

# Making Raise the Age Work for New York City Youth

Second Anniversary October 2018 - 2020



## Spotlight on Keeping Youth in their Communities

**COMMUNITY JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE**

**THE  
GRADUATE  
CENTER**

CITY UNIVERSITY  
OF NEW YORK

## *Introduction by the Honorable Edwina G. Mendelson*



October 1, 2020 marks the one-year anniversary of the full implementation of the Raise the Age law, an historic piece of legislation that raised the age of criminal responsibility in New York State to 18 years of age. Since the implementation of Raise the Age, the vast majority of criminal matters involving young people under age 18 are now addressed in our state’s juvenile justice system, where youths have better access to social services and programs geared towards intervention, rehabilitation and community integration. In the following pages of this report, you will get a firsthand look at how this new law has impacted youths, whose lives no longer have to be defined by an interaction with the justice system. However, the work undertaken to get to this milestone anniversary was not just a clerical matter of increasing a number. The real impact that Raise the Age has had on these young people, as well as their families and our communities, is the result of countless hours of dedication, persistency and collaboration between many different individuals and organizations across New York State.

Prior to the enactment and implementation of Raise the Age, anyone 16 years of age or older who was arrested – even as young as 13 in some circumstances – would have their criminal cases processed through the adult criminal justice system, where incarceration remains the primary tool available to address crime. For young people, this punishment-centric approach often leads to a cycle of incarceration, that also disproportionately impacts people of color. This approach can also have lasting consequences on the developing adolescent brain, which does not fully mature until the individual is in their early twenties. Over the course of several decades, a growing movement to reduce the touch of the adult criminal justice system on the lives of young people led to increased calls to change the way that New York State dispenses youth justice.

With the enactment of the Raise the Age legislation, we created an entirely new system of adolescent justice whose effects would be felt not just in the court system, but in state agencies, prosecution and defense organizations, legal service providers, law enforcement, social services organizations, corrections, schools, community and religious groups, and many others across the state. Raise the Age could only be successfully implemented with the active participation of all these involved groups, as it quickly became clear that the “implementation” of this law was a shorthand word for meeting, planning, developing, coordinating, and training at the local, county, district, and statewide level. Securing and harmonizing the perspectives of all these individuals and organizations across the state was certainly not always easy, but it was, and is, always critical to the success of Raise the Age.

I am deeply proud of the hard work undertaken by these many partners to ensure a successful implementation of Raise the Age. The stories and information in this report are a testament to their tireless efforts. Yet I am also grateful for the lessons learned to get us to this remarkable one-year milestone. I do not hesitate to call Raise the Age a success, yet it is a success that has been earned through the invaluable and wholehearted participation by a host of people, groups and organizations across our state. But our work is not done. Our achievements can only be sustained by continuing the collaborative efforts that have brought us to one year of the successful full implementation of Raise the Age – the fruits of which have brought a positive impact on the lives of young people.

***Edwina G. Mendelson***  
*Deputy Chief Administrative Judge,  
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For years, New York was one of the last two states in the United States that treated all youth arrested at age sixteen, no matter how minor the alleged offense, as adults.<sup>1</sup> On October 1, 2017, New York enacted “Raise the Age” legislation ensuring that fewer young people would face prosecution as adults and thereby avoid the collateral consequences of adult prosecution. After implementation of Raise the Age (RTA), arrests of youth continued to decline in New York City.<sup>2</sup>

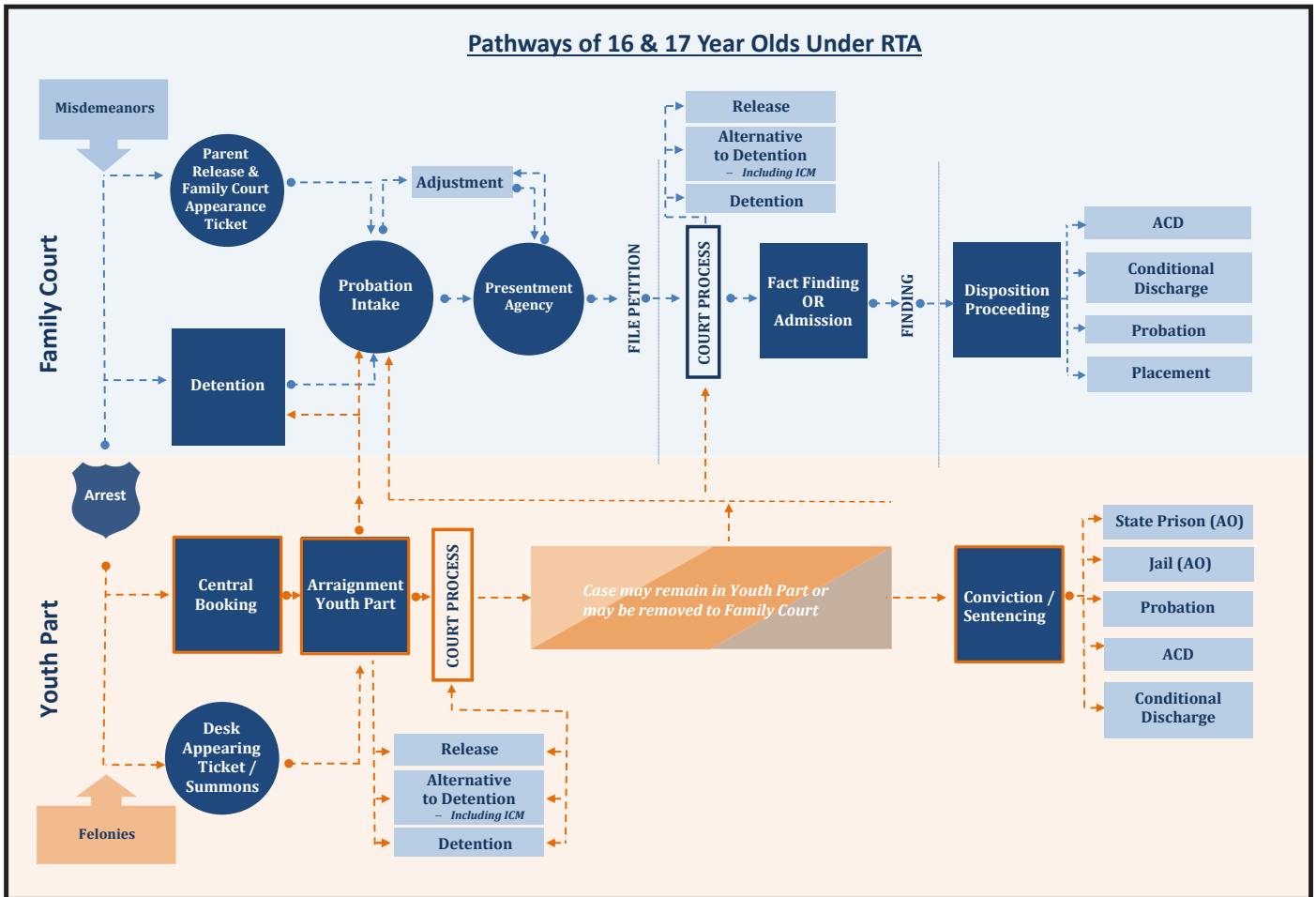
These numbers are critically important, ***because when young people are in the adult justice system, they and their communities are less safe than they would be otherwise.***<sup>3</sup> Each number represents a young person whose life is impacted by statutes and by adult decision-makers. So much has been quantified about Raise the Age in terms of arrests, detention beds, and cases processed. This report instead seeks to share some of the intangibles of Raise the Age through the perspectives of the people working in and living through the experience of Raise the Age.

