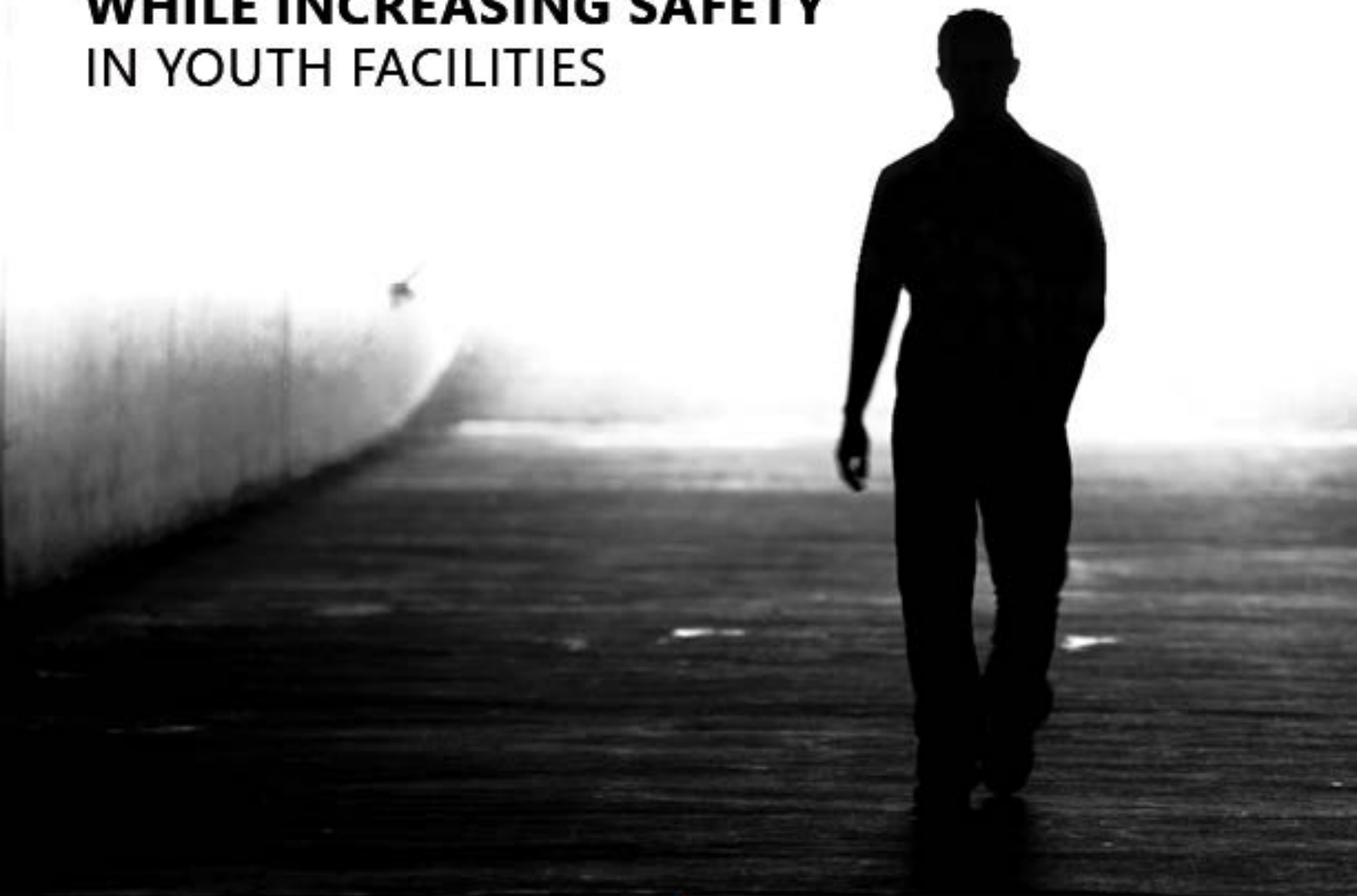


# NOT IN ISOLATION

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HOW TO REDUCE ROOM CONFINEMENT  
**WHILE INCREASING SAFETY**  
IN YOUTH FACILITIES



**Stop**  
Solitary  
for Kids

## Executive Summary

In 2016, the Center for Children’s Law and Policy, Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators, Center for Juvenile Justice Reform at Georgetown University, and Justice Policy Institute launched the Stop Solitary for Kids campaign. The Campaign’s goal is to safely reduce and ultimately end the dangerous practice of solitary confinement for young people in juvenile and adult facilities. Collaboration between stakeholders both inside and outside youth facilities is a key Campaign philosophy. The Campaign works with advocates, lawmakers, state and local government official, state juvenile justice agency directors, superintendents of state and local juvenile facilities, parents, youth, and community leaders to highlight effective strategies to reduce and eliminate solitary confinement.

