

Youth Advocate Program, Inc.

649 West North Street

Decatur, Illinois 62522

217-422-7864 or 429-5441

Status Offender Service: Crisis Assistance for Teenagers

I. Introduction

This proposal is a description of a crisis service for teenagers, statistics on youth served from July 1, 1978, through June 30, 1979, case examples of the children served, and an explanation of the financing that is necessary to continue this service in Macon County.

To understand completely this proposal some background information is necessary.

First, teenagers (under eighteen) violate the law when they run away, are beyond their parents control (ungovernable or incorrigible), or when under sixteen do not attend school (truant). Such youth receive the label of status offenders. They commit an offense because of their status, i.e., age.

The traditional response to these teenagers has been to treat them the same as delinquents (youth who commit crimes). It is estimated that as recently as 1974 fifty percent of the children in juvenile correctional facilities were status offenders. Macon County locked them in the juvenile detention facility (juvenile jail) and did not segregate them from delinquent youth.

While this attitude continued, a national effort developed that had two concerns. First, if young people commit acts that are not crimes for adults, they should not be treated as criminals; thus, they should not be locked up. Second, if youth do run away, are ungovernable, or are truant, they do need help, and some assistance ought to be available to them. Therefore, status offenders should not be treated as criminals but should receive service.

There are three reasons for service. First, at a minimum, it can stop the status offense. Second, service may prevent further deterioration; actually this deterioration often occurred when non criminals were locked with delinquents. The former acquired the latter's habits. Third, service offers a child an opportunity for improvement. The young person and his family are helped to examine their problems and begin corrective steps.

Illinois has taken three steps to implement this philosophy regarding status offenders. First, the Juvenile Court Act prohibits their placement in a correctional facility. Second, in 1977, an amendment to the Juvenile Court Act prohibited the placement of status offenders in any locked facility. Third, the state offered to interested counties a crisis service for status offenders. Instead of locking these youths up, a social worker was to be called. This program began in Macon County and, of course, is the subject of this proposal.

The Status Offender service was initially funded by a federal grant which the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration awarded Illinois. This grant permitted a two year pilot period for the opportunity to implement and assess the service. Governor Thompson was impressed with it, and he committed the state to continue these services.

However, as explained in the budget section, state government does expect localities to fund up to twenty five percent of the cost of the service.

II. Status Offender Service: Crisis Assistance for Teenagers

At a minimum, this service is a more humane response to status offenders than jailing them and at least as effective, but it also has two advantages. First, it relieves police and juvenile court time from non criminal matters. The police are responsible to handle youth who violate the law; this includes status offenders. And when the police take custody of any child, the juvenile court is to review this act. Second, the child and the family receive services which encourage them to examine their situation and to take corrective action.

When the police apprehend a status offender, they can call a crisis counselor. (The actual job title is Status Offender Coordinator or Counselor). Usually the police only call when the youth is a repeater or the situation is particularly grave. The vast majority of youth that the police see are "station adjusted", and do not have additional police contacts. The police discuss with the youngster his infraction, and this encounter deters further anti-social behavior.

However, some youth repeatedly run away from home or certain parent/child relationships continually erupt. When the police face these circumstances, service beyond police intervention is necessary. Additionally when the police apprehend a child who has been gone from home for weeks or when a particularly explosive family argument confronts them, the police, again, need to offer the youth and his family services.

The status offender service is available twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. When the police call, the counselor responds immediately. Her purpose is to calm a crisis and to get an agreement that the parent and child will return home and attempt to resolve their difficulties. This course of action is usually best for the child and family, but additionally if the child returns home, court time is saved as no court intervention is necessary.

If one party is not willing, then an alternative or shelter care placement is found, but even if this possibility occurs, the counselor continues to help the youth and the family to resolve their differences and to reunite them. If the counselor and police agree that placement is necessary, the Illinois Commission on Delinquency Prevention will pay for placement for up to fifteen days.

