

# The Need for a Youth Services Coordinating Agency in Marion County, 2009

Currently, there are more than 3,000 children in need of services (CHINS) in Marion County. Of those now in the care of the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS), approximately half are in foster care, with the remainder in residential care, relative care, in their own home, or in another setting. Within the juvenile justice system in 2006, there were 8,439 delinquency cases and 2,384 status offenses. Research conducted by Indiana University Center for Health Policy (CHP) staff estimated that there are approximately 38,000 youth under age 25 who exhibit four or more risk factors for contact with either DCS or juvenile justice. This number is significantly larger than the current number of youth being served by DCS and Juvenile Justice, suggesting a potential for significant growth in these systems in the future.

Research indicates that our best hope for creating public programs that deter child abuse, neglect, and delinquency is to create a comprehensive system of care that focuses not only on intervention, but also on prevention. Such systems are both coordinated and integrated, and they involve both the interests and input of the children and families involved. Efforts to address the needs of vulnerable children and families before they are deemed

at risk or in need of services have been proven effective in multiple studies.

Researchers studying prevention in a variety of fields have also concluded that isolated services are less effective than coordinated systems of care in addressing the needs of vulnerable children. In a system of care model, the education, juvenile justice, mental health, and child protection subsystems work together with families and other communi-

ties and other community agencies through a unified approach to deal with the problems of child abuse, neglect, and delinquency—and their precursors—together. Communication, teamwork, and shared goals and philosophies are vital for the system to work effectively. Coordination of services is essential to deliver services in an effective manner. Researchers



studying prevention research in a variety of fields have also concluded that isolated services are less effective than coordinated systems of care in addressing the needs of vulnerable children. To achieve the comprehensive approach needed to prevent children from entering the system, more coordinated and strategic efforts are needed to assist community and neighborhood organizations and formal service providers in identifying prevention programming needs.



Because of the need for additional youth services in Marion County and the effectiveness of coordinated and integrated youth services, the Early Intervention and Planning Council (EIPC) is planning to establish or appoint an existing agency to coordinate research, evaluation, and fundraising for youth services in Marion County. This brief takes a look at the opinions of those working at youth-serving agencies to see if they also see a need for a coordinating agency. Individuals working with youth-serving agencies are also asked their opinion on whether a suitable agency already exists or if an agency would need to be established.

### **A Diversity of Existing Programs**

There are at least 110 youth-serving agencies in Marion County, many of which have multiple programs. With so many agencies and programs, it can be hard for consumers to know the best place to obtain services. Also, agencies and programs may duplicate the services of other programs.

A coordinating agency could help ensure the efficient provision of services without overlap and help to ensure that children and youth in need of services do not slip through the gaps.

The Center for Health Policy conducted two surveys to determine the opinions of the directors of youth-serving agencies in Indiana and individuals in charge of programs providing youth services in Marion County and the need for a coordinating agency. Both surveys were similar; one survey was sent to the agency director or CEO and the second survey was sent to the front line program directors as identified by the head of each youth-serving agency. Where possible, we report responses from both the agency and program surveys. The results from these surveys help us to understand the attitudes of those providing youth services with regard to:

1. Gaps in youth services,
2. Youth-serving agency interaction, and
3. The need for a coordinating agency.



### **Gaps in Youth Services**

When asked if there are gaps in services, 66 percent of the agencies responding and 41.8 percent of the programs responding indicated that there are many gaps in services. There is fairly strong agreement (50.8 percent of agencies and 59.6 percent of programs either strongly agree or agree) that poor interagency cooperation is a reason for gaps in youth services in Marion County, pointing toward the need for an organization to help coordinate youth-serving agencies. There is also agreement that no program is comprehensive enough to provide for the needs of youth (54.40 percent of respondents to agency surveys and

55.9 percent of respondents to program surveys either strongly agree or agree). A coordinating agency could address these issues by helping to coordinate services between agencies and also by serving as a clearinghouse to provide consumers of youth services with information on what services are available and from which programs these services are available.

### **Youth-Serving Agency Interaction**

The view of youth–agency interaction tends to be a positive one. There is much agreement that the complexity of problems require an integrated approach and that youth services can accomplish more by working together. There is also overwhelming agreement that youth with serious problems receive more comprehensive services and that interagency coordination helps to keep children from falling through the cracks. The majority of respondents either strongly agree (6 percent of respondents to program surveys and 6 percent of respondent to agency surveys) or agree (77 percent of respondents to program surveys and 67 percent of respondents to agency surveys.) that their experiences in working with other youth agencies are largely positive. Few respondents disagree with this statement (6 percent of respondents to program surveys and 3 percent of respondents to agency surveys) and none of the respondents strongly disagree with this statement.

