



**The New York City Council,  
Committee on Juvenile Justice  
January 16, 2019**

***“Oversight – Evaluating Programs that Aim to Reduce Recidivism Among Justice Involved Youth”***

**Testimony by  
New York City Administration for Children's Services  
Felipe Franco, Deputy Commissioner  
Division of Youth and Family Justice**

Good morning Chair King and members of the Committee on Juvenile Justice. I am Felipe Franco, Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) within the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). With me today is Sara Hemmeter, Associate Commissioner for Community Based Alternatives and Close to Home. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. We appreciate the City Council's interest in the young people we serve and in ensuring the programs and services we provide produce positive youth outcomes.

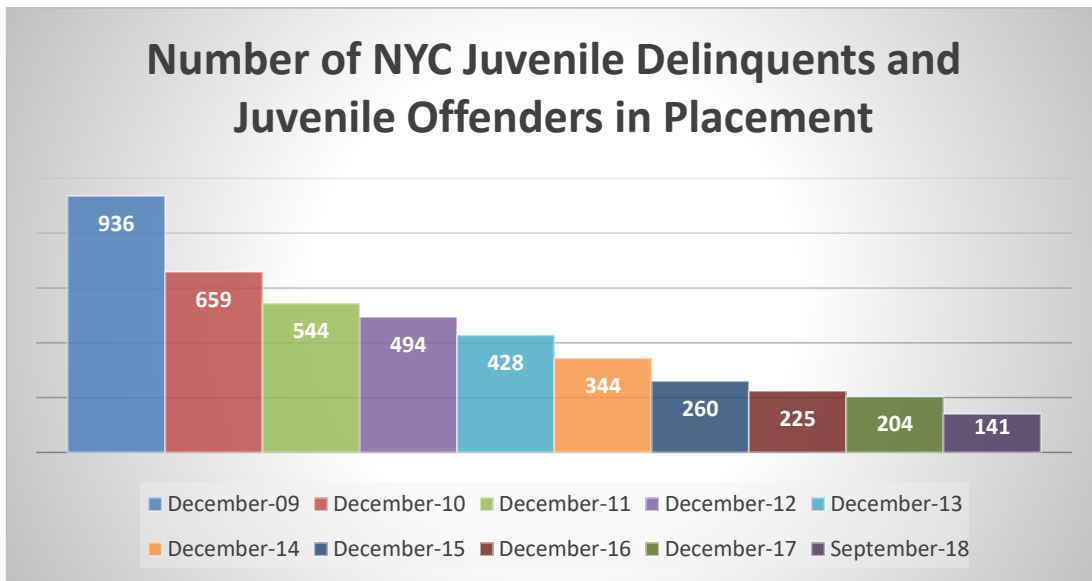
### **DYFJ Overview**

As you know, DYFJ administers a continuum of juvenile justice services, which includes community-based services for youth and their families, detention services for youth who are arrested and awaiting court resolution, and residential placement services and aftercare through Close to Home for youth who are adjudicated by the Family Court.

### **Evaluating Juvenile Justice Interventions**

In DYFJ, we strive to improve the lives of children involved in the juvenile justice system, reduce their likelihood of further justice system involvement, and advance public safety. Preventing future re-offending, protecting public safety, and enhancing youth and family well-being are our top priorities. To do this we have made substantial investments throughout our continuum in practices that have been proven effective in producing these positive youth outcomes.

Our interventions are clearly working. From 2008 to 2017, the number of juvenile arrests decreased 70%, from 13,564 to 4,080. Prior to Raise the Age, overall admissions to juvenile detention decreased significantly year over year, dropping 64% from Fiscal Year 2007—when nearly 6,000 youth were detained—to 2,126 in Fiscal Year 2017. Likewise, the number of youth in placement has decreased by almost 80% from 2009 to 2017. The number of young people entering Close to Home placement declined 40 percent just from Fiscal Year 2017 to Fiscal Year 2018.



A recent study by the Research and Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice<sup>1</sup> tells us that measuring the success of justice interventions involves more than just an analysis of recidivism data alone—it requires a greater focus on positive outcomes. In the study, Dr. Jeffrey Butts notes that, when given proper reinforcement and the right supports, youth learn over time to refrain from anti-social behavior that might otherwise result in further justice system involvement<sup>2</sup>.

