



**The New York City Council,
Committee on Juvenile Justice
Committee on Cultural Affairs
January 29, 2016**

“Oversight- Examining Cultural Non-Profits in the New York City Juvenile Justice System”

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

Good morning Chair Cabrera, Chair Van Bramer and members of the Committees on Juvenile Justice and Cultural Affairs, Libraries & International Intergroup Relations. I am Felipe Franco, Deputy Commissioner for the Division of Youth and Family Justice. With me today is Stephanie Prussack, Associate Commissioner for Detention Services and Jennifer Romelien, Executive Director of Detention Program Services. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the cultural programs and services that ACS and our partners provide for youth in our juvenile detention facilities. Also, on behalf of Commissioner Carrión and my colleagues, I would like to thank Chair Cabrera and the Juvenile Justice Committee for recognizing 27 deserving and committed Crossroads Juvenile Center staff during yesterday's proclamation ceremony.

Overview of DYFJ

The Administration for Children's Services' Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) oversees a continuum of services and programs for youth at every stage of the juvenile justice process. Our mission is to improve outcomes for young people who come into our care, which we strive to accomplish by contracting with agencies that support youth in community-based alternative programs, secure and non-secure detention facilities, non-secure placement residences, and limited-secure placement residences.

DYFJ provides secure and non-secure detention services to young people who are awaiting the conclusion of their family or criminal court case. New York distinguishes between a "juvenile delinquent," which is a young person between the ages of 7-15 who commits a crime is considered a "juvenile delinquent" and a juvenile offender, which is a 13, 14 or 15 year old child who commits a more serious or violent act – such as murder, manslaughter, assault, sexual assault, attempted murder, burglary, arson, or kidnapping and who may be treated under the law as an adult. ACS' 13 non-secure detention residences serve juvenile delinquents, while our two secure detention centers

(Horizon Juvenile Center in the Bronx and Crossroads Juvenile Center in Brooklyn) serve both juvenile delinquents and juvenile offenders.

The number of youth admitted to detention has been decreasing for some time. That number has continued to decrease from 2,928 in 2014 to a total of 2,722 in 2015. This has occurred due to a reduction in the number of juvenile arrests, as well as the increased number of community-based alternative programs designed to divert young people from the justice system.

Cultural Programs for Young People in Juvenile Detention Facilities

While young people are in our care, ACS seeks to expose young people in detention to positive programming and services to encourage them to get on a better path. DYFJ and our partners maintain a range of programs and services that provide structured, fun, and developmentally appropriate activities, and culturally enriching experiences for justice-involved young people. Our partner agencies and community-based organizations offer high quality services for our youth and help ACS enhance and expand a network of activities. This testimony will highlight some of the cultural activities that take place within our detention facilities.

We are fortunate to have a number of collaborative partnerships with our sister City agencies and with cultural and educational institutions that provide positive services to the youth in our care. Many of the programs that we speak about today are funded through awards by the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development's SONYC (School's Out New York City) program, and some are funded by the Department of Cultural Affairs, through its Cultural Development Fund.

The Performing Arts

One of our partnerships is with Carnegie Hall, the respected New York City musical institution. Once a year, through Carnegie Hall's Musical Connections program, youth in both of our secure detention facilities work with professional musicians to develop and record original compositions. Residents perform these musical works in concerts at the facilities which are attended by their family members, DYFJ staff, and fellow residents. The performances are the culmination of two weeks of collaboration between our residents and Carnegie Hall artists that include lyric development, songwriting, track recording, track mixing, and song rehearsal. We have seen great benefit from the Musical Connections program – staff have reported a positive change in “tone and temperature” around the times these programs take place. Detention residents get to showcase their talents, or discover new ones, and gain exposure to positive activities which they can continue when they return home.

Detention runs a number of other performance art workshops, each of which emphasize different skills and all of which provide an outlet for creative expression:

Drama Club gives our youth an opportunity to learn, write and perform their own skits and plays. Drama Club also features unscripted performances and role playing, which allow youth to learn positive problem solving and conflict resolution skills.

With the help of artists from the Shadow Box Theatre, a puppet making and performance workshop, our youth make their own puppets and perform puppet shows with scripts they create themselves.

Flex Dance Gives young people opportunities for self-expression and self-esteem building through urban dance. Collaborative dance scenes and projects require youth to work together and cooperate, which in turn reinforces team building.

Building Beats allows youth to create their own electronic music. Detention staff has played the music created by youth in this program at family visiting days and other facility events, which allows parents, staff and others to experience and enjoy the musical creativity of our young people.

Youth in our non-secure detention (NSD) group homes have had the opportunity to explore and experience some of our most venerable cultural institutions throughout the City. Through Arts Connection— an arts-in-education organization in the City and its “High Five Tickets to the Arts Programs,” – NSD youth have watched performances by Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater at the New York City Center, the Joyce Dance Company, and the Blue Man Group. They have seen on- and off-Broadway plays and shows at the Apollo Theatre, and have visited several museums throughout the City, including the Museum of Modern Art.

Creative Writing

DYFJ also partners with several community based organizations that use creative writing to encourage positive self-expression. Through the Bronx Writers Corps, youth engage in creative writing with established authors. At the completion of the program, the youth’s work is compiled and published in a book. In a similar program, youth work with Voices UnBroken, which provides youth the opportunity for creative self-expression through the craft of poetry. Another program, Power Writers, allows youth to participate in judgment-free writing activities, poetry and spoken word.

Artwork

Our youth also have the opportunity to express themselves through their own artwork. Art Start is an award-winning creative arts organization that provides creative arts workshops in NYC shelters and alternative schools such as the Passages Academy in both of our secure detention

facilities. Doing Art Together (DAT) is a non-profit arts education organization that provides hands-on programs to under-served audiences. DAT's programs build skills that enhance the ability to learn and are easily transferred from the classroom to life. DAT aims to offer high quality arts education programs that level the educational playing field for children and youth (ages 2 through 22) who come from under-resourced communities.

Our youth have participated in several mural programs with artists from the Groundswell Project and artists from Creative Art Works. These murals depict messages of hope and transformation from our youth and are displayed throughout both secure detention facilities. Two murals created by youth at Horizon are on display in the community health clinic at Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx.

The Animation Project (TAP) is a digital technology non-profit that provides animation through art therapy. TAP uses digital art technology as a tool to change the lives of youth.

Closing

Thank you for the opportunity to share the important work we are doing to address the cultural needs of young people in our juvenile justice facilities. We appreciate the Council's ongoing support as we continue to strive toward improving services for the City's most vulnerable youth. We, as well as the other city agencies represented today, are happy to take your questions.