Panel Title: #16 Juvenile Diversion Programs

Paper Title: The Diversion of Juvenile Offenders: Initial Success and Replication of an Alternative to the Criminal Justice System.¹,²

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Before explicating the details of our efforts during the past several years to divert adolescents in legal jeopardy from further involvement in the criminal justice system, this research needs to be placed in its larger context. The larger project was aimed at examining the systematic use of college student nonprofessionals as human service deliverers in several social systems. The larger program included four sub-projects aimed at developmentally representative target groups, i.e., school children, emotionally disturbed adults, and senior citizens residing in a nursing home, in addition to adolescents in legal jeopardy. Each sub-project involved college student change agents as the mode of service delivery. The college students are paired with target individuals on a one-to-one basis. The total set of four projects was directed at questions of who works best with whom using what training techniques (Kiesler, 1969, 1971; Paul, 1969). In line with this overall goal, more specific project endeavors addressed the questions of volunteer selection, volunteer training, supervision strategies, resultant changes in the volunteers per se, resultant changes in the respective target populations, and the impact of the projects on the social service systems in which they were embedded.

In brief, each sub-project operated according to a triadic organizational model. Each was "staffed" by two principal investigators who supervised two graduate students, who shared or split responsibility for training/supervision of the nonprofessional change agents and the project's specific research. Each year the two graduate student co-directors were responsible for direct supervision of undergraduate student change agents. The research reported here is based on one of the four sub-projects which was aimed at diversion of alleged adolescent offenders from the criminal justice system (Seidman and Reppaport, 1974).

This work is predicated on several major values and related objectives (Fairweather, 1972; Reppaport, in press). First of all, a major concern is intervening as early as possible in the process to thwart an individual's continued envelopment by "rehabilitation" systems that almost inevitably seem to be detrimental to human welfare. The aim is to avoid or at least minimize the effects of "disculturation" (Goffman, 1961),
isolation, push-outs, etc. Related to this we endeavor to avoid "blaming the victim" (Ryan, 1971; Shur, 1973) or focusing on his/her deficits, but instead we attempt to identify and build upon an individual's assets and strengths (Rappaport, et.al., 1975; Rappaport, in press). The goal is to avoid placing the individual in a client or patient role. Instead, the focus is on fostering self-sufficiency by enabling the individual to become his/her own advocate (Davidson and Rapp, 1976; Sarason, 1976) and/or to learn critical negotiation skills in dealing with significant individuals and/or agencies in their particular social support networks. Finally, a central concern was in having an impact on the relevant social system, e.g., the juvenile justice system, so that the pertinent system prevents and/or minimizes the exacerbation of difficulties of future entrants into the system by searching for, developing and utilizing more beneficial alternatives. In short, the effort was directed at experimental social model building, rather than exclusively the individual level of change or assessment.

The field of juvenile delinquency prevention has been and is experiencing an unparalleled search for alternative intervention strategies (Gold, 1974). Although enthusiastic adherents for various approaches can be found, there is little basis for strong belief in the relative efficacy of contemporary approaches when compared to each other or when compared to more traditional strategies. While some community based programs have indicated promising results (Palmer, 1971; Palmer, 1975; Shore and Massimo, 1973), most of these programs are poorly evaluated and the majority continue to be operated out of highly traditional corrections facilities (Griggs and McCune, 1972).

From prior experiences in the local juvenile justice system as well as the relevant research literature it was apparent that the point at which a youngster reaches the probation stage was not the most ideal point in the system at which to intervene. Consequently, the project focused on gaining the cooperation and participation of the juvenile police officers primarily responsible for alleged offenders in two adjacent midwestern American cities (joint population - 90,000), as well as the county police department.
Over the course of a pilot semester and summer the staff worked in close collaboration with the relevant police officers in an attempt to develop an alternative that was sensible and potentially beneficial to the youth with whom we would be involved. In developing these relationships, a good deal of "sizing up" of each other occurred. It became apparent that there was a common concern with the juvenile officers of the two city police department centering on the apparent ineffectiveness of the juvenile court intervention methods. After the initial role negotiation phase, more attention was paid to specific plans for actual initiation of the project. The plans for referral procedures, pre and post assessment, random assignment, insuring volunteer involvement on the part of referred youth, protection of the constitutional rights of the youth, specification of our intervention methods, and detailing of our plans for community continuation of the project following cessation of the NIMH funds were all discussed. This time appeared critical in order to adequately work out the "bugs" in the measurement and referral procedures.

