

THINK OUTSIDE THE WALLS



People are more important than buildings.

Twenty years ago, the Connecticut Juvenile Training School was built without considering the needs of the young people who would be placed there. Large, prison-like facilities were the norm in juvenile justice systems. Today we know that these environments are the **most expensive and least effective way** to deal with youth who break the law. We continue to spend tens of millions of dollars on CJTS, without any indication that it improves public safety. ***Simply replacing CJTS with an alternative locked location is bad for kids, public safety and taxpayers—it is also extremely premature.***

Lock down will be a piece of our system, but shouldn't be the centerpiece.

Though a small number of locked beds will remain necessary, there are youth at CJTS today who can be safely, successfully and more cheaply served outside of a youth prison. **Until a thorough analysis of committed delinquent Connecticut youth is done, we won't know what our system should look like and how big each element of it should be.** We need to make sure the right programs exist outside the walls to serve these youth.

We need more options.

Most youth who are committed delinquent—put into DCF custody by our juvenile justice system—go to CJTS. Incarceration should not be the go-to. We need smart responses to individual situations. It is as if we are riding a bike with only one gear. It might work on a flat stretch, but it is useless pedaling uphill. We need more gears on our bike. We need more options that judges and DCF can choose from to ensure the best outcomes for public safety, youth and the budget. Other states are using innovative approaches that we have not tried.

Youth should only be incarcerated when they present a public safety risk.¹ State law now forbids putting a youth in detention unless there is a public safety or flight risk, or unless the youth is being held for another jurisdiction. The same standard should be applied to post-adjudication youth.

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation. No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration. 2011, page 3.

[more at ctjja.org](http://ctjja.org) [#think4kids](https://twitter.com/think4kids)

Think Outside the Walls is a series of issue briefs that will educate the public about how best practice and research shows we can help high-need youth succeed.



We need to define “secure.”

“Secure” need not mean a locked cell. Think outside the walls. What if we placed a professional with a youth one-on-one 24/7? Other states have developed creative solutions like this—and spent less than we do at CJTS.

How do we know that CJTS is overused?

- DCF documents show youth being admitted to CJTS because of their fear of being shot or because they are homeless.² Kids should not have to be locked up to be safe.
- A DCF deputy director and the CJTS superintendent have spoken publicly about the need for a residential facility with a lower level of security than CJTS.³
- DCF’s analysis shows that African-American youth are more likely to be sent to CJTS, instead of residential treatment or group homes.

The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance will regularly release a **THINK OUTSIDE THE WALLS** issue brief that looks at an issue related to the high-need youth in our juvenile justice system, breaks down the research and analyzes Connecticut data. We’re going to focus on kids, not buildings.

Some topics we’ll be exploring in upcoming issue briefs:

- **What Works** CJTS costs more than \$170,000 per youth.⁴ We’ll look at programs that serve kids better while saving taxpayers money.
- **Trauma/Behavioral Health** All girls and 97% of boys sent to CJTS in 2015 had more than one mental health diagnosis.⁵
- **Public Safety Research** shows that incarcerating youth who do not pose a serious threat to public safety harms kids, provides no public safety benefit and wastes taxpayer dollars.⁶
- **Race and Ethnicity** The intensity of a youth’s supervision level should be based on their assessed risk and need, not on the color of their skin. We must intentionally examine decision points to eliminate bias and employ standardized tools to guide decision making.

² CJTS Congregate Care and Parole Re-admissions, Jan. 2016-August 2016.

³ August 22, 2016

⁴ An estimate reflecting recent layoffs.

⁵ CJTS Advisory Committee, Annual Report to the Legislature.

⁶ Pew Charitable Trusts. Re-examining Youth Incarceration, April, 2015.