

---

# Service Needs

## CHAPTER 5

---

**T**he 1998 omnibus crime bill imposed a temporary moratorium on new juvenile residential facilities (and facility expansions) of 25 or more beds.<sup>1</sup> In part, this reflected legislative concerns about two large private facilities that were seeking licensure (and have since opened). Some legislators questioned whether there was a need for additional beds and whether Minnesota's facilities were adequately addressing juveniles' service needs. The crime bill also requested that our office study juvenile service needs, and we asked:

- **Do counties believe that they have sufficient alternatives to residential placement? If not, what types of non-residential services are most needed?**
- **Does Minnesota need additional residential beds for juveniles? Do existing facilities meet the needs of juveniles, and is there sufficient aftercare?**
- **What are the reasons that some children do not complete the programs in which they are placed, and what is the extent of non-completion?**
- **Is there sufficient information about the outcomes of residential placements?**

Overall, we found a more pressing need for improved availability of non-residential services (including aftercare) than residential services. With the possible exception of foster care, most counties do not perceive significant needs for additional residential beds. Facility occupancy rates in most regions of the state have not been high enough to cause serious placement difficulties. Some counties would prefer residential services to be more responsive to juvenile needs—for example, through shorter programs, greater efforts to work with families, and more culturally sensitive programming.

Many of our findings in this chapter are based on surveys of county human services directors, county juvenile corrections supervisors, and judges. The judgments of these three surveyed groups sometimes differed, perhaps reflecting differences in the types of cases with which they were most familiar or their

---

<sup>1</sup> *Minn. Laws* (1998), ch. 367, art. 10, sec. 15.

interpretations about what constituted “adequate” or “available” service. We asked county officials to base their responses on the types of cases for which their agency has been directly responsible, and we assumed that human services officials might sometimes have direct knowledge of placements in correctional facilities, just as corrections officials might sometimes have direct knowledge of placements in human services facilities.<sup>2</sup> In general, human services directors expressed less satisfaction with existing services for juveniles than did corrections officials.

## NON-RESIDENTIAL SERVICE NEEDS

It is difficult to assess the need for residential placements without considering the availability of placement alternatives. In some cases, it might be possible to avoid (or shorten) a residential placement if there are appropriate non-residential programs in the juvenile’s home community. For this reason, we used surveys to document the service preferences of county human services directors and juvenile corrections supervisors throughout Minnesota. We found that:

- **Most counties reported a greater need for additional non-residential than residential services for juveniles.**

---

**Most counties would rather invest new funds in non-residential than residential services.**

We asked county officials what their top spending priority would be if they received additional funding to pay for out-of-home placements or non-residential services for at-risk children. According to our surveys, 71 percent of county corrections supervisors and 64 percent of county human services directors said that their top spending priority would be non-residential services.<sup>3</sup> In addition, 44 percent of corrections supervisors and 38 percent of human services directors said that their counties “sometimes, rarely, or never” have sufficient alternatives to residential placements.<sup>4</sup>

We asked additional questions to determine county satisfaction with the availability of 25 specific types of services--most of which could be provided in either residential or non-residential settings. Table 5.1 shows the percentage of respondents who said they were not satisfied with the availability of these services. More human services and corrections officials said they were dissatisfied with the availability of truancy services than any other service, and many human services and corrections officials also identified services for “low-functioning” (i.e., low intelligence) juvenile offenders as another category of

---

<sup>2</sup> The surveys instructed respondents to mark “don’t know” if survey questions asked about types of cases or facilities with which the respondents had little or no experience.

<sup>3</sup> Among corrections officials, 18 percent said that paying for out-of-home placement would be their top spending priority; 11 percent said “don’t know.” Among human services directors, 31 percent said that out-of-home placement would be their top spending priority; 5 percent said “don’t know.”

<sup>4</sup> Among juvenile corrections supervisors, 16 percent said that they “always or almost always” have sufficient alternatives, and 37 percent said they “usually” do. Among human services directors, 17 percent said that they “always or almost always” have sufficient alternatives, and 45 percent said they “usually” do.

**Table 5.1: County Satisfaction With Availability of Juvenile Services**

Service	Percentage Not Satisfied With Service Availability	
	Human Services Directors (N=84)	Corrections Supervisors (N=82)
Truancy services	70%	59%
Foster care for entire families	68	*
Services for children who are high risks of running away	67	44
Services for "low functioning" juvenile offenders	61	55
Services for offenders under age 12	60	41
Treatment/services for serious emotional disturbances	58	49
Treatment/services for juvenile sex offenders	54	30
Services for children who are high risks of reoffending	54	43
Instruction in critical thinking skills	49	39
Parenting skills (for parents of troubled children)	49	55
Treatment programs for entire families	49	43
Chemical dependency treatment/services	46	41
Instruction in daily living skills	46	54
Vocational training	46	49
Intensive probation for juveniles	*	30
Services for children with limited English skills	*	*
Services for female juvenile offenders	43	43
Services for child abuse victims	40	*
Suicide prevention services	39	*
Services for child neglect victims	37	*
Short-term "consequence" programs for offenders	35	27
Intensive, in-home case management	26	30
Services for children in permanent foster care	23	*
Family counseling services	18	18
Services for extended jurisdiction juveniles	*	21

\* indicates categories for which at least 30 percent of respondents said "don't know/not applicable. "

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

concern. Human services officials said they would like additional foster care arrangements that are designed to serve entire families (including the parents). Corrections officials said they would like to see the parents of troubled juveniles receive parenting training, and they would like to see more instruction in daily living skills for juveniles.

In each case that county officials expressed dissatisfaction with service availability, we asked whether they would prefer (1) additional residential beds, (2) additional services in existing residential facilities, or (3) additional non-residential services. For all but one of the services (foster care for entire families), human services directors identified non-residential services as the most pressing need. For all but five of the services (consequence programs; services for emotionally disturbed children, female juvenile offenders, extended jurisdiction juveniles, and low

---

**Some residential placements could be avoided.**

functioning offenders), county corrections supervisors said that non-residential services were the most pressing need. There were no service categories for which county officials said that additional residential beds was their top priority, although some told us that they would like more beds *in addition to* more non-residential services.

Improved non-residential services would probably not entirely eliminate the need for out-of-home placement.<sup>5</sup> There will always be occasions when children must be removed from home for their own protection or to protect public safety. But county officials and judges told us that effective non-residential services could help them avoid making some long-term placements:

- Among both county human services and corrections officials, more than half of our survey respondents said that at least 15 percent of out-of-home placements exceeding one month could have been avoided in the past year if the county had an adequate system of non-residential services.<sup>6</sup>
- As shown in Table 5.2, most judges said there is little potential for reducing the number of out-of-home placements for extended jurisdiction juveniles and felony-level violent offenders. For all other categories of children we asked about (such as truants and misdemeanants), most judges said there is “some” or “significant” potential for reducing placements through improved community services.

---

**Table 5.2: Judges’ Opinions About the Potential for Reducing Placements Through Improved Non-Residential Services**

"For each of the following categories of children, how much potential is there in your judicial district to reduce out-of-home placements from current levels through the development of additional non-residential services?"

	Percentage of Judges Who Said:		
	Significant Potential	Some Potential	Little Potential
Extended jurisdiction juveniles	3%	23%	51%
Felony-level violent offenders	2	23	62
Felony-level property offenders	15	52	20
Misdemeanor-level offenders	36	39	12
Truants and runaways	36	38	15
Children with emotional or mental health problems	16	51	21
Children who have been victims of abuse	20	45	23
Children who have been victims of neglect	18	50	21
Chemically-dependent children	21	50	19

NOTE: Percentages of respondents who said "don't know/not applicable" are not shown.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division survey of district court judges (N=143), August 1998.