1973 - 1974

Following formal referral of 37 youths by the juvenile officers of the two metropolitan police departments, an interview was held with the youth and one of his or her parents. At that time a staff member explained the program to them, reviewing their constitutional rights under Gault and their rights as voluntary subjects; participation agreements and confidentiality agreements were signed at this time. There were no refusals. Following the introduction, the interviewer separately administered four assessment instruments to the youth and the parent. These instruments were the Marlow-Crowne Social Desirability Scale (1963), utilized to assess the positive description of one's behavior, a 16-item version of Rotter's Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (1966), revised specifically for the project to more adequately accommodate the reading level of the youth, a social labeling scale developed specifically for this project to assess the degree to which a youth identified him/herself as having been labeled delinquent or deviant by significant others in his/her life, and a 15-item behavioral checklist of commonly committed offenses.
designed to assess self-reported illegal activities in the prior three months. In addition, at the end of the interview, the youth was asked to nominate a close friend who would also be asked to complete the same assessment procedures, all of which asked questions about the referred youth. Following pre-assessment, the youth and his or her parents were informed as to whether they would be assigned to the program or whether they would be asked only to complete the post assessment approximately four months later. In other words, the pre-assessment was completed with the interviewer blind to eventual experimental condition.

In summary, pre-assessment consisted of youth, parent and youth-nominated peer verbal reports on four assessment instruments, all pertaining to the youth's behaviors and perceptions. At the time of termination, the four interview-based measures were re-administered to all three sources. In addition, police, court, and school records were searched, covering the time periods one year prior to, and throughout the duration of the program; police and court records were also gathered for a two-year follow-up period.

In each case, referral to the program was accomplished as an alternative to a juvenile court petition being filed. The youths referred to the program had the following characteristics: 28 were males, 9 were females; 28 were white and 9 were black; the age range was 11 to 17 years with the mean age being 14.1 years; an average youth was in the eighth grade; the mean number of police contacts in the year prior to referral was 2.16. The 37 youths were randomly assigned to the experimental program or a control group. More specifically, randomization followed a procedure resulting in two-thirds of the youths being assigned to the experimental condition with stratification for sex, race, police department, and order of referral. Since goals for a given youth might be accomplished at any time during the program, it was expected that date of termination of contact between the college students and their referred youth would vary on an individual basis. In order to insure a consistent pre to post interval for experimental and control groups, control youths were randomly yoked with experimental youths, and each member of the experimental-control pair was evaluated over the same time interval.
The college students were assigned to youths following the completion of pre-assessment. Every effort was made to match student and youth on the basis of mutual interests, race, and sex. The student initiated the contact by phone and thereafter was involved working with and for the youth six to eight hours per week for an average of four and one-half months (range three to five months). Intervention duration was determined by a goal attainment procedure (Kiersuk and Sherman, 1968).

Strategies used by students can best be described as a conglomerate effort involving the ingredients of relationship skills, behavioral contracting, and child advocacy. The contracting component involved the assessment and modification of the interpersonal contingencies in the life of the youths, (e.g., with parents, teachers). The specific methods employed involved the establishment of written interpersonal agreements between the youth and significant others, as mediated by the student, according to the procedures outlined by Stuart (Stuart, 1971; Stuart and Lott, 1972; Stuart and Tripodi, 1973). In addition to the enhancement of specific behavioral changes on the part of the youth and significant others in his or her life, it was necessary in most cases to mobilize needed community resources for the youth in order to insure durability of desired change, and to provide legitimate avenues for attainment of the youth's goals. The strategies employed have recently been labeled child advocacy and involve the targeting of community resources such as educational, vocational, or recreational programs for change. The specifics of these procedures have been reviewed by Kahn, et.al. (1973) and further detailed in a recent paper by Davidson and Rapp (1976).

**Results**

There were no statistically significant changes on any of the verbal report measures either from the adolescent's, his/her parents' of his/her peers' perspectives. An apparently dramatic program impact on the youths involved was evidenced primarily by police and court records and an isolated trend in school records. **Police and court records.** Figure one depicts the differences between experimental and control subjects during the year prior to referral, during the intervention interval, and during the first and second year follow-up intervals since termination.
During the one year period prior to referral there were no significant differences in the number of police contacts, seriousness of police contacts (accomplished by a scheme developed by Sellin and Wolfgang (1964) modified to accommodate uniquely juvenile offenses), or the number of petitions filed with the court. As you can see from Figure 1, all of the differences during the intervention, first year and second year follow-up intervals favor the experimental group, in that they have fewer contacts of lesser severity and fewer petitions filed than the control subjects. Most of these differences are significant at conventional levels, although a few only exhibit a trend. When we collapse across the approximately 27-month interval from time of referral through a two year follow-up period, the number of police contacts ($F = 10.15, p = .003$), severity of police contacts ($F = 12.07, p = .001$), and the number of petitions filed ($F = 5.48, p = .025$) strongly corroborate the efficacy of the experimental program. Controlling for prior level of "difficulty" of the youths by employing the severity of police contacts during the year prior to referral as a covariate leaves the results unaffected.

