

LOOKING FORWARD

Youth Perspectives
on Reducing Crime
in Brownsville and Beyond

YOUTH
JUSTICE
BOARD

This publication was written by Youth Justice Board members and staff. The Youth Justice Board is a project of the Center for Court Innovation. It was founded to give young people a voice in policies that affect their lives. Each year a team of youths from across New York City investigates a current juvenile justice or public safety issue, formulates policy recommendations, and works to promote and implement key ideas.

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Points of view and opinions expressed in this document are the opinions of the Youth Justice Board members and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Center for Court Innovation or the above-named entities.

May 2011

Dear Reader,

We are teenagers brought together by a common interest in being a part of the solution to some of the challenges that affect our communities and us. This year our goal is to reduce youth crime in Brownsville and improve the experiences of youths who live there.

As members, we've met with justice system stakeholders at the city-level, Brownsville community leaders, and residents and youths from the neighborhood, among others. We've also had the opportunity to visit Brownsville and see the neighborhood. Combining what we've learned with what we've seen, we have developed 10 recommendations that we believe will meet our goal.

We hope that these recommendations are considered seriously by city policy players and Brownsville community leaders alike. We are confident that they present strong ways to help reduce youth crime in Brownsville and throughout the city and to improve the experiences of youths who live here.

Thank you for reading our report and recommendations.

Sincerely,

The Youth Justice Board

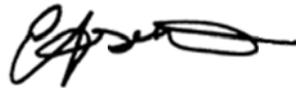
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About the Youth Justice Board

Launched by the Center for Court Innovation in 2004, the Youth Justice Board (the Board) is an after school program that brings together teenagers from around New York City to study and devise policy recommendations on an issue affecting youth in the city. Members represent the diversity of New York City, coming from different neighborhoods and schools and bringing varied personal experiences to the program. After several months of fieldwork, the young people present their findings directly to key city and state officials. In the past seven years, Board members have presented their recommendations to the city's Schools Chancellor, the Mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinator, the Commissioner of the city's Department of Youth and Community Development, the Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, the New York City Department of Probation, and the Administrative Judge of New York City Family Court.

In previous years, the Youth Justice Board studied the challenges faced by youths returning home after confinement for juvenile delinquency, safety problems in New York City high schools, the experiences of youths who go through New York City Family Court's permanency planning division, and juvenile Alternative to Detention programs in New York City. This year's cohort investigated youth dynamics in the neighborhood of Brownsville, Brooklyn, including education, recreation, crime, and other social activities.

Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Youth Justice Board, a group of New York City teenagers who study public policy issues that affect young people. Since August 2010, the Youth Justice Board has focused on reducing youth crime in New York City using the neighborhood of Brownsville, Brooklyn as a case study. This report presents ideas about how to reduce incidences of youth crime in Brownsville and neighborhoods that face similar challenges. In 2011-12, the Board will work to implement many of the ideas contained in this report in conjunction with the development of a new community justice center in Brownsville. The Board's ultimate goal is to make Brownsville a safe, supportive neighborhood for young people that provides for their social, emotional, and educational needs.

Over five months, the Youth Justice Board conducted interviews with over 30 individuals involved in the city justice system and the Brownsville community. The Board visited four community justice centers and conducted three focus groups with young people involved in the justice system to learn about the experiences and perspectives of youths. The Youth Justice Board developed 10 recommendations designed to reduce youth crime in Brownsville and make the community a safer, more supportive place for youths to grow up.

A. Community supports and services

1. Provide educational resources and supports for youths moving through middle school and into high school.
2. Provide alternative education, job-readiness, and mentoring services to youths.
3. Ensure that health, mental health, and social service resources are available at appropriate levels.
4. Provide programming for parents and families to help prevent foster care placement.

B. Community development

5. Foster community relationships and promote opportunities through events, media, and social networking.
6. Increase options for recreation to promote relationship building.
7. Engage youths from Brownsville in the development of the Brownsville Community Justice Center.

C. Crime and prevention

8. Provide programming designed to transform negative peer pressure into positive peer support.
9. Encourage better communication and stronger relationships between police and youths.

