



DO MORE GOOD

**A Progress Report from the
NYC Department of Probation**



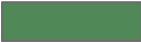
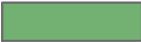
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Assistant Commissioner Karen Armstrong and Renea Carter spruce up Callahan-Kelly Playground in Brooklyn

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Where We Are



<u>Percentage of Total Population on Probation</u>	<u>DOP Locations</u>
 3.1% +	 Adult Court-Based Locations (10)
 2.6 - 3.0%	 Juvenile Court-Based Locations (5)
 2.1 - 2.5%	 Central Office
 1.1 - 2.0%	 NeON Offices (7)
 Less Than 1.0%	 NeON Satellites (7)

A Note from the Commissioner

There's an old tale about three blind men who wanted to figure out what an elephant looked like. Upon finding one, they used their hands to explore different parts of the elephant's body. The man with the leg said an elephant was like a pillar. The man with the tail said an elephant was like a piece of rope. The man with the trunk said an elephant was like a giant snake. They soon fell into a loud argument before being interrupted by a passerby.

"The elephant is a very large animal," said the passerby. "Each of you touched only one part. Perhaps if you put the parts together, you will see the truth."

This report is our attempt to put the parts together. For the last three years, the NYC Department of Probation (DOP) has been engaged in an agency-wide, five-borough transformation effort. It all began with a Listening Tour that took me to every one of our offices, where I had in-depth discussions with staff from every level of the agency, from Assistant Commissioners to probation officers to clerical and support staff. I also met with a wide range of stakeholders: people on probation and their families, judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, community members, service providers and advocates. We then incorporated that feedback into a new [mission and goals](#) for the agency, which boils down to three guiding imperatives: do no harm, do more good, and do it in the community.

You will read more about the initiatives we've launched to meet these lofty goals and how we're striving to improve both public safety and life outcomes for our clients. In reviewing this report, I am struck not only by how much we've accomplished, but by how many people, both within DOP and beyond, played crucial roles in turning our ideals and theories into working programs. Together, we have created a new model of probation with pachyderm-sized potential.



Vincent N. Schiraldi



From left: Commissioner Schiraldi with a South Bronx NeON client; Staten Island NeON Ribbon-Cutting; recognizing Branch Chief Nora Santos

DO
NO
HARM

Since 2009, DOP has reduced the rate at which we file violations against adult probation clients by 45%. We also increased the rate at which we divert youth out of the system by 36%. In 2012, 88% of youth successfully completed diversion. By focusing more resources on those clients who pose the greatest risk, while removing the barriers that prevent many of our clients from succeeding, we can responsibly reduce the number of people involved in the criminal justice system.

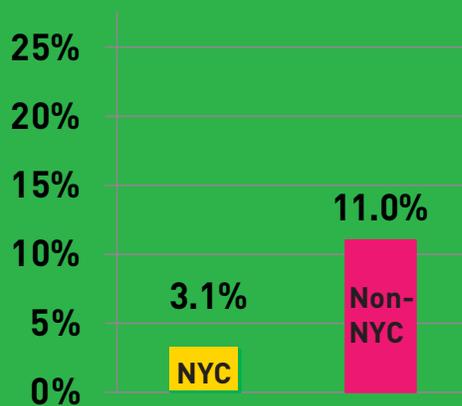
The Big Idea:

Focus on Risk:

Ensuring Safety:

Public safety is best served when DOP focuses more resources on high-risk clients.

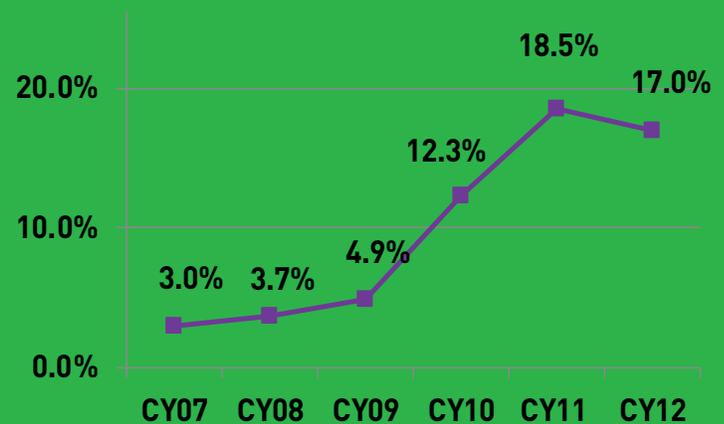
2012 VIOLATION RATES: NYC/Non-NYC



DOP files fewer violations than the rest of New York State.