If we were to stringently define success as no further contact with the police and a failure as one or more contacts with the police, we again find the results to be quite powerful, despite the time interval (see Table 1). While an increasing number of experimental subjects have further contact with the police, there was no substantial increase in the average number of contacts, severity of contacts or petitions filed with the passage of time.

School records. An encouraging trend in the school data involves the percentage of youths still enrolled in school at termination. All youths were enrolled at the time of referral; 71% of youths in the experimental group were still enrolled at termination while only 50% of the control group remained in school. The remainder of
both groups had either voluntarily dropped out or were extruded through suspension procedures. This trend, however, did not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance.

Juvenile Justice System

The total number of cases in which court petitions were filed by the police on any juvenile (regardless of program referral) were recorded on a month-by-month basis for the year prior to program implementation and during the months of program operation. The mean proportion of cases in which petitions were filed during the program operation was less than that of a corresponding period the previous year.

During program operation, from September, 1973, to March, 1974, only 11% of all juvenile cases investigated involved the filing of petitions. This is in contrast to the parallel period during the year (September, 1972, to March, 1973), when 16% of all cases investigated resulted in petitions filed. This occurs at a time when yearly averages were on a steady rise. An analysis of variance for time series designs (Gentile, et.al., 1972) was performed utilizing the two successive years of September to March monthly means as data points. The results were significant ($F = 8.41$, $df = 1/10$, $p < .01$).

1974 - 1975

In planning the second year of operation, the data indicated reduced recidivism rates and the failure to achieve attitudinal changes during the intervention interval in the prior year. With the hope of examining the replicability of the program's effort on the so-called "hard" recidivism data, one major change and one major addition were made in an effort to more clearly understand some of the processes related to this success. First, the training and supervisory orientations were separated into strictly behavioral contracting and advocacy. The three small training/supervisory groups with a conglomerate orientation were changed to two sets of two small groups with each set exclusively receiving either a behavioral contracting orientation or child advocacy orientation. While all groups had the same pair of
co-supervisors, the college students were exposed to distinctively different training manuals, mastery evaluations, and content of supervision. Supervisory behavior was monitored weekly. Obviously, this separation was intended to feret out differential effects of behavioral contracting, child advocacy, and "treatment as usual" conditions. The pre-post interval for all groups was 18 weeks. A second major foci was to gain a detailed monitoring and understanding of the critical components of events in the lives of the youth, the components of the intervention approaches, and the salient features of the training and supervision sessions. Given the previously uncharted nature of this particular endeavor, it was also necessary to assess the outcroppings of these processes in a very exploratory fashion. The goal of this component of the research design was to both provide behaviorally specific data about these domains and to allow sufficient breadth in scope of the events assessed to provide ecological validity for the results.

Process interviews were conducted at four, ten, and sixteen weeks after referral with the target youth, their parents, the volunteer student (experimentals only), and the student's supervisor (experimentals only). A rational empirical strategy was employed to construct 33 process scales reflective of critical life events, perceptions of change, characteristics of the interventions, and performance in training and supervision.

Several changes in the pre-post measures were made. First, the Gough-Peterson (1952) Socialization scale was used as an indicant of socialization. Second, the recently developed Nowicki-Strickland (1973) Locus of Control Scale was used as a measure of Rotter's notions of internal-external locus of control. Third, the card sort procedures developed by Gold (1970) were used as a measure of self-reported delinquency. Fourth, the social labeling scale described earlier was maintained. All questionnaire based measures were administered to the target youth, one of his/her parents, and a peer nominated as a close friend in a second interview following the referral interview.

Thirty-six youths were referred to the project (33 males and 3 females). The mean age was 14.5. Twenty-one of the youth were white and 15 were black. In terms
of the social characteristics of the youth's families, all youth came from lower to lower-middle class families. On the average, the group had 2.22 police contacts in the year prior to program referral. The type of offenses for which they had been arrested literally ranged from curfew violations to attempted murder. Following the completion of pre-assessment the youth were randomly assigned (according to similar procedures outlined for the 1973-74 project) to one of three conditions: behavioral contracting, child advocacy, or "treatment as usual control".

