

A Seat at the Table

*Secure Care from the
Community's Perspective*



Executive Summary

Following the dismal findings of a survey on the state of juvenile justice in our nation, Virginia's Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) recognized the need and began the hard work of transforming our juvenile justice system. Over the last three years DJJ has successfully closed 5 Juvenile Correctional Centers (JCC) across the state. A crowning achievement of the transformation to date has been DJJ's ability, with the support and advocacy efforts of RISE for Youth, and other advocates, to preserve the funds from closing Virginia's largest youth prison, Beaumont JCC. DJJ is reinvesting these funds to build out and strengthen a continuum of services to support youth as alternatives to incarceration. One of the issues Virginia continues to grapple with, however, is how and where to appropriately rehabilitate youth who have caused significant harm and have the most significant rehabilitation needs.

Right now, the Virginia General Assembly (GA) is faced with the monumental task of determining what a secure care facility for youth with the deepest support needs will look like and where it will be placed. The Department of General services has been asked to present options for a new Central Virginia Juvenile Correctional Center to the GA's House Appropriations, Senate Finance Committees and the governor by October 31, 2018.¹ To ensure that our state representatives are able to make an informed decision based on all relevant perspectives and information, **RISE for Youth**, a nonpartisan campaign in support of community alternatives to incarceration in Virginia, organized a learning tour, held on September 29th, 2018. The event was designed to allow legislative representatives, state agency representatives, affected community members, service providers, and others to learn from each other and from local and national juvenile justice experts about ways Virginia can re-imagine secure care as part of its overall juvenile justice system transformation.

Attendees were taken to view three properties. At each location, attendees heard from the property owner about the existing programming. Also present were construction specialists who explained how each site could be made fully secure, while still blending in naturally with the other community elements and providing a home-like alternative to the remote institutional youth prison model of the past. A model that is a financial drain on Virginia's economy and with a proven track record of failing to produce the intended outcome of sustained youth rehabilitation. Throughout the tour, participants heard about the positive financial implications of community-centric secure care and the experiences of other jurisdictions that are transforming their approach to secure care for youth as well.

Throughout the day, participants also had the opportunity to see how local organizations are already offering many of the elements needed to set youth on the right path and support them in their transition to adulthood. Supports such as vocational training infused with life skills coaching, and the value of a home-like environment in setting youth up for successful and sustained reintegration into society. Attendees heard how professionally trained staff working with youth in smaller home-like settings are proving that this model produces long lasting successful outcomes for young people in other localities. Attendees heard how allowing providers to serve both youth in secure care and members of the community builds the potential for a cost-sharing arrangement that lessens the financial burden created by the cost of providing services to youth in secure care alone. They also heard why keeping youth close to home, where they can have regular access to and support from family and community, is so important.

Background

Following a study conducted by Annie E. Casey and others in 2015, Virginia's Department of Juvenile Justice, (DJJ) advocates and community members all recognized that Virginia's juvenile justice system needed to change. By late 2015, DJJ had successfully closed four of its six juvenile correctional centers (JCC), Barrett, Natural Bridge, Hanover and Oak Ridge, leaving only Bon Air and Beaumont JCCs. Although the transformation was yielding results, (notably, the length of stay guideline revisions shortening the average time youth could be committed to youth prisons) JCCs, or youth prisons, were still overused and recidivism still high. In a report published in 2015, the Commonwealth Institute (TCI) stated that "almost three-quarters of youth who have been held in the state's youth prisons are convicted of another crime within three years of release."¹ TCI also noted that the state's own data showed higher re-arrest rates for youth incarcerated for longer periods (compared to those incarcerated for shorter lengths of time).² While states across the country had been successfully moving towards smaller juvenile facilities, 85% of youth in Virginia custody were living in facilities with 200 beds or more.³ The majority of youth incarcerated in Virginia's youth prisons were [and still are] youth of color.⁴ The communities that lost the most youth to youth prisons were almost entirely high poverty localities, and many youth returned to those communities worse off than they left, having experienced a significant disruption in education and vocational training.⁵

As the state continued to take steps to improve its juvenile justice system, RISE for Youth worked to ensure that youth, families, and affected community member voices and ideas were included in the changes. With the support and advocacy of RISE and other advocates, In 2017, DJJ closed Beaumont JCC and successfully secured the surplus of funds from the closure to reinvest into a broader continuum of services. The task of creating the continuum of community-based services was contracted out to two experienced organizations, Evidence Based Associates and AMI Kids.