SOURCE: OPCA State Probation Plan Data Summary, 2013

EARLY DISCHARGES AS % OF ALL ADULT CLIENT DISCHARGES



DOP is requesting early discharges for more clients.

SOURCE: DCJS Data

Almost all adult clients **(85%)** are on probation following a felony arrest...

... and yet nearly all **(79%)** complete...

... and almost none **(4%)** who do complete get rearrested for a felony within a year.



Probation Officer William Houser helps a client apply for a Certificate of Relief

Removing Barriers to Success

It's not that Emmanuel didn't want a job. He did, badly. The problem was the box.

"I went to many job fairs," says the 24-year-old probation client from Staten Island. "They just never called me back after I checked off the box, and it kept happening and happening."

Emmanuel is referring to the box you have to check on many job applications if you have a criminal history. In 2011, the City of New York launched the **Ban the Box** initiative, which required most City agencies to refrain from asking about criminal history on initial applications and interviews. DOP took this a step further, applying the same guidelines to the organizations we contract with, a policy the City eventually extended to all human service agencies.

But these reforms didn't help Emmanuel when he was applying for private sector opportunities. What he needed was an official court document that would indicate to employers that he was eligible for employment.

Emmanuel isn't alone. Countless New Yorkers are hindered in their efforts to get their lives back on track by collateral consequences, which are mandated or *de facto* restrictions placed on people convicted of crimes. In addition to Ban the Box, DOP is engaged in a multi-front effort to help eligible clients move beyond these barriers to success.

Certificates of Relief (CORs) are issued by the court and waive certain restrictions that would ordinarily accompany a conviction, such as the automatic loss of an occupational license. Many clients aren't aware they're eligible for a COR, and the process for obtaining a COR can be long and arduous.

DOP launched a **Certificate of Relief Drive** to address these issues. Staff met with clients one-on-one, helped eligible clients fill out the application, and then worked with the Courts to expedite processing. Commissioner Schiraldi also authored an [op-ed](#) on the issue in the *New York Law Journal* and sent it to the judiciary to promote the granting of CORs. All told, DOP submitted 1,983 COR applications to the Courts.

Emmanuel attended a COR drive at the urging of his Probation Officer. After receiving his COR, he landed a job in sales support at a restaurant. But that's not his ultimate ambition—he plans to go back to school and study music production.

DOP is engaged in two other related efforts:

RAP Sheet Assistance: Many people with criminal records don't know how to explain their official Record of Arrest and Prosecution (RAP Sheet) to employers, school admissions offices, landlords, and benefit providers. Moreover, it is estimated that 40%-55% of New York State RAP sheets contain errors. As part of the NYC Young Men's Initiative, DOP teamed up with government partners and four community-based organizations* to help New Yorkers in all five boroughs understand and, if necessary, correct their RAP sheets.

Warrant Project: DOP is in the process of helping clients resolve active warrants. We are focusing on warrants that are more than ten years old for probation clients who were convicted of low-level nonviolent misdemeanors, and more than 15 years old for clients convicted of nonviolent felonies. In the first year of the project, we facilitated the vacating of more than 1,000 warrants.

**Legal Action Center, Youth Represent, Community Service Society, The Bronx Defenders*

DO
MORE
GOOD

At DOP, probation is about more than compliance. Our goal is to improve public safety by linking people to services that address their risks and needs. Whether referring clients to existing programs or creating new ones, we are helping them develop the tools they need to leave the justice system for good.



A Bronx client is congratulated by his sons after receiving his GED

Evidence-Based Policies & Practices

Of the many acronyms you'll hear in the hallways and conferences rooms of DOP, none is used more often than "EBPP," which stands for "Evidence-Based Policies and Practices."

