

# **NEBRASKA COALITION FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE**

## **FY 2010/2011 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR & NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE**

**JULY 1, 2010 – JUNE 30, 2011**



**The Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and  
Criminal Justice**

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# Message from the Chair

The Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice presents the FY 2010/2011 Annual Report to the Governor and the Nebraska Legislature, which highlights the Coalition's accomplishments throughout the year. The Coalition serves as an advisory group for the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice on statewide juvenile justice issues while maintaining compliance with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act.

On behalf of the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice, I would like to take this time to thank the Governor's Office for their continued support. It is the goal of the Coalition to improve all aspects of the juvenile justice system in the State of Nebraska by assisting communities and the state with the planning and implementation of systemic improvements, advocacy, education, and recommending state and federal funds be awarded for such purposes. With the appointment of such a diversified Coalition, Nebraska is able to come together with a vast knowledge of the juvenile justice system, in hopes to improve the lives and futures of our youth and their families who are impacted by the juvenile justice system. This diversified group helps to bring statewide issues with the juvenile justice system back to the Coalition which in turn is able to recognize and recommend funding of sources for improvement in programs throughout the state of Nebraska.

***“When the students are occupied, they're not juvenile delinquents. I believe that education is a capital investment.” — Arlen Specter***

Sincerely,



Mark Benne, Chairperson

# Message from the Youth Committee

Key to the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act (OJJDP) is belief in the power of the youth voice. The Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice takes this ideal to heart. Over the last few years, members of all ages collaborated to identify, engage and empower young members allowing Nebraska to have, arguably, one of the nation's most active youth memberships. Insight provided by the youth committee represents a variety of socioeconomic, geographical, ethnic and racial backgrounds, as well as, personal and professional experiences. The Coalition hopes to continue to cultivate this powerful voice.

Our work has focused locally and nationally. Currently, all six youth members regularly attend and actively participate in quarterly and youth subcommittee meetings. In addition to bringing a needed perspective to meetings, members have worked locally to remove barriers to full youth member involvement, find ways to gain input from young people with system involvement and honor those that have utilized the system to improve themselves. Nationally, we have experienced many exciting milestones, including:

- Three separate members have represented Nebraska on the National Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) Youth Committee over three years.
- Members have held Hill Visits with the offices of Senator Johanns and Senator Nelson.
- Nebraska elected a youth member to Vice Chair of NCJJ.
- A current member was spotlighted in the National CJJ e-Monitor newsletter.
- Twice, Nebraska has been one of a handful of states to send multiple delegates to the annual National Youth Retreat.
- Two members currently serve on National CJJ Youth Committee workgroups.
- A current member co-facilitated a new State Advisory Group Member Training at the National CJJ Conference in 2011.
- Nebraska was one of six states to have a youth member represent their state at the 2011 National CJJ Council of State Advisory Groups meeting.
- A current member is part of a team of four youth members from across the country creating a training curriculum focused on engaging State Advisory Group youth members and presenting its pilot at the 2011 OJJDP National Conference.
- A current member was appointed to the Federal Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice by OJJDP. This is the first year that youth members have been appointed.

As young professionals, we continue to gain invaluable insight from our fellow Coalition members. Their unwavering support, willingness to teach and trust in our abilities has allowed us to expand our understanding of all elements of Coalition work. Understanding the challenges that youth members in other states face, we are grateful to be part of such a dynamic group. Regardless where our professional paths lead, we know that Nebraska will be known as a state that honors the meaning of the OJJDP for a long time to come.

Respectfully,

The 2011 Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice Youth Members

# Executive Summary

In FY 2010/2011, the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ) and Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (Nebraska Crime Commission) reviewed and made recommendations on 135 applications requesting funding, **awarding 109 grants for a total of \$3,196,171** in state and federal funds.

The Coalition and the Nebraska Crime Commission are proud to highlight accomplishments from July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011. The projects listed herein were funded by the State of Nebraska and Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention grant funds administered by the Nebraska Crime Commission.

