

**Script for ALF Class XXV Powerpoint Presentation**  
**Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline: A Study of Solutions**

**Slide #1: Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline in Houston and Texas: A Study of Solutions**

Hello. My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm here to talk about the American Leadership Forum Class XXV project "Dismantling the Cradle to Prison Pipeline in Houston and Texas: A Study of Solutions." First, I'll give you an overview of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis, then I want to talk about solutions to dismantle the pipeline and finally I would like for us all to talk about ways that we can work together to help children reach their full potential.

**Slide #2: Introduction: What is the Cradle to Prison Pipeline crisis?**

There is a growing epidemic that threatens the health and prosperity of all Texans. From the day tens of thousands of children are born, multiple risk factors converge to suck children into the prison pipeline instead of towards educational advancement and career success. You can see these risk factors in this "drain" graphic on the slide. A lack of access to prenatal care, drugs and alcohol abuse, child abuse, a lack of positive role models, unemployment all lead children towards the prison pipeline.

But we believe that prevention and intervention can make a difference in dismantling the pipeline and creating a more positive future for the youth of our community. On the slide, you can see the interventions that can lift children out of the pipeline.

The American Leadership Forum Class XXV decided to focus on programs and practices that are effectively shutting down the pipeline in four target areas: prenatal care and early childhood development, education, health and mental health care and juvenile justice.

In each of these areas, we have documented programs that are making a difference and offering young people more opportunities for a better life. This is just the start of the conversation and we know that there are many organizations that are making a difference in our community.

But one point that we want to emphasize is that prevention and early intervention are far more cost-effective than crisis care when children get sick or into trouble, drop out of school or suffer family breakdown. Pennies spent today on prevention and early intervention can save dollars in "cure" down the road.

### **Slide #3: Social and Economic Costs**

The need to act is urgent. As you can see in this graphic, an African-American boy born in 2001 has a one in three lifetime risk of going to prison, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.<sup>1</sup> In a moment, we will talk about the economic impact of such high rates of incarceration.

### **Slide #4: Social and Economic Costs**

You can see here the risks for Hispanic and Anglo boys.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, the Department of Justice does not collect data on the incarceration rates of Asian children, but we will see in a moment how this pipeline is affecting all communities.

We should also note that girls are the fastest growing part of the pipeline. Currently, girls represent one in every seven juveniles in custody. So there is a need to lift boys AND girls out of the pipeline.

### **Slide #5: Social and Economic Costs**

How do you think the construction of prison cells is forecasted?

[GIVE AUDIENCE TIME TO RESPOND]

According to members of the Corrections Committee of the Texas House of Representatives, prison cells are forecasted based on third grade reading scores. So these charts show us the danger of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline. About 80% of African-American and Hispanic children are reading below grade level by the fourth grade. About 50% of White and Asian children are reading below grade level by fourth grade.<sup>3</sup> This is a direct predictor of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline and involvement in the criminal justice system.

And we need to be clear that this current system isn't saving us any money. It costs about \$7,000 per child for a year of public education, while the cost of incarcerating a child for a year in the Texas Youth Commission is \$68,000.

---

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974 – 2001" (August 2003). Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, "Prevalence of Imprisonment in the U.S. Population, 1974 – 2001" (August 2003). Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Education Progress, *The Nation's Report Card: Reading 2007* (2007), Tables A-8 and A-9. Calculations by Children's Defense Fund.

## **Slide #7: American Leadership Forum**

The mission of the Houston/Gulf Coast Chapter of the American Leadership Forum is to join and strengthen diverse leaders to better serve the public good.

Here are the members of our class. You can see that we represent diverse sectors of our community. We are business leaders, educators, elected officials, attorneys, media leaders, law enforcement officials, health care professionals, foundation and non-profit executives.

But all of us are united in our belief that we have got to dismantle the cradle to prison pipeline. And in analyzing this issue, we felt that what was missing was a study of solutions. We decided to document WHAT WORKS in dismantling the pipeline with the hope that we could reach leaders like you and create the “public will” to invest in prevention programs.

Here is what we learned.

## **Slide #8: Brain Development Slide**

High quality early childhood development is key to dismantling the pipeline. A child’s brain grows more rapidly during the first five years of life than at any other time. Early child development sets the foundation for later success in school and life.

