

# REDUCING MINORITY OVERREPRESENTATION in the Juvenile Justice System



Minority youth make up 42% of the US population but represent over 68% of youth involved in residential placement in the juvenile justice system, and a staggering 75% of youth in custody for violent offenses. Whether acting on volition or by mandate to reduce the number of minority youth in the juvenile justice system, jurisdictions recognize that these numbers are unacceptable. As a result, many states and localities are working to implement systemic reform that change policies, practices and behaviors that lead to the disparity of system-involved minority youth. Some localities have also attempted to reduce minority overrepresentation by diverting more minority youth to community supervision programs, like evening reporting centers.

However, systemic reform takes time, and evening reporting centers or community supervision programs like them may unintentionally widen the net. Both approaches are designed to reduce the number of minority youth who are already system-involved. But the overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system is not just about detention or system involvement, it is about a whole host of social factors that are likely to increase system involvement or expose youth to system involvement, if they remain unaddressed.

Minority youth are overrepresented in impoverished and crime-ridden neighborhoods where they have access to fewer after school programs; minority youth have higher unemployment and less access to jobs, and are more likely than their white students to be kicked out of school. Minority youth are more likely to have frequent and multiple contacts with law enforcement, delinquency adjudications, violations, charges and lengthier arrest records. Minority youth are also more likely to be sentenced to longer terms of secure confinement (or even probation) than white youth for the same offense or categories of offenses.

## YAP Model

**No Refuse Policy:** No youth or family will be refused or ejected from services.

**Individualized Planning:** Each plan is based on the family's unique needs, strengths, culture and preferences.

**Family Focused:** Parents/Carers are engaged as partners in their services, and support is offered to help them meet their needs and goals.

**Strength-Based:** We look at what strengths and assets kids and families have and seek to build upon them.

**Neighborhood-Based Recruiting:** We recruit staff who live in the same communities as the families we serve.

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) provides jurisdictions with a true community-based alternative to institutionalization that can help reduce the number of minority youth in the juvenile justice system right away and address social needs that may lead to system involvement. For over 40 years, YAP has worked to bring or keep the highest risk youth safely home from secure confinement by building on individual strengths, community resources, and family engagement. YAP can help states and localities satisfy their mandate and desire to reduce the number of minority youth in the system or at risk of being system involved.

## MERGE

(Males Engaged in Reducing Violence through Gainful Employment)

With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, MERGE engages young minority males ages 14-24 from high crime areas involved in the justice system to reduce violence through partnering with local community colleges and casinos to provide education and employment opportunities to youth. The program also requires all participants to complete the SAMSHA approved evidence-based “Peaceful Alternatives to Tough Situations” curriculum, provides soft-skill training, and provides a wide range of additional support dependent upon need, such as Wellness and Recovery Support and Services, Supported Work, Driver’s Education Training, GED Preparation, and Parenting Skills and support.

### *YAP has experience working successfully with high-risk minority youth.*

Over 84% of the youth in our programs are minority youth. Nearly 90% of youth remain arrest free while in our program, and 80% do not recidivate after graduating from our program. Importantly, 93% of the youth we serve remain safely home in their communities after our service period ends.

### *YAP provides culturally competent services.*

We intentionally match youth with advocates who live in the same communities as our youth, ensuring cultural matching and competency of staff with youth. Advocate matching is something we do well. In study conducted by the University of Albany and YAP, 90% of the Advocates from our juvenile justice programs nationwide report sharing a common ethnic or cultural identity; 84% share interests in sports, music, or hobbies; and 80% were raised in the same type of community as most of the youth with whom they work. Cultural matching of the advocate with the young person facilitates service acceptance and participation by the young person. YAP also connects youth with other positive role models from within their community.

### *YAP provides a safe alternative to detention and other out-of-home placements.*

YAP Advocates support youth by maintaining frequent and often intensive weekly contact (on average 8-10 hrs/wk) with them from within their homes, school and community. During their time together, Advocates work from a holistic plan individually tailored to address the specific needs, strengths and interests of the youth and his/her family. Advocates are also available 24/7 to address crises and emergencies.

***YAP helps to ensure that youth comply with the conditions of their probation or parole.***

Advocates ensure that the young person meets all required appointments and mandates, reducing instances of violations. Advocates often accompany young people to their appointments and court hearings, providing transportation as needed.

***YAP connects young people with job training resources and employment opportunities.***

Youth are able to participate in supported work, which provides paid on-the-job training, including apprenticeships and internships, to young people unable to secure employment through regular channels. YAP's Supported Work employers are often minority business people in the youth's community who become partners in supporting the high risk youth we serve.

***YAP strengthens the family unit and builds pro-social connections to the community.***

YAP's Wraparound Advocacy model is flexible, strength-based, culturally sensitive, partners with parents/caregivers and supports the needs and interests of the entire family. YAP's approach also builds Family Teams that include professionals and individuals from the community that support the youth and his/her family. Team members help engage the youth in pro-social opportunities and use their social capital to enable the young person to access jobs, volunteer mentors and provide opportunities to give back to the community.

***We have high expectations for our young people and maintain an unconditional commitment to them.***

We believe that each young person has potential and value their uniqueness. We work with them to develop their talents, strengths and interests. We encourage them to persevere as they face challenges, modeling, coaching and teaching coping skills. We don't expect perfection, but we maintain a long-term positive vision for our youth. And no matter what, ***we never give up on them.***

**Lucas County, OH**

An initiative to reduce DMC in the Lucas County (OH) Juvenile Justice System is showing positive results. Lucas is an Annie E. Casey JDAI site. YAP's program opened in 2006.

Juvenile Court Administrator Deborah Hodges reports a 46% decrease in the average daily population in the County's detention facility from 2009-2013. The number of African American youth also decreased by 46% during the same time period.

Juvenile Court Judges strongly support efforts to reduce DMC and the County's juvenile detention population, and to connect youth with community-based services appropriate to their needs. YAP is part this community-based continuum.

## Camden, NJ

YAP helps prevent DMC by providing early intervention (often called station house intervention) at a youth's initial point of contact with police.

One of many examples is Camden (NJ) where YAP staff rode with police as they made their rounds in predominately minority neighborhoods.

YAP staff are on call 24/7 to intervene at any location.

## Research and Outcomes

YAP is recognized as a “**Promising Practice**” by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the National Council on Crime & Delinquency. Ten external evaluations conducted by respected organizations have led YAP to consistently being considered a **Best Practice Model**. YAP programs were shown to have high program completion rates; low rates of placement into residential foster care; low numbers of young people who are AWOL; and residential stability. The **University of Texas/San Antonio** is currently evaluating YAP's model through one of five OJJDP Mentoring Best Practices Research grants.

84%

of YAP youth are youth of color

of YAP youth are aged 13 or older

74%

93%

of YAP youth remain in the community at discharge

of YAP youth remain arrest free

86%

View our documentary film “Safely Home” at [www.yapinc.org](http://www.yapinc.org) or by scanning the QR code. For more information, contact Gary Ivory at [givory@yapinc.org](mailto:givory@yapinc.org) or at 214.417.7614.

