

## New Issue Brief on Family Engagement and Involving Parents & Caretakers in Juvenile Justice Decision-Making Processes

The RFK National Resource Center is pleased to announce the availability of [Family Engagement and Juvenile Justice: The Evolution of \*Parrens Patriae\*](#), authored by the Honorable Mark A. Ingram and Dr. John S. Ryals, Jr.

Throughout the history of the juvenile justice system, consideration has been given to how parents and caretakers should—or should not—be involved in addressing the short- and long-term needs of children in the system. *Family Engagement and Juvenile Justice: The Evolution of *Parrens Patriae** takes a reflective look at systems' engagement with families and the shifting perception of parent and caretaker involvement—which continues to recognize that parents and caretakers play an integral role in effectively serving youth and the community.

This brief describes the continuum of “family voice” and “system voice” decision-making approaches and the inherent impact on youth outcomes, including recidivism. The authors also highlight practices and approaches that improve interactions and effectively engage families, such as Motivational Interviewing and Family Group Decision-Making case planning. The brief articulates the substantial need not to view family engagement as simply one “part” of a case plan, but rather to integrate policies and practices that place families at the center of the service-delivery spectrum.



### Family Engagement and Juvenile Justice: The Evolution of *Parrens Patriae*

By Honorable Mark Ingram, Magistrate Judge, 8th Judicial District, State of Idaho and Dr. John Ryals, Jr., Evaluation/Treatment Supervisor, Jefferson Parish Department of Juvenile Services, Louisiana

Amanda was a troubled and precocious 14-year-old girl from a large urban city who was homeless and placed in detention for theft. After 90 days in detention, she was released to her parents, who were known by authorities to have a drug problem. Amanda was placed in a foster home, but she ran away from her parent's home and began living in another part of town. She was eventually placed in a residential treatment facility. True to her history of theft, Amanda stole money from her foster parents and was returned to the facility. When asked about her wrongdoings, Amanda seemed to be unapologetic, apathetic, and nonchalant about the offense. She continued to act out and was eventually placed in a secure facility.

While “Amanda’s” case could mirror many contemporary cases from across the nation, it is based on a factual vignette of a girl named Amanda who was placed in a “House of Refuge” in 1825. The House of Refuge was the solution to urban America’s orphan crisis where youth were seemingly abandoned by their parents and society. The House of Refuge was created to correct delinquent behaviors. Prior to the House of Refuge, youth with behavioral issues were often sent to prison.

The organization responsible for this innovative approach to in-service intervention in the lives of neglected, abandoned, and delinquent children was the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile

Delinquents. To offer an explanation for juvenile incorrigible behavior, the Society asserted, “youth of this class are, in all probability, too poor, or too degenerate, to provide them with clothing fit for them to be seen in school, and therefore are compelled to commit theft, in order to find employment, or be better cared for. Accusation, in many instances, of the most flagrant offenses, is not a punishment, but what is degrading, even taught to observe iniquity, and to be despised by their parents, who are, in all probability, obliged to beg, and even encouraged to act of dishonesty, to satisfy the wants induced by the insolvency of their parents.”<sup>1</sup> The Society asserted that the reason for the behavior or whether these organizations of the juvenile justice system were to be blamed for the behavior was not the issue, but because parents they presumed were inept. It is clear that not only were parents presumed to be the genesis of juvenile offending, but their inaction was also to blame for the behavior and thus dismissed from consideration as a part of the solution.

To be fair, the historical amnesia leading to the diminished relevance of parents in children’s lives was rooted in earlier

<sup>1</sup> Document delivered to the House of Refuge, submitted by the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents, 1825. The House of Refuge was established in 1821. The Internet Archive is 2013.

<sup>2</sup> [www.societyforreformationofjuveniledelinquents.org](http://www.societyforreformationofjuveniledelinquents.org)

To access this Issue Brief, please visit: <https://rfknrcjj.org/resources/family-engagement/>.

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### About Us

Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice, led by Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps, uses proven models, frameworks, tools, resources and the best available research to serve local, state, and national leaders, practitioners, and youth-serving agencies to improve system performance and outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system. RFK National Resource Center focuses primarily on youth with prior or current involvement in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (dual status youth), the review and improvement of juvenile probation systems, and the use of a model framework to address the state and national laws and policies governing the exchange and sharing of data, information, and records for youth and families. To learn more about us and how we can serve your jurisdiction, please visit [www.rfknrcjj.org](http://www.rfknrcjj.org).

### Every Child Deserves a Childhood

Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps is a private, non-profit licensed child welfare agency providing community-based services, education, foster care and adoption, residential treatment, and juvenile justice programming to individuals and families in crisis. Our programs are focused on helping children and adolescents deal with past hurts, develop self-esteem, and have a chance for a brighter future as contributing members of society. All that we do at RFK Children's Action Corps is based on the belief that every child deserves the chance to lead a happy, healthy, and productive life. For more information and to get involved, visit [www.rfkchildren.org](http://www.rfkchildren.org).