Breaking Down the Walls

Lessons Learned From Successful State Campaigns to Close Youth Prisons

YOUTH FIRST
PRISON IS NO PLACE FOR KIDS

"Reformers come and reformers go. State institutions carry on. Nothing in their history suggests that they can sustain reform, no matter what money, staff and programs are pumped into them."

Jerry Miller
former Massachusetts Division of Youth Services Commissioner
in *Last One Over the Wall*

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Table of Contents

Introduction

During the past two decades, juvenile justice systems in numerous states have made progress towards transformational change. Advocates, grassroots activists, and attorneys have worked alongside young people involved with the system, as well as their families, to dismantle the current system of youth incarceration and to establish in its place responses to adolescent behavior that respect children and families and build on their strengths. In addition to improving the lives of children and families impacted by the justice system, these reforms have saved taxpayer money without compromising public safety.[1]

To accelerate the efforts to end harmful and inequitable youth incarceration, and to build on the work of the youth, families, and advocates who have fought successfully to close youth facilities, the Youth First Initiative looked at six successful campaigns, gathering lessons learned and strategies for success.[2] Despite the progress that has been made, youth prisons still exist in almost every state, with the juvenile justice system incarcerating youth of color at much higher rates: African-American youth are more than 4 times as likely, Native American youth more than 3 are times as likely, and Latino youth are almost 2 times as likely to be incarcerated as white youth.[3] Additionally, the juvenile justice system arrests, charges, and imprisons youth of color at rates that far exceed those for white youth who have been alleged to engage in similar conduct.[4]

No state has completely dismantled the youth prison model that has been the signature feature of juvenile justice since the early 1800s. Yet, successful campaigns have resulted in the closure of dozens of youth prisons in all regions of the country. This work—the work of creating a future where no child faces imprisonment—is the unfinished business of the civil rights movement.

The strategies shared throughout this document are based on public documents as well as hours of conversations with youth, family members, and other advocates who generously gave their time to explain what they thought made their campaigns successful, as well as what they would do differently knowing what they do now. This report focuses on common themes among the six campaigns; more information about each individual campaign can be found in the case studies included in the Appendix.

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1). Annie E. Casey Foundation. "No Place For Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration." (2011). Available at http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-NoPlaceForKidsFullReport-2011.pdf

2). The information contained in this report is based on interviews with people involved in the state-level campaigns and supporting materials (including lawsuits, statutes, and advocacy materials). Youth First thanks the many youth, family members, and advocates who generously shared their stories and their time.

3). W. Haywood Burns Institute, "Stemming the Rising Tide: Racial & Ethnic Disparities in Youth Incarceration & Strategies for Change." (2016).
Available at http://www.burnsinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Stemming-the-Rising-Tide_FINAL.pdf

4). Ibid.

Six States, Six Stories

1999-2012

California's campaign to end abusive facility conditions and close youth prisons

In the late 1990s, more than 10,000 children were imprisoned throughout the state of California in facilities that were widely decried for violence and abusive conditions. Youth were locked in their cells for 23 hours a day, and in at least one facility youth were handcuffed around the clock, sometimes clad only in their underwear. There were suicides, beatings, and canine attacks, and youth were placed in small cages while in an educational setting.[5] A small, committed, and persistent group of advocates and attorneys began to collaborate on strategies to improve conditions in state facilities. Although this group recognized the need to address the abuses in the facilities, it also realized that the model itself—large, distant, prison-like institutions—is inherently harmful to children. This recognition was driven in part by the experiences of young people who lived in the California Youth Authority prisons. California-based advocates and attorneys worked for decades to reform the system, and their strong coalition, nimble strategies, and ability to seize political moments of opportunity dramatically reduced the number of children held in state-level facilities.

Californians rally to close youth prisons. Photo: The Ella Baker Center For Human Rights

5). Jill Leovy and Jia-Rui Chong/Los Angeles Times. "Youth Authority to Review Use of Cages." (February 6, 2004). Available at http://articles.latimes.com/2004/feb/06/local/me-cage6

2001-2012

New York's *No More Youth Jails* and *Empty Beds, Wasted Dollars* campaigns

New York system leaders, advocates, families, and youth defeated strong union opposition and harnessed momentum for reform to close 20 state prisons. The momentum was in large part created by activists and youth organizers who, prior to the state-level campaign, had campaigned successfully to stop the expansion of youth jails and to create new community-based alternatives to incarceration in New York City. Also contributing to the momentum was a widespread recognition of the dismal outcomes that broken windows policing had on young people of color and the appointment of a strong, reform-minded leader, Gladys Carrion, as head of New York's state system.

Center & Right: New Yorkers campaign to close the Spofford youth jail. Photos: Amadou Diallo

1996-2004

Louisiana's *Close Tallulah Now!* campaign

In Louisiana, a perfect storm between the sheer numbers of children who were imprisoned and brutal prison conditions set the stage for reform. In 1995, approximately 2,000 young people were being held behind bars and Human Rights Watch documented the abusive conditions these young people commonly experienced. When asked what they would most like to change in the facilities, "virtually every child . . . responded that they would like the guards to stop hitting them and that they would like more food." [6] Louisiana-based attorneys and activists partnered with imprisoned youth, their families, and national juvenile justice advocates to launch a groundbreaking campaign that closed a notoriously abusive youth prison and aimed to transform Louisiana's juvenile justice system.

Clippings: Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JPPL)

6). Human Rights Watch, "Children in Confinement in Louisiana." (1995). Available at https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/c/crd/us95o.pdf

2006-2011

Texas' legislative campaign to reduce youth incarceration

In the wake of a devastating sexual abuse scandal, Texas advocates seized a moment of opportunity and shifted the debate from one that centered on reforming abusive prisons to one focused on shutting down facilities and reducing the number of children who live behind bars. The advocacy efforts were driven by a legislative strategy and required strong collaborations between lawmakers, advocates, youth, and their families. The resulting landmark legislation transformed the Texas juvenile justice system and significantly reduced the number of children held behind bars.

Youth Facility
Photo: Richard Ross

Texas Youth Facility
Photo: The Austin American Statesman

1998-2004

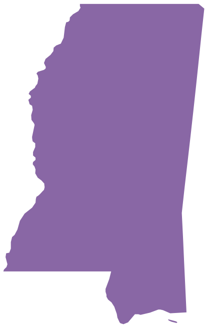
District of Columbia's campaign to close Oak Hill[7]

The District of Columbia reformed a dysfunctional system that over-relied on incarceration, warehousing almost exclusively African American and Latino youth at a large, inhumane, and abusive youth prison: the Oak Hill Youth Center. Recidivism rates were high, and there was a dearth of community-based programming for youth. The juvenile justice system did not serve youth or the community. DC's campaign led to the closing of Oak Hill, its replacement with a smaller more rehabilitative facility, the creation of a cabinet-level agency to increase accountability and transparency, and a major increase in the availability of community-based services.

Left: Campaigners rally to close Oak Hill Youth Center
Photo: The Washington Post

Below: Sign outside of the Oak Hill Youth Center
Photo: Liz Ryan

7). Portions of this document describing the DC campaign are reprinted or adapted from Liz Ryan and Marc Schindler. "Notorious to Notable: The Crucial Role of the Philanthropic Community in Transforming the Juvenile Justice System in Washington, D.C." (2011). Available at https://giving.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/notorious-to-notable-final.pdf



2003-2012

"Singing the Blues" for Mississippi's imprisoned children

In 2002, the United States Department of Justice released an investigation describing conditions in Mississippi's youth prisons (euphemistically called training schools). Although the conditions documented by the federal government shocked some people, they were well known to Mississippi's children and families. In these prisons, children as young as 11 years old were beaten, stripped naked, and confined to dark rooms with nothing but a hole in the floor as a toilet. They were sexually abused and denied access to medical and mental health care. The then-Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights called the prisons the worst the federal government had seen in 20 years. In the wake of the US DOJ report, Mississippi's community organizers, racial justice advocates, attorneys, and other advocates built a powerful coalition to advocate for legislation that overhauled Mississippi's juvenile justice system, reduced the number of children in custody, and ultimately closed a youth prison, two detention centers, and a prison built specifically for children tried as adults.

Mississsippi activists campaign to close down the Walnut Creek Youth Facility
Photo: The Southern Poverty Law Center

Who are the children in youth prisons?

In New York, 53 percent[8] of all youth imprisoned were there for a misdemeanor, and 100 percent were younger than 16 when they committed their offense. Fifty-six percent of the children imprisoned in Florida were there for misdemeanors or probation violations. According to a census of juveniles in residential placement across the United States in 2013, only 23% were committed or detained for violent offenses, a number that has held relatively steady since at least the late 1990s.[9]

An incarcerated youth
Photo: Richard Ross

8). Annie E. Casey Foundation. "No Place For Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration." (2011). Available at http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-NoPlaceForKidsFullReport-2011.pdf

9). Sarah Hockenberry. "Juveniles in Residential Placement, 2013." (2016). Available at https://www.ojjdp.gov/pubs/249507.pdf

Critical Lessons Learned from Successful Campaigns to Close Youth Prisons

#1 Take the long view

Successful campaigns are most often the result of multi-year efforts around seeking justice for children. Reformers may find that things even get worse before they get better (for example, as previously sympathetic stakeholders leave their positions, or media coverage of youth crime causes public opinion shifts). At a certain point, however, incremental progress and well-laid groundwork can lead to major change and momentum. Advocates from successful campaigns highlight the need to focus on small wins and keep spirits up to achieve transformative and lasting change. State campaigns should be prepared for many ups and downs along the way.

California's decades of advocacy

Advocacy efforts in California reduced the state's youth incarceration population from close to 10,000 in the mid-1990s to 680 youth in July of 2016;[10] the state went from 11 institutions to only three (and a fire camp)[11] in that same time period. But these changes did not happen overnight or even over several years. The work began in the 1980s when a small group of criminologists, civil rights attorneys, human rights advocates, and former correctional administrators began meeting to discuss the problems with California's state youth prisons and to strategize around solutions. In the first years of the advocacy, the lead organizations were Youth Law Center, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, and Commonweal. California, like other states, was in the middle of a "get tough" era, and it was a demoralizing time for advocates, but the group worked steadily, considering whether to work collaboratively with agency administrators, file lawsuits, go public, or pursue other strategies.

Although it was hard to get traction in a political climate focused on locking people up, the groundwork laid by the group eventually led to small victories, which advocates then built upon. In the late 1990s, the coalition successfully brought attention to conditions in the youth prisons, which had significantly deteriorated: youth were locked in their cells for 23 hours a day, were forced to go to school and exercise in metal cages, and were subjected to draconian forms of force, including pepperball guns, tear gas, beatings,

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10). California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation:
http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/docs/research/Monthly_Population_Tables_2016/07-2016_Monthly.pdf

11). For a description of the Pine Grove fire camp see
http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Juvenile_Justice/Facility_Locations/Youth_Conservation_Camps/index.html

and canine units. There were a number of suicides. Investigative reporters at important media outlets reported on children's experiences in youth prisons, key legislators held hearings and sponsored legislation, and public opinion began to recognize the state system as troubled and abusive.

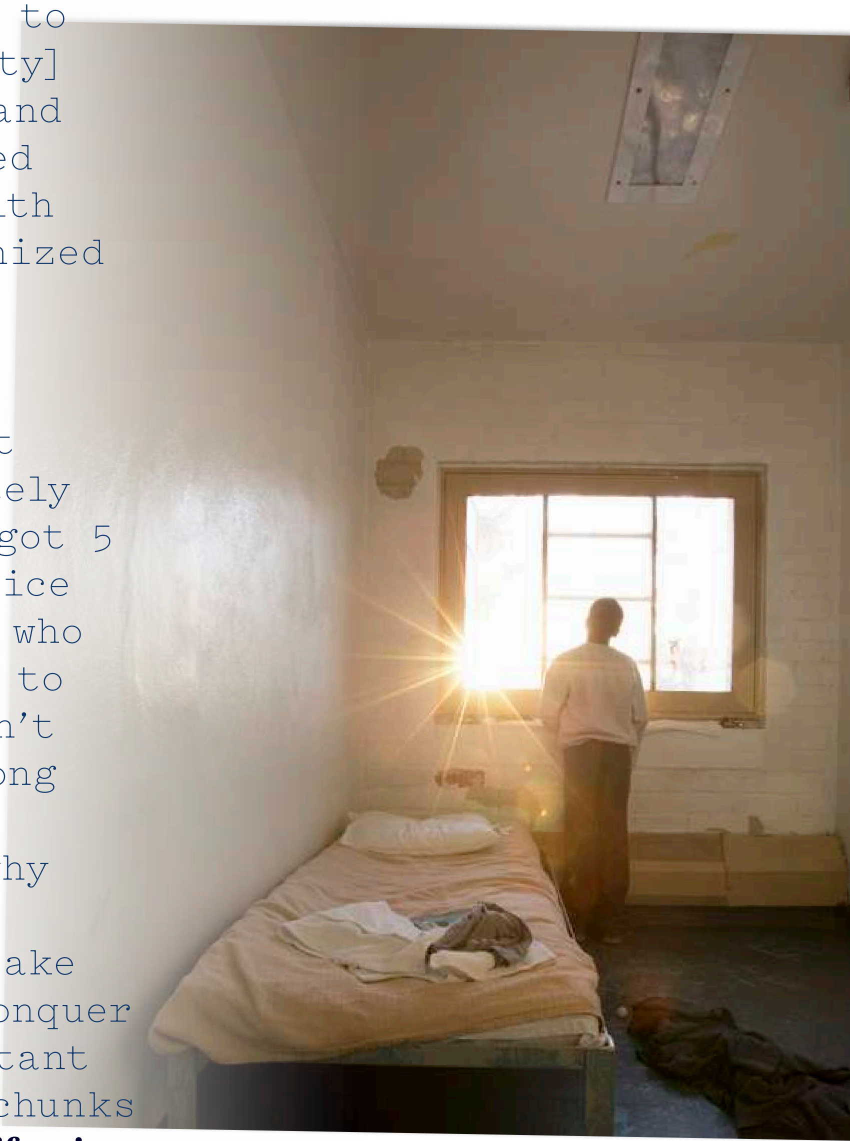
"From the minute I stepped into a California Youth Authority facility so many years ago, I knew that it was the wrong way to respond when young people get into trouble, and that pit in my stomach has never gone away. You have to be unwavering in your beliefs about what is right, and have faith that even if it doesn't happen right now, a time will come when people can hear what you are saying. Even if you are not successful right now, you can build a record of what is wrong that can be used later on to make your case to the public and to policymakers." —**Sue Burrell, California**

Young Women in California's Youth Authority
Photo: Richard Ross

In the early 2000s, advocates initiated litigation, which led to a settlement and some positive changes; during the same period, the California advocacy forces were bolstered by the efforts of emerging grassroots organizations working with families affected by California's juvenile justice system, in particular the Ella Baker Center's Books Not Bars campaign.[12] Also, the Pacific Juvenile Defender Center organized juvenile defense counsel around the state, litigated against commitment to state facilities, and educated other court professionals about the troubled state system. These efforts (combined with the impact of fiscal constraints and other external forces) also contributed to successful legislative changes, county policy changes, and executive action from 2007 to 2012, which further reduced incarceration in California.

