

# Learning Independence for Empowerment (LIFE) Transitions Program A Program of New York City Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)

## PROGRAM REVIEW SUMMARY

This overview of the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice LIFE Transitions Program (LTP) 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 July 2008 through interviews with staff representing CEO, the two providers (Good Shepherd Services in the Bronx and the Center for Community Alternatives in Brooklyn), and Girls Incorporated (Girls Inc.) of New York City, which developed LTP curricula, as well as a review of program documents and monthly data reports through June 2008.

**Sponsoring Agency:** New York City Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)

**Provider Agencies:** Two community-based organizations (CBOs) provide LTP services: Good Shepherd Services (GSS), located in the Bronx, and the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA), located in Brooklyn. Girls Inc. of New York City was contracted to develop LTP curricula and provide technical assistance on its implementation.

**Start Date:** LTP implementation began in two DJJ secure detention centers in late March 2008.

**CEO Budget:** FY08 \$323,690; FY09 \$592,000

**Target Population:** The LTP serves youth and adolescents, ages 10 and older, who have been detained at DJJ's two long-term, secure detention centers—Crossroads and Horizon. LTP services are provided to youth during their detention stay and (for those who complete at least one LTP workshop while in detention) program services are offered after the youth are released back into the community.

**Statement of Need:** Each year in New York City, more than 3,500 youth return to their communities from youth detention and face extreme difficulty in transitioning back to school and attaching to positive, mainstream activities.<sup>1</sup>

**Goal and Services:** The goal of the LTP is to improve educational preparedness for youth involved with the juvenile justice system by improving their life skills, attitudes, and beliefs about the value of education and school attendance, and their awareness of careers and goal-setting skills. To reach this goal, LTP is structured to provide weekly life skills workshops to all youth while they are in detention. When these youth return to the community, they will continue to receive LTP workshops along with case management services to assist them in connecting to school, positive activities, and support services as needed. Throughout the program, CBO provider staff serve as caring adults with whom the youth can establish a caring bond. Continuity is also provided through CBO workshop facilitators serving as LTP case managers in the community.

**Eligibility Criteria:** All youth residing in Crossroads or Horizon detentions centers are offered the opportunity to participate in a weekly LTP workshop offered on-site. Youth who are released from the two detention centers back into the community are eligible for LTP community-based services, provided that they completed at least one LTP workshop while in detention and have parental consent to continue the program.

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<sup>1</sup> Center for Economic Opportunity, (December 2007), *Strategy and Implementation Report*, Center New York: Center for Economic Opportunity p. 33.

**Targets/Outcomes:** LTP implementation was in its early stages during the program review period; thus, data collection for this review focused on implementation outputs and process outcome measures. Target and actual numbers for these categories are presented below, as well as percentages of targets obtained as of June 2008.

**Table 1. Target Numbers, Actual Numbers, and Percentage of Target Met (as of June 2008)**

Implementation Outputs	Annual Target Numbers	Actual Numbers (March-June 2008)		Percent of Target Meta <sup>a</sup>	
		CCA	GSS	CCA	GSS
Number of youth participating in LTP workshops	1,384	550		40%	
Number of in-detention LTP workshop groups conducted by each CBO provider per week	10 groups	15	14	150%	140%
Number of LTP workshops completed by youth while in detention	n/a	b	1-4 sessions=209 5-11 sessions=48 12 sessions=12	n/a	
Number of youth released from detention whose parents/guardians received outreach from a CBO provider*	n/a	74	13	n/a	
Number of youth "intakes" into the community-based component of LTP by each CBO per year*	75	16	1	20%	1%
Number of individual case management plans developed*	n/a	13	1	n/a	
Number of youth re-enrolled in school	n/a	5	0	n/a	
Number of LTP workshops completed by youth while in the community	n/a	6	0	n/a	
Number of baseline participant surveys completed	1,384	421		30%	
Number of Week 5 surveys completed	723	147		20%	
Number of Week 11 surveys completed	213	13		6%	
Process Outcomes	Annual Target Numbers	Actual Numbers (March-June 2008)		Percent of Target Meta <sup>a</sup>	
		CCA	GSS	CCA	GSS
Percent of participating youth are re-enrolled in school within 10 days of program intake	95%	1/5	0	20%	--
Percent of youth on probation who attend all their scheduled court appointments	100%	c		--	
Number of program intakes who participate at least 90 days at each CBO per year	50	d		--	

<sup>a</sup> These percentages are based on the LTP services that were implemented in the first quarter of the program, between March and June 2008.