## **SUMMARY OF SERVICES PROVIDED IN FY 2010/2011**

<b>Grant</b>	<b>Programs Serviced</b>	<b>Amount Awarded</b>
2010 State Juvenile Services	26	\$587,812
2010 County Aid	40	\$1,492,500
2010 County Aid Enhancement	18	\$145,063
2009 Juvenile Accountability Block Grant	6	\$427,310
2009 Title V	3	\$33,486
2009 Title II	16	\$510,000

# Introduction

The **FY 2010/2011 Annual Report to the Governor & Nebraska Legislature** outlines activities and accomplishments of the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice (Coalition) from July 1, 2010 – June 30, 2011. The Coalition is an advisory group to the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice (Nebraska Crime Commission) and advises the Nebraska Crime Commission on statewide juvenile justice issues and juvenile justice grant funding. The Coalition is required to comply with the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP Act) and was established in Nebraska Revised Statute § 43-2411 in 2000 to advise on state and federal juvenile justice grant funds received by the Nebraska Crime Commission.

Coalition members are appointed by the Governor, for terms of three years, based on membership guidelines established by the JJDP Act and state statute. Members elect a Chair and Vice Chair on a biannual basis and meet quarterly at various locations across the state. Five standing subcommittees meet in addition to quarterly Coalition meetings: Executive, Grant Review, Disproportionate Minority Contact, Youth and County Planning Advisory.

## **GOAL**

The goal of the Coalition is to improve all aspects of the juvenile justice system in the State of Nebraska by assisting communities and the state with the planning and implementation of systemic improvements, advocacy, education, and award recommendations of state and federal funds for such purposes.

## **PURPOSE**

It is hoped the lives and futures of children, youth and families involved with the juvenile justice system will be improved.

# Federal Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Act is a federal law that declares it a policy of Congress to provide necessary resources, leadership and coordination to:

- Develop and implement effective methods of preventing and reducing juvenile delinquency, including those with a special focus on preserving and strengthening families so juveniles may remain in the home;
- Develop and conduct effective programs to prevent delinquency, divert juveniles from the justice system, and provide critically needed alternatives to institutionalization;
- Improve the quality of juvenile justice in the United States;
- Increase the capacity of state and local governments and public and private agencies to provide juvenile justice, delinquency prevention and rehabilitation programs, and conduct research, evaluation, and training in delinquency prevention;
- Encourage parental involvement in treatment and alternative disposition programs; and
- Promote interagency cooperation and coordination of services between state, local, and community-based agencies.

The JJDP Act governs the secure confinement of juveniles in detention and correctional facilities, including jails, lockups, juvenile detention centers, and prisons. The JJDP Act is designed to protect juveniles in custody by regulating where, when, and how long juveniles can be securely confined.

Congress originally enacted the JJDP Act in 1974 to require the deinstitutionalization of status offenders and non-offenders as well as the separation of adult and juvenile offenders in detention and correctional settings. In 1980, Congress passed an amendment to the JJDP Act requiring the removal of juveniles from adult jails and lockups. In 1988 and 1992, Congress turned its attention toward the disproportionately high number of minority youth confined in secure detention and correctional facilities. Responsive to a growing concern that minority juvenile offenders are overrepresented within the juvenile justice system, the Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC) amendment was added. In 2002, Congress reauthorized the JJDP Act with few changes. The “C” in DMC was expanded to mean contact in the system, not just confinement.

# Nebraska's Participation in the JJDP Act

In 1981, the Governor and Legislature authorized Nebraska's participation in the federal JJDP Act's Formula Grant Program. Nebraska's eligibility for receiving Formula Grant Program funding is determined by its compliance with the four core requirements of the JJDP Act.

The Four Core Requirements are:

1. Removal of status and non-offenders from secure detention facilities;
2. Separation of adult and juvenile offenders throughout incarceration;
3. Removal of juveniles from adult jails and lockups; and
4. The state must collect and analyze data to identify and address any disproportionate numbers of minority youth at specific decision points throughout the juvenile justice system.

With the Nebraska Legislature's passage of LB1073 in April of 1998, state law is now consistent with the requirements of the federal JJDP Act, resulting in the eligibility of the state for the Act's Rural Exception. The Rural Exception allows adult jails and lockups in rural areas to securely detain juvenile offenders (misdemeanants and felons) awaiting initial court appearance for up to forty-eight hours, excluding holidays and weekends. The juveniles must be sight and sound separated from adult detainees. Prior to being granted use of the Rural Exception, Nebraska's rural jails and lockups were only able to detain an accused juvenile criminal offender up to six hours prior to initial court appearance unless adult felony charges were formally filed.

