

# FAILURE BY FRAGMENTATION

**By Sid Gardner**

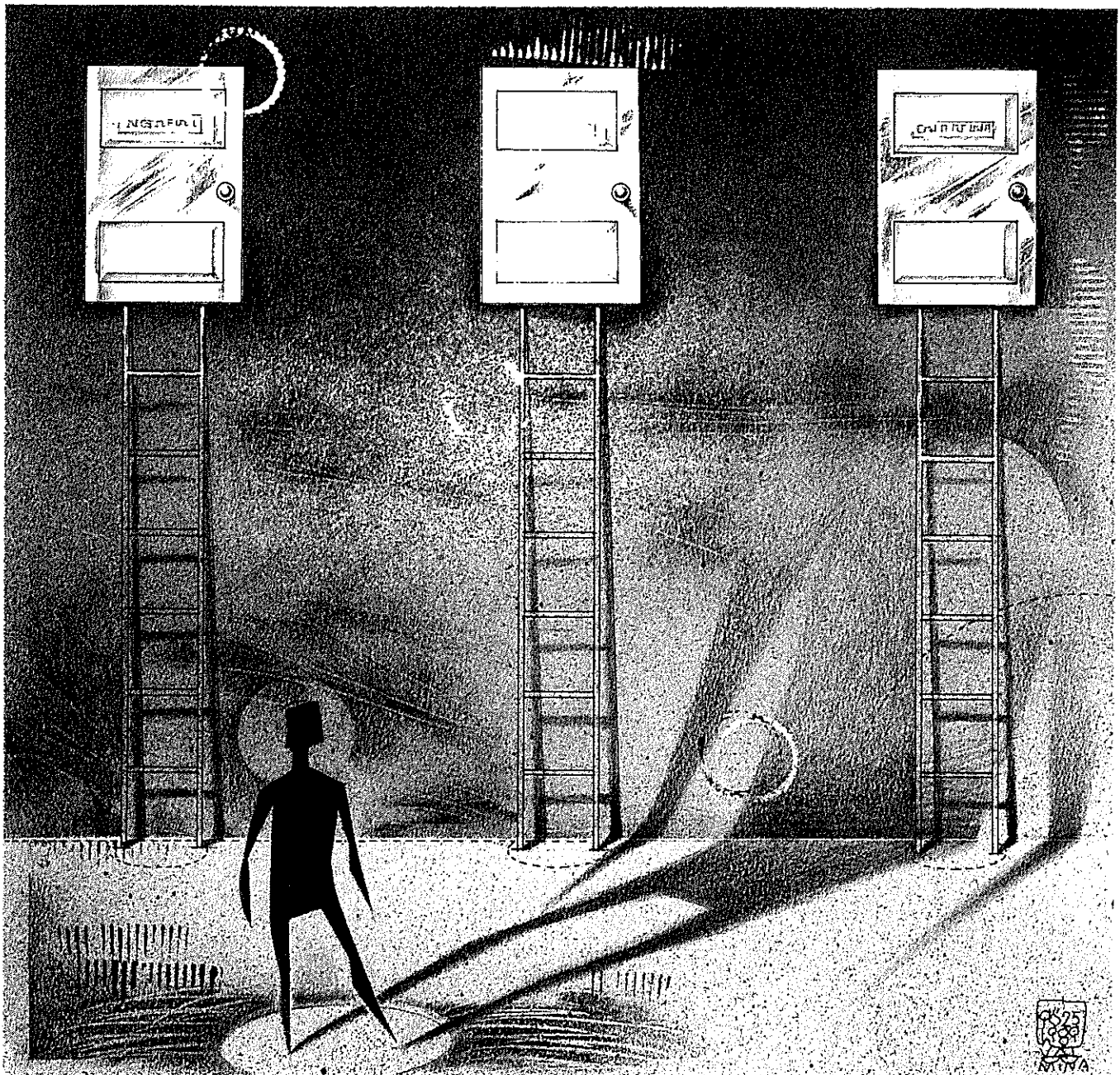


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**Untouched by well-meaning but isolated youth programs, too many of California's young people slide toward adult lives of illiteracy, joblessness and addiction. One compelling solution: weaving current programs into a collaborative new network that can help break the fall into despair.**

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**R**ICARDO had problems. His teacher knew he had the ability to be a B student or better, but he had skipped classes 25 days last semester, and when he came, he sat quietly and said little. His homework was handed in only about half the time, and his grades were far below what his intelligence test scores indicated he could do.

