



**Bringing Justice to the Youth Justice System
Alternatives That Work
The Youth Advocate Program
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Through the TimeBanks USA Racial Justice Initiative, there is now a moral, economic and legal force underway to compel judges and other officials to choose from an array of proven practices that help (not harm) America's youth. Using a new legal doctrine, the TimeBanks USA Racial Justice Initiative will begin putting judges and their communities on formal notice of the injuries resulting from juvenile confinement practices and of the availability of much more effective and affordable alternatives. The national Youth Advocate Program (YAP) is a premiere example of a proven alternative to detention and confinement that can be adapted for any community.

HOW IT WORKS

Since 1975, YAP has operated a community-based wraparound program that now reaches 16 states and Washington, D.C., and works annually with approximately 10,000 youth who otherwise would have been in secure confinement.

According to YAP's Web site, www.yapinc.org, the program's basic principles include:

- a no refuse intake policy
- individualized planning process tailored to the needs and strengths of each family
- developing respectful partnerships with parents and caretakers
- a family focus and strength based approach to problem-solving
- recruitment of staff from the neighborhoods where the young people and families live
- organizing community members into teams to support families
- providing opportunities for young people and their families to give-back to family team members and the community so that youth are not viewed as "needy" clients but are considered resources and contributors
- an optimistic, never-give-up approach

The Web site explains that "local advocate staff, recruited from the same neighborhoods as the youth, serves as a form of 'natural helper' to the referred youth. Advocates work early mornings, evenings and weekends directly with the children, young people and families. They are the linchpin of a holistic services model that combines elements of wraparound, mentoring, positive youth development and restorative justice."

RESULTS

YAP has been cited as an effective alternative to detention by the Office of Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the National Council on Crime & Delinquency. Based on an analysis of closed cases, YAP was realizing less than a 20% recidivism rate, while state correctional facilities average 50%-70%. In addition, YAP's program model can be operated at about half the cost of residential contract services while achieving a success rate that compares favorably with the more expensive residential service. YAP-Louisiana, for example, costs \$57/day compared with \$315/day for the state juvenile correctional facility (rates of secure care vary around the country).

In short, YAP and other alternative approaches to juvenile justice are more effective than incarceration. *And* they are less expensive. *And* they enhance public safety by turning youth away from the lifestyles and the incarceration that lead to more crime.

WHY IT MATTERS

With all these advantages known, officials who still choose traditional detention and confinement for minority youth are exhibiting "deliberate indifference" or "intentional disregard," which will constitute intent to discriminate under a new legal doctrine being deployed by the TimeBanks USA Racial Justice Initiative. Using a series of public hearings across the nation, officials will be given two choices: change their practices voluntarily or change them as a result of successful litigation against them.

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