EBPP is at the heart of much of what we're doing, from the way we assess risk and needs to the way we interact with clients at the most fundamental level. But while it has many applications, EBPP is always about one thing: Doing what works.

Validated Assessment Tools: It goes without saying that the more you learn about someone, the better you can be at helping them make real and positive changes in their life. When it comes to the work we do, probation officers need to have a complete picture of each client's risks and needs.

In an effort to improve accuracy, consistency, and efficiency, DOP teamed up with state and federal partners to identify the best scientifically-validated risk and needs assessments for both adult and juvenile clients.

Thanks to these new tools, DOP is now focusing more resources on clients who pose the greatest risk of re-offending. The Bureau of Justice Assistance and the National Institute of Corrections have played a crucial role in helping us implement EBPP.

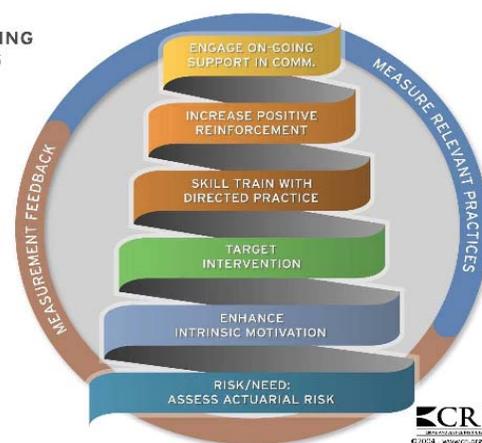
Strength-Based Approach: Punitive, compliance-based approaches to probation haven't demonstrated much success when it comes to changing client behavior. DOP has adopted a strengths-based approach that recognizes and builds on client assets rather than focusing exclusively on his or her shortcomings and mistakes.

Probation officers are being trained in motivational interviewing, which involves strategic use of questions and statements to help clients find their own reasons to change. Research suggests that motivational interviewing and its emphasis on empathy, optimism, and respect for client choice may be particularly useful for clients who are initially resistant to change.

We are also investing in and recognizing our own staff. DOP has launched a comprehensive series of trainings and Professional Development Days that engage staff at every level of the agency, and we regularly honor outstanding personnel.

Here's how Probation Officer Danny Moore sums up the strength-based approach: "I give them respect, and I'm not condescending or only telling them what to do. It's verbal judo. If they fail to complete the requirements of probation, I sit down and talk with them, talk about how this is going to affect them. Being earnest and truthful elicits a positive reaction."

EIGHT GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR RISK/RECIDIVISM REDUCTION



Young Men's Initiative

The meeting begins with a Nerf football.

An Arches mentor tosses the football to a participant, along with a simple question: "How was your day?"

For some of the young men gathered at Harlem Commonwealth Council on this particular evening, the answer is straightforward: "Fine" or "Okay."

Others have more to say, like the young man who says "Life's been hard. I feel like I gotta come here, like I gotta talk to somebody."

Whatever the answer, the Arches mentors offer empathy for those going through hard times and encouragement to those who are doing well.

Arches Transformative Mentoring is a group mentoring program for probation clients that was launched as part of the NYC Young Men's Initiative (YMI), the nation's most comprehensive effort to tackle the disparities that are slowing the advancement of black and Latino young men.

Support for the initiative is provided by Open Society Foundations and Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Every Arches participant is paired with mentors who are available to help them whenever they need it.

The program has made a big impact on Manny, who completed Arches but still comes back regularly. Before Arches, Manny had trouble dealing with his anger—he once lost his job after getting into an argument with a customer. He now credits Arches for teaching him how to control his emotions: "I realized I had to sacrifice who I was for who I could become."

DOP administers six other YMI programs, making us one of the lead partner agencies. With each program, DOP contracts with community-based organizations across the city:

Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM): An intensive mentoring and advocacy program for adolescents at risk of out-of-home placement (see page 19).

Community Education Pathways to Success (CEPS): A literacy program that also provides participants with career help.

Justice Community: Connects clients to community benefit projects.

