

Focus: Case study of the “prisons without guards” run by the Brazilian Association for the Protection and Assistance of the Convicted (APAC)

Goal: Imagine alternatives and identify elements of this justice innovation that can be imported into other contexts



KEY TAKEAWAYS

Started in 1972, Brazil’s APAC prisons are innovative facilities in a country otherwise known for high violence, crime, and incarceration rates, as well as overcrowded prisons, racial tensions, and a punitive culture. APACs are characterized by the lack of guards and uniforms, focusing instead on rehabilitation, personal responsibility, and connections with and service to the local community.

- Focus is on the human, not the crime
- More than 100 single-gender facilities exist in Brazil with an average of 270 *recuperandos* (the APAC term for the convicted) per facility
- Transfer to APAC from conventional prison requires final judgment, written application, ties to the local community, and judicial approval
- Provide strong spiritual, social, and psychological support as well as vocational training and other services
 - Founded by Christians; use religion to facilitate rehabilitation
- Not used for juveniles

Key benefits of the APAC approach include cost savings and improved individual outcomes.

- Cost per person is less than half that of conventional facility
- *Recuperandos* earn sentence reductions for time in APAC
- Recidivism rate is 15% vs. 80-85% in conventional facility; escape rate is <1%

Although juveniles likely need more structure and support than provided by an APAC, three elements are immediately promising for juvenile justice:

- Priority on self-empowerment and responsibility
- Strong programming and support services
- Predictable and sizable sentence reductions for time served
 - Potential tension between this and flexibility built into most US juvenile sentences

Juveniles can be transformed without prisons, but structure and positive role models are essential components as they prepare to re-enter society.

- Authority figures can ensure safety and that everyone receives needed treatment
- Important to have people to emulate as youth learn about empowerment, responsibility, and positive identity

Given the risk associated with radical innovation, a new system may begin at state-level and demonstrate success before expanding nation-wide.

- Particularly important to have positive record if community violence or crime rates rise, triggering backlash and retrenchment

Terms change our perceptions and should be used to evoke empathy and a desire to support an individual rather than dismissal or recrimination.

- They can envision a youth’s future—student, business leader, entrepreneur—or focus on the past—convict, felon, gang member.
- Applies to media depictions and advocacy work, as well as within a facility

Incremental advances can lead to the fulfillment of a vision—particularly in the face of constraints imposed by cost or political will—as long as they continue steadily and faithfully.

While individual investment in the community is essential and volunteerism desirable, the state should not be absolved of its responsibility to compensate those whose work replaces otherwise paid public services.



KEY EXAMPLES

- [No Kids in Prison](#) (USA)



REFERENCED RESOURCES

- [“I have no thought of escaping”: inside the Brazilian prisons with no guards”](#) from *The Guardian*
- [“APAC is Changing Lives in Brazil”](#) from Prison Fellowship International
- [“APAC: Brazil’s Restorative Justice Prisons”](#) by Loren Walker