



# Okanogan County Public Health

<http://www.okanogancountv.org/ochd/index.htm>

1234 South 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue  
P.O. Box 231  
Okanogan, WA 98840  
(509) 422-7140  
TDD (800) 833-6388

February 22, 2016

To: Commissioner Detro  
Commissioner Campbell  
Commissioner Kennedy

From: Lauri Jones, Community Health Director

We understand that the Commissioners are exploring the idea of outsourcing county juvenile detainees to another area of the state.

To even consider outsourcing our adolescents is wrong on countless levels. Okanogan County Public Health is concerned for the wellbeing and safety of all Okanogan County's citizens regardless of circumstances. The transfer of our juveniles to Martin Hall would create unnecessary hardships on detainees and their families. These unneeded stresses would also impact those who provide services to our at-risk youth. This in turn affects the mental, emotional, and the overall health and wellbeing of the community.

Okanogan County Public Health maintains a contract for services provided to Okanogan County Juvenile Detention. We see all detainees for an initial health assessment as well as additional services which may be needed during their stay at the detention center. We receive \$15,000 per year to provide these services at a substantial savings of over \$20,000 to the county. If this contract were dissolved, it would have a direct effect on our Public Health budget and staff.

Okanogan County has an obligation to ensure that our juvenile facility meets standards and that services are provided and maintained within our county.

Sincerely,

Lauri Jones  
Community Health Director  
Okanogan County Public Health

# Report on the Importance of Community Investment in Juvenile Justice and Successful Re-entry

Compiled for Lauri Jones, Okanogan County Public Health

Carolanne Sanders, MPHc, University of Washington - COPHP

6 May, 2016

We understand that Okanogan County Commissioners are exploring the idea of privatizing the county's juvenile justice services and outsourcing juvenile detainees to another area of the state. Okanogan County Public Health Administration strongly opposes this decision and advocates against it, based on scientific findings on adolescent development, behavioral health, justice policy, public health promotion, and the importance of community networks as a social structure. Specifically, we cite the growing body of research that examines the importance of family contact while a youth is incarcerated. Studies have found that family visits significantly reduce depression and violence among adolescents within the juvenile justice system; most notably, an emerging study from experts at the University of Washington finds parent contact to be one of the strongest drivers of reduced recidivism and skill acquisition for youth.<sup>1</sup>

## *Parent Investment in Youth*

A national survey of family members found that 86% of respondents "wanted to be more involved in their child's treatment while they were incarcerated."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, maintaining family relationships during youth incarceration are a critical part of ensuring that returning adolescents do not experience difficulties bonding with their parents after their sentence ends.<sup>3</sup> Re-engaging youth in society after release is a long, complex, and sensitive process requiring cooperation among the probation officer, juvenile justice transition specialist, social worker, case manager, family member, community partner, and others.<sup>4</sup> It is enough of a challenge to do this well within a setting that is familiar to the youth and with the full support of their established social networks. In fact, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency reports that by the 12-months post-release point, nearly 55% of juveniles will have relapsed into criminal behavior.<sup>4</sup> Youth engagement is widely recognized as one of the most influential factors that prevent this relapse from occurring; furthermore, we know that community engagement promotes both education success and youth engagement.<sup>4,5</sup>

A separate study found that continual family investment in youth—defined as "time spent working, talking, or playing" or even simply being together—reduced delinquency over time, moderated the effects of illicit behavior, and was associated with positive outcomes for the youth over the course of adolescence and adulthood.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the social capital that family investment provides works to reduce the likelihood of future misbehavior and help youth resist the temptation to re-engage in crime and delinquency. To move youth detainees from Okanogan County to another part of the state would be to make family investment more difficult for working parents, less feasible for larger families, and, ultimately, less likely to happen overall.

## *Community Investment in Youth*

Outsourcing juvenile services elsewhere in Washington state would likely lead to higher youth recidivism rates in Okanogan County, as it would prevent youth from staying connected to their communities throughout incarceration and re-entry. Detaining youth in another part of the state would not only decrease their odds of receiving family visits—it would all but eliminate their ability to maintain ongoing and regular relationships that are integral to healthy adolescent

development (e.g. sports coaches, mentors, church members, work supervisors). To this end, outsourcing juvenile services would in fact become a substantial barrier to successful re-entry.

In one study of a juvenile justice facility in the southwest United States, researchers implemented focus groups among 310 youth, transition staff, and stakeholders. These focus groups identified parent involvement and lack of sufficient life skills programming as barriers to success after re-entry.<sup>4</sup> Current practices at the facility that promoted successful re-entry included social skills instruction, vocational instruction, and parent groups. Researchers concluded that “over the years we have shifted the blame for recidivism and a lack of engagement from youth to the juvenile justice system itself. Now we know that the responsibility for the success of the population is ours as a community.”<sup>4</sup> In light of this, moving Okanogan County’s incarcerated youth away from their communities may actually lead to undesirable outcomes, including likelihood of re-offense and the inability to become productive members of the workforce after societal re-entry. It is clearly in the social and economic interests of affected youth, their families, and the entire Okanogan County community that juvenile justice services remain within the county.

The message is clear; it is of the utmost importance that Okanogan County youth are able to remain firmly connected to their community, physically and relationally, in order to truly benefit from juvenile justice rehabilitation. Although juvenile justice systems play an important role in immediately addressing crime and social issues, unnecessary elements such as extended sentences, high rates of incarceration, and outsourcing to far-away facilities may cause more harm than good as people “become less engaged in each other’s lives and communities lose capacities to grow.”<sup>3</sup> As long as there are alternatives to outsourcing juvenile justice services, Okanogan County commissioners should seek arrangements that support youth and their families, promote a healthier community, and would not result in unnecessary harm.

#### References

1. Sanders C. Email Interview with Sarah Cusworth Walker, PhD. 2016.
2. Vera Institute of Justice. *Family Engagement in the Juvenile Justice System.*; 2013.
3. Gust L V. Can policy reduce the collateral damage caused by the criminal justice system? Strengthening social capital in families and communities. *Am J Orthopsychiatry*. 2012;82(2):174-180. doi:10.1111/j.1939-0025.2012.01156.x.
4. Mathur S, Clark HG. Community Engagement for Reentry Success of Youth from Juvenile Justice: Challenges and Opportunities. <https://muse-jhu-edu.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/article/556433/pdf>. Accessed May 6, 2016.
5. Identifying, Engaging, and Empowering Families: A Charge for Juvenile Justice Agencies. <http://www.vera.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/family-engagement-for-juvenile-justice-agencies.pdf>. Accessed May 6, 2016.
6. Wright JP, Cullen FT, Miller JT. Family social capital and delinquent involvement. *J Crim Justice*. 2001;29(1):1-9. doi:10.1016/S0047-2352(00)00071-4.