with truant. Case managers should understand the issues affecting the target population and

community. Rapport is the key to providing effective case management services. It is important not to make promises you cannot keep. Follow-up and consistency are crucial when working with families. A flexible schedule is particularly important when serving working-class families. Remember their time is limited and valuable. Change is a difficult process for everyone, so do not expect quick and dramatic changes. Acknowledge small improvements with incentives such as school supplies or household items.

When working with students, I find that gaining their trust is invaluable. Be understanding, patient, do not pass judgment and **listen**. Be consistent and follow-up, follow-up, follow-up! Be honest and open. As the case manager in Gulfton, I typically ask students what they believe is best for them and then work collectively with them to help them achieve it. It is a mistake to assume that what they need is an adult to tell them what is best for them, what to do, and/or treat them as if they are incompetent. I work with students to identify their goals. Students are receptive to this strategy. Meet with them regularly, not just when something is wrong.

#### **What not to do....**

It is important not to expect students and their families to share the same values and beliefs as you do. For instance, when I began working with this Project, I was determined to advocate high school graduation with a diploma and see General Educational Development (GED) Testing Programs as an ultimate last resort regardless of the student's situation due to my values. But as I began providing case management services, I realized that although I may share the same cultural background and have generally similar experiences as the students, I must revise my goal of advocating initially for a high school diploma to advocating for the completion of high school in the manner that best suits the student. Completing high school is a significant accomplishment for anyone, but to this target population, it indicates true triumph over risk factors that challenge their integration and acculturation process.

## **The At Risk Youth Program, King County Superior Court, Juvenile Services Division**

### **General program background**

The At Risk Youth Program, through King County Superior Court, Juvenile Services Division, was developed in 1999 with a grant from OJJDP to provide alternatives to the formal court process for court-involved, truant youth in King County, Washington.

Initially, two alternatives were developed: Attendance Workshops and Community Truancy Boards.

a) The pre-court attendance workshops have provided truant youth the opportunity to develop behavior contracts with their parents in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. These contracts are monitored by the school district for thirty days to assess compliance and level of behavior change. In the event of non-compliance, school districts can refer youth to community truancy boards (if available) or request a preliminary hearing for these youth to obtain a court order compelling them to go to school.

b) With the initiation and support of Superior Court, Becca<sup>2</sup> staff helped schools develop Community Truancy Boards (CTBs) in several school districts. CTBs consist of school district personnel, including but not limited to, the Becca representative (liaison to court), school counselors, school nurse, and volunteer members of the community.

Unfortunately, due to decreases in funding, not all school districts were able to maintain their CTBs, and currently there are only two in operation in King County. The CTBs are very effective, however, in that a student and parent(s) are given time to meet with the board and explain their circumstances in depth, resulting in referrals, recommendations, and commitments from all parties to take necessary steps agreed upon to resolve the problems that impact youths' attendance. A stipulated agreement is the outcome of this meeting, and therefore a binding court document.

c) In addition, four case managers serve youth and families in King County. Each is assigned to a geographic area that serves the school districts in that region. By focusing on specific geographic areas, they are able to provide individualized case management by establishing on-going relationships with school-based and community-based staff, as well as with law enforcement, attorneys, and social workers. They act as liaisons between families and other providers to facilitate the success of families following through with their court-ordered obligations.

Superior Court operates a Becca Court in two sites in King County, with a full-time Becca commissioner who rotates between both locations. Truancy, At Risk Youth and Child In Need of Supervision (CHINS) cases are heard Monday through Friday in one or the other courthouse.

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<sup>2</sup> The Becca Bill is Washington State's compulsory education law. It is named after a school-aged girl, named Rebecca, who was murdered during the school day while she was truant. More information can be found at <http://www.metrokc.gov/proatty/truancy/becca.htm>.

Services are free to all youth and families in the 19 King County school districts that we serve.

c) Please describe in general the youth you serve, i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, income. We serve all truant youth from KC, mostly middle-high school students. We have no statistics on individual demographics at this time, although we serve many immigrant populations and a variety of ethnic groups. Many families are low income, but not exclusively.

d) How many hours per week (or month) do you dedicate to providing case management services, and what is your caseload?  
Current caseloads are between 35-45, however not all receive the same amount of service or require the same amount of work. We are working to establish guidelines for this, as the ideal caseload is closer to 25 for in-depth work.

How many hours on average do you spend with each client?  
See individual case history reports.

**Advice to case managers or those setting up case management programs.**

i) What is the ideal case load?  
For intensive case management: 20-25.

ii) Ideas about forming relationships with community agencies  
Identify common “causes” in your geographic area. Actively recruit service providers offering support to families in those areas. Find out other agencies’ needs and goals, so that you have mutual incentives to partner, e.g., one agency that offers parent support and education may have trouble getting attendance at their voluntary events. This could become a resource for a family.

Join, or help facilitate a network group – providers/agencies with common target populations that can get cross-trained in the other programs’ information. Advocate for relationship development between schools and service providers. Schools and courts alone cannot meet the needs of all families.

Attend school meetings as often as possible; this practice allows the court to support efforts made by schools, as well as provide them with information about more resources.

Put together resource/information packets to hand out to agencies; offer to come speak to staff about your program, and take back information about theirs.

iii) Strategies for involving parents and families  
*“It’s not the process, but the people along the way that made it work.”* Quote from a mom after a successful intervention.

Always introduce yourself to both parents and youth. If possible, try to meet with them before a preliminary or fact-finding hearing; letting them know what to expect from the court process helps to reduce tensions and stress. Let them know what you can and can't do, remind them as to why they're in court and give them hope: e.g., "If we all do our jobs well, this process will be helpful for your family."

- Give your card to both parents and youth.
- Try to find out what the family perceives as barriers/challenges to the youth's attendance;
- Be non-judgmental;
- Use a strength-based approach throughout involvement, e.g., find out what goes well, what works, and capitalize on those strengths;
- Remember that buy-in among parents is greater on an At-Risk Youth petition than a Truancy petition because parents filed in order to seek help. In a truancy case, parents are involved because the school filed.

iv) Strategies for gaining student trust

- Introduce yourself to the student as well as the parent(s);
- Make youth feel important;
- Compliment students in front of their families and others when appropriate;
- Acknowledge that things are difficult. Explain your role, and your hopes for them, and that the more you know about their challenges, the better you can help the situation;
- Set clear boundaries, and let youth know what you can and cannot do.
- Meet with youth alone at some point; tell them, and then remind them, that what happens depends on choices they make – that they have some control in whether or not they come back to court;
- Be honest and non-judgmental;
- Listen to them – ask what they think is helpful, and offer assistance in areas the youth identifies. Your perceived attitude towards them is vital for them to buy in to your assistance.
- Be genuine – youth are used to being talked down to – a combination of respect and a sense of humor will go a long way. Acknowledge youths' progress and assets, and keep expectations high. You may be the first adult that sees them as "successful," and it can be motivating.

v) The balance between sticks and carrots

After establishing rapport, and building trust, you want to balance friendliness and helpfulness with accountability. Holding kids accountable to expectations also helps build trust, and lets them know you think they can be successful.

vi) Working with the schools

Attend staffings when possible and appropriate. Case management involvement can often help ease tensions between the school and the youth/family. Provide updates about community services/referrals to the schools. School staff change over time, and resources

unused by some staff members may seem more useful to others. Work on clarifying the issues that impact the student's attendance.

vii) Other thoughts

The court process is expensive; the better we do our job, the more helpful and meaningful the experience to our community members – make it count!

It's important for case managers to continue accepting contact with former students. If young people are not in good standing at school, it's hard for teens to find out about opportunities to continue their education. Their parents are focused elsewhere, and the youth may still want direction.

viii) Best Practice Ideas

- Case managers need to be accessible.
- If there's an option to choose additional cases, look for those that have three or more contempts, or are over two years old, to find out what is keeping the case around and move it along.
- Know when to step out, as well as to step in.
- Court case managers are unique, in that they work hard to direct youth and families away from their own agency, by hooking them up with outside services, etc.
- Use an intake package if available.



## **TLC for Children and Families, Inc., Olathe, Kansas**

### **General Program Background**

Juvenile Intervention Services for Truants (JIST) offers a twelve-week community-based intervention to youth and their families who are seeking assistance to improve family relations, school attendance and increase positive adult interactions for youth. JIST also offers a school-based service, with the case manager located in the school for truancy prevention. The case manager builds relationships with at-risk students and their families to provide support and advocacy on the youth's behalf. The JIST case managers meet face to face with each youth on a weekly basis for 1 to 2.5 hours to review and set goals; provide appropriate referrals to resources and to advocate on the youth's behalf for services. JIST serves youth aged 12-17, male and female, all ethnicities and all socioeconomic levels. The maximum caseload is 12 students per case worker. For the fiscal year 2005, 193 youth were served in both programs. Sixty-six percent of youth who were available for follow-up information and completed the 12-week program maintained a 95% or greater attendance or graduated from high school during the 12 months after the program. One hundred percent of youth who were available for follow-up information and completed the 12-week program had no new juvenile offender adjudications during the 12 months after the program.

The overall goals and objectives for the case manager are to: 1) provide strengths-based case management services to youth and their families to increase functional skills, decrease the need for judicial intervention and maximize independent functioning in the community, 2) effectively communicate with youth, parent/guardians, caseworkers, schools, law enforcement, Social and Rehabilitative Services, attorneys, judges, District Attorney's Office, and other social service agencies, 3) assess and identify strengths and needs of clients and complete case plans with youth, 4) provide the most beneficial referrals for the clients, including education, support and crisis intervention by becoming familiar with community based programs and services, and 5) focus on providing services and referrals that allow the youth to remain in their homes.

### **Advice:**

- Use positive reinforcement for small steps taken in the right direction.
- Always be sincere.
- Be honest and direct.
- Follow through with consequences.
- Empower the students by allowing them to select among a set of choices that you provide.
- See their side of the situation.
- Connect them to an adult or someone at the school to whom they can relate.
- Be a motivational speaker.
- Let each one know that they are special in their own way.
- Focus on their strengths and all the positives of the situation. (If they are in denial that a problem exists, then focus on how the issue will affect their lives.)
- Refer, refer, refer.

## California School Attendance Review Boards

### General Program Background

In California, the State School Attendance Review Board (State SARB) has been strongly encouraging the development of case management strategies for students with persistent school attendance or school behavior problems. Our concern is that too many high-risk students disappear from the educational system with no case management or follow-up after an initial identification of their problem. California is only slightly above the national average in its graduation rate as determined by the National Council for Educational Statistics; the SARB process, if fully implemented, would provide a safety net for students who are no longer engaged in school. Early identification is only useful if it is followed by early intervention and follow-up.

California's *Education Code* Section 48273 encourages case management of high-risk students by requiring every school board to adopt regulations for gathering and transmitting information about students with persistent problems to the county superintendent. The State SARB has developed a format for case management reports which includes information on the number of interventions attempted at the school level by grade, as well as cases referred to the SARB level. The form is available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/documents/sarbformat.xls>. This data tool is vital for case management of students with persistent school attendance or school behavior problems because it encourages follow-up and allows for county level strategy intervention development. In his *February 2005 Highlights* to county and district superintendents, Jack O'Connell, California's State Superintendent of Public Instruction, stated: "Just as decisions about instruction must be driven by data, so must decisions about dropout interventions."

Another approach to improving case management in California has been the development of a sample school board policy with administrative regulations for attendance supervision. California's *Education Code* Section 48240 requires school boards to appoint a supervisor of attendance and such assistant supervisors of attendance as may be necessary to supervise the attendance of students in the district or county. School boards are also required to prescribe the duties of the supervisor of attendance and assistant supervisors of attendance, not inconsistent with law. Although the law does not specifically require that case management be one of those prescribed duties, case management for students with persistent school attendance problems is a logical duty of the supervisor of attendance. The State SARB has developed a sample school board policy with administrative regulations which may be adapted by school boards to meet local needs and which is available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/45463>. The State SARB encourages school districts in California to develop school board policies and local strategies for case management which will reduce the number of dropouts in the state public education system.

