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## Don't forget detainees at home

*By Josephine Cardamone*

"The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering the prisons," Fyodor Dostoyevsky, "The House of the Dead."

Torture is wrong. Our nation believes this, and we are concerned about torture tactics used on detainees, as we should be. Shouldn't we also be concerned about abusive tactics used on our own population, particularly our children?

The Aug. 25 Ithaca Journal article headlined, "Staff severely injured youths," describes a U.S. Justice Department report that found staff at two juvenile-detention facilities in Tompkins County used excessive force in controlling some of their residents. Some might argue that the staff behavior is not torture, but if the results are injuries and even death, what name should we give it? We put them in detention centers in the hopes that they will reform themselves and become positive, productive citizens. How can they learn to behave in a peaceful manner when they are treated with violence?

Get-tough, boot-camp programs purport to help troubled teens, but they don't work. A review of the scientific evidence by the National Institutes of Health found that programs using fear and tough treatment are ineffective and may make teen criminal behavior even worse.

"Compared with other kids with a similar history of bad behavior, those who entered the juvenile justice system were seven times more likely to be arrested for crimes as adults. Further, those who ended up being sentenced to juvenile prison were 37 times more likely to be arrested again as adults compared with similarly misbehaved kids who were either not caught or not put into the system," according to an Aug. 7 Time Magazine article.

We spend millions of dollars to incarcerate young people, but we don't evaluate the success of the programs. In fact, many studies demonstrate that our punitive programs do not reform the kids or decrease criminal behavior. If we honestly want to get tough on crime, not just get tough on kids, we should use programs that actually work.

Effective crime prevention programs begin when children are babies and provide information and assistance to young families. They continue to support, counsel and advocate for the children as they grow up. Even if the teenager does need to go to a facility, the states that have adopted a positive, therapeutic, non-coercive approach have less recidivism than states that use negative and violent measures to curb teen crime.

The therapeutic model adopted in Missouri has a 7.3 percent recidivism rate. The harsh discipline approach in Texas results in 50 percent recidivism. Barry Krisberg, president of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency, praises Missouri's approach and says states with troubled juvenile corrections systems could learn from its philosophy.

Perhaps it's easier to raise our voices about abuse of prisoners in faraway places, but we need to also pay heed to the children in our own state who are being harmed. It is in our own best interest to care about these kids when we consider the impact of their detention time and treatment once they return to our communities.