

CONNECTS

CASEY

WINTER 2006
A REPORT FROM THE
ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

IN THIS ISSUE: Juvenile Detention Reform Initiative Sparking a “Vibrant National Movement”; Notes of Recognition; Detention Systems Failing to Meet the Needs of Girls; INSITES



ANDRÉ CHUNG

JUVENILE DETENTION REFORM INITIATIVE SPARKING A “VIBRANT NATIONAL MOVEMENT”

After a decade of drastic, often ill-informed shifts toward punitive juvenile justice in the 1990s, America is witnessing a quiet but substantial swing toward more humane approaches supported by evidence. The Supreme Court outlawed capital punishment for juvenile offenders in 2005. Several states have announced plans to replace prison-like youth facilities with smaller, more therapeutic correctional homes, and over five

dozen jurisdictions nationwide are implementing a detention reform model, developed and supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, that has shown that the use of secure facilities for juveniles can be reduced without compromising public safety. The model also has been a springboard for broader reforms in juvenile justice.

When *The American Prospect* magazine released a special juvenile justice issue in September 2005, six of eight articles mentioned Casey’s work or quoted the

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Jason J. and his mother Lakechia credit a Washington, D.C., “youth court” featuring peer jurors—many with juvenile justice system experience—with helping Jason learn important lessons. “I have seen a complete turnaround in him,” says Lakechia.

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The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private charitable organization dedicated to helping build better futures for disadvantaged children in the United States. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families. In pursuit of this goal, the Foundation makes grants that help states, cities, and neighborhoods fashion more innovative, cost-effective responses to these needs.

JUVENILE DETENTION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Foundation's experts. "The juvenile-justice ideal has received a new lease on life thanks to pioneering efforts by states and foundations," announced the lead article. Written by National Council on Crime and Delinquency President Barry Krisberg, the story cited Casey's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) as a crucial development underlying recent progress and creating a "vibrant national movement" for reform.

JDAI focuses on the detention phase of the juvenile justice process prior to trial or pending placement to a juvenile corrections program. Between 1985 and 2001, the number of youth held in detention centers nightly nationwide nearly doubled to 27,000. Yet less than one-third of detained youth are charged with violent crimes, and an alarming 62 percent are minorities. The disproportionate confinement of minority teens is a vexing and pervasive problem.

In 1992, the Casey Foundation selected five jurisdictions as JDAI demonstration sites. Three—Cook County (Chicago), Illinois; Multnomah County (Portland), Oregon; and Sacramento County, California—implemented comprehensive detention reform initiatives. Each developed screening procedures to ensure that only high-risk teens were held in detention, launched alternative programs to supervise youth in the community, and improved case processing to reduce lengths of stay for those placed in locked detention. All three sites achieved positive results.

Cook County reduced its average daily population in locked detention from 693 to 454 between 1996 and 2003. Cook County leaders developed alternatives to locked detention for young people who don't pose a serious threat of fleeing or reoffending, including community-based Evening Reporting Centers that offer constructive activities during afternoons and early evenings while allowing youth to stay at home and in school. In Multnomah County, Oregon, JDAI lowered the daily detention

population by 65 percent. Multnomah also reduced the disproportionate confinement of minority teens by sharply lowering the proportion of minorities in detention. (See Summer 2002 *Casey Connects*).

Today, seven years after the formal demonstration period ended, Casey is helping more than 60 jurisdictions replicate the JDAI model—with public agencies and foundations contributing significant funds to support detention reform and related work. Many more localities have applied to participate. The Foundation conducts a site visit and makes a readiness determination to ensure that each site has the political will and administrative acumen to succeed.

"We are looking, first and foremost, for places that are committed to the values and the strategies of the initiative and have the capacity to implement the complicated changes necessary to do this right," says Bart Lubow, director of Casey's program for high-risk youth.

Unlike the initial demonstration sites, today's replication partners receive only modest grant support from Casey for travel, training, planning, and coordination. But the Foundation offers an elaborate mix of consultant support, staff training, resource materials, and opportunities to learn from other sites.

