

## Drilling Down: Exploring Performance Measures to Improve Juvenile Justice

Douglas Thomas

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In recent years, several juvenile court jurisdictions across the U.S. have collected mission-driven outcome data and reported system performance in the form of juvenile justice report cards. The report cards present a handful of juvenile court outcomes in a simple, easy to understand format that informs readers about the successes of juvenile courts relative to stated goals. However, the data collected for measuring performance has value beyond a periodic report card on a few benchmark measures.

This *Bulletin* uses performance data collected from 10,718 juvenile probation cases closed between 2000 and 2006 by the Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Department located in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to demonstrate the utility of juvenile justice outcome data *beyond the report card*. We have conducted an exploratory analysis of the outcome data from those cases to explore trends, identify outcome characteristics and generally ask some new questions that are raised by the outcomes of closed cases.

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### Introduction

In a previous *Technical Assistance to the Juvenile Court Bulletin*<sup>1</sup>, we presented a case for measuring juvenile justice system performance along with a field-tested strategy for collecting and reporting juvenile justice outcome measures. The strategy described in that report resulted from wide ranging and multi-disciplinary development initiatives that involved several organizations, including the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the National Center for Juvenile Justice, the Pennsylvania Commission on

Crime and Delinquency, the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission, Florida Atlantic University's Community Justice Institute, and the American Prosecutor's Research Institute.

In this *Bulletin*, we focus on the experience of just one jurisdiction—the Allegheny County Juvenile Court in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Allegheny County's Juvenile Court, specifically its Juvenile Probation Department, has been measuring and applying performance outcomes for several years. This *Bulletin* includes an exploratory analysis of almost 11,000 cases closed by the Allegheny County Juvenile Court between 2000 and 2006 and presents baseline performance measures for that period. The outcome data are used to take a closer look at those cases and some of the patterns, trends, and questions that emerge.

### Measuring Juvenile Justice System Performance

**What is Performance Measurement?** Simply put, performance measurement is the act of assessing an organization's ability to do the things it was designed to do, including measures of productivity (how much they do), effectiveness (how efficiently they do it), quality (how well they do it), and timeliness (how long it takes them to do it). The purpose of performance measures is to provide feedback relative to what the organization set out to do. Gordon Bazemore, Ph.D, one of the principal designers of the strategy documented by the previous *Special Project Bulletin*, suggested three fundamental reasons for measuring performance: 1) It is the right thing to do—the juvenile justice system owes it to taxpayers to tell them what they are getting for their money; 2) It is the practical thing to do—taxpayers are more likely to support and participate in juvenile justice processes if they are kept informed; and 3) it is the empirical thing to

do—specific performance measures make it possible to describe the success or failures of the juvenile justice system in quantifiable terms.<sup>2</sup>

**A Proven Strategy.** The performance measures strategy has been replicated in multiple and diverse jurisdictions for several years.<sup>3</sup> The strategy, flexible enough to match the unique characteristics of multiple jurisdictions, is defined by five core design principles. First, performance measures must be mission-based—performance measures that are mission-based reflect the core values of the organization. Second, outcome measures must be clearly and unambiguously defined. Third, the recognition that *intermediate outcomes* (i.e., empirical evidence that one is achieving mission-based objectives) are valuable and useful. Fourth, outcome data is best collected at the time of case closing. Finally, data quality may be assured by reporting and applying outcomes early, often, and in multiple ways.

## Allegheny County, A Pioneer in Measuring Performance

The Allegheny County Juvenile Court and Probation Department has been collecting and reporting performance-based outcomes since 1999 to help manage its day-to-day operations. It was among the first juvenile justice agencies to document and measure system performance based on outcomes from individual closed cases. As a result, it has been a pioneer in applying performance-based outcomes to administration, management, and planning.<sup>4</sup> Allegheny County produced its first system-wide *report card* in 2003. This report card was introduced to the public during the County's

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***Mission-driven outcome measures “take the guess work out of managing the Department, allow us to analyze case-specific outcomes, and make it possible for us to apply data-driven corrections to our operations.”***

– Jim Rieland, Director of Probation Services, Allegheny County Pennsylvania

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Juvenile Justice Week celebrations and juvenile court open house in October of that year. The Department has, from the beginning, used specific performance measures related to re-offending, violating conditions of probation, completing community service, payment of restitution, and meeting other conditions of probation.

In October 2006, the Juvenile Probation Department released its fourth annual *Juvenile Probation Report Card*. The report card presented outcome data for the 1,507 cases closed in 2005 and demonstrated continued levels of high performance across most outcome measures (see table below).

## Beyond the Report Card: An Exploratory Analysis

A juvenile justice report card represents an important step toward measuring performance, gauging progress, and increasing accountability to the public. Toward these ends, juvenile court jurisdictions may use case-level outcome data for myriad reasons. Performance-based outcome measures may be used to identify and celebrate areas of high goal achievement and to identify and correct areas of low goal achievement. They may be used—and have been used—to inform key constituents, facilitate planning and budgeting, direct and motivate staff, and to assess/evaluate progress.

**Figure 1:**

### **Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Report Card: Outcomes for Cases Closed in 2005**

- 90% successfully completed supervision without an adjudication for a new offense while under supervision.
- 94% complied with conditions of supervision without a serious violation of probation (i.e., one resulting in a more restrictive disposition).
- \$215,827 in restitution was paid to victims of juvenile crime.
- 76% of juveniles, with restitution orders, paid in full.
- 70,014 hours of community service were completed by juveniles under court supervision.
- 96% of juveniles with restitution obligations completed all or more of the community service assigned or ordered.

However, outcome-based performance measures may also be used to develop general explanations about the way the organization works and why it works that way. These types of analyses are introspective in nature. This is the approach taken for this *Special Project Bulletin*.

To explore some of the trends or patterns in the data, National Center for Juvenile Justice project staff conducted an ad hoc analysis of over 10,000 cases closed by the Allegheny County Juvenile Court between 2000 and 2006. By “drilling down” past the usual outcome variables we were able to look more closely at issues related to mission and goals, juveniles who re-offend, length of supervision, and issues related to race, gender, and age. We then presented selected findings to juvenile court staff for their reactions, responses, and interpretations, some of which are included in this report.