Results

In brief, the results of the pre-post experimental component (an 18 week interval) of the design provide a pattern very similar to the data from the 1973-74 project. Namely, the verbal report data regardless of instrument or source failed to yield any significant findings for condition, time, or the interaction term.

Police and court records. Figure 2 indicates that the results of the 1973-74 project are strongly replicated at each time interval (i.e., through a first year follow-up point, to date) and on all recidivism and severity of recidivism variables. Furthermore, there do not appear to be any significant differences between the two experimental conditions - behavioral contracting and advocacy. Again, controlling for prior level of "difficulty" of the youths by employing the severity of police contacts during the year prior to referral as a covariate leaves the results essentially unaffected.

Again, stringently defining failure as one or more further contacts with the police following referral as a failure, results are quite powerful during the intervention interval. Table 2 shows that there does appear to be some deterioration at the first year follow-up point, but the experimental conditions taken together still exhibit significantly less recidivism than the controls ($X^2_{cor.} = 6.30, p<.05$). However, advocacy subjects compared with controls manifested only a trend toward less recidivism ($X^2_{cor.} = 3.23, p<.10$).
School records. Turning to school records, while analysis of grade point average failed to yield any significant results, analysis of attendance rates indicated a maintenance of school attendance among both experimental groups across time and a highly significant decrement at a two month follow-up point in the control group.

Process analyses. The basic design used to analyze the process dimension data was a three by two by three analysis of variance with repeated measures. The three factors included were condition, success versus failure, and the three process time periods. A success-failure criteria was determined for all youth by categorizing and youth who had one or more further police contacts and/or attended school less than an average of two days per week as a failure. Youth who remained out of trouble and stayed involved in school to some extent were categorized successful.

Table 3 presents a summary of the findings of the process and outcome data. These results lead to the beginning formulations of multiple contingency model of program operation and impact. First, for all conditions it was apparent that the success-failure criteria was closely related to what has been described as socially acceptable or sanctioned role involvement. The youth who end up in further trouble with the police and completely uninvolved in school, are characterized by low levels of involvement at home, with the school system, and with the employment market. Second, two of the intervention scales were specifically constructed as checklists of the model intervention conditions to assess the compliance of the volunteers in carrying out the prescribed intervention. Both experimental groups were assessed on the advocacy and contracting scales. The results strongly indicate that the two interventions were distinct. In other words, those in the contracting condition carried out their interventions according to the contracting model and not the advocacy strategy and vice versa.
Most striking, however, was the differential pattern of interventions displayed by different success and failure groups in both conditions related to the events in the youth's life. Youth who were more involved in socially approved roles received interventions focusing on multiple life domains. In addition for successful youth the intervention more closely followed the prescribed model. The interventions of those groups were characterized by higher levels of various intervention dimensions following from their intervention models. The contracting success group was observed to focus on the family and on the youth's behavior in school. On the other hand, the successful advocacy group focused on employment, the youth's friends, and changes in the school per se.

The contracting group which failed to meet with success, tended to focus on changing the youth within the family across time. In the school area, the intervention of the contracting group started with an intense effort which quickly desists. Since they showed increases over time in employment interventions and legal interventions, it is most likely that they began reacting to the demands of the justice system directly. These events coincided with the time the youth get into further official trouble with the police. In addition, they indirectly responded to the early failure in the school area through attempts at employment. In other words, they remained relatively focused on the youth in the family throughout. Their attempts at school intervention were replaced by an unproductive search for employment. Apparently, they began responding to the juvenile justice system's need for information, reports, etc., when the youth becomes reinvolved in the justice system.

The advocacy failure interventions showed a somewhat different pattern in response to similar patterns of life events. Namely, the target youth in this group were reinvolved in trouble almost immediately (by Wave I process assessment) and consequently the intervention was characterized by responses to these legal problems. This took the direct form of engaging in interventions in the justice system as well as intensifying efforts towards obtaining a job for the youth. Essentially, the advocacy
failure group included no intervention in the family domain and only minimal school intervention. In other words, the advocacy failure interventions focused from the beginning, both by actual life events and the prescriptions of the advocacy model, on responding to the justice system.

It is apparent then that the outcomes observed in the experimental and control youth were related not only to group assignment but to an apparent set of critical events. Given that the relationship of the youth to important social systems showed some deterioration following referral to the project, successful outcomes are unlikely to result. These patterns of interaction were observed much more frequently in the case of controls. When the interventions of the experimental youth met with initial success both in terms of their impact on the youth and the degree to which they can get things going in multiple areas of the youth's life, the program provides a stabilizing influence.