12). http://ellabakercenter.org/books-not-bars/books-not-bars-basics

"Our first campaign goal was to get [California Youth Authority] to stop abusing our kids. I and other family members testified at Senate hearings, we met with the Director of CYA, we organized marches in front of Chad and other CYA facilities. As the campaign went on, we started demanding that the state shut down the facilities... Ultimately the Books Not Bars campaign got 5 facilities shut down. My advice for family members and youth who are involved in campaigns is to keep in mind that changes don't happen overnight. It is a long process and sometimes people get disillusioned and ask, 'why bother?' It is important to remember that it's going to take time. Instead of trying to conquer the world at once, it's important to take on things in little chunks first." **— Laura Talkington-Denies, California**



Above: Inside the California Youth Authority
Photo: Richard Ross

Left: Inside the California Youth Authority
Photo: SF Chronicle

"My advice to family members is to remember that it is a long process. But if you have consistency, you can achieve real progress. Being involved with the Books Not Bars campaign was like a lifeline for me. I was in a lot pain; joining the campaign helped me through it. I learned that it is a slow flight, an uphill fight, but a fight worth doing." **— LaNita Mitchell, California**

Ups and Downs in New York, Mississippi, and DC

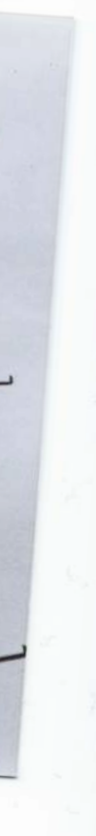
In New York, the No More Youth Jails campaign was launched in 2001, with a short-term goal of preventing construction that would add 100 new beds to each of two detention facilities in New York City. The campaign also had longer-term goals of investing in community-based alternatives, reducing youth incarceration through policy change, and shutting down the Spofford detention center. Several members of the No More Youth Jails campaign had been part of community organizing to shut down Spofford in the 1990s. Reform in New York City had many ups and downs—Spofford was closed at one point only to be re-opened less than a year later, and in the midst of the campaign, New York's then-Mayor introduced a new program that flooded high schools in poor neighborhoods with police officers and zero-tolerance discipline policies. But after decades of persistent advocacy, using many of the strategies discussed in this report (youth-led advocacy, coalition building, use of research-based tools), New York improved outcomes at the local level and statewide by creating a range of community-based alternatives to incarceration, closing more than 20 facilities between 2007 and 2014 (including Spofford), and reducing the number of children in prison from 2,300 youth in 2007 to 730 youth in 2013.

"I spent time at Spofford and also on the barge. I didn't get any help when I was locked up. I remember one time when I was at Spofford, I saw a guard in the day room throw a bible across the room. I used to go to church growing up and that incident really affected me. I still remember it to this day. [As part of the No More Youth Jails campaign] we explained to Council members that young people who are locked up are not offered any help; that the community resources weren't there." — **Andre Holder, New York**

Spofford Ave, NYC
Photo: Amadou Diallo

During the 2004 legislative session, the Mississippi Coalition worked on a bill that would have established a study commission to examine, among other things, the feasibility of closing the training schools. Coalition members worked very closely with the House sponsor to arm him with the literature describing why states needed to re-examine their reliance on training schools. They used stories of children who were experiencing brutal conditions and of their families who had to visit their children and bear witness to bruises and broken spirits. When the bill passed the House, it was a triumphant moment for the Coalition. Members were in tears in the gallery of the Capitol recognizing that the state legislature was poised to take action to defend the rights of Mississippi's impoverished Black children. But the bill died in the Senate without so much as a hearing. The fact that the Senate refused to give this bill any consideration outraged the bill's House sponsor and, rather than defeat him, inspired him to fight harder for Mississippi's imprisoned children. The Coalition realized that this setback required a re-imagined legislative strategy and an increased emphasis on the media strategy, working with local reporters to place stories about the training school's conditions and waste of taxpayer dollars in targeted media outlets.

In 2005 and 2006, the Coalition's advocacy resulted in the enactment of the Mississippi Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act and the Juvenile Justice Reform Act. These pieces of legislation overhauled Mississippi's juvenile justice system from top to bottom. Among the reforms included were: prohibitions on the imprisonment of status offenders, first-time, non-violent offenders, and any child who had not committed a felony; a requirement that judges determine whether a placement can meet that child's needs before issuing a disposition order; the creation of community-based alternatives; and development of a facilities monitoring unit. The legislative strategy centered on providing additional support to the Chair of the relevant legislative committee. This included prepping families to testify before the committee, providing talking points, drafting legislation, providing digestible summaries to allies and adversaries, and executing a media strategy meant to bolster the Chair's authority on issues of justice reform.



As the Mississippi campaign began to gain ground, it also had to contend with some unintended consequences of its growing impact. For instance, some lawmakers proposed shutting down the juvenile justice system altogether and allowing the children who commit serious crimes to be tried and prosecuted in the adult system. This would have resulted in more children being sent to a privately-run prison specifically for youth tried as adults. The Mississippi campaign successfully fought this by launching an effort to highlight the dangers of processing youth in the adult criminal system. As a result, Mississippi passed a law that brought 17-year-olds who committed misdemeanors into the juvenile justice system.

"Working alongside young people, their families, community groups, and elected officials to close down the juvenile prison in Mississippi was the most difficult, inspiring, rewarding work I've ever been engaged in. The strength of the young people who survived unspeakable abuse at the hands of the state but who were willing to tell their stories over and over kept us going when we felt exhausted and beat down." — **Sheila Bedi, Mississippi**

The District of Columbia campaign also didn't follow a straight trajectory of success, and advocates had to keep a vigilant watch on the reforms being considered to ensure they would actually improve outcomes for kids. In 1985, DC's Public Defender Service, in collaboration with the American Civil Liberties Union, filed a class action lawsuit known as *Jerry M.* against the District government over the inhumane conditions at the notorious Oak Hill Youth Center and other juvenile secure facilities operated by the District. The lawsuit highlighted horrific conditions and troubling violence in the District's secure facilities, violations of the due process rights of confined youth, the lack of professional training of staff members, and many other issues. A year after the *Jerry M.* lawsuit was filed, the District and plaintiffs entered into a Consent Decree that required that the Youth Services Administration, the District's executive branch juvenile justice agency, and other DC government agencies implement changes necessary to improve and reform the Oak Hill Youth Center and its other secure facilities. The legally binding agreement also contained several provisions to reduce overcrowding and create a comprehensive plan for a continuum of community-based care and services for youth. However, conditions continued to deteriorate and despite years of litigation and millions in fines, the *Jerry M.* lawsuit had not required the closure of Oak Hill.

"One of the clear lessons of the campaign was the power of community and youth organizing to push policy. The city had the recommendations for quite some time but it was the youth organizing that pushed the implementation process. It was a powerful lesson to witness."
— Jonathan Stith, District of Columbia

Jonathan Stith
Photo: Jonathan Stith

In 2000, with funding support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, then-DC Mayor Anthony Williams established the District of Columbia Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) on Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform. The Commission's mandate was to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the juvenile justice system focusing on changes at Oak Hill, but later that year it appeared to be considering punitive and misguided policies, such as making it easier to transfer youth to the adult criminal justice system. Local and national advocates began organizing and created the Justice for DC Youth Coalition (JDCY). In November 2001, the BRC made several recommendations: the closure of Oak Hill; its replacement with a smaller, more rehabilitative program; expansion of community-based programs; and a reduction of the transfer of youth into the adult criminal justice system. The DC Council did not, however, immediately adopt the recommendations. In fact, following a spate of high-profile crimes by youth, punitive legislation was introduced in 2002 and 2003 that would send more youth to adult criminal court, subject parents to monetary fines and give them jail time or suspend their driver's license if their child was delinquent, and allow juvenile delinquency records to be used to deny eligibility for public housing. With support from the foundation community, the Justice for DC Youth Coalition was able to successfully defeat the proposed legislation. Through the work of the JDCY and then-Councilmember Adrian Fenty, the DC Council unanimously passed comprehensive reform legislation in 2004, which included a requirement to close the Oak Hill facility within five years and replace it with a smaller, rehabilitative facility. It also prioritized keeping youth in the least restrictive setting and at home as much as possible with community-based supports. The city also created a new cabinet-level agency, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), through a separate bill. Though the legislation lacked enforcement mechanisms, it increased accountability and transparency, and combined with the hiring of respected juvenile justice advocates and experts from across the country to run DYRS, created an opportunity for the reforms to be implemented consistent with best practices in the field.

"The conditions at Oak Hill were horrible and the city knew it. In fact, they were constantly being fined. It wasn't until the Councilmen took a tour and saw the inhumane conditions of Oak Hill [that things changed]. This experience was the wake-up call. The youth no longer resembled dangerous criminals, but their own children."

— Arja Nelson, District of Columbia

Teenagers look out from their cells at the Oak Hill Youth Center
Photo: Kike Arnal

#2 Let youth and families lead

Juvenile justice reformers are increasingly realizing that their work is made stronger with a diverse coalition that focuses on the stories, experiences, and analysis of impacted young people and their families. In a number of the campaigns profiled here, civil rights lawyers worked for years to improve conditions for incarcerated youth. These efforts stopped some of the worst abuses and garnered media attention, setting the stage for broader reforms to close facilities. In some states, such as Louisiana, when youth and their families who were directly affected got involved, they pushed beyond improvement of conditions to closure of youth prisons. The work was dynamic and successful in large part because young people and their families were not tokenized; instead, their expertise took a central role in shaping the direction and strategy of each campaign.

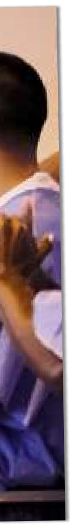
"When I talk about what I went through and where I am now, everyone's jaw hits the ground. My story gives them hope. It also helps people realize how crazy it is to spend all this money locking up kids who are just like me." — **Jason Wang, Texas**

Photo: Courtesy, Jason Wang

David Utter
Photo: Woolf Law

"As a lawyer, all I was used to was the tinkering around the edges of reform—increasing staffing, improving programming, getting more recreation and education into the facilities, etc. We were seeing all of this money poured into the facility, and the levels of violence just were not dropping. It was the parents in Louisiana who said 'why don't we just close these places?'... It was the parents and children who created the idea, and their drive and leadership caused lawyers to see things differently." — **David Utter, Louisiana**

“When I was 16 years old, I was incarcerated in one of the worst juvenile prisons in the state of Texas. Staff were abusing youth sexually and there were riots almost every week. The Texas Legislature was investigating these conditions and asked to hear from the youth: while I was testifying my heart was beating 1,000 times a second, but I talked about the problems at the facility and the fact that there was no real option for us to make a positive change in our lives. I told lawmakers that we needed opportunities to learn and develop leadership skills. If prisons with riots and sex abuse were all that we knew, we’d end up right back to prison.”
— **Jason Wang, Texas**



Leveraging family expertise in Louisiana

Louisiana’s reform work began with legal efforts to improve conditions in youth prisons, including a class action lawsuit. But even after the case was resolved through a settlement that required federal court supervision, the violence remained intractable. Most months, according to state documents, there were up to 400 incidents of violence that left indicia of harm on children’s bodies including broken jaws and eye sockets, gashes requiring sutures, and deep bruises. For years, as Louisiana spent millions of dollars to comply with the federal litigation, the extreme levels of violence persisted. Finally, the parents of imprisoned youth began to realize that there was no reforming these prisons, so they pushed their children’s attorneys to work to develop strategies aimed at de-incarceration and closure. The Close Tallulah Now! campaign targeted the Tallulah Youth Correctional Center, one of the most notorious youth prisons in Louisiana, for closure. The campaign had a four-prong strategy: legislative advocacy, grassroots organizing, litigation, and media outreach. Although Tallulah was the named target, the campaign went well beyond one facility, working to transform the juvenile justice system so that it invested in children, families, and their communities and diverted money from prisons into community-based services. Impacted family members and youth were part of each of these strategies, speaking to the legislature and the media, providing details about prison conditions that informed litigation, and organizing and carrying out grassroots protests such as a New Orleans Jazz Funeral during which protestors mourned the future of Louisiana’s imprisoned youth.

Grace Bauer-Lubow and Cory
Photo: Juvenile in Justice

"As a mom I felt like when I let my son go into this system, I assumed that they knew more about taking care of troubled kids than I did. But in two years, things were getting worse not better. I quickly learned that I might not have been doing everything right, but they were doing things much worse. Working to close Tallulah taught me that I had a voice and that I was the expert on my own child and my family. A lot of families walked away from this work with the knowledge that when something is wrong we can band together and we can fight whatever is wrong. We may not always win, but we just don't have to sit idly by. We can change things for our children."— **Grace Bauer-Lubow, Louisiana**

Building youth capacity in New York

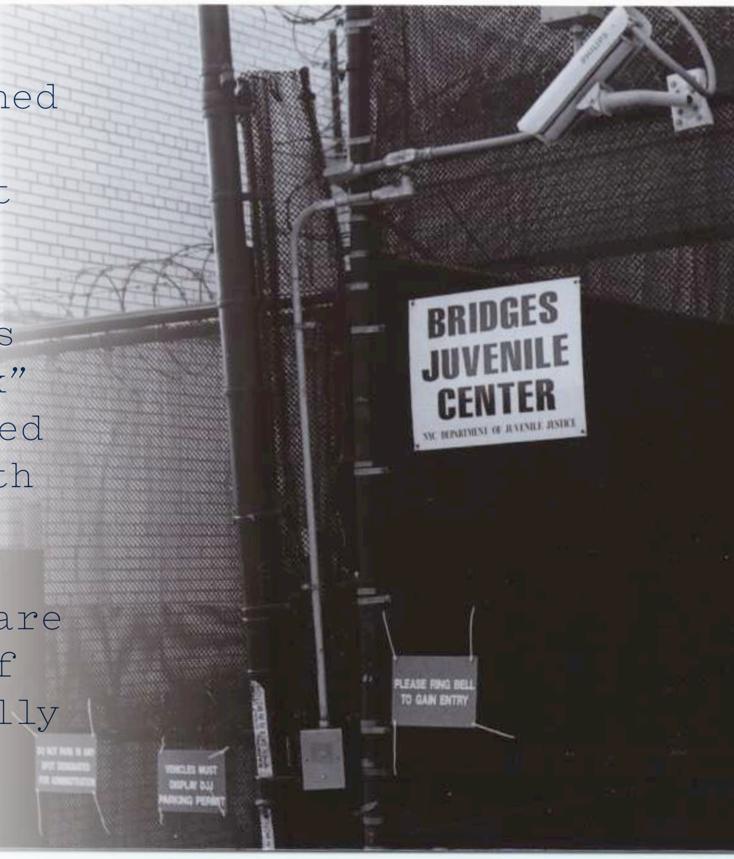
Building leadership and capacity of youth, families, and affected communities has long-term payoffs. The leadership of families and youth is critical to campaign success because actualizing that leadership builds the architecture of reform. The New York campaign truly centered its work on the leadership of young people and worked to build the capacity of young people to develop and lead sophisticated policy campaigns. To set the campaign goals and agenda, the youth in the New York campaign participated in a power mapping process in which they identified targets and developed a strategy and organizing plan to build the campaign's reach and power. The campaign also held a series of social outreach events, which used different forms of cultural expression such as rap, spoken word, and dance to reach young people from across the city. The campaign developed eye-catching outreach materials including a hand-painted banner, colorful brochures, and postcards to send to the Mayor.

“I was part of the No More Youth Jails Steering Committee. There were a few adults on the steering committee who were there to help support young people’s leadership. I appreciated how the adults were stepping back without stepping off the scene entirely. They understood the difference between guiding and directing. They helped guide us but also gave us the space to make mistakes. What worked well is that campaign took the time so that youth could participate. There was the space for youth to figure things out and make mistakes. The campaign allowed youth to be accountable while still recognizing that they are still young people. The campaign gave young people the space to come together on a social level–we helped with barbeques, cultural events to bring youth together. It made me understand that change does not just happen on a policy level–change has to happen in the hearts and minds of people.” **—Chino Hardin, New York**

Chino Hardin
Photo: Amadou Diallo

The youth in the New York campaign also engaged in rallies and direct actions to raise public awareness. Youth from Make the Road’s Youth Power Project pulled off one of the campaign’s most successful direct actions: during their spring break, youth obtained the newly elected Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s schedule and followed him around every day for a week asking him why he was spending $65 million on 200 new youth detention beds. When the Mayor finally acknowledged the youth and tried to answer the question, they recorded his fumbling response on video, which in turn became another powerful outreach and organizing tool. During the City Council hearings on the proposed city budget, nearly 75 young people testified against the jail expansion plan. In June 2001, the No More Youth Jails campaign won an important victory when the City Council cancelled the Mayor’s proposal for the 200 detention beds and pulled the $65 million from the budget.