## Trends and Characteristics: Cases Closed in Allegheny County 2000-2006

The Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Department closed 10,718 cases between January 1, 2000 and December 31, 2006, an average of over 1,500 cases each year. The typical case involved a white or black offender (about half of the cases involved white offenders and about half involved black offenders) and, just over 15 years old when the case was opened, and just under 17 years old when the case was closed. The average length of supervision for these cases was about a year and a half. The vast majority of cases involved juveniles who did not re-

offend under supervision, completed assigned community services, and paid most or all restitution ordered.

## Mission-Driven Outcomes: Balanced and Restorative Justice and Pennsylvania

The *Desktop Guide to Good Juvenile Probation Practice* states clearly that effective juvenile probation is “mission-driven, performance-based, and outcome-focused.”<sup>5</sup> These characteristics are interrelated; you cannot have one without the other. Effective outcome measures are predicated on a clearly articulated mission, unambiguous goals, and measurable objectives. At the same time, reliable outcome measures are a necessary pre-requisite to assuring that mission-driven goals are being met.

In 2004, Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell included the juvenile justice system outcome measures developed in Allegheny and other Pennsylvania counties in the budget request for Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Court Judges Commission

(JCJC). Accordingly, JCJC mandated that all counties report, on a quarterly basis, outcomes on all delinquency cases closed, and in 2005 published Pennsylvania’s first state wide juvenile justice report card.

One of the initial, but not unexpected consequences of measuring and reporting juvenile justice outcomes, was the realization that Pennsylvania’s balanced and restorative justice goals needed to be clarified to produce satisfactory outcomes. To rectify this situation, Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee<sup>6</sup> commissioned a series of three *white papers* to establish clear and consistent definitions of Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice goals. The white papers were developed on the basis of delinquency-related research and balanced and restorative justice principles, and on the advice and consensus of carefully selected focus groups. Each paper presents a clear definition of one of the balanced and restorative justice goals, why it is important, how it can be achieved, and how it can be measured.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 2:  
Characteristics of Cases Closed by  
Allegheny County Juvenile Court (2000-2006)**

	All Cases	White	Black
Number of Cases Closed	10,718	5,279 (49%)	5,129 (48%)
Male	77%	80%	74%
Female	23%	20%	26%
Age at Case Open	15.2	15.6	14.9
Age at Case Close	16.8	17.0	16.7
Average Length of Supervision (Days)	578	494	654

## Outcomes by Balanced and Restorative Justice Goals

How has Allegheny County's Juvenile Court and Probation Department performed over time relative to the goals and objectives of balanced and restorative justice. We were able to look at goal-specific outcome data for all cases closed between 2000 and 2006 to provide a partial answer to this question.

**Community Protection:** Protecting the community from juvenile offenders who are under juvenile court supervision is, perhaps, the most critical goal for any juvenile court and probation agency. This is the essential agreement made between the juvenile court and the community—the juvenile court assures the community that offenders placed on probation or other forms of community supervision can be handled in the community without compromising community safety. In Pennsylvania community protection is defined as “the process of contributing to safe communities—with particular emphasis on known juvenile offenders—through prevention, supervision, and control.”<sup>8</sup>

As reported above, the vast majority (88%) of juveniles under supervision of the Allegheny County juvenile court in 2006 did not commit an additional offense while under supervision. Chart 1, below demonstrates that this was a consistent outcome during the period between 2000 and 2006, ranging from a low of 79% in 2000 to a high of 91% in 2001.

The initial response to these outcomes in Allegheny County was to celebrate the fact that the most of the cases closed are *successful* in terms of the community protection goal. This is, indeed, worthy of celebration. But after the initial

recognition of a job well done, it is natural to ask about the other 12% of the cases that do report a new offense while under supervision. What are the characteristics of juveniles who re-offend?

Jim Rieland, Director of Probation for Allegheny County, considers this to be the “golden question.” To answer it, he suggests that “we now need to analyze this data and determine how we can modify our supervision practices based on what the data is showing us.” The outcome data collected by Allegheny County allow us to take a closer look at the characteristics of juveniles who re-offend in terms of age, gender, race, and other outcomes (e.g., completion of community service, payment of restitution). With this information it is possible to begin making adjustments and improvements where necessary with an eye toward reducing the number of juveniles who re-offend.

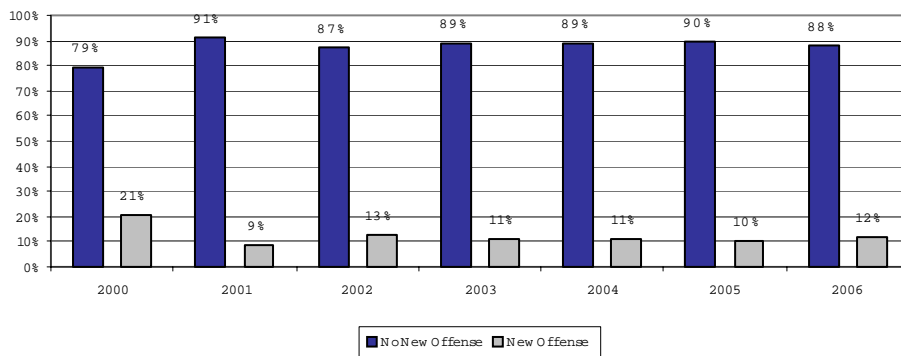
**Focus on Protecting the Community:** The case closing data provide a clear profile of the characteristics of juveniles who re-offend while under supervision. Juveniles who re-offend are more likely to be male, black, younger at the time the case is opened and older at the time the case is closed,

less likely to complete community service, and less likely to pay restitution.

- Between 2000 and 2006, less than 13% of all cases closed involved a juvenile who re-offended while under supervision.
- The vast majority (87%) of the juveniles who re-offended were male.
- A simple majority (62%) of the juveniles who re-offended were black.
- Juveniles who re-offended were younger at time of case opening and (14.6 years old) and older at time of case closing (18.3).
- Juveniles who re-offended were less likely to have restitution and community service obligations.
- They were also less likely to complete community service hours or pay restitution.

