



## FACT SHEET: COMMUNITY-BASED AND HOME-BASED ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION

### What are community-based and home-based alternatives to incarceration?

For youth who have come into contact with juvenile delinquency systems, community-based and home-based alternatives are designed to provide youth with needed supervision and services outside of locked facilities. As defined in the JJDP, **community-based programs** and services are small group homes or other suitable places located near the juvenile's home or family that provide needed services. **Home-based alternative services** are programs that serve youth in their own homes instead of incarceration or other out-of-home placements.

These programs can be carefully constructed to protect public safety while avoiding the harmful outcomes for youth often associated with incarceration. Many youth who are sent to local detention facilities to await their hearings or to secure facilities once they are adjudicated are not risks to public safety and could be served more effectively and less expensively closer to home in community-based and home-based alternatives. Cost savings from implementation of many evidence-based programs reach tens of thousands of dollars per child.<sup>1</sup>

### What are some common types of community-based alternatives?

Laws in most states allow youth to be detained if there is a danger that they will commit new offenses while they are awaiting their hearings or if there is a risk that they will not appear in court. **Pre-hearing alternatives to detention** are designed to ensure that youth are complying with their conditions of release and not committing new crimes, and that they and their families know when they need to come to court.

- **Evening reporting centers** are designed to keep youth occupied and supervised when they are not in school. These centers provide transportation immediately after school to a location where youth complete homework, learn life skills, participate in community service, receive meals and have recreation time under careful supervision. Staff monitor school attendance and performance and stay in contact with parents, then provide transportation home around 9 PM.<sup>2</sup>
- **Home detention** programs require youth to live at home, generally with tight curfews. Staff from a probation department or outside agency visit youth in their homes, schools and other settings to ensure that they are complying with release requirements, including school attendance and behavior, curfew, drug abstinence and other expectations. Staff in the most intensive programs make several contacts with youth each day. Some home detention programs incorporate electronic monitoring.<sup>3</sup>
- **Short-term shelter care** is an option for youth who do not pose a danger to the community but cannot return home because it is unsafe for them to return, or there is no appropriate family member's home with adequate supervision for them.<sup>4</sup> Many situations of untenable homes are best handled through the child welfare system rather

than the juvenile justice system, but shelters can provide temporary care while such circumstances are investigated and resolved.

Once youth have been adjudicated, courts determine the services youth need for rehabilitation. **Community-based alternatives to secure placement** allow youth to stay close to home where their families can be involved in their rehabilitation. For example:

- **Multisystemic Therapy (MST)** is an intensive treatment program for serious youth offenders focused on improving the family's capacity to overcome the known causes of delinquency. A masters-level therapist with a very small caseload comes to the youth's home and other places where the youth is involved in the community, and is available to the family 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. MST interventions typically aim to improve families' discipline practices and abilities to communicate, decrease youth association with deviant peers, increase youth association with positive peers and recreational activities, improve youth school or vocational performance, and develop a support network of extended family, neighbors, and friends to help youth and their families achieve and maintain such changes.<sup>5</sup> MST has been shown to decrease recidivism up to 70% as well as achieving other positive outcomes.<sup>6</sup>
- **Functional Family Therapy (FFT)** is a structured family-based prevention and intervention program for at-risk youth that works to change behaviors by engaging and motivating families and youth. A short-term intervention of up to 30 hours offered mainly in clinical settings but sometimes in-home, this therapy focuses on family communication, parenting skills, and conflict management skills.<sup>7</sup> FFT has been shown to reduce recidivism between 25% and 60%.<sup>8</sup>
- **Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)** places adolescents who need out-of-home placement due to serious delinquency in specially-trained and supported foster homes, rather than incarceration or group home settings. The foster care placements, which last for six to nine months, focus on academic and positive living skills; daily structure and supervision based on clear expectations, limits and consequences; and support for youth in developing positive peer relationships. At the same time, the youth's family receives therapy and parenting skills training to promote successful return after the program.<sup>9</sup> Studies have found that placement in MTFC can prevent escalation of delinquency and other problem behaviors such as youth violence. Placement in MTFC is more economical and more effective than placement in group care in decreasing offense and incarceration rates after program completion.<sup>10</sup>

What provisions currently exist in the JJDP A regarding community-based alternatives?

The JJDP A currently allows states to use their federal juvenile justice grant program funds on community-based and home-based programs.

How should the JJDP A be strengthened to promote use of community-based and home-based alternatives where appropriate for public safety?

In order to reduce unnecessary use of incarceration, the federal government should provide states with more information on effective community-based programs. States should construct plans to make community-based and home-based alternatives available to the right youth.

