



ADVOCACY IN ACTION: CROSSOVER YOUTH

Advocacy in Action is a series of briefs focused on issues of potential importance to the court-appointed special advocates (CASAs) or guardians ad litem (GALs) who advocate for the best interests of children who have been neglected or abused. Understanding how these issues may impact child and family outcomes is foundational to being a successful advocate.

Each *Advocacy in Action* brief starts with a summary of the issue and how it may impact children who have been neglected or abused,

followed by recommended actions for advocates in light of the research. Each brief also includes a promising practice from the nationwide network of CASA/GAL programs and a list of resources for those interested in learning more.

Though these issues are interrelated, each brief is categorized as pertaining to either children's safety, permanency, or well-being.



CROSSOVER YOUTH

WHY IT MATTERS

Crossover youth are youth involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In short, they have experienced maltreatment (resulting in their child welfare involvement) and have engaged in delinquency, bringing them to the attention of the juvenile justice system. **Dually involved youth** are youth who have had some level of system contact with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, whereas **dually adjudicated youth** are court-involved in both systems.

It is difficult to determine just how many youth are involved in both systems, and getting an accurate estimate often depends on how broadly dual system involvement is defined. Some estimates suggest that more than 50 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system also have child welfare involvement.¹ In field work with several jurisdictions across the country, the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for

Juvenile Justice found that approximately two-thirds of the juvenile justice populations in those jurisdictions had some level of child welfare system involvement.²

Crossover youth are more likely to receive harsh sentences and to be detained on first-time charges.

Crossover youth, compared to youth who are only involved in one system (child welfare or juvenile justice), experience

higher rates of criminal justice involvement and use of public support services as adults. Additionally, they often struggle with mental health problems, substance abuse, unemployment, homelessness, poor educational outcomes and recidivism.³ Crossover youth are more likely to receive harsh sentences, are more likely to be detained on first-time charges and are less likely to receive probation versus incarceration, compared to youth who have not had any child welfare involvement.⁴ Youth of color, disproportionately represented in both child welfare and juvenile justice systems, are more likely to have poor outcomes.

AN OVERVIEW OF PATHWAYS LEADING TO IDENTIFICATION AS A DUALY-INVOLVED YOUTH

	Starting Point	Occurrence	Result
Pathway 1	Youth has an open child welfare case	→ Youth is arrested	→ Youth enters the delinquency system
Pathway 2	Youth is arrested	→ Youth has a previously closed child welfare case	→ Referral is made to child welfare
Pathway 3	Youth is arrested—no previous contact with child welfare	→ Upon investigation, maltreatment is discovered	→ Referral is made to child welfare
Pathway 4	Youth is arrested, adjudicated, and placed in a correctional placement	→ Time in correctional placement ends, but there is no safe home to return to	→ Referral to child welfare

From Denise Herz, Philip Lee, Lorrie Lutz, Macon Stewart, et. al., *Addressing the Needs of Multi-System Youth: Strengthening the Connection between Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice* (Washington, DC: Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and the Robert F. Kennedy Children’s Action Corps, March 2012), 3, <http://bit.ly/1jmO3mg>. Used with permission.

THE CROSSOVER YOUTH PRACTICE MODEL (CYPM)

The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform (CJJR) at the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy developed the Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM)⁵ with the purpose of improving outcomes for youth who are involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The CYPM is based on the notion that when child welfare, juvenile justice, related agencies and partners collaborate to address the needs of these youth, better life outcomes can happen.

CASA volunteers are important partners in these collaborations, known as “CYPM implementation teams.” According to the authors of the CYPM, given that CASA volunteers are often assigned to more complicated cases and crossover youths’ cases are generally quite complex, an experienced CASA volunteer can make a significant impact in how crossover youth are supported. Accordingly, the authors recommend that CYPM implementation teams invite CASA volunteers to participate in the planning and implementation of the model from the beginning of the process.

ADVOCATES IN ACTION

Estimates suggest that more than 50 percent of youth in the juvenile justice system also have child welfare involvement.⁶

ACTIONS RELATED TO THE CYPM

The authors of the CYPM have the following recommendations for CASA volunteer participation in CYPM implementation teams:⁷

- **Get involved in CYPM planning and implementation.** CASA volunteers can help inform the CYPM protocols, related tools and youth and family engagement strategies. They should be key stakeholders in the implementation team from the onset of the effort.
- **Strive to become involved as early as possible in a crossover case.** Since CASA volunteers often know the youths' particular circumstances and history, they are in a position to share important information and act as liaisons for needed services for the youth across both systems.
- **Participate in the case planning team.** The CASA volunteer should participate in all multidisciplinary team meetings, as well as meetings with the youth and family. They can work closely with staff from both juvenile justice and child welfare agencies to ensure that everyone has the same understanding of case plan goals and requirements and the responsibilities of all involved.
- **Seek access to information about the youth.** In order to be most effective in their roles, CASA volunteers should be equipped with relevant information on the youth in a timely manner which will leverage their role in providing sound best interest advocacy for the youth.
- **Advocate for youths' involvement in "normal activities."** These youth are often so inundated with therapeutic supports and services that they do not have an opportunity to participate in regular activities that would serve to support their growth and development. CASA volunteers can advocate for the youth's participation in recreational and social activities in their school and community.