10. Establish coordination between the Brownsville Community Justice Center and the Crossroads Detention Center to better support youths involved in the justice system.

The recommendations put forth by the Board are not meant to be static—they are intended to be a starting point for change. The Board hopes its recommendations will spark conversation with community-based organizations, local schools, the Department of Probation, the New York City Police Department, and other partners. Over the next year, the Youth Justice Board will work with these stakeholders in an effort to encourage the implementation of the ideas contained in this report.

Points of view and opinions expressed in the report are the opinions of the Youth Justice Board members and do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the Center for Court Innovation or the program’s funders.

**To download a copy of the Board’s report and to learn more about the program, go to:
www.courtinnovation.org/youthjusticeboard**

Background

The Board chose to focus on youth crime and Brownsville for the 2010-12 program cycle for several reasons. First, although crime rates have been declining across the city in recent years, Brownsville has largely bucked this trend and has been called the city’s “most murderous” neighborhood. Second, a new community justice center has been proposed for Brownsville focusing on young people. Finally, Brownsville is in a unique position to incorporate positive interventions, proffered both from within and through partnerships with citywide organizations.

Brownsville Community History

Demographics

Brownsville was a neighborhood of predominantly Eastern European immigrants from its establishment in the mid-1800s through the Second World War. Many immigrants chose to live in Brownsville as an alternative to the crowded Lower East Side of Manhattan. In the 1950s, the demographics of the community began to shift as more African-Americans and Puerto Ricans moved into the neighborhood. The rising cost of living in other parts of the city fueled this transition, as many long-term Brownsville residents could afford to move to other neighborhoods during the post-war boom, while lower income minorities moved to Brownsville.²

Housing

The population of Brownsville’s public housing projects further exemplifies these changes. When the first of these buildings—the Brownsville Houses—opened in 1948, its population was 52% white and 48% black.³ During the 1950s, the city adopted a policy of “urban renewal,” which effectively cleared low-income slums out of high-profile areas, displacing residents farther from the center of Manhattan. Brownsville was one of the neighborhoods that absorbed large numbers of people forced to relocate.⁴ Initially, most displaced residents did not move into public housing because the rent was too expensive.⁵ As New York City Housing Authority policies changed in the early 1970s to require residents to spend 30% of their incomes on rent, higher-income residents lost incentive to remain in the community as their required monthly contributions rose, while the opposite occurred for lower-income residents.⁶ As a result, Brownsville’s housing projects became home to many of the city’s poorest residents.

Notable Events

Brownsville was the site of two historic labor disputes. The first of these was the Beth-El (now Brookdale) Hospital strike of 1962, which saw a coalition form between mostly white union

² According to Wendell Pritchett’s book *Brownsville, Brooklyn*, the city’s “urban renewal” policy further contributed to the altered demographics, as it displaced many people of color.

³ Wendell Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, (2002) 98.

⁴ *Ibid.* 120-121.

⁵ *Ibid.* 119.

⁶ *Ibid.* 249.

organizers and minority rank-and-file workers during a period of racial unrest elsewhere in the country. Their success in gaining union recognition was a model for organizers nationwide.⁷ Six years later, community relations would take a turn for the worse with the onset of the Ocean Hill-Bronxville teachers strike. In 1967, the New York City public schools experimented with decentralizing leadership and placed communities in charge of managing their own schools through local governing boards. In Bronxville, when the newly appointed governing board dismissed 13 teachers and 6 administrators, staff claimed a breach of contract. The dispute escalated to involve then Mayor of New York City John Lindsay, the United Federation of Teachers, and the governing board. The Bronxville strike eventually led to a series of strikes which sporadically closed schools across the city throughout the spring and fall of 1968.⁸

Current Landscape

Demographics

In 2008, Bronxville's total population was 113,484. The community continues to be primarily black and Latino, with 71% of the population black and 25% Latino. Bronxville is home to a substantial number of children, with nearly 37,000 residents—approximately one-third of the population—younger than 18. Over 40% of children in Bronxville live below the federal poverty level.⁹

