

Calls mounted to close Boonville. Louis W. McHardy, the St. Louis juvenile court's director of court services, charged that "[t]he state wants the kids to adjust to an outdated institution [but] we need to adjust the system to these kids." Boonville's superintendent himself derided the institution as a place for "warehousing of bodies" and openly questioned whether "institutions are the best form of handling anything." Attorney General John C. Danforth called for replacing Boonville with foster homes or group homes where children supervised by probation officers could live in non-institutional settings closer to their own communities. Danforth called his proposal "nothing less than a total shift of philosophy in dealing with juvenile offenders in Missouri." "We must learn how to rehabilitate juvenile offenders and we are not doing a good job in Missouri now."¹⁶⁶

In 1973, Missouri's new Governor, Christopher S. Bond joined the call for "reforming the historic pattern of juvenile institutions." At the Second Governor's Conference on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency, he told the delegates that "[e]xisting institutions in too many instances are monuments to the mistakes of the past, reflecting our propensity for trying to solve social problems by building an enclosure to keep them out of sight and mind." The Governor called for new "community-based treatment services, group treatment techniques and diversification":

Historically, we have not progressed very far from the days of large and isolated institutions designed for the sole purpose of removing violent and disturbing elements from our society. There are many significantly detrimental features of this approach to our juvenile delinquency problems. It reflects a policy of custody and forgetting those who most need our help. It has led to the establishment of large institutions in rural settings, typically characterized by an increasingly wide cultural gap between black youths from the urban centers and white, rural guards and personnel. It has discouraged the development of effective rehabilitation programs.¹⁶⁷

In 1975, the United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri entered a consent decree in a class action filed two years earlier challenging conditions at Boonville. State officials agreed to close "the Hole" and to improve conditions in detention cells that held the most troublesome boys. Under the Reorganization Act of 1974, the state Board of Training Schools became the Division of Youth Services within the Department of Social Services. DYS was charged with preventing juvenile delinquency and rehabilitating juvenile offenders.

By 1975, Boonville housed less than two hundred boys, all between twelve and seventeen, and DYS had already begun operating groups homes in various

parts of the state. As the state sought to improve the training schools throughout the 1970s, signs pointed toward some minimal progress. When positive peer culture was introduced at Boonville in 1972 and at Chillicothe later in the decade, the new program met initial resistance from townspeople and public officials concerned about safety, and from staff dubious about its rehabilitative potential. Praise for the program came from the Missouri Juvenile Officers Association (which became the Missouri Juvenile Justice Association in 1977), a number of state legislators and other community voices. In 1977, Boonville's assistant administrator admitted that a few years earlier, the institution was "a snakepit—everything you ever heard about reform schools was true here." But he maintained that positive peer culture had thrust rehabilitation to the forefront.¹⁶⁸

Controversy continued to dog Boonville. In 1976, investigative reporter Kenneth Wooden wrote *Weeping In the Playtime of Others*, which described his visits to juvenile correctional facilities in thirty states. He wrote that during his November, 1973 visit to Boonville, inmates told him about staff members "having sexual relations with the children, beating them, throwing them into solitary confinement for no substantial reason, pushing drugs, etc." Boonville's superintendent denied the charges, saying that the conditions Wooden described "may have been true at one time, and I suspect a lot of it is, but it isn't true now." A staff attorney with the National Juvenile Law Center in St. Louis, which had filed the 1973 class action suit challenging Boonville's conditions, maintained that Wooden had published research done several years earlier without updating his findings. A Missouri Juvenile Justice Association official agreed that Wooden's material was more than ten years old by the time he published it. In the second edition of his book (published in 2000), Wooden reiterated that he had written about "events occurring at the very time of my visit" in 1973.¹⁶⁹

Legislators and other critics challenged the efficacy of positive peer culture in 1979, when escapes from Boonville doubled during a six-month period. When a 15-year-old Grandview boy ran away from the institution and drowned himself in the Missouri River, officials said it was Boonville's first suicide in at least seven years. The House-Senate Committee on Correctional Institutions recommended ending positive peer culture at the Chillicothe girls institution. The inmate population at Chillicothe began dwindling after the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974 mandated deinstitutionalization of status offenders.¹⁷⁰

The 1970s were "law and order" times, when many leaders called on states and localities to respond to violent crime with get-tough measures. The nation's patience with juvenile crime had worn particularly thin. After years of struggling with conditions at the training schools, the Division of Youth

Services nonetheless resisted calls to continue the struggle or to construct new secure congregate facilities. Instead the state closed Chillicothe in 1981 and Boonville two years later. Today the two institutions, like the Tipton Negro Girls School which closed in 1960, are adult correctional facilities.

Throughout the 1980s, the Division of Youth Services replaced Boonville and Chillicothe with smaller regional, community-based facilities that enabled local staff to treat delinquent children near their homes in cooperation with local juvenile courts. A few other states flirted with similar reforms but soon retreated. Missouri's rejection of congregate training schools remained complete and unequivocal. National leadership beckoned.