

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

STUDYING A COMMUNITY-LED APPROACH TO YOUTH JUSTICE

When it comes to America's reliance on mass incarceration as punishment or a deterrent to crime, I'm an open book. Our standing as the world's No. 2 jailer, behind China, is troubling and wrong.

But the idea of incarcerating youth — especially for low-level offenses — sets my hair on fire.

Data shows that its overuse is ineffective, undermining public safety. And it's harmful to youth, damaging their physical and mental health and crushing prospects for future success.

Some jurisdictions around the country have adopted a different approach to youth justice.

Community-based diversion strategies keep youth in trusting, caring relationships and steer them away from punitive systems, while holding them accountable.

Tomorrow in San Diego, the Applied Research Center for Civility (a partnership between the National Conflict Resolution Center and UC San Diego), will be hosting a conference called "Community-Led Diversion: Building a New Paradigm in Youth Justice." More than 150 people are expected to attend, including government leaders and juvenile

justice practitioners from around the country.

The conference is sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), based in Baltimore, Md., and The Conrad Prebys Foundation.

In advance of the conference, the Center for Civility issued a preliminary impact paper on best practices in juvenile diversion, culminating two years of work. It reflects the expertise and contributions of dozens of individuals and organizations across the country that are supporting efforts for community-led diversion.

As described in the paper, community-led diversion initiatives center the things that make neighborhoods safe, reallocating funds from arrests, detention and incarceration into investments that enhance community well-being.

Flipping the traditional juvenile justice model has been shown to reduce recidivism rates, mitigate racial disparities and be more cost effective than punitive approaches like incarceration. Ultimately, a community-led approach can prevent youth from system involvement in the first place but improves outcomes

even for youth who have had previous encounters.

Nate Balis, director of the Juvenile Justice Strategy Group at AECF, will deliver the conference keynote. AECF has been working for many years to reimagine youth justice. When the pandemic began, they wanted to know how it would affect youth detention practices in systems around the country.

Balis, along with Marc Schindler, assistant secretary and chief of staff for the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services, recently shared AECF's findings in *The Imprint*.

After declining to their lowest number in January 2021, detentions have crept up and now exceed pre-pandemic levels by 5 percent.

Average detention time is nearly 40 percent longer. Deep, decades-old racial and ethnic disparities have only gotten worse, with Black youth detained at eight times the rate of White youth.

While it paints a discouraging picture overall, AECF found significant differences between communities across the country. One-third of jurisdictions made

steep reductions in juvenile detention, averaging 30 percent. Many of them are investing in community-based diversion.

As Balis and Schindler wrote, there is a throughline from the pandemic — and prolonged isolation — to increasing rates of victimization and violence among youth. During a pivotal time, the authors explained, teens "lost caregivers and loved ones, lived through parents' job loss and uncertainty, and fell behind in their studies ... hitting young people of color the hardest."

It magnifies the urgency of building community capacity to support youth and creating a system based on trust. The current system is failing, even in progressive states like California. In the April 15 edition of "Closing Argument," a newsletter of the nonprofit The Marshall Project, Jamiles Lartey described a 2020 reform law that was supposed to "remake the way the California juvenile justice system looks, feels, and even smells."

The law phased out state-run juvenile facilities in favor of county-run ones. But county officials across the state have pushed back, arguing that the

new law lets the state "off the hook" when it comes to funding and accountability for youth detention.

And so, today, conditions in the Los Angeles County youth facilities are so poor that California Attorney General Ron Bonta asked a state judge to sanction local officials. Bonta noted increased drug use by youth and understaffing that has at times left young people without guards to escort them to the bathroom — forcing them to relieve themselves in their cells.

Now is the time for alternatives to systems that subject troubled youth to illegal and unsafe conditions. We must keep them connected to — and help strengthen — their support networks at home and in the community.

Tomorrow, we will discuss ways to put community-led diversion theory into practice, for the benefit of youth across the country. I couldn't be more excited.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncronline.com

LOTS

FROM B1 housing shortage," Bertao said. "However, we look forward to the challenge and collaborating with the community on this project."

The master plan covers the nine blocks between Cleveland and Pacific streets, and Seagaze and Civic Center drives.

The goal of the plan was to create places for people to live, work and dine in the downtown core, and it encouraged builders to pursue taller and more densely populated developments.

