



NYC Department of Juvenile Justice Discussion Paper Workforce/Lifeskills & Educational Engagement Program for Youth in Detention

A core priority in Mayor Bloomberg's agenda is combating poverty in New York City. To lead this effort, the Mayor established the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO) to turn the recommendations of the Commission for Economic Opportunity into policy and practice. A central recommendation of the Commission was to combat young adult poverty through preventive and targeted strategies for high-risk and disconnected youth, including youth in detention.

Youth who drop out of school are more likely than school graduates to be arrested while youth engaged in quality educational activities have lower re-offending rates.¹ Evidence shows that educational achievement is also linked to reduced poverty.² With this in mind, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) aims to implement a detention-based curriculum to build the skills and mindset necessary for educational success and prepare youth for future workforce engagement, and to develop a program model that can address the needs of youth in detention and offer services to youth upon their return to the community.

The Department invites juvenile justice stakeholders to contribute to the development of this program. This discussion paper will describe the targeted populations, the environments within which the program will be delivered, and the core goals and challenges of implementing programs in detention. It is the Department's intent that this paper will spark ideas that will create a program to move detained youth to economic independence and self-sufficiency.

Background on DJJ

The Department of Juvenile Justice administers detention in secure and non-secure facilities for youth who are alleged juvenile delinquents or juvenile offenders with pending cases and youth with adjudicated cases awaiting transfer to State facilities. DJJ runs one short-term secure facility, two longer-term secure facilities, and a network of 17 community-based non-secure group homes throughout New York City. Each year, thousands of youth return to their communities from juvenile detention in New York City.

In Fiscal Year 2006, 5973 youth were admitted to detention. The average daily population across the system was 449. Alleged juvenile delinquents constitute over 90% of the population admitted to the Department, and alleged juvenile offenders comprise approximately eight percent of the total population. Approximately half of all young people leave custody within the first 10 days of detention, while youth with multiple or complex cases have higher than average lengths of stay, the average stay is about 30 days. Approximately 30% of youth are placed with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), while approximately 70% return to the community.³ The Department's readmission rate in Fiscal 2006 was 43%⁴.

¹ *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*; National Criminal Justice Reference Services, U.S. Department of Justice; *Abandoned in the Back Row: New Lessons in Education and Delinquency Prevention*, The Coalition for Juvenile Justice 2001 Annual Report.

² U.S. Census Bureau: Annual earnings information from "More Education Means Higher Career Earnings," a statistical brief from the Bureau of Census, and Current Population Reports, Series P20-4761.

³ Youth returning to the community include youth with a variety of case outcomes including case dismissals, probation, conditional discharges, etc.

⁴ The readmission rate reflects the percent of youth admitted during the period with a prior history of admissions and is not equivalent to a recidivism rate. Youth can be released and re-admitted during the pendency of a single case. While youth can be admitted to detention based on a

Approximately 80% of the population in detention is male and 65% is between the ages of 14 and 15. Approximately 55% of the population self-identified as Black, 22% Hispanic, 11% White or White Hispanic, 1% Asian and 11% other/unknown. While detained youth come from the five boroughs, certain neighborhoods are overrepresented, including South Jamaica and Far Rockaway in Queens (Queens CD 12, 14); Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New York, Brownsville and Bushwick in Brooklyn (Brooklyn CD 3, 5, 16, 4); Soundview, Morris Heights, South Bronx, University Heights and Tremont in the Bronx (Bronx CD 9, 1, 5, 4); Harlem and East Harlem in Manhattan (CD 10, 11); and the North Shore in Staten Island (Richmond CD 1).

Between 30% and 40% of youth in detention have a Special Education classification, a significantly greater proportion than the approximately 14% citywide rate.⁵ Approximately 29% of youth read below the 4th grade level.

DJJ's strives to provide comprehensive care to youth and to prevent their further involvement in the juvenile justice system. DJJ offers case management services, program and recreation services, health and mental health services, and the Department of Education's (DOE) Passages Academy. Youth with health or mental health needs released into the custody of a parent, guardian or the State are provided with a discharge plan that outlines these needs and identifies community based services. Additionally, DJJ contracts with community based organizations (CBOs) to provide workshops to youth in custody on topics such as conflict mediation, literacy instruction, gang prevention, and gender-specific programming.

Program Development

DJJ intends to develop a program based on innovative practices in juvenile reentry that engages youth while in detention, links youth to community-based supports, and addresses the varying challenges of serving youth in detention.

