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Considerations for Justice-Involved Youth Programming

Lessons Learned and Recommendations from the Arches, AIM, and NYC Justice Corps Evaluations

Lindsey Cramer, Sino Esthappan, Mathew Lynch, and Margaret Goff
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Starting in the 1980s, justice policies nationwide have emphasized a "tough on crime" approach to addressing youth delinquency. But research shows that punitive responses to delinquent behaviors—especially behaviors that pose minimal risk to public safety—undermine the well-being of youth, their families, and their communities. Thus, policymakers and practitioners have recently begun to develop and implement a new approach to safety and justice that advances success for all youth and their communities, especially those vulnerable to justice system contact.

In line with this new approach, New York City (NYC) has invested significant time, resources, and effort over the past decade into shifting its philosophy and culture around serving justice-involved youth. By expanding the continuum of youth programs and services, NYC agencies and stakeholders have sought to more effectively meet the needs of youth and their families. Building on these efforts, the New York City Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity (NYC Opportunity) partnered with researchers at the Urban Institute (Urban) to evaluate three programs designed for justice-involved youth. Starting in 2015, Urban evaluated the Arches Transformative Mentoring program (Arches), the Advocate, Intervene, and Mentor (AIM) program, and the NYC Justice Corps program.

The purpose of this brief is to identify several lessons learned and recommendations designed to inform current and future programming for justice-involved youth in New York City, drawing on findings from Urban's evaluations of the three programs. This brief is intended for all NYC stakeholders who serve justice-involved youth, such as justice system staff, judges, court actors, probation officers, law enforcement officers, community- and faith-based organization staff, and other local partners. For the purposes of this brief, we define "youth" as juveniles and young adults ages 13 through 24. The brief is organized into the following three sections: a review of the relevant literature on the challenges justice-involved youth face and recent New York State and NYC strategic efforts to combat those

challenges; a brief overview of the three program evaluations and the respective findings; and the lessons learned and recommendations for current and future youth programming in NYC.

Challenges for Justice-Involved Youth

Youth violence has declined sharply nationwide over the past two decades. Between 2002 and 2014, the proportion of youth involved in violence declined by nearly 30 percent (Salas-Wright et al. 2017). Despite this decline, the United States still has the highest rate of youth under correctional control of any developed nation. More than half of all petitioned delinquency cases (or referrals to prosecution) referred to juvenile courts are either adjudicated delinquent or found guilty and referred to prosecution (Hockenberry and Puzzanchera 2018). Of these cases, approximately 300,000 youths younger than 17 who face contact with the justice system receive probation (Hockenberry and Puzzanchera 2018), and nearly 53,000 younger than 18 are sent to out-of-home placement facilities, such as detention centers, residential treatment centers, and adult prisons and jails (Sawyer 2018). Youth ages 18 to 24 comprise 21 percent of people admitted into adult prison every year.[1] So, although youth experience the harmful effects of both the adult and juvenile systems, the juvenile system has traditionally adopted a rehabilitative approach to providing age-appropriate services to youth. In comparison, the adult system uses a less rehabilitative approach and focuses on more punitive measures.

DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUTH

Research shows that the brain does not fully develop until age 25, and that adolescence—defined as a transitional period between the onset of puberty and adulthood (Casey and Caudle 2013)—is when a brain begins its final stages of maturation (Luna 2004). Because of the evolving nature of adolescent brains, youth are less likely to exercise impulse control and more likely to engage in risky behaviors. Steinberg et al.'s (2009) five-site study on the intellectual and psychosocial functioning of more than 900 individuals found significant differences in maturity (as measured by impulse control), resistance to peer pressure, and decisionmaking between younger and older participants. According to the Steinberg study, youth ages 16 to 17 were significantly less mature than those 22 and older, and youth ages 18 to 21 were significantly less mature than those 26 and older.

More importantly, as adolescent brains mature, youth become less likely to engage in risky behaviors and more likely to make sound decisions, reducing their risk of involvement in the justice system. Research finds that adolescence is the peak of youth delinquency and that most youths "age out" of delinquency as their brains mature (Moffitt 1993). The landmark Pathways to Desistance study, for example, followed more than 1,300 youths involved in the juvenile justice system for 7 years, and found that 90 percent of youths who had committed crimes (including serious and violent crimes) did not engage in antisocial behavior as they aged into adulthood (Steinberg, Cauffman, and Monahan 2015).

