

# MIDDLESEX COUNTY, NJ JUDGE ROGER DALEY (RET.)



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Spot

An excerpt from YAP's Policy & Advocacy Center publication *Safely Home*

## SYSTEM REFORMER

In 1998, Middlesex County (NJ) had more than 100 kids in detention on any given night. By 2012 the number of youth in detention on any given night was between 15 and 20. Recently retired juvenile court Judge Roger Daley was one of two judges who presided over the reduction in Middlesex County.

One of the most influential experiences for Judge Daley was peer-to-peer mentoring with other judges he met through the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. In addition, he was moved by Supreme Court jurisprudence that relied on neuroscience to overturn adult sanctions for kids, including the juvenile death penalty in 2005 and later curtailing juvenile life without parole in a series of decisions. From his perspective, if the US Supreme Court was acknowledging that adolescent brain development affected their ability to understand the consequences of their actions that should also affect the practice in his courtroom.

He also credits much of the change in Middlesex County to a shift from a punitive court to a therapeutic court and initiating a special, multi-disciplinary team that included memorandums of understanding between agencies. Judge Daley decided that in order to change the practice, people needed to start working together or nothing would ever happen. He began to convene people from other youth-serving agencies. Foremost on his mind was the families. As he put it, "you don't hurt a family that wants to be a part of the solution. We're talking about the lives of children; I wasn't doing this to be popular."

One challenge persisted. Although he tried to avoid placing kids in detention for probation violations, he did use detention for probation violations to help youth with addictions. The lack of community detox facilities meant that kids couldn't get into inpatient drug treatment unless they were in jail.

In 2008 JDAI, which had already successfully reduced detention populations in multiple other counties in New Jersey, did analysis of how many kids were in detention in Middlesex County. The County hadn't created any alternatives when JDAI did its assessment, so Judge Daley reached out to others in the state for help. One state leader responded, and introduced Judge Daley to staff from Camden

**"You don't hurt a family that wants to be a part of the solution."**

**- Judge Roger Daley**

Youth Advocate Programs to adapt its Community Reintegration Services program (CRIS) in Middlesex County.

Middlesex CRIS created a meaningful detention alternative for kids who Judge Daley described as "the really risky ones, the ones who were going to be locked up in state prisons." Post-discharge outcomes from 2013 show that 90% of youth were not arrested while in the program, 87% of the post-discharge youth surveyed were not arrested at the last known time after discharge, and 89% were living in the community at discharge, with 85% living in the community post-discharge.

Judge Daley considered CRIS a successful program that helped to reduce the detention population by directly providing an alternative he felt could help the youth and family and also address public safety concerns. He believes that one of the reasons for the program's success is that CRIS used Advocates, paid street workers who were boots on the ground working with the kids in their neighborhoods and with their families. In 2010, JDAI formally entered Middlesex County and has continued to help Middlesex County, through CRIS and other alternative to detention programs to reduce the detention population.

*Source: Interview with Judge Roger Daley, March 11, 2014; Internal YAP outcome data for Middlesex County CRIS and DAP Programs, 01.01.11-12.31.13*