The State SARB has also developed a *School Attendance Review Boards Handbook* available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/ai/sb/documents/sarb02.pdf>. This handbook emphasizes the importance of early identification and intervention, and provides a sample

"Case Chronology Work Sheet" on page 36. The "Case Chronology Work Sheet" provides a format for recording contacts or actions taken in case management. The handbook also contains more formal documents which may be used in case management:

- "Attendance Records and Summary of Action" (page 37)
- "School Attendance Review Board Information Sheet" (page 39)
- "Confidential SARB Referral Form" (page 40)
- "District Attorney Mediation Referral" (page 42)
- "District Attorney Truancy Referral" (page 45)
- "Subpoena for SARB Hearing" (page 46)
- "School Site, Student, and Parent Agreement" (page 47)
- "Summary of Parent(s) and Pupil Conference Agreement" (page 48)
- "Student-Parent Agreement" (page 49)
- "SARB Confirmation of Agreement Letter" (page 50)
- "SARB Congratulations Letter" (page 51)
- "SARB Identification Stickers" (page 52)
- "Petition to the Court to Suspend or Delay Driving Privilege Pursuant to *Vehicle Code*" (page 53)

These sample tools or documents for case management were designed as models or examples for California, but I believe many of these tools could be adapted for case management in other states. If anyone has questions about the SARB process in California, I may be contacted at [dkopperu@cde.ca.gov](mailto:dkopperu@cde.ca.gov) or (916) 327-3590.

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## **Isanti County, MN Truancy Probation Officer Program**

### **General Program Background**

#### Program Name

Isanti County Truancy Probation Officer Program (Isanti County, MN)

#### Services Provided

Pre-court truancy interventions for all students grades 9 – 12 at an area high school as well as post-court supervision (Probation) for all juveniles referred to court from this school for truancy.

#### Student Population Served

Primarily Caucasian, ages 14 to 18, male and female, primarily average income level, approximately 1700 students, mainstream students as well as students receiving special education services.

#### Case Management

The Truancy Probation Officer (PO) has two separate caseloads:

1. The *Probation Caseload* ranges from five to fifteen juveniles who have been placed on probation for being adjudicated habitually truant. These juveniles all attend or attended the high school in which the Truancy PO is officed during the school year. The time spent working with these juveniles varies each week. In an average week, approximately 50% of the PO's time is spent working with this caseload. The PO ensures that each juvenile completes his/her court orders and follows the conditions of probation. The Truancy PO also assists other Juvenile PO's not on site at the high school with probation-related matters when convenient.
2. The *Truancy Intervention Caseload* includes all students (approximately 1700) at the high school in which the PO is officed during the school year. During the school year the PO works full time at the high school. While Probation duties are a part of the PO's daily routine, pre-court interventions with the general school population are the primary focus of duties during the school year. Fifty to seventy-five percent of the PO's time is spent working with these students in an average week. Due to the large number of students with whom the PO communicates, visits are generally very short – no more than a few minutes. Some interventions are more time consuming.

### **Advice for Developing a Truancy Intervention Program**

1. Develop a position where the only focus of duties is on improving school attendance. This prevents other duties from taking valuable time away from truancy interventions.
2. Include the school(s) who will be receiving truancy intervention services, Probation, the County Attorney's Office, local Judges, local law enforcement and any other involved area agencies in the development process. All parties will be involved at some point (pre- or post-court) and will have valuable input as to how the program can be most effective. A positive working relationship with all parties involved is critical to a successful program.

3. Clearly define roles/responsibilities of all parties involved in the truancy intervention process. Depending on the number of students in the school(s) that will be serviced, it may be appropriate to designate some duties to school counselors, assistant principals, instructional assistants, etc. Divide the caseload up in a way that most effectively reaches as many students as possible at the targeted time.
4. Document your truancy intervention protocol. This provides a point of reference if there is ever any question as to when to intervene with students, and who is responsible for what.
5. If possible, have staff officed in the school(s) that you will be servicing. The close contact with students and visibility within the school is important. Students need to know where they can go if they have questions/concerns regarding attendance. This also allows for easy communication with school staff.
6. Start interventions as early as possible.
7. Involve parents early and often in the intervention process. Parents appreciate any kind of contact. Parent support is necessary, particularly in cases where truancy is chronic.
8. Communicate regularly with all agencies involved in the truancy intervention process. Regular updates on how the program is going are helpful for all. This will help to maintain a positive working relationship with all and will greatly increase the effectiveness of your program.
9. Assign the responsibility of determining consequences for truanancies to school staff (counselors, assistant principals, etc.). This allows the truancy interventionist to be a support person in helping students improve their attendance, rather than meting out negative consequences for poor attendance. This also helps the truancy intervention staff to maintain a positive relationship with students.
10. When selecting a person to work as your truancy intervention staff member, find someone who enjoys working with the age group of students you will be servicing and someone who communicates extremely well with others. This is a critical piece of a successful program.
11. While it's important to be a support person for students who are having problems and are, as a result, being truant, be careful not to become too "friendly" with students. Teenage kids are very good at taking advantage of such a situation, and an overly familiar relationship is counter-productive.
12. Work diligently with every student until all resources and opportunities to improve have been exhausted. Don't give up on any student.
13. Understand that school is not the place for every child. There may be a time when you need to suggest an alternative learning program or GED. If that is appropriate, that is OK. Students need to be in a program where they are being successful.
14. Have a clear attendance policy at the school(s) with which you will be working. Be sure everyone involved has a full understanding of that policy and the consequences associated with it and that the policy is fully and consistently enforced.

### **Advice for case managers**

I have worked with hundreds of students over the past four years and have experienced several successes, big and small, in that time. I think there are several reasons for those successes:

- The students see that someone cares
- Someone is able to explain to these students why it is so important to graduate from high school and that they develop responsible behaviors (including attendance) while at school, as these behaviors will carry on into their adult life.
- I clearly understand our school's attendance policy and am able to relay that knowledge to the students and apply it to how they can improve and be successful.
- Students have been referred to support services that they truly need and have not been connected to before
- The cooperation I have had with the school and area agencies has been wonderful. Our program would not be successful without the cooperation we have.
- I truly enjoy working with the students at the high school. I connect very well with them, and I think that they feel comfortable in my office.

### **A Particularly Challenging Case**

The most challenging cases that I have experienced are the ones where the student truly does not fit in at the high school, honestly does not care whether they are successful or not and, whether they are aware of it or not, are looking for a way to get out of the high school and into another program. The way they commonly do that is through chronic truancies. In our efforts to help these students be successful at all costs, we often times offer them opportunity after opportunity to improve their attendance while trying everything we can think of and being as creative as we can be. Eventually there comes a time when we have to recommend an alternative placement or suggest that the student pursue a GED, because that is truly the only way that he/she will be successful. It is sometimes difficult to realize that a student does not belong in a regular school setting and that keeping them there is setting them up for failure, but it is necessary to be able to make that decision when the time is right for the student.

### **The Importance of an Effective Truancy Intervention Program**

Promoting positive school attendance is so important to all students not only to their success at school but also in their future. Kids often times do not see how their actions and behaviors during their teenage years will effect their adult lives. Helping kids to understand that correlation will positively change their lives forever!

## **Project Respect Truancy Reduction Program, Pueblo, CO**

### **General program background.**

The goal of the Pueblo School District 60's Project Respect Truancy Reduction Program is to reduce the truancy rate by identifying the causes of truancy and implementing effective interventions in order to give all children the educational opportunities they deserve. Research indicates that truancy often leads to a life of delinquency and crime. Truancy Prevention in Pueblo, Colorado is taken very seriously. Pueblo School District 60 and the 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court have taken an aggressive stance in the fight against truancy.

The goals of the Truancy Reduction Program are to address underlying risk factors for truancy:

1. Improve school attendance for targeted students.
2. Improve the academic outcomes for students.
3. Improve students' social-emotional lives.
4. Increase student and family access to services in the community.
5. Decrease juvenile delinquency and recidivism.

We serve all of Pueblo School District 60 students and are a school-based program. We have a Community Advocate who works with families and students who are faced with issues of non-attendance, suspension, and who are at risk of school disengagement. We are located in most Title One schools and serve many students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. We serve 324 students: 83% Latino, 11% Caucasian, 4% Native American and 2% African American.

### **Your advice to case managers or those setting up case management programs**

Our Community Advocates are case managers. They provide the following services to families:

Daily Responsibilities:

1. Provide services to families, addressing engagement and attendance;
2. Provide tutoring, mentoring, mental health or substance abuse treatment;
3. Provide anti-bullying education;
4. Abide by and enforce the Dist. 60 school attendance policy;
5. Ensure accountability for grants;
6. Collect and record data for Project Respect;
7. Obtain and maintain approved releases of information;
8. Transport students and families to/from school and to/from appointments;
9. Scrupulously maintain confidentiality;
10. Prioritize home visits

The average caseload for an advocate ranges from 12 to 18 families who meet program criteria.

•Responsibilities of the Community Advocates:

1. Work with student's attendance and discipline issues;

2. Collaborate with school staff, community agencies, students, courts and families concerning educational, social and emotional needs.

•Goals of the Community Advocates:

1. Alleviate any obstacles interfering with academic success;
2. Improve attendance and enhance school engagement.

We engage students and families by having or providing:

- Monthly Pot-Luck Family Nights
- Love and Logic Parenting Classes
- Annual Basketball Tournaments
- Annual Volleyball Tournaments
- Cinco de Mayo 10k/5k Run/Walk
- 16<sup>th</sup> de Septiembre Golf Tournament
- Attending parent/teacher conferences with the parents/students
- Home visits
- Doing strength based inventories for parents and students and providing services.

**Community Partners include:**

- Catholic Charities
- DAP/Pathways for Youth
- Department of Social Services
- Symphony
- Cathie Bonham MA LPC
- Tom Farley Esq
- Pueblo School District 60
- Title One funding
- Colorado Trust
- El Pomar
- Little Ceaser's Dave Femester
- Sonic
- Colorado Juvenile Minority Family Advocate
- OJJDP
- Colorado Foundation for Families and Children
- National Center for School Engagement
- Colorado After School Network
- Pueblo Medical Society
- Pueblo School District 60
- 10<sup>th</sup> Judicial District Court
- Catholic Charities
- Pueblo Police Department
- Pueblo County Department of Social Services
- Pueblo County Detention Alternative Program
- Posada Homeless Shelter
- El Centro Del Quinto Sol Community Center
- YMCA
- Pueblo Chamber of Commerce
- Crossroads Drug and Alcohol Center
- YWCA-Child Care Center at Keating
- Boys and Girls Club
- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Center•Project Unidos Mentoring Program
- Operation School Bell
- Rare Breed Youth Sports
- Pueblo Community College
  - University of Southern Colorado-Social Work Department
- University of New Mexico- Highlands- Social Work Department
- Private Donors
- YWCA-Women's Crisis Center
- Pueblo County Probation Department
- Spanish Peaks Mental Health Center



### **What Works:**

- Do not tell the family what is wrong with them, they already know. Always work from a strength based philosophy.
- Encourage school engagement/parent involvement, whatever a parent can do to assist in the education process.
- Celebrate strengths and successes.
- Encourage community partnerships
- Learn names of the family members; be engaging and sincere when speaking to them.
- Keep an open door policy at your school.
- Let the family know they can call upon you when appropriate.
- Have a resource guide for community agencies and phone numbers to contact if the family is facing a challenge.
- Know your community resources and include them in collaboration in providing services for students and families.
- Truancy is a community issue and must be treated as such.
- Keep accurate data regarding services to families and students. If the data show that you are not making a difference, try something new and review your data again until you show gains. **Your data should drive your program!**

## Success Stories

### Anthony

#### Background of the Student and Family

Anthony, aged 15, lived in an apartment building that houses low-income families with varying ethnic backgrounds from three public school districts. Last fall, Anthony was placed with his biological mother, 34 years old, by state services, after a period of living with his grandfather while his mother was in treatment. She was struggling to attend state funded community college, work part time, and remain sober. The state supported the youth living in the two bedroom apartment with his sister, his mother's boyfriend, two pit bulls, a cat and a python snake. It was small, crowded and the youth slept on the floor in the living room. The boyfriend was the most stable member of the household and worked daily as a construction laborer. All household members were Caucasian. The mother's health was poor, and she was ill often. Anthony felt his mother favored his older sister.

#### Challenges and Assets

Anthony liked living with his grandfather and other family members and resented his mother's efforts to have him back home with her. He thought she just wanted his support funding; he had no privacy by living in the living room. He was angry at home and at school. He had often been suspended for bad behavior and was expelled for the remainder of the school year. His mother was angry and had few effective strategies to support her child except to complain about the school. The youth was put on probation for a community offense and his probation counselor worked hard with the family to stabilize household tempers. The juvenile probation counselor did not know the educational systems in the community and suspension was the norm for the teen. Anthony knew how to stay home via suspension and make his mother angry. That was the one thing he controlled.

