

Preventing Juvenile Delinquency by Investing in Child Abuse Prevention

As the New York State Office of Children and Family Services moves forward with initiatives to enhance services in the juvenile justice system, Prevent Child Abuse New York strongly advocates for a two-tiered approach to not only intervene with youth offenders, but to prevent those children from ever ending up in the juvenile justice system in the first place.

Research has consistently identified child abuse as a risk factor for violent behavior in adolescents. A lack of nurturing, hostility and neglectfulness can produce delinquent behavior.ⁱ Children who are abused or neglected are 50% more likely to be arrested while a juvenile, 40% more likely to be arrested for a violent crime as an adult, and 33% more likely to abuse drugs. The results of one study showed that 55% of status offenders and 45% of juvenile delinquents had substantiated histories of maltreatment. The percent of status offenders who had been sexually abused was seven times higher among runaways.ⁱⁱ

Being abused or neglected as a child increases the likelihood of an arrest as a juvenile by 53%, as an adult by 38%, and for a violent crime by 38%. Violent child victimizers are substantially more likely than those that victimize adults to have been physically or sexually abused as children.ⁱⁱⁱ

There are about 450,700 runaway children and 127,100 throwaway children each year in this country.^{iv} Two major motivations of a runaway child are to avoid an emotional experience or consequence that they are expecting to occur or to escape a recurrent or ongoing unpleasant, painful or difficult experience in their life. Runaways are more likely to have a history of sexual abuse and child abuse and incest contribute significantly to the health problems of runaway adolescents and require special attention.^v Life on the streets exacerbates the typical health problems of adolescents, where often they ignore signs of poor health due to the fear that they may be returned home.^{vi}

Traditionally, the juvenile justice system has focused on dealing with youth after an initial contact with the local juvenile court. While this reactive emphasis delinquent behavior is still prominent and necessary, the last 20 years has seen the emergence of a proactive approach to help stem the swell of delinquent youth. This new approach is known as the public health model of crime prevention. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention has identified a number of prevention programs, many of which are, in fact, either *child maltreatment* prevention programs, or are components of such. These include:

- Academic Skills Enhancement
- Community Awareness/Mobilization
- Gang Prevention
- Leadership and Youth Development
- Mentoring
- Parent Training
- Truancy Prevention

Programs that offer these types of services include Healthy Families New York and the New York State Children and Family Trust Fund, among others.

For more information on Prevent Child Abuse New York's policy positions, please contact Michelle Gross at 518-445-1273 or mgross@preventchildabuseny.org.

ⁱ Youth Violence: *The Child Abuse Connection*. Virginia Child Protection Newsletter. Summer 1994.

ⁱⁱ Famularo, R. et al. *Child Maltreatment Histories Among Runaway and Delinquent Children*. Clinical Pediatrics 29(12):713-718. December 1990.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kempe, R.; Kempe, C. H. Assessing Family Pathology. *Child Abuse and Neglect*. The Family and the Community pp. 115-126. 1976

^{iv} National Center for Juvenile Justice. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*. September 1999.

^v Rotheram-Borus et al. *Sexual Abuse History and Associated Multiple Risk Behavior in Adolescent Runaways*. American Journal of Orthopsychiatry. 1996.

^{vi} Manov, A.; Lowther, L. *A Health Care Approach for Hard-to-Reach Adolescent Runaways*. Nursing Clinics of North America. 18(2):333-342. June 1983.