On an ongoing basis, Nebraska Crime Commission staff monitor records for all juveniles securely confined in correctional and detention facilities throughout the state to determine if their confinement procedure complies with federal and state law. As required by the JJDP Act, an annual Compliance Monitoring Report is submitted to the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) detailing the amount and type of juveniles held in violation of the Act.

# Diversion

A critical point in the juvenile justice system includes the prosecutorial decision to charge a case. Clearly, prosecutors exercise discretion in deciding whether to formally charge a young person with a law violation. Often this discretionary point is informed by objective factors like the level of detail in the police report, the amount of evidence, the victim, the type of offense, and the youth's prior involvement in the system (U.S. Department of Justice and OJJDP, 2009). A prosecutor may elect to send a youth through diversion and then dismiss the case. In other instances, a prosecutor may file the case in court and dismiss only upon successful completion of the diversion program. Although there are many different variations of diversion programs, the core concept of juvenile diversion is programming that a juvenile is required to participate in lieu of formal processing. Diversion programs are typically for juveniles who have committed a minor, often first-offense. Some jurisdictions allow youth with prior offenses, depending upon the facts and circumstances (MIPS, 2010). While participating in a diversion program a youth is generally required to attend educational classes and complete tasks designed to help them learn from their mistake and / or to repay society; often these are programs built upon principles of restorative justice (U.S. Department of Justice and OJJDP, 2009).

In Nebraska, a county attorney has discretion to file a juvenile's case in court, or refer to other services like diversion or mediation under Neb. Rev. Stat § 43-247. If the youth successfully completes diversion, his or her record is sealed pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat §43-2.108.03. In July 2011, the University of Nebraska Omaha's Juvenile Justice Institute conducted a brief phone survey to determine which counties in Nebraska offer juvenile diversion, either through the county attorney or through an outside contracted agency. Thirty-two counties (34%) of Nebraska's 93 counties do not offer formal juvenile diversion. Two counties reported offering a very limited diversion program open to minor traffic offenses (Thayer County) or minor in possession of alcohol (Thurston County). More than half (52% ) of Nebraska counties offer a formal juvenile diversion program. Eleven counties did not reply to the survey.

Diversion is an important processing point when studying disproportionate minority contact (DMC). First, as a matter of equity, juveniles should be offered the opportunity to informally divert out of the system—based upon objective factors like the type of offense or number of priors. Because diversion is a discretionary point within the juvenile justice system, subjective factors, like bias, may operate in conjunction with objective factors (U.S. Department of Justice and OJJDP, 2009). Another reason for studying this entry point is that diversion has been shown to be an effective deterrent to future legal involvement (Dembo et al., 2008; Rodriguez, 2007).

# Disproportionate Minority Contact

Nebraska strives to reduce and eliminate the disproportion of minority youth in contact with the juvenile justice system known as DMC or disproportionate representation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system. Nebraska has taken major steps to address this increasing plight. Cherry, Colfax, Dakota, Dawes, Dawson, Douglas, Hall, Lancaster, Madison, Platte, Sarpy, Saunders, Scottsbluff, and Thurston Counties are the 14 counties that were designated and tracked for DMC in 2010.

In 2011, Douglas County was awarded a grant for the Burns Institute to host community engagement events around DMC. The purpose of the technical assistance was to develop a long-term plan for community partner engagement for addressing racial disparities. The W. Haywood Burns Institute (BI) is a national nonprofit with a history of demonstrated leadership in the field of juvenile justice and ethnic and racial disparities reduction. The BI's mission is to help protect and improve the lives of youth of color and poor youth by promoting and ensuring fairness and equity in youth-serving systems across the country. The BI has worked in over 40 jurisdictions nationally and achieved results in reducing racial and ethnic disparities. The BI model is dynamic and innovative because it proves that reducing disparities is a solvable problem.

Nebraska was officially launched as a Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) site in February 2011, in Douglas County. JDAI is a nationally renowned reform process that effectively: lowers detention populations, enhances public safety, saves tax payer money, reduces the overrepresentation of minority youth, and introduces other overall juvenile justice system improvements. The JDAI Collaborative consists of juvenile justice decision makers focused on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of our juvenile justice system and “changing the way we do business.”