## **Slide #9: Disparities in Early Vocabulary Growth**

Studies have shown the disparities in early vocabulary growth for children with a high socio-economic status as opposed to children with a low socio-economic status. By age three, children in affluent families have an average vocabulary of about 1200 words, whereas children in economically disadvantaged families have an average vocabulary of about 400 words.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, by the age of three, poor children have one-third the vocabulary of their more affluent peers. Just think of where these children will be by kindergarten or fourth grade.

That’s why early childhood development is so important – to prevent children from falling behind at such an early age. Let’s talk about what works.

One thing we can all do is to ensure that children’s minds are being stimulated at a young age and that a nurturing care-giver reads, sings, plays and talks to infants and toddlers at least two hours a day.

---

<sup>4</sup> Data from Houston Collaborative for Children. Source: Hart, B. & Risley, T. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

## Slide #10: Prenatal Care and Early Childhood Development

These three programs are cost-effective and successful in helping to address poverty and improve early childhood development.

- **Healthy Family Initiatives** operates a number of programs that strengthen families, including a home visitation program where peer educators visit first time parents and follow up with children for several years. The program focuses on developing parenting skills and preventing child abuse. As you can see, the results are remarkable, with a 99% success rate in preventing child abuse among vulnerable families. And the program is cost-effective. An investment of \$8,000 per family a year is far less costly than the cost of one year in the juvenile justice system.
- **ChildBuilders** educates children and youth about personal safety, healthy relationships and how to be nurturing parents in the future. Using its “train the trainer” approach, ChildBuilders can reach large numbers children with a small staff at a cost of less than \$25 per child. These programs have a dual purpose: they prepare the next generation of parents and they also inoculate children against child abuse. By participating in training on healthy relationships, children often recognize the signs of abuse in their own lives and seek help. And \$25 a year per child is a fraction of the \$70,000 a year that is costs to treat an abused child.
- The **Lee High School child care center** provides access to onsite, affordable child care. The program has a double benefit: enhancing the early childhood development of vulnerable infants and toddlers and helping teen parents graduate from high school.

The impact is impressive. 25% of infants entered the Center behind their appropriate development stage in motor and language skills, but 100% of the infants in the program were at or above developmental norms for their age after one year.

## Slide #11: Education

Every 10 seconds in the United States, a high school student drops out. I know we’re all concerned about rising dropout rates. We’ve got to address this issue, and the first step is to study what works. These are programs with high graduation rates that also teach students the skills needed to perform in the workplace.

Their success relies on a number of factors:

- intensive parent involvement,
- intensive student commitment with long school hours,
- experiential activities in the community and

- active mentorship from positive role models.
- **Genesys Works** hires and trains students from low-income high schools to work for major corporations. The program gives students valuable skills for the business world, including training on information technology, engineering drafting or accounting and how to succeed as a professional. Through the program, students discover they can succeed as professionals and change the direction of their lives. As you can see, more than 90% of participants go on to college when they finish the program.
- **Pro-Vision** started the first all-male charter school in the state of Texas, directly working to channel urban males away from the pipeline. The program has a remarkable 90% graduation rate compared to the 49% graduation rate of HISD.<sup>5</sup>
- **Cristo Rey Jesuit College Preparatory High School** will be coming to Houston in Fall, 2009. The program gives students means to earn up to 70% of tuition costs through corporate internships. Nationwide, Cristo Rey High Schools have an average graduation rate of 94%, with a 1% drop out rate.

## **Slide #12: Health and Mental Health Care**

A major barrier fueling the pipeline is the lack of access to mental health services. Children with mental health disorders represent between 9 to 13% of the general child population.<sup>6</sup> But 55% of children in the juvenile justice system have a significant mental health disorder.<sup>7</sup> Access to mental health treatment would divert many children from involvement in the costly juvenile justice and child welfare systems.

These program provides critical health and mental health services to vulnerable populations.

