

## **Project Zero Presentation at Harvard Kennedy School**

*The Ash Institute has named the NYC Department of Probation a finalist for the Harvard Kennedy School 2008 Innovations in American Government Awards, and the Institute's 2008 Annie E. Casey Innovations Award in Children and Family System Reform. On June 12, Commissioner Martin F. Horn, accompanied by Deputy Commissioner for Juvenile Operations Patricia Brennan, made the following presentation before the Institute's National Selection Committee, chaired by David Gergen. The presentation focused on the Department's Project Zero, a reform initiative that has introduced a fundamental change of thinking in the juvenile justice system.*

Our innovation began with the recognition that an honest appraisal of the long-term consequences of confining juveniles demonstrates its destructiveness. The administration of juvenile justice in our country is marked by an absence of coherent leadership and is essentially unmanaged.

Project Zero represents our resolve to take advantage of that vacuum and change the paradigm in New York – from the bottom up.

New York's juvenile justice system was two-dimensional; the only options for judges dealing with adjudicated juvenile delinquents were return to the home or residential placement. Removing a child from the home doesn't improve the family's capacity to raise the child. It disrupts the child's education, teaches the child the wrong skills and stigmatizes. It should be reserved for the few children so damaged as to be dangerous, for whom nothing else will suffice.

The City and State were each spending \$80 million annually on residential care of juvenile delinquents and 81% were rearrested within three years. We were spending a lot of money to make kids worse! People speak of cradle-to-prison pipeline in minority communities. It makes an express stop at the Family Court.

Probation sits at the information crossroads of the juvenile justice system. From that fulcrum we embarked upon our goal – ZERO New York City kids sent to out-of-city placement. From the work of others we learned that structural reform needs to be coupled with deep cultural change. Solutions can't be imposed from the outside. Good innovations arise inside government and resonate with the values and culture of the staff who make government work day in and day out.

We found decision points where we could change practice and policy. We resolved to be data-driven and accountable for the results.

The data demonstrated the most significant factor in determining whether the Judge sends a child to placement was the Probation recommendation; and probation officers were idiosyncratic in their decision-making.

We created a research-validated instrument to guide sentencing recommendations, achieved consistency and the results were immediate and dramatic. From 2004 to 2007

placement recommendations declined from 40% to 18% -- placement admissions declined from 1,257 to 795.

Probation has the power to divert cases at arrest. Using consistent decision-making tools and structuring the interactions, we increased the number diverted by 206% -- from 1,070 in 2002 to 3,271 in 2007. While juvenile arrests increased by 3,500, the number of cases going to court increased by only 412.

Our Alternative to Detention program, designed 30 years ago, was based on flawed model, enrolling kids who would not otherwise be detained while seriously compromising their school advancement. We closed it down.

This propelled efforts to design an evidence-based tool to determine risk of re-offending and failure to return to court. The risk Assessment Instrument has become part of everyday practice in Family Court. Detention of low-risk youths has declined by 53%.

We made the system three-dimensional. We created Esperanza; placement in the community, with evidence-based supportive services, working with the family, keeping the child in school and working closely with the PO.

Based on our success the City invested \$11 million dollars to expand similar community placement services. This year the State proposed closing six residential facilities as a result of the reduction in kids sent to their care, redirecting the monies saved to efforts like ours.

Faced with a 41% increase in juvenile arrests from 2002 to 2007, we have reduced the City's use of placements by 37%. The mayor's Office projects \$43 million in savings over the next four years.

This change is here to stay. The costs are too high for the City or the State to turn back. Our staff, the Judges, the bar and community-based organizations have embraced this change and have a stake in its future.

Last month the City began weekend court processing for arrested juveniles. We are the first jurisdiction in the state to process JD s over the weekend. The remarkable thing is that unlike the adult system where arrestees must see a judge within 24 hours, there is no such right for juveniles. The City did it because it helps to avoid unnecessary juvenile detention – and Project Zero drove that change.