

# Rising Up

# Speaking Out

Youth Transforming Los Angeles County's Juvenile Justice System

DEAR LORD  
BE GOOD TO ME  
THE SEA IS SO  
WIDE AND  
MY BOAT IS  
SO SMALL



Children's Defense Fund  
CALIFORNIA

Here, then, is the truth as I have come to understand it, after listening to hundreds of young people and their families, speaking with dozens of scholars and practitioners, and reading thousands of pages of documentation of vicious abuse, chronic neglect, and unremitting failure behind the walls of our nation's juvenile prisons . . .

We owe young people nothing less than a complete transformation in how we respond when they step outside the law: an end to isolation and a national infrastructure of community-based supports.

Nell Bernstein, *Burning Down the House: The End of Juvenile Prison*  
(New Press, Kindle Edition, June 2014) 18.

Cover Page: Top Photo: Photo courtesy of Los Angeles County Office of Education Road to Success Academy. Bottom Photo: Photo courtesy of Angela Chung, Camp Kilpatrick 2013 before demolition.

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Juvenile Justice System**

## **Policy Brief**

January 2015

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This policy brief is a collaboration between the Children's Defense Fund - California (CDF-CA) and five CDF-CA Youth Policy Program Fellows who experienced time in Los Angeles County's juvenile probation camps, highlighting findings from the UCLA-affiliated Leap & Associates, LLC youth focus group study on recommendations for transforming probation camps.

# Introduction: The Moment is Now

When youth are taken away from their homes and communities and placed under the custody of a juvenile justice system, all of us have an important responsibility to ensure that during this most formative period of their lives, young people heal and are prepared to succeed when they return to their communities. Instead, our most vulnerable young people, overwhelmingly youth of color, end up locked up in juvenile justice facilities across the U.S. and in Los Angeles County. These facilities are all too often warehouses, where youth are retraumatized and deprived of a quality education and support system. In fact, many youth are more likely to return to their communities under-resourced, over-criminalized, and pre-programmed for adult prisons rather than on a direct path toward college or career. In short, the juvenile justice system has failed in its promise of rehabilitation.

Los Angeles County — home to the largest juvenile justice system in the U.S. — now has a historic opportunity to leave behind its outdated and harmful correctional camp model. Over the last decade, the Los Angeles County Probation Department — driven in part by lawsuits and the Department of Justice (DOJ) monitoring — has implemented a number of reforms to address the problems and abuse found in their camps. But these changes are not enough; what is needed is true transformation. By tearing down the decades-old Camp Kilpatrick — a relic of the penitentiary-like, boot-camp style that Los Angeles County built in the 1960s — the county is piloting a therapeutic approach to working with young people.

Referred to as the Los Angeles Model (LA Model), this approach is inspired by promising practices across the country, including the Missouri Model, which pioneered a non-institutional and homelike approach to treatment for youth removed from their communities. It is built on the notion that youth cannot heal, change and thrive without safety, and that safety is best achieved through relationship-building and positive youth development. The LA Model is an unprecedented collaboration among the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Probation Department, Office of Education (LACOE), Department of Mental Health (DMH), advocates, researchers, youth and families. If successful, this collaboration can be a model for juvenile justice reform throughout the state of California.

The most important voices in guiding and informing the LA Model and any juvenile justice reform in this country are youth who have experienced the system. In this policy brief, five young people — in partnership with CDF-CA's policy researchers — share their own unique experiences inside probation camps and amplify key recommendations from an important UCLA focus group study on how to improve conditions inside Los Angeles County's camps. This brief weighs in on the debate around what works, what does not work, and what should be changed in juvenile justice facilities, while bringing to light the voices, experiences and ideas for change of those who have experienced the system.

# A Snapshot of Los Angeles County Probation Camps

## TIMELINE

### 1931

Camp Glenn Rockey is built. Considered an innovative juvenile justice model at the time. Prior to Rockey, all youth were directed to either “training schools” or adult prisons.<sup>1</sup> The facility design of Rockey was, and continues to be, boot camp and penitentiary-like.<sup>2</sup>

### 1950-1960's

Los Angeles County builds a majority of its probation camps in the 1950s and 1960s with the same model as Camp Rockey.

### 1990

Challenger Memorial Youth Center (CMYC), a 660-bed facility broken into six camps, opens.<sup>3</sup> The newest of LA County's probation camps, yet the most institutional in design,<sup>4</sup> CMYC is located next to an adult prison in Lancaster.

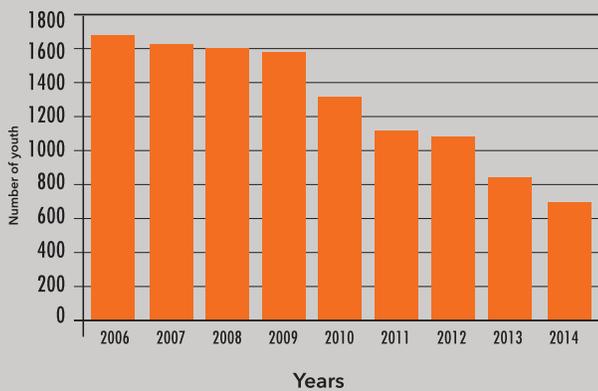
### Early 2000's

At its height, LA County Probation operated a total of 19 juvenile camps counting Dorothy Kirby Center, a residential treatment facility.<sup>5</sup>

### Today / 2014

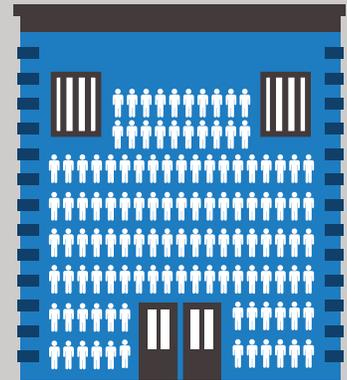
Today, 14 probation camps remain, eleven for males, two for females, and Dorothy Kirby a treatment center for both genders. Except Challenger camps built in the 1990s, the majority of probation camps in Los Angeles are over fifty years old, and operate under similarly antiquated practices.

## A Declining Population of Probation Camp Youth



## Los Angeles County Current Probation Camp Model

- » Facility Design: Large, institutional, and geographically isolated
- » Sleeping & Living: Large open dorms with 50-120 beds in military barracks style; open bathrooms; no privacy
- » Staffing Schedule: Staff work 56-hour work schedule with long (16 hour) shifts, sleeping at facility, then gone for several days
- » Safety: Safety largely through supervision (command centers), and at times restraints, isolation rooms



## A TROUBLING HISTORY



**2000:** A Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury report cites filthy and unsafe conditions in the county's juvenile halls and probation camps.



**2004:** The Department of Justice (DOJ) investigates unsafe and abusive conditions at 3 juvenile halls.



**2008:** A DOJ investigation and federal oversight into LA County's probation camps begins. **Findings include mistreatment, assault, excessive use of force, and inappropriate use of solitary confinement.**



**2010:** A federal class-action lawsuit charges LA County with failure to educate youth in the county's largest probation camp, Challenger Memorial Youth Center.



**2012: AND BEYOND** Improvements have occurred, yet media continues to report problems in the camps and halls like failure to provide adequate nutrition and clean water, and staff overseeing fight clubs.

# How This Youth Policy Brief Came to Be: Background and Methodology

## The Focus Groups

During the spring of 2014, the UCLA-affiliated research team under the UCLA Health and Social Justice Partnership, Leap & Associates, LLC, in collaboration with the Children's Defense Fund – California (CDF-CA), conducted a series of five focus groups with the goal of gathering recommendations from young people who had spent time in Los Angeles County's probation camps (see Appendix: Summary Data on Focus Groups). Each focus group was structured around a set of carefully predetermined questions to answer the overarching question: "How can Los Angeles County's probation camps provide a more positive experience for youth?" Five focus groups were held in collaboration with four youth-serving organizations — Homeboy Industries, the Youth Justice Coalition, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition and the Coalition for Engaged Education (formerly New Roads for New Visions). A total of 46 young people participated in these five focus groups. (See Appendix for demographic information on the youth who participated, including age, race and ethnicity, gender, length of time in camp and how recently the youth were in camp).

## The CDF-CA Youth Policy Program

With the help of UCLA researchers and the host organizations, CDF-CA selected five individuals who participated in the focus groups to also serve as fellows in the CDF-CA Youth Policy Program. Each of these five focus group participants expressed a desire for the opportunity to deepen their recommendations and co-write research-based findings in a publication. CDF-CA's Youth Policy Program Fellows ranged in age from 18 to 27 and have collectively spent 102 months (8.5 years) in Los Angeles County's probation camps from 2001 through 2014, including camps Scott, Scudder, Afflerbaugh, Smith, Scobee, Gonzales, McNair and Rocky.

The CDF-CA Youth Policy Program involved a five-month long commitment, including weekly workshops during the summer that included formal training in research, analysis and policy writing. Each fellow authored one section from among five common themes that emerged in the focus groups, describing their experiences but also summarizing the focus group findings and co-drafting recommendations for change within that theme. The juvenile justice policy team led in drafting the introduction and broader recommendations at the end, and edited other sections of the policy brief. The entire brief reflects a collective and collaborative process among the five fellows and CDF-CA's juvenile justice policy team.

