

Youth Work Snapshots

Campaign for Youth Justice

Washington, D.C.

(202) 558-3580

www.campaignforyouthjustice.org

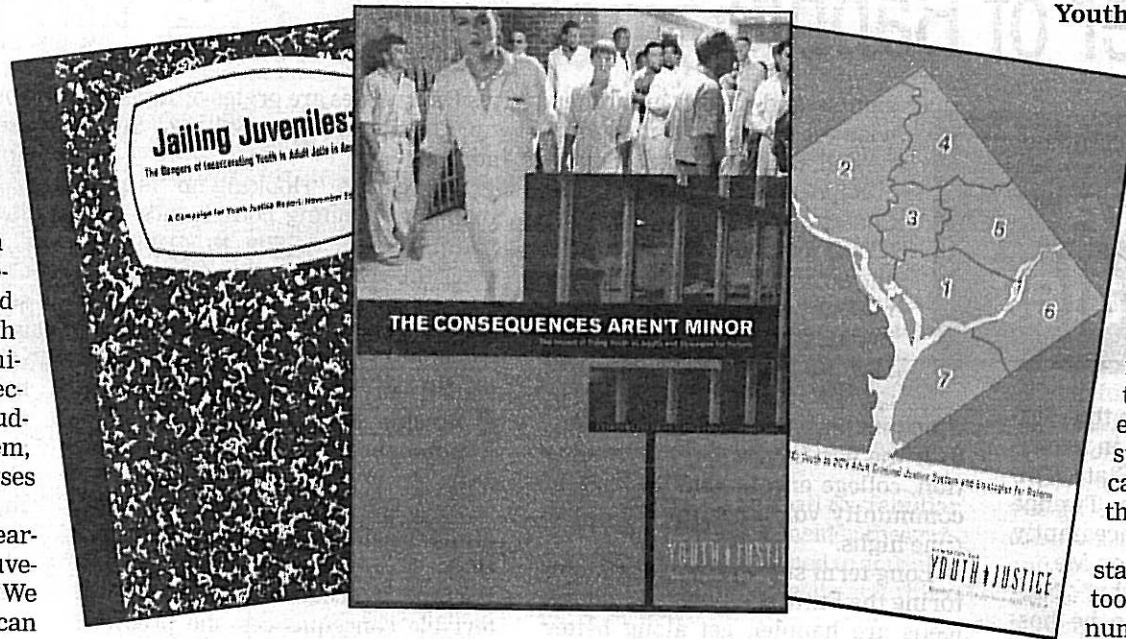
Objective: To end the practice of trying youth as adults.

In a Nutshell: The campaign teams with national, state and local organizations to work toward reducing the number of youth who are processed in adult criminal courts. It also promotes effective youth-serving practices, including in the juvenile justice system, by producing reports and analyses based on existing data.

"We are a support system, a clearinghouse of information" on juvenile justice, says CEO Liz Ryan. "We may not know the answer, but we can find the answer."

Where It Happens: The campaign is based in Washington and also operates advocacy groups in North Carolina, Virginia, Wisconsin and Connecticut.

Who Started It and Who Runs It: When Ryan was working at the Youth Law Center two years ago, she was contacted by the parent of a youth who had been charged as an adult. "She asked me ... how would I change this for kids nationally?" Ryan recalls. "I said I would do a national campaign, try to incubate reform efforts in a number of states, convene them together, share strategies, try to expand to enough states at some point that you achieve a tipping point. I would try to push for media attention for this issue nation-



The art of persuasion at the campaign includes producing reports about juvenile detention.

ally."

That woman – who wishes to remain anonymous because her child's case is pending – offered to fund such an effort. "That's how we got started: at a coffee shop, talking about the impact on one family, on one child," Ryan says.

Ryan now oversees a full-time staff of three, with one part-time employee and usually three or four interns during each school semester.

Overcoming Obstacles: Finding the right data from the right sources is essential for putting out effec-

tive reports, Ryan says, but it isn't always easy. She has relied on veteran policy analysts for help. For example, in June 2006, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency conducted a national poll on an issue the campaign wanted to report about and prepared materials about it for Ryan to disseminate.

Cost: The organization's annual budget is slightly over \$1 million.

Who Pays: Major donors include the Public Welfare Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, the Meyer Family Fund, the Eckerd Family

Fund and the anonymous mother.

Youth Served: Youth in the juvenile justice system in the states where the campaign's advocacy groups operate.

Advantages: Ryan sees public momentum toward progressive reform of the juvenile justice system, which eases the challenge of convincing "policymakers they can do the right thing and show[ing that] they won't get unelected," Ryan says. "I have a strong sense of urgency because I don't know how long this sweet spot will last."

Research Shows: All four states the campaign works in took steps toward reducing the number of youth who are tried and sentenced as adults. The

largest development occurred in Connecticut, where the campaign worked with the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance to help pass a law to raise the maximum age for juvenile court jurisdiction from 16 to 18 – "a major victory" according to Ryan. "To me, it signals a sea change in where the country is moving. A number of states are beginning to re-examine this issue."

What Still Gets in the Way: Only working in four states and Washington. Organizations in other states "want to partner with us," Ryan says, but expanding will be difficult without funding to hire staffers.

– Ed Finkel and Marta Dehmlow