Rieland attributes the relatively low rate of re-offending to Allegheny County's commitment to protecting the public and the continuum of supervision, monitoring, and incapacitation resources available to the Department. Russell Carlino,

**Chart 1:  
Allegheny County Juvenile Probation (2000-2006):  
Community Protection:  
No New Offenses/New Offenses While Under Supervision**



Assistant Administrator, reiterates the Department's commitment to community protection. The Department, he says, "makes a substantial contribution to community protection through enhanced supervision practices and dispositional alternatives that range from informal adjustments to secure care in Youth Development Centers."

The community supervision options available to juvenile courts and probation staff in Allegheny County include excellent working relationships with community groups throughout the county, improved police/probation partnerships, community-based probation supervision, a Community Intensive Supervision Program (CISP)<sup>9</sup>, electronic home monitoring/home detention, specialized probation services for sex offenders, a drug and alcohol unit, a day treatment/supervision program, and most recently, a juvenile court warrant unit (see Figure 4).

**Accountability:** In Pennsylvania, accountability is defined as the "process of helping offenders understand and acknowledge the wrongfulness of their behavior and the impact on the crime victim and community together with the obligation to take action to repair the harm."<sup>10</sup> The typical system responses to achieve this goal are through assuring completion of community service, requiring payment of restitution, and increasing victim awareness among offenders. Allegheny County has tracked completion of community service and payment of restitution for several years.

**Community Service.** Community service is a commonly employed mechanism to actively engage juvenile offenders in activities designed to help repair the harm caused by their delinquent acts. The proportion of Allegheny County cases with community

service requirements increased substantially from just over half of all cases closed in 2000 (56%) to approximately two-thirds of all cases beginning in 2001 (64%) and extending through 2006. Carlino attributes the *bump* in community service to measuring and reporting outcomes, causing "judges and probation officers to increasingly view community service as a necessary component of court dispositions or informal adjustments. We expect that the percentage of juvenile court referrals being ordered/assigned community service will continue to increase."

**Restitution:** Restitution is a mechanism that allows juvenile offenders to take pro-active measures to repair harm caused by their offenses. Restitution is more than a method of financial restoration of victims. In addition to addressing financial losses of victims, "restitution validates and vindicates the crime victims'

experiences by implicitly acknowledging that the offender, not the victim, was responsible for the losses."<sup>13</sup> The high rate of paying restitution in full demonstrates the commitment by Allegheny County probation officers to collecting the entire amount of restitution ordered in favor of the victim.

**Victim Awareness:** While Allegheny County has a long history of ordering restitution and assigning community service, it has only recently required participation in and completion of victim awareness classes. The case closing outcome data from Allegheny County indicates that during the period between 2000 and 2006, the percent of cases closed with victim awareness requirements increased dramatically from 10% in 2000 to 74% in 2006. The dramatic increase in requiring participation in victim awareness training is attributed to the demonstrably low numbers of participants in 2000 and 2001 and

**Figure 3:  
Characteristics of Cases Closed by Allegheny County:  
Juveniles Who Did or Did Not Re-Offend  
While Under Supervision (2000-2006)**

	All Cases	Did Re-Offend	Did Not Re-Offend
Number of Cases Closed	10,718	1,340	9,379
Percent of All Cases	100%	12%	88%
Gender (% of Cases)			
Male	77%	87%	75%
Female	23%	13%	25%
Race			
White	49%	35%	51%
Black	48%	62%	46%
Age at Case Open	15.2	14.6	15.3
Age at Case Close	16.8	18.1	16.7
Average Length of Supervision (Days)	578	1,248	473

the introduction of a standardized curriculum in 2001.

**Focus on Accountability.** The Allegheny County Juvenile Court and Probation Department have a long history of ordering or assigning community service and restitution. More than two-thirds of all cases closed between 2000 and 2006 had community service obligations and more than a third had restitution obligations. During that time period, juvenile offenders accounted for over 455,000 hours of community service, about 65,000 hours each year and more than \$1.2 million in restitution paid, about \$171,000 per year.

- Community service hours were ordered or assigned in 7,128 cases (67%) closed between 2000 and 2006.
- Over 458,000 hours were ordered and over 455,000 hours were completed (99%).
- 92% of offenders with community service obligations completed them in full.
- Restitution was ordered in 3,929 cases between 2000 and 2006.
- Over \$2.06 million in restitution was ordered and about \$1.2 million was paid by offenders (56%).

**Figure 4**  
**Allegheny County Juvenile Court Warrant Unit**

The Allegheny County Juvenile Court Warrant Unit began operations in 2004 with the goal of improving community protection by working collaboratively with local law enforcement agencies, particularly the City of Pittsburgh Police Department and the Allegheny County Sheriff's Department, to actively pursue offenders who have absconded, failed to appear for court, or violated conditions of supervision. As of December 31, 2006, over 90% of those sought by the Warrant Unit have been apprehended and detained at the Shuman Juvenile Detention Center pending a court appearance. In addition, the Warrant Unit has confiscated a wide range of illegal and potentially dangerous objects, including assault weapons, handguns, ammunition, narcotics, and gang paraphernalia.

County Probation Director, Jim Rieland states that the creation of the Warrant Unit was based—in part—on a desire to improve on the 12% re-offense rate suggested by the case closure outcomes, as well as respect for the authority of the court, and public safety concerns.

- 78% of offenders with restitution obligations paid them in full.
- In 2000, only 10% of all cases participated in victim awareness training, by 2006 that proportion had increased to 74%.

**Competency Development:**

Competency development is, perhaps, the least clearly defined and understood of Pennsylvania's balanced and restorative justice goals. This unfortunate conclusion is supported by the fact that, in

spite of a well documented continuum of competency-based interventions and treatment services<sup>12</sup>, missing or incomplete data make it impossible for Allegheny County to generate consistent and reliable competency development outcomes. Of course, Allegheny County is not alone. Few jurisdictions have been able to generate useful outcome data related to the participation and successful completion of competency development (and clinical treatment) activities. This is clearly a high priority focus for Allegheny County and other jurisdictions throughout Pennsylvania and nationally.

