In April 2014, Youth Advocate Programs’ Policy & Advocacy Center will be publishing a report, funded by the Public Welfare Foundation, on the effective elements of community-based alternatives for high-risk youth in the juvenile justice system.

For advocates, we hope this report will be a nuts and bolts document they can use when talking to policymakers and their staffers in Congress, the Administration and in statehouses across the country.

For policymakers, we hope this document will help them advocate for and implement alternatives in their own communities.

Community-based programs that provide the right amount of intensity can provide safe and effective alternatives to youth incarceration and residential placement. The elements of effective community-based programs that will be discussed in detail in the report include:

* **Individualized Services**: Tailor services to individual needs
* **Cultural Competence**: Recruit staff from the kids’ neighborhoods so they can be credible messengers
* **Family Focus**: Provide services for the entire family & value their expertise
* **Strength-Based Interaction**: Build services based on individual strengths & interests
* **24/7 Availability**
* **Safety & Crisis Planning**
* **Youth & Family Engagement**: Ensure that families and youth have a voice and choice in what happens to them
* **Supported Work (subsidized employment)**: Help youth get apprentice-type jobs that reflect their interests, supported by staff trained in job coaching
* **Civic Engagement / Giving Back to the Community**
* **No refuse intake policy**: Serve any and all kids, regardless of the complexity of their case or needs
* **Purposeful Transition**: Ensure that time in a community-based program is finite, and plan with the family to connect to formal and informal community supports to maintain stability and increase growth
Costs
It is axiomatic that community-based programs for juvenile justice involved youth cost far less than incarcerating a youth or placing a youth in residential placement. Nationwide, the annual cost of incarcerating a youth can be as high as $100,000 / year and residential placement costs hundreds of dollars per day. Both types of placements are unable to include all of the elements listed above.

In contrast, an intensive community-based program that individualizes services based on need (and therefore can work with kids at any risk level, including high-risk youth) costs as little as $65 / day, and will always cost far less than residential placement or incarceration. The captured savings can be reinvested in high-poverty, high-crime communities. Also, programs that utilize neighborhood-based recruitment create jobs for local communities.

Recidivism and Public Safety
This report will also highlight the outcomes for youth in juvenile justice programs run by Youth Advocate Programs in several counties in Alabama, in Middlesex County, NJ and Newburgh NY. Overall, YAP agency-wide outcomes for juvenile justice involved youth, with an average 6 month length of stay, are as follows:

- 90% of the discharged individuals were not arrested while enrolled. In addition, 82% of the post discharge individuals were not arrested between enrollment and the date last contacted.
- 36% of the discharged individuals had felony or misdemeanor adjudications/convictions prior to entering YAP's programs. Of those, 83% were not arrested while enrolled.
- 34% of the post discharge individuals had felony or misdemeanor adjudications/convictions prior to entering YAP's programs. Of those, 71% were not arrested between enrollment and the date last contacted.

The report will also highlight the work and approach of Community Connections for Youth, a community-based program in the South Bronx and the approach in Wayne County, MI (Detroit), operated by Black Family Development.

Informed by Youth
Youth experience and voice should be an integral part of policymaking and service delivery. Part of this report will include the voices of juvenile justice involved youth who have been in residential placement or incarcerated and are now in a community-based program. What clearly comes through in the final numbers and answers is that the youth need and want support but feel as though the system incarcerates them or places them out of the home because it does not have adequate resources to assist them in their communities.

When asked the question “If you could talk to adults who make decisions about kids in the juvenile justice system, what do you think is most important for them to know about what kids need and how to help them (for example,
what works and what doesn’t work and why),” the youth clearly show in their responses that they want to feel as though those making the decisions hear what they have to say and that they are judged and treated fairly.

Overwhelmingly, the youth who responded to this survey voiced that they believe they are able to make positive changes in their lives and just want to be given the opportunity to do so. Here are a few other survey results that demonstrate the types of positive outcomes that can be achieved through a community-based program:

* 98% said they trusted their Advocates
* 86.3% worked on parole and probation mandates with their advocates
* 90.8% of youth stated they worked on school and education with their advocate.
* 85.8% of youth felt that they worked on learning different life skills with their advocate
* 79% worked on their relationships with their families with their advocates
* 85.3% worked on planning to participate in positive activities and organizations in their communities with their advocates

Highlight Perspectives of Judges and Court and State Juvenile Justice Administrators

Finally, the report will also spotlight counties and states that have successfully implemented community-based alternatives in their communities. The specific entities to be included are: Lucas County Juvenile Court (Toledo, OH), NY State Office of Children and Families (Newburgh staff), and Middlesex County Juvenile Court Judge (Ret.).