---

<sup>5</sup> In 1996, the Minnesota Department of Human Services set a goal of reducing the number of children in out-of-home placement statewide by 50 percent by the year 2005 (*1996 Performance Report* (St. Paul, December 1996), 29). This goal was not based on a systematic review of service needs but on the belief that too many children were being placed out of home unnecessarily.

<sup>6</sup> Eleven percent of human services directors and 12 percent of corrections officials estimated that 50 to 100 percent of their placements could have been avoided through improved non-residential services.

There have been various states and other jurisdictions that have tried to reduce out-of-home placements by enhancing home-based or community-based services. The term "wraparound services" has been used to describe efforts to tailor services to the needs of children and their families--often with small caseloads for social workers or probation officers and funding pooled from multiple programs. For example, Alaska significantly reduced its juvenile out-of-state placements in the late 1980s by making greater use of local outpatient care, home-based services, day treatment, and other community-based services. Massachusetts closed its state-operated "training schools" for delinquent youth in 1972 and developed community-based residential and non-residential services in their place. In 1987, Iowa pooled 30 categories of child welfare funds and gave counties flexibility about whether to use the funds for residential or non-residential services. In the early 1990s, Vermont enhanced local services and mandated interagency service delivery to help children with severe emotional disturbances return home from placement (or avoid placement altogether).<sup>7</sup>

---

**Community-based programs hold promise, but more research about their results is needed.**

While there is general agreement among researchers and practitioners that these types of reforms are promising, there has been limited research about the effectiveness of "wraparound" programs and other community-based services. Some recent literature reviews have concluded the following:

"There is still a critical need for a consensus to emerge regarding the existence of a best practice program (or preferably programs) that have demonstrated effectiveness and can be transportable, defensible, and implementable in new locales."<sup>8</sup>

"There is little evidence that community-based alternatives are any more effective in reducing recidivism than training schools. A few experiments that set out to demonstrate that small community-based programs or in-home supervision programs were more effective than traditional training schools failed to do so. On the other hand, meta-analysis of numerous juvenile program evaluations suggested that treatment programs that employ multimodal methods, including cognitive-behavioral and skill-oriented techniques, were more effective when run in the community rather than institutional settings."<sup>9</sup>

"A literature is accumulating with respect to the effectiveness [of family preservation services], and it, too, is inadequate. . . . Studies that have included more rigorous controls suggest that family preservation services may reduce child placement in the short run but that their effectiveness diminishes over time."<sup>10</sup>

---

7 Paul Lerman, "Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care: System Reforms and Regulating Placements," in *Protecting Children from Abuse and Neglect*, ed. Gary B. Melton and Frank D. Barry (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 353-437; James Yoe, Suzanne Santarcangelo, Margaret Atkins, and John D. Burchard, "Wraparound Care in Vermont: Program Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of a Statewide System of Individualized Services," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996), 23-39.

8 Abram Rosenblatt, "Bows and Ribbons, Tape and Twine: Wrapping the Wraparound Process for Children with Multi-System Needs," *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 5, no. 1 (1996), 105.

9 Elizabeth Piper Deschenes and Peter W. Greenwood, "Alternative Placements for Juvenile Offenders: Results from the Evaluation of the Nokomis Challenge Program," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 35, no. 3 (August 1998), 270.

10 Kathleen Wells, "Family Preservation Services in Context: Origins, Practices, and Current Issues," in *Home-Based Services for Troubled Children*, ed. Ira M. Schwartz and Philip AuClaire (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 18-19.

“In sum, although [wraparound] programs are an interesting concept and evaluation strategies are becoming more rigorous, there is currently a paucity of valid and reliable empirical data to support their effectiveness.”<sup>11</sup>

Overall, Minnesota county officials expressed to us a preference for serving more of their most troubled children through non-residential services. These services are not appropriate for all children in out-of-home placement, but they may enable counties to serve some children in less restrictive settings. This complicates the task of estimating the future need for residential services, which we discuss next.

## BED AVAILABILITY

We used several methods to evaluate whether there is a need for additional beds in Minnesota residential facilities. First, we compared each region’s number of licensed residential beds to its number of children (and, alternatively, to its number of children in poverty). Second, we examined the “occupancy rates” of existing facilities to determine the extent to which there is unused capacity in the residential services system. Because occupancy data are not regularly collected for all facilities, we relied on (1) information on occupancy collected by a Department of Corrections consultant for December 31, 1997, and (2) similar, one-day occupancy information that we collected for additional facilities in Fall 1998.<sup>12</sup> Third, human services directors and juvenile corrections supervisors in each county provided us with their opinions about service needs in our August 1998 surveys.

### Beds Per Capita and Occupancy Rates

To assess regional variation in bed capacity, we began by examining each judicial district’s total number of beds in correctional facilities, Rule 5 facilities, and group homes. Table 5.3 shows that there were 30 licensed beds statewide per 10,000 children, and this ranged from 19 to 63 in individual judicial districts. But this disparity became smaller when we compared each district’s number of beds with the number of children in poverty. Specifically, the total number of licensed beds per 1,000 children living in poverty ranged from 13 (in Judicial Districts 2 and 4--Ramsey and Hennepin counties) to 29 (in the Ninth District--northwestern Minnesota).<sup>13</sup> The two districts with the lowest rates are the state’s smallest judicial districts in geographic area, and both are adjacent to districts with much

<sup>11</sup> Brady C. Bates, Diana J. English, and Sophia Kouidou-Giles, “Residential Treatment and its Alternatives: A Review of the Literature,” *Child & Youth Care Forum* 26, no. 1 (February 1997), 43.

<sup>12</sup> The University of Minnesota Institute for Criminal Justice surveyed facilities that were serving juveniles in court-ordered placement for delinquency. We supplemented these efforts by contacting Rule 5, Rule 8, and detention facilities that were not contacted for the Institute’s survey. As time permitted, we contacted some of the larger facilities surveyed by the Institute to update information on juvenile populations. Facilities that we contacted had somewhat higher occupancy levels overall than those surveyed by the Institute, perhaps reflecting seasonal variations in occupancy or differences in the facilities contacted.

<sup>13</sup> Regional comparisons should be made with care because some facilities serve children from throughout Minnesota. For example, 39 percent of the beds in the First District were at the state correctional facility at Red Wing.

**Table 5.3: Number of Rule 8, Rule 5, and Corrections Beds by Judicial District**

Judicial District	Licensed Beds per 10,000 Children Under Age 18	Licensed Beds per 1,000 Children Living in Poverty
First	19	27
Second	28	13
Third	20	17
Fourth	25	13
Fifth <sup>a</sup>	37	25
Sixth	51	26
Seventh	38	23
Eighth	37	21
Ninth	63	29
Tenth	24	28
Statewide	30	20

**There is a fairly balanced distribution of beds throughout Minnesota's regions.**

<sup>a</sup>A new non-secure corrections facility opened in Elmore, Minnesota in 1998. Once the facility is completely open, it will provide 150 beds. At the time of our survey, it only provided 75 beds, so our analysis did not include the 75 beds not yet open.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division analysis of data from the Department of Human Services' and Department of Corrections' licensing units and the United State Bureau of the Census.

higher numbers of beds per 1,000 children in poverty. Thus, many children from Districts 2 and 4 could be placed outside the districts but remain somewhat close to home.

As shown in Table 5.4, there are about 3,700 beds licensed as correctional facilities, Rule 5 facilities, and group homes. We found that:

- **Secure correctional facilities had relatively high occupancy rates (88 percent statewide), but the occupancy rates of other types of facilities were considerably lower.**

**Table 5.4: Statewide Occupancy Rates for Selected Types of Residential Facilities**

Facility Type	Number of Licensed Beds	Estimated Number of Residents	Estimated Occupancy Rate
Rule 8 Group Home	659	441	67%
Rule 5 Residential Treatment Facilities	918	596	65
Non-Secure Correctional Facilities <sup>a</sup>	1,600	1,228	77
Secure Correctional Facilities	<u>575</u>	<u>507</u>	<u>88</u>
Total	3,752	2,775	74%

NOTE: The estimated number of residents and occupancy rates are based on survey data which included all but 99 of Minnesota's 3,752 beds.

