Incarceration does not teach them a lesson …

- More than 80 percent\(^1\) of youth who leave the Connecticut Juvenile Training School are rearrested.
- This is in line with national experience. Within three years of release, around 75 percent of youth are rearrested and 45 to 72 percent are convicted of a new offense.\(^2\)

… or it teaches them the wrong lesson

- Some studies indicate that incarceration not only does not stop law breaking – but it actually makes it more likely.
- One 10-year study found that incarceration was not only associated with more adult crime but also with more violent crime, compared with a control group of similar youth.\(^3\)
- One study identified juvenile incarceration as a significantly greater predictor of recidivism than a poor parental relationship, carrying a weapon or gang membership.\(^4\)
- An extensive report by the Pew Charitable Trusts concluded that youth incarceration provides no public safety benefit:

> A growing body of research demonstrates that for many juvenile offenders, lengthy out-of-home placements in secure corrections or other residential facilities fail to produce better outcomes than alternative sanctions. In certain instances, they can be counterproductive.\(^5\)

What about “dangerous” youth?

- A fence and locked cell are not the only ways to achieve security. We could assign a one-on-one worker to a youth 24/7 for less than the cost of CJTS, which is more than $30 million annually.
- Most of the young people sentenced to CJTS have multiple mental diagnoses. We know that incarceration only makes their conditions worse.

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Good mental health care, which is best delivered in a community setting, is a much better way to change behavior.

- For the rare youth who presents a risk to public safety that cannot be managed in a less drastic way, the state should establish small, therapeutic locked facilities. These should not be downsized prisons – but a true departure from CJTS in culture, environment and purpose.
- The typical stay at CJTS is six months, so youth are rapidly returning to their communities now. We have to ask ourselves: Does time in prison send them back better or worse? Research and recidivism rates both suggest that they go back worse.

How do we know community-based programs will work?

Because they already do.

- Community-based programs are better than prisons at keeping neighborhoods safe. A John Jay College of Criminal Justice study of community-based programming found that 86 percent of juvenile justice youth remained arrest free while participating. These were youth considered “high risk.”

If youth prisons don’t work, why do we have them?

The only answer that makes sense is that we have them to punish youth. Connecticut’s legislature agreed last year to remove punishment from the mission of our juvenile justice system.

- We can still hold kids accountable. Community programs ask a lot from kids, including active participation in school and counseling and often community service and restorative justice practices, where they make restitution.
- The reason we have a separate juvenile justice system is that we recognize kids have an enormous potential to rehabilitate. That is the system’s purpose. Incarceration undermines that purpose.

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6 Evans, D. and Delgado, S., Most High Risk Youth Referred to Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. Remain Arrest Free and in their Communities During YAP Participation (April 2014); Evans, D. and Delgado, S., YAP’s Approach to WrapAround Services Appears Intensive and Flexible, (May 2014), John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center; Evans, D. and Delgado, S. YAP Helps Keep Youth Out of Secure Facilities and Living in Their Communities, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Research and Evaluation Center, (June 2014)

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Think Outside the Walls is a series of issue briefs that will educate the public about how best practice and research shows we can help high-need youth succeed.