

NEW JERSEY JUVENILE DETENTION ALTERNATIVES INITIATIVE (JDAI)
CAMDEN COUNTY DETENTION ALTERNATIVES ASSESSMENT

Prepared For:
Camden County JDAI Steering Committee

Prepared By:
Nicole Salamatin, M.A., JJC Detention Specialist for Camden County
Paul DeMuro, Consultant
Jennifer LeBaron, Ph.D., JJC Research & Evaluation

INTRODUCTION

In many jurisdictions, juvenile justice officials have only two options for handling an alleged delinquent following arrest – release the youth to a parent/guardian, or place the youth in a secure detention facility. When faced with these limited options, over-reliance on secure detention for youth who do not represent a serious risk to public safety or for failure to appear in court is bound to occur. As such, the use of effective detention alternatives is a critical, core strategy of the JDAI.

Detention alternatives are short-term programs that serve youth whose cases are pending in juvenile court. Their purpose is to serve youth who would otherwise be placed in a secure detention facility, providing a level of supervision sufficient to safely maintain these youth in the community and to ensure their appearance in court. If implemented effectively, detention alternatives reduce the overall detention population and relieve overcrowding. However, problems arise if detention alternatives are not used in a manner consistent with their purpose. Net-widening in both the use of alternatives and in the use of secure detention often occurs when alternatives: 1) are viewed as treatment options, 2) serve youth who would not have been detained, 3) fail to include effective in-program methods for handling basic rule violations, or 4) are not perceived as providing a level of supervision sufficient to maintain public safety and ensure court appearances.

Recognizing that a continuum of quality detention alternatives is an essential component of effective juvenile justice systems, the Camden JDAI Steering Committee agreed to an assessment of the County's current alternatives continuum; this paper is the result of that assessment. The paper first describes the methodology employed in conducting the detention alternatives assessment. It then presents findings from the "alternatives one-day snapshot" – an analysis of youth in Camden's detention alternatives on October 1, 2004, and the circumstances of their cases. Finally, the report concludes with a number of recommendations regarding the operation of the detention alternatives

METHODOLOGY

The alternatives assessment was conducted using two primary methods – a one-day snapshot of youth in detention alternatives, and a qualitative examination of the alternative programs.

Detention Alternatives One-Day Snapshot

Sample. The one-day snapshot of youth in detention alternatives involved collecting data for a sample of youth in each of the three alternatives available in Camden County – the YES Shelter, Electronic Monitoring (EM), and the Intensive Supervision Program (ISP). The snapshot date was October 1, 2004, with the expectation that by choosing this date most youth would have departed the alternative by the time the analysis occurred, thereby allowing the analysis to include the circumstances of each youth's release, disposition, and other case-processing events.

On the morning of October 1, 2004 there were 74 youth on EM, 7 in the YES shelter, and 5 on ISP. Given the small number of youth in the YES Shelter and on ISP, the sample includes all youth in those programs. However, in order to expedite the analysis a sample was drawn from the EM program. After listing the 74 youth on EM in chronological order according to admission date, every second name on the list was selected for inclusion. This resulted in a sample of 36 EM youth, and a total detention alternatives sample of 48 youth.

Data & Analysis. Consistent with the data collection approach utilized for the Camden County Youth Center (CCYC) one-day detention snapshot, information was primarily gathered from Family Court files, then supplemented and cross-referenced with detention center data and the Family Automated Case Tracking System (FACTS). Data analysis was also similar to that utilized for the CCYC snapshot, with special attention to length of stay and program outcomes (i.e., completion vs. removal from program).¹

Qualitative Assessment

The second approach used in the alternatives assessment was qualitative in nature. This approach included interviews/discussion with individuals involved in the use or operation of Camden's detention alternative programs, as well as some field observation. The purpose of the qualitative piece was to gain an understanding of how the detention alternatives currently function. Interviewing and spending time with individuals involved in the programs provided specific and important insights regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the alternative programs, particularly from the perspective of the programs' key stakeholders.