There is widespread and growing awareness of the harms and ineffectiveness of solitary confinement within the youth justice field and among the public at large. The practice – alternatively described as “room confinement,” “isolation,” “separation,” or “seclusion” – is the involuntary placement of a youth alone in a room or other area for any reason other than as a temporary response to behavior that risks immediate physical harm. As demonstrated throughout this publication, the harms of solitary confinement are experienced most acutely by youth with mental illness, youth with trauma histories, youth of color, and LGBTQ and gender non-conforming youth.

Not in Isolation is a practical guide to help leaders and agencies develop roadmaps to reducing room confinement in their facilities. Because there are multiple existing resources documenting the negative effects of room confinement on youth and staff, Not in Isolation instead focuses on ways to avoid and prevent the practice of room confinement altogether.

### **ANSWERING THE QUESTION: “IF NOT ROOM CONFINEMENT, THEN WHAT?”**

As national developments and standards call for limits on the use of room confinement, the challenge of implementation falls largely on state and local facilities. In 2015, the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators published the [Toolkit on Reducing Isolation](#), which outlined several core strategies for reducing room confinement. However, throughout the Campaign’s work, agency directors and facility superintendents ask additional questions such as, “How can I reduce room confinement while keeping youth and staff safe?” and “How have other facilities like mine started this process?” Many administrators want information on effective strategies to reduce room confinement *and* real-world examples of how to implement strategies in practice.

This first-of-its-kind publication tells the stories of how three state agencies and one county sheriff’s department operating a juvenile detention facility undertook efforts to safely reduce the use of room confinement: Colorado Division of Youth Services; Massachusetts Department of Youth Services; Oregon Youth Authority; and Shelby County Sheriff’s Department in Memphis.

## NOT IN ISOLATION IS A PRACTICAL RESOURCE. EACH CHAPTER INCLUDES:

- Perspectives, quotes, and examples from facility and agency staff;
- Sample policies, forms, tools, and other materials; and
- Details from each site about challenges, lessons learned, and results (qualitative and quantitative).

While none of the jurisdictions featured in this publication are perfect models, they achieved measurable reductions in the frequency and duration of room **CONFINEMENT**. *Not in Isolation* includes data from each jurisdiction to show that it is possible to reduce room confinement without increasing violence in a facility. Moreover, shifting youth justice facility practices away from punitive isolation and toward models that focus on emotional regulation and behavioral skills helps youth successfully transition back into their communities.

The title of this publication reflects that understanding that reforms related to room confinement do not occur in isolation from other aspects of facility operation. Reducing room confinement is inseparably related to changes in staffing, training, mental health services, programming, behavior management, and other factors.

## WHY NOW IS THE TIME TO REDUCE ROOM CONFINEMENT

Room confinement has recently been catapulted into the national spotlight due to a convergence of mainstream media attention, litigation, legislation, policy developments, and investigative reports. As awareness about room confinement grows, so does public scrutiny and legal jeopardy for jurisdictions that continue the practice unchecked. It is more critical than ever that youth justice facility and agency administrators develop alternatives to room confinement consistent with evolving best practices, professional standards, and an understanding of adolescent development. Several recent developments highlight the urgency to reduce room confinement for facilities that house young people:

- Federal courts in four states have entered orders against facilities for putting **YOUTH IN ISOLATION, RESULTING IN HUNDREDS** of thousands of dollars in litigation costs.
- Legislation in seven states in the past three years has limited the use of isolation in youth facilities. Several other states are currently considering similar legislation.
- In December 2018, Congress passed bipartisan legislation to limit isolation called the [First Step Act](#), which permits isolation only when there is an immediate physical harm – never as a sanction or punishment – for youth in federal custody.
- In 2018, Congress also reauthorized the [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act](#) (JJDP), which requires states to provide data on the use of isolation and describe their strategies to reduce its use.