### The Need for a Coordinating Agency

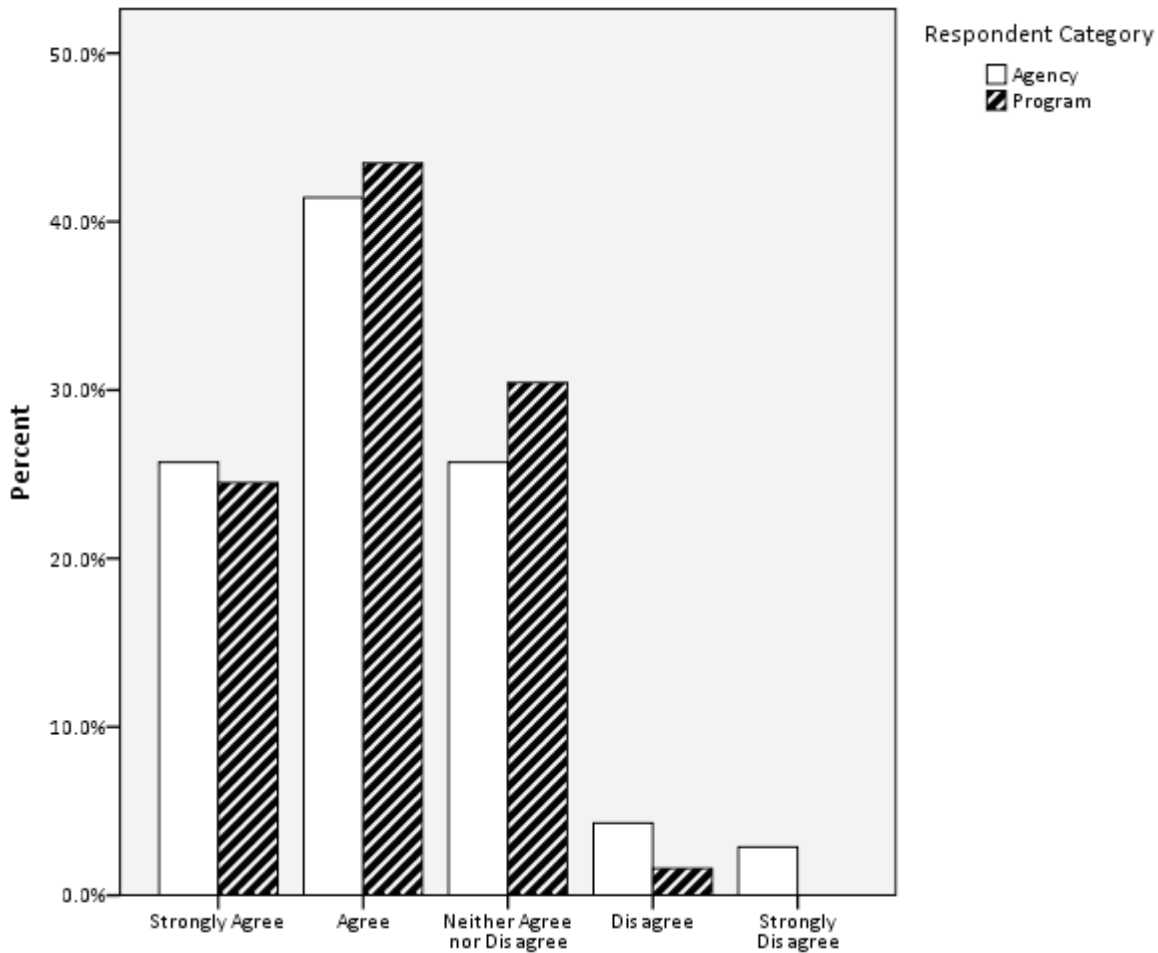
The Early Intervention and Planning Council intends to establish or appoint an existing agency to coordinate research, evaluation, and fundraising for youth services in Marion County. To learn more about perceptions regarding such an agency, we asked several questions regarding a coordinating agency. These questions were asked in both the agency and program surveys.

