

***NYC Department of Juvenile Justice
&
The Center for Economic Opportunity***

***Inside/Outside: Building Blocks to
Economic Independence***

Meeting the Needs of Youth Returning to the Community from Detention

July 12, 2007 @ Medgar Evers College
Feedback from work groups

Dialogue with the Experts

On July 12, 2007, the Department of Juvenile Justice and the Center for Economic Opportunity convened key stakeholders, experts and community leaders to lend their expertise to combat poverty through preventive and targeted strategies for youth with contact with the juvenile justice system. The feedback from this event, as well as feedback resulting from focus groups held by the Department with youth in detention and formerly detained youth, will be used to inform the Department's design of a program focused on connecting youth to the educational and workforce mainstream. Participants who attended the working forum were broken into four work groups:

Parent Engagement
Girls' Service Needs
Educational Attainment
Workforce Development

Group participants were asked a series of questions that focused on identifying issues, barriers and strategies to build a successful program to connect youth to the educational and workforce mainstream. Following the breakout sessions each group reported their findings to all forum participants. The salient points are presented here.

Parental Engagement

Question 1: What issues are most important to parents regarding school and work for their children?

- Returning their children to a good school at the appropriate grade
- Ability to transfer their child to a more appropriate school that meets individual needs
- Stigma associated with court-involved youth
- Access to teachers and counselors
- Developing youth/parent relationships with teachers
- Access to parent or youth advocates in the schools
- Relationships with the system/stakeholders (DOE, DJJ, ACS, CBOs)
- Foster opportunities for youth/parent employment
- Business/private-sector involvement/investment

Parental Engagement

Question 2: What are the most significant barriers to engaging parents once youth are released from detention?

- Addressing parent needs (schedules, financial issues, lack of education, etc.)
- Lack of access to community based services for families
- Lack of mental health services

Parental Engagement

Question 3: In what ways can a program support parents in getting their children enrolled and attending school in the community?

- Outreach to parents through community centers and CBOs
- Provide knowledge of community services to parents
- Services on weekends/after-hours
- Develop resources/materials for youth and families
- Better connection with DOE

Parental Engagement

Question 4: Who are the best people to engage parents?

- Other parents
- Parents who have gone through the system
- Parent Resource Centers
- Parent advocates
- Community -- “it takes a village to raise a child”
- Church outreach centers

Educational Attainment

Question 1: What are the barriers to getting youth interested in school/education as a positive institution or force in their lives?

- Lack of services/rigidity of the system
- Lack of relevant curricula
- Lack of appropriate placements for over-aged/below-grade youth
- Negative experiences in school create negative attitudes
- Not enough feedback/participation by youth in their educational experience

Educational Attainment

Question 2: What are successful strategies to overcome them in detention and the community?

- Structured environments/small focused schools
- Mentoring (adult and peer mentoring)
- Creating education/life plans with youth buy-in
- Holistic approach that addresses underlying issues (e.g. mental health issues) and is youth-development-based

Educational Attainment

Question 3: What program elements can increase school attachment in the community?

- Incentives
- Structured and continuous guidance
- Strong parental involvement
- Incorporating behavioral principles
- Curricula/design that is relevant to age
- Activity-based/pro-social

Educational Attainment

Question 4: What program elements and incentives can encourage ongoing school attendance in the community?

- Support activities that engage youth (arts, physical education, etc.)
- Work-study programs
- Bring outside programs into the schools

Educational Attainment

Question 5: How can a community program best engage specific educational sites in supporting these goals?

- Have gatherings of key stakeholders
- Develop collaborations and partnerships
- Provide direct work in the schools/have dedicated staff in the schools

Girls' Service Needs

Question 1: What are the best ways to engage girls in thinking about school and work?

- Provide young women with an understanding of how to negotiate relationships while pursuing school and work aspirations
- Identify and affirm their personal strengths
- Provide exposure to careers
- Provide role models that they can identify with

Girls' Service Needs

Question 2: What are the barriers to girls' school attendance and achievement?

- Girls are often very confrontational towards other girls and often don't want to work with each other
- Girls in detention are often victims of crime or abuse themselves
- Court involved girls often do not have the support of family or friends
- Unhealthy management of emotions and relationships
- Girls don't experience each other as a source of support

Girls' Service Needs

Question 3: What are the successful strategies to overcome them in detention? In the community?

- Meaningful assessments of educational, mental health needs etc. so they can connect girls with the appropriate resources
- Program and DJJ staff should model behavior that they want girls to emulate/ serve as role models
- Although girls say they do not want to work with other girls, their relationships with other girls in detention can be used to help overcome this
- Activities should be participatory (Popular Education)
- Youth should be segmented by length of stay, 1st stay in detention, and/or recidivist status
- Build relationships between community providers and the schools

Girls' Service Needs

Question 4: What program elements are essential to engage and retain young women in the community?

- Consider non-traditional mentoring models
- Identify informal or formal support networks that exist within the community where girls can turn to for support
- Outside providers should begin engagement of the youth while in detention

Girls' Service Needs

Question 5: What program elements or approaches should NOT be used to engage court-involved girls?

- Some believe that most girls do not know themselves and are easily manipulated, while others believe that they must work in groups in order to be prepared for the world

Girls' Service Needs

Question 6: What are the best ways for a program like this to address the emotional and relational needs of participants?

- It is important to validate their experiences, feelings, etc.
- Allow for group work to build this skill to succeed in world of work
- Allow for girls to deal with their own feelings of being victimized
- It is important that youth have consistent relationships with a caring staff person
- Validate for girls the value they place in relationships and provide skills for learning how to cope with relationships
- Staff should be trained on the differential needs of boys and girls
- Allow girls to challenge gender roles and validate their own experiences as girls and women

Workforce Development

Question 1: What are the barriers to future work and career planning for youth?

- Not enough incentives to the private sector to engage youth
- Longer prep-time to get kids ready for work than adults:
 - Assessments
 - Tools
 - Youth often have a limited world view
- Unrealistic expectations from youth about work and pay
- Broken promises
- Lack of role models
- Lack of hope
- Feel unheard
- Lack of educational attainment

Workforce Development

Question 2: What are the best ways to engage youth in thinking about careers?

- Ask youth what their strengths/weaknesses are
- Bring in people from different careers with whom they can identify
- Exposure to other environments other than their own
- Find out what's important to them
- Expose kids to socialization/cultural opportunities

Workforce Development

Question 3: What program elements are essential for positive workforce attachment and future careers?

- Skill building
- Work with literacy needs
- Don't mix adults/juveniles
- Provide contextualized learning opportunities
- Experiential learning
- Integrate skill building with workforce development
- More tolerance for failure
- Flexibility
- More exposure to technology
- Peer-to-Peer learning
- Role playing
- One-stop shopping
- Need to create a job market for teens