



## Community-Based Alternatives to Incarceration for Youth

**Diversion from the formal criminal legal system:** Many young people can be more successfully helped by interventions that don't require ongoing legal system supervision. This lessens the odds that they will penetrate deeper into the juvenile justice system for failing to follow a legally imposed condition that has nothing to do with their offense. Examples of successful diversion interventions include stopping the practice of arresting young people for normative adolescent misbehavior in school, and [Restorative Justice interventions](#) to resolve peer and community conflicts or offenses.

**Community mentoring and support programs:** These programs provide more intensive supports for young people, and examples include the [Youth Advocates Program](#) and [Credible Messengers](#). These programs recruit young adults from the community—often with a history of contact with the justice system themselves—to provide up to 30 hours per week of contact, with help to connect youth to educational, employment and other positive youth development supports.

**Intensive in-home supports:** These supports help families manage their children more effectively. Examples include [Multisystemic Family Therapy](#) and [Functional Family Therapy](#). Both are evidence-based programs that have demonstrated success as more effective alternatives to institutional incarceration, with reduced recidivism and better youth development outcomes at a lower cost.

**Behavior change interventions:** Examples include [Trauma-Informed Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#) and [Dialectical Behavioral Therapy](#). These are evidence-based interventions that reduce recidivism, by helping young people develop their emotional and interpersonal skills, such as impulse control, judgment, emotional regulation, conflict resolution

**Temporary out-of-home treatment:** [Multi-dimensional Treatment Foster Care \(MTFC-A\)](#) —sometimes referred to as Treatment Foster Care Oregon —is an evidence-based short-term foster care program specifically designed for adolescents who are justice system involved. MTFC-A has been implemented in over 100 locations nationally and internationally. This program supports foster parents to meet the special needs of young people who have been involved with the youth justice system, as well as supporting the young person's family to prepare to have the young person return home.

**Residential Treatment Programs:** As demonstrated in New York City, even youth with a history of very serious offenses can be safely treated in community settings. For some youth, this means placement in a staff-secure program, i.e., a group home with 24-hour, eyes-on staff security and the ability to know immediately if a young person leaves the program without authorization.

A very small number of youth may require treatment within a building-secure program. These group homes are designed as small—six to eight residents—and community-based, close to the homes of the young people, with the goal of re-integrating the young person back into the community as soon as possible. The ["Missouri Model"](#) is one example of residential treatment that is based on positive youth development.