## Youth Speak Out on How to Improve Probation Camps in Los Angeles County

### Five Common Themes

The focus groups discussed a wide range of topics related to how county agencies, policymakers, the community, nonprofit organizations and advocates can improve Los Angeles County's probation camps. Five common themes emerged, listed in order of importance (See Supplemental Summary Brief for details):

1. *Increase the availability and diversity of programs.*
2. *Foster mentorship and supportive relationships with probation officers.*
3. *Cultivate the dignity of youth at camp through increased privacy, cleanliness and nutrition.*
4. *Increase connections with family and community.*
5. *Improve camp discipline and management procedures.*



## Create More Programs, Diverse Programs and Programs Directed Toward the Future Success of Youth

**Preparing the mind, body and soul for success**

by Karla Fuentes-Quiroz

*When I was at Scott, we had a really amazing art program, which was a very good distraction from the personal drama that can go on at camp. But when a fight happened at camp, the staff came to the conclusion to cut the art program. I was disappointed and mostly mad. I fell back into the same routine, letting my mind mess with me, which actually made time pass by much slower.*

When youth are serving time during the most important period of their adolescent development, programs benefit them by keeping youth occupied while learning important and useful life and emotional-coping skills.

Youth who fall into the juvenile justice system often have instability in their lives, whether at school or at home.<sup>6</sup> They often end up incarcerated because they are trying to find a way to make a living or look for safety, but sometimes in all the wrong places. They are struggling with personal issues, with self-esteem and with the ability to succeed in anything. More programs in the juvenile justice system can help fill

these needs and give youth something to look forward to. For example, mental health programs, such as counseling and therapy, help the individual stay mentally balanced and make him or her less likely to return to lockup.<sup>7</sup>

Participants in the focus groups shared that, even though programs are so important, their availability in the camps is limited. I spent time in camps Scott and Scudder from 2010 through 2011 and know what it was like when there were not many programs. During my camp stay, there was a lot of spare time. The few programs we did have could be taken away very easily or we would be excluded from them due to behavior.

Sometimes, I would get bored during free time because there was nothing to do. I would let my mind mess with me. I would get sad and build more anger within myself. Running would actually help relieve some stress, but most of the time they did not allow that. When I was at Scott, we had a really amazing art program, which was a very good distraction from the personal drama that can go on at camp. But when a fight happened at camp, the staff came to the conclusion to cut the art program. I was disappointed and mostly mad. I fell back into the same routine, letting my mind mess with me, which actually made time pass by much slower.

Raul Barreto, who spent time at Smith, Afflerbaugh, McNair and Gonzales camps from 2001 to 2005, described feeling that, at that time, it seemed that camps didn't even value programs. "While I was going through camp — any kid that went through camp — that's all they were doing was going through camp. There was really no focus on what they experienced while they were there; it was just feed them, shower them, move them here and there." Although probation has implemented changes since then, the feeling of being warehoused and shuffled around in places with insufficient programs was something others who had recently been in camp also shared in the focus groups.

Youth in the focus groups shared that, while the number of programs has increased, some camps still have little to no programs. Ensuring sufficient programs becomes increasingly important as camp stays may potentially get longer given that the three-month camp order was recently eliminated and replaced with five- to seven-month and seven- to nine-month sentences.<sup>8</sup> Ralphica Garnett, who spent time at Scott and Scudder camps from 2009 to 2010, shared that "if there would have been more programs, there might have been less fights as girls would have been less aggravated. A social communication class was really needed, and so were career programs and book clubs with someone intellectual to talk about books and the importance of literature. There were not many good books to read."

Barreto shared that programs are important "because they give you skills, somewhere to focus energy and an opportunity to make positive relationships. I went to four different camps and only one had programs. Not only was the program fun in that camp, but also I learned something and I met someone that I know today, my mentor. In the camps where there weren't programs, all I learned was how to fight and have conflict."

Not surprisingly, focus group youth shared that they had the most success in the camps with the most programs. Daniel Bisuano, 18, experienced positive programs run by CEE-Hope, InsideOUT Writers and several other organizations at Camp Gonzales in 2014: "I was in Unusual Suspects run by CEE-Hope, which was an acting program where we learned how to act out scenes, did warm-up exercises, and at the end, when we learned our lines perfectly and made our costumes, we did a two-day play. This was valuable and gave me new experiences and showed me that I'm not just this person in jail ... it gave me a sense of freedom and independence and at the same time provided me with joy and happiness. It was a memory that I'll never forget. At Gonzales, there was also Photoshop, Flow and there were lots of programs and many other productive programs." The positive impact that this experience had on Bisuano was shared by others. Garnett notes that "at Scott I worked in the kitchen. I loved the Culinary Arts program, where I learned how to cook at a young age and earned one college unit for the four-month program. I use most of those skills now still."

Youth in the focus groups also shared that they wished efforts would be made so the scheduling of probation requirements, school, programs and free time would not conflict. I agree – I often felt as if, when we were in school, we would lose out on school time because they would take some of us out for drug counseling to the point where sometimes there would only be three kids in my classroom.

As for schooling inside the camps, youth shared that quality education should be a more important part of life at camp. When youth get locked up, their education gets disrupted. And what education they do receive inside does not always go toward helping them graduate. While inside, having a good education can determine whether youth continue to do well by finishing school or getting a job.<sup>9</sup> As James Anderson explained about his time at Camp Scobee, “being able to take college classes while at camp through LA Mission Community College helped to truly boost my self-esteem and realize my true potential within an academic environment.” Community college or college courses should be available at all camps.

All five focus groups shared that camp programming should also teach important skills to prepare youth

for life after their release, such as motherhood and fatherhood programs, programs to teach youth self-sufficiency, vocational training, strategies to address family conflict and self-expression programs so youth can learn to express themselves in positive ways. If a person coming out of lockup exits with a well-written resume and a list of resources for job opportunities, then he or she has been exposed to a real world solution. Research supports this. The Center for Juvenile Justice Reform conducted a study focused on the relationship between program interventions and recidivism and found that the most effective juvenile justice programs are those that focus on building skills and encouraging constructive personal development.<sup>10</sup>

## Recommendations for Increasing the Availability and Diversity of Programs

- Implement programs at all camps that are youth-centered and tailored individually for a youth’s strengths, skills and interests. Programs should be scheduled in ways that encourage youth participation, making efforts to address gaps in scheduling and ensure equal access across the camps.
- Provide camp programs that prepare young people to successfully transition back into their communities, such as higher education workshops, work and technical skill-building, and job search and interviewing workshops.
- Provide high quality education in probation camps, including utilizing the 300 minutes of instructional time for supportive and advanced curriculum, better textbooks and more avenues to establish stronger credit recovery. Continue to expand successful educational models such as Road to Success Academy, a project-based learning model that was piloted in the two girls’ camps and is currently being expanded.<sup>11</sup>
- Expand partnerships with community-based organizations at all camps to provide a diverse array of programs for young people to develop pro-social skills and connections with mentors (e.g., Camp Gonzales, arguably the most resourced camp,<sup>12</sup> has many such partnerships and can serve as a model).



## Build Mentorship and Supportive Relationships Between Probation Staff and Camp Youth

### Building Connections that Heal

by Raul Barreto

*A positive relationship with an adult is an essential ingredient to healthy adolescent development. For a troubled teenager, an encounter with a positive role model could be the life-changing experience that becomes a turning point for that youth.*

From the moment youth enter the juvenile justice system, they should be exposed to a positive environment, different from the lifestyle that brought them in. Instead, youth in the focus groups shared that entering camp often felt like entering a familiar, disconnected place, similar to the dysfunctional, neglected spaces they came from. This is why focus group participants emphasized the need for building stronger relationships based on trust and mentorship between staff and youth in Los Angeles County's camps – they wanted something different, something positive.

I myself was sent to four camps as a teenager and, reflecting back on that experience now, I ask myself: “What

if I met a mentor during my first camp program? Would I have gone on to have three more camp placements? Would I have ended up going to prison as an adult?” I was 13 my first time in camp and was sentenced to nine months. During those nine months I didn't get counseling, I didn't learn a trade or any new skills and, probably most importantly, I never made a connection with a positive adult or anyone I trusted who could give me life advice. I had myself and my peers. When I wasn't worried about my peers doing something, I was worried about staff and vice versa. I learned to survive in so many unnecessary ways that are only useful in institutions. Every time I was released, I remained unguided and

misinformed and, usually, I ended up recidivating. Luckily, I eventually broke that pattern. Many of the kids I met, fought with, laughed with and lived with throughout my many stays in juvenile detention are now dead, heavily drug addicted or serving life in prison. The difference between me and them is that during my last camp program, I met a volunteer who became my mentor, a person who until this very day will answer my call, listen to my problems and give me the best possible advice he can offer. I firmly believe it was this simple, consistent act that saved my life.

