

**COUNCIL OF JUVENILE CORRECTIONAL ADMINISTRATORS**  
**TOOLKIT: Facility Closure and**  
**Strategic Downsizing of Juvenile Justice Systems**  
**July 2018**





This Toolkit was prepared by the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA) with additional support from The Pew Charitable Trusts. Many agencies across the country are closing facilities. CJCA members have been informally helping each other through this process and wanted to collect their experiences, resources and advice in one document. In addition to juvenile justice administrators and agency staff, the information here may be useful to legislators, court officers and administrators, leaders of related agencies (e.g., education, health), advocates, and others who may be engaged in the closure process and/or supporting youth and families. CJCA is grateful to the many individuals who assisted in developing this Toolkit and willingly shared their talents. We extend our gratitude to the participants of the Jan. 4, 2018 convening to Discuss Facility Closure and Strategic Downsizing of Juvenile Justice Systems meeting held in Orlando.

### Participants:

Lisa Bjergaard, Director, North Dakota Division of Juvenile Services

Kristi Bunkers, South Dakota Director of Juvenile Services

Susan Burke, Director, Utah Division of Juvenile Justice Services

Carey Cockerell, Commissioner, Kentucky Department of Juvenile Justice

Christy Daly, Secretary, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice

Mike Dempsey, Executive Director, CJCA

Joyce Holmon, Deputy Director, Residential Services, Virginia Dept. of Juvenile Justice

Clint McClellan, Director of Facility Services, Oregon Youth Authority

Teresa Stroud, Senior Director of State Programs & Facilities, Texas Juvenile Justice Department

Terri Williams, CJCA Associate Member, Community Solutions, Inc.

In addition to the CJCA members above, Dana Shoenberg, Senior Manager, and Ruth Rosenthal, Associate Manager, of The Pew Charitable Trusts' public safety performance project, attended the meeting. Lisa Pilnik, Consultant and lead writer for this toolkit, also attended the meeting.

CJCA would also like to thank the following additional individuals who provided information for or feedback on this document: Peter J. Forbes, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Youth Services; Andrew Block, Director, Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice; James Maccarone, Director, Mississippi Division of Youth Services; Kim Godfrey, Executive Director, PbS; Chris Blessinger, Executive Director, Indiana Division of Youth Services; Simon Gonsoulin, CJCA Associate member (Chair); and Ines Nieves, Deputy Commissioner, New York Office of Children and Family Services, DJJOY.

---

## A CJCA Toolkit: Facility Closure and Strategic Downsizing of Juvenile Justice Systems

### CJCA Board of Directors

#### Officers:

Lisa Bjergaard (ND), President  
Kevin Brown (NJ), Treasurer

Cindy McKenzie (MT), Vice President  
Susan Burke (UT), Secretary

#### Directors:

Ines Nieves (NY), Northeast Region Representative  
Phyllis Becker (MO), Midwest Region Representative  
James Maccarone (MS), South Region Representative  
Anders Jacobson (CO), West Region Representative  
Christy Daly, chair, Research and Data and Analysis Committee  
Peter J. Forbes (MA), chair, Positive Youth Outcomes Committee  
Steve Lafreniere (AL), chair, Behavioral Health Committee  
Chris Blessinger (IN), chair, PREA Committee  
Simon Gonsoulin, Associate Members Representative  
Kim Godfrey, Executive Director, PbS Learning Institute  
Michael P. Dempsey, Executive Director  
Sharon Harrigfeld (ID), Immediate Past President

Copyright © 2018 Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators (CJCA)

All rights reserved.

Except as permitted under the United States Copyright Act of 1976, no part of this publication may be reproduced or distributed in any form or by any means or stored in any database of retrieval system, without prior permission of CJCA.

Suggested citation:

Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators. (2018). CJCA Toolkit: Facility Closure and Strategic Downsizing of Juvenile Justice Systems  
Retrieved from <http://www.cjca.net>.

Copies of this Toolkit and its appendices can be downloaded at [www.cjca.net](http://www.cjca.net)

Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators  
639 Granite Street, Suite 112  
Braintree, MA 02184  
Tel: (781) 843-2663 Fax: (781) 843-1688

---

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION ..... 6

ARRIVING AT FACILITY CLOSURE AND EARLY PLANNING .....10

COMMUNICATING ABOUT CLOSURE..... 15

MEETING YOUTH AND FAMILY NEEDS ..... 19

MEETING STAFF NEEDS ..... 30

MANAGING LOGISTICS..... 36

REALLOCATING RESOURCES..... 38

CONCLUSION ..... 43

## INTRODUCTION

The number of residential facilities housing youth in the juvenile justice system declined by one third in the United States between 2006 and 2016, falling from 2649 to 1772.<sup>1</sup> This shift comes at a time of even more dramatic decline in both violent crime arrests and the rate of out-of-home placements: from 2006 to 2015, both fell by nearly half.<sup>2</sup> As populations continue to fall and decision makers recognize the rising costs for each youth held in secure facilities, the question, therefore, is not *whether* states are going to close facilities, but *how* best to manage those closures when they occur, as well as how to redirect facility operational funds to other parts of the system, such as community-based diversion and/or aftercare services.

Juvenile justice agencies arrive at facility closure for a variety of reasons. In some cases, systemic reforms may have fueled a decrease in the number of youth who are removed from their homes and committed to state custody through the juvenile justice system. For example, some states have passed laws limiting the types of offenses that can lead to out-of-home placements, regulating length of stay, or expanding discretion for release.<sup>3</sup> In others, closure is the vehicle through which leaders find the resources needed in order to enable reforms to their systems. In other jurisdictions, leaders choose to close existing facilities because they do not meet the agency's current needs or strategic plans for serving youth, families and communities. In still others, budget pressures push agencies to shutter facilities that may have been operating at less than full capacity. This guide is intended to help juvenile justice agencies responsibly and successfully close a facility and consider closure as a component of efforts to safely reduce the use of juvenile justice placement facilities, in a way that:

Closing a facility is a uniquely challenging undertaking. But it can also be an unprecedented opportunity to realign a juvenile justice agency's resources, examine current and anticipated bed capacity needs, and reconsider facility practices to better meet the agency's mission and ultimately improve long-term outcomes for youth and their families.

- *Meets the needs* of youth, families, public safety, the agency and agency staff, and other stakeholders as much as possible during the closure process and beyond, while *minimizing emotional distress* and disruption;
- Takes advantage of changes in placements, staffing, and funding as an *opportunity to improve care and practice* (for example, introduction of new evidence-based practices or increased training opportunities to build staff capacity), improve

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on one-day counts. Most recent data available are from 2016.

<sup>2</sup> See Figure 2 (page 8).

<sup>3</sup> The Pew Charitable Trusts Public Safety Performance Project. "Re-Examining Juvenile Incarceration." (April 20, 2015) Available at <http://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2015/04/reexamining-juvenile-incarceration>.

conditions of confinement, as well as improve atmosphere and culture, including reducing use of isolation and restraint practices;

- *Preserves resources* needed to meet youth needs and achieve the agency's mission;
- Meets the *goals that led to closure* (for example, research-informed service delivery, data-driven realignment of resources, efficient and effective use of funds to promote youth rehabilitation);
- Occurs in a *timely manner*, and with an emphasis on *youth and staff safety*; and
- Serves to improve *long-term outcomes* for youth entrusted to the care of juvenile justice systems.

*"The Virginia DJJ closure of one of the last two large correctional facilities was done as part of our reform strategy which is 'Reduce, Reform and Replace.' Within our reform strategy we endeavored to reduce the number of youth in a secure correctional environment and replace the large correctional center with two smaller, state of the art facilities within one hour of the majority of our youths' families. Virginia had closed several facilities previously due to budget cuts. But during the last closure it was very important that we as leaders could intelligibly explain how this closure was directly related to our reform. It was important that people understood the 'Why'."*

*Joyce Holmon, Deputy Director of Residential Services, Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice*

*"In recent years, the national conversation around juvenile justice has acknowledged and generally accepted a fundamental premise - that juvenile offenders are different from adult criminals. This awareness creates an opportunity for thinking about a variety of reforms, including a close examination of practices around juvenile incarceration. Facility closure is one of the most visible aspects of juvenile justice reform. Facility downsizing and closure requires more planning, involvement of stakeholders, and careful attention than any other reforms because it creates such a high profile."*

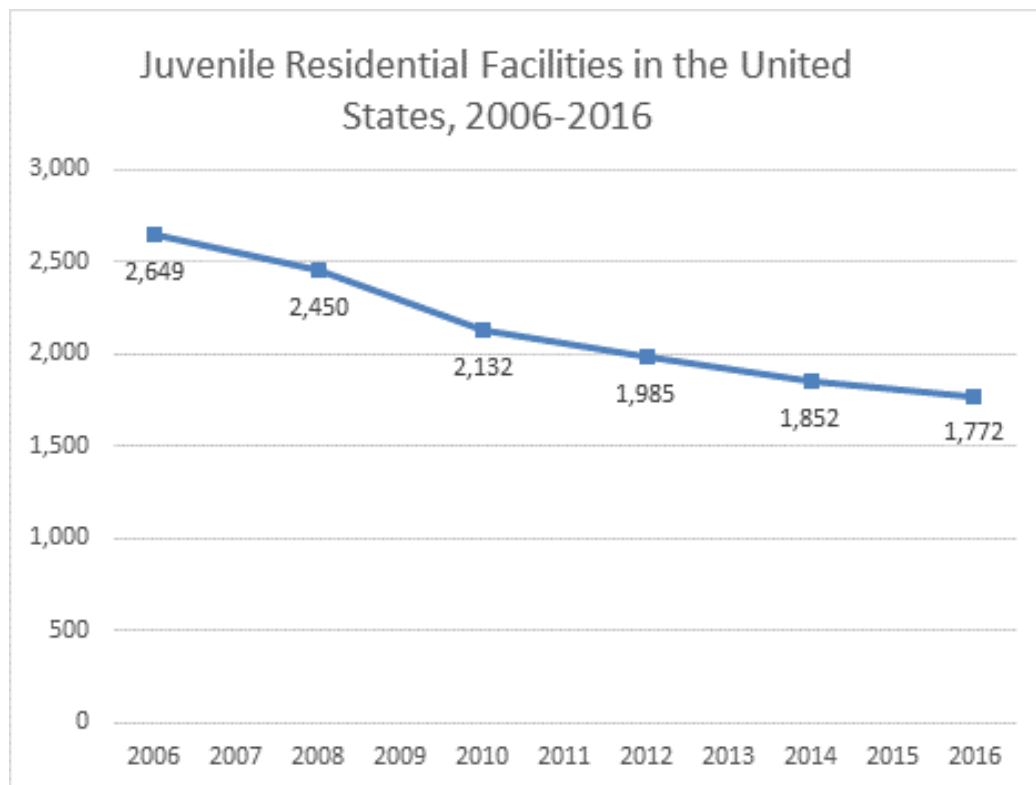
*Lisa Bjergaard, Director,  
North Dakota Division of Juvenile Services*