Ricardo's homeroom teacher asked the school's guidance counselor to talk to him. After a few days, a slip came to Ricardo in first period asking him to see the counselor. He never went, and the counselor had a caseload of 175 students, so she was fully occupied with the ones who did come. The teacher also asked Ricardo if he wanted to attend an after-school tutorial program, but he said he didn't have time and the teacher wasn't able to follow up the suggestion.

Since Ricardo's mother was a welfare recipient, his family was known to the welfare agency. His older brother had a criminal record, and four years ago, a juvenile justice program had targeted younger siblings of arrested minors, so Ricardo was also in its files. The program had been cut back, however, and no one had ever seen Ricardo.

A United Way agency in Ricardo's neighborhood offered after-school recreation programs. Ricardo had dropped in several times, and the counselor there had entered his name in the records as a youth he wanted to get to know, seeing his obvious intelligence and his quietness. But outreach was difficult for the agency and the counselor had not been able to do any home visits.

Because Ricardo had worked at a summer job last year, the local job training agency had kept records on his performance at a downtown printing shop. He really liked the job and worked hard at it. Ricardo enjoyed making money that was his own for the first time. He had also been tested before the summer job began, and had attended career orientation classes as part of the summer training. But the agency had not yet worked out how it would get information about

summer job performance back to the high schools, and Ricardo's work history was unknown to anyone in his school.

Ricardo also had a younger sister, and she had been abused by their mother's boyfriend. One of her classmates complained anonymously about this abuse. Since no life-threatening circumstances existed, overworked child protective service workers opened a file, but it remained inactive. It bothered Ricardo that he knew something strange was going on, but couldn't do anything about it.

### **The Fragmentation Dilemma**

**T**HE problems of California's youth are large and growing. In my 25 years in children and youth services, I have seen scores of the thousands of young people like Ricardo who are at risk of not achieving their full potential—and many are even more at risk. The headlines chronicling the youth problem are familiar: high rates of school dropout, unemployment, gang membership, juvenile incarceration, drug abuse, delinquency and teen pregnancy. Ricardo's is a composite portrait, presented instead of an actual youth in an actual city, to bypass the finger-pointing and scapegoating that signifies our frustration with these trends. Unfortunately, his complex problems are typical. So are his community's offerings.

There are many programs in every community in California designed to help youth like Ricardo and their families: the county welfare agency, the county child protection agency, the juvenile courts, the youth employment programs, the health and mental health programs, the child care and early childhood development agencies, private agencies funded by the United Way and other sources, the city recreation and parks department, and dozens of programs within the public schools. Ricardo and his family are being "served" by at least nine agencies—but no

one agency truly takes responsibility for helping Ricardo, and separately they fail to treat him as a whole person. They are paid to treat each of a variety of "problems"—poor grades or absenteeism or child abuse, for instance—that add up to his being at risk. And they have no way to get beyond these symptoms to who he is as a whole person, and so he moves, lost, from one agency to another.

What is the moral of a story like this? Liberals use the story to argue for more money, more programs. The fate of young people like Ricardo illustrates society's indifference, they say. Conservatives, on the other hand, point to the already substantial bureaucracy designed to "help." They cite the system's failures as evidence that such efforts are doomed—wasteful and useless.

In my own view, both morals are wrong. Liberals are wrong because they argue for more money for programs but don't feel compelled to document how these efforts are actually helping the whole child. So are conservatives who place responsibility on the family and say that society should stop wasting its money.

In fact, we are ultimately failing our children not only because we haven't invested in them, but also because as communities we have failed to work together to hold ourselves accountable for the substantial resources we do invest—and for the outcomes of our most vulnerable residents. Eventually, programs and money will be critical. But not when program fragmentation is the rule; more isolated programs only exacerbate the fragmentation.

Fortunately, at this point in California and across the nation dawns the beginning—some would call it a renaissance—of a movement that is neither blindly conservative nor liberal on these counts. It goes by a variety of bureaucratic names—"program linkages," "service integration," and "interagency coordination"—but I call it "collaboration." I am a part of that movement and have been for many years.

## **“The system as a whole is so fundamentally flawed that huge amounts of dollars dumped in wouldn’t do much good.”**

We are a funny lot, swimming I think upstream against the tide of human nature by trying to broaden, rather than narrow, to link, rather than divide, the causes of and solutions to children’s problems in this society. The attitudes of this growing group were well captured recently by Stanford University’s Michael Kirst, who heads Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) and edited the recent ground-breaking report “Conditions of Children in California.” After three years of research, Kirst concluded that tenacious collaboration alone will not make up for our societal underinvestment in children. In some areas, such as children’s mental health and homelessness, collaboration takes a back seat to the greater problem of a sheer lack of resources and funding. But without collaboration, more investment would not be much help. “The system as a whole is so fundamentally flawed that huge amounts of dollars dumped in wouldn’t do much good,” he says. At the root of the flaw is the mentality of isolated programs.