<sup>a</sup>A new non-secure corrections facility opened in Elmore, Minnesota in 1998. Once the facility is completely open, it will provide 150 beds. At the time of our survey, it only provided 75 beds, so our analysis did not include the 75 beds not yet open.

SOURCE: The Department of Human Services' and Department of Corrections' licensing units, Program Evaluation Division phone survey of facilities (August - October 1998), and University of Minnesota's Institute for Criminal Justice survey of facilities (as of December 31, 1997).

**New facilities  
will be opening  
in some  
districts with  
bed shortages.**

In the DHS-licensed group homes and treatment facilities, about one-third of licensed beds were unoccupied on the days we contacted them. In non-secure correctional facilities, nearly one-fourth of licensed beds were unoccupied.

Table 5.5 shows facility occupancy rates by judicial district. Several districts with shortages (or near shortages) of correctional space are anticipating increases in the number of licensed correctional beds within the district's boundaries. In the First District, the Red Wing facility expects to increase its licensed juvenile capacity from 128 to 206 as it converts adult prison space to juvenile facility space.<sup>14</sup> The Second and Fourth districts (Ramsey and Hennepin counties) have been exceeding their licensed detention capacities because they have not yet opened new detention beds with the bonding money authorized by the 1994 Legislature. Hennepin County has been debating the construction of a new facility for several years, and Ramsey County started construction of a detention center addition in 1998.<sup>15</sup> In the Sixth District, a large private correctional facility recently opened in Buhl and is not reflected in our tables (it was not open at the time of our survey). The facility plans to have 186 beds (non-secure and secure) available in early 1999, which will more than double the number of licensed correctional beds

**Table 5.5: Estimated Occupancy Rates for Selected Facilities by Judicial District**

Judicial District	Rule 8 Group Homes	Rule 5 Residential Treatment Facilities	Non-Secure Correctional Facilities	Secure Correctional Facilities	Total
First	66%	67%	114%	69%	89%
Second	75	55	85	110	77
Third	53	78	56	77	62
Fourth	72	39	85	105	71
Fifth <sup>a</sup>	76	84	77	17 <sup>b</sup>	76
Sixth	55	96	90	96	87
Seventh	56	82	58	66	64
Eighth	80	70	70	87	77
Ninth	65	73	77	70	72
Tenth	73	42	71	97	73
Statewide	67%	65%	77%	88%	74%

NOTE: The estimated occupancy rates are based on survey data which includes all but 99 of Minnesota's 3,752 beds.

<sup>a</sup>A new non-secure corrections facility is opening in Elmore, Minnesota. Once the facility is completely open, it will provide 150 beds. At the time of our survey, it only provided 75 beds, so our analysis did not include the 75 beds not yet open.

<sup>b</sup>The Fifth District only has 12 secure correctional beds; only two were occupied at the time of our phone survey.

SOURCE: The Department of Human Services' and Department of Corrections' licensing divisions, Program Evaluation Division phone survey of facilities (August - October 1998), and University of Minnesota's Institute for Criminal Justice survey of facilities (as of December 31, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> On the day we contacted Red Wing, it had 148 juvenile residents, although its licensed capacity was still 128.

<sup>15</sup> Ramsey County's addition will result in a net increase of 40 secure beds; Hennepin County officials told us they are considering adding 36 secure beds.

in the district.<sup>16</sup> These additions will not ensure that correctional beds will always be available when needed, but they will reduce occupancy rates in the affected districts. In addition, some correctional facilities use detention and residential space interchangeably, which gives them more flexibility for accommodating placements.

It is much more difficult to objectively assess what portion of Minnesota's family foster home "capacity" is being used. As of mid-1998, Department of Human Services records indicated that foster homes inspected by counties and private agencies could legally serve up to about 13,400 children. These included a variety of types of foster care, ranging from emergency beds to treatment-oriented foster care for children requiring special services. Based on surveys of foster home licensing agencies we conducted in August and September 1998, we estimated that about 45 percent of the licensed capacity was in use.<sup>17</sup> But human services officials cautioned us that the "licensed capacity" of foster homes may significantly overstate the actual number of children that could be served at a given time. For example, counties often license foster homes for more beds than either the county or foster family prefers to have in use. Also, some foster homes meet requirements for licensure, but counties prefer to rarely (if ever) make referrals to them.

## County Staff Opinions About Residential Service Needs

---

### The availability of secure correctional beds has improved.

We surveyed county human services directors and corrections supervisors to determine their perceptions about recent trends in bed availability and areas of current need. As shown in Table 5.6,

- **Fifty-nine percent of county juvenile corrections supervisors said that the availability of secure detention beds in Minnesota improved in the past three years, and 45 percent said that the availability of secure residential (post-disposition) beds improved.**
- **Fifty-one percent of county human services directors said that the availability of Minnesota foster homes operated by relatives of children improved during the past three years, but 40 percent of the directors said that non-relative foster care options declined.**

The improved availability of secure detention and residential beds largely reflects the 1994 Legislature's approval of \$20 million in bonding authority for juvenile detention center construction grants, which were allocated to each judicial

---

<sup>16</sup> Our data for District 5 (southwestern Minnesota) do include a new correctional facility in Elmore that had 75 beds open by October 1998.

<sup>17</sup> The Department of Human Services does not collect information on utilization of foster care beds. We collected information from licensing agencies that represented about 88 percent of the system's capacity, but some were unable to provide information about the number of children in subcategories of foster care.

**Table 5.6: County Officials' Perceptions About Recent Trends in Placement Availability, By Facility Type**

During the past three years, the county's ability to find timely, appropriate, in-state placements. . .	Percentage of Officials Who Said:		
	Improved	Stayed the Same	Declined
Human services directors (N=84):			
Shelter care	38%	52%	10%
Treatment foster care	29	57	14
Regular foster care	7	52	40
Relative foster homes	51	43	6
Group homes	13	77	4
Rule 5 mental health facilities	5	85	10
Corrections supervisors (N=82):			
Secure detention facilities	59%	33%	5%
Secure residential facilities	45	40	9
Non-secure correctional facilities	33	55	10
Group homes	11	76	10

NOTE: Percentages of respondents who said "don't know/not applicable" are not shown.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

**Many counties have had increased difficulty recruiting non-relative foster parents.**

district.<sup>18</sup> According to the Department of Corrections, the grant-funded projects that have been completed or are in progress will double the state's number of secure detention beds and triple the number of secure treatment beds. Some judicial districts' projects are still underway or in the planning stages, so not all counties have benefitted from the bed expansions so far.

In contrast, many counties said they have had increased difficulty recruiting foster parents in recent years. Some said this reflects the improved economy and the increase in two-earner families. Counties would prefer to have several viable foster care options for each child being placed, but some staff told us that they have increasingly placed children in the first foster home opening that appears to fit the child's needs and characteristics.

For various categories of residential facilities, we asked county staff whether they perceive a need for additional beds. In all categories except Rule 5 treatment facilities and Rule 8 group homes, a majority of county staff said that they think there is at least "some need" for additional beds. But much smaller numbers of county staff said there is "significant need" for new beds in these categories, as shown in Table 5.7. We found that:

- **County human services directors most often identified foster care and corrections supervisors most often identified secure residential facilities as the types of residential care with "significant need" for more beds.**

<sup>18</sup> *Minn. Laws* (1994), ch. 643, secs. 7 and 79.

