

NATIONAL JUVENILE JUSTICE NETWORK

COMMUNITY SUPERVISION: WHY IT MATTERS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

A National Juvenile Justice Network Snapshot*

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For too many years the juvenile justice system has been like a broken bicycle stuck in one gear – incarceration – even though that gear generally can prevent youth from moving smoothly down the road to adulthood. Research on adolescent development has shown us that incarceration interferes with young people’s ability to obtain the relationships and experiences that they need for positive growth. For healthy psychological development, youth need the involvement of a parent figure who is concerned about their emotional growth, relationships with peers who have adopted positive social and academic behavior, and opportunities (such as good educational programs, extracurricular activities, and work) that allow them to develop “autonomous decision-making and critical thinking” skills.¹ All of which are in short supply in detention centers and prisons. Recent research has highlighted the physical and mental health problems and poor life outcomes that result from incarceration, making the need even more urgent to shift gears towards a common-sense approach of providing a continuum of care and supervision for youth within their communities. Below is a brief summary of this new research and recommendations for a better path forward.

Incarceration Harms

Youth who are incarcerated in secure facilities are at risk of substantial harms including: physical, emotional, and sexual victimization; suicide; disruptions to their mental and physical development; disruptions to their education; and negative impacts on employment and future economic success.² Half of all incarcerated youth reported experience with theft or violence while in placement, with younger

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youth at greatest risk of violence, while 1 in 10 youth in state-owned or operated facilities reported sexual victimization.³ When we subject youth to this type of harm and trauma, it is understandable that there are lasting negative impacts. Studies have found that incarceration increases the rate of antisocial activity and raises the level of offending for some youth.⁴ Additionally, Aizer and Doyle's 2013 study determined that youth incarceration results in large decreases in the likelihood of high school completion and large increases in the likelihood of adult incarceration.⁵ Finally, we are disproportionately applying this punishment to youth of color – in 2013 youth of color were confined 2.7 times the rate of white youth (with black youth confined at 4.7 times the rate of white youth).⁶ To add to this litany of ills, now two new studies have identified further evidence of the significant negative impact of youth incarceration.

Poor Health Outcomes⁷

A 2017 study of 14,344 participants in the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health found that incarceration during adolescence and young adulthood was associated with worse physical and mental health outcomes as adults. The magnitude of the risk was tied to the amount of time spent incarcerated, though any length of incarceration was associated with higher odds of having worse adult general health.⁸ The study found the following when comparing incarcerated youth to youth who had never been incarcerated:

- Youth incarcerated for less than a month were 41 percent more likely to have symptoms of depression as adults.
- Youth who were incarcerated for one to twelve months had a 48 percent increased risk of worse general health as adults.
- Youth incarcerated for more than a year were nearly three times more likely to have physical limitations, over four times more likely to have depressive symptoms, and over two times more likely to have suicidal thoughts as adults.

Poor Life Outcomes⁹

A 2016 Northwestern University study of more than 1,800 detained youth who were tracked five and twelve years after their detention found poor adult outcomes that were most pronounced for male youth of color. The study looked at eight outcomes: educational attainment, residential independence, gainful activity, desistance from criminal activity, mental health, abstaining from substance abuse, interpersonal functioning and parenting responsibility. Karen Abram, one of the researchers stated, "Involvement in the juvenile justice system can lead to a downward spiral that is difficult to reverse." Youth of color may experience more profound disadvantage because they have fewer resources and opportunities to make up for the deficits of incarceration. Key findings included:

- 12 years after detention, only 21.9% of males and 54.7% of females had achieved more than half of the 8 positive psychosocial outcomes examined.
- Minority males, particularly African Americans, were the least likely to achieve age-appropriate milestones. Among the males, 46 percent of non-Hispanic whites had achieved more than half the outcomes, compared with only 29 percent of Hispanics and 19 percent of African Americans.