Oceanside has several of the tallest beachfront buildings in North County.

The tallest is Marina Towers at the Oceanside Harbor, a 17-story condominium building constructed in 1976 before the California Coastal Commission was created to more closely regulate coastal development.

The Oceanside City Council approved a two-block, 12-story resort hotel proposed by San Diego developer and former Union-Tribune owner Doug Manchester in 1998 for Pacific Street near the pier. However, the Coastal Commission refused to sign off on changes to the city's local coastal plan that were needed for the project, and Manchester's Oceanside project died in 2002.

Oceanside Historical Society Vice President John Daley said Friday that the city has been working for 50 years to attract economy-boosting, tourism-oriented development to its downtown core.

Denver-based G.F. Properties, a subsidiary of the Southern Ute Indian Tribe, owns the five blocks being developed by Ryan.

All five blocks formerly belonged to the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway, which operated a switching yard for freight



ADRIANA HELDIZ U-T PHOTOS

One of two parking areas under consideration for development in downtown Oceanside, close to the pier.



The lots are part of a nine-block master plan approved more than 20 years ago by the City Council.

trains there until the 1980s.

The moving trains blocked street traffic dozens of times a day, and the switching yard was considered an eyesore that attracted crime to the area. Negotiations with the railroad, the Marine Corps and regulating agencies concluded in 1988, when the railroad yard was moved to Camp Pendleton just north of the Oceanside harbor.

The property remained

vacant for years as the city developed its master plan and waited for developers to help build it.

Some people have said Oceanside's rising skyline changes the city's character and obscures its ocean views. To Daley, that's just progress.

"You have the same view as you had 100 years ago," when you consider that even a single-story building will block the view from nearby

streets, he said.

Views along the east-west street corridors are more important, Daley said. Those are protected by city codes and ordinances that require building setbacks and prohibit overhead obstructions.

The first project completed in the master planned area was the Wyndham Oceanside Pier Resort, a seven-story, time-share building and hotel that opened in 2008 at the northeast corner of Pacific and Pier View Way.

The most recent additions were the two resort hotels that opened in 2021 facing Pacific Street — the Mission Pacific and the Seabird, both built by S.D. Malkin Properties of San Diego.

The Seabird is noted for incorporating the historic Graves House into its layout. More widely known as the "Top Gun" house for its appearance in the hit 1986 movie, the Victorian-style cottage is now a nostalgic pie shop at the front of the new hotel.

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DRIVER

FROM B1 one ... ignition! Blast off!" Daynes counted down before the bus revved and started climbing the hill.

After parking in front of the school Daynes gave Eli another hug and sent him off to class. The morning route, which begins at 6 a.m., only takes about three hours a day, a perfect fit for Daynes, who can finish it before going on to his other job in sales.

Before also taking on bus driving, Daynes worked as a sales representative and wrote a book on raising kids with special needs, "Keep It Together Man: For Dads with a Special Kid."

Around December, Daynes started noticing Eli's pickup time was getting pushed back further and further. He would get calls from the school at 6 a.m. saying the bus would be 45 minutes late. Forty-five minutes would turn into an hour and 45 minutes, which prompted him to start asking questions about what was going on with the bus drivers.

At first he just wanted to do a route to help out.

"It's easy, you check in, do the route, take these angels to school and then you're done," he said. "And that's what I originally wanted to do, but I love it so much I've gone permanent."

Daynes said he knew he was going to commit when he showed up for his first day and saw a white board that

said 12 routes were uncovered.

With the uncovered routes it becomes a mad dash for dispatch to get on the radio and find drivers to pick up extra kids or take another route, trying to fill the gaps the best they can to get the kids to school, Kenny said.

Poway Unified currently has 90 regularly available drivers covering 100 routes, according to Anton Lotter, the district's transportation services director.

The district needs at least 120 routes to properly serve transportation needs and to eliminate student rider waitlists.

"Essentially, the transportation department needs a total of 140 drivers (including 20 substitute drivers), which means we need to recruit an additional 50 drivers to ensure proper service coverage," Lotter said.

Daynes said he would hear people talking about issues they saw in the school district and community and wanted to see what he could do to help.

"I asked myself, 'Why don't people just make a difference themselves? Why can't I do that?' Well I can, and I did," Daynes said.

For more information on becoming a bus driver, contact PUSD transportation at (858) 748-00140, ext. 0259, or rickenny@powayusd.com.