Many youths prosecuted in the adult and juvenile justice systems are charged with low-level offenses that often reflect typical adolescent behaviors. In 2015, 23 percent of all youths in the juvenile justice system (approximately 10,885) were held in confinement for either technical violations of

probation supervision, such as skipping meetings (18 percent), or status offenses such as truancy, running away, and underage drinking (5 percent) (Horowitz and Carlock 2018). The Prison Policy Initiative estimates that approximately one in three youths in the juvenile justice system charged with low-level offenses (nearly 17,000 youths) could be released without posing significant risks to community safety (Sawyer 2018). These cases involve youths charged with status offenses, minor drug offenses, public order offenses not involving weapons, and technical violations. Punitive responses (such as arrest and incarceration) to low-level infractions that often reflect typical adolescent behavior undermine the process of desistance, increasing youths' vulnerability to justice system contact.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM CONTACT

Although rates of arrest and incarceration have declined significantly since their peak in the 1990s, racial and ethnic disparities have grown (Rovner 2016). Youth of color are overrepresented at every stage of the criminal and juvenile justice systems (NRC 2014). Youth of color are more likely to be arrested than white youth, despite there being no substantial differences in behaviors or status offenses (Rovner 2016). For example, black and white youth are equally likely to commit status offenses, violent crimes, and property crimes (Kann et al. 2014). However, black youth are more than twice as likely as white youth to be arrested for all delinquent offenses (Puzzanchera and Hockenberry 2015). Racial and ethnic disparities are exacerbated when cases are processed in juvenile courts. Among cases that are adjudicated delinquent, black youth are less likely to receive probation than white youth and more likely to receive out-of-home placement dispositions. Black justice-involved youth are more than four times as likely to be committed to secure placements as white justice-involved youth, and in some states, they are more than ten times as likely to be sent to out-of-home placement (Rovner 2016).

The increased presence of law enforcement in communities of color is associated with racial disparities in stops across precincts and neighborhoods (Gelman, Fagan, and Kiss 2007) and among law enforcement officers (Ridgeway 2007). Residents of these neighborhoods often experience concentrated disadvantage and limited access to community resources (Liberman and Fontaine 2015), problems that are made worse by increased surveillance and contact with the justice system. Recent research has also found that demographic changes in these neighborhoods—resulting from gentrification and economic restructuring—are associated with increases in quality of life complaints that increase police presence in neighborhoods historically comprised of people of color (Legewie and Schaeffer 2016).

CONSEQUENCES OF JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

Studies find that involvement with the justice system is linked to many negative behavioral, social, and economic outcomes, magnifying the challenges that justice-involved youth face as they transition to adulthood (Chung et al. 2005). Removing youth from their homes and placing them in justice facilities removes them from critical family and social supports, hinders prosocial development, and increases the risk of reoffending, especially among those who are already at low risk of delinquency (Fabelo et al. 2015; Ryon et al. 2013). Research also shows that arrests and incarceration reinforce (and often worsen) the conditions that enable crime and violence in neighborhoods that experience concentrated disadvantage (Liberman and Fontaine 2015). The effects of disadvantage and justice system contact are

mutually reinforcing, and youth involved in the justice system face many obstacles to accessing opportunities that facilitate upward mobility, such as education and employment. Studies have found that justice system contact negatively impacts academic outcomes. Hirschfield (2003), for example, tested the effects of arrest on 778 youths of color who had been arrested at least once, finding that arrest increased the likelihood of dropping out of school and decreased school attendance and test scores. These negative outcomes were worse for youths who had been arrested multiple times, as well as those who had been detained.

Barriers to education continue into higher education. Between 2006 and 2018, the Common Application, which is used by more than 750 colleges and universities, required applicants to report juvenile and criminal history information. Research also shows that 20 percent of colleges and universities have denied admission to students because of their criminal or juvenile record (CCA 2011). Studies find that a significant number of applicants who begin an application and check the box revealing convictions do not submit a completed application (Rosenthal et al. 2015). Although the Common Application no longer requests this information, colleges and universities have broad discretion to conduct official background checks. Similarly, justice system involvement has affected access to financial aid since 1998, when Congress established mandates that precluded applicants with felony and misdemeanor drug convictions from receiving Pell Grants, Stafford Loans, and work study (Lovenheim and Owens 2014). Recent estimates suggest that lifting the bans on these grants would expand postsecondary educational access to over 463,000 incarcerated people, increase employment rates among formerly incarcerated workers by 2.1 percent during the first year after release, and reduce state prison spending by $365.8 million per year (Oakford et al. 2019). While the recent passage of the First Step Act has opened opportunities to lift the ban on access to Pell Grants based on criminal records, it remains to be seen whether the ban will be removed.

Efforts to Support Justice-Involved Youth in New York

Although the consequences of justice system involvement for youth are far-reaching, a growing body of research conducted over the past several decades has identified ways to keep communities safe while minimizing justice system contact for youth. Investments in community-based alternatives to incarceration that keep youth close to their homes have potential to reduce future involvement with the justice system. Drawing on this body of research, New York State and NYC have implemented a range of state and local policies, practices, and programs to help youth overcome the challenges discussed above. Specifically, these include state-level policies, justice reform efforts, and citywide initiatives.

STATE-LEVEL POLICY CHANGES

In 2012, New York State enacted legislation that enabled NYC's juvenile justice system to place youth close to their communities and families. This created the necessary conditions for NYC's Administration for Children's Services (ACS), Department of Probation (DOP), and other NYC officials to create the *Close to Home* initiative, focusing on supporting family and community ties for justice-involved youth during placement and reintegration into the community (ACS 2018).

