

Stop the Revolving Door: Giving Communities and Youth the Tools to Overcome Recidivism

Recommendations on Juvenile Reentry in New York City

YOUTH
JUSTICE
BOARD

A Project of the Center for Court Innovation

Youth Justice Board

This publication was written by the Youth Justice Board. Launched in January 2004, the Youth Justice Board is a team of young people from throughout New York City who study and propose solutions to public safety issues. The Youth Justice Board brings youth voices into the public debate on the topics—like juvenile justice and school safety—that most affect New York City teenagers.

The Youth Justice Board is a project of the Center for Court Innovation, a public-private partnership between the New York State Unified Court System and the Fund for the City of New York that works to improve public confidence in justice. The recipient of an Innovations in American Government Award from the Ford Foundation and Harvard University, the Center is an independent, non-partisan think-tank that works to reduce crime, aid victims, and strengthen neighborhoods. The Center's demonstration projects include the award-winning Red Hook Community Justice Center and Midtown Community Court.

Points of view and opinions in this document are the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Center for Court Innovation.

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Dear Reader,

We'd like to ask you to put yourself in the shoes of a young person coming home after spending time in state custody for juvenile delinquency.

You committed a crime such as robbery, and because you did, you were removed from your home and your neighborhood and sent upstate. You were placed in a facility for 12 months. Your 12 months are up. Now what?

Coming home means coming back to the same situations that you left. Your family is used to life without you, you don't have the steady supply of money from illegal activities, and your school won't take you. The people—your friends—that led you to crime are still there, perhaps the only people that are welcoming you back. And, before you know it, you're back to your old lifestyle, back in the same courtroom waiting to be sentenced, this time for drug dealing.

This is just your imagination, but in reality this is the "revolving door" that many youths continue to walk in and out of.

Now imagine you're the parent of a child returning from state custody. Your daughter is coming home after being away for 12 months. You love your child, but as difficult as it is to admit, maybe your life was actually easier while she was away (like one parent we spoke with). You wonder: How many days of work am I going to have to miss this time around to go to court or to meet with a guidance counselor because she's not going to school?

Reentry affects more than just that young person and family, though. When a young person is rearrested we all suffer: we don't feel safe on our streets, and our tax dollars are spent on police and jails rather than on schools and after-school programs. Did you know that it costs \$80,000 to place a young person for one year? That doesn't even include the costs of arrest or court!

The worst thing, though, is that we lose bright, young people to lives of crime.

Stopping the revolving door for young people coming home from placement must be made a priority. By putting our heads together, we have the opportunity to make a difference and help these young people become contributing members of society.

We hope that through this report on improving the reentry experience for youth, we can educate people and communicate to policymakers just how important the issue of juvenile reentry truly is.

The Youth Justice Board,

Sonia Balaram
Wendy Runn
Lanel Hernandez
Jeremy Jirau
Maimouna Kane
Monique Sawyer
LeShon Howell
Wendy Runn
Carlotta Flor mena
Kerrythe Adams
Shane Conner
Nakela

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Executive Summary

This report presents the recommendations of the Youth Justice Board on juvenile reentry in New York City. Juvenile reentry refers to young people coming home to New York City neighborhoods after being in state custody for juvenile delinquency.

What is the Youth Justice Board?

Launched in January 2004 by the Center for Court Innovation, the Youth Justice Board brings together young people from throughout New York City to propose solutions to the public safety issues that affect them and their peers.

The goal of the Youth Justice Board is to provide a credible vehicle through which young people, ages 14 to 18, can have a voice in the debate about public safety policy in New York City. Members learn how policy is crafted in the real world. Who really makes the decisions that affect youth? Under what kinds of constraints (fiscal, legal, political, etc.) do decision-makers operate? What roles—both formal and informal—do community voices play in the process? These are the kinds of questions that the Youth Justice Board helps participants answer.

The sixteen Board members, drawn from high schools throughout the city, spent nine months researching the topic of juvenile reentry. They met with over two dozen city and state officials, youth workers, scholars, and even reentry youth and their family members. They spent months analyzing the data they collected, formulating policy recommendations and drafting a formal report. The Board has already presented their recommendations to the Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development, Mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinator, and Association of the Bar for the City of New York.

Findings/Recommendations

The Youth Justice Board chose to focus on juvenile reentry because they were shocked to learn that 75% of all youth released from state custody are rearrested within three years. Based on their interviews and research, the Youth Justice Board identified three principles that should apply to the whole reentry process:

- **Early Planning**

Most juveniles who enter placement return to the same communities that they left. Placement is an opportunity to prepare the young person—and the family—to address the challenges he or she will face when released. Therefore, planning for the return home should start early—as soon as the decision is made to send the young person to placement.

- **Individual Treatment**

The Youth Justice Board recommends that the key players involved with each young person meet early to create a plan that reflects his or her individual strengths and challenges. The team should include the young person, guardians, staff from the state agency responsible for

placement and reentry (New York State Office of Children and Family Services, or OCFS), and a school representative.

- **Coordination**

Young people in placement and aftercare come into contact with many agencies (e.g. OCFS, the New York City Department of Education, and community-based service providers), but the Board heard from several agencies that they are in the dark about what other agencies were doing. Regular meetings of all the agencies working with reentry youth would help improve communication, ensuring that youth do not fall between the cracks.

Building on these principles, the Youth Justice Board recommends the following ideas to help prevent recidivism among reentry youth:

- 1. Motivate young people to succeed**

Ultimately, reentry youth themselves are the only ones that can improve their lives. One of the reasons youth drop out of programs and get into trouble is that they are not involved in activities they enjoy. To help reentry youth stay motivated, the Board recommends linking youth to programs they can get excited about, offering job training and links to adult mentors, in particular.

- 2. Help young people get in school and stay in school**

Although everyone interviewed agreed that education is crucial, it is hard to get reentry youth back in school and it is hard to get them to stay in school. One Department of Education official said that the biggest barrier is “the human hurdle—no one wants them back.” The Board recommends that OCFS make a higher priority of helping young people catch up in basic reading and math skills while in placement and provide an orientation workshop once they return home to prepare students for the return to their local school. In addition, the Department of Education should match students to schools quickly, make sure credits earned in placement are transferred correctly, and create incentives for schools to accept reentry students.

- 3. Strengthen the relationships between family and youth**

One OCFS official said that if a young person is not accepted by his or her family, he or she will hang out in the streets. He emphasized that it was important to make sure that the family is ready for the young person’s return and bring the youngster up to speed on what has occurred back home. To help address these problems, the Board recommends counseling for the family and youth together, as well as voluntary parent-to-parent support groups. In addition, to maintain communication while the young person is in custody, OCFS should make sure families have an easy way to visit placement facilities in upstate New York.

- 4. Improve the reentry process**

The Board recommends four specific ways to improve the current reentry process:

- Share assessment information.* OCFS collects a lot of information about the young person. Relevant information from these assessments should be available to the organizations that provide services to the young person.
- Track the early warning signs of recidivism.* Usually there are warning signs before a young person is rearrested: he or she becomes truant, violates curfew or doesn’t attend

programs. OCFS should institute a uniform system to track these warning signs and intervene before the next arrest occurs.

- c. *Create Connection Centers.* The Board recommends creating a transition facility just north of New York City that would focus on helping young people make the difficult transition from placement to home. Since it is closer to home, OCFS aftercare workers, Department of Education staff, and parents could all meet to make sure the details of the reentry plan (e.g. school placement) are in place.
- d. *Create Welcome Centers.* Once they are back home, reentry youth need a place where they can go to get reliable information about services and opportunities. Welcome Centers in their communities would have links to youth development programs, mental health and substance abuse services, job training and peer support groups.

The above recommendations are described in greater detail in the report that follows.

Introduction

Did you know that every year over 2,200 juveniles are released in New York State after serving time in custody for juvenile delinquency,¹ and that almost eight out of 10 are rearrested and end up right back in the system?²

These kids are not imaginary. They live in our neighborhoods and they go to our schools. Sixty percent of these juveniles live in New York City. They are young people just like us, the members of the Youth Justice Board. The problems and challenges that these juveniles face when they come back to their homes and communities are not widely publicized, and their voices are seldom heard.

As teens who face many of the same problems, we felt that it was important to let these voices be heard. Hearing comments such as “I don’t think I have a future”³ from another teenager really struck us. It was this concern that inspired and motivated us to create policy recommendations concerning youth coming out of placement.

This report presents the recommendations of the Youth Justice Board on juvenile reentry in New York City. Juvenile reentry refers to young people who come home after being in state custody (also known as placement) for juvenile delinquency.

The Youth Justice Board is a group of sixteen concerned teens from all over New York City. Although we come from different backgrounds and communities, we share a common goal—making a positive difference in our neighborhoods and the lives of young people.

The Youth Justice Board spent nine months analyzing the challenges that young people released from placement face when they return to their communities. The culmination of our analysis is the set of recommendations we present in this report. Through intensive training, interviewing and research phases, we asked all kinds of reentry stakeholders about their views on how to improve the reentry process. We interviewed policymakers, young people who have spent time in placement, their parents, social service agencies for youth, community-based organizations, and local officials.

In our research, we found that a number of important factors affect whether young people who have returned home manage to stay crime-free. These factors include:

- family support for the newly returned young person;
- an appropriate school;

¹ New York State Office of Children and Family Services, *Youth in Care: 2002 Annual Report*, 26.

² Bruce Frederick, *Factors Contributing to Recidivism Among Youth Placed with the New York State Division for Youth*, 1999, New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, 5.

³ This quote is from an interview with a participant in the Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network.

- counseling and other programs to address the youths’ specific issues; and
- communication and coordination among agencies that deal with reentering youth.

The Youth Justice Board made this report with the hope that it will contribute to the well-being of youth who have fallen through the cracks of society, and that it will be a catalyst for change.

Why did the Youth Justice Board choose to focus on reentry?

We chose to focus on juvenile reentry because we were shocked to learn of the high recidivism rates—the number of young people who are re-arrested after returning from placement.

A 1999 study of recidivism rates among reentering youth conducted by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services found that 81% of boys and 45% of girls released from state custody had been rearrested within 36 months (see Figure 1). Combining boys and girls, 75% of all youth released from state custody were rearrested within three years. (From now on, in this report, we’ll refer to this study as the DCJS study).

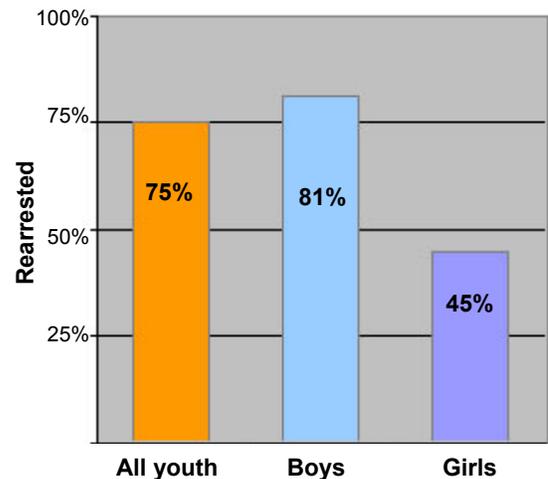


Figure 1: 75% of young people in New York State custody from 1991 to 1995 were arrested within 36 months of their release.