Justice Scholars: Educational program for high school students and GED candidates.

Neighborhood Opportunity Network: Community-based probation offices that are tightly connected to local networks of service providers and stakeholders (see page 21).

RAP Sheet Assistance: A partnership with community-based organizations to help clients clean up their criminal record (see page 8).

For all of their differences, every one of DOP's YMI programs is focused on helping clients build positive connections.

At the end of each Arches session at the Harlem Commonwealth Council, the group gathers to repeat an affirmation they all know by heart: "Today I am better, stronger, wiser than I was yesterday, because today I am committed to making positive change happen in my life. Freedom, peace, power."



Staten Island Adult Operations Director Lisa D'Ambrosio and a client celebrate his completion of the Arches program

**YouthWRAP participants
help restore the beach at
Riis Landing in Far Rockaway**



NYC YouthWRAP

Najee, a 17-year-old probation client, was in his family's third-floor apartment in Coney Island, Brooklyn, when Hurricane Sandy hit.

"It was scary," he says. "It was hard. No toilet, no shower, you didn't want to go outside even when you had to. Stores were vacant, no one was here. Things were all over the place."

Thanks to a program called NYC YouthWRAP (Weekend Restoration Assistance Program), Najee was able to help put things back together. Over the course of almost a year, he spent nearly every Saturday and Sunday working at the Salt and Sea Mission in Coney Island, often making the nine-block trip on his skateboard.

DOP launched NYC YouthWRAP in January 2013 in response to a simple question: How can DOP staff and clients help our fellow New Yorkers recover from Hurricane Sandy? The program connected probation clients between the ages of 14 and 18 to Hurricane Sandy restoration projects around the city. Clients received a stipend for participating. The program ended in November.

The NYC Center for Economic Opportunity and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City provided funding for the program. All told, NYC YouthWRAP engaged 472 young probation clients in 33 Superstorm Sandy projects, and they logged some 69,000 hours of service. A remarkable 95.6% of participants attended at least five times.

But as Commissioner Schiraldi has said, "The impact of this project cannot be captured by numbers alone. Every week, we hear stories about how NYC YouthWRAP is not only changing the way everyday New Yorkers see young people on probation, it's changing the way these young people see themselves, a transformation that is essential to reducing recidivism and making our city even safer."

The heart of NYC YouthWRAP was the partnerships DOP forged with the City government agencies and community-based organizations that are on the frontlines of the recovery effort. Whether rebuilding homes, chopping vegetables at a food bank, organizing disaster preparedness seminars, or cleaning up parks, our clients were working side-by-side with the residents of storm-damaged communities.

NYC YouthWRAP represented DOP at its best—creative, proactive, and deeply engaged in the community. Every project was coached by two DOP staff members, who functioned not only as probation officers, but also as leaders.

Ayodeji, a 16-year-old probation client, said it best when describing his coach, PO Paul Hay: "He pushes you. If he sees potential in you he likes to drag it out. He doesn't like to see people slacking off. He's real, he's honest. I like that."

THE BASICS

Participants: 472

Sites: 33

Hours of Service: 69,000

Stipends Earned: \$600,000

RELIEF SUPPLIES

Boxes of Supplies Packed: 19,000

Meals Prepared or Served: 90,000+

Pounds of Food Packed: 70,000

HOME & BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

Rebuilding Projects: 46

Painting Projects: 236

ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION

Bags of Debris Collected: 5,717

Plants Planted: 2,080

Miles of Trail/Road Cleared: 5

DO
IT IN
THE
COMM-
UNITY

Modern probation was founded in 1831, when a Boston bootmaker named John Augustus made good on his promise to the court to rehabilitate a man accused of being a “common drunkard.” Since then, probation has changed dramatically, but DOP remains committed to the bedrock principles of community corrections while embracing the latest research and techniques.

Close to Home

Yamila and Tiffany have only known each other a few months, but they already finish each other's sentences.

"People in the street think she's my daughter or that we're sisters or cousins or something like that," says Tiffany. But it wasn't always this way.

