

Families With Service Needs: Outcome Findings Demonstrate Success

Excerpts below taken from the Connecticut Families With Service Needs Project Report
Justice Research Center 2010

Families with children who are engaging in risky behaviors such as running away from home, school truancy, sexual activity and general disobedience of family rules often rely on state operated programs to help address these problems. The state of Connecticut has defined such children and parents as Families With Service Needs (FWSN). Public Act 05-250 passed in 2005 and established that children in violation of FWSN orders could no longer be committed to secure detention facilities. In 2006, P.A. 06-188 amended this legislation, and created the Families with Service Needs Advisory Board, which was tasked with managing the implementation of services associated with P.A. 05-250. This was effective on October 1, 2007 and resulted in sweeping system changes across the juvenile justice system regarding handling of status offenders. During that same time, the Judicial Branch Court Support Services Division received funds to implement four Family Support Centers (FSCs), a model developed to provide needed services and court diversion for FWSNs. Statewide implementation calls for six more FSCs, pending appropriate funding. From 2007 to 2009, the FWSN system changes and the implementation of Family Support Centers underwent a process and outcome evaluation, conducted by the Justice Research Center.

The FWSN Service Delivery Plan provided three primary objectives: (1) prevent children from entering the court system by encouraging positive, pro-social development, school attendance, family engagement and community-based programming; (2) intervene to divert at risk children from the court system; and, (3) provide evidence-based services to children who enter the court system.

According to outcome study results, substantive system changes have occurred in Connecticut that have IMPROVED outcomes for Connecticut's Families with Service Needs. These results reinforce Public Act 05-250 and 06-188 as they were imposed in an attempt to reduce the overall number of FWSN complaints, and limit judicial involvement in FWSN cases. In addition to the outcomes below, the study determined that Family Support Centers are operating as intended, and they have already improved with age.

The Juvenile Justice System has also experienced a decrease in the number of delinquency cases across the state of Connecticut, potentially indicating that children referred as FWSN are not being arrested just to get services as originally posited by critics of the plan.

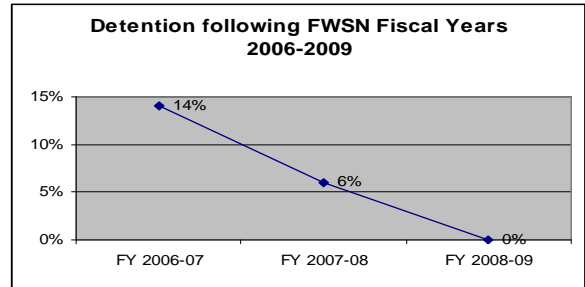
Major findings include:

1. *Significant reductions in FWSN referrals across the state of Connecticut.* In just two years, the FWSN initiative accomplished a 62 percent reduction in the total number of FWSN complaints made by families, schools, community organizations and other agencies.

FWSN Referrals Fiscal Years 2006-09

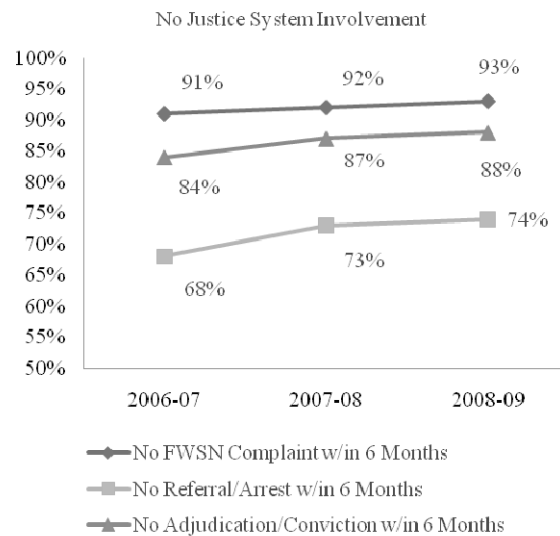
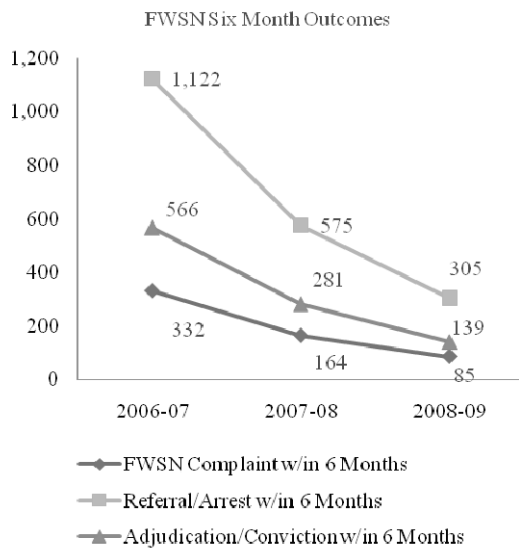
Total FWSN Referrals FY 2006-07	3,521
Total FWSN Referrals FY 2007-08	2,102
Total FWSN Referrals FY 2008-09	2,062

2. *An end to detention placements.* In FY 2008-09, ZERO FWSN complaints had a placement in a detention facility.



3. *The percent of FWSN complaints without further justice system involvement increased* from 68 to 74 percent (from 2006-07 to 2008-09) without a referral or arrest, a statistically significant change.

4. *There were more FWSN cases without a subsequent adjudication or conviction.* In FY 2006-07, 84 percent of all FWSN complaints were without adjudication or conviction within six months of referral. By April 1, 2009, this increased to 88 percent, a statistically significant change.



5. *Significant decreases in judicial processing.* The analysis of 6,816 FWSN complaints from October 1, 2006 through April 1, 2009 showed that *the courts' involvement in handling complaints declined* from 50 percent to 4 percent in two years and shows that aggregate outcomes for all cases are better.