RISE for Youth held town halls and meetings in many communities to raise awareness among grassroots community providers about the availability of funds to support the youth from their own communities. Several meetings were held in the Hampton Roads region, where 40 percent of state-committed youth are from. RISE also published a [report](#) sharing what these communities want and need for their young people to be successful without justice system involvement. Through its community support efforts, RISE quickly recognized some very disturbing trends. Young people's experiences while in state care, coupled with the prevalent lack of resources in their home communities, often make transition back into community and avoiding subsequent system involvement very difficult, if not impossible.

In response to these troubling trends, RISE and community partners, through a range of reports, events, and activities, asked DJJ and the legislature to continue the move away from the outdated, large, remote youth prison model. The resounding ask from advocates and community was that DJJ:

- Invest in communities and youth, to include adding the securest of care to the continuum of services within affected communities;
- Offer community central rehabilitation methods that put youth on the correct path, rather than sending them away to large remote facilities; and
- Offer services that allow youth and their families to work together towards a brighter future.

The RISE message proposes broad investments in affected communities. We recognize that the development of a continuum of care within the juvenile justice system that promotes rehabilitation and accountability through therapeutic community-based services rather than incarceration, are key to creating a next generation of healthy and productive Virginia citizens and truly safe communities. RISE also recognizes that this continuum will need to include secure care for some period of time for a small number of youth. RISE hosted the Seat at the Table Secure Care Tour to imagine options for addressing the needs of that small number of youth with community input and from a community centered perspective. This proposal is the result of bringing community, agency and youth experts and stakeholders together to explore options in Virginia, to learn from lived experiences and from the work of other states. These findings compiled here are to ensure that our state representatives make the best possible decision after considering all relevant information about what secure care can look like in Virginia.

1.) L. Goren & M. Cassidy/Commonwealth Institute. "Smarter Choices for Virginia's Youth and Future." (2015).

2.) Based on one year re-arrest rates. Goren & Cassidy/Commonwealth Institute.

3.) Goren & Cassidy/Commonwealth Institute.

4.) In FY 2015, 67.2% of youth admitted to direct care were Black; in 2017, 68.1% of youth admitted to direct care were Black. Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice. "Data Resource Guide FY 2017." From djj.virginia.gov/pdf/about-djj/DRG/Direct_Care.pdf

5.) Goren & Cassidy/Commonwealth Institute, stating "Only about a quarter of youth who are held in the state facilities achieve a high school diploma or pass the GED while they are being held there, and fewer than 3 in 10 successfully complete even one career and technical education (CTE) course while at the prisons."





A Day of Learning

On September 29th, RISE hosted the “Seat at the Table Secure Care” tour, bringing stakeholders to visit community-centric spaces in Richmond already providing elements of a continuum of care (e.g., vocational training, access to positive and credible messenger role models) and that could serve as models for secure care locations and style options. Typical practice around the country has been to build a secure juvenile justice facility, often copying the adult correctional institution model, and then loading in services to “rehabilitate” incarcerated youth. This model has repeatedly proven ineffective, and as a result, many states are closing their large expensive youth prison facilities.

Through the tour, RISE challenged attendees to throw out the traditional script for developing secure care. RISE asked attendees to begin with the fundamental elements we know all young people need for healthy development, and to factor in all the added supports needed for youth who have experienced and who have caused significant trauma and harms. This lens is important because the majority of youth in DJJ custody have experienced extensive childhood trauma. Only then did our conversation turn to finding ways to make the imagined space secure without losing the integrity of the original design elements.

