

March 2014 Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Expands

The Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) works to improve public safety and outcomes for youth by eliminating the unnecessary use of secure detention, reducing the disproportionate representation of youth of color in secure detention, and using effective alternatives for juveniles who should not be in secure detention. Ohio has had JDAI in place since 2010 with help from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, whose mission is to spread JDAI core strategies throughout the country.

JDAI is all about putting the right youth in the right place for the right reason. For many youth, a stay in detention opens the door to a slippery slope into the juvenile justice system. The key to success has been providing early intervention to respond to youths' needs. JDAI recognizes that detention is most effective when it is used for those youth who pose a risk to public safety and who may abscond while a case is pending. All too frequently, detention is used to handle status offenders (juveniles who did something that would not be a crime if committed by an adult, including breaking curfew, truancy, running away, and underage consumption), technical and probation violators, and other low-risk youth. In addition, statistics indicate that minority youth are disproportionately placed in detention.

Ohio's JDAI efforts have been established in Cuyahoga, Franklin, Lucas, Montgomery and Summit counties. Collectively, these counties have decreased their overall detention admissions by 29% over the last three years, and they have decreased minority admissions by 28%. I am happy to report that the initiative is formally expanding to Mahoning, Marion, and Trumbull counties. Meanwhile, other counties expressing interest will be on a readiness track for future involvement.

Collaboration between juvenile justice agencies, governmental entities, and community organizations leads to creating alternatives that provide youth with the potential to change. Examples of effective alternatives to detention include:

- Electronic monitoring
- Crisis intervention
- Respite/shelter care
- Home-based services
- Community service
- Life skills training & positive youth development
- Mentoring
- Pro-social activities, especially after school

These types of alternatives are meeting the needs of youth who can be successfully treated without detention. The efforts are preventing youth from going deeper into the juvenile justice system. In summary, JDAI improves public safety, gives youth a second chance, saves taxpayer dollars, and quite simply is the right thing to do.