I. County Juvenile Services Comprehensive Plan
Hamilton County
January 1, 2009 – December 31, 2011

Person responsible for completing plan and chair of community team:

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Chair of county board:

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II. Community Team

a. The community team is Family Connections. This is an informal team of individuals from the community who are either representing a particular agency or have interest in the well-being of youth and families. It has been in existence for 13 years, and meets approximately once per month. It does not have officers or committees.

b. Participants in the community team:

Suzanne Rauert, Middle School Counselor, srauert@esu9.org
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Maggie Rasmussen, High School Counselor, mras@esu9.org
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Community Members Contributing to Juvenile Services Plan

Linda Senff, County Judge
Angela Moural, Giltner School Counselor
Dorothy Molczyk, Licensed Counselor
Kirk Handrup, Hamilton County Sheriff
Scott & Chris Cerveny, Youth Center Directors
Roger Levering, Youth Center Board member
Roger Scott, Youth Center Board member
Mike Powell, Hamilton County Attorney
Sara Cline, Hamilton County Probation Officer
Merwyn Davidson, former Youth Center Director

III. JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM ANALYSIS TOOL

a. The system point questionnaires were distributed to the appropriate county officials and used as the basis for a planning meeting facilitated by Julie Rogers from the Crime Commission. The summary is below. Results from this report and discussion from this meeting are included in the content of this plan. (Appendix A)

Summary:

Hamilton County juvenile justice professionals and interested community members are a very committed group, working together to address the needs of youth in their community.

The Youth Center in Aurora is an example of very strong community commitment to 6th – 12th grade youth by providing a structured, healthy environment outside of school. The Youth Center is open to any youth in the county. Some of the main tenets of the Youth Center are that all are treated equally, an emphasis on respect, and positive reinforcement.

There is some concern that uncontrollable or ungovernable cases are rising in Hamilton County. Though the 2005-2007 data does not necessarily show that to be the case, it is important to monitor and adjust programming, particularly prevention, parental, and mentoring programming accordingly, before a law violation occurs.

As a result of the discussions had for the juvenile system analysis in Hamilton County, the following may be considered:

1) Diversion—partnering with another county or counties

Currently, no formal diversion program exists in Hamilton County, but there is an interest by community members to have that option for youthful offenders with the thought that diversion programming is better for kids than just getting a fine. Because the small numbers would not justify a stand alone diversion program in Hamilton County, the county could look to partner with surrounding counties to provide diversion to youth.

2) Prevention programming

The Youth Center provides excellent programming to youth in Hamilton County. At risk youth need something constructive to engage them and fill their time. Continuing to strengthen this program through after school programming, community service referral resource, event coordination, supervised activities, and informal mentoring is important.

Enhancing drug and alcohol education programs might be another component of prevention programming that is considered. These types of program might be implemented for youth, parents, and the community at large.

3) Parental involvement

Parental involvement is as important as it ever was to community members in Hamilton County. Finding creative way to involve parents in teenagers' activities is a challenge, particularly to encourage participation as it can not be forced. Communicating to parents so they know where they can turn for help and services for their children is also important.

4) Truancy prevention

A coordinated effort between the schools and the county attorney's office to establish truancy prevention procedures, processes, and definitions would be beneficial to ensuring kids stays in school. Clearly communicating among the schools, parents, youth, and other parties about the established criteria is key.

Community Input

b. Surveys were distributed (via Survey Monkey) to adults and youth in the community to assess their opinion on youth issues. Responses were requested asking what resources (preventative factors) were available for youth, what issues were the greatest concern, what were suggested ways to address those issues, and how effective did they perceive the law enforcement/court system were in dealing with youth violations.

Summary of results:
1. Adults identified these resources as preventative factors for youth in the community: TeamMates, DARE, Youth Center, school programs, Optimist sports, Boy/Girl Scouts, 4-H, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, drug prevention team, church youth groups, 12th St Cinema.

Youth identified these activities: Youth Center, bowling, youth group, movies, 4-H, sports, school organizations, Boy/Girl scouts.