And while my camp experience happened a lot longer ago than many other youth in the focus groups, the need for connection and mentorship continues to remain a problem for youth at camps today. My experience simply shows just how important it is when just one person makes a connection with a young person, such as what happened to me in my last camp. That is why focus group youth shared that they would have been more successful if they had sincere connections with probation staff. A series of studies and research in adolescent development shows the importance of positive relationships between adults and youth and that connection creates stability and healing.<sup>13</sup>

In fact, the March 2014 study of Camp Kilpatrick's AWARE sports program found that the single most critical component of reducing recidivism was the significant and long-lasting relationships between probation staff and youth at camps.<sup>14</sup>

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A positive relationship with an adult is an essential ingredient to healthy adolescent development.<sup>15</sup> For a troubled teenager, an encounter with a positive role model could be the life-changing experience that becomes a turning point for that youth. As James Anderson, who spent time in Camp Scobee, shared with me, "although

I experienced many negative encounters with staff, the most lasting memories were from the probation officers who invested time in helping to support and guide me." A simple yet powerful tool in making a connection and building a relationship with youth is when a probation staff member is willing to sit down and have a genuine conversation. This is the chance to offer viable solutions to problems awaiting youth upon their release and get involved in their personal development.

As an example, Ralphica Garnett shared that when she was 12 years old she met a probation officer who was proactive in helping her, pushing her to not return to camp, saying things like "you don't belong here" and constantly asking her about her plans for the future. Ralphica recalls her six-month program at Camp Scudder and appreciates the probation officer who made the decision to make an effort to check in with her consistently throughout her stay

at camp. "My relationship with that P.O. was impactful because I knew he had my back and actually cared about me. He made me feel like I wanted to do good and not come back to jail."

Unfortunately, focus group participants in all five clusters described that camp dorms were filled with probation staff that appeared overburdened with supervision, unengaged and, at times, even adversarial, leaving many youth feeling as if they had to fend for themselves in a hostile environment run by outdated approaches to staffing and dealing with youth. Rather than benefitting from positive relationships with adults, many of us felt we couldn't relate or connect with the people assigned to watch over us. In an environment where the youth-to-staff ratio was high, as it was when I was in camp, or low, as it is now, but still largely focused on supervision, it is impossible for kids to get the counseling needed to address mental or emotional issues. It is also impossible for staff to see everything occurring around them.

For me, I felt as if the youth who ended up in camp — many of whom were from dysfunctional homes, misled, hurt, confused, gang involved, drug addicted and received no counseling — invented a code of conduct that included violence, peer pressure and manipulation to survive. To cope, youth set up fights, stole from and tormented each other and acted out behaviors often learned in the juvenile facilities. Probation staff believed that the only way to deal with us and our trauma was to act as guards. So we were told to keep quiet and still throughout the day's activities, usually by barking orders and making "examples" out of anyone who defied commands. Probation officers easily resorted to writing up youth, sending them to solitary confinement (special housing unit or SHU) or using intimidation tactics, such as canceling access to mail, calls or free time, to get a point across. It can spiral into a continual wheel of suffering — staff not developing relationships with youth leads to more misbehavior, which staff then thinks justifies acting hostile toward youth. We have to break this cycle.

An ideal relationship between a probation youth and a probation staff would be an open, trustworthy one. The Missouri Model is a prime example of how effective positive staff support and counseling can be. The Missouri Model treats youth like students calling them students,

not criminals<sup>16</sup> and, as Richard A. Mendel noted, "strives to create safety through constant supervision and staff leadership — by showing no tolerance for physical or emotional abuse and by cultivating an enveloping atmosphere of healthy relationships and mutual respect."<sup>17</sup>

Focus group participants felt that they would have greatly benefited from having staff with social work or social service backgrounds who are trained in youth development to answer their questions and help guide them through their progress in camp. Daily, young people born into a life of traumatic disorder could chip away at identifying what their problems are and how to transition into productive lifestyles as individuals if they had the right probation officers and adults to mentor them. This would require the probation department to be more selective when training and hiring probation officers. Focus group participants also shared suggestions that probation officers be trained in building connections with youth who have trauma and that Los Angeles County should take advantage of the opportunity they have with youth and teach them their potential for greatness.

Youth in the focus groups reported that positive encounters with adults while in camp should also come from the outside, such as religious services and youth advocates presented through nonprofit organizations. Outside relationships with other adults from a diversity of backgrounds can help youth see different options for their lives, or they may relate to youth on a different level due to a shared interest or come from the same community or spark something new that the youth may not have considered. Unfortunately, these programs are currently limited, dependent on volunteers and often only available to kids with good behavior or to those who are favored by staff. Many kids either do not get, or pass up on, the opportunities to learn life-changing lessons and build positive relationships, because changing your life can be a sign of weakness in an environment where you have to be tough. Positive encounters such as those experienced in outside programs should be instilled into the probation camp processes so that all kids, regardless

of their experiences or struggles, behavior or status, have the chance to connect with somebody whom they can look up to, trust and learn from in a positive way. In a similar way, Daniel Bisuano met his mentor at the age of 18. The mentor was a volunteer who came once a week throughout his four-month stay at Camp Gonzales in 2014. “She treated me like a human being,” said

Bisuano. “She would ask me how I was doing and what I needed help with. She showed me that I was worth something instead of worthless.” Daniel explained that his mentor linked him with other positive people as well. “She would bring guest speakers who were successful in different traits or trades as examples of the possibilities available to me in my own future.”

## Recommendations for Building More Supportive Relationships

- Hire, invest in and retain probation staff who are not trained only as guards but rather who also want to work with youth and rehabilitate them. These efforts have already begun but need to be deepened; probation should reevaluate job descriptions and hiring practices to ensure the best staff is recruited and retained.
- Train and provide technical assistance for probation staff on all levels in trauma-informed approaches, positive youth development and other therapeutic approaches to communicating, managing and working with youth. Los Angeles County should invest in trainings such as those run by The National Child Traumatic Stress Network or other violence intervention programs that prevent re-victimization and train staff in the role trauma plays in brain development, adolescent development and behavior.<sup>18</sup>
- Build a mission, culture and operations centered on positive approaches to safety and building relationships, moving away from correctional approaches that emphasize control and supervision.
- Reevaluate things such as probation staff’s dress code to facilitate positive interactions. For example, a law enforcement officer-like uniform creates another barrier between youth and staff trying to form a connection. Regular civilian clothing would help youth feel less intimidated and make it easier for them to approach probation staff.
- Foster activities, routines and spaces for probation staff and youth to engage in positive ways (e.g., in Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, at the maximum security facility for youth who have committed serious and violent crimes run by the nonprofit Alternative Rehabilitation Communities (ARC), staff sit and eat with the young people at the dining table for all meals, creating a family feel).<sup>19</sup>
- Establish a working schedule for probation staff that supports a small group treatment model and is consistent with relationship building<sup>20</sup> (e.g., reevaluate the 56-hour staffing shift and determine whether a different schedule would allow for closer relationship building with youth).



# Cultivate the Dignity of Youth at Camp through Increased Privacy, Cleanliness and Nutrition

## Dignity For Our Youth

by Ralphica Garnett

*For me, the most basic human needs for anyone, adults or youth, are access to a sufficient amount of healthy food, the ability to feel clean, and living in a space that is safe and affords you privacy. As the focus groups showed, youth in probation camps often don't feel as if they have these things.*

Focus group participants raised the desire to feel safe, clean, fed and respected as a critical aspect of what was needed to improve camps. For me, the most basic human needs for anyone, adults or youth, are access to a sufficient amount of healthy food, the ability to feel clean, and living in a space that is safe and affords you privacy. As the focus groups showed, youth in probation camps often don't feel as if they have these things.

Food is a basic need for any human activity — while worrying about if you will eat and not having proper nutrition, human beings are not able to focus on everyday activities, including going to school, working,

counseling, recreation and sleeping. Research shows that children who suffer from poor nutrition can have long-term psychosocial problems, including experiencing difficulties with maintaining friends and having positive behavior, and developing anxiety or learning disabilities.<sup>21</sup> This is especially important because young people are still physically growing and developing their brains.

Yet a key common concern from focus group participants was that they sometimes did not get enough to eat at the camps. While I know that serving size is supposed to be regulated, the truth is some teenagers need more food than is being given by county and

state regulations. When I was at the Scott and Scudder camps, sometimes, when I was disciplined, I had to go to the SHU, and I would be left hungry. Also, since you couldn't take food to the dorms, and medication had to be taken during shower time, I had to take medication without food, which would leave me with a huge appetite, making it harder to sleep.<sup>22</sup>

Though growing youth often feel hungry, youth described leaving meals seriously hungry and still not being allowed to have snacks, such as an apple or an orange, in the dorm. They also described sometimes experiencing favoritism where some youth got more food than others depending on if they had a good relationship with a server.

When youth did get enough food, it changed how they felt. As Daniel Bisuano shared, "sometimes when I was at Camp Rockey, the food would be so good, fresh and tasty that it would remind me of a home-cooked meal. I would be so full I even looked forward to going back to bed to relax, not thinking of getting involved in any of the minor problems the camp might be having. Sometimes we could get seconds, but you would have to earn that seconds by gaining behavioral rewards. When I didn't have enough to eat, and I was left hungry, I would sometimes go to church services just so I could get a wafer. I felt desperate for food."

Focus group youth also noted that the quality of food at camps should improve. Obesity for youth can be an issue, which is why quality, nutritious food is important. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that some probation camp food is improperly cooked, may even be rubbery and sometimes even slimy pink meat is being served.<sup>23</sup> While Los Angeles County is working on this and has taken steps to address this problem as recently as last year, the problem seems to still remain.

The desire for more privacy, cleanliness and safety was another major topic that youth who had been in the camps raised during the focus groups. With the current camp design, being in an open dorm setting with a

population of up to 100 other girls or boys is stressful for youth on a daily basis. Beds are just a few feet apart from each other and all youth have for personal space is a cabinet, not even a closet, which means that when you change you are out in the open. Until recently, youth rarely broke into small group programs and spent much time grouped together with all the other youth in the dorm.

