

When Troubled Youth Can't Stay at Home: An Analysis of Out-of-Home Placements in Hennepin County

by Misty L. Heggeness and Elizabeth E. Davis



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The Hennepin County Home School in Minnetonka is a state-licensed residential treatment facility for juveniles aged 13–17 who are committed to the facility by the court.

Significant behavioral issues can result in youth being removed from the home by local government officials and temporarily placed in an out-of-home setting, such as a group home or juvenile corrections center. These young individuals face a complex array of family, societal, and personal issues that have led to a need for placement outside of their family home. Many out-of-home placement cases involve adolescents who have interacted with human services and juvenile corrections departments on more than one occasion. Out-of-home placements occur for two reasons: either

because of child protection-related issues, such as abandonment or neglect, or for behavioral reasons, including stealing, committing vandalism, attempting suicide, abusing alcohol or drugs, or being physically violent. Youth placed in out-of-home settings for behavioral reasons in Hennepin County are the focus of this article.

In Hennepin County, both human services and juvenile corrections departments handle out-of-home youth placements for behavioral reasons. Youth who face similar underlying problems that influence their behavior may be placed by different

departments, depending on the circumstances (see sidebar for an example).

Out-of-home placements for youth are expensive. The cost to Hennepin County for alternative living arrangements for youth with behavioral problems was approximately \$56 million in 2004. In addition to a growing concern about costs, there is little evidence that these placements are effective. In 2004, Hennepin County created a new unit, the Joint Care Management Initiative (JCMI), to manage these complex and costly out-of-home placements. The JCMI unit is one example of a national trend where local human

Josie and Samuel

Josie is experiencing recurring episodes of family violence in her home between her parents. In school, teachers notice that Josie is cutting herself and make a report to the county human services department. The caseworker determines that Josie is cutting herself as a coping mechanism for dealing with her feelings regarding the domestic violence issues at home, and places Josie in a group home for safety. In addition, Josie receives intense counseling services.

Samuel is Josie's brother. He is also experiencing recurring episodes of family violence in the home. Samuel, unable to deal with the stress of home problems, starts a fight at school with another classmate. Samuel had a knife and stabbed the other classmate in the arm. School staff break up the fight, and Samuel is removed from the school by the police. He is turned over to the juvenile corrections department and put in the juvenile detention center. His parents are called but they do not show up at the detention center or at Samuel's hearing. A court

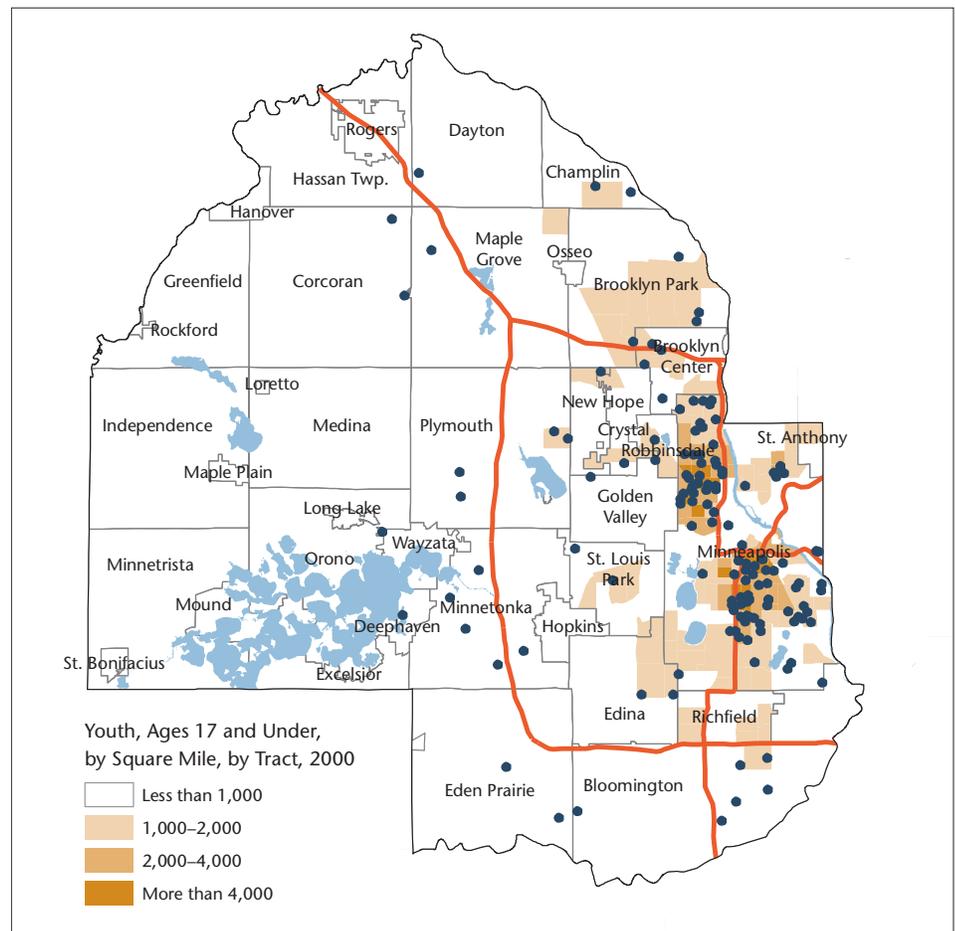
finds that Samuel's actions were dangerous, and he is placed in a short-term consequence program for 90 days. Although both Josie and Samuel experienced the same underlying family issues, they acted out their frustrations, anxiety, and anger in very different ways. Their behavior caused them to be assigned either a social worker from a human services department or a corrections officer from a juvenile corrections department and placed in different out-of-home placements by two distinct departments.