There was wide agreement that youth-serving agencies in Marion County would benefit from a coordinating agency, as

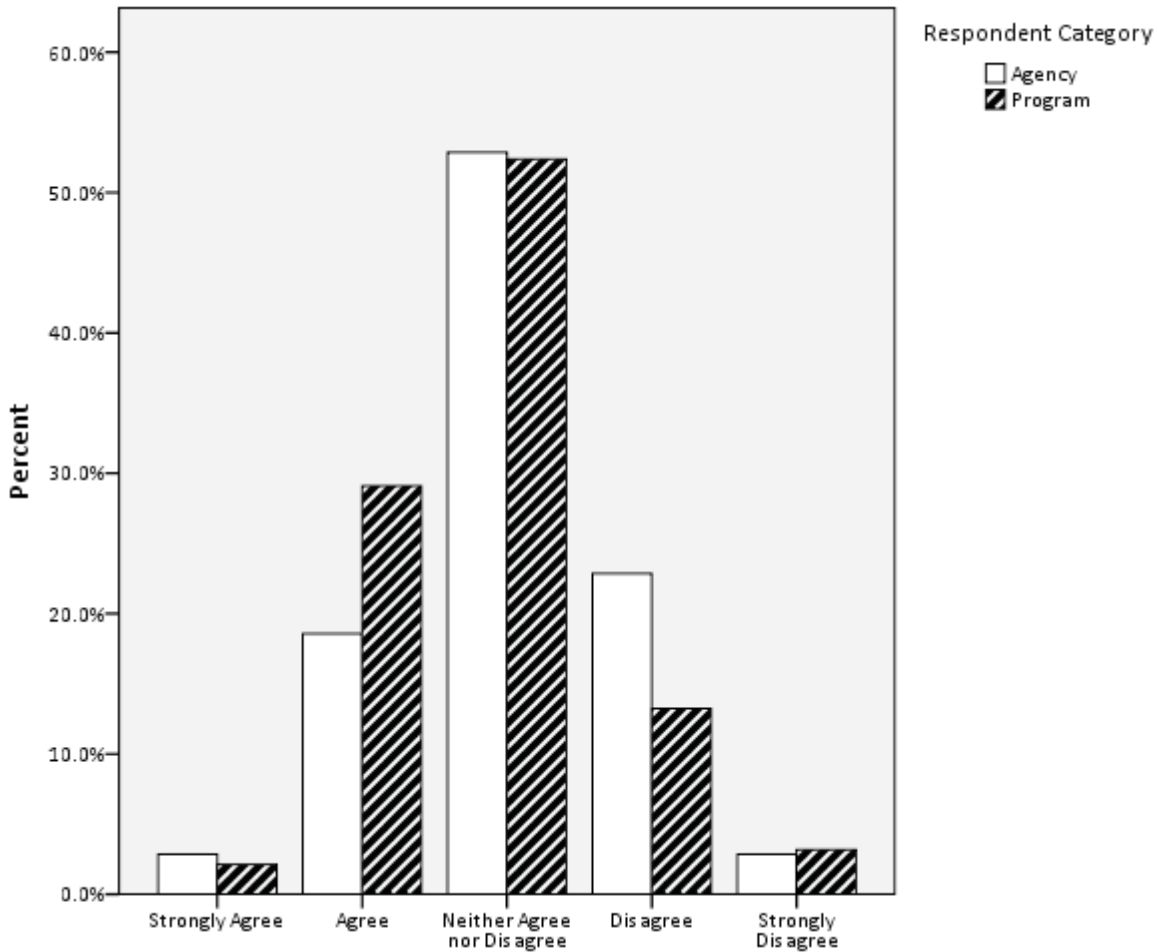
can be seen in Figure 1. Fully 68 percent of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that such an organization would prove beneficial and only 3 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Opinion was more evenly split on whether an existing agency could fill this role, with 31 percent either strongly agreeing or agreeing that such an agency exists, 52 percent neither agreeing nor disagreeing, and 16 percent either strongly disagreeing or disagreeing.

**Figure 1:** Youth serving agencies in Marion County could benefit from an organization that could coordinate research, evaluation, and fundraising.



**Figure 2:** There is an existing agency that can serve as a coordinating agency.



Those who disagreed that there is an existing agency that could fill this role were then asked if they believed such an agency should be created. There were a total of 64 responses to this question across both surveys. Of those who answered, 54 percent said that such an agency should be created and another 14 percent said that such an agency should not be created. The remaining 32 percent were not sure if a new agency should be created.

