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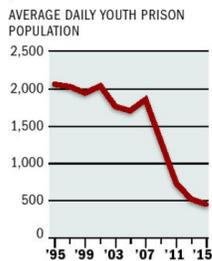
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Program keeping juveniles in the community, not locked up

20 years of RECLAIM

A program created in 1995 has kept young people out of state prisons.



Source: Ohio Department of Youth Services
THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH

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Will Caudle guides a group discussion at the Village Network, a provider that receives RECLAIM Ohio funds through Franklin County Juvenile Court.

By [Alan Johnson](#)

The Columbus Dispatch • Thursday July 9, 2015 7:11 AM

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Ohio's juvenile-incarceration system was seriously overcrowded and in trouble in the early 1990s.

As then-Gov. George V. Voinovich said, "We have programs that have

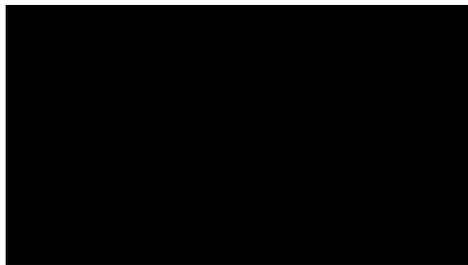
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not been working for a long period of time. We need to get our troops together and change things.”

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That change was RECLAIM Ohio, a program created in 1995 that has pumped \$1 billion into community juvenile-corrections programs and triggered an 81 percent reduction in young people in state lockups.

After 20 years, RECLAIM (Reasoned and Equitable Community and Local Alternatives to the Incarceration of Minors), operated by the Ohio Department of Youth Services, is a national model for keeping juveniles out of high-cost state prisons and in lower-cost, more-effective community programs.

“Every time I speak nationally, I hear about RECLAIM Ohio,” former Ohio Supreme Court Justice Evelyn Lundberg Stratton said. “They were way ahead of the times in terms of their approach to this. This is so much a smarter way to do it.”

Created when Voinovich and Lt. Gov. Mike DeWine were in office, the program was devised to give Ohio juvenile judges options — and money for those options

— to keep young offenders in local programs instead of sending them to state prisons. By 1992, 10 juvenile facilities were jammed with 2,500 offenders — far above design capacity.

RECLAIM is credited with reducing the number of juveniles in state custody to 460, a drop of 81 percent from the peak, resulting in the closing of seven juvenile-detention facilities statewide.

“I believe we’re now at our sweet spot where we need to be to offer programming for our youth. We’re smaller, but we have a bigger influence on juvenile justice and our community,” said Youth Services Director Harvey

J. Reed. “I believe there will always be a need for a state program. We play a vital part in the system.”

DeWine, now Ohio’s attorney general, said officials realized that the state youth program “wasn’t doing a very good job and was unsustainable over a long period of time.” Still, the idea of shifting state money to local programs was “taking a chance,” DeWine said.

The Voinovich administration ultimately decided it was better to “let the money follow the young person instead of the state spending money,” DeWine said. “It was a risk worth taking. We felt there were smart, talented juvenile judges around the state who could do a better job.”

“Ohio is at the forefront of national juvenile-justice reform and realignment efforts and serves as a model for other states looking to ‘right-size’ their own institutional footprints,” according to a recent report by the Schubert Center for Child Studies at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland.

The program provides financial incentives for judges to sentence juvenile offenders to community programs instead of sending them to the state. A per-capita distribution fund has funneled \$385.5 million to counties, along with \$579 million in incentive funds and \$47.3 million in newer treatment programs, bringing total RECLAIM



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spending to more than \$1 billion in 20 years.

The program has changed the overall number of juveniles sentenced for felonies from 9,064 in 2004 to 4,674 last year, Youth Services said.

Clermont County Commissioner Bob Proud was dubious when RECLAIM was presented in the early 1990s.

“All of us were from Missouri — show me. We’d heard all these great schemes in the past that didn’t work.”

But Clermont was chosen for a pilot program in the early going and Proud became sold on the idea. He is now chairman of the state advisory committee.

“RECLAIM is the only program that I know of that is a funded non-mandate,” Proud said. “It’s been a godsend.”

While it has saved money, Proud said, he never forgets there are people behind the numbers.

“Every number we talk about is a person with a family. When we tell about how many commitments have been averted to a DYS facility, and we’re able to keep that young person locally, and do treatment, that is the beauty of RECLAIM. We keep them local and the counties are paid to keep them local.”

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