

## PROGRAMS THAT WORK

# Reclaiming Futures: Freeing Youth from Drugs and Crime

by Lisa Pilnik

*Daquita Wagner first became involved with the juvenile justice system at age 11. Over the next few years she explored drugs, skipped school, and by age 16, she felt she had “dug a hole and was so deep in that hole that it would be impossible to turn [her] life around.” Today, however, thanks to a great mentor, supportive judge, and numerous dedicated court and treatment staff, Daquita is free from drugs and crime.*

Unfortunately, happy endings like these are rare in the delinquency system, although there are many substance-abusing youth in the system. The percentage of juvenile justice cases that involved drug offenses jumped from 7% in 1985 to 12% in 2004, and the number of drug offense cases more than doubled from 1991 to 2004.<sup>1</sup> In 2004, there were 193,700 juvenile court cases in which the most serious charge was drug-related.<sup>2</sup> Forty-three percent of the youth in these cases were age 15 or younger when referred to court.<sup>3</sup>

Daquita Wagner was fortunate to be involved with Reclaiming Futures, a five-year, \$21 million project of The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, housed at the Graduate School of Social Work at the Regional Research Institute at Portland State University. The project, with 10 pilot sites around the nation, improves outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system who have substance abuse problems.

The goal, says Laura Burney Nissen, Ph.D., M.S.W., National Program Director for Reclaiming Futures, is to provide enough treatment, the right kinds of treatment (e.g., evidence-based and age-appropriate), and supplemental support, such as education, job, and community support; graduated responses to crimes; and creative and meaningful community service opportunities. Although the role of the courts differs in each jurisdiction, courts in all Reclaiming Futures sites have a role bringing all parties involved (e.g., probation departments, treatment agencies) together.

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The project was recently evaluated by the Urban Institute and Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. Biannual surveys of 20-40 experts in each of the 10 Reclaiming Futures locations uncovered information about the quality and effectiveness of the community's substance abuse treatment and juvenile justice systems. Researchers found significant improvements on most areas measured over the 2 ½-year study. The findings suggest that “Reclaiming Futures is a promising strategy for improving interventions for youth.”<sup>4</sup> (For more information on the factors measured, see box, next page.)

Judges and attorneys can benefit from the work done by Reclaiming Futures site by helping their jurisdictions become a Reclaiming Futures sites (see “The Future of Reclaiming Futures,” below), or by integrating elements of the model described below into their jurisdiction's practice.

### The Reclaiming Futures Model

Each site works differently, but all

follow a basic model,<sup>5</sup> created by the Reclaiming Futures National Program and the 10 initial sites:

**Screening:** Youth are screened for substance abuse issues as soon as possible after entering the juvenile justice system. The screening is a quick and inexpensive measure that does not need to be administered by a clinician. It shows whether a teen needs further assessment and services.

In some jurisdictions, courts order the screenings, refer youth to the program, and/or monitor their progress, while in others the courts simply exercise oversight to make sure all of these things are happening. In some sites, screenings are administered by juvenile justice staff, while in others someone from the substance abuse treatment provider administers them.

Some sites have eligibility requirements for who receives screenings (e.g., only nonviolent offenders), but Reclaiming Futures is working towards universal screening. The screening is not intended to be a net-widening measure (e.g., leading to additional charges). Instead, the results are shared with those who can help the juvenile, such as families and potential treatment providers. The Reclaiming Futures model does not require a specific screening tool, but it should meet reliability standards and be age-appropriate.

