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**FINAL EVALUATION REPORT
ON THE
PINS ADJUSTMENT SERVICES
ACT OF 1985**

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FINAL REPORT ON THE PINS ADJUSTMENT SERVICES ACT

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The results of this independent evaluation conclude that the 1985 New York State revisions to chapter 813 of the Family Court Act concerned with the comprehensive assessment and diversion from court of persons in need of supervision--the PINS Adjustment Services legislation--was successful in promoting system level changes in implementing counties which in turn accomplished the law's intended purpose in a cost-effective fashion. Specifically:

- ✓ the PINS legislation lessened the burden on family court;
- ✓ the PINS legislation more expeditiously connected PINS youth and their families with services likely to decrease the need for out-of-home placements;
- ✓ the PINS legislation provided overall savings to New York State taxpayers.

These general conclusions flow from several specific findings based on a analysis of PINS-related activity in a sample of implementing counties. A summary of specific findings:

1. Counties implementing diversion procedures showed marked increases in the proportion of their cases referred to diversion services.
2. Reductions in barriers to all types of support services accompanied the implementation of the PINS diversion procedures.
3. Implementation of the PINS diversion legislation reduced system costs by 10 percent over what they would have been without the legislation.
4. There is widespread acceptance of the PINS program among officials in implementing counties and agencies.
5. Lead agencies in implementing counties on the average performed their role in a responsible manner.
6. The planning and implementation of the PINS procedures substantially increased inter-agency communication and by inference the effective provision of related services.
7. The planning process associated with implementation of the revised PINS procedures provided an excellent mechanism for guiding the available resources to the service gaps

II. BACKGROUND FOR PINS LEGISLATION AND EVALUATION

A. Context of the PINS Legislation

The chapter 813 legislation continued a long-established trend in the area of social interventions related to youth and their families by implementing procedures designed to strengthen families and enable children to remain in their homes. In an effort to avoid court procedures which could remove youth from their families by placements in institutions, the chapter 813 legislation encouraged counties to establish multidisciplinary evaluation and intervention programs. The intent of these programs was: 1) to provide a comprehensive assessment of what might be needed by the youth and the youth's family to permit the youth to remain at home; and 2) to actually coordinate the receipt of the needed services within the context of each county's existing service delivery system.

Although these programs were expected to entail new and increased costs to counties and the state of New York, it was hoped that these increases would be offset by savings from decreased court involvement and reductions in expensive out-of-home placements. The overall expectation of reduced costs was both logical and reasonable, but it was by no means a guaranteed outcome. In fact the changed procedures might have both cost more and harmed youth and their families if the multidisciplinary evaluation and diversion activities served merely to delay an inevitable court intervention.

Because of the potential for unintended outcomes, the enabling legislation called for an independent evaluation of the implementation and impact of the PINS adjustment services act. The Center for Governmental Research Inc. (CGR) responded to this request and was selected to perform the five year evaluation.

B. Premature Evaluation Termination

Unfortunately the complete evaluation could not be accomplished. NYS budgetary restrictions in the spring of 1990 caused CCF to ask CGR to halt its evaluation and report findings which could be supported at that time. This report contains a summary of these findings.

Two major and important items remain unexamined: first, the extent to which the legislation continues to impact as intended after state incentive funding is withdrawn and counties must maintain diversion services using their own resources; second, the long range consequences of diversion from court remain unexamined because insufficient numbers of diverted youth were followed for a period long enough to determine the degree to which diversion permanently inhibited out-of-home youth placement.¹

¹ However, earlier research by CGR found that diversion led to reduced recidivism and reductions in out-of-home placements (CGR 1989b).

III. EVALUATION RESULTS SUPPORTING BENEFITS OF THE LEGISLATION

In spite of the premature termination of the evaluation, sufficient results were obtained to support an overall positive evaluation both with respect to a beneficial outcome of the legislation and to the accomplishment of these benefits in a cost-effective fashion. We now present overviews of the information supporting the main findings.

A. Decreased Burden on Family Court

A decrease in family court burden is supported by two specific findings.