- Results for girls did not differ by race or ethnicity.
- As youth aged, the number of positive outcomes increased only modestly.
- Among males, non-Hispanic white males were significantly more likely to achieve most positive outcomes compared with males of color, but were less likely to abstain from substance abuse.
- Twelve years after detention, non-Hispanic white males had nearly 3 times the odds of educational attainment compared with African American and Hispanic males and 2 to 5 times the odds of gainful activity compared with African American and Hispanic males.

Benefits of Community Supervision

States can avoid the harms – both to safety and youth outcomes – of incarceration by developing a continuum of care at all points in the system from arrest through trial and disposition. By creating a diverse array of services and supports, states will be able to keep youth from being arrested and placed out of home.¹⁰ Fortunately, the research supports the use of these community based options.

Researchers at John Jay College of Criminal Justice reviewed data on 3,523 juvenile justice-involved youth in the Youth Advocate Program’s (YAP) community-based supervision and found that 86% remained arrest free while in the program.¹¹ The YAP results demonstrate that community-based supervision accords with public safety goals. Now, furthering the call to action, the new research outlined in this snapshot further indicates that community supervision can also lead to improved public health outcomes.

Conclusion

Recent research has further deepened our understanding of the significant negative impacts of incarceration on youth and communities. But developing and utilizing a variety of gears – including a continuum of community based supervision in lieu of incarceration – we will be able to respond to youth behavior in a way that builds healthy young people and fosters healthy and thriving communities.

For More Information

- [“2017 Legislative Options for Youth Decarceration Reforms,”](#) by the Youth First Initiative, provides policy reform ideas for reducing incarceration.
- [“Beyond Bars,”](#) by the National Collaboration for Youth, calls on policymakers to invest in community-based alternatives to youth incarceration.
- [“Breaking Down the Walls,”](#) published by the Youth First Initiative, analyzes six successful campaigns to close youth facilities, gathering lessons learned and strategies for success.
- [“Bringing Youth Home: A National Movement to Increase Public Safety, Rehabilitate Youth and Save Money,”](#) by the National Juvenile Justice Network, includes examples of states that reduced their juvenile facility populations and are now not only reaping the rewards of newfound

funds that can be directed into more effective community-based services for youth, but are also seeing a better return on their investment in terms of juvenile rehabilitation and public safety.

- The [“Community-Based Alternatives” section of the Juvenile Justice Resource Hub](#), provides an overview of the salient key issues regarding community-based alternatives, recent reform trends, and links to resources.
- [“The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-Based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model.”](#) a collaborative publication by the National Institute for Justice and the Harvard Kennedy school, makes the case that youth incarceration is an ill-conceived and failed approach that has been damaging the very youth it is supposed to help for generations.
- [“How Does Incarcerating Young People Affect Their Adult Health Outcomes”](#) is an abstract that provides information on the longitudinal study of the impact of youthful incarceration on adult mental and physical health.
- [“Safely Home.”](#) a report by Youth Advocate Programs, details the elements of effective community-based alternatives for high-need youth so that they can be safely supported in their homes and communities.
- [“Sex and Racial/Ethnic Differences in Positive Outcomes in Delinquent Youth After Detention”](#) is an abstract of the 12-year longitudinal study by the Northwestern University Juvenile Project on the psycho-social outcomes of youthful incarceration.
- [“The Truth About Consequences: Studies Point toward Sparing Use of Formal Juvenile Justice System Processing and Incarceration.”](#) by the National Juvenile Justice Network, highlights studies demonstrating the negative effects of formal juvenile justice system processing, compared to diversion, and the ineffectiveness of incarceration.

¹Juvenile Justice Information Exchange, Juvenile Justice Resource Hub, “Community-Based Alternatives: Key Issues/Why We Need Alternatives to Formal Juvenile Justice System Processing and Incarceration,” accessed February 13, 2017, <http://jjie.org/hub/community-based-alternatives/key-issues/>, citing National Research Council, “Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach: Report Brief,” (Committee on Law and Justice, November 2012), 2, accessed at <http://bit.ly/11I5r3H>.