It's a formula that's working. The first replication site was California's Santa Cruz County, which hired a key official in the Sacramento JDAI project as its juvenile probation chief in 1997. As a result of JDAI, Santa Cruz sharply reduced its daily detention population and lowered the share of minority youth in detention.

In Bernalillo County (Albuquerque), New Mexico, JDAI reduced the daily detention population by 44 percent. Bernalillo leaders closed a wing of the local juvenile detention center, reinvesting the money in detention alternatives and a new mental health clinic. In Camden, New Jersey, where the detention center was built to house 37 youth, JDAI lowered the population from 89 to 58 per day. Likewise, JDAI projects in Ada

County, Idaho, and Ventura County, California, lowered detention populations by at least one-third. JDAI sites also are working to reduce the disproportionate confinement of minority teens, improve conditions and treatment of confined youth, and develop constructive new approaches for youth in the detention process.

Several JDAI sites have substantially reduced detention budgets and steered the money into more productive, cost-effective uses. Locked detention typically costs \$100 to \$300 per night per youth—far more than even the most ambitious alternatives. In Pierce County (Tacoma), Washington, JDAI

California JDAI counties were awarded almost \$2 million in grants to upgrade their mental health services for troubled youth.

In May 2005, the New York-based JEHT Foundation announced a \$2.5 million multiyear grant to support Casey efforts to replicate and expand JDAI programs nationwide. “JDAI is a program whose time has come,” explains JEHT Foundation Senior Program Manager Helena Huang. “There’s a growing demand for JDAI from the field. So why not increase the supply and strengthen a program that’s already working? It’s a great way for us, as a recently established foundation, to access and

were far more likely than whites to be arrested for drug crimes and also more likely to be punished after arrest, local officials devised a Felony Drug Diversion Project that offers supervised treatment, rather than probation or confinement, for many drug offenders. In Santa Cruz, local leaders assembled Neighborhood Accountability Boards that hold hearings for low-level youth offenders rather than push them into the formal court system. These citizen-based panels meet with offenders and victims to hold young people accountable for their actions through constructive sanctions such as restitution, community service, apology letters, counseling, and life skills.

There’s a GROWING DEMAND for JDAI from the field. So why not INCREASE THE SUPPLY and strengthen a program that’s already working?



JAKE SCHUELLKOPF

Officer Larry Ortega visits a youth in Bernalillo County, New Mexico’s community custody program. The program—which uses home visits, phone calls, and electronic monitors rather than locking teens in detention cells—has been a key factor in JDAI’s success in Bernalillo County.

In Illinois, where Cook County remains a model site and JDAI is being replicated in several other jurisdictions, state legislators created a new, independent juvenile corrections agency in November 2005. The new agency took control of juvenile facilities from the Illinois Department of Corrections, which operates adult prisons. According to Cook County Probation Director Mike Rohan, JDAI’s success was key to the new law’s passage.

leaders closed a 50-unit wing of the local detention center and reallocated \$800,000 per year to detention alternative programs. Other JDAI sites are securing foundation grants and tapping government funding streams to enhance services for youth involved in the juvenile system. Three

support system leaders on the forefront of juvenile justice reform.”

Increasingly, the momentum from JDAI is spilling over from detention into other phases of juvenile justice. When data revealed that minority teens in Portland

“Absent the progress we’ve had with detention reform, I think it wouldn’t have happened,” Rohan says. “Policymakers aren’t risk-takers. Until they see positive results, they’re not likely to stick their necks out and support reforms.”

RECOGNITION

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enable unemployed and underemployed women to find work in a career offering potential growth and advancement. The center offers a 15-week course in job readiness and specialized skills such as nursing assistance, child care, pharmacy, culinary arts, and upholstery. The upholstery training program started in 2001 with help from retired upholsterer Herb Davis, who began teaching a small group of women in the center's basement. Today, Caroline Center Upholstery is an "earn-as-you-learn" for-profit venture occupying two large rooms of the center. "As the customer base grew, people continued to come and call," says Patricia McLaughlin, the center's executive director. "We felt this program could be a way to employ women and to really put our beliefs to the test. We hire the women that we train, and we hope employers will too."