Most directly, when compared to their pre-implementation activity, counties implementing diversion procedures showed marked increases in the proportion of their cases referred to diversion services. Although the percent varied across counties, on the average about 74% of 1989 cases were referred for diversion. In contrast, over the same time period, non-implementing counties showed a decrease in the use of diversion from court with the result that only 43 percent of 1989 cases were referred for diversion (CCF 1990). This increased use of diversion was also found in CGR's tracking and comparison of sample cases in counties before and after implementation of the PINS diversion procedures (CGR 1989a). Diversion was also used for PINS youth with prior PINS allegations; in other words not just the "easy" first time youth were diverted from court.

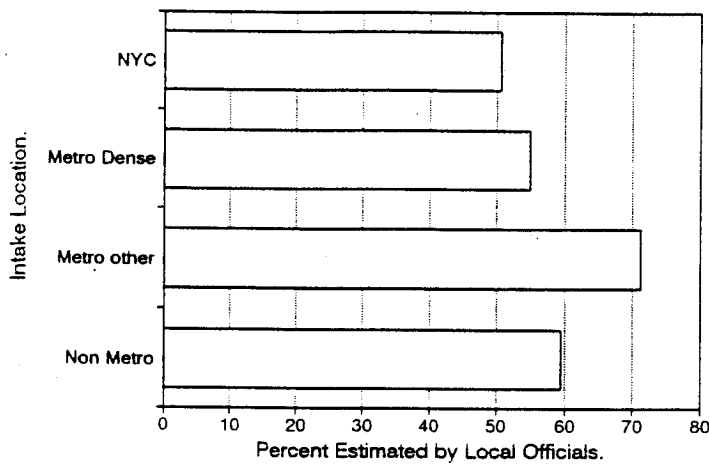
However crisp and supportive of a beneficial impact of the PINS legislation, an increase in diversion may have resulted because the availability of diversion services through PINS procedures may have encouraged greater use of the PINS system by youth and families who never would have entered the pre-diversion system. In other words, what appears to be a beneficial impact of the legislation could merely illustrate that implementing counties were more successful at bringing "easy" youth into the diversion program--an impact commonly referred to as a "net widening."

"Net widening" does not explain the increasing use of diversion in implementing counties. Graph 1 provides summaries of estimates made by local officials in implementing counties of the percent of youth who would have gone to court in the absence of the PINS diversion program.² These officials estimate that between 50-70% of intake youth would have gone to court were it not for the diversion program. Although based on a survey, this estimate is comparable to the counties' actual pre-implementation figures. Thus it appears that no substantial net-widening occurred, allowing the reasonable inference that the decrease in court burden occurred because of the implementation of chapter 813 diversion procedures.

² Source: CGR 1990, Table 3.25.

Graph 1

Estimated PINS Youth Going to Court Without PINS Diversion.



