HOW TO USE RESOURCING COMMUNITIES: YOUTH INVESTMENTS FOR JUSTICE TRANSFORMATION

TIP SHEET

NYJN’s Policy Platform Resourcing Communities: Youth Investments for Justice Transformation can help you:

1. **Build coalitions between youth and education justice advocates.**
   Use our policy platform as an opportunity to meet and strategize with other advocates in your area working on youth justice transformation.

2. **Educate stakeholders.**
   Use our policy examples, youth stories and curated research to talk to local and state stakeholders on ways they can take action to shift away from youth incarceration toward community youth investments.

3. **Educate legislators and policymakers.**
   Arm legislators and policymakers with the policy research and promising programs they need to make the case for shifting investments away from ineffective youth incarceration toward effective youth investment in your state. Use our implementation recommendations in Section 4 to pull the specific policy ideas that make the most sense or have the most viability for your state.

4. **Engage youth and families.**
   Scanning our policy platform may give you ideas about how to engage youth and families in policy discussions around youth investments for justice transformation. Consider hosting a roundtable for youth to discuss their experiences and brainstorm ways to get more youth and families involved in your policy advocacy.

5. **Develop key messages that will resonate in your area.**
   Use our VPSA (Values, Problem, Solutions, Action) messaging framework to develop key messages that will resonate in your state or jurisdiction. See below.
How Advocates Can Frame Policy Arguments to Invest in Youth for Justice Transformation
Values, Problem, Solution, Action (VPSA) Framework

Value: Safety
We all want and deserve to live and work in safe environments:
- Schools,
- Neighborhoods,
- Workplaces
- Grocery stores, etc.

Problem: Investing in more youth incarceration violates our shared value of safety because we are not actually serious about creating real safety conditions.

Research tells us that safe environments are cultivated when people feel they have what they need to live abundant, thriving lives: economic and housing stability, jobs that support their families, recreation, healthy food, opportunities for leadership and self-advocacy, quality schools that support healthy development and education, and affordable, accessible health care. Carceral models of punishing young people don’t create safer environments for anyone. They do and create the harmful emotional and physical conditions that put communities at greater risk for harm by:

- **Exacerbating trauma** that youth may have experienced, increasing the emotional and physical conditions that may lead to their engagement in harmful actions for themselves and others in the community.
  - Most young people in the legal system have experienced ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) such as homelessness, poverty, reported abuse or neglect, or diagnosed mental health challenges prior to coming into conflict with the law. When we don’t address the root causes of their existing trauma or harm, incarceration can compound their existing ACEs and add to harm and trauma by exposing them to unsafe conditions in carceral settings, such as physical and chemical restraints, isolation, injury and youth suicidality.

- **Ignoring the systemic causes of community harm**, including poverty, housing instability, poor school quality and limited social capital - all of which disproportionately impact Black and Brown communities due to centuries of systematic marginalization and under-resourcing rooted in systemic racism. When young people’s actions become the focus instead of the systems failures that created the conditions for such actions to occur, fundamental problems never get solved and already marginalized communities feel the most unsafe.

- **Increasing recidivism** (repetition of harmful behaviors leading to repeating cycles of court involvement) which in turn increases community harm and feelings of not being safe.

Solution: We need youth investments.

The way to healthy, safe communities is to ensure abundant resources for children to flourish and to end the failed and morally bankrupt policy of Black and Brown youth mass incarceration.
To reach this goal:

States and localities must invest in youth by giving communities the resources they need for young people to flourish; partnering with and empowering young people to reimagine holistic models of care that no longer rely on punitive, carceral systems; and creating the infrastructure to support the reimagined models of care.

When our communities are safe, young people have abundant resources for their:

1. Leadership, self-expression and empowerment. Youth should have abundant opportunities to:
   - Learn skills needed to advocate for one’s self and one’s community
   - Enjoy arts & enrichment programs for healing, self-expression and community advocacy
   - Contribute in community and systems-level decision making

2. Health, safety and healing. Communities should be filled with:
   - Community health workers to increase abundance of mental health touch points for communities
   - Restorative justice conflict resolution models (in schools and in communities) that teach accountability, reconciliation, support for those who are harmed and future harm reduction principles
   - Trained violence interrupters in hospitals and public health spaces as well as trained community violence interrupters or neighborhood change agents
   - Mental health emergency responders that prioritize harm prevention
   - Substance abuse treatment response, not drug criminalization

3. Family, communities and healthy connections. Communities should be equipped to provide:
   - Families with infants and pregnant parents cash inflows and free and low-cost day care to support the immediate developmental and health needs of infant and young children
   - Education for families to navigate complex legal, child welfare, behavioral or educational systems and advocate for equitable policies and practices in the best interest of their children
   - Free education and support groups for youth experiencing mental health challenges
   - Youth with credible messenger and mentors relationships

4. Quality education and opportunities. Safe thriving communities offer young people:
   - Meaningful opportunities for vocational development and career aspirations
   - Quality, transformative schools rooted in academic, social and emotional development not surveillance, policing and punishment

Action*: We call on all stakeholders to collectively shift investments away from ineffective youth incarceration toward effective youth investment.
● For Advocates, Youth and Families: **Educate, organize and build coalitions to demand public dollars shift away from youth incarceration toward community youth investments.** Use the “From Incarceration to Investment Checklist” to design a youth investment model that would work for your community.

● For Policy Decision Makers: **Shift investments away from ineffective youth incarceration toward effective youth investment.** Work with youth, families and communities to create a community investment model that would work for your state and community. Include impacted voices in the decision making process.

*See [Resourcing Communities](#) for a full list of action steps.

Need support using *Resourcing Communities* in your area? Email [info@nyjn.org](mailto:info@nyjn.org).