

COALITION FOR JUVENILE JUSTICE

**HANDOUT
WITH CARE**

**Serving The Mental Health
Needs Of Young Offenders
2000 ANNUAL REPORT**

The Sixteenth Annual Report to the President, the
Congress, and the Administrator of the Office of Juvenile
Justice and Delinquency Prevention

as prescribed by

Section 241 (b)(2)(C), (D) and (E) of the Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, as amended

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EXHIBIT **E14** Juvenile Justice

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☐ Entire document provided.

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Meeting Date **1-15-04**

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The conclusions reached and recommendations made are exclusively those of the Coalition.

LETTER FROM THE NATIONAL CHAIR

Dear Mr. President, Members of Congress, and fellow concerned citizens:

One out of every five children in the United States will at some point need help to contain and manage strong emotions or severe stress. They may have erratic mood changes. Anxiety and depression may wash over them and drown out better judgment. These children suffer with mental health problems. These children sometimes break the law.

Unfortunately, nationwide, we too often lock away children with mental health problems, rather than providing them with effective treatment. Arrest and sentencing have become key points of entry into the arena of mental health services for tens of thousands of youth. Yet juvenile detention facilities and staff are rarely equipped to provide appropriate and adequate care—and youth are simply warehoused.

Neglect and indifference come at a high cost: an estimated 50 to 75 percent of youth in detention facilities suffer from mental health problems and are likely, without counseling and support, to become more vulnerable, more volatile and more dangerous to themselves and others. Youth with mental health problems are at high risk for attempting suicide, suffering misdiagnoses or being abused. Children in corrections have been forcibly and brutally restrained, over-medicated, beaten or killed because corrections staff misinterpret symptoms of mental illness.

The choices we must make regarding children with mental health problems are critical. Given the need to make informed decisions, the Coalition for Juvenile Justice proudly offers to you its 2000 annual report,

Handle with Care: Serving the Mental Health Needs of Young Offenders. The report illustrates findings from a year-long investigation into the scope of mental health concerns and services in the juvenile justice system. It exposes myriad systematic shortcomings and a lack of effective, integrated mental health assessment and treatment services.

If you care about children, families and community safety, this report is a "must read." **Handle with Care** proves how pervasive mental health problems are among youth in general and young offenders in particular. The report explains why parents may be forced to surrender their children to the juvenile court because they cannot receive assistance with mental health problems anywhere else. The report reveals how poverty, race, gender and sexual orientation may unjustly block young offenders from accessing services.

Handle with Care also identifies the excellence we can create. Treatment methods that focus on rebuilding a child's family structure while ensuring that he or she receives intensive therapy have reduced recidivism among young offenders by as much as 80 percent. Imagine if such approaches were replicated and part of routine practice. Moreover, there are early detection, prevention and intervention efforts that reach children before emotional distress turns into a mental health problem or a mental illness, and before children engage in dangerous or delinquent activity.

Think of how safe our communities could be if we are to become more proactive.

Mr. President, members of Congress, local leaders and fellow citizens, I urge you, on behalf of the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, to read this report for understanding and guidance. I encourage you to carefully consider the

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recommendations to policy makers, practitioners and the public that appear on its final pages. Our Coalition is hopeful that the proposed action steps will provide children—especially those in the juvenile court system—and their families with wider access to high quality mental health assessment and treatment services. Let us focus on children and shape their futures anew and for the better.

With sincerest greetings and great hope,



Robert Pence
2000 National Chair
Coalition for Juvenile Justice

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Note to Readers: Diagnostic and technical terms are used throughout this report. Such words have been highlighted by the use of bold type when they first appear in the text. Definitions for each may be found in the Glossary.

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