The *Close to Home* initiative allows youths adjudicated as juvenile delinquents in the family court system to be supervised under the auspice of ACS through community-based, nonprofit providers in non-secure and limited secure placements in or near the borough in which the youth resides. Before *Close to Home*, these youths would have been placed in placement facilities upstate, far from their families. In the years since implementing *Close to Home*, NYC's juvenile justice system has limited its reliance on sentencing youth to traditional placement facilities and has instead sentenced youth to alternative supervision or placement options in their communities.

Before 2018, New York was one of only two states to adjudicate 16- and 17-year-olds as adults. In 2017, New York State enacted *Raise the Age* legislation that increased the age of criminal responsibility to 18. Although *Raise the Age* may initially increase the caseload and costs of NYC's juvenile justice system, evidence from other states' adoption of similar legislation suggests long-term positive impacts on recidivism and the economy (JPI 2017). Furthermore, these state-level policy changes may also diminish the burden on NYC's adult justice system. If youth can access services appropriate for their age and needs, they may be less likely to commit future crimes and become involved in the adult system (Maschi et al. 2008; Skowyra and Cocozza 2007).

Moreover, there have been important state-level justice reforms that do not specifically target youth but have beneficial consequences for them. For example, the 2009 reforms to New York's *Rockefeller Drug Laws* addressed mandatory minimums for certain felony convictions, discharged nonviolent drug offenders under community supervision, and enhanced judicial diversion to drug court alternatives for people charged with felony drug offenses (Kellam and Bates 2014). When those reforms passed, 170 drug courts were operating in New York State, including 62 felony drug treatment courts. The New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services demonstrated in an analysis that drug court participants experienced significantly lower recidivism rates than a similar group of people who were sentenced to prison (Kellam and Bates 2014). The reformed *Rockefeller Drug Laws*—especially their focus on drug courts—paved the way for further state-level changes to emphasize community-based treatment.

JUSTICE REFORM EFFORTS

NYC has also adopted broad justice reforms that are not specific to youth, but which have provided continued support for community-based and age-appropriate service provision. NYC residents have led a campaign to *Close Rikers* Island Jail Complex, where nearly 8,000 incarcerated people from NYC reside. Through a Blue-Ribbon Panel formed to discuss changes to NYC's criminal justice system, community members' voices informed the panel's recommendations, which included increasing the use of diversion programs, modifying court processes, and expediting cases at all levels (Marton 2018). In August 2018, NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio announced plans to replace the Rikers Island facilities with borough-based jails, continuing the push for community-based innovations in the criminal justice system.

In addition to community-driven campaigns, NYC has continued to implement justice system reforms that emphasize the importance of keeping justice-involved people close to their communities. To support this goal, DOP established *Neighborhood Opportunity Networks* (NeONs) in 2011. NeONs are

neighborhood-based probation offices designed to bring together community organizations, government stakeholders, local businesses, and community members to connect probationers with local resources and services. NeONs aim to increase probationers' access to education, employment readiness, mentoring, and other health-based programs. More recently, the Manhattan District Attorney's Office's Criminal Justice Investment Initiative (CJII) is working to establish five *Youth Opportunity Hubs* to connect youth with an array of services across NYC.

CITY-LEVEL INITIATIVES

NYC has developed several citywide initiatives focused on the unique needs of youth, and especially young men of color. NYC's *Young Men's Initiative* (YMI), which launched in 2011, was created to address inequities for young men of color. YMI was funded through a public-private partnership to provide young men of color with increased access to education, health, and employment services. Through YMI, NYC implemented community-based programs for justice-involved youth such as the Arches and AIM programs; YMI also funded an expansion of the NYC Justice Corps program. Many YMI initiatives have undergone independent evaluations showing promising results and impact. For instance, a qualitative 2016 Urban assessment showed that YMI stakeholders perceived YMI as a successful strategy (Astone et al. 2016).

In concert with YMI, DOP expanded its continuum of *alternatives to placement* to keep and support youth in their communities. This included launching programs such as the AIM and Every Child Has an Opportunity to Excel and Succeed (ECHOES) programs in 2012, and the Pathways to Excellence, Achievement, and Knowledge (PEAK) program in 2013. ECHOES provides justice-involved youth ages 14 through 18 with conflict management, job training, and life coaching services. PEAK was designed to enroll youth younger than 18 who were on probation and provided them and their families a secure after-school environment that included school liaison services, after-school programming, family counseling, caretaker forums, and mental health services.[2]

As described above, New York State and NYC have engaged in many state-level policy changes, justice reform efforts, and citywide initiatives. These efforts have built a strong foundation for NYC to provide youth community-based, age-appropriate, and evidence-based services to help them address the challenges they face, and offer important context to the implementation of the Arches, AIM, and NYC Justice Corps programs.

Overview of Program Evaluations

The following section briefly describes the Arches, AIM, and NYC Justice Corps programs and Urban's evaluations, and lists the key findings from each evaluation. Table 1 provides an overview of the three programs and summarizes Urban's evaluation designs and findings.