Josie and Samuel's situation is not unique; youth typically enter the placement process through a particular department (human services or juvenile corrections), usually as the result of a specific incident. Regardless of which department is responsible for the placement, it is common for these youth to face similar underlying issues, as in the case of Josie and Samuel. This suggests that a more streamlined process might be warranted for placing children with behavioral issues out-of-home.

services and corrections departments are coordinating services in an effort to improve the outcomes for youth and their families and to reduce costs.

This article reports on our recent study that examined the similarities and differences of youth placed by either Hennepin County's human services or juvenile corrections departments for behavioral reasons; our study also compared the placement experiences of these youth in terms of the types of placement and length-of-stay. Although our first objective was analyzing the characteristics and experiences of youth placed by the two departments, including where youth live (Figure 1), we also examined the placement experiences of youth with different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Disparities by race in child welfare have received much attention during the past decade in Minnesota. While the disproportionality by race of youth placed out-of-home by human services and juvenile corrections departments is generally acknowledged, there is disagreement about what factors cause these discrepancies. There is also little information about differences in experiences after the youth are placed out-of-home. In this study, we compared placement types and length of placement across racial and ethnic groups to examine the potential differences in experiences of these groups after being placed. The key question we asked is whether the type of youth and their experiences in placement differ depending on which department made the placement decision.

Figure 1. Permanent Residence of Youth Placed Out-of-Home for Behavioral Reasons and Ratio of Youth Ages 17 and Under in Hennepin County



Source: Hennepin County

Note: This figure includes only youth in the 5% study sample, not the entire out-of-home placement population. Dots on map are randomly placed in the center of the geographic area where youth homes are located, and do not represent an exact location of the home.

Our findings have implications for how services are provided, including whether or not to coordinate services across departments. If the youth placed have similar characteristics regardless of which department places them, better coordination or streamlining of services could improve experiences and outcomes for youth and reduce inefficiencies in the system or, at a minimum, reduce discrepancies in how youth are treated based on which department places them. The results may also help inform ongoing interdepartmental coordination efforts in Minnesota and give direction for potential changes in state and national child welfare and juvenile corrections policies and laws.

The research upon which this article is based was supported in part through a New Initiative grant from CURA. We also acknowledge the support and partnership of the Hennepin County Department of Strategic Initiatives and Community Engagement, the Hennepin County Human Services and Public Health Department, the Hennepin County Community Corrections Department, and the Hennepin-University Initiative.