*"In South Dakota the decision on facility closure was made in the context of reform as opposed to a negative event. It was a positive outcome of our reform efforts. The number of youth committed to our care had been steadily declining, so the need for a large state-run correctional facility no longer existed in South Dakota. The closure of our facility allowed youth in state custody to receive treatment they need in smaller facilities closer to home or in many cases to stay in their homes and receive services as a result of money being reinvested into community based services."*

*Kristi Bunkers, Director of Juvenile Services  
South Dakota Department of Corrections*

## Juvenile Out-of-Home Placement: Recent Trends

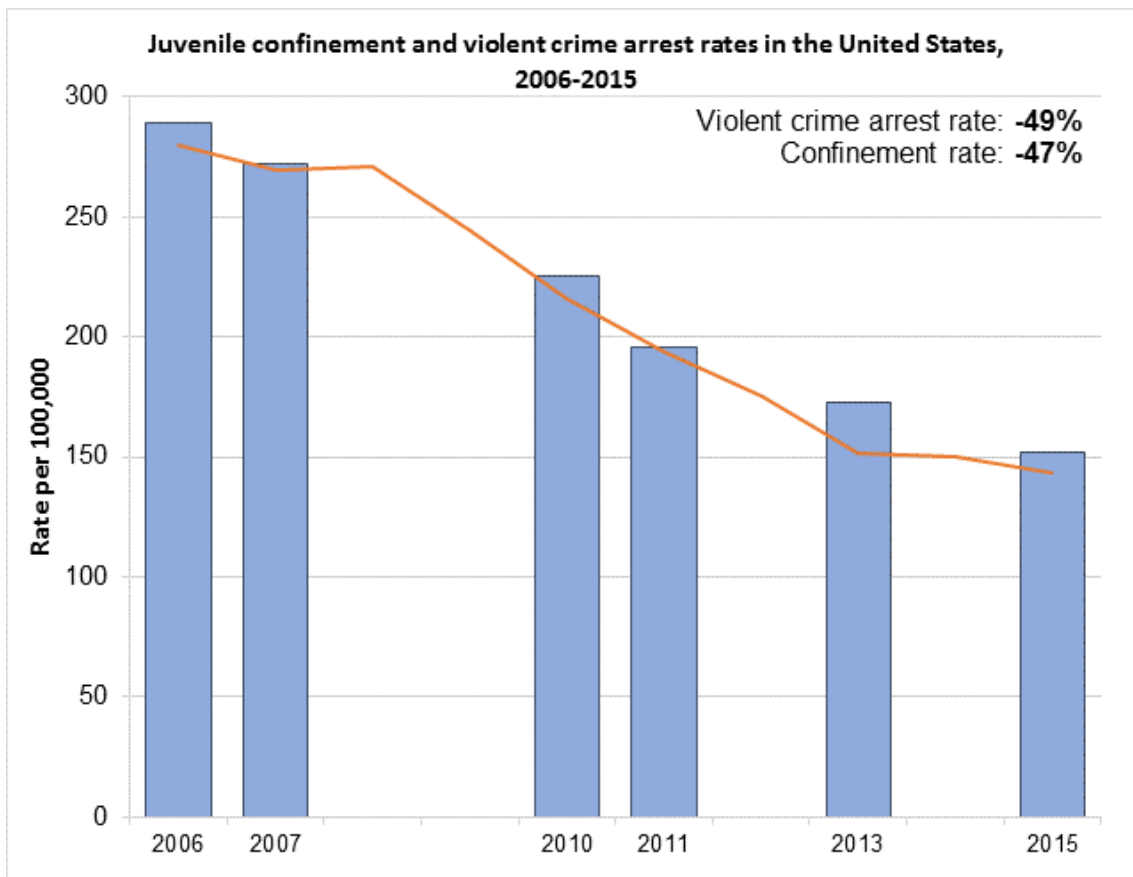
Figure 1: Juvenile Residential Facilities in the U.S. 2006-2016



The number of residential facilities housing justice-involved youth in the United States declined by one third between a one-day count in 2006 and the same census in 2016, falling from 2,649 to 1,772.

Source: Puzzanchera, C., Hockenberry, S., Sladky, T.J., and Kang, W. (2018). Juvenile Residential Facility Census Databook. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/jrfcdb/> The data come from the Juvenile Residential Facility Census, a biennial one-day count of residential facilities housing justice-involved individuals under age 21.

**Figure 2: Juvenile confinement and violent crime arrest rates in the U.S. 2006-2015**



Note: Violent crime arrests include those for murder, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Rates of juvenile arrests for violent crimes and confinement in juvenile justice facilities fell by 49 and 47 percent, respectively, from 2006 to 2015 (the most recent year for which data are available).

Sources:

Sickmund, M., Sladky, T.J., Kang, W., & Puzzanchera, C. (2017). "Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement." Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>. Confinement data come from the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement, a biennial one-day count of justice-involved youth under age 21 in residential facilities.

National Center for Juvenile Justice (December 6, 2017). Juvenile Arrest Rates by Offense, Sex, and Race. Online. Available: [http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/excel/JAR\\_2016.xls](http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/crime/excel/JAR_2016.xls). Data on arrests of individuals under age 18 are adapted by the National Center for Juvenile Justice from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's "Crime in the United States" reports.

## ARRIVING AT FACILITY CLOSURE AND EARLY PLANNING

Jurisdictions may be closing facilities for a number of different reasons. Some of the factors--alone or in combination--that have led to closure include:

- Decreasing populations (as system-wide reforms led to fewer youth being incarcerated and/or offense or arrest rates declined);
- Budget pressures;
- Agency or legislatively initiated realignment of resources (such as focusing use of out of home placements on youth with more serious offense histories or risk levels in order to direct more funding to community-based care);
- Concerns about particular facilities (such as aging buildings, conditions of confinement lawsuits).

### STRATEGIC PLANNING

*Develop a strong, research-backed strategic plan and then leverage relationships with key champions to achieve it. Invite legislators and other key supporters to tour programs regularly so that they can meet the youth and staff who are benefitting from new approaches and understand the impact of adequately funding programs that work.*



### **Staff Say Farewell at Closing of Larned Juvenile Correctional Facility in Kansas**

Staff of Larned Juvenile Correctional Facility (LJCF) said goodbye as the doors of the facility were permanently closed on March 3, 2017.

## DECIDING WHICH FACILITY TO CLOSE

In some states, the juvenile justice agency is given some choice - or asked to provide recommendations to the legislature or executive branch - on which facility to close. This process can begin by undertaking a comprehensive review of all existing facilities. Each facility should be evaluated in terms of climate, costs, and outcomes: for example, is the facility difficult to keep staffed? Do conditions of confinement require greater oversight from agency leadership or cause lawsuits? In many cases, it may be clear which facility(ies) should be closed, but in others looking at objective factors may help.

### Factors To Consider When Closing A Facility

#### Location

- Distance of facility from homes of youth who make up the facility's population
- Transportation available or that must be provided (for example, bringing families to visit, taking youth to court or outside services)
- Workforce available near the facility to provide appropriate services to youth
- Ease or difficulty of providing oversight and support in this location
- Whether the property is leased or owned

#### Staffing

- Staff to youth ratio
- Staff characteristics (such as education levels, licensure, ratio of clinical to line staff, skill level)
- Staff turnover/vacancy/callout rates, broken down by employee type, such as licensed professionals, line staff
- Staff tenure
- Specialized training staff have had and use in their work (for example, trauma, gender-responsive care)
- Staffing patterns/teams

#### Safety and Health

- Assaults against staff resulting in injury
- Assaults against youth resulting in injury
- Other injuries (such as accidental/industrial)
- Whether staff are trained in and using safe and effective supervision strategies
- Security features
- Frequency of youth self-harm and self-harm attempts; existence of self-harm hazards
- Space for recreation and programming
- Sanitation/cleanliness
- Any relevant audit findings, youth grievances filed, staff and youth climate surveys

### Youth Outcomes

- Data on subsequent offending of youth following release from the facility, recognizing that facilities treating higher-risk youth will likely have higher recidivism rates. (Note that some systems are able to adjust such measures to account for differences in risk levels between facilities.)
- Any long-term data the agency has on positive youth outcomes for juveniles who have been at different facilities (for example, educational or vocational attainment, job placement and housing)

### Education

- Teacher qualifications
- Coursework available (such as for youth to achieve high school diploma and beyond)
- Student progress and achievement (such as reading and math levels, credits obtained, GED/diploma completion)
- Special education needs addressed (such as certified teachers, individualized education plans developed and met, availability of related services to meet youth needs)

### Vocational Programming

- Programs offered and youth enrolled
- Industry certifications available/earned

### Costs and Legal Requirements

- Lawsuits pending or settled against the facility
- Overall cost to run the facility (per square foot and per youth), based on above factors

### Physical Plant

- Facility capacity (how many youth can be placed there; what is its current population)
- Facility configuration (for example, single rooms or dorm-style)
- Facility physical condition (including age of facility, availability of natural light, HVAC system condition)
- Maintenance requirements
- Building and land capacity to meet programmatic and security needs
- Environment (therapeutic/normative vs. correctional/institutional)

## REPURPOSING FACILITIES

Many closed facilities have simply been sold for private uses, but other public uses for former juvenile correctional facilities (or their land) have included:

- a law enforcement post;
- a teen center;
- a day treatment provider;
- vocational programming;
- agency offices;
- training center;
- housing
- or adult correctional facilities.