OTHER ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

- **Learn more about and attend trainings pertaining to crossover youth,** especially if you work with older youth. Learn about risk factors for dual involvement as they pertain to the youth you advocate for. This may help you intervene to address those risk factors for that youth.
- **Learn more about the delinquency system,** whether youth you advocate for are eligible for diversion, such as participating in community

service versus placement in juvenile detention, and how long it is appropriate for them to be held in detention, so you can understand their rights and advocate accordingly.

- **Get to know staff from the juvenile justice courts and agencies** ahead of being assigned a crossover youth. Establishing a relationship ahead of time will help ensure a strong partnership on behalf of the youth's best interests.
- **Acquire an understanding of the juvenile justice system.** It is important to understand, for example, that the delinquency case nor any information related to it should be discussed with the youth until after adjudication occurs. This will help prevent incriminating information from being divulged that could require the CASA volunteer to be summoned as a witness in the delinquency case..
- **Become acquainted with juvenile justice system supports and offerings.** This information

will help you understand what is available to youth as they navigate the justice system either via diversion or at adjudication.

- **Learn about the connection between behavioral health and crossing over to the juvenile justice system,** as behavioral health concerns are a particular risk factor for many youth in foster care due to their histories of abuse or neglect and trauma. See "Selected Resources" for more information.
- **Advocate for youths' best interest in schools by** ensuring that educators are informed about the impacts of trauma and how to work with youth who have been exposed to trauma, and understand the links between child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Since educational achievement is a known protective factor to avoiding crossover involvement, CASA volunteers should advocate for youth's positive school involvement. See "Selected Resources" for more information on this topic.

BRIGHT SPOT

CROSSOVER YOUTH APPROACH: THE SOUTHWEST GEORGIA CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE

The Southwest Georgia Children's Alliance, Inc. is an umbrella organization first founded in 2003 as the SOWEGA CASA program. While serving 100 percent of the children coming before dependency court in twelve counties, SOWEGA CASA saw the further

need to support children who are in the dependency system, the delinquency system, and at times, both systems. Two additional victim advocacy programs, housed along with SOWEGA CASA and under the guidance of a sole board of directors, were born.

The first, the Lighthouse Children's Advocacy Center, was created in 2012 to provide expert forensic interviews, forensic medical

examinations, and advocacy for children who are suspected to be victims of physical, sexual, or exposed to domestic violence abuse.

The second, the Children in Need of Services program, was created in 2013 with a focus on delinquency and other adolescent problem behaviors. The 2013 passage of Georgia House Bill 242 had resulted in the designation of a population of children as being at-risk of neglect through their engagement in behaviors such as running away, curfew violations, fighting in public, and truancy. The Children in Need of Services program was the first of its kind in Georgia. It works with these children and families to engage them in services, with the goal of helping youth avoid a life of criminality and enabling them to thrive instead.

Recognizing that crossover youth are vulnerable to a number of risk factors, the SOWEGA CASA program commits to providing these youth with CASA volunteers. Because of their unique challenges, the CASA volunteers who are assigned to these youth are experienced and well-seasoned volunteers. The program specifically seeks out volunteers who are working or retired teachers or social workers, or others who have experience being in court, as they will attend both the dependency hearings as well as the delinquency hearings.

In addition, advocates participate in multi-disciplinary hearings that are attended by representatives of various agencies and the court, school personnel, and mental health providers and medical professionals, as appropriate. The outcomes

that the team works to achieve at these hearings include:

- reducing youths' juvenile justice involvement by increasing the use of diversion when appropriate and possible;
- reducing youths' child welfare involvement through prevention of out-of-home placement by improving family capacity, increasing placement stability and seeking permanency quickly;
- improving youths' school outcomes including increasing attendance, reducing discipline referrals and suspensions, and improving on-time high school completion;
- reducing youths' time spent in detention;
- utilizing a trauma-informed approach during the teaming process;
- increasing referral and screening systems to youth to provide effective mental health and substance use services;
- enhancing youth and family connection to the community; and
- using wraparound community systems of care to reduce status offenses.

Viewing crossover youth holistically and using wraparound supports and services that take both strengths and needs into account has been a successful approach for SOWEGA CASA, as they work with partners to reduce the number of crossover youth in their jurisdiction.