- **The Harris County Hospital District's Community Behavioral Health Program** provides early interventions for children, in collaboration with the family, school and other programs to fit the needs of the individual. Evaluating and intervening at early stages, before a child receives a label of "troublesome" or "bad" allows a child to

---

<sup>5</sup> Children at Risk reports that 49% of HISD students graduate in four years. The four year graduation rate for males in HISD is 46%. The four to six year graduation rate for males in HISD is 48.9%. These calculations do not account for the small percentage of students who left the Texas public school system to enter private school, homeschooling, left the country/state, or passed away.

<sup>6</sup> Austin based Advocacy, Inc. reports that 9 to 13% of the general youth population is estimated to have a mental health disorder.

<sup>7</sup> Statewide data shows that up to 55% of children under the care of the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission (TJPC) or Texas Youth Commission (TYC) have a significant mental health problem.

achieve much greater success in school and in life and helps avoid failures that lead to high dropout rates, limited employability and high incarceration rates.

- **The Council on Alcohol and Drugs Houston – Kinder Clinic** works with pregnant women, many of them teenagers, to get and keep them off alcohol and drugs during pregnancy. The program also focuses on providing effective treatment for those newborns with *in utero* alcohol and drug exposure to reduce the long-term consequences of this exposure.

This is so important because *in utero* exposure to alcohol and drugs commonly contributes to behavioral disturbances in children and adolescents. By reducing or eliminating this exposure, we can decrease behavioral disturbances later in life. Intervening as early as possible also helps avoid many of the problems that later push children into the juvenile justice system.

- **Baylor College of Medicine Teen Health Clinic** offers seven inner city primary care clinics that provide free or low cost health care, counseling and education to indigent young men and women from 13 to 25 years of age.

The programs address the critical issue of teen pregnancy. Every minute a child is born to a teen mother in the United States.

The clinics provides prenatal care tailored to the needs of pregnant and parenting teens and operate teen clinics at Lee and Chavez High School to meet the health needs of uninsured students.

**Some 97% of Lee High School students are uninsured and 88% of Chavez High School students are uninsured.<sup>8</sup>**

### **Slide #13: Juvenile Justice**

The final area that we addressed in our research is the juvenile justice system. As we have noted, 55% of children in the juvenile justice system have a significant mental health disorder. Despite this, the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission reports that only 59.5% of youth on probation who need mental health services actually receive them.

Zero tolerance school discipline policies are also transforming schools into a major point of entry into the juvenile justice system as children are increasingly arrested on school grounds for subjective and loosely defined behaviors.

---

<sup>8</sup> Data on uninsured students were obtained from the Houston Independent School District. HISD includes a question on student health insurance on school enrollment cards.

[YOU MAY WANT TO MENTION SOME ZERO TOLERANCE EXAMPLES. BELOW IS A LIST OF ACTUAL CASES WHERE POLICE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO SCHOOLS FOR NON-VIOLENT BEHAVIORS OF YOUNG CHILDREN.]

Below are examples of the impact of zero tolerance policies in criminalizing children at young ages for non-violent behaviors. Stories were compiled by the Children's Defense Fund.

**1. Two 4-year olds refused to take their nap**

In November 2006 in the Bronx, NY, Jaden Diaz and Christopher Brito would not take their nap. As a result, they were removed from class and handcuffed by police. The police threatened them saying they would never see their parents again and "when you go to jail, you're not going to have no fun, no TV, no toys."

**2. A 6-year old first grader smacked his classmate's bottom**

In November 2007 in Prince William County, Virginia, Randy Castro smacked his female classmate's behind. School officials wrote an incident report calling his behavior "sexual touching against a student, offensive" and called the police. Randy thought he was going to prison. Now he refers to himself as a "bad boy."

**3. A 6-year old child had a temper tantrum**

In March 2007 in Avon Park, Florida, Desre'e Watson was handcuffed and taken from her school to central booking at the country jail after 20 minutes of uncontrollable behavior. Desre'e was reportedly yelling, screaming, kicking, flailing, crying and wailing. Additionally, she pulled a school staff member's hair and "took flight" under a table. She was charged as a felon with battery of a school official and with two misdemeanors: disruption of school function and resisting a law enforcement officer.

**4. A 5-year old boy misbehaved**

In January 2008 in Queens, NY, Dennis Rivera, a 5-year-old boy with speech problems, asthma and attention deficit disorder, was handcuffed in school and taken to the psych ward of a hospital after throwing a tantrum and knocking items off of the principal's desk.

