Experts Offer Strategies for Preventing Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Crossover

"**We** knew the pathway existed," Shay Bilchick said during the opening of [Preventing Youth from Crossing Over Between the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems](), a webinar held Wednesday by the [National Training & Technical Assistance Center](), a program of the [Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention]().

As a prosecutor working the family court circuits in Florida, Bilchik — now the founder and director of the [Center for Juvenile Justice Reform]() (CJJR) at [Georgetown University's Public Policy Institute]() — noted an apparent connection between child abuse and neglect and delinquency cases, referring to such crossover youth as a "challenging" population.

Shortly after Bilchik joined the Public Policy Institute in 2007, the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform and [Casey Family Programs]() worked together to create the [Crossover Youth Practice Model](). This model stems from the [Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Integration Breakthrough Series Collaborative](), developed in the mid-1990s by the Associates in Process Improvement, Casey Family Programs and the [Institute for Healthcare Improvement]().

According to Bilchik, certain methods, policies and practices can "interrupt the trajectory" of crossover between child welfare and juvenile justices systems. Serving as the webinar's moderator, he introduced three speakers with extensive experience in "crossover prevention."

"These young people are our young people," said CJJR Program

Manager Macon Stewart. "Prevention is a collective responsibility."

Stewart said that crossover youth entails three categories of juveniles; those that have experienced some level of maltreatment and delinquency — typically referred to simply as "crossover youth" — as well as dually-involved youth and dually-adjudicated youth. The primary difference between the latter two, Stewart said, is that while dually-involved youth, to some degree, have been involved in both systems, dually-adjudicated youth have been "formally involved" in both systems through court actions.

Stewart noted four primary pathways in which youth crossover between child welfare and juvenile justice systems, noting that juveniles with open child welfare cases and subsequent delinquency charges represented the "most dominant form of crossover."

Although many factors influence crossover youth, Stewart cited placement instability, the absence of pro-social bonds and challenges in educational settings as the three most common.

In evaluating crossover youth, Stewart advised communities to collect data on previous referrals, placement types, number of placement moves and especially individual pathways to crossing over. "The data is key in this," she said, urging stakeholders to establish "a memorandum of understanding" around data sharing.

Stewart suggested that prevention efforts focus on building collaborative relationships with local law enforcement, placement providers and schools, emphasizing "time-limited" and "very targeted" approaches. She advised that foster home and residential placement personnel should have trauma-informed training and encouraged the use of student mentors and advisors for at-risk youth. She also advocated the use of school liaisons, so that stakeholders could concentrate on

"what can you do as opposed to focusing in on what you can't do."

"Prevention strategies in L.A. have been going on for many years," said Maryam Fatemi, the deputy director of Los Angeles County's Division of Family and Children Services. She said that the county adopted their initial process in 1997, resulting in a pilot project, called the [AB 129-Systems Integration Initiative](), in 2007. By 2012, an updated protocol called the [Los Angeles County Crossover Youth Initiative]() — which is anchored around multi-departmental, joint assessments — had been implemented countywide.

Citing a 2011 study funded by the [Hilton Foundation](), Fatemi said there was a definite connection between prior child abuse and neglect and juvenile delinquency. The adult outcomes for crossover youth, she said, were many times tragic.

"Nearly one quarter of crossover youth received treatment for a serious mental illness during the first four years of adulthood," she said.

Fatemi promoted the use of multi-system strategies, specifically multi-disciplinary teams and collaboration with existing school-based programs, as a means of preventing youth crossover. "Education and employment services provide key opportunities for intervention," she said.

Children in group homes are a population Fatemi is particularly concerned about. "Youth living in a group home when arrested are more likely to be detained in juvenile hall than youth residing in other types of placement," she stated. To deter youth crossover, she advised that group homes engage in sharing data with other departments and give feedback to other agencies about staff turnover and delays in service.

Mick Moore, assistant to the Superintendent for Interagency Relations with the Puget Sound Educational Service District and a senior education consultant in King County, Wash.,

helped develop the [PathNet model](#), which is designed to help crossover youth achieve "alternative pathways" to education, particularly when they lack sufficient credits to obtain a high school diploma.

"Stability is a key factor in limiting crossover," he said. The PathNet model consists of four primary modules, which include strength-based assessments, student-driven plans, connectivity to proper educational and vocational programs and the assistance of a "care manger," which Moore described as "a significant adult there to help them."

Moore referred to the program as "an immediate step to the next connection in education and vocation." In 2010, [House Bill 1418](#) was officially adopted by the Washington Legislature, creating a statewide program to reengage youth that are "significantly" behind in academic credits.

Using braided funding models, a number of programs designed to help crossover youth were established, among them a dropout intervention program targeting Latino youth called "[Avanza](#)" as well as a project called "[Pathway through Apprenticeship](#)," which helps community college students connect with local businesses and industries.

Moore ended his presentation by stating that crossover youth require consistent, dependable services, which may take many years to develop.

"Instability is one of our greatest problems with these youth," Moore concluded. "Reengagement into education and vocation with crossover youth is a process, not a singular event."

Photo by the OJJDP.