When I was in an open dorm setting, I experienced an unsafe situation where another minor cut my hair while I was sleeping. This happened partly because night staff was not properly supervising the area – there were too many of us. It is hard to have safety in such a large dormitory setting.

Another issue that focus group members described was the lack of privacy and cleanliness of bathrooms at camp. Youth reported that having to shower so close to another peer was horrible. Participants shared that in the shower, everybody's "stuff" is going down the same drain, and there is no elbowroom and nowhere to change in private. It is dehumanizing. Raul Barreto reflected on his experience with showers in camp: "We only had three-minute showers each day. The staff didn't care about how clean you were, they cared more about getting it done. When I was in there, there were 120 kids to shower in an hour. You go in, you go out, your time is up. You'd get in trouble for not finishing on time, or get write-ups, which could affect you in court. The first time I was in camp, I was only 13... I grew up getting programmed with this." While this experience was in the early 2000s prior to many of the reforms, the focus groups revealed that youth who had more recently experienced camp also had traumatic experiences with showers, having to rush and feeling as if being clean was not a priority but rather a luxury.

Karla Fuentes-Quiroz expressed how shower time would be used to punish the whole platoon if one person misbehaved: "When that happened, staff would let the water run for literally one minute and shut it off, and

scrub for one minute, and then wash off for only one minute. If we weren't finished, staff would yell to leave the shower area and order us not to touch the sinks to rinse off unless we would like to be escorted to [the SHU]." When things like this happened, youth felt that they needed more time to shower, especially at the end of the day after being sweaty from recreation. It is hard to feel good about yourself when you are not clean.

Focus group youth also shared that many of the camp bathrooms smelled and even had mold. Fuentes-Quiroz further said that she saw bathrooms and showers that were not cleaned with disinfectants and that young people had to clean the bathrooms without the right supplies, so they would steal old underwear to clean up a mess.

Camp youth also described how poor the quality of camp hygiene products were, at times leaving youth complaining about rashes, having body odor after certain activities, and not having the proper hygiene products and opportunities to take care of bodily needs and cleanliness, such as taking a shower or putting on deodorant that actually works. Many youth in the

focus groups reported that they did not feel clean because the toiletries offered were poor quality or there was no access to certain things such as washcloths. As I witnessed, sometimes youth would use socks or disposable underwear to clean themselves in the shower or use toothpaste as deodorant. In many camps, youth only get access to nicer toiletries or belongings, or their own toiletries and shoes, if their parents will bring it to them; many families are unable to visit the camps, which means those youth never get their own items, which does not seem right. For girls at camps, access to feminine products was difficult sometimes. Karla shared that pads and napkins were hard to get and that when their clothes would get stains, they would use their clothes to clean themselves up. Then when laundry time came, all of the clothes would be washed together, making Karla feel dirty and not cared for.

Youth continue to feel that Los Angeles County's probation camps' layout and operations need to change and stop following a correctional model, which make youth feel confined like prisoners instead of youth. Punishment that deprives a person of basic human needs robs youth of their childhood and their dignity.

## **Recommendations for Cultivating Dignity, Privacy, Cleanliness and Nutrition at Camp**

- Provide access to healthier food, more food and better quality food. This includes providing more snacks, removing expired food and having equal access to seconds (i.e., not providing reward systems for youth to have seconds).
- Increase hygiene by providing youth with individual towels and soaps, better quality hygiene products, including feminine products, cleaner and nicer clothing, and better quality and cleaner bedding (e.g., Santa Clara County's William F. James Enhanced Ranch provides each youth his or her own regular commercial hygiene products).
- Create physical layouts of camps that provide more privacy in bathrooms (for toilets and showers), as well as dorm rooms with less crowding, homelike furniture and better quality beds (e.g., The Missouri Model created homelike pods that fit 12 youth in one setting rather than 100 beds in one dorm with a single control center<sup>24</sup>).



## Increase Connections with Family and Community

### Gone But Never Forgotten: Increasing Family Engagement for Youth in Camps

by Daniel Bisuano

*When I was incarcerated, I got frequent visits from my mother, and we tried to build a relationship, and we did make progress. Unfortunately, things went downhill after being released since we had not had in our visits the chance to establish the right communication skills and address and overcome our problems and bad habits. If there had been more therapeutic opportunities, I believe that things would have been a lot better for my mom and me.*

Family is one of the key factors to helping youth build better connections and help overcome barriers and challenges to their success.<sup>25</sup> For me, family is my backbone. Families are one of the most important social support systems critical to the success of youth in the juvenile justice system, if not the most important. Research by the Vera Institute shows that increased family visitation is associated with improvements in school and in behavior for incarcerated youth.<sup>26</sup> So, it is no surprise that I, along with the young men and women that participated in the focus groups, felt that family visitation was one of the main ingredients to help make the camps a better place. These youth shared a number of things about why family was important and how the camps could do

a better job of providing support to help create positive family relationships.

First, youth shared how detrimental it was when families were not a part of their lives. Ralphica Garnett shared how infrequent visits and communication with her family impacted her: “Being so far away from home, my mother was unable to visit me. This had a big effect on my ability to run a good program. I was depressed and I would cry. My heart hardened ... The only chance I had to talk to my family was once a week, which wasn’t enough. I needed reassurance that everything was okay at home, and not getting this, as a child, was very stressful.”

When I was incarcerated, I got frequent visits from my mother, and we tried

to build a relationship, and we did make progress. Unfortunately, things went downhill after being released since we had not had in our visits the chance to establish the right communication skills and address and overcome our problems and bad habits. If there had been more therapeutic opportunities, I believe that things would have been a lot better for my mom and me. Youth shared similar stories of how, when family relationships are strained, they can be a big obstacle to their success and healing. As several youth who participated in the focus groups explained, they often didn't realize how much they looked up to their families and how much the troubles they had gotten into were in some way connected to their relationships and communication with their families until they ended up in camp. It was often only after lashing out at others and trying to hurt them that they realized how influential family really was, in both positive and negative ways. Youth shared that, in camp, family engagement should be used more often to help the youth and family members build skills and learn tools that will help them to work better together, find solutions, heal and recreate in a more positive way. This means working with families in a structured environment, like family counseling, to overcome barriers that had negatively impacted youth and their families. To the youth, the importance of this could not be overemphasized.

Additionally, youth shared that things should be done to help make family visits more positive for everybody. Many youth shared that letting visitors bring in things like home-cooked meals reminded them of home and helped make them feel more comfortable with their families, which made the visits go better and feel more homelike. During one of my camp programs, one of the

*Providing more visitation time allows the youth to bond with their parents, role models and family members, which is essential in paving the path to future success by giving the youth something to look forward to and someone positive to look up to.*

supervisors let my family members bring in outside food for me to enjoy during visiting. This was very helpful in improving the overall mood for me and my family, making the visit more easy going and giving me a chance to open up and feel more at home.

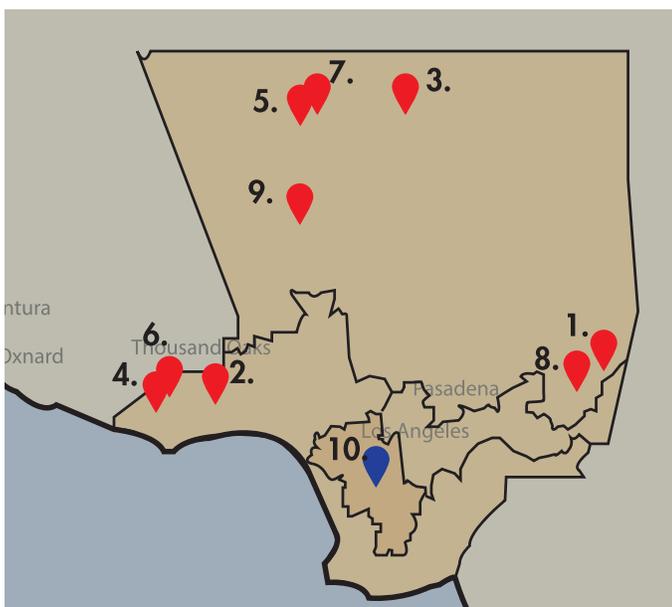
In addition to a more productive and positive family involvement, youth in the focus groups shared that they would have benefited from increased family involvement, perhaps expanding the definition of family to include mentors and community members. They recommended more or longer visitation hours, more family activities, more family therapy, more phone calls and receiving mail on time. Providing more visitation time allows the youth to bond with their parents, role models and family members, which is essential in paving the path to future success by giving the youth something to look forward to and someone positive to look up to. Youth who participated in the focus groups and received regular visits from their family members each weekend reported how helpful this was. Youth shared the same for phone calls and mail; if youth were provided more than one phone call per week, they shared there would be a lot less tension in camp. More phone calls and mail would allow youth who were unable to receive visits for any number of reasons to be provided with the opportunity to talk to loved ones. They shared that mail is very important in bridging the gaps between youth and their families and loved ones, giving their camp sentences meaning and giving them something to look forward to when they were released.

