

**RE-THINKING SERVICE  
DELIVERY STRATEGIES FOR  
PINS AND JD YOUTH AND  
THEIR FAMILIES IN MONROE  
COUNTY**

August, 2003  
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# **RE-THINKING SERVICE DELIVERY STRATEGIES FOR PINS AND JD YOUTH AND THEIR FAMILIES IN MONROE COUNTY**

Prepared by CGR on behalf of:  
**Monroe County Workgroup on PINS and JD Diversion**

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Thanks to Dan Ross and Bob Burns for their support and willingness to take a fresh look at the PINS and JD processes.

## Staff Team

This project was staffed by Rob Rosenkrantz, MPA, Director of Integrated Services for Children and Families, and Kimberly Hood, MPA, Research Associate.

## I. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-1980s, the Monroe County Department of Human and Health Services, Division of Social Services (MCDHHS-DSS) and the Monroe County Office of Probation – Community Corrections (Probation) have offered a wide array of diversion services to prevent youth involved with the probation system from being adjudicated as Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS)<sup>1</sup> or Juvenile Delinquents (JDs)<sup>2</sup> and placed in foster care. Currently, these preventive services include the following:

- ❖ in-home counseling programs;
- ❖ school-based programs;
- ❖ substance abuse specialists;
- ❖ sex offender treatment;
- ❖ mediation services;
- ❖ intensive short term out-of-home placement;
- ❖ intensive in-home child and family care coordination;
- ❖ intensive supervision;
- ❖ drug court;
- ❖ electronic monitoring;
- ❖ juvenile day reporting center; and
- ❖ aftercare.

Despite the range of preventive and diversion services available in Monroe County, the numbers of adjudicated youth being sent to

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<sup>1</sup> A Person in Need of Supervision (PINS) is a term that describes youth under the age of eighteen who demonstrate a pattern of serious behavioral problems (non-criminal misconduct) such as running away, not attending school regularly, incorrigibility, marijuana use, or being ungovernable or habitually disobedient, and who come to the attention of the juvenile justice system.

<sup>2</sup> A Juvenile Delinquent (JD) refers to youth over seven and less than sixteen years of age who have committed an act that, if committed by an adult, would constitute a crime.

foster care and Office of Children and Family Services residential facilities remained steady from the mid 1980s to the current period.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Monroe County: Total Placements</b>
<b>1998</b>	310
<b>1999</b>	301
<b>2000</b>	312
<b>2001</b>	299
<b>2002<sup>3</sup></b>	262

*Source: Monroe County Department of Human and Health Services, Division of Social Services.*

Placing a child out-of-home is disruptive for both the child and the family and often yields limited success in addressing the youth's behavioral issues or meeting the longer-term needs of the child and family. Moreover, these placements are costly, with higher levels of care costing taxpayers up to \$84,000 per year.<sup>4</sup> According to MCDHHS-DSS, among the 262 youth placed out-of-home in 2002, an estimated 90% were placed in the more costly higher levels of care. The annual cost of out-of-home placement for these youth was approximately \$20 million in 2002. However, when considering that the average length of placement among these youth exceeds one year, the total costs associated with placing this cohort are likely to be substantially higher.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally, the implementation of the PINS 18 legislation, which went into effect in July 2002 and raised the age limit for a Person in Need of Supervision from 16 to 18, is likely to lead to greater

<sup>3</sup> In 2002, the number of PINS and JD placements dropped to 262 (12% fewer than the previous year). This decrease is likely attributable to two initiatives undertaken by the County in 2002: 1) a cross systems review of each youth recommended for placement, begun in the spring of 2002, and 2) the Monroe County Youth and Family Partnership, established in April 2002, which successfully diverted 25 youth from residential placement using an interdisciplinary team of DSS caseworkers, Probation Officers, and mental health clinicians.

<sup>4</sup> This figure represents gross costs, or the federal, state, and local share of tuition and room and board. (Source: MCDHHS-DSS)

<sup>5</sup> Per MCDHHS-DSS, the average length of stay for PINS/JD youth in DSS care and custody who were discharged from care in 2002 was approximately 22.5 months.

usage of the PINS system and higher costs for the County. Therefore, it is imperative in these days of dwindling resources that public funds be used in the most efficient and effective ways to better serve youth, their families, and the community.