Education and Youth Services

There are currently seven high schools operating in Bronxville: two traditional high schools, and one 6-12 school, as well as four Diploma Plus Transfer Schools, offering degree programs for young people no longer enrolled in traditional high schools.¹⁰ Another high school targeting “disconnected” young people who are not enrolled in school or employed is scheduled to open in September 2011. Together, these schools will serve about 2,000 students.¹¹ All told, Bronxville is home to a total of 29 schools serving young people grades K-12.¹²

One of the neighborhood's most popular resources for young people is the Bronxville Recreation Center, which is home to indoor basketball courts, a swimming pool, performance spaces, dance studios, and a computer room, among other options. The Recreation Center also hosts many events, including the annual “Old-Timers Day” block party that is very popular in the

⁷ Ibid. 175.

⁸ Ibid. 230-235.

⁹ *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, Citizens' Committee for the Children of New York, Inc., (2010).

¹⁰ These schools serve youths who are over age and under-credited, and thus present the highest risk of dropping out of school.

¹¹ Data compiled from New York City Department of Education, 22 Apr. 2010 <http://schools.nyc.gov>.

¹² Due to many young people attending high school in neighborhoods outside of where they live, neighborhood graduation rates are not available. According to the Citizens' Committee for Children, about 63% of young people attending high school in Brooklyn graduated on time in 2008. *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, Citizens' Committee for the Children of New York, Inc., (2010).

community. Additional youth programming is offered by the Brownsville Partnership, local libraries, the Brownsville Youth Leadership Council, and the Police Athletic League.

Crime

Brownsville's local police precinct recorded 50% more reported index crimes (murder, rape, robbery, felony assault, burglary, and grand larceny) in 2009 than in neighboring precincts.¹³ Brownsville and the adjoining neighborhoods of East New York, Bushwick, and Bedford-Stuyvesant accounted for almost half of Brooklyn's and nearly a fifth of the city's murders in 2008.¹⁴

Perhaps not surprisingly, a notably high number of Brownsville's community members are incarcerated at any given time. Recent prison admission data shows that Brownsville has the second highest rate of prison admissions in Brooklyn – 13.7 per 1,000 adult male residents.¹⁵ In a neighborhood defined by just two square miles, several Brownsville blocks have been identified as “million-dollar blocks,” a phrase that denotes areas whose currently incarcerated residents will cost more than \$1 million to imprison.¹⁶

Brownsville's youth crime and incarceration rates suggest that, without substantial changes, these problems could remain entrenched for years to come. In 2008, there were over 1,600 arrests of Brownsville young people (ages 8 to 18).¹⁷ Community members report rising gang-activity and gun violence, and Brownsville's youth imprisonment ratio is among the highest in the city (1 out of 12 males, ages 16 to 24).¹⁸ Brownsville is also home to the Crossroads Juvenile Center, which houses young people who have been arrested and are being detained during the pendency of their Family Court proceedings. Crossroads is one of two juvenile detention facilities operating in New York City, and while not all of those detained at Crossroads come from Brownsville, the facility houses many young people from Brownsville and its surrounding neighborhoods.

Housing

With 18 public housing developments in total, Brownsville has the most concentrated public housing of any neighborhood in the country. Brownsville also has a significant incidence of

¹³ Veronika Belenkaya, Ben Chapman, and Erin Durkin, *Violent deaths and robbery statistics are up in 73rd Precinct*, NY Daily News, 4 Jan. 2009, 21 Apr. 2011 http://www.nydailynews.com/ny_local/brooklyn/2009/01/03/2009-01-03_violent_deaths_and_robbery_statistics_ar.html; *Police Department City of New York: CompStat*, New York City Police Department, 12 May 2010, 21 Apr. 2011 http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/crime_prevention/crime_statistics.shtml.

¹⁴ Kai Wright, *Where Murder Won't Go Quietly*, New York Magazine, 7 Jan. 2008, 21 Apr. 2011 <http://nymag.com/news/features/crime/2008/42604/>.

¹⁵ *NYC Analysis 17*, Justice Mapping Center, Oct. 2006, 21, Apr. 2011 <http://www.justicemapping.org/>.