TABLE 1

Program Characteristics

	Arches Transformative Mentoring	Advocate, Intervene, Mentor	NYC Justice Corps
Target population	High-risk youth ages 16–24 who are under probation supervision and live in catchment areas citywide	High-risk youth ages 13–18 who are under probation supervision citywide	Youth ages 18–24 who have experienced justice system involvement in previous year and live in one of four boroughs
Target enrollment	450 annually	50 annually	160 annually
Core program activities	Group mentoring sessions using Interactive Journaling curriculum Group and individual mentoring with credible messengers Individual case management Group meals and stipends	Individual mentoring with advocate-mentors and credible messengers Group activities Individual service plans Family team meetings	Risk/needs/strengths assessment Cognitive behavioral therapy groups Workforce readiness workshops One-on-one case management Community Benefit Projects Placements in jobs, educational and vocational training, and youth development programs Group meals and stipends
Program length	6–12 months	6–9 months	6 months
Evaluation design	Implementation and impact evaluation	Implementation and outcome evaluation	Implementation and outcome evaluation
Impact and outcome findings	Arches participants were less likely to be reconvicted of a crime than members of the comparison group. In the matched sample, 1.8 percent of participants were reconvicted within 12 months of beginning probation versus 5.9 percent of the comparison group.	The majority (67 percent) of AIM participants were kept in the community (i.e., not placed in a juvenile residential facility) by the end of their time in the program. When excluding placements due to technical violations of probation conditions, this number increases to over 80 percent.	Among participants enrolled from January 2016 to September 2017, approximately 61 percent of participants graduated, with over a quarter of those graduates placed in employment and over 30 percent of enrolled participants placed in educational, vocational, or youth development programming.

Notes: Urban's evaluation examined the NYC Justice Corps program (launched in 2016) after the second redesign of the program. PRI, NYC Opportunity, and YMI redesigned the program for several reasons. First, the Justice Corps program was nearing its contractual end. Second, an evaluation conducted by Westat (Bauer et al. 2014) showed that Justice Corps had mixed results on key outcomes of interest, including employment and recidivism. While the program showed strong impacts on employment outcomes and wages, it did not have an impact on participants' recidivism. Based on these findings, PRI, NYC Opportunity, and YMI saw an opportunity to redesign the program with the aim of improving recidivism outcomes. However, when PRI, NYC Opportunity, and YMI made this decision, NYC Opportunity had already made new investment commitments that resulted in less available funding for the Justice Corps redesign. Third, PRI, NYC Opportunity, and YMI wanted to more closely align Justice Corps with New York City's Career Pathways strategy, which had been underway as a method for programs to coordinate with partners to place participants in education, skills training, or career-track jobs.

Arches Transformative Mentoring (Arches)

Urban conducted an implementation and impact evaluation (via propensity score matching[3]) of the Arches Transformative Mentoring Program implemented by DOP. The Arches program was initially privately funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies in 2012 as a pilot program under YMI with 15 program sites. Bloomberg Philanthropies also funded an expansion of Arches to implement the program in three additional sites. In early 2016, in anticipation of the end of the Bloomberg Philanthropies funding, DOP submitted a request to the NYC Office of Management and Budget, which allocated city tax levy funding to continue the program. Arches provides curriculum-based interactive journaling, group mentoring, and individual mentoring to high-risk young people—identified through DOP's validated risk assessment tool—ages 16 to 24 who are under probationary supervision. Arches service providers incorporate credible messengers into group-based mentoring. Credible messengers are people who were either formerly justice-involved or had other relatable experiences that resonated with youth participating in the program (e.g., living in the same neighborhoods, similar backgrounds). Credible messengers work with Arches participants to achieve goals such as positive behavior change, healthier decisionmaking, improved access to education and employment opportunities, and stronger ties to their families.

Urban's evaluation aimed to identify how program participation affected justice system outcomes, assess participant and staff perceptions of the program, and point to model practices that were associated with successful program operations and positive outcomes. Urban's evaluation of Arches found the following:

- Arches participants enrolled from November 2015 to June 2017 were less likely (than the comparison group) to be reconvicted of a crime.

  » In the matched sample, 1.8 percent of participants were reconvicted within 12 months of beginning probation versus 5.9 percent of the comparison group, an approximately 69 percent difference.

- Arches was particularly successful for participants ages 17 and younger.

  » At 12 months, the comparison group had significantly higher rates of any arrest and any reconviction.
  » At 24 months, the comparison group had significantly higher rates of felony arrest, any reconviction, and felony reconviction.

- Curriculum completion was associated with less recidivism.

- Participants achieved improvement in self-perception and relationships with others.

- Participants reported close and supportive relationships with their mentors.

- Flexibility in program structure supported sustained participant engagement and positive outcomes.

- Program providers felt positively about DOP's program management and technical assistance provision, but highlighted opportunities for enhancement.

- The interactive journaling curriculum seemed to be out of touch with youth on probation in NYC.

- Program delivery may be enhanced through increased dosage of services, greater service coordination, and more comprehensive support for provider sites.

Upon release of Urban's evaluation report (Lynch et al. 2018), the research team discussed the key findings with program stakeholders and solicited their feedback through a data walk, an interactive way for community stakeholders, researchers, program staff, government officials, and service providers to engage in dialogue around research findings about their community (Murray et al. 2015). As a result, the city agency partner and DOP (the Arches program manager) are currently working to incorporate many of the recommendations (e.g., modifying curriculum, implementing mentor supports) into the program model and operations.