Virginia can be a national leader by envisioning secure facilities that start with the services and supports that youth need to become successful adults free from further system involvement. Secure facilities should be staffed with well-equipped providers who know and understand the unique needs of the youth in their own communities. These reimaged facilities should include security measures that do not undermine the youth-serving components of the program model. Virginia should place these secure facilities within resource-desert communities, and rather than limiting services to youth in facility, the new model should also offer services and supports for youth and other community members who are not justice-involved. This approach will allow the surrounding community to view these facilities as neighborhood assets that contribute to the overall improvement of community health.

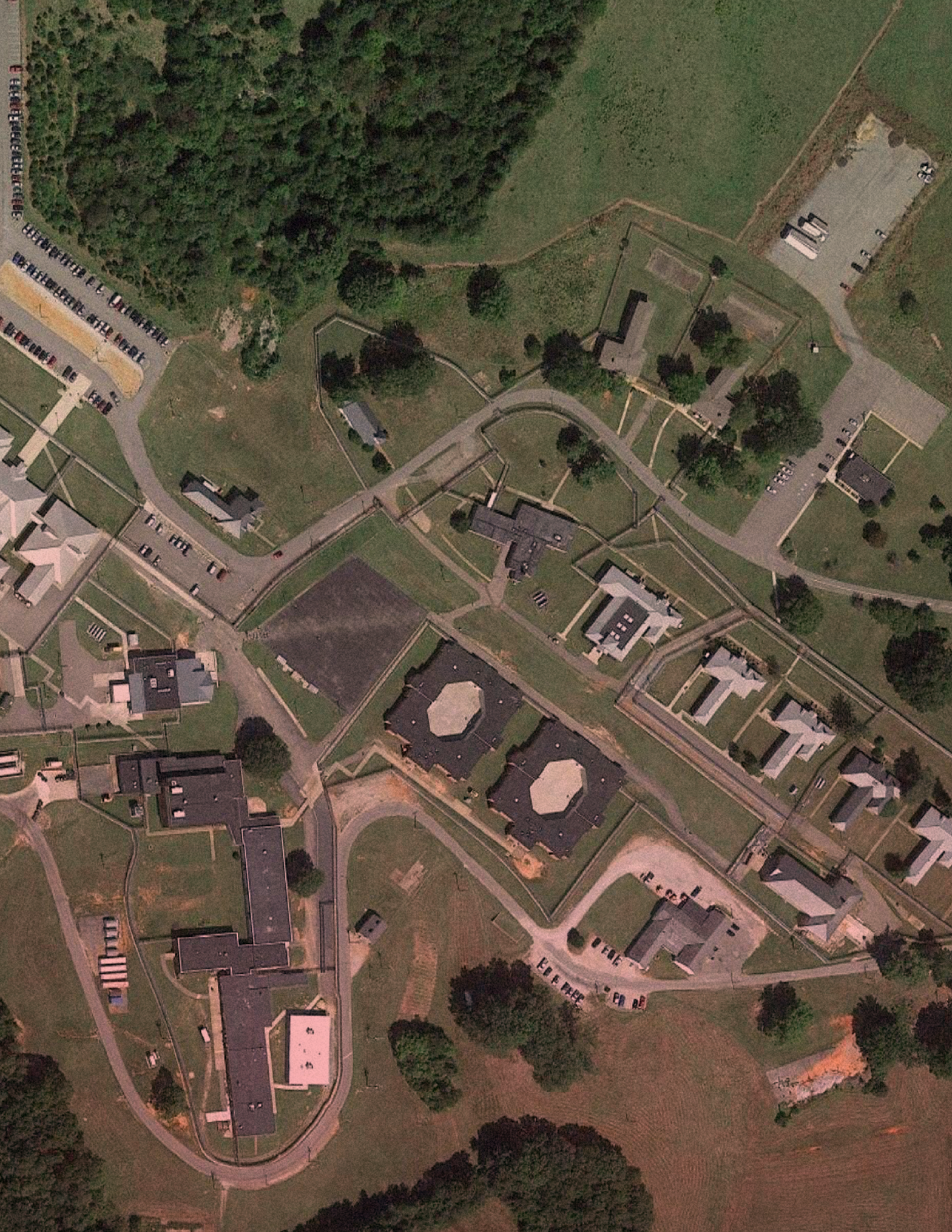
Looking Beyond Remote Youth Prisons

Youth who are placed in secure juvenile facilities return home afterwards. Having these settings located in or near a youth's community can ease that transition in many ways. Addressing the root causes of behavior should involve the entire family and should offer positive alternatives to challenging situations or patterns in a young person's experiences. Close proximity to parents and other family members means that these persons can support youth and be involved in treatment and learn new ways to help youth in crisis. Being in the same school district can make educational transitions easier, and access to local service providers means fewer difficult transitions as well. Having smaller facilities in communities also makes it much easier for community members without children in the system to get involved and support youth or benefit from the community-based services that they may personally need.

More than 20 individuals participated in the Day of Learning, including legislative and Department of Social Services staff, attorneys, educators, returning citizens, youth, parents, pastors, private foundation staff, and mental health and other providers. Throughout the day participants learned about the reasons why the "status quo" of large facilities far from a youth's home are ineffective. The day was spent experiencing settings that allowed attendees to consider new possibilities with organizations serving Virginians in meaningful and positive ways.

The first site the group visited was Clo's House, which provides supportive transitional services for men returning to the community from incarceration through a contract with the Department of Corrections. The second site was Recycle for the Children House which runs a recycling program that teaches youth about the importance of recycling and allows them to work to earn their own money. The third site, The Welcome Table, is a training program which prepares youth and adults for careers in the culinary arts industry. RISE for Youth Executive Director, Valerie Slater, explained that each site was chosen because of its central location within communities where youth and families live and work and would benefit from greater access to services and supports. Each site also had the potential to be a model, expanded or adapted to offer secure residential care in a home-like environment.





