Justice Scholars

Quick Stats-Expanded Program

Agency	Start Date	Number Served Annually	Annual Budget
Department of Probation	January 2012	272	$1,578,387*

*Does not include $800,000 CEO innovation funds

Problem Statement	Court involved[i] young adults face a multitude of challenges returning to their communities, frequently confronting the same issues that led them to an arrest. In the absence of intervention, these young people are likely to recidivate, particularly if they return to neighborhoods entrenched in poverty, crime, and record levels of unemployment. Many of these young adults have poor literacy skills and require job-readiness training for employability. Evidence indicates that post-release education or employment has a significant impact on reducing recidivism. Yet, in New York City and other jurisdictions across the country, too few programs focus adequately on the young adult age group who, without assistance, find barriers to education and legitimate work insurmountable, particularly in the current labor market. Employers who are otherwise hesitant to hire individuals previously involved in the criminal justice system, are more willing to consider it where there is evidence that someone is highly motivated and reliable, qualities best "demonstrated by high attendance [in youth development programs] and short stays in transitional work."[ii]
Research and Evidence	According to the Vera Institute of Justice, up to 60% of adolescents ages 16-18 in New York City jails read below a fifth grade reading level.[iii] A research study by Public Private Ventures has demonstrated that two-thirds of young adults returning from New York State prisons never return to school.[iv] Of the 27,000 people on probation citywide, approximately 8,000—or almost one third—are teens and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24. Of these 8,000, 84% are male; almost half are Black and nearly one-third Latino.[v] Justice Scholars evolved out of several NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) programs that serve disconnected and court involved youth. One of the CEO programs that recognize the need for educational services is the Young Adult Literacy program. This program creates pre-GED level literacy projects for young adults based on best practices including targeted instruction, work readiness and support services. A report by Westat and Metis Associates examined the literacy and numeracy gains for the young adults enrolled in the Young Adult Literacy program who were also offered a paid internship. Using a cluster randomized design, the study suggested that adding paid internships conditioned on attendance in education services led to increased attendance and program retention, as well as an increase in participants' math gains. Another promising CEO program is NYC Justice Corps, which prepares young adults who have been involved in the criminal justice system to succeed in the labor market while giving back to their communities. An educational component was added to address the needs of this population. The program is currently undergoing a random assignment evaluation with results expected in 2012. The model appears promising with participants having a 70% engagement rate for the entire six months of the program.[vi]

Program Description	Justice Scholars is an education-based program serving court involved young adults living in communities with high rates of poverty and incarceration and low rates of high school completion. The program offers multiple educational tracks depending on the particular needs of the program participants. At the start of the program and upon completion of an initial assessment of educational and other needs, participants will review options and finalize a plan of action. The program will place youth into one or more of the following educational tracks based on age and an educational assessment at intake, with a preference to serve those most at need: Post-secondary Track, GED Track, Basic Education Track, and High School Track. Justice Scholars also provides career exploration services to encourage participants to establish individual goals and plans. The program emphasizes job-readiness, explains the educational requirements for a variety of careers and discusses the steps needed to attain a specific career. The program uses a dynamic system of support to meet participants' needs on an ongoing basis, including assessment, goal setting, basic case management services, and follow up services. The program will offer individual and/or group counseling sessions to discuss progress, obstacles to compliance, and on-going issues. In addition, the program will encourage positive interactions among participants, with methods including seminars and peer mentorship. Justice Scholars offers financial incentives during the program and follow-up period based on: attendance rates, educational accomplishments, weekly meetings and monthly follow-up meetings. Participants will be afforded the opportunity to gain critical information regarding their legal rights, and viable pathways to enhance their ability to become contributing members of their communities. Justice Scholars is a six month program with a minimum of six months follow-up service period for all participants.

Implementation Timeline	Programs launched in January, 2012.

Target Population	The program targets court involved young adults who are ages 16-24 at the time of enrollment. Forty percent of participants will be probationers. The program targets several communities with high rates of poverty and incarceration in NYC, as well as low rates of high school completion.

Expected Outcomes	• 70% of participants are retained during the first six months of the program. • Of those in basic education track, at least 50% of participants demonstrate improvements in literacy skill and numeracy skill levels of one or more grade levels, based on nationally recognized assessment tools. • At least 50% of all participants are placed into continued education activities or unsubsidized employment. • At least 30% of all participants earn a GED or high school diploma within 12 months of program start. • At least 30% of all participants who do not earn a GED or high school diploma within 12 months of program start are still enrolled in educational programming. • Less than 15% of those who remain engaged for a minimum of one year will be reconvicted of new offense within one year of program intake.

[i] *Court involved refers to individuals who may have been arrested but not necessarily convicted of a crime.*
[ii] Public Private Ventures. *(2000). Getting Back to Work: Employment Programs for Ex-Offenders. Philadelphia, PA: Buck, Maria.*
[iii] Vera Institute of Justice, *Just 'Cause, Vol. 15, No. 3, fall (2008).*

[iv] Public Private Ventures. *(2008). Disconnected Young People in New York. Philadelphia, PA: Wyckoff, Cooney, S.M., Djakovic, D.K., McClanahan, W.S.*
[v] NYC Department of Probation.
[vi] NYC Center for Economic Opportunity, Westat/ Metis Associates. *(2009). Evaluation of NYC Justice Corp: Final Report of Year one of Justice Corps Program Implementation.*