- OJJDP should be required to collect data, share information and provide technical assistance on adoption of evidence-based and promising community-based and home-based programs.
- States should be required to include in the plans they submit to OJJDP specific information about how they will use community-based and home-based services to address the needs of at-risk youth and youth who have come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

### Why are these changes needed?

The unnecessary use of secure detention separates youth from the communities and families most invested in their success. Detention profoundly and negatively impacts young people's mental and physical well-being, their education and their employment.<sup>11</sup> Detention can exacerbate mental illness and make it more likely that incarcerated teens will engage in suicide and self-harm.<sup>12</sup> Economists have shown that incarcerating youth reduces their future earnings and their ability to remain in the workforce.<sup>13</sup> Educational researchers have found that more than 40 percent of incarcerated youth have a learning disability. Detention uproots young people from their schools and creates significant challenges for youth attempting to return to school after they leave detention.<sup>14</sup>

These changes in the JJDPA would focus states on using federal grant dollars effectively to serve those youth who can safely be maintained in the community without incarceration through community-based and home-based services. It would require that OJJDP serve a more active role in gathering and sharing information about evidence-based and promising best practices. Targeted use of community-based alternatives to incarceration is an effective tool for reducing racial and ethnic disparities in detention and secure placement.

### Case studies:

- Multisystemic therapy is one of the proven Blueprints for Violence Prevention which has been deemed an evidence-based practice<sup>15</sup> and replicated in several countries.<sup>16</sup> In a recent study, the **South Carolina** Department of Youth Services youth provided MST services had a 20% lower rate of recidivism than youth who received traditional services from the Department.<sup>17</sup>
- In **Santa Cruz, CA**, juvenile justice officials worked closely with community service providers to create culturally competent alternatives to detention including an evening reporting center, case management services and other reforms. The County significantly reduced its overrepresentation of Latino youth in secure detention.<sup>18</sup>

For more information, contact:

Dana Shoenberg, Deputy Director  
 Mark Soler, Executive Director  
 Center for Children's Law and Policy  
 1701 K Street, NW Suite 600  
 Washington, DC 20006  
 (202) 637-0377  
[dshoenberg@cclp.org](mailto:dshoenberg@cclp.org)  
[msoler@cclp.org](mailto:msoler@cclp.org)

---

<sup>1</sup> Washington State Institute for Public Policy, “Benefits and Costs of Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Youth,” p. 7, and “Evidence-Based Juvenile Offender Programs: Program Description, Quality Assurance and Cost,” pp. 1-3, available at <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/pub.asp?docid=04-07-3901> and <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/07-06-1201.pdf>; Paul DeMuro, Annie E. Casey Foundation Pathways to Detention Reform series, Consider the Alternatives: Planning and Implementing Detention Alternatives, p. 10, available at <http://www.jdaihelpdesk.org/Docs/Documents/Publications>.

<sup>2</sup> DeMuro, Consider the Alternatives, pp. 19-21.

<sup>3</sup> DeMuro, Consider the Alternatives, pp. 15-19.

<sup>4</sup> DeMuro, Consider the Alternatives, pp. 21-23.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/MST.html>; and [http://www.msts services.com/executive\\_summary.php](http://www.msts services.com/executive_summary.php).

<sup>6</sup> See <http://msts services.com/text/research.html>.

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org/html/programs\\_1999/01\\_FFT.html](http://www.strengtheningfamilies.org/html/programs_1999/01_FFT.html).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms/FFT.html>.

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.mtfc.com/mtfca.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> Barry Holman and Jason Ziedenberg, The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities, Justice Policy Institute, November 2006, p.2.

<sup>12</sup> Mace, D., Rohde, P. and Gnau, V., “Psychological Patterns of Depression and Suicidal Behavior of Adolescents in a Juvenile Detention Facility,” *Journal of Juvenile Justice and Detention Services*, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp. 18-23 (1997).

<sup>13</sup> Freeman, R.B., “Crime and the Employment Disadvantage of Youth,” National Bureau of Economic Research (1991).

<sup>14</sup> See Holman and Ziedenberg, Dangers of Detention, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/modelprograms.html>.

<sup>16</sup> See [http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/programfulldetails.asp?PROGRAM\\_ID=102#description](http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/programfulldetails.asp?PROGRAM_ID=102#description).

<sup>17</sup> Id.

<sup>18</sup> Judith Cox and James Bell, “Addressing Disproportionate Representation of Youth of Color in the Juvenile Justice System,” available at [http://www.jdaihelpdesk.org/Docs/Documents/JDAI%20Model%20Sites/Santa%20Cruz%20County/18.0\\_Address%20Disproportionate%20Representation.pdf](http://www.jdaihelpdesk.org/Docs/Documents/JDAI%20Model%20Sites/Santa%20Cruz%20County/18.0_Address%20Disproportionate%20Representation.pdf).