Advocate, Intervene, and Mentor (AIM)

Urban conducted an outcome and implementation evaluation of DOP's AIM youth mentoring program, a juvenile alternative-to-placement (ATP) program serving youth ages 13 to 18 who are under probation supervision. AIM matches youths with adult advocate-mentors, who are credible messengers in the community. The advocate-mentors then work one-on-one with those youths to develop individual service plans that identify their goals related to education, family engagement, employment, community service, mental health, and prosocial activities. Through intensive, individualized mentorship, AIM seeks to reduce the use of out-of-home placement among youth.

Urban's evaluation sought to document program operations, describe stakeholders' and participants' experiences with the program, and assess justice system outcomes. Urban's evaluation found the following:

- The majority of AIM participants enrolled from January 2012 through May 2016 were successfully kept in their homes/community (i.e., not placed in a juvenile residential facility) by the end of their time in the program.

- Within 12 months of enrollment in AIM, fewer than 20 percent of participants were adjudicated in Family Court and fewer than 6 percent were reconvicted in criminal court.

- Participants' most frequently identified goal areas were education, legal compliance, family, and prosocial activities.

- Participants and staff viewed the program favorably and notably cited the family team meetings, mentors' responsiveness to youths' needs, and ongoing support as the program's strengths.

- Participants found the program activities relatable and engaging.

- Staff desired a longer program period, and often worked with participants after they completed the program.

- Staff suggested that the coordination and communication between AIM providers and probation officers could be improved.

In addition to releasing and disseminating Urban's evaluation report (Cramer et al. 2018), the research team presented the key findings and recommendations to program stakeholders and partners.

NYC Justice Corps

Urban conducted an outcome and implementation evaluation of the NYC Justice Corps program implemented by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice Prisoner Reentry Institute (PRI). NYC Justice Corps was a workforce readiness and recidivism reduction program that served justice-involved youth ages 18 to 24 and aimed to place youth in educational programs, employment, vocational training, or other youth development programs. Through three phases of programming, NYC Justice Corps provided youth with case management, individual and group-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and workforce readiness workshops. All participants also planned and completed a community benefit project (CBP) to foster youth engagement in the community.[4]

Urban's evaluation used an action-research framework to undertake a multi-method implementation and outcome evaluation. Through the action-research framework, Urban researchers provided interim findings and feedback to NYC Justice Corps providers and staff during the study. Urban's implementation evaluation described the strengths and challenges of Justice Corps as perceived by program staff, participants, and stakeholders, and identified considerations for future programming. The outcome evaluation measured participant outcomes related to program engagement, placements, and earnings. Urban found the following:

- The program graduated[5] approximately 61 percent of participants enrolled from January 2016 to September 2017, with over 25 percent of graduates placed in employment and over 30 percent of enrolled participants placed in educational, vocational, or youth development programming.

- Program staff appreciated key elements of the 2016 program redesign (such as early placement), as well as the flexibility with which they could implement the program.

- The CBT component helped teach youth conflict resolution and communication skills.

- Program participants and staff considered the workforce readiness services and certifications to be critical program components for keeping youth engaged in the program and preparing them for placements in employment and further training.

- The CBPs provided youth opportunities to practice the hard and soft skills learned through the program and connect with their communities.

- Participants expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the program.

In line with the action-research framework, the research team shared the evaluation's findings with NYC Justice Corps provider staff, NYC Opportunity staff, and PRI leadership staff prior to writing the evaluation report. The research team facilitated a discussion with the program stakeholders and incorporated their feedback into the evaluation report (Cramer et al. forthcoming).

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Drawing on the findings from the Arches, AIM, and NYC Justice Corps program evaluations, Urban identified several common lessons learned from the three programs.

Lessons Learned

Using risk and needs assessments helped the programs identify youths' needs and tailor services to meet those needs. All three programs used a risk and needs assessment, and used the results to inform case plans and guide individual case management. For the Arches and AIM programs, DOP assessment staff conducted validated risk and needs assessments and shared the results with program staff. NYC Justice Corps used the Service Planning Instrument (SPIn) Reentry assessment; program staff completed a short version of the SPIn assessment with participants during the program's intake phase, and the full version during the program's core phase. However, Justice Corps stakeholders revealed that administering the full SPIn Reentry assessment at more frequent intervals would have been useful in determining how individual participant needs changed over the course of programming.

Training staff in core evidence-based practices (e.g., risk and needs assessments, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing) was necessary to build capacity for effective programming. All three programs provided program-specific training as well as training on topics such as CPR, first aid, and crisis intervention. Moreover, Community Connections for Youth (CCFY)—a nonprofit, capacity building organization—acted as the primary training and technical assistance provider for Arches providers, and facilitated training for mentors, program directors, and coordinators on curriculum and group facilitation. CCFY also offered cross-site training opportunities on special topics such as gang awareness.