"I used to be disrespectful and all I thought about was myself and my friends," says Yamila, a 14-year-old probation client who lives in the South Bronx. Things hit rock bottom when a local TV station ran a photo of Yamila because she had run away and been reported missing.



From L-R: Tiffany, Probation Officer Willounda Prince, Yamila

But now Tiffany, who serves as a youth mentor through our **Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM)** program, says Yamila has "made a complete 180. She's really involved in her school and her community."

AIM pairs probation clients with mentor advocates who are on call 24/7. Probation Officer Frances Chisholm, who supervises Yamila, compares AIM to training wheels on a bicycle: "When the child leaves the program, the child has the skills to make it in the long run."

It was young people like Yamila, on the wrong track but still full of potential, who inspired New

York City's efforts to vastly reduce the number of young people sent upstate to inefficient and ineffective residential juvenile justice facilities.

DOP played a key role in this campaign, which brought city and state agencies together with parents, advocates, non-profit leaders, judges and other stakeholders to push for a community-based juvenile justice system. The group's hard work was realized in April 2012, when Governor Andrew Cuomo signed "Close to Home" legislation that authorized New York City to create a system of residential facilities and alternative-to-placement (ATP) programs.

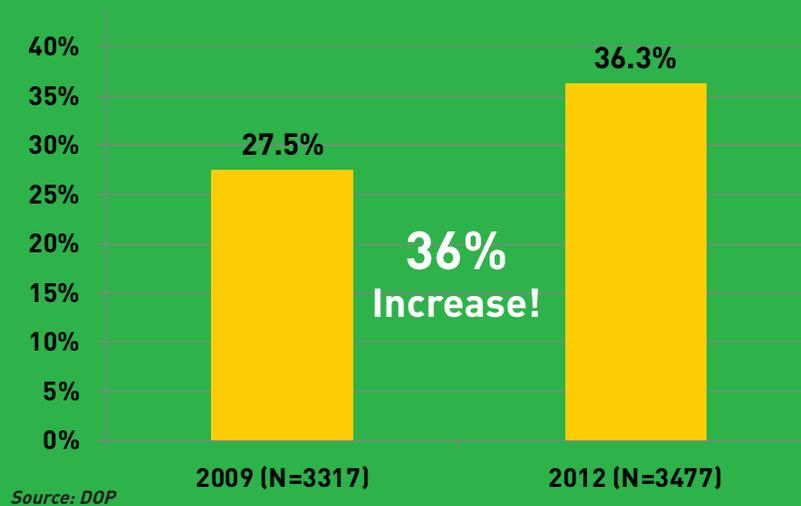
The City's residential facilities are administered by the NYC Administration for Children's Services, while DOP is responsible for expanding the continuum of ATP programs. DOP developed the new programs with two goals in mind: 1) keep our neighborhoods safe, and 2) provide high-risk, high-need young people with the support and tools they need to get their lives back on track. The programs complement DOP's successful push to reduce juvenile revocation rates and increase juvenile diversion rates (see charts at right). In addition to AIM, DOP operates two other ATP programs:

Every Child Has an Opportunity to Excel and Succeed (ECHOES): A conflict management program featuring work readiness programming and life coaching.

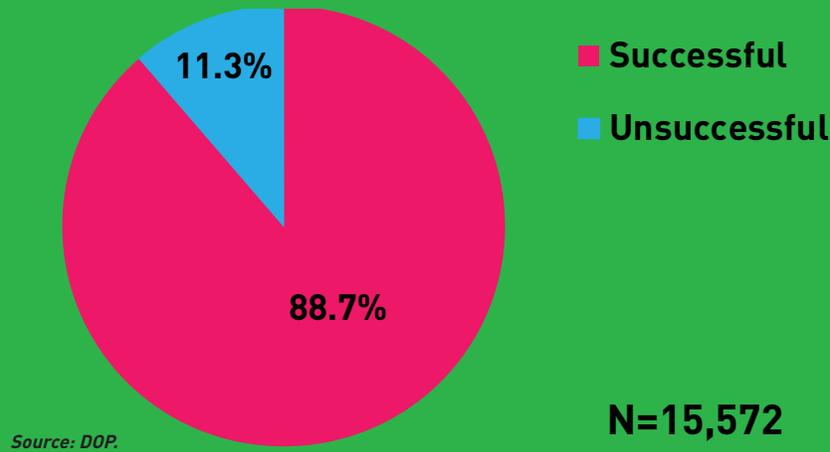
Pathways to Excellence, Achievement, and Knowledge (PEAK): Partners two local high schools and two non-profit organizations to provide youth who are at risk of out-of-home placement with intensive education-based programming.

