

Community-Based Mentoring for Justice-Involved Youth

The Urban Institute's October 2018 report presents findings from an implementation and outcome evaluation of Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM). The evaluation finds that AIM successfully helps participants avoid out-of-home placement (equivalent to prison in the adult context) and recidivism, and supports them to pursue and achieve individualized goals to reduce their risk of re-offending.

The evaluation documents AIM program operations, participant outcomes, stakeholder experiences, and best practices. It also presents recommendations to address program challenges, such as limited aftercare and inconsistent provider reporting. The evaluation conducted focus groups and interviews with participants, alumni, caregivers, AIM staff, New York City Department of Probation (DOP) staff, Family Court staff and other stakeholders; reviewed program materials; and analyzed administrative data.

Key Findings

- **Over 90 percent of AIM participants avoided felony rearrest within 12 months of enrollment**—far exceeding the program target of 60 percent.
- **Over two-thirds of participants completed AIM without an out-of-home placement.** When excluding placements due to non-criminal technical violations of probation conditions (e.g., truancy), this figure rises to over 80 percent.
- **Participants re-offended at low rates.** In the year after enrollment, few participants had new felony adjudications or convictions in Family Court or Criminal Court (see chart). In the year following program completion, only 3 percent received a felony conviction or youthful offender adjudication in Criminal Court. Prior research shows 12-month reconviction rates of 25 percent among youth released from placement in New York State.ⁱ

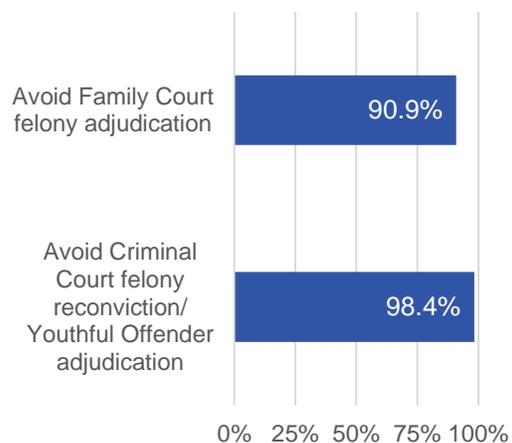
What is Advocate, Intervene, Mentor?

AIM is a six- to nine-month court-mandated community-based mentoring program that serves youth under probation supervision ages 13 to 18 with high criminogenic risk. Youth are referred to AIM as an alternative to out-of-home placement. AIM utilizes a one-on-one mentoring model with a paid advocate-mentor available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

AIM advocate-mentors are credible messengers, defined as individuals who are respected in the communities served, typically coming from the same neighborhood and backgrounds as the participants, including prior justice system involvement. Advocate-mentors work with AIM participants to co-create individualized service plans designed to transform attitudes and behaviors, reduce recidivism and improve participants' personal outcomes.

Launched in 2012, AIM is implemented in all five New York City boroughs by local nonprofit service providers, and is managed by DOP as a component of the Young Men's Initiative.

Justice-Related Outcomes Within 12 Months of Enrollment



My son wouldn't open up to me. Always so angry. I didn't know why. After the program, he opens up now. He comes to me now.

—AIM participant's parent

Additional Findings

- Participants who completed AIM attained or made documented progress toward the majority of goals set in their individualized service plans, and goal attainment was positively correlated with more time spent with advocate-mentors.
- Participants, alumni, caregivers, program staff, and other stakeholders all expressed positive feelings about their experience with the AIM program.
- Participants valued one-on-one interactions with advocate-mentors, and caregivers valued the family meetings and providers' responsiveness to participant needs.

Challenges

- Providers noted challenges stemming from the wide range of eligible ages, highlighting the disparate needs and maturity levels across youth ages 13 to 18. Staff experienced greater difficulty engaging the youngest participants.
- Providers asserted that the program length is too short, and have each established varying aftercare strategies to sustain engagement with participants following the end of their mandated enrollment.
- Stakeholders highlighted inconsistencies in coordination between DOP, providers and Family Court, particularly related to referral processes and provider reporting on participant status and outcomes.

Recommendations

- Improve knowledge base of Family Court stakeholders regarding the AIM program model and eligibility criteria, and involve program staff in the screening of AIM candidates prior to court mandate.
- Expand training for advocate-mentors to include additional evidence-based practices related to youth development, conflict management, and self-care.
- Expand activities and service offerings for participants, and establish formal alumni engagement opportunities following the completion of mandated programming.
- Implement more frequent and transparent reporting mechanisms across AIM stakeholders, and provide formal and routine reporting on participant outcomes and program targets.
- Adopt and routinely report on intermediate participant outcome measures, such as engagement in school, involvement with families, and development of prosocial interaction and communication skills.

Looking Ahead

This evaluation highlights opportunities for enhancement to the AIM program model, and builds evidence that can inform New York City's cross-cutting justice system reform efforts. New statewide policy will significantly expand the number of youth eligible for juvenile justice services such as AIM, as youth ages 16 and 17 transition out of the adult criminal justice system into Family Court in 2018 and 2019 respectively. Simultaneously, the City is moving forward with plans to replace the Rikers Island jail complex with borough-based facilities, a strategy that requires significant reductions to the population of detained and sentenced individuals held in City custody. NYC Opportunity and YMI will partner with DOP, AIM providers, and other justice system stakeholders to strengthen the AIM model and juvenile justice services more broadly, guided by these and other related evaluation findings.

Further and Related Reading

Urban Institute, 2018, "Evaluation Report on New York City's Advocate, Intervene, Mentor Program." https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/evidence/AIM_Final_2018.pdf

Urban Institute, 2018, "Arches Transformative Mentoring Program: An Implementation and Impact Evaluation in New York City." https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/evidence/Arches_Final_2018.pdf

¹ Office of Children and Family Services. 2011. "OCFS Fact Sheet: Recidivism Among Juvenile Delinquents and Offenders Released from Residential Care in 2008." Rensselaer: New York State Office of Children and Family Services. This finding is referenced for context as the evaluation did not include a comparison group. With the implementation of Close to Home in 2012, it is presumed that recidivism declined among youth released from placement, but supporting data is not available at this time.