The family rallied when they felt the support systems lagging and, at these times, they were most responsive and active. The youth is intelligent with good transfer grades from the school near his grandfather's home. He tested negative for substance abuse and he only got into trouble because he wanted spending money. He wanted to work and get out of the home; however, he was only 15 years old. His sister attended another school district and seemed to have fewer challenges. She worked in a subsidized city program during the summer and he wanted to do that, too.

#### Case Management Activities

I visited the family at home and listened to the members tell their stories and wishes. His probation counselor was open and eager to provide support services if the family would participate regularly. I asked for in-home family counseling and anger management skills for the youth via juvenile services, and I tackled the school district. I am currently

looking for a tutor for Anthony to keep him engaged in school work while he is on the wait list for an alternative program. He wants to return to his home school in the fall so he may remain on tutoring services to pass two classes by year end. Tutoring expenses will be covered from a grant and will continue through the fall if Anthony attends his sessions regularly. I met with staff from his home school and developed a good relationship with his counselor and a male teacher, who personally agreed to engage Anthony. The challenge was an administrative staff member who felt Anthony intimidated female teachers and she kept suspending him to protect her young teacher's ability to control her overcrowded classroom.

Anthony attended weekly Anger Reduction Training (ART) classes and graduated with new skills and an ability to understand anger in others. Mother and son are participating in family counseling sessions and he seems to like the counselor and the process. He feels he can return to school and remain in school. Home is improving, and his mother feels relief.

I obtained an application for the summer work/education program his sister participated in last summer and personally spoke to a program manager to see if Anthony could participate in it this summer. They agreed to give me an application and to give it heavy consideration for enrollment. His mother is pleased that I am advocating for her son. He has a weekly job, now, working for the school district assisting the track and field manager with the spring season. He reports to the district stadium after school, gets his long jump/triple jump assignment and remains at work until the last event is held and he is dismissed. He is earning money, participating in an appropriate activity and learning to maintain a time card, take direction, and show initiative.

Anthony is attending all his assigned classes and services. He is working weekly, has not re-offended and is eager to attend tutoring and summer work. His outcome is excellent, and the family home is peaceful. He has a new probation counselor and she is an advocate for him and willing to attend school meetings and continue all the services in place.

#### Alternate Strategies

When I received the case, Anthony had already been suspended for several days, and I did not have a clear understanding of the school's position. Only after working with his counselor on a schedule change, did I find out about the teacher who complained about his actions in her classroom. The youth made a big mistake more than once and the school needed to support their young teacher with a mentor and discipline strategies. Anthony was not the only disruptive student, and the classroom is part of a newly organized small school program inside a traditional building. There were no options for transfer because only a few instructors taught 9<sup>th</sup> grade classes. I would have asked the administrators to provide some kind of program or administratively transfer Anthony to another building for his 9<sup>th</sup> grade year before he became a target for the teacher and administrator.

## Tyrell

### Background of the Student and Family

Tyrell is a 16 year old African American youth living in a state-supported home with little contact from his biological family. He qualifies under IDEA as needing 100% self contained classroom instruction and vocational training. He tested positive for substance abuse while under the supervision of juvenile services. He continues to be supervised by a probation counselor. He is currently living out of the school district with his African American foster parent and her mother's extended family. The home is crowded, friendly, and very organized. There are eight members of the household and he sees his prior foster mother daily because she lives upstairs, and his current guardian is her daughter.

The last two years of schooling, while he was living with his biological father, resulted in several suspensions, truancy issues and offenses in the community. The local probation office had him under supervision on prior matters and he felt lost, alone and abandoned. He said his father would often visited, but he did not provide financial support for Tyrell. His biological mother lost custody of him due to her ongoing drug use during her pregnancy. He was placed in foster care because his father could not be located at the time. When he was two years old, his father tried to care for him, but he has been in and out of care with his foster mother's family for years.

### Challenges and Assets

Tyrell needed enrollment in his residing district and his foster parents were not sure how to transfer him since they could not locate his father for permission or a change of guardianship. He failed to attend school for several days, was suspended for possession and had no transfer grades. He needed IEP instructional materials and a self contained classroom for success. Tyrell used drugs sporadically when not in his new home. Another challenge was financial; his foster family wanted state support for the youth. He came with no clothes, shoes or medical coverage.

Tyrell was on community supervision and needed close monitoring to maintain his placement.

Working with his placement family is a pleasure, and their high expectations for Tyrell are an asset. They will not tolerate drug use, but will support him in attending outpatient treatment. His prior foster mother knew his father, spoke respectfully of him in front of Tyrell and wanted both parties to have a positive relationship. She was willing to participate in family counseling and include all members of the household so everyone would know the expectations. All the other children in the family attend school daily and pass their classes.

### Case Management Activities

I arranged to meet his placement mother at the enrollment center for his new district, and I discussed the family situation with their personnel. I facilitated enrollment of the youth

and brought his immunizations, IEP and transcripts. He was immediately given a choice of classes and placed in an appropriate educational program. It is beneficial for a Case Manager to bring all necessary documents when enrolling a student in school.

Next, I wrote the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) a letter explaining the home situation and the need for support funds for the family. The family now receives financial support to help the youth with his needs. His probation counselor provided in-home family counseling and the entire household participated in their weekly sessions. I worked on outpatient treatment and finally found an inner city group that provides activities, sports and field trips along with weekly counseling.

#### Outcome

I am optimistic for his outcome is as long as he remains with his current family and is free from drugs. Seeing his father is not beneficial unless his father chooses to visit him at home. The youth is currently engaged in school, happy and drug free.

## Josh

Josh, a 15 year old male and 10<sup>th</sup> grader, was referred to the JIST (Juvenile Intervention Services Truancy) Program through the Johnson County District Attorney's office. He had just been released from Juvenile Justice Authority custody and returned home when he was placed in the Truancy Case Management Program. While in a group home his grades and attendance improved, but soon after he returned home, truancy became an issue again.

His JIST caseworker learned that Josh and his immediate family had been in and out of the system several times. At the time Josh was signed into the program, both parents were on probation themselves. Once in the program the caseworker discovered three main issues that led to Josh's truancy: alcohol and drug abuse by Josh and other family members, domestic violence and negative sibling role models who were delinquent themselves.

Alcohol and drug abuse, specifically marijuana use, were used as Josh's recreational activity and during the program he had a positive drug screen. He was struggling with his grades and failed all but two classes. Along with resources for substance abuse relapse treatment, Josh and his family were given numbers for food and utility assistance and domestic violence intervention. His parents' issues of domestic violence and substance abuse reportedly decreased as a result of their being on probation and also having a desire to keep their son both in school and at home.

During the 12-week program, Josh, guided by his caseworker, began to focus on his individual strengths and how to keep from returning to custody. He set goals for himself in the areas of Education, Socialization, Identity, Affection, Health and Economic Situation.

While on the program, Josh's school attendance dramatically improved as did his grades. On his last progress report, he earned all A's and has not missed a single day of school so far this year. To say that he successfully completed the program would be an understatement.

## Jeremy

### Background of the Student and Family

Jeremy was the nicest chronically truant kid I have known - popular, handsome, charming, and athletic. He was 16 at enrollment in my Stay in School Program and had every intention of going to school daily, but he did not get up in the morning and his family did not want the job of waking him. He had an attention disorder, had medications but at times did not take them, and his parents were tired of filling prescriptions. Jeremy was Caucasian, tall and athletic, but with fourth grade math skills and 9<sup>th</sup> grade reading skills. His father was an alcoholic and his mother had a job most of the time. His sister had graduated and attended community college and worked. When I interviewed her, she said she had just gotten tired of her brother and how he manipulated her parents, so she left home.

The youth was on supervision and completed probation without attending school.

### Challenges and Assets

Jeremy agreed to do everything but failed to follow through with his intentions. He did not take his medications regularly, and said he did not like how it made him feel. He hyper focused on baseball and was a star pitcher in a local premier league. He wanted to play for the school varsity team, but he could not qualify because of his grades and attendance. Jeremy knew his game schedule and could make every practice, game, and team meeting. Baseball was his mother's favorite sport and she supported her son by raising funds for the team.

The family home was modest and there were always kids around and family friends. I sensed that it was acceptable to his family for Anthony to skip school, and because he was an athlete, he found acceptance, recognition and fame. He went to prom with his girlfriend and did not have to work because of practice or team meetings. There are no expectations for him except to play professional baseball.

### Case Management Activities

It took me awhile to understand the family dynamics and history. Even though his best grades were in vocational classes, I could not get Jeremy interested in career testing or classes. He would respond by attending team meetings because he liked all the other Stay in School members and he wanted an incentive check for participating in team vocational activities.

I spent time with his mother trying to understand his school failure. When I visited the family in the late morning, his parents were in bed. I made arrangements for psychiatric evaluations, drug screenings, etc. His probation counselor and I met several times and I kept him informed of Jeremy's participation in my program. Jeremy completed probation even though he did not go to school. I enrolled him in two alternative projects, but he always failed to attend. His school district filed a truancy petition but he managed to avoid consequences.

### Outcome

While I was working with Jeremy, I felt like I did not make a difference in his life and feared that he would easily slip through the cracks. Nonetheless, Jeremy is now 18 years old and he wants to go to the local community college. He has decided to attend school and he wants a diploma or GED so he can play baseball. School is finally his decision and it is now a part of his focus. He comes into my office every month or so, to check in, and he always thanks me for enrolling him in my program and being there for his family. Case Management of this youth did not look successful during his active enrollment, but all of the opportunities ended up benefiting him in the long run.



## Amy

### Background of the Student and Family

Amy was a 15 year old 9<sup>th</sup> grade girl (born in the U.S.), who lived with her mother. Her parents are from Ethiopia and they separated in 2000. Father lives out of state. The child had no health issues.

### Challenges and Assets

Amy came to the attention of the case manager due to a truancy petition that had been filed by the school district. The school counselor had reported that the youth had a big problem with skipping classes, mainly Language Arts and History. Amy's attendance improved after a school meeting with her and her mother. However, her attendance became problematic again after Amy ran away from home.

Amy's mother was concerned with her daughter's attendance and with her not following house rules. Mother reported the youth would go and come as she pleases and engage in reckless activities. Mother was also worried about who Amy was spending her time with. Mother reported that during one occasion Amy had a boy over during school hours and they were having sex. Amy admitted that she did have a boy over to her house but only for ten minutes during the day when she should have been in school. She also has made allegations that mother beat her. Amy reported when they lived in Ethiopia her father would beat her and mother as well. The mother admitted that they use physical discipline to punish their daughter, but stated that neither she nor her father "beat" Amy.

Amy complained that her mother does not let her do anything or go anywhere without her mother's supervision. She also reported that her mother wanted her to hang out only with Muslim friends. Her mother reports she only wants her to refrain from hanging out with bad people and believed some of Amy's friends may be gang affiliated. The school district filed a truancy petition and was in the process of starting the contempt process.

### Case Management Activities

As case manager I spoke with the school counselor who reported that she asked the mother to come and talk to me about other resources and possible referrals. I met with the mother, discussed the issues (listed above) and offered assistance. The mother reported that Amy had participated in individual counseling, but they had not tried any family counseling. The case manager also spoke with the mother about filing an At-Risk-Youth petition. Her mother said she would like to file one, and did. During the course of working with the family, the case manager referred the family to family counseling, a wraparound support program and to a gang awareness and prevention program.

The case manager contacted the family and other community-based providers weekly to see how things were going. During the course of two years, Amy had several warrants issued for her arrest for either failure to appear or for leaving her court-ordered placement. As a result, she went through several sanctions including writing book reports

and papers, performing community service hours, day reporting, work crew, and secure detention.

The case manager developed a good working relationship with Amy and her mother and from time to time was able to mediate and counsel both to assist them in understanding the court process and navigating through services.

### The Outcome

After a long road, Amy started attending school daily, keeping her counseling appointments, following house rules and not running away from home. As a result, her mother allowed Amy more time with her pro-social friends, which had a positive impact on the mother /daughter relationship. Amy's mother commented that she is talking "with" her daughter, instead of "at" her daughter.

The case manager recently had contact with Amy who reported that she is enrolled in a community college and that she and her mother have a good relationship.

