Case History

Michelle is 15 years old and has been involved in the justice system since she was removed from her mother's custody at age 6. She is currently on probation for an incident involving drinking and joy riding that resulted in an accident.

Michelle lives with her grandmother whom she is very close to—her father is deceased and her mother is an addict. She has two older siblings, a 21- year-old brother and a 19-year-old sister. Her sister is living on her own, going to a community college and working. Her brother is incarcerated for drug-related charges. There is a report on record with child protective services that Michelle was molested by her brother about a year ago.

Michelle is interested in dance. Until the seventh grade, she did well in school and was well-liked. She is now in the ninth grade; she has been suspended twice for possession of alcohol on school grounds and her grades have become erratic. Michelle is back in court after being caught smoking marijuana and violating her probation.

Question

How would your court currently handle Michelle's case?

What low or no cost changes could your court team make to improve the process, treatment, and/or outcome for youth like Michelle?

This case scenario is reproduced from an article entitled "Resiliency and Crossover: A Framework for Case Conceptualization" by Shawn Marsh, PhD, Director, Juvenile and Family Law Department, NCJFCJ, and Jessica Pearce, Project Coordinator, Juvenile and Family Law Department, NCJFCJ

Strategies to Support No or Low Cost Changes

Court:	**Court/Court Administration Strategies**	**CRB Strategies**	**Defense Bar/Prosecution Strategies**	**DHS/Juv. Dept. Strategies**	**CASA Strategies**
Change #1:					
Change #2:					
Change #3:					

National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ) Cross-Over Committee Recommendations

Ten Easy Steps: Even if you're not in a position to take major steps toward a more integrated process, following are specific actions almost any judge can take to improve the process—and the outcomes for youth involved in both systems.

1. Identify (or have the parties identify) all related cases: delinquency, dependency, dissolution, paternity, orders of protection, status offenses, etc. Where possible and appropriate to the circumstances of the case, consolidate all cases before the appropriate judge (e.g., consolidate custody cases before the dependency judge). At a minimum, communicate with all other judges to avoid inconsistent or duplicative orders.

2. Where youth are dually adjudicated, have probation officers and child welfare workers attend all reviews and other substantive hearings in both cases.

3. Encourage youth to attend all hearings and invite their participation. If they don't want to attend, ask them to write letters or participate by phone.

4. Make identification of family, kin and anyone else having a connection with the child an ongoing priority throughout the case. Identify, develop and agree upon criteria for placement, visits, transportation, attendance at school/ other youth functions, phone contact, etc., and promote a variety of levels of involvement by anyone who wants to support the youth (and parents).

5. Establish a process for joint assessment, case planning and service provision, including probation, child welfare, behavioral health providers and family (e.g., child and family teams).

6. Train group home staff on alternatives to arrest for difficult behaviors and revise policies to eliminate preference for calling law enforcement first.

7. Offer to train schools on accountability conferencing or similar processes as alternatives to suspension/expulsion. Work with schools to develop in-school suspension programs or behavior contracts.

8. Initiate peer-to-peer multi-system training for probation, child welfare and behavioral health line staff.

9. Develop a juvenile justice training that can be offered as in-service training to teachers and school administrators.

10. Develop (and utilize in every case) standard orders directing schools to release educational information to probation and child welfare workers, *or* require parents to sign appropriate releases in a form acceptable to the schools.

Additional Suggestions From the Literature

1. Integrated one family – one judge case assignment
2. Cross-system data collection and information sharing
3. Engaging at least one consistent, caring adult for each youth
4. Early identification and objective assessment for dually involved youth
5. Ensure continuity of counsel
6. Use of a dedicated docket
7. Multi-system responsibility for service provision
8. Joint pre-hearing conferences
9. Combined dependency delinquency hearings
10. Joint court orders and/or court reports
11. Mandatory appearance of probation officers and social workers at court hearings
12. Court control of continuances
13. Joint case plans
14. Active involvement of MDTs in case planning
15. Family centered assessments and interventions
16. Gender specific programming for girls
17. Interagency agreements and formal written plans
18. Collaborative funding
19. Provide training to juvenile defense counsel on dependency issues
20. Presume against closing dependency cases
21. Thoroughly review the discharge plan before discharge from placement
22. Cross-system training