

## Moving Closer to Home



### New York's Close to Home Initiative

As did Connecticut's Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, New York's 32 member Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice found the system was failing in numerous ways. Far beyond the millions of dollars spent on state-run institutions that did not improve "public safety", youth in confinement were exposed to dangerous and abusive situations, they were held in facilities far from families and those who could provide stability and a connection with home, they did not have access to programs that would help them develop skills for their future reentry, and they did not have access to a consistent education system. In the 2011 Annie E. Casey Foundation report *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*, they stated that the use of correctional training schools is "neatly summarized in six words: dangerous, ineffective, unnecessary, obsolete, wasteful and inadequate."<sup>1</sup>

New York's reform work began years before Close to Home (C2H). In 2002, the City of New York launched a local alternative-to-placement program, *Esperanza*, that offered a range of therapeutic programming, including programming for families. In 2006, a risk assessment tool was adopted to help provide guidance to those in the detention centers as to whether a youth requires a secure detainment or could be referred to community-based supervision. The Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI) was created in 2007 as part of New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS), to further expand evidence-based and community-based alternatives providing programs that help youth rather than confine them. In 2010, The Department of Juvenile Justice merged with the ACS to create the new Division of Youth and Family Justice within the ACS. The next step was the development of a multi-agency collaboration led by ACS and the Department of Probation called the Dispositional Reform Steering Committee. Two of its strongest accomplishments are the adoption of a nationally recognized evidence-based tool for youth on probation, the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory, and a Structured Decision-Making Grid.

Through these reforms New York made headway in "minimizing the dislocation of youth from their families and building positive connections between young people and their communities." In 2012 when Close to Home was established, they defined and adopted seven core principles: Public Safety, Accountability, Evidence-based and Evidence-Informed Treatment, Educational Continuity and Achievement, Community Reintegration, Family Engagement and Collaboration, and Permanency.



Through the C2H Initiative, New York is looking through a well-being lens and making out-of-home placement decisions prior to adjudication using multi-agency teams, when possible, so that mental health, child protection, and educational needs can be taken into consideration. For those youth in residential care, aftercare providers became part of the planning process who met with families prior to the youth's release. "The Task Force found that many youth in juvenile justice facilities posed no significant risk to public safety. Instead, more than half of the youth were placed in a facility for a misdemeanor or technical violation of probation." <sup>2</sup>

## Successes of New York's C2H

Close to Home defined their goals in three areas: fulfilling the vision of C2H, meeting the challenges presented by implementation of the initiative and implementing the seven Core Principles. They have claimed achievement of two goals defined in their vision – removing NYC youth from large, dangerous, expensive and ineffective facilities far from youths' homes and bringing a great majority of NYC youth home to NYC or the immediate area. <sup>2</sup> An accomplishment they define as most critical was the achievement of consensus among all stakeholders since inception and commitment of support throughout implementation.



How are they measuring success after five years? <sup>4</sup>

- Since the program began in September 2012, C2H has served over 775 young people and approximately 390 young people have successfully completed the program.
- 91% of the young people who complete the program transition into Department Of Education (DOE) schools.

