Following is a comentary by Susan Richardson, National Executive Director for Reclaiming Futures.

Almost two million American youth need treatment for alcohol and other drug use or abuse. But only 1 in 20 will receive treatment.

Research shows that teens with substance abuse problems are more likely to break the law, behave violently or drop out of school. In fact, 4 out of 5 young people in the juvenile justice system commit crimes while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Young people need to be held accountable when they break the law. Unless they receive treatment for a substance abuse problem that helped them get in trouble in the first place, they will often find themselves back in juvenile court again and again.

That's where Reclaiming Futures comes in. By connecting juvenile courts with treatment providers and community members, we help teens overcome drugs, alcohol and crime.

We accomplish this by creating teams of juvenile court judges, probation officers, substance abuse treatment professionals and community members. Using an evidence-based six-step model, the team works together to ensure that teens get the treatment and services they need, while tracking their progress and identifying service gaps.

So how does the model work?

- Step 1: Initial Screening: As soon as possible after being referred to the juvenile justice system, youth are screened for possible substance abuse problems.
- Step 2: Initial Assessment: Teens with possible substance abuse problems are assessed using a reputable tool to measure their use of alcohol and other drugs, individual and family risks, needs and strengths. This allows the team to measure the severity of the problem, which informs the treatment plan.
- Step 3: Service Coordination: The team designs and coordinates an intervention plan that is family driven, spans agency boundaries and draws upon community-based resources.
- Step 4: Initiation: Treatment begins.
- Step 5: Engagement: The team engages both the teens and their families and follows up with them during treatment.
- Step 6: Transition: Teens transition out of agency-based treatment services. The team makes sure that kids and their families have community resources and support in place, in order to lower the risk of relapse and recidivism.

It's essential for the family and community to be involved throughout the process because almost every young person who appears in juvenile court eventually returns home. In order to stay drug and crime free, teens need positive mentors and caring adults in their lives. They also need help with completing school and finding a job, which is why Step 6 is so important – troubled young people need help transitioning from the juvenile system to a happy and

productive adult life.

We're not the only ones who understand the importance of connecting teens with quality treatment and care. The Obama Administration's 2012 National Drug Control Strategy prioritizes treatment and coordinated care to people struggling with addiction. As part of the Strategy, we are working with the Administration to spread our model throughout the United States to improve treatment for youth involved with the juvenile justice system. We believe we are a solution for the entire nation.

To learn more about Alcohol, Drugs and Youth, click here.

To learn more about Reclaiming Futures, please visit www.reclaimingfutures.org.