Some of these uses will require significant renovation or building of additional structures, so the layout of the space and surrounding land may influence possible uses.

For more guidance on repurposing facilities, see the Urban Institute brief "Transforming Closed Youth Prisons" at [urban.org/transformingyouthprisons](https://urban.org/transformingyouthprisons).

### PRESERVE HISTORICAL ARTIFACTS:

*If the facility is historically significant, consider partnering with a historical or research organization or a local university to help retain and preserve historical documents or artifacts.*

Regardless of which factors have played a part in the decision to close a particular facility, the process of looking closely at each facility also presents opportunities to identify other ways to improve the system as reform moves forward.

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE:

*Some leaders have found that having an external group support data analysis, assessment of systems or facilities, or planning reform efforts (for example a national organization or a local foundation), can help keep system stakeholders focused on the big picture. Many agencies have found that partnering with an external group expanded their capacity to make decisions and plan in data-driven ways, brought additional expertise at critical moments, and ensured they were thinking about why they were carrying out a closure. Such assistance has also helped leaders identify and focus on goals and how closure would impact the youth and their families as they made decisions and communicated with staff and communities.*

## Bringing the Right Partners to the Table

This resource outlines a number of strategies for successfully closing a facility, and each one is dependent on having the right people or groups involved. Different stakeholders need to be engaged while working toward different closure goals, but throughout the process agency leadership should develop plans and strategies for working with:

- Youth and families;
- Agency staff representatives at all levels (from line staff to supervisors) and in all areas (including direct care, case management, behavioral health, medical, facility maintenance/services, clerical and business staff);
- Key legislators and legislative staff;
- Relevant executive branch representatives;
- Juvenile court judges;
- Probation staff and leadership;
- Other decision makers who helped bring about the decision to close a facility;
- Contractors working at the facility;
- Advocates and monitoring groups;
- Detention staff and leadership;
- Unions (if applicable)
- Other agencies that will be serving youth released from the facility (such as education, behavioral health); and
- Other community stakeholders

## Establishing a Timeline for Closure

A jurisdiction's reason for closing a facility will play a major part in its planning and decisions, starting with the timeline for closure. An emergency closure due to conditions at the facility will need to happen immediately, while a closure based on declining populations can be carried out over a longer period, allowing for more planning to meet youth, family and staff needs. Where agencies are able to decide - or provide a recommendation - about the timeline for carrying out closure, they will want to *allow enough time* to plan out and prepare for where each young person will go (for example, home, or transition to another facility) as well as to give staff adequate notice and support in finding new positions within the agency or elsewhere. Allowing too much time, however, can lead to prolonged stress and

### RESPONDING TO CONCERNS:

*To address front-line staff concerns, identify peer ambassadors. Staff who understand the agency's rationale for closure and the larger systems change it is part of may be able to explain it to their peers effectively during in-service trainings, through newsletter articles, and in other ways.*

*Ensure that youth and families know how to reach the agency directly. Hold town hall meetings, group meetings with youth, case managers, and staff, family days that include youth and their family members, and other question and answer opportunities.*

unsafe situations if adequate staffing cannot be maintained until all the youth leave the facility. Using a phased approach to closure, including each of the elements of closure discussed in this guide, will allow closures to be undertaken in a planful way that meets youth, family, community and agency needs.

In determining a closure date, determine how long it will take to carry out the planning for transition, and ensure this can happen before staffing levels decline significantly. Additionally, planning and training or re-training of staff may be necessary if the closure of one facility results in any significant changes in a different facility's mission or type of youth being served, such as changing from serving male youth to serving female youth or a change from serving low to high-risk and needs youth.

## COMMUNICATING ABOUT CLOSURE

It is essential that everyone who will be affected by facility closure understands what is happening and why, in a timely manner. Ensuring this happens will significantly impact what youth, families, staff, communities, legislators, and the public think about the closure itself and the agency's management of the process. Careful and specific planning will be key to managing the flow of this information, making sure everyone is getting accurate and targeted information, and delivering the news in a timely way. While the specifics of the plan may vary, some key principles are discussed below.

### Sharing the Initial News about Closure

Whether by e-mail, phone, or in person, anyone personally affected should hear the information from agency leadership or more senior staff. This means getting information out before the news or the gossip mill does, with a very specific plan about

#### COMMUNICATIONS:

*Perhaps the most effective thing leaders can do when it comes to messaging and communications is to communicate proactively, rather than responding to concerns after the fact. For example, if workers are unionized, sitting down and meeting with union leaders to seek input and share information as soon as possible can go a long way toward preventing problems and pushback. This should include sharing information about how you plan to address their concerns. Reaching out to media outlets to educate writers and share plans and reasoning is part of effective communication as well.*

- *Have a written document that anticipates potential questions and answers. Circulate it among senior leaders. This will help ensure that facility staff, other stakeholders, and media hear consistent messages from leadership.*
- *Enlist facility staff early to help with logistics, considerations for youth moves and other planning. They will likely be able to come up with ideas the central office wouldn't, and engagement can help them take ownership of the coming changes.*
- *If closure was prompted or strongly supported by external stakeholders such as legislators or the Governor, include them as messengers for the agency's efforts and give them other opportunities to visibly and actively support the work.*

who will be contacted, by which members of the team, in what order. Being clear as soon as possible about which facility is closing (or recommended for closure) will help avoid losing staff throughout the agency due to uncertainty. It will also give staff and the closing facility's community time to develop other employment options, if layoffs will be necessary due to the closure. The day the closure is announced will be an "all hands on deck" experience, and everyone on the team should know who they are reaching out to—and what message they are delivering—in advance.

Bring the right partners to the table to plan communications: Within the juvenile correctional agency, the leadership team, communications department, human resources, government relations team, and program staff will be key partners. Staff with front line experience can "reality check" plans and messaging. Consulting with youth and family members will help ensure that communications address their concerns, and working closely with the judiciary, probation, and agencies that have staff working with youth in the facilities can ensure that in the course of planning and carrying out transitions, communications efforts are also aligned. Ensure key partners from other agencies, as well as key external stakeholders, are included as appropriate.

### **Ongoing Communications about Closure**

*Use a variety of communication methods:* As leaders work to share information as widely and effectively as possible, they should consider whether holding both individual and small group meetings with some key stakeholders, as well as town hall or community meetings to reach larger audiences, will be effective. In order to keep information flowing throughout the process, and to reach even broader audiences, consider posting a Q & A document or video message from the director on the agency's website, including regular

#### **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:**

*Don't forget the larger community where the facility is located in communications. Meet with local influencers individually to learn about concerns, and then hold larger events to share information and answer questions. As jobs will likely be a major concern, partnering with other employers in the area and then publicizing any joint efforts, such as job fairs, may be helpful. For the communities to which the youth will be returning (to their home or to a residential placement close to home), educate community members about why and how keeping youth closer to home is better for both youth and their communities, and how the closure fits with the positive transformation of the system.*

#### **MESSAGING:**

*Starting with the announcement of closure and continuing throughout the process, communications should explain why the closure is happening and how it ties into larger improvements and reforms in the juvenile justice system. Communications should also highlight how the closure will be undertaken in ways that support youth, families, staff and communities, and are consistent with the agency's mission.*

updates in agencies' newsletters and/or by e-mail. (Make sure that staff who don't have e-mail receive paper copies.)

*Target communications:* Develop a list of audiences with which to share information throughout the closure process. At a minimum this will include youth and families, facility staff, other agency staff, legislators and their teams (particularly those representing the district where the closing facility is located), community members (where the facility is closing, where youth will be going, and in youths' home jurisdictions), courts, counsel, law enforcement, and media. Depending on the specifics of the jurisdiction, this may also include unions, contractors, and other groups.

All of these stakeholders should receive consistent and accurate information, but the level of detail, specific information of interest, and most effective messaging and messengers will vary and can be addressed in a *communications plan*. This may mean developing a number of customized fact sheets, presentations, and other resources highlighting different elements of the closure process for different audiences.

*Communicate to support resource preservation goals:* Particularly in any communications with legislators and budget officials, it's essential to keep an eye on the long-term need to provide necessary services and supports in lieu of operating the closing facility. Talk about what additional services and supports the agency will be putting into place in youth's communities and why they will lead to better outcomes.

*Be transparent, realistic and reassuring:* Sharing as much information as leadership is able to will help the agency's credibility. When leaders don't know what will happen on a key issue, they should try to acknowledge that while providing reassurance.

*Keep communication going:* Continue providing updates throughout the process. Meet regularly with legislators and others concerned about job losses to detail efforts to support employees. Communicate with youth and families promptly and frequently about decisions and plans, to reduce anxiety as well as to answer new questions that have arisen. Communicate with facility staff at all levels about staffing changes and youth moves. As closure progresses, this may mean weekly and then daily calls between the facility and central office to go over any changes to the plans.

