



End the Incarceration of Kids for Behaviors Like Running Away And Help Kids Heal from Traumatic Experiences

The experiences of kids who are traumatized by abuse are too often overlooked, and those experiences—when not addressed—can result in behavioral issues, poor health outcomes, and subsequent involvement in the youth justice system. Youth justice involvement due to status offenses—such as running away or skipping school—often stem from traumatic experiences in a child’s past. To create safer communities and set all Kentucky kids up for future success, we must respond to children who get in trouble in the most effective way possible.

Instead of incarceration for status offenses, utilize community services that are equipped to respond to kids’ traumatic experiences:

End the abuse to prison pipeline in Kentucky

In Kentucky, nearly 30 percent of all incarcerations of girls are for things like running away or skipping school, despite an overall drop in the number of incarcerations for status offenses. Studies show justice-involved girls have higher rates of adverse childhood experiences, including physical and sexual abuse, neglect, and family violence. Children in Kentucky experience abuse or neglect at more than twice the national average, putting them more at risk of becoming involved in the youth justice system. Kentucky has made strides in how we care for children who have experienced abuse or neglect, and when these experiences are recognized, children have a more hopeful future.

Activate the right response to address the root cause of a child’s behavior

Though Kentucky has made improvements in its youth justice system in recent years by creating the FAIR teams to work with youth charged with status offenses, the child may still end up in jail. And the trauma of that incarceration only increases the chance of future offenses and may even add to trauma the child has experienced in the past. Rather than relying on incarceration, we can better serve kids by offering services outside of jail. Alternative responses should connect the child and family to community services that address the root causes of behavior and will support a child’s healthy development to get them on track to becoming a successful adult.

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:

End the incarceration of youth for behaviors like running away and missing school to help kids heal from traumatic experiences and become contributing members of their community.