Harrel writes for the U-T Community Press.



POWAY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Eli still greeted his dad, Rick Daynes, with a hug when he got picked up a week after his first trip.

TRADES

FROM B1 "We are focusing specifically on seniors who are choosing to enter the workforce after high school ... just to open their eyes to all the different careers that exist," said Lisa Stout, executive director of the San Marcos Promise, which helps kids prepare for their future beyond high school.

As a former school counselor for nearly 20 years, Stout says she was among those who steered her students toward the traditional "four-year path," which she said is great but not for every student.

The yearlong program is called Promise 360 because it focuses on exposing students to every aspect they need to succeed professionally — from developing leadership skills to learning about the numerous non-college career options and deciding which is the right fit, Stout explained.

"We want them to be successful no matter what industry or job they choose," Stout added.

The program then directly links students to local businesses with job openings.

Stout says the goal is to help students shift away from common jobs that are often part time, with lower wages, and toward higher-paying careers in full-time positions with benefits and growth potential.



CHARLIE NEUMAN FOR THE U-T

High school seniors from San Marcos tour the warehouse of Action Air Conditioning, Heating & Solar during a visit with the Promise 360 Program.

The need for trades

Stout says the push for students to attend college has unintentionally cut off a crucial pipeline in the education of the skilled trades via apprenticeships and internships.

Analyses in recent years have found employers unable to fill midlevel jobs in skilled trades in part because students are steered toward college. Recent labor statistics suggest that's still the case.

A recent analysis by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce estimated that there are 9.5 million job openings in the U.S. but only 5.6 million unemployed workers — mean-

ing that if everyone found a job, there would still be nearly 4 million unfilled positions. And a disproportionate number of those are skilled labor, according to the chamber, which has previously reported that finding skilled labor remains a challenge for contractors.

Employers nationwide, meanwhile, are stepping up their hiring, adding 339,000 positions just last month, Friday's jobs report showed. Many industries are still adding jobs to keep pace with consumer demand, and to get back to pre-pandemic staffing levels.

Johnson says he can attest to the difficulty hiring,

explaining that as older workers retire, Action is having more trouble finding younger people trained to take their jobs.

"Our biggest struggle is finding qualified workers who can pass a background and drug test," Johnson said. "So we figured if we can't hire them, let's create."

Last year, Action created its own academy to train the next generation of heating, ventilation and air conditioning technicians, using a four- to six-week crash course to teach students the fundamentals of heating and air.

Marissa Sanchez, a career and financial aid coach

for The San Marcos Promise at Mission Hills, says she saw firsthand students struggling with education, especially after the pandemic.

"A lot of them really need that hands-on work to be motivated in what they're doing every day," she said.

During their visit to Action last month, students got a glimpse into HVAC work as they toured the warehouse, heard from professionals in the field and sat in on an Action Academy class, where a dozen students were learning about wiring thermostats.

Johnson went on to explain to the visiting high school seniors that a career in HVAC can involve various trades, from electrical to plumbing, and positions, from residential to commercial to sales. "There's a lot of different aspects to our trade — it's not just one size fits all," he said.

The San Marcos Promise has partnered with a range of local companies in various fields, including EDCO San Marcos, the city of San Marcos, the Vallecitos Water District and Diamond Environmental Services. Stout says these companies all need workers and have openings for different types of good-paying jobs with benefits and room for growth.

"It's going to be a win-win for the student and the company," Stout added. "I think it's really going to make a huge difference in their lives."

Looking ahead

Mission Hills senior Luis Garcia was among those who didn't believe college was the right path for him after graduation.

"There's a lot of kids in high school that don't know what they're going to do after high school," Garcia said. The Promise 360 program "just really gives you more options that you really did not think you had."

Garcia was able to choose a construction apprenticeship program that was right for him and also learn other useful skills, like time management.

Vanessa Mendoza has aspirations of becoming a nurse but worried that the necessary schooling would be too lengthy. "I felt like I was going to give up halfway through it," the Mission Hills senior said.

Then after her dad died in November, she dropped out of high school. "It was really hard, because I really didn't know what to do," Mendoza said. "I needed motivation."

She says she found that motivation in Promise 360, where she learned she could still explore a career in the medical field.

The program helped "show us that anything is possible and that you don't have to go to college to be successful in life," she added.

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