

# **“WE’RE IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL”: ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION FOR YOUTH IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW**



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*A young man burglarizes the home of a police officer in Englewood, stealing a laptop. The officer is upset and frustrated, perceiving the young man as nothing more than a thug. Precious Blood Ministries staff is able to bring the young man, his mother, and the officer together in a peace circle. Everyone discusses what happened and its impact. The officer speaks to the young man about how the burglary hurt him, not just through losing an important possession, but especially because it affects him as a father. His son is now saying he no longer wants to live in the neighborhood, and the officer worries he is not providing adequately for his own child. The mother of the youth who committed the offense also speaks of the stress and pain the situation has created for her. The youth is able to express his own experiences, growing up in the challenging neighborhood without adequate resources and experiencing struggles at school. The officer also grew up in Englewood and is able to begin to connect with the youth who had broken into his home. The young man is able to recognize how his actions hurt the family he burglarized and also hurt his own mother. He apologizes many times. When the circle facilitator asks the officer what he needs to recover from the harm done to him, the policeman states that he has everything he needs, but that he wants to see the young man go to school. The officer also mentions that he is a coach. He offers to play ball with the young man, who joins him. Father Kelly, a staff person from Precious Blood Ministries, notes that this outcome could not be reached through a court process that focuses on assessing culpability and meting out punishment by sending the youth to detention. Father Kelly believes the accountability process of a true restorative justice circle can lead to lasting positive changes for all parties, as well as building community connections.*

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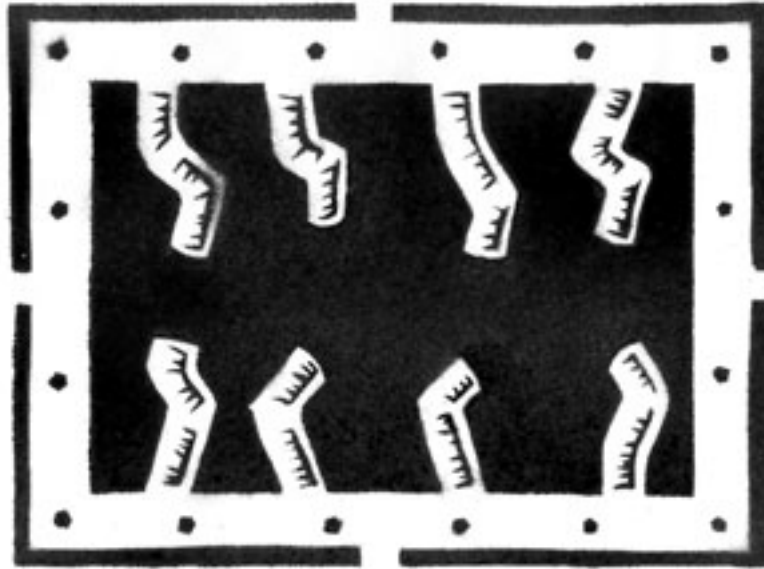
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### THE CRISIS OF YOUTH INCARCERATION

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There is an urgent need to find constructive ways to respond to young people in conflict with the law. Research compellingly demonstrates that youth placed in juvenile detention centers compared to alternative interventions are much more likely to later spend significant time in prison (Aizer and Doyle, 2013). Juvenile and adult incarceration both create exorbitant financial and social costs (Petteruti, Velázquez, and Walsh, 2009). Incarceration of juveniles is harmful to young peoples’ development, education, families, communities, and their current and future socioeconomic status (Majd, 2011; Bickel, 2010). Furthermore, incarcerating youth is not effective at enhancing public safety (Butts & Evans, 2011; Petteruti, Velázquez, & Walsh, 2009). Conditions of detention, even when monitored and regulated, often involve serious violations of human rights, such as solitary confinement and sexual violence perpetrated by staff (Beck, Cantor, Hartge, & Smith, 2013; Kysel, 2012; Krisberg, 2009). These abuses harm youths’ physical health, mental health, and social well-being (McCarty, Stoep, Kuo, & McCauley, 2006; Mendel, 2011). Destructive conditions that create lasting damage are even more extreme for youth confined to adult jails and prisons (Arya, 2007; Sarri and Shook, forthcoming; Wood, 2012). The detention process disconnects youth from family and supportive relationships, interrupts education, and makes it difficult for youth to get adequate exercise, healthcare, nutrition, and support.



Incarceration is extravagantly expensive. In 2012, Illinois taxpayers paid an average of \$86,861 per year for each youth incarcerated in state prison (Illinois Department of Human Services, 2012). Taxpayers paid an astounding \$219,000 per year for each youth confined to the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (Civic Federation, 2013). These numbers do not include associated costs, such as government monies used to pay police, investigators, prosecutors, public defenders, judges, court personnel, and others for the arrest, investigation, and adjudication of youth's criminal cases. Illinois (and the rest of the United States) has made a staggering investment in the criminalization of youth.

Incarceration is traumatic for youth, as evidenced by young peoples' suicides, suicide attempts, self-harm, and the worsening of mental health symptoms while inside (Hayes, 2009; Ford, Chapman, Hawke, & Albert 2007). The stigma of incarceration follows youth for a lifetime, interfering with education, housing, jobs, economic wellbeing, and stable community relationships (Houchins et al, 2009). Disproportionate arrest, prosecution, conviction, and sentencing of youth of color perpetuate and intensify racist injustice throughout the United States (Jones, 2012; US Department of Justice, 2012; Cahn, Nash, and Robbins, 2011). Incarceration can be particularly horrific for gender non-conforming youth, who may be assigned to facilities on the basis physical examinations or identification documents rather than based on the youth's own gender identity and presentation. Thus, someone who lives in the world as a young woman may be incarcerated at a men's prison. This exposes the youth to significant danger and trauma (Estrada & Marksamer, 2006). Finally, there is no conclusive evidence that incarceration in juvenile detention centers safeguards our communities, improves pro-social behavior among those currently or formerly incarcerated, or rehabilitates youth who have engaged in harmful behavior (National Juvenile Justice Network, 2011). Because incarceration is expensive, traumatic, disruptive, and ineffective (Mendel, 2011), exploring alternative strategies for working with youth in conflict with the law offers rich opportunities to promote community

well-being while saving money. Carefully implemented, alternatives to detention/incarceration can reduce harm in communities, promote youth development, contain costs, enhance safety, protect human rights, and build a stronger society.