A total of 25 individuals participated in the interview process. The interviews took place with:

- Five administrative personnel involved with the management of the detention alternative programs;
- Seven direct service staff, including six EM staff interviewed collectively in a focus group format, and one YES staff person interviewed individually;
- Three Family Court judges responsible for placing youth in detention alternative programs;
- Six youth in the detention center in January 2005 who had not been successful in an alternative program and who were therefore admitted to secure detention;
- Two youth under the current supervision of a detention alternative, including a home-visit to one youth on EM, and one youth at YES;
- The parents of the EM youth visited at home.

Interviews were conversational and open-ended in nature, and lasted for approximately 30-45 minutes. In addition to the home-visit of the one EM participant, the interviewers also spent some time in the field with two of the EM staff.

¹ The methodology originally suggested called for applying an RAI to the snapshot samples. This approach posed a greater challenge than anticipated given a) the jurisdiction-specific policy considerations typically included in RAIs, and b) the differences in criminal statute across jurisdictions. As such, an existing RAI could only be partially/indirectly translated into NJ "language" through a "best-guess" approach. Applying such a quasi-translated RAI would have yielded ambiguous results, at best. It seemed the most interpretable (and meaningful) results could be attained by a direct comparison of CCYC youth to alternatives youth on relevant factors (current offense, offense history, etc.). Such comparisons appear throughout this report, where appropriate.

ONE-DAY SNAPSHOT FINDINGS

Demographics

As noted in Table 1, youth in detention alternatives on the snapshot date were predominantly male (72.9%) and of minority background (79.2%). All youth were from Camden County and most (52.1%) were residents of Camden City. Finally, the average age of youth at the time of admission to an alternative was 16.8 years.

Table 1. Demographics (N=48)

▶ Gender		▶ County of Residence	
Male	72.9% (35)	Camden	100.0% (48)
Female	27.1% (13)		
▶ Race/Ethnicity		▶ Town of Residence	
African American	64.6% (31)	Camden City	52.1% (25)
Caucasian	20.8% (10)	Clementon	10.4% (5)
Hispanic	12.5% (6)	Other (< 5% each)	37.5% (18)
Other	2.1% (1)		
▶ Age at Admission			
14-15	16.7% (8)		
16-17	47.9% (23)		
18-19	35.4% (17)		
Avg.	16.8		

Secure vs. Alternatives. Comparing the results from the secure detention snapshot to the detention alternatives snapshot, alternatives youth were more often female (27.1% vs. 14.6%) and of non-minority background (20.8% vs. 12.4%) than CCYC youth; they were also older (16.8 vs. 15.9). While Camden City had the greatest representation as the town of residence for both groups, representation was somewhat greater among CCYC youth (59.6% vs. 52.1%). Additionally, Clementon (10.4%) was the second most common town of residence among alternatives youth, while Pennsauken (7.9%) was second among CCYC youth.

Current Offenses

Table 2 provides information regarding the current offenses for which youth were placed on a detention alternative. The current offenses are those representing the “proximate cause” – the most immediate reason – for the youth’s most recent detention alternative admission.

As noted in the table, the average number of charges per youth at admission was 2.4, though half of all youth presented with no more than one charge (50.0%). Most youth had among their current offenses new delinquency charges (72.9%); just over one-quarter (27.1%) had only violations among their immediate offenses. In terms of specific offenses, the most severe current offense was most often a 3rd degree drug offense (22.9%) or a VOP (10.4%). When categorized by degree, offenses of the 3rd degree were most common (41.7%), followed by violations (27.1%). When considered by type, drug offenses were most common (31.3%), followed by violations (27.1%) and persons offenses (20.8%).

Secure vs. Alternatives. Youth in alternatives were fairly similar to youth in secure detention in terms of current offenses. Admissions for violations were similar, though slightly less common among alternatives youth than among CCYC youth (27.1% vs. 31.8%). VOPs and 3rd degree drug offenses were the top two offenses among both groups, though the order was reversed, with 3rd degree drug offenses more common among alternatives youth (22.9% vs. 15.9%) and VOPs more common among CCYC youth (19.3% vs. 10.4%). However, the more severe offenses, as measured by degree, were more prevalent among secure detention youth, with 20.5% of CCYC youth admitted for a 1st or 2nd degree offense, as compared to 12.5% of the alternatives youth.

