Aftercare and Specialized Aftercare Services  
by Megan Clouser

One of the primary goals of Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System is to provide treatment to delinquent youths in the least intrusive manner, preserving the family unit whenever possible. However, as with most ideals, it is not always possible to meet this objective in real world situations.

While probation continues to be the most frequent disposition ordered by Pennsylvania juvenile courts, statistics show that residential treatment (secure or non-secure) was determined necessary in 4,155, (11.7%), of the 35,531 cases brought before the Commonwealth’s juvenile courts in 1994.

For those juveniles placed in residential facilities, one of the most critical moments in treatment occurs when residential programming is completed. Unfortunately, juvenile justice officials note that while many of these children make great strides towards rehabilitation while in custody, all too often these gains are lost after release.

In recognition of this phenomenon, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency has been providing funds for the development and operation of county-based aftercare programs since 1978.

Most simply, aftercare is a period of extended supervision and service delivery provided after a youth is released from a residential placement. Aftercare supervision often includes such components as regular contact with an aftercare counselor, monitoring of school/job attendance, and referral to additional support services as appropriate.

The planning for aftercare, however, begins the moment a youth enters placement. Through regular contact between the aftercare counselor, the youth and the youth’s family during the placement period, the necessary links are forged between the treatment environment and home community to facilitate successful reintegration.

This issue of Pennsylvania Progress will follow more than two decades of aftercare programming in Pennsylvania from the original demonstration project established in 1974, through the expansion of aftercare services to 30 Pennsylvania counties, to the evolution of specialized aftercare models such as Intensive Aftercare and Drug and Alcohol Intensive Aftercare.

The Loysville Youth Advocacy Program

Nowhere has the failure of juveniles returning from residential treatment facilities been more noticeable than in the public education system. Juveniles who demonstrate potential for academic achievement while in custody repeatedly fail or drop-out of the public school system shortly after their return.
The Pennsylvania Department of Education—responsible for both the operation of the public school system and the correctional education program provided in residential facilities—felt an obligation to ensure that the academic potential of these students realized in treatment was later fulfilled through the public schools in their home communities.

In 1974, the Department of Education provided funding through its Bureau of Correctional Education to create a demonstration aftercare program, the Loysville Youth Advocacy Program, at the Loysville Youth Development Center. (The Loysville Youth Development Center is one of eight state-run institutions operated by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. Located in Perry County, the facility services male delinquents from across the state who are between the ages of 12 and 18).

Realizing that the causes of school failure often reach far beyond school walls, the Loysville Youth Advocacy Program was designed to address social and emotional, as well as educational issues, faced by juveniles returning from residential placement.

The Advocacy Program was operated through a contract with the West Perry School District and employed four aftercare counselors to provide services to juveniles ordered to the Loysville facility by either Dauphin or York county juvenile courts—the two counties responsible for the majority of placements to this facility.

The day a youth from either Dauphin or York county entered the facility, an aftercare counselor was assigned to the case and formal aftercare planning began. Throughout the juvenile’s stay at the facility the aftercare counselor continued to meet with the youth and the family to ensure that sufficient living arrangements and school or employment opportunities would be available upon release.

The aftercare counselor then maintained daily contact with the youth for the first month following release. After this time, the case was reviewed on a monthly basis to determine the need for continued services, the type of services to be provided, and the frequency of contact required. According to an aftercare counselor who worked at Loysville for the duration of the program, aftercare services continued for a minimum of six months with one-year being the average length of programming.

However, the program’s origin, officials in the Department of Education, as well as the aftercare workers, acknowledged that an institutionally based program was not the ideal model as the aftercare workers were not members of the communities into which the juveniles would be returning. The demonstration project was therefore designed primarily to spark the interest of county and local governments in providing county and/or community-based aftercare services.

THE COUNTY-BASED AFTERCARE MODEL

Developing a County-Based Model

The Loysville program did indeed gain the attention of county governments as well as the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. In 1978, based on the success of the program, the Commission provided $51,444 in funding to the Pennsylvania Department of Education to support the establishment of county-based aftercare programs through an initiative known as the “Pennsylvania Youth Aftercare Project.”

Working closely with the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, the Department of Education designed this initiative to intervene with youthful offenders in a supportive, non-authoritarian manner as they are reintroduced into the regular society after a period of incarceration.

The Project funding was divided between five interested counties—Cambria, Clearfield, Mercer, Lehigh, and Lycoming. In each county the aftercare program was operated through the juvenile probation department. The Aftercare Project provided general guidelines for program operation, however, specific policies and procedures were allowed to vary between counties to represent individual needs of the county and the juveniles being served.

In 1979, the Pennsylvania Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission took over the reigns on the Youth Aftercare Project. As the Commission’s primary responsibility is to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of county-based juvenile courts and their probation departments, the Department of Education agreed the new county-based model fit more directly under the auspices of the Commission.