When we found out about the high recidivism rates, we were surprised and felt a need to do something to change it. In 2002, 64% of youth discharged from state placement were from New York City (see Figure 2). The 1,500 youth who return home to New York City from state placement every year grow up in the same neighborhoods, go to the same schools and are the same age as us, dealing with many of the same issues that all teenagers face. It is this unique perspective that helped us to relate to reentry youth and have a deeper understanding of what challenges they face and what could be done to improve their chances for success.

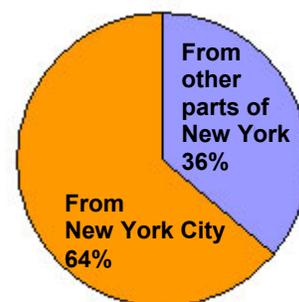


Figure 2: In 2002, the majority of youth in state custody were from New York City.

Another main reason why we chose to concentrate on reentry was because we found that there were not many people who knew about the high recidivism rate and what happens to the young New York City residents who leave state placement.

We hope that through this report on improving the reentry experience for the youth, we can demonstrate how important it is to take a stand on the issue of reentry. If the sky-high recidivism

rates are not made a priority, the future will hold much bigger problems. An investment in reentry programs and the juvenile justice system is an investment in the future.

Why is this issue important?

Reentry affects thousands of people in New York City besides the youth. It affects their families, the image of New York City teens and the welfare of all New Yorkers. It affects the safety of our neighborhoods.

And it affects how we spend our tax dollars. When reentry youth are rearrested, city and state dollars have to pay for police, courts and jails. This is money that is not being spent on schools and afterschool programs. It costs \$80,000 to place a young person in state custody for one year⁴—and that doesn't even include the cost of arrest or court!

According to our calculations (see below), the state spends at least \$157 million each year on placement. Yet, the total statewide budget for juvenile reentry is about 10 million dollars.⁵

Cost per year	X	Average length of stay	X	Number of juveniles admitted into OCFS custody, 2002	Total annual cost
\$80,000		11 months		2142	\$157,080,000

Most of all, though, 75% of released youth—approximately 1,000 New York City youth each year—get caught up in the justice system again instead of working to become executives, doctors and lawyers.⁶ They become a drain on our communities, rather than a source of strength.

The Youth Justice Board

We are a group of 16 youth leaders from all over the City of New York who are interested in making a change in our communities by making policy recommendations on the issue of reentry. We are ambitious, highly motivated and dedicated to helping other teenagers.

We joined the Board after learning of the expectations and goals of the program, which are to develop leaders, give youth a voice, and make a difference. Hearing these words (rarely heard regarding teenagers), we were very excited about this opportunity. After a competitive

⁴ Officials at the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) told us that the annual cost is approximately \$80,000. Other people we met with estimated a higher annual cost of placement.

⁵ This is an estimate based on two pieces of information. According to the Juvenile Justice Project of the Correctional Association, OCFS has an annual reentry budget of one million dollars. In addition, the New York State Executive Budget for 2004-2005 states that OCFS “will invest \$6 million in Evidence-based Community Initiative programs designed to reduce the rate of recidivism among non-violent youths through the use of local non-profit agencies providing services ranging from family-based counseling to specialized after-school programs.”

⁶ We arrived at this number by multiplying the recidivism rate from the DCJS study (75%) by the number of New York City youth released from placement in 2002 (1,511).

application process, we were picked and together we brainstormed topics and issues that were important to us and where we wanted to focus as a group. Among the many topics we discussed were juvenile justice and school safety. The Youth Justice Board first became passionate about reentry when we heard about the high number of youths who recidivate.

Over the course of three months, we conducted in-depth research and learned investigation strategies and interview techniques. We invited research specialists to come speak to us. The training included sessions on note-taking, listening, and preparing for interviews, as well as lessons about the juvenile justice system and New York City government.

We then split into four groups in order to conduct 30 interviews with the organizations, young people and parents who make up the pieces of the reentry puzzle. We interviewed the following agencies and people in the Spring of 2004:

Adolescent Portable Therapy

Jean Callahan, Project Director
Evan Elkin, Clinical Director

Annie E. Casey Foundation

Molly Armstrong, Senior Consultant

Advocates for Children

Robyn Grodner, Director, Queens Family Court Project
Erin O'Neil, AmeriCorps
Helen O'Reilly, Case Advocate
Chris Tan, Director, Juvenile Justice Transition Project

Community Prep High School

Ana Bermudez, Co-Director

Children's Aid Society

Felipe Franco, Director, Community Reentry
Patricia Crossman, Director of Youth Programs, East Harlem Center

Correctional Association

Mishi Faruqee, Director of the Juvenile Justice Project
Youth participants

Friends of Island Academy

Sarah Guzman, Youth Leader
Edward Mercado, Youth Leader

Good Shepherd Services

JoEllen Lynch, Assistant Executive Director for Community-based Programs

Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network

Chris Watler, Judicial Hearing Officer
Youth participants
Participants' families

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Dr. Michael Jacobson, Department of Law and Police Science

Legal Aid Society

Monica Drinane, Attorney-in-Charge, Juvenile Rights Division

National Center on Juvenile Justice and Mental Health

Kathy Skowrya, Program Associate

New York City Department of Education

Dr. Lester Young, Senior Executive, Office of Youth Development and
School-Community Services
Tim Lisante, Local Instructional Superintendent

New York City Department of Probation

Pamela Hardy, Associate Commissioner, Family Court

New York City Department of Youth and Community Development

Jeanne Mullgrav, Commissioner

New York Police Department

Sgt. Daniel Rivera, Juvenile Data Unit

New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Faye Lewis, Reentry Programs, New York City
William Baccaglioni, formerly Director of Strategic Planning

Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator, City of New York

Eric Lee, Deputy Criminal Justice Coordinator
Michele Sviridoff, Deputy Coordinator for Research and Policy

Phoenix House

James Dahl, Director of Research

Red Hook Community Justice Center

The Hon. Alex Calabrese, Presiding Judge

After each of the interviews, we reconvened to share our findings. Each group put together a presentation on their interview. We had to get everything we learned down to a 'T' because we were in charge of educating the rest of the group to the point where they knew everything without having been there. These mini-presentations were good practice for our final

presentations and helped teach us how to present and be comfortable with the information we had just acquired.

After each presentation we looked at the areas we felt were being neglected and brainstormed possible solutions. This is where we gave birth to our policy recommendations.

The interview period lasted around three months, all jam-packed with new knowledge on this topic. Then we were on our way to developing possible policy recommendations. Midway into our 'policy phase,' we were given an opportunity to have a one-day retreat at Brooklyn College. We broke into small groups that focused on different areas and created a first draft of our recommendations. (You know what they say: all work and no play makes jack a dull boy, so after all the work we were able to unwind and went bowling. After a couple of slices of pizza and a couple of strikes, we were still talking about reentry!)

It then took us several weeks of discussion and work to finish our recommendations, begin the report and develop our presentation. We have learned a lot on the way here. We were all strangers to each other and to the topic of reentry; now we are friends who have studied reentry long and hard. We hope that the tremendous amount of work we put into this project is demonstrated on the following pages.

What Our Investigation Revealed

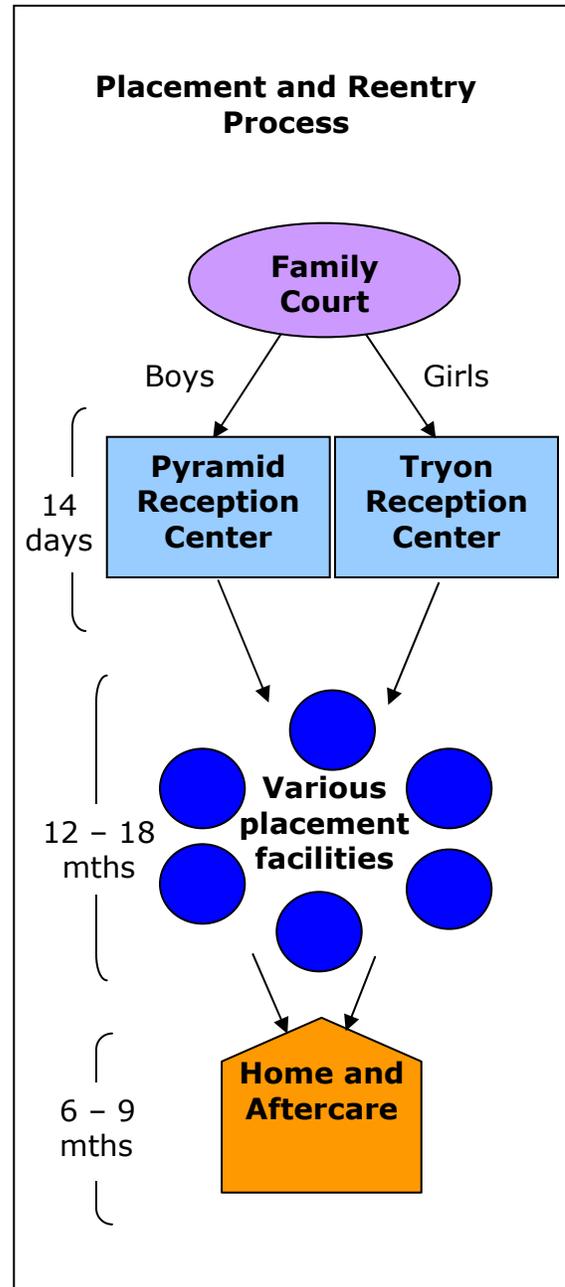
What is the current system?⁷

In New York State, if a youth under the age of 16 is found responsible for a juvenile delinquency offense, the judge may decide it is in the best interests of the community and the young person to place the young person in the custody of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). The judge can assign the young person to OCFS placement for 12 to 18 months.

After the court decision (or adjudication), boys go to the Pyramid Reception Center in the Bronx and girls go to the Tryon Reception Center in Albany. Over the course of the next 14 days, the young people receive a series of tests and assessments that cover the psychological, behavioral, educational, and medical areas of their lives, including an assessment of the risks the young people present to themselves, the facility, community and family. OCFS also hosts a family day at the reception centers.

The information gathered at the reception centers is often used to decide the type of facility the juvenile will go to, as well as his or her date of release from custody. From the Pyramid or the Tryon reception centers, the young person is then placed in the appropriate placement facility. Most facilities have a combination of programs, with staff trained in different areas (e.g., substance abuse, sex offenses, mental health)

At the facilities, young people attend classes every day, taught by state-accredited teachers. G.E.D. programs are also offered. Young people participate in group sessions, depending on their needs. These include sessions on anger control, substance abuse, and morals.



⁷ We would like to thank Faye Lewis of OCFS New York City Reentry Programs for most of this description of the current process.

