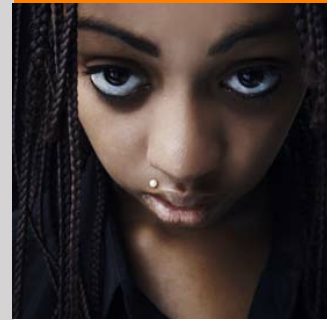


# Safely Home

by Shaena M. Fazal, Esq.

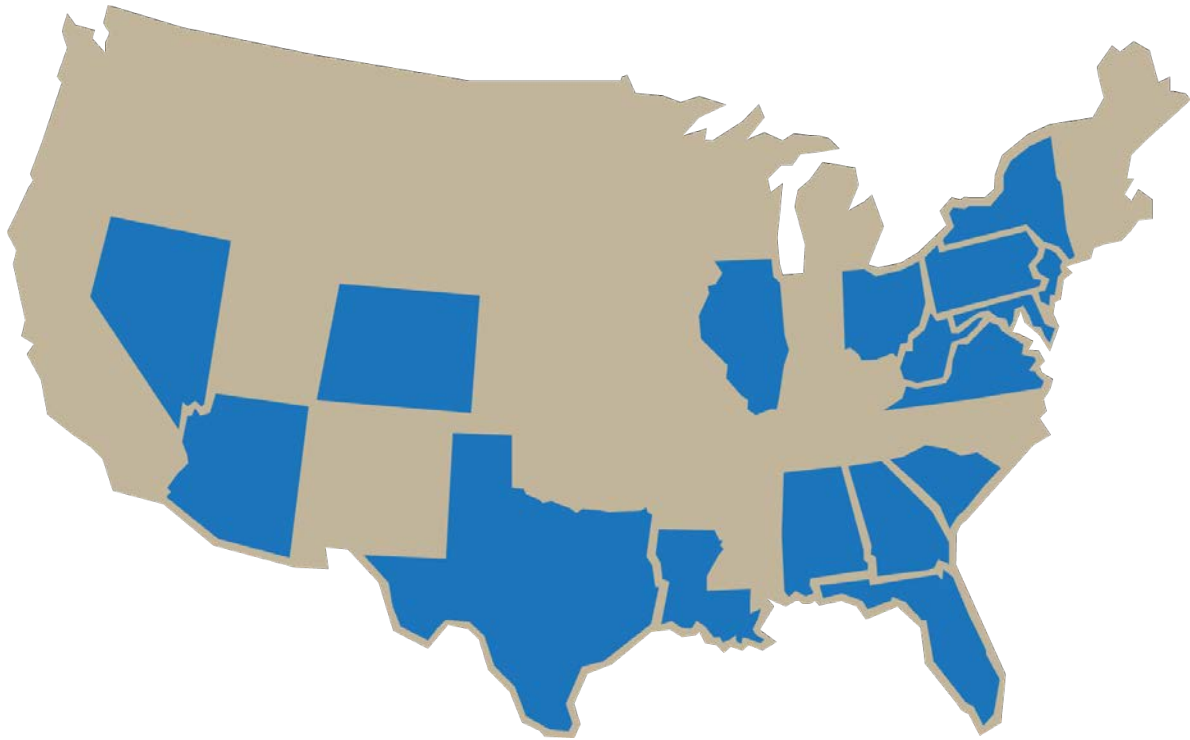


Youth Advocate Programs  
Policy & Advocacy Center

June 2014

Reducing youth incarceration and achieving positive outcomes for high and complex need youth through effective community-based programs





## About YAP

YAP is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization exclusively committed to the deinstitutionalization of youth through direct service, advocacy and policy change since 1975.

*This report was generously supported with  
a grant from the Public Welfare Foundation.*

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# Executive Summary

Tonight, 70,000 youth will sleep in a locked facility, separated from their families. Many of them are there because their communities lack programs that could keep them safely home. *Safely Home* describes how communities and systems can safely support high-need youth in their homes and communities, focusing on the elements of effective community-based alternatives for high and complex need youth in the juvenile justice system. These youth are not lost causes. With the right supports, they can live safely at home with their families and in their communities, not in isolation.

## THE KEY MESSAGES FROM SAFELY HOME ARE:

**A lack of effective alternatives for high-need youth contributes to youth incarceration.** Systems cannot achieve deincarceration goals unless they build continuums of community-based programs to serve *all* youth, especially those with the highest need (highest risk), and have the willingness to implement them. Currently, most kids with complex needs are left out of services or lack the support they need in current services and as a result, end up "left out and locked up."

**Virtually anything that can be done in an institution can be done better in the community.** Whether a youth needs 24/7 supervision, access to treatment or a way to appreciate the consequences of his behavior, an effective community-based program can create that environment in a way that keeps a youth safe and increases the likelihood that he or she will succeed.

**Systems can redirect institutional dollars toward less expensive community programs.** Effective community-based programs can serve three to four kids in the community for the same price as locking one up. In fact, if communities served 20 youth in the community over 6 months, instead of through out-of-home placement, they could save more than half a million dollars.

**Communities can't climb out of poverty, neighborhood violence, and other risk factors through incarceration, especially of their youth.** Risk factors that make youth vulnerable to incarceration cannot be eliminated through incarceration. In fact, many of the environmental and social factors that contribute to youth incarceration get worse, not better with incarceration.

**Community-based programs that provide the right amount of intensity can provide safe and effective alternatives to youth incarceration and residential placement.** The elements of effective community-based programs that will be discussed in detail in the report include:

- Accept all kids and adopt "no reject" policies
- Be available, accessible and flexible
- Empower voice, choice & ownership
- Individualize services for each youth
- Ensure family-focused services
- Take a strength-based approach
- Provide culturally competent services
- Engage youth in work
- Prioritize safety and crisis planning
- Provide unconditional caring (no-eject policies)
- Create opportunities for civic engagement and giving back
- Cultivate long-term connection to community

## BRIGHT SPOTS: SAFELY SUPPORTING HIGH-NEED YOUTH IN THE COMMUNITY

*Safely Home* also highlights how high-need youth have been safely and successfully supported in their homes and with their families in jurisdictions around the country. A series of briefs by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center noted that of 3,523 high-risk youth living at home and supported by an intensive community-based program, 86% remained arrest free while in the program and 93% remained living at home at the end of services. In a separate brief, the Research and Evaluation Center looked at 1,851 YAP youth who were in the juvenile justice system for misdemeanors, status offenses and felonies. The use of secure confinement for youth decreased, regardless of the severity of the offense. Six to twelve months after discharge from YAP, 95% were living at home and in their communities. Consider these other outcomes from around the country:

### Redirection: Alabama- where the state committed to redirecting dollars from state institutions to counties to develop alternatives

3,340 youth in state custody in 2006; 1,485 youth in state custody in 2013

YAP's Alabama Program outcomes: 220 youth in program (01.01.2011 - 12.31.13)

- 87% not arrested while in program; 80% remained arrest-free post-discharge
- Number of kids living in community went from 68% to 91%
- Number of kids on probation declined: 79% at entry to 35% post-discharge

### Creating Continuums for All Youth: Lucas County, OH

- 300 youth committed in 1988; through May 31, 2014, only 17 committed

### Building Community Capacity: Community Connections for Youth, South Bronx, NY

- Focused on high-need youth in poorest congressional district in the country
- 80% of CCFY participants voluntarily continue with program even after the court mandate ends

### Alternatives to Detention: Middlesex County YAP (New Brunswick, NJ)

- 85% living in the community *after discharge*
- 87% not arrested *after discharge*

### Focusing on High-Need Young People: Roca, Inc., Massachusetts

- Served over 400 very high-risk people with felony convictions
- Retention rates of 78%
- Those who completed the model:
  - 90% had no new arrests
  - 100% had no new technical violations
  - 70% have demonstrated educational gains

## INFORMED BY YOUTH

Youth experience and voice should be an integral part of policymaking and service delivery. Part of this report includes the voices of over 300 youth from 14 states, all of whom are involved in YAP programs and have been in residential placement or incarcerated. When asked the question "*If you could talk to adults who make decisions about kids in the juvenile justice system, what do you think is most important for them to know about what kids need and how to help them (for example, what works and what doesn't work and why),*" the youth clearly show in their responses that they want to feel as though those making the decisions hear what they have to say and that they are judged and treated fairly. The most common answer to the question about what they would say to an administrator: "Listen to us."

# Introduction

WE KNOW THAT OUT-OF-HOME  
PLACEMENTS AND YOUTH  
INCARCERATION ARE BAD FOR KIDS  
AND PUT YOUTH AT HIGHER RISK OF  
POOR OUTCOMES SUCH AS:

- \* SEXUAL ABUSE
- \* TRAUMA
- \* RECIDIVISM
- \* SUBSTANCE ABUSE
- \* HOMELESSNESS
- \* DISCONNECTION FROM  
SCHOOL AND WORK
- \* POVERTY
- \* POOR MENTAL HEALTH AND  
PHYSICAL OUTCOMES

At a 2012 Congressional Briefing in Washington DC on the harms of youth incarceration, an audience member stood up and asked, "What exactly should we do with youth in the system if we aren't going to lock them up?" The panel of juvenile justice experts answered that we should put youth in community-based programs instead.

In this report we attempt to more thoroughly answer the question asked at that briefing by describing: how to redirect dollars to pay for community programs; examples of successful reform efforts; and the key characteristics of effective non-residential, community-based programs that will help systems achieve the goal of reducing the number of incarcerated youth in their jurisdictions by supporting youth and families. This report illustrates how community-based programs have helped and can help youth and young adults with complex needs live safely in their homes and with their families, rather than institutions.

On a daily basis, nearly 70,000 youth are locked up in juvenile detention or corrections facilities, residential treatment centers, or adult jails and prisons.<sup>1</sup> A small library of excellent reports focuses on the litany of reasons **why** it is bad to incarcerate youth, raising important concerns about effectiveness, disparate treatment of youth of color, brain development, costs, comparisons with other countries' justice approaches, the damage to youth and families, and humane treatment of children and others. Collectively, these reports make an extraordinary case that, for many reasons, relying on youth incarceration as a way to help troubled youth is bad policy.

Here we focus on **how** community-based programs can reduce youth incarceration for youth with the most complex needs, those youth most likely to be placed out of their homes.

The time is ripe to start discussing a shift in how we frame and approach juvenile justice. For youth in the system, programs based in the community are considered the "alternative," implying that for kids at risk, incarceration is the default and community programs the exception. Supporting youth and families in their homes and communities should be the default for justice-involved youth, and incarceration the last alternative.

At the same time, it is essential that advocacy for less youth incarceration avoids net-widening. Moving kids from residential settings to communities should result in using fewer beds, not refilling the emptied beds with new kids. The priority should be to empty the beds and leave them empty, close down the facilities and build up



neighborhoods' community competence and capacity to serve, support and empower the most marginalized youth and their families.

Right now, states and local jurisdictions can redirect the dollars they spend on out-of-home placements such as juvenile detention facility beds or private residential beds right into the community. They can also reduce the use of beds to start small pilot programs that build on existing community resources to bring youth safely home.

Across the country, judges, administrators, counties and states have reduced the number of youth in institutions and depended on continuums of community-based programs to do it. Community-based alternatives can be used both at the front end of the system, where an alternative to detention or state incarceration can stop a youth from ever entering an out-of-home placement, and also the back end, where redirecting dollars from beds to communities and investing in community-based aftercare can make all the difference to a returning youth's future. The central premise is that long-term change, nurturing and caring happens best in the context of family, neighborhood and community.

Communities across the country, including Alabama, New York, Ohio, Michigan and New Jersey have stepped up to help youth achieve personal and social success they could not achieve in an institution while maintaining community safety and reducing recidivism. Correctional and probation leaders demonstrate that anything that can be done in an institution can be done better in the community, including providing 24/7 care, and accessing treatment. They also prove that with an effective community-based program, systems can support youth and young adults in their homes and neighborhoods without compromising community or public safety.

Importantly, institutions provide virtually none of the supports the community can. Removing kids from their communities and homes may temporarily alleviate any perceived immediate risk to the public, but incarceration does not ultimately address the underlying needs that contributed to the risk in the first place. Youth need to learn how to function and make good decisions within the community, and having the support of caring, competent adults and access to safe and positive people, places and activities is what leads to good long-term outcomes. Kids can't access these supports in isolation.

The best way to reduce youth incarceration for all kids is to rely more on effective community-based programs that can safely keep or get youth

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH WITH THE MOST COMPLEX NEEDS CAN KEEP THEM SAFELY AT HOME AND WITH THEIR FAMILIES. ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS INCLUDE:

- \* NO REJECT POLICIES
- \* AVAILABLE, ACCESSIBLE & FLEXIBLE SERVICES
- \* YOUTH & FAMILY VOICE, CHOICE, AND OWNERSHIP
- \* INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICES
- \* FAMILY FOCUS
- \* STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH
- \* CULTURAL COMPETENCE
- \* ACCESS TO WORK
- \* CRISIS AND SAFETY PLANNING
- \* NO EJECT POLICIES
- \* CIVIC ENGAGEMENT/ GIVING BACK
- \* LONG-TERM CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY SUPPORTS

*"There's enough research to support the fact from both a clinical and research perspective that the least restrictive environment is the best setting for kids. We know that. We have to be able to prioritize community programs."*

*There's more value in putting money in the community. That's where we see the best outcomes."*

*-Alice Thompson  
CEO, Black Family  
Development <sup>2</sup>*

out of facilities and build up communities and families. This report identifies the essential ingredients for effective community-based programs for youth with complex needs. These elements include:

- No Reject Policies (Inclusive Intake)
- Available, Accessible & Flexible Services
- Youth & Family Voice, Choice and Ownership
- Individualized Services
- Family Focus
- Strength-based approach
- Cultural Competence
- Access to work
- Crisis and Safety Planning
- No Eject Policies (Unconditional Caring)
- Civic Engagement / Giving Back
- Long-term Connection to Community Supports

There is a mosaic of effective community-based, non-residential grassroots programs that have these elements and are demonstrating how programs are capable of safely helping youth and families with the most complex needs succeed in their own neighborhoods. It is the family and the community that will sustain the youth's success in the long run, so it is in our best interest for governments to support them.

