

**Model Education Programs for Rikers Dischargees:
CUNY Catch
A Program of the New York City Department of Correction (DOC)**

PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY

This overview of the Department of Correction's CUNY Catch program is based on a program review conducted by Westat/Metis staff for the evaluation of the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) initiatives. The data were collected between March and May 2008 through interviews with staff of the CEO and Department of Correction (DOC); site visits to the three CUNY Catch sites at LaGuardia Community College (LCC) in Queens, Bronx Community College (BCC) in the Bronx, and Medgar Evers Community College (ME) in Brooklyn; a review of program documents and monthly data reports through May 2008 and management and data reports from DOC through June 2008; and observations of recruitment practices on-island at Rikers Island's Horizon Academy and Austin H. McCormick Island Academy high schools.¹

- Sponsoring Agency:** New York City Department of Correction (DOC)
- Provider Agency:** CUNY Catch at LaGuardia Community College, Bronx Community College, and Medgar Evers Community College
- Start Date:** November 2007
- CEO Budget:** \$450,000
- Target Population:** Incarcerated and formerly incarcerated youth 16 to 24 years old
- Statement of Need:** Among young adults, ages 16 to 24, who are in poverty, youth exiting detention and young people returning from incarceration are at particularly high risk of becoming disconnected from school and work. About 70 percent of offenders and ex-offenders are high school dropouts. Without intervention, two-thirds of ex-offenders are likely to be re-arrested.²
- Goal and Services:** The overall goals of CUNY Catch are to reduce recidivism, increase attainment of GEDs, increase college enrollment, increase the employment and future earnings of formerly incarcerated young adults, and increase public safety by providing outreach to youth on Rikers Island and educational and vocational services to young people after release.
- Eligibility Criteria:** Rikers Island inmates 16 to 24 years old (whether sentenced or detained) who are students at the Horizon Academy, as well as sentenced individuals who do not attend the schools but reside in various dorms within the facilities that house the schools.
- Targets/Outcomes:** The target and actual numbers for the categories presented in Table 1, as well as the percentage of each target obtained and the remaining targets pro-rated for the final 4 months of the contract, are as of June 2008.

¹ Island Academy and Horizon Academy are the two high schools on Rikers Island and operate under District 79 (Alternative Schools and Programs) of the New York City Department of Education (DOE). Island Academy has three school sites and serves detained and sentenced male and female inmates ages 16-24 in three jails. Horizon Academy serves detained male inmates ages 18-24 in five jails.

² Center for Economic Opportunity (December 2007), *Strategy and Implementation Report*. New York: Center for Economic Opportunity.

Table 1. CUNY Catch Outputs and Outcomes Through June 2008*

Milestone Category	Target Numbers	Actual Numbers	Percent of Target Met	Monthly Targets Remaining**
Recruitment	500	500	100%	0
Confirmed Arrivals	500	193	39%	77
Gaining Literacy Level	100	15	15%	21
Passing GED Predictor Test	125	37	30%	22
Receiving GED	75	15	20%	15
Enrolled in College	75	21	28%	14
Vocational Training	25	25	100%	0

*Data provided by DOC.

**Numbers are per month based on 4 months remaining in contract; OMB spreadsheet indicates services started on Nov. 19, 2007

Selected Key Findings

Fidelity to the Program Model. The CUNY Catch model offers on-island pre-release services and off-island post-release services (described below). The model calls for LCC to serve as the administrator for all three CUNY Catch sites, providing oversight and coordination. LCC is expected to clearly communicate to all sites the nature and expectations of the performance-based contract and the milestones to be achieved, and provide any necessary start-up support and training. The administration of the program was not implemented with fidelity. LCC has deficiencies in its management capabilities and has not managed the CUNY Catch sites as intended. Program activities are being implemented with fidelity at two of the sites (LCC and BCC). ME does not yet have career counseling and job placement due to staff turnover and lack of funding, as well as poor communication and support from LCC. There is consistency and uniformity across the three sites in the pre-GED and GED classes, the location of the program within a community college, and to some extent the counseling provided off-island.

Characteristics of the Clients Served in Comparison to the Target Population. The program is specifically targeting only age-eligible inmates from the various correctional facilities on Rikers Island. The provider's demographic data also show that the program's participants fall within the target age range of 16 to 24 years old.

Service Delivery. The core components of the CUNY Catch Program include on-island pre-release services and post-release services that take place at the three off-island locations. Pre-release services provide outreach and recruitment conducted through individual and group sessions that include an assessment of educational and vocational needs and transition planning. Post-release services include pre-GED courses, GED classes, college remediation classes, career counseling, assistance with job placement, assistance with college application and enrollment, and counseling.

Provider Capacity. Interviews with DOC staff reveal that LCC has limited capacity to serve as administrator for the three sites. The communication and support provided to BCC and ME have been insufficient and have resulted in delays in implementation as well as poor outputs and outcomes. ME demonstrated problems with start-up capabilities, delays in implementation, and staff turnover, which negatively affected its ability to recruit and provide services to the target population. It is unlikely that the program has the capacity to meet its targets. The capacity to collect data and report accurately at the provider level is also limited and quite different across the three sites.

Agency Management. DOC monitors CUNY Catch's implementation progress and meets monthly with the program directors from all three sites to discuss the program's progress. DOC personnel visit individual sites to observe implementation of the program and speak with staff, and monitor progress through the milestone achievements and contact with on-island school principals.

Early Outcomes. At this point, although the provider is making progress in reaching and recruiting the target population, only slightly over one-third of those recruited on-island actually make it to the program off-island. While there has been progress in achieving outcomes such as passing the GED predictor (30% of target met), receiving GED (20% of target met), and enrolling in college (28% of target met), the program has had its most success in the number of participants enrolled in vocational training (100% of target met). Given the slow progress made toward achieving the milestones in the 8 months of program operation, it is unlikely that the program will meet the remaining milestones. In terms of client satisfaction, CUNY Catch participants revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the program and its ability to support them in attaining a GED.³

Conclusions and Recommendations

As implemented, the CUNY Catch program is in alignment with the CEO mission and is meeting many key CEO criteria.

- The program is providing innovative programming, as few programs exist to help post-incarcerated youth with educational and career advancement.
- Agency oversight is in place, enabling it to remain stable, make improvements, and be replicable in other sites.
- Specific and measurable outcomes have been articulated.

However, program administration provided by LCC is extremely poor and has resulted in negative effects on implementation of program activities as well as outputs and outcomes. And ME is not yet providing career counseling and job placement services and has no concrete plans in place to provide them.

Other program elements are not yet in alignment with the CEO mission and criteria.

- A change to the structure of the program's current administration is recommended. Instead of LCC, as a participating college, serving as the administrator of the three CUNY Catch sites, an independent entity could serve as the central administrator of the program which would keep the three participating colleges under one umbrella. Alternatively, each site could become self-administered.
- In order to bridge the gap between recruitment and enrollment with this challenging population, we recommend that the program dramatically increase its on-island recruitment and assessment.
- Due to the population's service needs, it is recommended that social work case management be integrated into the post-release services.
- An efficient tracking system that shows the actual level of staff effort directed at keeping participants engaged in the program would be beneficial in planning accordingly.
- The program could benefit from technical assistance in all areas of data collection, coordination, reporting, validation, and analysis, including quality assurance protocols on data entry, managing duplicate cases, and sharing data effectively across the sites.

³ The interviewed participants were those who were enrolled in pre-GED or GED classes, available in the office that day, over age 18, willing to be interviewed, and not on probation (as required by the Westat Institutional Review Board, which approved the research).