

**National Parent Caucus
Training on the “Missouri Model”**

Youth prisons don't work. There Is a Better Way!



Most youth prisons (sometimes called training schools or juvenile correctional centers) teach young people how to be better prisoners. This does not prepare them for a positive future.

There is a better way to help youth in the justice system become successful adults. It has been around for decades, and it works!

In the fall of 2010, I visited one of Missouri's juvenile justice facilities. What I saw and heard from the youth there was amazing.

Unlike kids in most youth prisons, youth in Missouri's secure facilities are not treated like prisoners. There is no lockdown, or use of isolation cells at all. The staff members are not guards; they are youth workers with college degrees in social work, psychology and so forth.

The kids live together in small groups of 8-12 in a safe, homelike setting. A positive peer culture helps youth succeed, and they work hard to deal with the reasons that they ended up there. **They don't just change their behavior, they change their thinking.**

The results are dramatic. Three years after they complete parole, 67% of youth released from Missouri's facilities have avoided further involvement with juvenile justice or adult corrections.

Compare that with Virginia, where 70% of kids released from our juvenile correctional centers are re-convicted of a new crime within 3 years of release.

Clearly, the youth prison model isn't working. Missouri has a better way, and they've been doing it since the mid-1970s. We need to keep advocating for our states to move away from the failed youth prison model to something like Missouri's approach.

Here are some key comparisons between the Missouri Model and other youth prisons:

Missouri Model	Youth Prison
Youth live in homelike environment .	Youth live in prison-like environment , with cells.
There are no cells, isolation is not used .	Isolation and 23-hour lockdown are used to punish and/or control youth.

Missouri Model	Youth Prison
Staff are “youth specialists,” with college degrees in psychology, social work, or other relevant field.	Staff are guards or correctional officers, with little or no training in working with youth.
Facilities are small, with no more than 50 youth. Youth spend all their time in groups of 8-12.	Facilities are large, with hundreds of youth. Living units (pods) may be somewhat smaller.
Regional system so that youth are usually placed no more than 50 miles from home. Some facilities are in or near urban areas.	Facilities are in remote, rural locations. Youth may be placed far from their home communities.
Overall philosophy and approach is therapeutic, with a belief that youth want to succeed and can succeed — and that this requires a safe and nurturing environment.	Overall philosophy and approach is “correctional,” with belief that punishment is the most effective way to keep youth away from further crime.
System engages with families as partners, encourages and facilitates family involvement in youth’s treatment.	Often hostile or indifferent to families; or at best don’t help families overcome barriers to involvement in youth’s treatment.
Youth stay in groups to help each other and to maintain a positive milieu. If someone acts out, the group helps him or her sort out what’s going on.	Youth who act out are often placed in isolation and not given help to learn how to manage their feelings and behavior.
Staff works with youth to maintain an emotionally safe environment and develop skills needed to succeed.	Staff does not address ridicule and emotional abuse that can occur in the facility. The harsh environment is a given; youth are left to fend for themselves.
A “service coordinator” works with the youth and family before, during, and after placement.	A parole officer is assigned to the youth — sometimes at the start of their confinement.
More youth succeed. Three years after they complete parole, 67% of youth released from Missouri's facilities have avoided further involvement with juvenile justice or adult corrections	High recidivism rates.

The best way to learn more about the Missouri Model is to visit the web site at www.missouriapproach.org There you will find videos, publications, photos, and more descriptions of the model and how it works.