## HOW TO USE THIS PUBLICATION

This report can be used by youth justice system administrators, supervisors, staff, practitioners, and advocates, as well as policymakers and other key stakeholders, to:

1. Provide concrete examples of how several jurisdictions have reduced room confinement;
2. Give practical guidance on how to translate strategies to reduce room confinement into practice;
3. Generate new ideas about how youth facilities and agencies can successfully reduce room confinement;
4. Encourage comprehensive efforts to reduce room confinement that focus on multiple areas of operation (behavior management, training, staffing, mental health) to improve overall outcomes for youth and staff;
5. Provide credible perspectives from staff and administrators on why and how to reduce room confinement;
6. Highlight the need for state and local youth facilities to reexamine and change their use of room confinement;
7. Demonstrate that it is possible to reduce room confinement in a diverse range of youth facilities without sacrificing staff safety. This includes facilities and agencies with large youth populations, detained and committed youth, older youth, youth charged as adults, and youth with violent charges; and
8. Develop a better understanding of the resources, time, and supports necessary for facilities to create lasting reductions in room confinement.

## TAKEAWAYS ON REDUCING ROOM CONFINEMENT

*Not in Isolation* demonstrates that there are multiple paths to reducing room confinement. Each jurisdiction was driven to reduce room confinement by different external and internal circumstances, and each used a slightly different approach to achieve success. However, there are several common strategies and lessons learned:

- Structure efforts to reduce room confinement around a central principle or approach that connects policies, practice, and culture.
- Include staff in planning, developing, and implementing changes.
- Provide strong leadership committed to reducing room confinement despite setbacks and challenges.
- Create a communication plan to message changes in room confinement to staff.
- Prepare administrators, supervisors, and senior staff to explain why reducing room confinement is the right thing to do.
- Understand the use of room confinement in relation to other aspects of facility operation, (e.g.

level of staffing, programming for youth, adequacy of staff training, utilization of mental health professionals, and effectiveness of the behavioral management systems).

- Use data to identify problem areas and create targeted solutions.
- Prioritize positive relationships between staff and youth as a tool to maintain safety.
- Redefine alternatives to room confinement as proactive interventions (versus reactive approaches of waiting until behavior has escalated to the point of requiring room confinement).
- Develop tools and practices to help youth exit room confinement as quickly as possible.
- Be prepared to make a case for additional resources by documenting your current practice, progress, results, and needs.
- Leverage external relationships with unlikely allies.

## HIGHLIGHTS FROM EACH JURISDICTION

### COLORADO DIVISION OF YOUTH SERVICES

1. Developed an organizational model to change agency culture and improve practices;
2. Used the legislative process to request additional staffing resources;
3. Implemented an incentive-based behavior management system;
4. Remodeled physical environments to align with principles of adolescent development and rehabilitation; and
5. Relied on regular data analysis to steer reforms.

### MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

1. Integrated Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) into the behavior management system and living unit management;
2. Redefined accountability based on skill-building – rather than punishment – to change behavior;
3. Identified positive youth-staff relationships as a critical tool for facility safety;
4. Developed “exit strategy” guidelines to help youth transition out of room confinement quickly;
5. Created individual support plans for youth who continuously acted out or could not respond to programming.

### SHELBY COUNTY JUVENILE DETENTION CENTER

1. Implemented daily circle-up groups;
2. Enhanced staff training on how to work with youth and Safe Crisis Management;
3. Established a standardized review of videos and documentation of room confinement incidents;

4. Hired an additional staff to enhance programming and volunteer activities; and
5. Relied on assistance and examples from consultants (including other facilities).

### **OREGON YOUTH AUTHORITY**

1. Changed culture before changing policy;
2. Developed a culture based on Positive Human Development (PHD);
3. Used data strategically to create Skill Development Counselors and specialized units;
4. Leveraged the political process to secure funding; and
5. Created a 10-Year Plan that included redesigning physical plants to support alternatives to room confinement.

## **SECTIONS OF THE REPORT**

### **CHAPTERS ON FOUR JURISDICTIONS**

Each chapter describes how a jurisdiction reduced room confinement over time.

### **HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY EXAMPLES**

*Not in Isolation* also includes section headings, bullet-pointed guidelines, images, and graphics to direct practitioners to specific areas of interest. Each heading contains links to useful policies, forms, and examples.

### **APPENDIX OF RESOURCES AND TOOLS FROM EACH JURISDICTION**

This publication includes a section listing resources (policies, forms, training materials, and videos) from each jurisdiction.

### **APPENDIX OF QUOTES FROM ADMINISTRATORS AND STAFF**

*Not in Isolation* tells the story of each jurisdiction through the insights and experience of administrators and staff. The publication contains an appendix of quotes from these individuals.