### **The Program Mentality Explored**

**H**ELPING children is inherently good. They can’t vote, often can’t speak up for themselves, and don’t usually command the resources—especially if they are from poor or broken families—needed to assure a productive future. To help a child is among the highest forms of human charity, and countless religious and ethical precepts reinforce that message.

But our help nearly always takes the form of isolated new programs because of some peculiarly American traits. Americans are problem-solvers. Our country’s only native philosophy is pragmatism, and pragmatism dictates that when we see a problem, we form a committee, start a program that addresses that problem—and it is

solved. Evidence of illiteracy leads to a new literacy program. Evidence of child abuse results in a new shelter. Evidence of delinquency leads to legislation for after-school programs. Legislators, businesspeople, foundation and agency heads narrow the symptom down and scramble for resources to help a few dozen or hundred out of a community’s thousands of at-risk kids and families. We ignore the underlying causes of problems and fail to see how they are interrelated—and how solutions must be coordinated. In doing so, we also ignore options to strengthen existing programs or to develop links among programs.

There are other explanations for this “program mentality.” State legislators like separate programs because they spread the credit around. Many school districts in California have dozens of separate programs for dropout, pregnant, challenged, non-English-speaking and other children, all mandated and funded by the state and federal governments. These were created as honest attempts to help young people. But each also allowed politicians to take credit for “responding” to a problem—without making anyone accountable for Ricardo’s success. Programs are what legislatures are all about. Few subjects bore most legislative committees more quickly than discussion of linking the programs they created. Putting together pieces of an old puzzle isn’t as fun as inventing a whole new game.

Likewise, professionals on the ground level have clear incentives to promote narrow programs. Whether in social work, education, health, mental health, child development, higher education or job training, we accumulate rewards, promotions, and recognition through specialization—not by doing interagency liaison work or becoming generalists. We are trained to believe that only our specialized approach can solve the problems of the specific children who concern us. Under this solipsism, we believe it is our mission to develop and lobby for new programs organ-

ized around our specialty. Reports Lisbeth Schorr in her recent book *Within Our Reach*, “Complex intertwined problems are sliced into manageable but trivial parts.” Adds Brian Cahill, president-elect of the Los Angeles Children’s Roundtable: “The major barrier to a comprehensive system of children’s services...may be tunnel vision within the field of children’s services.”

Finally, the “system” may seem so inflexible and the needs so urgent that we bypass the more important—and difficult—task of systemic change or of making old programs more effective. When we are moved by the discovery of a new (or renamed) target group like abused children, dropouts, teen parents, crack babies and other youth at risk of a dim future, our desperation and intensity lead us to create new, narrowly defined programs *just for those children*. “We can’t trust the regular classroom (or welfare department, or United Way, or police department, or hospital) to help *these* kids,” we say. “They need a special program.”

It is a powerful sentiment—and sometimes right on target. For instance, because core existing school programs have yet to be reformed to welcome and educate immigrants, California needs a strong network of new programs to ensure adequate education for newcomers—and some groups have begun to tackle this task. But beyond creating the programs, communities and educators must link them with the many other agencies that serve these youngsters and also insist that entire schools become responsive to immigrant students. Creating “needed” new programs should not allow us to avoid taking on the inertia of the status quo.

The bottom line: human nature relishes the excitement and momentum of building something uncomplicated that has comprehensible, immediate results. But we end up contributing our money, and more important, our political and spiritual energy, to building a fragmented “non-sys-

tem” of well-meaning, specialized programs. A cogent sign of this lack of system: not a single city in California—all which routinely request more state money to combat youth problems—has any idea how much is being spent now, or where it is being spent.

### Collaboration Defined

**S**EEING the nature of a problem sometimes suggests the outline of its solution. Fragmentation, as I and others like me view it, must be addressed through collaboration and accountability for results.

In the movement toward collaboration, different communities are pathfinding in different ways. Dayton, Ohio, (pop. 240,000) became one of the first communities in the U.S. to count accurately all the money spent combating youth problems. In California’s Ventura County, many agencies came together to stabilize the lives of mentally ill youth before family breakdown and institutionalization were needed. Likewise, in San Bernardino, a carefully designed Children’s Services Network has coordinated the fund-raising of different agencies, breeding collaboration and increasing resources at the same time.

