

Juvenile Detention Reform 101: the Model and Core Strategies

Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) does not seek to eliminate the use of detention. Rather, JDAI seeks to **detain only the right kids for the right reasons for the right amount of time**. Explaining how youth are developmentally different than adults, how adolescents respond to authority and the effect of trauma on their behavior. Holding youth accountable for their actions while keeping them on track for long-term success.

Ensure high-risk youth are detained

The key to good detention practices is an objective decision-making process ensures that high-risk youth are indeed detained.

- The use of a rigorously tested, validated screening tool typically requires detention for any youth accused of a serious violent felony, and it uses a point system to detain any young person who—based on empirical evidence—poses a high likelihood to harm public safety or fail to appear in court.
- This screening instrument is developed through a collaborative process involving state and/or local judges, prosecutors, probation chiefs, public defenders, and other community stakeholders... **and law enforcement.**

Right kid + right reason + right time

Alternatives for moderate-risk youth

Alternative to detention programs for moderate-risk youth provide meaningful supervision and lead to better outcomes at lower cost.

- For instance, among the 18 New Jersey Counties participating in JDAI in 2014 and 2015, just 4% of youth placed in detention alternatives were arrested on new delinquency charges during the period they might have been detained.
- In 2019, aggregated data reported from Indiana's 32 JDAI counties showed success in use of Alternative to Detention (ATD) programs. Of the almost 4,500 completed ATDs, 89% of the exits occurred without new referral for an offense or failure to appear for a court hearing.

Protect Public Safety

JDAI sites report impressive results in protecting public safety. Compared to their levels prior to sites joining JDAI,

- total arrests are down 44% in sites that track them,
- total delinquency petitions are down 35%, and
- felony petitions are down 57%.

Detention and incarceration are especially damaging to young people's odds of success.

- A recent study involving tens of thousands of youths in Chicago found that, controlling for offending history and a wide range of background variables, **being placed in detention during adolescence "results in large decreases in the likelihood of high school completion and large increases in the likelihood of adult incarceration."**

