



HARVARD Kennedy School

**ASH INSTITUTE**

for Democratic Governance and Innovation

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## **DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES HONORED AS INNOVATIONS IN AMERICAN GOVERNMENT AWARD WINNER**

***Harvard University's Ash Institute & the Annie E. Casey Foundation Recognize Program's Work Curbing Juvenile Delinquency***

**Cambridge, Mass., – Sept. 9, 2008** – The Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard Kennedy School today announced Missouri's Division of Youth Services as the winner of the 2008 Annie E. Casey Innovations Award in Children and Family System Reform. The Division of Youth Services of Missouri's Department of Social Services serves youth offenders in small, dormitory settings and focuses on individualized and group treatment approaches. As one of the six government programs honored at tonight's Innovations in American Government Awards gala in Washington, D.C., the Division of Youth Services will receive \$100,000 toward replication and dissemination around the country.

Recognized as "the guiding light for reform in juvenile justice" by the American Youth Policy Forum, the Missouri Division of Youth Services (DYS) forwards a promising new philosophy in treatment of youth offenders at its 42 locations across the state. Instead of the predominant punitive practices, DYS takes a therapeutic approach, viewing youth as a direct product of their experiences and capable of turning their lives around through a step by step change process. DYS youth participate in daily group meetings with 10 to 12 of their peers to talk through challenges and serve as positive role models for each other. Each young person receives individualized educational assistance and participates in a host of volunteer and community engagement activities. For many DYS youth, such positive experiences carry enormous weight; often these are some of the very first accomplishments for which they can feel proud. In addition to youth served at DYS treatment centers, many are diverted from the juvenile justice system all together through community-based programs supported by the Division, while other low risk youth receive day treatment and family support while living at home.

Through ongoing group therapy, dedicated staff, relationships with the court system, and strong community support in the form of liaison councils and neighborhood advisory boards, the program cites measurable results in halting the cycle of juvenile crime. Not only does the program note significant reductions in violence while youth are enrolled in DYS, over 90 percent of youth avoid further incarceration for three years or more after graduating from the program. According to studies of other states that count recidivism in a similar way, Missouri's nine percent rate is well below states such as Florida, Maryland, and Louisiana with new juvenile re-offense rates of 29 percent, 30 percent, and 45 percent respectively. Moreover, the program model enforces the importance of academic achievement and reports all time high graduation and GED rates: 90 percent of youth earn high school credits, 48 percent return to public schools, and 70 percent progress more rapidly than same-age peers in core subjects.

"Missouri's Division of Youth Services is leading the nation in developing more effective and humane responses to juvenile delinquency," said Douglas W. Nelson, president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. "We are very pleased that DYS has been chosen as this year's Annie E. Casey Innovations Award in Children and Family System Reform winner. The 'Missouri Model' demonstrates that improved treatment, education, and support is cost-effective, reduces recidivism rates, and most importantly, provides troubled youth with the opportunity to turn their lives around and become contributing members of their communities."

"It's an honor to receive the 2008 Annie E. Casey Innovations Award in Children and Family System Reform," said Tim Decker, director of the Division of Youth Services. "Our system is based on the belief that the public interest is best served by helping young people turn their lives around and become law-abiding and productive citizens. Our treatment and education approach, combined with job preparation and family and community engagement to support the life changes they are making, gives us the system we have today. We are always working to achieve better outcomes."

"As states across the nation grapple with the most effective ways to rehabilitate and reform juvenile offenders, Missouri demonstrates a truly unique approach to halting the pernicious cycle of youth delinquency," said Stephen Goldsmith, director of the Innovations in American Government Awards Program at Harvard Kennedy School. "By offering youth and their families a community of support networks, these adolescents are able to succeed beyond what was ever deemed possible. In honoring this program, we hope other states will develop similar strategies for transforming offenders into productive citizens."

Since 1986, the Ash Institute's Innovations in American Government Award Program at Harvard Kennedy School has honored 187 federal, state, and local government agencies through Ford Foundation support. In highlighting exemplary models of government innovation, the Program drives continued progress in improving the quality of life of citizens and encourages scholarly research and teaching cases at Harvard University and institutions worldwide. Many award-winning programs have been replicated across jurisdictions and policy areas, and have served as harbingers of today's reform strategies or as forerunners to state and federal legislation.

**About the Annie E. Casey Foundation**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization, whose primary mission is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).

**About the Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation**

The Roy and Lila Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation advances excellence in governance and strengthens democratic institutions worldwide. Through its research, education, international programs, and government innovations awards, the Institute fosters creative and effective government problem-solving and serves as a catalyst for addressing many of the most pressing needs of the world's citizens. Asia Programs, a school-wide initiative integrating Asia-related activities, joined the Ash Institute in July 2008. The Ford Foundation is a founding donor of the Institute. Additional information about the Ash Institute is available at [www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu](http://www.ashinstitute.harvard.edu). Applicants for the 2009 Innovations in American Government Awards are encouraged to apply at [www.innovationsaward.harvard.edu](http://www.innovationsaward.harvard.edu).

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