While the County has historically invested substantial resources in programs to decrease the number of youth that go to court and consequently residential placement, continued high placement rates have served as a wake-up call for MCDHHS-DSS and Probation leaders. In the current fiscal environment, many agencies are being asked to do more with less. The MCDHHS-DSS and Probation leaders have made a commitment to finding ways to better serve their clients and reduce out-of-home placements not only because these placements are costly, but also because there is little evidence of the effectiveness of these placements. In fact, in a December 2001 report, the Vera Institute found that among a majority of youth entering the PINS system in New York City with a history of truancy, school attendance decreased following an out-of-home placement.<sup>6</sup>

## Project Methodology

The Deputy Director for Children and Family Services in DSS and the Probation Administrator engaged CGR to facilitate a County Workgroup to develop recommended approaches for reducing Monroe County's PINS and JD filings, and, ultimately, improve youth and family outcomes and decrease out-of-home placements.

The initial Workgroup was composed primarily of county staff who best know the backgrounds, needs, and current services available to PINS and JDs - mid-level and front line staff from the Office of Probation and MCDHHS Division of Social Services. The Workgroup was expanded to include other community stakeholders familiar with the issues of serving this population. The full workgroup included representatives from the following:

- ❖ Monroe County Department of Human and Health Services, Division of Social Services;
- ❖ Monroe County Office of Probation – Community Corrections;

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<sup>6</sup> Dylan Conger and Alison Rebeck, *How Children's Foster Care Experiences Affect Their Education* (New York: Vera Institute, 2001).



- ❖ Monroe County Department of Mental Health;
- ❖ Rochester/Monroe County Youth Bureau;
- ❖ Monroe County Family Court;
- ❖ Monroe County Department of Law;
- ❖ Monroe County Sheriff's Office;
- ❖ Legal Aid Society Law Guardian Program;
- ❖ Coordinated Care Services, Inc.;
- ❖ City and Suburban School Districts.

Over the past nine months, CGR facilitated monthly Workgroup meetings, collected and analyzed data, and made presentations to the Workgroup on current PINS and JD operations both within and outside of Monroe County. To assist in the development of recommendations, several subgroups were formed and these smaller work groups were asked to consider specific issues or areas more closely (e.g., truancy, the current diversion model, options for earlier intervention) and develop recommendations for consideration by the larger Workgroup. Then, using a consensus-driven process, the larger Workgroup considered and debated various options, and ultimately adopted the recommendations contained in this report.

To inform the work of the subgroups and the Workgroup, CGR's research included:

- ❖ A review of the County's existing diversion and placement processes<sup>7</sup>;
- ❖ Interviews with more than 65 stakeholders involved in the PINS and JD processes and a synthesis of their comments on what they perceive to be the strengths and weaknesses of the current system as well as their suggestions for improvements;
- ❖ A record review of a sample of youth adjudicated as PINS or JDs and remanded to foster care;

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<sup>7</sup> While conducting formal evaluations of these programs and making program-specific recommendations were beyond the scope of this project, CGR reviewed the diversion services contracted by MCDHHS-DSS and conducted interviews with agency staff.

- ❖ Identification, summary, and presentation of innovative approaches used by Dutchess, Erie, Orange, and Schenectady Counties to reduce PINS and JD placements. CGR interviewed Social Services and Probation staff in each of the counties to better understand the processes currently in place, the impetus for their implementation, and the outcomes for youth and families involved. The models we researched shared the following key elements:
  - *Early Interaction with Youth and Their Families*: All of the models reviewed work with youth and families to resolve problems early on, before involvement with the juvenile justice system.
  - *Family Engagement*: The models recognized the importance of serving **both** youth and their families.
  - *Quick Access to Services*: The models all strive to link youth and their families with the most appropriate level of services as quickly as possible.
  - *Accountability*: All of the models are designed to track outcomes over time, and adjust to changing needs and opportunities.

After reviewing the data and analysis presented by CGR, the Workgroup achieved consensus on a number of strategies for helping youth and families avoid court involvement. These strategies are to be presented to the Director of MCDHHS, the MCDHHS-DSS Child and Family Care Path Manager, and the Administrator for Probation – Community Corrections.

The remainder of this document outlines the current status of the PINS and JD system in Monroe County and the Workgroup's recommendations. **It proposes a new way for Monroe County to serve its youth and families who are involved in the PINS and JD process and, therefore, at risk of out-of-home placement.** The Workgroup recommends new mechanisms for serving potential PINS and JD youth and their families. It also envisions a re-defined service philosophy which would enable the County to shift from a culture of placement to one of community-based care - where out-of-home placement occurs only when a youth's needs cannot be safely met in the community.

## II. THE CURRENT STATUS IN MONROE COUNTY

During 2002, Monroe County received 840 PINS allegations and 1,207 JD complaints. Of the 840 PINS allegations, nearly a third were diverted or not pursued, and two thirds (542) were petitioned to court. The number of PINS allegations increased about 12% between 2001 to 2002; partly reflecting the implementation of the PINS 18 legislation which went into effect in July of 2002. Nonetheless, in each of the most recent three years, the petition rate has consistently been above 60% annually.