Types of Out-of-Home Placements

In Hennepin County, the type of out-of-home placement for a youth is generally decided by judges, social workers, corrections officers, and other relevant parties based on the type of offense, its severity, the number of previous offenses and placements, and relevant factors

related to the home environment. There are multiple agencies available for placement, which can be grouped into four main types: short-term consequence programs, group homes, residential treatment centers, and juvenile corrections centers. These different placement types can be categorized based on two dimensions: typical length-of-stay and level of restrictiveness (Table 1).

Placement length-of-stay and restrictiveness do not go hand-in-hand. Although short-term consequence programs typically have the shortest length-of-stay, they are ranked, on average, as the third most restrictive type of placement setting. Youth are placed in short-term consequence programs because they exhibit deviant behavior in need of correction. These programs have clear timelines and usually involve intense supervision, direction, and support. Short-term consequence programs tend to house first-time offenders or youth who have committed minor delinquent behavior. Youth may be housed in short-term consequence programs for a second or third placement, but their length-of-stay in placement is usually extended for subsequent offenses.

Group homes and residential treatment centers fall in the middle of the spectrum on typical length-of-stay, yet they differ in restrictiveness. Group homes are typically the least restrictive type of placement. In most group homes, youth may come and go throughout the day, pose little threat of running away,

and are more likely to have significant family issues dominating their reasons for placement. Residential treatment centers are more restrictive. Youth usually are placed in a residential treatment center to work intensively on mental health and other issues related to their behavioral problems. Juvenile corrections centers, on the other hand, are associated with the longest stays and are the most restrictive placement type. Crimes that result in this type of placement are the most severe and involve offenses such as major property damage or personal injury to others.

Although the type of placement is a major determinant of the length-of-stay, there is considerable variation within categories, as we will discuss below. The type of placement chosen for a particular youth depends upon the incident triggering the placement decision, along with factors such as the number of previous placements and exacerbating conditions in the youth's home.

Study Data and Methodology

This study provides a unique opportunity to examine data from more than one department, because rarely are data from human services and juvenile correction departments' data systems combined and analyzed jointly. In 2007, through a unique partnership with Hennepin County, we obtained case review data to analyze characteristics of the youth who were placed, placement types, and length-of-stay. The case review data came from two sources:

Table 1. Definition and Characteristics of Types of Placement

Type	Definition	Length-of-Stay Duration*	Level of Restrictiveness†
Short-term consequence programs	These programs have clear timelines for length-of-stay before youth enter placement (30, 60, or 90 days). Youth are placed in these types of highly secured, locked-down residential settings to work on chronic behavioral problems in an environment with intense supervision, direction, and support.	1	3
Group homes	Youth placed in group homes generally have less severe behavioral problems and are more likely to have parental or other family behavioral issues. Length-of-stay is variable.	2	1
Residential treatment centers	Secured settings where youth with mental-health or behavioral problems are placed to work on resolving their problems by creating stability in mental-health and reducing behavioral problems.	3	2
Juvenile corrections centers	Youth placed are sentenced by a court to a specific amount of time in the correctional center based on the type and severity of the offense. Youth are placed after being convicted of some criminal behavior.	4	4

*The length-of-stay scale ranges from 1 (shortest mean stay) to 4 (longest mean stay).

†The level-of-restrictiveness scale ranges from 1 (least restrictive) to 4 (most restrictive).



The type of out-of-home placement chosen for a particular youth depends upon such factors as the incident triggering the placement, the number of previous placements, and exacerbating conditions in the youth's home. For example, first-time offenders or youth who commit minor delinquent behavior may be placed in short-term consequence programs, whereas repeat offenders may be placed in a more restrictive residential treatment center to work on mental health and other issues related to their behavioral problems.

- ▶ The Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development and JCMCI constructed data files for all youth in an out-of-home placement for behavioral reasons in the county who ended a placement during a three-year time span from October 1, 2001, to September 30, 2004.¹ A 5% random sample (168 youth) was generated from these data files.²
- ▶ Hennepin County staff social workers and probation officers then manually collected additional information about these youth from case file records, such as whether goals were identified in the case file or whether the placement had been reviewed by a committee prior to the youth being placed.

The County completed case review work in 2006, and conducted limited internal analysis of the data using the additional case file information. After

¹ The Hennepin County Office of Planning and Development has since been renamed the Hennepin County Department of Strategic Initiatives and Community Engagement.

