A Formula for Change: Advocacy in the Courts, the Legislature and the Streets

Re-Visioning Justice in America
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Institutional Inequities

Youth were packed into cottages in the Cheltenham (Maryland) facility. There were not enough bathrooms, so many young men had to go to the bathroom in the cells where the staff poured bleach—you talk about a filthy, overcrowded, violent environment for children.

Gregory Perkins, Baltimore Interdenominational Alliance

Look at this way—either you’re going to be raped at Tallulah [youth prison] or else you’re going to be fighting every day.

Grover Arbuthnot, New Orleans youth

While African Americans and Latinos make up less than two-thirds of New York city’s youth population, they comprise 95 percent of the young people at Spofford prison.

Mishi Faruqee, New York City advocate
Policy Accomplishments

• No More Youth Jails/Justice 4 Youth campaign stopped the funding for mass expansion of youth prison in New York City’s capital budget in the early 2000s

• Pressure the state legislature to redirect funds away from prisons and to higher education

• Created a “firewall” between the Office of Youth Services and Department of Corrections

• Juvenile Justice Act of 2003 (Louisiana)
  – Created a Children’s Cabinet Research Council
  – Closed Tallulah youth prison

• Expand educational services to incarcerated youth (Maryland)

• Bolstered the Independent Monitor’s office to investigate abuses (Maryland)
How did these changes occur?
(Ingredients in the Formula)
Build Broad-Based Coalitions

- Maryland Juvenile Justice Coalition (MJJC)
- Prison Moratorium Project
- Justice 4 Youth
- Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana (JJPL)
- Maryland Campaign to Close Cheltenham

- Organize meetings/schedules
- Identifies critical policies/experts
- Bridge different sectors Intergenerational
- Youth advocates
- Legal advocates
- Juvenile justice officials
- Children’s advocates
- Street workers
- Faith-Based advocates
- Prison advocates
- Education advocates
- Mental health professionals
Mobilize Different Affected Groups

- Organize Affected Groups
- Organize family and friends of affected groups
- Groups should have input in policy development
- Families and Friends of Louisiana’s Incarcerated Children (FFLIC) played a leading role in the state’s juvenile justice reform movement
  - The group had 450 members
Movement coalitions have taken on an “ombudsmen”

- Call for investigations
- Publicize investigations/inform lawmakers
- Bring in experts
- Invite national/well-known groups
- Routine monitoring of policy role
- Leverage existing statutes

(Civil Rights of Institutionalized Persons Act)
Constituent Lobbying & Legislative Testimonies

- Involve affected groups (e.g. parents, advocates, & youth) in constituent lobbying & testimonies
- Work hand-in-hand w/legislative allies & movement insiders
- Integrate data into lobbying activities
- Example: Oct. 2004-April 2005, advocates held monthly meetings w/Maryland lawmakers & participated in 2 lobbying sessions
Community-Based Crime Reduction/Anti-Violence Intervention Strategies

- Linked policy reforms w/grassroots strategies that combat crime and divert youth from jail (Mentoring Male Teens in the Hood/Maryland) (Community Conferencing Mediation)

- Developed comprehensive aftercare programs (Youth Empowerment Project/Louisiana)

- Political education courses for at-risk and formerly incarcerated youth (Each One, Teach One/New York)