### HOW WE OBTAINED THE INFORMATION CONTAINED IN THIS REPORT

Youth Advocate Programs (YAP) is a nearly 40-year old non-profit organization committed to the deinstitutionalization of youth through direct services, policy and community advocacy. Local YAP leaders run neighborhood-based, grassroots juvenile justice programs in over 90 communities across the country. We began construction of this publication by reaching out to youth, juvenile justice advocates, policymakers, juvenile justice administrators and direct services staff to hear directly from people on the ground about their experiences with effective programs.

One of the key elements integral to effective programs is giving youth and their families, voice and choice in what happens to them. Because we are endeavoring to articulate what communities, youth and families need to achieve personal and social success, we wanted to know what justice-involved youth thought has been most helpful for them and their families to stay in their communities.

Through surveys to over 300 youth involved in YAP programs in 14 states, we solicited their feedback. Most of the highlighted quotes attributed to YAP

youth are in response to the question, *"If you could talk to adults who make decisions about kids in the juvenile justice system, what do you think is most important for them to know about what kids need and how to help them (for example, what works and what doesn't work and why)?"* Other results of the surveys are integrated within.

We also took a page from the business leadership world where some of the best behavioral scientists suggest that identifying and scaling "bright spots" is an effective way to realize change.<sup>3</sup> So we reached out to a county administrator, a judge and a state agency that have, in their respective communities, successfully implemented community-based alternatives for justice-involved youth. The system leaders we interviewed included Deborah Hodges, the Lucas County Ohio Court Administrator; Judge Roger Daley (Ret.), Middlesex County, NJ; and Annie Wellington and Beverly Watson, from NY State's Office of Children and Family Services' Mid-Hudson division.

We identified both YAP programs and non-YAP programs that demonstrate programmatic bright spots. The YAP programs in this report serve youth as alternatives to detention programs in rural communities in four Alabama counties (Baldwin, Cullman, Marshall and Walker) and in urban communities, Middlesex County, New Jersey (New Brunswick) and Lucas County, Ohio (Toledo). This report also features an aftercare program in the mid-Hudson region of New York state (Newburgh) which helped the state to close its facilities by bringing youth out and back to their home communities. Other programs or approaches highlighted here are Community Connections for Youth in the South Bronx, Roca, Inc. in Massachusetts and Black Family Development in Wayne County, Michigan (Detroit).

In addition to sharing youth stories as a way to authenticate success, we also share outcome data that quantifies the success of these programs in reducing youth incarceration. For some of the programs highlighted within, we conducted site visits where we interviewed youth, program directors and frontline workers.

## PROGRAMS HIGHLIGHTED WITHIN:

- \* **BLACK FAMILY DEVELOPMENT (WAYNE COUNTY, MI)**
- \* **COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH (SOUTH BRONX)**
- \* **ROCA, INC. (MA)**
- \* **YOUTH ADVOCATE PROGRAMS (AL, NJ, NY, OH, NATIONAL)**

## STATES, CITIES AND COUNTIES HIGHLIGHTED:

- \* **ALABAMA**
- \* **MIDDLESEX COUNTY, NJ**
- \* **LUCAS COUNTY, OH**
- \* **NEWBURGH, NY**

THE TAN QUOTES THROUGHOUT THIS REPORT ATTRIBUTED TO YAP YOUTH ARE IN RESPONSE TO THIS SURVEY QUESTION:

*"If you could talk to adults who make decisions about kids in the juvenile justice system, what do you think is most important for them to know about what kids need and how to help them (for example, what works and what doesn't work and why)?"*

# Systems Do Have the Money

*"If you have \$300 a day to spend on a kid why can't you invest it in your own community where you have a better shot?"*

– Deborah Hodges, Lucas  
County Juvenile Court  
Administrator <sup>4</sup>

*"Reform is always more a matter of will than of legislation, and most youth and adult corrections agencies have the capacity to reform themselves within existing legislation and budgets."*

– Jerry Miller, *Last One over the Wall* <sup>5</sup>

Community-based programs yield better results for kids than incarceration and can be implemented without spending any new money. As of 2011, 70,000 youth are detained in some kind of residential placement or secure confinement on any given night.<sup>6</sup> According to a Justice Policy Institute report, states spent **7.1 million dollars a day to incarcerate youth** in 2008 for a total of **5.7 billion** annually.<sup>7</sup>

Although the number of youth incarcerated has declined, the per day cost of incarcerating a youth or placing them in a residential center or group home has remained high, in some states as high as \$667.00/day.<sup>8</sup> Keeping youth incarcerated at this rate or even the average rate of \$240.00/day is very expensive and does little to achieve public safety and positive youth outcome goals.<sup>9</sup>

For example, using the American Correctional Association average cost of youth incarceration of \$240.99/day, the cost of incarcerating 20 youth for 180 days, or six months is \$867,564. In contrast, a community-based program that can create a wraparound community for a youth, individualize services based on the unique needs of each youth, engage the family and connect the youth to neighborhood resources, costs on average \$75/day.<sup>10</sup> Using that rate, it would cost a jurisdiction \$270,000 over that same 180 day period to help 20 youth and their families achieve stability in their own homes and communities. Therefore, if communities use the money they spend on incarceration or residential placement on effective neighborhood-based programs instead, they can save \$597,564, more than half a million dollars for just 20 kids over a 6 month period.

For that cost, youth and families can get the services they need and taxpayers can receive a meaningful return on investment: youth and families will be more connected to school, work and community resources and the family will be more stable, having developed and implemented the intervention in their homes amidst their real life

“IF COMMUNITIES USE THE MONEY THEY SPEND ON INCARCERATION OR RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT ON EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS INSTEAD, THEY CAN SAVE MORE THAN HALF A MILLION DOLLARS FOR JUST 20 KIDS OVER SIX MONTHS.

## AVERAGE DAILY COST



circumstances, rather than in a remote location and without one another's support.

It will always be far less expensive to serve a high-need youth in his or her home and neighborhood than in an institution, but systems need to be cautious not to *underinvest* in the supports that can safely keep youth and young adults in their communities. We only need to look back in history to the movement that closed sanitariums to know that well-defined problems can't be solved with resources and alternatives that are asymmetrical to the intensity of needs of the people most affected. The deinstitutionalization movement to close sanitariums lacked proper funding to support patients in the community. As a result, many people who needed mental health care found themselves homeless, struggling on their own, or re-institutionalized in prisons, and not getting the mental health care they needed.<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, using community-based programs to cut youth incarceration requires some investment in neighborhoods, families and kids, but not nearly as much we spend on incarceration. Depending on the program, normal costs include paying staff, ensuring accountability, tracking outcomes, securing community services that can help address mental health and substance abuse needs and getting youth back to school and into paying jobs. As youth needs increase, so should intensity of services. Yet, even an intensive community-based program that works to empower youth and families with complex needs to achieve community connection and personal stability costs on average \$75/day.

*"I'm no liberal, I'm an open-minded person who looks at the facts," Daley said. "And the facts are, if we were to invest just a little bit of money on this part, the juvenile system, we would save ourselves a tremendous amount of money. These kids are malleable. There's tremendous hope in all of them. Society has really fallen down. What we've done is we've built big prisons and we've spent billions of dollars on that end of the system."*

*-Judge Roger Daley, (Ret.),  
Judge Daley Retires After  
Transforming Juvenile  
Court, 2012<sup>12</sup>*

*"Commitments to DYS are down significantly without threatening public safety. State funding for community-based, non-residential programming has increased, even as the budgets for the Department of Youth Services and Administrative Office of Courts has shrunk."*

*- Smaller, Smarter and More Strategic, Juvenile Justice Reform in Alabama, (2011) <sup>15</sup>*

**“ RIGHT NOW, ANY JURISDICTION THAT USES RESIDENTIAL OR STATE FACILITY BEDS HAS THE MEANS TO SEND FEWER YOUTH TO OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT.**

Community investment also reduces the current astronomical costs for taxpayers in both social and economic terms. It is estimated that 6.7 million youth are disconnected from school and work, including justice-involved youth.<sup>13</sup> The total cost of that disconnection is \$65.8 billion dollars in lost wages every year.<sup>14</sup>

The good news is that governments can fund deincarceration and support community-based programs without spending any new money. As discussed below, by reducing reliance on detention as leaders did in Lucas County, Ohio and Middlesex County, New Jersey, or on state incarceration as took place in Alabama and New York State, the total number of youth in custody can go down and the dollars spent on costly and ineffective institutions can go towards supporting families and communities to care for the kids who need it the most, in their homes and neighborhoods instead.

### **REDIRECT & REINVEST**

Right now, any jurisdiction that uses residential or state facility beds has the means to send fewer youth to out-of-home placement and build support for them in the community. They can simply decide to spend less on beds and redirect that money to community-based programs. Departments can exercise their authority - or if necessary, *request the authority* - to use dollars designated for residential services in the community instead.

Importantly, some localities and states have redirected resources from institutions to community-based programs. Justice Reinvestment is a policy initiative that advances the ideas of redirection,<sup>16</sup> but has been criticized for failing to include advocates or people most affected by the system. Advocates believe this has resulted in redirecting dollars from costly institutions to community corrections or other unrelated projects.<sup>17</sup> Still, the concept of justice reinvestment is sound and has been adopted perhaps most notably by New York City through its Neighborhood Opportunity

Networks focused on reducing out-of-home placements via organizational change, and greater investment in community resources that connect youth and adults to positive opportunities and neighborhood resources.<sup>18</sup> Other successful models implemented at the state level include RECLAIM Ohio and Redeploy Illinois.

In addition, a new framework for redirection and reinvestment is the Safely Home Campaign.<sup>19</sup> The Campaign is focused on closing facilities or reducing reliance on out-of-home placements, ensuring that the captured savings are reinvested into the communities and not diverted to unrelated activities or political investments (e.g., tax breaks).



## Bright Spot



# Redirection: Alabama

## Alternatives to Incarceration and Detention

Since 2006, 52 of Alabama's 67 counties have reduced Department of Youth Services admissions, with some counties reducing admissions by 75% or higher. These reductions were the result of Alabama's successful efforts to purposefully reduce the number of committed youth and its dependence on residential care.

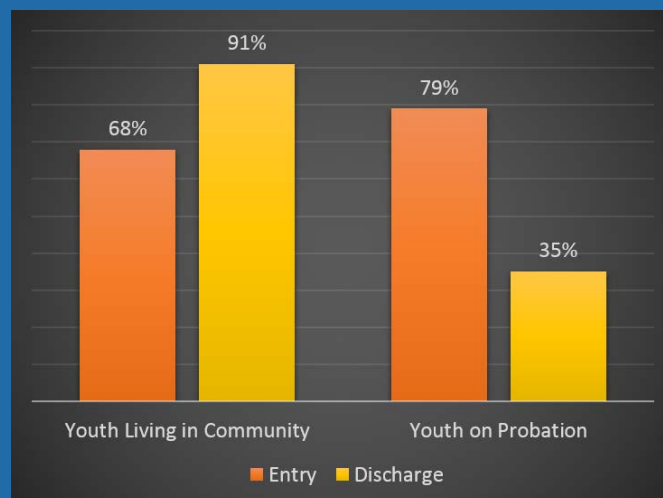
Recognizing that it was incarcerating too many youth, including status offenders, DYS and the Administrative Office of the Courts, (AOC), with help from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, led a series of reforms in the state. These included: intentionally contracting for fewer beds; creating a strategic plan that favored the least restrictive setting possible and that explicitly stated that incarceration was an inappropriate and unnecessarily expensive response to most delinquent youth; building relationships with local courts, and; giving \$1 million in grants to local courts specifically to implement county-controlled, community-based alternatives to detention.

Alabama incentivized counties to create community-based alternatives to reduce the number of state commitments, and it worked. In 2006, DYS had 3,340 total youth commitments; in 2013, it had reduced that by more than half, with total commitments of 1,485.

In four rural Alabama counties - Baldwin, Cullman, Marshall and Walker Counties, YAP operates local community-based alternative to detention programs in partnership with the respective county courts. From

January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2013, 220 youth graduated from these programs. Three quarters of the youth in this program had annual family incomes below \$35,000. At entry to the program, 64% had at least one prior out-of-home placement and 38% had more than one prior out-of-home placement.

During the program 87% of the youth were not arrested, and 80% of the post-discharge youth remained arrest-free. The percentage of kids living in the community increased from 68% at entry to 91%. Likewise, the number of kids on probation declined from 79% at entry to 35% post discharge.





## OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS

When systems remove children and youth from their homes for treatment, punishment or safety, they are placed in an "out-of-home placement." This can include foster care or institutions such as group homes, wilderness camps, secure and non-secure residential treatment centers, training schools, psychiatric hospitals and youth or adult jails and prisons. These institutional settings rely on uniformity to maintain safety and while in these settings, youth live away from their families and have limited, if any, opportunity to make choices for themselves. In some cases, states may send youth to an out-of-home placement in another state. These are called "out-of-state placements."

The Campaign is collaborative, supported by national and local partners and focused on the important goals of reducing reliance on institutional placement and the number of youth of color in out-of-home placements.<sup>20</sup>

Of course some cities, counties and states face challenges with closing public facilities, but reducing private residential facilities, especially those run by for-profit agencies does not present those same political challenges.

It bears repeating that some states spend as much as \$677/day to incarcerate a youth. If systems invested that much in supporting youth in their communities, it would no doubt yield extraordinary results. Even one tenth of that spending can safely support a high-risk youth and his or her family in the community. Or, put differently, we can safely support three to four youth in the community for the same price as locking one up.

“WE CAN SAFELY SUPPORT THREE TO FOUR YOUTH IN THE COMMUNITY FOR THE SAME PRICE AS LOCKING ONE UP.”



## COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

Programs that provide services to youth in need while youth remain living at home with their families are **community-based programs**. Youth receiving services through community-based programs freely engage in decision-making in their own lives and receive services that respond to individual needs and strengths. Group homes and residential centers are limited in their capability to provide these same opportunities and are not community-based programs. However, some out-of-home placements, like well-supported independent living, foster, kinship and fictive kin care homes can be considered community-based.

### OUT-OF-STATE PLACEMENTS

States can also find resources to fund community-based alternatives by ending the costly practice of sending kids to out of state facilities. Most states that send kids out of state believe that the services the youth needs are unavailable in-state.

However, communities have abundant resources to help even youth with complex needs in their homes; it just takes time and effort to find them. We should be audacious with how we help youth and young adults with the most complex needs; they need the most intensive effort we can give them. While the state's institutions may not have the services to help a youth with complex needs, that does not mean that the entire state lacks those resources. Importantly, sending kids out of state also means separating youth from their families, and in some cases, where the distance is great, aggravating an already-compromised family connection. Finally, using out-of-state facilities means sending kids, jobs, and dollars out-of-state as well.

The bottom line is that states and local communities have the money to help kids in need - it is just being spent disproportionately, and unnecessarily, on residential beds.



# Expanding Community-Based Programs for Youth and Young Adults with Complex Needs

*"I've come to understand and to believe that each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done. I believe that for every person on the planet. I think if somebody tells a lie, they're not just a liar. I think if somebody takes something that doesn't belong to them, they're not just a thief. I think even if you kill someone, you're not just a killer. And because of that there's this basic human dignity that must be respected by law."*

-Bryan Stevenson, *We Need to Talk About an Injustice*,  
TED Talk, 2012 <sup>21</sup>

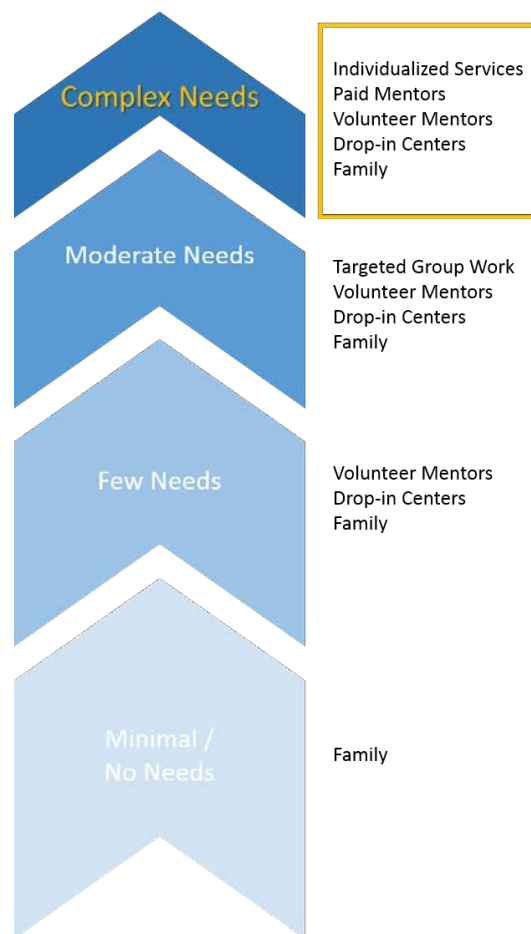
Communities cannot achieve the goal of reducing youth incarceration without community-based programs for high-need youth. This report is focused on those youth with the most complex needs who need intensive community-based programs to bring or keep them out of institutions. Continuums of care must include non-residential community-based programs for the highest need youth. Interventions for high-need kids should also be based on the individual attributes of each individual youth, not just what the file reveals about institutional placement, behavioral and offense histories.

## BUILDING CONTINUUMS OF CARE FOR ALL KIDS

Nearly all of the kids incarcerated in state-run facilities and private residential centers in the United States can be safely supported in their family homes and communities.

To drastically reduce the number of kids in confinement communities need effective continuums of care equipped to serve all youth. Every community has the ability to create a continuum of effective community-based alternatives. But, for the continuum to successfully reduce the number of incarcerated youth it must include programs for kids with the most complex needs.

Youth in the juvenile justice system run the gamut - from kids who need no services and shouldn't be in the system at all to those who have varying degrees of need. Services can be as accessible as connecting to a volunteer mentor and utilizing community drop-in centers to needing more intensive group work, in addition to neighborhood programs. But kids with the most complex needs at the highest risk of out-of-home placements need intensive community-based programs that provide one-on-one, individualized services, in addition to all the supports that effectively help kids with lesser needs.<sup>22</sup>



## MEET THE KID, NOT THE FILE

Youth with the most complex needs are those who have delinquency and behavioral histories that traditionally lead systems to believe that residential placement or secure confinement is the only appropriate response. Or, they may have persistent unmet needs, including substance abuse or addiction, mental health challenges, family needs, economic insecurity and others. Community and/or domestic violence, poverty, racism and exposure to trauma can further influence behavior and create barriers to accessing needed help. These youth likely have official files that document these challenges and emphasize their deficits, risky behaviors, past placements, disciplinary violations, behavioral challenges, other derogatory information and all that they did wrong, painting an overwhelming picture of a youth who can't succeed in the community and needs to be placed out of home.

“SYSTEMS CAN BUILD WAYS FOR YOUTH TO BE ACCOUNTABLE AND UNDERSTAND THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ACTIONS WITHOUT RESORTING TO INCARCERATION.

Nevertheless, they are not the lost causes their files say they are. Addressing these risks can be important but it does nothing to promote well-being and positive development, which is what leads to positive long-term outcomes. Instead, assessments should focus on identifying a youth's assets, interests and competencies in order to engage youth in the short-term and have the best likelihood of achieving long-term goals, like safety and positive connections to community.

To effectively serve a youth in the community then, you have to meet the kid, not the file.<sup>23</sup> Effective community-based programs are well-equipped to devote time to working with the youth and family to identify and develop skills and interests that can lead to success, access interventions that complement youth assets and find services that are responsive to the unique needs of each youth.

Not only can kids benefit from community-based programs, but systems can build ways for youth to be accountable and understand the consequences of their actions without resorting to incarceration. Graduated sanctions, tiered supervision and restorative justice practices can easily take place in the community and provide community-based programs and probation, corrections and parole departments with non-carceral opportunities for youth to appreciate and learn from the consequences of their behavior.

For example, one youth was arrested for stealing cars and blowing them up on the Reservation. In a YAP program in upstate New York, his YAP Advocates - paid street workers - worked with him to develop a plan to regain the trust and respect of his community and also restore a sense of personal integrity. The youth came up with his own plan, supported by his Advocates to address

each of these challenges in the community, make him accountable for what he had done and begin to repair the damage.

In the first step in his plan, he went to visit the Town Superintendent, admitted his wrongdoing and asked what he could do to improve the community and regain the community's respect. The Superintendent told him that to start to hold himself accountable he could begin by giving back and paint swingsets and other structures kids play on at the park, do repairs at and plant flowers at the Meals on Wheels headquarters. They agreed that he would also help with planning and logistics for the American Legion at the town's 4th of July Parade.

To regain the community trust, the youth held a free car wash for people every other week where he detailed cars inside and out. And to rebuild his integrity, he committed to volunteer to bag food for elderly people who relied on the food pantry, and helped them carry the bags to and from their cars.

Whether it is because of circumstance or exposure to risk factors or a file, out-of-home placements should not be the only option for youth with complex needs, and indeed we know that they can succeed in their homes and communities. We just have to offer them the right supports; and we don't need facilities to do that.

***“Don’t be quick to judge a kid. Sometimes there are reasons a kid acts out.”***

*-YAP Youth, Age 16  
South Bronx, NY*



**“TO EFFECTIVELY SERVE A KID IN THE COMMUNITY YOU HAVE TO MEET THE KID, NOT THE FILE.”**



# Continuum of Community-based Services for ALL Kids: Alternatives to Detention

Lucas County has successfully implemented a continuum of community services for youth in detention. Deborah Hodges, the Lucas County Juvenile Court Administrator has a diverse background in systems that enable her to see myriad perspectives having previously worked as a social worker, a juvenile probation officer, and a field worker for a residential facility as a family counselor.

The Administrative Team in Lucas County, under the direction of Judge Denise Navarre Cubbon started to lead the reduction in the use of beds with a simple change: staff were held accountable for why they would place a youth in detention. Through the development of a continuum of alternatives to detention, such as Community Based Detention, change started happening. As a result, the focus was on ensuring that very few youth were in detention and it worked: fewer kids were held in detention and the change in practice had an impact on state incarceration as Lucas County began sending fewer youth to state facilities.

The positive ripple effects of reducing secure detention are evident in Lucas County. There, the focus wasn't just on reducing the numbers, but also on making sure the interventions were meaningful to the kids and that the County was achieving positive outcomes with youth. As she put it:

*"We need programs that do one-on-one work with the youth. I'm not saying group*

*work is bad, but at the end of the day, kids really need that one-on-one, and that's the value of working with individuals. I always challenge placing kids in programs that only do group work. It is easier for us, but it's more meaningful for the kids to receive individual attention. I'm not against [group work] but it shouldn't be the norm. A kid will always remember when you spend one-on-one time with him."*

She also described other benefits of community programs that work with each youth individually such as achieving better outcomes, building trust between youth and workers, being flexible and having the willingness to try new and creative approaches to meeting a youth where they are.

Lucas County's approach was successful. In 1988 the County committed 300 kids to the Department of Youth Services (the state juvenile prison system); in 2014, by the end of May, it had only committed 17. Though its detention facility has 125 beds, according to Deborah Hodges, the court will continue to focus on only placing youth who pose a risk to community in the facility. The average daily population in 2013 was 36. The Court always has an eye on community safety, while ensuring that a range of alternative services and programs could safely manage most kids in their home communities. **From 2009 to the first quarter of 2014 the average daily**

## Lucas County, OH (Toledo)

**population decreased by 72%. During this same time period, the average daily population for black youth in Juvenile Detention Center also decreased by 71%.**

Lucas County also created an Assessment Center that prioritizes making sure that kids with non-violent misdemeanors and school-based offenses never see detention, using a continuum of alternatives to detention to safely manage the youth in the community instead. They're also not just limiting their focus on kids assessed as low-risk. Lucas County recognized that it could help 80-90% of the juvenile sex offenders in the county receive treatment and help in the community through individualized services and specialized group homes.

For the past three years, Lucas County has been working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation on the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI). In addition, the Court works in partnership with YAP to provide alternatives for youth to help them be successful in the community and divert youth from further penetration in the juvenile justice system. Of the 161 youth in YAP's Lucas County program, 88% were living in their communities and 68% remained arrest free at least six months post-discharge.



Kids committed to state juvenile prison by Lucas County



# The Connection between Strong Communities and Positive Youth Outcomes

A RECENT BRIEF BY THE JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE DEMONSTRATES THAT HIGH-RISK YOUTH CAN BE SUCCESSFULLY SERVED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES. RESEARCHERS THERE LOOKED AT DISCHARGE AND POST-DISCHARGE OUTCOMES OF 3,523 HIGH-RISK YOUTH. MOST YOUTH, 86%, REMAINED ARREST-FREE WHILE IN THE COMMUNITY, AND THE VAST MAJORITY, 93%, WERE LIVING SAFELY IN THEIR COMMUNITIES AT THE TIME OF THEIR DISCHARGE FROM YAP.

- MOST HIGH RISK YOUTH REFERRED TO YOUTH ADVOCATE PROGRAMS, INC. REMAIN ARREST FREE AND IN THEIR COMMUNITIES DURING YAP PARTICIPATION, JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE, APRIL 2014

*"It is increasingly clear that opportunities to experience a sense of place, belonging, and trust during adolescence promotes wellbeing - not just for individual youth, but also for the environments in which they live."*

- *Places to Be and Places to Belong, Youth Connectedness in School and Community* <sup>24</sup>

Of the 70,000 youth incarcerated on any given night, none of them are throwaway kids. And with that many kids locked up, systems and communities clearly have not done everything they can. With very few exceptions, systems can and should replace out-of-home placements with strong, non-residential community-based programs. It is up to us, as the adults, to devise a continuum of care focused on supporting all youth, including the toughest kids with the most complex needs. The type of support that is most effective for youth can only happen in their communities.