Several factors contributed to this family's success. First, both Amy and her mother were willing to engage in services and were open to trying something new. The case manager is doubtful that this family would have been connected to the community services without case management. Access to the community-based services that were provided to the family required collaboration between the case manager and the person or agency providing the services.

## **Mark**

### Background of the Student and Family

Mark was a 16 year old 10<sup>th</sup> grade boy, born in the U.S. He lives with his mother and father on an island near Seattle. Despite the fact that his mother and father are wheelchair bound, they are very mobile.

### Challenges and Assets

Mark came to the attention of the case manager due to his assistant principal who had inquired about possible resources and filing information. The case manager's understanding was that Mark had been taking advantage of his parents' inability to keep up with him. Mark would not maintain regular school attendance, and at times he would not come home on time for curfew. Mark had also been verbally abusive to his parents.

### Case Management Activities

The case manager spoke with the assistant principal who reported that the school had tried a number of interventions with Mark and his parents in order to assist Mark in attending school on a more regular basis. The assistant principal also reported that Mark had only had two discipline referrals. The case manager went to the school to work with the staff on filing their petition and also conducted two home visits with the family. Mark's parents reported that he had been prescribed medication for depression but that he was no longer taking it. They also reported that they had been diligent in stressing the importance of education to Mark.

The case manager worked with the parents, mental health counselor, and school to come up with an attendance agreement that Mark would be able to follow. The case manager also worked with Mark in looking at other educational alternatives. Although there were not many in the area, Mark was very excited about the CEO (Career Education Options) program at the community college. Mark agreed he would attend school everyday in order to show the CEO program he was serious about his education.

### The Outcome

Mark started attending school each day and was looking forward to attending the CEO program in the fall.

Recently, the case manager had contact with the previous assistant principal, who is now the principal, and he reported that Mark currently has a job and is doing well.

The success of this story comes from the parents' ability to overcome their own disabilities and from the case manager's effort to track down every service available as well as attend every school meeting and court hearing. The case manager was able to help

keep the family together and communicating at this time, and by establishing rapport with the youth, was able to help him make a positive educational decision.

## **Malaya**

### Background of the Student and Family

Malaya was a 15-year-old 9<sup>th</sup> grade Filipino girl who lived at home with her parents and her 11-year-old sister. Both of Malaya's parents worked outside of the home. Her mother moved to the United States in 1993. Her father and both daughters moved in 2001.

### Challenges and Assets

Malaya's father reported that his wife was difficult to communicate with, stubborn, talked a lot, and refused to listen. The father also described Malaya as being "out of control". She was truant from school, ran away from home, and did not obey the curfew. Malaya's father reported that he found her at her boyfriend's house during school hours. Due to Malaya's failure to maintain regular school attendance, the school district filed a truancy petition with the Juvenile Court.

Malaya stated that her mother talked too much, didn't listen, and lectured her about her behavior. She also stated that her parents argued because her mother wanted everything her way. Malaya reported that she did not like being with her family because her parents were too strict and they did not trust her. Malaya's father and mother (on rare occasions) met with the bilingual teacher, counselor and assistant principal to work through some of their family issues.

### Case Management Activities

The truancy petition was relatively new, and the school district had just begun the contempt process at the time the case manager met with Malaya's father to assist him with filing an At-Risk-Youth (ARY) petition. The court granted the petition and ordered Malaya to follow the court order. The court also ordered the parents to attend parenting classes. Malaya's father indicated (on the record) that he worked the graveyard shift and it would be difficult for him to attend the classes. Her mother did not enroll in the parenting classes and had not participated in the ARY process, despite continuous encouragement from the case manager, including numerous phone calls, mailings, and referrals to culturally appropriate service providers.

### The Outcome

Malaya had four warrants issued for her arrest over a nine-month period. However, her parents decided not to have the warrant served on her at school, since she started attending school on a more regular basis. At one point, Malaya's mother was court-ordered to appear at the next hearing. She appeared and started taking the ARY process seriously. Near the end of the case manager's involvement, Malaya and her mother began to communicate more effectively. Malaya stopped running away from home and she and her parents reported "things are much better."

## **Aziza**

### Background of the Student and Family

Aziza was a 16-year-old 10<sup>th</sup> grade girl born in the U.S. to Somali parents. She lived with her mother in public housing. Aziza has no other siblings and no history of substance abuse.

### Challenges and Assets

Aziza's mother reported that she was not following the house rules, not attending school on a regular basis and was verbally abusive. The mother also reported that as a result of Aziza's inconsistent school attendance, the school district had filed a truancy petition, but had yet to file a motion for contempt. Aziza's mother reported that she frequently ran away from home and would be gone for up to ten days at a time. She also reported that they had tried family counseling, but that she felt Aziza could benefit from some individual counseling.

### Case Management Activities

The case manager met with Aziza's mother to discuss the truancy process. The mother requested additional information on filing an At-Risk-Youth (ARY) petition because Aziza was running away from home. The case manager explained the process and assisted the mother with filing the petition. Over the course of four months, the case manager worked with Aziza's mother, Aziza and the school counselor to adjust Aziza's school schedule and to enrolled her in night classes. The case manager also referred her and her mother to a culturally appropriate service provider for individual and family counseling.

### The Outcome

During the time of the case manager's involvement, Aziza only ran away from home once. She finished her night school classes and started attending school regularly. Within four months, Aziza's mother reported that she "made a total turn-around and was no longer verbally abusive." As a result of Aziza and her mother's improved relationship, her mother requested and was granted a dismissal of the ARY petition. The case manager has not had contact with the family since the dismissal.

## **Sue: The Power of a Home Visit**

Sue was in the second grade and seldom went to school. When Sue did go to school she always appeared tired and could not concentrate. You see, Sue had 74 absences her first grade year and during the second grade she was quickly approaching many more. There were phone calls home and oftentimes either the phone was disconnected or no one answered. Mom would sometimes call from a pay phone to say her daughter was sick.

The Project Respect Program began the second semester when Sue was in the second grade. The Community Advocate assigned to Fountain Elementary School reviewed the attendance of all students in the school. Sue's attendance waved a red flag; the advocate knew she had to act fast. She called Sue's home and, yes, the phone had been disconnected. The Advocate did a home visit and it took time before someone answered the door, but the Advocate continued to knock and wait. Finally, Sue's mother answered. The advocate stated, "we really miss having Sue in school, is there anything I can do to help you get her to school?" The mother was hesitant at first, as she thought the Advocate was from the Department of Social Services. The Advocate explained she was from the school and had resources to share if there was a problem that prohibited Sue being in school. The mother then reluctantly invited the Advocate in.

The apartment was located along a long narrow hallway up several stairs. The smell of cat urine filled the air. The advocate and Sue's mom went into the apartment and asleep on the couch was Sue. The advocate asked, "Do you and Sue know what time school begins?" "Yes", mother replied, but Sue is sick today. The Advocate asked, "What can I do to help?" Mother stated, "There are many problems and I don't know where to begin." The mother stated that she and Sue must sleep during the day because the apartment is infested with bats that are active during the nighttime, and that is why they have many cats. And there was one more thing; a bat had bitten Sue the night before. The Advocate then hurried over to Sue to see if she was all right. The Advocate then took Sue and her mother to the emergency room for treatment. Sue began her series of rabies shots that day.

The Advocate then knew this was just the beginning of her work with Sue and her mother. The Advocate called the Housing Authority and got emergency housing for Sue and her mother. The Advocate got the city to condemn the apartment building so no one else had to endure what Sue and her mother did. The Advocate also contacted Goodwill to get furniture and clothing for Sue and her mother. And I am glad to say that Sue is now in the eighth grade and has been on honor roll for four of those years and in the third grade achieved perfect attendance. The Advocate and Sue's mom are still in contact and the Advocate attends most of Sue's school functions. The power of one home visit can make a difference in the life of a child!

## Dylan

### Background of the Student and Family

Dylan was a 16-year-old 10<sup>th</sup> grade Caucasian boy, born in the U.S., who lived with his mother.

### Challenges and Assets

The school district had a truancy petition in place, and Dylan's mother had filed an At-Risk-Youth petition. The case manager became involved after the school district requested assistance in filing a motion for contempt on the truancy petition. In addition to truancy issues, the mother reported that Dylan was not following house rules or the curfew. Dylan was participating in a drug and alcohol outpatient program, but he had stopped attending that as well. Mother reported that Dylan had a history of being verbally abusive and would often throw objects in the house.

### Case Management Activities

The case manager spoke with the school district and the mother and discussed with them how best to approach Dylan's truant behavior. His mother and the school district agreed that they would pursue filing the motion for contempt under the At-Risk-Youth petition. In the course of filing motions for contempt, the case manager made several referrals to various programs and services including a drug and alcohol program, a wrap around support team, and alternative education. The case manager met with Dylan's mother on several occasions to explain the programs and services and to assist her with working through any barriers that prevented Dylan from getting connected with them.

### The Outcome

In light of all of the motions for contempt, Dylan made dramatic improvements in following house rules, attending school, and getting back into outpatient treatment. At last contact, Dylan was considering obtaining his GED and enrolling in a culinary arts program. Jurisdiction had run out on the At-Risk-Youth petition, but the school district's truancy petition was still active.



## **Randy**

### Background of the Student and Family

Randy was a 16 year old 10<sup>th</sup> grade Caucasian boy who lived with his mother and grandmother. Randy had no known health issues, however, his mother reported that he might have been suffering from clinical depression. His mother also reported that his grandmother repeatedly “stirs up grief” and makes her family unhappy, even causing the mother to lose her job.

### Challenges and Assets

The school counselor reported Randy had not attended school on a regular basis since 5<sup>th</sup> grade. At the time the truancy petition was filed, he had a total of 30 unexcused absences. The school district also reported that Randy’s mother felt he should have been allowed to attend the drivers education class, since he had maintained perfect attendance in that class. The school district tried a number of interventions; including an attendance agreement with the parent (Randy refused to participate in the agreement process), a referral for in-home family counseling, and a referral to a multi service agency.

### Case Management Activities

I was assigned as a case manager to assist Randy in enrolling in a GED program. I met with Randy and his mother to discuss the importance of following the court order and how I could assist them through the process. Randy’s mother stated that she would like him to get his driver’s license so that he could get a job. I gave Randy and his mother information on GED programs and he chose one at the local community college. I worked with Randy in getting him to take the entrance exam. I had several conversations with Randy and was able to motivate him to take the exam and begin the program. I also had several conversations with his mother to discuss Randy’s underlying issues including the possible depression. She was not willing to explore those issues, and her focus remained on helping him get his drivers license so he could get a job.

### The Outcome

After three months of court hearings, warrants for failure to appear, and motions for contempt, Randy’s mother withdrew him from the school district which enabled him to enroll in and attend the GED program. At last contact, Randy was still attending the GED program.

## Lacy

I. When I first started working with Lacy and her family she was 15 years old and in 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the small, rural town of Enumclaw. She rarely attended school and was failing all classes. Lacy is Caucasian and lived with her mother and step-father. Her older sister had moved out on her own but lived nearby and continued to be part of the family. The family was in the middle income range, but early on in our involvement the mother decided to quit her job to be more available for Lacy. Lacy had been arrested twice on theft charges but was not on probation. Mental health issues appeared to impact the functioning of Lacy and her mother.

II. Lacy was referred to case management assistance in part due to the level of conflict between her and her mother. The family dynamics were intense and all were attempting to deal with past trauma and establish new roles when the mother remarried. Lacy had been inappropriately touched by an adult at age 13. The man was prosecuted and in custody. Lacy's older sister had been sexually abused by Lacy's father (her sister's step-father) so Lacy did not have contact with him. Lacy was using marijuana and alcohol, and when the conflict increased with her mother she would run away for several days at a time. In addition, she was dating a 19-year-old boy who had fathered a baby with another 15-year-old girl. Lacy's parents were very concerned about her involvement with this boy and felt he was a negative influence given his criminal history and chaotic family.

III. Early on I provided the mother with information on the At-Risk-Youth petition (ARY). Referrals were given for a drug/alcohol assessment, parent support groups and individual counseling. Mother appeared on the verge of a breakdown, and later shared that her husband expected her to require psychiatric hospitalization during this difficult time. The more the parents attempted to access resources for Lacy, the more she rebelled and ran away. Her mother scheduled four consecutive drug/alcohol evaluations for Lacy, all of which she missed. Eventually the provider was unwilling to reschedule. When Lacy was picked up on a warrant for failing to appear for a hearing, I arranged a drug/alcohol evaluation at the detention center, which recommended outpatient treatment.

