

# Wayne County Community-based Programs Cited as a National Model

Jun 25, 2014  
By Michigan Chronicle



Instead of spending billions each year on incarcerating youth, a new report by Youth Advocate Programs Policy & Advocacy Center (YAP) calls on state and city policymakers to redirect taxpayers' dollars to less expensive, more effective community programs that improve public safety by better supporting youth and their families and keep youth close to home.

The report identifies Wayne County's juvenile justice system and the nonprofits they partner with to serve youth in the community as a "bright spot" — a key approach to serving youth in the community that is reducing reliance on youth incarceration and keeping youth close-to-home.

"We can redirect the precious dollars we are currently spending on youth prisons and create real opportunity for all young people, and help these youth steer clear of crime, and successfully transition to adulthood," said Jeff Fleischer, CEO, Youth Advocate Programs, an international nonprofit committed to community-based alternatives to out-of-home care. "Today we are launching the Safely Home Campaign with this report to give juvenile justice agencies, policymakers and taxpayer a roadmap to make our communities safer."

The report, "Safely Home," draws upon a series of recent briefs by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center on the public safety and permanency outcomes of thousands of youth served by YAP, and a survey of 300 young people served by community-based programs instead of incarceration. "Safely Home" finds that more than eight out of ten youth remained arrest free and nine out of ten were at home after completing their community-based program, at cost that is a fraction of what would have cost to incarcerate these youths.

The findings highlight how high-need youth have been safely and successfully supported in their homes with the help of intensive community-based programs like YAP. Intensive community-based programs can serve three to four high-need youth safely in the community for the same cost as incarcerating one child, the report found.

The report notes that Black Family Development, a nonprofit organization in Michigan that helps build community-based services along principals identified in the report, is one of the nationally significant "bright spots" transforming the juvenile justice field.

The Michigan County on Crime and Delinquency recently noted in its own research that by partnering with organization-like Black Family Development to get dollars and services to youth in the community, Wayne County has decreased the number of youth placed out-of-the-home by 50 percent, and saw the number of young people sent to youth facilities dramatically reduced, from 731 in 1998 to only seven in 2012.

As Wayne County reduced reliance on incarceration and expanded use of community-based organization, it saw youth recidivism decline, and spending on youth facilities reduced.



**Alice G. Thompson** Alice Thompson, CEO of Black Family Development. "We have to be able to prioritize community programs."

"There's enough research to support the fact that both from a clinical and research perspective that the least restrictive environment is the best setting for kids," said

Along with the qualitative research and data analysis, “Safely Home” analyzed successfully community-based programs in several cities, counties and states.

“Our community worked hard to build a continuum of community-based programs, because we recognize that kids do much better when they’re supported at home than they do in a locked facility,” said Deborah Hodges, a Lucas County, Ohio Juvenile Court administrator. “Programs like YAP and others like them in our continuum are critical to our mission of working with youth at the community level and helping them be successful.”

The report highlights additional YAP programs and programs operated by other organizations that share similar characteristics and similar success rates. “Safely Home” describes key elements of these effective community-based programs that can be brought to scale, such as: No reject or eject policies; available, accessible and flexible services; youth and family voice, choice and ownership; individualized services; cultural competence; access to work; Crisis and safety planning; civic engagement/giving back; and long-term connection to community supports.

Despite the proven success of programs like YAP, there are still many regions that have not yet implemented alternatives to incarceration at the scale they are needed, and continue to spend millions to incarcerate youth. Florida spends \$97 million on juvenile incarceration each year. New York State, despite shutting down many of its youth prisons, has yet to substantially redirect its funds to community-based alternatives, and is reported to be spending upwards of \$300,000 per year to incarcerate a youth. In several counties in Pennsylvania, in addition to Philadelphia, there are high rates of incarceration and out-of-state placement.

“Being in this program was the first time people helped me to get a job doing something I was interested in, and where people did what they said they would. If it wasn’t for them, I would probably be locked up again,” said Cortez, a youth in YAP’s Chicago program. “I’ve been locked up most of my childhood and now I’m getting my college degree in business management.”