



Arches Reduces Recidivism Among Young Adults on Probation

The Urban Institute's February 2018 report, "Evaluation of Arches Transformative Mentoring Program," presents findings from an impact and implementation evaluation of the Arches Transformative Mentoring program (Arches). The evaluation was conducted to identify the impact of Arches on participant outcomes, including recidivism; to assess participant and staff experiences in and attitudes toward the program; to identify practices associated with successful programmatic operation and positive outcomes; and to develop recommendations for program enhancement.

The implementation analysis draws on qualitative data collected through stakeholder interviews, participant focus groups, site-specific program observations, and analysis of administrative program data. The impact evaluation uses a quasi-experimental design¹ to compare rearrest and reconviction among 279 Arches participants enrolled between January 2013 and October 2014 and a comparison group of 682 young adult probation clients not enrolled in Arches who began a probation sentence between January 2013 and December 2014.

Impact Evaluation Findings

Arches participants are less likely to be reconvicted of a crime. Relative to the matched comparison group, felony reconviction rates among Arches participants are 69 percent lower 12 months after beginning probation and 57 percent lower 24 months after beginning probation (see Chart 1). This impact is driven by reductions among participants under age 18.

Curriculum completion is correlated with recidivism reduction. Participants who complete the interactive journaling curriculum are less likely to be rearrested or reconvicted than their fellow participants who do not.

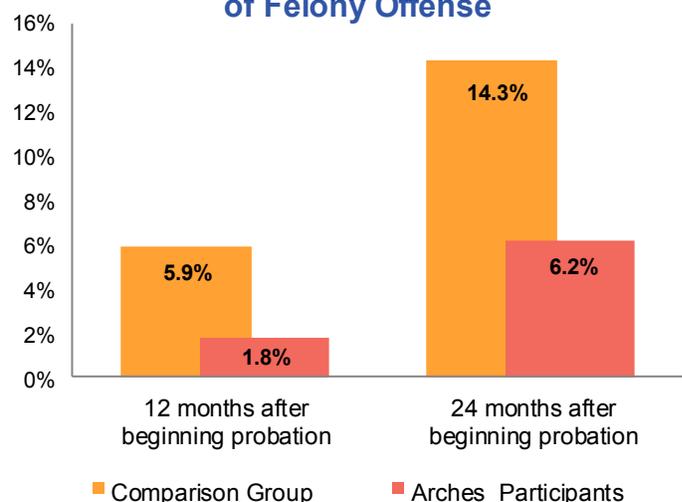
Participants achieve improvement in self-perception and relationships with others. Pre- and post-assessment show gains in key attitudinal and behavioral indicators, including emotional regulation and future orientation.

What is Arches Transformative Mentoring?

The Arches program serves young adult probation clients ages 16 to 24 years. Arches uses a group mentoring model with an evidence-based interactive journaling curriculum centered on cognitive behavioral principles, delivered by mentors with backgrounds similar to those of their mentees, known as "credible messengers." Arches incorporates work readiness services, community engagement and recreational activities, and one-on-one mentorship opportunities, with case management services provided by Probation Officers. Arches allows enrollment on a rolling basis and provides stipends to support sustained participant engagement.

Launched in 2012 as part of the NYC Young Men's Initiative and with funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, Arches is managed by the NYC Department of Probation (DOP) and currently operates at 13 sites,² many in coordination with the DOP Neighborhood Opportunity Network (NeON) initiative, which established community-based probation offices co-located with social service provider organizations.

Chart 1: Percent Reconvicted of Felony Offense



Difference in felony reconviction rates were statistically significant at 12 months after beginning probation ($p < 0.01$) and 24 months after beginning probation ($p < 0.001$).

¹ The evaluation use a technique called propensity score matching, which helps to overcome potential bias by matching Arches program participants and comparison group members on observed characteristics, and comparing outcomes across a sample of matched cases.

² Bloomberg Philanthropies funding initially supported operation at 20 sites, which declined to 18 sites before the launch of this evaluation. After the completion of Bloomberg Philanthropies grant funding, new city funding was allocated to supports operation at 13 sites, which is feasible because sites had not been operating at full capacity.

“Arches’ goal is to get [participants] focused; [mentors] don’t want us to take the same path that they went through. Every time, the conversation is to [put] yourself in a different situation, to change your mindset.”

-Program Participant

Implementation Evaluation Findings

Participants reported very close and supportive relationships with mentors. Mentors’ status as credible messengers, their 24/7 availability for one-on-one mentoring, and a “family atmosphere” within the program are credited with fostering trust and communication that support participants’ attitudinal and behavioral change.

Flexibility in program structure supports sustained engagement and positive outcomes. Rolling enrollment is credited with supporting successful program integration by allowing providers “to meet each participant where they are.” Group mentoring, in which participants engage with multiple mentors rather than being matched to a single mentor, is credited with enhancing relationship development by allowing more organic mentor-mentee matching.

Program providers reflected positively on DOP management and technical assistance provision, but highlighted opportunities for enhancement. Providers noted good working relationships with DOP program management staff and individual probation officers, but cited challenges securing sufficient referrals from DOP to reach enrollment targets. Provider training is positively reviewed, but providers expressed desire for increased on-site coaching and new training content, such as trauma-informed practice and crisis intervention strategies.

Interactive journaling curriculum presents challenges. Program observations revealed inconsistencies in curriculum implementation across sites. Stakeholder feedback pointed to concerns regarding the structure and cultural relevance of the curriculum for the Arches program model and participant population. The report recommends better tailoring the curriculum to align with the real-world experiences and expectations of program participants.

Program delivery may be enhanced through increased dose, greater service coordination, and provider supports. The report recommends increasing the frequency and length of programming to support deepened participant engagement and to introduce wraparound and aftercare services. The report also highlights the potential for expanded collaboration across Arches providers to improve knowledge sharing and best practices adoption, as well as enhanced partnerships between Arches providers and other young adult programming to supplement service delivery and grow community awareness of the program. In addition, the report calls for expanded mentor supports, including opportunities for full-time employment and advanced training and education.

Looking Ahead

The Urban Institute report shows that Arches is an impactful program with demonstrated ability to reduce participant recidivism and great promise to produce sustainable attitudinal and behaviors change for justice system-involved young adults.

New York City has already formalized its commitment to Arches, both through the allocation of new city funding to sustain the program following the completion of Bloomberg Philanthropies grant funding, and through the city-funded implementation of the Next STEPS program, a modified version of Arches serving young adults at risk of justice-system involvement.

Findings and recommendations from this report will inform potential enhancements for the Arches and Next STEPS programs, as well as the development of new young adult programming.