**5. A 10-year old elementary school student took a pair of scissors out of her backpack during class**

In December 2004 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, fourth-grader Porsche Brown was handcuffed and taken to the police station when she took a pair of scissors out of her backpack. School officials reported that she had not threatened anyone with the scissors but had violated a zero-tolerance rule which considers scissors potential weapons.

**The bottom line is that we need to channel children away from the juvenile justice system. And these programs do just that.**

- **The Harris County Stay-in-School Program** is a collaborative effort of the District Attorney's Office, the TRIAD prevention program, seven Justice of the Peace Courts and eleven school districts. The program helps prevent truancy through media campaigns, warning letters and truancy learning camps. Warning letters are issued upon three unexcused absences, and, as you can see, the warning letters have deterred 80% of recipients from becoming a truancy case.
- **The Annie E. Casey Foundation Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)** works to divert children from unnecessary secure detention. With initiatives throughout the country, JDAI creates and tests new ways to establish smarter, fairer and more effective and efficient juvenile justice systems. Programs focus on innovative screening methods, relying on hard data, collaborating between systems and communities and developing effective alternatives to incarceration.

Programs throughout the country have had an enormous impact, reducing the jail population by two-thirds, arrests by half and juvenile crime by more than one-quarter.

JDAI has now launched a Houston/Harris County initiative, mobilizing high level community leaders to reduce the number of children in the juvenile justice system in Harris County. Taskforces are working to identify alternatives to incarceration, reduce the length of time a child spends in custody, reduce racial disparities in the juvenile justice system and ensure that interventions are timely and appropriate.

- **Systems of Hope** provides comprehensive, coordinated support services to help youth diagnosed with severe emotional disturbances stay in school and out of jail. The program operates under the premise that the mental health needs of children, adolescents and their families can be better met within their home, school and community environments than through the use of expensive institutional settings.

Both Depelchin Children's Center and the United States Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) have evaluated Systems of Hope. The 2008 SAMHSA Report Card shows that participating youth spend more time in school, improve their school grades, improve their behaviors, exhibit fewer disciplinary problems and have fewer arrests, and demonstrate improved emotional health with improved levels of emotional well-being and few suicide attempts.

The program has had a significant impact in reducing expulsion and suspension rates. 61.4% of youth at intake had either been expelled or suspended from school in the prior six months. But after six months in the program, this rate dropped to 28.6%

[CLOSE WITH A STORY OF A CHILD HELPED BY ONE OF THESE PROGRAMS.]

It's important to look at the faces behind the statistics and to listen to the stories of children who have grown up in the pipeline.

One of those children is Chelsea, who escaped the pipeline with the help of Systems of Hope.

Growing up, Chelsea had a very abusive father. He was abusive to Chelsea, her mother and her brothers. He did a lot of drugs and forced Chelsea and her brothers to try them along with him at a young age. All her life, people told Chelsea that she wasn't going to amount to anything and she believed them. Throughout middle school and high school, she cut class a lot. She got into a lot of fights. She got suspended more times than she could count.

She started using drugs and alcohol, later got pregnant and tried to commit suicide.

But then Systems of Hope stepped in and provided Chelsea with comprehensive support and counseling to help her get back on her feet. She's just now 17 years old, went through rehab, is raising her little boy and plans to go to college next year.

Chelsea was born into the pipeline. She grew up in an abusive home and was exposed to drugs and alcohol at a young age. But Systems of Hope turned her life around. Chelsea's story represents what positive interventions can do to lift children out of the pipeline and guide them towards more positive outcomes.

**Slide #14: You can help by:**

There are many ways that you can help to dismantle the pipeline.

[REVIEW LIST AND TALK ABOUT WAYS THAT PEOPLE CAN HELP TO DISMANTLE THE PIPELINE]

Together we CAN solve this problem and help our children to reach their full potential.

**Slide #15: Thank you**

Thank you for your time and attention. I'd now like to open the presentation up to any questions or comments you might have on what we can do to dismantle the cradle to prison pipeline.

Mention project WIKI [www.zero2three.com](http://www.zero2three.com) as resource to add additional organizations that are working to dismantle the pipeline.