In most cases, an aftercare worker conducts a home assessment four to six months before a young person is scheduled for release. Once the final release date is set, OCFS notifies the aftercare worker—ideally one month before release. At that point, the aftercare worker will call the family. In 2002, 2,361 youth were discharged from OCFS custody; 64 percent (1,511) were from New York City.⁸

Once the young person is released, he or she is under the supervision of the aftercare worker until the term of the disposition is over. The responsibilities of an aftercare worker include: assessing the condition of the home prior to release to determine if the child can return home, finding necessary resources to support the child upon release (a Youth Service Plan), monitoring progress, ensuring that he or she remains law abiding, instituting graduated sanctions (mostly curfew restrictions) and on a regular basis assessing the youth's improvement through a detailed Community Reentry Assessment.

Since the DJCS study highlighted the high recidivism rates for reentry youth in 1999, OCFS and other agencies have started several pilot programs to improve the reentry process.

OCFS has launched several evidence-based pilot programs that tackle reentry.⁹ They are:

- **Intensive Aftercare Program:** This program works with boys and starts the planning for their reentry shortly after adjudication at the Pyramid Reception Center. A case manager creates a service plan for the young person early on, with the input of the young person's family, and ensures that the young person is receiving the appropriate services. Planning for the return to the community includes making arrangements to enroll the young person in school, as well as linking him or her to community-based services such as substance abuse counseling and mental health programs.
- **Multi-Systemic Therapy:** Because it is very expensive to place kids, Multi-Systemic Therapy does not require the young person to leave home. This program focuses on wrapping services around the entire family.¹⁰ A case manager works with the family to help them negotiate systems, especially the school system. The case manager also works with the family to address all of the issues facing the young person and family—employment, substance abuse, etc.
- **Functional Family Therapy:** Like Multi-Systemic Therapy, Functional Family Therapy focuses on the family. Through weekly one-hour sessions with the family, Functional Family Therapy tries to help the family (including siblings) improve communication and develop positive solutions to family problems. Two staff from

⁸ Office of Children and Family Services, *Youth in Care: 2002 Annual Report*, ii, 26.

⁹ Evidence-based is a term used to describe a program when research evaluations have shown that the program is successful in achieving its goals.

¹⁰ 'Wraparound' refers to an approach to providing services to young people and families. It means that the young person and family receive a full set of services that are individualized to their particular strengths and needs. These services are 'wrapped around' the family.

OCFS and two staff from Children’s Village (the non-profit that runs the program) work with the family for 8 to 26 weeks.

- **Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care:** This program is for reentering youth who are taken out of their home and put in therapeutic foster treatment care. While the child is out of the home, case workers work with the biological family. The goal is to reunite the family.

OCFS has also started a partnership with the New York State Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs and the Children’s Aid Society for reentry youth in Manhattan and the Bronx. This program—the **Community Reentry Program**—provides wraparound services to help youth reintegrate successfully into their home communities. Youth receive a one to two week screening that addresses physical health, mental health, substance abuse, education needs, employment, family needs, extracurricular interests and other youth development needs. Two transition schools (one in Manhattan, one in the Bronx) allow youth to be placed immediately in an academic setting until they are matched to a school. Once assessments and school placements are complete, youth are referred to one of the seven Boys and Girls Club sites in Manhattan and the Bronx.

Other programs we learned about include:

Located in Harlem, the **Juvenile Reentry Network** is a community-based reentry program for juveniles returning to Harlem and Upper Manhattan from state placement. The Juvenile Reentry Network combines rigorous monitoring (participants appear every two weeks before an OCFS hearing officer), intensive parent engagement, and links to youth development programs and social services through partnerships with the Children’s Aid Society and other community-based providers. A central part of the program is that the network of providers working with each young person meets before each appearance to review the young person’s progress and recommend next steps.

The Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services (CASES) opened the **Community Prep High School** in collaboration with the New York City Department of Education and the City University of New York. It is a transitional school and focuses on “school-readiness.” The goal is to improve the academic and social skills that students need to move on to—and succeed in—their next school, vocational program, or employment setting. The Community Prep School targets students who read significantly below grade level.

CASES also opened the **School Connection Center** in September 2002 to facilitate and streamline admissions by placing students released from custodial schools (schools in jails, detention centers, and secure facilities) into community schools. The Center matched Manhattan students with appropriate schools and gave students access to a wider range of schools than they have historically been granted. The School Connection Center closed in November, 2004. According to CASES, one of the reasons the Center closed was because they felt that a series of new policies enacted by the New York City Department of Education in Fall 2004 would be successful in getting reentry youth back in school and therefore fewer students would need the services of the School Connection Center.

Friends of Island Academy primarily serves older youth (over 16 years old) who are released from Rikers Island, a New York City jail for adults. Upon discharge, the Academy provides job training, counseling, education, mentoring, and youth leadership development. In return, participants are expected to stay out of trouble, take responsibility for themselves, and work to rebuild their lives. Friends of Island Academy also works with some youth who have been released from OCFS placement.

Phoenix House is the nation's largest non-profit organization devoted to the treatment and prevention of substance abuse. Eighty percent of the participants in Phoenix House's substance abuse treatment programs are referred by the courts. The Phoenix House Academy in Yorktown, N.Y., helps adolescents addressing substance abuse problems by combining residential treatment with on-site accelerated education.

Advocates for Children of New York provides a full range of legal services to reentry youth to secure quality and equal public education services. These include free individual case advocacy, technical assistance, and training for parents, students, and professionals about children's educational entitlements and due process rights in New York City.

Adolescent Portable Therapy is a substance abuse treatment program. It identifies young people in detention who use drugs heavily and offers treatment that 'follows' the youth.¹¹ Rather than deliver treatment from a fixed location, Adolescent Portable Therapy works with kids inside detention centers and placement facilities, and then continues treating them in their home communities. It is a pilot program started in 2001 by the Vera Institute.

The **Legal Aid Society** is the nation's largest and oldest provider of legal services to children who appear before the New York City Family Court in juvenile delinquency proceedings. The Legal Aid Society is starting a juvenile reentry program in Fall 2004.

There is a great need for change

Through our research, we saw proof of the need for change. According to the DCJS study, when youth come back to the streets, 75 percent are rearrested within the first three years of release. The same study found that:

“Youth faced an especially high risk of rearrest during the first six to nine months following first release from residential confinement to community supervision. Twenty-six percent were arrested within the first three months following release; 42 percent were arrested within six months; and more than half were arrested within nine months.”

¹¹ A New York City Family Court judge may place youth in detention while they are awaiting the outcome of their juvenile delinquency case.

It costs \$80,000 a year for each child in placement.¹² In contrast, on average, the state and city spend approximately \$4,200 a year on reentry for those same children (see Figure 3).¹³

The state and city spend a large amount of money on placement, but that expenditure seems to be wasted when the youth returns to crime. We feel that it is important to publicize the fact that so much money is being spent on something that doesn't even seem to work. Half of that money comes directly from New York City's budget.

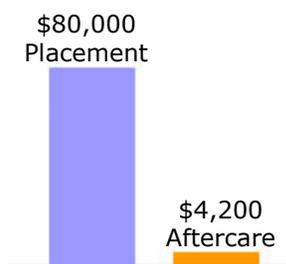


Figure 3: Annual spending per person on placement and aftercare

Just about everyone that we interviewed was aware of the high recidivism rates and agreed that changes needed to be made. William Baccaglini, former Director of Strategic Planning for OCFS, said straight out “*The system does not work. Would you go back to a deli where eight of the 10 sandwiches were terrible?*”

There is another major issue we want to highlight: the percentage of minority youth in placement is significantly higher than the proportion of minority youth in the general population. African American and Latino youth make up 63% of the total youth population in New York City.¹⁴ However, they represented 94% of New York City youth admitted to OCFS custody in 2002.¹⁵

In our research, we found that this pattern is true for both youth and adults throughout the United States—so much so that there is a term for it—disproportionate minority contact (DMC). A national study published by the U.S. Department of Justice found that “*the preponderance of research over three decades documents evidence of racial disparities, at least at some stages within the juvenile justice system...The results clearly showed that there were substantial differences in the processing of minority youth within many juvenile justice systems. These differences could not be attributed solely to the presence of legal characteristics or other factors. Instead, approximately two-thirds of the reviewed research indicated that a youth's racial status made a difference at selected stages of juvenile processing.*”¹⁶

The Youth Justice Board did not have the time to fully understand how this issue plays out in New York and create specific recommendations to address it. However, we urge juvenile justice policymakers in New York to address these racial and ethnic injustices, along with the high recidivism rates.

¹² Officials at OCFS told us that the annual cost is approximately \$80,000. Other people we met with estimated a higher annual cost of placement.

¹³ We calculated the average annual spending on reentering youth by dividing our estimate of OCFS' annual reentry budget (\$10 million) by the number of youth released from custody in 2002 (2,361). See p. 9 for an explanation of our estimate of the annual reentry budget.

¹⁴ Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, 2002, 16.

¹⁵ New York State Office of Children and Family Services, *Youth in Care: 2002 Annual Report*, 37.

¹⁶ Carl E. Pope, Rick Lovell, Heidi M. Hsia, *Disproportionate Minority Confinement: A Review of the Research Literature from 1989 Through 2001*, U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2002.

We would like to make a note about OCFS. We know that OCFS has a tough job. Young people who are referred to OCFS for placement usually face tremendous challenges and helping them turn their lives around is very difficult.

OCFS is doing several things to improve the reentry process, including:

- shifting dollars from placement to reentry;
- investing \$6 million in community-based aftercare programs;
- creating partnerships with community organizations like the Children’s Aid Society; and
- working with the New York City Department of Education to improve the process for reenrolling youth in local schools.

We applaud these changes and new programs. In fact, many of our recommendations are based on the positive aspects of new initiatives started by OCFS and other agencies in New York City.

However, we feel that much more needs to be done and can be done—not only by OCFS, but by city players as well.

Contributing factors

We found that there are several factors that contribute to the rearrest of young people after they have been released from placement:

Most reentry youth are dealing with multiple risk factors. The DCJS study found that over 95 percent of the children placed in OCFS custody had risk factors in four or more of the following areas: “mental health, substance abuse, behavior at school, academic performance, handicapping conditions, household characteristics, criminal or abusive family environment, or personal relationships with other family members.” OCFS data show that this pattern was still true in 2002 (see Figure 4).

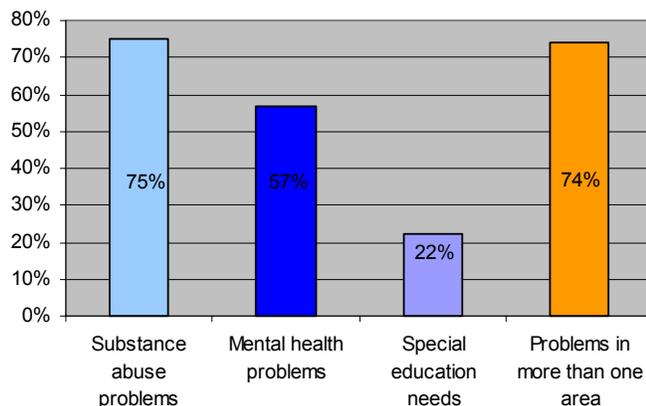


Figure 4: According to the Office of Children and Family Services, youth admitted to placement in 2002 faced significant challenges.

