

New Options for Young Lawbreakers

AS PART OF its effort to keep young people out of juvenile lockups and jails, the city has developed a new continuum of programs for kids who get in trouble with the law.

In the past, teens aged 15 and under were often sent to detention centers or state-run lockups not because they had committed serious offenses, but because judges believed they didn't have enough supervision at home and there appeared to be no alternative. By providing young people with support in their communities, the new programs aim to minimize young people's contact with the justice system, and to provide options that are appropriate to the behaviors that get them in trouble in the first place: Kids who commit minor offenses are connected to community groups and moved out of the system, while kids at greater risk take part in intensive services and supervision. Following are short descriptions of these programs and interventions.

Court Diversion

Over the past six years, the city has more than doubled the number of juveniles it diverts out of the court system, often sending them instead to community programs that provide case management, counseling and other services (see “Case Closed,” page 6). If a young person successfully completes the terms of diversion, his or her case is dismissed without any deeper involvement in the justice system—a process known as “adjustment.” In 2011, more than 4,500 juveniles aged 15 and under had their cases closed through adjustment. The cost of these programs varies, as the terms of an adjustment can range from check-ins with a probation officer to completion of an online course to participation in a brick-and-mortar community program.

Alternative-to-Detention Programs

To reduce the number of youths sent to juvenile detention, the city's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator contracts with a nonprofit in each borough to provide alternative-to-detention (ATD) services for young people with a pending delinquency case in family court. There are three tiers of ATD programs. The first two tiers include community supervision, which involves making sure a young person attends school and meets curfew, and afterschool supervision and activities five days a week. Programs providing these levels of supervision typically cost approximately \$2,500 to \$3,000 per child and serve about 100 to 200 young people per borough each year. The third tier, for young people who need more supervision, is provided by the Department of Probation (DOP).

Many of the ATD programs provide services such as tutoring, mental health assessments and referrals, classes in life skills and anger management, and recreational activities like visits to parks and dance workshops. While some have the capacity to work with young people who are considered at high risk of breaking the law or who have mental illness, a handful of organizations offer independent ATD programs for these and other specialized groups, including children whose families are unable or unwilling to have the youth remain at home as they await their hearing in family court. These specialized programs generally cost more per child than typical ATD programs. For instance, Boys Town has a program that takes in 140 young people each year who have violated probation or struggled in other ATD programs; it costs a little over \$4,000 per year per child, and is funded by the Administration for Children's Services.

Tiered Probation

Every day, close to 2,000 juveniles (aged 11 to 15) and about 7,000 young adults (aged 16 to 24) are on probation in New York City—numbers the DOP cites when describing itself as the city's largest alternative-to-incarceration program. Probation has always offered a certain amount of flexibility: Probationers check in with varying frequency and intensity, according to judges' orders and probation officers' discretion. Under the department's recent reorganization, probationers are assigned to one of three tiers, depending on the severity of their offences and their risk of breaking the law again. “Level 1” probationers meet with their probation officers just once per month, while those on “Level 3” have 14 contacts per month. These services are funded through DOP's operating budget.

General Supports

Under the umbrella of Mayor Bloomberg's Young Men's Initiative, which aims to improve life outcomes for black and Latino boys, the Department of Probation is launching a series of education, job training and mentoring programs for young people in the five neighborhoods where the greatest number of probationers live. While some of these programs can serve as alternative-to-placements that prevent their participants from going to youth lockups and jails, young people with any kind of criminal justice involvement can participate in many of them—including young people on probation as well as those who have been arrested but not brought to court. Under contract with the DOP, service organizations provide case management, internship placement and financial incentives for 16 to 24-year-olds involved in the justice system.

- *Young Adult Justice Scholars* provides educational services, career exploration and case management to court involved youth. The program plans to serve 272 young people annually, at a cost to the taxpayer of \$7,500 per participant.
- *Young Adult Justice Community* provides job training and support as well as internship placements to court involved youth. The program aims to serve 252 young people annually, at \$7,500 per participant.
- *Arches: A Transformative Mentoring Program* connects probationers to adult mentors and supportive peer groups. The program will serve 840 young people annually, at \$5,000 per participant.
- *Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS)* provides educational support to youth who are on probation, and will target approximately 146 young adults annually, at \$6,000 per participant.

Alternative-to-Placement Programs

The city currently operates three formal alternative-to-placement programs, which serve young people in their communities who would otherwise be sent to out-of-home lockups.

- *Enhanced Supervision Program (ESP)* provides intensive supervision to juvenile probation clients who would otherwise be placed in a residential facility. ESP probation officers visit young people at home and school, and work with probationers' families. Probationers in the program attend behavior modification groups and perform community service. In fiscal year 2012, the program served 1,158 young people, at \$1,750 per participant.
- *Esperanza* is a community organization under contract with the DOP. Juvenile probation clients who would otherwise be sent to lockup participate in a six-month program that provides intensive supervision and in-home family counseling. In 2012, the program enrolled 161 young people, at \$15,000 per participant.
- *Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI)* provides short-term, therapeutic, evidence-based treatment programs for young people who have gotten in trouble with the law and who would otherwise be placed in juvenile justice facilities. The Administration for Children's Services contracts with nonprofits to provide young people with therapists who meet with them and their families in their homes several times a week with the hopes of reestablishing parents as authority figures and preventing young people from reoffending. Specialized programs in Queens, Brooklyn, and Staten Island provide treatment for young people with substance abuse issues and psychiatric issues. JJI serves 368 children per year, at an average cost of \$17,975 per family.

The probation department is in the process of establishing three new alternative-to-placement programs, which will be run by community agencies and will serve an additional 215 young people per year:

- *Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM)* is a new program administered by the DOP, designed for youth who are determined by Family Court to need an alternative-to-placement program, or who are already on probation but have been rearrested for a serious felony. Participants are paired with a paid mentor, who connects them to community organizations and is available to the young person and his or her family 24 hours a day. The program has a total capacity of 100 participants per year, at a cost of \$18,850 per client.
- *Pathways to Excellence, Achievement and Knowledge (PEAK)* will operate as a full-day program for youth who are at risk of being placed in an out-of-home lockup. It will be run by a single community-based organization, under contract with the Department of Probation, and will combine education and behavior modification services with therapy and after-hours crisis intervention. The program will serve about 90 young people per year, and its cost per participant is not yet available.
- *Every Child Has an Opportunity to Excel and Succeed (ECHOES)* will combine two components: intensive case management provided directly by specially trained DOP probation officers, and an after-school job preparation and employability program provided by a nonprofit under contract with the DOP. It will serve 70 youth on probation annually throughout the five boroughs, at a cost of about \$13,000 per youth. ✖