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Serving Children, Families, and Communities

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National Center for Youth in Custody

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During the past few years, as the juvenile crime rate has dropped, the number of youth in custody and the number of facilities and beds has decreased. Although in some cases, this has led to improved custody conditions for youth, such as decreases in overcrowding (Hockenberry, Sickmund, and Sladky, 2011), these improvements are by no means universal. For example, in many facilities, youth who have committed status offenses or technical parole violations are housed in the same units as youth who have committed a serious, violent offense (Sedlak and McPherson, 2010). A number of reports on the conditions of confinement for juvenile offenders have shown that youth custody needs reform (Beck, Guerino, and Harrison, 2010; Hubner and Wolfson, 1999; Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, 2010). The field is eager for help to identify alternatives to current practices that may be ineffective, harmful, or dangerous, such as the use of chemical restraints, fixed mechanical restraints, and excessive isolation (Sedlak and McPherson, 2010). Staff in detention and confinement facilities need high-quality training and technical assistance to ensure that they provide for the safety, security, and rehabilitation of youth in their custody.

In 2010, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) responded to the field-generated call for assistance, leadership, and support to improve conditions in

youth and adult facilities housing youthful offenders by creating the National Center for Youth in Custody, also known as NC4YC.

The Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators and the National Partnership for Juvenile Services codirect the center. A team of experts that represents the major disciplines that deal with youth in custody guides the center's activities. These include, medical, mental health, and legal professionals; social scientists and other academics; community-based organizations; former residents of juvenile justice and adult facilities; and parents and other family members. In addition, the center has access to an extensive pool of practitioner-based consultants and partner agencies that are ready to respond to training and technical assistance requests from professionals who work with youth in custody.

Mission and Objectives

The center's mission is to advance the field of juvenile justice by providing training and technical assistance and by disseminating effective practices and approaches to the justice community. The center will strive to serve the range of facilities in which juveniles are placed, including adult facilities that confine juvenile offenders. The center emphasizes the rehabilitative goals of the juvenile justice system.



In support of its mission, the center has set forth the following objectives:

- Deliver strategic, targeted, and measurable training and technical assistance directly to facilities that detain or confine youth.
- Identify, document, and promote effective, evidence-based approaches to working with youth in custody.
- Expand the knowledge base and research on juvenile justice and best practices in detaining and confining youth.
- Create a resource community for juvenile justice practitioners, youth in custody, and families.

Services and Operating Principles

The center has three priority service areas. First, it helps those who work with youth in custody improve the conditions of custody and confinement for youth. Second, it supports and enhances participation with the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act. Third, it works to strengthen family and community engagement in all aspects of youth custody.

The center provides the following products and services:

- Resource library.
- Training.
- Training curriculums.
- Webinars.
- Professional development.
- Multilevel technical assistance, including mutual aid, onsite assessment, corrective response planning, and crisis response.

The center operates on the dual principles of shared costs and mutual aid. First, whenever possible, requesting agencies help fund their training or technical assistance request. This allows the center to support the greatest number of requests, thereby maximizing OJJDP resources.

Mutual aid means that requesting agencies contribute time and in-kind resources either in return for assistance already provided or in anticipation of future support from the center.

For More Information

For more information about the National Center for Youth in Custody and how to access training and technical assistance services, visit the center's Web site at www.nc4yc.org.

References

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