"The outreach for the No More Youth Jails campaign worked really well. As a young person, I learned that we had allies to help us. I learned that it was just not my voice out there alone. I was educated about the youth justice system. There are so many things that youth in the system are not aware of. I was educated on NYPD's "Stop and Frisk" and what to do when you are stopped by the police. I learned that youth in New York's criminal justice system become adults at 16, and I learned about how youth of color are stereotyped in the media. Most of all, I learned that there are really intelligent young people who have been involved in the system. And because I had become involved in the system, it motivated me." — **Andre Holder, New York**



Gate Outside the Bridges (aka Spofford) Youth Jail, NYC
Photo: Amadou Diallo

Need for ongoing training and support for youth and family leaders

One of the most frequent regrets shared by members of successful campaigns was not building capacity for youth and families to fully engage, or for lawyers and other professionals to support them fully. One advocate wished their campaign had done media, legislative, and legal training for youth and families earlier on, while another said that adding a case management component and having a team designated to "check in" with youth and families could have had a great impact. In New York, to help support and train young people to become advocates and leaders in the campaign, the Correctional Association's Juvenile Justice Project launched a youth leadership training program in 2004. This program recruited youth to participate in a 15-week comprehensive training program that provided training in media, public speaking, and legislative and budget advocacy. From 2004 to 2008, the program trained more than 150 youth, many of whom went on to train other young people and helped organize Lobby Days at the State Capitol and other campaign events.

Focus on Youth and Family Engagement

DC advocates' efforts to close the Oak Hill Youth Center and reform DC's overall approach to juvenile justice was centered on youth and family leadership. Arja Nelson, a leader of the DC campaign, provided the following tips for successful youth and family involvement:

— Have the people most affected be involved in the decision-making.

— Schedule meetings and hearings at the end of the work day and provide child care.

— Select a handful of youth to share their stories instead of one token child.

— Encourage young people to see their work in campaigns as a path to healing and empowerment.

— Campaigns are long, burnout is high, and youth get bored. Create and celebrate small goals so youth feel they are making a difference.

— Engage and provide incentives (e.g., grocery gift cards) to encourage parental participation.

— Be patient with parents. Sometimes they need to witness the positive impact on their child before they can express interest in a campaign.

— Involve churches. Identifying the right church will help with community involvement.

Gina Lyles, Art 180
Photo: Amanda Maglione

#3 Be explicit about racial injustice

The racial and ethnic disparities in a jurisdiction's youth prisons can be easy to prove if data are publicly available, but how to address those disparities effectively as part of a campaign for change can be much more difficult. Among the campaigns profiled here, those who did explicitly address racial injustices reported that it was essential to their campaign's success; some of those who did not do so expressed regret and the feeling that not doing so was a missed opportunity.

RISE for Youth's Caleb & Da'Quon
Photo: Amanda Maglione

"One of the greatest lessons I have taken away from FFLIC is that how we do the work is just as important as the work we do. Working to grow an explicitly anti-racist organization with people from so many different ethnicities was a life lesson in itself for a white gal who grew up in the Deep South. We couldn't say to ourselves that we were all the same or that our differences didn't matter. To say differences didn't matter meant they weren't of great importance when our differences were of tremendous significance to the struggle ahead. To say we were all the same meant ignoring the fact that although we all came to that group with the damage of racism and classism, it was much deeper and harmful for some than others. To fight the system we would have to look at our own wounds and be willing to look at the wounds of others, and then pick ourselves up and fight together. At times this was an incredibly painful process and all the while the system continued to try and consume our children."— **Grace Bauer, Louisiana**

Framing imprisonment of youth as a racial justice issue in New York

In New York, concerns about job loss were the main barrier to prison closure. Campaign members and the state's Commissioner for the Office of Children and Family Services, Gladys Carrion, a Latina woman from the Bronx, addressed this concern head on. They spoke plainly about the deeply troubling racist implications of imprisoning Black and Brown teenagers in order to provide jobs for a mostly white labor force. By squarely addressing the issue of race, the campaign forced honest public conversations about who we imprison in this country and why. The campaign emphasized the fact that the children incarcerated in OCFS facilities were almost exclusively Black and Brown kids who were being sent from New York City to facilities in other parts of the state that employed mainly white people as guards and other staff. Commissioner Carrion used blunt language to highlight that there was one system for white children and a different, separate system for Brown and Black children, and she said that as a state, New York should no longer be willing to export Black and Brown children to support local economies. This made clear that reducing the imprisonment of New York's children was very much a racial justice issue.

"Being involved in the campaign gave a reason, rhyme, and language for me to understand all the things that have happened to me. I now understood internalized oppression. I realized that a lot of things that happened to me were not my fault—how I kept getting arrested for non-violent offenses—how my experience was part of larger oppressive policies against communities of color." — **Chino Hardin, New York**

Racial justice implications of California's reform efforts

California's campaign outcomes suggest that advocates can never assume that de-incarceration success will translate into a reduction in racial disparities. Although California successfully reduced the number of children held behind bars, those efforts have not reduced the racial disparities, and today 90% of the youth currently in their state system are youth of color.[13] Efforts to specifically address these disparities are now underway, including work by the Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY) and the W. Haywood Burns Institute[14] focused on community mapping of services to show where most support is needed. These groups have also worked for culturally appropriate programs and services for youth of color.

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13). California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/docs/research/Characteristics/12_2014_Characteristics.pdf

14). http://www.burnsinstitute.org/our-work/cjny/

#4 Embrace diversity and plan for conflict

Engaging a wide range of stakeholders will position a campaign for success, but passionate people who are each deeply committed to solving intractable social problems will inevitably disagree. Successful coalitions recognize this tension and address it by engaging in open, honest, and frequent communications, as well as setting guidelines for processing conflict and having hard conversations. Coalitions also can increase their impact by ensuring that partners have clearly defined roles and responsibilities that take advantage of their areas of expertise and influence.

Different —*but successful*— approaches to disagreement in California, Texas, and Louisiana

In the early 2000s in California, a small group of reformers who had been working together since the 1980s was reenergized with foundation support, and the coalition was expanded to include grassroots organizers and families affected by California's juvenile justice system. As the group coalesced, it was clear that everyone agreed that the abuses in the system needed to be stopped, that the system should be much smaller, and that the long congregate care model of institutions was counterproductive and damaging. However, there was one area of disagreement: some in the advocacy community wanted to call unabashedly for closure of the state facility system whereas others were concerned with preserving a viable alternative to transferring youth to the adult criminal justice system. There was no group consensus on these issues, so people just agreed to disagree, work as a coalition, respect each other, and (outside of the coalition work) pursue the bottom line they thought was right. The organizations involved in the coalition also worked effectively together, playing different but complementary roles. While the Prison Law Office litigated, Commonweal and the Youth Law Center worked to change laws on confinement time and parole and educated stakeholders; the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice wrote about the dangers of big institutions; the Pacific Juvenile Defender Center filed motions and sought changes in local policies; and Books Not Bars held direct actions in Sacramento to highlight the tragedy of youth deaths in the youth prisons.

In Texas, the reform coalition was extremely diverse—it included criminal justice reformers, racial justice organizations, members of the faith-based community, and conservative groups. The coalition worked successfully with its many members by ensuring that each had a clearly defined role. It also developed a process through which only specified coalition representatives were authorized to meet with lawmakers and express the will of the group—this ensured that the coalition spoke with a unified voice.

In Louisiana, as previously discussed, the families and legal advocates had different goals at different points, with families ultimately convincing the other advocates that the facilities could not be fixed and needed to be closed completely. In addition to these different points of view, the sheer volume of activities and approaches being undertaken by Louisiana's coalition of diverse stakeholders required planning and coordination. With assistance from national allies, a concrete campaign plan was developed that included individual work plans for each campaign member. (Louisiana later paid this assistance forward by travelling to Mississippi to help advocates there with the early stages of their own campaign.) These plans often needed adjustments, but taking the time to plan the work yearly, and then quarterly, helped to delegate tasks effectively and ensure accountability. The campaign's four key strategies—legislative, grassroots, legal, and media—were timed and executed using regular communication and a clearly agreed upon schedule of weekly calls and biweekly meetings of the people involved in the campaign.

Activists discuss the year ahead at Art 180
Photo: Amanda Maglione

"[At one point in the campaign] families had an accountability session with [two men involved in the campaign who had negotiated independently] on how white men with power went behind and made a deal. While no one was saying the deal was the wrong thing to do, it had been done without the input of families, and that felt very disrespectful. It was hard to deal with, and there was a lot of follow-up after that." —**Grace Bauer-Lubow, Louisiana**

#5 Statewide reform needs local stakeholders

Engaging local juvenile justice officials through listening sessions, town hall meetings, and focus groups can help make the case for facility closure, as well as de-incarceration and resource re-allocation.

Local action in Louisiana and California

One of the most influential coalition activities in Louisiana involved holding town hall meetings in every region of the state. Juvenile justice stakeholders, including judges, probation officers, law enforcement stakeholders, detention administrators, families, young people, and allies in the community attended and discussed their perceptions and experiences with juvenile justice. This process helped to build a strong, statewide foundation.

In California, in conjunction with the statewide litigation and legislative work, advocates made sure that county-based stakeholders were informed about conditions in the state-level youth prisons and that judges fully understood and felt empowered to use their authority to remove youth from state prison if expected services were not being provided. Counties acted on this information: some declared a moratorium on sending children to state prison; others sent probation officers to visit all the confined youth from their county.

Incarcerated Youth in California
Photo: Richard Ross

"We had key family members in different regions of the state. So when a child died at CYA, we were able to organize vigils in counties across California. Mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents all joined the campaign and said that we are no longer going to tolerate the state abusing our kids. We did have to deal with retaliation against our children inside. The more vocal parents became about the abuse, the more brutal the staff were against our kids. Some parents pulled out of the campaign because of this. But some parents persevered. My son fought for people's rights inside. He would send us notices from inside the prison to let us know what was happening."

— **Laura Talkington-Denies, California**

#6 Harness the power of public opinion and the media

Coalitions should develop messages that are simple, consistent, and used with persistence. In Louisiana, for example, the simplicity of the slogan "Close Tallulah Now!" helped to clearly communicate the "ask." The clear messaging also helped keep the diverse coalition on message and make the coalition's goal unmistakable. "Close Tallulah Now!" became a rallying cry and provided a common identity to statewide coalition members. Several of the campaigns profiled also developed a communications plan and identified an individual or group responsible for executing it.

Information gathering and sharing in California

California advocates recognized the power in educating system stakeholders, lawmakers, and the general public about the abuse children lived through in the youth prison. By developing a number of ways to document and share this information, the advocacy community worked collectively to reduce the number of children held behind bars. For example, attorneys involved in conditions litigation provided county-based judges with information about abysmal conditions in the prison and reminded these judges about the power they had to remove children from abusive prisons. This information also was shared with the public defender community, which used it to craft appellate strategies based on the record of abuses in California's youth prisons.

Advocates also documented complaints received from youth and families in a manner that allowed lawmakers to use these complaints as a basis to call for legislative hearings. Families and youth organizing around these issues centered powerful direct actions and protests around the specific abuses youth endured inside the prisons. The direct actions, litigation, and legislative hearings helped stoke the media's interest in juvenile justice. A number of reporters at the state's most important newspapers did investigative reports and provided ongoing coverage that helped keep the need for reform in the limelight. Eventually, the media messaging shifted from a focus on the abusive facilities to the ways in which the system could be more effective at improving the life chances of young people.

Developing and strategically deploying a media message in New York

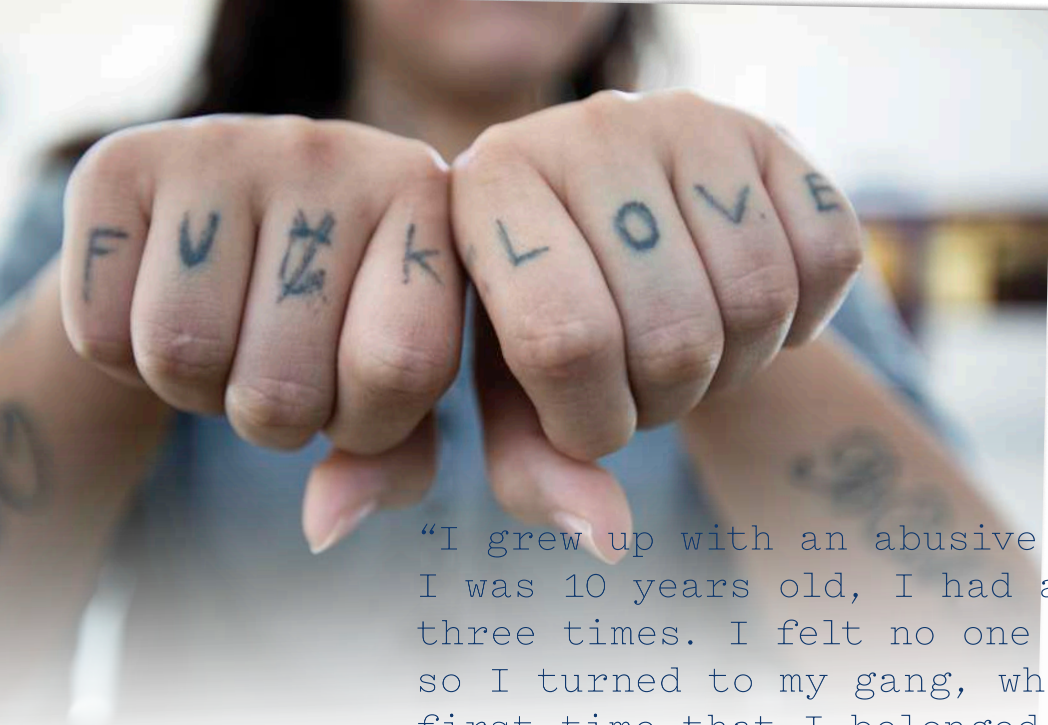
New York's Empty Beds, Wasted Dollars campaign pushed a specific, targeted media message: that the upstate facilities were nearly empty and the state was squandering millions of dollars to keep these facilities open. The campaign also wanted to expose the vested interests that were pushing to keep the facilities open, particularly the legislators representing the districts where the facilities were located. One tactic that the campaign used to raise public attention to this was to take out ads in the local papers targeting specific legislators who were opposed to facility closure. The advocates also reached out to editorial boards and columnists in all the major media markets in New York State. To expose the waste of the current system, campaign members worked with the Office of Children and Family Services to bring TV news cameras into the near-empty facilities, which the unions and some upstate facilities were fighting to keep open. System stakeholders, including judges, were allowed to tour the prisons so that they could witness firsthand the damage prisons cause to the children they ordered to be held behind bars.

Some opponents also tried to raise public safety concerns, but the campaign was able to use data effectively comparing recidivism of the OCFS facilities and community-based alternatives. OCFS captured this information and shared it widely, as did the campaign. It was hard to make an argument that de-incarceration was putting public safety at risk when all research showed that diverting young people from the system was promoting public safety, whereas keeping youth incarcerated was detrimental to young people. The New York campaign also developed proactive messaging around key solutions to the over-incarceration crisis. The Juvenile Justice Coalition highlighted the work of several of its member organizations that provide alternatives to incarceration and highlighted the success stories of young people who had participated in the programs.

