



## **AIM (Advocate, Intervene, Mentor) Program Concept Paper**

### **Purpose**

The following Concept Paper is the precursor to a forthcoming Request for Proposals (RFP) that will include programming for young people involved in the juvenile justice system.<sup>1</sup> In partnership with the Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), the Department of Probation (DOP) will seek up to four qualified community-based organizations (CBOs) to deliver the Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM) Program in New York City. This Concept Paper outlines DOP and CEO's approach to managing high-risk youth on probation facing the highest probability of out-of-home-placement, through intensive mentoring and advocacy.

### **Background**

For highly disengaged teenagers who are also currently involved in harmful/risky behaviors, interventions far more intensive than traditional youth programs, including traditional mentoring models, are needed to achieve significant results. These young people are often involved in high-risk street activity within their communities and involved in the juvenile justice system. As a result, teenagers in this high-risk population are likely to become even more deeply involved with the juvenile justice system. In addition to community safety concerns, they are among the most expensive population to serve in policing, incarceration, hospitalization and social services. Enabling them to right their life trajectory will have collateral and positive effects on their communities, families and peers, in addition to saving taxpayer dollars.

Delinquent behavior and repeat arrests are not only harmful to communities but serve as obvious obstacles for high-risk youth in becoming thriving adults. Forty-five percent of all out-of-home-placements of juvenile delinquents are the result of violations of conditions of probation, and a recommendation for placement by DOP is the highest factor correlating with court-ordered placement. A study funded by the National Institute of Justice found that 63% of young people sent to Office of Children and Family Services facilities are rearrested within two years of their release, with 43% of those arrests involving felony charges.<sup>2</sup> Other barriers, such as educational

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<sup>1</sup> Defined as those who display one or more criminogenic risk factors/ risky behaviors which led to them being arrested and placed on Probation through the Family Court.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Mitchell-Herzfeld, Vajeera Dorabawila, Leigh Bates, and Rebecca Colman, "Juvenile Recidivism Study: Patterns and Predictors of Re-Offending Among Youth Reentering the Community From OCFS Facilities and

deficits, hinder their progress as well. For example, nearly 60% of adolescents age 16-18 in New York City jails read below a fifth grade level and two thirds of them will not return to school after their release.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these alarming statistics, there are approaches that have proven effective in serving this group of young people. The Coalition for Juvenile Justice recently released a comprehensive review of the literature and research surrounding Positive Youth Development (PYD) and its application in the Juvenile Justice System.<sup>4</sup> As the report outlines, rigorous research has led to an evidence-based argument for the efficacy of interventions grounded in youth development principles for high-risk juvenile justice-involved youth that include elements such as: intensive (beyond recreation-focused) mentoring, strengthening relationships between youth and their families/educational institutions, and participation in structured extracurricular activities. Adolescents within this group of high-risk juvenile justice involved youth who have been most resistant to change and unresponsive to the traditional range of services offered specifically to them can be more tolerant of services offered within the structure of their existing family support system.<sup>5</sup> In this regard, research has shown that effective interventions must include sustained relationships that support young people in believing that education, employment, and civic responsibility are valid life pursuits that have positive system outcomes. The youth's family support system provides expanded opportunities for interactions with the youth that would not be possible with a more traditional mentor-mentee pairing approach.

DOP is seeking ways of applying and adapting these approaches to serve a population of youth who were previously placement bound but could be better rehabilitated in community settings through rigorous programming. The AIM program will serve these high-risk youth in the South Bronx and East New York/Brownsville neighborhoods, specifically those who are: 1) given an alternative to placement disposition in Family Court as a result of a delinquency proceeding; 2) facing a violation of probation for chronic lack of responsiveness to previous intervention and engagement strategies; or 3) re-arrested for a violent felony offense. These targeted neighborhoods for the AIM program were chosen based on the number of juvenile clients concentrated in each.

### **DOP Neighborhood Opportunity Networks (NeONs)**

As part of our overall strategic plan to address crime and incarceration, DOP is implementing evidence-based, cost-effective policies and practices and putting resources in the communities most heavily involved with criminal justice systems. To this end, DOP is developing Neighborhood Opportunity Networks (NeONs) in neighborhoods where large numbers of people on probation live<sup>6</sup>.