The new laws went into effect first for 16-year olds on October 1, 2018 and for 17-year olds one year later. They created several major changes. First, 16- and 17-year olds charged with misdemeanors now have their cases processed through Family Court under laws established for the processing of legal matters around alleged juvenile delinquency. This means that there is the possibility that their cases can be “adjusted” by the NYC Department of Probation (DOP), diverting them from prosecution and further court action. Regardless of the legal outcome of their case, they will not have a criminal record along with its collateral consequences. Second, 16-



and 17-year olds charged with felonies are now defined as “Adolescent Offenders” and their cases are heard in newly established Youth Parts instead of being processed as other adult criminal cases.

The RTA legislation also established new legal procedures for felony cases to be removed to Family Court. If a youth is charged with a non-violent felony, there is a presumption in favor of removal. If the youth is charged with a violent felony, different legal standards apply.



The outcomes of Adolescent Offender cases across New York City shows that the spirit of the Raise the Age legislation is being honored, which is to ensure that the prosecution of young people as adults should be reserved for as few cases as possible under new and exacting legal standards. In fact, 84% of Adolescent Offender cases that started out in the Youth Parts were removed to Family Court; ninety-two percent of these cases were non-violent felony matters and 80% of violent felony cases were also removed.<sup>4</sup>

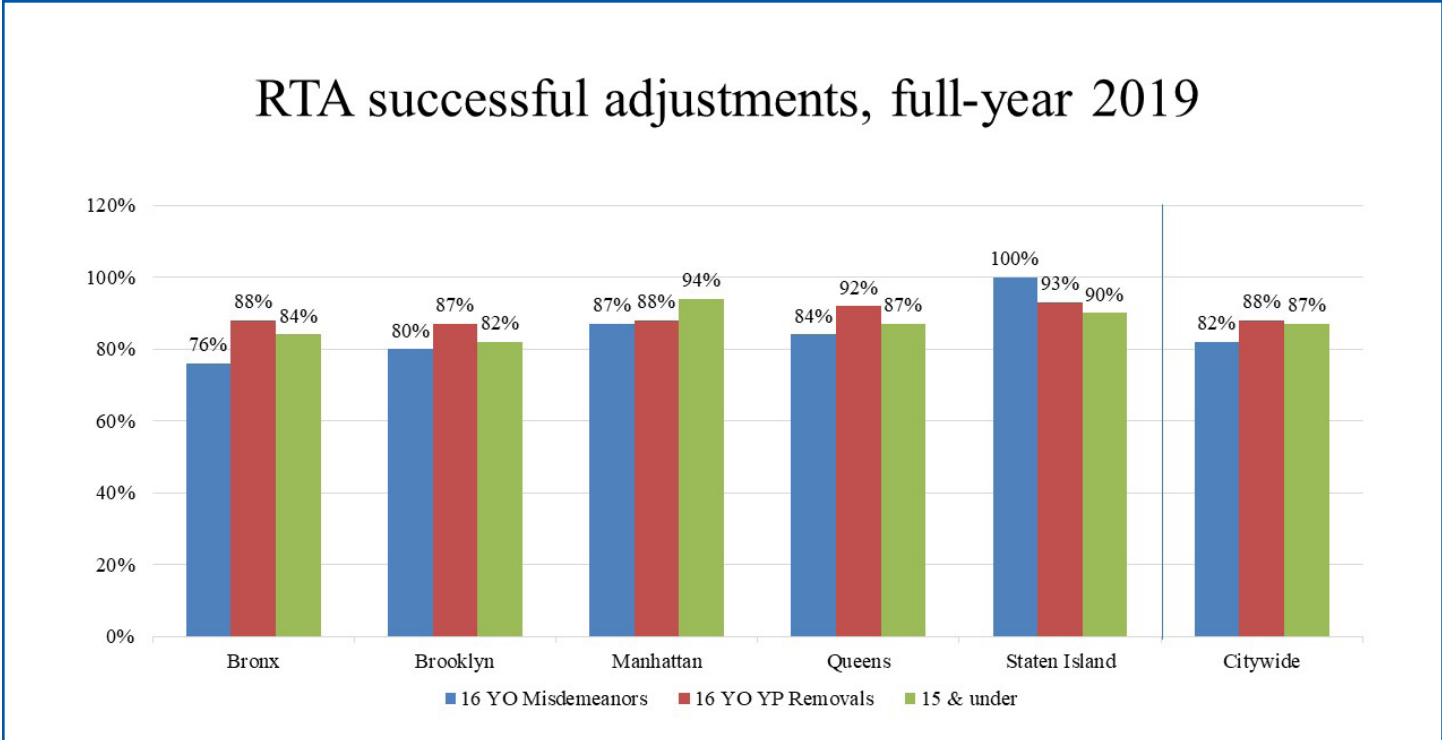
Once a young person’s case is removed to Family Court, it is typically treated the same as any other new Family Court matter. This means the young person may be considered for possible adjustment or diversion from further court action. Now youth who start off in Family Court or who come to Family Court through the removal process from the Youth Parts meet with a probation officer to determine if their case is eligible and suitable for adjustment. If a

young person’s case is opened for adjustment services, the level of their engagement with a probation officer will vary according to their individual circumstances. If the person who accused them of a crime is willing, they may participate in a restorative justice process, which is not widely available in the adult system as a means of resolving cases. If a young person is interested in being mentored, or participating in other supportive services, their probation officer can connect them as appropriate.