Conservative, moderate, and progressive political forces can easily unify around the idea of less expensive, more effective ways to build young people's capacity, hold youth accountable for their behavior, and promote individual and community well-being. Alternatives to incarceration can deliver all of this and help meet the individual needs of youth.

This paper describes a number of programs in Chicago that provide alternatives to incarceration for young people charged with or convicted of crimes. Included in this exploration are issues of cost, effectiveness, capacity, and the needs of youth and organizations moving forward. In reality, the idea of such programs is not truly "alternative," but already embedded in our current criminal legal system through the mandates of the Illinois Juvenile Court Act itself, as explored in the next section.

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#### **LEGAL MANDATE FOR ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION AND DETENTION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH**

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The Illinois Juvenile Court Act specifically mandates that the juvenile justice system "[p]romote the development and implementation of community-based programs designed to prevent unlawful and delinquent behavior and to effectively minimize the depth and duration of the minor's involvement in the juvenile justice system" (Juvenile Court Act, p. 1). The Act further tasks the system to "[p]rovide programs and services that are community-based and that are in close proximity to the minor's home" (p. 1), and to "[a]llow minors to reside within their homes whenever possible and appropriate and provide support necessary to make this possible" (p. 1). Capacitation and rehabilitation without incarceration of youth convicted of crimes is not actually an alternative form of delivering justice. The Illinois legal system mandates that this be the heart of our juvenile justice programming.

Cliff Nellis, an attorney from Lawndale Christian Legal Center, explained that the Juvenile Court Act mandates that in the sentencing of a youth, "By statute, you have to do an individualized assessment, you have to always when possible place them in the home with their parents and siblings, able to continue building relationships with school teachers. This is required of judges, state's attorneys, and the probation department, and every defense attorney should be advocating for this. Then the community and state must put forth resources to have community-based alternatives, because you can't carry out the law if there are no [programs] to put the kid into." Nellis clarifies that the juvenile courts are required to sentence youth in the least restrictive of all reasonable alternatives. In order to confine a youth to the Department of Juvenile Justice, the state's attorney or probation department must demonstrate to the judge that all efforts have been made to place a youth with a community-based program and that only if a community program is not viable may incarceration be considered.

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## **WHAT ARE ALTERNATIVES TO DETENTION?**

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There are many different ways to conceptualize and define alternatives to incarceration. A robust consideration of the concept must go beyond imposing new forms of punishment, confinement, and surveillance. In addition, there are numerous programs that provide support to youth that one might think of as preventing incarceration and detention. These include excellent education, afterschool programs, sports, youth job programs, training programs, camps, and anything that provides young people with resources to learn, grow, develop mastery, meet basic needs, build positive relationships, and find ways to share and contribute in their community. These programs are too numerous to count and abound in particular in wealthy, well-resourced communities offering abundant opportunity for learning, self-expression, connection, and recreation. Access to money, resources, recreational spaces, positive programs, and schools focused on providing youth with positive options, along with low levels of police surveillance, leads to low levels of criminalization and incarceration in wealthy neighborhoods. While we advocate providing such resources to all communities, this report does not examine all the types of programming and neighborhood characteristics that lead to healthy outcomes for youth. Instead, we are describing programs that work with youth who don't receive adequate resources or assistance from government, communities, schools, families, neighborhoods, programs, or religious institutions and thus become involved in conflicts with the law. For this paper, "alternatives to incarceration" refers to programming which takes the place of detention for a youth, either after arrest and before trial, or after conviction and sentencing. The program may be considered an alternative if the youth would be incarcerated at the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center or the Illinois Youth Center if not for participating in this program. The programs we considered also generally work with young people intensively enough that they can actually make a longterm difference in the youths' lives.

During the interviews, program staff identified some of the key elements of a true alternative to incarceration in this spirit, mentioning that an optimal alternative to incarceration is community based and connects youth to the community. Instead of coming from outside institutions, a good alternative to incarceration builds relationships and a sense of safety and connection within the community. Without this, a program can serve more as an extension of carceral systems into the community rather than a true alternative that provides long-term benefits for youth.

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## **ALTERNATIVES IN CHICAGO**

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There are already a number of programs in place in Chicago that serve as excellent alternatives to incarceration for youth. The organizations running these programs deserve recognition and need support to continue and expand their crucial work. This paper documents some of these effective and innovative programs, which can serve as models for future programming. The report also takes inventory of some of the key needs identified by program staff and the youth. We give brief overviews of five model programs with different capacities and structures. Each has its own effective practices for helping youth gain the resources to grow into positive adults. The programs included in the



report are Precious Blood Ministries, Lawndale Christian Legal Center, Youth Outreach Services, Circles and Ciphers, and New Life Centers of Chicagoland.

There are other programs in Chicago that provide alternatives to incarceration for youth, such as programs within the Cook County Probation Department (whose programs are briefly described in the Appendix), New Beginnings Church, and Youth Advocate Programs. Unfortunately we were unable to reach staff of these organizations to conduct detailed interviews, but it is important to note that the work going on in the city spans beyond the programs detailed here. The report will give brief profiles of each of the five programs and then summarize the needs and recommendations identified.