Depending on skill level—trainee, apprentice, or upholsterer—each woman receives a commission. By the time they become upholsterers, they receive 50 percent of what their project earns. The business plan helped Caroline Center Upholstery attract new residential and commercial customers and increase revenue to support center programs.

SHERECE WEST

Former Casey employee Sherece West has been named loaned executive managing director of the Louisiana Disaster Recovery Foundation. Louisiana Governor Kathleen Babineaux Blanco created the foundation to support long-term family restoration and recovery in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and to help citizens through a network of Louisiana charities and nonprofit agencies.

West has over 15 years of community service experience. As a program associate at the Casey Foundation, she spent 13 years partnering with grantees and consultants on the Foundation's signature Rebuilding Communities Initiative, which

worked to help transform troubled neighborhoods into safe, supportive environments for children and their families. She is now president and chief executive officer of the Carrier Foundation, a family foundation in Lafayette, Louisiana, dedicated to improving outcomes for disadvantaged children and families in southwestern Louisiana. West is continuing her work at Carrier while helping with the hurricane recovery.

SUSAN BATTEN

Susan Batten, a senior associate at the Casey Foundation, was one of ten people nationwide selected for the prestigious Connecting Leaders Fellowship Program of the Association of Black Foundation Executives. Since 1971, the association has worked to sustain philanthropy in African-American communities and to encourage black leadership and participation in organized philanthropy. Each fellow receives mentoring support from seasoned leaders, a professional development stipend, and leadership coaching during the fellowship year from October 2005 to October 2006. Batten will participate while still maintaining her full-time position at the Casey Foundation.

Batten has 20 years of experience working on public and foundation-related efforts to improve outcomes for children and families. She joined Casey in 1999 and for several years served as site team leader for the Foundation's *Making Connections* initiative in Providence, Rhode Island. In recent years, she has guided Casey's work on issues of equity and disparities related to race, class, and culture. "Susan is the first to say that the growth of the Foundation's work is the result of many

Sherece West



Susan Batten



FAMILIES COUNT WINNERS NAMED

FAMILIES COUNT: The National Honors Program celebrates organizations that do an exemplary job of strengthening families. The 2006 awards, announced during National Families Week in November 2005, went to the Atlantic Street Center in Seattle, Washington; the Georgia Justice Project in Atlanta; and the Grace Hill Settlement House in St. Louis, Missouri. Above, Leon Smith, who got help becoming a role model for his family from the Georgia Justice Project, is pictured with his granddaughter Desiree. For more information about FAMILIES COUNT, visit www.aecf.org/familiescount/.

colleagues' efforts," says Frank Farrow, director of Community Change Initiatives at Casey, "but we all recognize and appreciate the crucial leadership role she plays."



From left to right, William O'Hare, Linda Asato, Tracey Feild, and Maureen Lee at the Caroline Center.

NOTES OF RECOGNITION

WILLIAM O'HARE

As coordinator of KIDS COUNT, the Foundation's state-by-state effort to track and promote the well-being of children, William O'Hare has been helping Casey staff and grantees use data since 1993. O'Hare, who retired from the Foundation this past December, has over 25 years of experience as an applied demographer. So when America's Promise, an alliance to strengthen young people, created a council to provide guidance on reorganizing its research practices, the organization sought O'Hare's help. Serving on the Alliance Research Council, he will use statistics and analysis to promote children's issues. America's Promise was founded after a 1997 presidential summit attended by Presidents Bush, Carter, Clinton, and Ford, with Nancy Reagan representing President Reagan. They challenged the nation to make children and youth a national priority.

O'Hare also has joined the steering committee of the International Society for Child Indicators, a new group that will provide support for child indicator projects worldwide. "I was asked to join the committee because KIDS COUNT is seen as a leader in this field," says O'Hare.

