

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
JUDICIAL PROCESS COMMITTEE
Representative Shirley J. Meyer
June 09, 2010**

**North Dakota Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
Division of Juvenile Services
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**REPORT TO LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
Senate Bill 2355**

Background: Senate Bill 2355 directed the department of corrections and rehabilitation to establish a pilot program in the south central judicial district for the purpose of providing short-term shelter, assessment, and intervention services for at-risk children and youth. The program was to provide professional assessment and family reunification services as an alternative to foster or group care. Placement was to be non-secure and approved by the juvenile court. A non-profit was to provide the pilot program services. An appropriation of \$200,000.00 was authorized.

History: North Dakota has a comprehensive system in place to deal with issues of child protection and public safety. Children who require protective care, rehabilitative services, or for those youth whose behavior poses a danger to the public receive intervention services through this system. The system is effective, albeit complicated. It is designed to meet the needs of the most challenging and extreme situations.

When the formal system is engaged, the juvenile court places custody with a county or state agency. A case plan for remediation of the situation is developed, and often the child is placed outside of their home.

In less extreme cases, families who are experiencing issues or problems are able to engage in services on their own. However, a gap exists in the continuum for families whose issues are complicated, or for whom a crisis is emerging. These families may have exceeded their own capacity to deal with the problem, but may not necessarily require the intervention of the formal system.

Unfortunately, absent an intermediate level of intervention, these family situations sometimes deteriorate into a full-blown crisis those results in the engagement of the formal system.

In response to this need, a demonstration project was begun in December of 2006 in the South Central region. Start-up funding was provided through the Children's Services Coordinating Committee and the Bush Foundation. Those dollars ended on 6/30/09. Local start-up support was also provided by the City of Bismarck. The appropriation authorized by SB2355 was intended to continue the demonstration program through the 09-11 biennium, thereby allowing for a thorough analysis of the effectiveness of a crisis intervention approach.

Program Description: Youthworks' Short-Term Care and Assessment Center (STCAC) operates in Bismarck, and serves youth and families who primarily live in Burleigh and Morton Counties. The facility provides short-term shelter for youth who cannot immediately return to their home. They are placed with the consent of their parent. The facility is not licensed as a foster care setting, but is designated by the court as the shelter setting for the South Central judicial district.

Eligible youth include:

- those who are taken into custody (or citable) and cannot be immediately or safely returned to their home without further assessment and reunification services
- those whose parents say they can no longer manage their child's behavior and need immediate and professional intervention

These youth are sheltered in a safe place, and while they are with Youthworks they and their families are provided:

- crisis intervention available on an ongoing 24-hour basis.
- a professional assessment regarding safety
- mental health screening
- immediate family counseling and reunification services
- liaison with other providers who might be working with the family
- recommendations and referrals regarding the need for other services (anger management, addiction evaluation, etc.)
- a follow-up case plan that includes brief-model family therapy

Data: The pilot is just finishing its first year of operation under this appropriation. Therefore, data from the cohort beginning July 1, 2009 is not yet available. However, some data is available from previous cohorts.

The data is presented in 180-day increments. In other words, we looked to see how many youth who received shelter care services with crisis intervention and were reunified were still with their parents 6 months later. The data presented is from youth who entered shelter during the year beginning July 1, 2008 and ending June 30, 2009.

103 youth received shelter care services during this time. Of those, 37 youth were at high risk for further formal system involvement, but were identified as candidates to receive reunification services. These 37 youth did receive pilot program services.

At the end of 180 days, 67.6% of the youth were still successfully placed with their families.

A detailed analysis of cost is underway, and results will be available before the next legislative session convenes. Also planned is a comparative analysis of the costs that could typically be expected if these youth did proceed into the foster care system.

Other performance data is being collected, to include a parent satisfaction survey which should yield some valuable information about the usefulness of this process from the family perspective.