**Assessment:** A reliable assessment tool is used to determine if the youth is using alcohol or other drugs, and to discover needs, risks and strengths of youth and their caretakers. The assessment is an in-depth, clinical process that builds upon the screening. This assessment helps program staff determine the severity of substance abuse problems, and provides valuable

## Reclaiming Futures: Evaluation Factors

The Urban Institute and Chapin Hall evaluators studied 13 aspects of the Reclaiming Futures communities. Statistically significant improvements were found in all but one area (Partner Involvement):

### ADMINISTRATION

- Access to Services
- Data Sharing
- Systems Integration
- Resource Management

### COLLABORATION

- Client Information (how well agencies share client information as part of service delivery)
- Partner Involvement
- Agency Collaboration

### QUALITY

- AOD (Alcohol and Other Drug) Assessment
- Treatment Effectiveness
- Targeted Treatment
- Cultural Integration
- Family Involvement
- Pro-social Activities (whether recreational, cultural and other positive activities are available and used by juvenile justice youth)

Source: Butts, Jeffrey A. and John Roman. *Changing Systems: Outcomes from the RWJF Reclaiming Futures Initiative on Juvenile Justice and Substance Abuse. A Reclaiming Futures National Evaluation Report.*

For more information, the full Urban Institute report is available online at [www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411551\\_changing\\_systems.pdf](http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411551_changing_systems.pdf)

information to help devise the juvenile's service plan. The assessment tool should also meet reliability standards and be age-appropriate.

**Coordinated Services:** Reclaiming Futures sites know each child needs different services (e.g., substance abuse counseling, tutoring, extracurricular activities), and ensures service plans are created and carried out collaboratively by families and appropriate local agencies.

"Collaboration seems like an easy concept," says Nissen, "but actually when you are dealing with numerous different agencies with real or

imagined barriers to an integrated response, it's difficult. It takes intentional revision, redesign and community muscle to make it happen." Several sites have developed Memoranda of Understanding or other written agreements that spell out roles and responsibilities of each partner agency, and clarify how decisions will be made about the program. All sites have regular meetings of the teams that run the program and other stakeholders.

Each site's leadership team consists of a staff director and representatives from the judicial, justice, and treatment communities, and the community at large. These representatives

participate with their peers around the country in a program that includes professional development, information-sharing, and advocacy. Reliance on formal and informal community resources is key, and several Reclaiming Futures sites also use "natural helpers" to help youth and their families succeed. Natural helpers are volunteers from the community who mentor the teen, act as a resource for the entire family, and communicate directly with service providers to make sure the service plan is followed.

**Initiation:** Reclaiming Futures views the start of services as a "critical moment in intervention," so one element of the service plan (e.g., one counseling session or meeting with a mentor) should begin within 14 days of the juvenile's assessment. Some sites raise this bar and strive to have a first contact with *each* of the planned services within the 14 days. Service contacts are monitored for youth who are receiving formal substance abuse services as well as for those who are not.

**Engagement:** "The number one reason kids don't make it in treatment is because they never show up," says Nissen, "and the number two reason is that they stop showing up." Attending numerous sessions early on makes it more likely a juvenile will stick with services. The Reclaiming Futures model requires three successful service contacts within 30 days of the assessment.<sup>6</sup> Engagement is monitored for all juveniles receiving intervention, whether or not they are being treated for substance abuse, and engagement can be evaluated for the intervention as a whole or for individual elements of the service plan.

**Completion:** The group that designs the service plan (e.g., the family and agency representatives) decides how much of the plan needs to be accomplished before it is considered complete. As the plan is completed, youth and families become more involved

with natural helpers and other community-based resources and less reliant on services provided through the agency. Relapse is considered a part of recovery, so youth who relapse generally return for treatment, although the amount of time that has passed and the youth's legal status may impose limits on the services they can be offered or mandated to take part in.

"Reclaiming Futures is about providing a coordinated, integrated system of care, opportunity, and accountability," says Laura Burney Nissen. "The model is about changing the system to provide more available, more effective and more integrated services, ultimately rendering cost savings and community safety."

### Reclaiming Futures in Action: Stories from Two Sites

Although all sites follow the model described above, they each had to do some systems-level work to make their projects succeed. Several sites also created additional services and programs beyond the six core items outlined above.

