

provides direct services, including crisis counseling and temporary shelter, on tribal and federal lands and sponsors a training program for multidisciplinary teams that handle child sexual abuse cases and comprehensive victim services on tribal lands. The OVC is partially funded by fines and penalties paid by federal crime offenders.

The Academy of Forensic Social Work was started in 1985. Many certified members of the academy also belong to the National Organization of Forensic Social Workers (NOFSW), which is a clearinghouse for information regarding forensic social work and provides a forum for professional networking. **Forensic social work** is the application of social work to questions and issues relating to law and the legal system (NOFSW, 1998), which essentially covers the entire criminal justice system as well as civil family matters such as divorce and custody issues. Certification as a diplomate in forensic social work by the National Organization of Forensic Social Work is required by many employers in correctional facilities, courts, and police departments.

Social work's effect on the criminal justice system has been uneven. Over time, the system has become increasingly punitive. It has almost never provided criminals with appropriate access to effective treatment and rehabilitation programs (Pew Report, 2010). Instead, the correction system emphasizes containment and punishment. Although it is difficult to advocate for criminal offenders in a system and a society that promote punishment over rehabilitation, social workers continue to strive to improve the criminal justice system.



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Practice Settings LO 5

Forensic social workers practice in a variety of legal settings, from juvenile and family courts to adult corrections, probation, parole, and victim assistance. Their presence helps monitor and modify legal processes to ensure fair treatment for all concerned.

Juvenile and Family Courts The juvenile and family court system is the organizational and policy context for social work practice with children, youth, and families.

CASE EXAMPLE

Sheila was 16 when she was arrested for shoplifting in a Dallas mall. Because this was her first offense, she was sent to a juvenile diversion program, which worked with first-time offenders, their families, and their schools. The purpose of the program is to keep young people out of the court system and prevent them from committing other crimes. For the next 18 weeks, Sheila's social worker spent six to eight hours a week in Sheila's home, working with her and her family. Sheila was also required to attend shoplifting prevention classes. Because shoplifting is often a sign of problems at home, including abuse, the social worker spent a lot of time working with Sheila's family. Sheila successfully completed the diversion program and to date has not had another arrest.



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The juvenile and family court system is intended to (1) prevent delinquency; (2) protect society by reeducating children who break the law; (3) prevent abuse and neglect; (4) protect children who are being abused and neglected; and (5) preserve and strengthen families (Ezell, 1995). The system deals with two kinds of offenses: delinquent youth offenses and status offenses. Delinquent youth offenses are violations of the law for which an adult can also be prosecuted. **Status offenses**, on the other hand, are illegal only for people young enough to be considered minors. Missing school and running away from home, for example, are not crimes when carried out by a person over 18 years of age (Ezell, 1995). The functions of social workers in the court system can include making psychosocial assessments, conducting court investigations, giving courtroom testimony, supervising probation, and fulfilling court-assigned social services (Needleman & Needleman, 1997). When social workers investigate reports of abuse, perform custody evaluations, or find shelter for runaway youths, they are acting as agents of the court, and the powers and protections of the court allow them to intervene (Ezell, 1995). There is no consistency in the way juvenile and family courts operate from state to state, so social work functions may vary according to location.

Social workers can make and have made important contributions to juvenile delinquency prevention programs, including parent training interventions, early intervention, child abuse prevention, violence prevention, substance abuse prevention, gang prevention, conflict resolution, and truancy reduction. These programs are best situated in family, school, or community settings. The evidence suggests that a comprehensive program that includes components drawn from virtually all theories of criminal behavior best prevents juvenile delinquency (Welsh & Farrington, 2007).

Juvenile Corrections Juvenile corrections encompass a wide range of interventions for young people who have broken the law. Juvenile corrections social workers play major roles in the system as caseworkers, counselors, administrators, policy analysts, program evaluators, and advocates.

CASE EXAMPLE

When Joey was 16, he robbed a cabole in Los Angeles with an unloaded gun. Instead of going to trial, Joey pleaded guilty and agreed to participate in a one-year substance abuse treatment program at a youth development center. As part of the program, Joey's family had to agree to participate as well. After Joey completed the program, he was assigned a social worker/case manager. The social worker was required to develop a three-month follow-up treatment plan for Joey and his family, including identifying community resources they could use to help Joey maintain his drug-free lifestyle.

Adjudication is the process of formal accusation, trial, and sentencing. Most adjudicated juveniles are sent to training schools. Typically, training schools are physically similar to maximum-security prisons, although some are more like secured communities of houses or cottages (Mays & Winfree, 1998).