Yamila beams when talking about Tiffany: "Without her, I'd be back in 8th grade. I think everyone needs an advocate. It's sad that I had to meet them this way, but it's kind of a blessing."

Percentage of youth diverted, 2009 vs. 2012



Success rate for youth diverted between 2009-2012



AIM utilization by month, July 2012-October 2013



Source: DOP

Neighborhood Opportunity Network

"In places like Marcy [Brooklyn] there are people who know the ins and outs of government bureaucracies, police procedures, and sentencing guidelines, who spend half of their lives in dirty waiting rooms on plastic chairs waiting for someone to call their name.

But for all this involvement, the government might as well be the weather because a lot of us don't think we have anything to do with it – we don't believe we have any control over this thing that controls us."

- Jay-Z, Decoded (Spiegel & Grau, 2010)

Despite decades of hard work from DOP staff members, for too many clients the experience of being on probation was much like what Jay-Z described—a punishment to be endured, not an opportunity to improve oneself.

Changing this mind set and creating a more meaningful probation experience required a fundamental shift in how and where DOP did business.

It began in December 2011 when Mayor Michael Bloomberg opened the first NeON in Brownsville, Brooklyn. Since then, DOP has opened six more NeON offices and seven NeON Satellites. At the end of 2013, DOP is serving 50% of medium and high-risk adult clients at a NeON or Satellite. Additionally, NeON recently received the Excellence in Community Corrections award from the American Association of Probation and Parole.

This is a remarkable accomplishment, not only for its scope, but also for the speed at which it was implemented. And it all began with a theory.



From L-R: Community event in Staten Island; poetry in the South Bronx; a client speaks at the opening of the South Jamaica NeON, Staten Island staff in the Lavender Lounge



(NeON)

Justice Reinvestment

Over the past decade, Justice Reinvestment has emerged as a leading strategy for right-sizing correctional populations and redirecting public resources to neighborhoods where criminal justice is often the dominant government presence. Most Justice Reinvestment efforts have been top-down, state-led initiatives. NYC is one of the first major cities to pioneer a bottom-up Justice Reinvestment initiative that begins at the neighborhood level.

DOP began by looking at where our clients lived, and we quickly identified a handful of neighborhoods that were home to large numbers of probation clients. In most cases, these neighborhoods were far from the existing Court-based DOP offices where clients were required to report. This wasn't just inconvenient for them; it also made it much harder for probation officers to develop relationships with the

community-based organizations that were best-equipped to provide our clients with the services they need.

After a comprehensive series of multi-level internal discussions, DOP decided to launch the NeON initiative and begin moving probation operations to the neighborhoods where our clients lived. The initiative received an important early boost from Mayor Bloomberg's Young Men's Initiative, which allowed us to locate programs in NeON neighborhoods.

A New Probation Officer/Client Relationship

Moving probation officers into the communities where our clients live is just a start. As Jacqueline Simmons, a Supervising Probation Officer at the Brownsville NeON, puts it, "We need to take the time to do something other than cookie-cutter probation."



NeON leadership and staff are tasked with engaging local educators, businesses, healthcare and service providers, arts organizations, and tenant associations. Through these connections, staff members become more familiar with community assets, needs, and activities, and are better able to link clients to education, work and community opportunities. At the same time, the staff functions as NeON community ambassadors, increasing understanding and support for our work.

This effort is best captured by our NeON Satellites, which are co-located in the offices of local non-profits and host DOP staff members a few days a week, allowing us to expand the reach of the NeON and more easily connect clients to local resources, sometimes just by walking them down the hall. No longer do clients only meet with their probation officer during hurried appointments and unannounced home visits.