Lacy's mother struggled with concerns for her daughter's safety, and was overwhelmed with the court process and how best to utilize this resource. We worked closely and in many ways my role was that of "parent mentor". We discussed strategies and planned short-term and long-term goals. Oftentimes, her mother just needed someone to tell her she was working hard to help her child, and to remind her to take care of herself along the way. Parent support referrals were given regularly and the mother began to make calls and access support from those groups.

Conflict within the family was noted and both Lacy and her mother requested family counseling. A referral for Functional Family Therapy, contracted by the court was made. The intake session was held at the detention center, as Lacy continued to have difficulty staying home.

The school truancy representative worked closely with the family, and we linked the truancy and ARY cases. The school Lacy attended was small, and traditional options were limited. Relationship building continued between the representative and the family, especially with Lacy.

At one point Lacy left home and chose to stay with her boyfriend in his car, in differing locations. The family was near exhaustion when she returned home with news that she was pregnant. In many ways the family felt the ARY petition was increasing the conflict and adversarial relationship between Lacy and her parents. The petition was dismissed at the parents' request and their focus became rebuilding the relationship with Lacy, and the health of her and the baby. The truancy petition was left in place to "be the heavy" and provide structure. The truancy representative continued to work closely with Lacy's parents and me. I located a program that provided education on how drug use affects a fetus and made a referral for Lacy. I also connected the family with specialized services for pregnant teens and continued to provide support to Lacy's mother.

IV. Lacy is currently attending an alternative program near her home. The truancy representative was able to arrange a special schedule for this young mother. She gave birth to a healthy baby girl in August 2005 and is residing at home with her mother and stepfather. She attends school regularly and had top grades. She is earning credits rapidly and is scheduled to graduate on time. She has career goals including continuing education after graduation. The relationship within the family is greatly improved. Lacy and her mother came in to visit a month ago and shared what they felt had helped. Lacy noted her relationship with the district representative was supportive. She felt that knowing she could end up in detention gave her the extra push to get out of bed on the mornings she didn't want to. The improved relationship with her mother made it all come together. Lacy's mother felt that "the people we met along the way helped more than the actual court process." She voiced her appreciation of having a case manager and how helpful this role was in an e-mail to the court when she requested a dismissal of the ARY petition. Lacy will receive recognition at the King County Truancy Awards put on by the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

## Marissa

I. Marissa was a 15 year old Caucasian girl living with her mother. Mother was not married, but her boyfriend was part of the family. Marissa had no siblings. Marissa and her mother were both raised by Marissa's maternal grandmother, and both suffered intensive emotional abuse from her. Marissa was placed with her grandmother when she was very young as her mother struggled with substance abuse issues. Marissa returned to her mother at age 13 and both were struggling to overcome their abusive pasts while developing a nurturing relationship.

II. The school requested case management assistance to engage Marissa and her mother in making education a priority. Marissa's assets included being artistic, active, verbal, honest, and having a willingness to participate in services and try new things. Her mother was committed to working through their past issues and keeping herself drug-free. Marissa attended school, but often skipped classes she did not particularly enjoy. She struggled with typical ADHD characteristics such as misplacing completed homework, forgetting assignments and socializing in class instead of paying attention. She had chosen to stop taking her ADHD medication due to side effects.

III. My first goal in working with this family was to begin a relationship with both individuals. I concentrated on active listening to understand their needs better. The mother's relationship with the school was strained, and her response varied from strongly defending her daughter to becoming overwhelmed and blaming Marissa for all their problems. We worked on finding services in the community that would be supportive, and on establishing family goals. A meeting was scheduled with the school to request that Marissa be screened for additional services. Although she was at or above normal intelligence she was failing many classes. The meeting included the district Psychologist, Assistant Principal, Counselor and several of Marissa's teachers. Marissa was opposed to special education and resistant to medical management of her ADHD symptoms. We developed a plan around ADHD school tips not involving medication with a follow up meeting to check for improvement. We were able to schedule Marissa in an Urban Dance class that she had been unable to access previously.

Community referrals included drug/alcohol assessment for Marissa, Parenting support for her mother, a Functional Family Therapy referral for family counseling and researching summer programs. Marissa began an intensive outpatient treatment program that included individual counseling and family work. Her mother had cancelled the treatment when transportation became difficult, but with assistance from the family counselor we were able to access free transportation for Marissa to and from the treatment program. In general, the family seemed the most stable with active case management. With our goal being self-sufficiency, we worked with the family counselor on increasing the family's support outside of service providers. I worked with this family for seven months, including weekly contact for the first two months, decreasing to once or twice per month for the remaining five months.

IV. Marissa continued to struggle in her traditional high school. She researched and completed an application to an alternative school in her area that was self-paced. She decided to resume medication for ADHD. She began volunteering at the church where she had performed community service hours on her truancy petition. She continued to attend and participate fully in her outpatient drug/alcohol treatment. At her last hearing she had been clean and sober for 8.5 months. The struggles between her and mother flare up from time to time, but they both have resources in the community. Marissa attends the alternative program regularly and reports feeling more comfortable in that environment. The truancy petition was dismissed.

## Alex

I. Alex was a 16 year old Caucasian male living with his mother and two younger siblings. His parents divorced when Alex was young, and his father had remarried and had two children from his second marriage. Alex lived with his mother after the divorce, but stayed with his dad and step-mother for one year when struggles escalated between him and his mother. The truancy petition was filed approximately one year after Alex returned to his mother's home. He had multiple absences, and the school reported in the petition that Alex was not engaged in learning, attended for social reasons only, had attitude problems and was failing most classes. He was diagnosed with ADHD and possible depression. Both parents were college educated and were professionals. There was an unsubstantiated possibility that Alex had been sexually abused by an older neighbor boy when he was ten years old.

II. The referral for case management was made by the Commissioner due in part to the conflict level in the family and the filing of an At-Risk-Youth petition (ARY). The ARY and Truancy petitions were linked, and hearings occurred together. Alex seemed very angry with his mother; there were reports of violent behavior and significant substance abuse. Both parents were actively involved in seeking help for Alex and both attended hearings regularly and kept in close contact with the case manager.

III. Substance abuse appeared to be a major contributor to Alex's struggles. Referrals were provided for an assessment. Inpatient treatment was recommended, but in Washington State a youth must agree to inpatient treatment and Alex was unwilling to go. Drug use and school absences led to several contempts on both petitions. Referrals to inpatient providers and detoxification programs were provided to the parents. I assisted Alex's parents with planning an "intervention" the evening before the treatment bed became available. His mother was encouraged to invite extended family members and friends and also friends of her son to attend and discuss their concerns for his health and wellbeing. They planned to use specific examples and be loving and supportive. The intervention was a success, and Alex agreed to the inpatient program. He completed treatment and enrolled in outpatient follow-up care when he returned home. The school continued to work closely regarding his needs and provided support at the school. Alex requested an appointment with his psychiatrist to discuss medication options. Mother had concerns about stimulants being prescribed given his recent drug abuse. After several months clean and sober the court supported Alex's request.

V. Alex continues in outpatient treatment. He has medication management for his ADHD and is following doctor recommendations. Although both the ARY and Truancy petitions have been dismissed as successful, the court continues to receive updates from Alex's outpatient treatment provider. The reports note that he continues to attend regularly, participates fully and has clean U.A.s consistently. The family's level of conflict is decreased. Alex received a certificate of achievement from our Commissioner for making healthy choices. He is currently enrolled in a district education program that is allowing him to make up credits. He is on track to graduate early!

## Angela

Angela came from a stable family until the mother decided to leave. She is very well mannered and quiet. She carries herself well. Her father is a hard worker and has taken on the responsibility of being a single parent. At one point, he was allowing the mother to come back and forth into their lives, but eventually put a stop to it. Dad filed for a divorce, instead of just being separated while the mother's whereabouts were unknown. Dad was allowing Angela to go and stay with the mom during the separation, if he knew of her whereabouts, but this became the contributing factor to Angela's attendance problem. The parents missed the two scheduled Attendance Intervention Team Meetings scheduled at her school, so the case was referred to the State Attorney's Office for further intervention. Since the father took on the responsibility of keeping all of the children, he decided to take some parenting skill classes. He refused counseling services because Angela was beginning to confide in him and he wanted her to continue to do this, since she was comfortable doing so. Dad has someone working with her on Saturdays to pass the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test. He wants her to be around positive role models because her ambition is to be a veterinarian. I involved her in our Honor Rows program, where she could spend time participating in positive scheduled events during the summer time and then as a reward, she was given the opportunity to attend one of the Jaguar football games. She indicated every time I picked her up that she looked forward to that day and always inquired about when the next event was to be held. She stated that she wanted to stay in the TAP program and that way she could see me. I told her that she's doing well in reference to attending school, so unfortunately her case was going to be closed out successfully. She asked if she could call from time to time and if I would check on her sometime. I told her that I would be happy to check on her and her family, to see the progress they are making.

## **Bailey**

I. Bailey is a 14 year old girl, currently on my caseload. She attends a middle school in Kent and is in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Bailey's family is from the Philippines, and Bailey is bilingual. She lives with both biological parents and two older brothers. The family is middle income with both parents employed.

II. Case Management assistance was requested by the school district. Bailey had not attended school for several months. The previous school year she had been truant approximately 80% of the time, so the school planned to hold her back to redo the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. She began attending when the school offered to promote her to 9<sup>th</sup> grade with her friends if she could improve her attendance. She did not manage to attend regularly and remains in 8<sup>th</sup> grade for the 2005-2006 school year.

Areas of concern included communication issues. Her mother speaks English but at times legal matters were difficult for her to understand. I requested interpreters be available at hearings after discussing the option with her mother. Also of concern was the possibility of undiagnosed mental health issues. I asked about the possibility of depression, and her mother reported that Bailey often said she was depressed. Culture played a role, but it was unclear what other factors were contributing to Bailey's struggles.

I scheduled and attended a meeting at Bailey's school with the counselor, mother and Bailey. We learned that although Bailey had had attendance issues since Kindergarten, she was bright and tested at grade level. A new schedule was put in place for Bailey including one period with the school counselor at the end of the day. An attempt was made to assist with building relationships for Bailey at school. Most of her friends had moved up to the high school. Some success was noted with Bailey attending school four of the five days her first week back. Attendance dropped off again and she returned to court on a contempt hearing. She seemed depressed and I spoke with both her and mother about a mental health evaluation. Her mother was resistant at first, but using the family's medical insurance I located a Psychiatrist willing to meet with the family the following week. Bailey was diagnosed with depression and anxiety and prescribed medication. Again, improvement was noted but for a short time only. After gathering information from the school counselor, psychiatrist, parent and student, other areas of concern were discovered. Domestic violence (her father was abusive toward her mother and older brothers) and substance abuse by her father and brother impacted the family dynamics. At a following hearing Bailey disclosed taking 17 of her prescription medications two days earlier. Her mother had not contacted a medical provider or the psychiatrist. They had cancelled appointments with the psychiatrist and had no other services in place. I encouraged the mother to contact the psychiatrist and a medical provider to determine what kind of medical care was needed regarding the overdose.

Her mother did not follow through with accessing services, and a referral to Children's Protective Services was made. Complications developed between CPS court and Truancy court about how to coordinate services to serve this family best. When Bailey took a second overdose, I contacted the crisis center and assisted in accessing family services. A referral was provided to the mother for a D.V. program with an advocate



from the Philippines. Intensive family counseling is being provided through the CPS court which gives additional motivation for the parents to participate. The psychiatrist was able to provide information to the court regarding how much of Bailey's attendance issues were a direct result of mental health problems versus willful violation. His recommendation included family counseling and for Bailey to be held accountable for non-attendance.

I worked closely with this family for the first five weeks. This included the school meeting and referrals. My involvement dropped to once or twice per month when Bailey began working with the psychiatrist, but it increased to a very intensive level after the first overdose. I spoke with the mother daily and with Bailey several times per week for nearly a month.

IV. With mental health issues no longer considered the bulk of the "problem" Bailey received electronic home monitoring (EHM) for failure to attend school. She was informed that not attending would result in secure detention. She agreed to two weeks of EHM (normally the court can only order one week) to avoid secure detention. She attended school regularly while on EHM and continued to attend after being released. The family is participating in culturally competent services and Bailey meets with the psychiatrist regularly. She has purged her contempt citation and is following house rules. Both Bailey and her mother were positive about the changes and hopeful for continued success.