#### Dayton, Ohio

In Dayton, the site that showed the most change in the Urban Institute/Chapin Hall evaluation, program staff realized that for the model to succeed, they needed a more strength-based culture within the county. They cross-trained everyone in their system who comes into contact with kids (police officers, prosecutors, therapists, probation officers, judges), to view youth in terms of their strengths, rather than their problem or disease, explains Charlotte McGuire, Project Director. Now, professionals who work with youth use positive youth development strategies to help them build leadership skills and encourage them to give back to their communities and become important assets to their families.

The Dayton site polled taxpayers about the courts and juvenile crime. They found that citizens felt the sys-

## Reclaiming Futures Sites

The Reclaiming Futures National Program Office is based at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. Visit their Web site: [www.reclaimingfutures.org](http://www.reclaimingfutures.org). Ten local sites also exist throughout the country:

#### Anchorage, AK

Contact: Tom Begich, Project Director  
Address: 3350 Commercial Dr., Suite 103  
Anchorage, AK 99501  
Phone: 907/440-8523  
E-mail: [tbegich@ak.org](mailto:tbegich@ak.org)  
Web site: <http://www.reclaimingfuturesanc.org>

#### Chicago, IL

Contact: Rose Golden, Project Director  
Address: 1100 S Hamilton, 2nd floor  
Chicago, IL 60612  
Phone: 312/433-6527  
E-mail: [rimgold@cookcountygov.com](mailto:rimgold@cookcountygov.com)

#### Dayton, OH

Contact: Charlotte D. McGuire  
Address: Montgomery County  
Juvenile Court  
303 W. Second Street  
Dayton, OH 45422  
Phone: 937/496-6737  
E-mail: [mcguirec@mcoho.org](mailto:mcguirec@mcoho.org)  
Web site: <http://mcjc.mcoho.org/Department/ReclaimingFutures/default.asp>

#### Marquette, MI

Contact: Michelle DeMitchell, Acting Project Director  
Address: 2111 CR M-554  
Marquette, MI 49855  
Phone: 906/458-1903  
E-mail: [mdemitchell@hotmail.com](mailto:mdemitchell@hotmail.com)

#### Portland, OR

Contact: Benjamin S. Chambers, Project Director  
Address: Reclaiming Futures Oregon  
Portland State University  
PO Box 751  
Portland, OR 97207-0751  
Phone: 503/725-8955  
E-mail: [bchamber@pdx.edu](mailto:bchamber@pdx.edu)  
Web site: [www.co.multnomah.or.us/dcj/jcjembrace.shtml](http://www.co.multnomah.or.us/dcj/jcjembrace.shtml)

#### Rosebud, SD

Contact: Marlies White Hat  
Address: Sicangu Policy Institute, P.O. Box 557, Mission, SD 57555  
Phone: 605/856-8203  
E-mail: [Marlies.WhiteHat@sintegleska.edu](mailto:Marlies.WhiteHat@sintegleska.edu)

#### Santa Cruz, CA

Contact: Yolanda Perez-Logan, Project Director  
Address: Juvenile Division of Santa Cruz County Probation  
P.O. Box 1812  
Santa Cruz, CA 95061  
Phone: 831/454-3845  
E-mail: [prb285@co.santa-cruz.ca.us](mailto:prb285@co.santa-cruz.ca.us)

#### Seattle, WA

Contact: Margaret Soukup, Project Director  
Address: King County Mental Health, Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division  
Seattle, WA 98104  
Phone: 206/263-8958  
E-mail: [margaret.soukup@metrokc.gov](mailto:margaret.soukup@metrokc.gov)

#### Southeastern Kentucky

Contact: Michelle Kilgore, Project Director  
Address: Kentucky River Community Care  
115 Rockwood Lane  
Daniel Boone Parkway  
Hazard, KY 41701  
Phone: 606/436-5761 x 7631  
E-mail: [mkilgore@hotmail.com](mailto:mkilgore@hotmail.com)

#### New Hampshire

Contact: Ray Goodman  
Address: New Futures  
8 Continental Drive, Unit G  
Exeter, NH 03833  
Phone: 603/658-2770  
E-mail: [rgoodman@new-futures.org](mailto:rgoodman@new-futures.org)

tem gave up on kids too easily and that youth deserved second chances. Citizens also favored treatment over lockup for certain offenses, and were willing to pay taxes for treatment. They were also willing to volunteer to make a difference in children's lives, particularly children in their own neighborhoods. These findings, along with data collected as kids went through the program, helped Reclaiming Futures Dayton convince the local government to enact important funding and policy changes, including creating a 12-bed treatment facility run by the county health department.