¹⁶ Eric Cadora, *Criminal Justice and Health and Human Services: An Exploration of Overlapping Needs, Resources, and Interests in Brooklyn Neighborhoods*, Open Society Institute, Dec. 2001, 13, Apr. 2011 <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/prison2home02/cadora.htm#10>.

¹⁷ Written correspondence from Michele Sviridoff, New York City Criminal Justice Agency, 2 Feb. 2010.

¹⁸ *NYC Analysis 17*, Justice Mapping Center, Oct. 2006, 21, Apr. 2011 <http://www.justicemapping.org/>.

homelessness, ranking sixth in New York City, further compromising the stability of Brownsville’s families.¹⁹

Though housing is a challenge in Brownsville, the community is home to an ambitious effort to stabilize families at risk of homelessness led by an organization called Common Ground. This initiative – the Brownsville Partnership – brings together key social service and government agencies to combat homelessness. The Brownsville Partnership works to address this issue by focusing on both the economic factors and the “erosion of community ties” that contribute to homelessness.²⁰ The Brownville Partnership assesses its impact in diverse areas including rates of homelessness and incarceration, individuals’ participation in community events, school completion, and cleanliness of public spaces.²¹

The Brownsville Community Justice Center

The Center for Court Innovation—in conjunction with the New York State Court System, the City of New York, the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office and others—is in the planning stages for the new Brownsville Community Justice Center, a problem-solving community court that will be devoted to addressing neighborhood crime through a combination of judicial intervention, social service delivery, community and family engagement, and a multi-faceted collaboration of justice system, education, and social service partners. Through its research and recommendations, the Youth Justice Board is helping to lay the foundation for the new justice center.

Community justice centers attempt to harness the power of the justice system to address local problems. They can take many forms, but all focus on creative partnerships and problem solving. They strive to create new relationships, both within the justice system and with outside stakeholders including residents, merchants, churches and schools. They also test new and aggressive approaches to public safety rather than merely responding to a crime after it has occurred. The Center for Court Innovation currently operates community justice centers in Red Hook, Brooklyn, Midtown Manhattan, Harlem, and the Bronx, and provides technical assistance to jurisdictions worldwide seeking to implement these models.

Looking ahead

The assets and challenges present in Brownsville add up to a unique opportunity. Because it has both a real public safety problem and a pre-existing infrastructure of public and private agencies that are aware of the challenges in the neighborhood and committed to solving them, Brownsville is ripe for positive change. This report provides young people’s perspectives on how these changes can most effectively support youths in that community.

¹⁹ *Common Ground: Brownsville Partnership*, Common Ground, 13 Mar. 2010, 21 Apr. 2011
http://www.commonground.org/?page_id=466.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Findings

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on four months of research conducted by the Board, including interviews, site visits, and focus groups. The members interviewed 35 policymakers and practitioners, conducted site visits to four operating community courts, and led focus groups during which 28 young people (ages 13-18) who live, work, and/or attend school in the Brownsville community shared their experiences, impressions, and hopes for the neighborhood. Through this research, the Board sought to identify issues affecting young people both in Brownsville and across the city, approaching challenges through the lens of crime prevention and possible improvements to the juvenile justice system. The Board hopes that these findings will be useful for stakeholders, policymakers, and service providers working in all New York City neighborhoods. The issues that the Board identified fall under three themes:

- **Community supports and services.** The Board learned that young people in Brownsville face challenges related to services, support systems, and positive engagement opportunities.
- **Community development.** The Board learned about the unique characteristics and culture of Brownsville that are important for policymakers and others working for changes within the community to understand.
- **Crime and prevention.** The Board learned that Brownsville is a neighborhood with high crime rates and a correspondingly high concentration of both justice-system involved residents and police officers on the streets. Board members feel that making the neighborhood safer is a primary component of improving the community and is the responsibility of all members of the community, not only the police.

More specific information related to these findings is detailed below.