In their seminal book, *The Abundant Community*, John McKnight, co-director of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute at Northwestern University, and co-author, Peter Block write:

*"When they are competent, communities operate as a supportive and mediating space central to the capacity of a family to fulfill its functions. A competent community provides a safety net for the care of a child, attention and relatedness for the vulnerable, the means for economic survival for the household, and many of the social tools that sustain health. If the function of the family is to raise a child and provide what we can summarize in the phrase, peace of mind, then it is the community that provides the primary determinants of success of these functions."* <sup>25</sup>

This is the essence of a strong, competent community that can safely support youth and families, even those with high needs and who are in crisis. It is not just aspirational to think that high-need youth can be safe and in their homes and communities instead of locked up in institutions. We know that when effective community-based programs partner with governments to provide the right supports and intensity, and build programs based on assets, not deficits, kids really can succeed.

In spring 2014 the John Jay Research and Evaluation Center published a series of short briefs that looked at 3,523 juvenile justice involved youth



ages 11-18.<sup>26</sup> Nearly all, 90%, had prior legal dispositions including 30% who had prior felonies. More than 1/5 had at least one prior out-of-home placement and kids stayed in the program for an average of four months, with some youth receiving services for as long as 20 months.<sup>27</sup>

Yet, despite their histories, 86% remained arrest free while in the program and 93% were still living in their communities at the time of their discharge from the program.<sup>28</sup>

In a separate brief, the Research and Evaluation Center looked at 1,851 YAP youth who were in the juvenile justice system for misdemeanors, status offenses and felonies.<sup>29</sup> The use of secure confinement for youth decreased, regardless of the severity of the offense. Six to twelve months after discharge from YAP, only 5% were living in secure facilities.<sup>30</sup>

This series of briefs documents one example of how community-based programs can keep even youth with the most complex needs safe in their homes and with their families. It is also critical that we continue to use effective community-based programs for the highest need youth because communities can't climb out of poverty, neighborhood violence and other challenges through institutionalization, especially of their youth.

On the other hand, survivorship and resilience, the most basic of strengths, form the foundation for development of interests, talents, assets and capabilities; all things a strong family and community can nurture. Every neighborhood has people in it to whom kids gravitate to and who excel at relating to kids. These "natural helpers," are untapped resources with boundless expertise in their communities. Effective community-based programs value this expertise and hire natural helpers to support the youth and build community capacity.

No community-based program can effectively keep a youth safe and at home without a strong partnership with corrections and probation leaders. Rather than duplicating government services - like probation officers, parole or government aftercare workers - community programs can augment them and fill important gaps. Community-based programs are positioned differently than an authority that has the power to revoke a child's freedom and separate a family. They can engage the family and youth, make them feel safe and build a bridge between the individual strengths and the resources of the community, and also help the government entity see the youth and family in context of their circumstances, rather than as just another "case" in an already heavy caseload.

Community-based youth workers can also augment systems' outreach and achieve shared goals by devoting intensive one-on-one time with the youth,

*"Effective community-based alternatives are ones that build communities."*

*-Rev. Rubén Austria,  
Executive Director,  
Community Connections  
for Youth*

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YOUTH INCARCERATED  
ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT,  
NONE OF THEM ARE  
THROWAWAY KIDS.

“ **NO COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAM CAN EFFECTIVELY KEEP A YOUTH SAFE AND AT HOME WITHOUT A STRONG PARTNERSHIP WITH CORRECTIONS AND PROBATIONS LEADERS.**

being available at all hours, especially non-traditional hours. Importantly, they can also broker more positive results. For example, many system involved youth have burned bridges or are known negatively in their community, which further alienates them from participation in activities that might otherwise engage them in a positive way. Neighborhood-based workers can help to re-establish credibility, restoring access to community resources.

It may seem overwhelming but the response is quite simple: empower families and neighborhoods to help youth in the community and support them in any way they need. Effective community-based programs can do this for all youth, even those with the most complex needs.





## Bright Spot



# New York State, Office of Children and Family Services Alternatives to Incarceration / Aftercare

In 2011, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo gave his State of the State Address to a crowd of 2,200 people and received rousing applause for declaring that "incarceration is not an employment program." He argued that facilities that cost \$200,000 a year per youth and had recidivism rates of 90% were not working. New York State proceeded to close juvenile facilities and invest in alternatives to incarceration and residential placement, and in aftercare.

The mid-Hudson region in Newburgh, New York, 60 miles north of New York City is one area that implemented aftercare for kids coming home from secure residential placements. Newburgh is a community that ranks safer than only 5% of all American cities, and to address the safety and development needs of the youth in its care, the NY State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) used an array of service providers to reintegrate kids coming home from closed facilities or residential centers. OCFS in Newburgh describes itself as very hands on with the youth and relies on YAP to help the toughest kids move past hurdles or get out of limbo. It refers kids with the highest level of supervision needs who can benefit from out-of-the box thinking, availability and flexibility of a community-based program.

According to Annie Wellington, OCFS Supervisor for the Mid-Hudson region, many of the youth in its care often perceive that they will be thrown out of programs or sent back to residential. OCFS recognizes that, despite

that perception, kids make it through when people refuse to give up on them. Their strategy is to respond to that resiliency and wrap a safety net around each kid so that when challenges arise, there is a plan in place to provide persistent support.

The partnership with YAP also serves a few other key purposes: It extends the reach of OCFS into the community, enabling more face-to-face contact with each youth. Importantly, OCFS also recognizes that each community has its own dynamic culture and part of that culture can be to keep outsiders out. Having street workers (Advocates) who hail from the same neighborhoods as the youth helps to reach the youth where they are and augments the services, helping OCFS achieve its goals of safety and positive youth outcomes.

In Newburgh, nearly all the youth served in the YAP program (96%) were in out-of-home placements when they were referred and 100% had at least one prior out-of-home placement. But, the success in Newburgh demonstrates that even youth with "high risks" can be safe, and even thrive, in the community: Eighty-two percent of the discharged youth and 94% of post-discharge youth lived in the community at the time of the last known contact. And, 82% were not arrested while in the program, and 69% were not arrested since discharge; whether arrested or not, nearly all still lived in the community.

# Elements of Effective Community-Based Programs for High-Need Youth

No Reject Policies



Available, Accessible  
& Flexible Services



Youth & Family Voice,  
Choice & Ownership



Individualized  
Services



Family Focus



Strength-based  
Approach



Cultural Competence



Access to Work



Crisis & Safety  
Planning



No Eject Policies



Civic Engagement /  
Giving Back



Long-term Connection to  
Community Supports



*"The most useful guidance for practitioners, and the most informative perspective for program developers and researchers, will not come from lists of the names of programs shown by research to have positive effects. Rather, they will come from identification of the factors that characterize the most effective programs and the general principles that characterize 'what works' to reduce the recidivism of juvenile offenders."*

*- The Primary Factors that Characterize Effective Interventions with Juvenile Offenders: A Meta-Analytic Overview <sup>31</sup>*

A variety of successes in deincarcerating youth by using effective community-based programs are happening throughout the country. For example, Lucas County Juvenile Court has led the effort to reduce the number of youth the County sends to detention.<sup>32</sup> In Middlesex County, NJ, Judge Daley (Ret.) worked with a continuum of providers to send high-need youth to alternative to detention programs,<sup>33</sup> and in NY State, under the leadership of then-Director Gladys Carrion, and now under Acting Director Sheila J. Poole, the Office of Children and Family Services began to literally close facilities and enlist the help of community-based organizations to bring kids close to home.<sup>34</sup>

Under the direction of Vinny Schiraldi and Ana Bermudez, the New York City Department of Probation is now funding intensive neighborhood-based, family-focused programs in all five boroughs specifically to support youth in their homes and communities who would otherwise have been sent to upstate residential and correctional facilities.<sup>35</sup> And in Wayne County, MI, Black Family Development, led by Alice Thompson, is managing a continuum of non-profits to provide a variety of services for justice-involved youth, including a majority investment in community-based programs.<sup>36</sup> Each of these leaders worked with myriad community-based organizations to accomplish their goal of having the best outcomes for youth, including those with the most complex needs.

To the left is a description of essential ingredients for an effective community-based program for justice-involved youth with complex needs. While YAP is one community-based program that incorporates these elements into its services, it is not the only one. Other organizations like Black Family Development, Community Connections for Youth and Roca also incorporate many of these practices (and

others) into their approaches to successfully serving youth in the community.

The elements described below are by no means exhaustive and some programs may be implementing each of these in a variation of the way they are presented below, and others may desire to change practices to be more inclusive of some of these elements. But at the very least, community-based alternatives should include these elements to best serve justice-involved youth.

### ACCEPT ALL KIDS: "NO REJECT" POLICIES

Exclusionary intake policies contribute to youth incarceration and leave kids left out and locked up. If community-based organizations maintain acceptance criteria that leave kids with the most complex needs out, correctional centers will take them, no questions asked. Policies that exclude certain youth present systems with gaps in services that lead to an unnecessary and expensive use of placements in detention, state incarceration and sometimes, out-of-state placement. Even when programs with no reject policies do exist in the community, systems may believe that high-need youth have needs that can only be addressed in an institutional setting.

Most of the time, exclusionary criteria in community-based programs exist because a youth's needs fall outside the scope of available services. In these programs, the epicenter of the intervention is the available services, not the youth's needs. Programs that adopt no refusal intake policies, on the other hand, make the youth's needs the central priority, and adapt traditional services to meet those needs or create services where they don't exist. Shifting the priority from the services to the youth enables the community to serve more and a wider range of youth.

A lack of community-based programs with no reject policies also leaves those youth with mental health or intensive family needs vulnerable to being sent out-of-state, based on a belief that the needed services are unavailable in-state.

For example, in a 2013 analysis of gaps in services for committed youth, the state of Maryland identified the primary needs for the youth it sent to out-of-state facilities.<sup>37</sup> Of the 300 kids it sent out of state in FY 2012 and FY 2013, the primary treatment needs were family function, mental health and aggression. The report also stated that the use of out-of-state placements evidences a gap in services. Importantly, of the 300 youth sent out-of-state, 95% were African-American and Latino.<sup>38</sup>

## No Reject Policies



Available, Accessible &  
Flexible Services

Youth & Family Voice,  
Choice & Ownership

Individualized Services

Family Focus

Strength-based Approach

Cultural Competence

Access to Work

Crisis & Safety Planning

No Eject Policies

Civic Engagement/  
Giving Back

Long-term Connection to  
Community Supports

***First they need to  
think as if I am their  
kid and then just be  
fair."***

*-YAP Youth, Age 16  
Atlantic City, NJ*

***"Locking us up does  
not help us."***

*-YAP Youth, Age 18  
Baltimore, MD*

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Systems understand these gaps in services that lead to an unnecessary use of out-of-home placements. Like Maryland, New York State also recognized that exclusionary policies lead to a gap in services and unnecessary out-of-home placement for youth in its Close to Home Initiative. Consider this language from a recent request for proposal in which NY sought to evaluate the resources available to youth with the most complex needs:

*"In the course of implementing Close to Home, the Community-Based Interventions Committee has identified a service gap for two groups of justice-involved youth:*

- 1.Youth who are eligible for ATP [alternatives to placement] Programs but who are not accepted by any of the existing ones due to certain exclusionary criteria and*
- 2.Youth who... have many social service needs that put them at risk of out-of-home placement.*

*These youth are usually in detention pending the disposition of the case. These youth tend to have complex, multisystem needs, and current programming as well as current dispositional recommendation and planning processes have not been meeting those needs. As a result, some of these youth may have been placed in Close to Home residential facilities unnecessarily." <sup>39</sup>*

This RFP and the Maryland report articulate the challenges facing the highest risk youth, and how exclusionary policies contribute to incarceration of youth who could be safely served in their communities.

### **AVAILABLE, ACCESSIBLE & FLEXIBLE**

Community-based programs should also be available to families at times when a family most needs them, including in the early mornings before school, into the evenings after school and on weekends, the times that youth are most apt to get in trouble.<sup>40</sup> For the highest risk youth, it is critical that programs can be flexible and able to support the youth and family regardless of the time, even being available 24/7 so that families in crisis can access the support they need to remain intact and safe in the community whenever and wherever they need it.

Programs should also be geographically accessible, providing services at locations most convenient to the family, such as their home, school and

neighborhood, rather than requiring a family to come to a program location that may be difficult for them to get to.<sup>41</sup>

Because youth needs will evolve, community-based programs should also be flexible and able to adapt the interventions, including the frequency of contact (how many days a week) with the intensity of contact (how many hours a week) and adjust it over time in the process of helping the youth and family achieve and maintain stability in the community. This level of availability reflects a real commitment to the youth and family that the services designed to help them are reliable, especially in times of crisis or instability.