### ***Precious Blood Ministries***

Father Kelly described this program's innovative work in Back of the Yards in Chicago. A core element of their approach is to focus on building relationships and mentoring young people, from a grounding in restorative justice principles and practices. The program serves about sixty youth, connecting an adult point person to each young person. Precious Blood provides activities on Saturdays for youth as part of what some call "Saturday Sanctions," which can serve as an explicit alternative to incarceration. Instead of being detained, the young person attends programs with Precious Blood. Father Kelly and the Precious Blood team focus on helping youth expand their knowledge of the city and have new, positive experiences together.

The team works a great deal with youth who are already in juvenile detention and those who have been released. The program engages youth in positive activities right in their home neighborhoods. Last summer, they created a community garden and a mural. Young people gain job readiness skills, new social skills, and positive contacts in these projects, which involve them in teamwork and give them a clear structure. Staff also engage in informal activities with youth, such as playing basketball.

The program also provides volunteer mentors. The mentors help young people make plans for future education, navigate conflicts and choices, and gain access to resources that can create motivation and positive energy, such as a studio space to record their own original music.

Along with the specific alternatives to incarceration, Precious Blood has many other programs that help to strengthen communities in Back of the Yards and beyond. They hold regular meetings to find ways to support and challenge the youth in their care. They offer peace circles to people who have inflicted and/or experienced harm in the community. They offer peace circle facilitation trainings. Precious Blood Ministries also holds specific events to educate community members and to organize the community for peacemaking.

### ***Circles and Ciphers***

Ethan Ucker, one of two staff people, discussed this hip-hop youth leadership development organization, incubated by Project NIA in Rogers Park, that works almost exclusively with youth in conflict with the law. Last year they served about ninety youth. As currently constituted, Circles & Ciphers offers programming in prison, school, and community settings to young men of color who are gang-involved, on probation, on parole, and in detention. Additionally, the organization operates as a restorative justice hub, offering workshops, trainings, and facilitating conflict resolution processes with young men and young women from Chicago's North Side. Their work fuses restorative justice practices and principles with hip-hop arts and culture to create a safe space for young people who are marginalized, criminalized, and disengaged from their communities. Through a comprehensive series of hip-hop infused peacemaking circles, young people can "express themselves, reflect on the challenges they are facing and the legacies they have inherited, make art, and analyze behaviors (their own and the actions of others) in terms of root causes and underlying needs" (Ethan Ucker). Peacemaking circles, structured non-hierarchically, provide a context in which young people can share

their personal stories, listen deeply, resolve conflicts, build relationships, express new and emerging parts of their identities, and articulate their dreams for the future. Staff support youth as they become restorative justice practitioners in their own right, internalizing restorative justice values and principles so that they inform everyday decision-making, approaches to conflict, and personal relationships with peers, family members, and adults. In partnership with staff, youth leaders design and implement their own leadership projects in the community, such as youth-led community gardening circles, an inter-generational community book club, and a collaborative mixtape CD. A recent focus has been on supporting students who are at risk of being pushed out of school, providing space for them to express the challenges they are facing in school, and to cultivate critical consciousness about the impact of institutional racism and systems of oppression.

Organization staff and volunteer mentors flexibly respond to the manifold needs of youth, accompanying them to help build bridges with a variety of resources in the community (food, housing, job readiness training, employment opportunities, financial literacy). When youth are in crisis, such as losing housing or needing help with family emergencies, the staff advocate for them and assist them to meet their needs. Circles and Ciphers has brought together members of opposing gangs successfully in circle, as well as hosting successful circles including youth and police. The project has also been engaged in work beyond alternatives to incarceration, including working with youth in detention and providing programming to youth in a DCFS group home.

### ***New Life Centers of Chicagoland (Urban Life Skills Program)***

This is a program in Little Village, a predominantly Mexican American neighborhood. Their core work is intensive mentoring for youth in conflict with the law. Matt DeMateo mentions that the program has an excellent relationship with the judges they work with, who send youth to participate in the intensive mentoring program as well as a Saturday sanctions program specifically as an alternative to incarceration. New Life also has two different jobs programs and multiple sports leagues.

The program generally provides the intensive mentoring to approximately fifty to seventy-five youth annually who remain with the program for a year. Urban Life Skills currently works with every youth on juvenile probation in Little Village. The additional sports activities in the neighborhood, such as summer sports leagues involve over three hundred youth as well as their families.

The project cannot accept all the youth who are interested in receiving their services, and New Life generally focuses on the highest risk youth with gun cases. The program provides substance abuse counseling and Real Life Skills training. Real Life Skills includes adventure therapy during the summer which can include kayaking, rock climbing, and mountain biking. The staff also teach youth anger management, job readiness, and financial literacy. The program provides Friday night programming as well during the time when youth have the highest risk of becoming involved in violence. Friday night programming includes dinner and then teaches twelve core lessons (one per month). The lessons vary from goal setting, relationships, perseverance, and family to name a few. One of the lessons, Little Village vs. the World, focuses on expanding the youths' worldview and



learning about Chicago and its neighborhoods, with all their ethnic and cultural diversity. The program includes social activities to reinforce the lessons, and New Life also engages youth in peace circles. Each youth receives one-on-one mentoring, and the program takes them to events such as a recent mentoring conference for boys of color. Staff want to help youth learn ways to have fun that are healthy and safe and do not involve any drug or gang activity, and so also take them out to eat and bring them to the lake.

The program has served about four hundred youth over the past six years. Although youth are assigned to individual mentors who follow them closely, because the mentors are volunteers with other commitments, the program follows a group mentoring model. Everyone works with and checks in with young people so that all youth can be included in the organization's programs even if their main mentor is unable to attend.