---

#### **LEGISLATOR EDUCATION:**

*Retaining the funding the system needs to provide effective treatment and supervision both in the community and in remaining facilities may require educating legislative staff and budget officials on research regarding what works for youth, as well as on elements of facility safety and legal requirements.*

---

## RESPONDING TO OPPOSITION

While many people will view facility closure as a positive development, agencies may also face opposition from unions, judges, local legislators (for example, those representing the area where the facility will close), or other powerful stakeholders. Here are some tips for responding:

### Be Proactive

Set up face-to-face meetings as soon as agency leadership is ready to go public with plans for closure, letting key leaders know that this is happening, and laying out plans to address their concerns (for example, helping staff find other employment, ensuring youth moves are appropriate and well planned and executed).

### Explain the Decision

Share whatever information led to the decision to close this particular facility (for example, budget numbers, safety-related incident rates, staff turnover/shortages, the jurisdiction's larger strategic plan for shifting to more community-based care and fewer residential placements). Share any reports, data or documents that lay out the reasoning for the decision or recommendation. Even if the decision was prompted by external forces, it is still important for a successful closure that the agency support the closure once the decision has been made.

### Marshall Allies

There may be some situations in which agencies simply cannot satisfy the goals they wish to achieve through closure while also satisfying all others' wishes. In those situations, make sure to have support through the words and actions of other key stakeholders. For example, if judges want to be able to continue sending youth to a facility slated for closure, the legislature may need to explicitly forbid it. If unions or communities oppose closure based on job losses, it may help for the Governor or another key leader to make public statements about why this closure is better for youth and families and commit to supporting workers in finding other employment. Early conversations between the executive branch top staff and union leaders may help communicate priorities and encourage buy-in. Similarly, legislators representing the district where the facility is closing may receive calls from constituents concerned about job losses, and may be able to support the agency's messaging, particularly if they receive assistance from the executive branch or other legislators. Working closely with allies throughout the closure process will help ensure that they can support change as needed.

## MEETING YOUTH AND FAMILY NEEDS

Meeting the needs of youth and families includes making the *best possible decision on where youth will go* when they leave the closing facility, *ensuring safety until facility closure*, and *reducing and addressing anxiety or stress* that arises from the transition and any uncertainty related to those decisions.

When a facility closes, some youth may be able to return home, while others will transition to a non-secure, treatment-focused residential setting, and still others may be placed in a different secure facility. These decisions will need to be made on an individual basis for each young person, along with specific plans for how to continue education, behavioral or physical health treatment, vocational programming and other services with as little disruption as possible. The agency and its partners should also take steps to ensure that community-based programs or other secure facilities that will be receiving youth are safe and capable of meeting youth needs in keeping with evidence-based and research-informed best practices.

Some specific strategies that have been used by jurisdictions to minimize the negative impact of closure on children and families are discussed below.

### Determining Where Youth Will Go

Decisions on where youth will go should be made consistent with research and best practices.

For youth who will be transferred to other residential settings, decision makers should review any reports about those facilities and try to collect information from key stakeholders to determine if that facility needs improvements or additional staff or support before receiving additional young people.

#### YOUTH INVOLVEMENT:

*Ensure that youth are involved in the planning and execution of the closure, through participation in workgroups, youth climate surveys, and opportunities for more informal feedback. Where facilities have youth councils or similar leadership entities for youth, these organizations can contribute to planning.*

#### OWNERSHIP:

*Even if a facility closure was initiated by the state legislature or other stakeholders outside the agency, it is important for the agency to “own” the reform in its messaging--and actions--since the closure process itself and what happens next for youth, families, and staff will be determined by those decisions.*

#### ENCOURAGE EXPRESSION OF CONCERNS:

*Staff and youth must be able to share their concerns and frustrations without fear of reprisal. This will allow leadership to build trust and also to understand their needs so that they can respond appropriately.*

## USING RESEARCH TO INFORM PLACEMENT DECISIONS

Research studies have found that: incarceration with probation was associated with higher recidivism than probation alone,<sup>i</sup> and for all but the highest risk youth, community-based in-home services produced the best recidivism outcomes.<sup>ii</sup> A national study also determined that smaller facilities had lower rates of sexual victimization than larger facilities.<sup>iii</sup>

<sup>i</sup> Aizer, A., & Doyle Jr., J. J. (2015). Juvenile Incarceration, Human Capital, and Future Crime: Evidence from Randomly Assigned Judges. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 130(2), 759–804.

<sup>ii</sup> Lowenkamp, C.T. & Latessa, E.J. (2005). *Evaluation of Ohio's RECLAIM Funded Programs, Community Corrections Facilities, and DYS Facilities*. Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>iii</sup> Heaton, L., Cantor, D., Ren, W., Hartge, J., Beck, A. (2016). Facility-level and Individual-level Correlates of Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities, 2012. Bureau of Justice Statistics: Washington, DC.

Pre-closure releases may involve going back to a judge or other external decision maker to show that a youth is ready for release sooner than anticipated if the agency does not have sole release authority. For new dispositions, make sure that decision makers are aware of their range of options for placement and in-home services, rather than automatically sending all youth who would previously have been placed at the closing facility to the same location.

*Stop sending new youth to the facility slated for closure as soon as the decision to close is made, and release any youth who are ready to return home, consistent with ensuring public safety based on existing program completion criteria. Reducing the population level of the facility also minimizes the number of young people who have to go through a difficult transition to a new facility.*

Using *multi-disciplinary teams* to make *individualized decisions and plans* for each young person can help increase the likelihood of success. Behavioral health and child welfare are essential partners to ensure that youth have access to appropriate placements and services. Inviting ombudsman staff and family/advocacy groups to be part of planning can ensure that youth-centric decisions are made and that concerns are addressed early on in the planning process. Probation/parole staff have important insights about and relationships with community-based programs, schools, courts, and other child serving agencies. Encourage the team developing placement recommendations to seize the process as an opportunity to look carefully at youths' strengths and needs, and better match them to the services that will make them successful. Set reasonable expectations (such as: we can recommend early release when appropriate, but not every youth will be able to go home), and explain who will make final decisions in each case. For each young person, the team should ask:

- Will the youth be ready for release before the closure date, consistent with public safety, even if this is an earlier release than previously planned? If so, can the agency make that decision at its discretion or does a petition need to be made to the court? Can or should youth return to parents? A different family member? Would independent living or a program like Job Corps make sense (if the youth is 18 or older)? Encourage teams to think outside the box if returning to parents is not a good option even with supportive services in place.
- If the youth still needs to be in a residential placement, does he or she need secure care or a non-secure placement?
- Where are the youth's parents and/or other family or supportive individuals located?
- What clinical services does the youth need, and which providers or placements in the agency's network can meet those needs?
- What other placements or in-home services are available through the agency or through partner agencies? How well are those placements or services meeting youth needs generally? Which would be best equipped to meet the needs of this particular youth? Does the school system have access to services for which the youth qualifies?
- Are there factors related to other youth that need to be taken into consideration (such as co-defendants, gang involvement)?

It is essential that this process *start early*, and is carried out in phases, so that staff are not scrambling to determine where youth will go at the last moment.

Along with a decision about *where* the youth will go, individualized planning will be needed to minimize disruption of *services*. This may mean creating a plan for each young person that includes:

- Education (for example, ensuring re-enrollment, credit transfer, etc.)
- Behavioral and physical health (identifying services needed as well as providers and payment sources); recreation; wellness; any other treatment needs
- Family engagement, for example what supports or services does the family need to have the child return home, or to be a resource (e.g., by visiting their child frequently if the youth will not be returning home)?
- Religious practice (if the youth desires)
- Basic needs (for example, food, clothing, hygiene items)

Beyond the individual teams making placement and service recommendations, this process may require advocacy by senior staff or agency leadership to ensure that other systems are meeting their own obligations (for example, child welfare must place youth who cannot safely return to parents in the least restrictive setting as soon as they are eligible to leave the juvenile justice system, schools must enroll all eligible students and meet any special education needs, etc.) Additionally, staff within each discipline will

---

need to work with their peers outside the facility to ensure smooth transitions. For example, education staff will need to work with their counterparts at any receiving facilities, residential placements or schools in communities to which young people will be returning.

## Ensuring Safety, Addressing Anxiety, and Easing Transitions

Meeting the needs of youth and families during what may be a major change will vary according to where the youth is going, as well as the specific circumstances of the young person. Some strategies that can be helpful for youth returning home, and for youth transferring to other residential placements, are outlined below.

### For all youth:

Youth should have the opportunity to hear from agency leadership directly rather than having information trickle down through staff. Facility staff should also regularly talk to youth about how they are doing (for example, do they need help addressing anxiety about the transition?)

Agency leadership may need to step up their presence at the facility to ensure that safety is maintained and best practices continue to be used. Some agencies have had leaders establish and rotate overnight presence at a facility during a time of change or crisis.

### For youth returning home:

Youth who will be exiting juvenile justice system custody require thoughtful and comprehensive transition and re-entry planning. Agencies should ensure that youth who are transitioning out of system custody in advance of a facility closure *are receiving the same re-entry services and supports as any other youth* who is released to the community. Below are a few examples of the considerations and activities agencies should incorporate in their plans for youths' return home:

- Recognize that the home the young person is returning to may be different than the one the youth left. Families may have moved or new adults or children may have joined or left the home. Encourage youth and families to talk about these changes and what they mean (such as, will the youth have a different bedroom now? Go to a different school?).