<b>Year</b>	<b>PINS Allegations Presented to Intake</b>	<b>Cases Petitioned as a Percent of Cases Opened at Intake</b>
<b>1996</b>	702	59%
<b>1997</b>	919	59%
<b>1998</b>	707	53%
<b>1999</b>	667	57%
<b>2000</b>	791	65%
<b>2001</b>	748	63%
<b>2002**</b>	840	64%

\*These data do not represent an unduplicated count of youth against whom PINS allegations were filed; an individual may have multiple PINS case openings within a given calendar year.

\*\*As of July 1, 2002, 16 and 17 year olds became eligible to enter the PINS system.

Concerning JDs, Table 3, below, indicates that the number of complaints decreased by 20% from 1996 to 2002. However, there were still 1,207 complaints filed in 2002 with more than half (642 or 53%) ultimately being petitioned. While the number of petitions has ranged from 601 to 773 over the last seven years, no clear trend has emerged. Nevertheless, when considering the combined total of PINS and JD cases petitioned (1,184 in 2002), a significant number of Monroe County youth are at risk of out-of-home placement in any given year.

	<b>JD Complaints*</b>	<b>Total JD Petitions</b>
<b>1996</b>	1508	742
<b>1997</b>	1343	679
<b>1998</b>	1614	773
<b>1999</b>	1356	683
<b>2000</b>	1248	617
<b>2001</b>	1228	601
<b>2002</b>	1207	642

\* The number of JD complaints overstates the number of youth entering the JD system since multiple complaints may be made against a single individual.

## Stakeholder Perspectives

As noted above, CGR interviewed a broad range of stakeholders who work with PINS and JD youth and their families, and summarized these stakeholder perspectives to inform the Workgroup's efforts. CGR obtained feedback from more than 65 individuals through a combination of one-on-one and group interviews with the following: MCDHHS-DSS and Probation staff, law enforcement personnel, school representatives, law guardians, Monroe County Family Court Judges, Juvenile Prosecutor's Unit staff, and community provider agencies. *The reader should note that the following reflect stakeholder impressions and perceptions, many of which we heard repeatedly; however, CGR did not independently verify the accuracy of these statements.*

### *Perceived Strengths to Build On*

Stakeholders perceived the following features of the current system as strengths to build on when considering ways to improve outcomes for youth and families:

- ❖ Stakeholders perceived a wide array of programs and services for youth in Monroe County.
- ❖ Currently, the County provides diversion services that are successful in reducing the number of PINS and JD youth who go to Family Court.
- ❖ There are good relationships among the various child-serving systems and providers in Monroe County.
- ❖ County DSS and Probation staffs are well trained, experienced, and dedicated.

*Perceived Weaknesses of the Current System*

- ❖ The current system is designed to send youth the message that they have to accept consequences for their actions. However, the system does try to provide willing youth and families with needed services that may help divert the youth from court and placement.

The following are key weaknesses of the existing system, as identified by stakeholders. *Again, the reader should note that the following reflect stakeholder impressions and perceptions, many of which we heard repeatedly; however, CGR did not independently verify the accuracy of these statements.*

- ❖ The current system can be confusing to parents and youth; many families have misconceptions about the PINS process and potential outcomes.
- ❖ It's often difficult to engage a parent or other family members in the process; some parents are looking for "someone else to fix my kid."
- ❖ Out-of-home placements are rarely an effective long-term means of resolving a child's behavioral issues, and placement may lead to further problems between the youth and parent/family.
- ❖ The current system was designed in the 1970s and there are newer and more effective models out there today that may increase success.
- ❖ The current diversion programs and services have not been evaluated, and we do not have a clear understanding of their effectiveness.
- ❖ Schools are inconsistent and often extremely late in filing truancy petitions. Few schools have clearly defined policies and procedures for handling truancy matters and many school personnel lack knowledge about the PINS process.

*Needs Identified by Stakeholders*

Stakeholders were asked to identify gaps they have encountered when trying to meet the needs of families involved in, or likely to become involved in, the PINS or JD process, and noted the following:

- ❖ The need to better educate youth, families, and the community- including providers, schools, etc.- about the PINS process and the services that are available in this community.
- ❖ A need for greater parenting skills training.
- ❖ A need for expansion of mediation services (more “slots” as well as earlier access to the service).
- ❖ Many stakeholders cited the benefits of mentors and positive role models in the lives of PINS and JD youth, but most felt that existing programs are unable to meet the demand for such services.
- ❖ By the time a youth reaches probation intake, he or she has exhibited a pattern of incorrigible or ungovernable behavior. Many stakeholders believed that there is a strong need to identify these youth early on, and to link them to community services before it becomes necessary to involve the Probation Department and potentially Family Court.