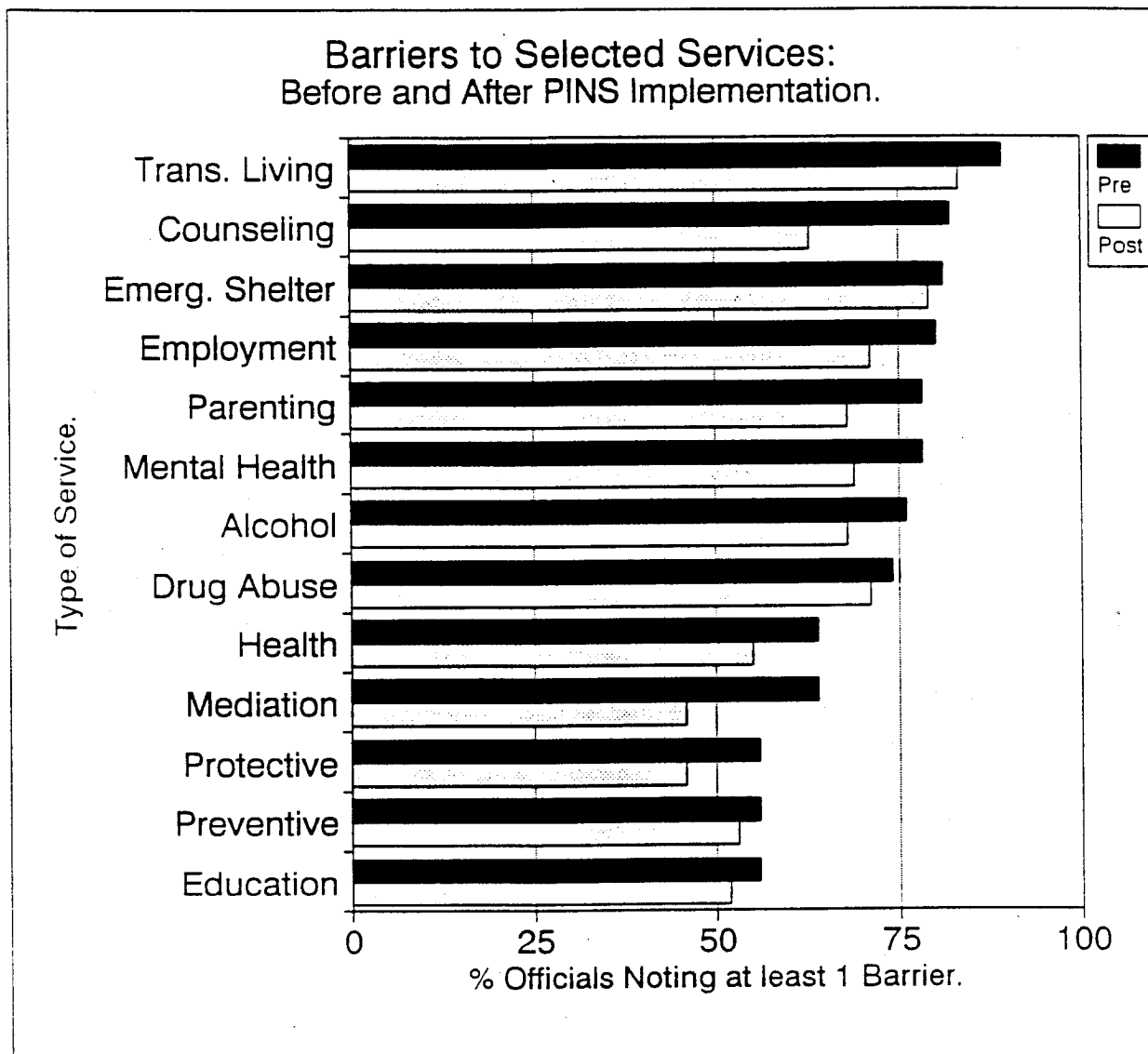
B. Reductions in Barriers to Youth and Family Services

Many believe that an important problem for youth and their families is the existence of barriers to support services of various kinds. In implementing the chapter 813 legislation, the increased availability of a wide range of services through court diversion procedures could in turn promote inappropriate use of PINS procedures to obtain services for youth and families. If this were to occur, the system might become overwhelmed with an actual increase in the difficulties of obtaining services for youth and their families, especially those who were most in need.

This was not the case. Based on a survey of local PINS officials, CGR found reductions in barriers to all types of support services accompanied the implementation of the PINS diversion procedures. Graph 2 illustrates the extent of the reductions.³ To be sure many reductions to existing barriers were not large and significant barriers remain. Nonetheless Graph 2 should counter any fears that diversion--at least during the initial phases of implementation--has increased the sometimes already high barriers to those services needed by youth and their families and in the processes prevented the legislation from having its intended long range beneficial impact.

³ Source: CGR 1990, Table 3.54.

Graph 2



C. Overall Cost Effectiveness

Diverting youth from court is not free and a legitimate question concerns the balance of presumed savings from court processing and out-of-home placements with the increased costs of assessment and diversion procedures and services. CGR tracked youth in four sample counties to answer this cost-benefit question. Comparing tracked youth in the before and after PINS system, costs totaled \$2,845,611 while savings totaled \$3,261,468; in other words the overall benefit/cost ratio for the 813 legislation was 1.1 to 1. In sum, the PINS diversion legislation reduced system costs by 10 percent over what they would have been without the legislation. This overall cost saving occurred mainly through a reduction in expenses related to diversion of youth after their initial contact with the PINS program--youth and families with a higher potential to benefit from the types of services coordinated through

the comprehensive assessment mechanism. In contrast, the PINS diversion procedures were not cost effective in reducing expenses related to youth with repeated system contact.