Seizing moments of opportunity in Texas and Mississippi

Two juvenile justice reform bills had been introduced in Texas in 2005, each addressing a few very specific issues with the Texas system, but both died during the legislative process before reaching a vote.[15] Texas reformers were continuing to work on a comprehensive legislative reform package when a major youth prison scandal hit and dominated news cycles for many months in 2007. The advocates seized this opportunity both to protect youth in custody from further abuse and to push to significantly downsize the system. The campaign gathered information through meetings with youth and their families and through aggressive use of Freedom of Information Act requests to identify incidents of abuse and violence that occurred inside the youth prisons. Advocates then worked to widely publicize the information in the media and with the legislature. When the scandal broke, both lawmakers and the media needed more information about Texas's juvenile justice system—information about how the system functioned, data about the children held behind bars, and stories directly from affected youth and families. The coalition stepped into this void and funneled information to ensure it could be used for powerful, strategic impact. Lawmakers jumped into action and held multiple oversight hearings, supported by legislative staff who felt passionate about protecting children. The Texas coalition developed strong media messages that focused on the scandal, violence, and abuse of children. These communications efforts in the media successfully told the story about how dangerous the environment was and how the system was so overwhelmed that it could not protect children from sexual abuse committed by high-level administrators.

15). Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. "A Timeline: Criminal and Juvenile Justice System Reforms." (August 2013). Available at: http://www.texascjc.org/sites/default/files/publications/TCJC%20Timeline%20of%20CJ%20and%20JJ%20Reforms_0.pdf



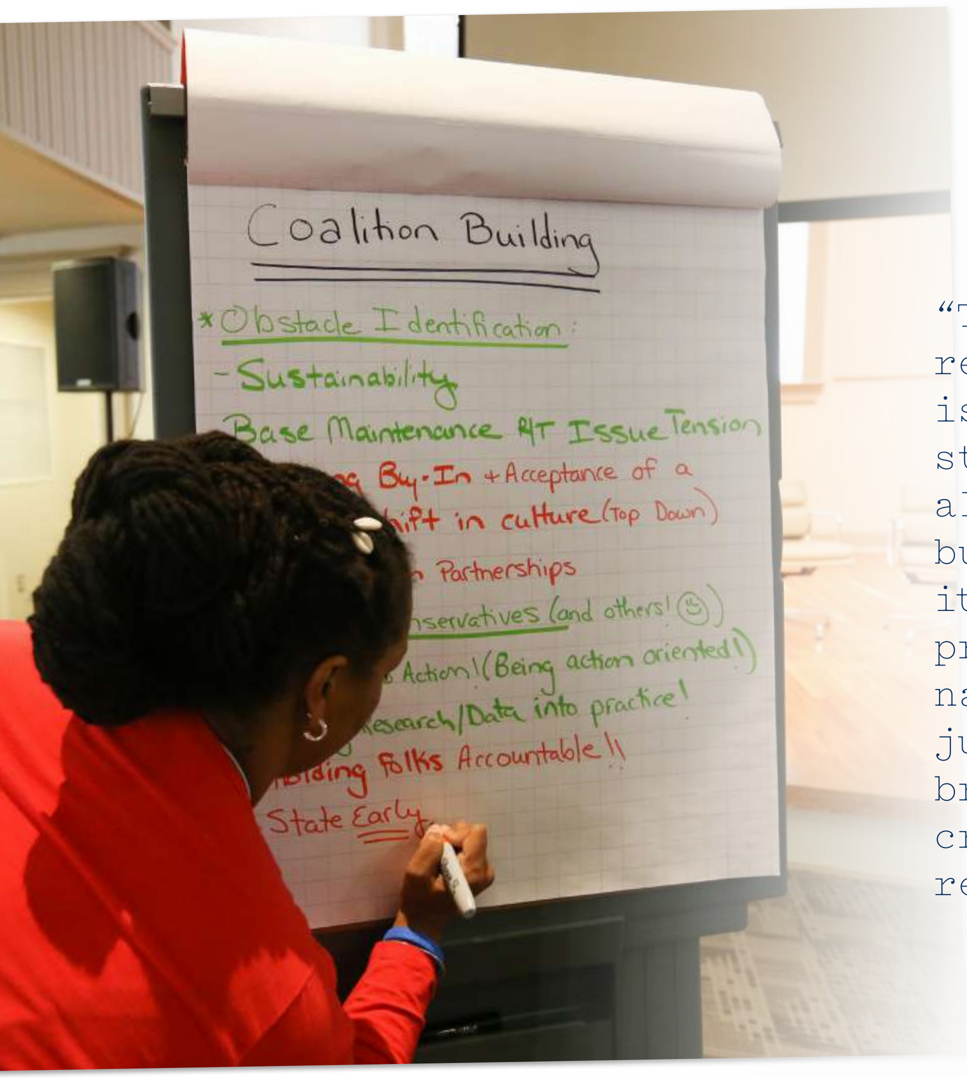
An incarcerated youth displays her tattoos
Photo: Richard Ross

"I grew up with an abusive father. By the time I was 10 years old, I had attempted suicide three times. I felt no one cared about me, so I turned to my gang, where I felt for the first time that I belonged. I made bad choices, I own that, but everyone I met in juvenile prison had a story just like mine. We had all gone through great hardship; if people could really understand us, understand our lives, maybe they'd see that we're not so different from them. Maybe if they were in our position, they may have made some of the same choices that we did. I've seen so many non-violent youth turn violent inside because they had to in order to survive. Locking us up doesn't give up the tools we need to live in the world."
— Jason Wang, Texas

In the summer of 2007, a major scandal broke regarding Mississippi's Columbia Training School—girls had been shackled together for weeks at a time and sexually abused. In the wake of these allegations, calls to close the prison were made by families, communities, and lawmakers with a renewed sense of urgency. The lawyers filed a class action lawsuit on behalf of these young women and the community organizers planned a powerful, direct action called "Singing the Blues for the Girls at Columbia," where a blues band of young people played at a blues festival and in between sets young people read letters from the girls at Columbia describing the abuse they endured. People who attended were asked to sign petitions and write letters to the girls letting them know they weren't forgotten. Young women testified before the legislature and told their stories of abuse and victimization. In January 2008, the state announced that it would permanently close the Columbia Training School.

Educating the public in Louisiana

In Louisiana, advocates had to fight myths and misperceptions about prisons and public safety; their work was aided by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which did a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of Louisiana's juvenile justice system. Advocates used that information to "fact check" media statements by those who wanted to keep youth prisons. Advocates also faced resistance based on job losses that would result from facility closure. They combatted this by developing messaging about the realities of youth prison jobs, which are low-paying and high-stress. In many youth prisons, these positions have high turnover and staff are not given the appropriate skills to work with children. The campaign also shared data showing that the highest-paid jobs in the prison did not go to local residents, but instead to people with few ties to the state.



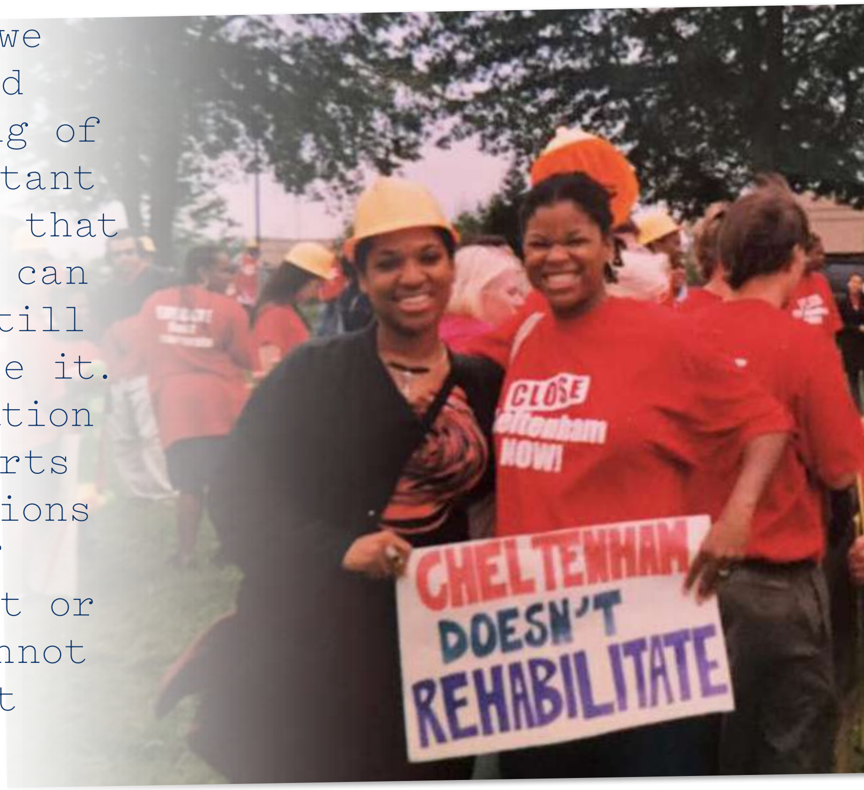
"The biggest lesson relating to what worked is that there is no set strategy that works in all places and no magic bullet. In Louisiana, it was very much public pressure and real national shame that our juvenile justice system brought to the state that created the impetus for reform."— **David Utter, Louisiana**

Activists discuss coalition building
Photo: Amanda Maglione

Conclusion

Eliminating prisons for our children is a moral imperative, but it is no easy task. Communities around the country are paving the way to a prisonless future for our children. This report shares experiences of some successful campaigns and the strategies they employed to close youth prisons and decrease the number of youth who are held behind bars. The campaigns referenced in this report occurred in every region of the country and targeted elected officials on both sides of the aisle. The successes documented here demonstrate that a world without prisons for our children is possible. These campaigns also tell the story of the trauma, violence and abuse that mostly Black and Brown young people have endured because of this country's failed experiment with imprisoning youth. This abuse happened at the hands of the states and was funded by taxpayer dollars. In this way, we all bear responsibility for what happens to young people when they are imprisoned, and we all must take responsibility for contributing to the end of youth prisons. There is a whole spectrum of ways to do this—from dedicating one's professional life to this cause, as many of the advocates profiled here have done, to speaking out on social media and within your networks about the myths perpetuated about youth imprisonment and the young people involved with the system. These campaigns—and the youth whose lives and experiences animated these campaigns—call us all to act urgently to replicate these efforts.

"One of the biggest lessons we learned as a coalition around Oak Hill was that the passing of legislation is such an important victory and so powerful, but that is not where it ends. People can pass legislation, but they still have to implement and execute it. And it is in that implementation and execution that your efforts can be rolled back if conditions or the landscape changes, if people do not pass the budget or drag their feet, etc. You cannot stop at the victory, you just have to pull through."
— Amoretta Morris, District of Columbia



Amoretta Morris
Photo: Amoretta Morris

More, More, More: Leveraging Prison Closure Campaigns to Achieve Additional Reforms

Several states took advantage of the momentum around changes in the law and public opinion around youth prisons to push for larger reform, such as legislation that reduced incarceration and improved the system overall. The Texas campaign started with a goal of removing youth from prisons, and only later shifted focus to facility closure; the resulting legislation and advocacy efforts reduced the amount of time youth could be incarcerated, but it also included measures aimed at ensuring accountability and preventing abuse. In Louisiana, the legislation that closed the Tallulah facility also required standards and licensing for juvenile detention centers, school discipline reform, and a number of other measures to keep children in communities and ensure accountability in the supervision of those who are incarcerated. In addition to pushing for youth prison closures, the New York Juvenile Justice Coalition successfully advocated for passage of the "Re-Direct New York" legislation, which created a fiscal incentive for communities to invest in alternatives to incarceration.

Commissioner Gladys Carrion
Photo: Amanda Maglione

"In addition to closing facilities, the [New York] campaign accomplished several key reforms: reducing the number of young people in confinement, decreasing the ratio of staff to young people, bringing in therapists and clinicians, and introducing programs such as dance and dog therapy, music, and arts. [The Office of Children and Family Services] improved education and the number of qualified teachers. Moreover, the agency brought in more resources to really address what the needs of young people were and how to improve their experience. OCFS strengthened a college program inside a facility and created a transitional program for when they are released, so that young people can go to local community college. OCFS reduced the violence and created an LGBTQ training and policy. The reforms were driven by research and science and supported by evidence of what works." — **Commissioner Gladys Carrion, New York**

Sustaining Change

The lessons and stories presented here are primarily based on the active phases of five successful reform campaigns—stopping when the campaign "won" the legislation it wanted or when a prison closed. Just as many of the campaigns had ups and downs, however, reforms don't always play out the way they are intended, and states and systems may backslide as leadership changes or public scrutiny recedes. Every one of the systems profiled here, for example, still faces challenges, despite the improvements that were made. For that reason, it is essential that even after reforms are achieved and campaigns wind down, the youth, families and other advocates in a community pay attention to the following:

1) What is happening to young people now that the facility is closed? Are they being sent out of state or to other, equally bad facilities? Youth should be kept in their communities and homes whenever possible. If a residential placement is required, it should be the least restrictive appropriate setting, in small and developmentally appropriate facilities.

2) Are system leaders, relevant legislators, and other key decision-makers committed to a juvenile justice system that focuses on allowing young people to reach their full potential, rather than punishing youth or supporting private interests? Reform happens when a stakeholder (agency head, lawmaker, judge, etc.) takes up the mantle of de-incarceration, but stakeholders don't stay in their positions forever. Education and advocacy must be an ongoing effort so that positive changes can be sustained.

3) Are savings from juvenile justice reforms being recaptured and redirected into the community? Is the money following the youth and their families? Louisiana's reform legislation, for example, established a fund for monies saved by reducing the use of youth prisons, allowing the savings to be used towards prevention, early intervention, alternative sanctions, and other reforms.

4) Are more youth being sent to the adult (criminal) system? One repeated concern about juvenile justice reform is that it will lead to more young people being sent into the adult system. Although states across the country have raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction, there are still many ways youth can be transferred or waived into adult court, sometimes based on the discretion of a prosecutor rather than a judge. And when prosecutors or judges do not believe that the available juvenile court sanctions are sufficient to hold youth accountable for serious offenses, they may look to the adult system.

5) Are there any other unintended consequences that may have come about as a result of reforms? Advocates, system-involved youth, and families should continue to communicate and identify any patterns that may need to be addressed after the official end of a campaign.

Appendix | CASE STUDIES

California

Overview

California's campaign to end abusive facility conditions and close youth prisons

In the late 1990s, more than 10,000 children were imprisoned throughout the state of California, in facilities that were widely decried for violence and abusive conditions. Youth were locked in their cells for 23 hours a day, sometimes clad only in their underwear. There were suicides, beatings, and canine attacks, and youth were placed in small cages while in an educational setting.[1] A small, committed, and persistent group of advocates and attorneys began to collaborate on strategies to improve conditions in state facilities. Although this group recognized the need to address the abuses in the facilities, it also realized that the model itself—large, distant, prison-like institutions—is inherently harmful to children. This recognition was driven in part by the experiences of young people who lived in the California Youth Authority prisons. California-based advocates and attorneys worked for decades to reform the system, and their strong coalition, nimble strategies, and ability to seize political moments of opportunity dramatically reduced the number of children held in state-level facilities.

California's Timeline for Change[2]

1980s: Despite the "tough on crime" policies in California, a small group of criminologists, civil rights attorneys, human rights advocates, and former correctional administrators begins meeting to discuss issues with and possible solutions for youth prisons (e.g., working collaboratively with agency administrators, filing litigation, going public). The primary organizations involved in the early years were Youth Law Center, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Commonweal, and the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice.

Late 1990s: The Coalition connects with key legislators who begin to hold hearings and sponsor legislation. Investigative reporters report on the conditions inside California's youth prisons, which had significantly deteriorated. Some members of the public begin to recognize that the state system is abusive and troubled.