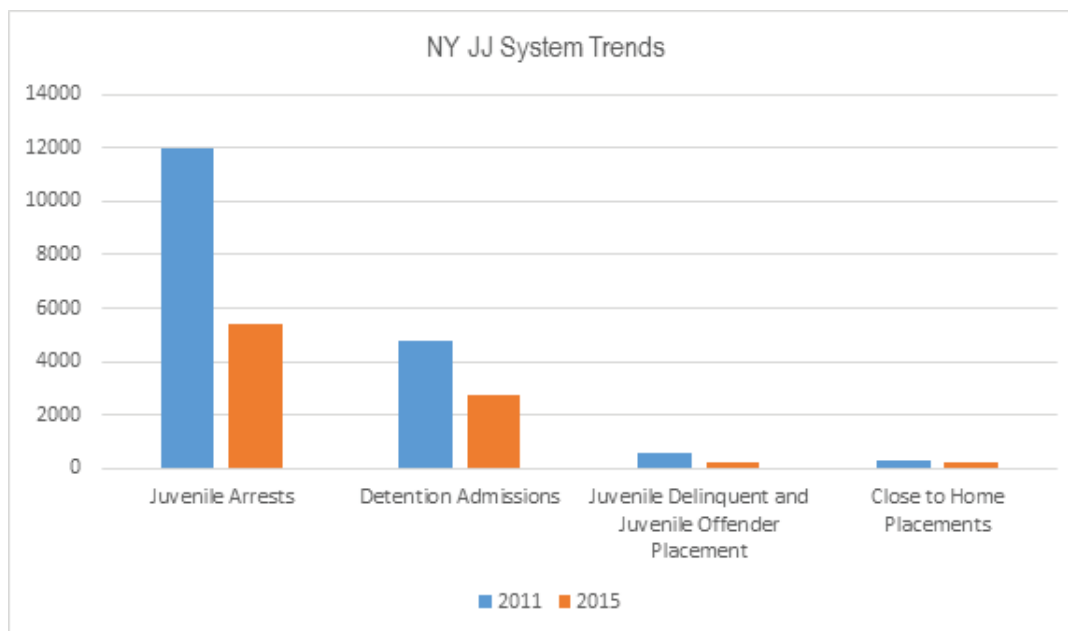


- Approximately 160 Close to Home youth earned more than six high school credits during their participation in Close to Home.
- 31 Close to Home youth passed a Regents exam during the 2012 – 2013 school year.
- Nearly 22% of Close to Home youth earned 10 or more school credits.
- In 2016, 98% of young people earned DOE credits toward graduation.
- Nearly 22% of Close to Home youth earned 10 or more school credits.
- In 2016, 80% of youth in Close to Home placements successfully transitioned home to a parent or family member.

The Close to Home Initiative has also been successful in its thoughtful implementation of activities and services. For their non-secure placement (25 sites and 7 provider agencies), they target an 8:1 staff to youth ratio which includes case planners, clinicians, education transition specialists, recreation and group leaders. Their programming is modeled after the Missouri Youth Systems Initiative, Intensive Treatment Model and the Lasallian Model, and they utilize interventions including the sanctuary model, aggression replacement training, individual/group/family counseling, cognitive behavioral therapy, mentoring, positive youth development activities, and integration of aftercare services. <sup>7</sup> Programming for their four limited secure placement sites is based on the Missouri Youth Systems Initiative and the Intensive Treatment Model.



In addition, their juvenile justice trends from 2011 – 2015 improved:



### Lessons learned by NY to guide our work

Connecticut and other states following New York's Close to Home footsteps have the benefit of their lessons learned. New York implemented C2H very quickly. As a result, there were several unanticipated outcomes of concern:

- Safety and security of the community was challenged. While the goal was to create an environment free of altercations, contraband and AWOLS, community programs were still staffing up and training, so there was a great need to collaborate for creative ideas with the state agencies and other community providers to address gaps.
- A full spectrum of programs was not operational for the first six months. This led to some youth in need of more intensive services being housed in general beds, and combined with strain on the system, led to mismatch of services.
- A cornerstone of juvenile justice reform is the premise that mental and behavioral health challenges and exposure to trauma often are the cause for a youth's entry into the system. In the early implementation of the initiative, programs were not prepared to address the level of behavioral health needs, including having clinical staff with the required credentials.
- Staff stability was a concern as well. Given the increased level of care and training needs, hundreds of staff members were required to get up to speed in a short period of time. Adequate training and skills contribute to the motivation level of staff and frustrations in the beginning led to higher than desired levels of turnover. <sup>3</sup> "Residential work in the youth justice system is difficult and challenging. Striving for low caseloads allow for increased support, accessibility and contact. <sup>7</sup> Youth justice systems must recruit staff carefully and provide employees with ongoing training and professional development to ensure quality of care and to minimize turnover." <sup>6</sup>
- Some areas they found to be strong include family engagement, educational goals, evidence-based/evidenced-informed approaches, community and coordination, and flexibility and responsiveness. The proximity of the placements to families and communities has increased contact between youth and their families. <sup>3</sup> Ninety-seven percent of youth who were released home had at least two home visits prior to release. Fewer than 10%



of youth exiting the Close to Home placement had their aftercare revoked for violations of their terms of release, such as a new arrest.<sup>2</sup>

- Another success in the structuring of the initiative was the way in which educational services were delivered. Most youth began receiving the same NYC Department of Education curriculum. During the 2016 – 2017 school year, “youth earned an average of 9.3 credits and passed 91% of their classes, continuing year-over-year improvements in both areas.”<sup>2</sup> Usage of evidence-based and evidence-informed approaches early on became a foundation of the work, and strong communication and coordination with the provider community has helped the infrastructure to be flexible and responsive to immediate needs and changes as they arise.