It is difficult to define ideal collaboration since no community has yet fully linked, counted and evaluated its youth services. But basically, genuine collaboration entails the creation of a community process to plan a service system for children, youth and families in which no new programs are started without participation by existing programs; schools and public and private agencies (reflecting current management philosophy) are linked horizontally in partnerships, rather than stacked vertically or allowed to float separately; funding is “pooled” rather than categorized to avoid turf protection; the many services needed by a child like Ricardo are “brokered” by

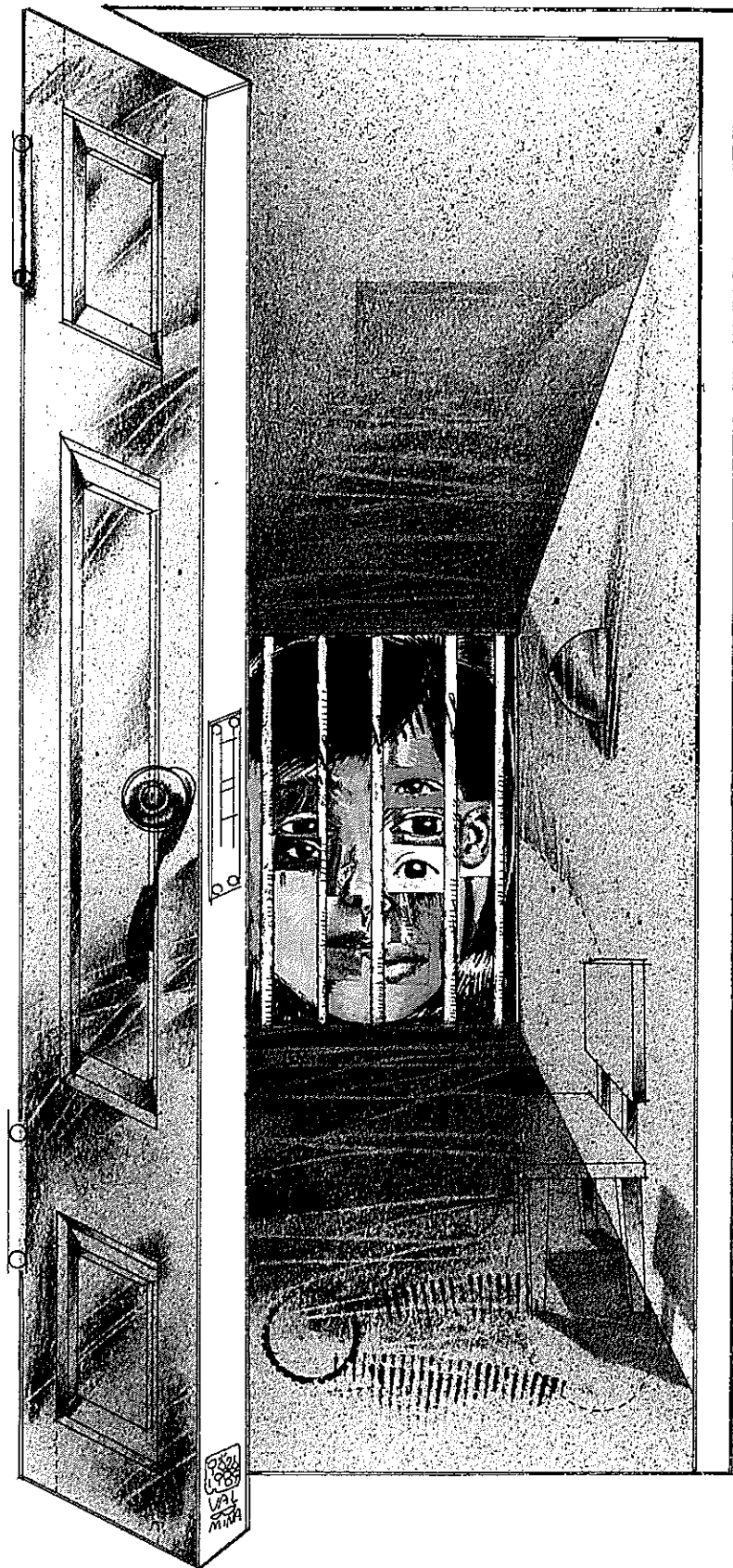


ILLUSTRATION © VAL MINK

### Wasted potential: unhappy consequences for California’s future

**“A community needs to ‘keep score’ on what  
is happening to its youth.  
Without goalposts, the game doesn’t mean much.”**

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one agency or a cross-agency “case manager”; employers are important players; and publicized annual indicators of youth “outcomes” allow citizens to hold political and agency leaders accountable for results. Many communities in California are beginning to work piecemeal toward this definition of collaboration. Solano County, northeast of San Francisco, is one.