After this crisis period, the counselor has intensive contact with the youth and the family (at least ten hours per week). This investment of time helps the counselor to return the child home as she has been placed, to prevent any new status offense and to counsel with the youngster and family to develop a specific course of action to prevent any new crisis. To assist the child and family, the counselor may involve the family in extended family therapy at the Mental Health Center, the counselor may find employment for the youth, or the counselor may work to develop a new educational plan for

the young person. These examples indicate how the counselor helps the family and child lay a foundation to solve their problems.

The counselor works with the family for three weeks, but will stay longer if more time is necessary to develop the family's next step.

If the child has been placed, the counselor has the additional responsibility of preparing court testimony and recommendations to either the County Probation Department or the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. This latter task is most important. The Youth Advocate staff has the time to investigate a case thoroughly and provide the juvenile court with more information. Also staff counsels with the family to help them resolve their differences.

In sum, this service recognizes that youth and families in crisis need help. The assistance is offered immediately, and the counselor remains until the crisis is thoroughly calm and the family has begun corrective steps.

III. Statistics

These were youth and families served from July 1, 1978, through June 30, 1979.

Total number of youth was eighty eight.

The next three tables indicate age, sex and race.

AGE	
12 and under	6
13	11
14	17
15	29
16	22
17	3

SEX	
Male	38
Female	50

RACE	
White	65
Black	23

This fourth chart combines age, race and sex.

	12 & under	13	14	15	16	17
White female	0	3	10	17	5	3
White male	1	5	5	5	11	0
Black female	0	2	1	6	3	0
Black male	5	1	1	1	3	0

It clearly indicates that the typical youth was a fourteen or fifteen year old white female. Thirty one percent were in this category.

The next table indicates why service was provided. There are more reasons than children because some youth were referred for multiple reasons.

REASONS	
Runaway	49
Beyond Control	33
Truancy	10

The sixth table is the length of service.

Length of Service	
1-3 days	5
4-10 days	20
11-3 weeks	48
3 weeks - over	15

The next table shows the number of youth who were placed when the police requested service, when a first court hearing was held, and when service ended. (second court hearing)

Placements	
Crisis	43
First court hearing	28
Service termination	8

By service termination, ninety percent of the youth had returned home.

The final table states the parental make-up of the child's home, (the household that the child is living in). Natural means that the child is living with his natural parents, and reconstituted means that the child is living with either a natural and step parent or adoptive parents.

Parents	
Single	45
Natural	12
Reconstituted	31

Only fourteen percent of the youth were with their natural parents. Although it can not be stated conclusively, there may be a direct correlation between the difficulties that these youth and families encounter and family break ups.

IV. Case Histories

Below are two youths who received this service.

Mary Carter (not her real name) is a 15 year old white female. The Decatur Police Department referred her to status offender service because she was beyond her mother's control. The police requested a status offender worker while they interviewed mother and daughter. Upon arrival at the police department both mother and daughter were angrily exchanging verbal insults and accusations.

Mother felt Mary was headed for trouble. She relayed Mary was drinking, "doing drugs", staying out late, never said where she was going, what she was doing, there was trouble at school, never helped around the house, and totally ignored her requests as well as often "talked back". Mary felt her mother's personal behavior and current life style were disgraceful and she was no example for her to follow, let alone someone to condemn her behavior. Mary agreed she should be doing some things different but felt her mother really didn't care anyway and thought the whole situation to be unbelievable.

Time was spent with both mother and daughter, and the case was discussed with the juvenile officer. The Status Offender program was described as well as other community resources that were available. We discussed the importance of maintaining the family unit and the desire to prevent court involvement where possible. During this time mother and youth calmed down. They agreed to cooperate with the status offender program in hopes of resolving and/or working on existing conflicts. It was agreed that mother would return home, and Mary would follow her with the status offender counselor.

The following ten days were spent counseling with the family, assessing family needs, and discussing desired goals, and appropriate available community services. The family consisted of mom, daughter, and a younger sibling. Mother and father were divorced, mother had remarried several times, and the last step-father had died several months earlier. It was discovered that rather than handling problems as they arose, both mother and daughter let hostility, misunderstanding and disappointment build until a major outburst occurred. Thus, they lacked positive communication skills as well as problem solving ability.

