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

Vincent Schiraldi
Senior Research Fellow
Introduction

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.
Outline

• A little history
• An inherently flawed model
• High costs and negative outcomes
• Significant and unwarranted disparities
• Endemic Abuse
• Challenges to reform
• The DC experience
• Recommendations – the four “R’s”
History of Youth Confinement in the U.S.

- 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
Racial Disparities in Youth Imprisonment

Youth Residing in U.S. Juvenile Detention, Correctional and/or Residential Facilities, 2013
U.S. Leads on Youth Incarceration Rate
Systemic or Recurring Maltreatment, 1970-2015

Don Dale Youth Detention Centre

Rikers Island, New York City

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPovQSiwCbQ
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>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>Get my GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sitiz</td>
<td>Drugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get 4A</td>
<td>640 Life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support My Family</td>
<td>640 BOYZ ya Digg</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After I get out of school, find me a college to go to. In going to be a veterinarian and take care of my family.

And when I go home, don't come back. Focus on me of here, by do what I am doing so I can go home and take care of my son. Take care of my son and be a good father to him, keep him know take.
Chapter 3: A New Beginning
Four “R’s” of Closing Youth Prisons

- **Reduce** the pipeline into youth prisons
- **Reform** the culture that wrongly assumes locking up kids makes us safer
- **Replace** youth prisons with small, homelike facilities because youth prisons don’t work and harm young people
- **Reinvest** savings into a range of community services, supports and opportunities
Texas Tough?
Less Incarceration, More Safety
Percentage Change in Adult and Youth Incarceration and Arrests
Texas, 2007-2013

Source: BJS Prisoners in 2007, 2013; OJJDP
Less Incarceration, More Safety

Percentage Change in Adult and Youth Incarceration and Arrests
Texas, 2007-2013

Source: BJS Prisoners in 2007, 2013; OJJDP
Less Incarceration, More Safety

Percentage Change in Adult and Youth Incarceration and Arrests
Texas, 2007-2013

Source: BJS Prisoners in 2007, 2013; OJJDP
Less Incarceration, More Safety

Percentage Change in Adult and Youth Incarceration and Arrests
Texas, 2007-2013

- YOUTH CONFINEMENT: -38%
- YOUTH ARRESTS: -49%
- ADULT IMPRISONMENT: -2%
- ADULT ARRESTS: -8%

Source: BJS Prisoners in 2007, 2013; OJJDP
For more information

Vincent_Schiraldi@hks.harvard.edu

Web page: https://www.hks.harvard.edu/programs/criminaljustice