Table 2. Current Offenses (N=48)

▶ Most Severe Current Offense		▶ Type of Act Leading to Alternative Admission	
3° CDS	22.9% (11)	New Delinquency Charge(s)	72.9% (35)
VOP	10.4% (5)	Violation Only	27.1% (13)
DP/PDP	8.3% (4)	▶ Most Severe Current Offense – Type	
Violation of Conditional Release	8.3% (4)	Persons	20.8% (10)
3° Aggravated Assault	6.3% (3)	Weapons	4.2% (2)
4° Criminal Sexual Contact	4.2% (2)	Property	12.5% (6)
2° CDS	4.2% (2)	CDS	31.3% (15)
3° Firearms/Weapons	4.2% (2)	Public Order	4.2% (2)
4° Theft	4.2% (2)	Violation	27.1% (13)
FTA	4.2% (2)	▶ Most Severe Current Offense – Degree	
BW/Violation (Other) ²	4.2% (2)	1 st Degree	2.1% (1)
Other (<5% each)	18.8% (9)	2 nd Degree	10.4% (5)
▶ # of Charges/Counts in Current Referral		3 rd Degree	41.7% (20)
0	2.1% (1)	4 th Degree	10.4% (5)
1	47.9% (23)	DP/PDP	8.3% (4)
2-3	31.3% (15)	Violation	27.1% (13)
4+	18.8% (9)		
Avg.	2.4		

Court History at Time of Alternative Decision

A review of Table 3 indicates that youth in the alternative snapshot varied in terms of the nature and extent of their history of court involvement. While total number of adjudications at the time of admission ranged from zero to 14, youth averaged 2.6 total adjudications and a majority of youth (60.4%) had two or fewer adjudications. Similar variation was seen in terms of delinquency petitions. While youth averaged 3.6 total delinquency petitions, the range was from zero to 14. And, while number of petitions filed for a VOP ranged from zero to five, youth were almost equally divided between those with no history of a VOP petition (52.1%) and those with at least one such petition (47.9%).

Table 3. Court History at Time of Detention Alternative Decision (N=48)

▶ Total Adjudications		▶ Total Petitions		▶ Delinquency Petitions	
0	16.7% (8)	0	2.1% (1)	0	2.1% (1)
1	25.0% (12)	1	10.4% (5)	1	14.6% (7)
2	18.8% (9)	2	22.9% (11)	2	31.3% (15)
3-4	20.8% (10)	3	16.7% (8)	3	16.7% (8)
5-6	12.5% (6)	4-5	20.8% (10)	4-5	16.7% (8)
7+	6.3% (3)	6+	27.2% (13)	6+	18.8% (9)
Avg.	2.6	Avg.	4.2	Avg.	3.6
▶ VOP Petitions		▶ 1 st – 4 th Degree Petitions		▶ Aggressive/Assaultive Petitions	
0	52.1% (25)	0	12.5% (6)	0	52.1% (25)
1	27.1% (13)	1	39.6% (19)	1	27.1% (13)
2	10.4% (5)	2	18.8% (9)	2	12.5% (6)
3	6.3% (3)	3	12.5% (6)	3	4.2% (2)
4+	4.2% (2)	4+	16.7% (8)	4+	4.2% (2)
Avg.	0.9	Avg.	2.0	Avg.	0.8
▶ CDS Petitions		▶ Other Petition Types*		▶ Prior Petitions Pending	
0	41.7% (20)	Weapons	27.1% (13)	0	89.6% (43)
1	33.3% (16)	Sex Offenses	10.4% (5)	1	8.3% (4)
2	14.6% (7)	Arson	6.3% (3)	2	2.1% (1)
3+	10.4% (5)	Escape	2.1% (1)		

* Percent/number of youth with at least one petition of a particular type.

² The alternatives snapshot included one case where the act leading to the alternative admission was termination of from the drug court program and another case that involved the FCIU.

Secure vs. Alternatives. As a group, alternatives youth had slightly less extensive court histories at the time of admission than youth in secure detention. Alternatives youth averaged slightly fewer total adjudications (2.6 vs. 3.4), total petitions (4.2 vs. 5.5), delinquency petitions (3.6 vs. 4.1), VOP petitions (0.9 vs. 1.3), 1st through 4th degree petitions (2.0 vs. 2.7), and aggressive/assaultive petitions (0.8 vs. 1.3). However, 18.8% of the alternatives youth had a petition for a sex offense, arson, or escape in their court history, as compared to 8.0% of the CCYC youth.