The percentage of cases in Family Court that are opened for adjustment, citywide, has steadily increased since 2016. This trend has continued since RTA took effect in October 2018.

The vast majority of the cases of young people diverted from prosecution are deemed successfully adjusted. Those cases are sealed and there are no public records of those matters. However, if there is a new, serious arrest or another change in circumstances suggesting that adjustment is no longer appropriate, the young person’s case may be referred for prosecution.

As shown below in a preliminary analysis of internal DOP data in the first year of RTA, 16-year olds whose cases were removed from the Youth Parts to Family Court had a higher rate of successful completion of the period of adjustment without being referred for prosecution than young people whose cases originated in Family Court. This is particularly notable because the charges filed against these 16-year olds were felonies, thus placing them at least initially under the jurisdiction of the adult system because of the seriousness of the charges. This suggests that adult prosecution was not appropriate in those cases, and perhaps having all cases, regardless of a misdemeanor or felony charge, originate in Family Court might make a better use of system resources. That would also be less traumatizing for youth and their families.



Source: New York City Department of Probation internal data.

“I’ve got your back if you put the work in. My job is to keep you out of court....You give me your word, I have your back.”

When a young person’s case is removed from the Youth Part to Family Court, the young person and their family meets with a Probation Officer like Amy Blackman, who is assigned to an Intake and Adjustment unit in the Youth Part. Officer Blackman is one of the probation officers who joined DOP as the agency expanded its ranks to meet the demands of RTA. Through an assessment process, she determines whether or not their cases can be adjusted or referred for prosecution. In addition, she works with young people who have agreed to having their cases diverted from prosecution, offering to connect them with resources to help ensure they will not have any further involvement with the court system. From her perspective, when she first meets a young person and hopefully their parent or guardian, her first responsibility is to ensure that they understand the dauntingly complex process that brought them before her. She takes as much time as necessary to help them understand.

Her message is one of mutual accountability: “I’ve got your back if you put the work in. My job is to keep you out of court....You give me your word, I have your back.”

One of the primary tenets of probation practice in New York City is Positive Youth Development. It teaches the transformative potential of the relationship between a caring, trusted adult, including a probation officer, and a young person.<sup>5</sup>

For young people whose cases are not removed to Family Court, actors in the system must be committed to treating them in a developmentally-appropriate matter and to understand the importance of connecting with their families whenever possible. To that end, Court Liaison Officers are stationed in the new Youth Parts to connect youth and families with services if they are interested. Upon learning that RTA had become the law, Probation Officer Willounda Prince thought it was long overdue. Her personal and professional experience had convinced her that criminal court was no place for children, and that detention should be the choice of last resort. She began her career working with the former NYC Department of Juvenile Justice, and



*A relationship built on trust, shared accountability and responsibility, and simplest of all, caring, can be one of the most powerful influences on a young person. It is not what services a young person is offered that makes the difference, but first and foremost who offers those services, and how, that can determine whether a young person chooses to avail themselves of any opportunity.*

then later the Division of Youth and Family Justice at the Administration for Children's Services (ACS). She worked with youth in different detention facilities in New York City, and was responsible for transporting youth to and from court, Rikers Island, and upstate facilities. She never felt any of these places were places for children. All her experiences, including witnessing the process of booking and arraigning youth through the criminal court system, motivated her to pursue a career in probation. Her goal was to work where she could keep youth safe in their own communities. Officer Prince thought a total system overhaul was needed to prevent children whose brains had not fully developed from being saddled with criminal records that imposed barriers for success later in their lives. She wanted to protect them from the trauma of adult processing and incarceration. She applied for and was grateful to earn a position as a Court Liaison Officer (CLO) in the Youth Part. Here she watched the system transforming while expanding her own professional development. Officer Prince explained that her personal background was similar to that of the youth and families she encounters. She saw how her own family members had been derailed by the stigma of a criminal record. She also knew that her own decision-making and impulse-control abilities changed when she reached her mid-twenties.



The impact of transformative relationships is a hallmark of the groundbreaking transformation of New York City probation practice that has been underway over the past few years. Having identified a programmatic absence of these relationships as a significant gap in services for young people whose cases are not removed from the Youth Parts, DOP drew on its proven Intensive Community Monitoring (ICM) model already operating in Family Court, and expanded it to the Youth Part.

ICM is an Alternative to Detention program, to monitor and work with young people who would otherwise be detained while their cases are pending in the Youth Parts. Prior to RTA, this option was only available to young people whose cases were in Family Court. This robust option that included probation officer supervision did not exist for older teenagers. ICM probation officers are responsible for ensuring that the young people meet the court-ordered conditions of their release. They make home and school visits and check in frequently with the youth. But most importantly, they provide critical support and access to opportunities and resources.

NYC  
PROBATION
INTENSIVE COMMUNITY MONITORING (ICM)

**PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**  
Intensive Community Monitoring (ICM) is a Family Court, and Youth Part pre-trial program option, designed to keep its participants safely in the community through supervision and program options throughout the pendency of their case. Youth engaged in ICM will receive intensive and individualized monitoring, in addition to referrals to the New York City Department of Probation embedded programming as appropriate, which may include transformative mentoring opportunities; however, participation in programming or services is not mandatory for compliance.

<p><b>KEY ELEMENTS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expedited Initial Contact</li> <li>• Signed Agreement</li> <li>• Office visits</li> <li>• Home visits</li> <li>• School visits</li> <li>• Agency visits (if applicable)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly groups</li> <li>• Daily contacts, including curfew checks</li> <li>• Referrals for services, as appropriate</li> <li>• Extended tours (weekend, morning and evening shifts)</li> <li>• Written progress reports-48 hours notification for Youth/ Adolescents who are in non-compliance</li> </ul>
<p><b>KEY ENHANCEMENTS:</b> Credible Messenger Mentoring</p>	<p>Youth WRAP (community engagement and employability program)</p>
<p><b>DURATION OF PROGRAM:</b> 60 days (Family Court)</p>	<p>60-120 days (Youth Part)</p>
<p><b>MAXIMUM NUMBER OF SLOTS:</b> 60 Slots per team</p>	<p>3 officers, up to 20 youth per officer, 1 supervisor</p>