**Table 5.7: Perceived Need for Additional Juvenile Facility Beds**

**Except for foster care, counties generally do not have a significant need for new residential beds.**

	Percentage of Officials Who Said There Is:		
	No Need for New Beds	Some Need for New Beds	Significant Need for New Beds
Human services directors (N=84):			
Shelter care	25%	67%	6%
Treatment foster care	15	54	29
Regular foster care	5	46	48
Relative foster homes	14	40	40
Group homes	45	40	6
Rule 5 mental health facilities	52	38	6
Corrections supervisors (N=82):			
Secure detention facilities	33%	50%	15%
Secure residential facilities	28	45	26
Non-secure correctional facilities	35	51	10
Group homes	43	49	6

NOTE: Percentages of respondents who said "don't know/not applicable" are not shown.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

Despite the fact that half of the state’s judges, county corrections supervisors, and human services directors told us on our surveys that they often have difficulty finding Rule 5 mental health treatment beds within a reasonable distance from children’s homes, relatively few county staff said that there is a significant need for new Rule 5 beds.<sup>19</sup> Even in the Sixth Judicial District--which had a 96 percent occupancy rate at its Rule 5 facilities--just one of the district’s four counties (Carlton) indicated a “significant need” for additional Rule 5 beds in our surveys.

## Conclusion

Overall, county staff have had increasing difficulty finding appropriate non-relative foster care for children. Also, counties have occasional difficulty finding openings in the larger residential facilities at the times they need them, and (as noted in Chapter 2) they sometimes have problems finding placements for the most difficult children on their caseloads. But, particularly in light of most counties’ stated preferences for improved non-residential services,

- **We do not think that there is evidence of a serious statewide shortage of residential beds for juveniles, with the possible exception of foster care.**

<sup>19</sup> We found that 54 percent of human services directors, 50 percent of corrections supervisors, and 50 percent of judges said that they are “sometimes, rarely or never” able to make timely, appropriate placements within a reasonable distance from the child’s home (emphasis in original question). Among facility types, this was the highest level of dissatisfaction regarding placement distance.

**The size of Minnesota's juvenile population is expected to decline.**

DHS-licensed residential treatment facilities and group homes have had relatively low occupancy rates. DOC-licensed facilities have had higher occupancy rates, but many new beds have recently been added or are in the planning stages. In general, there is not a wide disparity in the availability of residential beds by region, and bed expansions underway or already funded by the Legislature should address some of the remaining bed shortages.

A final consideration regarding future bed needs is the size of the juvenile population. Although Minnesota's population of persons under age 20 has grown slightly in recent years, the population is expected to decline gradually in the near future. The state demographer's office projects that the population of persons under age 20 will decline by 13 percent between 2000 and 2025.

## SERVICE ADEQUACY

Even if Minnesota has enough of most types of residential beds, it is important to consider whether existing facilities effectively serve children's needs. Our study focused on the adequacy of Minnesota's **system** of residential care and did not evaluate the quality of care in individual residential facilities or the content of individual programs. However, we used results from our surveys of county officials to help us consider service adequacy, as discussed below.

### Residential Program Length

Some county staff told us that they have been trying to find facilities with shorter programs for the children they are placing--partly out of concern about growing placement costs, but also because they are unconvinced that longer child placements produce better results. In some cases, counties have tried to convince facilities to shorten the length of their "standard" programs. Other counties have simply decided to increase their use of facilities with short programs and decrease their use of facilities with longer programs.

Our surveys of county staff indicated that:

- **Corrections and human services officials are less satisfied with the availability of short-term placement options (less than three months) in Minnesota than with the availability of longer-term options.**

Table 5.8 shows that only about half of corrections officials and one-fourth of human services directors expressed satisfaction with the number of Minnesota residential placement options that are less than three months in length. In contrast, about two-thirds of corrections and human services officials said that there are enough placement options that are more than six months long.

The table also shows that 69 percent of human services directors expressed a desire for more placement options in which the length of stay is dictated by the child's needs. Most corrections officials told us that there were enough such

**Table 5.8: County Perceptions About Length of Existing Residential Programs**

	Corrections Supervisors (N=82)		Human Services Directors (N=84)	
	Percentage Who Agree	Percentage Who Disagree	Percentage Who Agree	Percentage Who Disagree
There are enough residential placement options:				
Less than three months	49%	43%	26%	58%
Three to six months	60	27	35	43
More than six months	70	21	67	15
In which length of stay is guided by child's needs	59	32	15	69

NOTE: The percentages of those who responded "neither agree nor disagree" and "don't know" are not shown.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

options available. The responses of corrections officials might reflect the fact that delinquent juveniles are more likely than other juveniles to be placed in programs of pre-determined length--sometimes as a way of imposing a consequence for their actions.

## Programs Tailored to Juveniles

Minnesota's array of placement options includes a mix of public and private facilities that vary widely in size, philosophy, and program content. Many facilities prefer to work with certain types and ages of children, and some facilities have staff with specialized areas of expertise. Some residential facilities operate treatment programs, while others are largely intended to provide a safe place for children to live. Within this "marketplace" of facilities, it is up to counties and courts to find the best settings for individual children. In our surveys, 77 percent of corrections supervisors and 48 percent of human services directors said that residential programs in Minnesota are "usually or always" well-suited to the types of children their agencies try to place.<sup>20</sup>

Although many facilities have adopted unique or specialized approaches to care and treatment, county placement staff usually expect facilities to show some willingness to tailor their programs to meet the unique needs of individuals. We asked county officials to rate various categories of facilities on their adaptability to individual needs. As shown in Table 5.9,

- **Treatment foster care programs--that is, foster homes that offer in-house supportive services or treatment--received the best ratings from human services and corrections officials for their efforts to tailor programs to meet children's needs.**

<sup>20</sup> Twenty-three percent of corrections supervisors and 48 percent of human services directors said that residential programs are "sometimes, rarely, or never" well-suited to the children they try to place.

**Table 5.9: County Perceptions About Adaptability of Facilities to Children's Needs**

"To what extent do the following types of residential facilities adequately <u>tailor</u> their programs to meet the individual needs of the children they serve?"	Percentage of:			
	Corrections Supervisors (N=82)		Human Services Directors (N=84)	
	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never
"Treatment" foster care	67%	21%	61%	36%
Group homes	62	38	17	77
Correctional residential facilities	54	45	5	68
"Rule 5" mental health facilities	55	18	38	60
Chemical dependency treatment facilities	56	40	25	63

NOTE: The percentages of those who responded "don't know" are not shown.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

**State agencies hope that rules they have drafted for residential facilities will improve services.**

For each category of facilities, a majority of corrections supervisors said that facilities were "usually or always" sufficiently flexible in their approaches. Corrections officials' greatest dissatisfaction was with post-disposition correctional facilities; 45 percent said that these facilities "sometimes, rarely, or never" adequately tailored their programs. Human services directors gave relatively low ratings to all categories of facilities except for treatment foster care. State agency staff told us that they hope that proposed rules drafted jointly by corrections and human services officials in 1998 will help to ensure that children's needs are adequately served by residential facilities.

## Working with Families

By definition, children in out-of-home placement are living apart from their parents or guardians (although some live in foster care with relatives). Some children live in residential facilities in their home communities, but others live in facilities that are far away from parents or other close relatives. The Minnesota Family Preservation Act establishes a state policy opposing unnecessary parent-child separations and favoring reunification of families, when appropriate.<sup>21</sup> In cases involving children needing protection or services, one of the stated purposes of state law is to "preserve and strengthen the child's family ties whenever possible and in the child's best interests."<sup>22</sup>

Some researchers have concluded that children who are more "connected" to family members are less likely to experience emotional distress, have suicidal thoughts, use drugs or alcohol, and engage in violent behavior--things that might

<sup>21</sup> *Minn. Stat.* §256F.01.

