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## DETENTION REFORM: A COST-SAVING APPROACH

*“A single detention bed costs the public as much as \$1.5 million over a 20-year period.”*

—EARL DUNLAP, CEO, NATIONAL JUVENILE DETENTION ASSOCIATION

**JUVENILE DETENTION  
ALTERNATIVES INITIATIVE**

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

While some youth need to be confined for public safety reasons, many communities spend millions of dollars detaining youth who could be safely supervised elsewhere. By helping ensure that the right youth—but only the right youth—are detained, the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) helps communities reduce wasteful spending detaining non-violent youth, and frees up these funds for more effective public safety solutions.

### **JUVENILE DETENTION IS THE MOST EXPENSIVE, BUT LEAST EFFECTIVE WAY TO ACHIEVE PUBLIC SAFETY GOALS.**

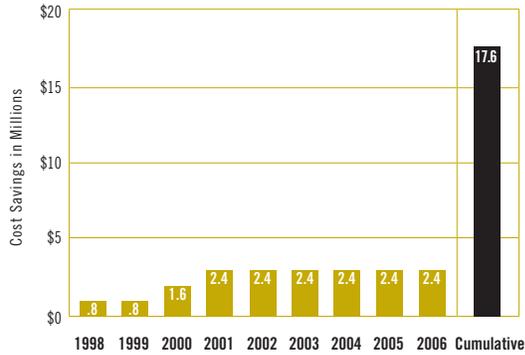
While costs vary from region to region, the price of detaining a young person can range from \$32,000 to \$65,000 annually, or even more in some places. Over time, these costs really add up: including construction, finance, and operating costs, a single detention bed can cost \$1.5 million over a 20-year period.

JDAI cuts costs by helping communities safely reduce detention populations, which enables them to close detention units or avoid the expense of new construction. Many JDAI sites have shifted money once spent on detention to other kinds of youth supervision programs and services, saving counties and states millions in confinement-related costs.

### **WITH FEWER YOUTH DETAINED, JDAI SITES HAVE CLOSED DETENTION UNITS AND SAVED MONEY.**

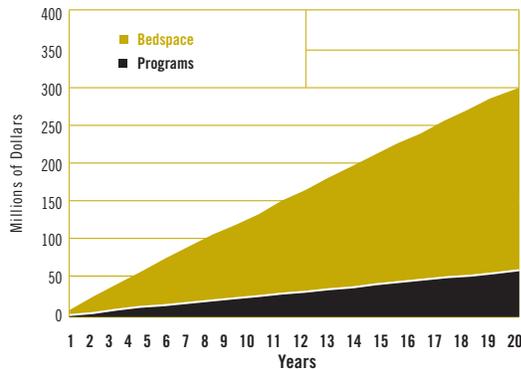
Because JDAI safely reduces the number of young people detained, many communities realize big savings by closing wings (or units) of detention centers. For example, because of decreased detention use, Multnomah County (Portland), Oregon, closed three 16-bed detention units between 1998 and 2001. Since then, it has saved \$2.4 million each year in detention

FIGURE 1  
**JDAI MODEL SITE MULTNOMAH COUNTY REDEPLOYS  
 \$17.6 MILLION DOLLARS**



Source: Multnomah County, Oregon, *JDAI Results Report*, 2006.

FIGURE 2  
**OVER 20 YEARS, JDAI'S DETENTION ALTERNATIVES  
 WILL SAVE COOK COUNTY ALMOST A QUARTER OF  
 A BILLION DOLLARS IN DETENTION COSTS**



Source: Cook County, Illinois, *JDAI Results Report*, 2006.

operating costs, for a total of more than \$17 million in cumulative savings.

