## ALABAMA ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION & DETENTION



An excerpt from YAP's Policy & Advocacy Center publication Safely Home

## REDIRECTION

Since 2006, 52 of Alabama's 67 counties have reduced Department of Youth Services admissions, with some counties reducing admissions by 75% or higher. These reductions were the result of Alabama's successful efforts to purposefully reduce the number of committed youth and its dependence on residential care.

Recognizing that it was incarcerating too many youth, including status offenders, DYS and the Administrative Office of the Courts, (AOC), with help from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, led a series of reforms in the state. These included: intentionally contracting for fewer beds; creating a strategic plan that favored the least restrictive setting possible and that explicitly stated that incarceration was an inappropriate and unnecessarily expensive response to most delinquent youth; building relationships with local courts, and; giving \$1 million in grants to local courts specifically to implement county-controlled, community-based alternatives to detention.

Alabama incentivized counties to create community-based alternatives to reduce the number of state commitments, and it worked. In 2006, DYS had 3,340 total youth commitments; in 2013, it had reduced that by more than half, with total commitments of 1,485.

In four rural Alabama counties - Baldwin, Cullman, Marshall and Walker Counties, YAP operates local community-based alternative to detention programs in partnership with the respective county courts. From January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2013, 220 youth graduated from these programs. Three quarters of the youth in this program had annual family incomes below \$35,000. At entry to the program, 64%

had at least one prior out-of-home placement and 38% had more than one prior out-of-home placement.

During the program 87% of the youth were not arrested, and 80% of the post-discharge youth remained arrest-free. The percentage of kids living in the community increased from 68% at entry to 91%. Likewise, the number of kids on probation declined from 79% at entry to 35% post discharge.

Sources: Juvenile Justice Reform in Alabama, report from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, (2011); Committed Youth Demographics, Alabama Department of Youth Services, 2006-2013, both available at http://dys.alabama.gov/.