LINDA ASATO

As executive director of Wu Yee Children's Services, Linda Asato, a former Casey Fellow, helps the community-based organization in San Francisco's Chinatown provide high-quality, linguistically and culturally appropriate support services for children and families. In recognition of her outstanding work, she recently won one of 15 spots in the LeaderSpring Fellows Program, a two-year leadership training program for Bay Area nonprofit executive directors.

LeaderSpring Fellows work on improving their leadership and management skills, enhancing their organizations, and building collaborative relationships with peers and communities. Most work for organizations that provide direct services to primarily African-American, Latino, Asian American, and Native American residents living in low-income neighborhoods, including immigrants, homeless people, low-wage earners, developmentally disabled people, and foster children.

Asato joined the Casey family in 2000 as part of the Children and Family Fellowship, an intensive, 11-month program that helps mid- to senior-level leaders develop the vision and skills to oversee initiatives that benefit large populations of children and families. Her creativity and spirit make her a natural choice for the LeaderSpring award, says Donna Stark, Casey's director of leadership development. "If you put an idea in front of her, she'll have a million ways to strengthen it or to think about it in a different way. What we see now is Linda expanding her reach and connecting with a network of her peers."

TRACEY FEILD

Tracey Feild, a member of the Casey Strategic Consulting Group (CSCG) who has spent the last 14 years of her career helping social service providers improve their practices and outcomes for children and families, has won an award from the Center for Child Welfare Policy. Feild earned the 2005 Pro Humanitate Literary Award for an article she wrote about child welfare funding. Noting both the constraints and opportunities the funding offers, she detailed how states have created a funding roadblock by narrowly implementing the Medicaid program. The

article was published in the spring 2004 edition of the *Social Work Forum*.

Feild started with CSCG in January 2005 as director of consulting engagements, joining a team of professionals who help state, local, and county agencies plan and implement reforms in their child welfare systems, usually triggered by a crisis or leadership transition. She gained experience overcoming political and social barriers to reform through her previous work with the Institute for Human Services Management, a national consulting firm in Westminster, Maryland; the Maryland Social Services Administration; the Ohio Department of Human Services; the Urban Institute; and the Peace Corps. The Center for Child Welfare Policy, which is part of the North American Resource Center for Child Welfare, recognized Feild and fellow honorees at a ceremony last September in Providence, Rhode Island.

CAROLINE CENTER

A business plan developed by the Caroline Center—a job training program for Baltimore women—has earned the center an award from the Yale School of Management and the Goldman Sachs Foundation Partnership on Nonprofit Ventures. While participating in the Casey-supported Baltimore Community Wealth Collaborative, the Caroline Center developed a plan to expand an upholstery training program into a for-profit business staffed by its participants. The center competed against 464 entrants nationally and was one of eight winners. In addition to a \$25,000 prize, the center will receive technical assistance to implement its business plan.

Sponsored by School Sisters of Notre Dame, the Caroline Center's mission is to



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DETENTION SYSTEMS FAILING TO MEET THE NEEDS OF GIRLS

“More girls are entering detention and they have significant needs that differ in both degree and kind from those of the boys for whom detention systems have historically been designed,” concludes a new report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. These trends “magnify the already troubling conditions under which many girls are detained,” says *Detention Reform and Girls: Challenges and Solutions*, the thirteenth and latest in Casey’s series of “Pathways to Detention Reform” reports.

Between 1990 and 1999, the number of girls entering juvenile detention nationwide rose 50 percent, compared with only a 4 percent increase for boys—an upward trend that continued through 2001, notes the report, released in November 2005.

Girls are far more likely than boys to be detained for misdemeanors, technical violations of probation and parole, and status offenses, such as underage drinking or curfew violations that would not be crimes if committed by an adult, the report notes. Nationwide, girls comprised 19 percent of the young people detained in 2001 but 24 percent of those detained specifically for technical violations and 43 percent of those detained for status offenses. The report suggests that, contrary to the statutory purposes of detention, many jurisdictions are detaining girls not simply to maintain public safety, but to protect and arrange services for girls who have not committed serious crimes—including many who have run away from chaotic or abusive homes.