The new model incorporated successful components of the Loysville program including the initiation of aftercare planning at the time of commitment,
coordination of planning between institution staff and aftercare counselors, and continuous contact between the aftercare counselors, youth and the youth’s family during placement.

In addition, the primary strength of this new model was that the aftercare counselors lived and/or worked in the communities to which the juveniles were returning. This allowed for greater levels of supervision in the community and a greater understanding of the community resources and specific challenges that may be faced by a youth upon return to the home environment.

In 1982, the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission promulgated standards to govern the provision of aftercare services and to ensure equity of services across county programs. These standards are presented on page five.

Expansion and Evaluation

During the early 1980’s, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency worked closely with the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission to provide funding to those counties most dedicated to establishing aftercare programs.

In 1984, the agencies announced a formal joint initiative to expand the availability of both intensive probation and aftercare services across the Commonwealth. The aftercare component of this initiative was a five-year effort to fund the start-up and initial operation of aftercare programs within county probation departments and to measure the recidivism rates of juveniles serviced.

Through this initiative, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency would provide a maximum of $20,000 per aftercare position in the first year, up to $12,000 per position in the second year, and the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission would provide $3,000 per position for the third and subsequent years of operation. In addition, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency supported the initial employment of a Statewide Intensive Probation/Aftercare Coordinator at the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission’s Center for Juvenile Justice Training and Research at Shippensburg University.

In 1990, the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission released the final data on the Aftercare Project reporting that aftercare programs were operational in 30 of Pennsylvania’s 67 counties employing a total of 52 aftercare specialists. Evaluation data from these programs revealed that from 1985 to 1989, the Aftercare Project served 4,115 juveniles with recidivism rates ranging from a high of 9.7% in 1985 to a low of 7.3% in 1988. (Recidivism rates for this evaluation were determined by a new adjudication in juvenile court, or a new conviction in criminal court, within a twelve-month period following release.)

INTENSIVE AFTERCARE

A 1987 report, “Recidivism Among Juveniles Released From Three Secure Placements in Pennsylvania,” by Lynne Goodstein of the Pennsylvania State University and Henry Sontheimer of the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission, found that 49% of those juveniles who were classified as serious, habitual offenders were re-arrested within six months of release from residential placement.

In response, the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission proposed a new initiative, the Intensive Aftercare Project, to target those offenders whose juvenile history indicated the repeat commission of serious and violent acts such as robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, and forcible sexual assault. The objectives of this new program were to provide enhanced services and supervision to this subgroup of juvenile offenders to effect a reduction in the level of recidivism.

Through an appropriation from the State Legislature in FY 1988-89, the Commission received $250,000 to support the implementation of pilot intensive aftercare programs in Philadelphia and Allegheny (Pittsburgh) Counties—the two counties representing the largest
Funded primarily by county government since 1992, the Philadelphia Intensive Aftercare program has continued to expand. The program currently employs 14 intensive aftercare counselors, a supervisor, a drug technician, two assistant counselors and a secretary.

In response to growing numbers of juveniles who exhibit drug and/or alcohol problems coming before the juvenile courts, the Pennsylvania legislature appropriated $3.5 million to the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission in FY 1989-90 to develop programs to combat drug and alcohol abuse among juveniles coming into contact with the system.

PENNFREE, as this initiative became known, was a one-time infusion of funds to be used to establish (1) county-based drug and alcohol intensive probation and aftercare programs, (2) statewide drug and alcohol testing capabilities, and (3) a statewide juvenile probation training component to equip counselors with the specialized skills required to implement components (1) and (2).

An early evaluation of this program found that, of the 931 juveniles who had received drug and alcohol specialized probation/aftercare services by 1991, only 6.7% were arrested for a new offense and 3.5% were re-committed for a probation violation.

When PENNFREE expired in December 1991, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency began to work with the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission to ensure that these valuable new programs and services did not become extinct as well. Through a three-year dedication of funds, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency provided almost $2.5 million in federal Drug Control and System Improvement (DCSI) monies to continue 62 drug and alcohol probation/aftercare positions in 41 counties, to continue drug and alcohol testing programs in approximately 60 counties, and to provide specialized drug and alcohol training to approximately 200 juvenile probation/aftercare counselors annually.

The required state match for federal DCSI funding was provided by the state legislature through the annual grant-in-aid appropriation administered by the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission. As of January 1, 1995, the Commonwealth has fully incorporated Drug and Alcohol Intensive Probation/Aftercare funding into the volume of cases involving juveniles classified as serious and habitual according to definitions of the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. State funds were used to hire a total of eight intensive aftercare counselors: five in Philadelphia county and three in Allegheny county. Start-up work began on the programs in 1988, and both programs were fully operational by the spring of 1989.