The New York City Juvenile Justice system focuses on ensuring youth success in school, at home and in the community, not just on their failures. We know that fewer youth are being arrested than ever before in New York City, and fewer youth are being admitted to detention, fewer youth are being adjudicated and fewer young adults are entering the criminal justice system, but that is not enough. We cannot become complacent with our success in reducing delinquency. We need to

<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey A. Butts, Emily Pelletier, and Lila Kazemian (2018). *Positive Outcomes: Strategies for Assessing the Progress of Youth Involved in the Justice System*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

<sup>2</sup> Butts et al. 2018

ensure that the few youth that come in contact with the system are acquiring the skills and supports they and their families need to transition to productive adults.

Due to this commitment, DYFJ has intentionally expanded our array of therapeutic and evidence-based interventions throughout our continuum, which are targeted toward positive youth development, strengthened family functioning, and thus promoting a new trajectory for our youth away from criminal behavior to adult success.

We are seeing the positive impact these interventions are having across the City: New York City is the safest it has been in decades. Crime in New York City has decreased over time in both the adult and juvenile systems. Thousands of families continue to receive community-based juvenile justice prevention services through DYFJ's contracted providers each year, while the number of youth entering Detention and Close to Home has declined dramatically over the past several years.

I will now discuss some of the interventions employed throughout our continuum, and the evidence behind them.

### **Community-Based Alternatives**

We know that for most young people, the best way to promote positive youth outcomes is to support youth within their families and community. Along with our partners at the Department of Probation and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, we work to engage youth in programs and services in their homes and communities whenever possible.

The most effective interventions not only engage the young person but also treat the whole family. DYFJ's Family Assessment Program (FAP) is available to families with youth up to age 18 to help avoid involvement in the juvenile justice system by providing services. The Family Assessment Program services help families address difficult teenage behaviors such as truancy, using drugs, running away from home, and/or struggles with mental illness. FAP services offer

parents the skills they need to support their children, enforce limits, and steer them towards positive activities.

ACS also administers the Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI), which serves youth under supervision by the NYC Department of Probation (DOP). Specifically, JJI is a program for youth who have been adjudicated in Family Court and it provides intensive services to keep youth with their families in their communities while under probation supervision.

The Family Assessment Program (FAP) and the Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI) use home-based interventions. Functional Family Therapy (FFT) has decades of empirical research demonstrating that FFT reduces recidivism and/or the onset of offending between 25 and 60 percent more effectively than other programs<sup>3</sup> and significantly reduces potential new offending for siblings of treated adolescents<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, MultiSystemic Therapy (MST) is an intensive family- and community-based treatment program that focuses on addressing factors that impact chronic and violent juvenile offenders and has been proven effective in reducing recidivism and out-of-home placements and improving family and peer relations.<sup>5</sup>

With Raise the Age, we have expanded our array of preventive programs to meet the needs of older youth, and we have invested in new evidence-based programs such as Multi-Systemic Therapy: MST-Psychiatry for youth with high mental health needs; MST PSB for youth with

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<sup>3</sup> Alexander, J.F., Sexton, T.L., and Robbins, M.S. 2000. The developmental status of family therapy in family psychology intervention science. In *Family Psychology Intervention Science*, edited by H. Liddle, D. Santisteban, R. Leavant, and J. Bray. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

*See also*, Alexander, J.F., Pugh, C., Parsons, B.V., and Sexton, T.L. 2000. Functional family therapy. In *Blueprints for Violence Prevention (Book 3)*, 2d ed., edited by D.S. Elliott. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, Institute of Behavioral Science, University of Colorado

<sup>4</sup> Klein, N.C., Alexander, J.F., and Parsons, B.V. 1977. Impact of family systems intervention on recidivism and sibling delinquency: A model of primary prevention and program evaluation. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 45(3):469–474.

<sup>5</sup> Henggeler, S. W., Melton, G. B., & Smith, L. A. (1992). Family preservation using multisystemic therapy: An effective alternative to incarcerating serious juvenile offenders. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 60, 953–961.

problematic sexual behaviors; and MST-EA for emerging adults who don't have a family resource and need help to achieve independence.