<sup>22</sup> *Minn. Stat.* §260.011, subd. 2 (a).

**County officials think that correctional facilities could make greater efforts to work with families.**

result in out-of-home placement or that could make reunification more difficult.<sup>23</sup> Regarding parental contacts in out-of-home care, one summary of research reported that:

Study findings consistently demonstrate an association between the frequency of parental visiting and shorter lengths of stay in out-of-home care, suggesting that parent-child contacts play a role in the child’s functioning and development while in care. . . . A primary purpose of parent-child contacts during placement is the preservation of family relations to meet the child’s need for continuity in relationships. This is just as important in cases in which the child may not be reunified with the birth family.<sup>24</sup>

Our surveys indicated that:

- **Among various types of residential facilities, corrections facilities received the lowest ratings from county officials for their efforts to work with the families of the children they serve.**

According to Table 5.10, most county corrections officials said that facilities other than correctional facilities “usually or always” made sufficient efforts to work with children’s families. Human services directors gave all types of facilities lower ratings than did corrections officials, with the lowest ratings for correctional facilities and group homes.

**Table 5.10: County Perceptions About Facilities’ Efforts to Work with Families**

"To what extent do staff in the following types of residential facilities make sufficient efforts to work with the families of the children they serve?"	Percentage of:			
	Corrections Supervisors (N=82)		Human Services Directors (N=84)	
	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never
"Treatment" foster care	72%	18%	51%	44%
Group homes	74	26	33	57
Correctional residential facilities	37	63	4	73
"Rule 5" mental health facilities	59	16	56	40
Chemical dependency treatment facilities	78	20	46	42

NOTE: The percentages of those who responded "don't know" are not shown.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

23 R.W. Blum and P.M. Rinehart, *Reducing the Risk: Connections That Make A Difference in the Lives of Youth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Division of General Pediatrics and Adolescent Health, 1998). Recently, some theorists have suggested, however, that parents have less influence on children’s behavior than do peers. For example, see Judith Rich Harris, "Where Is The Child’s Environment? A Group Socialization Theory of Development," *Psychological Review* 105, no. 3 (July 1995), 458-489.

24 Inger P. Davis and Elissa Ellis-MacLeod, "Temporary Foster Care: Separating and Reunifying Families," in *When There’s No Place Like Home: Options for Children Living Apart From Their Natural Families*, ed. Jan Blacher (Baltimore: P.H. Brooker Publishing, 1994), 142-3.

---

**Aftercare services are needed to help juveniles following their discharge from residential facilities.**

## Aftercare

Research has shown “almost universal agreement that the level of children’s in-treatment adjustment is not predictive of their level of postdischarge functioning.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, even children who make considerable progress during their time in residential care often do not sustain this when they return home. For this reason, researchers and practitioners usually endorse “aftercare” services following residential placements, although research has provided little solid evidence about which specific types of aftercare may be most effective.

Some facilities provide their own aftercare services for juveniles who have completed their programs. Also, county probation officers and social workers often continue to work with children discharged from residential settings. The 1997 Legislature appropriated \$130,000 in each year of the current biennium to improve aftercare services for juveniles released from facilities operated by the Department of Corrections, and it required the Commissioner of Corrections to design a “juvenile support network” in local communities to provide aftercare services for juvenile offenders.<sup>26</sup> For example, the department requires that all juveniles committed to its Red Wing facility participate in an “extended furlough” in a community-based group home or other facility prior to returning home. In addition, some juveniles committed to the department’s facilities have participated in meetings with people from their home communities intended to help the juveniles understand the harm they have caused.

We asked county officials and judges to evaluate the aftercare services available for children discharged from various types of facilities, and their perceptions varied. As shown in Table 5.11, we found that:

- **For all facility types, a minority of county juvenile corrections supervisors reported to us that adequate, appropriate aftercare services are “usually or always” available.**
- **Human services directors reported that adequate aftercare services are least available for corrections and chemical dependency facilities; for other types of facilities, 50 percent or more said that adequate aftercare services are “usually or always” available.**
- **For all facility types, judges who said that adequate aftercare services are “usually or always” available outnumbered those who said that such services are “sometimes, rarely or never” available.**

---

25 Bates and others, “Residential Treatment and Its Alternatives,” 16.

26 *Minn. Laws* (1997), ch. 239, art. 1, sec 12, subd. 3. The legislation required counties, communities, and schools to develop and implement the network. It also mandated the commissioner to require CCA counties to incorporate aftercare programs into their CCA plans.

**Table 5.11: Perceptions About Availability of Aftercare Services**

"To what extent do children have access to adequate and appropriate community-based services after they have completed the following types of residential placement?"	Percentage of:					
	Corrections Supervisors (N=82)		Human Services Directors (N=84)		Judges (N=143)	
	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never
"Treatment" foster care	41%	51%	67%	30%	46%	38%
Group homes	43	56	50	43	59	28
Correctional residential facilities	37	60	27	54	49	38
"Rule 5" mental health facilities	34	49	57	39	50	37
Chemical dependency treatment facilities	40	59	37	56	63	27

NOTE: The percentages of those who responded "don't know" are not shown.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

## Cultural Sensitivity

Eight-eight percent of Minnesota's 1997 population under age 18 was white (not including persons of Hispanic ethnicity). In most Minnesota counties, non-Hispanic white persons accounted for at least 95 percent of the total population under age 18. However, Chapter 4 showed that large percentages of children placed out of home in Minnesota are members of racial or ethnic minority groups.

Whatever the reason for the large number of minority children in placement, service providers' success in serving children's interests may depend on whether they can "connect" with the children. This may require an understanding of cultural differences among the children in placement and, when necessary, a willingness to tailor services. State law requires juvenile courts to ensure that reasonable efforts--"including culturally appropriate services"--have been made to prevent placement or reunite a child and family in cases where children have been determined to need protection or services.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the Minnesota Family Preservation Act requires social services agencies to "strive to provide culturally competent services" in their efforts to prevent unnecessary parent-child separations and encourage family reunifications.<sup>28</sup>

As shown in Table 5.12, our surveys indicated that:

- **There is room for improvement in the sensitivity of facility staff to cultural and ethnic differences in the children they serve.**

<sup>27</sup> *Minn. Stat.* §260.012. The law does not contain comparable language for child delinquency cases.

<sup>28</sup> *Minn. Stat.* §256F.01.

**Facility staff should be conscious of children's cultural differences.**

**Table 5.12: Perceptions About Cultural Sensitivity of Residential Programs, Selected Counties**

Are programs at the following facilities "sufficiently sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences in their resident populations?"	Percentage of Officials in Counties Where Minority Groups Comprise More than 5 Percent of the Child Population:			
	Corrections Supervisors (N=31)		Human Services Directors (N=32)	
	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never	Usually or Always	Sometimes, Rarely or Never
Facilities or group homes for children with emotional disturbances	52%	35%	53%	38%
Facilities or group homes for children in need of protective services	Not asked	Not asked	53	34
Juvenile correctional facilities	55	35	Not asked	Not asked

NOTE: The percentages of those who responded "don't know" are not shown.

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

Among counties in which racial/ethnic minorities comprised more than 5 percent of the total population under age 18, about one-third of the corrections and human services officials we surveyed said that facility staff are "sometimes, rarely, or never" sufficiently sensitive to cultural and ethnic differences.

## Budget Considerations

As discussed in Chapter 3, county revenues pay for the majority of out-of-home placement costs. In some counties, growth in out-of-home placement has triggered county budget crises. For instance, Hennepin County officials proposed significant cuts in social services programs in 1997 to address a multi-million dollar projected budget shortfall due to growth in placement spending. In 1998, members of the Mahanomen County board expressed concerns to legislative and executive branch leaders that the county faced a fiscal crisis, partly due to the county's high rates of children in out-of-home placement. Many county officials have suggested that the state should provide additional financial support for out-of-home placements.