Reentry youth go back to neighborhoods high in poverty and crime. Many of these young people live in impoverished neighborhoods and others face financial, as well as social, strife.¹⁷ The DCJS study found that 87 percent faced one or more of the following challenges: high crime neighborhood, single parent home, at last address less than 1 year, unemployed mother, unemployed father, or receiving public assistance benefits.

¹⁷ National Research Council, *Juvenile Crime, Juvenile Justice*, 2001.

Family relationships are a significant factor. The DCJS study reports that 80 percent of the youth had one or more of the following problems with the family environment: family involved in crime, substance abuse in the family, negative home assessment, youth sexually or physically abused, or a home not accepting youth. Furthermore, 65 percent had one or more of the following problems with their parents: bad relations with elder male or female, PINS for disobedience or runaway, or may need a surrogate home.¹⁸

There is a need for programs dealing with substance abuse and mental health. Drugs and alcohol are also a major problem for New York City youth in placement. According to OCFS, 75 percent of all juveniles in placement have problems with drugs and alcohol. According to the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, 60 percent of boys and 70 percent of girls in the juvenile justice system have mental health disorders.

Most young people in placement have a bad track record in school. According to the DCJS study, 92 percent of youth returning from placement have an educational handicap, 78 percent have behavioral problems in school, and 89 percent are either more than three years behind in reading and math or have low grades in core subjects.

¹⁸ PINS stands for “person in need of supervision.” A child under the age of 16 who does not attend school, behaves in a way that is dangerous or out of control, or often disobeys his or her parents, guardians or other authorities, may be found to be a person in need of supervision.

The Youth Justice Board’s Recommendations for Juvenile Reentry in New York City

Here are our recommendations to increase the chances of success for young people returning home after OCFS placement. In our recommendations, we suggest ideas for addressing many of the factors which contribute to the high recidivism rates for reentry youth.

First of all, there are three principles that should apply to the whole reentry process:

Principles

- **Early Planning**
- **Individual Treatment**
- **Coordination**

In addition, there are four areas that are critical. Think of them as key pieces of the reentry puzzle:

Critical Areas

1. Motivate young people to succeed

- A. Focus on what reentry youth are passionate about
- B. Offer jobs and job training
- C. Provide adult mentors

2. Help young people get in school and stay in school

- A. Prepare students to return to school
- B. Match students to schools quickly, based on their interests and needs
- C. Improve tracking of education credits
- D. Create incentives for schools to accept reentry students

3. Strengthen the relationships between family and youth

- A. Provide counseling for the family and youth together
- B. Offer parent-to-parent support groups
- C. Make sure families have an easy way to visit their children while they are in placement

4. Improve the reentry process

- A. Share assessment information
- B. Track the early warning signs of recidivism
- C. Create Connection Centers
- D. Create Welcome Centers

These principles and recommendations are explained in detail on the following pages.

Principles

First Principle: Early Planning

Most juveniles who enter placement will return to the same challenges that they are leaving. Therefore, we feel it is extremely important that planning about the young person's return home start early—as soon as the decision is made to send the young person into placement.

Evan Elkin, Clinical Director of the Adolescent Portable Therapy Program told us: *“The transition from a highly structured environment to the same environment they were in when they got into trouble is difficult. The transition is often abrupt and not planned for well enough.”*

Placement is an opportunity to begin work on the many challenges youth face, so the young person—and, as important, the family—are better prepared when he or she return home. School placement and other services are often difficult to arrange. Getting a head start provides the best chance that the right supports and services will be in place once the young person is back home. It can prevent gaps in which the young person is not in school or getting services.

We would like to stress the importance of this because idle time—not being supervised or doing something constructive—is detrimental to the juvenile's success and future and can make it more likely that he or she will get into trouble.

Most important, planning early for the return home educates the juvenile and the family about their options and the resources available to them. This is the juvenile's life and it is important that he or she has input on what goes on. One participant in the Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network, for example, told us that while he was in placement, he never heard anything about what was going to happen to him when he got out.

Implementation: Reentry planning should start as soon as a judge decides to send the young person into placement. Ideally, reentry planning should be initiated at the OCFS reception centers and continue once he or she is in placement. Our second principle discusses who should be involved in the planning discussions.

Existing Initiatives: OCFS has started one pilot program (the Intensive Aftercare Program) where reentry planning starts early—at the OCFS Pyramid Reception Center. This program serves almost 100 boys.

Currently, for other cases, OCFS conducts a home assessment four to six months before the young person is supposed to go home and informs the aftercare worker only one month before the young person is released. At that point, the aftercare worker calls the family to let them know their child will be released.

Second Principle: Individual Treatment

No two young people are exactly the same. They have different likes, dislikes, family situations and school histories.

Research shows that by celebrating and acknowledging the differences of youth it is possible to help them succeed.¹⁹ We recommend that the key players involved with each young person meet early to create a plan that reflects each individual's strengths and challenges.

We consistently heard in our interviews that many parents and youth are not fully aware of their options concerning programs to support them. An important goal of the team meetings would be to make sure that the parents and the juvenile are educated about the options available to them and have a say about what will happen in the young person's life.

We also want to make sure that all young people actually get the services identified in their plans, such as family counseling, mental health and substance abuse treatment, job training and tutoring. These services should start in placement and continue, if they are still needed, once the child is back home. We stress this point for two reasons:

- First, a study just released by the National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse says that, nationwide, only 3.6 percent of arrested young people who need substance abuse services actually receive them.²⁰
- Second, in our interview with James Dahl, director of research for Phoenix House, he said that *“relapse rates are lower for those who have had drug treatment while incarcerated AND receive continued services after they are released.”*

While recommending regular meetings among these people and institutions may at first seem unrealistic, it is important to consider the advantages. By requiring these people to meet, reentry agencies, the parent, school and others involved with the young person can be constantly kept up to date on what is happening. This makes it more likely that problems will be identified and resolved quickly—and effectively.

Implementation: The youth's reentry into the community should be coordinated among the youth, his or her family, OCFS and other key players. We believe that the key players in the youth's life should be required to convene regularly—perhaps on a bi-weekly to monthly basis — to create and monitor a plan that reflects individual strengths and challenges. The team should include:

¹⁹ Laura Nissen (1998), *Promising Systemic and Programmatic Approaches for Working with Substance-Abusing Juvenile Offenders*. Paper presented at the Juvenile Justice and Substance Abuse National Planning Meeting, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Annapolis, MD.

²⁰ *Criminal Neglect: Substance Abuse, Juvenile Justice and The Children Left Behind*, National Center for Addiction and Substance Abuse, 2004.

- the young person;
- guardians;
- OCFS counselors in placement facilities;
- OCFS aftercare workers; and
- school representatives

The team would continue meeting to track the young person's progress after the return home. By keeping close tabs on the young person, the team could put in place quick resolutions with solid support for problems, and help the young person take responsibility for his or her actions. Ultimately, the team would help the young person stay out of trouble, making the neighborhood safer.

**Existing
Initiatives:**

We believe OCFS has a great starting point for implementing this idea. OCFS conducts extensive assessments of young people when they arrive at the reception centers. So OCFS is already collecting a lot of the information they need to create individualized plans. We think it is important, however, to create a support team that includes the young person and the parent or guardian early on. The support team would have the responsibility of creating the individualized plans.

Several of the pilot programs we looked at emphasize team work and family involvement. These include the Intensive Aftercare Program, Community Reentry Program that is a partnership between OCFS, the Children's Aid Society and the Boys and Girls Club, and Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network. The Intensive Aftercare Program includes the family in their early planning, but the teams assembled by the other programs only start once the young person returns home and serve only a portion of the total reentry population.

Third Principle: Coordination

Every year, young people in placement or aftercare come into contact with many agencies. In addition to OCFS, these might include the New York City Department of Education, substance abuse treatment providers, and community-based aftercare services.

Although these agencies all have the same goal of giving these children a better life, future and attitude, we heard from several agencies that they are in the dark about what other agencies were doing or planning. We also saw that a lot of agencies shared the same problems and challenges working with reentry youth. Some of the comments we heard in our interviews included:

“Communication between agencies is inadequate—there is often little coordination. For example, mental health records don’t follow the youth. There can sometimes be different philosophies—for example, on the use of medications for mental health treatment. Also, many agencies are frustrated that they are not able to ensure continuity of treatment after a young person leaves their custody.”²¹

“A key recommendation I would give to state and city policymakers is to improve coordination among different agencies responsible for the young person.”²²

To help agencies do a better job coordinating with each other on these kinds of issues, we recommend convening a regular forum of all the agencies working with reentry youth. All these organizations are experts in this area. If they are all put in the same room, they could brainstorm ideas and agree on changes that would improve the reentry process. They could coordinate their efforts and address issues before they became system-wide problems. Agencies could also educate each other about what is and is not working. It is particularly important to improve communication between city and state agencies.

Implementation: Convene a forum or meeting of agencies working to make the reentry process easier, more positive and more successful. These meetings should be coordinated by state and city officials working together. We recommend that the Office of Children and Family Services represent the state and the Mayor’s Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator represent the city.

- All agencies involved with different parts of the placement and reentry process should sign a contract to attend all required meetings.
- Each agency should designate people to attend these meetings.
- It should be the same people each month so there can be continuity and no confusion.

²¹ Jean Callahan, director, Adolescent Portable Therapy

²² James Dahl, director of research, Phoenix House

- Since there are a wide variety of agencies there might be meetings of smaller working groups, as well as the complete group. We recommend three smaller working groups that would focus on schools, community-based services, and substance abuse and mental health services. An OCFS representative should be part of each of the working groups.
- One suggestion is that the meetings of the working groups take place every two months and the meeting of the entire group take place once a year.

**Existing
Initiatives:**

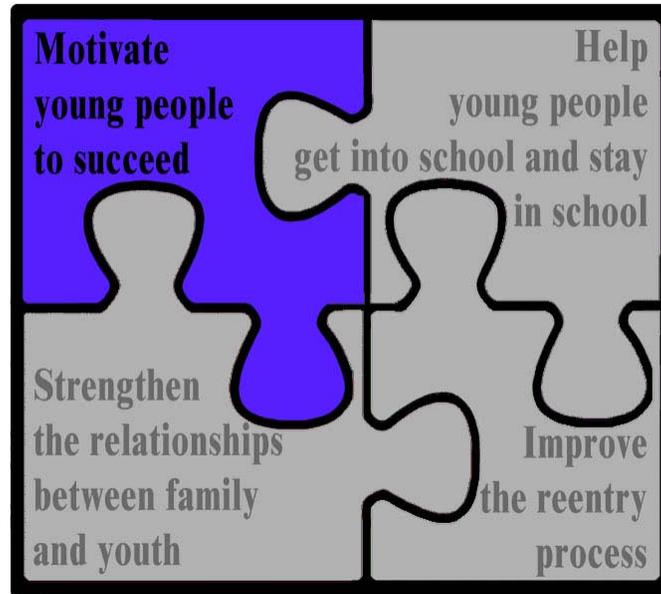
The Center for Alternative Sanctions and Employment Services has convened the Committee on Court-Involved Students. The Committee includes representatives from OCFS and the Department of Education. The Committee's conversations have led to two pilot programs (the School Connection Center and the Community Prep High School) that help reentry and other court-involved students, as well as contributed to a new Department of Education policy for reentry youth.