The Dayton program also strengthened communication between treatment providers, natural helpers, and the probation system. Now, when a treatment appointment is scheduled, the probation officer receives a fax, and is promptly notified if an appointment is missed. Natural helpers remind teens about treatment appointments, and ask afterwards if appointments were kept. As a result of this tighter coordination, the percentage of youth showing up for treatment jumped from 35% to 78.6%.

## Portland, Oregon

The Portland site was another very successful site according to the Urban Institute/Chapin Hall evaluation. It also made system-level changes to make sure the model worked for juveniles in their jurisdiction, says Benjamin Chambers, Project Director. Through data collection and analysis they found many kids whose screening scores showed they needed a full assessment were not being referred or were being referred but not treated. To address this issue, they created a new staff position, called a treatment expediter, to serve as a bridge between different agencies and staff. This individual receives periodic updates on the screening results and receives copies of all referrals and treatment reports. She then works with the appropriate people to make sure referrals are made when necessary and that kids

who are referred receive treatment. The Portland project is still collecting data, but anecdotally has seen that the treatment expediter helps ensure kids receive assessments and treatment.

Reclaiming Futures Oregon (along with four other Reclaiming Futures sites) also undertook a public awareness campaign called "When you were 15," in which prominent local figures (the superintendent of schools, the police chief, a local rock star, a member of city council, etc.) and ordinary citizens shared stories of what

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They found that citizens felt the system gave up on kids too easily and that youth deserved second chances.

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their life was like at age 15, with a focus on important adults in their lives at that time. The campaign got radio, newspaper and television coverage, and led to a partnership with the Portland Trailblazers basketball team. Although originally conceived to attract mentors, the campaign proved more successful at building community support for Reclaiming Futures and developing relationships with the business community, which the Oregon site is now working to parlay into job opportunities for the teenagers they serve.

## The Future of Reclaiming Futures

The evaluation by the Urban Institute and Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago is the most recent in a series of studies that show the Reclaiming Futures model works. With this research behind them, the Reclaiming Futures team is now working on spreading the model so more communities can benefit from it. The initial five-year funding ended last year, but each of the original sites has

been funded for two more years and will serve as a resource for new sites. The U.S. Department of Justice, along with the federal Department of Health and Human Services and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation have already provided funding so three new communities can start Reclaiming Futures sites. Plans are underway to fund twelve more sites between 2008 and 2009.

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*Lisa Pilnik, J.D., M.S.*, is a staff attorney at the ABA Center on Children and the Law. She works on Center projects related to child and adolescent health, juvenile status offenders, and father involvement in the child welfare system.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Stahl, Annie. *Fact Sheet: Drug Offense Cases in Juvenile Courts 1985-2004*. U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved February 15, 2008, from <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/fs200803.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Butts, Jeffrey A. and John Roman. *Changing Systems: Outcomes from the RWJF Reclaiming Futures Initiative on Juvenile Justice and Substance Abuse. A Reclaiming Futures National Evaluation Report*. Portland, OR: Reclaiming Futures National Program Office, Portland State University, 2007, 1.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/?q=solution\\_model](http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/?q=solution_model)

<sup>6</sup> This number is based on the standards set by the Washington Circle Group, a group of national experts in substance abuse policy, research and performance management, [www.washingtoncircle.org](http://www.washingtoncircle.org).

**To learn more** about how your jurisdiction can become a Reclaiming Futures site, view the call for proposals online at [www.reclaimingfutures.org/?q=cfp](http://www.reclaimingfutures.org/?q=cfp).