² The 5% sample was created using a standard randomization process in SPSS (a statistical software package) and was found to be representative of all youth in Hennepin County who are in out-of-home placement for behavioral reasons based on various demographic, socioeconomic, and system variables.

this initial study was completed, questions remained regarding whether significant differences existed between youth placed by the two departments, and whether their experiences in placement were similar. The authors of that study suggested that additional research was needed on the factors influencing placements, especially poverty, previous placements, and family conditions. We addressed many of these factors in the study we report on here.

In 2007, through a special partnership with the County, we were provided access to the case review data. We reviewed the two types of case-file data on human services and juvenile corrections placements for the selected sample, as well as data for a number of variables, such as demographics, placement department, type of placement, and length-of-stay. All figures and tables represent data from the 5% study sample (168 youth).

Characteristics of the Youth in the Placement Sample

The average youth in the study sample of out-of-home placements was about 15 years old, male, and living in the city of Minneapolis (Table 2). About 45% of the youth were identified as Black, non-Hispanic and about one-third were White, non-Hispanic. Nearly two-thirds (62%)

of the youth had at least one mental-health diagnosis in their file. The most common mental-health diagnoses were related to a behavioral disorder, mood disorder, or substance abuse. About 20% of the youth were identified as living in poverty, although this information was missing for about one-third of the sample. The youth in the sample had experienced approximately five previous placements on average. More than half of the youth were placed in either short-term consequence programs (38%) or group homes (27%). Residential treatment center placements accounted for almost one-fourth (23%) of all youth placements, whereas juvenile corrections centers (11%) and other, non-identified placement types (1%) made up the rest of the sample.

Are the Youth Placed by Hennepin County's Two Departments Different?

To determine whether youth placed by either the Hennepin County human services or juvenile corrections department were different, we conducted chi-square tests for independence between the department variable and individual youth characteristics. A chi-square test for independence tests whether or not the differences seen—in this example, between the characteristics of youth placed by human services versus those placed by juvenile corrections—are due to a real difference between characteristics of the youth in each department or chance error. If the chi-square test finds the differences related to a particular characteristic are statistically significant, then we can conclude that the youth placed by the two departments are different with respect to that characteristic.

When analyzing mean and percentage differences of diverse demographic and other characteristic variables by department, we found that youth placed by human services versus juvenile corrections are similar in many ways (Table 2). Based on testing for significant differences via chi-square tests, we did not observe statistically significant differences between youth placed by the two departments in terms of most characteristics, including the neighborhood they live in, age at placement entry, race/ethnicity, poverty status, physical disability status, and most mental-health diagnoses.³ These are all indicators that

³ With a larger sample size, more of these differences may be statistically significant. However, given the available data, we cannot state with confidence that the youth placed by the two departments differ significantly on these characteristics.

Table 2. Means and Percentages for Variables by Placement Department, Hennepin County, 2001–2004

	Human Services	Juvenile Corrections	All
Geographic variables			
Minneapolis	59.0%	54.4%	57.1%
First-ring suburbs	11.0%	16.2%	13.1%
Second-ring suburbs	8.0%	16.2%	11.3%
Third-ring suburbs	4.0%	1.5%	3.0%
Outside of Hennepin County	18.0%	11.8%	15.5%
Demographic variables			
Female ***	39.0%	13.2%	28.6%
Age at entry, mean	15.1	15.8	15.4
Race			
White, non-Hispanic	29.0%	33.8%	31.0%
Black, non-Hispanic	43.0%	47.1%	44.6%
Other, including Hispanic	22.0%	17.6%	20.2%
Race missing	6.0%	1.5%	4.2%
Poverty			
In poverty	24.0%	14.7%	20.2%
Not in poverty	47.0%	54.4%	50.0%
Poverty data missing	29.0%	30.9%	29.8%
Has a physical disability	5.0%	2.9%	4.2%
Additional child characteristic variables			
Diagnosed with at least one mental health disorder	64.6%	58.2%	62.0%
Diagnosed with a behavioral disorder	50.0%	41.2%	46.4%
Diagnosed with a mood disorder	25.0%	30.9%	27.4%
Diagnosed with an anxiety disorder **	22.0%	10.3%	17.3%
Diagnosed with a substance-abuse disorder	16.0%	25.0%	19.6%
Diagnosed with mild mental retardation *	8.0%	1.5%	5.4%
Diagnosed with other mental-health disorder	35.0%	29.4%	32.7%
Child protection-related problems at placement **	23.0%	8.8%	17.3%
Child behavioral problems at placement ***	82.0%	100.0%	89.3%
Parent behavioral problems at placement	18.0%	17.6%	17.9%

the youth came from similar environments and faced similar neighborhood and other demographic conditions.