Both mom and Mary were open to counseling and felt this was a service which would be highly beneficial. It was also felt that they needed a support system for an extended period of time in order to maintain family harmony and to promote positive and honest family communication. Additionally the Status Offender Coordinator perceived that continued conflicts could be curtailed by supplying Mary and mother with someone to call to discuss the situation and suggest alternatives as well as provide possible recommendations and/or resolutions to deal with the particular situation.

Mother and daughter agreed to this plan. The counselor served them for three weeks until the present crisis was calm and an extended counseling program and support system was begun.

Sue Bates (not her real name) is a 14 year old white female who was beyond her parents' control. An argument between her father, step-mother, and herself resulted in Sue running to a friend's house and refusing to go home.

Father informed her that he would call the police if she was not home by 11:00 P.M. Fearing complications the neighbor contacted the status offender service at 10:00 P.M.

The Status Offender Counselor contacted the youth, the parents and the friends with whom the youth was staying. The worker felt that the situation could be resolved but that all involved needed to calm down. Therefore, an immediate home visit was made. After discussing the situation with the youth, then with parents as well as conferring with Officer Rick Hazen of the Decatur Police Department, the worker secured an agreement that Sue could remain with the neighbor for the evening and return home the next day with status offender services becoming involved.

The following day, the Status Offender Counselor met with the youth, the parents, and then with all parties together. Present difficulties, the family background, and the importance of maintaining the family unit were discussed as well as the services available through status offender service.

Sue, her father, and her step-mother lacked good communication skills. Often when a dispute arose, rather than rationally discussing the problem, hostilities and misunderstandings became verbal arguments with the result that Sue and father did not speak for several days. Step-mother, at age 22, often felt inadequate in disciplining Sue because of her age and lack of expertise in handling teen-agers. Sue's father and step-mother were also experiencing slight marital disharmony.

Problems noted with Sue were use of drugs, alcohol, boyfriend relationships, discontentment with amount of freedom at home, hostility/misunderstandings between youth and father, lack of communication, uncooperativeness, and prior medical problems of youth. All involved felt the situation was no longer in their control.

Difficulties had existed for several months with increasing outbursts. Finally the previous night's episode resulted. Due to the numerous existing problems, the parents and Sue felt a short vacation was needed from each other in order to bring their lives and problems into proper perspective.

It was agreed and arranged for Sue to spend a month's vacation in Chicago with her Aunt. During the next few days while arrangements were finalized, status offender services were intensively utilized in order to maintain harmony within the home, provide appropriate services, and assess family desires and needs. It was also agreed that upon Sue's return home, the parents and youth were to feel free to contact status offender service, and services would be reinitiated to help maintain the family unit and introduce other appropriate community services.

About 4-5 weeks later, Sue's step-mother informed Youth Advocate of Sue's return and requested our services. Status Offender service was immediately initiated. A major barrier within the home was ineffective communication between youth and parents. Parents' fears of drug and alcohol abuse on daughter's part and youth's feelings of being "hassled" by parents, not trusted, and misunderstood continued to hamper communication and understanding. Counseling sessions with youth, parents, and total family were incorporated, and it was felt continued sessions would be increasingly beneficial. It was also felt that extended services would be appreciated and appropriate. Part-time employment was sought and obtained for Sue. This added to youth's feeling of satisfaction and self-worth. The home situation had become relatively calm and it was soon time for status offender services to end.

Upon termination, it was recommended that Department of Children and Family Services open the case and the youth and family become involved with the Placement Deterrent Program through the Youth Advocate Program.

This service provides weekly contact with the family by an experienced counselor as well as an advocate to spend about 15 hours per week with Sue. It was felt that this intensive intervention service would supply the needed support system and incorporate and monitor the corrective steps needed to maintain the youth at home and resolve current family difficulties.

All involved parties were in agreement with these recommendations. Services were coordinated so that upon status offender termination, the placement deterrent program began and treatment plans, goals, etc., were compared and discussed in

order to maximize consistency and continuity of services.

Sue is continuing to do well at home and further police and/or court involvement has been prevented thus far.

V. Funding and Budget

The annual cost of the crisis service is \$32,000, but the actual direct cost to Decatur/Macon County is only \$8,000. The difference is provided by the state through the Governor's Donated Funds Initiative.