In addition, the Mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinator's Office told us that they have brought together city agencies to discuss how to improve the juvenile justice process here in New York City. However, this group does not include OCFS because it is a state agency.

Critical Areas

Here are our specific recommendations in four critical areas:

1. Motivate young people to succeed



We must remember that reentry youth themselves are the only ones that can improve their lives. From the start of placement, they should get encouragement to define their own goals and milestones. This would create an incentive to go back to the real world. At the same time, the goals and milestones defined by the young person could be used by the support team to help the young person develop an increased sense of responsibility and accountability.

Jean Callahan, of the Adolescent Portable Therapy program told us, *“The moment of intake [right after an arrest] is a moment of crisis. Youth can be very motivated at that time to make a change. But when they get out of placement, behavior can really deteriorate. Both the youth and the family have a fantasy of what life will be like that is unrealistic—what is expected of them in placement is nothing like what’s expected of them in the real world. The challenge and goal is to get their motivation to peak once they get home. Once the youth is home, the goals are to find what is a driving force in their lives, increase the influence of the family and find alternative peer environments.”*

To help reentry youth stay motivated, we recommend three things:

1A. Focus on what reentry youth are passionate about

We believe that one of the reasons youth drop out of programs and get into trouble is because they don't have anything that they enjoy or are passionate about. It is our experience and the experience of our friends that we are more likely to stay involved in a program that engages us with something we really care about. We think the same is true for reentry youth. When reentry youth return to their communities, their involvement in programs that meet their interest (e.g., sports teams or rapping studios) can keep them busy and off the streets.

Felipe Franco, who runs the Community Reentry Program at the Children's Aid Society, told us *"when things are interest-based, there is not a need to push the youth into anything since the programs are catered to their wants and dislikes."*

Unfortunately, another common theme in our interviews was that reentry youth were often not welcomed back into neighborhood programs. That is why we recommend that efforts to enroll them in after-school programs start as early as possible in the reentry planning process.

Implementation: We recommend linking youth to programs, teams, or neighborhood organizations that they can get excited about, based on an assessment of their strengths, interests and needs. Where possible, we recommend involving reentry youth in programs with other young people who haven't been involved with the juvenile justice system and where they aren't branded as reentry youth. This gives them the opportunity to step away from a negative self-identity and create more positive friends.

One specific recommendation is that once youth are back home, OCFS should organize regular forums where youth discuss ideas and share experiences with each other, as well as get inspiration from motivational speakers. As teenagers, we need to hear from people that we can relate to.

Here's how it might work:

- The forums would take place twice a month and be led by peer educators.
- The peer educators would be youth who have successfully graduated from reentry programs or regular kids who would like to volunteer.
- The peer educators would receive training, provided by OCFS, on how to run these forums.
- At every session, reentering youth would choose a topic related to the things that teens go through and just have a discussion about it. Little by little they would gain confidence and trust and in the end they would be able to share personal experiences about their lives. It would be a chance for the teens to build relationships with each other.

- A survey would be taken asking the teens who their role models are or people that they would like to meet. OCFS would try and bring relevant speakers to talk to these teens. The guests would talk to them about their life experiences and how they overcame obstacles.
- These sessions with motivational speakers could happen once every month and this would help the teens be motivated to do their best because they would be looking forward to this event.
- As incentive for some of the speakers, OCFS could give them publicity, letting the media know about what they are doing.

**Existing
Initiatives:**

We encourage programs such as the Children's Aid Society's Community Reentry Program that incorporate what their participants enjoy (such as basketball teams or rap studios) and allow them to make friends in a setting where they are not marked as 'reentry' youth.

1B. Provide Job Training and Jobs

For reentry youth, going back home can mean facing financial problems—the same ones that may have contributed to their offense. One OCFS official told us that one of the barriers to success for some reentry youth was that they were used to making good dollars selling drugs and that it would be difficult to work for McDonald’s for less money.

While this might be true in some cases, we think that many young people would rather have a legitimate job (especially if it was tied to a future goal), but may not know how to get one or how to keep one. One Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network participant told us that the jobs the program provided him really encouraged him to stay on the right path.

Part-time jobs would:

- help with financial problems;
- teach responsibility by giving the young person structure and require him or her to fulfill obligations;
- help keep youngsters off the street while providing something useful to do;
- give them work experience and help develop self-esteem; and
- be fun and enjoyable, if linked to their interests.

Implementation: We recommend that OCFS offer job-readiness training to youth, beginning while they are in placement. Job-readiness would include job training, preparation for what youth can expect in a work environment, and guidance to help the youth explore ideas about their future. OCFS can get information through the initial assessments on the kinds of careers that the youth would like to pursue. This training would start in placement and continue in the community while the young person is under the supervision of OCFS, as a component of the peer-led workshops described in the previous recommendation. The sessions might run like this:

- The sessions would take place twice a month.
- A different topic would be discussed in every session.
- The first part of the course could start out with the basics: how to write a resume, how to look for jobs, how to prepare for an interview, etc.—all the things that are necessary when applying for a job.
- Based on the information about popular careers from the assessment, OCFS could have workshops on different careers. Once a month, for example, participants could receive information on the profession and some basic training needed for that particular field (for example: How to be a mechanic; how to be a store manager).
- Youth could be evaluated every month on how well they are performing and what needs to improve.

- OCFS can look into working with different organizations and companies that may be able to reserve a certain number of spots so that when youth are released they can have jobs to go to.
- Job placement opportunities will first be offered to those participants who were the best in the training and the ones that have the most financial need. This will help keep the participants motivated, and also help build a positive reputation for the program with the companies and organizations that hire reentry youth.

**Existing
Initiatives:**

OCFS already has some pieces of this recommendation in place. From our interviews with OCFS and reentry youth, we know that OCFS brings in adults to talk about different careers while young people are in placement. Some of the pilot programs (Children’s Aid Society, the Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network) also try to link their participants to jobs. For example, we spoke with one boy who had been inspired by hearing someone speak about a career in underwater welding while he was in placement. His OCFS aftercare worker and the Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network judge were encouraging the young person to pursue that interest.

1C. Provide adult mentors

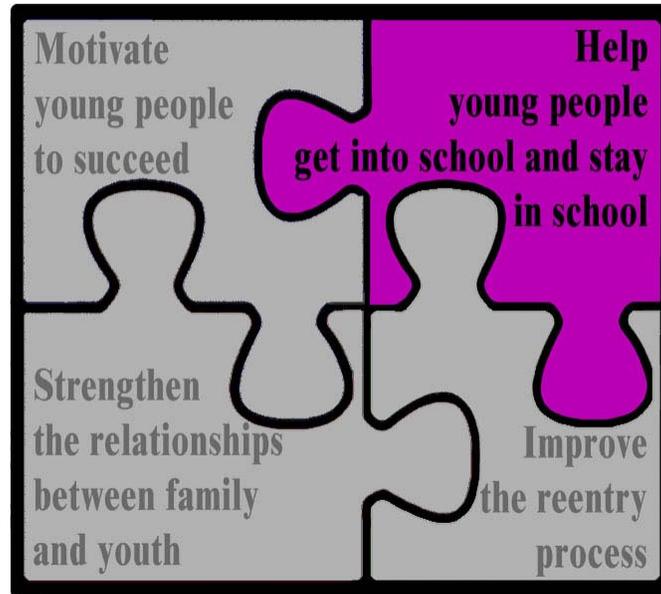
Studies have shown that a helpful adult figure in a youth's life can lead to positive outcomes.²³ Many of the youth returning from placement need positive role models to steer them towards making a successful transition back into their communities.

Implementation: Counselors and aftercare workers should try to get to know the child while in placement so they can understand what type of person would likely be a good match for him or her. When the child returns to the community, he or she would be appointed a mentor and meet with the mentor every week. The mentors should receive training to deal with difficult behavioral issues. We recommend that OCFS partner with existing mentoring organizations, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and with community-based organizations.

Existing Initiatives: Children's Aid Society has a mentoring program for reentry youth.

²³ Susan M. Jekielek, M.A., Kristin A. Moore, Ph.D., Elizabeth C. Hair, Ph.D., and Harriet . Scarupa , M.S., *Mentoring: A Promising Strategy for Youth Development*, 2002, Child Trends Research Brief, 1.

2. Help young people get into school and stay in school



Almost everyone we interviewed felt that education was an absolutely critical part of the reentry puzzle. We were encouraged, then, to find that senior staff at the Department of Education were aware of the issues with reentry students. Dr. Lester Young, senior executive of the Office of Youth Development and School-Community Services, said that “*Students in transition [which includes students returning from OCFS placement] are a major priority of this office. We have a responsibility to help ALL students.*” The Department of Education has recently enacted new policies for transition students and has also set up an office to deal with young people in transition.

Ana Bermudez, of the Community Prep High School, told us that the key problems with reentry students are that “*it is hard to get kids in school and it is hard to get kids to come to school.*”

Here are our recommendations to address those problems:

2A. Prepare students to return to school

Many reentry youth are way behind in basic reading and math skills. Also, students returning to school from a state placement facility can find it hard to adjust to a new school. They may not feel prepared. They may lack the motivation.

Ana Bermudez, of the Community Prep High School, illustrates this difficult mind set: *“I didn’t really know how little our students thought of themselves as learners, or how much they would react against it when you asked them to be students and learners. How scared of engaging they would be. That they had no image of what a student is.”*

Implementation: We recommend that helping youth catch up in reading and math should be a top priority for OCFS. Since 64 percent of youth in placement are from New York City, perhaps the Department of Education could work with OCFS to develop a curriculum that will prepare young people for their return to school in New York City.

We also heard in our interviews that there aren’t enough schools or programs in New York City that can work well with students that are really behind academically. We think the Department of Education should make sure there are enough programs that help students who are behind grade level catch up.

Once the young person is back home, the Department of Education should make sure reentry youth have good tutoring programs available.

We also recommend an orientation in which students attend workshops on topics that can be helpful upon returning to school, helping them get off to a fresh start.

- The orientation would take place after placement, during the young person’s stay in a Connection Center, a facility where we recommend released youth would stay for one or two weeks before returning home (see recommendation 4C on p. 48).
- The workshops would be focused on milestones set by the young person during placement. The topics would include:
 - What he or she should expect back in school;
 - How to handle academic problems and personal conflicts; and
 - Study skills.
- Parents would be brought in so they could also be prepared and so they could be there for their children at an important time.
- The orientation would also include a motivational speaker with a person "who made it" after coming from a similar

situation.

- As part of the orientation, students should receive “care packages” consisting of school supplies and items to help the young person stay organized (e.g., school planner, binder, pens, dictionary/thesaurus and geometry set). The care package is important for several reasons. It helps make sure the child is prepared for school, helps the family out financially and provides encouragement to go back to school, showing the youth someone cares and is interested in him or her doing well.

Existing Initiatives:

Youth in OCFS placement attend school every day. However, we heard mixed reviews on the quality of the classes. Advocates for Children told us that since the environment is calmer and youth are in a very structured environment, some students are able to make real progress. However, a young person in the Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network said, *“A few of the teachers were alright, but many wouldn’t bother to teach. Instead they would waste time by showing a movie. On top of that, the special ed teacher had students coloring for most of the day.”* We heard similar comments from other reentry youth.