For more information, contact training@casaforchildren.org

SELECTED RESOURCES

Name	Description
<p><u>American Youth Policy Forum, <i>Understanding Foster, Juvenile Justice and Crossover Youth</i>⁸</u></p>	<p>This resource provides several graphics depicting outcome data across these three populations and makes recommendations about effective interventions.</p>
<p><u>Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, <i>The Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM): Behavioral Health and Crossover Youth</i>⁹</u></p>	<p>This issue brief discusses: 1) the relationship between behavioral health and crossover youth; 2) the ways the Crossover Youth Practice Model addresses behavioral health; and 3) how one jurisdiction has used CYPM to address behavioral health outcomes.</p>
<p><u>Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, <i>The Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM): Engaging Court and Appointed Special Advocates to Improve Outcomes for Crossover Youth</i>¹⁰</u></p>	<p>This issue brief discusses the following: 1) the role of CASA volunteers in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems; 2) ways CASA volunteers can improve outcomes for crossover youth; 3) how CASA volunteers fit within the CYPM framework; and 4) how CASA volunteers have operated in the field to make a difference for at-risk youth.</p>
<p><u>Center for Juvenile Justice Reform: <i>Crossover Youth Practice Model Jurisdictions map</i>¹¹</u></p>	<p>This map of the United States identifies which states and counties are currently implementing crossover youth practice model interventions.</p>

Name	Description
<p><u>Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, <i>Keeping Youth in School and Out of the Justice System: Promising Practices and Approaches</i>¹²</u></p>	<p>According to this resource, when revising school policies and implementing school-based diversion programs, there are four important strategies that policymakers, educators, and juvenile justice leaders should consider: training staff, addressing disproportionality and disparities, developing school-justice partnerships, and collecting and evaluating data. This resource can be shared with education and child welfare partners to create a better understanding of how schools can protect students from justice system involvement (or exacerbate it).</p>
<p><u>The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN), <i>Crossover Youth and Trauma-Informed Practice</i>¹³</u></p>	<p>This webinar covers findings from research on crossover youth and how traumatic stress plays a role in their trajectory, as well as implications for policy and practice. It expands on policy and practice implications with discussions of strategies for policy reform and ways to translate research into promising practices.</p>

ENDNOTES

- 1 Douglas Thomas (ed.), "When Systems Collaborate: How Three Jurisdictions Improved Their Handling of Dual-Status Cases"(Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice, April 2015): 3, <http://www.ncjj.org/Publication/When-Systems-Collaborate-How-Three-Jurisdictions-Improved-their-Handling-of-Dual-Status-Cases.aspx>.
- 2 David Altschuler, Gary Stangler, Kent Berkley, Leonard Burton, "[Supporting Youth in Transition to Adulthood: Lessons Learned from Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice](#)" (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, April 2009): 9.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Hui Huang, Joseph P. Ryan, & Denise Herz, "The journey of dually-involved youth: The description and prediction of re-reporting and recidivism" (Children and Youth Services Review, 2012). 34. https://jbcc.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/journey_of_dually-involved_youth_huang_ryan_herz_2012.pdf
- 5 Lenhoff, C., Jones-Kelly, H., & Abbott, S. (2017). *The Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM)*. Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy, Center for Juvenile Justice Reform.
- 6 Douglas Thomas (ed.), "When Systems Collaborate: How Three Jurisdictions Improved Their Handling of Dual-Status Cases"(Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice, April 2015): 3, <http://www.ncjj.org/Publication/When-Systems-Collaborate-How-Three-Jurisdictions-Improved-their-Handling-of-Dual-Status-Cases.aspx>.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 *Understanding Foster, Juvenile Justice and Crossover Youth*, American Youth Policy Forum, nd, <https://spark.adobe.com/page/TK0GmOayfk2E2/>
- 9 Abbott, S. & Barnett, E. (2015). *The Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM): Behavioral Health and Crossover Youth*, Center for Juvenile Justice Reform. Available at: <https://cjjr.georgetown.edu/cjjr-publishes-issue-brief-on-behavioral-health-and-crossover-youth/>
- 10 Lenhoff, C., Jones-Kelly, H., & Abbott, S. (2017). *The Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM)*. Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy, Center for Juvenile Justice Reform. Available at: <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/our-work/crossover-youth-practice-model/>

- 11 *Crossover Youth Practice Model Jurisdictions*, Center for Juvenile Justice Reform. Available at: <http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/our-work/crossover-youth-practice-model/#jurisdictions>
- 12 Farn, A (2018). *Keeping Youth in School and Out of the Justice System: Promising Practices and Approaches*. Center for Juvenile Justice Reform. Available at: http://cjjr.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/CP-Series-Bulletin_School-Justice-May-2018.pdf
- 13 *Crossover Youth and Informed Practice (2013)*. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network. <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/crossover-youth-and-trauma-informed-practice>