In Pennsylvania, competency development is defined as the "process of helping offenders acquire knowledge and skills in the domains most closely associated with their offending behavior together with opportunities to practice skills and establish positive relationships."<sup>13</sup> Pennsylvania identified 5 appropriate competency development domains – pro-social skills, moral reasoning, academic, workforce development, and independent living.<sup>14</sup>

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***“Probation officers understand that they cannot submit the case for closing until restitution is paid in full or the offender reaches the age of 21. Probation officers and supervisors take pride in their ability to collect restitution in full from juveniles, regardless of their employment history, socioeconomic status, etc. The court has developed innovative methods (e.g., a stipend fund) to provide younger offenders with opportunities to earn money for restitution if they are not old enough to obtain a work permit. Administration will continue to examine the data to determine how we can ensure that the court orders restitution in all cases where victims incur out-of-pocket expenses.”***

– Russell Carlino, Assistant Administrator

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**Figure 5  
Community Service Completed  
Often Exceeds Community Service Assigned**

Between 2000 and 2006, juveniles under court supervision routinely completed more community service than the amount originally ordered. On average, 65,530 hours of community service were ordered or assigned per year. However, the average amount completed was 66,925 hours per year. The total amount of community service hours ordered was just over 458,000 hours, almost 460,000 hours of community service were completed (102%). The consistent trend of exceeding community service hours ordered is commonly attributed to the fact that probation officers hold juveniles accountable to complete all community service in a timely fashion and routinely assign additional hours when juveniles fail to adhere to community service work schedules or when they violate other conditions of probation.

Pennsylvania's juvenile justice leadership has worked hard to overcome these issues. In fact, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency convened an expert panel to define and clarify the goal, resulting in publication of *Advancing Competency Development: A White Paper for Pennsylvania* in 2005.

The white paper, in turn, facilitated the revision of competency development and treatment domains and definition of outcome measures for Pennsylvania. The revised competency development and treatment domains and outcome measures were officially adopted and incorporated into Pennsylvania's state wide Juvenile Court Management System (JCMS) in the summer of 2007.

Furthermore, NCJJ staff developed a competency development resource guide to be published by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency in the spring of 2008. The guide, *Advancing Competency Development: A Resource Guide for Pennsylvania*, will include: competency-based curricula, resources, and programs that juvenile probation officers and

To address the lack of clarity regarding the competency development goal, and thus the dearth of reliable outcome measures, Allegheny County has worked closely with the National Center for Juvenile Justice to operationalize, implement, and measure successful completion of competency development and treatment goals. Central to this task has been the creation of a competency development assessment protocol and results-based supervision planning strategy.

***Focus on Competency Development.*** Allegheny County is not the only jurisdiction in Pennsylvania struggling with implementing the competency development goal. In fact, it is a state wide problem that has been brought into focus precisely because of the difficulty jurisdictions are experiencing in terms of identifying competency development activities, documenting completion, and measuring outcomes.

Allegheny County is also working closely with residential and community-based service providers to achieve and measure competency development and treatment goals. Ted Kairys, an Assistant Administrator with responsibility for (among other things) placement management contracts, met with representatives and executive directors from approximately 15 residential facilities during the late summer and fall months of 2007. During that time, he distributed a brief description of how the five competency development domains are defined and informed the providers that there will be a highlighted focus on competency development in 2008.

**Figure 6  
Characteristics of Cases Closed by  
Allegheny County Juvenile Court:  
Community Service and Restitution (2000-2006)**

	<b>Community Service</b>	<b>Restitution</b>
Number of Cases	7,218	3,929
Percent of All Cases	67%	37%
Amount Ordered / Assigned	458,707	\$2,064,072
Amount Completed / Paid	455,635	\$1,208,614
Percent Completed / Paid	99%	56%
Percent Cases Completing / Paying in Full	92%	78%

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***“Since the juvenile justice goals were legislated 11 years ago competency development has been the most difficult to implement as evidenced by our outcome measures.”***

– *Russell Carlino*

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other youth service providers can use to address competency development among juvenile court-involved youth.

At the same time, the Allegheny County Probation Department developed a competency development assessment, a supervision plan, and an outcome reporting protocol which it completed in the fall of 2007. The competency-based assessment, supervision, and reporting protocol is being implemented in Allegheny County’s formal case planning process which should increase assignment and completion of competency-based activities as well as enhance outcome measures for this goal.

## **Length of Supervision**

Why is it important to calculate and track the average length of supervision? Frankly, it has not been all that important to juvenile court and probation in the past. Unless the probation period is determined by law or court order, probation cases tend to remain “on the books” for indeterminate reasons. Probation managers are often unaware of how long cases have been open. Sometimes length of supervision is noticed only when caseloads become overly large and probation officers become overburdened and there is a need to reduce caseloads. Probation officers and managers may then look at the cases that have been under supervision the longest to see which can be closed to make way for new cases.

However, the length of supervision provides an important indicator for both case management and operations management. Paying attention to length of supervision allows individual probation officers opportunities to better manage their case-loads by weighing accomplishments against time on probation. For example, Russell Carlino suggests that just knowing how long juveniles are on supervision provides a benchmark against which juvenile probation officers can measure their efforts.

In Allegheny County, the average length of supervision for juveniles on probation dropped precipitously between 2000 and 2006. The average length of supervision of closed cases in 2000 was just less than two years (721 days). By 2006, the average length of supervision had decreased to about 1.4 years (511 days). Because the *average amount* can be strongly influenced by high or very low measures (indeed, the length of supervision between 2000 and 2006 ranged from a low of one day to a high of over 4,000 days), the median value (or midpoint of the distribution) is sometimes used as a measure of central tendency. The median length of supervision also dropped demonstrably between 2000 and 2006, from 391 days to 292 days. Most cases were under supervision for about 6 months, this has been consistent from year to year.

Rieland maintains that the average length of probation supervision in Allegheny County has declined because juvenile probation officers are closing cases in a more timely manner because they have a better

idea of what they are trying to accomplish. Once specific probation supervision plan objectives have been achieved—payment of restitution, completion of community service, successful completion of competency development activities or treatment plans, and demonstrated ability to remain crime free—there is little reason to keep cases open.