Placement History

A review of Table 4 indicates of the youth in a detention alternative on the snapshot date, a majority (60.4%) had one or more prior detention admissions, though less than half (47.9%) had experienced a prior placement in a detention alternative, and just over one-quarter (27.1%) had a history of prior failure to comply with the conditions of a detention alternative program. Just over two-thirds (68.8%) of the youth were under some type of supervision at the time of the event/act that ultimately led to their placement in an alternative.

Secure vs. Alternatives. Prior detention admissions and detention alternatives placements were common among both groups of youth, though collectively alternatives youth had a less extensive history than CCYC youth. More CCYC youth had one or more prior admissions to secure detention (76.1% vs. 60.4%) as well as to detention alternative programs (63.6% vs. 47.9%) than alternatives youth. And, in turn more CCYC youth had a history of prior program failure than the current alternatives youth (40.9% vs. 27.1%). Finally, CCYC youth were more often under some type of supervision at the time of admission than alternatives youth (85.2% vs. 68.8%), and specifically under probation supervision (67.0% vs. 45.8%).

Table 4. Placement History at Time of Alternative Decision (N=48)

▶ Prior Detention Admissions		▶ Prior Detention Alternative Admissions	
0	39.6% (19)	0	52.1% (25)
1	29.2% (14)	1	25.0% (12)
2-3	25.0% (12)	2	14.6% (7)
4+	6.3% (3)	3+	8.3% (4)
Avg.	1.3	Avg.	0.9
▶ Prior Detention Alternative Failures		▶ Supervision Status at Time of Admission	
0	72.9% (35)	None	31.3% (15)
1	18.8% (9)	Probation	45.8% (22)
2+	8.3% (4)	Detention Alternative	12.5% (6)
		Informal/Indirect ³	8.3% (4)
		Parole	2.1% (1)

History of Failure to Appear or Runaway Behavior

As noted in Table 5, almost one-third (31.3%) of youth in the alternatives snapshot had failed to appear for a court hearing on at least one occasion. Fewer youth had a clear indication of runaway behavior (20.8%). Of the youth who exhibited some type of runaway behavior, the location most commonly was home/foster care (6 cases).

Secure vs. Alternatives. Youth in secure detention and in detention alternatives were similar in this area. While slightly more CCYC youth had a history of one or more FTAs (38.6% vs. 31.3%), the groups were virtually equal in terms of the proportion with some indication of runaway behavior (CCYC = 20.5% vs. alternatives = 20.8%).

³ This supervision status category includes two youth who had been released to parents on what seemed to be informal house arrest, one youth on “informal probation,” and one youth under the care/custody of DYFS.

Table 5. Failure to Appear and Runaway Behavior (N=48)

▶ Number of Failures to Appear		▶ Runaway Behavior	
0	68.8% (33)	No History of Runaway Behavior Indicated	79.2% (38)
1	20.8% (10)	Prior History of Runaway Behavior	10.4% (5)
2	8.3% (4)	Runaway Behavior at Time of Admission	10.4% (5)
3	2.1% (1)		

Additional Factors: Family and Mental Health

A review of Table 6 reveals that more than half (54.2%) of the youth in the snapshot had some history of involvement with the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS). Also, well over one-third (39.6%) of the youth had an open DYFS case at the time at the time of the alternative decision. Regarding parent/caregiver availability, in 39.6% of the cases a review of available information did not readily indicate whether a parent was contacted and/or available at admission. When this information was present, it seemed most often a parent was available (39.6%), while in a smaller proportion of cases it appeared the parent was available but unwilling to take the youth home (16.7%).

Regarding mental health issues, available information suggests most youth did not present with mental health concerns (77.1%). However, in almost one-quarter of the cases (22.9%) moderate to serious mental health concerns were indicated. Indicators of mental health needs included, but not limited to, clinical diagnoses (e.g., bipolar, ADHD), suicide attempts, and/or psychotropic medication.

Secure vs. Alternatives. Problems in these areas were more prevalent among youth in secure detention. CCYC youth more often had some history of DYFS involvement (63.6% vs. 54.2%), as well as an indication there was in fact an open DYFS case (55.7% vs. 39.6%) than alternatives youth. CCYC youth also more often presented with mental health concerns (28.4% vs. 22.9%), and with an indication those concerns were moderate to serious in nature (22.7% vs. 12.5%) than alternatives youth. However, comparisons regarding parent/caregiver availability are difficult to draw given the lack of readily available information in this area for both groups.

