

Ohio leads the way against juvenile solitary confinement

By Jennifer Bahney Assistant Editor Updated May 10, 2016 ☐ (...)

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Solitary confinement is being phased out in juvenile correctional facilities across Ohio, including at Circleville JCF, for being harmful to youths and counter-productive to the goal of creating safer facilities. Now, Ohio is paving the way for other states by helping to introduce the national Stop Solitary for Kids campaign designed to change the way incarcerated youth are disciplined.

Ohio Department of Youth Services (DYS) Assistant Director Linda Janes recently launched the program in conjunction with the Center for Children's Law and Policy, the Center for Juvenile Justice Reform, the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, and the Justice Policy Institute. Since the program's introduction, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors has voted to ban juvenile solitary confinement except in the most extreme cases.

Ohio began to cut back on the number of hours its juveniles spent in solitary confinement in 2014. That's when DYS introduced a new program called Path to Safer Facilities that focused on reducing violence, increasing meaningful activities, and engaging family partnerships.

Since then, the number of solitary hours juveniles have spent in Ohio facilities has decreased by 89 percent, and violent acts inside lockup have decreased 22 percent. At Circleville JCF, seclusion hours are down 90 percent, while acts of violence have decreased by 27 percent.

In an opinion piece for [Cleveland.com](#), DYS Director Harvey J. Reed wrote that a better understanding of

adolescent brain development has led his department to back away from using solitary confinement as a tool to try to change behavior.

“The research was pointing out that isolation causes psychological damage,” Reed wrote. “Examining our own data, we found that as we increased seclusion, violence also increased...We made the decision that seclusion would only be used as a last resort, when youth are out of control and a harm to themselves or others, and only for as long as necessary.”

Instead of focusing on punishing bad behavior, DYS has shifted to rewarding good behavior and offering incentives like outdoor activities and competitions. Last month, the Herald reported on a basketball tournament that was held as a reward for good behavior for about 40 young men from area juvenile correctional facilities.

Another major goal of the Path to Safer Facilities program is to reunite young people with their families and communities.

“The move away from seclusion is all about maximizing the time we have with the youth in our care,” said Circleville JCF Superintendent Phillip Elms. “It’s key to the youth being successful returning back into their communities.”

For more information on the national program, visit jjie.org/stop-solitary-for-kids-a-national-campaign-for-change.

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