

December 2001

At-Risk and Runaway Youth in Washington State: Outcomes for Youth Admitted to Secure Crisis Residential Centers and Mandatory Chemical Dependency Treatment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 1995, Washington State implemented policies for at-risk youth intended to protect children and help families reconcile. Known as the “Becca Bill,” the policies include court intervention for at-risk youth and provisions for mandatory treatment of youth with chemical dependency problems. The bill established *secure* crisis residential centers (CRC), which prevent youth from leaving CRCs without parental or staff permission. During their stays in secure CRCs, youth and their families are referred to counseling and treatment services. The 2000 Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Institute) to examine outcomes for Becca youth:

Using existing data sources, examine criminal, substance abuse, and education outcomes of “Becca” youth (youth who have been placed in secure crisis residential facilities or mandatory chemical dependency treatment). EHB 2487, Section 607(5)(a), Laws of 2000

The Institute followed outcomes of 628 youth who entered secure CRCs between June 1997 and August 1999. We also surveyed the parents to obtain their impressions of the process. Because it was not possible to create a comparison group, this study cannot evaluate whether the Becca Bill “works.” Rather, our findings describe the characteristics of youth who use secure CRCs.

Key Findings

- **Age and Gender:** The average age of a youth entering a secure CRC during the study time frame was 15. Females constituted two-thirds of secure CRC youth.
- **Alcohol and Substance Abuse:** One-third of the youth in the study received drug and alcohol assessments following a Becca admission. Of those assessed, 83 percent were diagnosed as chemically dependent or substance abusers.
- **Mental Health:** Mental health services were provided for 17 percent of youth following a Becca admission. The majority of these youth received outpatient mental health services. Seventy-seven percent of youth in outpatient care were diagnosed as severely or seriously disturbed.
- **Family Conflict:** Following a Becca admission, 34 percent of youth were referred to Family Reconciliation Services. Seventy-five percent of the parents receiving these services reported them to be very or somewhat helpful.

- **At-Risk Youth (ARY) and Child in Need of Services (CHINS) Petitions:** Prior to a Becca admission, 35 parents had filed ARY petitions, and 13 had filed CHINS petitions. During the period after a Becca admission, 68 ARY and 33 CHINS petitions were filed.
- **Educational Status:** Of the 567 youth who should have been in high school, 38 percent were enrolled in public school during the year following a Becca admission. Those enrolled in school attended 120 out of 180 possible school days.
- **Criminal or Delinquent Activity:** During the 18 months following a Becca admission, 25 percent of youth had at least one criminal conviction. Thirty-nine percent of the crimes were felonies.
- **Family Outcomes:** After their release from secure CRCs, 72 percent of Becca youth lived with their parents. Forty-seven percent of parents surveyed thought their child's relationship with the family improved "a little" or "a lot." (Only 16 percent reported the relationship worsened.)