### YOUTH SUPPORT:

*Case managers or other staff may need to spend time working with youth individually to help them understand what their next steps are, such as going on websites or sharing brochures for programming or services they will be accessing after returning home or moving to a different residential setting.*

- Step up visitation as much as possible, including scheduling video visits, having families come to the facility, and sending youth home on “passes” for increasing lengths of time (for example, a day pass, then a weekend). Staff should debrief with youth after these visits and assist with any concerns the youth identifies.
- During visits home, schedule time for youth to do intake with service providers and probation/parole staff, register for school, and take care of other requirements so that they can start receiving necessary services--and have appropriate supports--as soon as they return home. When possible, the youth’s case manager or psychologist should be part of these visits to provide support and assistance.
- Provide close oversight to ensure youth receive all of the transition services typically offered to youth before release, such as assistance enrolling in school or Medicaid, or obtaining identification documents and a job, even though they may be on an accelerated timeline and staff will be completing many additional tasks related to closure.

#### GETTING INFORMATION TO PARENTS AND GUARDIANS:

*Send each parent or guardian a letter explaining what is happening and how to contact the appropriate person with questions. Then have each young person’s counselor or case manager (or another staff member) call each parent or guardian to review the contents of the letter to make sure they know about the move, and understand how they can ask questions and help their children.*

More comprehensive general resources on juvenile re-entry are available from the Council of State Governments Justice Center at <https://csgjusticecenter.org/youth/juvenile-reentry/> and as part of the CJCA/CJJR Youth in Custody Practice Model.

#### For youth transferring to other facilities:

The anxiety around change and uncertainty may lead to an increase in youth incidents. Train and support staff to respond to these behaviors in positive and therapeutic, rather than punitive, ways and set an expectation that staff will be vigilant in identifying youth needs and engaging more closely with youth during this period.

Help youth *learn about the new facility*:

- Bring staff from the receiving placements to meet with youth at the closing facility.
- Ensure staff are prepared to answer questions.
- Talk about the facets of day-to-day life that impact youth, such as food options or recreation time. Highlight any new or better features of the receiving facility,

such as better vocational programs, more recreation space, or new basketball hoops, and prepare youth for things that may not be better.

- Allow youth to see the new facility and meet staff in advance through online videoconferencing such as Skype.

Make the new facility *welcoming for new youth*.

- Enlist youth at receiving placements to welcome or perhaps meet with youth who are coming from the closing facility. If the facility has a youth advisory board, enlist the help of that group, and consider organizing a “welcome event” like a pizza night.
- Make sure that new placements are ready to receive new youth, particularly youth who are already dealing with the challenges associated with a placement change. For example, ensure staff has prepared living units so that sheets, pillows, new personal hygiene kits, clothing, etc. are ready and waiting. Also ensure youth have avenues and supplies needed for documenting needs or concerns, or recording grievances.
- Ask youth for input on decor (for example, paint colors) and allow them to help make the facility more comfortable.
- Allow youth to bring personal items and familiar objects. If a large group of youth are moving from one facility to another, consider moving paintings, murals, memorials, soft furniture or other items.

#### CONTINUUM OF SERVICES:

*Ensure that each community in the jurisdiction has a continuum of services at its disposal for youth diverted from the system and for youth adjudicated delinquent, including evidence-based services commonly used with justice-involved youth such as Multisystemic therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT).*

*Ensure that the agency's funding streams and provider contracts allow the flexibility to provide each youth with the care that best meets their individual needs and circumstances.*

#### For families and other individuals close to youth:

Supporting families so that they can support youth means communicating early and often, so that loved ones *understand what is happening and why*, as well as what it will mean for their children. Another key strategy is *connecting families to services* they may need in order *to be effective supports for their children* during this transition, such as transportation or behavioral interventions that engage both youth and families.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For more, see Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators Position Paper: Community-based Mental Health Services, available at <http://cjca.net/attachments/article/1010/Community%20based%20MH%20Services.pdf>.

*Visitation and other contact* with family can help both youth and families through the transition.

- On the day the young person moves, provide each youth an opportunity to call to say they have arrived safely and to tell loved ones about the new placement. For the first few weeks or months after the transition, give youth extra opportunities to call and write to loved ones.
- Schedule the date of the move right before a visiting day, and consider providing additional transportation, so that youth can have family support right away. (Provide additional staff support and activities for youth who do not receive visits.)
- Develop a visitation transportation process to assist families with getting to and from the new facility, especially if travel distances are greatly increased.
- Increase the availability of visitation, by offering more times and days when youth can receive visits, as well as offering more opportunities for phone calls and “video visits.”

---

**COLLABORATE TO SUPPORT YOUTH  
TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD:**

*Encourage residential and community-based programs to work with community resources or flexible providers to ensure that youth can access vocational programming, education, transferrable school credits, and other services that will prepare them for living wage jobs as they transition to adulthood. For example, if a residential program is small enough that they can't make up a “class” for a particular subject, could youth take classes through a local college?*

---

Agencies should also consider allowing family members to visit and tour their child's new placement or to meet with community-based service providers in advance. This opportunity can help families address their own questions or concerns, prepare youth for changes, and begin planning goals and services.

### **Taking Steps During the Closure Process to Ensure Safety and Meet Youth Needs *Post-closure***

At the same time the system is doing individualized work on behalf of each young person in the closing facility, changes elsewhere in the agency are also needed to ensure safety and good practice as the makeup of the custodial youth population changes. A smaller residential youth population can be an opportunity to invest in working with youth who have experienced complex trauma or have other acute needs (such as, through lower staff-to-youth ratios, more highly qualified staff and clinical staff, and better training for front line workers). It can also free up resources that can be directed to community-based care. Although the closure process will require

---

significant attention from agency leadership and staff, these other steps should be addressed in parallel, so that needed services and supports can be in place when youth exit.

#### For community-based services and small or non-secure residential placements:

Agencies must *look closely at whether local jurisdictions have adequate resources* to meet the needs of youth returning to them and if not, how the agency or other partners can support them. For example, if mental health needs aren't being addressed adequately, does the agency need to contract with additional providers to reduce wait times, or bring in mobile or telehealth services to reach youth in rural settings?

Note that jurisdictions should start planning and contracting early to ensure that youth can access needed services immediately upon release or placement.

#### Ensuring Safety in Receiving Facilities

An important aspect of planning is protection of youth transferring to a facility from another (closing) facility. Such youth may be vulnerable to territorialism among youth already in the facility. Planners should account for this factor and the simple fact that these youth are arriving at a time when the facility may be undergoing a significant change in the number or type of youth housed. Specific safety planning should include both individualized and group safety concerns; planners should try to have youth enter the facility on staggered dates, as part of an overall phased approach to closure.

Facility staff should pay attention to ensuring the safety of *younger youth* if they are being incorporated into a facility with youth who are older. Youth with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming youth, and youth with past histories of victimization all require special planning attention. Officials should also consider how to address gang alliances and similar fractionalization. Agency leadership should exercise close oversight to ensure these steps are *taken in accordance with the agency's mission and recognized best practices*, including a therapeutic rather than control-oriented approach.<sup>5</sup> As with other areas of systems change, officials may find it helpful to use data and research to inform planning and support decisions.

#### Maintaining or improving climate and culture in facilities

Receiving facilities should consider whether they can do more than simply absorb youth and staff; instead the agency may be able to take steps to *make the environment feel new for everyone*, including a culture based on merged staff and leadership and

---

<sup>5</sup> Lipsey, M. (2009). The primary factors that characterize effective interventions with juvenile offenders: A meta-analytic overview. *Victims & Offenders*, 4, 124-147.

physical elements from each facility. Joint training of new and remaining staff should be conducted to ensure uniform practices.

Facilities should also engage families as they plan for working with youth, as well as bringing in community volunteers to offer additional services that offer youth similar experiences to those their peers in the community are having (for example, the ability to engage in extra-curricular activities; access to role models from faith communities, the arts, or local businesses).

Agencies should also use transitions of staff and youth as an opportunity to re-examine existing practices and make needed changes. For example, if the facility's practice still includes use of seclusion or restraint, create and enforce policies to reduce their use. (See CJCA's 2015 Toolkit "Reducing the Use of Isolation" for a discussion of the dangers posed by isolation, and guidance for reducing its use. Also see the CJCA/Georgetown Center for Juvenile Justice Reform Youth in Custody Practice Model, the JDAI Detention Facility Assessment Standards and Guidelines, and PbS resources for additional guidance on improving practices and conditions in juvenile facilities.)

#### [Providing needed services](#)

Ensure that facilities receiving youth are using *evidence-based interventions appropriate to high-needs youth*. As stated in CJCA's 2013 Report on Safety in Facilities, "Today's youths in the 'deep end' of the justice system challenge youth corrections administrators to step back, analyze the problems associated with managing and treating these youths and develop responses that are grounded in research on adolescent brain development and treatment interventions that have been developed with these youths in mind: Aggression Replacement Training, Multi Systemic Therapy, Trauma-Informed Care, Motivational Interviewing

#### [VIGILANCE ABOUT POPULATION LEVELS:](#)

*Pay close attention to changing population levels and plan for potential increases and decreases. Avoid keeping facilities at "full capacity" if possible; constantly re-evaluate youth to ensure that youth who do not need higher levels of care are released or moved when appropriate and that there are beds available for youth who do need them.*

#### [ADDRESS CONDITIONS IN RECEIVING FACILITIES:](#)

*Review any internal or public information about facility culture and safety in the receiving facility, such as certification or audit reports, incident reports, youth and staff surveys, and grievances, and take steps to make needed improvements before adding additional youth. For transfers to facilities that are not run or controlled by the agency, information should still be gathered about safety considerations, and steps should be taken to encourage changes.*

and others.” The report also recommended that, in a time of smaller but more high-needs youth populations, agencies should “constantly monitor facility culture and make necessary adjustments to keep facilities safe.”

Agencies should also make sure that even smaller placements offer access to services needed by the remaining placement population in order to *prevent youth from being sent far away to receive needed care*. This may require, for example, contracting with numerous outside providers instead of having a few staff clinicians who can only offer certain interventions.