Pat Nicodemus was a foster parent and member of the Juvenile Justice Commission in 1982 when she was asked by the Solano County welfare director to look at the county’s emergency foster care system. The county had just been forced to close an emergency children’s shelter, and the community was up in arms about the fate of abused, abandoned and neglected children. Nicodemus quickly became disturbed about what she was learning. She knew that foster children needed much more than what the strapped child welfare department could offer—typically doctors, mental health services, consistent schooling, job training and placement, and college readiness programs. But the more she looked, the more she realized how these children were isolated in child welfare, with little help from outside. “We had no idea where to get resources or who to contact for help for these children,” says Nicodemus. “It was as bad at the line-worker level as it was at the top.”

Nicodemus took up the challenge of collaboration with considerable political skill. Quickly, she gathered key agency heads—“the movers and shakers with the commitment and the energy to do something about it,” she says—into one room and forced them to communicate. “During the first year, most of us were not sure why we were there,” says Nicodemus, now a community resource specialist (“scrounger”, she calls it laughingly) with Contra Costa County’s Families First project. “We weren’t hung up on turf issues, but we weren’t really clear on what we could do.” But in time, the discussions led to perhaps the one of the earliest and

broadest models of interagency collaboration in the state, the Children’s Network of Solano County. Nicodemus recalls: “The Network concept came [when] we saw that foster care issues were part of a much larger set of problems facing kids.”

The Network helps the county avoid program fragmentation and duplication by providing a forum in which the needs of a youth can be followed across agencies. Agencies get to know each other’s strange language. Normally each uses different shorthand—“601’s, JTPA, SARB, 99-457, HIV kids”—and almost no one knows what it all means or how different eligibility requirements work, or when it’s OK to share information from different caseloads.

Another small step forward occurred in Santa Clara County, where two visionaries—Judge Len Edwards and staffer Ann Shine-Ring—have managed to pull county department heads together into an Inter-agency Council for At-Risk Youth. Edwards pushed the initiative. As the judge making decisions on child abuse and neglect cases, he became extremely frustrated. Police, child welfare, and school agencies were sending him hundreds of youth each year with little idea what other services—drug treatment, job training, day care, parent education counseling—were available or could be arranged. “Before Edwards arrived,” reports John Hubner in the *San Jose Mercury-News*, “the leaders of the various agencies concerned with the welfare of children didn’t talk to one another. Each was focused on running his own bureaucracy and was all but oblivious to the larger, systemic problems.” Since its creation by the county Board of Supervisors, the Council has brought social workers from various agencies together in a pilot program to “broker” services for the stressed families and children of one East San Jose elementary school. Such teamwork is unprecedented.

### Looking to the Past

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**T**HESE examples are not the first time communities have experimented with collaboration. The history of community-wide service integration is long, but little has been learned from it. I have spoken with the heads of state and federal agencies who are firm believers in the “new” service integration, but have no idea that the concepts hail from the original immigrant Settlement Houses, where social workers from a host of agencies combined forces to help immigrant families. Apparently the lessons of the Settlement Houses were lost during the Depression and then the Great Society, when the program mentality hit its stride.

When I came out of graduate school at the flood tide of the Great Society in 1965 and went to work for the mayor of New York, expansion of isolated programs was the entire focus. Growing lobbies for everyone from the mentally ill and special education students to gifted children were winning categorical funding. When reformers charged that federal money was being wasted on overlapping, unaccountable programs, the battle that continues today had begun. As it remains today, the rhetoric placed “effectiveness” (only special programs can help these kids thrive in such an oppressive system) against “efficiency” (we can’t even count what we’re spending, much less make it fit together to help people). Almost lost in this rhetoric, then as now, was the idea that separate programs linked together could be more effective and cost-efficient.

Two notable attempts to make this linkage model real were Model Cities in the late 1960s and Elliot Richardson’s services-integration efforts, which culminated in the stillborn Allied Services Act in 1974. Model Cities spread money to many cities, including Fresno, to knit together dozens of programs—at one point, as many as 50

programs from more than six different federal agencies—initiated by the Great Society. But expansion of the program from its original six cities to 150, demanded by Congress as a price of launching Model Cities, watered the program down and only a few of the cities were able to hold their tenuous local coalitions together into the 1970s. Richardson's Allied Services came out of a series of Health, Education and Welfare local demonstration grants, but eventually fell victim to White House-congressional warfare in the aftermath of Watergate in 1974.