### EMPOWER VOICE, CHOICE & OWNERSHIP

Youth and their families should have a voice and a choice in what happens to them, instead of being told what they need.<sup>42</sup> Research supports what common sense tells us: addressing needs identified by youth and family, and planning for corresponding interventions with them, improves engagement, retention and success. When the intervention process is inclusive and strength-based, the family and youth have ownership over their own successes; they are start-up investors more likely to engage in activities and interventions they choose.

Instead of prescribing interventions for youth and families, programs should approach them in a spirit of partnership, asking: *What do you need? How can we help? How can we work together as equal partners? And when you're stable, how can we give back to the community?* Engaging youth and families in identifying what is important to them and responding with meaningful choices that directly reflect their expressed concerns demonstrates respect and a true partnership based in trust.

Every aspect of work with a young person or family requires their input, from the youth's initial assessment and plan to development, to ongoing activities and daily interventions.

**“WHEN THE INTERVENTION PROCESS IS INCLUSIVE AND STRENGTH-BASED, THE FAMILY AND YOUTH HAVE OWNERSHIP OVER THEIR OWN SUCCESSES; THEY ARE START-UP INVESTORS MORE LIKELY TO ENGAGE IN ACTIVITIES AND INTERVENTIONS THEY CHOOSE.**

No Reject Policies

Available, Accessible & Flexible Services

**Youth & Family Voice, Choice & Ownership**



Individualized Services

Family Focus

Strength-based Approach

Cultural Competence

Access to Work

Crisis & Safety Planning

No Eject Policies

Civic Engagement/  
Giving Back

Long-term Connection to  
Community Supports

***“Youth need to have a say on how to make their life better.”***

-YAP Youth, Age 15  
South Bronx, NY



## Bright Spot

# Community Connections for Youth, South Bronx, NY

## Community Capacity & Positive Youth Development

Community Connections for Youth in the South Bronx is a leader in developing community capacity for juvenile justice reform. By empowering grassroots faith and community organizations to serve young people in the justice system, it quite literally creates community connections for youth that have proven effective in reducing recidivism. An independent evaluation by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice found that youth engaged in CCFY's court diversion program were 33% less likely to be arrested than youth in a comparison group.

CCFY uses a youth development approach that prioritizes strength-based assessments and intake processes. The process focuses on how to tap into what really matters to the youth in an effort to connect him or her to sustainable resources and supports and generate ownership and even enthusiasm for being a part of the community. While youth are mandated to CCFY's program for an average of 60 days, 80% of participants continue to engage voluntarily even after their court mandate ends. In fact, 42% of youth mandated to CCFY's programs stayed active with the program voluntarily for more than 6 months.

CCFY also recognizes families as primary resources and the most important parts of a child's success. Many of the families are in crisis, and in large part, the juvenile justice system has been created to address that crisis. According to Executive Director, Rubén Austria, it is not about finding the best way to "treat" the kids, but the

best way to *develop* family and community networks. CCFY engages family members in support networks and leadership development opportunities. Families start to feel capable to support other families, feeling the impact of an intentional and robust community. The growth of CCFY's parent support network led the NYC Department of Probation to offer CCFY a contract to provide parent peer coaches for families currently going through the juvenile justice system.

In its efforts to grow community competence, CCFY has committed to incubate smaller grassroots organizations that lack independent capacity to get or maintain government funding but whose ability to connect to young people in the juvenile justice system is, according to Rubén, "off the charts." CCFY aims to support these organizations so that they can learn to formally partner with the justice system as they continue to be central to supporting all kids in the community.



Source: Jacobs, N. *Community Connections for Youth: A Report Covering the First Three Years of an Innovative Grassroots Approach to Pro-Social Adolescent Development in a Neighborhood of Chronic Disadvantage* John Jay College of Criminal Justice (June 2012)



## INDIVIDUALIZE SERVICES FOR EACH YOUTH

Each child in need is different, and has myriad needs, strengths, resources, interests and challenges.<sup>44</sup> They also differ in the ways they could best use help and support. Each kid's family capacity will vary as well. Because of these differences, community-based services must be individualized and built around a youth's unique needs, strengths and situation, not just available services, and address all life domains in addition to risky behaviors and safety concerns.

Most institutions and community-based organizations take a service-driven approach, where the help a youth receives is based on a menu of interventions from substance abuse, to anger management and many important others. But, when a youth's strengths and needs don't fit within the scope of available services, one of three things will happen: the youth will receive services she doesn't need; individual needs, even those that may lead to deeper system involvement, continue to go unmet, or; as noted above, kids will be rejected from community-based services and sent to out-of-home placements where their needs are likely to persist, unmet.

A needs-driven approach, on the other hand, involves creating an actual holistic plan for each youth, even if the necessary services are outside the scope of what's traditionally available. It enables communities to think outside-the-box in designing youth interventions for multiple domains, such as mental and physical health, education, culture, family, financial, social, home, spiritual and safety. Importantly, it also encourages non-traditional and creative treatment plans informed by principles of positive youth development, the youth's interests and the family capacity. Individualized service planning reflects accepting kids for who they are and supporting who she or he will become. It tailors services to the uniqueness of the youth and their family, rather than push them into existing service slots or beds that are already set up but may not meet all the priority needs or utilize the identified strengths.

Youth's needs change over time as well, and so the intervention must change and adapt to meet the evolving needs. An individualized approach is effective in monitoring progress and modifying the intervention as needed. This approach is adaptive and can have the best results with youth who have been labeled the hardest to reach, "intractable," or "not amenable to service."

No Reject Policies

Available, Accessible &  
Flexible Services

Youth & Family Voice,  
Choice & Ownership

## Individualized Services



Family Focus

Strength-based Approach

Cultural Competence

Access to Work

Crisis & Safety Planning

No Eject Policies

Civic Engagement/  
Giving Back

Long-term Connection to  
Community Supports

***"All children in the program are not the same. All of the children come from different situations and backgrounds. It is important for the adults not to be judgmental."***

-YAP Youth, Age 17  
Philadelphia, PA

## Cortez

### Chicago, IL

*"I've been locked up for most of my childhood and now I'm going to college to get my degree in business management... I prefer to be a leader, not a follower."*

At age 13 Cortez was arrested and adjudicated delinquent for a weapons possession charge and sentenced to probation. Over the next 6 years he was in and out of three of the state's juvenile facilities based on violations of that probation including dirty drops and curfew violations. At 17, Cortez was arrested for armed robbery, only this time, the charge put him squarely in the jurisdiction of the adult criminal justice system where he spent time "doing the circuit" in and out of five facilities and one boot camp.

The only boy and the middle child, Cortez's father had been incarcerated since Cortez was four years old for first degree murder. His mother struggled to raise him and his siblings on her own, and Cortez was eventually removed from his home and placed in foster care. Now, at age 19, and after his release from prison and having received intensive community-based services through YAP and Lutheran Children and Family Services of Illinois, Cortez is enthusiastically moving forward down a positive pathway.

He knew that when he got out he wanted to pursue classes in carpentry thinking he would be interested in rehabbing homes. Upon his release he was matched to an Advocate, Shawn Parker. Shawn was able to develop a trusting relationship with Cortez, accepting who he was and where he was at, focusing on his strengths and small achievable steps towards Cortez's stated goals.

Shawn also was intentionally matched with Cortez because of his experience in carpentry and construction. Shawn facilitated a job for Cortez to work 25 hours/week, partially through a supported work placement.

Over time, Cortez realized he didn't want to rehabilitate houses, he wanted to flip them. So he worked with his advocate to apply and get accepted to a business management program at a local community college.

Cortez attributes his progress to a few things. First, he says the support he received once he got out helped him to learn and develop social skills that enabled him to feel comfortable in diverse environments, something he said he needed after being locked up for most of his childhood. Second, it gave him something to do. As he put it: "I will take doing something over doing nothing. You can change, it don't take much, but you just need to do something. As for me, I prefer to be a leader, not a follower."



Cortez (left) with his Advocate, Shawn



## ENSURE FAMILY-FOCUSED SERVICES

To effectively help a youth, a community program must include the family. There is no greater asset to ensuring a youth's success than the family.<sup>45</sup> Families are experts in their child's life and stay after all services are gone, whether those services are in the community or in an institution. Even if the family is struggling with chronic or devastating challenges, it remains a youth's best resource. Research shows that full *family* engagement is the most important factor for youth engagement and success. And when a youth's family is doing well, a child will do well too.

However, families are frequently considered the primary problem, rather than the primary resource. Many families of justice-involved youth are labeled non-compliant, resistant or not amenable to service from a worker's perspective who feels frustrated by a family's response (or lack thereof).<sup>46</sup> But from a family perspective it may have more to do with survival, fear or hopelessness, even trying to get through the end of the day. Sometimes families won't attend meetings because they may be working or taking care of children; or, for example, a mother may not attend court because she is one step away from losing her job if she misses work one more time.

In essence, some parents who may report to the system that they are not ready to have young people come home are reflecting back what see around them: a lack of support from the system to keep their son or daughter safe. Even a parent who says "I don't want my child to come home," may really mean, "I'm scared that I can't keep my child safe," or "I'm scared I can't help my child." They may feel that they cannot handle the child's needs. Rationally from where they're sitting then, they may feel that a youth is actually safer in a facility.

Community-providers can therefore best support youth by supporting their families. Youth with complex needs frequently come from families in crisis with long histories of system involvement. Parents and families are often survivors themselves; survivors of physical or sexual abuse, poverty, drug addiction, behavioral health concerns and mass incarceration. Parents are often under extreme stress, struggling with a number of concrete and emotional challenges. Focusing on the needs of the entire family - parents, siblings and youth - often gives a family the support it needs to overcome fears of caring for the youth in their own homes. Particularly, supporting parents in meeting their personal needs improves their capacity to better care for their child over time.

No Reject Policies

Available, Accessible & Flexible Services

Youth & Family Voice, Choice & Ownership

Individualized Services

## Family Focus



Strength-based Approach

Cultural Competence

Access to Work

Crisis & Safety Planning

No Eject Policies

Civic Engagement/  
Giving Back

Long-term Connection to  
Community Supports

*"I started to really think about the families. You don't hurt a family that wants to be part of the solution."(46)*

*- Judge Daley (Ret.),  
Middlesex County Family  
Court*



# System Reformer: Judge Roger Daley (Ret.)

## Middlesex County, NJ (New Brunswick)

In 1998, Middlesex County (NJ) had more than 100 kids in detention on any given night. By 2012 the number of youth in detention on any given night was between 15 and 20. Recently retired juvenile court Judge Roger Daley was one of two judges who presided over the reduction in Middlesex County.

One of the most influential experiences for Judge Daley was peer-to-peer mentoring with other judges he met through the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. In addition, he was moved by Supreme Court jurisprudence that relied on neuroscience to overturn adult sanctions for kids, including the juvenile death penalty in 2005 and later curtailing juvenile life without parole in a series of decisions. From his perspective, if the US Supreme Court was acknowledging that adolescent brain development affected their ability to understand the consequences of their actions that should also affect the practice in his courtroom.

He also credits much of the change in Middlesex County to a shift from a punitive court to a therapeutic court and initiating a special, multi-disciplinary team that included memorandums of understanding between agencies. Judge Daley decided that in order to change the practice, people needed to start working together or nothing would ever happen. He began to convene people from other youth-serving agencies. Foremost on his mind was the families. As he put it, *"you don't hurt a family that wants to be a part of the solution."*

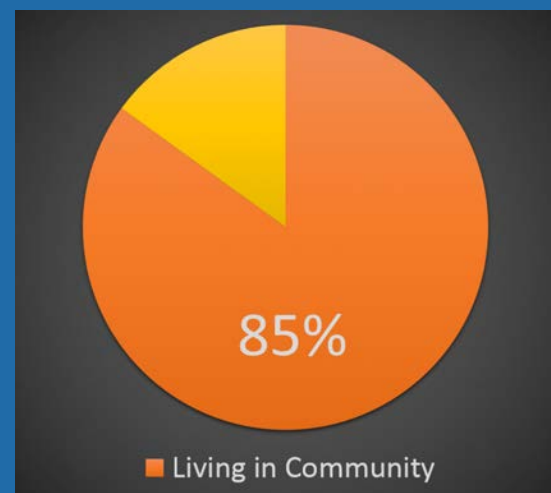
*"We're talking about the lives of children; I wasn't doing this to be popular."*

One challenge persisted. Although he tried to avoid placing kids in detention for probation violations, he did use detention for probation violations to help youth with addictions. The lack of community detox facilities meant that kids couldn't get into inpatient drug treatment unless they were in jail.

In 2008 JDAI, which had already successfully reduced detention populations in multiple other counties in New Jersey, did analysis of how many kids were in detention in Middlesex County. The County hadn't created any alternatives when JDAI did its assessment, so Judge Daley reached out to others in the state for help. One state leader responded, and introduced Judge Daley to staff from Camden Youth Advocate Programs to adapt its Community Reintegration Services program (CRIS) in Middlesex County.

Middlesex CRIS created a meaningful detention alternative for kids who Judge Daley described as "the really risky ones, the ones who were going to be locked up in state prisons." Post-discharge outcomes from 2013 show that 90% of youth were not arrested while in the program, 87% of the post-discharge youth surveyed were not arrested at the last known time after discharge, and 89% were living in the community at discharge, with 85% living in the community post-discharge.

