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June 25, 2014, 12:01 a.m.

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Community-based Programs More Effective, Less Expensive than Locking Up Youth, New Report Finds

Report: Juvenile justice systems can build ways for youth to be accountable, understand consequences without resorting to incarceration, states Youth Advocate Programs survey, data analysis

WASHINGTON, DC – 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.

"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 8 out of 10 youth remained arrest free and 9 out of 10 were at home after completing their community-based program, at cost that is a fraction of what it would have cost to incarcerate these youth. 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.

"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."

Along with the qualitative research and data analysis, *Safely Home* analyzed successful community-based programs in several cities, counties and states. Key findings from states, cities and counties where community-based programs are used instead of incarceration include:

- **Alabama:** In 2006, 3,340 youth were in state custody. Aided by state incentives, in 2013, 1,485 youth were reported in custody. Further, 87 percent were not arrested while enrolled in YAP's local community-based alternative to detention programs, and 80 percent did not recidivate post discharge.
- **Bronx, NY:** 80 percent of youth who participate in the Community Connections for Youth (CCFY) court diversion program voluntarily continued to participate after their court mandate ended, and a CCFY partnership with YAP helps the New York City Department of Probation keep juvenile justice-involved youth safely in their home communities
- **New Brunswick, NJ:** After adapting the YAP Community Reintegration Services program, 85 percent of youth were living in the community after discharge from the program and 87 percent were not arrested after discharge.
- **Lucas County, OH:** In 1988, 300 youth were committed to the state juvenile prison system by the county covering Toledo, Ohio. By holding court staff accountable for the reasons for placing youths in detention, in addition to implementing YAP alternatives, from January through May 31, 2014, only 17 children were committed.

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
- 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 \$190 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."

Safely Home makes the following recommendations to support youth, reinvest taxpayers' investments, and increase public safety:

Federal:

- Create financial incentives for states to invest in community-based alternatives to incarceration in federal grant programs serving youth.
- Require the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) to provide technical assistance for states and localities to create and expand community-based alternatives to incarceration.

States:

- Replace youth incarceration with supportive, community-based programs that engage families, include youth voice and choice and are grounded in principles of positive youth development and cultural competence.
- Downsize existing youth prisons.
- Raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 18.

To download an copy of the report, please visit www.safelyhomecampaign.org/safelyhomereport

YAP works to reduce youth incarceration and achieve positive outcomes for high and complex need youth through effective community-based programs, advocacy and policy change. The Safely Home Campaign promotes effective community-based alternatives rather than prison and out-of-home placements for youth. For more information, go to www.safelyhomecampaign.org