2002: The Prison Law Office files litigation challenging conditions inside the youth prisons, leading to a remedial scheme developed by plaintiffs and the state.

2003: Senate Bill 459 takes effect, reforming youth parole governance, adding case planning and reporting requirements, and allowing courts to change or recall commitments to the state agency and to set shorter commitment terms.

2004: Books Not Bars (a project of the Ella Baker Center)[3] campaign is launched, bringing the voices of families into the advocacy arena; its efforts to close youth prisons in California include rallies outside institutions, testimony to the state legislature, and formation of a statewide family network. They join "more traditional legal advocates"[4] in

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1). Jill Leovy and Jia-Rui Chong/Los Angeles Times. "Youth Authority to Review Use of Cages." (February 6, 2004). Available at http://articles.latimes.com/2004/feb/06/local/me-cage6

2). This timeline based in part on Sue Burrell, "California Juvenile Justice Reform in the 21st Century (So Far)." Available at http://www.ylc.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/CPDA%20California%20JJ%20Reform%20 21st%20C%20Jan%2006.pdf.

3). http://ellabakercenter.org/our-work/books-not-bars

4). Sue Burrell. "California Juvenile Justice Reform in the 21st Century (So Far)." Available at http://www.ylc.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/CPDA%20California%20JJ%20Reform%2021st%20C%20Jan%2006.pdf.

the fight for change, and foundation support helps re-energize their efforts.

Expert reports are published confirming the rampant abusive practices in the state system, leading to widespread media coverage, legislative hearings, and the convening of a Juvenile Justice Working Group by then-Governor Schwarzenegger.

Juvenile defenders, through the Pacific Juvenile Defender Center, organize and begin to litigate commitments to state facilities and to change local policies on commitments. They systematically inform presiding judges and probation officials of the expert reports and legislative changes, leading some counties to stop sending youth to the state system and others to ensure closer oversight of the youth they did send into the state system.

California Rule of Court 1479 becomes effective, clarifying that post-disposition advocacy must be part of juvenile defense. This gives defenders leverage to argue for adequate resources to provide post-dispositional representation and gives youth the right to be represented in motions to modify their dispositions.

2005: Inspector General reports and other efforts confirm that California's juvenile justice institutions still have major deficiencies and unacceptable conditions, including 23-hour lockdowns and lack of adequate educational and counseling services.

A new corrective action plan is developed (tied to the 2002 Prison Law Office litigation described above), including a commitment to reduce the state's reliance on large youth prisons. (More treatment and services were also required, making it more expensive to confine youth at the state level, which ultimately aided efforts to end the system as it existed at that time.)

2007: Reform bills pass prohibiting lower-level juvenile offenders from being committed to the state system and "realigning" substantial resources to the counties to serve them locally, as well as allowing parole services to be handled locally. (This followed failed efforts to pass wholesale reform in 2005 and 2006.)

2012: Governor Jerry Brown introduces a proposal to close down the entire system, based in part on the astronomical costs of state confinement (approximately $200,000 per youth per year).[5]

2014: California's state system is down to 680 youth in July of 2016,[6] with three institutions and a fire camp[7]—a significant decrease from the mid-1990s when it included a population of close to 10,000, with 11 institutions and multiple camps. Egregious ethnic and racial disparities continue to exist, however, as more than 90% of youth in the state system were youth of color.[8]

Other groups involved at this point included Youth Justice Coalition, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, Commonweal, Center for Juvenile and Criminal Justice, and Youth Law Center.

5). See, e.g., Karen De Sa/East Bay Times. "Gov. Jerry Brown calls for historic shuttering of state's notorious youth prison system." January 6, 2012. Available at http://www.eastbaytimes.com/2012/01/06/gov-jerry-brown-calls-for-historic-shuttering-of-states-notorious-youth-prison-system/

6). California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/docs/research/Monthly_Population_Tables_2016/07-2016_Monthly.pdf

7). For a description of the Pine Grove fire camp see http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Juvenile_Justice/Facility_Locations/Youth_Conservation_Camps/index.html

8). California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation: http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/docs/research/Characteristics/12_2014_Characteristics.pdf

In their own words: Perspectives from reformers

"From the minute I stepped into a California Youth Authority facility so many years ago, I knew that it was the wrong way to respond when young people get into trouble, and that pit in my stomach has never gone away. You have to be unwavering in your beliefs about what is right, and have faith that even if it doesn't happen right now, a time will come when people can hear what you are saying. Even if you are not successful right now, you can build a record of what is wrong that can be used later on to make your case to the public and to policymakers. Also, it is important to be connected to the young people and their families who are experiencing the ravages of the system. That helps you to show that the bad things are happening to real people, and it also gives youth and families a way to have hope and to be a part of making things better.

"In addition, it is important to use your own strengths and skills. For me as an attorney, it has been very useful to use my legal knowledge to affect law and policy changes. Even though I am still sometimes perceived as a troublemaker (a badge of honor), over time, people in the legislature or other public agencies have come to respect what I say and to reach out to me for advice and ideas about how to change things. Other people have their own skills to contribute, whether it is being able to genuinely speak on behalf of families, present data or research findings, or offer alternative solutions to problems needing attention…[or ability to use] modern media and communications to do this work." — **Sue Burrell**

"I first got involved with advocacy and organizing when my youngest son was arrested and eventually incarcerated. I was in a lot of pain and didn't know anything about the system. I read an article about the Ella Baker Center and I contacted them. I live in LA and they are based in the Bay Area. But when I called they told me that were going to have a meeting in LA and that I should come. So in 2004, I went to the meeting and got involved with Ella Baker Center and I am still involved more than 10 years later.

We did a lot of outreach to bring family members into the campaign. We placed flyers inside the visiting areas in the prisons. We also set up a table outside of the prisons so we hand out flyers to family members when they went to go visit their children. The Books Not Bars campaign gave family members and young people a place to call to report what was happening inside.

[The son of my friend from the campaign] experienced a lot of abuse inside. Things got so bad that he decided to speak out. After his mother died, he wrote a heartfelt letter that talked about how he was in pain and he hadn't received any counseling, only abuse from guards. The letter had a big impact in informing legislators and others regarding the conditions at CYA. He was put in solitary confinement as punishment for writing the letter but after pressure from legislators he was moved out of solitary.

The Books Not Bars campaign always included family members in setting its goals and agenda. The staff would brainstorm with family members. Family members who could not attend in person would join by phone. The campaign held workshops with family members to get our ideas and hear our concerns. Our short-term goal was to address the abuse inside the facilities and our long-term goal was to close the facilities.

A lot of our goals have now been accomplished. For example, one of the campaign's goals were to eliminate "time adds" where youth have their parole hearings postponed for 2 or 3 years as a disciplinary sanction. It was an important victory when we got time adds eliminated.

My advice to family members is to remember that it is a long process. But if you have consistency, you can achieve real progress. Being involved with the Books Not Bars campaign was like a lifeline for me. I was in a lot pain; joining the campaign helped me through it.

I learned that it is a slow flight, an uphill fight but a fight worth doing. I learned a lot about social change by attending classes and workshops.

If you are going to work with young people and family members, you have to genuinely care about the people you are working with. The staff at the Ella Baker Center felt our pain and cried with us. Their caring was the glue. We needed each other. The Ella Baker Center staff knew how to run campaigns and write policy and the family members brought the personal connections. We were two forces working together."— **LaNita Mitchell**

"I first got involved with advocacy and organizing when my son was sent to CYA at the age of 15 in 2000. My son asked me to send him a magazine and I bought one because the cover had a picture of an actress he likes. After I bought the magazine I saw inside there was an article titled *The Scariest Prison in the United States*. It was article about Chad, the CYA prison where my son was incarcerated. I found out that there was a class action lawsuit about the conditions there. I contacted the law firm handling the lawsuit and they directed me to the Ella Baker Center, which was leading the Books Not Bars campaign.

"I got involved with the Books Not Bars campaign and started meeting other family members who had children incarcerated at CYA. In 2004, we started Families for Books Not Bars. The mothers in our group were mad that our children were being abused inside CYA. We knew that our children had made mistakes but we were never told that they would be brutalized, beaten, locked up in cages for 23 hours a day.

"Our first strategy was to notify the right people. State Senator Gloria Romero was an important politically ally. She held hearings in Sacramento to expose what was going on inside the facilities. She was an important messenger because she and her daughter were victims of a violent crime but she still supported us.

"Our first campaign goal was to get CYA to stop abusing our kids. As the campaign went on we started demanding that the state shut down the facilities. I and other family members testified at Senate hearings, we met with the Director of CYA, we organized marches in front of Chad and other CYA facilities.

"CYA ran several facilities inside the grounds where Chad was located. There was one facility for younger kids called OH Close. When we marched, these kids came running towards the gate and cheering; the staff moved them away. When we marched by Chad, the youth locked inside could hear us chanting and they started whooping and hollering. We sent thousands of postcards to the Governor telling him that California should stop wasting its tax dollars on youth incarceration. We held a huge rally on Mother's Day and marched to a CYA facility on Norwalk.

"Our group went to Missouri to meet with Mark Steward and learn about the Missouri model. We met with DAs, public defenders, and other system stakeholders who wanted to help kids rather than send them to a failed system.

Our strategy was to strike when the iron was hot. Youth in CYA were dying so we raised public attention to that. The opposition didn't have a chance to take a breath.

"We had key family members in different regions of the state. So when a child died at CYA, we were able to organize vigils in counties across California. Mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents all joined the campaign and said that we are no longer going to tolerate the state abusing our kids. We did have to deal with retaliation against our children inside. The more vocal parents became about the abuse, the more brutal the staff were against our kids. Some parents pulled out of the campaign because of this. But some parents persevered. My son fought for people's rights inside. He would send us notices from inside the prison to let us know what was happening.

"Ultimately the Books Not Bars campaign got five facilities shut down. My advice for family members and youth who are involved in campaigns is to keep in mind that changes don't happen overnight. It is a long process and sometimes people get disillusioned and ask, 'why bother?' It is important to remember that it is going to take time. Instead of trying to conquer the world all at once, it important to take on things in little chunks first.

"My advice to professionals working with families and youth in a campaign is to be very patient and compassionate. Family members have to be part of campaigns. Advocates can't do all the work. You need many family members' voices. If one or two family members keep sharing their story, it eventually loses its impact and power. The staff at the Ella Baker Center didn't have kids in the system but did whatever they could to help family members and their kids. They provided a strong support system for families." — **Laura Talkington-Denies**

Change takes Teamwork

Organizations involved in the reform effort included:

— Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice
— Commonweal
— Disability Rights Advocates
— Ella Baker Center for Human Rights (Books Not Bars)
— National Council on Crime and Delinquency
— Pacific Juvenile Defender Center
— Prison Law Office
— Youth Justice Coalition
— Youth Law Center

Key California strategy: Effective, sustained information sharing

California advocates employed many effective strategies, with some of the most innovative being those that harnessed the power of public opinion and the media throughout their campaigns:

Intentional, strategic and public information sharing

California advocates recognized the power in educating system stakeholders, lawmakers, and the general public about the abuse children lived through in the youth prison. By developing a number of ways to document and share this information, the advocacy community worked collectively to reduce the number of children held behind bars. For example, attorneys involved in conditions litigation provided county-based judges with information about abysmal conditions in the prison and reminded these judges about the power they had to remove children from abusive prisons. This information also was shared with the public defender community, which used it to craft appellate strategies based on the record of abuses in California's youth prisons. Advocates also documented complaints received from youth and families in a manner that allowed lawmakers to use these complaints as a basis to call for legislative hearings. Families and youth organizing around these issues centered powerful direct actions and protests around the specific abuses youth endured inside the prisons.

Developing a consistent media "drum beat" to define the problem and then promote the solution

The direct actions, litigation, and legislative hearings helped stoke the media's interest in juvenile justice. The media was tuned into a number of specific abuses, such as several suicides in the facilities and a particularly brutal beating of youth that was captured on videotape and broadcast on the national news. (That incident was subsequently made all the more compelling because the facility had filed assault charges against the youth who were brutalized, not the staff.) Eventually, the media messaging shifted from the abusive facilities to the ways in which the system could be effective at improving the life chances of young people.

Additional Resources

Sue Burrell, "California Juvenile Justice Reform in the 21st Century (So Far)," available at http://www.ylc.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/CPDA%20California%20JJ%20Reform%2021st%20C%20Jan%2006.pdf.

Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, "Farrell Lawsuit Timeline," available at http://www.cjcj.org/uploads/cjcj/documents/Farrell_Litigation_Timeline.pdf.

New York

Overview

New York's No More Youth Jails & Empty Beds, Wasted Dollars campaigns: 2001-2012

New York system leaders, advocates, families, and youth defeated strong union opposition and harnessed momentum for reform to close six state prisons. The momentum was, in large part, created by activists and youth organizers who, prior to the state-level campaign, had campaigned successfully to stop the expansion of youth jails in New York City. Also contributing to the momentum was a widespread recognition about the dismal outcomes that broken windows policing had on young people of color and the appointment of youth advocate Gladys Carrion as head of New York's state juvenile justice system.

New York's Timeline for Change

New York City

1989: Following years of community pressure, New York City approves plans to replace the troubled Spofford youth jail with two smaller state-of-the-art secure detention centers.

1998: Both replacement facilities are opened and filled immediately.

1999: New York City reopens Spofford, citing the need for more jail capacity.

1993- 2000: Juvenile crime and arrests drop by 28 percent in New York City, but the number of young people in secure detention centers awaiting trial increases by 60 percent.[9]

2001: The Prison Moratorium Project and other youth organizing groups create the Justice 4 Youth Coalition and launch the No More Youth Jails Campaign with an immediate goal of stopping $65 million in spending to build 200 new youth detention beds and longer-term goals of city investment in community-based alternatives, policies to reduce youth incarceration, and shutting down Spofford (again).

2002: The Correctional Association of New York issues a report, *Rethinking Juvenile Detention in New York City*, documenting the number of youth detained for low-level charges, the racial disparities, and the cost of detention, and presenting a blueprint for reform, including a data-driven system that keeps young people in their communities.

2002-2007: Juvenile Justice Coalition members continue the campaign to close Spofford and create community-based alternatives to detention in New York City. In 2004, The Correctional Association of New York's Juvenile Justice Project releases a report, *Broken Promises, Broken System: Ten Reasons to Close the Spofford Youth Jail*. The report is authored by Malikah Kelly, a youth leader in the Justice 4 Youth Coalition.

2007: As a result of a multi-year advocacy campaign, New York City introduces a continuum of community-based alternatives to detention and a detention screening instrument for pre-adjudicated youth, leading to a significant decrease in youth detention in New York City.

2011: Spofford youth jail closes, enabled by the decrease in youth detention.

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9). Mishi Faruqee, "Rethinking Juvenile Detention in New York City" Correctional Association of New York. Juvenile Justice Project (March 2002) available at https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/JJReport.pdf

New York State

2000: Youth incarceration in New York City and New York State was at an all-time high, and 2,500 young people were sentenced to the state youth prisons over the course of the year. (New York City was the largest feeder into state youth prisons, driving the higher state numbers.)[10]

2006: Abuse inside state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) facilities receives widespread public attention after OCFS staff restrained and killed a 15-year-old boy at the Tryon youth prison.

2007: Governor Eliot Spitzer appoints Gladys Carrion as commissioner of OCFS. Carrion identifies as a priority issue reforming the state's broken juvenile justice system.

2008: Carrion announces plans to close six state youth prisons, partnering with the Juvenile Justice Coalition to plan the closure campaign as well as effective communications strategies to ensure public support.

The Juvenile Justice Coalition, working closely with OCFS launches the "Empty Beds, Wasted Dollars" campaign highlighting the cost of operating these underutilized, ineffective, and harmful facilities.