Judge Daley considered CRIS a successful program that helped to reduce the detention population by directly providing an alternative he felt could help the youth and family and also address public safety concerns. He believes that one of the reasons for the program's success is that CRIS used Advocates, paid street workers who were boots on the ground working with the kids in their neighborhoods and with their families. In 2010, JDAI formally entered Middlesex County and has continued to help Middlesex County, through CRIS and other alternative to detention programs to reduce the detention population.



Source: Interview with Judge Roger Daley, March 11, 2014; Internal YAP outcome data for Middlesex County CRIS and DAP Programs, 01.01.11-12.31.13

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## Youth & Family Voice, Choice & Ownership

## Individualized Services

## Family Focus

## Strength-based Approach



## Cultural Competence

## Access to Work

## Crisis & Safety Planning

## No Eject Policies

## Civic Engagement/ Giving Back

## Long-term Connection to Community Supports

## TAKE A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH

Any "assessment" of youth should begin with an understanding that first, all youth and families possess strengths, potential, interests and talents that make them unique and that can be built upon and shared; and second, that youth and families need access to positive people, places and activities to develop their natural potential and live full, productive lives.<sup>47</sup>

Many high-need youth have experienced serious challenges and unimaginable tragedies in their young lives and are survivors. They are extraordinarily resilient and often have untapped strengths that can be nurtured and developed. Addressing risk alone may equip a youth to survive, but falls short of promoting their wellbeing and helping youth thrive through engaging them in their own development and the development of their communities in meaningful ways. As one noted advocate has said, "[p]roblem free is not fully prepared."<sup>48</sup>

Strength-based approaches are informed by the principles of positive youth development, and recognize that youth have skills, access to opportunities to contribute based on their skills and interests, and the ability to make choices during the intervention - not at some distant point in the future after their problems have been extinguished.<sup>49</sup> This is especially important because it discredits the assumption that youth must be "fixed" before they can be developed. What we know about human motivation and adolescent development is that what youth need most is to be challenged as well as cared for.

“ADDRESSING RISK ALONE MAY EQUIP A YOUTH TO SURVIVE, BUT FALLS SHORT OF PROMOTING THEIR WELLBEING AND HELPING YOUTH THRIVE THROUGH ENGAGING THEM IN THEIR OWN DEVELOPMENT AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR COMMUNITIES IN MEANINGFUL WAYS.

*"Most kids don't need to be punished for their mistakes - they need someone like an advocate to lead them down the right path."*

*- YAP Youth, Age 14  
Philadelphia, PA*

Successful community-based programs first identify strengths and interests and then ensure that goals and interventions build upon and further develop them through individual and group settings and formal and informal activities. Important questions to ask when working with youth are "What are you good at?" and "What do you like?", "Who likes you?" and "Why do you think they like you?" For many kids, it will be the first time anyone has posed these questions to them, and it may be difficult for them to answer. Strengths can be something as simple as recognition of healthy, interpersonal relationships to something more concrete, like being good at baseball.

Building an intervention based on interests helps young people - and families and communities as well - to use strengths in positive ways to meet or address the needs or reduce risk behaviors. For example, if a youth is at risk of dealing drugs after school, a positive youth development intervention would engage him during that time in something he is good at, enjoys or is interested in. Successful programs continually assess potential strengths in the family and resources in their community, particularly in non-traditional settings. This is the essence of a strength-based approach informed by positive youth development.



A STRENGTH-BASED APPROACH IS EVEN MORE IMPORTANT FOR THE HIGH-NEED YOUTH WHO WILL NEED TO TAP INTO THEIR ABUNDANT COMMUNITY AND INTRINSIC RESOURCES TO SUSTAIN A SAFE AND HEALTHY LIFE. AS ONE RESEARCHER NOTED:

*"THE MORE DIFFICULT THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE, THE MORE IMPORTANT IT IS THAT PROFESSIONAL INTERVENTION BE ORIENTED TOWARDS INVESTING IN THE CAPACITIES OF SUCH INDIVIDUALS, THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES, SO AS TO EMPOWER THEM TO BE THEIR OWN PRIMARY INVESTORS IN WORKABLE AND SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS AND LIFE CHOICES."*

MAKING THE CASE FOR AN ASSET-BASED  
APPROACH TO PROBATION: FROM  
REFORMATION TO TRANSFORMATION <sup>50</sup>



## Middlesex, NJ

### Alternatives to Detention

Middlesex County YAP runs alternative to detention programs, CRIS (Community Re-Integration Services) and DAP (Detention Alternatives Program). In partnership with Judge Roger Daley (Ret.), Program Director Melissa Ortiz, heavily involved in local juvenile justice coalitions and advocacy, grew the program in direct response to the needs of the community. Today, Melissa continues that work with the Middlesex County Family Court.

One of the community's strengths was its youth and their potential; and one challenge was the number of youth who were gang involved and engaged in destructive behaviors. Integrating principles of positive youth development and youth leadership, YAP Advocates (paid street workers) worked with Melissa and the youth to create the Pathways gang intervention group to complement individual services in the CRIS and DAP programs.

Pathways serves as a support, education and skills group for the youth who choose to participate. In the group setting the youth and the Advocates are equals, everyone is responsible for their own behavior and together they decide what the group will discuss.

In one session, the youth and Advocates worked together and asked: how could rival gang members hate each other so much but be unable to look one another in the eye (even in group, they would look down at the ground when talking to rival gang members). They

realized they didn't know why they hated each other. It didn't change everything - rival gang members were still rival gang members - but they began to look out for each other because they had a sense of community based on their shared experiences.

They also focused on what they had in common, explored the underlying issues that led them to join their respective gangs in the first place, learned job training skills, and practiced improving social skills. For one youth, the Pathways group and fidelity to the concepts of seeing value and strengths in everyone and retaining hope, even in difficult and emotional situations proved to be critical.

Judge Daley sent a 16-year old young man, J.A., to the CRIS program. J.A. identified as a member of the Bloods street gang in New Brunswick and was in court for vandalizing a Jewish cemetery in New Brunswick. J.A. had multiple difficulties with relationships at home and in the community. He suffered from severe ADHD (although was not on medication), struggled with reading, had been kicked out of multiple schools, and exhibited violent behavior. He lived at home with his mother and his stepfather, and although his father lived nearby, they did not have a relationship.

One day, while at the Pathways program J.A. received a telephone call informing him that his house was raided and his family members were taken into custody. His stepfather had been selling and trafficking drugs out of

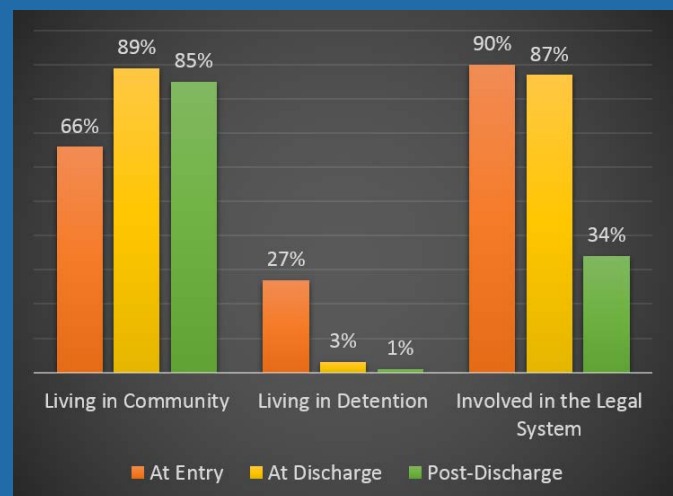


the home. In addition the young man's beloved dogs were killed in the process. J.A. was devastated. He feared being homeless- he had no relationship with his father and his mother and stepfather were in jail. YAP helped to reconnect him with his father and uncle and stabilize his living situation. Recognizing the bond between this young man and his mother, YAP took him to court for her hearings and offered emotional support throughout the entire process.

He continued to participate in YAP services and particularly in the Pathways program. He took a leadership role within the group and from time to time ran group sessions on his own. During this difficult time he was able to fulfill one of his ultimate goals - graduating high school. He now has a job in a warehouse and is stable, living with his father and serving as a peer mentor to other youth in his community. Although he was at risk of being in detention, the judge gave him a chance to succeed in the community. By working with other youth, getting support in a crisis and being connected to family, J.A. was able to overcome some intense obstacles.

J.A. was not an exception. Middlesex County YAP's alternative to detention programs are successful in keeping high-risk and high-potential youth in the community and out of detention, especially youth of color, who make up the majority (86%) of the youth in these programs. Of all the youth in the program, 90% were not arrested while in the program. Of those

contacted post-discharge, 87% had remained arrest free 12 months after leaving YAP.



## No Reject Policies

## Available, Accessible & Flexible Services

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## Individualized Services

## Family Focus

## Strength-based Approach

# Cultural Competence



## Access to Work

## Crisis & Safety Planning

## No Eject Policies

## Civic Engagement/ Giving Back

## Long-term Connection to Community Supports

## PROVIDE CULTURALLY COMPETENT SERVICES

Programs that will be most effective at reaching and helping youth will demonstrate a commitment to cultural and community competence. In working with high and complex need families, cultural competence is essential to engaging the family and the broader community in support of the youth and family.<sup>51</sup> It means matching families with workers who they will view as "credible." Becoming "credible" to a youth and family can include pairing them with someone who shares their language and who lives in the same neighborhood; or it could be connecting them with individuals who were once system-involved themselves, or have common familial histories. Community-based programs can and should rely on both professionals and paraprofessionals who possess an expertise in the community's needs, assets and strengths and who can develop trusting, caring, and credible relationships with youth and their families. This positive role model is one of the strongest protective factors to build a successful and crime-free life.<sup>52</sup>

Importantly, community-based programs that prioritize matching youth with culturally competent staff can directly reduce the overrepresentation of incarcerated youth of color. Societal and institutional racism are key contributors to systemic biases that result in more black and brown kids being locked up. Staff who have shared experiences as the youth, who hail from the same communities, neighborhoods and even blocks can help a youth identify and navigate through barriers endemic to a particular community. Likewise, culturally competent staff are more likely to build a trusting relationship with youth, leading to a greater chance of building a successful plan together.

It is natural for communities to create connections among its members, whereas government workers or even clinical staff may find it more challenging as they balance multiple cases and negotiate their various roles in a youth's life. The close relationships that kids can form with culturally competent staff can also help youth comply with probation or parole mandates by making sure they make appointments, appear in court, and support mandated interventions.

***"I think kids need someone who they can talk to like a best friend - putting young kids in jail is killing their future. Putting them in jail is belittling their confidence."***

- YAP Youth, Age 17  
Baltimore, MD



## Bright Spot



# Credible Messengers (South Bronx, NY)

## New York City Department of Probation: Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM)

In 2012, the New York City Department of Probation issued a concept paper to create the Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM) program, whose goal was to provide intensive community-based mentoring and advocacy for youth who would otherwise end up in state corrections. Specifically, it identified the target population as "high-risk youth on probation facing the highest probability of out-of-home-placement." In the concept paper for this program, NYC DOP articulated the importance of involving culturally competent community members in its program, in which it defined as a "credible messenger," or an *"individual who is well respected and trusted in the community and has the ability to effectively relay the components of the program to the participants; thereby transferring knowledge, enthusiasm, and most importantly support for the initiative that will leave the participants and their families with a clear understanding of the program components and goals," and who would "have a high rate of success in reaching the target population."*

In 2012, the NYC Department of Probation forged a partnership with YAP and Community Connections for Youth (CCFY), a grassroots community-based organization in the South Bronx, to help high-risk youth achieve personal and social success. Youth in the program were sentenced to YAP to keep them safe and in the community and avoid out-of-home placement in upstate NY. The targeted areas were located in the South Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the country. But the neighborhoods in the target area were also rich with culture, desire and resources to help and support its kids and families.

Together, YAP and CCFY recruited street workers from the community - credible messengers - who understood the community challenges facing many youth in the program and also the assets and strengths of the community that could be built in to support the youth and their families. These "credible messengers," many of them formerly incarcerated, are able to connect to the youth in ways that no one else can. These credible messengers work with Program Director, Doug Knepper, to build plans for the youth to avoid out-of-home placements, comply with the mandates of their probation and also develop into leaders empowered to make good and healthy choices.

CCFY has also demonstrated a commitment to supporting local partners to integrate youth in the program into existing youth development activities and networks of support. For example, CCFY helped to forge a partnership with a local community garden (*Friends of Brook Park*) where youth referred by the NYC Department of Probation could work side by side with adult mentors on a youth urban farming project. The collaboration also supports other grassroots community-based organizations like Friends of Brook Park to build its capacity to work with high-need youth. Together, CCFY, YAP and DOP have built a sustainable alternative to incarceration program that is truly rooted in the neighborhoods, depends on family and youth voice and choice and relies on community members to team up with the families and community organizations to help youth succeed.