Community supports and services

Brownsville offers few jobs and job training opportunities. Young people in focus groups reported that they are very interested in working after school and during the summer. However, they have had difficulty finding jobs within Brownsville. Some youths gained work experience through internships and placements through school, and others reported success working through the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development summer jobs program, though most of these placements were outside of Brownsville. Overall, youths reported that finding a job or internship without the help of a third party was difficult. Young people said that they are very interested in working and would welcome opportunities to participate in job training and placement programs in order to help them secure employment.

Schools do not always encourage young people attending school in the neighborhood to engage with the surrounding community. Until the early 2000s, high school-aged young people in

Brownsville had to obtain their diploma outside of the neighborhood because Brownsville did not have any high schools. While several high schools have been built over the past decade, many young people continue to go to other neighborhoods for their education, as is the case for students across New York City. The young people from our focus groups who attend school in Brownsville, regardless of whether they live in the community, said that they did not feel strongly connected to their schools. Possible reasons for this disconnect include the commute required of young people living in other neighborhoods and the lack of a strong menu of extracurricular activities offered by the school that help young people feel like they are part of a community.

Educational resources outside of school are lacking or difficult for young people to access within Brownsville. Many young people living in Brownsville are not enrolled in, or did not graduate from, traditional high schools. Youths in focus groups said that there is a need for GED classes and job training close to where they live, as they need opportunities to complete their education and to prepare for the workforce, but that it is difficult for some to travel in order to receive these services.

Available health and social services are often difficult to access within the community. The Board found that some necessary services, including social services, health services, and mental health services, are difficult to access. Some young people said that they would travel to other neighborhoods—or even boroughs—for health care and dental services, which they felt were of better quality than those available in Brownsville.

Children from Brownsville are more likely to become part of the foster care system than children in the rest of New York City. Research revealed that children in Brownsville are more likely to be reported abused or neglected than are children in other neighborhoods in Brooklyn and New York City.²² In 2009, there were approximately 1,665 abuse/neglect investigations in Brownsville, which account for nearly 9% of all abuse/neglect investigations in the borough of Brooklyn.²³ There is also a very high rate of re-abuse in Brownsville, with over 16% repeat indicated²⁴ investigations within 6 months.²⁵ These rates are higher than for children in New York City (12.5%) and Brooklyn (12.8%).²⁶ Further statistics show that cases of abuse/neglect rank first in “reason for placement” into the foster care system in Brownsville, with abuse/neglect accounting for 72.5% of all placements.²⁷ These numbers have implications for the

²² *Keeping Track of New York City's Children*, Citizens' Committee for the Children of New York, Inc., (2010) 202-16.

²³ *Community Snapshot 2009, CD 16: Brownsville*, Administration for Children's Services, 21 Apr. 2011 http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/cd_snapshots/brooklyn_cd16.pdf.

²⁴ A report is “indicated” when a child protective services worker determines there is credible evidence the child was abused or neglected.

²⁵ *Community Snapshot 2009, CD 16: Brownsville*, Administration for Children's Services, 15 Apr. 2011 http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/cd_snapshots/brooklyn_cd16.pdf.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

justice system as well, since young people involved in the foster care system are more likely to become involved with the justice system.

Community development

Youths in Brownsville find little reason to remain in their neighborhood long-term. Youths who participated in the focus groups almost universally asserted their interest in leaving Brownsville within the next ten years. For many, this attitude was the result of feeling that Brownsville was not going to get better anytime soon and therefore would not, for example, be a good place to raise a family. In the interim, young people's plans to leave the community may affect their current investment in it and their commitment to improving what is wrong. On the flip side, Brownsville community leaders who work with youths from the neighborhood indicated a clear understanding of the importance of providing activities and opportunities that would keep youths involved and invested in strengthening the community.

Many individuals working for positive change in Brownsville do so through informal networks. The Board learned from Brownsville community leaders and city-level justice system stakeholders that the neighborhood is home to many smaller, less formally organized networks of individuals working to improve the neighborhood. Among these networks are regular coffee klatches, where residents meet to discuss neighborhood affairs and develop strategies for addressing issues affecting the community. In some cases Brownsville's networks engage in their own outreach to the community, providing services and support where needed. For example, the "Navi Boys," a group of men who grew up in the neighborhood and are united by their preference for driving Lincoln Navigators, provide free transportation to elderly members of the community who need to buy groceries, pick up prescriptions, or otherwise travel around the neighborhood. These networks can serve as an important entry point into the community for policymakers and community organizers.