Establishing a JDAI site in Nebraska is a specific strategy identified in the State of Nebraska's approved Three Year Comprehensive Juvenile Justice Plan regarding Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Additionally, engaging in the JDAI process will address the following priority issues identified by the State of Nebraska's approved Three Year Comprehensive Juvenile Justice Plan: the lack of alternatives to detention, the overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system (also a priority issue identified in Douglas County's Three Year Plan), and the need for systemic reform in regards to data collection, risk assessment and evaluations.

# Compliance Monitoring

Nebraska continues to maintain compliance with the JJDP Act. Compliance with the Act resulted in Nebraska's eligibility for the full Title II federal award of \$600,000 in 2010. Noncompliance with one or more of the four core requirements would result in the state losing 20% of the allocation for each requirement not found in compliance. In addition, 50% of the remaining funds, must be allocated to rectify the issue of noncompliance. Compliance equates to a significant amount of dollars for the state and, more importantly, it means that the Nebraska has raised the standard for how youth are treated in the juvenile justice system. To promote and maintain Nebraska's compliance with the JJDP Act, the Nebraska Crime Commission staff work actively with local jurisdictions to remedy potential noncompliance issues through technical assistance, training, juvenile justice planning and ongoing monitoring.

## Nebraska Juvenile Services Act

The Nebraska Juvenile Services Act was created in July of 1990 with the passage of LB663. The Act is designed to assist communities in providing programs and services that create alternatives to incarceration for juveniles in the justice system. In July of 1992, responsibility for administration of the Juvenile Services Act was transferred to the Nebraska Crime Commission via LB447. The original Juvenile Services Grant Committee established working groups to develop by-laws, rules and regulations to meet state requirements. In 2000, this group was combined with the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice. The Coalition works to focus funding on current juvenile justice issues. The 2010 appropriation for the Juvenile Services Act funds was \$694,098; \$106,286 was retained for administrative costs; \$537,212 was awarded; and \$50,600 was retained through a Special Legislative Session convened by the Governor in November 2009.

# Juvenile Services County Aid

In 2005 the Legislature passed LB193, now Nebraska State Statute §43-2404.02. This transferred the administration of the County Juvenile Services Aid Program from Health and Human Services/Office of Juvenile Services to the Nebraska Crime Commission. The program is intended to provide resources to counties for needs identified in their Comprehensive Community Juvenile Services plan. By statute, each county is allocated funding based on the population of 12-18 year olds residing in the county. Counties are required to have a Comprehensive Community Juvenile Services plan in place to be eligible for County Aid funds. Counties can plan individually or as a region, thereby allowing them to apply for County Aid funds individually or as a partnership.

Counties provide a 40% match either through county general funds or by documenting the required match amount through annual county juvenile justice expenditures. In 2010 the total appropriation was \$1,492,500 of which \$1,347,437 was awarded.

## Juvenile Services County Aid Enhancement

In 2008, the Legislature passed LB1014. This bill states that any funds not distributed to counties under this subsection shall be retained by the Nebraska Crime Commission to be distributed on a competitive basis under the County Juvenile Services Aid Program.

In order to be eligible for County Aid Enhancement, a county must submit a County Aid application. Counties provide a 40% match either through county general funds or by documenting the required match amount through annual county juvenile justice expenditures. In FY 2010/2011, the total appropriation was \$145,063.

# Comprehensive Community Juvenile Services Plans

Nebraska State Statute § 43-3504 requires communities to develop a Comprehensive Community Juvenile Services plan and submit the plan to the Nebraska Crime Commission. Updated plans are submitted every three years. Technical assistance is provided by the Juvenile Justice Institute at the University of Nebraska at Omaha with funding from the Nebraska Crime Commission. Counties are eligible for federal and state juvenile justice funding through the Nebraska Crime Commission (Juvenile Services Act, § 43-2404.01) by having a plan on file. By thorough planning, a community is remarkably poised to apply for dollars to effectively address youth issues. Local community planning assists in the formation of Nebraska's state comprehensive plan as required by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Components of the Comprehensive Community Juvenile Services plan include:

- Juvenile Justice System Point Analysis – a juvenile justice county data analysis, which helps identify challenges or concerns.
- Community Capacity Inventory – which surveys youth programs and services to gain an understanding of how the 40 Developmental Assets and YLS risk-need factors are being addressed.
- Community Stabilizing Efforts Review – which incorporates the above components in a report identifying gaps in the community.

