

# Vera Institute of Justice

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-part-of-the-solution>

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

There's a story that's often told to illustrate the value of a strength-based approach, about a team sent to help malnourished children in Vietnam. The key to success was to look at children in the same villages who were thriving and identify sustainable solutions from within the community. I've been thinking about this story as I've been absorbing the recent coverage of the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS): the problems revealed by the DOJ investigation and the [recommendations](#) made by the Governor's Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice.

I've been working in and around OCFS facilities for the better part of a decade. I'm not naive to the problems in the facilities. But it's still occasionally hard for me to reconcile the stories of abuses with the staff I've come to know there. The thing is that I don't really need to reconcile the two, because it's not an "either-or" situation. There are staff in the facilities who lack the training or the temperament to work with challenging young people, and there are those who in individual situations had their best selves overcome by the power of the role.

However, even as some OCFS staff are struggling to carry out the concurrent mandates of security and rehabilitation, others are managing to walk that line. I have seen inspiring examples of patience and connection that helped create positive change in young people. My own career has been enriched by the insights provided to me by these staff members, and for that I'm grateful.

New York must learn from other jurisdictions to make OCFS facilities places where young people can be safe from harm. But as we draw on the best practices of others, we must remember the story of the healthy kids in the villages. There are OCFS staff who are doing good work under difficult circumstances, and they are an important part of the solution.

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