**JDAI HELPS COMMUNITIES AVOID BUILDING BIGGER, MORE EXPENSIVE DETENTION CENTERS.** By enabling communities with crowded facilities to reduce the inappropriate use of detention, JDAI helps avoid the costs of building bigger or additional detention centers. For example, before JDAI was introduced in Cook County (Chicago), Illinois, the county had authorized the construction of 200 new detention beds in response to chronic overcrowding. This new facility would have cost approximately \$300 million over 20 years. Instead, the county has spent approximately \$3 million annually on alternative-to-detention programs and related staffing. By safely reducing the number young people detained on any given day, JDAI reforms enabled the county to forego construction of the planned detention center. Over two decades, JDAI will save the county almost \$250 million.

**JDAI SHIFTS PUBLIC SAFETY SPENDING FROM DETENTION TO COMMUNITY-BASED SUPERVISION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES.** The tax dollars that communities save by reducing detention spending has been re-invested in other forms of youth supervision, services and interventions. In Pierce County (Tacoma), Washington, for example, JDAI reforms helped close a 50-bed detention unit and shifted approximately \$800,000 to support new community-based detention alternative programs for youth. In Bernalillo County (Albuquerque), New Mexico, JDAI helped the community close a wing of beds in a local juvenile detention center, and reinvested \$200,000 on detention alternatives so that youth are supervised safely in the community.

**JDAI HELPS REDUCE THE NUMBER OF YOUTH SENT TO EXPENSIVE STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES.** Sending a young person to a state correctional facility is expensive, and can cost taxpayers upwards of \$60,000 a year. While JDAI strategies are primarily

geared toward helping communities reduce the number of youth detained locally, many of the detention reform strategies help sites reduce the number of youth sent to state correctional facilities or other out-of-home placements. Cook, Santa Cruz, and Multnomah counties have seen the number of youth they send to state facilities decline by 50 percent or more, relying instead on community-based alternatives or interventions that have far better public safety track records than state lock-ups. Whether counties are saving funds they would have spent sending young people to expensive state placements, or whether states are saving money because counties are making better decisions, JDAI is helping save taxpayer dollars.

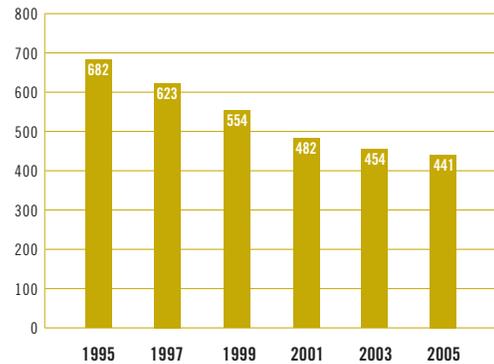
### HOW DOES JDAI HELP COMMUNITIES SAVE MONEY?

**1) JDAI INCREASES SYSTEM EFFICIENCY.** By identifying where there are backlogs or delays in the system, detention reforms can be implemented to speed up case processing so that youth move through the system faster. These efficiencies reduce lengths of stay in detention and expand program resources.

**2) JDAI DEVELOPS NON-SECURE ALTERNATIVES THAT ARE LESS EXPENSIVE THAN DETENTION BEDS.** While detaining a young person can cost tens of thousands of dollars each year, JDAI sites develop a range of detention alternatives to supervise young people in the community and ensure their appearance in court. For example, while a day in detention in Cook County costs, on average, \$114 a day, many young people are now supervised in the community by a youth advocate for \$17 a day, or report nightly to a community center for intensive supervision and programming at a cost of \$35 a day. Over 90 percent of the young people in Cook County's detention alternatives remained arrest-free while in the programs.

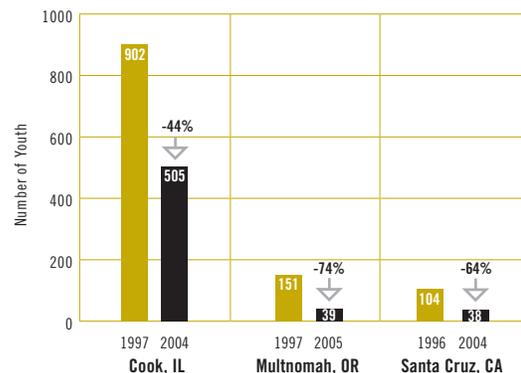
**3) JDAI KEEPS YOUNG PEOPLE OUT OF STATE JUVENILE FACILITIES.** JDAI's core strategies, including data-driven decision-making, improved stakeholder

FIGURE 3  
**COOK COUNTY REDUCED THE AVERAGE DAILY POPULATION IN DETENTION**



Source: Cook County, Illinois, *JDAI Results Report*, 2006.