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Voluntary Agencies," PowerPoint presentation. At the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, April 27, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Vera Institute of Justice, Just 'Cause, Vol. 15, No. 3, fall (2008). Public Private Ventures. (2000). *Getting Back to Work: Employment Programs for Ex-Offenders* Philadelphia, PA: Buck, Maria.

<sup>4</sup> The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (2010). *Positive Youth Justice: Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development*. Washington D.C.: Butts, Jeffrey A., Gordon Bazemore, & Aundra Saa Meroe

<sup>5</sup> For the purposes of this Concept Paper, a family support system is defined as the adults who care for the young person as family, who may or may not be related by blood.

<sup>6</sup> The first five NeONs are being launched in Brownsville, East New York, Harlem, Jamaica and the South Bronx

By the end of 2011, DOP staff will begin to co-locate with neighborhood-based organizations in each NeON community and join or work to develop effective networks of community organizations, government agencies, local businesses and residents in order to expand clients' access to the kinds of quality opportunities, resources, and services that build their strengths and reduce their involvement with the criminal justice system<sup>7</sup>. NeONs represent a fundamental shift in how DOP engages with probation clients and the community. As Mayor Bloomberg said when he announced NeONs as a component of the Young Men's Initiative (YMI)<sup>8</sup>, "Probation will transform itself into an agency designed to hold people accountable while connecting them to employment and educational opportunities."

In conjunction with the NeONs and the YMI, DOP is partnering with City agencies, community-based organizations and foundations on a number of innovative projects, including the AIM program. While each program takes a different approach, the overarching public safety goal is to help probation clients end any further involvement with the criminal justice system by strengthening their attachment to education, work and community. All of these programs share certain fundamental principles that also align with DOP's strategic plan:

- Enhancement of public safety. Research has proven that connecting young people in the criminal justice system to programs that help them continue their education, get a job and engage with their communities are a more effective and less expensive option to incarceration.
- Education is key to helping young people overcome the root issues that led to their involvement in the criminal justice system.
- When young people are engaged in the workforce, they are far less likely to become involved in criminal activity.
- When young people in the criminal justice system feel connected to their home community and family systems, they are less likely to harm their neighbors.
- Programs must build on clients' strengths, not merely try to minimize their weaknesses. Adolescent clients must be given the opportunity to develop the competencies needed to become successful adults.
- New York City is home to a network of community-based organizations of unmatched quality and breadth. DOP will engage these organizations as partners in our effort to help these young people realize their potential.

Probation clients in NeON communities will be offered mentoring, afterschool activities, education, literacy and job skills enhancement and opportunities to join local neighborhood improvement initiatives. DOP will work closely with community leaders to ensure that NeONs achieve local support, build on existing assets, and reflect client and neighborhood needs.

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<sup>7</sup> NeONs can be conceived as a spider web of resources within one neighborhood, or a bicycle wheel with spokes, rather than a single building with services.

<sup>8</sup> On August 4, 2011, Mayor Bloomberg announced the launch of the Young Men's Initiative, designed to help young men of color achieve their professional, educational and personal goals. Of the 27,000 people on probation citywide, approximately 8,800—or almost one third—are teens and young adults between the ages of 16 and 24. Of these 8,800, 84% are male; almost half are Black and nearly one-third Latino. It is only fitting that DoP is playing such a large role in the Initiative.

With this in mind, DOP and CEO propose the AIM Program to assist young people who risk further involvement in the criminal justice system in laying the groundwork for a positive future.

### **Program Goals**

The goal of the AIM Program is to enhance community safety by increasing resiliency and reducing risk factors for adolescents on probation who face the highest probability of out-of-home-placement, through intensive mentoring and advocacy. Utilizing an intervention strategy that pairs youth with paid advocates, the AIM Program seeks to provide participants with the structure and guidance needed for success by creating highly individualized plans with the youth and their families. These highly individualized service plans help participating youth transform attitudes and behaviors that have led to criminal activity. It serves young people whose needs go far beyond the traditional mentoring approach of companionship, confidence building and minor academic, social or career guidance.

