

Steven Kossman

President – National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA)
1992-1994



Bishop Steven Kossman officiating the wedding of his youngest daughter

Steven Kossman's career began forty years ago in the Community Services Unit in the Juvenile Division of the Illinois Department of Corrections. This was community organizing work developing and supporting programs and services that were intended to keep at-risk kids out of the system. Mr. Kossman's final position was as an Administrator of Grants-In-Aid for that same purposes. While in this position Kossman was also the Coordinator of the Youth Mandate initiative for the State of Illinois.

Following his start in Illinois, Kossman moved to Colorado where he was Director of Youth Services in Larimer County. This was also work aimed at keeping kids out of the system. During his stint in Colorado, he was President of the Colorado Youth Alternatives Council (the statewide coalition of youth serving agencies).

After Colorado, Mr. Kossman was off to San Antonio, TX where he was the Superintendent of the juvenile detention center and then the Deputy Director of Institutional Services. Mr. Kossman stated that he saw this as his opportunity to engage in a campaign to obtain funding for a much needed new facility. The one he took over had been a warehouse for voting machines and had been converted to something of a warehouse for children. Neglect and abuse were the milieu of the institution. They experienced a dramatic turnover of staff in the first year he was there. By the time they moved into the new facility, operations were considered a model for its design and the values it manifested in all aspects of programming and care.

Mr. Kossman's next position was as Deputy Director of the Juvenile Department in Dallas. He then became the Director and Chief Probation Officer and had the privilege of engaging in the design of a new juvenile detention facility and probation offices.

After returning to Illinois, Mr. Kossman became the first Superintendent of a new juvenile detention center in McLean County. Mr. Kossman viewed this as a wonderful challenge because it entailed tweaking the design and then hiring and training an entire staff (direct care, supervisors, and Administrators) along with the completing the development of all programs and services. It became the first facility of its kind in Illinois to receive accreditation from both the American Corrections Association (ACA) and the National Commission on Correctional Health Care (NCCHC). Mr. Kossman was asked by Peoria County to be an uncompensated consultant in the design of a new Juvenile Detention Center there. It was during that process that they created a new position of Director of Probation and Court Services (Adult and Juvenile Probation, Juvenile Detention and the operation of the Therapeutic Jurisprudence Courts) and he was invited to apply. As Peoria was his hometown, he was honored to spend the next 13 years in the position from which he retired in 2010. From 1990 forward, Mr. Kossman was also an Adjunct Professor in Juvenile Justice and Criminal Justice. Over the next twenty years, he taught the equivalent of ten and a half full-time academic years in addition to the full-time positions he held as a practitioner.

Mr. Kossman became involved with the National Juvenile Detention Association early on in his near 15 years in Texas; he met Charley Skaggs (Tarrant County) and Jim Martens (Harris County) who encouraged him to become involved with NJDA. Kossman attended his first national conference in Boston MA. He became involved in the committee structure of the Association and immediately found colleagues from around the country who were struggling with similar issues in their work. This presented the opportunity to share strategies with people who held similar values and beliefs about the work. Mr. Kossman was offered and given the honor of hosting a national NJDA conference while he was working in San Antonio. By that time, he had gotten to know most all of the "usual suspects" then involved. Mr. Kossman began to talk regularly with David Roush and Earl Dunlap about the field from a national perspective.

Upon becoming President of the Association, Mr. Kossman's single most important goal toward advancing the mission and purpose of the National Juvenile Detention Association was through the development and promulgation of Position Papers on salient issues in the field that we presented a voice from and for the practitioners who had no national voice until then.

During his presidency of NJDA Mr. Kossman believes that the definition of the appropriate use of Juvenile Detention was the greatest need for the field and the most critical issue on the national level demanding the most attention from the Association. Practices were far ranging between and within States. It was a worthy struggle within NJDA to come to agreement about these issues. Mr. Kossman was an auditor during this timeframe for ACA Juvenile Detention Standards and was beyond shocked at the practices in many jurisdictions. NJDA took and advanced a stance on these matters and began to provide technical assistance and training to state and local jurisdictions. These efforts were brought to fruition primarily through the work of David Roush and Earl Dunlap. Mr. Kossman was happy and honored to be along for the ride. David was the most recognized academic from the field and Earl was the most respected practitioner.

The most significant advancement that has been made in juvenile detention since Mr. Kossman served as President of the National Juvenile Detention Association is the formation of NPJS (National Partnership for Juvenile Services) promoting best practices and standards in the goal of promoting positive impact to youth, families and communities. In addition is the embrace of the issues of the over-reliance on secure detention within the juvenile justice system and the disproportionality of contact with and incarceration of ethnic and racial minority populations.

Mr. Kossman perceives that the most critical issues facing the National Juvenile Detention Association and the National Partnership for Juvenile Services is the continuing struggle in the areas of over-reliance and disproportionality within the field.

It was interesting and enjoyable to be provoked to revisit my association with NJDA.

