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### **Preserving the Lives of Troubled Youth**

The troubling sound of gunfire and shouting pollutes an impoverished neighborhood in Chicago. A young teenage boy continues to struggle in a gang and crime ridden city of violence (Glanton). These types of horrific situations are tough realities for many young individuals witnessing violence on a daily basis. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "In 2018, law enforcement agencies in the U.S. made an estimated 728,280 arrests of people under age 18" (National Center for Juvenile Justice). Statistics such as these demonstrate the urgency in finding an improved way of handling delinquents. More effective programs need to be incorporated into the juvenile justice system to assist in preventing at risk youth in committing future crimes.

For many years authorities have tired diverting young adults from the life of crime. However, it is hard to influence delinquents from going down an undesirable road unless there are alternative services available. About 100 years ago, a separate juvenile justice system was established in the United States with a goal of diverting young offenders from destructive punishments of criminal courts and focuses on rehabilitation of a juvenile based on the individual's needs. However, with any new reformatory measures to the juvenile justice system, tensions between social welfare and social control are bound to be present. Over time, this tension has shifted and has significantly varied from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. With 51 different juvenile justice systems in the United States with each one governing within their own laws and

regulations. As a result, it can be extremely difficult for every state to undergo a structural reform simultaneously (“The Juvenile Justice System”).

Many people have a pre-distinguished view on the causes of delinquency, yet what people ignore are the programs available to help young adults deter from a future life on crime. Rediscovered research on violence in children found that a child’s rebellious behavior involves both nature and nurture. A child’s brain is more malleable than an adult’s brain so when a child is exposed to horrific experiences their brains can be rewired (modifying cognitive processes). Furthermore, children who experience verbal and physical abuse during their early years have an increased possibility to have trouble with the law (Lundman 7-8). When a child grows up in an abusive or neglectful house, keeping them from falling into the world of crime can be challenging.

Previously suggested programs and initiatives have been constructed to build character, a work ethic, and self-esteem in at-risk children. In 1997, the U.S. Federal Government established a Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) whose purpose was to bring together caring, responsible adults and at-risk young adults in need of positive role models. For example, the Cincinnati Youth Collaboration in Ohio matched 136 youth and volunteers. The volunteers would plan beneficial activities including college visits, job shadowing, school beautification projects, and trips to New York City. A few years later researchers conducted a follow-up which showed that 99 of the 136 youth demonstrated improvement in their grades and 102 improved socially (Montgomery 116). Another study conducted in 1999 was the Denver Youth Study which observed urban youths from high-risk neighborhoods. The results of this study found that the best predictors of childhood success were having conventional friends, a stable family or positive role models, and positive expectations for the future (Montgomery 147). There are multiple

views as to what is the best solution to deterring delinquent behavior in young children, yet what happens when these predelinquent interventions fail to help all at-risk youth?

If society is unable to prevent juvenile behavior and detention is not an ideal option, diversion programs can be used as an alternative method to assist in rehabilitation of the troubled youth. Diversion aims to provide intensive and comprehensive services to juveniles who would ordinarily be involved in the juvenile justice system. The Sacramento County Diversion Project is a program that began in 1970 to control delinquency by diverting juveniles into short-term treatment. Specially trained deputy probation officers worked to prevent detention of juveniles by providing short-term crisis intervention and family crisis counseling. These specially trained officers would rotate handling juveniles in the diversion program and juveniles in regular probation intake services. By rotating shift assignments, officers were able to compress data from diversion and regular probation intake and compare the results. The data showed that the juveniles who were diverted through diversion were rebooked for criminal offenses at a lower rate than those experiencing the regular intake process. Ultimately, the project was able to reduce recidivism in youth in the juvenile justice system (Lundman 91-98).

Some researchers have found significantly lower recidivism rates among juveniles who underwent diversion programs than those who received the normal juvenile justice system processing in being incarcerated ("The Juvenile Justice System"). Attorney General of the United States, Loretta E. Lynch stated that young adults are more likely to commit additional crimes within three years of their release from the juvenile justice system ("Justice Involved Young Adults"). With these statistics in mind, authorities should begin integrating more diversion programs as well as reinvesting in community-based programs.

Successful prevention, like diversion, cannot be accomplished by just law enforcement alone, but the community must acknowledge and take action against delinquency as well. Multiple jurisdictions are experimenting with community-based alternative models of juvenile justice, such as the restorative justice model. Whereas the traditional juvenile justice model focuses attention on rehabilitation and offense punishment, the restorative model directs resources to balancing the needs of victims, offenders, and communities (“The Juvenile Justice System”).

One of the earliest restorative models was the Provo Experiment that provided a community-based intermediate intervention between routine probation and institutionalization. Experimenters, LaMar T. Empey and Maynard L. Erickson, reasoned that treatment had to be community-based because communities are where juveniles made delinquent decisions. Another reasoning for treatment was it had to be group oriented in order to reward the structure of delinquent groups that caused juveniles to mask ambivalence in favor of their outer appearance to their peers. Approximately 10 years following the construction of the Provo Experiment, the Silverlake Experiment was developed as an improved replication of the Provo Experiment. Similarly, the upgraded experiment placed juveniles in group homes in a middle-class residential neighborhood where they were expected to participate in daily group interaction sessions and attend neighborhood activities. What made the Silverlake Experiment more effective was the opportunity to probe the utility of community-based treatment to African-American and Hispanic offenders (Lundman 172-188). Restorative models have shown the ability to be just as effective as institutionalization without the need to fully withdraw juveniles from society.

A full juvenile justice system reform is difficult to incorporate instantly, but with the knowledge of previously effective methods. Authorities can use the basics of those approaches to

regulate a more effective systems. It is important to understand that there are no gains to detection or commitment of young delinquents to an institution where they are preyed upon and are in violation of juvenile protection laws (Coffey 52). The limiting factor in the slow reform is the fact that jurisdictions are unwilling to change the way of handling juvenile offenders. Even when foundations, particularly Annie E. Casey and MacArthur foundations that have already invested millions of dollars in research employing different strategies to prevent the continued delinquent behaviors ("9 Achieving Reform"). Nonetheless, society is still intolerant toward juveniles. Is this pre-established prejudice and unnecessarily strict punishments really the right form of action or are alternative methods more effective?

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