The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-Based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model

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Current juvenile justice programs fail to rehabilitate youth or promote public safety. Every youth prison in the country should be closed and replaced with small community-based programs.
• A little history
• An inherently flawed model
• High costs and negative outcomes
• Significant and unwarranted disparities
• Endemic Abuse
• Challenges to reform
• The DC experience
• Considerations
Youth justice programs have historically been modeled after adult penitentiaries.

- **170 years ago**: First “reformatories” emerge as “humane” alternative to poorhouses, prisons.
  - Developed to control “unruly youth, immigrants”
  - Abuse common from the outset
  - Rebranded by Progressives as “reform schools”

- ‘90’s “Superpredator Era” (Peaks at 109,000 in ‘99)
AN INHERENTLY FLAWED MODEL

- Youth *are developmentally different from adults*

- To mature, *youth need*:  
  - Modeling of prosocial behavior  
  - Opportunity for decision-making, critical thinking  
  - Positive adult-youth interactions  
  - Pathway to success (marriage and stable employment)

- Opposite of what they receive in youth prisons
HIGH COSTS
NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

- **Average cost:** $146,302/year (Justice Policy Institute, 2015)

- **Lifelong** negative individual & societal costs
  - Lost future earnings (and associated tax revenue)
  - Higher spending on Medicaid, Medicare
  - 70-80% of youth rearrested within 2-3 years
  - More sophisticated research shows higher rearrests, school failure, exacerbated mental illness, lowered employment prospects
Based on the young person’s current offense and his/her score on a scientifically validated risk/need assessment instrument SDMs suggest a range of appropriate dispositions.

Research shows that this kind of objective approach leads to better decisions (and lower recidivism).

“Having juvenile justice personnel follow a protocol for decision making reduces the variability in these determinations and increases the overall rate of sound decisions in the process… [Introducing risk needs assessments] can maximize the impact of resource investment by targeting resources to the risk level of the juvenile offender.” – National Academy of Sciences
A new validation study examining Florida’s dispositional matrix found that placing youth in an “above guidelines” disposition of any kind* doubles the likelihood that they will recidivate.
More than half (56%) of youth committed to Long Creek from 2010-2014 were adjudicated for misdemeanors.

58% of discharged youth were low to moderate risk.

85% 3 or more MH diagnosis, 3 in 10 stepped up from residential.

Are their no community alternatives for these youth? Are you making them worse like Florida?
RACIAL DISPARITIES IN YOUTH IMPRISONMENT

Youth Residing in U.S. Juvenile Detention, Correctional and/or Residential Facilities, 2013
SYSTEmic or recurring malTREATMENT, 1970-2015

WHY NOT JUST REFORM?

Reformers come and reformers go. State institutions carry on. Nothing in their history suggests they can sustain reform, no matter what money, what staff, and programs are pumped into them. The same crises that have plagued them for 150 years intrude today. Though the cast may change, the players go on producing failure.

—Jerome G. Miller
Former Massachusetts Secretary of the Department of Youth Services
Chapter 1:
“I wouldn’t kennel my dog at Oak Hill.”
Chapter 2: Bringing a little bit of Missouri to DC
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Present</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Get My GED</td>
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<tr>
<td>Girlfriends</td>
<td>Drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get a Job</td>
<td>Support My Family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good Life</td>
<td>$menu</td>
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<tr>
<td>640 Boyz, 4 Life</td>
<td>$100</td>
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**My Treatment House**

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Focus on me</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>get out of here</td>
<td>by finishing school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and doing what I am doing</td>
<td>so I can go home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>when I go back</td>
<td>take care of my son</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take care of my son</td>
<td>after school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>find my college &amp; go to</td>
<td>be a good father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&amp; be a good</td>
<td>show him how to be a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>father &amp; take care</td>
<td>In going to be a veterinarian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of my family</td>
<td>and take care of my family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**My Treatment House**
Chapter 3: A New Beginning
BORROWING FROM OTHER JURISDICTIONS

- Texas and California – banned misdemeanor and low level felonies, closed 8 facilities, funneled money to local programs
- Missouri and NYC – replaced large institutions with small facilities close to home neighborhoods, VA & CT soon
- NY, DC, soon L.A. – Structured Decision Making and Expanded Continuum funded by savings
- NYC – 21-day MH crisis facility for MH youth who blow out of residential placement
- Lots of places – no eject/reject contracts with residential providers
IMPLICATIONS

- Given current data and dismal record of youth prisons, seriously consider replacing Long Creek
- Collaborate on development of continuum and SDM to severely limit confinement of misdemeanants, NV felonies, low and medium risk youth, MH youth
- Reserve secure care for higher risk/severity youth
- Create small (15-30 bed), homelike facilities locked and/or staff secure, near population centers
- Emergency, short term facility for MH blowouts, combined with no-eject/reject contracts for residential providers
- Funnel savings into rigorous community based organizations
For more information

Find the report:


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