Connected to its alternatives to detention, New Life runs innovative jobs programs for youth. The organization participates in the mayor's program that provides a small number of paying positions for youth. In addition, New Life has a program called BLING—Building Leaders in the Next Generation. They take reclaimed urban materials such as glass broken in Chicago Transit Authority bus shelters, and create jewelry, sometimes based on their own designs. Youth are paid by the piece, so that their pay rate is related to the quantity and quality of what they create. While this is not strictly an alternative to incarceration, young people with well-paying and meaningful work are less likely to become engaged in street economies that can land them in trouble with the law. The BLING program so far has been quite successful and some of the jewelry is being sold online while youth also learn about web design.

Regarding the focus of their work, Matt DeMateo explains: "We're in it for the long haul and you have to be. If you're really in it for the long term, it can't be just about the numbers. We are shooting for success stories. We want to see lives transformed, and we want to see kids avoid further penetration in the system. If we get there at the beginning then we can break them free, so that's our goal.... I've seen a lot of hope in the work that we're doing, so there is hope in showing a kid that just because you did something stupid or made a stupid decision, it doesn't mean you're done."

### ***Youth Outreach Services***

Heidi Mueller (formerly of YOS) describes the Evening Reporting Center (ERC) which serves as a type of alternative to incarceration, although the work with each youth can be fairly short term. These programs do not focus on long term prevention of recidivism, but do keep youth occupied from around 4:30–8:30 PM. Research shows that these are the hours when youth have the highest risk of becoming involved in negative or delinquent activity. The goal is to keep them from getting involved in a new case, and also to provide opportunities for education, social support, and recreation.

Youth who are sent to an ERC instead of pretrial detention and successfully complete the program without additional arrests would usually be sentenced to continue more of the same program or to probation instead of detention. The ERC program provides safe passage to participants, picking them up and dropping them off at their residences. They get one hot meal, and the program has a curriculum with life skills. Youth Outreach Services (YOS) provides information and training on resumes, job readiness, anger management, money management, and healthy relationships. Youth also have time for recreation in the program.

This ERC can be used as an alternative to pretrial detention, as an alternative to a sentence of incarceration after a conviction, as part of probation, or as a response to a violation of probation. There is a probation officer affiliated with each ERC, and this officer evaluates programs. The probation department also provides monthly programs. Youth who are on electronic monitoring may also be required to attend ERC, sometimes simply to allow them to be involved in programming outside their homes.

YOS also provides a full diversion program for youth through their adolescent domestic battery intervention project. This project works with youth when authorities are called in regarding an act of aggression toward a relative or someone living in the house. The intervention project does not address dating or intimate partner violence, but rather cases of aggressive behavior toward a sibling or parent, or even destruction of property in the home, such as throwing a parent's cell phone against the wall. Without this program in place, police follow the same protocol for these cases as they would for adult intimate partner violence, often referred to as domestic violence. Domestic violence protocols are generally inappropriate and inadequate to address the real issues and needs in families in which teens are acting out. In some instances, youth in these cases are responding to long patterns of abuse by adults in the home, yet the youth are criminalized and penalized. With the YOS adolescent domestic battery intervention project, if an officer refers a case to the project, a crisis team goes out within an hour, twenty-four hours a day. A team does a family assessment, a safety plan, and family violence screening. They determine whether the youth should remain in the home with support or go for emergency temporary foster placement, while teams work to stabilize the family. They avoid sending the young person to detention. The team continues to work with the family for three months, using evidence based practices to stabilize the family and address needs. The family may be referred for services such as brief strategic family therapy or multi-systems therapy. The program uses motivational interviewing, and the youth may receive substance abuse counseling or mental health treatment. The program may also advocate with the state's attorney's office on behalf of the young person regarding his or her case.

YOS started the program for youth charged with domestic battery in 2010. Police, state's attorneys, and the probation department have all collaborated with the project. This program can provide complete diversion from the juvenile justice system. Now that the police have this option to bring youth to YOS, police often refer youth directly to YOS and avoid arresting youth in these types of cases.

# PRISONS WILL NEVER PREVENT THE REASON FOR CRIME



In the past year, in the ERC, YOS served between one hundred and fifty to one hundred and seventy five youth, usually fifteen at a time, but sometimes more. There were about fifty referrals to the adolescent domestic battery program between 2010 and the middle of 2012. A very small percentage of youth involved in the adolescent domestic battery program actually fit into typical stereotypes or profiles of perpetrators of intimate partner violence (batterers). With youth in the domestic battery program, a common case involves a family under unusual stress that has some kind of acute conflict which can resolve with appropriate supports. In some instances, the youth themselves have been the targets of violence over long periods. Girls who are the victims of violence in their families have often ended up in detention as an end result of the family violence; programs like this YOS project can interrupt that injustice.

YOS also runs a multisystem therapy program which is an alternative to incarceration. In those cases, youth will still go to court. YOS is also working with other groups to start up peace circles and a restorative justice hub in Austin.

### ***Lawndale Christian Legal Center***

Lawndale Christian Legal Center (LCLC) does a specific alternative to incarceration through an after school program that runs Tuesday through Saturday. Youth in the program are engaged in mentoring, tutoring, and community projects. The program helps them with vocational training, resume writing, cover letter writing, job search, academic tutoring, and seeks to engage them through hands-on work. Cliff Nellis, an attorney with the project, describes examples of how staff keeps the youth engaged. For example, one day with the program, the staff hoisted up a car and showed the youth how to change oil. LCLC also does detention reduction and petitions for reduction of bond, along with working with judges to prevent felony convictions and subsequent incarceration. The center served seventy youth last year.