*"To improve your whole system as part of closing facilities, you also have to bring about culture change at your remaining facilities. Make sure you develop your local leaders by giving them a clear vision and plan on how to get there. Ensure the resources are available and that the capacity (time to support and develop their staff) to lead is preserved."*

*Clint McClellan, Assistant Director, Oregon Youth Authority*



The Star Academy in Custer, South Dakota was closed on April 8, 2016.

## AVOIDING ADDITIONAL TRAUMATIC STRESS

Many youth in juvenile facilities have experienced prior trauma.<sup>6</sup> Agency leaders should strive for facility closures to reduce, not increase, youth's traumatic stress levels. As stated in CJCA's August 2017 Position Paper, *Trauma Informed Care in Juvenile Justice*, "CJCA affirms the need for the nation's juvenile justice system to adopt trauma informed strategies across all jurisdictions. These strategies will include the following essential elements (NCTSN, 2014)\*:

- Maximize the child's sense of safety; both physically and psychologically;
- Assist children in reducing overwhelming emotion;
- Help children find meaning and make connections with their trauma history and current behaviors and experiences;
- Address the impact of trauma in the child's behavior, development and relationships;
- Coordinate youth care, as traumatized youth are involved in multiple systems;
- Facilitate comprehensive assessment of the child's traumatic experiences and the impact on the child's development and behavior to guide services;
- Support and promote positive and stable relationships; and
- Provide support and guidance to the child's family and caregivers (staff)."

\*National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Think Trauma: Training for staff in Juvenile Justice Settings, adapted for the Texas Juvenile Justice Department by NCTSN, 2014.

For youth who are in a facility that is slated to be closed, both leaving a facility where they have been staying and the possibility of entering a new facility involve uncertainty and call for a trauma-informed response. Agency leadership and facility staff can achieve this by undertaking the strategies outlined above, and specifically by letting youth know what to expect (as much as possible), taking steps to ensure safety in supportive (rather than punitive) ways, and ensuring that any trauma-related or mental health services are continued throughout the transition, with the same provider if at all possible. Julian D. Ford, Ph.D., A.B.P.P., Professor and Director, University of Connecticut Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice, recommends the following additional steps be taken for youth during a facility closure:

- "Assist children in recognizing and managing negative emotions before they become overwhelming;
- Help children understand that many emotional and behavioral problems are stress reactions when they are reminded of past extreme stress experiences (trauma), and that they can learn ways to handle these reactions;
- Help providers, staff, and administrators recognize and understand the impact that working with traumatized children has on them (secondary traumatic stress) and provide them with practical skills for managing these expectable reactions that parallel the trauma-recovery skills they are modeling and teaching the children;
- Create service and placement plans that do not place the child in situations that are similar to past traumas; and
- Ensure that providers from all systems are aware of these principles and practices, in order to provide care for children that is trauma-informed and coordinated across multiple systems.

When a transition involves ending relationships with adults whom the child trusts and feels close to, ensure that the child knows those adults will always remember and care about the child after they are apart."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Yoder, J. R., Whitaker, K., & Quinn, C. R. (2017). Perceptions of Recidivism Among Incarcerated Youth: The Relationship Between Exposure to Childhood Trauma, Mental Health Status, and the Protective Effect of Mental Health Services in Juvenile Justice Settings. *Advances in Social Work, 18*(1), 250–269. <https://doi.org/10.18060/21305>

<sup>7</sup> E-mail on file with author. Also see Julian D. Ford & Margaret E. Blaustein. "Systemic Self-Regulation: A Framework for Trauma-Informed Services in Residential Juvenile Justice Programs." *J Fam Viol* (2013) 28:665–677.

## MEETING STAFF NEEDS

Staff at the closing facility, who may have been in their positions for many years, will have concerns ranging from the safety and well-being of the youth in their care, to their own job stability and that of their colleagues. Agency leadership will need to work to address these concerns immediately upon announcing the closure decision, and continuing throughout the closure process.

Agencies will also need to balance retaining enough staff to ensure safety and availability of services at the facility through closure with helping staff find other positions so that as few layoffs as possible are needed. Helping staff feel reassured and supported through the process will have many other benefits, including decreasing any

*"While the news of the closure of [our facility] was not something the facility staff or the community [where the facility was located] were glad to learn about, I think they all appreciated the transparency with which the process was managed. There were lots of in-person meetings and a concerted effort for frequent communication with the staff. We worked diligently with other state agencies to help place our tenured, talented personnel. The staff were a tremendous help to one another, and local resources were made available to help staff in their efforts to gain outside employment. The result of all of these efforts was that virtually every staff person had an identified position by the time closure occurred."*

*Terri Williams, Community Solutions, Inc. (Former Deputy Secretary of Juveniles Services, Kansas Department of Corrections)*

pushback about the closure itself, and ensuring that staff are fully present and able to provide needed support to youth and carry out their logistical pieces of the closure.

Recognize that staff will be anxious or even angry when leaders announce closure. While agency leadership may have been contemplating closure for weeks or more, staff may be taken off guard and have emotional reactions before they are able to process the

change and recognize the possible opportunities it presents. If staff discontent continues during the closure process, agency leadership will need to balance supporting them and addressing their concerns with holding them to a reasonable standard in their work, in order to ensure the facility meets its obligations, including meeting youth needs and maintaining a safe environment.

### Encouraging Staff to Remain and Work Effectively Until the Point of Closure

A number of staff members may leave soon after facility closure is announced, and agencies may see a steady number of individuals leaving after that, with some staying until closure based on prior agreement with the agency. Losing staff who work directly with youth before the facility closes can compromise the safety of the remaining youth and staff, and losing administrative staff can delay the timeline for closure. Some strategies for keeping staff on board until closure include:

- Creating an environment that pays attention to staff wellness;
- Offering recognition to staff who have served well for many years, and those who go above and beyond during the closure process;
- Ensuring agency leadership, staff supervisors, and HR personnel are being as transparent as possible, regularly meeting and communicating with staff to address their needs; and
- Expecting and planning for possible increases in incidents as both staff and youth react to the stress of change; encouraging staff to engage closely with youth, and supervisors to provide additional support and oversight of line staff, to keep these to a minimum. (Review the “Empowering staff to support youth long-term” discussion below and consider which of these suggestions the agency may be able to implement in the short-term to prevent safety issues.)

Agencies that have some budget flexibility and latitude over pay, and do not have stringent civil service or contract restrictions might also consider:

- Offering incentives such as retention bonuses for staff who are not staying with the agency but remain at the facility until closure; and
- Offering gap pay for some staff who choose to take jobs that will commence after facility closure (to cover all or part of pay between facility closure and the new position starting).

In times of stress and transition, even previously excellent staff may exhibit unexpected behaviors, such as calling out more frequently, or allowing/encouraging youth to misbehave. To guard against this, create an expectation of high quality work, and ensure that expectation is met through oversight and incentives.

- If bonuses are offered to staff who stay through closure, they can be tied to performance measures and have disqualifying factors such as calling out sick too many days.
  - Conversely, additional leave time can be offered as an incentive to accomplish transition tasks on or ahead of schedule.
  - Make extra efforts to stabilize the facility’s leadership team by ensuring they will have jobs elsewhere following closure, which will allow them to work confidently--and support junior staff--through the transition.
  - Give staff a sense of agency throughout the closure process by enlisting them to serve on workgroups and help plan for closure; respond promptly to concerns. Ensure that line staff and others are able to get away from their day-to-day responsibilities to attend town hall meetings about the transition, participate in job search activities, and attend to transition-related responsibilities.
-

## Helping Facility Staff Connect to Other Employment

Concerns about lost jobs may be among the biggest opposition agencies face when closing a facility, but there are many strategies to minimize the need for layoffs of well-performing staff and help staff transition to new positions within the agency or elsewhere.

### Transfers Within the Agency or to Other Government Agencies

The ability to transfer positions within a juvenile justice agency (or a related agency) will vary significantly according to the individual's role, training and qualifications and larger factors such as the location of the closing facility, state civil service rules, and mobility of the staff member. Clerical staff at a facility may be able to transfer to another office within the agency if geography allows (or if they are willing to move). Clinical and case management providers may be able to provide services as part of an agency's continuum of care (e.g., other facilities, community-based services). There are many specific strategies agencies can use to support staff:

- Create a list of vacancies and their required qualifications.
  - Have human resources leadership meet with impacted employees, individually and in groups, to explain rules and choices relating to job transfers within the agency and to other public agencies, early retirement, etc. This includes educating staff on any prioritization they will have for jobs within the agency, or with other state agencies. Encourage HR leaders to hold "office hours" at the facility to answer staff questions and address concerns.
  - Determine whether the agency can "hold" open positions, in order to make them available to staff after closure.
  - Work closely with HR (and have them work closely with staff) to ensure that highly qualified staff are able to receive priority for their preferred positions.
  - Partner with other state or local HR agencies, so HR staff can keep staff informed and help them connect with open positions.
  - Consider offering relocation expenses to staff whose skills would be well-suited to positions elsewhere in the agency.
  - Offer opportunities for retraining and development of additional skills.
  - Offer the services outlined below, such as resume building and interviewing, to staff who will apply for competitive positions within the agency, or to related agencies.
  - Be creative in offering "perks" to staff the agency is most concerned with keeping; for example, clinical staff who may be able to continue working with
-

youth in a new location--and therefore minimize treatment disruption--if offered moving and transportation support.

- Make sure that staff understand the differences between their current position and a new one in advance to ensure it's a good fit. For example, doing community-based case management requires being "on call" in a way that facility-based case management may not.

It is important to recognize, however, that not every staff member will be well-suited for a transfer to available positions within a realigning agency; staff who have worked primarily in secure facilities may not have (or want to develop) the skills necessary to serve youth in non-residential, community-based settings. Agencies should also review any existing collective bargaining agreements to ensure that all requirements, such as notification or seniority preferences, are met.