Agency survey respondents who stated that there is an existing agency that can fill this role were asked to name the agency or agencies (up to three responses) that could fill this role. Program survey respondents were asked to name just one candidate. On the agency survey, a total of 14 individuals answered this question. Responses include:

- McCoy (10 mentions),

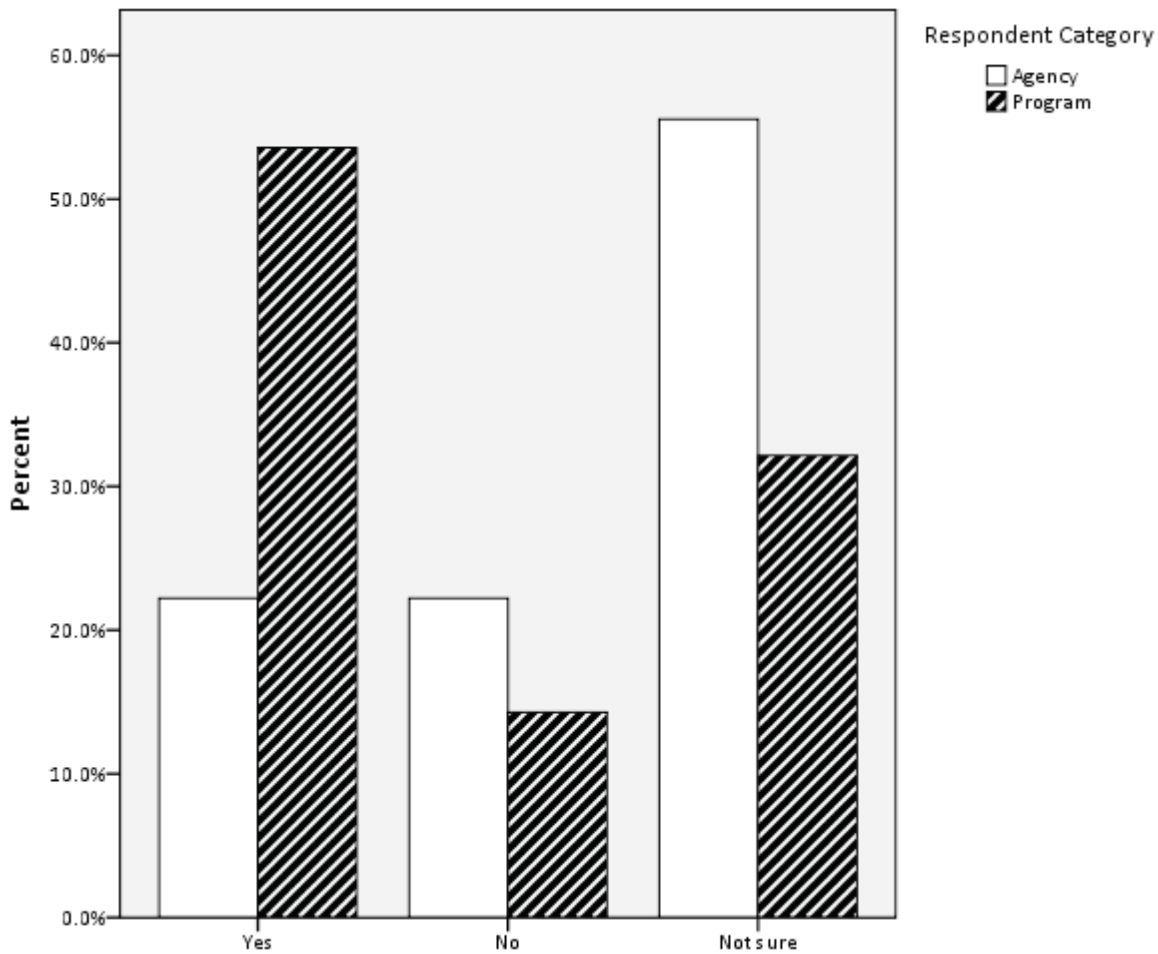
- Indiana Youth Institute (4 mentions),
- Central Indiana United Way (3 mentions),
- The Child and Adolescent Placement Program (1 mention),
- Indiana YouthPRO (1 mention),
- Indiana Youth Service Association (1 mention), and
- Choices (1 mention).

On the program survey, the most frequent responses included:

- McCoy (37 mentions)
- Choices (7 mentions)
- Indiana Youth Institute (5 mentions).

While these are both small samples, McCoy, the Indiana Youth Institute, and Choices are mentioned most frequently and even among these programs McCoy stands out as the one program mentioned most frequently.

**Figure 3:** Should a new agency be created?



*Research indicates that our best hope for creating public programs that deter child abuse, neglect, and delinquency is to create a comprehensive system of care that focuses not only on intervention, but also on prevention.*



## Thoughts for Policy Makers

These surveys have collected extensive information on youth-serving agencies and their programs in Marion County, which will be included in a directory of youth-serving agencies and programs. This directory will facilitate the location of relevant programs by those seeking services as well as those working to coordinate care, research, and funding of youth-serving agencies.