The length of supervision varied substantially across types of cases closed. For example, the average length of supervision was greater for males (604 days) than for females (477 days). It was greater for black offenders (654 days) than white offenders (494 days). The average length of supervision was almost three times greater for juveniles who committed new offenses while under supervision (1,284 days) than those who did not (473 days). Length of supervision was demonstrably higher in cases involving juveniles who were younger (10 – 13) at time of case opening than older juveniles (14 and older).

Eric Joy, Assistant Administrator, points to the caseload management aspects of average length of supervision. All other things being equal, a substantial reduction in the average length of supervision will necessarily result in reduced caseloads and other benefits. This may provide probation staff with more time to better manage cases by conducting individual assessments, developing proactive case plans, monitoring compliance with conditions of probation, and assuring that probationers actively participate in supervision, competency development, accountability, and treatment activities.



## Outcomes by Race, Gender, and Age

Because the outcome data used by the Allegheny County Juvenile Court is collected on a case-by-case basis at the time of case closing, it is possible to explore the individual characteristics of outcomes. We have chosen to analyze the performance outcomes by race, gender, and age.

**Race:** In spite of the fact that only about 18% of the juveniles between the ages of 10 and 17 years old in Allegheny County are black<sup>15</sup> a case involving a black offender was almost as common as one involving a white offender. For all cases closed between 2000 and 2006, most of the cases involved either a white offender (49%) or a black offender (48%). However, from 2000 to 2006, the proportion of cases involving black juveniles increased while the proportion of cases involving white juveniles decreased. By 2006, for the first time, the number of cases closed involving black juveniles exceeded the number of cases closed involving white juveniles—54% of the cases closed in 2006 involved black offenders.

Black juveniles were younger at the time the case was opened and were

*“The average length of supervision is important because it is an indicator of compliance. It provides an indication to offenders that the juvenile court will keep the case open until the offender is in full compliance with the conditions imposed by the court and that there are consequences to re-offending.”*

– James Rieland

under supervision longer than white juveniles. On average, black juveniles were about 7 months younger than white juveniles at the time of case opening, but only about 3 months younger when the case was closed. The average length of supervision for black offenders was about 25% greater than the average length of supervision for white offenders.

A review of key balanced and restorative justice outcome measures indicates outcomes for cases involving black offenders appeared to lag behind outcomes for cases involving white offenders. For example, black offenders were almost twice as likely as white offenders to re-offend while under supervision. Out of 5,129 closed cases involving African Americans, 828 (16%) re-offended while under supervision. Out of 5,279 closed cases involving Caucasians, 467 (9%) re-offended while under

supervision. White offenders were slightly more likely to complete community service obligations in full and even more likely to pay restitution in full. Finally, white offenders were slightly more likely to complete one or more competency development activity while under supervision. These data seem to indicate a need for a closer look at the processes, practices, and resources that can be used to improve outcomes for cases involving black juveniles.

**Focus on Outcomes by Race.** The case closing data indicate that black juveniles, compared to white juveniles, are younger at the time the case was opened, remain under supervision longer, have higher rates of re-offending, are about as likely to have restitution and community service obligations, but are less likely to complete all community service obligations and pay restitution in full. Between 2000 and 2006:

**Figure 7**  
**Characteristics of Cases Closed by Allegheny County Juvenile Court:**  
**Average Length of Supervision in Days (2000-2006)**

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Number of Cases	1,556	1,505	1,446	1,526	1,637	1,507	1,541
Mean	721.1	593.6	542.9	595.5	547.9	509.1	511.1
Median	391	309	291	294	283	327	292
Mode	182	182	182	182	182	182	182

- On average, black juveniles were about seven months younger than white juveniles at the time of case opening.
- The average length of supervision for cases involving black juveniles was 653 days compared to an average length of supervision for white juveniles of 494 days, an average of 25% longer.
- 16.1% of closed cases involving black juveniles included a new offense while under supervision compared to 8.8% of cases involving white juveniles.
- Community service was ordered in about two-thirds of the cases involving both black juveniles (63.5%) and white (69.7%) juveniles. And while black juveniles completed all community service obligations in the vast majority of cases (87.6%), all community service obligations were completed at a higher rate in cases involving white juveniles (95.4%).
- Restitution was ordered in about a third of the cases for both black (34.5%) and white (39.1%) juveniles. While both white and black juveniles paid their restitution obligations in full at a relatively high rate, cases involving black juveniles paid restitution in full at a lower rate (72.4%) than cases involving white juveniles (84%).

Allegheny County is actively addressing disparate outcomes related to race and other issues related to disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system. Allegheny County is one of three Pennsylvania jurisdictions participating in the MacArthur Foundation Models for Change Initiative, a national juvenile justice reform effort that focuses system reform efforts on selected issues, including

**Figure 8:  
Characteristics of Cases Closed by Allegheny County  
Juvenile Court:  
Case Characteristics by Race (2000-2006)**

	All Cases	White	Black
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Gender (% of Cases)			
Male	77%	80%	74%
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Average Length of Supervision (Days)	578	494	653

disproportionate minority contact. To that end, Allegheny County is actively developing structured, data-based case planning assessment and supervision strategies, a secure detention risk assessment instrument, and has initiated a study that examines the reasons for failure to adjust in placement (in 2006 black juveniles accounted for 86% of juvenile court referrals for failure to adjust in placement).<sup>16</sup>

Eric Joy cautions against assuming that the disparate outcomes are a result of “systemic discriminatory decision-making based on race.” This may be a faulty assumption that merits further research into other factors beyond race. He asks, for example, if “black youths are being disproportionately arrested for the most serious crimes,<sup>17</sup> why would you not expect them to be disproportionately represented at every stage of the juvenile justice process? Joy suggests that researchers focus on offense and socio-economic factors as well as race. Hunter Hurst, Director of the National Center for Juvenile Justice, concurs and suggests that further analysis include a sorting by neighborhoods, particularly by urban as compared to suburban

neighborhoods. Hurst also suggests that decisions made at the front end (e.g., intake screening) may have an impact on the types of cases referred to juvenile court.