Our surveys asked county officials and judges whether budget considerations have affected service decisions. We found that:

- **About 22 percent of judges said that budget constraints have "usually or always" limited their ability to provide children with the care and services they need; another 42 percent said that this has "sometimes" occurred.**<sup>29</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Twenty-nine percent said that this has "rarely or never" occurred, and 8 percent responded "don't know."

**Budget constraints sometimes affect placement decisions.**

**Most counties said that funding levels for juvenile services were inadequate.**

- About half of the county corrections supervisors and human services directors said that budget considerations have limited their ability to provide the care and services that children need.<sup>30</sup>
- Thirty-nine percent of corrections supervisors and 19 percent of human services directors said that some of their counties' children needing out-of-home placement have not been placed *due to budget considerations*.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, we asked county officials whether aggregate funding levels from federal, state, and county sources have provided sufficient overall funding for the services shown in Table 5.13. As a group, corrections officials expressed somewhat greater satisfaction with funding for residential services than with funding for various categories of non-residential services. But the human services directors--whose agencies pay most of the costs of out-of-home placement--overwhelmingly said that funding was inadequate in all of the categories.

When asked whether counties would likely place more children out of home if state or federal funds paid for a larger proportion of placement costs, most human services directors (63 percent) said that they would not.<sup>32</sup> County corrections

**Table 5.13: County Perceptions About Adequacy of Funding for Juvenile Services**

"From state, local, and federal sources combined, there is a sufficient overall level of funding for the following services in our county:"	Percentage of:			
	Corrections Supervisors (N=82)		Human Services Directors (N=84)	
	Agree	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
Residential services	32%	50%	11%	85%
Prevention and early intervention	16	68	19	79
Aftercare services	12	79	12	80
Other non-residential, community-based services	13	63	12	80

NOTE: The table does not show the percentages of those who said "neither agree nor disagree" or "do not know."

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division surveys, August 1998.

<sup>30</sup> Among corrections officials, 52 percent agreed with a statement that budget considerations have limited their ability to provide needed services, 33 percent disagreed, and 13 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. Among human services directors, 50 percent agreed, 39 percent disagreed, and 10 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

<sup>31</sup> In a 1997 survey, 42 percent of human services directors said that budget considerations have caused them to limit the number of child protection cases recommended for out-of-home placement. See Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor, Program Evaluation Division *Child Protective Services* (St. Paul, January 1998), 92.

<sup>32</sup> Of the human services directors, 23 percent agreed with a statement that increased subsidies would result in more placements, and 14 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

supervisors were split, with 41 percent saying that increased subsidies would result in more placements, and 41 percent saying that they would not.<sup>33</sup>

## PROGRAM COMPLETION

Completing a residential treatment or correctional program is not a guarantee that a child will successfully return to the community. But there are several reasons to measure program completion rates. First, program completion rates can be a first (but not sufficient) indication of whether the goals of the placement have been met.<sup>34</sup> If too many children in placement do not complete programs prior to discharge, this could reflect poor initial placement decisions, ineffective facility programs, intolerance by facility staff, or impatience by the placing agency. Second, out-of-home placements are expensive, and low program completion rates may reduce the cost-effectiveness of a county agency's placement strategies. Third, many children in placement have experienced repeated problems in school, family life, and previous social or correctional services, so it is preferable if they can be placed in programs that provide them with a realistic opportunity for success--perhaps avoiding further disruption and additional placements.

The Legislature requested that our study examine the program completion rates of juveniles in out-of-home placements and analyze the reasons for noncompletion.<sup>35</sup> Our surveys of county officials indicated that:

---

**Some counties think that facilities discharge too many juveniles before they complete their programs.**

- **Fifty-five percent of human services directors and 35 percent of corrections supervisors believe that residential facilities discharge too many children for violating facility rules.**<sup>36</sup>
- **Sixty-seven percent of human services directors and 41 percent of corrections supervisors said that Minnesota residential facilities "sometimes, rarely, or never" satisfactorily address the needs of resistive, aggressive, or difficult-to-control juveniles they admit.**<sup>37</sup>

Although many county officials believe that facilities discharge too many juveniles prior to program completion, several county staff told us that this does not occur as often as it did a few years ago. They said that some facilities have

---

<sup>33</sup> Another 16 percent of corrections supervisors neither agreed nor disagreed with a statement that increased subsidies would result in more placements.

<sup>34</sup> The Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies analyzed data for 568 juveniles who were discharged from member facilities in 1995. It found that the average program completer lived in a less restrictive living setting six months after discharge than the average non-completer--presumably indicating better child outcomes and lower public costs.

<sup>35</sup> *Minn. Laws* (1998), ch. 367, art. 10, sec. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Among human services directors, 19 percent disagreed with the statement that residential facilities discharge too many children for violating facility rules, and 8 percent neither agreed nor disagreed. Among corrections officials, 34 percent disagreed with the statement, and 27 percent neither agreed nor disagreed.

<sup>37</sup> Twenty-six percent of human services directors and 56 percent of corrections supervisors said that facilities "usually or always" address the needs of these juveniles.

---

**Proposed rules would require facilities to consider alternatives prior to early discharges of juveniles.**

become more tolerant of residents who “act out” as their occupancy rates have declined.

The 1995 Legislature required the commissioners of corrections and human services to jointly adopt rules for residential facilities that would include “a no-eject policy by which youths are discharged based on successful completion of individual goals and not automatically discharged for behavioral transgressions.”<sup>38</sup> Under the proposed “no-eject policy” drafted by the departments in 1998, residents who have not reached case plan goals could not be discharged unless a review by the facility and “other interested persons” indicates that the discharge is warranted.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the proposed policy would not prevent facilities from discharging juveniles prior to program completion, but it would establish a procedure for considering alternatives.

## Examples of “Non-Completers”

To help us better understand the circumstances surrounding cases of program non-completion, we obtained facility records for a random sample of 98 children identified by their facilities as “non-completers” and who were discharged in 1997.<sup>40</sup> In about one-third of the cases we reviewed, we discussed the circumstances of the child’s termination from the program with county staff (and sometimes with facility staff, too).

The following are examples of cases in which a facility initiated a child’s discharge. Sometimes this occurred because the child refused to participate in the program, made threats, disrupted the facility’s learning environment, committed crimes, or simply did not show improvement while in the program:

- During a one-month stay at a residential facility, a juvenile alternated between a pleasant demeanor and angry outbursts. The “last straw” occurred when she refused to take shelter during a tornado warning. When staff tried to restrain her, she kicked, spat upon, and yelled obscenities at them. The girl’s county social worker told us that she thinks that the discharge was probably in the girl’s best interests, although she was concerned about the abruptness of the discharge.
- A juvenile was placed in a residential program for sex offenders for more than a year, but he made no progress. According to his county probation officer, the juvenile was on “orientation status” at the time of discharge--a phase that most residents complete during the first two weeks at the

---

<sup>38</sup> *Minn. Laws* (1995), ch. 226, art. 3, sec. 60, subd. 2.

<sup>39</sup> The draft rules do not clearly indicate who would have the final authority to determine whether a discharge is warranted.

<sup>40</sup> For 17 private and public service providers, we obtained and reviewed records for a random sample of 25 percent of children discharged from their programs in 1997 prior to program completion. The sample size is not large enough to ensure that it is representative of all placements within the individual facilities or the state as a whole. We collected information from member agencies of the Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies, plus several large public and private residential facilities that have collected information on program completion.

facility. County staff told us that the juvenile completely ignored anything that staff told him; facility staff described him as unmotivated, stubborn, oppositional, defiant, and disrespectful. County staff subsequently placed him at a program that did not focus exclusively on his sexual behavior, and he completed that program.