No Reject Policies

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Access to Work



Crisis & Safety Planning

No Eject Policies

Civic Engagement/  
Giving Back

Long-term Connection to  
Community Supports

## ENGAGE YOUTH IN WORK

Connecting youth to work is a vital component of an effective community-based alternative for the highest need youth. The recent Annie E. Casey Foundation report, *Youth and Work*, emphasized the importance of connecting youth to jobs and work experience like this:

*"Early job experience increases the likelihood of more work in the future, as well as more employer-sponsored education. A continuum of work experiences from the teen years onward - including volunteer and community service, summer and part-time jobs, work-study experiences, internships and apprenticeships - build job-readiness skills, knowledge and confidence. These encompass not just workplace and financial skills, but also the broader "soft skills" of taking responsibility and initiative, working in teams, focusing on problem-solving and learning how to contribute. Despite the lack of jobs in the private sector, youth participating in school or other public systems - including foster care and juvenile justice - should be provided with subsidized work and/or work-like activities such as community service. Providers running youth programs should also be encouraged to hire young people."*

-*Youth and Work*, 2012 <sup>53</sup>

Having a job can be transformational. For many justice-involved youth, it can also be elusive. Kids who have arrest or delinquency records or even poor grades may also be unable to participate in many well-intended job programs sponsored by governments or non-profits.<sup>54</sup>

Yet we know that in order for kids to be employable later, they need experience now. For kids who are contributors to their family's income, earning money is a very real concern. A community-based program can help identify that need and help support youth to apply to jobs that interest him or her, and steer them away from unlawful activities that meet economic needs.

The benefits of jobs for youth are not inconsequential. According to Justice Policy Institute, employment is associated with "significantly" reduced crime in young people between 17 and 25.<sup>55</sup> Work instills confidence and pride and helps to build self-esteem and interpersonal relationship skills. It gives youth exposure to other people and their experiences, as well as to new skills. It provides an opportunity to

explore strengths and overcome challenges. Being a part of the workforce also helps youth to learn, in a safer environment, how to negotiate ups and downs, skills they can apply to other parts of their lives.<sup>56</sup> It also provides the young person with money to pay back restitution or fines, financial help to assist his family and enough cash to hopefully deter illegal activity. For youth living in communities rife with violence, a job can stop a bullet.<sup>57</sup>

Where traditional jobs are impossible, programs should consider building in a "supported work" component that subsidizes wages for youth to work in local businesses, assist local charities or perform in-house. Staff from community organizations should be trained in job coaching and help to facilitate a partnership with an employer, vouching for the youth and agreeing to provide support to both the youth and employer. This provides transitional employment opportunities, targeted for youth not yet ready for outside employment, to work in a safe structured environment.

“ **WORK INSTILLS CONFIDENCE AND PRIDE AND HELPS TO BUILD SELF-ESTEEM AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP SKILLS. IT GIVES YOUTH EXPOSURE TO OTHER PEOPLE AND THEIR EXPERIENCES, AS WELL AS NEW SKILLS.** ”

## Why Work is Important for High-Need Youth<sup>58</sup>

**WORK LEGITIMIZES EDUCATION:** IT HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL AND TRAINING. WHEN PEOPLE HATE THEIR JOB, ONE THING THEY USUALLY CONSIDER IS GOING BACK TO SCHOOL. OR, THEY REGRET DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL, OR NOT ADVOCATING FOR A BETTER EDUCATION.

**WORK HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE BUILD SOCIAL CAPITAL,** THE MOST IMPORTANT COMPONENT OF FUTURE LABOR MARKET SUCCESS.

**WORK HELPS PEOPLE GAIN ACCESS TO REAL LABOR MARKET INFORMATION** ABOUT WHAT JOBS ARE BEING CREATED, GROWING OR PHASING OUT. THEY LEARN STRONG LESSONS ABOUT THE SKILLS AND ATTITUDES NECESSARY FOR CAREER SUCCESS.

**WORK HELPS CHANGE THE PEER GROUP.** IT HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP A NETWORK OF LIKE MINDED PEERS.

**WORK DECREASES THE CHANCES OF GETTING IN TROUBLE.**

**WORK BUILDS PRIDE AND SELF-ESTEEM.**

**WORK HELPS MEET ECONOMIC NEEDS:** YOUNG PEOPLE BUY FOOD, CLOTHING, PAY FOR TUITION, AND MEDICAL NEEDS.

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## Civic Engagement/ Giving Back

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## PRIORITIZE SAFETY & CRISIS PLANNING

To get ahead of volatile situations, prevent escalations in conflict, and address public and personal safety concerns, safety and crisis planning is a key component of effective community programming. Credible threats, crises and instability are predictable challenges for high need youth. Many systems may also believe that because of these risks, incarcerating a youth or placing him in a residential setting is the only safe thing to do. Sometimes it is the family that raises a safety concern for the youth or siblings.

The safety and crisis planning process should include the youth and family and consider risks such as abuse/neglect, violence, substance abuse, criminal activity, exploitation, suicide, depression or runaway behaviors. It should also be trauma-informed and reflect an understanding of triggers that may lead to unstable or dangerous responses that compromise safety. Effective safety and crisis planning includes facilitating an honest discussion with the family and others who know them what emergencies or safety concerns have occurred in the past. Taking this approach, the program can predict what issues may arise in the future, and develop plans designed to prevent them. Program staff should prioritize safety and crisis planning in the beginning and continue to revisit the concerns and planned interventions, responding to changes in a youth and family's circumstances, as well as ongoing external threats.

Safety and crisis planning can be especially important for LGBTQ youth who are more likely to have suffered abuse or rejection, less likely to have a trusted adult in their lives that can help them navigate through and de-escalate situations where they may feel a rational threat to their personal safety.

Judges and juvenile justice agencies may also feel more comfortable sending a youth to a community-based alternative or releasing a youth from a facility if a crisis and safety plan is in place. Attention to the risks and intentionally planning to predict, prepare and intervene for predictable crises can alleviate an otherwise risk-averse system.



Marquis (left) with his Advocate Michael

## Marquis

### Newburgh, NY

Sixteen-year old Marquis' file listed all of his behavioral challenges and none of his strengths, including six prior cases and several out-of-home placements. His most recent offense - where he was charged with stealing merchandise from Walmart - landed him in Goshen Secure Residential Center in upstate New York. Upon his release, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) referred him to the Newburgh Youth Advocate Program's aftercare program to facilitate a supportive reintegration.

Since he was a little boy, his father has been incarcerated. Marquis grew up at home with his mother and 13-year old younger brother. When Marquis first came home from Goshen, his mother was reluctant to have him back to her house because she was overwhelmed and worried she wouldn't be able to support him, especially at times when he and his younger brother argue. YAP staff sat down with her and started a conversation about what she remembered was really good about him. Her recollection was strong, and she spoke fondly about many of his strengths, including that he was a "likeable kid." During the conversation, she became more comfortable with having him come home. YAP staff also suggested some ways they would support her and Marquis.

Shortly after he returned from secure confinement, Marquis became a target for local gangs and safety planning became a key concern for the YAP staff who worked with him. Although he was not in a gang, the gangs were trying to recruit him because he is well-known for his loyalty, strength and agility. The gangs would try to shoot at him to provoke him, thinking that if he gets shot, he would join based on a need for protection. Marquis also had a serious education need; he was suspended from school soon after returning home.

In the community, Marquis was known as a good kid, who was likeable, personable, determined and loyal. One YAP staff said "he's the kind of kid you would want him on your side." Marquis also shared his interest and love for boxing, something he enjoys not just for the fun of it, but also because it helps him channel some of his impulsivity more productively and helps to keep him calm.

During the process of creating an individual plan for Marquis, his mother, his sibling, his boxing coach, others from the neighborhood, OCFS partners and YAP staff met at his house. Together they built a plan that addressed his needs - safety and education and also built on his strengths. A teacher comes to Marquis and his mom's home every day for two hours to teach Marquis so he doesn't fall behind in school and can position himself to re-enroll next year. YAP staff made a plan to provide Marquis with transportation to and from home and the gym, so he would not have to walk the streets with the threat of gang recruitment hanging over him.

The plan reflected his affinity for and talent in boxing, and also his assets, including loyalty and commitment to hard work. It also included building constructive activities into his time at home before and after the teacher arrives, such as practicing and working a job at the gym where he trains. His coach has been a reliable support for him, even providing respite to Marquis' mother when she feels overwhelmed. Marquis' work and the support he has received has resulted in him being sanctioned by New York State to compete in boxing, something that gives him great pride in his accomplishments. He now travels throughout the state to box in sanctioned competitions, has a renewed relationship with his mother, is working to get back to school next year and has not been arrested or violated since his return home.

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Civic Engagement/  
Giving Back

Long-term Connection to  
Community Supports

***“Give us another  
chance and don't give  
up on us.”***

- YAP Youth, Age 17  
Atlantic City, NJ

## PROVIDE UNCONDITIONAL CARING: "NO EJECT" POLICIES

Community-based programs should not eject kids for getting off track. To the contrary, programs geared towards serving youth with the most complex needs and risk for out-of-home placement should anticipate and plan for challenges to arise. In addition to setting expectations, community-based programs should not blame or judge, but rather frame challenges as a communication that the planned intervention needs to be revisited and adjusted.<sup>59</sup>

This element is one of the most critical. Many youth and families at the highest risk of out-of-home placement have extensive histories of system involvement, unresolved circumstances and unmet needs that leave them living in crisis. Unconditional caring may be a foreign concept to many youth and families, who may have histories rife with exposure to trauma, abandonment by significant people in their lives and a consistent lack of safety and stability. They must have room to make mistakes if they are to succeed. Youth and families need an unconditional commitment to support them through the toughest of times. For most families, the benefits of unconditional caring cannot be understated.

Unconditional commitment helps to build the necessary trust with families that allows them to be vulnerable and honest, and open to being supported.<sup>60</sup> Adopting an unconditional response can also help frame obstacles as temporary, not permanent road blocks. It is not unusual for kids who have failed in the system to revert back to old ways as they begin to experience success. They are often used to being told they're worthless and won't amount to much, so as new messages start to reach them, they may act out and test new boundaries in an effort to feel safe. It is quite common for them to feel that it can't be true that they're doing well.

**“UNCONDITIONAL COMMITMENT HELPS TO BUILD THE NECESSARY TRUST WITH FAMILIES THAT ALLOWS THEM TO BE VULNERABLE AND HONEST, AND OPEN TO BEING SUPPORTED.”**



**“ADOPTING A "NO EJECT" POLICY IS ALSO SUPPORTED BY LEADING RESEARCH IN TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE WHICH TELLS US TO APPROACH YOUTH AND FAMILIES NOT AS "WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU" BASED ON BEHAVIOR, BUT "WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU."**

Importantly, adopting a "no eject" policy is also supported by leading research in trauma-informed care which tells us to approach youth and families not as "what is wrong with you" based on behavior, but "what happened to you." Exposure to trauma is common for kids in juvenile justice systems. According to the Justice Policy Institute, "between 75 and 93 percent of youth entering the juvenile justice system annually in this country are estimated to have experienced some degree of trauma." <sup>61</sup>

Unconditional caring also means staying with a youth even if, in rare cases, he or she may need to be detained or placed in a hospital setting due to danger to self or others, and advocating that the out-of-home placement be for as short a time as possible.

Unconditional caring does not mean that youth don't face consequences and accept responsibility for their behavior. However, consequences can include a range of responses that do not include re-incarceration, rejection from the program or unnecessarily punitive measures that reinforce the belief of low self-worth.

Finally, individual and family needs change over time which means the type and level of intervention will change too. Unconditional caring helps to accommodate for these changes and conveys to the youth that no one is giving up on them. Effective programs will inform families of this ethic, and during difficult times, youth and families can witness it and know that they will not be abandoned or punished when they need help the most.

***"All kids deserve another chance. No matter how bad their case is or was, all kids deserve another chance, to better themselves, to start fresh, to start brand new."***

***- YAP Youth, Age 17  
Lebanon, PA***



## Roca, Inc. (Massachusetts)

### Unconditional Caring; No Reject Policies & Practice

Based in Massachusetts, Roca's mission is to *help disengaged, disenfranchised young people move out of violence and poverty*. Since 1988, Roca has used its intervention model to help over 20,000 young men realize positive behavioral change.

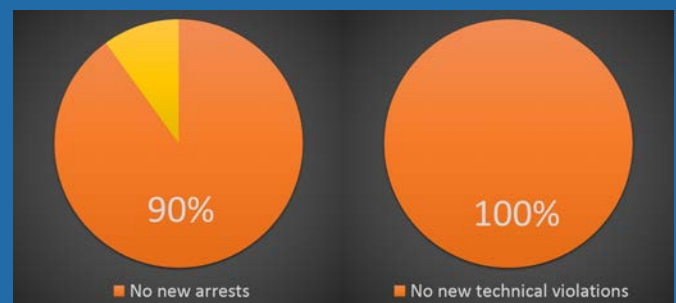
Its focus is on young men ages 17-24 who are high school dropouts, have felony convictions, have been failed by other programs and have no employment experience. Almost all the men in Roca's program also had nothing but negative institutional experience. Roca works with these young men for four years.

The Roca model begins with "relentless street outreach" to the most high-risk young men, then moves to intensive case management and relationship building, or "transformational relationships."

The third component is intensive programming, which includes Roca's unique transitional employment program. This employment program emphasizes unconditional caring and maintains a no eject policy. Roca intentionally builds in space for relapse into bad mistakes and dangerous behavior and does not eject men from the program because of it. While it does impose consequences, being kicked out of the program is not one of them. On average, it takes most young men in Roca's transitional employment program 15-18 months to complete 60 days of work in a row.

The final component of Roca's intervention involves collaborating with local and state governmental and law enforcement partners to extend the reach and success of the intervention.