Conclusions and Future Directions

The Community-Based Adolescent Diversion Project as an alternative to the traditional juvenile justice system has demonstrated efficacy in reducing the rates and severity of official delinquency in two successive years with two independent groups of youngsters. Presently, these changes have endured through a two and a one year follow-up point for the first and second set of participants, respectively. In the most recent phases of this project attention has been turned to dissemination of the project to local agencies. Local professionals have now been trained in its operation. As the project continues, cooperation has developed between police and the new program professionals such that the local community now has a viable alternative to court action for youthful offenders.

Providing alternatives which avoid the entanglement of youth in the legal system, it will be recalled, was a major motivation for this work from its onset. Although the stringent evaluation involving randomly assigning some adolescents to a control group can no longer be justified, arrangements have now been made with the local agency responsible for program administration for a continual monitoring of the results of
the intervention for youth who participate. This should provide on-going feedback about success and failure, and enable continual readjustment of procedures, rather than program stagnation.

Before the project can be disseminated to other locations it is necessary for other interventionists to carryout similar evaluations in their own locale in order to test its efficacy in different communities (e.g., those of varying size, differential police procedures, and community resources).

There remain a number of unanswered questions. Prime among them is "Why does it work?" What are the necessary ingredients for an effective intervention of this nature? For example, are college students (or college age people) necessary, or can similar programs operate by using older community volunteers? How crucial are the various contingencies contracted for in such a program? How salient is the intensity and format of training and supervision? What occurs in the lives of the youth and their social support networks one or two years following referral that maintains their continued non-involvement with the juvenile justice system? While a variety of hunches about these and other questions could be put forth, further replication work is currently being undertaken to explore and unravel the answers to these questions as systematically as possible. The hope is that others will join in the quest to develop, implement, and systematically evaluate similar program designed to reduce the negative impact of the criminal justice system on young people. In this regard, while programs such as the one described here may be of value for some youth, additional careful evaluations of diversion alternatives and proposals for the elimination of uniquely juvenile status offenses from the realm of crime (c.f. Schur, 1973) must be undertaken. It is only through multi-level interventions which combine such institutional changes with the kind of treatment alternatives suggested here that there is hope for significant impact on the problem of delinquency.
Figure 1. Police and court record data for first year of project.
Table 1

Success\textsuperscript{a} and Failure\textsuperscript{b} of Project and Control Youth
During Several Time Periods Subsequent to Referral

(First Year of Project)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>During Intervention Interval</th>
<th>First Year Follow-Up Point</th>
<th>Second Year Follow-Up Point</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Project Youth</td>
<td>( S ) \quad F</td>
<td>Project Youth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Youth</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control Youth</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{a}Success (\( S \)) = no further police contacts
\textsuperscript{b}Failure (\( F \)) = one or more additional police contacts
Figure 2. Police and court record data for second year of project.
### Table 2

Success\(^a\) and Failure\(^b\) of Behavioral Contracting, Advocacy and Control Youth

During Two Intervals Subsequent to Referral

(Second Year of Project)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>During Intervention Interval</th>
<th>First Year Follow-Up Point</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>S</strong></td>
<td><strong>F</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>B.C.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adv.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cont.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Success (S) = no further police contacts

\(^b\)Failure (F) = one or more additional police contacts
Figure 3. Percentage of school attendance – second year of Project.
### TABLE 3

Relationships of the Multiple Contingency Model  
(Second Year of Project)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavioral Contracting</th>
<th>Child Advocacy</th>
<th>Control</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Success</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Involved in socially approved roles.</td>
<td>1. Involved in socially approved roles.</td>
<td>1. Involved in family and school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Initiating contracting model.</td>
<td>3. Initiative of advocacy model.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Working on changes in the family area.</td>
<td>4. Working with the youth's friends.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Working on changes in the youth's school performance.</td>
<td>5. Working on changes in the school system.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| **Failure**              |                |         |
| 1. Uninvolved in socially approved roles. | 1. Uninvolved in socially approved roles. | 1. Involved in job seeking. |
| 3. Initial trouble initiating contracting model. | 3. Initial trouble initiating contracting model. |         |
| 4. Responding to juvenile justice system. | 4. Responding to juvenile justice system. |         |
| 5. Attempting to get youth employed. | 5. Attempting to get youth employed. |         |
| 6. Family intervention focused on youth per se and minimal school intervention. | 6. No family and minimal school intervention. |         |
References


Rappaport, J., Davidson, W.S., Wilson, M., & Mitchell, A. Alternatives to blaming the victim or the environment: Our places to stand have not moved the earth. American Psychologist, 1975, 30, 523-528.


Notes


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