The program goes beyond alternatives to incarceration to work to create other lasting change in the lives of youth. As a legal services center, they recently received a grant to do a mock trial program which will pay youth for their work in learning about the legal system and preparing for and creating the trial. LCLC wants to focus on skill development and apprenticeship with the youth for preparation for long term employment.

Mr. Nellis discussed how the criminal legal system can create lifelong barriers for youth who make mistakes or get involved in street economies to meet survival needs. He says, "They're usually way behind [grade level in school and can't get caught up in the education system]. They get caught [breaking a law], they get arrested.... [and then they are harmed by] our criminal records laws. Now you can get a felony conviction at seventeen years old. I have way too many seventeen year olds in adult court. I don't think any of them should be in adult court. Most of them are in on drug charges.... I think we could prove nine out of ten of our kids who are being arrested and convicted and even incarcerated for drug cases are doing this as a means of supporting themselves in some way or another, and to me that's a lot less culpable. This is not somebody with an ill intention. They're not trying to ruin society; they're trying to live. They're trying to provide for themselves in one of the few ways they know how, and whether an accurate perception or not, and frankly sometimes I think it is an accurate perception."

The Lawndale Christian Legal Center offers many programs that aid youth from North Lawn-dale in improving their lives, including providing legal advice and courtroom representation to children and young adults charged with crimes. When youth are detained, attorneys from the center visit them and the program also connects them to social services. The program stays connected with youth on average for about three years, maintaining contact throughout a legal case and on through parole if they serve time. If a youth is found not guilty, the program stays connected six months after the end of the court case. The program provides mentoring to youth throughout the process.

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## **NEEDS OF YOUTH AND OF PROGRAMS**

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During the interviews, program staff identified some of the key needs that their youth are facing, along with what organizations need to serve youth effectively. The young people sometimes have overwhelming needs because of the grossly unequal distribution of resources within US society. To function optimally, programs need access to adequate funding, staff, and physical resources such as space and equipment. The specifics are detailed below.

First, staff were able to identify some of the main needs that youth had expressed to them. The most central necessities the youth lack include housing, money for basics such as food and transportation, and jobs to be able to provide for themselves. Staff also noted that youth came to them seeking assistance to obtain identification, appropriate clothing for interviews, help with resumes and job applications, and bail money. Youth also requested aid in resolving conflicts, opportunities to engage in expressive arts, and the chance to record and distribute music, poetry, and spoken word compositions. Finally, young people sought chances to publicly share perspectives and personal stories to communicate their experiences and contribute to positive social change.

Staff of the programs also identified a number of issues that they believed were prominent among the youth. Program staff felt that the young people were frequently in need of safe spaces in their communities, job training, structured social activities, and opportunities to take responsibility and build a sense of mastery. Staff also felt their youth need mentorship, positive expectations from others, positive connections with others, space to talk about what is most important for them, tools for healthy relationships, and sometimes father figures or male role models. Programs that were attentive to legal issues noted that youth needed help to get fair bonds and also to make good decisions about fighting a case instead of taking a plea. Cliff Nellis noted that youth commonly take plea bargains in cases that might have had better outcomes at trial. Defendants are often unaware of the negative longterm consequences of their plea deals.

Other issues raised by staff were that youth and their families often had problems navigating the public school system and were sometimes dealing with inadequate schools which do not keep students up to grade level. Some youth were facing mental health issues or learning disabilities. When these issues were improperly identified or treated, mental health and learning issues led to truancy and behavior problems. Schools responded with suspension or expulsion. Some students had been inappropriately labeled with mental health or learning issues when they actually had other problems. Once students had been negatively labeled and expelled, schools were often unwilling to accept them back. Some staff noted that many of the youth need mental health services and currently available mental health resources have not always worked out well. In addition, mental health clinics in many poor neighborhoods of Chicago have been closed down. Some staff mentioned the need for clinical practitioners who truly understand the youths' social contexts and lived experiences, and practitioners who can relate effectively to young people with significant mental health needs. It is preferable for youth to work with experienced practitioners with whom they can build longterm relationships, rather than



interns who are newly learning clinical skills and will only be available for short periods of time. Yet clients with some of the most intense trauma and complicated needs are sent to clinics to work with a series of temporary, unpaid interns who have not yet even earned a clinical license.

Some youth need crisis intervention for themselves and their families. Many face unstable home and family lives. Staff spoke of youth moving between the homes of mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and friends because of conflicts and resource issues. These unstable housing situations led to particular hardships for youth on parole or electronic monitoring, as it could become literally impossible for them to comply with the criminal legal system's demands. Youth sometimes have difficulty staying in adequate communication with probation officers due to the youth's own situation or because of difficulty getting a response through the listed department phone numbers. Sometimes young people are not able to be in the location where the officer expects and so the youth gets violated. Youth on electronic monitoring sometimes have problems communicating with officers and may have their probation violated when they leave the house for a legitimate reason but without obtaining permission.



Some of the staff had different perspectives around drug issues. While Youth Outreach Services staff found that many of the youth who come to ERCs with cases have issues with substance abuse, Lawndale Christian Legal Center found that most of their clients, while often perceived to have substance issues, in reality were more often involved in drug cases because they were engaged in the underground economy, selling drugs to get money for survival. The Center also focused on helping young people understand the root causes of substance issues. They explain that in time and with patience, this usually comes down to a young person grappling with experiences of racism; smoking marijuana and drinking represent attempts to escape, to numb oneself to experiences of oppression.

