

LUCAS COUNTY, OH ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION



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Spot

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

CONTINUUM OF COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES FOR ALL KIDS

Lucas County has successfully implemented a continuum of community services for youth in detention. Deborah Hodges, the Lucas County Juvenile Court Administrator has a diverse background in systems that enable her to see myriad perspectives having previously worked as a social worker, a juvenile probation officer, and a field worker for a residential facility as a family counselor.

The Administrative Team in Lucas County, under the direction of Judge Denise Navarre Cubbon started to lead the reduction in the use of beds with a simple change: staff were held accountable for why they would place a youth in detention. Through the development of a continuum of alternatives to detention, such as Community Based Detention, change started happening. As a result, the focus was on ensuring that very few youth were in detention and it worked: fewer kids were held in detention and the change in practice had an impact on state incarceration as Lucas County began sending fewer youth to state facilities.

The positive ripple effects of reducing secure detention are evident in Lucas County. There, the focus wasn't just on reducing the numbers, but also on making sure the interventions were meaningful to the kids and that the County was achieving positive outcomes with youth. As she put it:

"We need programs that do one-on-one work with the youth. I'm not saying group work is bad, but at the end of the day, kids really need that one-on-one, and that's the value of working with individuals. I always challenge placing kids in programs that only do group work. It is easier for us, but it's more meaningful for the kids to receive individual attention. I'm not against [group work] but it shouldn't be the norm. A kid will always remember when you spend one-on-one time with him."

She also described other benefits of community programs that work with each youth individually such as achieving better outcomes, building trust between youth and workers, being flexible and having the willingness to try new and creative approaches to meeting a youth where they are.

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- Judge Denise Navarre Cubbon

Lucas County's approach was successful. In 1988 the County committed 300 kids to the Department of Youth Services (the state juvenile prison system); in 2014, by the end of May, it had only committed 17. Though its detention facility has 125 beds, according to Deborah Hodges, the court will continue to focus on only placing youth who pose a risk to community in the facility. The average daily population in 2013 was 36. The Court always has an eye on community safety, while ensuring that a range of alternative services and programs could safely manage most kids in their home communities. From 2009 to the first quarter of 2014 the average daily population decreased by 72%. During this same time period, the average daily population for black youth in Juvenile Detention Center also decreased by 71%.

Lucas County also created an Assessment Center that prioritizes making sure that kids with non-violent misdemeanors and school-based offenses never see detention, using a continuum of alternatives to detention to safely manage the youth in the community instead. They're also not just limiting their focus on kids assessed as low-risk. Lucas County recognized that it could help 80-90% of the juvenile sex offenders in the county receive treatment and help in the community through individualized services and specialized group homes.

For the past three years, Lucas County has been working with the Annie E. Casey Foundation on the Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI). In addition, the Court works in partnership with YAP to provide alternatives for youth to help them be successful in the community and divert youth from further penetration in the juvenile justice system. Of the 161 youth in YAP's Lucas County program, 88% were living in their communities and 68% remained arrest free at least six months post-discharge.

Sources: Interview with Deborah Hodges, Lucas County Court Administrator (January 23, 2014) and internal outcome data for YAP Lucas County Program, 01.01.12 -04.01.14.



Kids committed to state juvenile prison by Lucas County