The only statistically significant differences in youth characteristics between the two departments were gender, being diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, having child behavioral or child

protection-related problems, and being diagnosed with mild mental retardation. Girls were more likely to enter placement via the human services department, whereas boys were more likely to enter via juvenile corrections. In addition, those placed by human services were more likely to have an anxiety disorder,

be identified as having child protection-related issues at placement, and not be identified as having behavioral problems.

How Long Do Out-of-Home Placements Last?

Across all types of placement, the mean stay in placement was slightly

(Table 2, continued)

	Human Services	Juvenile Corrections	All
System variables			
Number of previous placements, mean*	7.6	2.2	5.4
Goals related to placement exist	77.0%	66.2%	72.6%
Placement review***			
Placement options reviewed by a committee	38.0%	54.4%	44.6%
Placement options not reviewed by a committee	48.0%	23.5%	38.1%
Placement review data missing	13.0%	22.1%	16.7%
Type of placement***			
Short-term consequence program	29.0%	51.5%	38.1%
Group home	39.0%	10.3%	27.4%
Residential treatment center	24.0%	22.1%	23.2%
Juvenile corrections center	8.0%	14.7%	10.7%
Placement type unknown	0.0%	1.5%	0.6%
Months in placement	4.2	3.8	4.0
N	100	68	168

Note: The first two columns show the means and percentages broken out by department. The statistical significance tests noted below refer to the differences between those youth in the sample placed by human services and those placed by juvenile corrections. The third column shows the means and percentages for all youth in the sample. The statistical significance tests do not apply to the third column.

*** Statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p < 0.01$), meaning there is a less than 1% probability that the differences shown between human services and juvenile corrections is a result of chance.

** Statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p \leq 0.05$), meaning there is a less than 5% probability that the differences shown between human services and juvenile corrections is a result of chance.

* Statistically significant at the 0.10 level ($p < 0.10$), meaning there is a less than 10% probability that the differences shown between human services and juvenile corrections is a result of chance.

less than five months. Table 3 shows the percentiles for length-of-stay (measured as number of days in placement) by placement type. Certain types of placements were expected to be longer than others, yet there was also considerable variation in length-of-stay within placement type. Short-term consequence programs had the shortest median length-of-stay of 31 days, yet could last several months. Group homes had a median length-of-stay of 72 days, which was still relatively short compared with median stays in residential treatment centers (235 days) and juvenile corrections facilities (330 days). Length-of-stay in residential treatment centers varied widely.

Are the Experiences of the Youth in Placement Different by Department?

Even though the youth placed by the human services and juvenile corrections departments shared many of the same characteristics, we did identify

some differences in system-related variables for youth placed by the two departments. All system variables showed discrepancies by department (Table 2). However, by conducting chi-square tests on these differences by department, we found that only the type of placement a youth was assigned and having a placement reviewed by a committee were

significantly different. Number of previous placements was significant only at the 10% level, although with more cases, it is possible the level of significance would increase. The difference observed for the type of placement was not surprising, because the human services department tends to place youth in group homes and residential treatment centers more than in

Table 3. Length-of-Stay in Placement by Placement Type, Hennepin County, 2001–2004

	Percentile of Number of Days		
	25th percentile	50th percentile (median)	75th percentile
Short-term consequence programs	19.5	31.0	87.5
Group homes	8.0	72.0	172.0
Residential treatment centers	115.0	235.0	361.0
Juvenile corrections facilities	229.0	329.5	379.0

short-term consequence programs and juvenile corrections centers. In addition, youth placed by juvenile corrections were more likely to have their placement reviewed by a committee. Because juvenile corrections placements tend to be more restrictive types of placements, it is logical that a higher proportion of those placements verify accurate placement setting via a committee. We concluded that, even though youth were mostly similar in terms of individual characteristics, they experience different types of placements and different system review practices based on the department with which they interact.