Table 6. Additional Factors: Family & Mental Health (N=48)

▶ DYFS History		▶ Parent/Caregiver Availability at Admission	
No Known History	45.8% (22)	Available	39.6% (19)
Closed Case	4.2% (2)	Available but Unwilling To Take Youth Home	16.7% (8)
Open Case	39.6% (19)	DYFS Custody/Foster Care	2.1% (1)
DYFS Involvement Indicated but Case Status Unknown	10.4% (5)	Not Indicated and/or Unknown	39.6% (19)
▶ Mental Health Concerns			
No Clear MH Issues	77.1% (37)		
Moderate to Serious MH Issues	12.5% (6)		
Possible MH Issues	10.4% (5)		

Length of Stay (LOS)⁴

As indicated in Table 7, the average length of stay for youth in a detention alternative was almost two months (59.7 days), though LOS ranged from 8 to 233+ days. More than one-third (35.7%) of the youth were in an alternative for more than 60 days, and 16.7% of the youth were in the alternative program for more than three months (90+ days). Additionally, length of stay varied by program type, from 36.4 days for YES youth, to 57.8 days for ISP youth, to 64.5 days for youth on EM.

Importantly, 30 of the youth in these alternative programs were in secure detention prior to placement on the alternative (an average of 6.6 days). Including time spent in detention pre-alternatives

⁴ As of February 24, 2005, one youth had not been released from the alternative placement. For that youth LOS calculations use the number of days between admission and February 24 (233 days).

admission increases the overall LOS to 65.0 days. Note, however, that Table 7 also indicates no fewer than ten youth were released from the current alternative placement to another “detention location” (most often secure detention). The LOS calculations discussed here do not include this additional detention time, and are therefore an underestimate of total time on “detention status” for these youth.

Finally, for youth included in the alternatives snapshot, the largest number departed the alternative program via dispositional placement (29). In seven cases (14.6%) – those categorized as “negative discharge” or “AWOL/abscond” – it was clear the youth’s behavior led to a negative placement outcome. Regarding length of stay, those negatively discharged from a detention alternative to secure detention had the longest LOS, remaining in the alternative program for 105.7 days prior to the negative discharge.

Table 7. Length of Stay (in days) in Alternative, by Program and Release Type (N=48)

▶ LOS in Alternative		▶ Average LOS in Alternative, by Release Type		
1-10	2.1% (1)	Release Type	LOS	# of Youth
11-20	12.5% (6)	Negative Discharge-Returned to Detention	105.7	3
21-30	12.5% (6)	Released to YES	64.0	2
31-40	16.7% (8)	Released to Dispositional Placement	57.7	29
41-50	14.6% (7)	Charges Dismissed (Released Home)	52.0	2
51-75	18.8% (9)	AWOL/Abscond	49.0	4
76-100	10.4% (5)	Returned to Detention to Await Placement	34.0	1
101+	12.5% (6)	Returned to Detention-Other Reason	31.6	5
Avg.	59.7	Released to Home	22.0	1
Median	42.5	Not Released as of 2/24/05	233.0	1
Max	233+	▶ Avg. LOS in Alternative, by Program		
		EM	64.5	
		ISP	57.8	
		YES	36.4	

Court Status and Location Prior to Alternative Program Admission

As noted in Table 8, about half (51.1%) of all youth in the alternative snapshot were admitted to an alternative pre-adjudication, though 41.7% were admitted to the alternative program placement post-adjudication. On the snapshot date, 39.6% of the youth in detention alternatives were in the pre-adjudication phase, with 54.2% in a later phase of the court process (37.5% awaiting disposition, 16.7% disposed/awaiting placement).

Regarding location of youth prior to admission to a detention alternative, Table 8 indicates most youth (62.5%) were in detention prior to the alternative admission, with the second largest proportion of youth (31.3%) residing at home. Of those youth admitted to an alternative post-adjudication, location prior to alternative admission was almost evenly split between detention (50.0%) and home (45.0%).