## **Nikita**

I. Nikita was a 12 year old 6<sup>th</sup> grader in the Renton School District when we first met. She is African American and lived with her mother and five year old brother. The family had financial struggles, but the mother was employed and able to maintain a stable home. Nikita had an I.E.P. for difficulties in Language Arts and for behavioral problems.

II. Nikita was referred for case management due to the conflict between her and her mother, recent Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement and lack of services. CPS had provided intensive in-home family counseling after several confrontations between Nikita and her mother had escalated to the physical level. Nikita was on probation for assaulting her mother. Neither Nikita nor her mother felt the family counseling had been helpful. They were willing to access services and committed to improving their relationship. Nikita specifically noted jealousy of her younger brother and the amount of time her mother spent with him.

III. During the first week with this family, I attended a meeting at the school regarding Nikita's recent suspension. We worked to develop a support team at the school that included the Vice Principal, I.E.P. Lead, School Counselor, Attendance Secretary and a school-based therapist from a contracted agency. Nikita had previously reported harassment from several female students. The harassment occurred outside of the school grounds and minimal follow-up was done. Nikita felt especially vulnerable when walking to school, so the school agreed to provide transportation even though she lived within the designated "walking distance." Nikita enjoyed playing the tuba and the flute but was unable to participate in the school's band due to attendance and behavioral issues. The team developed a plan to connect her with individual counseling at the school when attending, and at the library when suspended, and to provide tutoring and homework packets.

In addition, I made a referral to the court's contracted Functional Family Therapy (FFT), arranged a mental health evaluation for Nikita and parent support for her mother, and began researching community programs for the summer. When Nikita was found in contempt for her suspension, the court ordered community service hours. I made a referral to the Renton Area Black Parents Association (R.A.B.P.A.) and connected Nikita with the director. The family completed the FFT counseling and worked closely with R.A.B.P.A. Nikita met weekly with her therapist at the school. Her mother committed to spending time with Nikita in positive ways and increased the family's overall interaction.

I worked closely with this family for two months. After putting resources in place, my involvement decreased to phone or court contact approximately twice per month.

IV. Nikita became the first "Student Intern" at the Renton Area Black Parents Association, providing assistance at the Community Center and helping deliver school lunches to low-income elementary students over the summer. The Director met with Nikita and her mother to develop goals. They were able to assist Nikita with qualifying

for and participating in the “All City Marching Band” which is a high honor in Renton. The last scheduled court hearing was continued because Nikita was marching in a parade on that date. The family has since moved to the Kent School District. The truancy petition was put on hold as Nikita had begun attending school regularly and was participating in the school band program. The At-Risk Youth petition was dismissed.

## **Tony**

I. Tony was a 13 year old Caucasian male. He had an IEP for 7<sup>th</sup> grade at a middle school in Tukwila. Tony lived with both biological parents and was the middle of their three sons. His IEP covered language and math. Both brothers also received special education, one at the high school and one at the elementary school. Tony's mother was a strong advocate for his education and had chosen to keep him home rather than attend a school where the IEP did not meet her expectations.

II. The referral for case management came specifically from the Commissioner. Concerns were noted over lack of progress and the notable conflict and tension between the parent and the school district. I was asked to research the situation and provide a list of recommendations to the court. This was a unique request.

III. A copy of the report distributed to all parties is attached. The name has been changed for privacy to the family.

IV. The court ordered that the recommendations included in the attached report be implemented. Tony transitioned back to school, beginning with one class per day. The family completed Functional Family Therapy counseling and Tony learned skills to be assertive and voice his needs to his mother. Tony is currently attending school full-time. He received an award at the 2005 King County Truancy Awards Ceremony.

## Tracy

I. Tracy was a 14 year old Caucasian female living with her single mother and 21 year old disabled brother. She was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade at Renton Middle School. Tracy had an IEP for reading and math. Her mother was unemployed and struggling to access unemployment benefits. Tracy's two older siblings both had truancy petitions in the past. Tracy's father lives in Everett. Her parents divorced when she was four years old, and she had a close relationship with her father until a falling out at age 12. It is unclear what led to the breakdown in their relationship.

II. The family was referred to case management at the request of the school district. Tracy had not attended school for the majority of the school year. The family struggled with financial issues as well as health concerns. Both Tracy and her mother showed signs of depression.

III. The family agreed to schedule a meeting at my office for a thorough intake. We explored areas in which the family felt I could be helpful and identified barriers to school attendance. We created a written plan specifying what Tracy's mother would do, what Tracy would do, and what the case manager would do, and we each received a copy. During the intake, we discussed Tracy's prior diagnosis of depression. She was not taking medication and had not been to a mental health provider in nearly a year. While at my office, we contacted her previous psychologist and scheduled an appointment for the following week. We found the appropriate bus schedule, and I gave the family bus tickets. We contacted the school to let them know Tracy would be returning to school the week following spring break. I arranged to meet with Tracy 20 minutes before school started on that Monday and review her schedule. Tracy agreed to meet me and to bring copies of the poetry she wrote (her suggestion.) She arrived at school with the poetry but her mother had not taken her to the psychologist's appointment. At school, we completed paperwork for her to receive free lunches and arranged for the attendance secretary to be her primary contact at the school.

Her mother took Tracy to the second scheduled appointment with the psychologist at the court's insistence. Tracy requested family counseling, and a referral to Functional Family Therapy was made. Attendance continued to be an issue, but Tracy attended nearly 50% of the time, a substantial improvement over not attending at all. Tracy seemed to enjoy adult interaction, so we made a deal that the first week she attended 100% I would bring her lunch from McDonalds and eat with her. This is generally not part of our role, so special approval was required and received from my supervisor. The following week Tracy had perfect attendance. Her teachers and the office staff knew that she would be having a "lunch guest" as she seemed excited to share. We looked into resources for summer, and I provided Tracy and her mother with options for camps and activities with scholarships.

IV. Tracy expected to be held back that year, due to missing the first six months. Since she finished the school year with marked improvement, the school decided to promote her. She continued to receive mental health follow-up for depression. Mother

was referred to the WorkSource in Renton for assistance with employment issues. Tracy finished the year with an updated IEP and excited about attending high school. She had one of her poems published as “anonymous” in the school flyer.

The family has since moved out of King County and no current information is available. I feel this case specifically shows how many of our youth are eager to connect with an adult. Tracy knew me for a relatively short period of time prior to the “lunch plan” and yet the attention and support from an adult played a significant role in motivating attendance.

## Naomi

### Background of the Student and Family

Naomi was a 15 year old 10<sup>th</sup> grade girl (born in Ethiopia). She moved to the US from Kenya in 2001 with her mother, father, 16 year old brother and four year old sister. The family is in transitional housing. Her mother was not working at the time, and her father worked as a school bus driver.

### Challenges and Assets

Naomi came to the attention of the case manager due to a truancy petition filed by the school district. Her mother and father had reported that Naomi was not attending school on a regular basis and was not following the home rules. Her mother also reported that Naomi had been verbally abusive, and that she felt she had no control of Naomi. The parents reported that Naomi and her brother would often leave the home without permission, and the parents would report them as runaways. They had tried a number of interventions including a voluntary placement agreement (VPA) and Family Reconciliation Services (FRS) in-home counseling. The FRS counselor reported that the family was making progress and Naomi had been doing better in following the curfew and home rules.

### Case Management Activities

I met with Naomi and her father after a truancy hearing to discuss the truancy process and information about the At-Risk-Youth (ARY) petition. A few weeks later, I met with him again to assist him in filing an ARY petition and referred him to FRS for some in-home counseling. Although the family had engaged in FRS services in 2001, they were eligible to receive them again. Due to the mother and father's concerns that Naomi had been associating with known gang members, I made a referral to Seattle TEAM for Youth (STFY), a gang awareness / prevention and case management program designed to work with gang involved youth. Since the parents had filed an ARY petition, the school district took a back seat to filing motions for contempt under the truancy process, with the understanding that truancy matters could be dealt with through the ARY petition. Naomi had been found in contempt of the ARY order on several occasions because she had failed to show for work crew. As a result, she was on the verge of being dropped from the program and could have been subject to additional sanctions by the court. I worked closely with the work crew staff as well as the day-reporting school at Juvenile Court to ensure that Naomi had every opportunity to follow through with the court order.

### The Outcome

Despite several motions for contempt, I made several referrals to other service providers and created a positive relationship with Naomi and her family. She made great strides in getting back on track. With the care and support of the STFY case manager and SPD Detective, the FRS counselor, the truancy case manager, and her parents, Naomi's

behavior improved so much that her mother motioned the court to dismiss the ARY petition.

I have not had any recent contact with Naomi or her family. In this case “no news is good news”



## **Brian**

### a) Student & Family Background

Brian is a 15-year-old Caucasian male in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, living with his older brother (18) and grandmother in a middle class neighborhood in Bothell, Washington. Brian had lived with his older brother and grandmother for a number of years, as his mother was in and out of drug and alcohol rehabilitation. Grandmother reported that Brian had a history of marijuana abuse, truancy and anger management issues at the time of the At-Risk Youth (ARY) filing. Brian was enrolled at Kenmore Junior High and had an individual education plan in place for learning disabilities, including language/developmental delays and ADHD, starting last year. He had been suspended from school previously for sexual harassment and assaulting another student. He had also been verbally and physically abusive towards his grandmother.

### b) Description of Underlying Problem

Brian was charged with felony kidnapping and harassment (he had threatened his grandmother with a knife). He was skipping class at school and had behavior issues. He was abusing drugs and alcohol, which were the main contributors to the criminal charge involving his grandmother. Grandmother had filed an ARY petition just prior to the above criminal incident, based on out-of-control behavior, truancy issues, property damage, drug and alcohol abuse, and curfew issues. So, the youth had an at-risk youth order, a truancy order and pending criminal charges occurring simultaneously. He had only one prior (misdemeanor assault-diversion) and his grandmother had very little experience dealing with the juvenile court on any level. Assets: Both Brian and his grandmother were cooperative and easy to work with. The youth sincerely wanted things to be better. Grandmother was assertive in maintaining phone contact and trying to make sure she was on top of everything such as court dates, court orders, etc. Brian had a supportive and involved older brother, and he wanted to continue living with his grandmother. Challenges: Grandmother was fragile physically due to her age. Brian had serious drug/alcohol and potentially undiagnosed mental health issues and, as stated, three different court processes happening at the same time. He needed treatment, and his grandmother needed lots of support navigating the court processes and pursuing treatment options. Brian's mother (an addict) also surfaced during the process and wanted him to come live with her, as the social worker providing the family assessment for the ARY had concerns about the safety of the grandmother if the youth continued to live there. Case management was certainly warranted given the above issues.

### c) What I did as Case Manager

I worked with the family for approximately three months, at varying capacities. Some weeks I was in communication with the grandmother, school, court and treatment provider off and on throughout the week. The majority of my time spent with the family and the truancy representative involved educating them on the at-risk youth court and criminal court processes, how they intertwined around the above issues, informing them of what to expect next, how to handle certain court hearings and what their options were throughout. I worked closely with the truancy representative on consequences and planning, so that we were all on the same page regarding the youth and court activities. I

assisted the grandmother with learning the process for enrolling the youth in treatment at Ryther Child Center, getting her the application materials, and communicating with Ryther admission staff and counselors. Contact hours: approximately one to three hours per week, for the first six weeks or so. This decreased to perhaps one hour per week during the last month, as the ARY was dropped and probation kicked in. I was essentially the liaison between the grandmother, youth, school district, criminal court, ARY court, social worker and the treatment provider.

d) Outcomes: The grandmother learned how to navigate multiple court systems and the realm of youth drug and alcohol treatment. Brian improved his school attendance and behavior at home, due in part to the criminal court issues and pending probation hanging over him. Grandmother was able to navigate the courts successfully and stated that she was very appreciative of the assistance, support and guidance she received through a very complex and stressful period. Brian was engaged in drug and alcohol treatment, and was following his probation order. The ARY was eventually dismissed due to probation status.