Program staff benefitted from opportunities to confer, learn, and share challenges across program sites. The Arches, AIM, and NYC Justice Corps programs all illustrated the value of connecting staff across the various implementation sites (most often the five boroughs). For example, the Arches providers held regular in-person meetings and cross-site calls and trainings that coordinated by DOP and CCFY; the AIM providers held in-person cross-site meetings coordinated by DOP; and PRI supported cross-site trainings and meetings for the NYC Justice Corps providers. Staff from all three programs reported benefitting from learning about colleagues' challenges in the other sites and the lessons they learned from overcoming them.

Although program staff recognized the importance of data collection, they found it challenging to dedicate the appropriate time and resources to the task. Across the Arches, AIM, and NYC Justice Corps programs,

staff understood the importance of data collection, but were hampered by issues of internal capacity for data collection—staff were often required to support participants 24/7—as well as limited knowledge about how to use data in real time. In many cases, program providers were unable to allocate adequate funding toward data collection and management because most of the funding supported program services and activities.

Engaging program staff and stakeholders early and often during an evaluation provided opportunities to share interim findings and lessons. During the evaluations of all three programs, the research team routinely spoke to program leadership (e.g., program managers, directors, and administrators) via monthly teleconferences. These conversations provided opportunities for the evaluators to vet initial findings and outcomes and share interim lessons with program staff. The research team also presented the final evaluation findings to program staff and stakeholders to validate and refine the team's understanding of all three programs before releasing the evaluation reports. Notably, the NYC Justice Corps evaluation provided evaluators the opportunity to use an action-research framework, wherein Urban engaged program staff and local stakeholders in the development of the evaluation plan, data collection protocols, and dissemination of findings. Urban researchers also developed site-specific summaries documenting the research team's understanding of program operations at each site, as well as the implementation challenges and successes that program staff and stakeholders identified. These summaries provided the research team an opportunity to validate their understanding and vet their initial findings with program staff. In preparation of drafting the final evaluation report, the research team presented its findings to NYC Justice Corps provider staff and NYC Opportunity and PRI leadership staff to vet and gather their feedback on the findings.

Relationships with youth matter for program engagement, and credible messengers help establish those relationships with the program. Participants in both the Arches and AIM programs reported developing close and supportive relationships with their mentors. Because they were from the same neighborhoods or shared similar backgrounds, participants explained they could trust and depend on their mentors (i.e., credible messengers). Given their life experiences and backgrounds, credible messengers also brought important perspectives to program design. For example, the Arches credible messengers attended the data walk that the research team facilitated to share the evaluation findings, and offered feedback that informed the research team's recommendations for program implementation.

Providing services to participants' family members can help stabilize participants' homes and help them be successful in programming. Family members of Arches and AIM participants reported facing challenges accessing housing, food, and transportation, and felt that if programs provided them support services (in addition to services provided to participants), they would be able to provide a more stable household for their youth during programming. A stable household can help participants fully engage with program services and achieve positive outcomes.

When embarking on program development for justice-involved youth, it is beneficial to convene key stakeholders (e.g., government agency leaders, community leaders, and credible messengers) in a collaborative process to identify programming needs and priorities. Urban's evaluation of the Justice Corps program found that NYC Opportunity and YMI engaged stakeholders and program staff to undergo two

program redesigns. Previous evaluations conducted by Metis Associates and Westat (Bauer et al. 2014; Tapper et al. 2009) found the initial iterations of the NYC Justice Corps program yielded mixed results on key education, employment, and recidivism outcomes. Based on these findings, PRI conducted—with support and input from NYC Opportunity and YMI—surveys and focus groups to collect participants' and staff members' ideas for improving the program for justice-involved youth. Moreover, it is important to approach program development iteratively and make program modifications based on stakeholders' feedback. Using the information collected from participants and staff members, PRI, NYC Opportunity, and YMI identified and modified components of the Justice Corps program that were ineffective. The program subsequently refined its mission to focus on recidivism reduction, and offered additional activities to support that objective.

Participants appreciated opportunities to plan program activities and engage with their communities. The NYC Justice Corps program included community benefit projects (CBPs) that helped participants forge meaningful relationships with community members they might not otherwise have known. Program participants reported that the CBPs helped them feel more connected to their communities, improved their self-esteem, and made them feel they had more adults in the community concerned about their well-being. Participants also explained that they appreciated their role in designing and planning the CBPs. Participants reported the CBPs to be one of the most valuable and enjoyable aspects of the program, and some chose to continue their service projects after completing the program.

Program staff desired greater communication and coordination between program staff and government partners. Urban's evaluation of AIM found that program staff and stakeholders cited a communication challenge between mentors and probation officers. Staff recommended that there should be clearer expectations for communication and that mentors and probation officers should be communicating frequently.

Fostering partnerships with community-based organizations and service providers helps meet youths' needs. For instance, some NYC Justice Corps program sites had partnerships with other programs that served youth, and when participants were not ready for employment or education after completing the program, they connected them with these services to prepare them for employment or educational programs.