**TARGET POPULATION:**

<p><b>IN FAMILY COURT:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Moderate and High Risk Youth who would otherwise be detained</li> <li>• Youth who are in detention following a hearing/removal/step-down from detention</li> <li>• Youth who face compliance challenges in Tier 1 and/or Tier 2 programming in the Alternative to Detention (ATD) continuum</li> </ul>	<p><b>IN THE YOUTH PART:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• JOs and AOs who would otherwise be detained during pendency of their case, starting at arraignment               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Youth who are facing bail</li> <li>o Youth who have been attending an ATI program and are facing compliance challenges that have put them at risk of discharge from the program and potential detention</li> </ul> </li> <li>• ICM will be available at the request of the defense attorney or district attorney, subject to final determination by the court.</li> </ul>
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Like Officer Blackman, Officer Christopher Ochoa joined DOP in response to RTA; he supervises young people in ICM. Officer Ochoa tells the youth he supervises that although he is there to support and guide them, they have ownership over the process. He tells them, “You write the report to the judge,” encouraging them to feel a sense of responsibility and to believe in themselves. Officer Ochoa wants young people to feel his trust in their ability to do well. He remembers one young person who had a rocky start but who started to follow the terms of his release after a lengthy conversation. Officer Ochoa drove home the importance of the young person seizing responsibility for his future. This sent the message that Officer Ochoa believed that the young person was capable of doing so. The young people he worked with grew to care for him. When he had to take a medical leave, the young people expressed concern for his well-being and were worried about when he would be back at work. One even texted him directly to make sure he was okay.

However, sometimes a probation officer alone cannot quite build trust and connect these young people to programs in the community that promote pro-social behaviors and enhance their future prospects. It can be challenging for officers to build that trust for any number of reasons, including deep-rooted community and individual distrust of law enforcement. To ensure young people do have those trusting relationships, probation officers may refer them to a credible messenger mentoring program. Credible Messengers are people whose life experiences, that often included justice-system involvement, are similar to the young people they serve. They have

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undergone deep reflection and personal transformation. As mentor and Program Director Romel Shuler says, a credible messenger may have been incarcerated or gone through other hard times, but it is the transformation that matters: “It’s a state of being after having been through adverse situations...Really doing the work to change themselves and give back to the outside world. The transformation is key.” Credible messengers are often from the same or similar communities as the youth they serve. As one mentor, Lawrence Stukes, says that what enables him to connect with the young people he serves is, “It’s seeing oneself in another.”

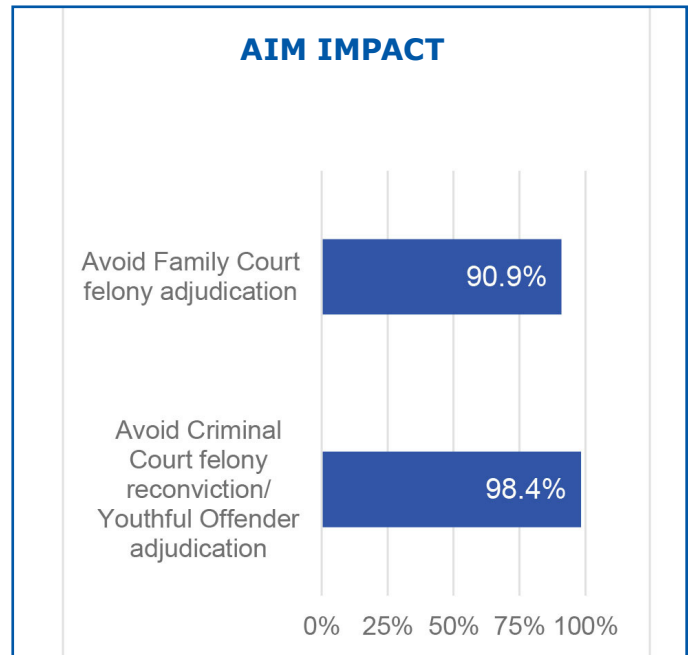
In New York City, probation has created innovative and nationally-recognized partnerships with a robust network of community-based organizations to connect young people with credible messenger mentors in both group and individual settings. Independent evaluations have found that the direct team approach probation officers and mentors take contributes to the success of these initiatives; Mr. Stukes describes it as acting as “one entity.” Credible messenger programs have been found to have significant impact. For example, an Urban Institute evaluation of the Arches Transformative Mentoring Program found Arches participants were 69% less likely to be reconvicted of a felony than similar peers after one year on probation; they were still 57% less likely to be reconvicted after two years than similar peers.<sup>6</sup> These Arches youth are at the highest-risk for future system involvement. This means they are less likely to wind up in state prison and face the potential life trajectory derailment that stems from incarceration.

A program that provides one-on-one mentoring for certain higher-risk youth placed on probation in Family Court, Advocate Intervene Mentor (AIM), has also shown significant positive results when evaluated: Ninety percent of young people in the program were not re-arrested for serious crimes during the first year, and two-thirds of them remained safely in their communities as opposed to being placed in facilities away from home.<sup>7</sup>

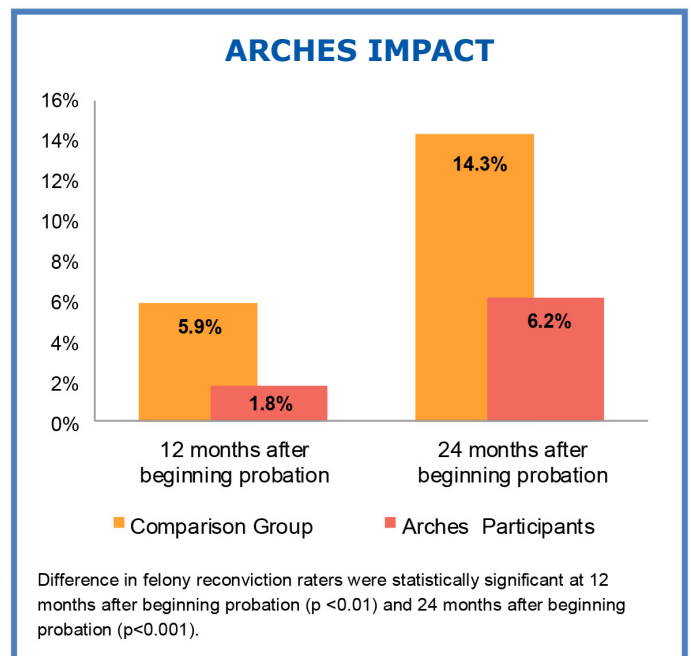
The contrast between outcomes for young people in AIM with those who were placed in facilities is stark. In the year following program completion of AIM, only 3% of participants were convicted of a felony or adjudicated a Youthful Offender for a felony in the adult system. In contrast, 25% of youth released from facilities have felony reconvictions in the year following release.<sup>4</sup>

Young people charged with crimes they allegedly committed at age sixteen did not have access to AIM prior to RTA. But now that they do, preliminary data suggests that they are having greater success in that program than their younger peers. Fifty-six percent of RTA youth in AIM successfully completed the program, as compared to 43% of younger youth who were not impacted by RTA.<sup>9</sup>

Evaluations showing the the impact of AIM and Arches highlighted opportunities to leverage “what works” and to connect young people with credible messenger mentors at new system points. **Plus+ Mentoring** was developed to connect credible messengers with young people in the Youth Parts and Family Court who were being monitored by probation officers instead of being detained during the pendency of their cases through the ICM program. These young people were not only kept out of detention, but also provided the strong and proven support of credible messengers.