Table 8. Court Status and Location Prior to Admission (N=48)

▶ Court Status on Date Ordered to Alternative		▶ Location Prior to Alternative Admission	
Waiver	2.1% (1)	Detention	62.5% (30)
Pre-Adjudication	51.1% (25)	Home	31.3% (15)
Adjudicated/Awaiting Disposition	35.4% (17)	YES	4.2% (2)
Disposed/Awaiting Placement	6.3% (3)	JJC	2.1% (1)
Other ⁵	4.2% (2)		

Secure vs. Alternatives. Court status on the snapshot date was similar for the two groups in terms of the proportion of pre-adjudicated youth in each setting (CCYC=38.6% vs. alternatives=39.6%).

⁵ One was an FCIU case and one case was reactivated/reopened following drug court termination.

However, regarding youth in the later phases of the court process, youth in secure detention were more often disposed/awaiting placement than alternatives youth (29.5% vs. 16.7%).

Court Case Processing Timelines

Table 9 describes case processing timelines for youth in the alternatives snapshot, overall and by program. Days between arrest and adjudication ranged from 42.8 for YES youth, to 53.1 for EM youth, to 67.8 for ISP youth. The next phase of case processing – from adjudication to disposition – ranged from only 7.7 days for YES youth, to 23.5 days for ISP youth, to 38.5 days for EM youth. Thus, total case processing timelines – from arrest to disposition – ranged from a low of 58.7 days for YES youth, to 84.8 days for EM youth, to a high of about three months (91.3 days) for ISP youth.

Secure vs. Alternatives. While this particular case processing analysis was not included in the secure detention snapshot report, returning to the data collected for the secure detention snapshot does yield some preliminary results. As a group, overall case processing timelines appear to be longer for alternatives youth than for CCYC snapshot youth. Initial analysis suggests this is true for arrest to adjudication (CCYC=28.9 days vs. alternatives=53.6 days), adjudication to disposition (21.3 days vs. 33.8 days), and thus for arrest through to disposition (50.2 days vs. 83.2 days).

Table 9. Court Case Processing Timelines⁶ by Program Type

	Arrest to Adjudication				Adjudication to Disposition				Arrest to Disposition			
	Avg.	Min.	Max.	N	Avg.	Min.	Max.	N	Avg.	Min.	Max.	N
EM	53.1	2	144	(29)	38.5	0	173	(25)	84.8	2	225	(25)
YES	42.8	18	62	(4)	7.7	0	15	(3)	58.7	45	69	(3)
ISP	67.8	14	110	(4)	23.5	0	49	(4)	91.3	29	131	(4)
<i>Total</i>	53.6	2	144	(37)	33.8	0	173	(32)	83.2	32	225	(32)

Summary – Youth in CCYC vs. Youth in Detention Alternatives

As noted throughout, Camden’s one-day snapshots revealed several differences between youth in secure detention and youth in detention alternatives. Demographically, youth in Camden’s detention alternatives were more often female, more often Caucasian, and older than CCYC youth. Alternatives youth were less often from Camden City (though Camden City had the greatest representation among both groups), and while Clementon youth comprised the second largest proportion of the alternatives group, Pennsauken was second among CCYC youth.

Current offense was similar across the two groups, with VOPs and 3rd degree drug offenses most common, collectively accounting for approximately one-third of both groups. Overall, alternatives youth had slightly less extensive court and detention histories, and were less often under probation supervision at the time of the act that led to admission. Runaway/FTA history was fairly similar across groups, though FTA history was somewhat more prevalent among CCYC youth. As for court processing, case processing times were longer for youth in detention alternatives than for CCYC youth. In terms of court status, alternatives youth were less often disposed/awaiting placement.

Finally, youth in CCYC seemed to present with greater “extra-legal” issues. Compared to alternatives youth, CCYC youth more often had a history of DYFS involvement as well as an open DYFS case. Indicators of mental health concerns also appeared to be more prevalent among youth in secure detention.