#### Employment Opportunities outside the Government:

Some staff may not want to move themselves and their families, or may not qualify for different positions within the agency or other government agencies. Helping those staff connect to new positions will involve collaboration with other potential employers, as well as offering training and other services. Specific strategies could include the following:

- Bring HR to the facility to offer resume writing and interviewing workshops as well as training on internet-based job searching and applications.
- Collaborate with the local workforce board, as well as unions representing staff, to offer services, including one-on-one meetings and job fairs.
- Work closely with other large employers in the area, particularly those facing staffing shortages, to identify how employees' transferable skills may meet their needs, and what opportunities for re-training might make sense.
- Enlist the help of local elected officials and civic leaders in identifying and procuring assistance from other local agencies or businesses that could hire facility staff.

#### **Improving Staff Job Satisfaction and Empowering Staff to Support Youth Remaining in Custody**

As juvenile justice systems downsize their facility populations, keeping only very high risk youth in secure settings, new approaches are being implemented to support youth rehabilitation and ensure youth and staff safety. For example, CJCA has developed a toolkit on positive youth development, available at <http://cjca.net>.

---

### Staff Training

Agencies should offer training specific to any new populations staff will be working with (such as girls, older or younger youth, higher risk youth). They should also train *all* staff on issues such as positive human development, trauma, adolescent brain development, and mindfulness, so that they can understand youth behavior and respond to it appropriately.

### Using Research Effectively and Implementing Best Practices

Agencies should offer ongoing training, support, and oversight to ensure that evidence-based practices are being used consistently and with fidelity to their models, and that staff understand how to address problems in ways that are consistent with those practices. Specific strategies and practices could include:

- Bringing in evidence-based practices like Dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and ensuring that all staff (not just clinical/mental health) who work directly with youth are trained on elements of these interventions that can help them understand and better respond to youth needs and behavior.
- Teaching positive behavior management skills, such as verbal de-escalation and use of incentives, and implementing systemic approaches like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a multi-tiered approach to social, behavioral and emotional support.
- Bringing in comprehensive training efforts such as the Mental Health Training Curriculum for Juvenile Justice, “an 8-hour training on adolescent development, mental and substance use conditions and treatment, childhood trauma, the important role of families, [including] practical strategies for engaging and interacting with youth.” (National Center on Mental Health and Juvenile Justice).

#### TRAINING:

*Consider bringing in outside experts to conduct trainings, offering food, and allowing staff to “dress down” for training sessions. These professional development events can also be used as opportunities for agency leadership to speak about larger changes in the agency’s approach and how these training topics fit in.*

*Arranging for facility staff to “shadow” probation staff and vice versa, can give each a better sense of where youth are coming from and going to.*

Note that many juvenile correctional agencies are currently undergoing data-driven improvements based on research-supported practices in partnership with Performance-based Standards (PbS).

### Addressing Staff Wellness and Facility Climate

Agency leadership should ensure that supervisory staff are “buying in” and clearly supporting new policies and practices, and making sure the practices discussed above are actually happening. This will set the tone for line staff, and help them learn the new ways of doing things. Agency and facility leadership can also help staff deal with stress and achieve work-life balance (such as by offering training on secondary traumatic stress and self-care, or flex schedules). Conducting staff climate surveys can also help identify staff needs during the closure process and beyond. Additional strategies for improving staff satisfaction and maintaining healthy climates within facilities include:

- Ensuring that mental health and other clinical staff are working closely and collaboratively with line staff, giving them each an opportunity to better understand the behavior and experiences of the youth they are working with.
- Supporting staff in the adjustment to different physical layouts (such as from dorm-style to single rooms) and what that means for working with youth. (This can be a good opportunity to call on the insights of staff in other parts of the system who may have relevant experience). Also, when making physical changes, like taking down razor wire or other normalization efforts, help staff understand how these fit into larger efforts to provide more effective tools for rehabilitating youth. Leadership may wish to remind staff that their newly developed skills

#### IMPORTANCE OF STRONG MANAGEMENT:

*Although youth remaining in facilities are likely to be those with the most acute needs, research has shown that facility management has a greater impact on facility safety than the characteristics of the youth population in the facility. (Based on data from Performance-based Standards participants, summarized in CJCA’s Report on Safety in Facilities).*

#### HELP STAFF KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT:

*As with youth who are moving as a group from one facility to another, staff who are transitioning somewhere else may benefit from hearing about any new or better resources or amenities at the new location, and from moving familiar or important physical items like memorials to colleagues, artwork, or furnishings.*

can be effective replacements for the physical security measures that are being removed.

- Improving the culture of the facility through reduction of use of isolation and restraint and other improvements in conditions of confinement, which will create a better atmosphere for youth to live in and staff to work in. (CJCA has developed a toolkit and an issue brief on reducing the use of isolation and alternatives to isolation, available at <http://cjca.net>.)
- Making sure agency leadership is forecasting changes and system improvement efforts and that staff understand what changes are desired and what impacts those will likely have. Placing changes in the context of national and local trends (such as lower incarceration rates) can also make them seem less personal to staff.

#### STAFFING:

*Develop extra or “floater” positions that can fill in during vacations, gaps when positions are being filled, and times when extra staff are needed in various parts of the facility. Ensure that they have the same training and expertise as other employees.*

#### Aligning Staffing With Needs

Agencies should - before, during and after closures - ensure that new staff hired will be able to meet current and planned system needs. Many jurisdictions have found that as they shifted to more community-based programming, and residential treatment for only the most high risk youth, their staff needed to have higher education and training levels. This change may also require increasing staff-to-youth ratios, increasing structure and the number of activities offered to youth, and placing greater emphasis on relationship development between staff and youth.

## MANAGING LOGISTICS

Closing a facility can involve many details, large and small. Beyond the big picture tasks that most impact youth and staff, agencies will need to tackle a multitude of smaller issues such as:

- Placement or release paperwork for all youth (including transfer of educational, health, and other records);

***“Juvenile justice agency leaders need to be able to balance the fiscal interests of policy makers against what the research says is good for youths who are incarcerated. Data clearly indicates that youths need living environments that support growth and development. Youth should also be given access to quality treatment services, programs to support their well-being and have their educational and vocational needs met. Reform efforts must focus on providing the highest quality of service to those who remain in the system, which will result in overall cost savings.”***

***Susan Burke, Director,  
Utah Department of Juvenile Justice Services***

- Termination of contracts specific to the closing facility;
- HR details for all staff (transfer paperwork, completing exit interviews, paying out unused vacation time, etc.);
- Ensuring proper facility maintenance and sanitation through closure and after (to preserve property value and avoid remediation costs);
- Inventory and sale or transfer of all furnishings and equipment in the facility;
- Record retention, transfer or shredding as appropriate (check applicable records retention policies); and
- Retention and/or safekeeping of historical documents, records, log books, photographs or equipment. (Some items may need to go to the state's records archive department while others might need to go to a historical society.)

Using detailed checklists can help ensure that all necessary tasks happen, but adequate staffing must be available to ensure all items are completed well and on time. Look at the planned closure date and work backward from that when setting timelines.

A successful closure process will involve coordination and management from agency leadership and targeted work from relevant departments (for example, HR will be heavily involved in staff-related issues, programmatic staff with meeting youth needs, and construction/risk management with physical maintenance and changes at the facility).

The logistical work of closure also includes communicating details needed to address day-to-day decisions and actions by outside entities. For example, judges need to know to stop ordering youth committed to the facility (or law

#### **KEEP SOME STAFF PAST CLOSURE DATE:**

*Accomplishing the final logistical tasks, such as dealing with records, moving furniture out, and cleaning, will require keeping a few staff on past the closure date. Work closely with HR to ensure that final employment dates will allow for this. A mix of incentives and oversight may be needed to reassure staff so they continue to do their best work right up until the end.*

#### **PROJECT MANAGEMENT:**

*If resources allow, bring in a temporary "project manager" if the agency can find someone with experience closing facilities (experience could be with juvenile, correctional, or other types of institutions, such as a school or hospital, as the logistical details will be similar). Someone in the agency's operations department may also be able to fill this role, but it is important to have one person with logistics expertise driving those aspects of closure (such as sequencing tasks, planning the movement of equipment, holding everyone to timelines) while others in the agency are more focused on the staff and youth aspects of closure.*

enforcement or probations staff may need to stop bringing youth to the location), and vendors need to know when food and supply deliveries will cease.

## Recognizing Facility Closure

Some jurisdictions have held public events or taken other steps to acknowledge closure, including recognizing staff with plaques and creating commemorative coins. One state allowed past residents and their families, as well as former staff, to tour the facility (after the last youth had left) and released balloons to provide a sense of closure. Others have held quieter internal events. This decision may depend on the reasons for and climate during closure, but make sure the choice is sensitive to any negative history of the facility being closed and balances youth and families' experiences at the facility with the wishes of current and past facility staff and leadership. (For example, staff may appreciate being acknowledged for their work, or may still be unhappy about the closure if they have not yet secured other employment; individuals formerly incarcerated at the facility and living in the community may have a variety of feelings about the facility and its closure). The agency should be sensitive to the range of sentiments in planning any commemoration event.

## REALLOCATING RESOURCES

Closing a facility will likely save jurisdictions a significant amount of money, but bolstering community-based alternatives and ensuring high quality care for those youth who still need to be in secure settings will require adequate resource allocation. Work to ensure that some or all of the resources saved through facility closure are reinvested in youth should start as early as possible and continue throughout and beyond the closure process.