Allowing for more visits is one thing; helping families overcome barriers to visiting is another. Youth shared in the focus groups that providing transportation would help facilitate these family visits. Many youth shared that transportation was a big issue for their family members

and the family members of their peers, especially given how far away the camps are from where most families lived. The lack of transportation contributes to the many reasons why families are unable to visit their children or loved ones, making it impossible to build relationships and work on positive communication skills. As James Anderson shared, “My mom usually couldn’t come to see me because she didn’t work and didn’t have the gas money she needed to make the drive. Plus, it was hard for her to navigate getting there ... she always got lost trying to find those places since the camps are all so far, so hidden from society. She enjoyed visiting me every chance she could, but she always said she wished these camps were closer, easier to find or that there was transportation for her.” Raul Barreto’s experience was similar: “Personally I didn’t get very many visits. I grew up kind of broke, so for my mom, she had other kids to watch and she worked. Right now, there are kids whose parents can’t afford to get there. What kind of support are these kids getting? Does probation even know?” Raul agreed that video conferencing, which probation is starting to utilize, would have helped because it would have let him connect with his family.

Youth shared that, since family visits and communication are so important to a youth’s progress, they should not be taken away as a consequence, used as a threat, or used in any other type of punitive way. Youth expressed that when things happened, such as drugs being brought into the camps, family visits were sometimes taken away or negatively impacted. As I experienced once, after drugs somehow got into the camp through some other youth’s family visit, visits became very depressing. Probation was so focused on the bad and looking for something to go wrong that it impacted my visits with my mom ... Sometimes we had little conversation and now families were not allowed to bring food. Youth in the focus groups shared how getting to make phone calls and receive mail was not consistent but instead felt like it depended on whether a probation officer liked you. There were many times I witnessed staff punishing other minors with their mail by ripping it or throwing it away right in front of the youth. The probation officers involved might have done this because they didn’t like the youth, and they might not have liked some of his past behaviors. Being treated this way makes you feel very uncomfortable and in

## Remote Camp Locations



1. **Camps Afflerbaugh and Paige**  
6631 Stephens Ranch Road
2. **Camp Gonzales**  
1301 Las Virgenes Road
3. **Camps Jarvis, McNair, Onizuka, Resnick, Scobee and Smith**  
5300 West Avenue I
4. **Camp Kilpatrick**  
427 Encinal Canyon Road
5. **Camp Mendenhall**  
42230 Lake Hughes Road
6. **Camp Miller**  
433 Encinal Canyon Road
7. **Camp Munz**  
42220 Lake Hughes Road
8. **Camp Rockey**  
1900 Sycamore Canyon Road
9. **Camps Scott and Scudder**  
28700 Bouquet Canyon Road
10. **District 2**  
Home to 40% of camp youth.

some cases unwilling to change or confront other issues because you may feel trapped, unable to fend or even speak for yourself.

Lastly, youth shared that probation should consider giving out home passes to help improve family connections. They felt that if youth are close to going home, they should start getting home passes, allowing them to go home for a day or two at a time. I wish

I had had a home pass to expose me to home life, family issues and outside temptations before I was released. Home passes have been used with success in many probation camp programs, including Santa Clara County's William F. James Enhanced Ranch Program.<sup>27</sup> That means that, by the time the youth does finally go home, he or she will know what to expect, how to overcome challenges in a positive matter, and feel more connected to his or her family and friends.

## Recommendations for Increasing Family Involvement

- Provide regular visits (i.e., more than one a week) for families and include flexible times to accommodate families' schedules (e.g., North Carolina state facilities provide visitation seven days a week, which helps youth build closer relationships with their families.<sup>28</sup>)
- Provide access to transportation, given that most probation camps are in remote locations where public transportation does not exist. This could be through transportation stipends, rides to camps or alternative meeting places where youth are transported closer to home for supervised visits (e.g., in Virginia, the Transportation Program provides low-cost transportation for family members who need it<sup>29</sup>). Sending youth to facilities in remote areas that are not accessible to families or community services also needs to be re-evaluated.
- Create alternative mediums for families to communicate with youth, such as Skype and video chat. Camps should consider home passes or "furloughs," which are used in many model juvenile justice programs, including Santa Clara County, California, Missouri and ARC in Pennsylvania.<sup>30</sup>
- Eliminate any practices that limit or remove visitation, phone calls or mail from family as punishment.
- Create physical spaces and procedures in camp that make families feel welcomed, valued, less intimidated and open to staff interaction.
- Expand the definition of family and allow visits from non-relatives; mentors, siblings under 18 years old and other loved ones play an important role in youth's lives and should be allowed to visit.

## CAMP SMITH

Photo courtesy of Kevin Cheng of the Long Beach Press Telegram



## Improve Camp Discipline and Management Procedures

### More like Children, Less like Prisoners

by James Anderson

*Study after study shows that most youth in juvenile correctional facilities have experienced some level of trauma. While research shows that up to 35 percent of children in the United States have been exposed to at least one traumatic experience, those within the juvenile justice system have rates that soar between 75 and 93 percent.*

Participants in the focus groups strongly called for a juvenile justice system that would focus on ending the use of a model that was built around punishment and humiliation. Participants found that the overuse of solitary confinement coupled with other forms of forceful discipline left many asking for more constructive approaches in responding to behavior. Youth suggested alternatives to punishment and other methods of interaction and camp management, including a system built on positive forms of discipline that would allow youth a sufficient amount of space and freedom in order to heal and receive opportunities for positive recognition and self-change.

Focus group participants gave examples of how pepper spray, restraints, isolation and verbal abuse were some of the overtly punitive methods probation officers used in order to enforce authority. Youth also noted that the normal day-to-day interactions in camp were embedded with other indirect forms of control and punishment. Simple activities and regimens, such as marching, requiring youth to remain seated on the floor with their chins to their chests, running to and from the cafeteria and other degrading practices, were found to perpetuate a cycle of indignity these youth were too often exposed to. As Daniel Bisuano offered,

“excessively regimented approaches in the camps oftentimes damaged us rather than rehabilitated us.”

While probation staff may not be trained to engage in humiliation tactics, the cultural influences associated with “boot camp models” can still lead to humiliation tactics, creating shame and punishment for these already traumatized young people.

Moreover, research shows that effective approaches to juvenile justice are treatment-oriented, helping youth to develop prosocial strengths and attributes, heal from past victimizations, build relationships, develop skills and address mental health and substance abuse problems.<sup>31</sup> Raul Barreto recalled many boot camp-like, punitive ways in which young people were managed at camps: “I remember when I was at Challenger in 2001, sometimes probation staff would be so mad at us that they would have us stand at attention in the summer sun in Lancaster for 45 minutes. They would sit in the shade watching us and punish everyone. There was another specific time in the winter at Afflerbaugh. It was shower time, so we were naked with towels around our waists. They opened up all the windows and had us sit on our beds as it got colder and colder and they lectured us.”

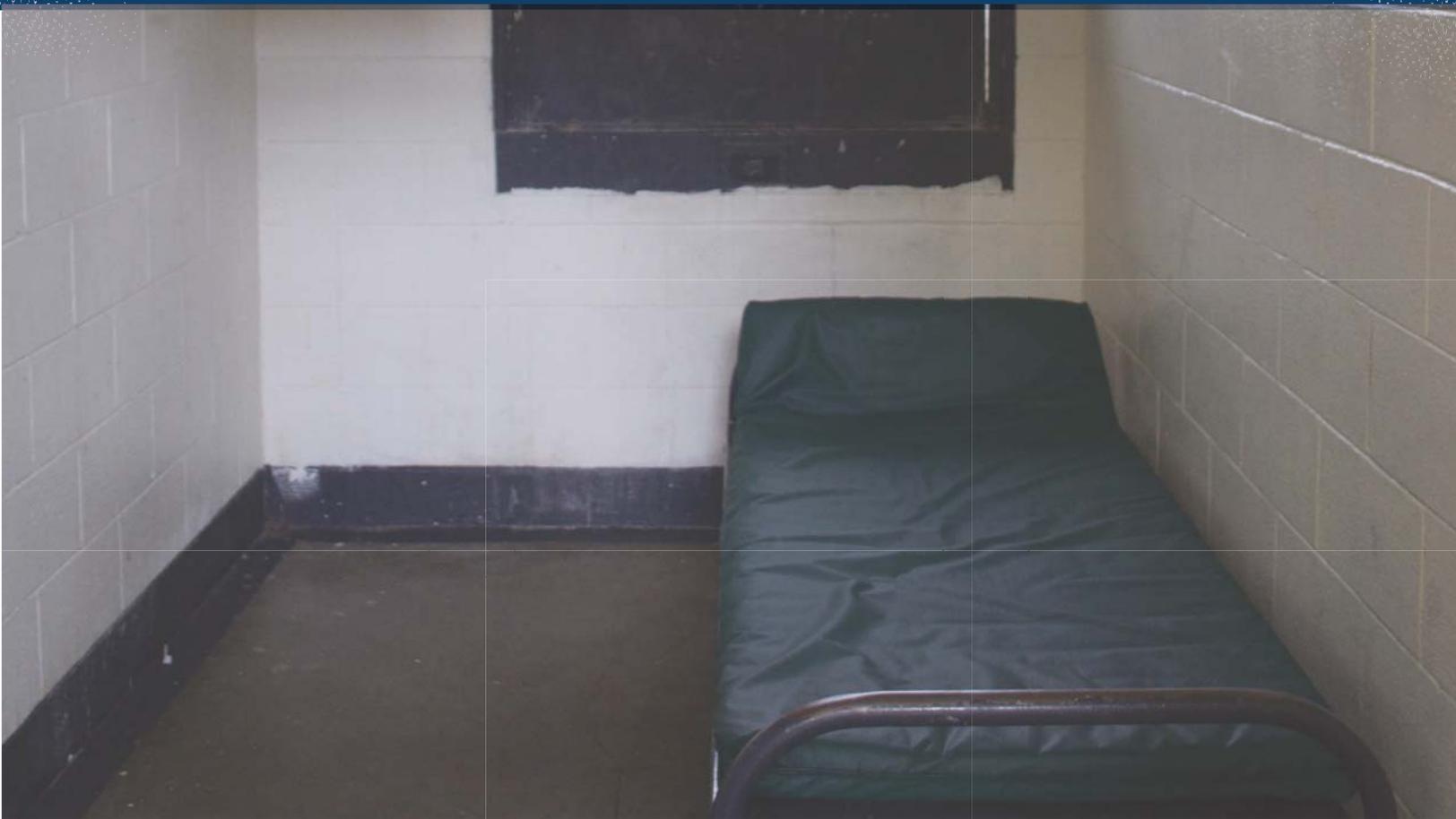
Solitary confinement was one of the most egregious practices used in the camps that focus group participants discussed. Solitary confinement has long been one of our society’s more primitive methods of addressing misbehavior. The problem with this is the overwhelming evidence showing the negative, long-lasting effects this approach has inflicted upon everyone, especially our younger generation.<sup>32</sup>