**AIM Impact Link:** [https://www.urban.org/research/publication/evaluation-report-nycs-advocate-intervene-mentor-program/view/full\\_report](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/evaluation-report-nycs-advocate-intervene-mentor-program/view/full_report)



**Arches Impact Link:** <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/arches-transformative-mentoring-program>

Plus+ Mentoring Program Director Romel Shuler believes that connecting with young people in the Youth Part while their cases are pending can be vital to them avoiding jail or prison on their present legal matter and hopefully in the future. In his view, because “the door to incarceration is open” at that point, the young people understand how much they have at stake and are more open to potential change. When they are trying to establish their own identities while dealing with the influences of their peers, it is critical for them to have a connection with a culturally competent adult role model. Mr. Shuler finds it most effective to be transparent with young people, and engage with them from the following perspective: “What you believe about yourself in a certain circumstance is what you’ll do.” He lets young people know he does not judge them. Instead, what matters is what they think about themselves. He does not tell them how to think, but it is their actions that reflect their own self-image.

Segun Olayini, another Plus+ Mentoring mentor and Program Coordinator, stresses the importance of transparency. He also tells the youth that he does not judge them. Instead, he says, “We are going to keep it 100, all the way real.” Sharing his own experiences as a young person, he tells them about himself as a teenager in a community like theirs who struggled in school. Although he was told he would never graduate high school, he then not only graduated but went on to earn a Master’s Degree. Mr. Olayini strives to build connections between the youth and their mentors, as well as among the youth in his group to create a sense of belonging and family. He knows this works and that participants clearly feel a sense of safety and support in their groups because they easily share very sensitive information and engage in serious conversations about their struggles.



### Plus+ Mentoring Program

The Plus+ Mentoring Program (formerly ICM+) uses curriculum-based group mentoring to help at-risk youth transform their attitudes and behaviors that have led to violence and/or criminal activity. Building on the success of the [Arches Transformative Mentoring](#) program model, the Plus+ Mentoring Program is designed to meet young people where they are in this process of positive youth development and pro-social engagement, focusing on changes in cognition and thinking and the attainment of problem-solving/social skills that often precede the ability to secure concrete attainments in education, employment, healthy personal relationships, and avoidance of criminal behavior.

The target population served by the Plus+ Mentoring Program includes high-risk youth between the ages of 13 and 18 who are currently on [Intensive Community Monitoring \(ICM\)](#) and/or [Adjustment](#) services, and may struggle to develop pro-social connections with various aspects of life such as conflict resolution, healthy relationships (e.g. peers, family, etc.), education, employment, and/or exhibiting anti-social thinking and behaviors.

The Plus+ Mentoring Program is **100% VOLUNTARY!** and is grounded in the process model for emotional regulation and uses an evidence-based curriculum employing cognitive behavioral, social-emotional, and mindfulness principles.

#### Plus+ Mentoring Program Components:

1. **Group mentoring** that encourages participants to become an important support system for each other (*Group mentor sessions occur 2x/week for 1.5 hours each*);
2. A cognitive-behavioral and **mindfulness training** curriculum is delivered by culturally appropriate “**credible messenger**” mentors;
3. Credible Messenger mentors are **available 24/7** for intensive one-on-one support, advice, and guidance;
4. Incorporation of emotional regulation values, principles and practices;
5. Intensive case management;
6. Participant **stipends** (up to \$500 over 6 months);
7. **Hot meals & Metro cards** after every group mentoring session;
8. **Safety planning** for “safe dismissal” of participants at the end of the program and safe return home; and,
9. **Pro-social developmental** outcomes – such as the ability to seek support in high-risk situations, control impulsive behavior, resolve conflicts, cultivate internal motivation, and develop social skills – can enhance interpersonal relationships, academic and employment success, and community engagement of youth.

<sup>1</sup> The Plus+ Mentoring Program cannot be court ordered and the young person’s decision to participate (with the consent of the parent/guardian for young people under 18 y/o) has no bearing on their success in ICM and/or Adjustment.

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“What you believe about yourself in a certain circumstance is what you’ll do.”

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During the spring and summer of 2020, young people in Plus+ Mentoring also had the opportunity to flex their creativity in creating a social media campaign encouraging their peers to follow public health guidelines. The Knockout COVID: Youth Campaign<sup>10</sup> was shared widely across social media by multiple city agencies, non-profits, and more, showcasing the young peoples talents and expertise in communicating with their peers. The campaign also highlighted these young people as leaders and essential members of their communities.

<http://bit.ly/Knockout-COVID>



## Voices of Youth Impacted by Raise the Age

Jared and Byron, participants in the Intensive Community Monitoring (ICM) program, shared their ICM experiences from their perspectives and how they felt the ICM program affected their current circumstances and aspirations for the future. What they shared underscored the power relationships have on the personal growth of young people and how working under the supervision of these probation officers shaped their outlook for the future.



## The Power of Relationships

A powerful theme that emerged in our interviews with Jared and Byron was the importance of a supportive and engaged ICM probation officer. Their respect and admiration for the officers resonated throughout the interviews. As they reported it was these relationships that drove positive changes in their lives. Although officers got them into programs and kept them out of trouble, it was their regard for the probation officers that enabled them to maintain their motivation. According to Jared, "She keeps me on track. She keeps the things interesting...She got me into Summer Youth. She kept me out of doing things that I would normally be doing, kept me out of trouble." Jared smiled as he described his relationship with his probation officer; it was filled with mutual caring. Byron was even more specific about his regard for their probation officers.