The main vehicle for this intervention is the use of wraparound services that are grounded in the development of engaged and sustainable family support systems.<sup>9</sup> The ultimate program goals are to improve education and criminal justice outcomes, as well as self-efficacy, as these will not only benefit the lives of the participating adolescents and their families, but will benefit the communities in which the young people live.<sup>10</sup>

### **Program Design**

Advocate/mentors are paired with no more than four youth and their families at any given time. Advocate/mentors will educate and empower participating adolescents and their families to foster, in the youth, alternative behaviors more conducive to personal and social success. In addition to one-on-one mentoring, advocate/mentors will build and strengthen social bonds between the client and the community in which they live. Advocate/mentors will play the role of connector, linking clients with community-based resources and facilitating healthier relationships with known institutions, including the client's school and family support system. This model works best when all involved are most committed to family involvement and /support. Supervision of the youth must always remain the primary responsibility of the family, not the advocate, so it is essential that the youth and the advocate come to see themselves as part of a team effort. The core components of the AIM Program include (1) an individualized, asset-based approach; (2) community – based advocacy; (3) layered supports for youth and families; (4) family participation; (5) an advocate; (6) wraparound services; and (7) vocational assistance

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<sup>9</sup> DOP recognizes that many of the participants' biological families have become fragmented. In the context of this project, a family support system is considered to be a group of adults (not including the mentor) who care for the young person as family. The group does not have to be related by blood but must be available to the young person long term.

<sup>10</sup> Based on research of best practice programs designed to reduce recidivism, and the evidence to date demonstrating the effectiveness of this particular model, DOP anticipates achieving between a 7 and 10 percent reduction in recidivism for youth who complete the program in the targeted communities. DOP will determine this recidivism reduction by comparing the rates of re-arrest on felony charges (DOP will also track all re-arrests, but will focus on felony re-arrests) to those of youth in other neighborhoods after controlling for demographic, criminal justice, and social factors.

## **a) Target Population**

Program participants will be adolescents, between the ages of 14 and 18, on juvenile probation or who are facing institutional placement as a result of a Family Court disposition (sentence) and who live in the South Bronx, East New York/Brownsville Brooklyn, and surrounding neighborhoods. Program participants must be:

- Sentenced to probation with an explicit court order to participate in AIM as an alternative to placement intervention;
- Facing a violation of probation's most intensive service level due to chronic absenteeism and/or unresponsiveness to interventions and engagement strategies, or
- Facing a violation of probation (of any service level) due to a violent felony re-arrest

All referrals will originate from DOP. While in the program the Probation Officer is expected to work closely with the advocate to ensure the success of the youth

## **b) Service Level**

AIM will serve 100 youth participants per year: Approximately 50 in the South Bronx (and surrounding neighborhoods), and 50 in East New York/Brownsville Brooklyn (and surrounding neighborhoods), subject to change based on current concentration of probationers at the time of RFP release. It is anticipated that 2 to 4 community-based service providers will be responsible for implementing AIM.

## **c) Key Elements**

### **1) Supported Work**

For a subgroup of participants AIM will also seek to improve the employment outcomes through group work sessions and subsidized employment. As an introduction to the supported work component, AIM staff will facilitate weekly group work projects with youth to build skills such as conflict resolution, punctuality, and good work place habits. If youth successfully complete this initial phase they may move on to receive 6-8 weeks of subsidized employment while working at a partnering local business. Local businesses that employ AIM youth with the help of a supported work stipend will agree to evaluate participants at the end of the 6-8 week period.

DOP seeks feedback from respondents about the optimal subgroup of participants for whom supported work would be ideal; as well as the criteria for selection and types of supported work experiences for this group of young people. Options for supported work experiences may include apprenticeships at local businesses.

2) Probation Officers remain an integral part of the intervention team, and it is expected that the AIM advocate/mentor will be in weekly communication with the assigned Probation Officer.

3) Program flexibility will be needed as providers must subscribe to a “no reject, no eject”<sup>11</sup> philosophy as they work towards the engagement of the youth, biological family and community family.

**d) Program Hours/Schedule**

AIM pairs participating youth with mentors who are available to them and their families 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and it is expected that each advocate/mentor will spend between 7 and 30 hours per week per client, for a range of 6-9 months.

DOP seeks feedback on how participating organizations would structure the 24/7 crisis intervention responsibility and the range of hours necessary to serve the participants and their families.