*I felt as if some officers were using these opportunities to enforce their authority throughout the facility. This incident, and many like it, often occurred after moments of minor noncompliance, such as talking back or laughing with other youth. I feel these actions, which are often behaviors of typical teenagers in a classroom environment, did not merit a harsh response.*

Study after study shows that most youth in juvenile correctional facilities have experienced some level of trauma. While research shows that up to 35 percent of children in the United States have been exposed to at least one traumatic experience, those within the juvenile justice system have rates that soar between 75 and 93 percent.<sup>33</sup> In addition, research shows that

the most potentially damaging way youth may be retraumatized is in the use of force or solitary confinement.<sup>34</sup> Through my personal experience, these two actions — solitary confinement and use of force — often went hand in hand. Many focus group participants shared similar stories where hostile encounters with staff over a variety of situations ultimately ended in the use of force and isolation in a camp’s SHU. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network reports: “Facilities with trauma-informed practices can substantially reduce their use of force and solitary confinement, and employ interventions that reduce re-traumatization. Achieving such a reduction begins with the recognition that existing practices, even when they are used with the best of intentions, are harmful to our youth.”<sup>35</sup>

Through my own experience in camp, I would often observe probation staff using the SHU as a manipulative tool. On more than one occasion, I found myself with my face slammed to the ground as a probation officer would push his pepper spray canister into my face and threaten to put me in isolation. I felt as if some officers were using these opportunities to enforce their authority throughout the facility. This incident, and many like it, often occurred after moments of minor noncompliance, such as talking back or laughing with other youth. I feel these actions, which



are often behaviors of typical teenagers in a classroom environment, did not merit a harsh response. Rather than take time to even understand what occurred, staff often quickly resorted to using force, which could then make the situation escalate further. These forceful approaches instill fear, creating damaging barriers between the youth and probation staff. Some of the most successful ways to maintain the safety of youth and the safety of the staff who work inside juvenile facilities is through alternative approaches that foster trust and connection. Probation is currently making efforts to minimize use of the SHU, which is good, but it needs to go farther; it should be eliminated. Alternative approaches to solitary confinement have been successfully used in both adult and juvenile facilities in states like Massachusetts, Colorado and Texas.<sup>36</sup>

To move beyond the harmful effects of negative consequences in the camps, focus group participants noted the need for positive forms of recognition. When removed from society, these young men and women

not only lose their freedom but also miss out on the opportunity to celebrate important milestones in their lives. Growing up behind bars can completely ravage youth of the opportunities and celebrations so many teenagers experience in the free world. This in turn can often make these young people start viewing themselves as different from society. It is clear that isolating youth from experiencing normal landmarks in human life — birthdays, graduations, family get-togethers and more — can begin to make them feel “different” from their peers, less like a teenager and more like a prisoner. By not celebrating life events, we as youth start to lose track of who we are and begin to lose sight of the positive things in life. This psychological impact can be damaging and make it harder for us to relate to others and succeed once we are released. These milestones play such an important role in providing the positive reinforcement youth need in order to develop properly. I experienced this firsthand in juvenile hall when staff acknowledged and celebrated my high school

graduation. Having them honor this important moment in my life made me feel proud and happy, and it made me feel human. Implementing these kinds of activities not only provides youth with a source of positive reinforcement, but also creates an atmosphere conducive to fostering positive relationships between staff and youth, as well as positive memories for youth to look back on.

Participants in the focus groups also spoke of the need for camp procedures that promoted personal time. Many individuals acknowledged the importance of having both alone time and time outside as major coping mechanisms to deal with camp life. With a population dealing with a large amount of anxiety and personal stress — from their own lives, from trying to stay out of trouble while still maintaining respect, from trying to successfully get through their camp programs, and from just surviving each day — creating a space for them to

gather their thoughts and emotions and just feel human is critical. Participants felt strongly about the constant strain of being supervised 24/7 while being around dozens of other youth. During my incarceration at camp, I was so overwhelmed with other people's issues and emotions that it made it hard for me to focus on myself and what I needed to personally work on. I remember feeling as though I couldn't escape from the madness, and this oftentimes triggered irritable and aggressive behavior. As a young person growing up in such a difficult environment, it is no surprise that learning how to instantly deal with a hundred other young boys could quickly turn into a disaster. This was only made worse by the constant, aggressive supervision style of some probation staff. With such an unrelenting environment, more free time for oneself is an extremely important issue to be focused on.

## Recommendations for Improving Camp Procedures and Ending Punitive Practices

- End regimented, boot camp-like camp procedures (e.g., marching with hands behind the back, sitting on bunks to be counted, and running to and from buildings) that demean youth and convey control and coercion.
- End punitive practices, including solitary confinement, use of force and pepper spray, and replace them with positive behavior support systems. Nationally recognized models demonstrate successful methodologies for crisis and safety management that are not deficit-based, such as Positive Youth Development, Trauma-Informed Care, New York State's Sanctuary Model<sup>37</sup> and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports.
- Adopt practices that let youth feel normal and valued, including recognizing normal adolescent developmental milestones — celebrating birthdays, acknowledging losses such as deaths, and recognizing accomplishments, such as graduations.
- Allow for personal space and freedom by developing camp routines and structures that allow for youth to experience a sense of calmness, privacy and reflection, which is critical to their development and the progress they make with their treatment.

# The Future of Juvenile Justice Facilities: CDF-CA's Broader County and State Policy and Practice Recommendations

The common thread that runs through all the recommendations made by the youth in this brief and within the focus group study is the desire to make probation camp a supportive and rehabilitative, rather than punitive, place for young people. By increasing programming, improving relationships, promoting dignity, incorporating families and changing disciplinary procedures, youth desire sweeping, holistic change rather than piecemeal reform. Los Angeles County – including the Probation Department, LACOE and other county departments – is already moving in the right direction. Efforts in response to the DOJ's monitoring and lawsuits have led to reductions in the number of young people incarcerated, increased programming, improved education models, and a greater focus on case management and rehabilitation. The county should continue to listen to what young people are saying and adopt and accelerate changes to move camps away from being penitentiary-like to being therapeutic environments.

The following overarching recommendations for county and state policy change support, connect, and build on recommendations from the youth and will help move California's juvenile justice system beyond the harmful penitentiary model.

## At the Los Angeles County Level

While the county has implemented a number of promising reforms, youth continue to be treated in troubling ways in camp and face many obstacles toward rehabilitation. Indeed, a majority of youth from the focus groups had experienced camp recently – 61% were in probation camps from 2012 through

2014 – even after many of these changes were already underway. Their troubling stories are not just a reflection of an old model but rather speak to trends that continue. They should be taken seriously. Though the county has spent millions of dollars since 2001 to bring about change in how juvenile justice-involved youth are treated, too many recommendations remain unimplemented, poorly implemented or too piecemeal to truly impact the lives of these young people. The county should reexamine the progress made in camps and take visionary leadership rather than compliance-driven reform to ensure change is meaningful and aligned with what youth need and have asked for. The following recommendations help achieve this:

**1. Ensure that physical spaces where youth are held are transformed to support healing and relationship building, rather than reinforce control and coercion.** Much of the input from the focus groups speaks directly or indirectly to inherent problems with Los Angeles County's physical camp design. Large facilities with an open dorm approach have been shown to be ineffective in meeting youths' needs and inconsistent with what we know about adolescent development;<sup>38</sup> in fact, they are in complete contradiction to best practices across the country, such as those inspired by the Missouri Model.<sup>39</sup> Even with camp population down and fewer youth in the dorms, these layouts are problematic; they are not conducive to relationship building, programming or making youth feel safe and human. Instead, best practices show smaller pod sizes with low staff-to-youth ratios, homelike environments and adequate privacy are proven to build better relation-

ships and make youth feel safer while maintaining staff safety.<sup>40</sup> Even the most well-intentioned staff will have a hard time building relationships with youth when they are forced to supervise from afar.