**Components of Intensive Aftercare**

Similar to the standard aftercare services, the Intensive Aftercare model designed by the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission begins the day a juvenile is placed in a residential facility and continues for a minimum of six months subsequent to release.

The distinguishing characteristics of intensive aftercare are the smaller case loads recommended per counselor (12 per intensive aftercare counselors versus 18 to 25 for standard aftercare counselors) and the heightened levels of supervision during the post-release period. For example, the Commission’s standards for intensive aftercare require the intensive aftercare counselor to make a minimum of three face-to-face contacts per week with the juvenile for the first six weeks following release, two face-to-face contacts during weeks seven through twelve, and one face-to-face contact after the twelfth week. This compares to one weekly contact recommended for standard aftercare services.

In addition, the intensive aftercare counselor initiates communication with the juvenile’s family at least once a week and with the juvenile’s schools, employer and significant others at least once every two weeks for the duration of post-release supervision.

**Evaluation**

Simultaneous with the establishment of the Philadelphia program, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency funded an evaluation of the program to determine its effectiveness. The “Philadelphia Intensive Aftercare Probation Evaluation Project,” released in December 1990, reports that the Philadelphia program achieved considerable levels of success with juveniles assigned to intensive aftercare showing a re-arrest rate of only 50% versus 64% for juveniles assigned to the control group. Moreover, this study found juveniles assigned to the control group accounted for twice as many new arrests and six times as many convictions and incarcerations as juveniles assigned to intensive aftercare.
The recommended caseload size for the aftercare officer is 18 youth. The caseload size of the aftercare officer shall not exceed 25 youth.

II. Aftercare begins when the placement decision is made. Aftercare services should be provided while the youth is in placement and for a six-month period following his/her release unless the youth is discharged sooner or supervision is extended by the Court.

III. Within 30 days after the placement decision is made, the aftercare officer will develop and complete a written treatment plan for the youth based on information gathered from the parent(s), guardian(s) and placement facility.

IV. The aftercare officer should attend the initial treatment staffing and release staffing conducted by the placement facility regarding the youth in placement.

V. The aftercare officer shall visit the placement site once every month to visit with the youth and the appropriate program staff.

VI. The Court shall require that the placement facility provide a written treatment plan within 30 days after the youth enters placement; written monthly progress reports or, where appropriate, written quarterly progress reports; and written release summaries which include a post-release plan.

VII. The aftercare officer shall maintain monthly contact with the parent(s) guardian(s) while the youth is in placement to communicate progress and to initiate and implement aftercare planning.

VIII. The aftercare officer shall complete a written post-release plan prior to the youth’s release from placement outlining post-release goals for the youth and how they may be attained.

IX. During the six-month period following release, the aftercare officer shall contact the youth and significant others at least once a week until the youth is stabilized the community. These contacts should increase or decrease depending upon the youth’s adjustment.

X. Aftercare cases shall be reviewed on a monthly basis by the aftercare officer and the Chief Juvenile Probation Officer or his/her designee.

In 1995, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency granted funds to Temple University for a complete evaluation of the drug and alcohol intensive programs. Designed to determine if the programs are effective in reducing overall recidivism rates as well as recidivism rates for drug and alcohol offenses among participants, this study is scheduled for completion in the fall of 1996.

The development of aftercare programs and related services in Pennsylvania provides an excellent example of the progress that can be achieved through the strategic dedication of seed monies. The ability of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to recognize the potential for excellence in new initiatives, and to work cooperatively with other key government agencies such as the Juvenile Court Judges’ Commission and the Department of Education, allowed for the expansion and continuous improvement of aftercare programs across the Commonwealth.
The effectiveness of aftercare demonstration programs has previously gained the attention of interested county governments as well as the state-legislature as illustrated through the dedication of state funding to the Intensive Aftercare and PENNFREE initiatives.

Today, local governments are recognizing the potential of the aftercare model for networking community resources and increasing community involvement in juvenile justice. In 1995, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency provided start-up funding to the City of Pittsburgh for a community-based aftercare model, the “Mayor’s Youth Initiative Project Service Consortium for Serious Adolescent Offenders.”

According to the Mayor’s office, this program integrates the themes of comprehensive services provision, collaboration, community involvement and sanctioning to address the needs of serious juvenile offenders returning to the community in a manner that capitalizes on the existing strengths of the Pittsburgh community.

Agencies that have already committed to participation in the consortium include the Allegheny County Juvenile Court, Abraxis, Alternative Program Associates, Pressley Ridge, YMCA East End Outreach Program, the Urban League, Whales Tale, and the Law and Psychiatry Program at Western Psychiatric Institute and Clinic, University of Pittsburgh.

The program is currently in the process of selecting juveniles for participation and training case managers. The program is anticipated to be fully operational by October 1996.

For more information on the development and operation of aftercare and specialized aftercare programs in Pennsylvania contact:

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