We met with two organizations that run transition schools or classrooms for reentry youth: the Community Prep High School, run by the Center for Alternative Sanctions and Employment; and the Children’s Aid Society. These schools serve young people in the Bronx and Manhattan. Tim Lisante, of the Department of Education, also told us of one program in the Bronx, Diploma Plus, whose specialty is working with students who are very behind in their grade level.

2B. Match students to schools quickly based on their interests and needs

A major complaint we heard from the young people and professionals we interviewed is that there is often a big delay in getting reentry youth enrolled in school.

Implementation: To keep young people motivated, we recommend that the Department of Education make a priority of enrolling youth in school as soon as they return home from placement. To make this happen, OCFS should notify the Department of Education at least one month before the young person is released, so that a school representative has time to talk to the parent, identify a school and do all the paperwork.

In keeping with our recommendation above to focus on what youth are passionate about, the Department of Education and OCFS should also work together to place youth in schools that match their interests. During placement, OCFS has a chance to learn what the young person likes and if he or she has any career goals. They can also ask parents about their child's talents and interests. OCFS should share this information with the Department of Education so that it can be used to match the young person to the right school. This would give the youth an incentive to go to school, and help give him or her the motivation to succeed.

Existing Initiatives:

In our interview with Department of Education representatives, we learned that OCFS and the Department have agreed on a new policy. Starting September 2004, instead of discharging students going to placement from their current school, the Department of Education will carry them on a "dual register" (that is, they will be registered at both their home school and at the placement school). This will make it easier for young people if they want to return to their home school, as they will not have to re-register at that school upon return from placement.

In addition, OCFS will let a Department of Education representative know one month before the young person returns home, so that the young person will be enrolled in a school upon his or her return to the community. In addition, the Department of Education will identify one person in each regional office (there are 10 regional offices in the city) who will be responsible for enrolling reentry youth in school. This regional representative will be the contact person for OCFS.

A third part of the new Department of Education policy will be opening transition centers this fall in each borough. The transition centers will act as a safety net for young people who, for some reason or another, are not able to be enrolled in school immediately. The transition centers will be run by community-based organizations and offer classes, Regents

exams and other services.

Until this fall, the Center for Alternative Sanctions and Employment Services had a pilot program called the School Connection Center which was trying to implement many of the pieces of this recommendation for reentry youth in Manhattan. The School Connection Center worked to enroll reentry youth in school as soon as possible and to resolve issues about credit transfers. They tried to find a school that is a good fit for the youth. For example, we talked to one young person who, with the help of the School Connection Center, was enrolled in the Manhattan High School for Graphic Arts because he had been a graffiti artist. The School Connection Center closed in November 2004, partially because they thought that the new Department of Education policies would be successful in helping transitional students and fewer students would need the help of the School Connection Center.

Advocates for Children also helps young people, including those who have returned from placement, that are having problems with the Department of Education such as getting into school, transferring schools, getting special education services and getting credit for courses they took while in placement.

2C. Improve tracking of education credits

Advocates for Children told us that youth in placement can sometimes do well in their OCFS school programs: *“According to students, it’s a calmer environment, they get more attention and they are required to go. Reading and math scores will sometimes improve.”* But too many times, when they go home, their New York City school doesn’t recognize the credits they earned in placement. An OCFS representative told us that the Department of Education often doesn’t accept credit automatically—they retest the young person, leaving him or her in limbo for 60 days. Sometimes, their work is not accepted and they have to repeat classes, or there are delays in transferring this information and this delays the youth getting back into school. This is incredibly demoralizing to a youth that has tried to do the right thing in placement.

Implementation: We strongly recommend that the Department of Education and OCFS agree on a system to transfer credits earned by young people in placement to the New York City school system. A uniform credit system would make everyone’s job a lot simpler, although we know that this would take a long time to accomplish. We also think this information should be transferred electronically between OCFS and the Department of Education—either through a linked computer system or, more simply, by e-mail. This might be difficult to achieve in the beginning, but with time it will pay off in effectiveness and time savings. In the meantime there should be a stronger information connection between the Department of Education and OCFS.

Existing Initiatives: In our interviews with staff at OCFS and the Department of Education, both agencies told us that they had been meeting to try to develop better protocols for reentry youth. Dr. Lester Young and Tim Lisante, a superintendent with the Department of Education, told us that the Department was about to announce a new policy (described in recommendation 2B on p. 36) that includes rules for transferring information on credits earned in OCFS placement to Department of Education regional representatives by e-mail. The new system was scheduled to begin in September 2004.

2D. Create incentives for schools to accept reentry students

We heard that there is a stigma associated with reentry youth—principals and schools often don't want to accept reentry students because they are afraid the student will have a negative impact on the school's ratings, safety and on the classroom atmosphere. When we asked Dr. Lester Young of the Department of Education what he thought the biggest barrier was for young people in transition, he answered, "*The human hurdle—no one wants them back.*" He identified three approaches to tackling the problem:

- Change the way we think about these young people;
- Examine where the negative perceptions come from; and
- Create supportive environments for the young people.

Implementation: Create incentives by:

Training teachers. Ana Bermudez, co-director of the Community Prep High School, told us that one of the reasons that the school had a difficult opening year was that the teachers had not been specially trained to work with students who had significant challenges. She felt that this kind of training for their teachers in year two made a big difference. She also felt that "*principals and staff in diploma-bearing schools are too quick to jump to negative conclusions. Teachers need to be trained to be able to respond to the issues court-involved youth face.*"

Training for teachers should include how to deal with students who act up in class and advice on ways to make it easier when a student joins a class in the middle of the year. If it would be too difficult to implement this citywide, maybe it could be accomplished in the neighborhoods with the highest concentration of reentry youth.

Increase support for schools accepting reentry youth. As we explained in our findings, youth coming back from placement are dealing with many problems (e.g. substance abuse, poor reading and math skills, troubled family situations) that can get in the way of doing well in school and can have an impact on other students and teachers. Schools may not want to accept reentry youth because they know that they require lots of attention and they may already feel their teachers and guidance counselors have too much to do.

We believe that schools may be more willing to accept reentry students if they knew that they could turn to the OCFS aftercare worker and other programs working with the young person for help if problems come up. We believe there should be a closer relationship between OCFS and the Department of Education once the young person is in school. One way this could happen is to have a school representative on the support team that meets regularly to discuss the young person's progress (see our

second principle on p. 23). The schools see (or should see) the student every day. This puts them in a perfect position to report early signs of trouble to the team so that everyone could respond quickly.

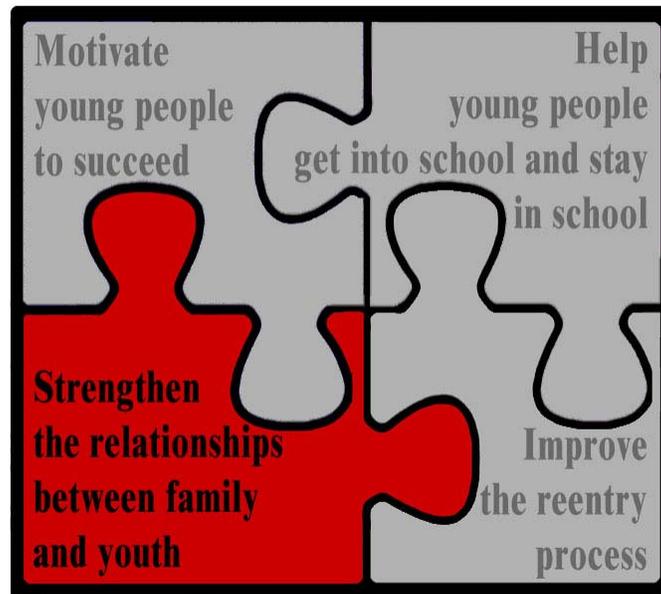
As we said before, reentry students are usually below grade level. Another way to support the schools would be to provide extra resources if they have several reentry students (e.g. more English and math teachers or tutors to help students catch up to their grade level).

Adjust the school ratings. We heard in several interviews that the Department of Education is watching schools and principals closely to see if they can improve student performance. While we agree with this, we think it can also make principals unwilling to accept students that might hurt their statistics. We think that there should be a way to adjust a school's ratings so that a school isn't penalized because it accepts reentry students.

**Existing
Initiatives:**

We did not find specific initiatives trying to increase incentives for schools to accept reentry students.

3. Strengthen the relationships between family and youth



Through our interviews with reentry staff and youth, we have found that fostering positive family dynamics is essential to success for reentry youth. William Baccaglioni, former Director of Strategic Planning for OCFS, felt that if a young person is not accepted by his or her family, he or she will hang out in the streets. He emphasized that it was important to: 1) make sure that the family is ready for the young person's return; and 2) bring the youngster up to speed on what has occurred back home. As a way of stressing the importance of the family, Mr. Baccaglioni told us that he regrets that he focused primarily on young people rather than families for most of his career.

3A. Provide counseling for the family and youth together

It is essential to the youth's success that the family as a unit learns to work together and sort out their problems. In addition, counseling stabilizes the family in a time of crisis and can help guide a child through the placement and reentry process.

Implementation: Joint youth-family counseling should start right after adjudication and continue in placement and once the young person is home.

We know that family counseling in placement sounds expensive, because parents would need to travel to upstate facilities to participate. However, we believe it is important for parents to visit their children in placement anyway (see recommendation 3C on p. 44), and the counseling could be made a part of these visits. In addition, young people we interviewed told us that their family's visits brought up a lot of emotional issues for them, especially when the family had to leave. One participant in the Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network told us that he saw his family once a month and it was painful. He didn't like his family seeing him in placement and the fact that he couldn't go home with them. Counseling in placement could help the youth and family deal with these kinds of issues.

Existing Initiatives: Several of the pilot projects we interviewed (Children's Aid Society, Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network) linked young people and families to counseling once they were back home. OCFS told us about two other pilot projects (the Intensive Aftercare Program and Functional Family Therapy) that place a big emphasis on family counseling.

3B. Offer parent-to-parent support groups

The parents we interviewed said that they'd like to know that they are not alone in their experience. In addition, they said it helps to talk to other parents struggling with the aftermath of placement.

Implementation: Parent-to-parent workshops should be put into place to act as a support group. They would be organized by the counselors working with the youth and family and offered to parents on a voluntary basis. This way, the workshops would not be an added burden for parents who feel that they are already being asked to do a lot.

Existing Initiatives: The Harlem Juvenile Reentry Network has a voluntary parent support group. The parents we spoke to said the support group was very helpful.

3C. Make sure families have an easy way to visit and call their child while they are in placement

It is important to keep the lines of communication open between the youth and family. Healthy communication contributes to the youth's success in and out of placement. Unfortunately, most placement facilities are hours away from New York City, and it is difficult and expensive to visit regularly. Many families cannot afford this expense. Also, making frequent phone calls can become costly.

