



## Research Highlights

### ***The Real Costs and Benefits of Change: Finding Opportunities for Reform During Difficult Fiscal Times***

*The Real Costs and Benefits of Change: Finding Opportunities for Reform During Difficult Fiscal Times* is a national report released by the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN).

#### **The Issue:**

- Several states have saved money by investing in alternatives to detention such as community-based treatment and other evidence-based programs.
- During a fiscal crisis, despite their cost-saving benefits and efficacy, programs shown to prevent delinquency and help justice-involved youth get back on track are often the first items on the “chopping block.” Lawmakers should be encouraged to keep and maintain these crucial proven programs.
- Programs that focus on prevention and treatment have been successfully implemented by states such as Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, California, and New York and have demonstrated improved outcomes for youth, increased public safety, and reduced costs.
- This financial crisis is a good time for policymakers to consider closing and downsizing facilities – ensuring that more young people receive community-based services, which have been shown to be less expensive and more effective.

#### **The Facts:**

##### ***Institutions are expensive.***

- **In Washington State, the WSIPP found that confinement is an expensive way to lower crime rates, providing only two dollars of benefits per dollar of cost.** Additionally in Washington State, a 40 percent increase in the use of secure confinement in the late 1990s was the main factor driving a 43 percent increase in juvenile justice spending over the same time period.
- **The American Correctional Association estimates that it costs nearly \$88,000 per year (\$240.99 per day) on average for each youth in a residential juvenile facility.** Some states report costs as high as \$726 per day (nearly \$265,000 per year) for a juvenile residential bed.

##### ***Incarceration is damaging to youth.***

- **Institutions have a criminogenic effect on youth.** Research shows that incarceration of youth actively increases the chance of future delinquent behavior and adult criminal activity. These youth can experience higher levels of recidivism, substance abuse, school difficulties, delinquency, violence, and adjustment difficulties in adulthood.
- **Incarceration of youth disrupts development.** Data shows that incarcerating juveniles may actually interrupt and delay the normal pattern of “aging out” of delinquent behavior.
- **Incarcerated youth are at risk for sexual victimization by staff and other youth.** A recent study from the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics revealed that an estimated 12 percent of youth (over 3,000 individuals) in state juvenile facilities and large non-state facilities reported experiencing one or more

incidents of sexual victimization by another youth or facility staff in the past 12 months or since admission, if less than 12 months.

- **Incarcerated youth are at risk for suicide, especially nonviolent offenders.** According to an OJJDP study, 70 percent of youth who committed suicide while confined were confined for nonviolent offenses (12 percent of those youth were confined for status offenses).
- **Incarceration disrupts education**, which is a protective factor against juvenile delinquency and recidivism.
- **Incarceration negatively impacts short- and long-term employment and economic outcomes for youth.** A Princeton study found that youth who spent some time incarcerated in a youth facility worked for three weeks less per year (five weeks less for African American youth) than youth who were never incarcerated.

### ***Incarceration is ineffective and can damage communities and society.***

- **Large juvenile correctional facilities have high rates of recidivism.** Every study of youth sent to such institutions in the past 30 years finds a 50-70 percent recidivism rate within one to two years of release.
- **Youth who have been incarcerated are more likely to recidivate than youth who are supervised in a community-based setting.** Between 1997 and 2006, seven of the 10 states that reduced the number of youth in confinement actually had drops in the total number of violent offenses reported to law enforcement.
- **Transfer to the adult system further increases the chance that a youth will recidivate when released.** Transferred juveniles are 33.7 percent more likely to be re-arrested for a violent or other crime than juveniles who commit the same level of offense, but are retained in the juvenile justice system.

### ***Evidence- and community-based programs are cost effective.***

- **Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care** provides a \$88,953 net benefit to crime victims and taxpayers per participant.
- **Functional Family Therapy** provides a \$49,776 net benefit to crime victims and taxpayers per participant and reduces a juvenile's recidivism rate by 18.1 percent.
- **Multi-Systemic Therapy** provides a benefit of \$13.36 for every dollar spent as well as a \$17,694 net benefit to crime victims and taxpayers per participant.
- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy** reduced criminal recidivism by about 25 percent in a study of adult and juvenile offenders.
- **Florida's Redirection Program**, which redirects youth from residential placements to evidence-based treatment options, has saved the state \$36.4 million over four years and avoids \$5.2 million in recommitment and prison costs. The program has also lowered recidivism rates for youth.

### ***The fiscal crisis is an opportunity to deinstitutionalize.***

- **Policymakers will be doing the right thing for their budgets and their youth by reforming their systems.**

To obtain a copy of NJJN's report, *The Real Costs and Benefits of Change*, please contact: Annie Balck, 202-467-0864 x125 or [balck@juvjustice.org](mailto:balck@juvjustice.org).