**Gender:** Female offenders accounted for about a quarter of cases closed between 2000 and 2006. The case closing data reveals some significant gender-based differences among cases. Cases involving females, for example, had a substantially shorter average length of supervision than males—477 days for females compared to over 600 days for males. In addition, females (7.2%) were half as likely as males (14.1%) to commit a new offense while under supervision. While females (27%) were far less likely than males (40%) to have restitution obligations, females were more likely than males to pay restitution in full. More than four-out-of-five (82%) of the females with restitution obligations paid in full, compared to about three quarters of males with restitution obligations.

**Figure 9:  
Characteristics of Cases Closed by Allegheny County  
Juvenile Court (2000-2006):  
Balanced and Restorative Justice Outcomes by Race**

	All Cases	White	Black
Number of Cases Closed	10,718	5,279	5,129
Commit New Offense While Under Supervision	12%	9%	16%
Complete Community Service Obligations in Full	92%	95%	88%
Pay Restitution Obligations in Full	79%	84%	72%
Participate in One or More Competency Development Activities	69%	72%	67%

**Focus on Outcomes by Gender.**

The case closing data indicate that case closing data for cases involving females are similar to cases involving males in terms of age at case opening and case closing and imposition of community service requirements. Females, however, are under supervision for shorter periods of time, are less likely to re-offend while under supervision, and less likely to have restitution obligations. Between 2000 and 2006:

- There are slightly fewer cases involving female offenders in Allegheny County than the national average (About 23% versus 26%).
- On average, females and males were about the same age at time of case open (15.2) and case closing (16.5 - 16.9).
- Girls were about as likely to have community service requirements (about two thirds of all cases) and to complete community service in full (over 90% for both males and females).

- However, there are some notable gender-based differences: females had a shorter average length of supervision (477 days versus 604 days), were half as likely as males to re-offend (7% versus 14%), less likely to have restitution obligations (27% versus 40%), and more likely to pay restitution in full (82% versus 75%).

At first glance, it may appear from the outcome data that female offenders present few complications for the juvenile court—relatively low numbers, low rate of re-offending, shorter periods of supervision, and more likely to complete community service and pay restitution. However, Valerie Bender, Co-Chairperson of the Female Services Sub-committee convened by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, warns that the seemingly rosy outcomes fail to tell the whole story about female offenders. Bender reminds us that the juvenile justice system was designed with boys in mind, and that “prevention and intervention services designed for males are

inadequate, perhaps even harmful, for females.”<sup>18</sup> She points out that “girls are different from boys, they take different paths to delinquency than boys, and they often need help dealing with different kinds of issues, including physical and sexual abuse, teen pregnancy, and single parenthood.” Bender also points to recent trends indicating that the female portion of the juvenile justice system’s workload has been rising in Pennsylvania:

- Female juvenile arrests increased 21% from 1994 to 2003, while male arrests declined by 3%.
- There was a 32% increase in female admissions to secure detention from 1997 to 2003, compared with a male increase of just 10%.
- The number of juvenile court cases involving females grew by 22% from 1997 to 2003, while the number of juvenile court cases involving males increased by just 6% over the same time period.<sup>19</sup>

**Age:** On average, between 2000 and 2006, juveniles were 15.2 years old at time the case was opened and 16.8 years old at the time the case was closed. However, court-involved juveniles seem to be getting older, the average age at case opening increased each year. In 2000, the average age at time of case opening was 14.9 years old. By 2006 the average age at the time the case was opened had increased by about 7 months to 15.6. The average age at case closing remained fairly stable, ranging from a low of 16.6 in 2002 to a high of 17.1 in 2006 (See Chart 2).

A closer look at the case closing data also reveals that juveniles who were younger at time of case opening were more likely to re-offend while under supervision and to remain under supervision for longer periods than older juveniles. The average age at time of case

opening of juveniles who re-offended was 14.8 years compared to 15.3 years for juveniles who did not re-offend. Juveniles that re-offended tended to be older at time of case closing—18.1 years compared to 16.6 years for juveniles who did not re-offend.

The youngest offenders at time of case opening were most likely to commit new offenses while under supervision. One or more new offenses committed while under supervision were reported in almost one in five (19%) of the cases involving juveniles aged 10 to 12 years old. Juveniles aged 13 to 15 years old were nearly as likely to commit a new offense while under supervision; a new offense while under supervision was reported in just over 16% of these cases. Older juveniles were far less likely to commit new offenses while under supervision. A new offense was reported in less than 10% of cases involving 16 and 17 year olds and only about 4% of juveniles who were 18 and older.

The youngest offenders at time of case opening also tended to be under juvenile court supervision longer. Cases involving very young juveniles (10 – 12 years old) had the highest average length of supervision (895 days). The average length of supervision decreased as the age of the offender increased. Juveniles between the ages of 13 and 15 were under juvenile court supervision for about 686 days, compared to 429 days for juveniles who were 16 or 17 years old at the time the case was opened. The higher average length of supervision may explain the higher relative rate of offending by younger juveniles (i.e., they are under supervision longer, hence, have more time to re-offend). On the other hand the higher average length of supervision may be explained by the relatively higher rate of offending (i.e., young juveniles who re-offend are

demonstrating a need for more supervision and more intensive interventions, including placement).

**Focus on Outcomes by Age.** The case closing data indicate that for all cases closed between 2000 and 2006:

- The average age at time of case opening was 15.2 and 16.8 at case closing.
- The average age at time of case opening increased by about 7 months from 14.9 in 2000 to 15.6 in 2006.
- Juveniles who re-offended (14.8) were younger at time of case opening than those that did not re-offend (15.3).
- Offenders who are younger (15 and younger) when the case is opened are more likely to re-offend than juveniles who are older (16 and older).
- The length of supervision is greater for offenders who are younger at time of case opening.