## Recommendations to States Considering a C2H Initiative

In their report, “Implementation of New York’s Close to Home Initiative: A New Model for Youth Justice”, The Center for Children’s Law and Policy make several recommendations to other jurisdictions looking at C2H options. After 5 years of implementation, stakeholders provided suggestions that would enhance the success of future reform in other states including:

- Invest in diversion practices that will downsize the juvenile justice system, make it more efficient and effective and provide pathway out of the system for youth.
- Ensure leaders are well-informed and onboard for the long-haul.
- Provide extensive period of planning and preparation to avoid pitfalls experienced by NY.
- Prioritize limited secure placements before non-secure placements.
- Assess the experience of providers in dealing with Juvenile Justice issues and determine relevance and training.
- Engage the community to offer public forum for input and comment.
- Merge systems for most efficient and effective delivery of services (DOJ and ACS).
- Monitor agencies for compliance with state foster care regulations and policies.
- Make out of home placement decisions prior to adjudication so that multi-agency teams can assess mental health, child protections and educational needs.
- Strengthen aftercare by ensuring youth are transitioned from a highly-structured program to aftercare services with the same service provider so that trust built with the program staff will help youth apply new skills, strategies and insights.
- Improve re-enrollment and re-engagement with community schools so that youth with a history of unmet special education need and a history of poor attendance have needed supports upon re-enrollment.
- Utilize evidence-based tools for intake and assessment of youth. An area that revealed itself for additional improvement is their intake and assessment of youth. While multiple factors were part of their assessment, the process did not have the capacity to identify youth with intellectual disabilities or who may have problematic sexual behavior and are not adjudicated for the offense. Unfortunately, these youth were sometimes not linked with the appropriate services.
- Improve community-based services for girls to assess needs in the community with an eye toward meeting needs earlier and before contact with the justice system.



## Connecticut’s Juvenile Justice System Reform with a Close to Home lens

In the four years of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee’s existence, it has made recommendations that carry the same principles as C2H. The following are some of the legislative mandates:

- The Connecticut Juvenile Training School will be closed on July 1, 2018.
- Juvenile Justice functions are being transferred from DCF to CSSD effective July 1, 2018
- As of July 1, 2018, there will be no more delinquency commitments to DCF and implementation will include addressing rehabilitative orientation, risk/needs assessment, system for graduated sanctions and public safety concerns.
- A new process is being developed by the Court Support Services Division that includes the following:
  - ~ Increase the cognitive-behavioral group offerings (curricula) throughout the service continuum
  - ~ Expand evidence-based, in-home programs such as multi-systemic therapy (MST), Treatment Foster Care Oregon (TFCO) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT).



- ~ Provide educational and vocational services
- ~ Develop a range of residential programs that will include the Re-Entry, Goal-oriented, Individualized Opportunity to Nurture Success (REGIONS) and new Helping Adolescent Males in Learning Their Options Now (HAMILTON)

Connecticut has and will continue to look at models such as Close to Home and benefit from their experiences as we continue juvenile justice reform, implementing more community-based programming options, reinvesting funds from unsuccessful practices and bringing our youth closer to home.”



## References

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5. Close to Home: Strategies to Place Young People in Their Communities, Antoinette Davis, Angela Irvine, and Jason Ziedenberg, National Council on Crime and Delinquency, May 2014
6. Staying Connected, Keeping Justice-Involved Youth "Close to Home" in New York City, March 2015
7. Close to Home Initiative presentation of NYC, ACS, John Dixon, Associate Commissioner, to JJPOC, March 2016



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