

About the Center for Children & Youth Justice



The Center for Children & Youth Justice is shaping better lives for youth involved in Washington's foster care and juvenile justice systems. In partnership with parents, advocates and policymakers, we develop and advance innovative approaches to systemic changes that will support kids, stabilize families and strengthen communities.

What We Do: Established in 2006 as a private nonprofit organization, the Center develops and coordinates programs and initiatives to reform our child welfare and juvenile justice systems – changes that can be shared with other organizations and states nationwide to help create better systems and better lives for children and youth everywhere. Our goal is to create systems that are integrated, unbiased, fueled with revolutionary ideas, and backed by programs proven to achieve the best results. By supporting the groundwork of emerging innovative thinking and sharing model practices with others in the field, the Center drives statewide reform efforts and helps to achieve replicable and lasting change. By sponsoring research, targeting grant funding toward evidence-based programs, proposing legislation, developing partnerships, and providing better training and information, we help everyone who cares about our youth to make better decisions about their care and their future.

Who We Are: The Center was founded by retired Washington State Supreme Court Justice Bobbe Bridge, who has been a leading advocate for children and families throughout her 35-year career as an attorney, jurist and civic activist. Justice Bridge now serves the Center as Founding President and CEO. Our Board of Directors and Advisory Council include some of our state's most respected and experienced leaders in the courts, law enforcement, child welfare, business and nonprofit organizations. A staff of experts in juvenile justice, foster care and children's advocacy manages our programs and initiatives.

Among Our Key Initiatives:

- **Models for Change** – In our first full year of existence as a nonprofit organization, we were selected to manage \$10 million in grants from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, leading its Models for Change juvenile justice reform initiative in Washington. We are now working at the grassroots level in six counties – Benton, Franklin, Clark, King, Pierce and Spokane – to help legal system professionals, community leaders, parents, youth and citizens identify and implement ways to improve their juvenile justice systems. These Models for Change efforts are aimed at deterring juvenile crime on three fronts: law enforcement to ensure just punishment and community safety; early intervention to make a juvenile's first brush with the law the last; and prevention with a focus on rebuilding and empowering social institutions that have traditionally instilled values and set boundaries for young people.
- **Mental Health/Juvenile Justice Action Network** – The Network is an expansion of the Models for Change initiative. One Network project – designed by the Center in collaboration with the Pasco School District and Lutheran Community Services – is under way at three middle schools in Pasco, where truant and misbehaving youth are diverted to mental health and community services instead of being referred to the juvenile court. In partnership with several other states, we are also providing training curriculum to juvenile justice system staff in adolescent brain development and youth mental health issues.
- **Child Welfare Resource Bank** – Over the decade spanning 1997 to 2007, nearly 2,000 recommendations for improving Washington's child welfare system were issued by boards, commissions, task forces and other bodies dedicated to protecting and supporting our state's most vulnerable children. In 2008, the Center developed a categorized, searchable database of those recommendations, identified from more than 250 reports issued by government panels, nonprofit organizations and advocacy groups. This in-depth meta-analysis is now available online to researchers and policy-makers. In addition, in late 2009, we convened summit meetings of key political, judicial and law enforcement decision-makers to collaborate on and commit to implementing important reforms in three major Resource Bank areas that may otherwise have remained nothing more than ideas on paper.

- **Supporting Early Connections** – This project involves families with infants and toddlers referred to court for child abuse and neglect. Working with an infant mental health therapist, families address the unique mental health and relationship needs of their young children. The program teaches parents, who themselves may have been abused or otherwise had no positive parenting models, to nurture and bond with their children and respond to their needs. It also addresses parents’ individual mental health or substance abuse issues. The result is that young children will return home sooner and be less likely to return to foster care. The program also provides training to professionals in the justice child welfare and mental health systems on how to better meet the needs of young children and their families. Program partners include Navos, King County Superior Court, parents’ attorneys, the State Attorney General’s Office, the Department of Social and Health Services, the King County CASA program, and infant mental health experts Dr. Sheri Hill and Dr. JoAnne Solchany.
- **Highly Vulnerable Youth: Promoting Positive Outcomes** – A 2006 grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation resulted in the Center’s “Pathways to Success” report, which recommends 11 proven and promising programs aimed at preventing at-risk youth from entering the juvenile justice system or producing better outcomes for youth already in the system. In 2008, a second grant from the Foundation allows us to evaluate the success of two of those programs – TeamChild and New Start Stay in School – in working with highly vulnerable youth facing cultural and language barriers.
- **Lawyers Fostering Independence** – Research shows that three years after leaving care, one in every four former foster youth have no high school diploma or GED, half are unemployed, one in five have experienced homelessness and one in three have been incarcerated. They leave care with no options for legal advocacy in civil matters – such as education, housing, benefits or domestic relations – that may arise during their involvement in the child welfare system or immediately after they leave the system. Our Lawyers Fostering Independence program – developed and implemented thanks to the Perkins Coie Community Service Fellowship Program – recruits, trains and retains a cadre of King County attorneys to provide pro bono civil legal services to youth aging out of the child welfare system. The program is aimed at helping former foster kids resolve civil legal issues that threaten their ability to succeed.
- We lead the work of the Washington State Becca Task Force and the Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care. The Center also is focusing on the issues at-risk youth in military families as well as children caught in circumstances of domestic violence and child maltreatment.

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