Transforming the camp environment does not require a complete rebuild. Dramatic changes can be made with limited resources. In Santa Clara County, for example, facility design was reconfigured on a limited budget to support a small group treatment model; sheets were hung up to separate the large dorm room into small group living spaces until walls could be erected. Homelike furniture, such as couches and bunk beds, replaced sterile cots to communicate a warmer feel. The physical layout of juvenile facilities in Los Angeles County and other counties can be, and should be, transformed now, as the status quo is unacceptable.

## **2. Adopt a youth-centered mission and philosophy for all probation camps that promotes positive approaches to safety.**

Studies show that trying to achieve safety largely through supervision, restraints, isolation rooms and force actually reduces safety for all who work and reside in a facility housing youth.<sup>41</sup> The recommendations written in this policy brief and shared by focus group study participants are clear — these punitive practices must be eliminated. In order to move toward a rehabilitative model, the mission and philosophy around how to work with youth must be changed; merely telling staff not to employ force or solitary confinement is not sufficient. All staff should have comprehensive training and support on trauma-informed approaches to working with youth. Additionally, staff in settings that serve youth should model safe, healthy and appropriate relationships with each other and with all youth. Moreover, it is difficult to remove control and supervision components in a vacuum; facility changes (addressed in the previous recommendation) and staffing changes are necessary to support positive approaches to safety.

## **3. Downsize the camp system and reallocate resources to fit a declining camp population.**

Camp population in Los Angeles County and the rest of California continues to decline – fewer than 800 youth are currently incarcerated in LA camps as of November 2014<sup>42</sup> – and reliance on community-based alternatives is gaining support as probation departments learn from national research that youth are better served in their communities. This is an important step forward. The Los Angeles County Probation Department should allocate resources and staffing to better reflect and support this declining camp population. While most camps in Los Angeles are less than half full, thirteen camps remain open, and the vast majority of camps still have a bed capacity of over 100 each. High staffing levels remain at most camps, and not always the right staff to work with youth. Additionally, probation struggles to find resources toward creating more community-based alternatives (e.g. both diversion programs and day reporting centers have been slow to roll out). As the county begins to implement the LA Model at the former Camp Kilpatrick site and expand it to other camps, the county should reevaluate its large camp system and take affirmative steps to dramatically reinvest county resources to better serve young people. Downsizing the camp system, whether by removing beds (i.e. lowering facility capacity), closing dilapidated camps or both, should be seriously explored.

## **At the State Level**

As part of the historic Senate Bill 81 (2007), also known as “juvenile justice realignment,” California has largely shifted responsibility for juvenile justice into the hands of 58 counties. There is no question that realignment has contributed to reducing incarceration at both the state and county levels. This dramatic decline is why California is often touted as a success story in juvenile justice reform. However, the state must go further to fulfill the promise of juvenile justice realignment: rehabilitate young people by serving them in their home counties. Simply moving

young people from one facility to another facility does not ensure rehabilitation – this policy brief underscores this. When county facilities largely mimic the same institutional, penitentiary-like state-run facilities that violated youth rights, youth are not being protected or supported. The state should step up and better protect youth at the state level in the following ways:

### **1. Improve state standards for juvenile justice facilities and ensure they are enforced.**

The Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC)<sup>43</sup> is the state agency tasked with, among other things, adopting and enforcing regulations for juvenile facilities. Unfortunately, state regulations for these facilities under Title 15 and Title 24<sup>44</sup> set a low bar. Called “minimum standards,” these regulations influence how counties build, run and maintain facilities. From regulations on staffing ratios to hygiene requirements to use of force or solitary confinement, these minimum standards are not in line with research. They must be strengthened. The BSCC along with the state legislature must create stronger, more robust standards consistent with adolescent development and nationally-recognized best practices for rehabilitation. Additionally, the BSCC must also increase its enforcement of these standards; the current policies around facility inspections are inadequate in providing consistent and meaningful oversight into how counties administer juvenile justice. The youth focus groups demonstrated that some counties struggle to even meet some of the most basic standards around safety, nutrition, and hygiene. The state must take affirmative steps to protect the rights of young people.

### **2. Increase leadership and technical support to counties in adopting best practices, including transitioning away from correctional models.**

The BSCC is more than an enforcement agency; it should not only hold counties accountable for improvements, but also help counties by providing technical assistance to move counties toward best practices that are rehabilitative. Strategies for leader-

ship and technical assistance could include producing webinars, workshops and research publications; providing grants to counties to visit innovative sites, meet experts and adopt best practices; training probation departments’ and facilities’ staff in how to better serve youth inside these facilities; and setting up stronger review processes to monitor the implementation of new approaches.

### **3. Pass new legislation to limit harmful practices such as isolation and restraint practices.**

Other states are ahead of California in protecting youth from abusive practices; Alaska, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania and the District of Columbia have banned punitive solitary confinement in juvenile facilities.<sup>45</sup> California should pass legislation that limits the use and abuse of solitary confinement, shackling, pepper spray and other uses of force on youth in juvenile justice facilities. The state should require consistent monitoring and review of counties and track data on the use of these harmful practices, as well as provide public reports about their use.

# Supplemental Summary Brief

## Focus Group Summary Brief

by Leap & Associates, LLC

In March and April 2014, a research team from the UCLA Health and Social Justice Partnership conducted five focus groups. The goal was to gather ideas and input from young people who had recently spent time in LA County probation camps. The question we asked was: **How can LA County probation camps provide a more positive experience?**

Focus groups were held in collaboration with Homeboy Industries, the Anti-Recidivism Coalition (ARC), the Youth Justice Coalition (YJC) and CEE – Hope (formerly New Roads for New Visions).

In total, 46 young people participated. Three of the groups were all male, one group was all female, and one had both males and females; in total, 82% of youth were male and 18% were female. Three quarters of the participants (71%) were 18 to 20 years old. Two thirds of youth who participated identified themselves as Latino (68%), one quarter African American (25%), and the remaining 7% were other racial/ethnic groups.

### Probation history of focus group participants

- **HOW RECENTLY IN CAMP:** The largest percentage of participants were most recently released from camp in 2013 (41% of youth), one quarter (25%) were released in 2012, 7% were released in 2014, and the remaining (27%) had been released prior to 2012. Two thirds of participants (61%) had been in a Los Angeles probation camp within the last two years.

- **HOW MANY CAMP EXPERIENCES:**

Forty-four percent of youth who participated had been in camp one time; 21% of youth had been in camp two times; 16% of youth had been in camp three separate times; and 18% had been in camp four or more times.

- **HOW LONG IN CAMP:**

The largest group of participants (27%) had spent a total of more than six months, but less than nine months in camp. The next largest group (20%) had been in camp for a total of one to two years. Nineteen percent of participants had spent a total of less than six months in camp. Eighteen percent of youth had been in camp for three years or more in total. Nine percent had been in camp for a total of more than nine months, but less than twelve and the smallest group had been in camp for more than two years, but less than three.

## THEME ONE

**Availability of more programs including motherhood, fatherhood, gang-intervention, education, life skills, job preparation, and reentry programs.**

Participants talked about how programs could be **implemented:**

- Taking an individualized approach to tailor programs to youth's strengths, skills, and interests;
- Asking youth what programs they want to participate in;

- Providing incentives for participation in programs;
- Scheduling important programs during the day rather than during recreation or free time.

Participants **suggested programs** to have available in camp:

- A wide variety of programs were mentioned by youth including fatherhood and motherhood programs, child development programs to better prepare youth to be parents, sports and recreation programs, life skills programs emphasizing how to be self-sufficient, job training and preparation, vocational skills, and having alumni return to camps to share their experiences;
- Stronger education programs including better availability of textbooks, better libraries, and more advanced curriculum;
- Leisure time and more self-expression programs were sought including writing programs, arts, music, gardening, and also having more outings;
- Programs addressing risk/needs areas including substance abuse and narcotics anonymous, criminal-thinking, anger management, along with having counselors available to address family issues.

Participants emphasized **transition back to the community:**

- Youth mentioned things such as being provided with a resource list for job opportunities, developing a clear transition plan, working out a smooth transition to school, and figuring out how they could get work experience while in camp so they could more easily get a job after reentry.

**Gang-intervention programs:**

- Working with gang-involved youth individually, and teaching life lessons, such as emphasizing the statistics of being a gang member, what gangs do to you, and how they don't actually care about you;

- Helping gang-involved youth get the power and resources to overcome bad decisions.

## THEME TWO

### More supportive probation officers and mentoring from camp staff

Participants emphasized having **more positive interactions** with probation officers in camp:

- Youth talked about probation officers acting as positive role models and mentors, being more invested in the youth;
- Youth stated that probation officers should be more attentive, constructive, willing to sit down and talk with youth, be interested and reach out to youth, treating youth like human beings and with respect, and have more open communication.

Participants discussed other items related to probation officers and staff:

- Probation officers should use youth assessments as a tool to get to know youth;
- The Probation Department should be more selective when hiring and training probation officers, to ensure probation officers are trained in youth development;
- Probation officers should have a social work/social service background;
- Probation officers should not hold grudges against youth.

**Mentoring and mentorship:**

- Alumni youth, probation officers, staff at camp and individuals from community based organizations could all serve as mentors or in a mentoring relationship with youth in camps;
- Youth want relatable mentors who look like them, are closer to their age and who have had experiences similar to theirs.