<sup>b</sup> DJJ is working with the CBO provider to collect data on this indicator and will provide it to CEO in the future.

<sup>c</sup> Due to the voluntary nature of the LPT program, youth may not report whether they are on probation. These data may sometimes be obtained if a probation officer calls the school or CBO to obtain attendance reports.

<sup>d</sup> The program review covered a period of LTP implementation that was not long enough to assess progress toward this process outcome.

\* The number of LTP parent/guardian outreach contacts, community program intakes and case management plans reflects implementation through July 30, 2008.

## Selected Key Findings

Key findings of this program review include:

**Fidelity to the Program Model.** As implemented thus far, LTP has maintained fidelity to the program concept, which is to provide “inside/outside” services in a seamless manner to youth while they are in detention and upon return to the community. The LTP curricula for boys and for girls are each composed of 12 45-minute modules, with one module delivered each week within a 1-hour workshop. Information obtained through this program review indicated that the LTP curricula are being implemented with targeted youth in detention on a weekly basis. CBO providers are required to conduct at least 10 LTP workshop groups per week, and the number of workshops conducted in detention by each provider has exceeded this number. The LTP curriculum is to be delivered in small-group settings, and CBO staff reported that, in detention, the average workshop group size is between six and seven. LTP workshops in the community were just beginning at the time of the program review and thus a consistent schedule and structure for their implementation was still being formed. As identified in DJJ’s LTP concept paper, individual case management plans are in place for youth who participate in the community component.

**Characteristics of the Clients Served in Comparison to the Target Population.** The program is designed to serve youth and adolescents, 10 years old and above, while they are in detention and when they return to the community. According to DJJ, in calendar year 2007, this population was 84 percent male; 68 percent is between the ages of 14 and 15; and Black and Hispanic youth account for 89 percent of the population. Approximately 29 percent of youth in detention read below the 4th-grade level. Demographic data collected through the LTP participant surveys suggest that the youth who complete the surveys during the LTP workshops sessions reflect the general population of youth in detention.

**Service Delivery.** LTP workshop facilitators began implementing the first cycle of the 12-module curriculum with youth at Crossroads and Horizon on March 22, 2008. A second cycle of workshops began in both centers in June. Although workshop facilitators varied in their facilitation style and, as needed, in their pacing of delivery, a consistent structure was used to implement the LTP curriculum by both CBOs. The biggest challenge to LTP workshop implementation during the start-up phase was the mixed support from detention center staff, in particular the Juvenile Counselors (JCs).<sup>2</sup> CBO provider staff perceived that the disengagement of some JCs from the program contributed to delayed start times or missed appointments for LTP workshops and/or lack of youth participation during the workshops. (It is important to note that there were also JCs who were enthusiastic about the LTP and helpful from the onset to workshop facilitators.)

At the time of this program review, the LTP community component was just beginning, although a small number of program intakes (N=15) had been achieved and LTP workshops had begun at CCA. Case management services were being provided to youth in the LTP community component at both CBO sites. In addition to case management services, participating youth are offered MetroCards (to assist with travel to and from the program site) and afternoon snacks at each session. Both CBO providers cited contextual challenges that affected program intakes and service provision for the LTP community-based component. Program intakes were affected by a significant proportion of program-eligible youth, especially youth referred to GSS, being mandated by the court to participate in other community-based programs. CCA reported that its ability to link participants to outside services was more challenging for youth who lived in boroughs (such as Staten Island) that had few local service providers available. GSS expressed concern about securing community-based mental health services for participants in a timely manner.

**Provider Capacity.** The two CBO providers are experienced in providing services to the targeted population of youth. Each of the CBO providers adhered to LTP staffing requirements while using unique and distinct staffing structures to deliver and manage LTP services. The workshop facilitators (and other CBO staff) have been trained in the use of the LTP curricula. The program review identified data quality issues related to how the LTP workshop participation data are compiled in monthly reports and the inconsistent manner in which case management records are maintained by the two CBO providers. DJJ’s LTP Coordinator provides the CBOs with training and technical assistance on data collection procedures and does careful audits of program reports submitted by the CBOs.

