

Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators Toolkit: Facility Closure and Strategic Downsizing of Juvenile Justice Systems July 2018

Highlights and Executive Summary

Across the country, juvenile justice systems are changing their services to better align with the needs of youth and communities. In many jurisdictions, this includes reducing the number of youth in residential placements and in some cases closing juvenile justice facilities. From 2006 to 2016, the number of these facilities holding youth on a given day fell from 2649 to 1772, a one third reduction. Although closing a facility is challenging, it can be managed effectively and create opportunities to:

- realign resources,
- examine bed capacity needs,
- re-examine practices, and
- improve long-term outcomes.

CJCA's *Toolkit: Facility Closure and Strategic Downsizing of Juvenile Justice Systems* provides guidance on carrying out facility closures and related system improvements, based on the experience and expertise of CJCA members. The full toolkit and additional resources are available at www.cjca.net.

Arriving at Facility Closure

Agencies may choose to close facilities because: 1) systemic reforms have reduced populations of youth in out-of-home placement; 2) leaders wish to free up and realign resources in order to reduce the need for and use of incarceration; 3) they must respond to financial pressures; 4) conditions or characteristics of particular facilities no longer align with the agency's mission; or 5) a combination of these factors.

Early Planning

- In deciding which facility to close, a range of facility factors including costs, programming options, youth outcomes, physical plant, safety, location, and staffing and should be considered.
- Absent an emergency, establish a timeline that allows for careful planning but doesn't drag out the process so long that stress is unnecessarily extended or staff depart too soon.
- Start working toward selling or repurposing the facility as soon as a closure decision is reached; this will avoid extended maintenance costs and other issues.
- Involve stakeholders who will be impacted by closure and those who can support the agency's efforts, including youth, families, staff, legislative, executive and judicial branch representatives, advocates, probation, detention, and youth-serving public and private agencies.

Communicating about Closure

- Share prompt, accurate, and targeted information with all stakeholders to help closure proceed effectively and ensure that the closure is perceived as a positive step.
- Share the initial announcement personally (face-to-face, by phone, or e-mail) with youth, families and staff before they hear it from media or other sources.
- Use a variety of methods to ensure that stakeholders receive regular updates so they understand what is happening, when, and how it will impact them.

Meeting Youth and Family Needs

- Decisions about where youth will go and what services they will receive must be made early, and on an individual basis, based on the strengths and needs of each young person.

- Multi-disciplinary teams including youth, families, behavioral health, child welfare, education, probation, and family and advocacy groups can support planful, individualized decision making.
- Stop sending new youth to the closing facility as soon as it is planned for closure, and release any youth who are ready to return home, consistent with public safety based on existing program completion criteria.
- Remain responsive to the high levels of trauma experienced by youth in juvenile justice systems, avoid causing additional traumatic stress, and allow families to support their youth (for example, through increasing and supporting youths' relationships, visitation and contact).
- When deciding where to send youth who will be going to other residential placements, consider facility safety, climate, and efficacy. Make needed improvements before youth are transferred.
- Give youth opportunities to contribute to closure decision-making, planning, and execution.

Meeting Staff Needs

- Maintain effective and transparent communication.
- Encourage staff to remain and work effectively until closure. Consider offering performance-based incentives, recognize staff contributions, help staff connect to other employment, and pay attention to staff wellness.
- Qualified staff can be offered positions in other parts of the juvenile justice system, or recommended to other state agencies.
- Offer staff assistance with skill-building, such as resume or interviewing workshops, as well as collaborating with other community employers informally or through job fairs or other events.
- Promote staff satisfaction through training, support, and oversight. Evidence-based practices such as Dialectical behavior therapy, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, and Mental Health Training Curriculum for Juvenile Justice have been used by juvenile justice agencies seeking to improve facility climate, as well as staff and youth satisfaction and outcomes.

Managing Logistics

- Use detailed planning, including checklists and similar tools, to ensure efficient completion of logistical aspects of closure, and approach closure in planned phases.
- Call on support from key partners inside and outside of the agency.
- Specific issues to address include: release/transfer paperwork for youth and HR details for staff; termination of facility-specific contracts; facility maintenance through and after closure; records transfer or retention; and inventory and transfer or sale of physical assets.

Reallocating Resources

- Preserving resources saved by closure and redirecting them to support youth and communities can increase the positive impacts of closure.
- Engage in early and ongoing advocacy and education, particularly of legislative staff. Focus on highlighting best practices and effective care across a continuum of services for youth, and back it up with research.
- Consider inviting legislators and other key stakeholders to visit programming that is offered as an alternative to the closing facility (in their own communities, if possible).

Closing a facility is one of the biggest and most impactful steps a juvenile justice agency can take. With careful and thoughtful planning and implementation, the closure process can improve the system, the lives of the youth and families it touches, and their communities.