### **Detention**

ACS provides secure and non-secure detention services for youth 16 and under who have been arrested and detained while waiting for judges to hear their case in court, as well as specialized secure detention for 16-year old adolescent offenders. As you know, the Raise the Age legislation also required NYC to move all 16- and 17-year-olds off Rikers Island to a facility that needed to be certified as a Specialized Juvenile Detention facility and jointly operated with the NYC Department of Corrections. Horizon in the Bronx has been licensed as our Specialized Juvenile Detention Center and houses young people transferred from Rikers Island, as well as newly arrested 17-year-olds.<sup>6</sup>

The youth who are placed in detention are often among the highest needs youth in the City and have experienced various traumas within their communities. DYFJ utilizes the NYC Model within our secure detention system. Adapted from the nationally recognized Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) model, the NYC Model is a therapeutic approach for working with youth in the juvenile justice system. Facilitated small group interactions are at the core of this group process model and include components of positive youth development and cognitive behavioral therapy to help youth make positive and long-lasting changes in their thinking and behavior. These therapeutic components are delivered to youth in a fully integrated treatment approach where social-emotional competencies are learned and practiced, and are administered by caring, skilled and well-trained staff who work together, as a team, to help youth make better decisions and manage negative behavior and thinking.

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<sup>6</sup> The Raise the Age law does not take effect for 17-year-olds until October 1, 2019. Until that date, youth who are 17 years of age continue to be charged and processed in the adult criminal court system.

With Raise the Age, New York City is working to have re-entry specialists in detention who will work with each youth, the youth's case manager, and the young person's family to connect the youth and their family with services in the community for continued support after discharge.

### **Close to Home**

It has been well documented that positive engagement of the family and the community leads to improved outcomes in juvenile delinquency. Grounded in this knowledge, New York State and New York City established Close to Home in 2012. In only a few years Close to Home has been identified as a promising practice that jurisdictions such as New Jersey, Florida, Philadelphia, Milwaukee and others are looking to replicate to reduce recidivism and improve public safety. Close to Home allows for work to occur simultaneously with the youth, the family and the community to ensure that factors that led to delinquency in the first place are addressed before the youth returns to the community. In partnership with the Department of Probation we at ACS have adopted a Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework and an evidence-based assessment tool—the Youth Level of Services (YLS)—to guide our intervention and ensure we reduce youth likelihood to recidivate.

As I stated before, reducing delinquency in New York City is not enough. We have made education a priority and have worked in partnership with the New York City Department of Education District 79 in this effort. In the 2016-2017 school year, there were 177 Close to Home youth enrolled in Passages Academy and the average young person passed 91% of their courses and earned an average of 9.3 credits. Of the Close to Home youth who took New York State Regents Exams, almost half passed. Parent and family engagement is a critical component of our work: for the youth leaving Close to Home in 2016 (222 youth) 81% were released to their parent or other family member.

## **Continued Commitment to Assessing Recidivism and Positive Youth Outcomes**

As you have heard today New York City has become a national model in juvenile justice reform, as many jurisdictions across the nation and the world visit our program in an effort to understand how we have achieved such decreases in juvenile arrests and improved outcomes for youth.

In March of 2018 the Columbia University Justice Lab published “Does Keeping Youth Close To Home Really Matter? A Case Study,”<sup>7</sup> and a full report will be published in 2019. In April of 2018 the Federal Department of Education conducted a webinar<sup>8</sup> to highlight the positive educational outcomes achieved by Close to Home. In February of 2018 The Center for Children’s Law and Policy, funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, published the “Implementation of New York’s Close to Home Initiative: A New Model for Youth Justice”<sup>9</sup>. All these studies and reports by independent entities have reaffirmed that New York City is doing what is right. We at ACS believe that we should take a closer look at the impacts of our work and do more to further research on recidivism and positive youth outcomes in Close to Home. Recidivism is an important metric that we and New York State will be examining in the near future, and we will continue to expand the ways in which we examine youth outcomes and how we can reduce juvenile delinquency in New York City.

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<sup>7</sup> Weissman, M. (2018). Does Keeping Youth Close to Home Really Matter? Unpublished case study, Columbia University, New York, NY.

<sup>8</sup> Franco, F., Lisante, T.F., & Marinacci, N. (2018). Quality Educational Programming in NYC ACS Close to Home Programs [Webinar]. Retrieved from <https://neglected-delinquent.ed.gov/events/quality-educational-programming-nyc-ac-close-home-programs>

<sup>9</sup> Jason Szanyi and Mark Soler, Implementation of New York’s Close To Home Initiative: A New Model For Youth Justice, Center for Children's Law and Policy (February 2018).



## **Closing**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the supports DYFJ provides for youth in our juvenile justice continuum to promote positive youth development and improve youth outcomes. We have made deliberate efforts to connect young people throughout our juvenile justice continuum with the services and interventions they need to address their unique issues, thrive in their community, and further reduce their involvement in the justice system. We know that there is still more work to be done, nevertheless we should be proud of having a juvenile justice system focus on youth outcomes and the safest city in the nation. We are happy to take your questions.