## Tony: Contract example

### *Superior Court of the State of Washington for the County of King*

401 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. North  
Kent, WA 98032

At-Risk Youth, CHINS and Truancy  
206) 205-2578  
206) 205-2585 fax

11-01-04  
"Tony"

On 10/22/04 the Becca Commissioner signed an order requesting that Dawn Nannini, Superior Court Case Manager, provide a report to "Tony's" mother and the (\_\_\_\_\_) School District regarding recommendations. Originally the report was to be completed by 11/08/04, but "Tony's" hearing has been rescheduled to accommodate the Commissioner's schedule and this report is being submitted on 11/01/04 to allow all parties time to review the recommendations.

After meeting with the (\_\_\_\_\_) School District on 10/26/04, "Tony" and his mother, and their advocate on 10/27/04 and after a phone interview with "Tony's" previous counselor, on 10/29/04, the following observations and recommendations are submitted to the court.

It is important to recognize that all parties interviewed were helpful and cooperative with more common ground than expected. There appears to be an overall desire to find a successful education program for "Tony". All parties commented on "Tony" being intelligent, insightful and artistic. A lack of trust between the parties was also noted, interfering with communication and collaborative problem-solving. "Tony's" behavior may be complicating the strained relationship between his mother and the school district. "Tony" has reported school incidents to his mother that he later denies when the school attempts interventions. In addition "Tony" has made allegations to the school of physical abuse in the home that he later denies.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. IEP immediately implemented allowing "Tony" to return to school on 11/08/04.** The school district will bring several possible IEP's to the court hearing on 11/05/04 with the following information included;
  - \* "Tony" to transition back to school with one block per day to be scheduled with his favorite teacher, (name).
  - \* The district will provide transportation and escort "Tony" to/from the class at a separate time from other students to decrease the risk of verbal teasing.
  - \*The school agrees to provide counseling with "Tony's" previous therapist who has tentatively scheduled "Tony" for sessions on Wednesdays at 3:00 p.m. for the months of November and December. The school has agreed to provide transportation to/from the

counseling sessions. (There was talk of the sessions being held at the school but the counselor is available only at his office.)

\*A tutor will be provided by the school district. Mother discussed that the tutor's relationship with "Tony" was the most important. It is recommended that the district identify 3-4 possible tutors and allow "Tony" to make the final decision on who he will work with for the next 30-60 days.

\*Any of the recommendations that the school agrees to but is unable to put in the formal IEP document may be included in the truancy order.

2. **Family to develop an IST (inter-agency staffing team.)** Information on an upcoming training for wrap around was forwarded to an advocate who is planning to attend if space permits. With an IST team "Tony" would be eligible for a case aide and possible flex funds to help with art supplies, positive activities and respite for his parents. The team approach may also decrease tension between the parent and school district.

3. **Family to research medication treatment for "Tony's" depression/anxiety.** Depression and anxiety were consistently noted in all of "Tony's" evaluations (a summary of evaluations and results was provided by the family Advocate and attached to this document) and by all parties interviewed. There are concerns that the depression and anxiety are contributing to "Tony's" difficulty managing peer teasing and other daily stressors. He was previously on anti-depressant medication for a very short time with minor side effects. It may be helpful for the family to explore the option of different medications helpful for youth with these diagnoses in an appointment with a medical professional.

4. **"Tony" to have a voice in his education.** If possible it would be helpful for "Tony" to be appointed a Guardian ad Litem. When meeting with "Tony" originally with his mother and advocate, he was unable/unwilling to provide information on his likes, dislikes or goals. He asked that I "ask her" and pointed to his mother. When speaking with him one on one, he volunteered that he wanted to return to school and that he was "bored out of my mind." He was also able to articulate various interests, including a desire to participate in sports. His depression coupled with his mother being such a strong advocate for him may contribute to his difficulty voicing his own interests. "Tony" should be allowed to attend court hearings and IEP meetings. He presents as a pleasant, engaging and likeable young man.

5. **Family to participate in FFT.** The court can provide Functional Family Therapy at no cost to this family. It is recommended youth, mother and father all participate. In the past it was noted that father's participation in treatment has been particularly helpful.

6. **Dawn Nannini be assigned for the next 30-60 days for assistance in implementing the above recommendations.**

7. **Truancy review hearing be scheduled to coincide with review of IEP.**

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.



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NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

Author:

Prepared for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention by the National Center for School Engagement.

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## **10 THINGS A SCHOOL CAN DO TO IMPROVE ATTENDANCE**

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1. **Make students and parents/guardians feel welcome.** Make a point to say “hello” to every parent/guardian or student you see in the halls and outside--make it your business to know his or her names
2. **Create an environment that enables students to feel successful in something—no matter how small it may seem.** Award academic and attendance “letters,” as you do for athletics.
3. **When a student is absent, immediately talk to the parent/guardian — not their answering machine.** Make a personal phone call in the evening, or call parents/guardians at work during the day.
4. **When a student is absent, immediately talk with them about why they were gone—let them know you are aware...and that you care that they are at school.**
5. **Forge a relationship with local businesses where youth may congregate when truant—encourage them to keep students in school during school hours.** Create a poster that states “We support youth in school and will not serve anyone under 16 during school hours.”
6. **Forge a relationship with local law enforcement—make them your allies in showing the community, families, and students that school is the place to be.** Empower community police officers to return youth to school.
7. **Don’t provide the temptation for youth to be truant.** Close your campuses during breaks and lunch.
8. **Empower and expect classroom teachers to take action when they think a student may be truant.** Ask teachers to make calls to absent youth or families in the afternoon or evenings.
9. **Reward and recognize good attendance—not just perfect attendance.** Post large signs giving the daily attendance for the day. Reward individuals, classes, and the school for increased attendance.
10. **Make your school a place where students feel safe and respected.** Adopt a character education program that is planned and implemented by students.



## **HOW CAN A SCHOOL ACHIEVE HIGH LEVELS OF PARENTAL AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT?**

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**The following Keys to Success were compiled and written by the National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE). They are based on information from actual school programs.**

- Assess family's needs and interests about ways of working with the schools;
- Set clear and measurable objectives based on parent/guardian and community input to help foster a sense of cooperation and communication between families, communities, and schools;
- Hire and train a parent/family liaison to directly contact parents/guardians and coordinate family activities. The liaison should be bilingual as needed and sensitive to the needs of family and the community, including the non-English speaking community;
- Develop multiple outreach mechanisms to inform families, businesses, and the community about family involvement policies and programs through newsletters, slide shows, videotapes, and local newspapers;
- Recognize the importance of a community's historic, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural resources in generating interest in family involvement;
- Use creative forms of communication between educators and families that are personal, goal oriented, and make optimal use of new communication technologies;
- Mobilize parents/families as volunteers in the school assisting with instructional tasks, meal service, and administrative office functions. Family members might also act as invited classroom speakers and volunteer tutors;
- Provide staff development for teachers and administrators to enable them to work effectively with families and with each other as partners in the educational process;
- Ensure access to information about nutrition, healthcare, services for individuals with disabilities, and support provided by schools or community agencies;
- Schedule programs and activities flexibly to reach diverse family groups;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of family involvement programs and activities on a regular basis.

NCPIE is dedicated to developing relationships between schools and families. The coalition's members include the major education associations and advocacy groups in this country. This makes them a great resource for a broad range of publications, training and other services that are available to promote community involvement, family education, family support, and school and family partnerships. For more information, including guidelines on creating a school policy for parental involvement, visit their web site at <http://www.ncpie.org/> or call NCPIE's Director, Dr. Sue Ferguson at (703) 359-8973.



**NCSE** | National Center for School Engagement

## **Alternatives to Juvenile Detention**

**National Center for School Engagement**

**July 28, 2006**

**An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children  
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## **Alternatives to Juvenile Detention: Effective Strategies for Working with Truant Youth**

Many judges are frustrated by a lack of choices and lack of evidence about what works in dealing with chronic truants. Often, when other efforts fail, juvenile detention is assigned as a last resort. This document provides ideas for interventions other than detention – interventions that hopefully will minimize, or even preclude, the need for such an extreme measure. It recommends a dual approach – the combination of sticks and carrots, sanctions and rewards. Ideally, rewards should be meaningful to the child, and sanctions should be geared toward a positive goal such as career planning or academic catch-up and should be determined according to the needs of the particular child.

The general approach advocated here is based on our experience evaluating truancy reduction programs across the country and on what many program managers and social workers have learned from years of working with truants. Many of the specific, creative ideas included here originate from those programs and from what judges recently reported in a national survey of truancy sentencing practices (Heilbrunn 2006). Additional information about many truancy reduction programs may be found in our Truancy Program Database which is available for browsing on the National Center for School Engagement website, [www.schoolengagement.org](http://www.schoolengagement.org).

### **Why not use detention?**

There are two main drawbacks to the use of juvenile detention for truants: the potential for doing more harm than good and cost. Negative outcomes can sometimes result from grouping delinquents together and from exposing non-delinquent to

delinquent youth. Such grouping provides a ready means for young people to share bad habits. Just as parents seek to isolate their children from delinquents in the neighborhood or school, so should society seek to isolate truants from the delinquent youth in detention.

Many judges assert that the threat of detention is a powerful deterrent to potential truants. Although no research that we know of has attempted to measure that deterrent effect, it seems likely that some, and perhaps many, youth would indeed be frightened enough by the possibility to maintain fairly good attendance. Children whose truancy is mostly mischievous in nature, who are not too far behind academically, and whose school attendance is within their control may fall into this category. However, neither detention nor the threat thereof can solve the problems of students who face serious impediments to school attendance, such as unmet mental or physical health care needs or fear of violence on campus. Nor can either one make a child appreciate the value of education.

Furthermore, there is a risk associated with a first detention stay. Once juvenile detention has lost its fear factor, it will cease to deter not only truancy, but delinquency as well.

The deterrent argument leads to two inherent conclusions. One, the sooner truancy is addressed the better, because attendance will be more within the realm of the student and parents' control, and two, the less detention is actually used, the greater its deterrent effect is likely to be.

A second drawback to detention is its cost; the average price of one day in detention was \$135.4 in 2001 (American Correctional Association 2002). If a few days in detention are not adequate to scare a student into attending school, many days are not likely to achieve the purpose either. Yet some detention stays for status offenses including truancy run into the hundreds (Snyder and Sickmund, 1999).

The reason for such long detention stays is unclear, but may be related to the fact that judges report using detention for reasons other than punishment of an offense (Heilbrunn 2004; Heilbrunn 2006). It is often used as a means of accessing mental health services, providing shelter, protecting the child from himself or others, and as a means of detoxification, all because more appropriate residential settings are full. It is a sad reflection on our values that we are more willing to fund jails to house our children than services to heal their emotional injuries. Setting up more appropriate channels would be less expensive and more efficient in addition to being more humane.

There is a third and equally important reason for using approaches other than detention for truants. It is not enough merely to get a child back into a seat in school. The child must become *engaged* in school, feel like a part of the school, understand its importance, and be motivated to do the schoolwork, otherwise he or she is not likely to learn much from the classes. Many truants have significant problems in their home lives that do not necessarily become apparent in a courtroom. Such difficulties include poverty, mental health issues or parents with mental health issues, parents who work such long hours that they can provide little guidance, younger siblings or children of their own to care for, or the death, illness or incarceration of a family member. It is no surprise that children who face such challenges are not focused on school. Punishment may make a child less willing to skip school, but will not address any of the underlying troubles that impede school attendance and adopting school success as a personal value. The approaches advocated here are geared toward promoting school engagement, rather than simple punishment of an offense.

## **Judges need collaborative systems in order to avoid the use of detention.**

Imposing strict sanctions requires a system – a system that relies on cooperation between police, probation departments, and detention centers. Providing effective support services requires a system as well – one that incorporates social service agencies, mental health providers, and school personnel in addition to the court. Once a system is in place, it is much easier to get children the services they need. Therefore, many of the alternatives to detention listed in this document require some degree of cooperation with other agencies, most frequently the school and social service or child welfare agencies. Although creating cooperative arrangements among agencies that have not worked together before may seem daunting, once a need is widely recognized, it may not be as difficult as it seems. A number of resources are available to help.<sup>1</sup>

### **What makes an effective intervention?**

- First, a thorough assessment of each child's situation and needs, combined with...
- ... the supports necessary for the child to focus on school. Then add...
- ... rewards for improvement – carrots! And...
- ... sanctions for lack of effort – sticks!