2. Both adults and youth were asked what were there greatest (youth) concerns.

Adult responses:

*not enough parent involvement; need for parenting skills
*need for places for youth to work off community service hours
*drugs, alcohol and underage sex
*activities for youth not involved in sports

Youth survey included a list with these possible responses (with percentage choosing each):

*boredom - 58%
*getting along at school - 42%
*relationships with opposite sex - 26%
*drugs - 21%
*cutting - 16%
*relationships with parents - 16%
*alcohol - 10.5%
*smoking/chewing - 5%
*suicide - 1%
*any other - 0%

3. Adults were asked how to address their concerns.

*Youth Center & Teammates better utilized
*More parental involvement
*Education, particularly about consequences of choices

Youth were asked what they wished they had to help them with their issues. These responses were possibilities:

*someone to talk to - 32%
*positive activities - 32%
*courage - 26%
*a safe place to hang out - 21%
*relationship skills - 16%
*a real friend - 16%
*employment - 0%
*what else?

One answered this way: a parent, someone I can talk to about personal stuff

4. In regards to violence in the schools, neither adults nor youth felt that it was a large issue. Bullying was identified by adults as the biggest concern.

5. Community surveys from adults indicated concerns with the law enforcement procedures:

*Law enforcement would be more effective if parents were more involved and taking responsibility for their children.
*There needs to be more communication with the school.

Youth responses:

*The majority felt that law enforcement is quite effective.
*One concern is for fairness – getting the whole story.
*Tougher discipline was suggested to improve the juvenile justice procedures.

6. 70% of adults felt drug abuse was either increasing slowly or rapidly. Substances abused included: alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, club drugs, meth.

Youth, on the contrary, said that drug abuse was stabilizing or decreasing slowly. Substances abused included: marijuana, meth, alcohol, cigarettes.

7. Adults identified these programs as having a positive impact on substance abuse: school assemblies, DARE, Youth Center, church youth groups, scouting, TeamMates, Big Brother/Big Sisters, drug prevention team, positive adult example.

Youth identified these items as making a positive impact on substance abuse: not hanging around people who do drugs, DARE, activities/sports, police more alert, Youth Center.

8. Adults identified these possible ways to address the issues: school assemblies, expand use of Youth Center, after school and summer programming, parent programs, getting youth involved in the community.

Youth were asked what change would make their life better. These responses related to substance abuse: adults stop doing drugs, youth stop doing drugs/drinking. **These responses give a glimpse of family issues: being able to talk to family members, a better place for mother to live away from abusive live-in, need money to pay bills, a mom/dad.**

IV. Community Socio-Economics

a. Hamilton County is located just east of Grand Island and 75 miles west of Lincoln. The county seat is Aurora, a very progressive community of about 4250 population. There are three main highways intersecting the county: Interstate 80 crosses the county about three miles south of Aurora. Highway 34 is an east/west highway, going through the towns of Hampton and Aurora. Phillips and Giltner are located several miles from this highway, but is their closest major highway. Highway 14 is the north/south highway going through the county. It also goes through Aurora, with the smaller communities of Stockham, Marquette and Hordville located close to this highway.
b. The main source of income in this county is farming, but there are also several large manufacturing plants and companies that provide income for many. (IAMS, ethanol plant, Aurora Cooperative, BonnaVilla, Memorial Health Care, Hamilton Telecommunications, the schools in Aurora, Hampton and Giltner are the larger employers.) The 2000 census indicates that 69.5% of the population over the age of 16 were employed. Median household income was $40,277; per capita income was $17,590. 8.8% of the families with children under 18 years were below the poverty level. That number increased to 34.9% of female householders with children under 18 who were below the poverty level.
c. The population of Hamilton County, according to the 2000 Census, is 9,403, with 2954 of that number being youth ages 0-19. The county is 99.0% white by race. 1% of the population is Hispanic. 38.8% of the households include youth under 18. 4.1% of the population are female householders with children under 18.
d. There are three public schools and one private elementary school in the county, with students from the NE part of the county attending schools in neighboring counties. Other educational assets in the county are the Alice M Farr Library, Plainsman Museum, the Edgerton Explorit Center, L'Eglise Art Center, and Prairie Plains Resource Institute. Each of these organizations provide opportunities in varied ways – history, science, art and natural resources – and most offer programs for youth participation. This is a community that has invested considerable resources to provide the "extras" that many communities do not enjoy. Youth in this county do make use of these opportunities, but most could be more fully utilized if there were adequate funding for programming and staff and more volunteers available to help.