The local advisory team reviews the components above and develops priorities and corresponding strategies that will be the focus of their juvenile justice and prevention programming for the next three years.

Common needs and priorities identified across the state include:

- truancy
- substance abuse among youth
- lack of collaboration among agencies working with youth
- lack of healthy youth activities
- lack of supervision of youth between 3 - 6 p.m.
- the number of youth entering the juvenile justice system

# Nebraska's Three Year Plan 2009—2011

In order to receive federal JJDP Act funds, a state must have a comprehensive three-year plan. This plan must address the status of the state's compliance with the four core requirements and include a plan to maintain compliance. Once a state complies with the core requirements, other program areas can be addressed.

The Coalition gathers community input on juvenile justice issues by accepting public comment at quarterly Coalition meetings, conducting public forums, reviewing local Comprehensive Community Juvenile Services plans, and from Coalition members' professional experience. The development of the 2009-2011 three-year plan was completed by members of the Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice, Crime Commission staff, and a consultant. The following five juvenile justice needs were set forth:

- Prevention programs, along with alternatives to detention programs, are not consistently available in communities statewide.
- Nebraska would like to have a holistic, collaborative systems approach when dealing with youth in Nebraska.
- Statewide access to appropriate services including detention, mental health, substance abuse, and violence issues is necessary.
- There is need for Nebraska to be more aware of family wellness.
- Minority youth in Nebraska are over represented in the juvenile justice system.

Based on the federal priority areas, Nebraska will continue to focus on maintaining compliance with the four core requirements and remain cognizant of the five state juvenile justice needs. Programming with the following focus areas will receive prioritization:

- Alternatives to Detention
- Community Assessment Centers
- Compliance Monitoring
- Delinquency Prevention
- Disproportionate Minority Contact
- Diversion Services
- Juvenile Justice System Improvement
- Native American Programs
- State Advisory Group Allocation

# Grant Review Process

The Nebraska Crime Commission is the designated state agency to facilitate the functions of state funds (Juvenile Services, County Aid and Enhancement) and federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funds (Title II, Title V and JABG). While each has different guidelines and rules, the process of granting the awards is consistent across funding sources.

Annually, funds are distributed on a competitive basis, with the exception of County Aid Juvenile Services funds and Juvenile Accountability Block Grant funds, which are formula based. An announcement for the availability of funds is released once a year and applicants have approximately two months to complete the required application. After the deadline, applications experience a grant review process. Three levels of review include: Staff Review, Grant Review Subcommittee of NCJJ and ultimately the Nebraska Crime Commission.

Programs receiving funding may be required to attend Grant Management Training and have a project period of one year. Continuation funding is not guaranteed and applicants must apply for funds annually. A step-down policy exists for Title II and Juvenile Services Grants. The policy states that contingent upon a program complying with the reporting requirements, meeting goals and objectives and proper management of funds, a program will be recommended for the same level of funding for two years and a step down in funds of 25% increments in the three years to follow.

The Nebraska Crime Commission is working to gather standardized data from all programs. Subgrantees are required to submit key indicators of their evaluation plans on a quarterly basis as well as Federal Performance Measures that are reported to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

# Success Stories

Lancaster County's Evening Reporting Center, operated through Cedars Youth Services, offers a positive alternative for youth in need of additional supervision assistance or for those who are at high risk for re-offending. On average we annually serve 65-85 youth. The target populations are both pre-adjudicated and adjudicated youth, primarily those that would otherwise be in detention, youth who are receiving a sanction, youth who are in needs of skill acquisition or youth who need to complete their community service hours. The Evening Reporting Center serve youth in the age range of 12-18 years of age. An evening meal and two snacks are provided to all participants and transportation to and from the center are provided. Services are offered at 6601 Pioneers Boulevard, and the hours of operation are 3:30 p.m.—7:30 p.m., Monday—Friday.