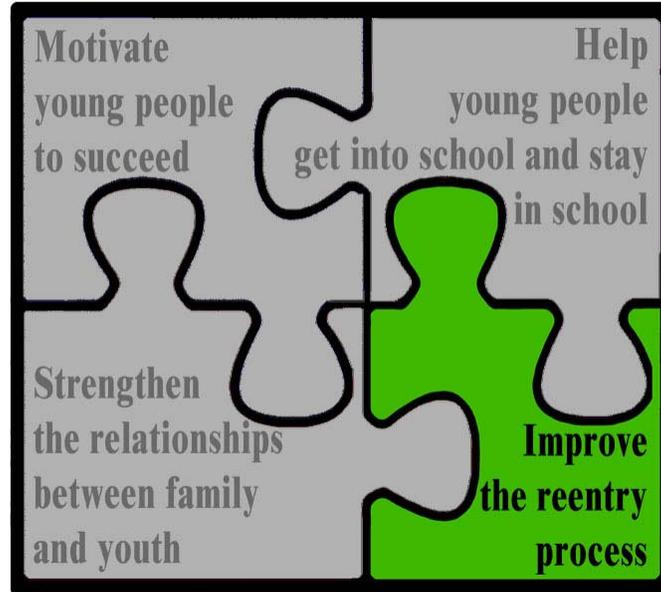
Implementation: OCFS should provide help with transportation fees or offer regular shuttles to upstate facilities. We suggest:

- Providing free buses/trains/shuttles, departing from different neighborhoods to transport families to visit youth in placement, OR
- Providing transportation fee waivers to families of youth.
- Providing reimbursements to families for phone calls to youth in placement.

Existing Initiatives:

In our interviews, we learned of specific cases where OCFS provided help with transportation costs to help parents visit their children in placement. However, OCFS does not provide transportation help to all parents.

4. Improve the Reentry Process



The Board feels that several changes would significantly improve the reentry process: giving organizations that serve reentry youth access to the assessment information collected by OCFS, close tracking of the early warning signs of recidivism, and creating Connection Centers and Welcome Centers to help young people make the adjustment to life back in the community.

4A. Share assessment information

OCFS performs psychological, behavioral, educational, and medical assessments when young people first enter placement and while they are in custody. However, the information from these assessments is not always available to the organizations that provide services to the young person. In many cases, these organizations then go ahead and conduct their own assessments, resulting in a duplication of effort and wasted time and resources.

Implementation: OCFS should work with partner agencies to create a system for giving its assessment results (as appropriate) to other agencies so that special needs can be addressed and efforts are not duplicated. There should be a portfolio created for each child, containing all the types of assessments he or she has taken. These files should go wherever the child goes. The people who receive the files should include the aftercare worker, the school and the staff of programs that the child attends.

Existing Initiatives: OCFS is partnering with organizations in the community that are working with reentry youth, and is sharing information with them about what is happening with the young person once he or she is back home. However, we are not aware of efforts (other than the Intensive Aftercare Program mentioned on p. 14), where OCFS is sharing the results of the assessments conducted in placement.

4B. Track the early warning signs of recidivism and evaluate pilot programs

Recidivism is the end of a long road. Usually, there are warning signs before a young person is rearrested: he or she becomes truant or does poorly in school, violates his or her curfew, doesn't attend programs, or begins fighting with his or her parents.

OCFS should track these warning signs. This way, they can respond quickly if something is wrong, before problems grow into more serious issues and new arrests. They can also track their own success in reducing how frequently these problems occur.

In addition, we learned about many pilot programs that are working with reentry youth. However, most could not give us data on their performance to date. This was usually because they had not been running long enough to know their success rates.

Implementation: These are some indicators OCFS might track to catch early signs of recidivism:

- School attendance and performance
- Drug test results
- Attendance at programs: substance abuse treatment, anger management, mental health services, afterschool programs, tutoring
- Family relationships
- Employment/job training
- Setting and achievement of goals

In addition, we think it is important to conduct research on the success of the pilot programs.

Existing Initiatives:

Although individual OCFS aftercare workers monitor the progress of the youth under their supervision, we do not believe OCFS has a uniform system for tracking these warning signs for all reentry youth.

OCFS is conducting evaluations of its evidence-based pilot programs, including the Intensive Aftercare Program.

4C. Create Connection Centers

When we learned of the reception centers, we thought that if there is a place you go when you are entering placement there should be a place to go when you are leaving placement.²⁴ We recommend creating Connection Centers that would focus on helping young people make the difficult transition from placement to home.

Implementation: Youth should stay at a Connection Center for one or two weeks after leaving placement and before going home. The facility for New York City youth would be a little north of the city. At the Centers, young people would get information about agencies and programs, as well as participate in peer support groups and educational orientations. Parents would be able to visit more regularly. The OCFS after-care workers and Department of Education regional representatives would meet with the youth and his or her parents to update the service plans and make sure everything is all set for the return home.

Here's how the Connection Centers might work:

- An orientation would take place here that would cover different aspects of the reentry plan (school, jobs, treatment programs and afterschool programs).
- Information about agencies and programs would be given out.
- Department of Education regional representatives would meet with their students in this facility.
- The previous assessments taken by OCFS would be given to staff in the new facility; new assessments would be performed and compared to the original ones.
- Their parents would visit them in this new facility.
- The aftercare worker could meet with the family and young person in this facility.
- Disputes about transferring credits from placement to the city school could be resolved here.
- Peer-support groups would be provided.

Existing Initiatives:

We are not aware of any existing programs like this in New York.

²⁴ OCFS runs two reception centers (one for boys and one for girls) that are the first place young people go after the decision is made to place them in state custody. Young people stay there for one to two weeks before being sent to a placement facility. The initial OCFS assessments take place here.

4D. Create Welcome Centers

Once they are back home, reentry youth need a place where they can go to get reliable information and find out about services and opportunities.

We recommend creating Welcome Centers in New York City for reentry youth. Think of a tourist drop-in center, or a college campus student activities center. The goal of the Welcome Center is to provide youth returning from placement with access to resources for what they want to know. Many people get jobs and internships through people they know. With the Welcome Centers, we can give reentry youth a resource that knows almost everyone.

Implementation: Here's how they might work:

The Welcome Centers would have links to different kinds of programs, such as programs for reentry youth, substance abuse resources, and peer support groups, as well as programs to get participants back on track with their personal development, such as volunteer work, tutoring, and other extracurricular activities. The Welcome Center would also be a drop-in center where reentry youth could talk one-on-one with a person about his or her unique situation.

In thinking about the Welcome Centers, we debated whether an initial appointment should be mandatory or voluntary. We decided to present both options. The advantage of a mandatory initial appointment with the Welcome Center is to make sure that all reentering youth are aware of the available services, even if they are initially reluctant to use them. The danger, though, is that a mandated first appointment will be contrary to the 'use-us-as-your-resource' spirit that the Welcome Center should have and won't encourage youth to come back.

The services, though, would be equally available after youth have transitioned out of aftercare, and would be available to all youth, not just reentry youth. This also supports our recommendation that there should be integrated programming for reentry and non-reentry youth, to help remove the stigma of reentry and to provide positive peer groups to reentry youth.

To help develop accountability, young people would need to complete certain requirements to get certain resources. For example, getting job help might require completing various training workshops. This approach uses the youths' 'wants' to get them to complete their task; e.g. "If you want that job, you need to learn how to complete a resume, and take an interview workshop."

We would encourage parents to be there, but wouldn't require it, so that

we don't exclude youth who have bad relationships with their parents.

**Existing
Initiatives:**

The Department of Education is creating new transition centers which will begin to run in the fall of 2004 (see description on p. 36). We recommend that OCFS coordinate with the Department of Education to turn the transition centers into Welcome Centers.

Conclusion

These are our recommendations to help make young people coming home from placement more successful. We offer this report as a drive, a drive for YOU to make a difference in these youths' lives.

We hope that this report will encourage you to take action in helping all the youth affected by juvenile reentry. This issue directly affects 1,500 youth who return to New York City every year and thousands more indirectly. Your help can really make a difference—whether it's by making a new policy or just telling your friend about this and passing the word on, shedding light on a much neglected issue.

This report is a product of nine months of dedication and hunger, hunger to make a difference, hunger to help out kids who haven't had the same opportunities we have.

We want your input on our report. What are your comments, suggestions, questions, or answers to any of the questions we ask? We welcome any feedback you may have.

In addition, if you feel anyone should be contacted on this issue, please don't hesitate to either get them in contact with us, pass this report on to them, or make us aware of them so that we can contact them.

We would like to thank you for reading this report. We hope that our voice will be heard and respected, and open the door for other youth groups. This is the voice of people affected by the current policies. This is the voice of tomorrow.

Comments? Questions? Feedback? Please send them to:

Youth Justice Board
Center for Court Innovation
520 Eighth Avenue, 18th Floor
New York, NY 10018
(212) 373-8084
yjb@courtinnovation.org

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Youth Justice Board Members

Nabeela Abid



Hello. My name is Nabeela Abid and I am 17 years old from Staten Island and I am a senior at the Susan E. Wagner High School. I can't wait until college. I am really glad that I am a part of the Youth Justice Board. I learned a lot about the juvenile justice system. I liked interviewing the people the most and trying to find out the cracks in the system. Hopefully, our research will make a difference. Aside from the YJB, I have other hobbies. I am the President of the Muslim club at my school. I have been treasurer for ARISTA, a national honor society, for the past 3 years and I volunteer regularly at Seaview Rehabilitation Center.

Sonia Balaram



My name is Sonia Balaram and I am a sixteen year old girl from Canada. I live in the Bronx and everyday I commute to The Calhoun School in New York City where I am a junior. The reason I joined the Youth Justice Board was because I wanted to make a difference. Teens rarely get the opportunity to make a difference and to meet other motivated teens who share the same passion of helping others. One of the reasons we decided to pick reentry and the juvenile justice system was because those teens in placement are just like us. They are teens going through the common struggles and trying to make the right decisions and we felt that we could relate to them and really give a voice to those youth. Since I have been involved with the Youth Justice Board, I have met some great people such as the incredible members of the Youth Justice Board and our dedicated staff. Other people who have really inspired me are the professionals who work in this field and seeing their dedication has motivated me to stay involved and explore career opportunities. In the future, I would like to continue to do great things and to motivate others to do the same. Thank you YJB for giving me such a great experience and memories.

Matt Baptiste



Hi. My name is Matthew but everyone usually calls me Matt. I am a sophomore at Canarsie High School located in Canarsie, Brooklyn. I am the quietest person in the group but don't ask me why. I joined the Youth Justice Board because I wanted to make a change in all communities for the better; I wanted to brush up on certain skills like writing and research; and, I obviously wanted the money. No, I'm just kidding. I wanted to make things better for the next generation.

Shane A.j. Correia



My name is Shane A.j. Correia. At the age of 16, I currently attend Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis High School for International Careers; however, I live in Mott Haven, Bronx. When I moved from Washington State in April of last year my first goal was to build up my high school credentials and that in part was why I joined the Youth Justice Board. Though through the past months the group has become more than an extra-curricular activity and the people more than associates—they’ve become a second family. I’ve learned a lot of things about myself thanks to the diverse group and the easy opening for a different opinion to find its way into the middle of a deeply heated conversation. I always thought that putting a bunch of people with different goals and different ambitions in one room was asking for a failure, but instead it’s proven to be more a strengthening process since no stance is ever left alone. With the past months, I’ve also learned that we all didn’t really have such different opinions. We are all trying to accomplish the same goal, to make a difference, just in our diverse opinions; we are taking separate roads to get to the same destination.