Compared with detained boys, girls in detention are far more likely to have been abused as children, to suffer mental health problems like depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, and to have undiagnosed learning disabilities. Yet most detention

facilities were built to house boys and have “boy-specific” detention policies, practices, and training.

Many detention facilities fail to meet girls’ needs, resulting in traumatizing, often counterproductive experiences for many girls, the report finds. These trends are “creating a real crisis in many jurisdictions,” it warns. *Detention Reform and Girls* offers recommendations and reviews effective initiatives to improve detention practices for girls. The report highlights the work of model sites in Casey’s Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative and other jurisdictions. Promising practices cited in the report include:

- Linking girls to community programs specifically focused on girls and geared toward building on strengths.
- Creating local alternatives to detention for girls, including community shelters and family-focused counseling services.
- Providing comprehensive legal representation for girls to address the needs of those who are involved in the juvenile justice system and are also dealing with other systems, including child welfare, special education, school suspension/expulsion, mental health, and/or social services.
- Ensuring that decision-makers understand all the issues affecting girls involved in multiple systems and that they work together to address all the girls’ needs and avoid unnecessary placement in detention.

Copies of *Detention Reform and Girls: Challenges and Solutions* can be ordered by calling the Casey publications voice line at 410-223-2890 or visiting www.aecf.org.

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PUTTING YOUTH AT THE FOREFRONT OF DETENTION REFORM



Daniel Smith* feels closer to other residents at the New Orleans-area juvenile facility where he lives, thanks to a new therapeutic treatment approach that includes frequent daily gatherings of youth and staff. "Now I have seven little brothers in the dorm who I can talk to," he says.

The improvements at Bridge City, which are based on Missouri's pioneering methods of reforming juvenile detention, will be adopted by Louisiana's two other secure care facilities. These changes, plus the closure of another facility with a bad reputation, are among the most visible signs of Louisiana's juvenile justice reform effort. A new five-year strategic plan includes measures to improve case management and increase community-based alternatives to incarceration.

When Daniel Smith* heard change was coming to the New Orleans-area correctional center where he's lived for several years, he thought, "What trick are they playing now?"

But after Bridge City Correctional Center was transformed into Bridge City Center for Youth last summer—with a new therapeutic treatment approach that includes redesigned dorms, retrained staff, a homier family visiting area, and more educational opportunities—Daniel, 19, relaxed a bit.

"It's really getting better," says Daniel. "Before, it looked like you were in jail. Now you feel like you're walking into someone's house. There's not as much tension. It's more laid back."

There is also less regimen and both residents and staff interact better. "Before, I wasn't really close to anybody," Daniel says. "Now I have seven little brothers in a dorm who I can talk to whenever I want."

"The net effect will be a reformed system with kids closer to home...and fewer kids in the deep end, in secure care," says Simon Gonsoulin, deputy secretary of Louisiana's Office of Youth Development. This will include successful early intervention, diversion, and reentry efforts.

Assisting Louisiana has been the Casey Strategic Consulting Group (CSCG), which helps public agencies, usually in the wake of a crisis, work to improve services for children and families. The Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative staff also will be involved in efforts to reduce the use of traditional detention centers.

Although Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused the temporary evacuation of Bridge City, the reform effort continues. "I am amazed at how unwavering their commitment to reform has been throughout the post-Katrina and -Rita period," says Bill Buckner, CSCG director of practice development.

*Last name has been altered.

At Bridge City, barracks-style dormitories housing about 20–30 youth ages 11–20 are being replaced by more home-like dorms for 8–12 residents. “We’re trying to create that family- or community-type environment where they’re responsible for caring for each other,” says Michael Gaines, interim director of Bridge City.

Security guards have been replaced by youth care workers—new employees and former guards trained in a behavior management approach based on an understanding of adolescents. And now, a dorm group called a circle often meets several times daily to discuss anything from misbehavior to homesickness, depression, homework, or a job well done. “The old way to handle a problem was to call somebody to come deal with us,” says Daniel. “The new way is the whole group, plus staff, sits with you until you figure out your problem.”