Developing a successful community justice center requires continual input from residents. Building a community justice center that truly serves the unique needs of the community takes time, careful planning, and community feedback. For example, planners of the Red Hook Community Justice Center spent five years developing relationships with residents and learning about the neighborhood's needs before it opened. Brownsville community leaders and residents said that they believe a community justice center in their neighborhood will succeed only if its development is informed by the ideas and experiences of the people living there. For example, some youths who participated in the focus group expressed an interest in the idea of a community justice center, but were most interested in the extent to which it would offer services and support programs for them, including opportunities related to job training and education. Youths stated that the justice center should offer resources to their peers who are not directly involved in the justice system. This sentiment was reflected in the commitment on the part of planners at the Center for Court Innovation and other city stakeholders to involve members of the Brownsville community as much as possible in the process of establishing and operating a community justice center.

Crime and prevention

Relationships between the police and young people in the community are strained or non-existent. Youths who participated in the focus groups expressed either dissatisfaction with, or indifference to, the presence of police in Brownsville. While a few youths stated that there were police officers they accepted and respected, many indicated that they saw police involvement in the neighborhood as a source of problems, not solutions. They asserted that police officers made decisions about them based on unfounded assumptions about youth behavior, for example that young people in groups are always up to no good. The rest of the youths in the focus groups expressed indifference to the presence of police. These youths felt that the police had little impact on what people in the neighborhood chose to do.

The possibility of justice-system involvement is not a crime deterrent for some individuals. The Board heard from New York City Deputy Police Inspector Samuel Wright that some of the people who commit offenses are less concerned about being caught than they are about achieving what they set out to do. In some cases, issues of pride and honor contribute to an individual's decision to commit an offense. For example, officers witnessed one young man shooting someone in front of a police station in Brownsville, well aware that he would get caught. When he was arrested, he told the officer, "I did what I had to do." We also heard that, in some cases, crime seems to run in the family. Deputy Inspector Wright spoke of one of his colleagues who has arrested a young person, his father, and his grandfather for committing robberies over the course of the officer's career.

*Residents of Brownsville have mixed feelings about the New York City Police Department's Stop, Question, and Frisk policy.*²⁸ Some youths who participated in the focus groups described feeling unfairly profiled by police under the Stop, Question, and Frisk policy utilized by the New York City Police Department. Their attitude about the policy in general, however, was more supportive. Youths understood why the policy was put into practice and agreed that the method made sense. This ambivalence was also expressed in interviews with Brownsville community leaders and city-level justice system stakeholders. Both groups identified instances in which they believed the Stop, Question, Frisk policy was enforced inappropriately, but said that the idea behind the tactic makes sense. Many interviewees also said that the policy has been effective in preventing crime.

Peer influence contributes to the decisions young people make. A consistent theme across all of the interviews involved peer pressure and the impact it can have on young people getting into and staying out of trouble. City-level justice system stakeholders said that youths often become involved in the juvenile justice system or engage in illegal behavior as part of a group or "in

²⁸ "When a police officer reasonably suspects that a person has committed, is committing or is about to commit a felony or a Penal Law misdemeanor, the officer is authorized by New York State Criminal Procedure law 140.50 to stop, question and possibly frisk that individual." *Frequently Asked Questions: Police Administration*, New York City Police Department, 14 Apr. 2011 http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/html/faq/faq_police.shtml.

concert with others.” A specific example of this phenomenon in Brownsville involves the numerous gang-affiliated youths in the neighborhood. Youths who participated in the focus groups also addressed this feature of the community, indicating that gangs were a prominent and growing part of the Brownsville community and something in which their peers were increasingly involved. A further example of peer-to-peer dynamics involves the issue of “community guns” that the Board heard about in one interview. In these cases, young people pool their money to purchase a single firearm that is shared among the group, making it difficult for the police to identify an owner.