### III. WORKGROUP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Workgroup was charged with developing strategies to reduce PINS and JD petitions and out-of-home placements and improve outcomes for these children and their families. After reviewing the current operations involving PINS and JDs, comments from stakeholders, and the strategies employed by other counties to better serve this population, the Workgroup developed the following recommendations:

**1. Implement a new *family engagement initiative* to reduce the number of youth formally involved with the Department of Probation – Community Corrections.**

This initiative will include:

- A **Family Orientation meeting** introducing parents who want to file a PINS petition and their youth to the procedures and possible outcomes and consequences of being involved in the juvenile justice system.
- **Short-term service coordination** to help link youth and family members to community services without entering the juvenile justice system.
- **Expanded availability of critical services** that can help families avoid deeper involvement in the juvenile justice system, including parenting education, mentoring, and mediation.

**2. Pilot a new PINS and JD Diversion Program modeled after the County’s Youth and Family Partnership Initiative.**

**3. Include an Early Judicial Intervention component as part of the diversion services available to youth.**

**4. Partner with schools to take systemic actions to address truancy problems earlier and reduce the number of PINS petitions submitted from the school systems.**

## Family Engagement Initiative

### *Family Orientation Session*

Many families have misconceptions about the PINS process, and may have unrealistic expectations about their involvement in the process, or the consequences of a child being placed in foster care. Under the *family engagement initiative*, all PINS-eligible families will be referred to a formal orientation session prior to opening a PINS case at diversion. Both parents and youth will be invited to the session, and family participation will be required if the family wishes to move forward with the PINS process. At the session, youth and parents will break into separate groups, where representatives from Probation and MCDHHS-DSS will explain the PINS process. Representatives from community agencies may also be present to answer questions about services and to begin helping the youth and family identify strengths and needs.

This orientation session will provide an opportunity to ensure that families understand the PINS process and potential outcomes **before** opening a case. The session is intended to divert families from the PINS process when their needs could be better addressed by other services in the community.

### *Service Coordination*

At the orientation meeting or shortly thereafter (within a week), a service coordinator will begin working with a family to assist the family in identifying its strengths and needs, make the family aware of available resources, and facilitate service linkage. The short-term service coordinator will be aware of a range of services, which may include: parenting education, mentoring, mediation, recreation programs, drug and alcohol services, mental health and youth counseling programs, domestic violence services, anger management programs, and other services. Essentially, the new initiative will provide preventive and/or supportive services to families and youth as a possible alternative to formal PINS diversion.

The role of the short-term service coordinator in this process is an important one. Often, families are unaware of the wide range of services available in the community, don't know what services they may qualify for, or don't know how to access the services. The role of the service coordinator is to help families understand the various service options and help them set up an initial appointment.