---

**Some early discharges are initiated by facility staff.**

- A juvenile lived with a foster parent for nearly two years, during which time a strong relationship developed. While in treatment for chemical dependency problems, the juvenile stole from the foster parent to pay for drugs. Upon learning this, the foster parent suggested that it would be best to find a different foster home for the child.
- Within three weeks of entering a residential facility, a juvenile refused to participate in group sessions, allegedly committed a sex offense against another resident, and then ran from the facility. The facility initiated the discharge because it thought the juvenile needed to face the consequence of a detention stay before being reconsidered for this program. County staff told us that another consideration was that the alleged victim of the sex offense was still at the facility.
- Following more than four months of placement, a juvenile was discharged from a residential facility after she “destroyed the facility’s group culture”—through bullying, threats, running away, and obstinance. She was also prosecuted for assaulting a staff member. County staff told us that the facility made appropriate efforts to work with this juvenile prior to her discharge.

In other cases we reviewed, it is possible that the placements “failed” because the child was put in the wrong program or did not receive services at the facility that addressed his or her needs:

- A juvenile offender was discharged from a Rule 5 facility six months after placement. The child ran away twice and was not apprehended after the second run. The child’s probation officer told us that this facility had been selected at the urging of the public defender; the probation agency thought that a correctional setting was better suited to this offender’s level of sophistication. In addition, the probation officer said that the facility was unable to provide culturally appropriate services for the child (who is Asian American), and she said that the program’s inability to provide effective services for the child was apparent long before the escape.
- At the time a juvenile was placed in a correctional facility, there were no indications of mental health problems. He had been examined by a psychiatrist and psychologist, and he was not in special education. During less than three months in placement, the juvenile destroyed property, was physically and verbally abusive, did not follow directions, and exhibited “out-of-control behaviors.” The county probation officer thought that the facility staff did their best to help the juvenile, but the juvenile was

discharged so that that he could receive treatment for emotional/behavioral problems.

- A juvenile offender with a history of drug use was placed in a correctional facility. His parents had wanted him placed in a chemical dependency treatment facility instead, but their preferred facility did not have a vacancy at the time. The boy's mother had been assaulted by him just prior to placement and, for her own protection, she did not want to wait for the preferred facility to have an opening. The boy ran from the correctional facility, and following his return he did not comply with program requirements. Several weeks after this placement was made, the chemical dependency program originally preferred by the family had an opening, and the boy was transferred there.

---

**Some early discharges are initiated by county staff.**

In some cases, children were removed from a facility by the county--but against the wishes of facility staff. Some facility staff expressed concerns to us that this is increasingly common. The following is an example of such a placement:

- Over the objection of facility staff, a county removed a juvenile from a facility following a five-month stay. The county social worker told us that the juvenile was making progress at the facility and had not completed the facility's treatment plan at the time of removal. But the county philosophy was to try to bring kids back to the community when their behaviors become more manageable--partly as a way to save money. The juvenile was placed in a group home, which was unable to provide the amount of structure he needed. The group home requested his removal, and the county placed him back in the original residential facility. The social worker told us that, in hindsight, it was probably a mistake to have removed him from the original facility so quickly.

We reviewed some cases in which county staff removed children from placement due to concerns about a facility's programs or supervision. For example:

- A county removed 11 children from a facility at one time. County staff concluded that the facility had inadequate supervision, which enabled children to engage in consensual and non-consensual sex. The county requested staffing changes at the facility, but the facility did not make changes that satisfied the county.
- A county social worker thought that a facility's psychiatrist had prescribed an inappropriate combination of medications for a juvenile on her caseload, and she also had concerns about the amount of restraint being used by the facility and its unwillingness to modify its programs. The juvenile told the social worker that one of the facility staff bit her, and she wanted to leave the program. The social worker told us that the facility was unresponsive to her concerns, and she requested removal of the child.

Finally, we reviewed cases in which voluntarily-placed children failed to complete programs because their parents or guardians chose to remove them from a facility. For example:

- Four months after a girl was voluntarily placed at a residential facility for emotional/behavioral problems, her parents removed her so that they could have a church conduct a “spiritual intervention” for her problems. County staff considered whether to seek a court order to continue the placement but decided to respect the family’s religious views.

## Rates of Program Completion

As reported in Chapter 2, less than half of the county officials we surveyed said that they “usually or always” have sufficient information about rates of program completion by facility residents. Facilities are not required by state law or rule to track information on program completion, and some of them do not systematically track completion rates. Facilities that do monitor program completion have varying ways of defining “completion.” For instance, some facilities consider children to be “completers” if they remain in a program for a certain period of time--such as the standard length of the program, or the length of time required by the court. Other facilities define “completion” based on the child’s progress rather than the time spent in the facility--that is, “completers” are children who have successfully accomplished most or all of the goals established at the time they were placed.

---

### Definitions of program completion vary.

Although the definitions of program completion vary somewhat, we reviewed existing program completion data for a variety of private and public facilities.<sup>41</sup> The most comprehensive data on program completion were available from a consortium of private residential facilities (including Rule 5 facilities, correctional facilities, group homes, and treatment foster care homes).<sup>42</sup> These data indicated that no single factor accounted for the majority of instances of program non-completion. Runaways accounted for 25 percent of the 1992-97 non-completers.<sup>43</sup> In addition, 43 percent of discharges were initiated by the facility or foster parents, 21 percent were initiated by county social workers and probation officers, and 7 percent were initiated by the courts.<sup>44</sup> In each category of residential facilities, we found that African American and American Indian

---

<sup>41</sup> The Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies (MCCCA) is a voluntary association of private therapeutic service providers, and the council has regularly collected a wide variety of information, including program completion data. In addition to reviewing 1992-97 MCCCA data, we collected 1997 program completion data for eight public correctional programs, three private correctional programs, all out-of-state delinquency placements in residential facilities, and all juveniles discharged from chemical dependency residential placements. Except for chemical dependency treatment programs, we limited our analysis to programs exceeding one month in length.

<sup>42</sup> Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies.

<sup>43</sup> Many counties have policies about how long they will continue to pay for an unoccupied bed at a facility, such as one or two weeks. If the child does not return during this time--and sometimes even if he or she does--the placement is terminated.

<sup>44</sup> These percentages are based only on cases for which a reason for discharge was indicated; 18 percent of cases did not indicate the reason. In some cases, facilities identified more than one reason for the discharge.

---

**Correctional facilities reported the highest rates of program completion.**

juveniles had lower rates of program completion than white, non-Hispanic juveniles.

Among all public and private programs we examined, those in facilities licensed by the Department of Corrections tended to have the highest completion rates--10 of 15 reported rates that exceeded 80 percent. Similarly, 77 percent of delinquents placed outside of Minnesota in fiscal year 1996 completed their programs.<sup>45</sup> In part, correctional facilities have high completion rates because the courts sometimes expect offenders to, at a minimum, remain in placement for a certain period of time as a consequence for their actions.<sup>46</sup> Four programs had rates below 60 percent, but three of these were lengthy programs for difficult offenders (such as sex offenders and repeat violent offenders). The director of one program with a relatively low completion rate said that it wants its offenders to “do the program, not do time”--but some counties have routinely removed offenders from the facility at the end of six months.

Rule 5 mental health treatment facilities tended to have somewhat lower completion rates--usually between 50 and 75 percent. This may reflect the fact that Rule 5 programs are, on average, longer than correctional programs. Also, discharge from Rule 5 facilities usually depends on the achievement of individual therapeutic goals, while some other types of facilities have programs of pre-determined length.