**e) Site Info**

Delivery of the services must occur in the targeted neighborhood. Proposers must be able to demonstrate an understanding of and experience with the targeted neighborhood, either directly or through a partner. Applications from organizations that do not currently have a presence in the targeted neighborhood would be strengthened by a concrete plan to partner with a neighborhood-based organization for the delivery of these services.

The contractor must be culturally competent. They should be familiar with the neighborhood in which the program is located, demonstrate an appreciation for and sensitivity to diverse languages, cultures, traditions, and family structures, and integrate this knowledge into service delivery. Advocate/mentors are expected to serve their clients wherever the client needs directs/dictates.

**f) Staffing**

Participating not-for-profits will be responsible for hiring local advocate/mentors who, as “credible messengers,”<sup>12</sup> will have a high rate of success in reaching our target population. Young people will be paired with a full-time advocate who will serve as a combination of mentor and advocate. Each advocate/mentor will have a caseload of no more than four clients and will be available to the youth and their families 24 hours a day/7 days a week, allowing for the high-touch broad and deep interventions necessary to reach young people who are severely disconnected.

Advocate/mentors would be culturally appropriate and possess an understanding of the targeted neighborhood. Advocate/mentors would be familiar with the unique challenges faced by young adults living in these neighborhoods. The client would benefit from the shared knowledge of an adult figure that understands the negative pressures as well as the

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<sup>11</sup> Probation will provide the CBO with the referred participants from their area. CBO’s will not be able to reject the referral, nor should they eject any participants from the program.

<sup>12</sup> A credible messenger may be defined as an individual who is well respected and trusted in the community and has the ability to effectively relay the components of the program to the participants; thereby transferring knowledge, enthusiasm, and most importantly support for the initiative that will leave the participants and their families with a clear understanding of the program components and goals.

positive influences that the community has to offer. Outreach to qualified neighborhood residents would be part of the recruitment plan for hiring advocate/mentors.

Proposers must also designate a staff member to be a court liaison to ensure accurate and prompt dissemination of pertinent information to all parties involved in the juvenile delinquency case.

**g) Linkages with the Community**

Prior to proposal submission, all contractors will need to establish effective linkages that would contribute to the creation of programs responsive to the needs of the local community. In particular, each contractor would establish linkages with local schools, healthcare providers, law enforcement, and other community-based service providers to enrich program services and maintain a referral network for participants. All linkages should be documented in the proposal.

**Performance Measures**

**a) Outcomes**

- 75% of the participants will not be arrested for a felony while in the AIM program;
- 60% of program completers will remain felony arrest-free for a period of 12 months after program completion.
- 85% of program completers will have an identifiable positive social support system outside of the family unit when they complete the program—e.g. school/education, employment, pro-social use of leisure time;
- 85% of program completers will be reconnected to their family support system or develop a viable one.

**b) Reporting**

In addition to weekly baseline communication with the Probation Officer, providers will submit quarterly reports to the Department of Probation on enrollment, contact hours with the advocate, including the nature of the contacts, educational engagement (DOP will monitor actual school attendance), general progress in the development of youth development competencies correlated to delinquency behavior, such as conflict management and peer group development, employment type, hours and pay for those who are working, and aggregate outcomes.

**Funding**

**a) Funding Amounts/Anticipated Payment Structure**

The anticipated annual funding for the AIM program is \$1.9 Million. It is anticipated that the payment structure for contracts awarded from the AIM RFP will be based on line-item budget reimbursement.

**b) Anticipated price per participant**

It is anticipated that the cost per participant will be approximately \$19,000.

### **c) Competition Pools**

It is anticipated that the RFP will be comprised of 2 separate competition pools: East New York/Brownsville and South Bronx and 2 to 4 contracts would be awarded in total for all competitions.

### **Evaluation of Proposals**

Proposals will be evaluated pursuant to criteria set out in the Request for Proposals. This will include the quality and quantity of successful, relevant experience; demonstrated level of organizational capacity; and the quality of proposed program approach and design.

### **Procurement Timeline**

It is anticipated that DOP will release the Request for Proposals in winter 2011 with the proposal submission deadline one month later.

### **Contact Info/Deadline for questions/Comments**

Comments are invited by no later than January 4, 2012. Please email comments to [conceptpaper@probation.nyc.gov](mailto:conceptpaper@probation.nyc.gov) and indicate "AIM Concept Paper" in the subject line. Alternatively, comments may be submitted in writing and mailed to:

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