The shift in emphasis from corrections to treatment and rehabilitation has “been a culture change” for kids and staff, says Gaines, a 29-year veteran of Louisiana’s system. “The environment is conducive for us to really do some great things for the kids.”

LISTENING TO KIDS AND FAMILIES

Margie Chavarria and Dalvin Williams, each 19, are experts on the juvenile justice system. Both got into trouble as adolescents and were confined in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. They also benefited from detention alternative programs connected with the Casey Foundation’s Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative. Both have turned their lives around.

Now, Cook County’s probation department is putting their expertise to work, involving Chavarria and Williams in a new Juvenile Advisory Council (JAC). The council puts youth at the forefront of juvenile justice reform efforts.

The JAC has three main functions: running orientation sessions for young people newly placed on probation and their families to increase the odds of a successful probation; conducting exit interviews with young people leaving probation, along with their families, to find out what did and didn’t work; and debriefing staff on the feedback so changes can be made. The young people receive stipends for serving on the council. “It’s one of the most exciting and important things we’ve done here in many years,” says Deputy Steve Eisman, the council’s staff coordinator. “Never before in this department’s proud history has it asked kids

and families, ‘What have we done well and what could we do better?’”

After being expelled from school for misbehavior, Williams took advantage of a probation department educational program to earn his GED. He now works part-time doing carpentry and painting and has enrolled in college.

Williams and Eisman co-lead the monthly council meetings. Williams also participates in exit interviews with youth. One thing they learned was that kids are embarrassed by school visits from probation officers. “Sometimes the officers come in wearing badges or clothes that make it obvious they’re from probation. So the kids feel like their confidentiality is being broken,” Williams says. Based on this input, “They’re coming up with a new policy.”

When the JAC began conducting focus groups with young people who had been through probation, the most striking finding was that many kids still “didn’t understand the basics,” says Robert Brown, who, at 27, is an elder statesman on the council. “Some didn’t know what a curfew was. They didn’t understand restitution [where offenders pay money or work to compensate their victims]. They didn’t understand home confinement.” JAC members now lead orientation sessions every six to eight weeks for all youth placed on probation, using games and role play to make learning fun.

“We didn’t have that orientation when I got on probation,” says Margie Chavarria, who was 13 when she entered the juvenile system on a burglary charge and later returned to detention on a probation violation. She didn’t realize not going to school or running away from home were against probation. “It’s basically common sense, but at 13 you don’t have a lot of common sense,” she says. “I’m proud to be participating with the JAC, because it’s helping these kids understand what this program is all about.”



JIM MORRIS

Dalvin Williams uses his past experience with the juvenile justice system to help other youth by serving on a council that advises the Cook County, Illinois, probation department. As part of this reform effort, Williams interviews young people leaving probation to get feedback on their experiences and on what changes may be needed.

COMBINING DETENTION REFORM AND MINORITY JUSTICE

On a balmy fall evening inside a community center in Tucson, Arizona's A Mountain neighborhood, about three dozen people kicked off an ambitious effort to combat the unequal treatment of minority youth in Tucson's juvenile justice system.

African Americans make up just 3 percent of the population in Tucson and surrounding Pima County. Yet, echoing a nationwide trend, black youth make up a far greater share—11 to 12 percent—of the young people locked up inside the Pima County Juvenile Detention Center. “The further you go in the system, the more disproportionate it becomes,” says Marcia Rincon-Gallardo, the county's staff coordinator for juvenile detention reform and disproportionate minority confinement.

Pima County is the first locality to address the minority justice issue by integrating two innovative reform projects—the Casey Foundation's Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) and the W. Haywood Burns Institute model. Casey Foundation officials laud Pima County's decision to combine JDAI—which has had impressive results in reducing disproportionate minority confinement in places like Multnomah County, Oregon—with the W. Haywood Burns Institute's more neighborhood-based model. Rather than focusing on countywide system reform, the Burns model focuses on specific neighborhoods that send the most minority youth into juvenile courts and detention centers.