United States Department of Justice (DOJ) releases findings of a year-long investigation into conditions in OCFS youth prisons, leading to litigation and a 2010 settlement agreement.

2008-2012: OCFS closes twenty facilities, makes investments in community-based services, becomes trauma-informed, hires psychiatrists and therapists, works to improve the education inside facilities, and changes hiring practices to hire more qualified staff. Commissioner Carrion also stems the flow of youth sentenced to OCFS custody by writing a letter to Family Court judges suggesting that they not place youth in OCFS prisons and redirecting agency resources to community-based alternatives to incarceration.

2011: New York State enacts the Juvenile Justice Coalition's "Re-direct New York" legislation as part of the Executive Budget, creating a 65 percent state reimbursement for local community-based alternatives and detention. This fiscal incentive program is known as Supervision and Treatment Services for Juveniles Program (STSJP).

2012: New York State enacts the Close to Home legislation, granting New York City the authority and funding to create a continuum of local juvenile justice programs including small, residential programs for adjudicated youth. As a result of the Close to Home law, all youth adjudicated in juvenile court remain in local programs and facilities close to their homes and families.

10). New York Sate Office of Children and Family Services, "Division of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth 2007 Annual Report, page 2 available at: http://ocfs.ny.gov/main/reports/Youth%20In%20Care%20 Report.pdf

In their own words: Perspectives from reformers

"In the last decade, we have seen a sea change in youth justice policy in New York City and New York State. This sea change didn't just happen by accident. It was a result of strategic organizing and advocacy. We developed concrete plans to build our power and to create a number of effective and flexible coalitions – youth-led coalitions, upstate-downstate coalitions, inside-out coalitions – all aimed at winning achievable and meaningful progress towards closing youth prisons and jails in New York City and New York State. Our wins were the result of the courageous and visionary leadership from people like Gladys Carrion who was willing to challenge the vested interests benefiting from youth incarceration – and from the passionate leadership of young people who gave their voices, energy, and vision to the decarceration movement in New York." — **Mishi Faruqee**

"Leadership matters, and you have to build coalitions; you cannot do this work alone. You have to be transparent. You have to share information, you have to give people the data, you have to open up these facilities, and you have to be willing to engage with the media. The media is key. I know people do not like to talk to the media, and we do not usually get good press, but you need to be strategic in how you use the media. It is important to both narrow the front door, but also to improve the conditions of confinement. That is important because I know some people think that young people should never be incarcerated, but there are young people who commit serious crimes, pose a risk to public safety, and need to be removed from the community." — **Commissioner Gladys Carrion**

"I had just come from jail. My first exposure to advocacy and social justice was through the Audre Lorde Project. Being queer has always been in the forefront of my life growing up but this project was the first time I was exposed to advocacy and discussions about it. I then applied for a summer internship at the Prison Moratorium Project. It was a time when PMP was looking to start doing youth organizing. Rashid and KJ interviewed me and said I should be at the forefront of this work. This was the first time anyone had said that to me. I first applied for the job because I wanted a job where I wasn't just flipping burgers; it wasn't until I got into the work that I discovered how deeply the issues affected me and how passionate I was to work for change.

"The first couple months I received an unorthodox education about the prison industrial complex. And then things really popped off when the No More Youth Jails campaign got started. The Prison Moratorium Project was at the forefront of the campaign. The campaign really took the time to truly involve young people in the work and setting the policy and campaign goals. We did a Power Mapping process that really helped young people understand relationships of power. Through this process we broke down who the decision-makers were and how we could build our own power. We had someone else come in and really break down the city budget process for us – the difference between the capital budget and the expense budget and where the $65 million could be reallocated. We got a deep education in so many things. We learned things that we never learned in school.

"Being involved in the campaign gave a reason, rhyme, and language for me to understand all the things that have happened to me. I now understood internalized oppression. I realized that a lot of things that happened to me were not my fault—how I kept getting arrested for non-violent offenses—how my experiences were part of larger oppressive policies against communities of color.

"Being involved in the campaign drove my passion. I testified in front of elected officials, including members of Congress in Washington. I helped develop an interactive workshop to introduce people to the campaign. The No More Youth Jails campaign was happening at the same time as the Books Not Bars campaign so we showed people a video about the Books Not Bars campaign. We also developed a Jeopardy game to give people an education about what was happening regarding youth justice in New York City.

"I traveled to DC to talk to Congress with folks from Building Blocks for Youth. That was very powerful for someone my age. It was the first time I got to dress up in a suit not to go to a funeral or a wedding. I developed an understanding that there are people who have not been through the system but who are still affected in a human way. I got a chance to be part of something on a human level.

"My advice for white professionals is that if they claim that they have reached a point where they think they are not racist then they are actually still perpetuating racial oppression. Whites have to recognize that challenging racism is a continuous life battle. If I were giving advice to adults who are working to bring young people into a campaign, I would tell them it's important to be the catalyst to create the space for young people to learn the tools to figure out who they are. For young people starting out in campaigns, my advice would be that freedom is always worth fighting for." — **Chino Hardin, New York**

"I first became involved with organizing through an organization called Youth Force. I was in an alternative-to-incarceration program and we went to Albany with the Juvenile Justice Coalition to talk about the need to fund more community-based alternatives. I was in the same group with young people from Youth Force. I was really impressed by them, by how knowledgeable and powerful they were. So when I heard Youth Force was hiring, I applied for a position there.

"Youth Force had so many projects going on. They ran a Youth Court in the Bronx. The program saved youth from going into the system. I think we need to spread programs like this nationwide. The Youth Court in the Bronx saved so many young people and saved so much money.

"They started a campaign to close Spofford. As a part of the Close Spofford campaign, we met with City Council members and other elected officials about why the jail should be shut down. We talked about the recidivism rates for young people coming out of Spofford. I spent time at Spofford and also on the barge. I didn't get any help when I was locked up. I remember one time when I was at Spofford, I saw a guard in the day room throw a bible across the room. I used to go to church growing up and that incident really affected me. I still remember it to this day.

"Also when I was at Youth Force, I became a part of the No More Youth Jails Campaign. I was involved with outreach for the campaign. We educated young people in schools, community centers, and programs about the campaign and got them to join. We organized rallies and met with City Council members. Just as in the Close Spofford campaign, we explained to Council members that young people who are locked up are not offered any help; that the community resources weren't there. I was part of the Steering Committee for the No More Youth Jails campaign. There were other members of Youth Force on the Steering Committee as well. We helped plan events like rallies and direct action.

"The outreach for the No More Youth Jails campaign worked really well. As a young person, I learned that we had allies to help us. I learned that it was just not my voice out there alone. I was educated about the youth justice system. There are so many things that youth in the system are not aware of. I was educated on NYPD's 'Stop and Frisk' and what to do when you are stopped by the police. I learned that youth in New York's criminal justice system become adults at 16, and I learned about how youth of color are stereotyped in the media. Most of all, I learned that there are really intelligent young people who have been involved in the system. And because I had become involved in the system, it motivated me.

"My advice to adults starting campaigns is to involve young people in the system. Young people know other young people who are in the system and can bring them in to the campaign." — **Andre Holder**

Change takes Teamwork

Organizations involved in the reform effort included:

—Prison Moratorium Project
—Youth Force
—Steering Committee of the Justice 4 Youth Coalition
(including Prison Moratorium Project, Youth Force, Correctional Association of New York's Juvenile Justice Project, Make the Road's Youth Power Project, FIERCE, Sister Outsider, Friends of Island Academy, Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, the Central Brooklyn Partnership, and the Urban Youth Alliance)
—Correctional Association of New York's Juvenile Justice Project
(coordinated by the New York Juvenile Justice Coalition)
—New York Juvenile Justice Coalition Steering Committee members
(including Legal Aid Society, Bronx Defenders, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, Children's Aid Society, Center for Court Innovation, CASES, Center for Community Alternatives, Osborne Association, Urban Justice Center, Urban Youth Alliance, Citizens Committee for Children, the DOME Project, Friends of Island Academy, and GEMS).
—Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
—New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Key New York City Strategy: Supporting Youth Leadership

In 2001, the Justice 4 Youth Coalition launched the No More Youth Jails campaign. From its very inception, the Justice for Youth Coalition was a youth-led effort. The Coalition was led by a steering committee of young people from several youth organizing groups. The role of the adults in the steering committee was to support the leadership of these young people.

To set the No More Youth Jails campaign goals and agenda, the youth in the coalition participated in a power mapping process in which they identified the campaign targets and developed a campaign strategy and organizing plan to build the campaign's reach and power. In order to bring in more young people, they developed an interactive workshop, which included a Jeopardy game to educate young people about what was happening in the juvenile justice system and to motivate them to work for change. The campaign also held a series of social outreach events, which used different forms of cultural expression such as rap, spoken word, and dance to reach young people from across the city. The campaign developed eye-catching outreach materials including a handpainted banner, colorful brochures, and postcards to send to the Mayor.

The youth in the campaign also engaged in rallies and direct actions to raise public attention. Youth from Make the Road's Youth Power Project pulled off one of the campaign's most successful direct actions. During their spring break, they obtained the newly elected Mayor Michael Bloomberg's schedule and followed him around every day for a week asking him why he was spending $65 million for 200 new youth detention beds. When the Mayor finally acknowledged the youth and tried to answer the question, they recorded his fumbling response on video, which in turn became another powerful outreach and organizing tool. During the City Council hearings on the proposed city budget, nearly 75 young people testified against the jail expansion plan. In June 2001, the No More Youth Jails Campaign won an important victory when the City Council cancelled the Mayor's proposal for 200 new detention beds and pulled the $65 million from the budget.

The Correctional Association of New York's Juvenile Justice Project coordinated the New York Juvenile Justice Coalition and during this period also worked to engage young people in the coalition's advocacy work. Prior to 2004, they had been a coalition made up of adult professionals working as defense attorneys, advocates, and service providers. In 2004, the Correctional Association of New York's Juvenile Justice Project launched a youth leadership training program to train and support youth leadership. From 2004 to 2008, this program trained more than 150 young people in advocacy and organizing. Several youth leaders from this program helped organize and train other young people to participate in coalition events including press conferences, public hearings, and Advocacy Days in Albany.

Key New York State Strategy: Addressing concerns about job losses

During the Empty Beds, Wasted Dollars campaign, the union representing the OCFS facility staff, as well as some elected officials and others, vocally opposed facility closures and related reforms. OCFS and advocates addressed this by ensuring that jobs would not be lost and that communities where the facilities were would benefit from their closure. To address concerns about job loss, OCFS guaranteed employees a job elsewhere in OCFS or for other state agencies for at least the first three years after closing the facilities. The Governor's office also sent a clear message that if upstate communities needed jobs, they would work to create jobs upstate but not create a local economy on the backs of young people.

The Cuomo Administration went on to create a special economic development fund for counties, which put about 13 or 14 million dollars in a fund for counties that were affected by closures so that they could use that money to create other economic development opportunities in the community. The local counties felt that these facilities were an important source of employment and investment in the community. The state invested in the local sewer system and paid for upgrades or taxes to support infrastructure development in these counties. It was successful because when the state closed facilities, people saw these investments in their communities.

Additional Resources

Mishi Faruqee, "Rethinking Juvenile Detention in New York City" Correctional Association of New York. Juvenile Justice Project (March 2002) available at https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/JJReport.pdf

Malikah Kelly, "Broken Promises, Broken System: Ten Reasons to Close the Spofford Youth Jail," Correctional Association of New York. Juvenile Justice Project (March 2004) available at http://www.correctionalassociation.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Broken_Promises.pdf.

New York State Office of Children and Family Services, "Empty Beds, Wasted Dollars," available at http://ccf.ny.gov/files/1813/8074/4718/EmptyBeds.pdf.

Louisiana

Overview

Louisiana's Close Tallulah Now! Campaign: 1996-2004

In Louisiana, a perfect storm between the sheer numbers of children who were imprisoned and brutal prison conditions set the stage for reform. In 1995, approximately 2,000 young people were being held behind bars and Human Rights Watch documented the abusive conditions these young people commonly experienced. When asked what they would most like to change in the facilities, "virtually every child . . . responded that they would like the guards to stop hitting them and that they would like more food."[11] Louisiana-based attorneys and activists partnered with imprisoned youth, their families, and national juvenile justice advocates to launch a groundbreaking campaign that closed a notoriously abusive youth prison and aimed to transform Louisiana's juvenile justice system.

Louisiana's Timeline for Change [12]

1994-1996: Tallulah Youth Correctional Center opens and reports of terrible conditions and abuses begin almost immediately; Human Rights Watch, the U.S Department of Justice, and local reformers begin investigating.

1998: Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana files class action litigation against the state on behalf of imprisoned children (U.S. Department of Justice later intervenes, collaborating closely with local attorneys).

1999-2000: Settlement agreements reached requiring federal court supervision; extreme levels of violence against youth persist for years, including up to 400 incidents of violence per month, such as broken jaws and eye sockets, gashes requiring sutures, and deep bruises.

2001-2002: Parents organize more formally into Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) and raise awareness of youth incarceration and conditions at Tallulah; parents testify at state senate hearings and FFLIC organizes a mock Jazz Funeral mourning their children's lost freedom and dreams.

2003: The Close Tallulah Now! campaign is officially launched as a highly coordinated collaboration between local and national partners, including grassroots, legislative, media and other advocacy. Legislation passes with reforms including:

— Closure of the Tallulah youth prison;
— A placement review process to ensure that children are in the least restrictive placement most appropriate to their needs and public safety;
— Creation of uniform standards and licensing procedures for local juvenile detention centers;
— The development of a comprehensive information-sharing strategy amongst all state and local agencies with a role in serving system-involved children and families;
— School discipline reform;
— Creation of a Children's Cabinet and Children's Cabinet Research Council;
— A move to regional service delivery; and
— Reinvestment of savings from reduced use of juvenile prisons into prevention, early intervention, alternative sanctions, and other reforms.

2004: Last child removed from Tallulah; Louisiana's youth custody population ultimately decreased to 350 children from 2,000.

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11). Human Rights Watch, "Children in Confinement in Louisiana." (1995). Available at https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/c/crd/us95o.pdf

12). For a more detailed account of Louisiana's Close Tallulah Now Campaign, see "Just Shut It Down: Bringing Down a Prison While Building a Movement" By Gabriella Celeste with Grace Bauer, Xochitl Bervera, and David Utter, available at http://www.fflic.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Just-Shut-It-Down.pdf.

In their own words: Perspectives from reformers

"As a mom I felt like when I let my son go into this system, I assumed that they knew more about taking care of troubled kids than I did. But in two years, things were getting worse not better. I quickly learned that I might not have been doing everything right, but they were doing things much worse. Working to close Tallulah taught me that I had a voice and that I was the expert on my own child and my family. A lot of families walked away from this work with the knowledge that when something is wrong, we can band together and we can fight whatever is wrong. We may not always win, but we just don't have to sit idly by. We can change things for our children.

"To inspire others: Be out front and don't apologize, gather allies but don't let others lead. We didn't turn to the state for funding, but we did reach out for support especially until we were able to stand on our own. We didn't ask for permission, and our campaign wasn't something that someone allowed us to do. We said what needed to be said, and did what needed to be done. I encourage people to study the work that we did and stop thinking inside the boxes that others try to stick us in. If we remain in those boxes with the rest of them we only are perpetuating the status quo. Eventually we will become part of it. There's a big world outside those boxes, and it is here that we will begin to build a better world for our children, ourselves, and our communities." — **Grace Bauer**

"The biggest lesson relating to what worked is that there is no set strategy that works in all places and no magic bullet. In Louisiana, it was very much public pressure and real national shame that our juvenile justice system brought to the state that created the impetus for reform.

