

REFORM SUCCESS STORIES

FOUR JURISDICTIONS: WASHINGTON, DC, NEW YORK CITY, MILWAUKEE, WI, AND VIRGINIA

The four jurisdictions featured in SSF2: Milwaukee, WI; New York, NY; Washington, DC; and Virginia, reformed their juvenile justice systems by incorporating the research findings on adolescent development into their approach to serving youth and embracing the principles of positive youth development. These jurisdictions significantly reduced the number of youth they incarcerated, and successfully serve young people through community alternatives to incarceration - including those involved in "violent" offenses.

WASHINGTON, DC

For decades, Washington DC's juvenile system was ineffective and plagued by abuse. This was particularly true of the District's largest youth prison, Oak Hill. In 1985, the ACLU brought a lawsuit, *Jerry M.*, on behalf of children incarcerated at Oak Hill. The suit led the city to enter a consent decree in which it agreed to alter policies and decrease overpopulation at Oak Hill, and to develop community-based alternatives for justice involved youth.

In 2000, Mayor Anthony Williams established a Blue Ribbon Commission on juvenile justice. The Commission issued a report with a broad array of recommendations intended to move the focus of DC's juvenile justice system away from incarceration towards one centered on community-based approaches to rehabilitation. In 2004, the DC City Council passed the Omnibus Juvenile Justice Act. The legislation mandated closure of Oak Hill by 2009, outlined new goals that included decreased reliance on incarceration, and called for the development of a continuum of care made up of community-based supports and services. The City Council also passed separate legislation that established the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), a cabinet level agency that would oversee all justice involved youth committed to the District.

DYRS' work to create a system predicated on positive youth justice included closure of Oak Hill and replacement with a much smaller, rehabilitative oriented secure placement facility, New Beginnings Youth Development Center. DYRS' work also included a broad, community-centered continuum of care meant to serve a large majority of justice involved youth in community-based programs within the city.

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Washington DC's reforms have greatly reduced the number of incarcerated youth. At the beginning of the city's reform efforts over 200 young people were being held in secure facilities in DC, and a significant number were placed in residential placement programs across the country. As of August of 2021, only 64 youth committed to DYRS are in secure placement.

NEW YORK CITY

Post 1990, New York City, like many jurisdictions, experienced a significant reduction in juvenile arrest rates. Given the lower arrest rates, the number of youth placed in secure facilities plummeted. The state's juvenile justice system, however, continued to be plagued by abuse and high recidivism rates. The drop in placements also led to skyrocketing costs, as the price for incarcerating a single youth rose to close to \$250,000 per year by 2008.

In 2006, a 15 year-old youth at the state's Tryon youth facility, Darryl Thompson, died while being restrained by staff. This tragedy highlighted the continuing problems of maltreatment and abuse within the state's system. In 2007, upon her appointment to the position of Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Gladys Carrion immediately announced that she would begin to dismantle and transform the State's Juvenile Justice System. Her work was bolstered by then Governor David Paterson's formation of a task force to transform the state's juvenile justice system. Ultimately New York State closed 21 youth detention centers and implemented trauma and evidence informed, therapeutic model throughout juvenile justice system.

In New York City advocates, policymakers, and Mayor Michael Bloomberg called for a substantial reform of the city's juvenile justice system and the return to city custody of its youth committed to state-run secure facilities.

Ultimately these efforts led to the development of the Close to Home Initiative, which was codified by the state legislature in 2012. Under Close to Home, all residents of facilities in Upstate New York from New York City would be transferred to placements in the city itself. The Initiative also established a multi-tiered system focused on serving youth in their own communities through a broad-based array of services and support mechanisms. As of August, 2021 New York City Family Court has only placed 63 youth in locked facilities. Those in residential placements are in small home-like facilities.

MILWAUKEE, WI

One of the earliest reform efforts to emerge in Milwaukee County was Wraparound Milwaukee, a program aiming to provide community-based support to local youth with emotional, behavioral, and mental health needs. The program provides a positive and effective approach to reducing delinquent and criminal behavior, and thereby decreasing reliance on incarceration. Since 2011, Milwaukee County has also provided a comprehensive continuum of services for youth and

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families as an alternative to placement within the State's youth correctional facilities. These efforts included keeping more justice involved youth in local, secure facilities focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment.

Despite these reforms, Milwaukee continued to send its youth to the State's main youth prisons at Lincoln Hills (boys) and Copper Lake (girls). Youth from the county represented approximately 60 percent of these facilities' committed youth. Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake were plagued by scandals, lawsuits, and investigations. The light shed on these problems was due in large part to the advocacy efforts of a diverse set of community organizations and youth advocates that eventually formed Youth Justice Milwaukee (YJM).

These troubles led to the passage of Act 185 in 2018, which mandated closure of the facilities by January 2021, the creation of a new state-run secure facility for youth deemed serious offenders, and funding for new county-run secure facilities for those with less serious offenses. Under the grant program developed out of Act 185, Milwaukee applied to the state for \$23.6 million to renovate a county facility to place youth living at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake. The state award, however, was \$8 million dollars short of the county's request. The decrease in funding undercut the county's capacity to build an adequate facility. Therefore, efforts to develop a county run facility are at an impasse. Milwaukee, however, continues to move towards fundamental reform of its juvenile justice system. Between 2016 and 2021, the county cut the number of youth sent to state-run facilities by approximately 70 percent. As of July, 2021, only 22 youths from Milwaukee County remained at Lincoln Hills and Copper Lake.

VIRGINIA

In 2014 Virginia State officials requested that the Annie E. Casey Foundation assess its juvenile justice system. The Foundation's findings were presented to the officials in January of 2015 and, shortly after, planning commenced to transform the system. The four goals of the Transformation Plan were to: 1) Reduce the use of the state's large and aging juvenile corrections facilities (the Beaumont and Bon Air youth prisons); 2) Reform supervision, rehabilitation, and treatment practices throughout the juvenile justice system; 3) Replace Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's (VDJJ) two large, antiquated facilities with smaller, regional rehabilitative and treatment oriented facilities supported by a state wide continuum of care; and, 4) Sustain the Transformation Plan by maintaining safe, healthy, inclusive work places, continuing to recruit, retain, and develop a team of highly skilled and motivated staff, and aligning procedures, policies, and resources to support the team in meeting the goals of transforming the state's juvenile justice system.

To immediately reduce the number of youth in Beaumont and Bon Air in 2015, VDJJ revised its guidelines to decrease the length of stay for youth committed to its residential facilities. In 2016, with both the support of the Governor Terry McAuliffe and the Virginia legislature, the state budget included provisions allocating funding for a variety of reform related measures: creating two small treatment facilities to replace the Bon Air and Beaumont facilities; providing funding for

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the creation of the transformation plan; funding a 64 bed therapeutic facility; and, permitting VDJJ to reinvest savings from prison closures in alternative facilities and approaches.

VDJJ has broadened reform since 2016 in a number of ways including continual identification and implementation of best practices throughout VDJJ's work, increased engagement of families and the utilization of data, and assessment tools to individualize the provision of services. Perhaps most importantly, VDJJ has shifted focus to the use of a continuum of care in community settings and developed intensive non-residential programs as alternatives to incarceration. Moreover, the continuum of care is designed to ensure that Virginia no longer has justice by geography: no matter which of Virginia's court systems a youth finds him/herself in, he or she is provided the same baseline services.

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