In terms of length-of-stay, the mean length-of-stay for youth placed by the human services department was 146.3 days, compared with 130.5 days for youth placed by juvenile corrections. However, median length-of-stay in placement was 79 days for youth placed by the human services department compared with 86 days for youth placed by the juvenile corrections department (Table 4). A handful of very long placements skew the mean length-of-stay for both departments. However, when we tested for significance, we found no significant difference between the mean length-of-stays for youth placed by the two departments.

Racial Disparities in Out-of-Home Youth Placement

In 2000, White, non-Hispanic youth were 69.5% of the youth population ages 10 to 18 in Hennepin County, but were only 32.9% of the youth in our sample; Black, non-Hispanic youth were 13.2% of the Hennepin County youth population ages 10 to 18, but were 46.2% of our sample.⁴ These data imply that White, non-Hispanic youth were underrepresented by a ratio of 0.5, meaning that there was 0.5 White, non-Hispanic youth in our sample to every one White youth in the population. Additionally, Black, non-Hispanic youth were overrepresented by a ratio of 3.5.

Disproportionality by race of youth placed out-of-home in human services and juvenile corrections departments has been discussed in local policy arenas for at least the past decade. In fact, during that time, the Minnesota Department of Human Services initiated

Table 4. Length-of-Stay in Placement by Placement Department, Hennepin County, 2001–2004

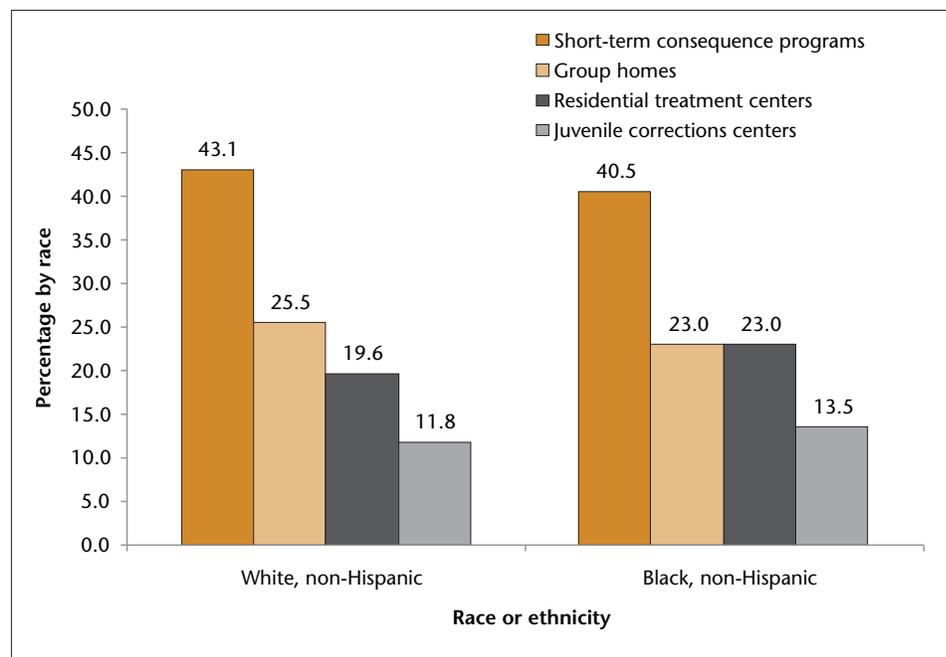
Department	Percentile of Number of Days		
	25th percentile	50th percentile (median)	75th percentile
Human services	19.0	79.0	247.0
Juvenile corrections	29.0	86.0	166.0

two advisory groups, the African American Disparities Committee and the American Indian Child Welfare Disparities Advisory Committee, to tackle this tough issue. Although data indicate that children of color are overrepresented and White children are underrepresented in these departments, there is general disagreement about what factors cause this disproportionality in placements, and whether racial disparities also occur in types of placement and lengths-of-stay.