CGR believes that this cost savings actually understates the long term benefits which will accrue to the PINS legislation. 1) This ratio represents a start-up year with the potential for long-term efficiencies to subsequently increase this ratio; 2) The increased use of therapeutically-oriented diversions based on comprehensive assessment contains many unmeasured and potentially important long-term benefits; and 3) The PINS legislation inducement of increased communications and coordination among agencies involved with troubled youth may provide unmeasured benefits to a wide range of other non-PINS youth-oriented programs.

D. Acceptance of the PINS Program in Implementing Agencies

Several different items support a finding of widespread acceptance of the diversion concept as implemented.

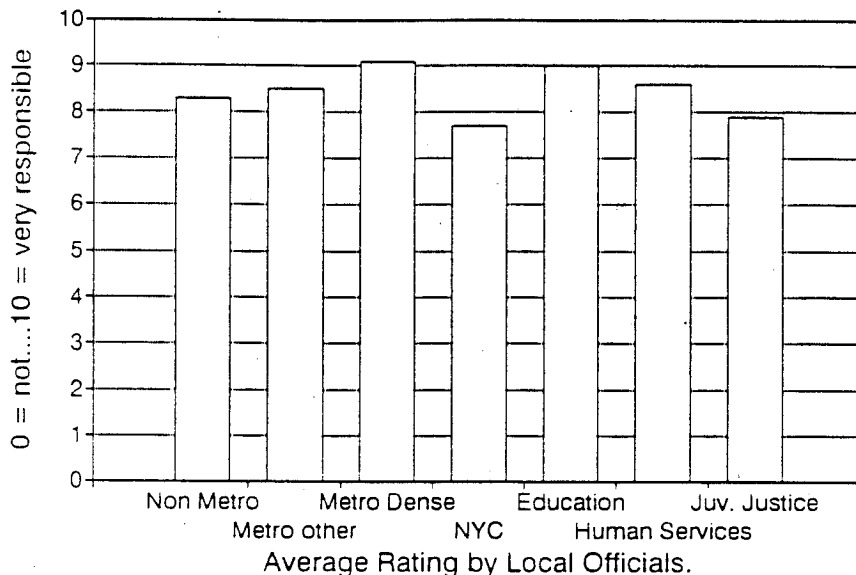
First and most directly, all counties implementing PINS procedures under the inducement of incentive funding have continued with the established procedures. But is this program continuation the result of positive views toward the PINS diversion and its results or contrariwise merely the easy continuation of now-established procedures? CGR's survey found officials with overwhelmingly positive views toward the PINS program in several crucial areas suggesting widespread support for the PINS assessment and diversion procedures.

Regarding what they needed to know in order to properly implement the new diversion program, among officials in a position to judge, 95 percent reported satisfaction with the amount of technical assistance provided by the Council on Children and Families; similarly 89 percent were satisfied with the quality of the technical assistance (CGR 1990:58). These results were similar across all types of implementing counties. Clearly county participants thought they had sufficient knowledge of the program's new requirements to get the new procedures off to a good start. This finding is a particularly heartening one because CGR's first report found deficiencies in the involvement and commitment of state interagency team members--deficiencies apparently caused by the usual start-up problems encountered by many programs.

One potential area of difficulty with PINS diversion efforts is that they require extensive coordination and communication across the sometimes diverse youth and family service agencies. How well (or poorly) lead agencies help plan this interagency activity impacts upon the acceptance of the PINS diversion procedures. Graph 3 illustrates the perception that lead agencies on the average performed their role in a responsible manner regardless of county type or officials' affiliation. The uniformity of the finding deserves special mention. Perceptions about the planning and operation of PINS diversion among the officials surveyed was for the most part uniform across: 1) counties varying in PINS need; 2) funded and non-funded agencies; 3) agencies required to approve versus those not required to approve the diversion plan; 4) private and government agencies; and 5) officials surveyed in both year 1 and year 2 implementing counties.

