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EDITORIAL

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WHY AREN'T WE CELEBRATING?

Juvenile detention and its practitioners have experienced landmark reforms as a result of the implementation of research driven changes and the operationalizing of philosophical changes in detention conditions and practice via the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). We have seen enlightened actions by juvenile court and juvenile detention leaders nationally, including expanded use of best practice and evidence-based knowledge about adolescence, brain development, and trauma. Barry Krisberg calls it a new positive philosophy for juvenile justice systems.

We continue to see empirically supported efficiencies take priority over dated ideologies through the use of less costly community-based detention alternatives that do not sacrifice public safety. We continue to be vocal that any youth incarceration done badly is harmful, that locked facilities should only be last resorts, that a vast majority of juvenile offenders do not need secure custody in order to thrive, and that more alternatives available to the bench equates to fewer youth in secure custody.

We also continue to affirm that objective, risk-driven custody decisions are far superior to traditional methods, and this strategy significantly reduces total days in care in most secure detention facilities. While it may be too soon to declare the death of crowding, we are more likely to overhear juvenile detention practitioners discussing staffing challenges or facility closure implications than average daily population populations.

But these lessons are not new. They are core beliefs from the juvenile detention leaders who formed the National Juvenile Detention Association (NJDA) in 1968 and are ours now. So, why aren't we celebrating?

We have been listening, attempting to implement the JDAI core values, lessons learned, and applied takeaways described at JDAI conferences and in its publications. However frustrating, we also understand the occasional overgeneralization that casts all practitioners as abusive due to

the undeniable harmful practices of a few. Our below-the-radar history of appropriately removing these individuals from the field and closing dangerous facilities goes largely unreported. We continue to work for improved conditions of confinement in the face of the advocates' messaging: "detention is harmful" and "do no harm." Many interpret the message to be, "Do no detention." That message frequently resonated in pre-JDAI times before low and medium risk youth were diverted to community-based and less restrictive environments, but not now, not with the few remaining high risk youth detained appropriately based on standardized risk assessments.

Not discouraged, we have promoted these best practices, applying much of the JDAI wisdom to the reform of the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) in Chicago. That perseverance has paid off, and a new daily program based on helpful concepts significantly reduced not only incidents of youth detainee violence but also recidivism. Yes, reductions in recidivism- the elusive "Holy Grail" of Juvenile Justice outcome research. At least that's how researchers from the University of Chicago Crime Lab described the findings in a Brookings Institute paper three years ago. The President's Council of Economic Advisers reviewed and commended on the findings in its July 2015 White House Report. Now, the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (QJE), the most rigorously peer-reviewed professional journal of economics, has published the full research report.

Thoroughly vetted "gold standard" research, evidence now exists that disadvantaged youth from Cook County, a JDAI model site of successful detention intake reform, had some positive life outcomes as the result of a pretrial detention experience done right. So why isn't juvenile justice jumping for joy? What more do we need to do to get support for a transformed model of conditions of confinement? Is it because the National Partnership for Juvenile Services (NPJS) has not gotten the word out and no one knows?

Well, not really. Powerful players in juvenile justice reform know a lot about what happened at JTDC. Consider the following:

OJJDP sent two researchers to Chicago two years ago to learn about the findings, but we've read nothing about it in their publications. Same applies to the JDAI; senior staff has had the findings for two years, but we've read nothing about it in their publications. Ironically, this happened in the MacArthur Foundation's backyard but nothing about it in their publications. Finally, we shared the findings with Northwestern University's prestigious Medill School but, again, nothing. Only the *Chronicle for Social Change* has asked why no response.

So, why aren't we celebrating? Stifling is a word that comes to mind. It is perplexing why so many organizations who ardently advocate for positive outcomes for justice-involved youth, would not be enthusiastically vocal about results which clearly show that when done well detention (for youth who need that level of care) can and does have significant positive results. A system which assesses individual types and degrees of youth need, accurately places them at a particular level of care in order to meet their needs, and then meets them with verified and measurable positive outcomes, is exactly what we presumably all strive for. So, it is surprising that there is not more open discussion and even enthusiasm for the results found in Cook County.

Bear

Maybe, when the child advocates who care about improving outcomes for the few who need some form of custody ever respond, a productive dialogue might ensue. Until then, we remain hopeful that this good news with a QJE stamp-of-approval will eventually be cause for celebration, and further, perhaps wholesale transformation of secure custody.