V. Identified Priority Areas

Based on survey results, discussions with community team, advisory groups, counselors and county board, these priority areas of need are identified:

1. Positive activities and positive relationships.

The surveys of adults and youth both identify positive activities as ways to address youth concerns and having an impact on substance abuse. (see survey summary in section IIIb above) This is not seen as a need to increase the number of activities available as much as it is getting more youth involved in those already in the community, particularly the Youth Center and TeamMates. Another need identified by youth was for positive relationships with others. This need for better relationships was expressed as being concerned about getting along at school, concerned about relationships with the opposite sex and concerned about relationships with their parents.

2. Parent involvement with their children.

National research rates parent involvement with their children as the greatest single deterrent to undesirable behavior. Lack of parental involvement and lack of parenting skills are issues that have been identified in past community plans, but must continue to be addressed. It is probably the most challenging, as the common perception of parenting classes is that it is a sign of failure, rather than a sign of strength. For example, the Family Nights that were held in previous years provided a perfect opportunity – free meal, free child care, excellent educational program – but attendance was very limited.

3. Drug and alcohol awareness and education for community/parents/youth.

This need was identified three years ago, and as a result, a county-wide drug awareness/prevention team has been organized and a facilitator hired. They are actively developing strategies to keep parents, teachers and others in the community abreast on issues surrounding drug/alcohol use and abuse. The survey results this year again identify the importance of directing efforts towards prevention as a key issue. One approach suggested was to raise the awareness of the consequences of choosing to use drugs and alcohol.

VI. Strategies

1. Positive activities and positive relationships.

*The Youth Center in Aurora, open to youth 6 - 12th grades, continues to be the most effective avenue for positive, supervised youth activities in this community. It is important that the Center continues to remain open late on weekends through hiring supervisors in addition to the Center Directors. This provides positive activities for youth not involved in sports, a safe environment and opportunity to develop relationships with caring adults. More volunteers need to be recruited to assist with supervision and to build relationships.

*Expand the programming available at the Youth Center to potentially increase the number of youth participants. Under the direction of the Youth Center Board, explore ways to get parents and more volunteers involved, to offer workshops to youth to address relationship issues identified in the surveys and potentially offer tutoring/mentoring in after school hours.

*Continue summer activities for the middle and high school youth. In the past there have been "clubs" as drama, scrap booking, and art. These types of groups, as well as more, need to be available to youth at no cost. A facilitator will be hired to coordinate and supervise these activities.

*Community organizations will be made aware of the need that exists for appropriate projects and supervision of youth needing to work off community service hours.

**Implementation will be carried out by the Youth Center Directors and their board. This is a continuation of what has been done in the past, but with different directors. This transition has not been easy, but it does give an opportunity for the staff and board to look at new directions they can take in order to attract more youth and meet the needs they have identified. It is the intent of the community that the Youth Center not charge an admission fee, and only minimal fees for snacks. This keeps the facility available to everyone. The County Commissioners have given their support for the Youth Center by budgeting money this current fiscal year which can help pay for utilities and maintenance. Funds from the Juvenile Services County Aid Funds are used to pay a stipend for additional supervisors (not the directors), purchase equipment and supplies.

2. Parent involvement with their children.

*Youth, school officials, law enforcement and others working with youth identify the need for parents to be more involved with their children. National research also confirms the value of parental involvement with their children as the best deterrent to the use of drugs and alcohol. However, too many parents do not understand the impact they can have, or take

advantage of those opportunities. This information needs to be more widely communicated in the county. Especially with recent media coverage of the Safe Haven Law, the awareness of the need for parent education and responsibility has been heightened. Through a variety of avenues – newspaper, school newsletters, Internet and others – parents will be encouraged to see education as a sign of strength rather than weakness, and see the importance of being an involved parent, regardless of the age of the child.