Recommendations

Based on lessons learned from the three programs, Urban researchers offer recommendations for current and future programming for justice-involved youth in New York City. By offering these recommendations, Urban hopes to provide all NYC policymakers and stakeholders serving justice-involved youth with considerations related to program development, staff training and coordination, program components and services, and program monitoring and evaluation.

It is important to note that the following recommendations require the dedication of time and resources. NYC policymakers, program staff, and other local stakeholders should be prepared to allocate substantial amounts of time and resources to program development and implementation.

Moreover, staff and stakeholders are often asked to devote time to program development in addition to the responsibilities of their formal jobs, so it is helpful to acknowledge partners' efforts and consider ways to support stakeholders' time and resources.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

- *Gather input from an array of stakeholders on the program design, including services, activities, dosage, duration, and desired outcomes.* One way to accomplish this is to establish working groups comprised of key stakeholders to discuss and oversee program development. Two other ways of gathering stakeholder input on program design are surveys and focus groups, which ensure additional stakeholders' voices are represented. To assist with this process, NYC's Nonprofit Resiliency Committee developed the Guide to Collaborative Communication and Human Services Providers, a step-by-step communication guide for effective collaboration between NYC government agencies and nonprofit organizations (NYC NRC 2018). Soliciting stakeholder input at the program design stage generates buy-in and support for implementation and ensures everyone has a shared understanding of the program's mission.

- *Include participants and credible messengers in program decisionmaking.* Credible messengers— who most often work directly with program participants—should be treated as local experts on the neighborhoods they serve and the youth they support, and should be included in programmatic decisionmaking. Participants, as the recipients of services and programs, also offer a critical perspective that should be included in program development.

- *Revisit program development iteratively to inform program refinements.* The collaborative process of engaging stakeholders around program design and implementation should be iterative and occur frequently (resources permitting) to ensure programming is responsive to the evolving needs of justice-involved youth.

STAFF TRAINING AND COORDINATION

- *Create opportunities for cross-site collaboration and learning.* Staff from all three programs revealed a need for more formal cross-site training and engagement opportunities to improve information sharing between service providers and to identify strategies for addressing common implementation barriers.

- *Invest time and resources in staff training and technical assistance.* While program-specific training helps staff understand their respective programs' distinct operations, policies, and procedures, it is also worthwhile to provide training opportunities for program staff on evidence-based practices (e.g., risk and needs assessments, cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing). NYC may consider offering trainings to multiple programs or practitioners at the same time, which may help to lower costs by avoiding duplicate trainings and set uniform standards and expectations that ensure that youth have access to a common set of services across sites and programs. To supplement staff training, NYC may consider leveraging the expertise of multiple organizations to provide staff with ongoing technical assistance. By

partnering with an array of technical assistance providers, future programs can access and draw on each provider's specialized area of expertise.

- *Communicate and coordinate with justice-system staff.* When youth are simultaneously involved in systems such as family court and probation, it is critical to have established communication protocols between justice-system stakeholders and program staff. Communication is key for supporting system-involved youth in fulfilling court and probation requirements and achieving program success. Consistent communication between agency and program staff ensures everyone has a clear understanding of a youth's legal obligations and program goals. This communication ensures that program activities and supervision conditions are aligned and do not create inconsistent expectations for youth (i.e., program staff are able to create case management plans that align with youths' legal requirements when there is clear and consistent communication among all stakeholders).

PROGRAM COMPONENTS AND SERVICES

- *Administer risk and needs assessments at multiple times during the program.* Risk and needs assessments should be applied with rigor and at multiple phases of programming (e.g., at 0, 3 and 6 months) to determine if and how individual needs have changed. Assessment results can be used to provide insight into how individual case management should be adjusted to meet youths' changing needs.

- *Increase engagement with the families of participating youth.* Families are often facing the same needs and challenges as youth. Such needs include food, housing, employment, or education. Programs may consider providing services to family members and creating opportunities for families to support one another. "Nutrition Kitchens," for example, are located at NeON locations in all five boroughs, provide DOP clients' families with access to food and supplies, and are regularly open to all residents. DOP also implements, through a partnership with CCFY, the Parent Peer Support Program. The program provides parents of justice-involved youth peer mentors to guide and support them while their children are involved in the juvenile justice system.

- *Hire credible messengers to engage with program participants.* Credible messengers from the same neighborhoods or with shared backgrounds can use their shared experiences to engage youth and build trust. This may help participants sustain their engagement in program services.

- *Implement activities that foster youths' sense of ownership in the program and their community.* Building participants' sense of ownership in program activities is important for their success in the program. It helps support participants' sustained interest and engagement in the program. Supporting relationships between program participants and community members can also help youth feel connected to their communities.

- *Develop a robust network of partners that serve justice-involved youth.* One program may not be able to fully address the many needs of justice-involved youth. It is therefore important to develop a network of organizations and service providers that can provide youth additional supports; the partner network should extend beyond those providers that serve only justice-involved youth. For example, future programs can develop partnerships with the array of youth-focused programs available through the NeONs. These partnerships can ensure programs are sustaining a continuum of care that meets the needs of justice-involved youth without duplicating efforts or overstretching their internal capacity.