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<sup>2</sup> JCs ensure safety and maintain order by traveling with the group of detention dorm residents to which they are assigned at all times and, therefore, are present during the LTP workshops.

**Agency Management.** DJJ hired two full-time agency staff (an LTP Coordinator and a Program Assistant) to manage and support day-to-day activities of LTP. These LTP staff members work closely with, and under the guidance of, four high-level DJJ administrators. The DJJ LTP Coordinator convenes monthly program stakeholder meetings that include DJJ agency staff; CBO providers, representing the full complement of LTP staff and beyond; detention center staff from Crossroads and Horizon; the Girls Inc. consultant; and a staff member from the NYC Department of Education who oversees the “Passages” schools that operate on site within each detention center. CBO providers view these stakeholder meetings as very effective in fostering communication, the exchange of ideas, and problem-solving among the LTP partners. DJJ has also engaged the broader community of juvenile justice experts and service providers to review and inform the process of LTP programming.

**Early Outcomes.** Between March 22 and June 30, 2008, a total of 550 youth in detention participated in the LTP workshops – 264 at Horizon and 286 at Crossroads. By serving 550 youth in its first 4 months of implementation, the program had achieved 40 percent of its target to reach 1,384 youth annually. The DJJ monthly reports to CEO indicate that an average of 227 youth participated each month in the LTP workshops conducted at Crossroads and Horizon. Given that the bed capacity across the two detention centers is 248, these preliminary data indicate that LTP is reaching most of the intended population in detention.

Among the 264 participating youth at Horizon, the majority (79%) completed between one and four workshops.<sup>3</sup> The number of workshop groups conducted per week was 15 at Crossroads (one group of girls and 14 groups of boys) and 15 at Horizon (two groups of girls and 13 groups of boys). The average group size was between six and eight participants. Between late March and July 2008, 56 percent of the 239 youth released from Crossroads and Horizon have been referred to the CBO providers by DJJ as eligible to participate in the LTP community-based services.

In April, the CBO providers began outreach to parents and achieved contact with the parents or guardians of 87 youth who had been released to the community – 74 at CCA and 13 at GSS. These contacts resulted in 16 program intakes, representing 12 percent of the 134 eligible youth whom DJJ referred to the CBO providers. The LTP annual target is for each CBO to achieve at least 75 intakes per year. With 15 intakes, CCA achieved 20 percent of the target, and with one intake, GSS achieved 1 percent of this target. Before the 2007-08 school year ended on June 26, 2008, CCA was able to re-enroll five of its program intakes into school. CCA had a total of six program intakes prior to the end of the school year and the re-enrollment of five of them (83%) is an early indication that this aspect of the LTP community-based component is being implemented effectively by this CBO. GSS did not have program intakes during the 2007-08 school year. Of the five youth whom CCA re-enrolled in school in 2007-08, one (20 percent) met the 10-day enrollment benchmark.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The DJJ LIFE Transitions Program is well aligned with the CEO mission. This program review covered the start-up period of the LTP. Given the early status of program implementation, it is premature to project the LTP’s likelihood of meeting its performance objectives. The Westat/Metis evaluation team did obtain evidence on the following:

- The program is engaging most youth in the two detention centers.
- The majority of youth released back into the community from Crossroads and Horizon are being referred to the CBO providers.
- The LTP outreach and case management services appear to be hampered mainly by contextual factors such as the siphoning of LTP-eligible youth into court-mandated programs at GSS and the high number of youth being referred to the program at CCA from neighborhood where services are less available.
- The program should continue to engage and expand input from local leaders, juvenile justice panels, and other experts from diverse sectors (through forums and LTP stakeholder meetings) who can bring the best thinking on strategies to troubleshoot contextual challenges faced by the LTP in its outreach and program intake efforts.

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of the program review, data were not available that provided a breakdown on how many youth at Crossroads completed one to four, five to eleven, or twelve LTP workshops because this process measure was recently added.