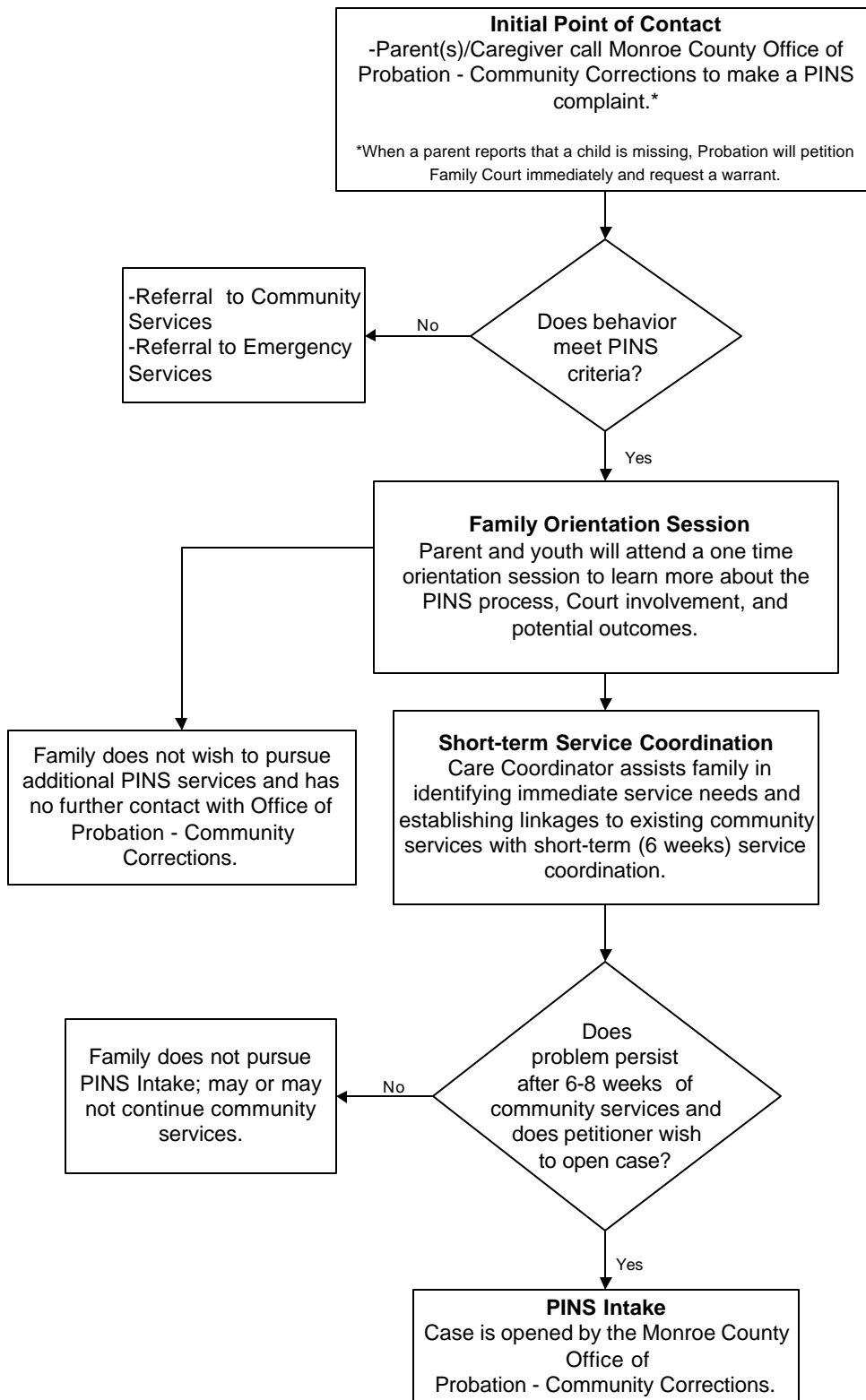
The *family engagement initiative* will make greater and better use of these existing community resources in order to divert more youth from Family Court and foster care. The County should also use this opportunity to identify and track the service needs of the youth and families involved in the initiative. Additionally, the focus will shift from serving the **child** to serving the **family**. Therefore, the early identification of family needs and the subsequent linkage to appropriate community services for the family become essential factors for success.

*Expansion of the  
Availability of Critical  
Services*

Parenting education, mentoring, and mediation/conflict resolution will be critical services for a significant number of families and youth engaged in the process described above. These services have demonstrated their worth in diverting youth from court in other counties and in Monroe County's own Drug Court initiative. Therefore, the Workgroup agreed that these services should be offered to all youth and families for whom they are appropriate. During the implementation phase, the current availability of services will be assessed. If expansion of certain services is necessary, this group recommends that the models selected be well researched, with proven effectiveness in serving adolescents involved in the juvenile justice system.

The flow chart below describes the *family engagement initiative*.

## Recommended PINS Process Flow for the *Family Engagement Initiative*



## PINS and JD Diversion Pilot Project

The *family engagement initiative*, outlined above, is intended to reduce the number of PINS filings. However, the Workgroup does not anticipate that all cases will be averted from Probation. Therefore, the following recommendations are designed to improve the outcomes for youth and families when a case is opened for PINS or JD diversion.

The Workgroup recommends that the Office of Probation establish and pilot a new approach to diversion modeled after the principles of Monroe County's Youth and Family Partnership initiative.<sup>8</sup> Recognizing that each family is unique, this initiative will offer a family a customized strategy and intervention based on their identified strengths and needs. The pilot will include:

- ❖ **A multi-disciplinary team approach to services.** DSS, Probation, and Mental Health staff will be cross trained in each others' systems and work together to conduct intake into diversion and determine the immediate needs of the youth and his or her family members. This team of staff will also receive specialized training using a strength-based approach for service planning and delivery.
- ❖ **Comprehensive assessment.** All participants in the pilot project will undergo a comprehensive family assessment. One component will be the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) currently used by Probation staff. The assessment will provide an in-depth evaluation of the strengths and needs of the entire family, not just the youth.
- ❖ **Flexible Funding.** As demonstrated by Kids Oneida, Wraparound Milwaukee, and other integrated systems of care around the Country, flexible funding is often the key to ensuring that the needs of families rather than funding requirements drive service development and availability. The pilot project's use of flexible funding will enable the PINS and JD diversion pilot project to tailor services to the particular

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<sup>8</sup> The Monroe County Youth and Family Partnership, established in April 2002, successfully diverted 25 youth from residential placement in 2002 using an interdisciplinary team of Division of Social Services caseworkers, Probation Officers, and mental health clinicians.

needs of a family and promote the concept that it will do “whatever it takes” to help families keep their children at home and in the community. The use of flexible funds will be driven by the comprehensive assessment, and allow for the purchase of services that enhance the functioning of the family.