One of the many benefits we have working with youth is being able to witness them grow and discover talents they never knew they had. \*Clair was referred to the program for repeatedly testing positive for substance abuse and truancy issues. After Clair's fourth day in the program staff noticed that she was assisting other youth in the program as well as holding her peers accountable. Before staff facilitates a group or exercise they may ask the youth to appoint a leader for that activity. More often than not, the kids choose Clair. Therefore, one of Clair's goals on her service plan was to develop healthy leadership skills. Clair took this goal as a challenge and made a significant amount of progress during her time here. When Clair was successfully discharged from the program she indicated that she was unaware of her capability to lead others. Clair planned on taking these talents and using them in school and extracurricular activities.

\*Name has been changed to protect identity

# Success Stories

Saunders County CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates)

Wahoo, Nebraska

Program Began July 1, 2010

Program Director: Susan Gottschalk

Stats:

Twelve children are receiving the benefits of a CASA

Nine volunteers

Six are working on cases

Prior to a recent placement review, I was waiting in the hall before court. The family, including the child and foster mom, were sitting together on a bench. CASA volunteer Deb Barry entered the building. Dad spotted her and said to his son, "There's Deb. Do you see her? Yes, we all know Deb don't we?" She was greeted with open arms as she proceeded to sit down with them and talk. The KVC Behavioral Healthcare case worker was recommending the child be placed back in the home. During court all parties, including the CASA, agreed it was time for the child to be returned to his parents. The family would remain under the supervision of KVC. Outside the courtroom there were many tears and congratulations. The parents hugged Deb and she reassured them she will be visiting and helping in any way. As I left, the foster Mom was sitting on the bench with the little boy telling him, "I'm so happy you are going home today. I will miss you, really miss you."

To see that kind of interaction and communication on behalf of all the parties involved proved to me the importance of the CASA program and how helpful it can be to everyone involved.

# Success Stories

Friendship Home provides safe, confidential emergency shelter and supportive services to women who are victims of domestic violence and their children. Our Children in Emergency Shelter Project works to incorporate the 40 Developmental Asset philosophy into our current programming for children, as well as increase the cultural sensitivity of our services. Following is a story of a family we served in shelter:

\*Amiya came into shelter with her three children, ages 12, 10, and 4. Amiya's abuser, and father of the youngest child, was extremely emotionally abusive to Amiya and her children. Amiya was awarded sole custody of the children due to this abuse. The children, upon entering shelter, were emotionally shut down and would only speak when directly spoken to. At first, the children stayed close to their mother or in their bedroom, or absorbed in television. Their Children's Advocate took care to gently approach each child every day and show interest in them, developing trust over time. The Children's Advocate used the 40 Developmental Asset philosophy individually in her work with the children and with their mother, to help her learn how to bring her children out of their shell and begin to discuss their interests and feelings. Before long the children began to blossom and enjoy their time with staff each day; doing activities such as playing outside, going on walks, playing video games, talking about their talents and interests, reading together, and listening to music. Amiya was delighted as she got to know her children for who they really are, and learned how to foster their strengths and help them work through fears. Amiya expressed gratitude upon leaving shelter, stating, "You changed my life and my children's life. I didn't realize how bright, creative, and funny my kids are. I am so grateful for your help...it's good to see them be kids again and enjoy life. Thank you so much for seeing us through the abuse and helping us to become a family again."

\*Name has been changed to protect identity

# Success Stories

## **VICTIM EMPATHY PROGRAM**

**Heartland Family Service, 2101 S. 42<sup>ND</sup> ST. Omaha, Ne**

The Victim Empathy Program is a restorative justice initiative that provides an opportunity for young offenders to understand the effects of their offense on their victim and the community. Through victim empathy classes, victim offender meetings and community service, youth gain a new perspective on his or her crime.

Restorative Justice emphasizes the harm done to a victim and the community, and works to involve all affected by the crime in the resolution process. The goal is to repair the relationship and fix the damage that has been done, thereby equipping the youth with a desire to avoid further crime. Since 2006, 700 youth have participated in the program with 90% successfully completing the class and 85% remaining crime free six months after completion.

A diversion worker from the Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center referred two 14 year old girls, charged with assault for fighting in school. During the circle discussion in the second victim empathy class where youth share their crime with the group and how they feel it impacted the victim; the two girls shared the details of their fight and realized that they had been manipulated by their peers to fight. The girls realized they did not really dislike each other; that others had exaggerated their differences. Because of the discussion in class that day, they realized if they had sat down and talked, rather than reacted to the pressure of their peers; the entire situation could have been avoided.

# Nebraska Coalition for Juvenile Justice

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