In both efforts, only a few communities met the programs' goals because most lacked the extraordinary political leadership and consensus needed to improve the entire youth system. Most cities simply created one more set of isolated agencies that lasted only as long as the federal money, then dwindled into the program landscape. Many cities learned how to appear to be coordinating without actually helping kids. An old friend of mine calls it "the coordination game"—cities set up new committees, an "Office for Children," or some other "reorganization," which placates child advocates while avoiding the hard task of working with parents and line workers to develop and link programs that really help youth.

### Hooks, Glue and Joint Ventures

**W**HAT this history teaches us about collaboration is that it must involve a legitimate, community-wide planning process that is indigenously generated, strongly led, includes broad multiracial citizen and parent involvement, and focus on accountability. It must also encourage agencies to proceed step by step into collaboration. The three escalating steps are "hooks," "glue" and "joint ven-

# REPORT CARD '89: The State of California's Children

**C**ALIFORNIA is home to 7.6 million children—one out of every nine in the U.S. The advocacy group Children Now has devised a first-ever report card to measure how our youth are faring in areas ranging from education to health. A warning emerged: we are failing children in many critical areas. Action and accountability are needed now.

## EDUCATION

**C\***

In 1987, 32% of all California students scheduled to graduate from high school did not. Among Blacks, 48% dropped out; among Latinos, 45%. In 1987, California ranked 30th nationally in the average dollar expenditure per public school student.

## HEALTH

**C**

In 1988, almost half of all two-year-olds in California were inadequately immunized for diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis. According to a 1985 study, three-fourths of Black and Latino children were inadequately immunized. In 1985, slightly more than one in five California children under age 18 had no private or public health insurance.

## SAFETY

**U**

Public hospitals in Los Angeles, Oakland and San Francisco report that in 10-25% of births, maternal urine tests for illicit substances were positive. The number of California children under age five in foster care increased 120% between 1983 and 1988. The state places children in out-of-home/substitute care at a rate twice that of the national average.

## TEEN YEARS

**D-**

California's teen pregnancy rate is the second highest in the nation. The state also incarcerates juveniles at a rate twice the national average. In 1988, 11th graders reported using the following drugs at least once a week: beer (19.5%), marijuana (8.5%), and cocaine (1.2%).

## INVESTING IN FAMILIES

**D+**

Family social and economic problems are hurting California's children. The California Department of Education estimates 25,000 school-age children are homeless—14,000 of them do not attend school regularly. On any given day, California may have as many as 25,000 runaway youth—25% of the nation's runaway population. Poverty afflicts one in five California children (\$11,650 or less annual income for a family of four).

## OVERALL GRADE

**D**

### EXPLANATION OF GRADES\*:

- A = EXCELLENT**
- B = GOOD**
- C = NEEDS IMPROVEMENT**
- D = SERIOUSLY DEFICIENT**
- U = UNSATISFACTORY**

\* Based on 27 measurable indicators in health, childcare, education, poverty and other areas.

From Children Now, 10951 West Pico Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90064.

Authors: Wendy Lazarus with Michelle Gonzalez. Distinguished California citizens who contributed to the report:

- Honorable Allen Broussard, Justice, California State Supreme Court
- Jaime Escalante, Garfield High School teacher, subject of movie "Stand and Deliver"
- Honorable Shirley Hufstедler, Former U.S. Secretary of Education
- Dr. Donald Kennedy, President, Stanford University
- Peter V. Ueberroth