**The pilot project will promote a culture and system of care that places a priority on keeping youth at home with their families.** The pilot will be based on the following core values:

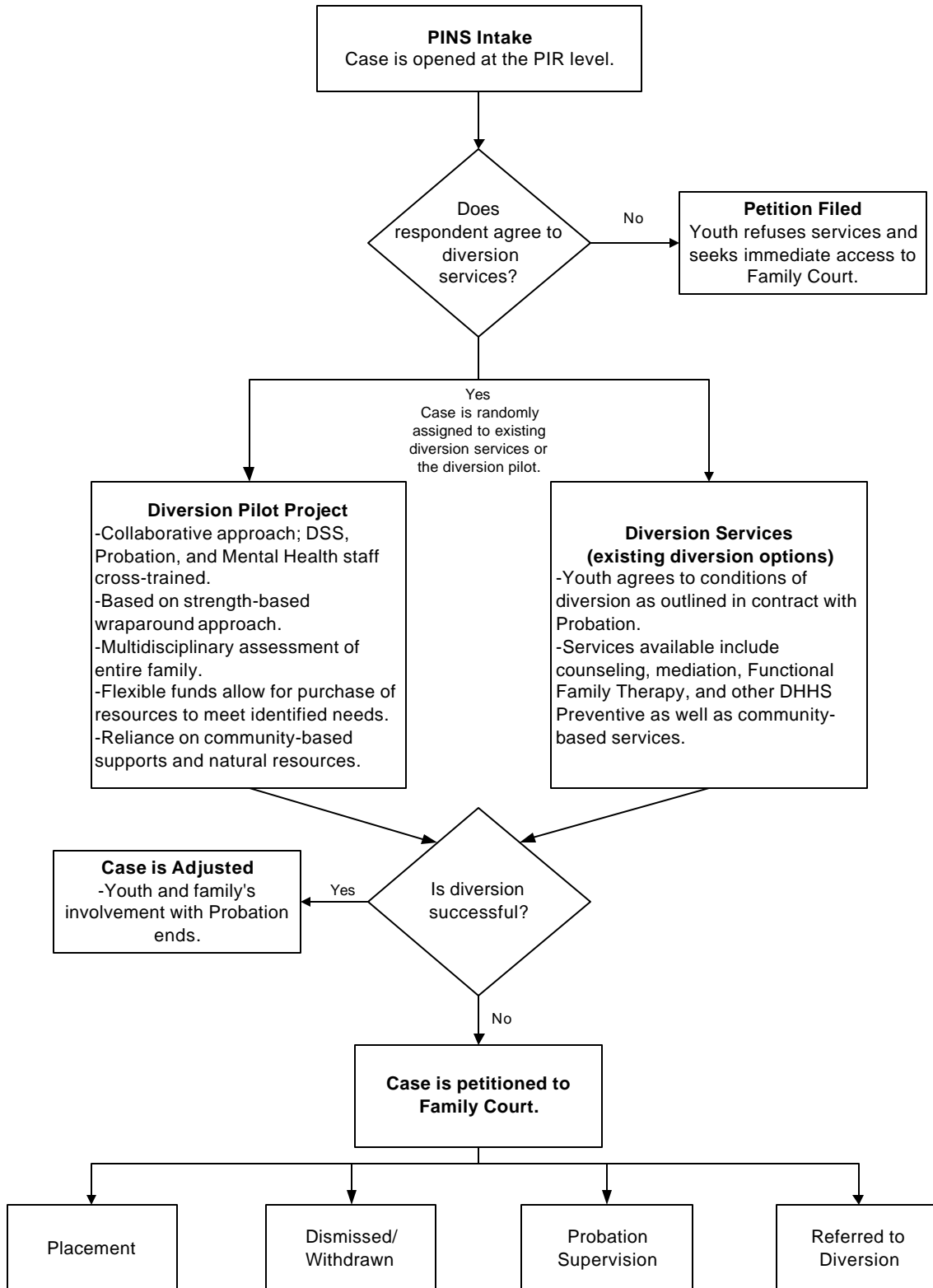
- ❖ Families know and can identify their assets and needs;
- ❖ Families are responsible for their children;
- ❖ Child and family teams allow everyone to work together—success requires a team commitment;
- ❖ Children and families are most successful achieving independence in their own homes and communities;
- ❖ Each child is unique; and
- ❖ Each team and plan should be responsive to the family’s cultural needs.