Recognize that reinvesting funds to support youth does not necessarily mean they will remain within the juvenile correctional agency. Providing funding and an

### BALANCED COMMUNICATION:

*Be frank about the benefits of closing a facility (for example, cost savings, improved environments for youth), but don't oversell those benefits, so that stakeholders understand that the alternatives will still have their own costs, and that no environment is going to work perfectly for every child.*

### REINVESTMENT:

*If reinvestment cannot be addressed in the larger reform or budget bill addressing the closure, work with legislative staff and allied stakeholders to put forward a stand-alone bill focused specifically on reinvestment.*

incentive structure can encourage counties to serve youth at home rather than sending them to state care. Funding diversion programs that support youth and families before arrest, referral or formal processing can support efforts to decrease the number of youth in juvenile justice systems overall. Increased availability of behavioral health care in communities can prevent youth who don't really need to be in the juvenile justice system from entering. Policies and services that help child welfare and education systems handle challenging youth in their care without reliance on the juvenile justice system will also contribute to shrinking the size of the juvenile justice system. Beyond simply reducing the number of youth in the system, allowing for resources to be directed to those who most need them, these types of changes can help juvenile justice systems achieve their larger goals of promoting better outcomes for youth and communities.

### Working with Legislative Staff

In conversations with legislative and budget staff it can be useful to highlight the fact that successfully closing facilities requires parallel investments in alternative services and supports. Share research showing the evidence-supported programming the agency would like to see put into place in communities as alternatives to the closing facility, including their costs. Even if closure is driven by budget shortages, agencies may be able to keep a portion of the savings if they make a strong case. Having these conversations early on can also lay the groundwork for additional support when the budget situation improves.

#### OVERSIGHT:

*Shifting to more community-based care will decrease the number of employees needed to work at state-run facilities, but may lead to an increased number of regional or central-office staff tasked with providing oversight to community-based programs. These staff should ensure that high-quality services are being provided to youth by external providers funded by the agency. Not all community-based providers or services will work equally well, so paying attention to what is successful and what outcomes are being achieved can help ensure the agency is investing resources in community-based services wisely.*

#### DATA:

*In addition to using national research to guide the agency's work and educate others, use local data whenever possible. If the agency does not currently collect and analyze data to show that what it is doing is working, and to identify areas of improvement, try to advocate for funding (or reallocate existing funding) to do so. If resources are tight, see if local universities, research groups, or community foundations can help.*

## Illustrating the Value of Supporting Youth through a Continuum of Care

Educating legislators and their staff, other agencies, and the juvenile correctional agency's own staff about the best uses of funding will be key to ensuring that facility closure helps support long-term improvements for youth and families. Some considerations on this issue include the following:

- Serving youth in their homes and communities is what works best; trying to rehabilitate youth elsewhere and then send them back home is less effective.<sup>8</sup>
- Keeping youth out of out-of-home placements will require that adequate services are available in communities: Some of these services may be offered by other agencies (such as behavioral health interventions), but they will require funding support. In an environment where some needed services have long wait lists, juvenile justice agencies may need to contract directly with providers to ensure that youth and families involved with (or at risk for involvement with) their agency are able to access them.
- Part of ensuring that an agency has the resources it needs going forward is being prepared to respond to criticisms that may arise. For example, if recidivism rates are going up as the number of youth in custody goes down, agency leadership may need to explain that the new concentrated higher-risk population is expected to recidivate at a higher rate. If there is an incident with a young person who was recently released from a facility and may be under community supervision, be proactive about reaching out to community leaders and elected officials in that area to discuss it.

## Keeping in Mind the Costs and Benefits

Closing a facility is a real opportunity to reinvest and realign funding to achieve better outcomes for youth, families, and communities. Closures should be carried out in ways that meet the agency's goals of better outcomes for youth and communities as well as protecting public safety and maximizing the effectiveness of juvenile justice spending. Achieving this goal, however, means balancing the reinvestment opportunities that emerge when you have fewer juvenile facilities with the harms that can occur when an agency has too many youth in one facility, or its only facilities are far from the families and home communities that can support youth. While bigger facilities can create economies of scale for specialized education or other service delivery, they can raise other concerns such as higher rates of youth victimization<sup>9</sup> that should be considered. In addition, some CJCA

---

<sup>8</sup> Fabelo, T., Arrigona, N., Thompson, M. D., Clemens, A., & Marchbanks III, M. P. (2015). *Closer to Home: An Analysis of the State and Local Impact of the Texas Juvenile Justice Reforms*. New York, NY. <https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NT.0000278743.20665.a0>; Lowenkamp, C.T. & Latessa, E.J. (2005). *Evaluation of Ohio's RECLAIM Funded Programs, Community Corrections Facilities, and DYS Facilities*. Cincinnati, OH.

<sup>9</sup> Heaton, Leanne et al. "Facility-level and Individual-level Correlates of Sexual Victimization in Juvenile Facilities, 2012." (June 28, 2016) Available at <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/flilcsvj12.pdf>.

members have found that larger facilities in their systems have lower staff retention rates than smaller ones. Prudent planners will consider these and other factors when making decisions about closure.

In determining what portion of funds will be available for reinvestment, part of the conversation should be about safety and service delivery for youth remaining in out-of-home care. Decision makers planning reinvestment should make sure that the staffing, service, training, facility maintenance and improvements, and other costs for serving the youth who remain are accurately calculated. Such calculations should take into account projected costs of caring effectively for a smaller but concentrated high-risk population if reforms have resulted in that makeup of youth in care.

### DEALING WITH FACILITIES POST-CLOSURE

Selling or repurposing the facility *as soon as possible* after closure will support the agency's goals in numerous ways:

**Preserving value:** The longer a facility sits unused, its resale value may drop, while the risk of trespassing, pests, mold, and other concerns may increase.

**Saving on maintenance costs:** Even if the agency will not be receiving the funds from a sale of the facility, transferring it to other hands quickly can save hundreds of thousands of dollars. Keeping a facility in good enough condition to repurpose or resell requires regular mowing (and related fuel costs), running water and air conditioners (to avoid mold), maintaining utilities, and numerous other steps, which will generally require keeping staff onsite, with salaries and benefits.

**Avoiding future costs:** If a facility falls below code, it may not have any resale value and the agency will need to pay additional costs for demolition.

**Preventing pressure to re-open:** If the facility sits vacant for too long, changes in the political climate, community services or court practices could lead to a push to reopen the facility if it is not currently being used in other ways.

Agencies can also preserve resources by ensuring that any equipment and other agency property (such as vehicles, computers) in the closing facility are reallocated to other parts of the system that may need them.

---

("facilities with higher rates of staff sexual misconduct are more likely to be larger in size, i.e., 25 or more youth," and "sexual victimization is less prevalent in facilities where youth report that there are enough staff to monitor what takes place in the facility.")

---

## Measuring Success When Closing a Facility

Agencies will need to determine what constitutes success in a facility closure, and how they wish to track and measure their progress and ultimate outcomes. Some measures to consider include:

- Number of safety or other incidents experienced by youth and staff and complaints filed during and following closure;
- Retention or reallocation of physical and financial resources;
- Enhancement of community-based services;
- Improved environment in any remaining facilities;
- Closure occurring in a timely manner, with all files and property placed appropriately;
- Percentage of staff laid off, retained or placed elsewhere.

## Opportunities Presented by Closure

Closing a facility may be a significant amount of work, and can realize some immediate benefits, including cost savings and fewer youth in secure confinement. Closure also presents opportunities to further larger system reforms, to improve conditions for youth who will remain in secure confinement, and to better align the agency's workforce to its needs and improve employee satisfaction. CJCA members who shared their experiences with closure reported many benefits to youth, families, staff, and the agency:

- One state shared that in response to staff concerns that the youth who remained in their new, smaller facilities would be the "most difficult" youth, the agency offered additional training and data-driven solutions, helping staff feel equipped to meet even acute youth needs in positive ways. Data also allowed leaders to show staff that the rate of incidents was no higher post-reform than it had been before.
  - A state that moved numerous youth from a large facility in a remote part of the state to a smaller facility close to the state capital was able to provide a wider range of services to those youth because of the increased availability of highly qualified professionals, as well as providing a newer facility that had single rooms.
  - Several states used closure as an opportunity to both reduce their populations by releasing appropriate youth and to move those youth who still needed to be
-

securely confined to facilities that had better safety records and had more fully embraced positive youth development practices.

- Ensuring trauma-informed practices during closure can also be an opportunity for an entire agency: one state found that mental health training brought in to address increased self-harm incidents in a facility that was closing was so effective that the agency is now providing that training to all staff in the system.
- As one state was bringing down the population of a facility slated to close, staff prepared youth for transition home by sending a psychologist and a case manager on home visits with youth. The involvement of clinical staff was so successful at supporting transition that it became a regular practice for the agency, especially for youth with severe mental illness.
- The closure process is a good time to re-examine how things are working at remaining facilities and placements and make changes as needed. States shared examples of culture change, increased service offerings, and practice improvements that happened in receiving facilities during the closure process. One state reported that the agency's closures were part of a cultural shift of trying to create safe environments, psychologically and physically, shifting from a correctional to a developmental approach. That state also emphasized that changes won't become embedded unless they are part of a larger culture shift.

## CONCLUSION

Closing a facility will require a significant amount of work by agency leadership, staff, and other partners, but using this guide can help agencies carry out a closure successfully and ultimately achieve better outcomes for youth and families. The appendix to this document provides numerous additional resources, as does the CJCA website. For additional support during a closure process, please contact: Michael Dempsey, CJCA Executive Director ([Michael.Dempsey@cjca.net](mailto:Michael.Dempsey@cjca.net)) or Darlene Conroy, CJCA Membership Services Manager ([Darlene.Conroy@cjca.net](mailto:Darlene.Conroy@cjca.net)).

Please see CJCA's website at [www.cjca.net](http://www.cjca.net) for sample tools and forms that serve as Appendices to this toolkit.

---