In the last 15 years, the work became my life. It remains an integral part of who I am today. The greatest lessons I have learned have been from the hundreds of families and young people from all across the country that I have met along the way. These mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, nephews, nieces, grandmothers, great grandmothers, wives, husbands, partners and children have shared their experiences in the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems with me. I consider myself to be the keeper of all of those stories and each day I have a duty to bring those voices and perspectives into meetings, discussions, hearings, or anywhere else that lacks those voices.

If we do not address the oppression and racism that fed the beast of mass incarceration, we will only trade this problem for another. I encourage the advocacy community to keep up their fight for reforms but to ensure that everything they fight for is informed by those who are the most directly impacted. Everyone has strengths that are needed to win this fight, if you don't see the strengths others have to bring, perhaps it is time to examine your own prejudices and privilege. The only way we will defeat this problem is to include everyone and for everyone's voice to have equal weight in the decision-making process. Who's missing at your table?

What we now know about incarceration and just how harmful it is to kids, the violence it causes for them, and how ineffective it is should be an impetus to redouble our efforts. We have demonstrated that we can close these places safely, we can save the lives of kids. We increased public safety through these campaigns in the past, so now more than ever, we need to push harder because removing kids from their homes and communities to "treat" them does not work. Moreover, juvenile detention and prisons inflict enormous damage on young people. Eliminating unnecessary detention and incarceration, and ensuring young people are safe if they are detained pretrial or removed from their homes as a consequence of an adjudication is a moral imperative." — **David Utter**

Change takes Teamwork

Organizations involved in the reform effort included:

— Agenda for Children
— Annie E. Casey Foundation Strategic Consulting Group
— Building Blocks for Youth (including the Justice Policy Institute and Youth Law Center)
— Families and Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Youth
— Grassroots Leadership
— Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana
— Metropolitan Crime Commission
— Southern Poverty Law Center
— Urban League of New Orleans

Key Louisiana Strategy: Leveraging National Resources and Partnerships

The state-based advocates in Louisiana recognized that national organizations and foundations had expertise in campaign development, media advocacy, data analysis, and policy work. They built strong collaborations with those national resources that helped ensure the Louisiana campaign had access to impeccable data, cutting-edge messaging and media strategies, and proven advocacy strategies. Some of the contributions from national groups included the following:

— The Youth Law Center and the Justice Policy Institute (working together as Building Blocks for Youth) worked with local partners to develop a concrete campaign plan and individual work plans for each campaign member. They also helped develop communications materials, and the Southern Poverty Law Center designed and published them.

— The Annie E. Casey Foundation performed a comprehensive, data-driven analysis of Louisiana's juvenile justice system; advocates were able to use information from that analysis to correct misperceptions and fight opposition to reform. Through the Casey engagement, a group of Louisiana stakeholders also toured the Missouri juvenile justice system; seeing the differences in that system was a real turning point for the campaign.

Additional Resources

Gabriella Celeste with Grace Bauer, Xochitl Bervera, and David Utter, "Just Shut It Down: Bringing Down a Prison While Building a Movement," available at http://www.fflic.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/Just-Shut-It-Down.pdf.

Texas

Overview

Texas' legislative campaign to reduce youth incarceration: 2006-2011

In the wake of a devastating sexual abuse scandal, Texas advocates seized a moment of opportunity and shifted the debate from one that centered on reforming abusive prisons to one focused on shutting down facilities and reducing the number of children who live behind bars. The advocacy efforts were driven by a legislative strategy and required strong collaborations between lawmakers, advocates, youth, and their families. The resulting landmark legislation transformed the Texas juvenile justice system and significantly reduced the number of children held behind bars.

Texas' Timeline for Change

2005: Two juvenile justice reform bills are introduced but die in committee.[13]

2006: ACLU convenes a bipartisan coalition including law enforcement and multiple statewide, faith-based entities, as well as parents and educators.

Families of imprisoned youth also organize to create their own family organization called Texas Families of Incarcerated Youth, speak to media, and participate in larger reform coalition.

2006-2007: Media reports and legislative hearings call attention to ongoing sexual abuse of youth by the two highest-ranking school officials at the West Texas State School. These reports followed years of complaints by youth, their families, and advocates about brutal staff violence throughout the state's youth prison system.

May 2007: Texas legislature passes a decarceration bill including the following provisions:

— Required the installation of video cameras in all youth prisons
— Established an Inspector General's Office in the Texas Youth Commission
— Prohibited the imprisonment of children who committed misdemeanors
— Established the Office of the Independent Ombudsman
— Mandated training for correctional officers
— Reduced the length of stay

(Legislation was already in progress before the sexual abuse became widely known, but public and legislative attention and calls for change helped support passage.)

2007: Three facilities are closed, partially due to the reluctance of counties to send youth to state facilities and pressure from the legislature and Governor for the Texas Youth Commission to release eligible youth. The state also cancels the contract with a private facility (after harsh conditions are uncovered by the Office of the Independent Ombudsman) and transfers 176 youth out of that facility.

2009: Texas legislature creates a grant program that allows the state probation department to fund local probation services, reducing commitments to youth prisons.

2011: Texas closes three more youth prisons and consolidates two others.

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13). Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. "A Timeline: Criminal and Juvenile Justice System Reforms" (August 2013). Available at http://www.texascjc.org/sites/default/files/publications/TCJC%20Timeline%20of%20CJ%20and%20JJ%20Reforms_0.pdf

In their own words: Perspectives from reformers

"When I was 16 years old, I was incarcerated in one of the worst juvenile prisons in the state of Texas. Staff were abusing youth sexually and there were riots almost every week. The Texas Legislature was investigating these conditions and asked to hear from the youth. Because I was a trustee at the prison, I was one of six other youth selected to testify. While I was testifying my heart was beating 1,000 times a second, but I talked about the problems at the facility and the fact that there was no real option for us to make a positive change in our lives. I told lawmakers that we needed opportunities to learn and develop leadership skills. If prisons with riots and sex abuse were all that we knew, we'd end up right back to prison.

"I was a youth ombudsman at the Texas Youth Commission. I helped mediate disputes between youth, staff, and helped the agency ombudsman figure out what was really happening at the facility. We worked together to document abuses as well as make policy changes to [use of] pepper spray and solitary confinement. We also worked together to improve family engagement. I was part of Texas Families of Incarcerated Youth and together we created the first ever Family Bill of Rights that gave parents and families more information about what was happening with their children and gave them influence over decisions that were being made about their children. I wanted to help parents like my mom, who was driving 14 hours a week to visit me, who had lost everything she had paying for my attorney, and others in similar situations.

"I grew up with an abusive father. By the time I was 10 years old, I had attempted suicide three times. I felt no one cared about me, so I turned to my gang, where I felt for the first time that I belonged. I made bad choices, I own that, but everyone I met in juvenile prison had a story just like mine. We had all gone through great hardship; if people could really understand us, understand our lives, maybe they'd see that we're not so different from them. Maybe if they were in our position, they may have made some of the same choices that we did. I've seen so many non-violent youth turn violent inside because they had to in order to survive. Locking us up doesn't give us the tools we need to live in the world.

"During my incarceration, I had the chance to participate in intensive rehabilitation programs. I learned about empathy, I learned about my emotional triggers, and I also learned about how my offense affected my victims. When I returned home though, my family and friends had gone through life without the type of rehabilitation services that I had, which made it difficult to relate. I had changed. This is one of the reasons why prisons are ineffective. Without holistic rehabilitation with involvement from your family and community, creating lasting change is extremely difficult.

"I was so scared before I was released from prison. I was scared that after release, I would be seen as a failure and someone undeserving of a second chance at life. Before my release, I even considered committing another offense so that I could stay behind bars instead. My first year home was a difficult test, I was constantly tempted to go back to my old lifestyle. I had learned to live life in prison; my challenge was to teach myself how to live life – the right kind of life – on the outside.

"Talking about my experiences with prison is not a pleasant experience. The first time I did after I had been released, I almost had a panic attack. There is no substitute, though, for hearing from the youth who have had to live and in many cases, still live with these experiences. It makes no sense to make policy decisions about youth justice issues without involving the youth whose lives will be impacted. When I talk about what I went through and where I am now, everyone's jaw hits the ground. My story gives them hope. It also helps people realize how crazy it is to spend all this money locking up kids who are just like me." — **Jason Wang**

Change takes Teamwork

Organizations involved in the reform effort included:

— ACLU
— Houston Ministers Against Crime
— League of the United Latin American Citizens
— NAACP
— Right on Crime
— Texas Appleseed
— The Fair Defense Project
— Texas Criminal Defense Lawyers Association
— Texas Criminal Justice Coalition
— Texas Families of Incarcerated Youth
— University of Texas School of Social Work

Key Texas strategy: Aim high and find the right champions

As the Texas legislation was being developed, the advocates in the Texas coalition sat down and brainstormed everything that they would want to have happen to fix their juvenile justice system. That meant that when they experienced the "perfect storm" of scandal, media attention, and public calls for accountability, they were in a perfect position to achieve comprehensive reform, rather than small, incremental changes. Their efforts were helped by having not only legislators who were in their corner, but also legislative staff who were personally committed to the cause, and therefore willing to do the legwork needed and fight for every item on the reform agenda.

Additional Resources

Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. "A Timeline: Criminal and Juvenile Justice System Reforms" (August 2013). Available at http://www.texascjc.org/sites/default/files/publications/TCJC%20Timeline%20of%20CJ%20and%20JJ%20Reforms_0.pdf.

William S. Bush/Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. "A History of Juvenile Justice Policy in Texas – Part I: The Path to the Texas Youth Council: Creating a Protective Umbrella for Juvenile Offenders, 1887-1949." (September 2008). Available at http://www.texascjc.org/history-juvenile-justice-policy-texas-%E2%80%93-part-i-path-texas-youth-council-creating-protective-umbrella.

William S. Bush/Texas Criminal Justice Coalition. "A History of Juvenile Justice Policy in Texas – Part II: The TYC Era: Between Rehabilitation and Punishment 1949-2008." (January 2009). Available at http://www.texascjc.org/history-juvenile-justice-policy-texas-%E2%80%93-part-ii-tyc-era-between-rehabilitation-and-punishment-1949.

District of Columbia

Overview

District of Columbia's campaign to close Oak Hill: 1998-2004 [14]

The District of Columbia reformed a dysfunctional system that over-relied on incarceration, warehousing almost exclusively African American and Latino youth primarily at a large, inhumane, and abusive juvenile prison: the Oak Hill Youth Center. Recidivism rates were high, and there was a dearth of community-based programming for youth. The juvenile justice system did not serve youth or the community. DC's campaign led to the closing of Oak Hill and replacement with a smaller more rehabilitative facility, the creation of a cabinet-level agency to increase accountability and transparency, and a major increase in the availability of community-based services.

DC's Timeline for Change

1985: DC's Public Defender Service and the ACLU file a class action lawsuit (*Jerry M.)* against the District over the inhumane conditions at the notorious Oak Hill Youth Center and other juvenile secure facilities operated by the District.

1986: A Consent Decree is entered into, requiring changes to improve and reform Oak Hill and other secure facilities, address overcrowding, and expand community-based care and services for youth.

1986-2000: Conditions continue to deteriorate, millions of dollars of fines are imposed, and other DC agencies are brought in to take over parts of Oak Hill's management and services.

2000: District of Columbia Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform launched (with funding support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation) with a mandate to examine the strengths and weaknesses of the juvenile justice system, focusing on changes at Oak Hill.

Plaintiffs in *Jerry M.* file motions seeking to place the entire DC juvenile justice agency into court receivership, and Congress begins oversight hearings.

The Justice for DC Youth Coalition forms to inform the Blue Ribbon Commission, advocating against the transfer of more youth to adult court and for closure of Oak Hill and redirection of savings to community-based alternatives.

"No More Oak Hills" campaign to close Oak Hill launched.

2001: Blue Ribbon Commission makes several recommendations: the closure of Oak Hill; its replacement with a smaller, more rehabilitative facility; expansion of community-based programs; and a reduction of the transfer of youth into the adult criminal justice system.

2002-2003: DC Council introduces punitive legislation to try more youth in adult criminal court, subject parents to monetary fines and give them jail time or suspend their driver's licenses if their child was delinquent, and allow juvenile delinquency records to be used to deny eligibility for public housing. Legislation defeated due to DC Youth Coalition's advocacy.

2004: Comprehensive reform legislation passes, requiring closure of Oak Hill within five years, redirection of substantial resources to community-based alternatives.

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14). Portions of this document describing the DC campaign are reprinted or adapted from Notorious to Notable: The Crucial Role of the Philanthropic Community in Transforming the Juvenile Justice System in Washington, D.C. by Liz Ryan and Marc Schindler.

Legislation also passes creating a new cabinet-level agency, the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS), intended to increase accountability and transparency.

2005: Vincent Schiraldi appointed DYRS Director and recruits other respected juvenile justice advocates and experts from across the country to join the DYRS leadership team.

2009: Oak Hill closes, and the New Beginnings Youth Development Center, which would house a very small proportion of the number of youth previously incarcerated (35 in 2016, down from a population of 250 in 2005), opens.

In their own words: Perspectives from reformers

"The inclusion of multiple perspectives worked for us. Those perspectives consisted of people who were associated with system (for example, public defenders, who are allies, but still part of the broader system). Then you also had the perspective of the young people and families, and I think that was a part that was so powerful. Parents were talking about what it was like to go visit their child. That inside perspective was more moving, powerful, and grounding. All of these factors were really important. It was significant to have policy insight in terms of what to change and to have lawyers at the table who had information. That information was not just related to what was happening at Oak Hill. They had experience, and they knew about the avenues and the vehicles that had been used in other places and things that other facilities and systems were trying. Another piece of information that was really crucial was information from other youth organizing groups who were working on these issues and info about other victories. It is not just the information about your facility and what is going on locally that matters, this effort is also about being a part of a network and having a network of organizations and communities locally and nationally because we know these are long fights. You are going to have setbacks and things like that. Having other victories inspires you and helps you think about other tactics.

"The initial meetings were during the day downtown, primarily with people participating as part of jobs. When we involved young people and families, we had to change meetings to the evenings in a community location, and the nature of meetings shifted. They were more interactive. People did check in. There was small group work. The meetings became more fun even though they were about a serious topic. When you have to create a meeting for a young person to be interested in, oftentimes it becomes a more interesting meeting for adults at the table too. Between meetings there was lots of emailing to communicate. There was a listserv and sub-committee meetings.

"In terms of recruiting people to meetings, there were folks who were not necessarily on an email chain and not connected to existing professional networks but who still became involved through outreach. We created colorful flyers for various meeting topics. We would flyer at the Metro (subway) and outside of school. We would go to various neighborhood and community meetings where we thought people who are interested in these meetings would be present. We flyered at libraries. In sum, there was a lot of outreach to get the word out about organization, about the work, and about the things we were talking about. The important part about this work was that it wasn't just about being able to build membership but also was about building political consciousness and awareness. What we needed was the political will to be able to shift resources away from incarceration to alternatives. As long as council members and elected officials could go in and say "lock them up, we want them off our street," we were not going to win. Part of the process was to get out and educate folks about types of alternatives that existed and problems with the existing system. I still remember the first set of flyers, when we first put them up, it cost $60,000 a year to incarcerate young people at Oak Hill. That was mind-boggling for people.

"There definitely was a lot of opposition. It helped to bring in young people, so those who opposed could actually talk to them face to face. What people will say about the young people not in their presence is different from what they will say when they are there. The strategy was related to direct confrontation.

"One of the biggest lessons we learned as a coalition around Oak Hill was that the passing of legislation is such an important victory and so powerful, but that is not where it ends. People can pass legislation, but they still have to implement and execute it. And it is in that implementation and execution that your efforts can be rolled back if conditions or the landscape changes, if people do not pass the budget or drag their feet, etc. You cannot stop at the victory, you just have to pull through.