In 1978, Governor Thompson offered local communities a tremendous financial opportunity. If the locality would raise twenty five percent of the cost of a program, the state would make the remainder available to the community. Thus, for no more than a quarter of the cost a locality could receive a complete service.

Besides receiving the crisis service at twenty five percent of its cost, Macon County also receives temporary shelter care at no cost. From August 1, 1978, through July 31, 1979, Illinois Commission on Delinquency Prevention paid \$9038.87 for temporary shelter care.

As long as a community provides crisis service for status offenders, the Commission will pay for temporary shelter for the few that require it.

Therefore, if Youth Advocate can raise \$8,000, the status offender crisis service will continue, and the county will receive over \$41,000, in services (crisis service and placement service).

ALBERT E. HURT

ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR

509 PROFESSIONAL BUILDING

363 SOUTH MAIN STREET

DECATUR, ILLINOIS 62523

JAMES P. BRINKOETTER, JR.
ASSOCIATE

AREA CODE 217
TELEPHONE 428-0913

October 16, 1979

To Whom it May Concern:

As Public Defender for the past eighteen months for Macon County, I have had extensive contact with the Youth Advocate Program. This program serves as an important supplement to the Probation Office and Department of Children and Family Services in crisis situations. In addition, experienced counselors are available to continue contact with a child and his family subsequent to being brought into the court system.

When a child comes into the court system, due to neglect or due to difficulties between the child and family, the immediate difficulty faced by the court system is the placement of the minor pending court action. The Youth Advocate Program provides temporary placement for children who, because of various circumstances, are unable to live at home. When a family home or relative's home are not available, the only alternative is paid placement. Your governmental body is being asked to pay 25¢ on the dollar for this paid placement. Federal funds will make up the difference.

The limitation on paid placement is ten days, with a possibility of one five-day extension. After the placement expires, responsibility for the child evolves upon the probation Office or upon the Department of Children and Family Services. Financial commitments are, therefore, limited.

As Public Defender, I have found that the Crisis Intervention Service is absolutely essential. Without the availability of the funding requested of your governmental body, the Crisis Intervention Service will not be available in the future as a practical matter.

If your governmental agency would care to question me concerning the usefulness of the services which have been provided in the past, please contact me and I will be more than happy to appear.

Very sincerely yours,



James P. Brinkoetter, Jr.
Assistant Public Defender

JPB:bdp

Frank J. Gollings
Circuit Judge
Sixth Judicial Circuit of Illinois
402 Macon County Building
Decatur, Illinois 62523
MC-9989

November 16, 1979

James Anthony Stahl
Youth Advocate Program, Inc.
649 West North
Decatur, Illinois 62522

Dear Mr. Stahl:

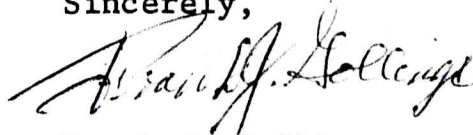
Please be advised that I have been satisfied with the operation of the Status Offender Service and the assistance that you have given teenagers, their families, and this Court. It is difficult to help young people with problems, and the efforts of your agency are valuable and appreciated.

Without your service there would be little to offer status offenders and their families when a crisis occurs.

Because of the positive record that you have and the need for the status offender service, I support your efforts to raise funds to continue it in Macon County.

I hope that you succeed, and if you need any particular help, please call me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Frank J. Gollings", written over a horizontal line.

Frank J. Gollings
Circuit Judge



CITY OF DECATUR · ILLINOIS

707 EAST WOOD STREET

DECATUR, ILLINOIS 62523

November 28, 1979

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

The Decatur Police Department, over the last several years, has had numerous occasions to contact the Illinois Status Offenders Office and have always found that they were very helpful to this department.

They cooperated with this department when we have had to call them after hours and in the detaining of runaways that we cannot house in jail. They have acted in a counselling capacity with the juvenile offenders and assisted in the referral and transporting of juveniles in Decatur.

The Police Department has been very satisfied with the cooperation we have received from this organization.

Sincerely,

Harold G. Lindsten
Harold G. Lindsten
Chief of Police
Decatur Police Department

HGL:mb