YOUTH FACILITIES ARE BETTER THAN ADULT FACILITIES

In 2016, on any given night in America, 4,656 children were held in adult jails and prisons. It is estimated that between 32,000 and 60,000 youth were admitted into adult jails in 2014. For the following reasons, it is crucial to remove these youth from adult facilities, and instead have them placed in youth facilities that are safer and more suited for their needs.

Youth corrections professionals recognize that juveniles are developmentally different than adults and require special treatment.

- The adolescent brain is not fully developed, particularly the area of the prefrontal cortex which is critical to higher order cognitive functioning and impulse control.
- The sub-cortical region of the brain, responsible for novelty and emotions, will more frequently take precedent over the prefrontal cortex, responsible for self-control, in an adolescent brain.
- Most youth will “age out” of their reckless and criminal behavior by young adulthood.

Youth corrections facilities across the country have been successful at rehabilitating youth. There are several model programs with proven results that have been replicated across the country.

- The Missouri Model uses small-scale residential facilities, group homes, and community based non-residential programs. It is focused on finding healthy alternatives to conflict and aggression. The results speak for themselves. The recidivism rates for Missouri are incredibly low. According to 2008 data, only 10% recidivism back into the Missouri Department of Youth Services. In addition, only 7% of youth are committed to adult prison within 5 years. Missouri is also a cost-effective program. The cost is $94 per all youth in state as opposed to $104 in neighboring states.
- The Texas Model is focused on individual treatment needs. There is a treatment program specifically for serious violent offenders and a program for sex offenders. For the violent offender program, recidivism within a year is currently 3%, with the sex offender program it is 2%.

Youth corrections programs have the ability to address these problems by providing positive socialization to juvenile offenders.

- Corrections professionals have begun to use therapies designed to teach better decision making and behavior. Specific examples that have proven results are Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Aggression Replacement Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, Multi-systemic Therapy, and Therapeutic Foster Care.
- Treatment programs for serious and violent young offenders have been shown to reduce recidivism by as much as 40%.

Youth corrections professionals recognize that young people who commit crimes often come from troubled backgrounds.

- Studies show that 75% to 93% of justice-involved youth have been exposed to some degree of traumatic victimization.
- Youth who witness violence are more likely to have emotional, behavioral, social, and academic problems.
- This emotional and physical trauma can inhibit effective adolescent brain development.
- Youth who are traumatized are likely to cope with it by becoming aggressive or fighting back.

To learn more, or to get involved in changing things in your state, contact:
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END NOTES:


5 See Jeffrey Arnett, Reckless Behavior in Adolescence: A Developmental Perspective, 12 DEVELOPMENTAL REV. 339, 339 (1992); see Patrick H. Tolan & Deborah Gorman-Smith, Development of Serious and Violent Offending Careers, in SERIOUS AND VIOLENT JUVENILE OFFENDERS: RISK FACTORS AND SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS 73 (Rolf Loeber and David Farrington, eds. 1998) (discussing established findings that crime prevalence increases during early adolescence for most crimes, except drug sales, which peaks in early adulthood).


7 See Stacy Nofziger & Don Kurts, Violent Lives: A Lifestyle Model Linking Exposure to Violence to Juvenile Violent Offending, 42 J. OF RESEARCH IN CRIME AND DELINQUENCY 3. 17-19 (2005) (finding that being a witness to violence increases the risk of offending by 769%).


9 Julian Ford et al., National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, Trauma Among Youth in the Juvenile Justice System: Critical Issues and New Directions, June 2007, at 3.


11 Shelley Zavlek, Planning Community-Based Facilities for Violent Juvenile Offenders as Part of a System of Graduated Sanctions, JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Wash., DC), August 2005, at 6; see Mark W. Lipsey & David B. Wilson, Effective Intervention for Serious Juvenile Offenders: A Synthesis of Research, in SERIOUS AND VIOLENT JUVENILE OFFENDERS: RISK FACTORS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTIONS 338 (Loeber & Farrington, eds. 1998) (conducting a meta-analysis of 200 studies of interventions with institutionalized and noninstitutionalized youth and finding that treatment programs for serious and violent offenders have been shown reduce recidivism by as much as 40%).