



A Vision to Serve Youth

Why Does Arkansas' Juvenile Justice System Need Reform?

We all want to do what's best for kids, and Arkansas' current juvenile justice system is not as effective as it can be in helping youth in trouble.

- Arkansas strives to provide the right help at the right time for youth, in the most cost-effective way possible.
- Without a broad range of community-based programs available, the Arkansas juvenile courts are often forced to rely on confinement, even though it costs more money and there are more effective alternatives to help kids.¹
- When everyone in the community – including schools, recreational and community organizations, service providers, volunteers, churches, businesses and healthcare providers – works together in partnership with the Division of Youth Services (DYS), the effectiveness and quality of help we offer youth will be dramatically improved.²
- Serious juvenile crime in Arkansas has dropped in the past decade, yet commitments to DHS have risen during the same time period.³
- Resources are more wisely spent on prevention and intervention services than on expensive placements, which aren't always necessary for protecting public safety.⁴

¹ Pat Arthur and Tim Roche, "Juvenile Justice Reform In Arkansas: Building a Better Future for Youth, their Families, and the Community," (2008), 1, <http://www.state.ar.us/dhs/dys/statistical%20report/ArkansasReportFinal.pdf> (accessed July 26, 2010).

² Pat Arthur, 2.

³ "Arkansas DHS Statistical Report FY2007," http://www.state.ar.us/dhs/dys/statistical%20report/dys_stat_report.html (accessed July 23, 2010).

⁴ Jeffrey Butts, Susan Mayer and Gretchen Ruth, "Focusing Juvenile Justice on Positive Youth Development," (Chapin Hall Center for Children Issue Brief, October 2005), 2-5.

Reform that increases community-based programs will save taxpayer money.

- In one state, it has been shown that providing youth in the juvenile justice system with an advocate – to help the child obtain needed healthcare and resolve school, family and housing issues – ensures better care in the community and can save the state \$4,000 per child a year.⁵
- The RECLAIM Ohio program has reduced the number of youth placed in state lockup facilities by nearly half since the juvenile justice reform legislation was enacted in 1993. The state saves the taxpayers as much as \$45 for every dollar it spends on the RECLAIM Ohio program.⁶
- In Texas, additional funding of as much as \$100 million to strengthen community-based services for youth has netted taxpayers more than \$200 million in savings.⁷
- The Redeploy Illinois program seeks to increase the use of community programs. During its first three years, the program helped keep 382 kids out of lockup by moving them toward community programs. This effort saved the state more than \$18 million.⁸
- Using data from across the country, a Washington State research agency found that community programs for youth could result in as much as \$2 billion in taxpayer savings and reduced crime rates.⁹

Reform better protects our communities.

- In Arkansas, nearly all kids who are locked up – even those with serious offenses – *will eventually return* to the community. That's why we need to provide them with effective programs to help them.
- In one study, youth who were allowed an opportunity for success in therapy programs were 43% less likely to get arrested than those youth who were not.¹⁰

⁵ Steve Aos, et al., "Benefits and Costs of Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Youth," (2004), <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/04-07-3901.pdf> (accessed July 28, 2010).

⁶ Annie Black, "The Real Costs and Benefits of Change: Finding Opportunities for Reform During Difficult Fiscal Times," (National Juvenile Justice Network, June 2010), 2

⁷ Marc Levin, "Getting More for Less in Juvenile Justice: Innovative and Cost-Effective Approaches to Reduce Crime, Restore Victims, and Preserve Families," (March 2010), 3.

⁸ Annie Black, 3.

⁹ Annie Black, 5.

¹⁰ Brian Lee, William Christeson, M.H.S., and Danielle Wondra, "On the Right Track to Safer Communities: Steering California's Juvenile Offenders Away from Lives of Crime," (Fight Crime: Invest in Kids *California*, 2007), 10.

- Kids who have drug problems are likely to relapse, but if they receive drug treatment in effective programs, they are less likely to be arrested.¹¹
- Addressing the complex psychological and behavioral needs of Arkansas youth in trouble with individualized care helps them learn to make better choices and become better citizens. For example, one Arkansas program has been up to 93% successful in preventing future arrests.¹²

Reform gives kids a better future.

- By requiring quality care and accountability in juvenile justice systems, we will recognize children as our most valuable resource and help them acquire the positive adult relationships recognized to help develop their strengths.¹³
- Locking kids up can increase the likelihood of future crime and create a cycle of arrest and release.¹⁴
- Interventions and programs that build on the strengths of youth and their families provide the best opportunity for rehabilitation and treatment of our youth.¹⁵
- When it is necessary to lock up youth because they threaten public safety, small, safe, humane facilities located close to the child's family and community offer the greatest opportunity for youth to learn how to make better choices.¹⁶

¹¹ Brian Lee, 17.

¹² Garland County JDC Programs.

¹³ Jeffrey Butts, 5.

¹⁴ Jasmine Tyler, Jason Ziedenisberg, and Eric Lotke, "Cost-Effective Youth Corrections: Rationalizing the Fiscal Architecture of Juvenile Justice Systems," Justice Policy Institute (2006), 2.

¹⁵ William Barton and Jeffrey Butts, "Building on Strength: Positive Youth Development in Juvenile Justice Programs," (Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2008).

¹⁶ Pat Arthur, 6.