“Pima County is very unique in the way we're rolling this out,” says Casey Foundation Senior Associate for Juvenile Justice Raquel Mariscal. “It's intentional up front that this is about both detention reform and minority justice.”

At the first Tucson meeting and at another a month later in the heavily Hispanic enclave of Sunnyside, parents, adolescents, educators, police officers, and court officials learned about JDAI and the Burns Institute and heard detailed briefings about unequal treatment of minority youth in their own communities.

In 2006, Pima County officials and their community partners will conduct focus groups with teens and parents and compile a service inventory to identify the options and opportunities available for kids in the targeted neighborhoods. Then they will develop community maps detailing where key services and resources are located and how youth can readily and safely commute to them.

“There are often fewer resources in [minority] communities—fewer detention alternative programs, fewer behavioral health services,” says Rincon-Gallardo. “Also, minority kids often live far from where programs and services are offered. They have further to travel, which can lead to missed appointments and then to probation violations.”

“If you're telling a kid he has to attend a life skills workshop, but in order to get there he has to travel through rival gang turf, you're setting him up for failure,” says Burns Institute Director James Bell. “Juvenile justice officials are often unaware of these dangers.”

While it is still too early to tell whether these efforts will succeed, Pima County officials are convinced that, by

Pima County, Arizona, is blending two REFORM EFFORTS to address the disproportionate confinement of minority YOUTH.

engaging community members and factoring in their perspectives, they're on the right track.

“We get to hear from parents. We get to listen to youth who have been through the system,” Rincon-Gallardo notes. “Without them, we wouldn't have the same depth of understanding.”

CREATING A TRUE JURY OF PEERS

When a police officer tried to drag him to the principal's office after breaking up his altercation with a fellow student, Justin J. didn't think he was being treated fairly. He hadn't thrown any punches. After cursing the officer, the 12-year-old soon found himself at a District of Columbia juvenile processing center under arrest for disorderly conduct.

Historically, youth facing such a charge would have their cases dismissed. Or they'd get hauled into juvenile court for a formal hearing—often a traumatizing, stigmatizing

experience—and possibly end up on an overworked probation officer’s caseload.

But in Washington, D.C., and in a rapidly growing number of communities nationwide, there’s a third option: youth courts. The jurors are other young people, often who’ve had experience in the system.

Washington’s Time Dollar Youth Court—part of the Time Dollar Institute, a national organization that encourages community service—is one of the nation’s largest, most successful youth court programs, hearing over 500 cases a year. Time Dollar refers to a social bartering system that encourages neighbors to exchange skills and resources.

The Time Dollar Youth Court convenes most Saturday mornings inside the Moultrie Courthouse in Washington, D.C., to hear cases of first-time youth offenders arrested for marijuana possession, simple assault, disorderly conduct, truancy, or other minor offenses.

Young people serving as peer jurors—many of whom previously faced the court—question the youth and listen to statements by parents and sometimes victims. Then they deliberate and decide on a sanction. Usually it’s a combination of an apology to parents or victims, community service, life skills classes, family or individual counseling, and required service as a peer juror. Three-fourths of youth court participants are asked to serve as jurors in future sessions.

Though the program hasn’t been evaluated, outcomes appear favorable. Only 10 percent of youth referred to the Time Dollar court between January 2003 and November 2004 were rearrested within six months—far below the 30 percent rearrest rate of comparable youth released following arrest or processed through the formal juvenile court system. Also, Time Dollar Youth Court participants can earn a refurbished computer by doing 50 hours of additional service after completing the required jury duty.

Justin J., now a program graduate who appeared before the youth court and served as a peer juror, says participating in



ANDRE CHUNG

youth court helped him feel less alone and “make better choices—not talk back to teachers and police officers, and watch where I hang around.” His mother Lakechia agrees. “I have seen a complete turnaround in him, honestly. He has inculcated a lot of the things he learned in the program.”

Justin J.’s experience with the Time Dollar Youth Court in Washington, D.C., and his participation as a peer juror hearing other young people’s cases made him feel less alone. It has also helped him “make better choices,” he says.