Moving away from Bricks and Bars

Clo's House

Clo's House is a 3-bedroom, 2-bath home. While this particular property was not a potential location for a juvenile facility, the owner spoke of a similar property that could be. Touring Clo's House gave attendees a sense of the residential feel that could be accomplished. Clo's House looked and felt like home, with a living room, bedrooms, a kitchen, dining room, and laundry area and most importantly staff and residents committed to the work of supporting the successful transition to independence for each residents. What Clo's House represented on the tour was a successful and replicable public-private partnership model. The home is run by a private provider who is under contract with the Department of Corrections. The owner shared extensively about the benefits of developing relationships with state agencies to be enabled to provide support to the members of your own community in ways systems charged with overseeing the entire Commonwealth cannot. Residents of the home also shared their stories of how living in the Clo's House helped support their successful transition back into society.

Recycle for the Children

Recycle for the Children House is also a 3-bedroom, 2-bath home that is currently being renovated. The owner runs a recycling program out of a multi-car garage on the property. This property's current configuration could house up to 6 youth. The property is situated on a double lot and given the large size (the adjacent lot is owned by the same owner), could be expanded to offer placements for 10-16 youth. While touring Recycle for the Children's home, RISE explained that, in addition to considering the location for securest care, the home should also be considered for a Community Placement Program (CPP) site. Currently, young people in DJJ custody and placed in CPPs are housed in their local juvenile detention center (JDC). Each participating JDC has between 8 to 16 beds. RISE encouraged attendees to imagine young people placed in a CPP or secure care receiving services in a homelike setting similar to the Recycling for the Children property with modifications. The size of the lot, even though in a residential setting, is large enough to support the inclusion of both indoor and outdoor recreation facilities. There are also several support resources in close proximity to this location.

The Welcome Table

The final stop on the tour was the Welcome Table in the Regency Inn. This location would require the most significant renovations of those toured, but has the potential to house 24-30 youth, and offers additional space for service provision, recreation and administration. Currently, the inn is open to the public and often serves community members in transition who rent rooms on a weekly basis, including some individuals participating in the culinary arts program. The Welcome Table is a nonprofit owned and operated by an individual other than the owner of the inn. Both the owner of the inn and of the Welcome Table expressed interest in exploring a partnership with the state that could transform the property to exclusively serve youth.