The concepts incorporated in the diversion pilot are based on best-practice models that have been used widely and effectively across the country. They have demonstrated results in reducing out-of-home placements, shortening the lengths of stay in residential care, improving child and family functioning, and increasing cost effectiveness.

The pilot project will have a point-in-time capacity of 25 youth. Assignment to the pilot will be random, and those youth who do not participate in the pilot will continue to have access to existing diversion services. The Workgroup recommends that the pilot be evaluated after a full year of operation to determine whether the new approach is more effective in reducing out-of-home placements than the County’s current diversion system.

The flow chart on the following page illustrates how the pilot will be incorporated into the existing diversion process. It should be noted that some, but not all, of the current diversion services contain elements that will be found in the pilot project.

## PINS Diversion Pilot Project Process Flow



## Early Judicial Intervention

As discussed earlier in this paper, youth and families are often unaware of the potential consequences of filing a PINS petition. Parents may have unrealistic expectations that the system will “fix” their children, and the youth involved may not perceive the seriousness of the consequences when diversion fails. Therefore, the Workgroup proposes the adoption of an Early Judicial Intervention model whereby youth and their families interact with a judge after intake, but **before** the case is formally petitioned to court.

Under this model, Probation Officers will refer youth in diversion for Early Judicial Intervention when they believe that a youth could benefit by this process. The Probation Officer will complete a referral form and include information necessary to allow the judge to have a meaningful interaction with the youth. The judge will interact one-on-one with each youth and the youth’s parents, where appropriate. To avoid a conflict of interest, and any potential prejudice to the youth, the judge assigned to the JD/PINS part will not take part in this initiative. Moreover, representatives from Probation and Presentment will not be present, and the matter will not be taken down by a court reporter.

The Workgroup envisions an initial referral at the beginning of diversion. A second court appearance could also be scheduled to enable positive feedback from the judge for youth who have been successful in their diversion efforts, and for another warning for those who remain at risk of being petitioned to court.

## Truancy Reduction

Because the primary allegation at PINS intake was truancy in 45% of the cases during 2001 and 2002, CGR completed a record review to determine if there were significant differences between youth entering the system primarily because of truancy, and those entering due to ungovernable (or in the case of the JDs, illegal) behavior. The review entailed a close examination of Probation case records for 20 youth who were placed in foster care during a six-month period in 2002. We found the problems and complexities of these two groups of youth and their families to be virtually indistinguishable. Furthermore, the review revealed that even when truancy was not the primary PINS allegation, the youth was likely to have demonstrated a long history of poor school attendance. Additionally, in a March 2002 report, the Vera

Institute found that a majority of parents of youth entering the PINS system in New York City reported that their children chronically skip school.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the findings above and feedback received from stakeholder interviews, the Workgroup developed a set of recommendations to reduce truancy at the school level. They stress: alternative strategies for addressing truancy problems; earlier identification and intervention; and greater collaboration between schools, Probation, Family Court and state and local human services agencies. While implementation of these recommendations would require additional staff time and resources, these costs would be more than offset by the benefits in terms of improved attendance, less staff time devoted to PINS and JD processes, and better classroom environments.

The Workgroup believes that the following actions represent the critical first steps that must be addressed in each building in every district in Monroe County:

- ❖ **Truant Officer positions should be re-established to identify and address truancy patterns.** Truant Officers are generally paraprofessional positions, and were effectively used in the past in the Rochester City School District. These staff would check attendance lists, make home visits, connect with parents, monitor ongoing attendance of problem students, and serve as a liaison between the school and probation officers. To encourage family involvement and commitment to increased attendance, truant officers could be assisted by a cadre of paid parent advocates who, with training, could perform similar functions and establish a rapport with parents of truant youth. These staff could also help with the important task of welcoming back and integrating students who have been absent due to truancy, placement in alternative educational programs, or placement away from home (detention, OCFS, DSS), thus avoiding further truancy and discipline problems.

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<sup>9</sup> Eric Weingartner, Andrea Weitz, Ajay Khashu, Robert Hope, and Megan Golden, *A Study of the PINS System in New York City: Results and Implications* (New York: Vera Institute, 2002).

- ❖ **Superintendents and district staff should meet with County Probation, Social Services, and Family Court staff at the beginning of each school year to discuss PINS and JD policies and procedures.** This meeting would ensure that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the issues, processes, and options available when addressing truancy. The participation and buy-in of superintendents and administrators in this meeting is critical because of their roles in setting policy and direction for frontline staff. The collaboration begun early in the school year should be reviewed for its effectiveness at the end of the year.
  
