

Dr. Barbara Dooley

President – National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA)

1998-2000



Barbara Dooley loves traveling – heading to Tybee Island in October, 2017 with family to celebrate her birthday and to Costa Rica in January 2018.

Dr. Barbara Dooley holds the distinction of being the first female president of the National Juvenile Detention Association, but her career didn't begin in juvenile justice. An Alabama graduate with a BA in Sociology and Speech, Dr. Dooley was given an emergency teaching certificate to teach in a Special Education class in Memphis. Even today, Dr. Dooley refers to this experience – 16 special education children, one of every diagnosis, as the best teaching year she ever had. Following her husband as he “climbed the corporate ladder”, Dr. Dooley taught in multiple educational settings –elementary through college and in many states including Tennessee, Florida, Indiana, and Rhode Island. When the family moved to Ann Arbor, Michigan Barbara Dooley became Dr. Dooley, earning her Ph.D. from the University of Michigan.

While in Rhode Island Dr. Dooley worked for a Family Services agency supervising the preventative mental health department. When the family was returned to Tennessee, Dr. Dooley planned to take a job with the State of Tennessee as Regional Director of the Healthy Children's Initiative. However, the Juvenile Judge was determined that she would work for the Juvenile Court Services. And that was that. For the next nineteen years Dr. Dooley worked for the Madison County Juvenile Court Services in various roles including the head of the Tennessee Juvenile Justice Training Center, the Assistant Director of the Madison County Juvenile Court Services and eventually the Director.

It was during her during her early years with Madison County that another Tennessean, Betty Adams told her about a meeting in Nashville that she needed to attend. This was her first meeting with the National Juvenile Detention Association. At the meeting, Dr. Dooley remembers meeting great people and being captivated by Charley Skaggs. She immediately joined the Association. True to Dr. Dooley's personality, joining meant being active, so she looked for jobs to do in the Association and landed on the Education Committee.

As noted, Dr. Dooley was the first female president of the NJDA. She did point out to this interviewer however, that she had run in the previous election and did not win. Dr. Dooley stated that her main goals during her term as president were to: 1.) get representation in NJDA from each of the 50 states, 2.) connect the way juvenile justice

services were delivered across the 50 states, focusing on not reinventing the wheel, 3.) provide information about training and technical assistance resources available from the Federal government that facilities might not be aware of, and 4.) promoting networking. Dr. Dooley's famous mantra at the NJDA conferences during her tenure was, "It's time to fraternize and cross fertilize."

There were several national issues during the time of Dr. Dooley's presidency that she hopes the Association, through her, the Board and the CEO's leadership were able to address, namely, the transfer of juveniles into the adult system without the proper safeguards, keeping juveniles and adults separate and keeping the sheriffs out of the business of running juvenile facilities, the staff to resident ratio requirements and the creation of monster size facilities which no one in the field thought created a good environment. In addition to these issues, Dr. Dooley felt that this was a time where NJDA, through the work of CEO Earl Dunlap had the ability to impact decisions on the state and federal level. NJDA was a strong advocacy voice and did great work in identifying best practices. Dr. Dooley stated that these two – advocacy and best practices must go hand-in-hand when working to improve conditions of confinement.

Since her presidency, Dr. Dooley noted that the advancements in programming – specifically the Cognitive Behavior Approach that is being adopted by facilities and states is probably the most helpful for youth. She is also encouraged by the move toward community-based placements in lieu of institutions and philosophically, viewing the child as only one part of the Juvenile Court Services client which also must include family and community.

According to Dr. Dooley, the future of NJDA/NPJS is dependent on appropriate levels of funding because one level of subsistence is necessary to survive, but more than that is necessary to thrive and truly help the field. The staff in juvenile facilities must have training in order to develop the skills necessary to hold youth accountable and teach them a better way.

One last thought from Dr. Dooley – People have to realize that it all comes back to relationships. It was relationships then, it's relationships now. Relationships are paramount, but that doesn't mean they are permissive. WE have to understand the criticality of understanding child development, and how to create boundaries, establish order, rules, structure, and an environment where youth can trust and feel safe. I still believe in something Dave Roush use to say when he would do audits, "Would I want my son or daughter in this facility?"