First Responders and Lasting Backup: DEC as A Door into a Continuum of Care

Sid Gardner

6th Annual Statewide Drug Endangered Children Conference
LaCrosse, WI
July 27-28, 2011

The Trigger and the Follow-up

• The first response: an investigation, followed by an arrest
  – That should be the trigger for a systemic response, rather than a simple referral
• Then—a good handoff, followed by lasting efforts to track and reduce potential harm to children
  – Law enforcement and the judicial system as the front door and the monitors of accountability
Arrests Involving Drugs and Alcohol

- Total arrests: (2009) 13.7 million
- Arrests involving drugs or alcohol
  - Arrests for drug abuse violations, 2007: 1,645,500 adults; 195,700 juveniles
  - 55-82% of prisoners tested positive for drug use in 10 ADAM sites (2009)
  - An estimated 37% of state prisoners serving time for a violent offense in 2004 said they were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the offense [382,368]
  - In 2002, local jail inmates reported alcohol use at the time of the offense in 33% of all offenses
  - An estimated 16% of convicted jail inmates committed their offense to get money for drugs

Arrests with drugs or alcohol that involve children

- 1.5 million children have a parent who is currently in state or federal prison
- The majority of incarcerated parents used drugs one month before their offense and were in prison for violent offenses or drug trafficking
- Nearly half of all state and federal prisoners, or 700,000 inmates, have at least one minor child
- Between 1991 and 1999, the number of children with an incarcerated parent increased by 50 percent; this number has likely increased

Of 13.7 million total arrests,

- Drug abuse violations 1,663,582
- Driving under the influence 1,440,409
- Liquor laws 570,333
- Drunkenness 594,300
From this data, a conclusion:

- One out of six arrests involves a child directly or indirectly affected by drug or alcohol use
- Two million-plus opportunities to recognize and respond to harm done to children

What happens after the arrest?

- Does it trigger a full-scale effort to prevent further harm and to intervene when children need developmental services?
- Or do we just make a referral?
- Who follows up on the referral?
- Who keeps track of children exposed to drug and alcohol abuse and the trauma that goes with it? Is there a community-wide, strategic response—or just a referral?
- It doesn’t end with child safety—that’s only the first chapter in the book

The Silos of Services
Fragmentation is too often the Norm

- Systems with different definitions of the client
- Systems with different eligibility criteria
- Systems with different training and professional perspectives
- Systems with “stay inside the box” rules
- Systems based on the myth of self-sufficiency: “we can do it alone,” “we don’t need help,” “we can’t get any help”

A referral isn’t a response

- Agencies don’t always respond
  - Eligibility, waiting lists, cultural barriers, referral somewhere else
- Parents don’t always go where referred
- Children often can’t get to a screening or assessment

Therefore, follow-up to referrals is as important as the referral itself

The five essentials

- Treatment for substance abuse
- Treatment of maternal depression
- A response to domestic violence
- Services to promote child development for high-risk children who may experience lifelong trauma
- Support for parents who were themselves abused as children

How can all the systems working together ensure that these services are provided and monitored for effectiveness, while holding parents accountable and making timely decisions about removal when parents don’t respond?
The Tests of Effective Collaboration:

- A presumption of harm to children if drugs or alcohol are involved in an arrest involving children
- A need for initial screening for risk and harm
- A good handoff to a genuine system of care
- Follow-up with continued, developmentally appropriate screening and assessment for harmful effects
- A continuing role for law enforcement and the judicial system in ensuring that an effective, accountable system of care exists
- Shared outcomes among all the agencies serving parents and children—with annual review of progress

Personal accountability & Community accountability

- How do we hold parents accountable for raising children responsibly?
- How do we hold systems and the whole community responsible for helping parents and children who deserve help?
  - Is there a community scorecard that annually measures what’s getting better—and what isn’t?
  - What do we care enough to count?
  - Which children do we track over time?
- The standard: reasonable efforts by agencies to respond to parents’ needs; reasonable efforts by parents to remain compliant, complete treatment, and respond to their children’s needs

A reality test

- Are we simply making referrals to the very agencies and caseworkers who have been hit with the worst cutbacks in the past 2-3 years?
- Handoffs to agencies with increasing caseloads and decreasing caseworkers are not good practice
- Are we making a handoff to the players on “the injured reserve”?
Reality test II

- How do we handle incentives and sanctions?
- Criminal court has the time-limited sanctions of jail time, drug testing, and probation
- Dependency court has the life-long sanctions and incentives of termination of parental rights—or reunification of parents with their children
- Which may be most effective?

Screens, ladders, and safety nets: a checklist

- Do we work across agencies to screen children for risk and harm?
- Do we provide parents and children with ladders to upgrade their parenting and their learning abilities?
- Do we have a safety net for parents and children who need extra attention?

Judicial Leadership can:

- Ensure that questions about child and family status are asked at intake
- Ensure that court information systems track clients who are parents and the status of their children
- Ensure an annual accountability review of the comparative outcomes of agencies funded to serve children and families
- Ensure adequate resources from a full array of state and local agencies to achieve intended results
- Ensure that reasonable efforts are required of both parents and the agencies that serve them
- Ensure effective links between criminal courts and dependency/family courts

Does the court do all of these?
First response needs lasting backup

- The initial response can be excellent, but the key to reducing harm to children is **backup, follow-up, and checkup**
  - How does the rest of the community back up law enforcement when officers find children at risk?
  - How well do we follow up once a referral is made?
  - How are we doing in providing services to those children and families involved in an arrest or investigation? How do we get our “annual checkup?”

Register Now

**Putting the Pieces Together for Children and Families**


Wednesday, September 14 - Friday, September 16, 2011

Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center on the Potomac—National Harbor, MD


Resources and Contacts

Sid Gardner
E-mail: sgardner@cffutures.org
Phone: (714) 505-3525
Children and Family Futures
4940 Irvine Blvd.
Irvine, CA. 92620