⁶ *Arrest to Adjudication* includes cases where current charges involved a new filing in court (N=40) AND where an adjudication had occurred by 2-24-05 (final N=37, 2 missing youth and 1 waiver decision under appeal excluded). Then, *Adjudication to Disposition* and *Arrest to Disposition* exclude an additional 5 cases where a disposition had not occurred as of 2-24-05 (final N=32, 2 adjudicated cases awaiting disposition, and 3 dismissals).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following interrelated recommendations are the culmination of the Camden County Detention Alternatives Assessment. The recommendations are based on:

- An analysis of the data presented in this paper, particularly the data concerning present length of stay in the detention alternatives;
- The information gathered in the interviews with youth and key stakeholders;
- Good practice principles regarding the planning, development, and implementation of alternatives to secure detention. (See Pathways #4, “Consider the Alternatives,” particularly Chapters 2, 3, and 5).

Recommendation 1: Need for Routine Detention Hearings. Youth placed in court ordered detention alternatives should receive routine detention review hearings so that they remain in a detention alternative for the shortest amount of time possible, consistent with public safety.

Youth in detention alternatives are in a form of court-ordered pre-trial supervision; thus length of stay in detention alternatives should be limited and carefully reviewed and monitored. Youth in Camden’s detention alternative programs are under intensive, court ordered supervision. Many youth spend a considerable amount of time in these alternative detention programs. In the interviews with the stakeholders, it became clear that while youth may have some court hearings while in a detention alternative, regular detention review hearings were not routine for youth placed in court-ordered alternatives. The longer a youth spends in a highly supervised detention alternative, the greater the chance the youth will fail. Moreover, longer lengths of stay in detention alternatives in effect back-up the case-flow in a detention alternative continuum – thus making it probable that other youth who might be placed in a detention alternative will be placed in secure detention.

Recommendation 2: Need to Develop and Monitor Clear Program Objectives. Clear program objectives, particularly with regard to population served, contact standards, and outcome measures, should be established and monitored for detention alternative programs.

Information gathered through interviews and observation combined with a review of the data suggest there is a real need to define explicitly a variety of conditions regarding the operation of Camden’s detention alternative programs. For example, in addition to clear parameters regarding length of stay, the EM program should clearly define its target population and establish standards for weekly face-to-face contacts. Once developed, these objectives, along with length of stay, should be carefully monitored.

Finally, all of Camden’s alternative programs need objective outcome measures that are routinely evaluated. Among such outcome measures are completion rates, failure-to-appear rates, and rearrest rates for program participants. This is true not only for detention alternatives, but for commitment alternatives, especially given the interconnectedness of the two program types (i.e., failure in commitment alternatives leads back to detention).

Recommendation 3: Restructuring of EM and YES Shelter Slots. The Camden County JDAI Steering Committee should consider restructuring the EM program and the YES shelter programs to better meet the needs of the local system and of the youth it serves.

Because of the relative lack of placement options available to the court – both pre-disposition detention alternatives and dispositional placement options – the Court by default has had to use EM and YES shelter beds for a variety of purposes and for a variety of youth. EM and YES shelter beds are often used (and used for a relatively long period of time) because the Court has few options to

address the needs of the youth before them. This reality has helped foster a situation where there is insufficient clarity regarding a number of operational issues with the present detention alternatives. In turn, and related to the earlier recommendations, there is insufficient ongoing monitoring of how the present alternatives operate and of program outcomes.

Specific Recommendations Regarding the Restructuring of EM and YES Shelter Beds

What follows is a set of more specific recommendations regarding the potential restructuring of Camden's EM program and YES shelter beds.

Restructuring EM Program

Pre-Adjudication. Assign 4-5 of the existing EM staff caseloads of 12-15 youth, for a total of 48-60 slots. In addition to the EM, each youth receives a minimum of three face-to-face contacts per week and two telephone contacts per day. Additionally, work to expedite the placement of youth onto EM; keep length of stay to 10-30 days; and hold routine detention review hearings.

