

Anne M. Nelsen

President – National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA)
2000-2002



Anne Nelsen, attending a protests at the Utah state capitol and enjoying travel to Scotland.

Anne first represented detention and then, for many years, the corrections side of the juvenile justice continuum in NPJS. Anne served as president of the National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) when The Partnership (NPJS) was founded, representing NJDA on the NPJS Board. She later served as president of the National Association of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (NAJCA), representing that organization on the NPJS Board. Anne's juvenile justice career path included working for the Utah Division of Youth Corrections (later renamed the Division of Juvenile Justice Services) in various capacities. Since retirement from her state work in 2005, Anne has worked as a juvenile justice consultant. That work has included facility assessments, facility monitoring following litigation, policy and standards development, training, auditing and working as an expert witness in numerous cases throughout the country. She serves as a Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) auditor. Anne serviced on the NPJS Board from the time of the founding of the Partnership until this January. She remains active in NPJS serving and dedicated to its mission of serving our profession.

Anne initially became involved with NJDA when Charly Skaggs was president of the Association. He recruited representatives from every state, which provided the opportunity to meet and collaborate with peers from around the country. Involvement in NJDA was an exciting chance to learn and grow as a professional while at the same time making a contribution.

The period of Anne's presidency was a pivotal time for NJDA. Discussions had begun and were proceeding to merge four membership organizations together to become stronger by "minimizing duplication and maximizing better resources and skills" to serve youth clients. This partnership was designed to achieve the goal of strength in unity. The four founding groups recognized that each offered unique perspectives and expertise, which they believed would prove to be more resourceful together. NJDA, NAJCA, the Juvenile Justice Trainers Association (JJTA), and the Council for Educators of At-Risk and Delinquent Youth (CEARDY) had joined forces under an umbrella organization known as the National Partnership for Juvenile Services or NPJS.

Anne states that the primary focus of NJDA/NPJS and the field is to encourage best practice in order to serve youth, families, communities and professionals involved in the juvenile justice field. It is important for juvenile detention and corrections facilities to provide positive and grow-promoting services to youth in order to enhance their future opportunities while ensuring community safety. The four associations that comprise NPJS work together to meet the needs of troubled young people through such activities as staff development and training, research, curriculum development and consulting on best practices.

Anne stated that, since her presidency, one of the most significant advancements in the field is the recognition that appropriate mental healthcare services should be available to youth in the juvenile justice system. From screening and assessment, diagnosis and treatment, quality mental healthcare is critical. Recent research around issues like trauma, youth suicide and substance use and abuse further verify the need for quality assessment and intervention.

As it looks toward the future, Anne feels that NJDA/NPJS needs to continue to be very supportive of staff in the juvenile justice system and continue to advocate for meeting their needs. It is hoped that The Partnership can collaborate with the federal government, private foundations and child advocacy groups to address those needs, using evidence-based approaches.

And finally, Anne stated that all parties involved – judges, the courts, law enforcement agencies and juvenile justice professionals -- should work together to achieve the common goal of minimizing the need for juvenile confinement, which should be limited and always a last resort or option.

We have to always remember: All kids / all children, deserve advocacy. They our our kids. We are not facility people, we are kid people.