Program staff also listed out some of the key needs that their organizations had in order to be able to best serve the youth. These included sufficient and stable funding; more staff; reliable and skilled volunteer or paid mentors; safe spaces and green spaces in communities; effective and accessible family therapy and resources to help families reduce stress; case management resources; sustainable long term jobs programs; and funding to pay staff who can stay long term, especially staff who live in the community and can build long term relationships and create trust. A significant need mentioned was money for safe passage, specifically helping youth navigate passing through rival gang territories, or being able to bring programming directly to youth

Heidi Mueller, formerly of Youth Outreach Services, noted that her program specifically needed resources to engage youth in healthy, safe, prosocial activities, particularly activities that build social skills. Many communities have few resources, and the neighborhood doesn't offer many youth-oriented activities. Once young people are on probation, their options are even more limited and they often can't participate in sports. YOS mentioned the serious need for money for recreational activities, money for more licensed foster homes, money for transporting youth, and money for emergency housing assistance. She also commented that the program needs models that are specifically designed for Cook County populations and translated into Spanish. At one point, YOS tried to use a model from social workers in another state, but that didn't work at all for the Chicago population.

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### **COSTS OF ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION**

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Most of the programs make heavy use of volunteers and also staff members who are paid by religious organizations. While this keeps costs low, it can reduce the sustainability of programs and certainly makes it impossible for others to replicate programs in different settings. Volunteers generally have other significant demands in their lives and religious-run programs rely on the individual religious organization to continue to prioritize the program, even though many religious institutions are struggling themselves to maintain adequate funding for their own buildings and programs for their own members.

Almost all the programs noted that there were youth who wanted and would benefit from their programs but could not be served due to the program's lack of resources and capacity. Precious Blood serves about fifty youth on a budget of around \$212,000 because the staff are members of religious

orders and live with extremely low pay. If not for their vows of poverty and the subsidies from the church, the real cost of programs would be around \$350,000 per year. New Life reported that they could possibly run their programs on about \$200,000 per year. During recent times of financial crisis, though, they have had to run on a budget of around \$60,000 as a short term emergency measure, using volunteers, and making most staff fundraise their own small salaries. Volunteers have also covered some of the expenses of programs. There are about twelve staff members paid by the church. This may not be sustainable over time. With this lower budget, New Life sees fewer youth, follows them for less time, and offers the youth less services.

Youth Outreach Juvenile Justice Programs has a total budget of around \$400,000. Of this, \$150,000 is for the adolescent domestic battery project. The program can only service part of Chicago because of resource limitations. Probation and police would both like to see the program expanded. For about \$300,000 this program for youth could probably meet the needs of the whole city. YOS's Evening Reporting Center budget is about \$175,000 which only covers fifteen youth at a time. Their pretrial program costs about \$86,400 per year. The multisystems therapy program costs about \$30,000 and the adolescent behavioral program is about \$30,000. In 2012, Lawndale Christian Legal Center's annual revenues were \$232,000, and the organization served 83 youth. Circles and Ciphers had a budget of around \$40,000 for last year and served about ninety youth. All of the programs struggled with lack of funding and resources to meet the extensive needs of youth they serve; all interviewees mentioned that their work was hobbled by a desperate need for stable money to run their programs and pay staff.

Because of reliance on volunteer labor and staff who either fundraise their own modest salaries or are paid by religious institutions, the budgets for many of these organizations are deceptively low and do not reflect the actual cost of provision of services. Another frequent theme in the interviews was the creation of innovative, effective programming which had to end after six months or a year because it was only funded via a short-term, one-time grant which was not renewed. Long-term, stable funding is an urgent need. These programs are providing crucial, life saving services to large numbers of high needs youth in communities facing extreme violence, lack of resources, and infrastructural challenges, and most are doing it on a shockingly small budget.

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### **PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS**

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The programs each have somewhat different ways of evaluating their work and measuring their successes, although all interviewees mention that assessment of their work can be a challenge. Several mention that funders sometimes use evaluation methods that do not give an accurate picture of the work and its meaning.

Many youth in resource-starved neighborhoods in Chicago are currently dying from acts of violence. Precious Blood Ministries demonstrates its success in many ways, yet Father Kelly says that sometimes he simply defines success as keeping kids alive. The neighborhood where Precious Blood works faces many extreme challenges and hardships, and youth confront multiple forms of

institutional and interpersonal violence. Young people who are part of a social support system and have access to material resources in the form of reliable shelter, food, and emergency funds are more likely, simply, to survive.

Circles and Ciphers focuses on the goal of nurturing leadership capacity and community engagement among young people who are dispossessed, providing tools and experiences so that they can build healthy relationships. Circles and Ciphers assesses the impact of their programming in terms of improved future orientation and cultivation of alternative images of manhood and critical consciousness among participants. They are currently developing an assessment methodology that will allow them to more accurately measure how young people engaged in the Circles and Ciphers pedagogy experience a shift in personal values as they actively work to transform their personal and community legacies, and forge new conceptions of identity by making different choices. Circles and Ciphers is training youth as researchers to collaborate in the development of these measures and methodologies.





For New Life Centers Urban Life Skills Program, success means being faithful to their own mission and to the youth, rather than simply assessing their work based on the number of youth they have served or whether youth have gotten involved in new criminal cases during the time they've worked together. New Life considers many factors in judging their own performance. They ask themselves if they have truly given youth every chance and shown up when no one else does, if they have walked alongside the youth during probation, if they have talked to the youth about breaking free from gang lifestyle and addictions to drugs, if they have addressed the meaning of true family, and if they have stayed connected to the youth for at least a year. If the young person made progress in one of those areas during that year, this would be success. New Life would like to be able to count having a job as a success, but the program can't even touch some of the barriers to employment that the youth face, so it would not make sense to measure the success of New Life by that metric.