The surveys also revealed some important perceptions of youth-serving agencies and programs in Marion County. Service ratings were low for prevention, intervention, and treatment services with prevention services receiving the worst rating of the three. There is also strong agreement that there are gaps in services. We found that respondents to both surveys tended to have positive views of their interactions with other youth-serving agencies.

Respondents largely agreed that youth-serving agencies would benefit from an agency to coordinate research, evaluation, and fundraising. Respondents were evenly split on whether an agency that could fill this role currently existed. Among those who thought such an agency existed, McCoy was mentioned most frequently. Among those who thought no such agency currently existed, responses were split regarding whether or not such an agency should be created. Overall there is an abundance of support for a coordinating agency, but less agreement regarding whether an existing agency should fill this role or a new agency should be created.

The EIPC recommends the development of a Nonprofit Coordinating Agency. The Nonprofit Coordinating Agency would serve both as a liaison to state child-serving agencies (DCS, education, and juvenile justice) and as a source of infrastructure support to youth-serving agencies and organizations. A representative from the coordinating agency would serve on the larger Early Intervention Planning Council. The Nonprofit Coordinating Agency's primary mission would be to coordinate and enhance prevention and intervention efforts to reduce the number of children and families who enter the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The coordinating agency would serve several key functions in pursuit of this mission:

Facilitate collaboration between youth serving agencies through strategic partnerships, sharing of information, and services. These responsibilities include:

1. Identify and facilitate opportunities for joint ventures between organizations that might increase the eligibility for certain performance-based grants,
2. Conduct ongoing research on best practice and information dissemination, and
3. Create a comprehensive report profiling early intervention services and programs available in Marion County.

Promote the integration of early intervention services with formal services provided within education, mental health, DCS, and juvenile justice to improve the quality of services and reduce costs of service provision. Critical roles of the coordinating agency would be to:

1. Identify gaps in service provision and provide stakeholders with information on available community resources to address those gaps, and
2. Serve as a liaison to coordinate the various systemic reform efforts.

Coordinate the resource development to bring in public, private, and philanthropic dollars to support the expansion of early intervention programming. These activities would include:

1. Provide technical assistance for fundraising including proposal writing seminars and prospect research;
2. Develop an online database outlining potential funding sources for youth-serving agencies, including foundation grants and federal and state social services grants; and
3. Research the financing processes of neighboring (and possibly other) states and communities to identify innovative practices.

Lead the effort to enhance prevention and intervention efforts to reduce the number of children and families who enter the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. This may include"

1. Expansion of substance abuse treatment programs;
2. Accessibility/availability of quality child care; and
3. Parenting training and support programs.



In its second year, the coordinating agency would employ a full-time director of research and evaluation to develop a series of outcome indicators to measure key performance targets set by members of the EIPC. These indicators will measure efficiency of spending, monitor sources of funding, and evaluate the relative success of early intervention efforts measured by numbers of children served and what levels of services received. The coordinating agency would:

- Convene a service provider's outcome/data results group,
- Establish a baseline of current child welfare expenditures by type of services and the relative success of those efforts,
- Aggregate and analyze data from all EIPC stakeholders to develop common indicators related to specific time phased performance targets,
- Develop a centralized database to providing ongoing tracking of data, and
- Develop methods of data sharing between public service providers, DCS, juvenile justice, and the City-County Council.

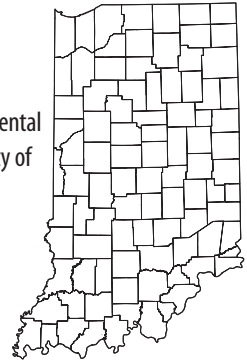
The director of research and evaluation would outline procedures to conduct annual internal audits of costs and services to ensure effective use of public dollars to provide services to children and families. The coordinating agency would provide assistance to all major stakeholders on data collection and evaluation methodology. These results would be published in an annual state of the children report and be used to demonstrate a return on investment and to facilitate ongoing community engagement and dialogue.



CENTER FOR HEALTH POLICY

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The Indiana University Center for Health Policy is a nonpartisan applied research organization in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis. Researchers at CHP work on critical policy issues that affect the quality of healthcare delivery and access to healthcare. CHP is one of three applied research centers currently affiliated with the Indiana University Public Policy Institute. The partner centers are the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment and the Center for Criminal Justice Research.



CHP conducted two surveys to determine the opinions of agency directors and program directors about the needs for a coordinating agency for youth-serving organizations. The information gathered will be included in a directory of youth-serving agencies and programs. This research was made possible by a grant from the City-County Council of Indianapolis and Marion County and carried out as part of the Public-Academic Partnership between the city of Indianapolis and IUPUI.

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