Statewide, chemical dependency placements tended to be shorter than most of the other types of placements we reviewed, yet their completion rates were relatively low. For example, the average juvenile who completed an inpatient chemical dependency program stayed for less than one month, but only 68 percent of juveniles who entered these programs completed them. Chemical dependency halfway houses and extended care programs averaged just under four months for program completers, but the completion rates were 42 percent for halfway houses and 65 percent for extended care. Several county staff told us that they have had particular concerns about the extent to which chemical dependency programs discharge children prior to program completion--perhaps because they are unequipped to handle disruptive children or because they have waiting lists and need not tolerate uncooperative residents.

“Treatment foster care” programs reported the lowest rates of program completion--usually between 33 and 50 percent. This may partly reflect the relatively long average periods of time that residents tend to remain in such settings, as well as the more subjective definition of program “completion” that has been used by some of the treatment foster care facilities. For example, one program director told us that her agency has computed completion rates based on

---

<sup>45</sup> Excludes juveniles still in programs at the end of fiscal year 1997.

<sup>46</sup> We did not collect information from the Anoka County Juvenile Center or the Department of Corrections facilities at Red Wing and Sauk Centre--all of which have guidelines that indicate presumptive lengths of stay based on offenses committed and prior history. Staff in these facilities said that it would be extremely rare for an offender to leave the facility before this amount of time elapses and program goals are met.

judgments about whether the child and his or her family have a healthy relationship at the end of the foster care placement.<sup>47</sup>

Overall, variations in program completion rates may reflect differences in the types of children served, program goals, program length, program effectiveness, and the extent to which counties and others have removed children from programs prior to completion. But, although these differences make it difficult to compare the completion rates of individual facilities, we think that placement agencies should be able to consider program completion rates (and the reasons for program non-completion) at the time they are considering child placements. In Chapter 6, we recommend that facilities be required to track information about the extent of and reasons for program non-completion.

## OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

---

### Counties and courts would benefit from improved information on program outcomes.

It would be useful to know not only whether juveniles complete the residential programs they enter, but also whether the programs have the intended long-term effects. Juveniles are placed for different reasons, so there may be a variety of desired outcomes, such as law-abiding behavior, placement in a permanent home, sobriety, and protection from subsequent maltreatment. This complicates the task of measuring placement outcomes.

We found that:

- **There is very limited information available regarding the effectiveness of Minnesota's juvenile residential services.**

There are no statutory requirements for counties to report information on placement outcomes, but we thought that some agencies might do so for purposes of making better placement decisions. According to our surveys of county officials, however, only 7 percent of human services directors and 7 percent of county corrections supervisors said their agencies had produced summary information during the past year on the success of children subsequent to out-of-home placements.

In 1998, the Minnesota Department of Human Services convened a task force of county and state officials to develop consensus about the most appropriate outcome measures for child welfare services. The task force identified 19 measures of outcomes that should be tracked regularly. For example, the task force recommended measuring the percentage of children who are in permanent living arrangements within 12 months of out-of-home placement. The department hopes to begin analyzing statewide performance on these measures in 1999.

Sixty-three percent of human services directors (but only 32 percent of juvenile corrections supervisors) told us that residential service providers should be held

---

<sup>47</sup> This may be the biological or adoptive family, a relative with whom the child is living, or a permanent foster family.

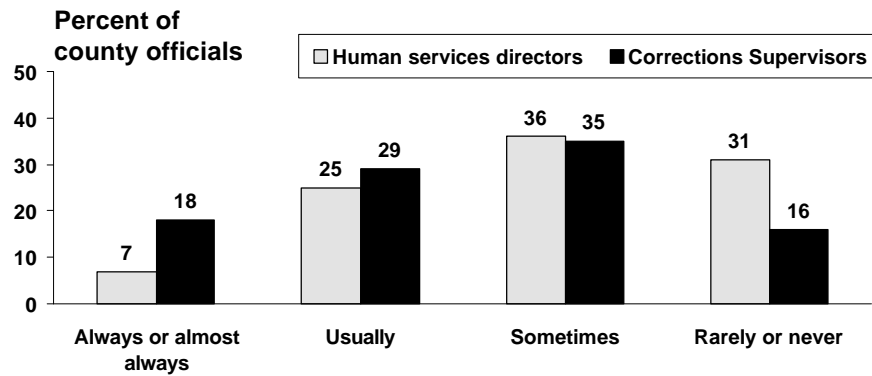
more accountable than they now are for the success or failure of the children they serve.<sup>48</sup> And, as discussed in Chapter 2, a majority of county corrections and human services officials told us they would like more information about the extent to which residents' problem behaviors recur following discharge from residential programs. Some service providers have made useful efforts to monitor service outcomes, while others have done little formal follow-up with discharged residents.<sup>49</sup>

To properly measure placement outcomes, it is necessary to know the goals of placements. The goals of placements are diverse, reflecting a diverse population of children in a wide variety of residential settings. But, as shown in Figure 5.1, our surveys indicated that:

- A majority of county human services directors and juvenile corrections supervisors said that judges “sometimes, rarely, or never” clearly specify the intended purpose of the placements they make.

**The courts often do not clearly specify placement goals.**

**Figure 5.1: Extent to Which Judges Clearly Specify Placement Goals, According to County Officials**



NOTE: The survey question was: "In court dispositions that involve child placements, do judges clearly specify the intended purpose of each placement?"

SOURCE: Program Evaluation Division survey of county human services directors (N=84) and corrections supervisors (N=82), August 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Of the human services directors, 44 percent said that courts should be held more accountable, and 35 percent said that counties should be held more accountable. Of the corrections supervisors, 7 percent said the courts should be held more accountable, and 16 percent said the counties should be held more accountable.

<sup>49</sup> For more than ten years, the private facilities who are members of the Minnesota Council of Child Caring Agencies have collected information about each child who is a resident in their programs. For instance, these facilities monitor changes in children's living arrangements from just prior to facility admission to six months after discharge. The council's public reports include summary information about various categories of facilities, but not about individual facilities.

---

**Without better outcome data, it is hard to judge whether placement practices are serving children's best interests.**

In addition, 62 percent of human services directors and 23 percent of corrections supervisors said that they believe that state law should be amended to require the courts to explicitly identify the purpose of each placement made.

In our view, improved data on juvenile outcomes could help to inform many decisions that are now made blindly. For example, some counties told us that they have started trying to place children for shorter time periods. Corrections staff in one county expressed concerns to us that its court makes nearly all placements in “consequences” types of programs and that it rarely places children in the therapeutic programs that it once used more often. Some counties have reduced their use of Rule 5 mental health facilities by placing more children in group homes that are less expensive and closer to home. Due to budget constraints, one county has increasingly placed sex offenders in short-term and outpatient programs, rather than the longer programs it used to use. Without careful monitoring, it is unclear whether these changes will better serve the interests of the children involved or protect public safety. As one analysis of recent reforms suggested,

Current evaluations [of alternative service systems] tend to emphasize out-of-home placement reductions and fiscal savings per capita served, but there is still insufficient evidence that youth are really “better off” for having been clients of the referred systems. . . . Much more is needed to yield convincing evidence that families function more smoothly, youth are less deviant, and presenting psychiatric symptoms have been reduced.<sup>50</sup>

## SUMMARY

County officials generally perceive a greater need for additional non-residential services for juveniles than for additional beds in residential facilities. Occupancy rates in some categories of residential facilities are not particularly high, and many beds have recently been added (or are in the planning stages) for the categories of facilities that have had the highest occupancy rates (secure and non-secure correctional facilities). Many counties would like juvenile facilities and aftercare services to respond more directly to the needs of juveniles and their families. Regardless of the types of services counties use, there is a need for improved measurement of program outcomes.

---

<sup>50</sup> Paul Lerman, “Child Protection and Out-of-Home Care: Systems Reforms and Regulating Placements,” in *Protecting Children from Abuse and Neglect: Foundations for a New National Strategy*, ed. Gary B. Melton and Frank D. Berry (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 385.