Engaging the Broader Community

NeON leadership and staff regularly host job, college and health fairs that are open to the entire community. This kind of outreach builds community understanding and trust and normalizes both probation operations and clients. A number of NeONs feature on-site GED classes for clients and other neighborhood residents.

We have also organized NeON Stakeholder Groups (NSGs), which consist of local leaders and residents, non-profit organizations, probation staff, and former clients and family members. NSGs help coordinate NeON activities, provide input on probation policies and practices, and represent their community.

Bringing Arts to the NeONs

One of the most remarkable parts of the NeON story has been the collaboration between DOP and various arts organizations. Through Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute, NeON clients participate in music writing workshops and [perform their compositions](#) with professional musicians. The South Bronx NeON has a poet-in-residence, Dave Johnson, who conducts a workshop that includes clients and staff. He also organizes weekly poetry slams that are open to the public. Their work was recently collected in

[Free Verse](#), a new journal published with help from See ChangeNYC, an initiative of the NYC Department of Design and Construction.

A poem from *Free Verse*:

**My hands
are burning
to touch my
dreams.**

- Tahara Lilly

Additional initiatives include Artistic Noise, which helped young people in the Bronx interpret the Family Court Law through art; the Animation Project, which uses computer animation to teach behavior modification techniques; and the Groundswell Mural Project, which has connected Brownsville NeON clients with professional artists to research, plan, and paint several large murals.

Redefining Community Corrections

By design, every NeON is unique, just like the communities they serve. In Staten Island, the first thing you notice when you walk through the doors is the distinctive color scheme. NeON leadership polled staff and clients on what color they found most soothing. Light purple was the clear favorite, and now the waiting room is affectionately known as the "Lavender Lounge."

Venture past the waiting room and down the hall and you'll find a pantry stocked with casual clothes, office attire, and food. All of the items were donated by DOP community partners and are distributed to clients in need. For instance, in early 2013 a client's home partially burned down, and donations from the pantry played a big role in helping her recover.

But it's about more than paint and pantries; it's about going the extra mile. When her clients need help accessing food stamps, PO Sheree Goode will walk across the street to the Human Resources Administration office to help them with the paperwork. Through such seemingly small gestures, the NeON is about helping our clients regain control of their lives, which will ultimately contribute to the safety and well-being of all New Yorkers.

Resource Hubs

Clockwise from L: Manhattan Adult Resource Hub; James Victore poster; art student refurbishes benches for the Bronx Family Court Resource Hub



When Commissioner Schiraldi began his tenure at DOP, one of his first priorities was making the agency's waiting rooms, which tended to be beige and soulless, more welcoming and useful.

The transformation he had in mind would go far beyond slapping on a new coat of paint. He began by establishing the Waiting Room Improvement Team (WRIT), which was comprised of DOP staff members from throughout the chain of command, as well as external partners.

The WRIT's findings were then handed off to an implementation team led by See ChangeNYC, an initiative of the NYC Department of Design and Construction. See Change enlisted the help of Biber Architects and two acclaimed graphic artists, James Victore and Paul Sahre. Together, they created a series of vibrant and exciting spaces. The offices that didn't get Biber-designed spaces still received help to improve their spaces, the standout example being Staten Island's "Lavender Lounge." All of the Resource Hubs include PCs for client use; books, magazines, and other literature; and video monitors that stream news, local events, and special programming.

The Resource Hubs are having a tangible impact on the lives of clients. Rodney Robinson works for HELP/PSI, a non-profit that provides health and substance abuse treatment services. Mr. Robinson regularly sets up shop at the Resource Hub in the South Jamaica NeON and talks to probation clients about the services offered by his organization. To cite just one success, he was able to help a client named Leshawn access much-needed dental and medical services.

According to Rodney Levy, Branch Chief of the South Jamaica NeON, in the Resource Hub "You don't feel like you're sitting in a government office waiting for someone who doesn't care." As a result, the clients are more receptive and motivated. It all adds up.

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A Progress Report from the NYC Department of Probation
December 2013

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**Department of
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