

Youth For Christ's Juvenile Justice Ministry: Bringing Hope to Incarcerated Youth

Despite a decline in teen arrests and incarcerations, the sobering reality remains that approximately 60,000 young people under the age of 18 are currently held in juvenile jails and prisons across the United States. For many of these youth, the detention centers are places of relative safety, consistent meals, sobriety and respite from constant trauma.

It's within these challenging environments that a glimmer of hope emerges, and it comes in the form of the light of Christ. Dedicated adults who enter these facilities to share the love of Christ with young individuals who may not have encountered the gospel can make a world of difference.

Youth For Christ, through its Juvenile Justice Ministry initiative, has taken on the mission of creating a faith-based continuity of care model specifically designed to establish holistic connections and secure relationships with young people during any interaction with the juvenile justice system. YFC's approach is centered on walking alongside these youth on their spiritual journey while addressing the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of their lives. The leaders and volunteers of YFC forge relationships that continue to provide support as these young people navigate the complex pillars encompassing the juvenile justice system.

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Eric Kelly, National Juvenile Justice Ministry Director at

YFC, expressed his concern about the absence of ministry in juvenile justice facilities, stating, "It breaks my heart to think about a juvenile justice facility without a ministry. There are young people sitting in cells right now who can't connect with a positive adult, who can't get the encouragement and support they need, or who don't have the opportunity to learn about the love of Christ."

Kelly emphasized that YFC's JJM programs serve as a means to gain access to these facilities, but the heart of the matter is the establishment of one-on-one, Christ-sharing relationships with the youth, extending from the facility back into the community. This ministry, as evidenced by the personal experiences of YFC staff who were former residents of juvenile detention facilities, is making a profound impact on the lives of these young individuals.

The key to the success of YFC's JJM lies in its exceptional staff and volunteers. "Our staff need to be great mobilizers," said Kelly, emphasizing the vital role of volunteers. "Tens of thousands of teenagers hear the door slam and don't connect it to anything positive like an adult who will listen to them, connect with them and pray for them."

Youth For Christ, with over seven decades of missional youth outreach, is committed to unveiling God's story of hope in the next generation, a generation that desperately needs it. YFC collaborates with local churches and like-minded partners to raise up lifelong followers of Jesus who lead by their godly lifestyles, devotion to the Word of God, prayer, passion for sharing the love of Christ, and engagement in social matters.

With chapters spanning the nation, YFC reaches out to youth from diverse backgrounds, addressing their silent struggles with a wide range of challenging issues. Through the YFC ministry, these young individuals find empowerment and witness the transformative power of a loving God. YFC's leaders are trained in the 3Story® relational ministry model, which

encourages building connections through the ups and downs of everyday life to lead people to Christ.

Since its inception in 1944, with Dr. Billy Graham as its first full-time staff member, Youth For Christ has remained a steadfast pillar of missional ministry. The organization operates in over 100 nations, with more than 130 chapters impacting communities across America.

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