### Transition and reentry:

- Probation officers should do more follow-up with youth during reentry, and have extended probation visits.

## THEME THREE

### Hygiene and cleanliness of camp, better/more food in camp

#### The **cleanliness of camp facilities:**

- Having cleaner bathrooms and cleaner facilities overall was emphasized, as well as specific things such as having clean towels, pillows, blankets and sheets.

**General facility improvements** such as having longer beds and better quality beds.

#### **Access to hygiene** was a significant concern:

- Including things such as allowing personal hygiene products (for example: youth having their own soap and towels), being able to shower more often and for longer periods of time, having more bathrooms, access to better clothes and better fitting clothes, and having a clean change of clothes;
- Quicker and more efficient access to medical and dental care.

#### **Better quality food and more food:**

- Not using expired food;
- Having larger portions;
- Access to more snacks;
- Overall, having healthier foods available.

#### **Privacy issues** were a concern for participants:

- This included a continuum of this from having single stall showers to more private restroom areas in general;

- Youth emphasized keeping personal information private and being respectful of confidentiality.

## THEME FOUR

### Visitation and Family Visits

Participants talked about **what to allow for visitation and family visits:**

- Including things such as more access to family visits and visitation, allowing more people (for example legal guardians, siblings, extended family and the youth's children);
- Youth mentioned wanting visitors to be able to bring home-cooked meals and personal hygiene products;
- Being able to have visits outside rather than inside;
- Youth asked for longer and more frequent visits.

Participants identified that **family and family interactions are crucial to their success** in camp:

- Losing visitation is not an appropriate punishment or consequence.

Participants addressed **other considerations** for family visits:

- Youth suggested providing transportation for family members to be able to visit;
- Providing more privacy during visits;
- Youth wanted to have their parents participate in classes or family counseling during visits;
- Youth addressed wanting to receive support from staff to facilitate visits going well.

Participants talked about several **items related to phone calls and mail**, emphasizing greater access to both, with oversight by staff, so that contact with outside friends and family would always be positive.

## THEME FIVE

### Camp procedures including discipline, more freedom, youth assessment and classification, and graduation

Participants addressed punishment and discipline, and **how to make it a more constructive experience:**

- Youth discussed “the box” – or 24 hour solitary confinement – most felt it was overused and its use was not helpful, although a small number believed its use to be appropriate in certain, limited circumstances;
- A clear emphasis on having **alternative punishments** emerged, such as doing clean-up, early PT, or exercising;
- Punishment should have a purpose.

Youth **assessment and classification:**

- Use such assessments as a way to identify youth with psychological problems;
- The possibility of camps having discretion regarding which youth could be placed at certain camps;
- Addressing gang affiliation was discussed as an important part of the assessment and classification process. Such identification could help prevent youth from becoming more gang-involved while at camp.

**Acknowledging important life events** in the youths’ lives, such as birthdays and deaths in the family, or graduation from the program.

**Having more free time**, not being supervised every minute of every day, and being able to go outside in the fresh air were all specifically mentioned.

The focus groups offered youth who had experienced LA County Probation camps an opportunity to **reflect**

**on their experience and share their thoughts** about improvements or changes that would make camp a more positive experience. All of the participants took this opportunity seriously, taking time to really consider what would have helped them succeed while in camp and thereafter.

Participants expressed their appreciation for being included in the focus groups and allowing **their voice to be heard**. Their suggestions were within the scope of realistic changes. And, although several sessions were held, representing a variety of organizations and experiences, the **themes of programming, support/mentorship, hygiene/food, visitation, and camp procedures** were consistent throughout.

# About the Authors

## CDF-CA Youth Policy Program Fellows

**James Anderson** is a program administrator for The Anti-Recidivism Coalition. James grew up in Los Angeles County and was quickly exposed to growing up in a dysfunctional family. At a young age, he began to get deeply involved in gangs and drugs and soon lost hope in life. During his last incarceration, his gang knew him for his extreme violence and loyalty. He was facing more than 30 years in prison when, a few weeks before his sentencing, one person brought hope and love into his life and inspired him to change. James went through an amazing transformation and made a commitment to dedicate his life to helping others in need. He is currently attending community college and plans to soon transfer to UCLA to major in political science. He is deeply involved in policy work and is working to stop crime and recidivism by helping give fallen youth newfound hope. In July of 2014, James was appointed to the State Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention by California Governor Jerry Brown. He has spoken extensively throughout the nation to raise awareness, inspire hope and provide individuals with a different perspective on why juveniles become involved in delinquent behaviors. One of his key messages is that it is never too late for someone to change.

**Raul Barreto** is a member of the Anti-Recidivism Coalition, a part-time student and a full-time operations administrator for one of the leading outdoor advertisement companies in Los Angeles. His passion is to raise awareness on issues concerning troubled youth and get involved to make a progressive difference however, whenever and wherever possible. Like many who fall through the cracks of society, he had a rough past that

was full of trials, neglect and lack of direction. He went through foster homes, homelessness as a kid, juvenile facilities, county jails, state prisons, drug addiction, rehabilitation facilities and homelessness as an adult. It was only through a connection he made with a sincere individual, who consistently reached out to him, that he was ever able to reach back and grasp the concept of a possibility for a productive life. His life struggles and what it took to overcome them gave him the feeling of a responsibility to be there for others in the way others have been there for him. Throughout his progress, he's learned the importance of passing on what was so freely given to him: a message of hope for a productive life of serenity by keeping an open mind and having the willingness to try a new way to live.

**Daniel Bisuano** was born in Arcadia but grew up all over southern California. Family is his backbone. Each of his family members have all contributed to forming him into the person he is today, with two little sisters and a mother, as well as a father who was not in his life often. He started getting into trouble around the age of 12 and was heavily involved in drugs and other criminal activities. Around that time, it seemed that going into camps and juvenile hall was normal, a constant revolving door; no matter how hard he tried, he kept going back. Since leaving the juvenile justice system in early 2014, he was given a chance to change his life and make it better. Since then, he has accomplished a great deal – graduating from high school, starting college and involving himself with many nonprofit organizations and positive people. He has found out what he truly wants and is pursuing his life goal to change the system for the better and create something that will give young men and women like himself support and a chance at achieving their goals.

**Karla Fuentes-Quiroz** is a freshman at West Los Angeles College studying administration of justice and an organizer with the Youth Justice Coalition. Ever since Karla was 14, she has been working and going to school, trying to support herself and her family. Karla entered the juvenile justice system when she was 13 and the dependency system when she was 16. Karla spent time in both Scott and Scudder camps. Karla aspires to become a probation officer who works with young people in the juvenile justice system, to give others opportunities that she was not given. Karla's main goal is to stop the cycle of locking young people up and institutionalizing them. What got her through the toughest times was always reminding herself that "it could always be worse."

**Ralphica Garnett** resides in Los Angeles and spent time in both the Scott and Scudder camps. After being sentenced to one year in camp at age 16, she knew she had to change. She felt as if no one really cared, and so she began to focus on herself and her goals. Working closely with the camp teachers, Ralphica wanted to pursue passing the GED test. After receiving her GED diploma, Ralphica was ecstatic about the accomplishment and realized she had a brighter future besides the circumstances she was in. After exiting camp, Ralphica searched for a school to start her bright path and soon enrolled in Los Angeles Trade Technical College. Majoring in cosmetology and doing what she loves to do, she is now a full-time student. Awaiting her graduation, Ralphica didn't let her past determine her future. A mother of two, Ralphica is setting a foundation for her family and staying a survivor; she's making a new name for herself. She strongly believes in giving back and that anything is possible. Taking the time to say "never give up," Ralphica is following her dreams no matter what. She now is working as an organizer for Youth Justice Coalition.

## **CDF-CA Juvenile Justice Policy Team**

**Angela M. Chung, J.D.** is a juvenile justice policy associate with CDF-CA in Los Angeles. Angela is a graduate of the David J. Epstein Program in Public Interest Law & Policy at UCLA School of Law. Before practicing public interest law in both the criminal justice and juvenile justice systems, Angela was a community organizer in Oakland and Los Angeles, working to establish alternatives to criminal justice solutions to poverty and addressing racial and gender inequalities.

**Michelle Newell, M.P.P.** is a senior policy associate with CDF-CA in Los Angeles. Since 2010, Michelle has worked on behalf of CDF-CA to both keep young people out of the system and to ensure that youth who are incarcerated receive the support and services they need to heal and successfully reintegrate in their communities. Michelle has a Master of Public Policy degree from the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and a Bachelor of Arts degree from UC Berkeley. Prior to working at CDF-CA, Michelle worked on promoting educational equity in California.

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## Children's Defense Fund

### C A L I F O R N I A

Children's Defense Fund-California is the California office of the Children's Defense Fund.

The Children's Defense Fund Leave No Child Behind® mission is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.

CDF provides a strong, effective and independent voice for all the children of America who cannot vote, lobby or speak for themselves. We pay particular attention to the needs of poor children, children of color and those with disabilities. CDF educates the nation about the needs of children and encourages preventive investments before they get sick, drop out of school, get into trouble or suffer family breakdown.

CDF began in 1973 and is a private, nonprofit organization supported by individual donations, and foundation, corporate and government grants.

[www.cdfca.org](http://www.cdfca.org)

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