The property owner also owns a second inn property and is interested in exploring opportunities for that property as well. In addition to reconfiguring the inn to house 24-30 youth, provide

some on site services, and to create outdoor and indoor recreational facilities, the vision for this site includes creating a rooftop atrium to give youth opportunities to learn gardening, play board games, and spend time in an indoor/outdoor space. The potential for this location to be transformed to provide services conducive to successful youth, family and community rehabilitation are numerous.

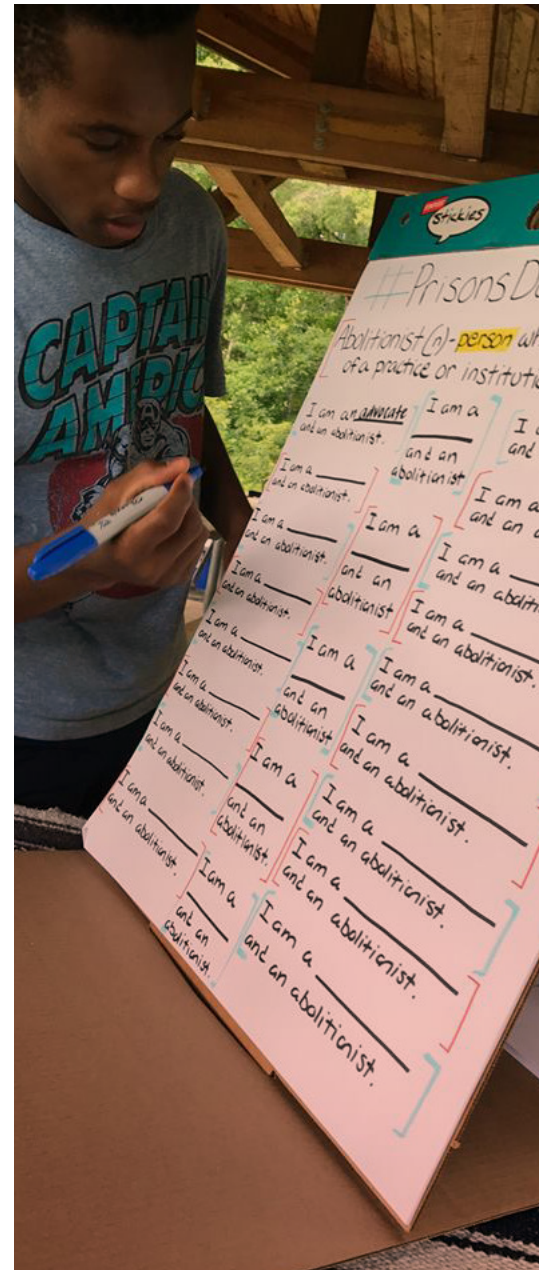
Close to Home: The New York Example

Rev. Rubén Austria, the founding Executive Director of Community Connections for Youth in New York City, attended the Secure Care Tour via teleconference during the third site visit and shared lessons learned from the Close to Home (C2H) Plan implemented in New York.

Horrendous conditions in state-run juvenile facilities spurred New York City to undertake a complete overhaul of its youth justice system starting in 2003. These reforms included changing policies and practices to reduce the use of juvenile detention and placement and the expanded use of alternatives to detention programming and standardized risk assessments. Reforms continued to gain momentum in 2010 when the city's juvenile justice and child welfare agencies merged and when in 2011 the city closed its troubled Spofford Juvenile Detention Center. In 2012, New York began phased implementation of its Close to Home initiative (C2H). Under C2H, New York City, through an agreement with the state, kept custody of youth from its 5 boroughs who would otherwise have been in state care, allowing them to stay in or near their home communities. Although there were several early challenges, the initiative produced impressive results. New York City stopped sending youth to state facilities entirely, placing them in limited secure and non-secure homes of 6-18 youth instead, and of those youth:²

- 91% passed their academic classes;
- 82% were able to transition back to a parent, other family member or guardian; and
- 91% were enrolled in pro-social community-based programs when leaving C2H.