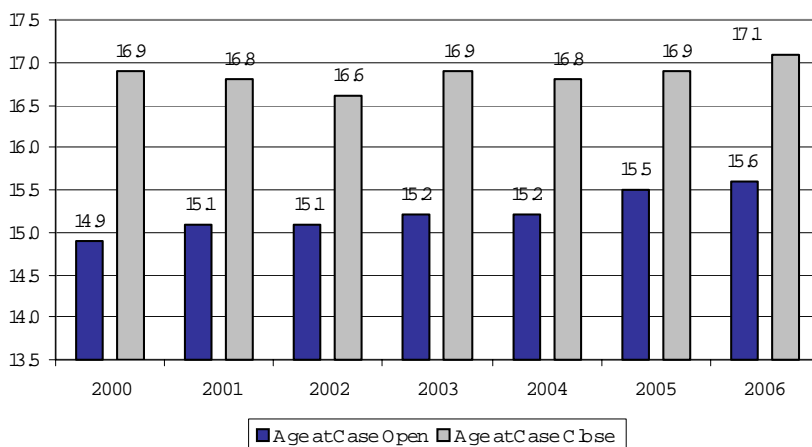
Jim Rieland observes that “these data support what has been written about age and delinquency” and notes that the data also suggests

that “we should spend some time better understanding these kids and their needs.” Rieland sees important policy implications in the data demonstrating the higher rates of re-offending among cases involving younger offenders. Should, for example, Allegheny County pursue a policy of diverting younger offenders from the juvenile justice system? How can the juvenile court and the probation department get communities and families more involved with young offenders? There are practical considerations for Rieland as well—“Are there any proven methods for supervision of young offenders? What works best for this population?”

## Conclusions

Allegheny County began collecting and reporting juvenile court outcome data with an eye toward improving practice and providing a juvenile justice report card on key balanced and restorative justice goals—community protection, individual accountability, and competency development. The initial reaction to the County’s juvenile justice report card was to celebrate the “good news,” the

**Chart 2:  
Allegheny County Juvenile Probation (2000-2006): Age at Case Open and Case Close**



**Figure 10:  
Characteristics of Cases Closed by Allegheny County  
Juvenile Court (2000-2006):  
Did Juvenile Commit a New Offense by Age  
at Case Open/Close?**

Commit a New Offense While Under Supervision?	Did Re-Offend	Did Not Re-Offend
Age at Case Open	14.8	15.3
Age at Case Close	18.1	16.7

and probation department have established a track record of consistently high achievement across balanced and restorative justice goals. However, we were also able to identify specific areas that warrant further attention and in which the juvenile court and probation department could improve, including juveniles who re-offend while under supervision, interventions and services for black offenders, younger offenders, and female offenders, and competency development activities.

It is unlikely that any jurisdiction can achieve a 100% rating on “no new offenses while under supervision.” However, the data in this analysis indicates that Allegheny County can improve on its average of 88% cases closed with no new offenses, by paying closer attention to offenders who are young at the time of case closing, slow to complete community service and pay restitution, and not engaged in competency development activities (particularly educational activities).

Continued attention toward providing appropriate interventions and services for minority offenders will go a long

success of the juvenile court relative to the outcomes measured.

The next response was to systematically apply outcomes to improving day-to-day operations of the juvenile court/probation department; to prove the adage that “what gets measured, gets done.” Juvenile probation supervisors and administrators began using the outcome measures to review performance of individual probation officers, probation units, and even juvenile court judges. This attention to outcomes seems to have resulted in a decrease in the number of juveniles who re-offended while under supervision,

an increase in completion of community service and payment of restitution, and increase in participation in victim awareness classes, and a decrease in the average length of supervision.

The purpose of the analysis reported in this *Special Projects Bulletin* was to take the performance measures data even further, to identify trends and issues that may have significance toward improving the ability of the court and juvenile probation department to achieve mission-driven expectations. While the analysis was merely exploratory in nature, we were able to demonstrate that Allegheny County’s juvenile court

**Figure 11:  
Characteristics of Cases Closed by Allegheny County Juvenile Court (2000-2006):  
Did Juvenile Commit A New Offense by Age Categories**

	Age Categories at Case Open				
	10-12	13-15	16-17	18 and Over	Total
No New Offense	806	3,691	4,008	873	9,378
%	81.0%	83.8%	90.8%	96.1%	87.5%
New Offense	189	711	405	35	1,340
%	19.0%	16.2%	9.2%	3.9%	12.5%
Total	995	4,402	4,413	908	10,718

**Figure 12:  
Characteristics of Cases Closed by Allegheny County  
Juvenile Court (2000-2006):  
Length of Supervision by Age  
at Time Case Was Opened**

Age at Time Case Was Opened	Number of Cases	Mean (Days)
10-12	995	895
13-15	4,402	686
16-17	4,413	429
18 and Over	908	389

way toward improving juvenile court and probation outcomes. The unfortunate truth is that cases involving black offenders have surpassed the number of cases involving white offenders and black offenders under perform in almost all outcome categories, including offenses while under supervision, completion of community service, payment of restitution, participation in competency development activities, and length of juvenile court supervision.

An increased focus on younger offenders may also pay dividends. Juveniles who are younger at the time of case opening are more likely than older juveniles to re-offend while under supervision, less likely to pay restitution, and are under supervision longer. Juvenile court and probation services and interventions may be designed primarily for the majority of juveniles who are older, leaving inappropriate or inadequate services for the smaller number but arguably higher risk young offenders.

Similarly, continued attention toward female offenders is likely to yield better results overall. While the data failed to reveal anything particularly alarming regarding outcomes related to female

offenders, one should not assume that the juvenile court is adequately meeting the needs of females. Female offenders, like younger offenders, make up just a small proportion of the total cases handled by the juvenile court and may not always register when it comes time to develop programs, interventions, and outcome measures. The relatively positive outcomes for females may, in fact, reflect the system's general indifference to females.