In our study sample, we found that, despite the differences in the proportion of youth of different races in placement, there were not racial disparities in the types of placements or average length-of-stay. Youth were placed in similar types of settings regardless of race. The proportion of White, non-Hispanic youth placed in short-term consequence programs and

group homes was roughly similar to those of Black, non-Hispanic youth (Figure 2). Although the proportions in residential treatment centers and juvenile corrections centers differ slightly, these differences were not statistically significant. Similarly, comparison of median length-of-stay by race showed no statistical difference. The median stay for White, non-Hispanic youth is 31.5 days for short-term consequence programs and 377 days for juvenile corrections centers placements, whereas Black, non-Hispanic youth have a median stay of 28.5 days for short-term consequence programs and 284 days for juvenile corrections centers placements (Figure 3). However, in a related study, we found that, after controlling other relevant demographic, family, and system variables, including placement type, Black, non-Hispanic youth exit placement,

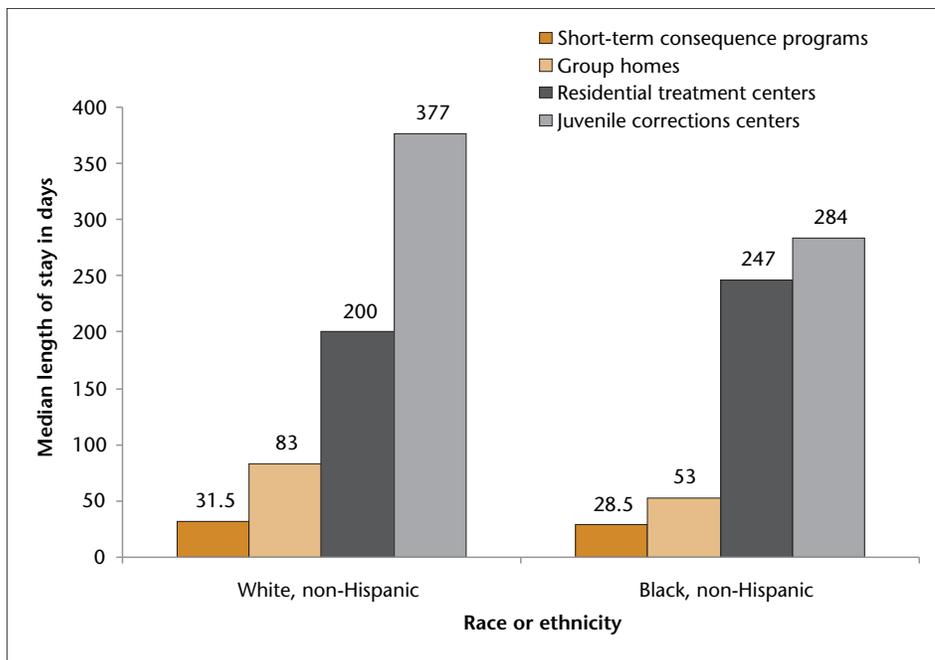
Figure 2. Percentage of Youth in Out-of-Home Placement by Race and Placement Type, Hennepin County, 2001–2004



Note: “Other, including Hispanic” category was excluded here because of the low representation for this group in each of the respective categories.

⁴ Population data by race are from the 2000 U.S. Census (www.census.gov).

Figure 3. Median Length of Stay in Out-of-Home Placement by Race and Placement Type, Hennepin County, 2001–2004



Note: "Other, including Hispanic" category was excluded here because of the low representation for this group in each of the respective categories.

on average, twice as fast as their White, non-Hispanic counterparts.⁵

There are several possible explanations why Black, non-Hispanic youth exit placement at a faster rate than their White, non-Hispanic counterparts. One is that Black, non-Hispanic youth are more likely than White, non-Hispanic youth to enter placement for minor, petty offenses, which causes them to be placed in less restrictive, shorter-stay placements. However, when we analyzed placement types and race together, we did not find any evidence that this was happening. As noted above, we found no evidence in this study that race was a significant factor in determining type of placement. Youth placed for minor, petty offenses tend to be placed in particular placement settings (for example, short-term consequence programs). Because we found that race was not a determining factor in the type of placement a youth was assigned, we concluded that Black, non-Hispanic youth were not entering placements related to minor, petty offenses at a faster rate than White, non-Hispanic youth.

