

REPORT OF THE 1974 JUVENILE SERVICES STUDY

Prepared for the Nebraska Department of Public Welfare  
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Nebraska is a nice place to grow up...

UNLESS you are experiencing problems in school, at home, with peers, with alcohol, with drugs or with the law...

UNLESS you require mental health services, foster placement, personal counseling, foster care, day care, developmental day care or speech and hearing services...

UNLESS your parents abuse or neglect you...

UNLESS you are a child or youth in need of services.

## SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

On May 13, 1974 the study staff began the task of examining the existing and needed "juvenile services" in the State of Nebraska. It quickly became apparent that neither a strategy nor an administrative mechanism for coordinating or providing juvenile services existed. Those services which existed for juveniles were either by-products of the normal activities of state code agencies or had been developed through local effort. Thus, the strategy adopted by the staff was to examine services for children and youth to determine what potential resources existed. This report therefore emphasizes services for juveniles, i.e. those youth with a high probability of coming to the attention of the criminal justice system, but examines these services within the context of all human services for children and youth.

As mandated by the Legislature, six public meetings were held. Consultation with relevant State agencies and commissions was achieved through the designation of liaison persons by each agency. Children and youth-serving facilities were visited; youth-serving professionals were interviewed and information was requested from relevant agencies. The relevant professional literature and Federal guidelines were examined and information was requested from the other 49 states. Consultants were hired to examine the staff's methodology and to provide suggestions concerning the conclusions and recommendations. Finally, recommendations were drafted concerning the initial steps necessary for improving the situation revealed by the study.

The body of the report presents, in detail, much of the information obtained. It also contains three types of recommendations. The first type involves needed improvements in the services currently provided by existing agencies. The second concerns the need to fill existing service gaps.

The third type of recommendation focuses upon the need to establish service coordination and comprehensive planning among State agencies and between State and county and/or private agency efforts.

This section serves as a summary of the report. First, a sampling of the information, examples, and personal statements brought to the attention of the staff are presented. A summary of each section of the report is then presented. Finally a three stage action plan is proposed.

#### Information Made Available To The Study Staff

The following pieces of information are taken from the body of the report. They provide a brief introduction to the problems and needs currently existing in Nebraska.

An eleven year old boy who continues to physically attack staff and destroy property in residential facilities is returned to a fatherless home because no existing residential treatment facilities in Nebraska are "geared" to working with this type of child.

A twenty-three year old man has been assumed to be retarded for the last 17 years; it is discovered that he has a speech and hearing deficit, but is not retarded.

Children and youth are frequently placed in foster care because the staff time and resources to remedy the home situation are not available.

After spending about three years in a series of foster homes, a 14 year old girl comes to the attention of a clinical psychologist. He views the girl as severely troubled and suffering from feelings of shame and worthlessness. The case record contains no information concerning the reason for terminating the foster placements. He eventually discovers 1) that the first

placement was terminated because the foster father allegedly made sexual advances, 2) that the next placement was terminated because no high school was available and the girl was only taking correspondence courses, and 3) that the original problem in the natural home had been remedied two years ago. In other words the girl could have been returned home some time ago.

In 1974 a young man reaches the age of twenty without having his cleft-palate surgically corrected.

Youth report that they can not find summer or part-time employment. Adults report instances in which businesses are willing to hire youth, but are restricted by legal and insurance limitations.

Individuals who work with troubled youth report that most school districts are not meeting the needs of their clients.

When his family leaves the State seeking employment, a 16-year old youth remains. Living in an abandoned building, he attends school, works part time and plays on the football team. As the weather becomes cold, he approaches local social service agencies for assistance. He is told he does not qualify for available categories of care. Two weeks later he is in court for having thrown a brick through a car windshield.

The State of Nebraska has not established standards or a procedure for licensing Infant Care Centers.

Only 3% of Nebraska's estimated day care needs are presently being met.

Representatives from an average Nebraska town reported at a public meeting that the town's efforts and expenditures on a youth club and programs have been unsuccessful. The young people are unresponsive; delinquency has not been curbed and many young people are leaving the town. The town has the willingness to develop programs, but lacks the "know how". The representatives

report that repeated attempts to obtain State assistance have failed to identify a responsive State agency.

Citizens from a small village in eastern Nebraska have developed a functioning youth club. Because the village's resources are limited, they have sought assistance from the County and the State. They have received none.

The telephone crises services of eleven mental health facilities were called by the study staff between 9:30 and 11:00 p.m. In four cases there is no answer. In another case, the party who answers is rude and reminds the "potential client" of the late hour.

National estimates indicate that between 11% and 14% of the population will require some minimal mental health intervention before age 13. Projections based upon current data indicate that, in one region of Nebraska, fewer than 3% of the young people will have received these services as minors.

Given its population, Nebraska should have 15 practicing child psychiatrists. At present there are six in the State; five of these are in the Omaha area.

There are 26 public school "hearing clinicians" in the State. Fifteen are in Omaha; seven are in Lincoln. Thus, the rest of the State is served by the remaining four.

District-County judges report that the pre-sentence investigation reports performed by State probation officers in juvenile cases frequently do little more than repeat the information originally provided by the judge.

While more than 50% of the serious crimes in Nebraska are attributed to juveniles, only 16% of the Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice funds are expended for juvenile programs.

The Nebraska Center for Children and Youth and the Nebraska Psychiatric Institute report difficulty in placing the client who is not ready for foster placement or a return home.

Youth-serving professionals throughout the State report that they can't get clients accepted by the Nebraska Center for Children and Youth and the Nebraska Psychiatric Institute because no beds are available.

There is no residential treatment facility in Nebraska specifically designed to work with adolescents with alcohol problems.

Youth-serving professionals and citizens at all public meetings cited a need for alcohol treatment programs.

Because emergency shelter facilities are not available, workers frequently must take clients home with them.

Delinquency prevention and juvenile diversion programs are available in few areas of the State.

The director of the Youth Resources Program (a Federally funded prevention program currently functioning in eight outstate communities) resigns, reportedly because State matching funds are not to be continued.

Within State agencies providing services to children and youth, there are no staff positions specifically designated to plan, coordinate and monitor those services for young people.

The only apparent efforts to develop the inter-agency coordination necessary to serve multi-problem youth are those which have begun at the county or multi-county level.