² Juvenile Justice Resource Hub, “Community-Based Alternatives,” accessed February 13, 2017, citing National Juvenile Justice Network, “The Real Costs and Benefits of Change” (Washington, DC: 2010), available at <http://bit.ly/10TTegO>; Justice Policy Institute, “The Costs of Confinement: Why Good Juvenile Justice Policies Make Good Fiscal Sense” (Washington, DC: 2009), available at <http://bit.ly/2mj2DNr>; Barry Holman and Jason Zeidenberg, “The Dangers of

Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities,” (Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, 2006).

³ Juvenile Justice Resource Hub, “Community-Based Alternatives,” accessed February 13, 2017, citing Melissa Sickmund and Charles Puzzanchera, eds., *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 2014 National Report* (Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice, 2014): 215-17, <http://1.usa.gov/1DhEoyR>.

⁴ Juvenile Justice Resource Hub, “Community-Based Alternatives,” accessed February 13, 2017, citing National Juvenile Justice Network, “Emerging Findings and Policy Implications from the Pathways to Desistance Study” (Washington, DC: 2012). Available at <http://bit.ly/14jXkQl>; T. Loughran, et al., “Estimating a Dose-Response Relationship Between Length of Stay and Future Recidivism in Serious Juvenile Offenders,” *Criminology*, 47 (2009).

⁵ Juvenile Justice Resource Hub, “Community-Based Alternatives,” accessed February 13, 2017, citing Anna Aizer & Joseph J. Doyle, Jr., “Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly- Assigned Judges,” National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) Working Paper No. 19102 (June 2013), at <http://bit.ly/2n0XBc5>; Brad Plumer, “Throwing Children in Prison Turns Out to be a Really Bad Idea,” Washington Post WONKBLOG (June 15, 2013), at <http://wapo.st/16hRVZx>.

⁶ Patrick McCarthy, Vincent Schiraldi, and Miriam Shark, “The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-Based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model,” *New Thinking in Community Corrections Bulletin* (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2016): 16, <http://bit.ly/2eMqelS>.

⁷ Andrew M. Seaman, “Being Incarcerated as a Juvenile Tied to Poor Health Years Later,” *Reuters*, Jan. 23, 2017, accessed Feb. 17, 2017, <http://reut.rs/2ktljHS>; Elizabeth S. Barnert and Tumaini R. Coker, “How Does Incarcerating Young People Affect Their Adult Health Outcomes?” *Pediatrics* 139(2) (2017), accessed Feb. 17, 2017, doi: 10.1542/peds.2016-2624, <http://bit.ly/2ITICC9>.

⁸ Barnert and Coker, “How Does Incarcerating Young People Affect Their Adult Health Outcomes,” 4.

⁹ Hilary Hurd Anyaso, “Rare Look at Youth Post Detention is Bleak,” *Northwestern Now*, Dec. 19, 2016, accessed Feb. 17, 2017, <http://bit.ly/2ITjydo>; Karen M. Abram, Nicole M. Azores-Gococo, and Kristin M. Emanuel, “Sex and Racial/Ethnic Differences in Positive Outcomes in Delinquent Youth After Detention: A 12-Year Longitudinal Study,” *JAMA Pediatr.* 171(2) (2017):123-132, accessed Feb. 17, 2017, doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.3260, <http://bit.ly/2mj3AFv>; Will Boggs, “Most Youth Fare Poorly After Detention for Juvenile Offenses,” *Reuters: Health News*, Dec. 19, 2016, accessed Feb. 17, 2017, <http://reut.rs/2nwqxVZ>.

¹⁰ National Collaboration for Youth, “Beyond Bars” (Dec. 14, 2016): 6, <http://bit.ly/2hrx7up>.

¹¹ National Collaboration for Youth, “Beyond Bars,” 7; citing Evans, D. and Delgado, S., Most High Risk Youth Referred to Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. Remain Arrest Free and in their Communities During YAP Participation (April 2014); Evans, D. and Delgado, S., YAP’s Approach To WrapAround Services Appears Intensive and Flexible, (May 2014), John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center; Evans, D. and Delgado, S. YAP Helps Keep Youth Out of Secure Facilities and Living in Their Communities, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Research and Evaluation Center, (June 2014)