⁵ See Misty L. Heggeness and Elizabeth E. Davis, "Youth Placed Out-of-Home for Behavioral Reasons: An Analysis of Characteristics, Type of Placements, and Length of Stay," Working paper, Series No. 2008-03. Minnesota Population Center, University of Minnesota, 2008.

Another theory is that placement agencies discharge youth based on observable characteristics of the youth, which may be associated with racial or ethnic differences. We do not have enough data to analyze this theory; however, a logical next step would be to analyze whether this type of behavior is occurring on the part of agencies, and whether it helps to explain the discrepancies by race in length-of-stay.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This article attempts to shed light on some of the complex dynamics surrounding youth who are temporarily placed out of their home for behavioral reasons. Not only are these cases complex because of family problems and environmental issues, including previous interactions with the human services and juvenile corrections departments, they are also the most expensive. It is often unclear whether or not the placements that youth experience are the best and most effective treatment for them. Our study did not evaluate the effectiveness of treatments and programs that youth experience (however, to find the best and most effective use of resources for youth with behavioral problems is an effort worth pursuing). Instead, we focused on understanding the characteristics of youth as they relate to the department responsible for the placement, the

type of placement, and the length-of-stay in placement, and we attempted to shed light on the dynamics surrounding disproportional representation by race in these placements.

We found that Black, non-Hispanic youth were overrepresented in out-of-home placements that occur for behavioral reasons. However, when controlling for relevant factors, their types of placements were not different than those of other youth, and their length-of-stay in placement was half that of White, non-Hispanic youth. There are various explanations for why this might be so. We did not find evidence to support the possibility that Black, non-Hispanic youth were more likely to enter the system for less severe crimes and behaviors, which would then lead them to experience placement settings that generally have shorter stays. Another explanation might be that youth are treated differently in regards to placement exits based on race, behavior, or other factors. Further research into the actions of placement agencies and youth behavior should be conducted in order to shed more light on this issue.

Overall, our findings demonstrated that youth placed for behavioral reasons, whether placed by human services or juvenile corrections departments, were mostly similar. It is not hard to imagine that, because they have similar demographic and other characteristics, the underlying problems they face that led to the incident resulting in their out-of-home placement may be more similar than different, as in the hypothetical case of Josie and Samuel (sidebar, p. 27). We also found, however, that Hennepin County human services and juvenile corrections departments differed both in whether there was a committee review of the placement before it occurs and what type of placement youth experienced. These differences have the potential to lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for the youth, depending on which department places them. Given that the youth in this study were similar regardless of the department which places them and face more or less the same type of mental-health problems, coordinating the work related to these types of placements—which is currently done by two separate departments in most counties in Minnesota—may increase efficiency or reduce costs. In addition, youth may have more consistent experiences and improved outcomes



Expressing their struggles through art, juveniles in an out-of-home placement facility created this mural about family issues. The mural is currently on display in the Hennepin County Family Justice Center.

in a coordinated system. Hennepin County, with the implementation of their JCMI unit, is a leading example of how this type of coordination can work across two different departments. Other counties should investigate whether this type of merger would have benefits, both for the county and for the youth who are placed out-of-home for behavioral reasons.

In general, more restrictive placements are more expensive than less restrictive placements because more security, supervision, and services are required. Longer stays are inherently more expensive than shorter stays, because placement agencies charge for each day the youth is there. The most expensive placements, therefore, are juvenile corrections centers, because they are the most restrictive and have the longest average length-of-stay.

Increasing coordination between two departments involves merging staff, workloads, and responsibilities for these out-of-home placements. These changes may be challenging, because human service and juvenile corrections departments do not have a history

of working together on such cases. Hennepin County is not the only local government system taking on this challenge. The Durham Initiative in North Carolina and the New York State Office of Children and Family Services have also implemented joint coordination efforts for this youth population. It is too early to identify whether the work of the Hennepin County JCMI unit is effectively creating more consistent experiences and improved placements for youth, as well as reducing costs. Future studies should evaluate the effectiveness of integrated programs like JCMI, the Durham Initiative, and others. Regardless, the fact that youth share similar characteristics, and often have experiences with both the human services and juvenile corrections departments, suggests that this type of coordination across departments should be considered throughout Minnesota.

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