



*Working to make North Carolina
the best place to be and raise a child*

FACT SHEET

COMPLETING THE PICTURE: TWO SYSTEMS OF JUSTICE FOR NORTH CAROLINA'S YOUTH

OVERVIEW

The 2008 KIDS Count Data Book, published annually by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, examines key indicators of child well-being across all 50 states and Washington D.C. This year's Data Book essay focuses on promising reforms in juvenile justice and underscores the need to provide delinquent teens with developmentally appropriate, research-based services.

North Carolina is doing quite well with its treatment of youth ages 10-15 in the juvenile justice system according to the 2008 KIDS COUNT Data Book.

- In 2006, the rate of detained and committed youth in custody was 82 per 100,000 youth, while the national rate was 125.ⁱ North Carolina's rate is 34% lower than the federal rate.ⁱⁱ
- In that same year, the percent of youth in custody for non-violent offenses was 59% compared to 66% nationally.ⁱ

This *Fact Sheet*, drawing upon reliable, relevant state data and research, provides additional insight into the nature of juvenile crime and delinquency in North Carolina.

North Carolina data show the state has experienced a decline in juvenile crime and Youth Development Center (YDC) commitments.

- North Carolina's juvenile crime rate reached an eight-year low in 2007.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The N.C. Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) received 34 complaints per 1,000 youth aged 6 -15 in 2007, a six percent decrease from the 2006 juvenile crime rate.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Over the past 9 years, there has been a 67.9% decline in YDC commitments.ⁱⁱⁱ

Juvenile Crime Prevention Council (JCPC)-funded services, are cost-effective and improve public safety.

- JCPCs, comprised of key community stakeholders in each county, assess local needs and allocate and monitor funding for appropriate services for at-risk youth and their families to reduce and prevent juvenile delinquency.
- Current research on adolescent brain development shows that teenagers' brains have not reached adult reasoning capabilities and that they are easily influenced by environmental factors.
- Evidence-based programs recommended by the Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP) have been implemented by several JCPC-funded programs such as life skills training, multi-systemic therapy and cognitive behavioral therapy. All have proven effective.
- Keeping one percent of North Carolina's youth out of YDCs saves the state \$23 million per year, which is equivalent to the entire annual JCPC budget.^{iv}
- An evaluation of JCPC prevention and intervention programs conducted by outside researchers revealed that: "most juvenile justice programs reduce recidivism and the most practical and cost-effective approach is to improve existing programs."^v

North Carolina does not treat 16- and 17-year-olds as the minors they are.

- North Carolina is *one* of only three states in the U.S. that automatically prosecutes all 16- and 17-year-olds in the adult criminal system, no matter how minor the offense.
 - More North Carolina youth are processed as adults than as juveniles.
 - 25,186 delinquent complaints were filed in the North Carolina juvenile system in 2004;^{vi}
 - In the same year, 32,926 offenders aged 16 and 17 were processed in the adult system;^{vi}
 - The majority of crimes by youth under the age of 18 are minor offenses.
 - The 2007 annual report from N.C. DJJDP classifies more than 65% of juvenile complaints as misdemeanors, a finding consistent with the numbers for 2004;ⁱⁱⁱ
 - More than 85.8% of offenses committed by 16- and 17-year-olds in the adult system were misdemeanors in 2004.^{vi}

JCPC programs can prevent crime among all children under age 18.

- The JCPCs are an effective infrastructure to provide a developmentally appropriate, research-based continuum of services for *all* youth, which includes education, parental participation, punishment and rehabilitation.
- About 23,000 youth annually receive locally-provided JCPC funded juvenile services, but the JCPCs are not adequately funded or supported to meet existing demands or to expand services.ⁱⁱ

The adult system offers limited treatment and educational opportunities and is not developmentally appropriate for youth.

- Sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are tried, sentenced and incarcerated just as any other adult in the N.C. criminal justice system with very few accommodations for their developmental level.
- Minors in the adult criminal system are more likely to be reconvicted, re-incarcerated or have their probation revoked.^{vi}
- The research-based programs preventing delinquency among North Carolina's 14- and 15-year-olds are proven to work for older youth as well.

Conclusion: It is time the North Carolina legislature requires 16- and 17-year-olds in the adult criminal system to participate in research-based programs currently required of youth under age 16 in the juvenile system. These programs have been shown to reduce crime but must be adequately funded to expand services to 16- and 17-year-olds.

ⁱ Annie E. Casey Foundation. *19th annual KIDS COUNT Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being*. p. 130. Available at: <http://www.aecf.org>.

ⁱⁱ Calculation by Action for Children North Carolina. June 9, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *2007 Annual Report*. Available online at: <http://www.ncdjdp.org/statistics/annual.html>. p. 6 and p. 11

^{iv} Calculation by Mike Rieder. Press Conference remarks. May 21, 2008. Haven House. Available online at: [http://www.ncchild.org/action/index.php/Action-for-Children-Press-Releases/May-21-2008-Legislation-Filed-to-Raise-Juvenile-Crime-Prevention-Councils-Funding-by-\\$5M.html](http://www.ncchild.org/action/index.php/Action-for-Children-Press-Releases/May-21-2008-Legislation-Filed-to-Raise-Juvenile-Crime-Prevention-Councils-Funding-by-$5M.html)

^v North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. *A Practical Approach to Evaluating and Improving Juvenile Justice Programs Utilizing The Standardized Program Evaluation Protocol: The Lipsey-Howell Project*. September 2003. Available online at: http://www.ncdjdp.org/jcpc/program_evaluation.html

^{vi} North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission. *Report on Study of Youthful Offenders Pursuant to Session Law 2006-248, Sections 34.1 and 34.2*. March 2007. Available online at: http://www.nccourts.org/Courts/CRS/Councils/spac/Documents/yo_finalreporttolegislature.pdf. p. 38. Data Note: The number of offenders is an estimate based upon doubling the numbers for July to December 2004 to reflect a 12-month period.