



*Breanna Hollie, LCSW, a care coordinator for TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities, Inc.), closely follows the young people she refers for services through the Juvenile Justice Collaborative.*

# Helping juvenile offenders find a path to success

When her best friend was killed last year, Victoria began a downward spiral. Her childhood had already been marked by her family's financial instability, frequent relocations and violence at home.

After she got into a fight with another teen, Victoria was arrested, and faced the possibility of incarceration in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. Research has shown that youth who spend time in juvenile detention centers are more likely to engage in future criminal activity, do poorly in school and have substance abuse and mental health issues. Research has also shown that teenagers' brains are still developing. They often cannot gauge the consequences of their actions and are vulnerable to peer pressure.

Instead of being placed in detention, Victoria's probation officer referred her to Lurie Children's Juvenile Justice Collaborative, an innovative new model aimed at giving juvenile offenders a second chance. After a comprehensive assessment, Victoria was referred to services at one of the 10 community-based agencies participating in the collaborative.

Victoria is currently receiving services in workforce development, therapeutic recreation and mentoring. Her care coordinator says she's enjoying school and

getting along better with family members and out in the community.

**The Juvenile Justice Collaborative is led by Strengthening Chicago's Youth (SCY), a Lurie Children's initiative** that partners with a wide range of community stakeholders to develop strategies to prevent youth violence before it occurs. SCY was launched five years ago, thanks to initial funding from Lurie Children's Founders' Board.

SCY's Director, Rebecca Levin, MPH, says the hospital is a natural fit to lead the collaborative, as one-third of Lurie Children's patients live in Chicago neighborhoods with limited resources. Levin says that the issues facing juvenile offenders are complex, and need coordination to be addressed successfully.

"When you look at a young person in the juvenile justice system, you have to also look at what's going on with their family," she says. "There may be issues with mental health, substance abuse, poverty and single

parents working multiple jobs. These factors contribute to young people being at greater risk for involvement in crimes like car theft, burglary and drug possession.”

With SCY providing coordination, officers from the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department identify potential candidates for the program who are between the ages of 12 and 18 and live in underserved Chicago neighborhoods. They are then referred to a care coordinator with Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities, Inc. (TASC), a nonprofit organization that focuses on alternatives to incarceration, and serves as the Collaborative’s intake and referral center.

“We believe that many young people could be kept out of the juvenile justice system by addressing the psycho-social and developmental issues that are often at the root of their behavior,” says Levin. “We need to emphasize treatment over punishment to get them the services they need, and keep them at home, in school and on a path to success.”

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### HOW YOU CAN HELP

Help at-risk youth turn their lives around by supporting the expansion of the Juvenile Justice Collaborative. Contact Tracy Sadlon at 312.227.7307 or [tsadlon@luriechildrens.org](mailto:tsadlon@luriechildrens.org).

One of the agency’s care coordinators meets with the youth and his or her family to assess the young person’s needs and risk level, and then refers them to the most appropriate community-based provider for support services. Their progress is closely followed by a case worker, who also makes visits to their home and school.

## Juvenile Justice at a Glance



**highest rate**

The U.S. has the highest rate of incarceration of any developed country  
*(Source: International Centre for Prison Studies, 2015)*

**1.5 million**

Juveniles are arrested in the U.S. each year  
*(Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2013)*



**nearly 30,000**

juveniles are arrested in Cook County each year, including nearly 18,000 in Chicago  
*(Sources: Juvenile Justice in Illinois: A Data Snapshot 2014, Chicago Youth Justice Data Program, 2015)*

**+ 80%**

of juvenile arrests in Chicago were 15- to 17-year-olds. *(Chicago Youth Justice Data Program, 2015)*