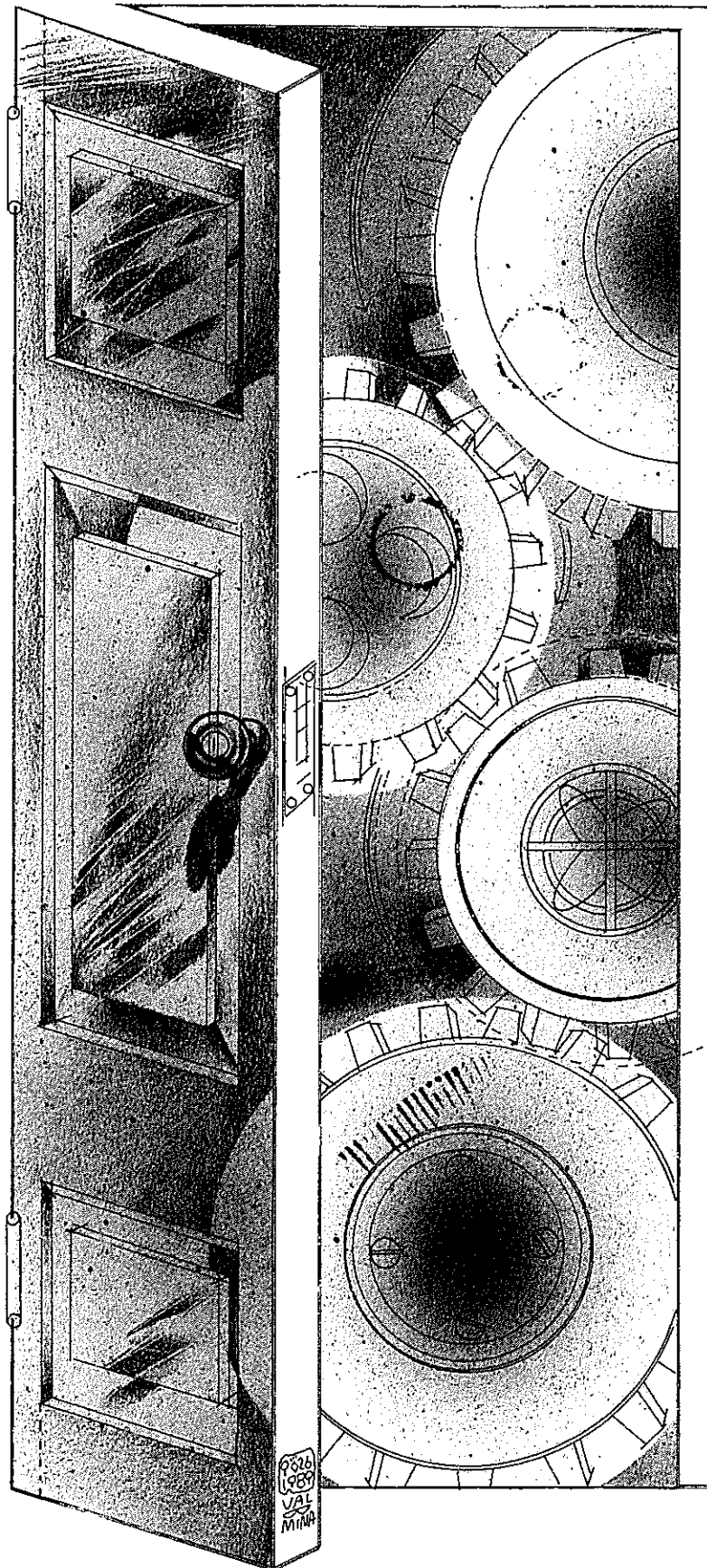


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## Collaboration in motion

tures." All help combat the program mentality by letting workers in each system know that no one agency can solve Ricardo's problems alone. Each encourages a protective services worker, for example, to make the broad diagnosis that Mom abuses Johnny partly because she is trying to be a parent without any role models and also because she wants a better job, and to call on both the employment and mental health system for help.

*Hooks* formally link a child's participation in one program to participation in another. Hooks can be developed only if planners ask "what other services do children in this program need?" Under federal law, for instance, foster children are "hooked" to local youth job training programs (JTPA), automatically qualifying for training and jobs. (Normally JTPA participants must meet stringent standards in income, school attendance and employability.)

Before this hook was established, foster children typically were released from county care at age 18 totally unprepared for adult life. Now there's at least a chance for job training. If the child welfare and youth employment staffs are able to work together, this hook ensures that after paying for years to shelter and raise a foster child, taxpayers make an often-critical final investment in that youth's self-sufficiency as an adult.

*Glue* assures that funding is conditioned on making sure kids get help under one roof, but from several sources. The lauded Teenage Pregnancy and Parenting Program (TAPP) in San Francisco is completely "glued" together. Most of the services that help TAPP's teen mothers and fathers thrive and graduate from high school at record rates are delivered by agencies other than the San Francisco Unified School District. Founder Amy Loomis cut subcontracting deals with child care, health, social service and job training agencies, thereby both limiting her agency's workload and taking advantage of other agencies' labor and expertise.

## Leaders in the Collaboration Movement

Santa Clara County Interagency Council on At-Risk Youth  
100 Skyport Dr., Mail Code 22A  
San Jose, CA 95115  
(408) 453-6961

San Bernardino Children's Network  
468 W. 5th St., Suite 110  
San Bernardino, CA 92415  
(714) 387-8966

Children's Network of Solano County  
2100 W. Texas St.  
Fairfield, CA 94533  
(707) 427-7228

Ventura County Children's Mental Health Services Demonstration Project  
300 Hillmont Ave.  
Ventura, CA 93003  
(805) 652-6737

Santa Ana 2000  
c/o Superintendent Rudy Castruita  
1405 French St.  
Santa Ana, CA 92701  
(714) 558-5512

Fresno Tomorrow K-6  
1900 Mariposa Mall, Suite 8301  
Fresno, CA 93721  
(209) 442-3342

San Francisco Office of Children, Youth, and Their Families  
City Hall  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
(415) 554-6139

In this "glue" scenario, TAPP becomes the crucial "broker" for its teenage clients—the broker Ricardo and his family lacked.