Matt DeMateo notes: "We're an alternative to detention because the kids would be locked up if they weren't placed in our program.... [F]indings show that shootings are down on Mondays and Thursdays when we have our Summer Softball League, and so guys that could have been out there because there are no other resources, no other places to play, could have been out there, caught a gun case, been locked up, and dragged into the system.... Can we ever measure those numbers? No. But we will keep doing the work because we need as many resources, and as many alternatives to the gang lifestyle, as possible." New Life actively tracks a variety of different factors including recidivism, connecting to a caring adult, substance abuse and more. New Life has a no-recidivism success rate of close to 75%, as measured by youth not violating probation or picking up a new case. This is almost double the national average.

Lawndale Christian Legal Center tracks many outcomes for its youth, including legal outcomes, school attendance, grades, recidivism, re-arrest, violation of probation, and whether a youth is found guilty at rearrest. Many of the youth have success measured by meeting learning goals through the mentoring programs, graduating from school, and avoiding rearrest. The LCLC also graduates a few youth based on extremely high standards. Graduates are youth who have stayed very connected to the program and not been rearrested. This year the program graduated one youth. Last year they graduated two. The standards for graduation are set so stringently because graduates become role models for others.

With YOS, about seventy-five percent of the youth in the program for adolescent domestic battery had successful outcomes. YOS considers the program a success when youth are able to achieve a stable living arrangement and meet goals they establish together with the program staff.

Each of the programs profiled here is engaged in different ways in crucial work to build positive, stable futures for youth. They each define success in their own way, depending on their orientation and mission. All programs struggle with the structural barriers in the neighborhoods in which they operate, and yet they have all achieved many successes with their youth, despite those constraints.





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### STORIES OF THE YOUNG PEOPLE

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The stories of young people involved in these programs are poignant: sometimes triumphant and sometimes tragic. These complex young lives never fit into the simple stereotypes endemic to US society about who “at-risk youth” are and how they behave. During the interviews, some program staff shared stories of young people they had worked with. Names and identifying details have been changed for confidentiality, and the identity of the storyteller is not included. One program interviewee spoke of a young man who had been part of the program for some time. The staff received a collect call. The youth on the phone had just been in touch with the program the week before, excited about a new job he was just about to start. Together, the staff and young person had prepared the job application, set up a mock interview, and worked on a resume. The young man had been hopeful and positive. But during this call he was in a state of crisis, crying and in extreme distress. He had been locked up and was calling from Cook County Jail. In the mass media, we typically hear of youth who inevitably fall “back into a life of crime.” But this young man was not in jail for lapsing into a “criminal lifestyle” involving drugs, violence, stealing, or even hanging out with others involved in lawbreaking. His “crime?” Riding his bicycle on the sidewalk in his own neighborhood. This is an activity that many Chicagoans, including one of these authors, frequently engage in, since riding on the streets can be life-threatening. But this author, a white woman, has never been stopped by police in her twenty years in Chicago. The youth in

question, however, was stopped by two police officers. This was the day after he found out that he had gotten the job, and two days before he was supposed to start work. The police handcuffed and arrested the young man for riding on the sidewalk. They took him to the police station and as the young man sat there handcuffed, an officer alleges that the youth kicked him in the shin. While the officer said that he required no medical attention due to the alleged kick, the police then charged the youth with felony aggravated assault and kept him in jail for some time. Riding a bicycle on the sidewalk in Chicago is not even a misdemeanor, but in fact a "petty offense." Yet the police chose to arrest and cuff the youth and take him to the police station in this case. Such events can create a negative spiral for a young person. This youth missed his the first two weeks at his new job. And if convicted of the charges against him, he could be labeled for life as a felon, leading to serious restrictions in eligibility for employment, educational loans, public housing and other forms of public aid, as well as the custody or adoption of children. If he had been undocumented, the conviction would be grounds for expedited deportation. In some states, felony convictions can lead to permanent loss of voting rights. In all states, felony convictions are associated with significant, long-term stigma and marginalization. Because of support from this Chicago program, the youth was able to get assistance with bail money and legal advice. He was able to get out of jail after only a brief incarceration to await the disposition of his case, which is still in process. This story illustrates why youth may feel hopeless about being able to avoid involvement with the criminal legal system, no matter how hard young people try. This also shows how crucial financial, social, and legal supports are for youth in communities that have a high density and intensity of police surveillance.



In another case, a staff member from a different program spoke of a young person whose history of trauma interfered with his otherwise significant progress in building a positive life for himself. At the time of the interview, the youth was being held at Cook County Jail. He had made some unwise decisions, but the staff noted: "He is trying as hard as anybody I know to turn things around, and so in some sense I think it's wholly unfair and unjust that he's there.... This kid [has] been trying, [and] some things that he couldn't really control have contributed to him being in custody. He had a full time job, was in full time college, lost his job, got kicked out of school, and is on academic probation because of a couple bumps in the road. Either he dropped dirty for marijuana, missed a probation meeting, or just little things here and there. [I]n my opinion.... the thing he would need the most is some kind of assistance with ... what I assume is some kind of a trauma or wound that he hasn't healed from... because we've all been able to see it... [H]e's this great kid with all kinds of potential, smart, articulate, and then something will happen [and he gets triggered]. ... He just switches to [swearing and wanting to] throw in the towel and give up. It's pretty easy to wind up in jail especially when on probation or parole." This case shows again how carefully youth must tread and how lack of adequate services and supports can increase the risk of incarceration.

Another staff person spoke of a positive outcome due to program intervention. A youth assaulted a teacher and the teacher, although not physically hurt, had emotional distress. The staff brought them together in circle and the teacher explained the impact of the attack to the young person, who apologized. The dean of students and a couple of other teachers also attended. The criminal legal system was bypassed altogether, and the harm was repaired.