- ❖ **At the beginning of the school year, each school building should have a plan in place for addressing truancy.** This planning process should include student input. In developing a plan, schools should consider the following:
  - discipline methods (e.g., consider alternative discipline methods such as in-school suspension or Saturday detention);
  - rewards and incentives for good attendance;
  - student mentors matched to at-risk youth;
  - the use of parent advocates or other staff to make regular daily telephone calls to the homes of absent youth, and to follow-up with families with habitually truant youth; and
  - increased use of Probation resources on-site.

The plan should also establish new methods to assist students transitioning back to school so that they feel welcomed rather than overwhelmed. School staff and the Probation Officer should work together to help these returning youth develop a plan for catching up on missed work, and provide assistance as the students re-acclimate themselves to the school environment.



## Summary of Anticipated Benefits

The Workgroup believes that the recommendations in this report would provide earlier and improved services to families with youth headed toward the juvenile justice system. Below is a list of anticipated benefits for each recommendation.

### ❖ **Family Engagement Initiative:**

- Gives parents a greater understanding of the consequences of filing a petition with Family Court.
- Encourages parents to take an active role in resolving conflict through parent education and mediation programs.
- Provides family members with linkages to community services based on their needs before the family is actively involved with the Office of Probation.
- Diverts families from Probation Intake.

### ❖ **Diversion Pilot Project:**

- Promotes a more family-focused and flexible approach to providing diversion services in order to reduce the number of youth and families petitioning Court.

### ❖ **Early Judicial Intervention:**

- Serves as a wake-up call for some youth headed toward Court.
- Provides an opportunity for youth and families making progress to receive positive feedback and encouragement.

### ❖ **Truancy Reduction:**

- Creates policies and procedures for addressing truancy before it rises to the PINS level.
- Reduces the number of petitions filed by schools.

Up-front attention to the strengths and needs of youth and their families, coupled with better service linkages and more options, will ultimately result in the overall reduction of PINS and JD filings, improve youth and family outcomes, and reduce out-of-home placements of Monroe County's youth.

## IV. NEXT STEPS

This paper presents a conceptual framework of recommended actions by the County Office of Probation, MCDHHS-DSS, Family Court, and school districts to reduce the number of PINS and JD filings and, ultimately, the number of placements of youth outside of their homes. One of the most important issues that must be addressed to implement these recommendations is the identification of resources. While the Workgroup does not have the authority to commit funds to this initiative, the chart below indicates potential resources that might be available to fund each of the recommendations:

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Potential Funding Sources</b>
1. Implementation of <i>family engagement initiative</i> a. Family orientation meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reallocation and training of existing DSS and Probation staff to lead the orientation sessions. This reallocation of staff time may be facilitated by a reduction in the number of families that enter PINS intake because of successful completion of the <i>family engagement initiative</i>.</li> </ul>
b. Short-term coordination c. Expansion of critical services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New OCFS funding in the 2003-04 budget to implement the PINS 18 law.</li> <li>• Preventive services funding.</li> <li>• Private foundation grants.</li> </ul>
2. PINS and JD Diversion Pilot Program modeled after the Youth and Family Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preventive services funds.</li> <li>• State and Federal grants.</li> <li>• Private foundation grants.</li> </ul>
3. Early Judicial Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reallocation of judicial and clerk time.</li> </ul>

The cost of additional truant officer positions, increased training and education of school personnel about Family Court and County Probation, and development of plans of action at the school level to address truancy will have to be born by the school districts. However, the Workgroup believes that funds spent on addressing truancy problems early will be more than offset by reduced staff time spent on disciplinary problems and PINS filings and increases in state aid resulting from higher attendance rates.

The Workgroup believes that the County should give implementation of these recommendations highest priority. A County implementation team should be established to:

- ❖ Identify detailed implementation steps for each recommendation involving County actions;
- ❖ Establish clear responsibility for the completion of each step;
- ❖ Develop an implementation timetable; and
- ❖ Determine the costs of implementing each recommendation and identify specific resources that could be used for implementation.
- ❖ Design an evaluation of the strategies implemented as a result of this report. The evaluation may include:
  - Monitoring outcomes of all who participate in the family engagement initiative.
  - Monitoring the outcomes of diversion pilot project participants; compare the outcomes of the pilot group to the outcomes of youth who receive diversion services under the current model.
  - Identifying and tracking youth and family service needs; comparing identified need to actual availability of services.
  - Undertaking a rigorous evaluation of all existing diversion services.

Family Court would be responsible for implementing the Early Judicial Involvement recommendation.