Post-Adjudication. Create a new post-adjudication community-based Intensive Supervision Program (ISP). Assign 2-3 present EM staff caseloads of 10 youth for, a total of 20-30 slots. Each youth receives at least four face-to-face contacts per week, with school visitations and family counseling. The Court could use this program as an alternative to residential dispositional placement, or for adjudicated youth awaiting a residential dispositional placement. For those on ISP awaiting placement, if the youth did well on ISP the Court might choose not to place the youth in a residential bed. Youth might also be placed on ISP enhanced by EM, or might be placed on EM during the first week or two, with "step-down" from EM an incentive for youth doing well. Length of stay for youth awaiting placement – 1-21 days. Length of stay for youth placed on ISP as disposition – 4-6 months.⁷

Restructuring YES

The YES facility has a total of 36 beds, presently comprised of three "discrete" programs, which include (a) 8 Court shelter beds, (b) 8 DYFS shelter beds, and (c) a 16-bed residential dispositional program.⁸ From one point of view, it appears that the Court shelter beds and DYFS shelter beds represent two separate shelter programs. However, in effect, there is little appreciable difference between the two programs, and more importantly, between the two populations of youth (in the interviews most stakeholders acknowledged this fact). And, although we do not have actual data regarding length of stay in the DYFS shelter beds, YES program staff reported that youth typically spend 60-90 days in the YES DYFS shelter beds (at times then moving into the YES residential treatment program). The Camden County Steering Committee should consider restructuring the YES program so that it has only two, distinct programs – one shelter program and one residential dispositional program.

YES Shelter Care. This would be a 16-bed, 30-day program with DYFS and (when applicable) probation staff charged with the responsibility of developing and presenting dispositional plans for each youth placed in a YES shelter bed. Assuming a 30-day LOS, the YES shelter would serve 192 youth per year, and with a 45-day LOS the YES shelter would serve 128 youth annually.⁹

⁷ The County has a concern regarding using County detention (operational) funds to fund in effect a "dispositional" alternative. Perhaps the County could be convinced to agree to such an arrangement on a pilot basis. The present EM staff includes some staff that is more disposed and comfortable with a role that involves the intensive, traditional pre-dispositional supervision of youth; these staff should remain with the EM detention alternative program. On the other hand, the present EM staff includes some staff who see themselves more as youth counselors. These staff could be considered for the dispositional ISP program.

⁸ In the YES residential program, youth attend school in the community, with all counseling services provided in the facility.

⁹ With a 30-day LOS, 365 days/30 day cycle = 12 cycles, then 16 slots X 12 cycles = 192 youth. For a 45-day LOS, 365/45=8 cycles, then 16 slots X 8 cycles = 128 youth.

YES Residential Program. Regarding the YES residential program, the Steering Committee should work with the provider to clearly identify the type of youth the program is designed to serve, and to develop a four- to six-month residential dispositional program for youth (32-48 residential dispositional slots/year). The program should emphasize working with family and extended family, and helping to prepare each youth for re-entry into the community.

Resulting Continuum of Detention Alternatives and Dispositional Options

Restructuring the EM and YES programs along the lines outlined above would enhance Camden's existing continuum of detention alternatives and dispositional options as described below (without an influx of substantial additional funding).

Detention Alternatives Pre-Dispositional Continuum

Residential

- The secure detention center.
- Host Homes. DHS has committed to developing 5-10 host home slots for youth held in secure detention because they are essentially homeless at the time of the detention decision without an appropriate family to provide supervision. With a 30-45 day LOS, 5 host homes could provide a residential detention alternative to 40-60 youth per year.
- YES Shelter Care. As described above, serving 128 to 192 youth per year.

Non-Residential

- EM. With 48-60 slots and a 30-day LOS = 576-720 youth per year.
- YAP Detention Alternative. Providing 20-30 hours of face-to-face supervision. Presently funded at 5 slots, with a 30-day LOS = 60 youth served per year.
- (ISP. As described above, ISP post-adjudication/awaiting placement slots, if opted for.)

Dispositional Options Continuum¹⁰

Residential

- YES Residential Program. Sixteen residential beds with a 4-6 month LOS = 32-48 youth served annually.

Non-Residential

- New ISP/EM Program. As described above, providing 20-30 community ISP intensive community supervision slots. With a 4-6 month LOS = 40-60 youth served annually (slightly lower, if combined with use as post-adjudication/awaiting placement program).
- YAP Dispositional Alternative. With 25 slots and a 6-month LOS = 50 youth served per year.

Final Reflections

More than most jurisdictions Camden needs additional resources for its youth and families; however, one clear message of this report is that Camden should use its current resources more precisely and more prudently. In all probability it would be a major mistake to add additional interventions before clarifying and monitoring the operations and outcomes of the current detention alternatives.

¹⁰ Within the context of Camden's other existing dispositional options.