Graph 3

**Rated Responsibility of Coord. Agency:
by Location and Respondents' Agency.**

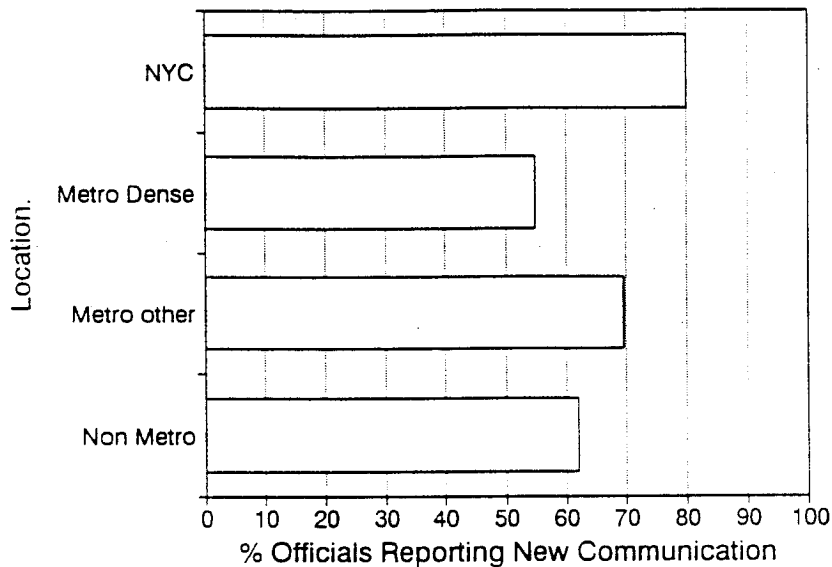


E. Enhanced Interagency Communications

The PINS legislation provided only modest funding for new or additional services for PINS youth and/or their families. The legislation envisioned that existing services would be more effectively employed with their impact enhanced through the comprehensive assessment procedures and through better coordination across agencies actually providing the services. In essence the legislation required that individuals in sometimes competing agencies cooperate and plan to a greater degree than previously. CGR's evaluation sought to determine if a change in this area could be measured. Activities surrounding the planning and implementation of the PINS procedures substantially increased inter-agency communication and by inference the effective provision of related services. Graph 4 shows that this increased interagency communication occurred in all types of implementing counties. Between 55 to 80% of survey officials reported new communication patterns as a result of the PINS legislation. CGR feels that this increased interagency communication may be the single most important impact of the PINS legislation upon the system involved with PINS youth.

Graph 4

New Inter-agency Communication Resulting from PINS Activities.



F. Allocations Put Money Where Needed Most

Resource allocations for each county indicated that the planning process associated with implementation of the revised PINS procedures provided an excellent mechanism for guiding the available resources to the service gaps that most affected each county. In each county, the planning process identified priority service areas. Tabulations showed a strong relationship between these priority areas and actual funding allocations (CGR 1989a).

G. Diversity of County Specific Activities

New York State counties differ considerably in both needs and services related to PINS procedures. In light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that CGR found considerable variety in the specific operational procedures used by each county to implement the PINS legislation. For example, even though often expressing positive feelings toward the PINS legislation, local officials were often weak in their knowledge of the specific ways in which the law effected its positive results.

IV. PROBLEM AREAS IDENTIFIED IN THE EVALUATION

This short summary did not dwell on problems identified during the evaluation because the positive results of the findings were clearly paramount. However, we wish to note for future consideration a list of potential problem areas which may at some point require more in-depth attention.

1. Although overall benefits exceeded costs in all types of counties, smaller counties had greater planning cost burdens than larger counties.
2. Because of the early termination of the evaluation, our results do not address the issue of most importance to an overall determination of the desirability of the Chapter 813 legislation: namely, did this legislation reduce out-of-home placements by strengthening families.
3. Of all the institutions associated with PINS youth, schools remained the most marginally involved.
4. While the PINS legislation lessened barriers to services, nonetheless barriers to needed services remain high.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

Congruent with our conclusion in the May 1989 report, the PINS legislation continues to create system changes which emphasize assessment and diversion in the adjustment of youth in need of supervision. While at the local level changes are not uniform in specific details, nonetheless systems changes, whatever they might be in each county, have generally decreased court adjudications. Given that specific implementation procedures and techniques differ considerably across counties, caution should rule in creating overly restrictive enabling legislation. CGR recommends that rather than strict procedural guidelines, standards of performance need to be clearly articulated for implementing counties.

The Center for Governmental Research strongly recommends that the State of New York enact legislation to continue and promote the use by counties of comprehensive assessment and diversion from family court of persons alleged to be in need of court supervision. In our judgement, the 1985 revisions to chapter 813 of the Family Court Act concerned with the comprehensive assessment and diversion from court of persons in need of supervision has been successful both in helping New York State's youth and families and in saving tax dollars.

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