

Safely Home

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

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."

Recommendations

► FOR CONGRESS

- Create financial incentives for states to invest in community-based alternatives to incarceration 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.