Mr. Castro and Ms. White is honestly the best. I would say the best POs in the state. They really put all into the jobs. They love what they're doing, and they love the youth. They really do a lot. They do a lot. As long as you're working with them, not doing anything you're not supposed to, they're going to be there for you, and even if you're not, they're going to still help you the best that they can. You know what I'm trying to say to you? If I was their boss, I would really promote them to the highest of the high because they're the best POs in my life.

Byron sought reciprocity in the relationship. Because he received so much from the officers, he thought about concrete ways to recognize how important they were and how much he valued them. He communicated their value in terms of financial rewards and better physical conditions for their work.

I would give them the highest pay. I would give them a nice room. Honestly, they're really good. They're really good at what they do in their job. They really helped me a lot, honestly, a lot. Ms. White is the best, Mr. Castro, I can't complain. I love them both like they were my parent or family members.

Both Byron and Jared expressed their connection with these officers in terms of family relationships. These were loving relationships that helped keep them on the right path. They enabled

both Jared and Byron become enthusiastic about the programs the officers had referred them to. They wanted to succeed so they would live up to the expectations the officers had for them.

That support honestly makes like my age of youth person want to continue doing right because they're there for us. Ms. White and Mr. Castro, they're here for us. Mr. Castro just told me like, 'I want to see you pass. I don't want to hear that you're going to pass a little bit later.' He's actually pushing me to do better, and Ms. White pushes me to do better. She helps me find jobs or whatever. She honestly gives me everything that she can. Honestly, I think that's important too.

Program referrals are important for pro-social growth. But simply making a referral is not enough. The young person must make use of the opportunities the officers present to them. Clearly, the loving relationships they had with these officers leveraged a desire to succeed whether the program was academic or vocational. For them to succeed, someone had to care, and the young men found Officer White and Officer Castro were those caring people; they showed the young men respect, concern, and love.

## Strategic Programming Makes a Difference

Both Jared and Byron described the programs that the officers had selected for their referrals. They mirrored the supportive relationships they had with the officers and expanded their circle of support beyond their supervision. They were particularly pleased that these programs focused on preparing them for future employment. For example, Youth WRAP involved young people in service-focused community projects. For Jared, the relationships he developed there and the opportunities it provided to give back to the community were critical. "The people in there they were cool. It was a fun thing to do every Saturday, just help handing out food, just helping people period." Both Jared and Byron were referred to Exalt which had a more specific focus on developing employment skills. Jared described it as "like a job-readiness program." It is a six-week program that sets youth up with internships that align with their interests and supports their future career goals.

Byron spoke about aspects of the program that provided excellent preparation for future employment. Using the word "honestly," he expressed the program's rigor and its expectations for participants to commit to their own successful outcomes.

It is honestly another great program. It helps you with critical thinking, communication, resource managing. I forgot, what's the other one? It basically helps you with interviews. It helps you how to speak correctly. It helps you how to think correctly, to think about the positives and the negatives. It helps you how to become a professional young woman or young man. It honestly does. It helps you so much. They honestly give you an internship. They send you after you finish these weeks that you're supposed to do, like how many weeks.

Byron maintained his commitment to Exalt by showing up and being on time, which was important to him because it communicated "...you do care you want to change your ways. You know what I'm saying become a better person." At Exalt, Byron had already learned how to paint and applied the skills he developed to work in school buildings and on other projects.

Jared and Byron understood how ICM had transformed them. It was through the supportive staff, peer relationships/social engagement, creative projects, skill building, and professional development that the programs afforded them. The ICM program provided them with a sense of community through which they could gain mutual support. But these benefits were amplified when they were connected to the Plus+ Mentoring Program. This program provided them with credible messenger mentors who are specially trained people who have faced similar life challenges, including their own histories of justice involvement. The credible messengers work closely with the probation officers to support the young people. Plus+ Mentoring promotes a family-like atmosphere where young people meet in groups, share a hot meal, and receive stipends for participation in evidence-based programming. In addition to the groups, credible messengers also work individually with the young people. They bring their own life experiences to the work that complements the probation officer's expertise. Byron summarized the Plus+ Mentoring experience: "They have mentors. These mentors are also like a great tool as well due to the fact that they helped me with my resume. They put you to trips. They give you food. They give you pay too."

## Expanding Horizons

Because of their RTA and ICM experiences, Byron and Jared did not have to face the outcomes associated with being tried as an adult. Instead, their experiences with probation officers, programs, and credible messengers expanded their horizons and enabled them to envision a productive and prosocial future. It gave them access to people who supported their aspirations and connected them with new experiences and opportunities to learn the world beyond their local neighborhoods. Jared said, "I took the Staten Island Ferry. That's the first time I ever took the Staten Island Ferry. That was the closest I ever got to the Statue of Liberty. There's a lot of things that I did that I never did before, so it was cool."

Besides enlarging their physical world, the ICM and Plus+ Mentoring programs gave them ideas about opportunities that they never imagined for themselves when they first appeared in court. Their probation officers encouraged them to consider participating in educational programs that they might not have believed possible for themselves in the past. The officers helped the young people envision a future with possibilities and seeded aspirations for entirely different lives as adults.

The school I'm in now Ms. White got me in there. I took an economics class, and the economics class inspired me. I like to do business now. I've been looking into when I turn 18, I'm going to just keep focusing on my school. I still got some time to go until finish school, but that's when I will start doing my stocks, and hopefully, by the time I graduate school, I'll have some knowledge on finances and business. I could probably go to college or something. Before I even came to the school, which was like four months ago, five months ago, I just wanted to go to the military. Then that economics class just changed my mind now.

Byron also had plans of entrepreneurship, but he envisioned a different route to achieving that goal with a carefully thought out plan. He described working in construction and saving up enough money ultimately to set up small businesses. He described planning for a better future:

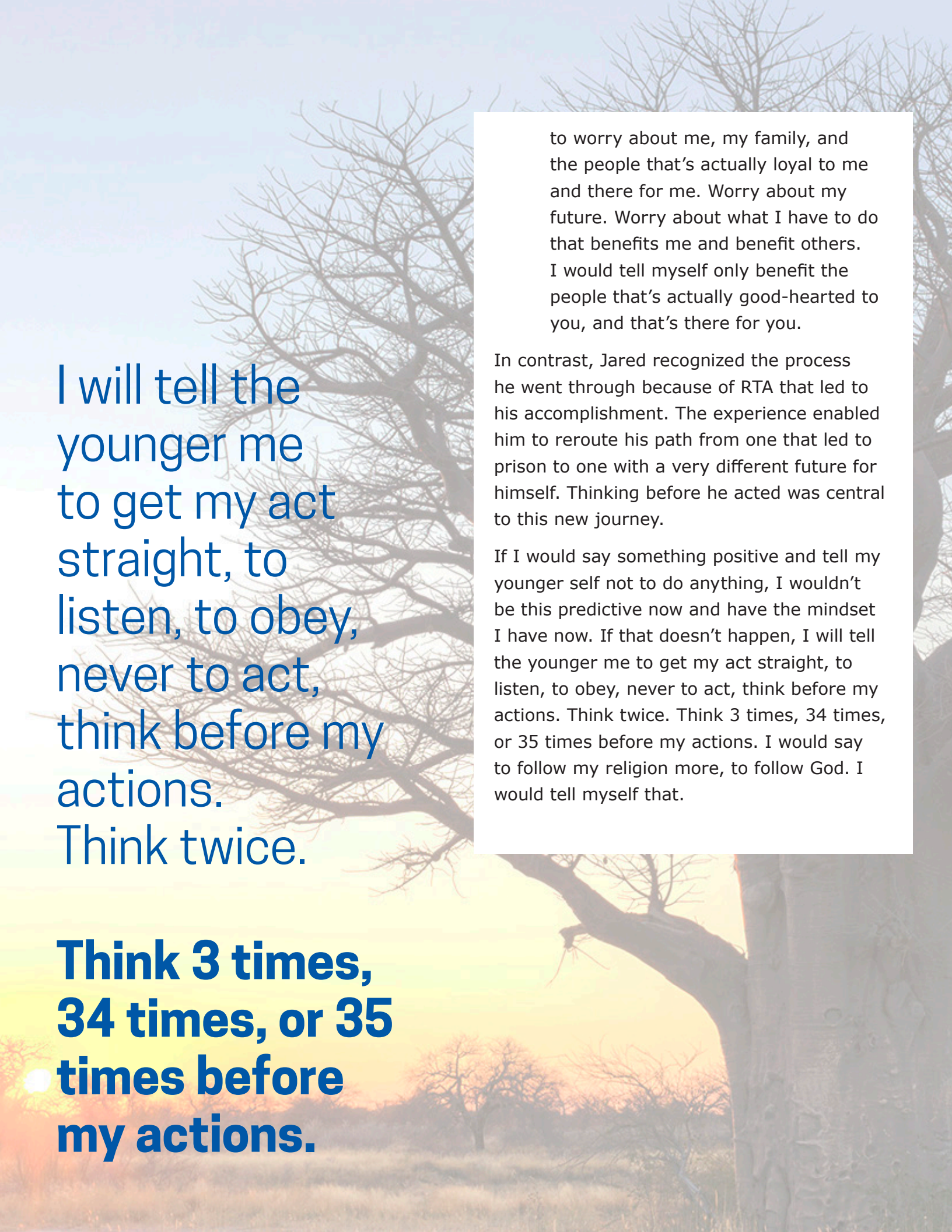
For my future, I want to go to construction. I want to go to a union. After I get my experience with construction, I'm going to start networking, getting to know people. I'm probably going to ask my supervisor or somebody who knows about crane operating. A crane operator you actually can make like I think up to like \$60 or I think up to \$80 an hour. It depends how much experience you have with cranes. With all that money I'm getting, which I'm going to be getting like 100 K or probably more depending on my experience, so with that money, I'm going to be putting it into—I'm going to go into real estate and flipping houses. Go to other states and flip houses. I'm going to put in the money into the ATM businesses, smoke shops. You have laundromats, dealerships. Oh, my god, there's so many.

## Messages to Their Younger Selves

When they were asked what they would tell other young people coming up, Byron and Jared shared a message that highlighted the importance of their RTA ICM experiences and the family-like atmosphere it provided for them. The relationships they had with their probation officers and mentors had the greatest impact on their personal journeys. According to Jared, ***"I think just like meeting all those people in ICM made it feel like a family connection type thing."*** This sense of family developed over time through these interpersonal connections, which were the highlights of their experiences and that nourished their personal growth.

They each had clear messages to offer their younger selves. Byron focused on his need to focus on himself and to foster those relationships that proved supportive and beneficial.

I would tell myself, don't trust nobody, no friends, no one's going to be there for you except for your mother, and there's only going to be certain people that's one of a kind and unique that's going to be there for you, which is good-hearted people. I would tell myself



I will tell the younger me to get my act straight, to listen, to obey, never to act, think before my actions. Think twice.

**Think 3 times, 34 times, or 35 times before my actions.**

to worry about me, my family, and the people that's actually loyal to me and there for me. Worry about my future. Worry about what I have to do that benefits me and benefit others. I would tell myself only benefit the people that's actually good-hearted to you, and that's there for you.

In contrast, Jared recognized the process he went through because of RTA that led to his accomplishment. The experience enabled him to reroute his path from one that led to prison to one with a very different future for himself. Thinking before he acted was central to this new journey.

If I would say something positive and tell my younger self not to do anything, I wouldn't be this predictive now and have the mindset I have now. If that doesn't happen, I will tell the younger me to get my act straight, to listen, to obey, never to act, think before my actions. Think twice. Think 3 times, 34 times, or 35 times before my actions. I would say to follow my religion more, to follow God. I would tell myself that.

## Conclusion, Looking Ahead:

There is much to celebrate about the implementation of Raise the Age in New York City: arrests and detention rates declined; the overwhelming majority of felony cases charging 16- and 17-year olds with felonies were removed to Family Court where older youth did as well if not better than younger teens when their cases were diverted from prosecution. Yet there is always more work to be done, as youth of color are more likely to be arrested and also more likely to be detained than their white peers.<sup>11</sup>

As a starting point, this report adds critical voices to the conversation about what we know keeps young people out of incarcerative settings and about how to provide - and who should provide - the kinds of structure and support that allow young people to remain safely in their own communities. Detaining and placing youth away from home can derail their life trajectories by making it more likely they will continue to have contact with the justice system. It also costs far more to incarcerate a young person than it does for an ICM probation officer to supervise them in the community and connect them to a credible messenger mentor.<sup>12</sup> We must continue to rely on what we know works, and listen to what young people tell us works - making sure young people feel heard and cared for, ensuring they have access to opportunities, and providing connection to adults who believe in their potential.