During the implementation of Close to Home, New York City also saw significant declines in youth arrests (53%), detention (37%), and out-of-home placements (68%); notably these declines were all at greater rates than the state as a whole.³



Questions:

- How do you make sure homelike facilities are secure, if the youth housed there are “locked up” for serious offenses?
- How do you ensure the security measures do not create an eyesore on the existing community?
- How do you make sure youth have adequate space to be outside and move around?
- Would community residents be notified of the intent to create a secure care placement in their community?

Answers:

- Ideas shared by a construction specialist included using existing home structures as administrative offices and adding an additional dorm styled building as a living space for youth on the smaller properties. Another option offered was to start over with the whole 2-lot area at site two. With careful planning, the specialists explained, the space could house the youth, have space for education, therapeutic services, administrative offices, and storage, and still have room for recreation.
- Another construction specialist added that different levels of security could be implemented according to a structure’s needs. The specialist explained that as experienced contractors, they know how to make something “look and feel” residential, both to youth living in the home and to the community outside, while still having the necessary security measures in place. This could include measures like reinforced metal supports embedded behind the sheetrock, blast-resistant and alarmed windows that are still aesthetically pleasing, metal-reinforced door jams etc.
- The double lot at site two also provides ample room to build a second dorm like sleeping quarters while still leaving adequate space for recreational space on the back of the double lot. The property is also large enough to support the building of an indoor recreational space. Construction specialists explained that designer fencing could be built around a lowered recreational area. The appearance from outside of the property would be a standard 12-foot fence. Inside, the youth would experience having a home with a sunken grounds area, with a fence 18 to 20 feet higher than ground level from inside the property.

Note: *These examples are mentioned to demonstrate the viability of the location for the intended purpose, and not as an exhaustive list of security measures needed.*

- Community residents would have a right to know that a secure care facility was being placed in their community.

Doing it Right

Creating a prison-like facility for justice system involved youth is easy; delivering quality services that help put youth on the right path, in a location that reinforces the message of belonging, home, family and community, thus, truly ensuring public safety and successful, healthy communities, is harder. Yet, each one of the programs visited during the Secure Care tour, and many more across the Commonwealth, rise to and meet this challenge every day.

- **Clo’s House** connects returning citizens to any services they need to reintegrate into the community. Clo’s House residents are also given opportunities to contribute to their community through volunteer opportunities, mentoring and speaking as credible messengers to at risk youth.
- **Recycle for the Children** teaches youth about recycling and allows them to earn money from recyclables. Recycle for the Children gives youth the opportunity to improve their community by helping reduce litter and pollution and helping support charities — Recycle for the Children House pays youth for their work and donates 25% of its proceeds to charity each quarter.
- At **the Welcome Table** young people receive hands-on training for careers in the culinary arts field, while being supported by positive adult role models. Students learn about every aspect of the restaurant business from cooking to professionalism, waiting tables, to handling money. The students who successfully complete the program earn an industry certification, a SafeServ Certification, a CPR Certification and job placement assistance.

Reflecting on the Day

Participants in the Seat at the Table tour discussed the importance of offering youth opportunities that would make them want to stay and complete their program, even in secure care and noted that relationships youth have with the staff in the house impacts how they respond to the environment as well.

Jerry Lee, a construction specialist, who is also a returning citizen and now serves as a peer mentor, motivational speaker, and DOC volunteer, explained that the current institutional structures are traumatizing for youth. He shared that often when you send youth to institutional settings they aren’t focusing on learning their math or grammar, they are worried about becoming a better fighter, so they can protect themselves and stay safe. “But if we can open up these types of houses,” he says, “the only thing they want to [know] is how can I own my own? How can I sink my feet into my own carpet? How can I work on my own sink?...A lot of [kids in] the juvenile facility come from the projects; they only know cinderblock. A lot of them haven’t slept beside sheetrock.”