**Implementation will be carried out by UNL Extension in cooperation with the Youth Center and schools. A free e-newsletter for parents is being developed which will be offered to all parents in the county. Projected time-line for this to be available will be late summer/fall of 2009. The local drug awareness team and Youth Center will also be involved with encouraging parent involvement. This will be an on-going focus.

3. Drug and alcohol awareness and education for community/parents/youth.

*The COPE drug awareness team will continue to provide education for the community, parents and youth. The emphasis will be on prevention and the consequences of choices made. One of their goals is to provide information for parents, teachers and others in the community who impact youth. They use a variety of methods: brochures, news releases, public meetings.

**Implementation will be carried out by the COPE team, in cooperation with the Youth Center and other groups in the community.

Appendix A

HAMILTON COUNTY

JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM ANALYSIS TOOL

(COMMUNITY PLANNING DECISION POINT ANALYSIS)

The Juvenile Justice System Analysis Tool (Tool) was developed by the Juvenile Justice Institute at the University of Nebraska at Omaha in conjunction with the Nebraska Crime Commission to assist in County Juvenile Services Comprehensive Planning.

The Tool consists of twelve areas of decision points that make up the formal juvenile justice system in Nebraska. Various factors are present at each decision point—oftentimes changing from year to year based on state or county dynamics within the system such as changes in policies, programs, and/or personnel.

There are formal factors dictating certain decision points in the system, such as statutory authority. In addition, each county or community has unique factors surrounding certain decision points within the local county juvenile justice system. Identifying such informal factors helps to understand and assess juvenile justice needs and issues in individual locales.

Available data might also inform the factors surrounding a data point. Anecdotal data might be compared with statistical data, for example, to assess the true state of the system. County data is assessed when applying the Tool where applicable.

Hamilton County

A Hamilton County Comprehensive Plan meeting was held October 2008. Those present included local representatives from the schools, the Youth Center, counseling services, the Sheriff's Department, the county/juvenile court (judge), the extension office, the faith community, and the community at large.

Each of the twelve decision points were discussed as they relate to the juvenile justice system in Hamilton County.

The following analysis names the decision point and states any *noteworthy* issue identified or problem acknowledged at the particular stage, particularly since the last submission of the comprehensive juvenile services plan for Hamilton County. Not all decision points are commented on. An assessment of the Hamilton County data has been completed as part of applying the Tool. Such data is referenced throughout this report when necessary to fully analyze a certain decision point.

NEBRASKA JUVENILE COURT REPORT - HAMILTON COUNTY
(Nebraska Crime Commission)

	2005	2006	2007
ARRESTS	13	6	2
OFFENSES			
3rd Degree Assault	1	0	0
Sexual Assault - 1st	0	2	0
Burglary	0	0	1
Drug - Felony	0	0	3
Theft > $1500	0	0	1
Theft < $500	0	1	0
Theft < $200	2	1	0
Crim Mischief - Misd	1	5	1
Major Trespass	1	0	3
Weapon - Misd	1	1	0
Disturbing Peace	3	0	2
Other Felony	0	0	1
Other Misdemeanor	9	10	7
Truancy	0	0	0
Ungovernable Behavior	1	3	3
Possession of Alcohol	11	4	7
Other Status	1	8	0
Neglect	2	1	1
Dependent	2	0	0
Other/Unknown	9	4	6
TOTAL	**44**	**40**	**36**

Hamilton County Data

Hamilton County has a juvenile population (ages 0 – 18 years old) of almost 3000, according to the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau. (http://factfinder.census.gov)

When comparing Hamilton County juvenile offense data from 2005 through 2007 to statewide data during the same time period, no significant differences can be identified. Arrests of 0-17 year olds in Hamilton County seems to have declined in that period—13 juvenile arrests in 2005, 6 juvenile arrests in 2006, and 2 juvenile arrests in 2007 were reported.

Decision Points:

Arrest/Citation (Police/Law Enforcement)

Whether an information report should be filed, or what offense, if any, under which juvenile should be cited or arrested

Whether to cite or arrest juvenile for juvenile or adult

Whether to take juvenile into custody or to cite and release

Notes:

This decision depends on the type of offense and the individual. Usually, traffic offenses are cited and released except for DWIs. Parents are contacted after citing. Probation makes the custody determination.

