

Vera Institute of Justice

The Vera Institute of Justice combines expertise in research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety. The mission of Vera's Center on Youth Justice (CYJ) is to promote the well-being and safety of youth, families, and communities by working with government to make juvenile justice systems equitable and humane in policy and practice.

Areas of Focus

To improve the quality of juvenile justice and make systems more equitable and humane in policy and practice, CYJ focuses on:

- Increasing data-driven decision-making and reducing bias in juvenile justice systems.
- Expanding the use of community-based interventions that strengthen ties between youth, families, schools, and communities.
- Diverting youth who may be more effectively and safely served by their communities or other systems from juvenile justice systems.
- Advancing the national discourse in youth justice through research and innovation.

Partners | Clients

Vera and CYJ have worked with state and local juvenile justice policymakers and practitioners as well as school districts, court systems, child welfare agencies, and other youth-serving institutions across the country.

Strategies | Services

CYJ combines research, planning and technical assistance with substantive expertise in juvenile justice to inform and facilitate the work of policymakers and practitioners nationwide. Five core services characterize our work:

- *Data-driven System Diagnosis.* CYJ collects and analyzes data to understand how juvenile justice systems are functioning in practice, and to provide stakeholders with the foundation for informed conversations about reform.

- *Facilitated Strategic Planning.* CYJ uses its empirical analyses of juvenile justice systems to support strategic planning processes at the state or local level. In many jurisdictions, we coordinate and facilitate meetings for interdisciplinary task forces, commissions or other policy-making bodies. CYJ staff moves planning efforts forward by focusing conversation on the key issues and questions that require resolution in order to implement desired changes. CYJ's facilitation helps stakeholders prioritize tasks, assign appropriate agents for reform, and ensure that reform plans make good, local sense. Once CYJ and the jurisdiction establish a strategic plan, CYJ works with stakeholders to develop indicators and benchmarks to promote the timely implementation and sustainability of reforms, and to measure the success of activities in terms of improved public safety, reduced costs, and positive outcomes for youth, families, and communities.
- *Research Targeted to Advance the Field.* CYJ's research staff advances knowledge in youth justice through exploratory studies, program evaluations, and literature reviews. Through their work with state and local partners, CYJ researchers have also developed expertise in the development of data-driven risk assessment tools and indicator systems to guide decision-making, including the use of detention, placement, and appropriate alternatives.
- *Innovation and Demonstration.* Vera has a long history of planning and implementing local pilot reforms in the youth justice arena. In partnership with city and state government, Vera has over the past decade demonstrated a series of system reforms designed to foster the well-being of youth while promoting public safety. These include Adolescent Portable Therapy (APT), a substance abuse treatment program for at-risk and system-involved youth, and Esperanza/Hope, a home- and community-based alternative to placement for adjudicated youth.
- *Juvenile Justice Expertise.* CYJ brings extensive, substantive juvenile justice expertise to every project we undertake. In addition to our direct work in partnership with government, CYJ staff stays on top of the latest developments in juvenile justice policy and practice, as well as lessons from research and the field. CYJ also marshals the expertise of a talented cadre of "national associates" – juvenile justice practitioners who work with the Center and its clients as expert consultants.