“Furthermore, you have to be able to keep momentum between campaigns. Being able to focus all of your energy on an upcoming vote of the council and piece of legislation or things like that is much clearer and easier to mobilize around than a watchdog role of monitoring and making sure something gets done after that win. That is not sexy. Oftentimes that work is not exciting, but it is so important, so that was definitely work that we had to do to maintain momentum between major campaign sessions and major activities.

“In a city where we have a slight majority of people of color but 100 percent of people incarcerated were African Americans at the time of the campaign, race was at forefront. There was a dialogue about disproportionate minority contact and confinement that would constantly end in the way young people were policed and criminalized. I think internally, how race played out even had to do with what it meant to expand the coalition and expand the players who were calling for change. That was one of the things that was really important even when you talk about the opposition and how did you deal with it relative to public safety. If you had initially primarily a group of white professional advocates and crimes and issues of violence predominantly in African-American communities, the critique here is that those white advocates are telling us to not police, let young people out, do this or do not do that, but they are not actually dealing with any of these issues. They are not having their car stolen, etc. There was an ability to dismiss what folks were saying in that way. We came in broadening the coalition and engaging Black young people and Latina young people and parents and families. It led to credibility when young people of color were able to speak on these issues.

“There was the external public experience of race. Internally, race was related to how power was held and how people experienced power and thought about race and race issues. I think we may have been more explicit about our internal race dynamics and issues of equity if we had it to do all over again. We have different tools in our toolbox to push those conversations about internal dynamics now. We were pretty clear about how we framed it externally, I think, and how juvenile justice polices and incarceration was inherently racist, but we could have done more work there.” — **Amoretta Morris**

“The conditions at Oak Hill were horrible and the city knew it. In fact, they were constantly being fined. It wasn’t until the Councilmen took a tour and saw the inhumane conditions of Oak Hill [that things changed]. This experience was the wake-up call. The youth no longer resembled dangerous criminals, but their own children. Places like Oak Hill Youth Center and St. Elizabeth’s were not rehabilitating young people. In fact, they came out worse than how they entered.

“Since young people don’t vote, we galvanized hundreds of parents to protest outside the Council offices. We (advocates, students, and parents) also scheduled meetings with Council members and other politicians to share our experiences, bring light to the situation, and offered to serve as a resource.

“‘Coffee Talks’ were really successful. We’d go around the neighborhood and sit down with grandparents, parents, and youth with or without involvement with the juvenile justice system. Some had even been in Oak Hill. Our community meetings were held after school and work hours so everyone could attend. Also, to increase participation we provided dinner and daycare. Back then Vincent C. Gray wasn’t a councilman, so he attended our meetings and was very active.

“When you’re working with system-involved youth, they have a lot of social needs and lack family support. Next time I’d have a designated team to help case manage and do ‘check-ins.’” — **Arja Nelson**

“Engaging parents…was a dance. Through the participation of young folk, it was important to be very clear about the positive role their children were playing. Invite them to events. Sometimes it was transformative for the parents to witness, especially because some feel their kids are apathetic. That all changed when they saw their kids testify at city council.

“One of the clear lessons of the campaign was the power of community and youth organizing to push policy. The city had the recommendations for quite some time but it was the youth organizing that pushed the implementation process. It was a powerful lesson to witness.

“The second thing I marveled about was to see lawyers and community folks work together. I’ve been in situations where lawyers can sometimes drive or shape the tactics, but in this situation the roles reversed.

“For people of color who are in policy there’s a way to surround their class privileges that can shape because there’s a tendency of ‘good decision vs. bad decision’ paradigm… ‘I made it out, I don’t know why you didn’t.’ My opinion is ‘You got let out, you didn’t make it out.’” — **Jonathan Stith**

“The biggest lesson learned was that my voice and opinion mattered. I never knew I could be part of the solution.

“My biggest advice is to encourage professional advocates to listen to the community they are trying to help. They have all the answers.” — **Tawanda Davis, District of Columbia**

Change takes Teamwork

Organizations involved in the reform effort included:

— Alliance of Concerned Men
— Covenant House
— Facilitating Leadership in Youth
— Justice Policy Institute
— Latin American Youth Center
— Youth Action Research Groups
— Youth Education Alliance
— Youth Law Center

Key DC Strategy: Calling on the Foundation Community

The DC foundation community and national foundations played a key role in supporting and actively working for reform in DC. In addition to the extensive and longstanding programmatic investments made by the foundation community, this included:

— Taking a leadership role in the transformation of the District’s juvenile justice system by supporting the development of a policy agenda, guiding the reform effort, and advancing the reform’s goals with policymakers—the visible activities of the foundations gave the effort prominence and additional credibility.

— Providing support for advocacy: the intentional foundation support of advocacy—a method of change often excluded from eligibility for foundation funding—over the course of the past decade created the capacity needed to achieve key victories in support of the reforms and serve as a backstop against retrenchment.

— Providing technical assistance to the effort, particularly that of national experts whose specialties cover facility operations in juvenile detention and juvenile corrections, decision-making on which youth to place in secure care, agency policies and procedures, and oversight of agency operations.

— Supporting efforts to engage and involve the community in the reforms, including building capacity of community organizations and individuals to provide direct services to court-involved youth and participate in a meaningful way in public policy discussions about the future of the reform.

— Engaging other funders employing a multi-faceted strategy of peer outreach, educational sessions, site visits to witness the application of the reforms, and, starting in 2005, regular meetings with DYRS Director Vincent Schiraldi and his leadership team.

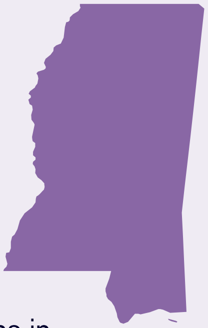
Additional Resources

Liz Ryan and Marc Schindler, "Notorious to Notable: The Crucial Role of the Philanthropic Community in Transforming the Juvenile Justice System in Washington, D.C.", available at https://giving.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/notorious-to-notable-final.pdf.

Marc Schindler "Should We Close All Youth Prisons and Is Now the Right Time?" available at http://jjie.org/should-we-close-all-youth-prisons-and-is-now-the-right-time/144549/

District of Columbia, "Blue Ribbon Commission on Youth Safety and Juvenile Justice Reform in the District of Columbia," http://dyrs.dc.gov/publication/blue-ribbon-commission-youth-safety-and-juvenile-justice-reform-district-columbia.

Mississippi



Overview

Singing the Blues for Mississippi's Imprisoned Children: 2003-2012

In 2002 the United States Department of Justice released an investigative report describing conditions in Mississippi's juvenile prisons (euphemistically called training schools). The conditions documented by the federal government shocked some, but they were well known to Mississippi's children and families. In these prisons, children as young as 11 years old were beaten, stripped naked, and confined to dark rooms with nothing but a hole in the floor as a toilet. They were sexually abused and denied access to medical and mental health care. The then-Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights called the prisons the worst the federal government had seen in 20 years. In the wake of the US DOJ report, Mississippi's community organizers, racial justice advocates, attorneys, and advocates built a powerful coalition that advocated for legislation that overhauled Mississippi's juvenile justice system, reduced the number of children in custody, and ultimately closed a juvenile prison, two detention centers, and a prison built specifically for children tried as adults.

Timeline for Change

2002: The United States Department of Justice releases an investigation describing conditions in Mississippi's juvenile prisons (euphemistically called training schools): Children as young as 11 years old were beaten, stripped naked, and confined to dark rooms, sexually abused, and denied access to medical and mental health care.

2003: Approximately 600 youth are imprisoned in Mississippi's training schools; more than 60 percent of whom were committed for status offenses.

2004: House passes a bill that would have established a study commission and that would have, among other things, examined the feasibility of closing the training schools. The bill dies in the Senate without a hearing.

2005–2006: Mississippi Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Act and Juvenile Justice Reform Act is enacted, overhauling Mississippi's juvenile justice system from top to bottom. Among the reforms included are: prohibitions on the imprisonment of status offenders and first-time, non-violent offenders and any child who has not committed a felony; a requirement that judges determine whether a placement can meet that child's needs before issuing a disposition order; the creation of community-based alternatives; and the development of a facilities monitoring unit.

2007: A major scandal breaks out regarding the Columbia Training School—girls had been shackled together for weeks at a time and sexually abused. Young women testify before the legislature and tell their stories of abuse and victimization. Attention and calls for change from families and communities increases.

2008: State of Mississippi announces that it will permanently close the Columbia Training School.

2010: Due to decreasing populations, some lawmakers propose a shutdown of the juvenile justice system.

Advocates launch a campaign to highlight the dangers of processing youth in the adult criminal system.

Mississippi passes new legislation bringing 17-year-olds who have committed misdemeanors into the juvenile justice system.

2016: Mississippi's training school averages fewer than 90 youth.

In their own words: Perspectives from reformers

“I was put in the Columbia Training School when I was 11 years old. I stayed in the training schools for most of my life as a teenager. In and out, in and out. They treated us like dogs. Worse than dogs. They beat us, laughed at us. No one wants their child to go through what I did. When Columbia closed, I was so happy because it meant no other child would have to live through that. People really need to listen to us. No one believed us when we talked about what happened there. What changed when we had lawyers is that someone believed in us and we could talk about what was happening. Adults need to listen to kids and ask them questions. Even questions you don’t want to know the answer to. My life would be totally different if I [hadn’t] grown up in those places. When I heard that there are people all over the country trying to shut these places down, it made me so happy because no one deserves to go through what we went through.” — **Tommy Croft**

“The Coalition immediately knew that we needed to focus on closing youth prisons in Mississippi. But it was also clear that this was incredibly heavy lifting. Mississippi is a very poor state and we’re talking about taking away people’s jobs—and a lot of those jobs were in poor communities of color. We hashed this out in our Coalition meetings and met with advocates from other states. We didn’t want our prisons to be jobs projects and we knew that these places couldn’t be fixed. Closure became the goal.

“Many of these kids came from backgrounds like my own. I was able to empathize with both the students and their parents. I could have so easily been one of these kids. Also the racial disparities in Mississippi are so real and so stark. Black children are targeted by the system—but at the same time, Black youth sometimes create harm in their communities. Black communities needed to come together to talk about youth crime and what a radical change in the justice system would mean for our state and our children.

“Through my role at the NAACP, I helped be the eyes and the ears of the Coalition. When children from certain communities were suffering abuse, we brought it to the Coalition’s lawyers. I created avenues for families to take their concerns directly to state lawmakers through committee work and one-on-one meetings. The goal was always to help communities recognize their own power and the role they have in holding elected officials accountable.

“Our Coalition was large and diverse. There was conflict sometimes between the national groups and the state-based organizations, between the lawyers and the organizers. I fell into the role of peacekeeper and mediator. I think it was important to have someone in the group who served that role, who could see all sides and who could keep us all focused on the big picture.

“I was also in a position to get angry with lawmakers who were not doing right by our children. We had lawyers and families lobbying them, but when they seemed to back down on promises, I could come up and let them know that I had the backing of their community and they had to do what was right for our community. I think this helped us move our legislative platform—we had an inside/outside/good cop/bad cop strategy.

“Working in coalition forced all of us to stretch outside our respective comfort zone. The lawyers realized that legal action wasn’t going to solve the problem. The organizers realized that rallies weren’t going to get it done. Policy advocates knew it couldn’t be solved by legislation. We looked deeply at our system and worked together to execute a multifaceted campaign.

“If you’re involved in a campaign—make sure that it’s bottom up and not top down. Campaigns need to be rooted in the communities that are most affected by youth prison and system abuse. My fear is that campaigns that are top down won’t be successful in the long term because they can’t actually get to the real root of these problems.” — **Derrick Johnson**

“The reasons I got involved—my son was railroaded and forced to confess to something he didn’t do. This made me aware of the problems in the system. And that’s what first made me realize the whole system was a problem.

“The judge made it seem that Walnut Grove was an ideal place for young men. But I could tell something was very wrong with that place from the minute I started going there to visit my son. One day I showed up to visit my son, and they told me he wasn’t there—but they wouldn’t tell me where he was or what happened to him. I spent hours on the phone to try to find my son. I couldn’t find him and I was angry and scared.

“One day, an organizer with the Southern Poverty Law Center found me and told me what happened to my son—that my son was seriously injured in a riot at the prison. She was still piecing together what happened, but for the first time I realized that there were people trying to help families and people like my son. That’s how I entered this work, because my son almost died at the Walnut Grove Youth Correctional Center and I wanted to make sure no one else had to live through that.

“The families wanted to shut down Walnut Grove because we knew it was no good. It couldn’t be fixed. As I started to tell my story, more and more people came forward and shared what was happening with their children and we formed a powerful groups of families. We had one goal—to protect our children and to shut down Walnut Grove.

“My work was around exposing what was really happening in that prison. We testified before the state legislature many times, did a lot of media interviews, many vigils, protests, and meetings with the family members. Family members are truth tellers, they see a side of the system that no one else does. It’s why we can get things done and why the people who run the system react to us—why we can make things happen.

“I think we were very organized because we had a lot of administrative support from SPLC. So we could focus on supporting each other and doing creative, hard work in trying to change the system and protecting our children.

“My advice is that families need to be involved and be a voice for the people inside prisons. The most important work is about finding alternatives to prison and jails. Because those places have nothing for our children and families, and we need to create ones that will be for us, by us.” — **Michael McIntosh**

“Working alongside young people, their families, community groups, and elected officials to close down juvenile prisons in Mississippi was the most difficult, inspiring, rewarding work I’ve ever been engaged in. The strength of the young people who survived unspeakable abuse at the hands of the state but who were willing to tell their stories over and over kept us going when we felt exhausted and beat down.

“We did a lot of communications work and I regret that we weren’t more careful to talk explicitly about the racial justice implications of the campaigns and that we relied too heavily on questionable data regarding the prevalence of mental illness among children who are incarcerated. It was the young people who helped me see this.” — **Sheila Bedi**

Change takes Teamwork

Organizations involved in the reform effort included:

Mississippi Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse:

— Action Communication and Education Reform
— Activists With A Purpose
— Advancement Project
— ACLU of Mississippi
— Children's Rights
— Citizens for Quality Education
— Citizens for a Better Greenville
— Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities
— Concerned Citizens for a Better Tunica County
— Critical Resistance South
— Hinds County Mental Health Commission
— Indianola Parent Student Group
— Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
— Mississippi American Federation of Teachers
— Mississippi Center for Justice
— Mississippi Education Working Group
— Mississippi Families as Allies for Children's Mental Health, Inc.
— Mississippi Human Services Coalition
— Mississippi Immigrant Rights Alliance
— Mississippi State Conference NAACP
— Mississippi Workers' Center for Human Rights
— NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
— Parents for Public Schools of Jefferson Davis County
— Parents United Together
— Public Policy Center of Mississippi
— Second Chance
— Southern Echo
— Southern Juvenile Defender Center
— Southern Poverty Law Center
— Teens Helping Teens
— Youth Innovation Movement

Issue spotlight: Learning from previous campaigns

Mississippi has a rich history of deep community organizing, and the groups that formed the backbone of the Mississippi Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse—the Coalition that formed to advocate for transformative change in Mississippi's juvenile justice system—came from that tradition. The organizers were joined by lawyers and racial justice advocates. The Mississippi Coalition launched shortly after the passage of the Louisiana Juvenile Justice Reform Act and advocates from Louisiana also came to Mississippi to help the Mississippi-based coalition members launch their work and brainstorm about opportunities and challenges presented by a conditions crisis of the magnitude revealed by the US DOJ investigation.

Additional Resources

Mississippi Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse, "Mississippi Juvenile Justice Reform Briefing Book," available at http://www.njjn.org/uploads/digital-library/resource_324.pdf.