FIGURE 4  
**JDAI SITES SAVE TAXPAYERS MONEY BY REDUCING THE NUMBER OF YOUTH SENT TO STATE FACILITIES**



Source: *JDAI Model Site Reports*, 2006.

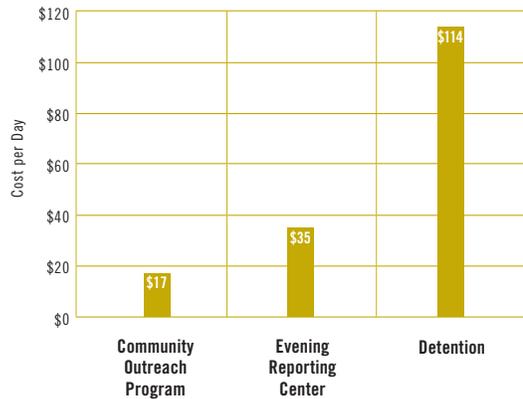
collaboration, and objective tools to identify the youth most at-risk of reoffending, have helped communities develop the skill set needed to reduce spending on state incarceration and other out-of-home placements. Thanks to JDAI, sites are making smarter placement decisions and relying more on proven community-based placements, all of which help save taxpayer dollars and keep more youth closer to home.

**4) JDAI HELPS PUT YOUNG PEOPLE INTO THE MOST COST-EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS.** New research that contrasts the costs and benefits of various crime reduction strategies shows that juvenile detention does not provide a big return on the money invested. For example, researchers in Washington State have shown that for every dollar government invests in detaining a young person, about \$1.98 in “benefits” are generated through reduced crime and savings to taxpayers. In contrast, evidenced-based practices (interventions that are scientifically proven to cut juvenile recidivism) yield much bigger returns, saving upwards of \$6 to \$13 for every dollar the government invests in these kinds of services to youth and families. The more public safety resources that can be devoted to these kinds of interventions, the more taxpayers will save by avoiding crime.

*For more information, see Holman, B., and J. Ziedenberg. 2006. The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities. Washington, D.C.: Justice Policy Institute.*

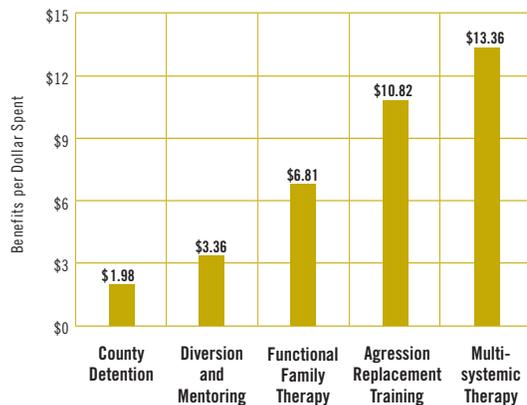
JDAI is an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. To learn more about the Foundation’s investments in this work, visit the Major Initiatives JDAI section at [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org). For access to JDAI’s technical assistance help desk, visit [jdaihelpdesk.org](http://jdaihelpdesk.org).

FIGURE 5  
**COOK COUNTY (CHICAGO): JDAI’s DETENTION ALTERNATIVES HELP COMMUNITIES SAVE MONEY EVERY DAY**



Source: Cook County, Illinois, *JDAI Results Report*, 2006.

FIGURE 6  
**COST EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERVENTIONS PER DOLLAR SPENT**



Source: S. Aos. 2002. *The Juvenile Justice System in Washington State: Recommendations to Improve Cost-Effectiveness*. Olympia, Washington: Washington State Institute for Public Policy.