Gerri Archer, a mental health provider, explained that, “If the staff were qualified mental health professionals, they’d have training in how to interact with youth, how to be genuine, how to communicate and let the young people know ‘you can feel safe here, we believe in you, you can

do better.” She explained that, “If the youth feel that, you care, they will respond to that, and will show respect,” adding that young people recognize when adults are invested in them, and are genuine, and that could help them make better choices and get the most out of a truly supportive secure care environment. She also noted that with qualified mental health professionals on staff, the programs could offer psycho-educational groups and counseling, giving youth a chance to work with their families as a cohesive group and take full advantage of growth and development opportunities offered to them.

Trina Louis, Acting Senior Policy Advisor for the City of Richmond Department of Social Services and a former juvenile justice professional, said that the same best practices work in juvenile justice and social services: keeping kids in the community, and providing the family and community support that keeps children healthy, whole and safe. We have to start from care, not custody, she explained.

Conclusion

Our legislators are facing the monumental task of determining the nature of secure care facilities for youth with the greatest support needs, and where these facilities will be placed in Virginia. In the coming weeks, the Department of General services will present options for a new Central Virginia Juvenile Correctional Center to the GA’s House Appropriations, Senate Finance Committees, and the governor.⁴ RISE for Youth organized a learning tour, held on September 29th, 2018, to allow legislative representatives, state agency representatives, affected community members, service providers, and others to learn from each other and from local and national juvenile justice experts about ways Virginia can re-imagine secure care as part of its overall juvenile justice system transformation.

RISE for Youth continues to advocate for broad investment in affected communities. RISE supports the development of a juvenile justice system that promotes rehabilitation and accountability through a complete continuum of therapeutic community-based services, rather than incarceration. The key to raising the next generation of healthy and productive Virginia citizens and truly safe communities depends on it. A complete continuum includes secure care for a small number of youth. RISE’s Secure Care Tour imagined options for addressing the needs of that small number of youth with community input and from a community-centered perspective. The following recommendations reflect the collective voice of community, agency and youth experts and stakeholders who, together, explored options for a new vision of secure care. RISE for Youth submits these findings and recommendations to ensure that our state representatives make a sound decision only after considering all relevant information about what secure care can look like in Virginia.

Endnotes

1.) HB 5002 Item C-47#3a

2.) Columbia University Justice Lab. “Does Keeping Youth Close to Home Really Matter?: A Case Study” March 16, 2018.

3.) Based on 2012-2016 data. Columbia University Justice Lab.

4.) HB 5002 Item C-47#3a

Recommendations

End the School-to-Prison Pipeline

- Virginia must do more to keep youth in school and end unnecessary push out for school based misbehaviors;
- Schools must invest in more support staff rather than law enforcement in order to adequately support and meet the needs of our youth in schools;

Invest in Communities

- Create community partnerships with directly affected youth, their families, and their communities;
- Provide more meaningful opportunities for affected communities to provide insight into the Transformation Plan;
- Increase resources in the communities that need them most to increase the likelihood of young people making better choices as they transition into adulthood and to reduce the likelihood of juvenile justice system involvement, while increasing public safety;

Continue Building a Robust Continuum of Care

- Continue to expand the continuum of care into affected communities;
- Intentionally contract with service providers from within affected communities;
- Hire individuals with prior system involvement to work with system affected and at-risk youth;
- Consider recommendations from directly affected youth, their families, and their communities for programs and services for youth;

Re-Envision Secure Care

- Identify and analyze housing options for youth in their home communities for the small number of youth who may need secure care; No youth should ever be placed more than one hour from home;
- Create environments that are as home-like as possible, housing no more than 24-30 youth to ease transition into and out of secure placement and to prevent additional traumatic stress;
- Create trauma-responsive living environments based on principles of positive youth development;
- Placements should be staffed by qualified professionals who truly want youth to succeed and have the training to help them do so;
- Ensure families are fully participating team members in their young person's treatment.

“I wanna be
an astronomer
but down
here I have
to stand
on the toilet
just to see
a few stars.”

- O, 16 years old

#PRISONSDONTWORK



RISE

FOR YOUTH

UNITED FAMILIES,
SAFE COMMUNITIES