Additional and better research is necessary to fully exploit the information made available by the outcome data. A great deal of data was left out of this exploratory analysis, including data related to offense, previous court involvement, school involvement, employment, mental health, secure detention, economic and demographic characteristics, placement histories, and specific interventions and treatment for each case. Each of the issues outlined above—as well as other issues not addressed in this report—should be the subject of further and more rigorous research. In this way, the outcome data used to develop report cards and manage day-to-day operations can be enhanced and leveraged to

improve system response to juveniles who re-offend.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Thomas, D. (2006). *How does the Juvenile Justice System Measure Up? Applying Performance Measures in Five Jurisdictions*. Technical Assistance to the Juvenile Court: Special Project Bulletin. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- <sup>2</sup> Bazemore, G. (2005). *Measuring What Really Matters in Juvenile Justice*. Alexandria, VA: American Prosecutor's Research Institute.
- <sup>3</sup> Jurisdictions that have implemented the performance measures strategy include the state of Pennsylvania—through the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges' Commission; the state of South Carolina—through the South Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice; several individual counties in Pennsylvania; Deschutes and Douglas counties in Oregon; Washtenaw and Marquette Counties in Michigan; Lucas County, Ohio; Belknap County, New Hampshire; and Kenosha County, Wisconsin.
- <sup>4</sup> At about the same time that Allegheny County was measuring juvenile probation performance, the Deschutes County (Oregon) Juvenile Department developed and issued its first juvenile justice report card.
- <sup>5</sup> Griffin, P. and Torbet, P. (Eds.). (2002). *Desktop Guide to Good Juvenile Probation Practice*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- <sup>6</sup> The Pennsylvania JJDPC makes funding recommendations to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency on the use of federal and state justice appropriations for juvenile justice related activities and programs and is the entity charged with preparing a biennial juvenile justice plan for the Governor on behalf of the Commonwealth.
- <sup>7</sup> Torbet, P. (2007). *Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice: Where Do We Stand?* Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- <sup>8</sup> Torbet, P. (2008). *Advancing Community Protection: Moving Toward Safe Communities*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.
- <sup>9</sup> The Community Intensive Supervision Program is designed to reduce the need for juveniles to be removed from their homes and placed in residential programs. CISP also provides aftercare services for male offenders returning to the community after placement.
- <sup>10</sup> Bender, V. and King, M. (2006). *Advancing Accountability: Moving Toward Victim Reparation*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

## Young Offenders: What the Research Says

The research is pretty clear on the subject—juveniles who get an early start on their delinquency careers, are at high risk for continued delinquency and long careers. The research is also clear about how best to handle young offenders—early intervention is important. Mullis and his colleagues report that young chronic offenders may exhibit unique personal and contextual characteristics that require greater attention by the juvenile justice system in terms of immediate interventions and follow-up services.\* To prevent an escalating offending pattern, it is important to intervene when early problem behaviors or precursors to delinquency first begin (e.g., school truancy, aggressive behaviors at school or home, substance abuse). There is evidence that early intervention in offender careers, particularly probation (but not incarceration), decreases the likelihood of recidivism. As offenders progress in a graduated sanctions system, treatments must become more structured and intensive to effectively deal with the more intractable problems that the more difficult and dangerous offenders present.\*\*

Research has long indicated that serious violent juvenile offenders are a distinct group of offenders who tend to start early and continue late in their offending. Many potential serious violent juvenile offenders below the age of 12 are not routinely processed in juvenile court and services in the community for such offenders appear unnecessarily fragmented leading to a lack of public accountability for young, potentially serious violent juvenile offenders. Many known predictors of serious violent juvenile offending may be incorporated into screening devices for the early identification of serious violent juvenile offenders. Researchers have concluded that it is never too early. Preventative interventions for young children at risk of becoming serious violent juvenile offenders are known to be effective and should be implemented at an early age. Nor is it ever too late. Interventions and sanctions for known serious violent juvenile offenders can reduce their risk of re-offending.\*\*\*

\* Mullis, R.L., Florida State University; Mullis, A.K., Florida State University; Cornille, T.A., Florida State University; Mary Ann Kershaw, University of South Florida; Adela Beckerman, Florida Memorial College; Daniel Perkins, Pennsylvania State University. (2005). *Young Chronic Offenders: A Case Study of Contextual and Intervention Characteristics*

\*\* Loeber, R. and Farrington, D.P., eds. (1997). *Never Too Early, Never Too Late: Risk Factors and Successful Interventions of Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders: Final Report of the Study Group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

\*\*\* Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (1998). *Juvenile Justice Bulletin: Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders*. Washington, D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

<sup>11</sup> Bender, V., King, M., Torbet, P. (2006). *Advancing Accountability: Moving Toward Victim Restoration*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, D., Hurst IV, H. (1997). *Accountability-Based Community Interventions Project for Allegheny County, Pennsylvania: Final Report*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

<sup>13</sup> Torbet, P. and Thomas, D. (2005). *Advancing Competency Development: A White Paper for Pennsylvania*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice

<sup>14</sup> For purposes of definition and conceptual clarity, clinical treatment modalities are not included in the definition of competency development. However, the white paper includes a discussion regarding the need for clinical treatment for mental illness, substance abuse, violence, and sexual aggression as different but related responses under the competency development goal.

<sup>15</sup> Puzanchera, C., Finnegan, T. and Kang, W. (2007). "Easy Access to Juvenile Populations" Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>

<sup>16</sup> Rieland, J. and Clark, K. (2006). *Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Department: 2006 Juvenile Probation Annual Report*. Pittsburgh, PA: Allegheny County Juvenile Probation Department

<sup>17</sup> In fact, black juveniles represent the majority of referrals to Allegheny County Juvenile Probation in 2006 for serious offenses, including aggravated assault (72%), aggravated assault on a teacher (91%), burglary (52%), drug charges (65%), firearm offenses (83%), robbery (84%), sex offenses (58%), and weapons in school (62%).

<sup>18</sup> Bender, V. and Griffin, P. (2005). *Pennsylvania Progress: Responding to Girls*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

<sup>19</sup> Zawacki, S. (2005). "Girls Involvement in Pennsylvania's Juvenile Justice System". *Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice Statistical Bulletin*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

## Contact Us

NCJJ, the research division of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), is a nonprofit organization that conducts research on a broad range of juvenile justice topics and provides technical assistance to the field. For additional information concerning the material in this report, contact:

Douglas Thomas  
Senior Research Associate  
National Center for Juvenile Justice  
3700 South Water Street, Suite 200  
Pittsburgh, PA 15203  
412-227-6950 (phone)  
412-227-6955 (fax)  
thomas@ncjj.org  
www.ncjj.org

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**National Center for Juvenile Justice**  
3700 South Water Street, Suite 200  
Pittsburgh, PA 15203