*Joint ventures* go a step further. Agencies create partnerships to raise funds for jointly operated programs, avoiding the common tendency for agencies to grow tentacles into other specialties. Joint ventures match strength to strength. In the Santa Clara County Interagency Project in San Jose, a local elementary school offered its strength—daily access at school to children from troubled families—to agencies employing talented counselors with many specialties. One counselor reports: "We were really training each other, and working more closely with families than we ever could back in our own offices."

The key element in these steps is the credibility of the community planning process. If spurred only by outside money or influences, local agencies will simply follow the money, not help youth. If local leaders are ineffective or don't understand program fragmentation to be a problem, they won't do anything about it. If the planning process is "top to bottom" with no involvement by parents, teachers, and the youth themselves, then the community will not "buy in"—and the proposed plan won't reflect the community's true needs.

In recent years, extraordinary leaders in Portland, Seattle, and Minneapolis have managed to pull their communities together. Now, among California cities, San Francisco (through the Mayor's Office of Children, Youth and Their Families), Santa Ana (Santa Ana 2000), San Diego (New Beginnings), and Fresno (Fresno Tomorrow) have developed processes among schools, agencies, employers, and political leaders to set goals and commit resources to a citywide strategic plan. Growing pressure from local business, which more than ever sees its future threatened by the shortage of skilled future employees, and advocates, who cannot bear to watch a third of a generation being lost, are helping to spark these new efforts. Leader-

ship often comes from newly installed district superintendents, county welfare chiefs, county supervisors, citizen activists, and businesspeople with fewer commitments to protect old alliances in the current service system. In Santa Ana, new school superintendent Rudy Castruita has worked with Mayor Dan Young to pull the chambers of commerce and Rancho Santiago College together with the city and the schools to recommend comprehensive action to improve the conditions of children and youth. In Fresno, Mayor Karen Humphrey is working with the county, the city schools and Fresno Tomorrow, a citizen group, to develop a long-range plan for at-risk youth.

In these efforts, accountability for results will be crucial. Communities need to take inventory of their children and youth services. This is a scary thing. To agree to do it is to admit that you have no idea how funds are spent now, and on what. When Dayton did its inventory, city leaders were shocked to find out that excluding the schools, \$50 million was being spent by dozens of different agencies "serving" roughly 5,000 troubled kids—an average of \$10,000 per youth. But the resulting inventory is now the basis for Dayton's excellent plan for youth.

In Baltimore, when one program requested funds to double its staff of case managers from seven to 14, the local community foundation insisted on knowing how many counselors were already working in the neighborhoods. The final tally from the probation, mental health, welfare and numerous other agencies: 300, many with the same impossibly large caseloads, predominantly consisting of the same families. The foundation agreed to fund methods to begin coordinating such

worker caseloads. Without such an inventory, it is impossible to determine how to commit new funds wisely—or to tell if such resources are needed at all.

A community also needs to "keep score" of what is happening to its children. Benchmarks are needed in areas like child abuse, youth in detention facilities, foster children, dropouts, youth employment, PTA attendance, youth participation in community service, or any other outcome that the community identifies as important. To use a football metaphor: without goalposts, the game doesn't mean much. In California, Children Now's 27 benchmarks for a statewide "report card" provide an excellent starting point for any community that wants to know how it is doing.

After years of striving, Californians trying to elevate children and youth issues in state policy-making are on the threshold of a breakthrough. Reports such as those by Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) and Children Now indicate persuasively that we are failing many of our children. Polling and political commentary indicate new public commitment toward at-risk youth. We must not submit to the tendency to respond with isolated programs. We need local scorecards, collaboration and strategic planning to truly help youth like Ricardo.

*SID GARDNER is a national expert in children's policy. He headed the Annie E. Casey Foundation's New Futures program and has worked with the Children's Defense Fund and the Federal Health, Education and Welfare Department. Currently, he directs California Tomorrow's Youth At Risk project, which assists selected California communities seeking to integrate services for poor and minority youth. The project has received funding from the Luke B. Hancock Foundation and the Stuart Foundations. For details call (213) 623-6231.* **CT**