PROGRAM MONITORING AND EVALUATION

- *Train and support staff in data collection and monitoring.* NYC should consider providing resources to programs so they can build capacity for data collection and monitoring. These resources can take many forms, such as funding to hire a data specialist, training current program staff, or providing ongoing technical assistance to staff. These methods can help programs develop the internal capacity for managing data; however, it is important to note that although DOP and its database vendor have provided ongoing trainings to providers, issues with data entry and concerns about the user experience persist. Programs can also partner with external research organizations for expanded data management services, although this limits a program's ability to build the expertise in-house.

- *Use various outcomes to measure program effectiveness.* In addition to tracking quantitative outcome measures such as placement, retention, and recidivism, programs should expand their outcome measures to include readiness to change, emotional self-awareness/self-regulation,

capacity for conflict management, community attachment, self-efficacy, and other indicators of socioemotional learning. Programs can collect data that speak to these types of outcomes by fielding participant surveys (e.g., pre- and post-program assessments, program satisfaction surveys), conducting interviews with participants and their families and analyzing the qualitative data for consistent themes, systematically reviewing participant case files, or collecting administrative data from other agencies or organizations serving the participants (e.g., schools, employers).

"We're dealing with young people who have a lot of milestones that are not captured in the major outcomes typically [tracked] for programs. For example, the connections staff make with a participant—that can be progress. Attitudinal change and other things are not always measured (or measured well); we must do a better job of capturing [these data]."
—Program staff member

- *Create formal feedback loops between evaluators and program staff and participants.* Evaluation results and program outcomes should be routinely shared with program staff and stakeholders to ensure findings are interpreted correctly and to inform program refinements. Programs also can include participants in the feedback loop to gather additional context around the outcomes and to ensure the data are interpreted correctly.

- *Explore opportunities to share data across agencies.* Data from government agencies can provide practitioners and stakeholders a more complete understanding of participants' outcomes. To collect program and administrative data, NYC stakeholders should execute data-sharing agreements across government agencies and program providers. Access to these data sources would also enable stakeholders to make data-driven decisions about implementation. Moreover, it is important that programs can receive data from state databases (e.g., Division of Criminal Justice Services) to measure and track additional participant outcomes (e.g., recidivism).

- *Engage in continuous performance management and program evaluation*. Ongoing performance management can ensure programs are being implemented with fidelity and are meeting their intended outcomes. Performance management can also help inform midcourse corrections and implementation modifications. It is also important to continuously engage in program evaluation to document implementation and assess outcomes and impacts. Program evaluations not only help stakeholders document the effectiveness of the program, but also contribute to the field's understanding of programming for youth.

Conclusion

As evidenced by New York State's and NYC stakeholders' and policymakers' substantial investments over the past decade, NYC has expanded its continuum of programs and services for justice-involved youth. Urban's evaluations of three youth programs revealed common lessons that support several recommendations for NYC to consider while funding, planning, and implementing current and future programs for youth. The recommendations presented in this brief emphasize the importance of engaging stakeholders in a collaborative process when designing programs, providing staff training and opportunities for coordination, implementing effective program services, and engaging in ongoing program monitoring and evaluation to document outcomes and inform program refinements. Building on the State's and NYC's foundation of youth-focused policies and programs, Urban hopes these recommendations help shape stakeholders' discussions about current and future programming for youth in NYC.

Notes

[1] Alex Frank, "Why Reimagining Prison for Young Adults Matters," February 28, 2017, https://www.vera.org/blog/why-reimagining-prison-for-young-adults-matters.

[2] In April 2017, DOP revised the PEAK model to include a drop-in center component and did not accept alternative to placement (ATP) enrollments during the transition.

[3] The Arches study sample was assembled by combining data from NYC DOP and the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services. There were 279 treatment cases and 682 comparison cases total. Comparison group cases were identified because they were similar on observable characteristics; however, they were not in Arches program catchment areas and thus could not receive Arches programming.

[4] As of June 30, 2018, the Justice Corps program ceased operation upon the end of existing program provider contracts. Urban's evaluation had no bearing on this decision. The evaluation was not conducted to form a basis for the decision whether to continue funding NYC Justice Corps. Rather, the purpose of the evaluation was to cull findings from the program redesign that could inform City decisionmaking for future services for justice-involved young adults.

[5] Graduates from the NYC Justice Corps program completed 6 months of programming to include work readiness training (e.g., writing resumes, obtaining NYS ID) and a community service project.

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About the Authors

Lindsey Cramer is a research associate in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, where her research focuses on evaluating programs and developing policies designed to support and strengthen fathers and families impacted by the justice system.

Sino Esthappan is a research analyst whose research focuses on juvenile justice, policing, and school discipline.

Mathew Lynch was a research associate in the Urban Institute's Justice Policy Center where he worked on research projects that included youth programming, reentry, treatment alternatives and diversion, and police technology.

Margaret Goff was a research analyst in the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute. Her portfolio focused on the consequences of mass incarceration on incarcerated parents and their children, and young people.

Acknowledgments

URBAN INSTITUTE

500 L'Enfant Plaza SW
Washington, DC 20024

www.urban.org

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