
Section 2.

4.b. History of Florida's Target Population

This document is a brief historical description of how Florida arrived at its current FINS/CINS target population, as explained by Dee Richter, formerly of the Florida Network of Youth and Family Services, followed by her suggestions for a process by which Louisiana might arrive at its own target population definition. It then presents a brief outline of how Vera would typically approach a target population analysis.

Florida's history:

- Runaway and Homeless Youth Act led to creation of CINS/FINS shelters
- Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act dictated that status offenders should not generally be placed in detention at all
- Florida's target population, as well as the use of the Florida Network for CINS/FINS services, was drawn directly from the passage of these two pieces of legislation (runaway, homeless, truant, and ungovernable youth.)
- Eventually recognized that many youth did not need shelter care, so created the non-residential services.
- Express exclusion of youth who are involved in the child welfare or delinquency systems based on the recognition that status offenders have distinct needs.

In order to define its target population, Dee suggests that Louisiana do the following:

- First, identify the existing needs by examining the young people who are already coming in to the system.
- Then, see if there are some kids you are currently serving who would be better served, or should be served, in a different system.
- Then, look at your capacity in light of your chosen model: how many kids can you serve *well*.
- Then, look to see what thresholds must be reached before a youth will come to you
- Finally, look at who is left out, and make a plan for future capacity building.

Vera's approach to a target population analysis:

- The first step in a target population analysis is to have clear definition of the youth the program is meant to serve
- Next, analyses are conducted to better understand the characteristics, presenting needs, risk, and so on, of youth currently being served by the program.
- Next, characteristics of the youth in the program are contrasted against the characteristics the program is meant to serve.
- If youth match up with whom the program intended to serve we can say that the program is serving its target population. If not, adjustments can be made in the referral and acceptance process of the program to ensure that the program is only serving youth it is intended to serve.

The following is a brief historical description of how Florida arrived at its current FINS/CINS target population, as explained by Dee Richter, formerly of the Florida Network of Youth and Family Services, followed by her suggestions for a process by which Louisiana might arrive at its own target population definition. In keeping with these suggestions, we then present a brief outline of how Vera would typically approach a target population analysis.

Florida's history:

The first steps toward the development of the current FINS/CINS target population (and system in general) were the passage of the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act, in response to which the first few of what are now the CINS/FINS shelters were created, and the broader Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act, which is a federal law that dictated not only that delinquency kids can't be locked up with adults, but that status offenders should not generally be placed in detention at all. Florida's target population, as well as the use of the Florida Network for CINS/FINS services, was drawn directly from the passage of these two pieces of legislation in 1974.

The JJDPa defined status offenders as runaway, homeless, truant, and ungovernable youth. Florida decided to stick with that definition, feeling that the federal government had made an important statement about the deinstitutionalization of these particular youth, who were not committing crimes but nonetheless getting wrapped up in the juvenile justice system. Then, when the Department of Juvenile Justice broke off from Health and Human Services, there was some debate about where status offenders should go. The Florida Network, which already happened to be serving runaway and homeless youth (though, at the time, those youth had to be referred to the Network by a state agency), advocated strongly for status offenders to be housed under DJJ because that was where all the "new agency" money was (budget went from 20 million to 37 million).

Truancy and ungovernable behaviors were then incorporated into the Florida Network status offender system to mirror the federal law. They had been identified by federal law as status offenders, so the Network wanted to serve them too. Moreover, the Network recognized a close relationship between all of these behaviors, and serving all status offenders tied in well with their mission – keep kids and families together. Essentially, anything that inadvertently has the potential to land a kid who has committed no crime in a locked setting away from the family, the Network wanted to serve.

In the mid 1980s, a senator made a case that many of these youth could be served well without needing to spend time in a shelter, and she led the charge to appropriate money for that purpose. This is when the non-residential component of the Florida system arose.

Another important aspect of the Florida target population is the express exclusion of youth who are involved in the child welfare or delinquency systems. This decision was made based on the recognition that status offenders have distinct needs.

Finally, the target population for the Florida FINS system is youth aged 10 to 17. Again, this decision was made in light of the intent of the federal law: if the system's goal is to address youth who are at risk of being swept up by the delinquency system and placed in detention, then 10 is about the youngest the system will need to address. In the case of truancy, if the youth is under 12, it is more of a child welfare issue than a status offending system.

In order to define its target population, Dee suggests that Louisiana do the following:

- First, identify the existing needs by examining the young people who are already coming in to the system.
- Then, see if there are some kids you are currently serving who would be better served, or should be served, in a different system. (E.g., is a status offender system really the right place for a 7 year old? If they are acting out uncontrollably, this might more likely be a child welfare issue).
- Then, look at your capacity in light of your chosen model: how many kids can you serve *well*. (It is better to choose a model and serve a narrow population well within that model than to do a weaker job with more kids).
 - As part of this, make sure that these youth can be served within this model no matter what agency FINS is housed under. You want your system to stand the test of time, which will inevitably include many big changes in the support structure.
- Then, look to see what thresholds must be reached before a youth will come to you (e.g., what should school do before referring to FINS, *how* truant does a kid have to be to be served?)
- Finally, look at who is left out, and make a plan for future capacity building. In other words, what kids should FINS serve that it can't serve now? Take that information to the legislature.

Vera's approach to a target population analysis:

- The first step in a target population analysis is to have clear definition of the youth the program is meant to serve (the program's target population, based on program goals, and objectives (or in this case what defines a status offender in LA)).
- Next, analyses are conducted to better understand the characteristics, presenting needs, risk, and so on, of youth currently being served by the program.
- Next, characteristics of the youth in the program are contrasted against the characteristics the program is meant to serve.
- If youth match up with whom the program intended to serve we can say that the program is serving its target population. If not, adjustments can be made in the referral and acceptance process of the program to ensure that the program is only serving youth it is intended to serve.