Another program spoke of a young person who was a model youth with the program. The young man stopped using drugs, came to all the meetings, and was successful with the program. The program wanted to help him find a job and create stability in his life, but he was undocumented. The new Dream Act is not accessible for many youth because it excludes those with criminal records. It is particularly damaging for undocumented youth to be convicted of a crime, as this can consign them to rapid deportation to a country where they may have no family, no language ability, and no survival skills. If they escape immediate deportation, a criminal conviction might lead to permanent life in the shadows with the relentless and eternal risk of deportation and separation from their families, loved ones, and sometimes the only country where they can remember living. The ability of undocumented youth to support themselves and family members through regular jobs is severely limited by current immigration regulations. Job programs for youth are unable to address these structural barriers to earning wages outside of street economies.

These stories remind us of the wide variety of structural barriers confronting youth and preventing them from attending school, meeting their basic needs, finding living wage work, and avoiding contact with the criminal legal system. Programs that reduce the harmful impact of the criminal legal system on youths' lives can make the difference between a life permanently in the shadow of the racist carceral state and a life of productive engagement with community and family.



If we could increase the graduation rates by 10% murder & assault rates would decrease by 20%, motor vehicle theft by 13% and arson by 8%. (Enrico Moretti, 2005)

These risk factors not only **cost** juveniles their freedom, but also **cost** taxpayers. On average it **costs** roughly **\$88,000** to incarcerate one juvenile offender for a year.

Raising the rates of high school graduations would significantly reduce the number of people behind bars and save taxpayers millions of dollars.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics it costs about \$9,644 to educate one student per year.





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## **A PLAN FOR MOVING FORWARD**

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Throughout interviews, we hear from staff and from the stories of youth the desperate need for stable funding for alternatives to incarceration and for youth job programs. Research has clearly demonstrated that providing young people employment opportunities can reduce youth violence (Sum, Trubsky, & McHugh, 2013). Effective programs already exist in Chicago which can help individuals and communities address conflict, reduce harmful behavior, create safe spaces for youth development, and initiate behavior change in youth caught up in dangerous situations. Incarceration itself is a social ill which breaks down families and communities, as well as stripping well-being, resources, possibilities, and hope away from youth. Detention itself is prohibitively expensive. High levels of surveillance and policing in low-income communities of color divert resources away from other forms of social intervention which are more productive and beneficial. Local and state governments and communities are facing financial crises, and relying on the criminal legal system to deal with youth crime through arrest and detention is expensive, destructive, impractical, and short-sighted. The core reason most youth in these programs are in conflict with the law is unmet basic needs, family crisis, lack of options for recreational and productive activities, inadequate schools, and intense surveillance and criminalization by the state and educational systems. The programs profiled in this report work with youth to address these issues in ways that are cost effective, nurturing, and oriented toward the future well-being of individuals and communities. Even with these excellent programs in place, youth may still lack resources to overcome structural barriers such as overall lack of government investment in poor communities of color, restrictive immigration laws and policies, excessive reliance on policing to address an inappropriately broad a range of social ills, inadequate opportunities for living wage employment, and militarized public schools which serve more as a conduit in the cradle-to-prison pipeline than a pathway to learning, jobs, or further education. Yet Precious Blood Ministries, Lawndale Christian Legal Center, Circles and Ciphers, New Life Centers of Chicagoland, and Youth Outreach Services all create new options for youth to find adult support, engage in positive activities with other youth, receive assistance with adequate housing and nutrition, get help with navigating the school system, and find a path out of involvement with the criminal legal system and into a better future. These programs are all operating on tiny budgets and a great proportion of volunteer labor, reducing their longterm capacity to create change for the youth they serve. Our society continues to invest heavily in policing, investigation of crimes, court processes, and incarceration. For a fraction of the economic and social costs incurred in those systems, we could invest in providing resources and alternatives for our youth. It is especially important that programs serve as true alternatives to incarceration and not simply as extensions of destructive, punitive systems placed within communities. People designing and implementing programs must be part of the communities they work in. Deep knowledge and experience with restorative, community, and transformative justice philosophy and practice are the heart of what makes alternative programs work for youth. There are experts in the community who are already showing us how.





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**APPENDIX**

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The Cook County Probation Department has alternatives to incarceration as well. Although we attempted to reach them, this program was going through a staffing change during the writing of this report and we were unable to obtain detailed information. The following information was provided by Kaitrin Valencia during her last day at the department.

The department has sanction programs, so that instead of being violated and going to court, a young person can do a contract instead of going before a judge. Youth may have the option to do a sanction with programs in the community. If they successfully complete, the probation officer can't violate their probation on those allegations.

The department also has pretrial case management for youth who are not going to school but not yet on probation. They offer a form of peace circles. There are different education and behavior change programs that are sometimes offered and if youth successfully complete, then the state will not press charges. This includes programs such as retail theft school. The program may connect youth with treatment. They have their own clinical division which provides art therapy and other forms of therapy, often with supervised student interns who are working on doctorates in clinical psychology. The program sponsors Evening Reporting Centers (as described earlier in this report), electronic monitoring, and shelter care as alternatives to the juvenile detention center in some cases. Shelter care is a non-secure residential site that is one step less intensive than incarceration. The department offers anger management training, pre-employment training with job skills and resume-building, and education advocacy for youth who may have learning issues or have been inappropriately labeled. The department has programs to help students get back to regular school attendance or to begin work on GEDs. Animal therapy is sometimes offered, and programming exists for children and youth via a faith-based consortium as well. Specialized officers work with dually involved kids who are the Department of Children and Family Services due to abuse or neglect by parents or guardians, and have also been labeled by the department as delinquent. There are also mentoring programs. A presiding judge recruits attorneys and mentors for kids on probation. All sanction providers have trained in providing a form of peace circles, and may offer victim offender mediation.