Initial Detention (Probation)

Whether juvenile should be detained or released

Notes:

Juveniles are transported to either Lancaster County or Madison County when detention is required. Transportation is usually not an issue, but personnel issues do arise. For example, if there is a female juvenile needing transporting and no female deputy is working, an extra dispatcher must be called to go as well.

Charge Juvenile (County Attorney)

Whether to prosecute juvenile

Notes:

Law enforcement forwards all appropriate reports to the county attorney's office in a timely manner for decisions on whether to prosecute a juvenile.

Whether youth should be prosecuted as juvenile or adult

Notes:

Most minor in possession cases are filed in adult court. All other cases are reviewed on a case-by-case basis. Hamilton County does not encounter very young offenders like other parts of the state.

Offense(s) for which juvenile should be charged

Pre-Adjudication Detention (Juvenile Court Judge)

Whether juvenile detained at the time of citation/arrest should continue in detention or out-of-home

placement pending adjudication

Notes:

The least restrictive placement for the juvenile is the priority pending adjudication. The court does not use electronic monitoring at this stage. Usually, a juvenile is placed with a suitable parent or guardian. Most juveniles are not put in detention pending adjudication.

Probable Cause Hearing (Juvenile Court Judge)

Whether State can show that probable cause exists that juvenile is within the jurisdiction of the court

Notes:

This is a very straightforward process in Hamilton County and is done as soon as possible.

Competency Evaluation (Juvenile Court Judge)

Whether juvenile is competent to participate in the proceedings

Notes:

Most juveniles, if in juvenile court on a serious matter, will ask for counsel. At times, attorneys representing the juvenile will request a competency evaluation but not often.

Whether juvenile is "responsible" for his/her acts

Adjudication (Juvenile Court Judge)

Whether juvenile is, beyond a reasonable doubt, "a person described by §43-247"

Whether to order probation to conduct a pre-disposition investigation (PDI)

Whether to order OJS evaluation

Whether to order a PDI and an OJS evaluation

Notes:

The least restrictive placement is absolutely preferred, with the understanding and reality that the services offered or available through placement on Probation or with OJS are different. The decision to order either a PDI or OJS evaluation is based on those understandings.

Both a PDI and an OJS evaluation are rarely ordered together in Hamilton County.

It was noted that school counselors are not necessarily contacted when a PDI is being conducted and OJS does have contact with the schools. Communication with the schools usually happens after a juvenile is place on Probation or with HHS/OJS.

Truancy is sometimes and issue, but it is a tough one because of lack of data, defining "truancy" consistently between agencies, and communication.

Disposition (Juvenile Court Judge)

Whether to place juvenile on probation

Whether to commit juvenile to the Office of Juvenile Services (OJS)

Whether to place juvenile on probation and commit juvenile to HHS or OJS

Notes:

The juvenile court judge tries to keep the juvenile on Probation as long as possible, though more services are available when the juvenile is placed with OJS.

Sometimes a juvenile will be placed on Probation and committed to HHS or OJS, especially if the juvenile is in need of a lot of services.

Administrative Sanctions (Probation)

Whether to impose administrative sanctions

Notes:

The preference is to impose administrative sanctions whenever possible before Probation makes a referral to revoke.

Motion to Revoke Probation (County Attorney)

Whether to file a motion to revoke probation

Modification/Revocation of Probation (Juvenile Court Judge)

Whether to modify or revoke probation

Notes:

After a violation of Probation is proven, the judge will highly consider the Probation officer's recommendation to revoke Probation, order an OJS evaluation, continue the juvenile on Probation, or a combination of such. Before a juvenile's Probation is revoked, the school is contacted to ascertain the juvenile's success in school which factors into the decision.

Setting Aside Adjudication (Juvenile Court Judge)

Whether juvenile has satisfactorily completed his or her probation and supervision or the treatment program of his or her commitment

Whether juvenile should be discharged from custody and supervision of OJS

Notes:

The court decides whether the juvenile has completed his or her supervision. Once a juvenile is placed with OJS and goes to the YRTC, OJS decides when the juvenile is discharged from custody.

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