## ENDNOTES

- 1.** The Governor’s Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice. (2015). *Final Report of the Governor’s Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice: Recommendations for Juvenile Justice Reform in New York State*, 28. Albany, NY. Retrieved from [https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReportofCommissiononYouthPublicSafetyandJustice\\_0.pdf](https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReportofCommissiononYouthPublicSafetyandJustice_0.pdf)
- 2.** Gewirtz, M.J. (2020). *The First Year of Raise the Age, and a Comparison to Similar Cases in October 2017 through September 2018*, 2. New York: New York City Criminal Justice Agency, Inc. Retrieved from <https://www.nycja.org/assets/The-First-YEAR-of-RTA.pdf>
- 3.** See e.g., Governor’s Commission on Youth, Public Safety and Justice at 17 & 19.
- 4.** Gewirtz at 25.
- 5.** See, e.g., Butts, Jeffrey A., Gordon Bazemore and Audra Saa Meroe. (2010). *Positive Youth Justice – Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development*. Washington, D.C.: Coalition for Juvenile Justice. Retrieved from <https://positiveyouthjustice.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/pvi2010.pdf>
- 6.** Lynch, M., Astone, N.M., Collazos, J., Lipman, M., and Esthappan, S. (2018). *Arches Transformative Mentoring Program: An Implementation and Impact Evaluation in New York City*, 46. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/arches-transformative-mentoring-program>

**7.** Cramer, L., Lynch, M., Lipman, M., Yu, L., Astone, N.M. (2018).

*Evaluation Report on NYC's Advocate, Intervene, Mentor Program*, 25. Washington, DC: Urban Institute. Retrieved from [https://www.urban.org/research/publication/evaluation-report-nycs-advocate-intervene-mentor-program/view/full\\_report](https://www.urban.org/research/publication/evaluation-report-nycs-advocate-intervene-mentor-program/view/full_report)

**8.** *Id.* at 30.

**9.** Internal DOP data.

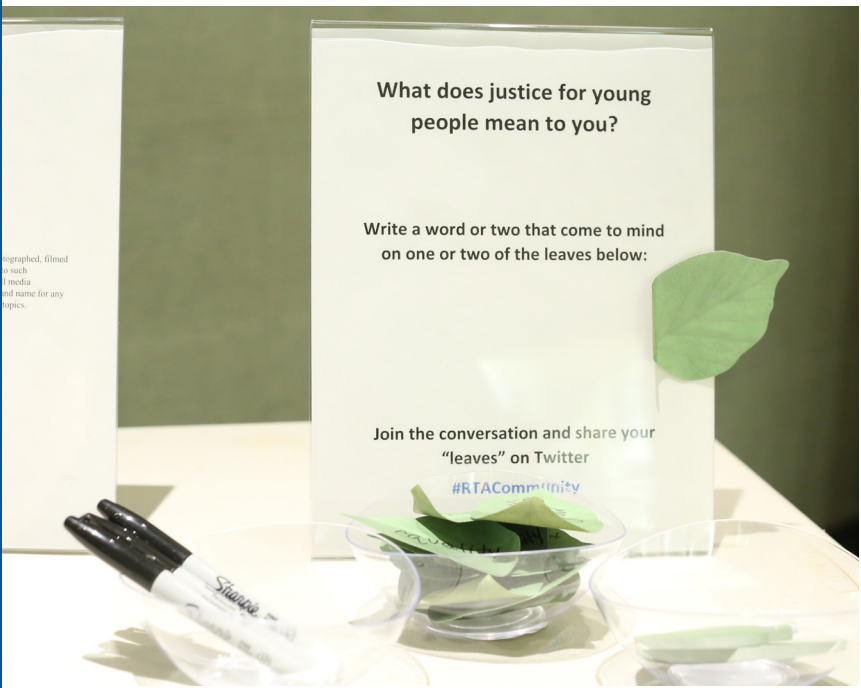
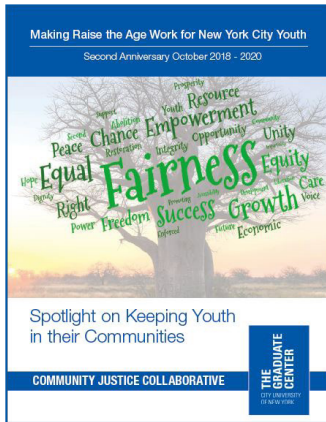
**10.** To view the Knockout COVID: Youth Campaign, visit <http://bit.ly/Knockout-COVID>

**11.** New York State Raise the Age Implementation Task Force. (2019). *Raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility: First Annual Report August 2019*. New York, NY. Retrieved from [https://www.ny.gov/sites/ny.gov/files/atoms/files/NYS\\_RT\\_A\\_Task\\_Force\\_First\\_Report.pdf](https://www.ny.gov/sites/ny.gov/files/atoms/files/NYS_RT_A_Task_Force_First_Report.pdf); Youth Justice Research Collaborative. (2020). *Evaluating the Implementation of Raise the Age in New York City*. New York, NY. Retrieved from <https://opencuny.org/virc/files/2020/08/Raise-the-Age-Evaluation-Policy-Brief.pdf>

**12.** Cramer et al. at 26. See also, e.g., Justice Policy Institute. (2020, July). *Sticker Shock 2020: The Cost of Youth Incarceration*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from [http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/Sticker\\_Shock\\_2020.pdf](http://www.justicepolicy.org/uploads/justicepolicy/documents/Sticker_Shock_2020.pdf)

### ***About the cover:***

This is an image of a Palaver Tree which in West African cultures represents a significant gathering place for story-telling, resolving differences and fostering community. In February 2020 the Community Justice Collaborative convened young people and adults working in academia, government, and community-based organizations at the CUNY Graduate Center to explore the impact of Raise the Age from a community-based perspective. Presenters and performers included: Aaliyah Guillory-Nickens of the Youth Speakers Institute, Hon. Edwina G. Mendelson, State Sen. Luis R. Sepulveda, City Council Member Keith Powers, Department of Probation Commissioner Ana M. Bermúdez, probation staff, the members of the Youth Justice Research Collaborative, Lawrence Stukes of FedCap Rehabilitative Services, Kadeem, Melody and Mike G the Rapper.



***Everyone attending was asked to answer the question: “What does justice for young people mean to you?” before they entered the room. The words on the tree reflect their responses as revealed to the entire group during the event.***

### ***About the Community Justice Collaborative:***

The Community Justice Collaborative (CJC) incubates initiatives that seek to transform the justice system through partnerships between academia, communities and public agencies and is part of the Center for Human Environments at the CUNY Graduate Center. CJC’s work leverages reimagined criminal and juvenile justice philosophy and practice and seeks solutions within communities that are disproportionately impacted by those systems.