The program should focus on relevant outcomes that measure both immediate and escalating success. Short-term outcomes should measure changes in participants' attitudes toward education and workforce opportunities while youth are still in detention. Long-term outcomes should evaluate performance and completion in the program after release from detention, reattachment and attendance to school, participation in community and work engagement activities, and involvement with the juvenile justice system. The program and curriculum design should include mechanisms to track and report the progress of program participants.

Given the challenges of serving youth in detention, the program to be delivered to youth *inside detention* should be designed around a cohort of core skills and learning experiences and structured as a scaffolded and spiral-learning experience or a continuum of skill-building activities. This model will permit each delivered session to stand alone as well as build on the previous session and prepare youth for the next session in the curriculum. The program should be interactive, activity-based, contain mixed-media elements, and be responsive to different gender needs and to youth with low-literacy levels.

new arrest, the court may remand youth back to detention on an open case based on non-compliance with conditions ordered by the court or other factors.

⁵ NYC Department of Education Statistical Summary for 2006-2007 as of 12/31/06 (<http://schools.nyc.gov/offices/stats/default.htm>).

The Department envisions that the core content areas of the program will include, but not be limited to:

- *Educational Attainment & Work Aspiration*
e.g. communication skills, planning, prioritizing, study habits, strengths identification, social mapping, myth-busting, comportment, etc.
- *Life Skills*
e.g. financial literacy, time-management, conflict-resolution techniques, teamwork, self-advocacy, etc.
- *Occupation/Career Awareness*
e.g. career exploration, identifying occupational interests/strengths, understanding career ladders, introduction to careers, high school and higher education, entrepreneurship, service-learning experiences, etc.

In February of 2007, the Department conducted focus groups with youth in detention and with formerly detained youth to inform the design of this program. These discussions with youth have confirmed that the program should provide youth with educational supports and community based resources; establish clear goals and milestones toward future success; allow youth to explore career options; be activity based; provide individual attention; and address the different needs of girls and boys in detention.

While any new program to combat poverty has challenges, working with youth in and out of detention presents some specific challenges that must be addressed as a program is developed to ensure its success. These include:

Educational & Literacy Levels: Youth in detention have high levels of Special Education classification and many have low-literacy levels. The curriculum used for this program should take these factors into account.

Age: Youth in custody range in ages from 9 to 17. The program should be designed with strategies that can engage all age groups on educational attainment and achievement and service learning.

Gender: Close to 20% of DJJ's residents are female. Programs must address the specific and differential issues faced by male and females in custody related to school achievement, dropout prevention and career attainment. Girls in detention, while often outperforming boys in terms of educational achievement, often have histories of trauma and/or abuse and present different emotional needs that must be specifically addressed when developing program services.

Differential Lengths of Stay: A youth's length of stay at DJJ can be anywhere from 24 hours to over 365 days. The model must allow for stand-alone learning of the core concepts of career path youth development, as well as provide scaffolding of skills for youth with longer stays.

Transience: Youth can move from facility to facility and from secure to non-secure detention, depending upon a number of variables, some of which are unpredictable. Youth may also return to the community, be placed with OCFS, or with other residential programs.

Adaptability to the Detention Setting: Programs must also have the capacity to work within the safety and security challenges of secure detention settings.

Coordination of Services in the Community: Services for youth in the community are often overlapping and lack the coordination to comprehensively address youth's needs. Absence of 'single point of contact' and lack of systems-level case management often result in disjointed service delivery. The program must address this challenge to ensure that successful outcomes can be reached for youth participating in the program.

The core elements and the program should extend to a curriculum *outside detention* and must be focused on attaining the long-term goals of the program, which bridge the experience of youth in detention with their return to the community. The delivery of this program outside detention requires a commitment by the provider(s) to support youth in their efforts to achieve educational and work-related goals.

To achieve these long-term goals, the following may be required:

- Collaboration with the educational system (DOE) to identify youth in detention and create linkages to appropriate educational settings upon reentry to the community.
- Collaboration with the educational system (DOE) to ensure enrollment and support educational attendance/participation of youth returning to the community.
- A program design that encourages completion through incentives and milestones.
- Collaboration with community providers working with court-involved and at-risk youth, including those providing workforce-related services, to help increase youth knowledge of program and service opportunities and facilitate their engagement in such programs.
- Engagement of the private sector to introduce youth to work experience and a variety of traditional and non-traditional career choices.

The Department understands that there are many challenges in the development of a program that can achieve its stated goals and is interested in collaborating with providers, stakeholders and community partners to overcome these challenges.

As a key step in the development of this program, the Department will be holding a working conference on this topic on July 12, 2007. Detailed information regarding this event is available on the Department's website at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/djj/html/initiatives.html>. Comments regarding this paper can be provided at the event or sent in writing to publications@djj.nyc.gov.