Annel Hernandez



My name is Annel Hernandez. I’m 16 and go to Brooklyn Technical High School. I live in Ozone Park, Queens. My entire life I have been fascinated with the art of law, politics, and policy. So when I first heard the name Youth Justice Board, I instinctively thought this was for me. Since day one in YJB we were educated about so many different subjects. I loved it and I was captivated by each of them. One in specific caught my eye and that of my group—the juvenile justice system. To be more precise, it was the way these juveniles literally get thrown back into reality. These kids were not given a chance; they are trapped in the system. I would hate to not be capable of just moving on in my life. I have such ambition and aspirations for my future and I only wish everyone was given the right to aspire.

Jeremy Jiraud



“A class clown in the Big City”: That is how I, Jeremy Jiraud, see myself, as a clown trying to bring a smile to anyone who will listen. Being from the Bronx in the Soundview area, you have to have a sense of humor or you’ll go crazy. I am a senior in A.C.E. Stevenson High School. Yes, one of the dirty dozen schools. It’s not so bad. Oh, I’m 16 years old. Yeah. I’m young. I joined the Youth Justice Board because I was mainly interested in how it would look on my transcript but working with the members and the pretty great staff it turned out to be great. I plan to be the next winner on *The Apprentice* and work for the richest man in the world, Mr. Trump. Bye.

Maimouna Kane



Hello. My name is Maimouna Kane and I am 17 years old. I'm from Brooklyn, Flatbush and I currently attend Graphic Arts High School. The numerous amounts of violent young deaths in my neighborhood pushed me to strive to make a change. That was why I was interested in the Youth Justice Board. I am interested in juvenile reentry because of the fact that so much money is spent to put these youth in placement but the recidivism rates still remain so high. A highlight of mine was speaking with the youth at the Harlem Justice Center. My ambitions for the future are to be successful in whatever I do and to positively affect my community while I am at it. I also really enjoy singing and composing lyrics.

Manny Lampon



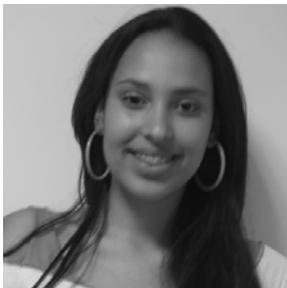
I am a passionate leader and freshmen student at City College. While I was in high school, I was the student leader of the Brandeis Gay Straight Alliance where it promoted a safe environment for all students in the school regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression. I also was a safe school intern for the LGBT center where the interns helped high schools all over the city to create safe environments for LGBT youth. I believe youth do not have to wait to get older to exercise their right to express what they believe in. Youth can be leaders now and have the power to influence positive social change.

LeShaun Lovell



Hi! I'm LeShaun Lovell and I'm 16 years old. I'm from Crown Heights, Brooklyn, by way of Trinidad. I love to write, perform, poetry, and sing (watch out for my album, just kidding). I'm a senior at Brooklyn Technical High School and a member of the Youth Justice Board. As a member of the Youth Justice Board, I feel I am doubly rewarded. As I embark upon this pioneering journey with the YJB, I learn more about myself every day. I also fulfill my obligation to my community, my peers and my people. The Youth Justice Board is where I know I am surrounded by intelligent, focused and dedicated (funny, too) people. We will always share a special bond. I wouldn't have traded this experience for anything in this world. !PAZ!

Amanda Martinez



Hello. My name is Amanda Martinez and I am 15 years old from Throgs Neck, Bronx. I am a sophomore at Preston High School. I was interested in joining the YJB because I really want to change things in society. I was seeing so many things that needed to change in the community and by joining a team of teens who share the same beliefs I felt our voice will be heard. Through my nine months with the YJB, I've learned so much about juvenile reentry, as well as how to speak up—something I'll be able to use for the rest of my life.

Flor Mena



My name is Flor Mena. I graduated from Paul Robeson High School and am now a freshman at Stony Brook University. I live in Crown Heights, Brooklyn. I was first interested in the Youth Justice Board because I wanted to learn how policy was made in New York City. In the Youth Justice Board, I learned that every idea has value. I have also learned that it is all very amazing and very much possible for minds to come together and effect change.

Kennyetta Odems



My name is Kennyetta Odems and I am 15 years old and live in Harlem. I was interested in the YJB because I thought it was the perfect opportunity to take action on problems that plague our communities. I am very passionate about law and in the future I would like to become a corporate lawyer.

Laurie Phung



My name is Laurie Phung. I'm 14 and currently attending Millennium High School as a sophomore. I live in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. I was first interested because it was good for resumes and my college counselor recommended it. As I got acquainted with the group, it wasn't about that anymore. It was about working as a team to get it all finished and making new friends. The thing that got me jumping at the topic was that these kids aren't actually bad they are just raised in an environment that had a bad influence on their lives and need help getting their lives back on track. I discovered that these youth are mainly minority and I'm really inspired by the fact that many kids want to change but there are all these things that are so hard, such as no support from their families. These kids want to hang out with their friends but because of all the programs the youth are mandated to, they have absolutely no time. These kids want to better themselves and many may not even be given the chance. The Youth Justice Board as a whole, as a team, and as friends, are going to try our best to give them a standing chance—to give them a new beginning and to make it easier on these kids.

Wendy Roman



Hi! My name is Wendy Roman and I'm 17 years old. I am a senior at the High School for Law and Public Service in Washington Heights, Manhattan. The reason why I joined the Youth Justice Board was because I wanted to make a difference in my community. I was tired of complaining of things and just sitting back and doing nothing about it. So I stood up and made sure that my voice was heard. When the topic of juvenile reentry came up, I knew that this was what I wanted the group to focus on. We are the next generation of this society and we need to make sure that our future leaders are mature young adults that have opportunities to later be doctors, lawyers, teachers, etc. Being a part of this group has been a great experience. Throughout the past months, I have learned so much about the juvenile justice system and I must admit that it feels great to know that we are helping these teenagers get back on the right track. I would like to thank the Center for Court Innovation and the staff members of the Youth Justice Board for letting me be a part of this project. I will always cherish all the moments of happiness and hard work that we lived. Thank You!

Zyolemi Suarez



My name is Zyolemi Suarez. I recently graduated from Edward R. Murrow and am now a freshman at Boricua College. The reason I joined the Youth Justice Board was because of the description of what they were looking for. I don't recall the exact words, but it was along the lines of a leader, motivated, smart, works well with others, etc. And when I heard that I was speechless. I even said something like "wow did these people follow me around and base their standards on me?" As you look at the rest of the Board members you see that there are others who perfectly match that description. Then I heard the part of what we were going to do for the community and how we were going to possibly make history—so then I said I have to do this. I wanted to make a change in this world that not only would help me, but most of all help others in my community and around the city.

Carla Tabb



My name is Carla Juanita Tabb and I'm a senior in Brooklyn Technical High School. I live in the Bedford-Stuyvesant area of Brooklyn. I'm interested in a career in law and I applied to the Youth Justice Board to gain experience in the public aspect of advocacy. I want to be an advocate for my community and populations I feel don't have a voice. I always wanted to focus on improving the juvenile justice system. I feel that I, as well as the other great members of the YJB, could add a unique perspective that could initiate great changes within the juvenile justice system.

Youth Justice Board Staff

Emily Feinstein joins the Youth Justice Board as the lead facilitator and curriculum developer. Ms. Feinstein is a trainer and consultant working with youth, educators and parents throughout the city. She has worked with various organizations including the Department of Education's Parent Academy, Educators for Social Responsibility and Partnership for After School Education. Ms. Feinstein will continue as an ongoing support and consultant to the YJB this coming year. She is proud to be part of the project, and greatly appreciates the commitment and work that went into making the YJB a success. Ms. Feinstein is also an artist who has displayed much of her work throughout the city. She received her B.A. from Temple University and her M.F.A. from Bard College.

Dory Hack is the Project Coordinator for the Youth Justice Board. She has been responsible for curriculum development and planning, and will be the lead planner and facilitator for the next Youth Justice Board cohort. She is also responsible for the planning, development and maintenance of several technology applications used by the Center for Court Innovation's projects. She is honored to have worked with the young people on the Board. Ms. Hack is a graduate of Wesleyan University.

Mary Beth King is an AmeriCorps volunteer with the Youth Justice Board. Ms. King managed the mentoring and personal development components of the board, helped to develop the curriculum, organized field trips and was responsible for all the administrative work. Before joining the Youth Justice Board, Ms. King worked with adjudicated youth in a wilderness therapy program in Colorado. Ms. King received a B.A. in Sociology from St. Lawrence University.

Jimena Martinez, Director of Youth Programming, is responsible for coordinating the work of the Center for Court Innovation's youth and juvenile justice programs. Her responsibilities have included launching the Youth Justice Board. Formerly, as the Project Director of the Harlem Community Justice Center, Ms. Martinez ran a community-based court. Ms. Martinez also served for three years as the Center for Court Innovation's Director of Technical Assistance, managing a team that provided assistance to hundreds of community justice projects around the country, including helping eleven cities open community courts. Before joining the Center, Ms. Martinez was director of development for Educators for Social Responsibility Metropolitan Area and a division manager at DRI/McGraw-Hill. She has a B.A. from Barnard College, Columbia University.

"I would like to thank every single member of the Youth Justice Board for a fantastic nine months. Our many hours of research, interviews, policy discussions, laughter and hard work together have left me inspired and very thankful to know such a remarkable group of young people."

Jennifer Rose was a planner and facilitator for the Youth Justice Board. She currently oversees the New York Public Safety Corps, a group of 40 AmeriCorps members who work on improving

public safety, engaging crime victims, aiding community improvement efforts and supporting the work of criminal justice agencies. Among her responsibilities, Ms. Rose helps identify work assignments for Corps members and supports members' professional development. Before coming to the Center Ms. Rose worked on human rights policy at UNICEF and spearheaded grassroots community projects involving women and youth as a Peace Corps volunteer in rural Guatemala. She received her B.A. from Colby College and her master's in Public Administration from New York University.

Youth Justice Board Advisory Committee

Greg Berman
Center for Court Innovation

Sabrina Carter
former Red Hook Youth Court member

Krista Diaso
Good Shepherd Services

Monica Drinane
New York City Family Court

Natalie Gomez-Velez
City University of New York

Eric Lee
Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator
City of New York

Tanya Lewis-Kelly
Harlem Community Justice Center

Karen Lucas
former Harlem Youth Court member

JoEllen Lynch
New York City Department of Education

Nora McCarthy
Youth Communication/NY Center, Inc.

Kennyetta Odems
former Harlem Youth Court member

Andrew Rubinson
Fresh Youth Initiatives

Robert Sherman
Surdna Foundation

Stefanie Siegel
Paul Robeson High School

Alfred Siegel
Center for Court Innovation

Christopher Watler
Center for Court Innovation

Alfonso Wyatt
Fund for the City of New York

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INNOVATION

520 Eighth Avenue, 18th Floor
New York, New York 10018
212.397.3050 fax 212.397.0985
www.courtinnovation.org