A judge alone cannot assess the often hidden and complex reasons behind a child's truancy. Help is needed, preferably from a trained social worker who could be affiliated with the school, the local social services department, or a community organization.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Bar Association has recently launched a focus on truancy and has begun with an excellent document on establishing truancy reduction programs including forming coalitions – see Pennington and Barnes, 2006. For a specific example based on the program in Jacksonville, Florida, see Heilbrunn 2005. In addition, an Internet search will yield many documents that offer tips on building community-wide cooperation regarding a wide variety of issues other than truancy, many of which may be helpful.

Once a child's problems have been identified, a variety of services must be available to correct the underlying causes of truancy. Perhaps the most effective method of organizing a collaborative system of supports is to create a formal Truancy Reduction Program. Depending on the services already available in the community and the level of interagency cooperation that can be built, a Truancy Reduction Program (TRP) may be little more than an organizing structure, or a referral agency, for accessing those services in an efficient manner. If few services are available, an effective TRP must provide the services as well as make referrals.

A number of structures are possible. A student may receive assessments and services before ever being sent to court, in which case court involvement will be a last resort. Alternatively, cooperation with assessment efforts and participation in services may be offered after an initial court referral has been made, as an alternative to a court appearance. A third alternative is for a judge to order cooperation with an assessment and referrals during a court appearance. Regardless of which structure best suits local needs and preexisting systems, there are many alternatives to sending a young person to juvenile detention, all of which are far less expensive.

Once problems have been identified and supports are in place, a system of rewards and sanctions, or carrots and sticks, will have a reasonable chance of success. Listed in the first table below are a number of orders a judge could give, other than juvenile detention. Some of them require the cooperation of other agencies such as the child's school, or the local community college. They are thoughtful ideas that promote a specific, positive goal geared toward getting a child, or in some cases a family, back on track, able and willing to participate in school. Each one is part of current practice in

courts around the country. Some of them are rather standard practices such as drug testing, but others are more creative. Each intervention was reported by at least one, and generally more than one judge who participated in the “Best Practices in Sentencing Truants” survey.<sup>2</sup> They are grouped by the overarching goal the sentence supports.

| <b>Meaningful Alternatives to Detention That Can Be Court Ordered, Grouped by Goal</b> |   | <b>Support, Stick or Carrot?</b> |
|--|---|----------------------------------|
| <i>Require student to focus on desired future and how to get there:</i>                |   |                                  |
|  | Tour juvenile detention facilities  | Stick                            |
|  | Tour area jails or prisons  | Stick                            |
|  | Tour local community college and prepare freshman course schedule using college catalogue   | Support                          |
|  | Require student to prepare a job/career plan and learn about the educational requirements of that plan                                  | Stick                            |
|  | Prepare a budget to match the income from a full-time minimum wage job  | Stick                            |
|  | Essays on career goals or on the student’s skills, strengths and interests and how they might apply to a career                         | Stick                            |
| <i>Academic supports and alternatives:</i>   |   |                                  |
|  | Tutoring  | Support                          |
|  | School sign-in sheets   | Stick                            |
|  | Modify school schedule to incorporate classes the student is happier with, or remove the student from a least favorite class or teacher | Carrot                           |
|  | Modify school schedule to meets student’s work or health needs, including a part-time option  | Carrot                           |
|  | Saturday school to avoid losing credit in current classes, or summer school to catch up to grade level                                  | Support                          |
|  | Alternative learning programs, potentially including residential programs   | Support                          |
| <i>Community or school engagement:</i>   |   |                                  |
|  | Join a school club or team  | Carrot                           |
|  | Join a community activity   | Carrot                           |
| <i>Parent involvement:</i>   |   |                                  |
|  | Require parent to attend school with child  | Stick                            |
|  | Weekly meeting with student, parents, and a teacher or school administrator or counselor, with or without the judge                     | Support                          |
|  | Court review hearings with parent participation required  | Stick                            |

<sup>2</sup> Results of the survey are described in Heilbrunn, “Sentencing Options for Truant Youth,” forthcoming on the NCSE website.

|                                |  |         |
|--------------------------------|--|---------|
|                                | Family counseling  | Support |
|                                | Parenting classes for parents of the student, or for teen parents when appropriate | Support |
| <i>Mental health services:</i> |  |         |
|                                | Mental health evaluation for the student and/or parent                             | Support |
|                                | Counseling for the student   | Support |
|                                | Drug testing   | Support |
|                                | Substance treatment program  | Support |

The second table presents a list of more generic sticks and carrots. They do not necessarily support any specific goal, and some of the incentives are more appropriate for truancy reduction program use than court use, but they serve to motivate young people.

| <b>Alternative sanctions – Sticks</b>                   | <b>Alternative rewards – Carrots</b>             |
|---|--|
| Restrict student’s driving privileges                   | Gift certificates to local stores or restaurants |
| Take away cell phone                                    | Tickets to sports events                         |
| Ankle monitoring  | Recreation center coupons                        |
| Community service                                       | Movie coupons                                    |
| Curfew  | After-school activities or parties               |
| Probation   | For younger children, a trip to the zoo          |
| Saturday school   | A rewards ceremony                               |
|   | Lots of encouragement                            |
| <i>There are many more possibilities – be creative!</i> |  |

Hopefully, this document has served to inspire other creative ideas that fit individual children’s needs and local capacities. The list of creative ideas is unending; most important for the child is ongoing support and encouragement. Young people with severe challenges cannot resolve those issues during several weeks of a truancy reduction intervention, let alone in a weekend detention stay. They need continuous monitoring, encouragement, and reminders of how important an education will be to their futures.

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## **JOINT EFFORTS TO IMPROVE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE**

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### **State Level**

- Build and maintain the health and productivity of a School Attendance Task Force.
- Clarify and share information at the state level among schools, courts, probation, social services, mental health, faith, business, and law enforcement regarding school attendance law, system flow among agencies, services, supports, and gaps.
- Develop a Memorandum of Understanding among agency partners to commit to the improvement of school attendance.
- Develop a public education and awareness campaign targeting parents/guardians, youth, and the general community about state law, consequences for non-attendance, and importance of staying in school.
- Form a group to target key legislators for support in passing statutes that will support the goals of the coalition.
- Educate and empower community members to write their legislative representatives about the need for supporting prevention programs.

### **Law Enforcement**

- Provide outreach to the community about the importance of school attendance—show an interest in youth that are out of school during the day—let them know you are aware.
- Make routine visits to schools to inform school personnel and students about attendance law and consequences.
- Established procedures and protocols should be put in place for reporting of nonattendance by the community and escorting students to school or to a community center.
- Law enforcement should be integrally involved in the community-level programs that improve school attendance. Several community policing models are in existence nationally that use the cooperation of law enforcement to significant advantage, including documented reductions of daytime crime.

### **Juvenile Courts**

- The court should consider a variety of sanctions for non-attending youth, such as community service, denied driving privileges, required school attendance of parents/guardians, and other consequences prior to detention.
- Judges and magistrates need to be made aware of existing community programs to positively engage youth in school.
- The juvenile court needs to be represented in any state or local-level efforts targeting re-engaging youth in school.

### **Department of Juvenile Justice**

- Develop standard protocols for intake and processing of cases of violation of attendance law. Train staff on the proper procedures and use of these protocols.
- Forge an information sharing agreement among agencies to reduce duplication of services for multiple-issue youth and their families.
- Access local universities for assistance in data collection and interns to assist with direct services in local pilot communities.



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**SCHOOL ATTENDANCE TRACKING:  
Challenges and Effective Practices**

**National Center for School Engagement**

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**An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children  
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## School Attendance Tracking: Challenges and Effective Practices

Tracking school attendance is a challenge at best, a nightmare for many. The No Child Left Behind Act holds states accountable for reporting attendance. However, there are a variety of reasons why attendance data are often misleading. Misleading data have financial ramifications for the schools and safety issues for students. For instance, if a child is known not to be in school, parents and school officials can follow-up to find out why the child is missing and if he or she is in danger. The most daunting challenge is *consistency*. Attendance tracking is wildly inconsistent, often between classrooms, schools, and districts.

Teachers within the same schools track attendance differently even when provided with sophisticated tracking systems (e.g., electronic classroom tracking, like Campus). Many track attendance only at the beginning of class which can lead to tardies being counted as absences. Some teachers believe it is the students' responsibility to correct the inaccuracies but students rarely know this or go out of their way to do so. Some teachers are non-compliant with tracking absences, especially if there is no motivation to do so. In addition, counselors and other staff who may be meeting with a student during his/her class period, may not report the whereabouts of the student which again leads to inflating the absence rate.

Inflation of the absence rate is not usually the main concern when tracking attendance. Schools are motivated to *look good* when it comes to attendance. The State School Attendance Review Board in California revealed that schools report truancy rates (unexcused absences) between 0% and 2000% with little relation to the size of the school<sup>1</sup>. One reason for the underreporting is the desire to mask truancy as something else. Over and under reporting is often a result of how truancy is defined, especially as it relates to tardiness and period absences. Again, this reflects the inconsistency with which schools define truancy<sup>2</sup> and their willingness to report it. Districts suffer from similar inconsistencies.

In addition to these inconsistencies, the practices of what to do when attendance is a problem vary, depending on the seriousness with which the school or district takes attendance, and the resources available to deal with it. If the school falls short on following up with absent students, attendance tracking becomes even more difficult. This can result in "losing" a student in the system, assuming a chronic truant has transferred, or simply applying a code that means "unverified" to the attendance records. Consequently, the school no longer records the student as non-attending, just unknown or non-existent. These codes are not necessarily included in drop out rates.

Some view software programs as the key to successful attendance tracking. There are numerous data tracking programs which are helpful aids, such as SASI, StarBase or StarStudent, Campus, STI, and many more. The greatest benefit in using these databases is seen when there is alignment among districts within a state. Consistency in reporting can be improved if all districts use the same database. Of course, the data are only as good as what is entered. Coding systems, attendance definitions, and personnel practices may still vary widely.

There are solutions to the challenges in attendance tracking. Challenges are based upon coding and follow-up on absence data. Solutions need to address how to improve coding and the

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on this and related reports contact David Kopperud, Education Programs Consultant, California Department of Education, Counseling and Student Support Services, 1430 N. Street, Sacramento, CA. email at DKopperu@cde.ca.gov.

<sup>2</sup> For more on this topic click on the web publication entitled "National Definition of Truancy" at [www.schoolengagement.org](http://www.schoolengagement.org)

process by which attendance data are verified once initial absences are identified. Table 1 outlines both the challenges and the solutions.

**Table 1: Challenges and Solutions to Attendance Tracking**

| <b>Challenges</b>                               | <b>Solutions</b>   |
|---|--|
| Teacher inconsistencies in reporting attendance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Motivation by principals including consequences of non-compliance.</li> <li>• Clear school policies.</li> <li>• Create a serious school culture of tracking attendance.</li> <li>• Evaluate teachers on attendance tracking practices.</li> <li>• Attendance tracking training for substitute teachers.</li> </ul>  |
| Inflating absences                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replacing tardy status with wrongful absence reporting at the end of class.</li> <li>• Encourage other staff (counselors, etc) who meet with students to be responsible for those students' attendance data.</li> </ul>   |
| Inconsistent/Incorrect coding                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well defined absence codes, i.e., defining how many tardies or period absences = a daily absence.</li> <li>• Eliminate using a single period absence as an indicator of daily absences.</li> <li>• Period tracking (e.g., track in every class or 2 + times a day in elementary).</li> <li>• Enter all absences as unexcused until there is evidence of a legitimate excuse.</li> <li>• Use software that allows for easy updates/corrections of attendance data.</li> </ul>  |
| Meaningless Codes                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eliminating unverified and "unknown" codes</li> </ul>   |
| Incorrect codes on chronic truants/drop-outs    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate follow-up with truants.</li> <li>• Eliminate transfer or drop-out status "assumptions" – insist on evidence of attendance at the transferred school.</li> <li>• Create a common student number that identifies the student regardless of transfer status.</li> <li>• Employ dedicated staff to address truancy, such as truancy officers and community advocates.</li> <li>• Eliminate automated parental notification processes – personalize the process via phone and home visits.</li> <li>• Provide attendance data on report cards.</li> <li>• Encourage personal relationships between parents and teachers, such that teachers follow-up with parents when a student is missing.</li> </ul> |
| Inconsistencies between schools and districts   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement district-wide and state-wide tracking and reporting policies.</li> <li>• Provide incentives to schools.</li> <li>• Use common database systems.</li> </ul>  |

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.



National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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