



Reversing the Trend: Children & youth with mental health challenges do not belong in the Juvenile Justice System

It is estimated that at least 75% of children and youth in juvenile detention have mental or emotional disorders that should be treated.ⁱ

Many factors account for this situation: among them, recent trends toward more punitive laws and decreased state level funding for mental health services. In addition, most communities have insufficient capacity to identify and respond to problems early, thereby preventing some disorders from developing and others from becoming complicated by additional issues, such as substance use.

And, yet, 75% of juvenile facilities do not meet basic suicide prevention guidelines, according to the Council for Juvenile Justice.ⁱⁱ

These trends need to be reversed.

Communities can save money.

One successful children's mental health system, which employed a wraparound processⁱⁱⁱ, estimated spending an average of \$4,200 per child while juvenile detention costs \$6,000 per child.^{iv} *That could mean a \$2,200 savings per child per month for your community.*

Incarcerating a young person can cost \$40,000 a year while substance abuse treatment without incarceration can cost as little as \$3,000 a year.^v *That could mean a \$37,000 savings per youth per year for your community.*

Communities can do better.

Recent evidence demonstrates how to promote good mental health and prevent some children's mental disorders from occurring or from becoming worse.^{vi}

Some communities are fixing this problem through collaborations between their juvenile justice and mental health systems.^{vii}

Chapters for the National Federation of Families are creating strategic alliances with police departments in their communities to help prevent unnecessary arrest and incarceration.^{viii}

Support strategies in your community to reverse this trend.

Create healthier communities for healthier children.

The National Family Voice for Children's Mental Health

ⁱ President's New Freedom Commission. 2003

ⁱⁱ Council for Juvenile Justice. *Handle with care: Serving the mental health needs of young offenders*. Annual Report. 2000. Page 2.

ⁱⁱⁱ For more information on the Wraparound Process, see www.rtc.pdx.edu/nwj/

^{iv} Milwaukee Wraparound 2004 presentation.

^v *Substance Abuse, The Nation's Number One Health Problem*. Schneider Institute for Health Policy. Brandeis University, p. 75, February 2001.

^{vi} For more information, see the National Federation's Tip Sheet on Promotion and Prevention

^{vii} Skowrya, K.R. and Coccozza, J.J., PhD. *Blueprint for Change: A Comprehensive Model for the Identification and Treatment of Youth with Mental Health Needs in Contact with the Juvenile Justice System*. Policy Research Associates, Inc. 2007

^{viii} For more information, see www.ffcmh.org