Roca has also made a commitment to rigorously track data and outcomes, reporting that in FY 2012 it served over 400 very high-risk young men and had retention rates of 78%. Of those who completed the intensive component of the model, 90% had no new arrests, 100% had no new technical violations and 70% have demonstrated educational gains.



## CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT & GIVING BACK

Creating opportunities for justice-involved youth to give back and engage in civic activities enables them to live within the concept of community and not in isolation. When youth have the opportunity to help someone else it builds a sense of confidence, self esteem, and responsibility.

Civic development and engagement - the growing recognition of one's impact on their surroundings and responsibility to others, as well as the ability and opportunity to work collaboratively with others for a common goal - is key to an effective community-based alternative program. It is incumbent upon us to help youth access these opportunities and develop into leaders who can transition from being recipients of services, to contributors to their communities. Importantly, the nature of the activity and leadership development has to be meaningful to the youth for it to have the desired impact on the youth and the community.

For example, in one YAP program, the director connected with a local police department that had amassed a collection of abandoned or broken bicycles. Kids in the program worked on the bikes and then donated the repaired bikes to kids in need in the community. Not only did they contribute to making the community better, but they could also see the impact of their contribution every time a child rode his restored bike in the youth's neighborhood. In another case, a gang-involved youth arrested for gun possession and stealing cars turned out to be good at math. He began to tutor younger youth in math as a way to give back to the community. Other examples could include connecting a youth who enjoys basketball or soccer to an opportunity to mentor younger kids in the sport; or have a small group of youth identify that they want to clean up a local playground that has been overtaken by drug dealers and is unsafe for their younger siblings or other young children in the community.

This approach capitalizes on principles of positive youth development and the value of giving back. A youth always labeled and perceived as an "offender," an "outsider" or one who will never amount to something, and who is given a chance give back in these ways gains a new perspective and recognition that can change his life.

No Reject Policies

Available, Accessible & Flexible Services

Youth & Family Voice, Choice & Ownership

Individualized Services

Family Focus

Strength-based Approach

Cultural Competence

Access to Work

Crisis & Safety Planning

No Eject Policies

## Civic Engagement / Giving Back



Long-term Connection to Community Supports

“ **CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH TO GIVE BACK AND ENGAGE IN CIVIC ACTIVITIES ENABLES THEM TO LIVE WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF COMMUNITY AND NOT IN ISOLATION.**

## No Reject Policies

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## Youth & Family Voice, Choice & Ownership

## Individualized Services

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## Access to Work

## Crisis & Safety Planning

## No Eject Policies

## Civic Engagement/ Giving Back

## Long-term Connection to Community Supports



## CULTIVATE LONG-TERM CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

An essential part of community-based programming focuses on (re)connecting families to a positive community of support.<sup>62</sup> This is essential because formal services to youth and family are finite and temporary. Regardless of the level of the family's ability to problem-solve and resourcefulness in navigating how to meet needs, they will need some degree of ongoing support. Even the "healthiest" of individuals has a community of supports with whom they share their happiest moments and holidays, and those they call for advice on relationships, job decisions or something as simple as who can fix a car. As a result, community-based interventions should build in both formal services and informal supports that remain after formal services end.

This "community of support" is comprised of both social, informal supports - such as friends, mentors, recreational activities like sports, and safe places like the YMCA or library - and professional supports (such as mental health, school, employment training, etc.) that will be there for the youth and family now and for the foreseeable future.

An added benefit is that connecting youth to his or her community helps a youth to begin to see the community differently. When a youth becomes a part of the community, it may be more difficult to cause harm to it.

Research shows that people with reliable, positive social support systems are healthier, happier, and have more positive outcomes in many areas of their lives.<sup>63</sup> Whether systems rely on community based programs to reduce youth incarceration either at the front end of the system or at the back end, planning for purposeful transition - including connecting to community - should start on the first day of services so families are stable and prepared. Lasting intervention will take place with families and communities, not within facilities or community-based programs.

“REGARDLESS OF THE LEVEL OF THE FAMILY’S ABILITY TO PROBLEM-SOLVE AND RESOURCEFULNESS IN NAVIGATING HOW TO MEET NEEDS, THEY WILL NEED SOME DEGREE OF ONGOING SUPPORT.

## Bright Spot



# Black Family Development, Wayne County, MI (Detroit) Alternative to Incarceration and Detention

In 2013, the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency (MCCD) published the report, *There's No Place Like Home: making the case for wise investment in juvenile justice*, in which it discussed how Wayne County had shifted from a system that was state-controlled and focused on incarceration, to a local, self-sustained system based on rehabilitation and prevention. The local system included five managed care organizations that helped mobilize community-based services for juvenile justice-involved youth in an effort to keep them in the community and close to their families. One of those managed care organizations is Black Family Development, a youth-serving non-profit founded by African American social workers.

The geographic area that Black Family Development covers is Wayne County, with a particular focus on Juvenile Justice Services in nine zip codes on the east side of Detroit with the highest rate of youth crime in the County. The organization reaches 11,000 individuals and 2,700 families every year, including 1,500 youth diverted from court and 500 committed youth.

Black Family Development provides subgrants to community-based programs and to residential providers, although it favors keeping kids at home and with their families. Alice Thompson, the CEO of Black Family Development noted that "the community should be a partner to support the family. Children should be in the least restrictive setting and being with the parents in the least restrictive setting. When that is not possible

the priority should be to find a way to reunite the family with their child."

Their approach, along with the other four managed care organizations, is working. In *There's No Place Like Home*, MCCD reported that out-of-home placements of youth in Wayne County decreased by 50% and the number of youth placed in state facilities was drastically reduced, from 731 youth in 1998 to only seven youth in 2012. Importantly, recidivism also declined from 56% in 1998 to 17.5% in 2012, and residential costs were cut by 42 million dollars.

To augment the individualized services youth get through the community-based programs, Black Family Development also drives an active community role in cultivating cultural education for youth, building community capacity, bridging relationships between police and families and reducing abuse of zero tolerance policies in school that put kids on the school-to-prison pipeline.



Source: Interview with Alice Thompson, Executive Director of Black Family Development, February 2, 2014; Staley, K. & Weemhoff, M. (2013). *There's no place like home: Making the case for wise investment in juvenile justice*. Lansing, MI: Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency.

# Conclusion

ACCEPT ALL KIDS

BE AVAILABLE, ACCESSIBLE  
AND FLEXIBLE

EMPOWER YOUTH &  
FAMILIES

INDIVIDUALIZE SERVICES

ENSURE FAMILY FOCUSED  
SERVICE

TAKE A STRENGTH-BASED  
APPROACH

*"It isn't rocket science, but sometimes it's so overwhelming you don't know where to start. It's taken years but you have to start and it all falls into place. We still have a ways to go. We will always have a way to go."*

-Deborah Hodges, Lucas County Juvenile Court  
Administrator <sup>64</sup>

Our expectations for youth should reflect their potential and promise and focus on what they can achieve, not just what we want them not to do. Kids do best when they're with their families and in their communities. They cannot succeed if they are continually living on the margins, isolated from the nurturing and caring that all kids need to thrive.

Youth who have committed delinquent or criminal acts or who have multiple unmet needs and a history of out-of-home placements are the kids that need our help the most. To support them in the ways that they need supporting, communities must develop continuums of care that seldom use incarceration, if at all, and invest all or most of their resources building community capacity, strengthening families and developing youth strengths and talents.

Not only do we have the money to support youth and families in their own neighborhoods, we can no longer afford not to. Sending youth to institutions can place them at further risk for trauma and abuse, and exacerbate underlying needs that cannot be met within the institution (e.g. mental health). Research shows that youth in out-of-home placement are at higher risk for a number of poor outcomes, including sexual abuse, trauma, recidivism, substance abuse, homelessness, disconnection from school and work, poverty and increased likelihood of physical and mental illnesses.

Youth incarceration also hemorrhages state and local budgets, disinvests in communities, is unsustainable and fails to address the root causes of youth delinquency, mental health challenges and other persistent unmet needs. Communities, on the other hand, are vibrant, lively networks of people, who, when empowered, can wrap their resources, assets and will around a youth and family in need to help them achieve stability and pursue their goals.

When kids receive these services in the community, they don't have to adapt to a new environment like they do when they return from institutions. Importantly, when the intervention happens in the



community, the family and others who care for the youth are there to support him every day, not just on visiting days. And, community programs can reduce the intensity of the services (and therefore related costs) as kids become stabilized. In institutions, the level of service and costs remains the same regardless of a youth's progress.

Public safety is a valid concern, and one that can be addressed in the community through intensive programs. If kids need more structure, the community-based program can create the structure in the community with pre-planned routines, schedules and plans. An institution is not the only place to provide structure. If a youth needs intensive therapy, a non-residential program can provide intense therapy in the community. If kids need 24/7 supervision, that can be created in the community, too. This level of intensity should help courts, probation departments, parole and juvenile justice agencies begin to see youth with complex needs as acceptable risks, not high risks for whom incarceration seems to be the only appropriate response.

With the right supports, kids can also learn to be held accountable in community settings and there can be consequences for behavior that are effective but fall short of incarceration. In the community, there is great opportunity to explore graduated sanctions and restorative justice practices that promote healing and community connectedness, not isolation. We do not need to incarcerate kids to teach them that their behavior is wrong.

Providing services in the community for the most complex need youth is hard, not easy. It takes a lot of thought and planning, an array of solid providers and a coordinated system that needs to be managed on a daily basis. But in the long run, it is not only the right thing to do but it gets the best outcomes and has the biggest impact. Paying for a cell and locking kids up is the easier option; working with the kids in the community is challenging but well worth the time, effort and money. And it can be and has been done.

For all these reasons, advocates, youth, families, and system leaders must come together to divest in youth incarceration and invest in youth, families and communities. Together, we can bring youth safely home.

PROVIDE CULTURALLY  
COMPETENT SERVICES

ENGAGE YOUTH IN WORK

PRIORITIZE CRISIS AND  
SAFETY PLANNING

PROVIDE UNCONDITIONAL  
CARING

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR GIVING BACK / CIVIC  
ENGAGEMENT

CULTIVATE LONG-TERM  
CONNECTIONS TO  
COMMUNITY

# Recommendations

## ► FOR CONGRESS

- Create financial incentives for states to invest in community-based alternatives to incarceration and in federal grant programs serving youth.
- Require OJJDP to provide technical assistance for states and localities to create/expand community-based alternatives to incarceration.
- Require OJJDP to convene juvenile justice system stakeholders to discuss the creation and expansion of community-based alternatives to incarceration.

## ► FOR STATES AND LOCALITIES

- Don't build any new facilities and work to downsize existing, secure long-term institutions.
- Reduce the use of private residential beds for youth in the juvenile justice system.
- Raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 18.
- Systems should build in separate and unique services for youth ages 18-25 who fall outside of the juvenile court system but need help with transition to adulthood.
- Replace youth incarceration with supportive, community-based programs that engage families, include youth voice and choice and are grounded in principles of positive youth development and cultural competence.
- Invest in intensive, robust community-based re-entry programs for youth coming home from institutions to complement government aftercare or parole.
- Redirect savings of decarceration into a continuum of non-residential, community-based services.
- Prioritize culturally competent programs that can help reduce the overrepresentation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system.
- Work with other agencies to create an integrated support system for youth and families in need.
- Seek training and technical assistance from experts in deinstitutionalization and build community capacity to support high-need youth.

## ► FOR ADVOCATES

- Emphasize that community-based programs must be non-residential.
- Advocate for adequate funding to support youth and their families in the community.
- Advocate for redirection that results in true community investment.
- Advocate for non-residential community-based program for all youth, including programs for youth with the highest needs.
- Advocate for community-based programs that have evidence of success, are considered promising practices as well as those that are evidence based.

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The sentiment that we can and should do whatever it takes to keep justice-involved kids safely home in their own neighborhoods and with their families is at the heart of this report and reflects the vision of YAP's founder, Tom Jeffers. As a result of that vision, Youth Advocate Programs is a mission-driven, grassroots community of dedicated advocates whose expertise, experience and passion supported this work in myriad ways. Sherri Brown was the director of YAP's Baldwin County, Alabama program who enthusiastically supported this project but passed away before its publication so never got to see how her state and her program could be raised up as a bright spot. In addition, YAP staff Carla Benway, Judy Warner, Gary Ivory, Alan Kassirer, Stacy Huggins, Christopher Shaak, Sherri Munn, David White, Tim Thrasher, Michael Flowers, Adam Santacroce, Casey Lane, Jim Kelly, Melissa Ortiz, Fred Fogg, Dana Newman, Doriene Silva, Cliff Kubiak, Stephanie Hart and Jeff Fleischer provided unwavering internal support. Cheryl Furman is the extremely talented and extraordinarily patient self-taught graphic designer whose touch elevates the important messages within this report.

As an organization, we acknowledge the families of the youth in the juvenile justice system and recognize that family voice and choice is an essential part of any reform effort and that working together with families is the only way to bring youth safely home.

Finally, and most importantly, many thanks to the 316 youth who took the time to contribute their voices and stories to this report. Their experiences inform our own advocacy and help guide our collective effort to reduce youth incarceration and build strong communities. In the end, the youth are the leaders who will make the biggest difference, and we acknowledge their expertise, the value of their histories and are grateful for their input.



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