Issues of “turf” define the community for many young people and limit where they feel comfortable going within Brownsville. Most young people who participated in the focus groups and who live in Brownsville said that they feel safe in their neighborhood. However, many residents define the neighborhood narrowly. For example, some residents consider only the most central region of Brownsville—Pitkin Avenue and the high-density housing projects—to encompass their neighborhood, thereby excluding Ocean Hill and southern Brownsville in their definitions. The Board heard from adults living and working in the community that many youths feel threatened in parts of Brownsville where they do not live, due in part to prevalent gang activity. Often, this prevents them from leaving their immediate surrounding area to participate in activities in other parts of Brownsville. Adults familiar with the community cited the Brownsville Recreation Center at the southern tip of the neighborhood as one place that some youths feel afraid to go because of known gang hotspots they would have to travel through in order to get there.

Middle school-aged youths are a key demographic to target for preventive services. Middle school is a period during which young people are particularly susceptible to peer pressure and negative influences. Many youths who become involved with the justice system at this age are arrested for participating in group crimes. Involvement in the justice system can cause young people to fall behind in school, whether because of missed classes, social stigma, or both. Unfortunately, this increases the chances that youths will be forced to repeat a grade, a known risk factor for dropping out and for future justice system involvement. Furthermore, youths in this age group are often under-served by positive extracurricular activities.

New York City is in the midst of reforming its juvenile justice system. Over the past few years, New York City has increased options for arrested young people to remain in their communities rather than spend time in detention or placement facilities. In March 2011, the city closed Bridges, formerly known as Spofford, Juvenile Detention Center, leaving New York City with two remaining juvenile detention centers: Horizons, located in the Bronx, and Crossroads, located in Brownsville. Many justice system stakeholders indicated the important place Crossroads occupies within the New York City juvenile justice system as one of these facilities. Having fewer detention facilities across the city means that more young people will be coming in to the Brownsville community through Crossroads.

Residents of Brownsville who witness or have information about crimes fear retaliation that may come with reporting them to the police. City-level justice system stakeholders identified an unwillingness on the part of community residents to report on the illicit activity of others, or to “snitch,” as a major challenge. In particular, Anne Swern of the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office indicated that district attorneys face serious obstacles to removing dangerous members of the community when witnesses and victims of serious crime refuse to participate in the prosecution of the perpetrators.

The hours before and after school are important for juvenile crime prevention. The beginning of the school day and the hours just after school are times when many young people who become involved in the justice system commit offenses. Many of the problems that occur on school grounds stem from young people who do not attend a particular school going to that school to find a peer with whom they have issues. In addition to altercations that occur on or around school premises, the hours after school are when young people are most likely to engage in, or become a victim of, violent crime.²⁹

²⁹ *Facts About After School Programs & At Risk Youth*, After School All-Stars, 27 Apr. 2011
<http://www.afterschoolallstars.org/site/pp.asp?c=enJJKMNpFmG&b=854685>.

Recommendations

A. Community supports and services

1. Provide educational resources and supports for youths moving through middle school and into high school.
2. Provide alternative education, job-readiness, and mentoring services to youths.
3. Ensure that health, mental health, and social service resources are available at appropriate levels.
4. Provide programming for parents and families to help prevent foster care placement.

B. Community development

5. Foster community relationships and promote opportunities through events, media, and social networking.
6. Increase options for recreation to promote relationship building.
7. Engage youths from Brownsville in the development of the Brownsville Community Justice Center.

C. Crime and prevention

8. Provide programming designed to transform negative peer pressure into positive peer support.
9. Encourage better communication and stronger relationships between police and youths.
10. Establish coordination between the Brownsville Community Justice Center and the Crossroads Detention Center to better support youths involved in the justice system.

1. Provide educational resources and support for youths moving through middle school and into high school.

We learned that some young people in middle school make choices regarding school participation and delinquency that can have an impact on the rest of their lives. Ana Bermudez, Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Probation, said that there is often not a strong support system in place for young people in middle school, and that the transition from eighth to ninth grade is especially difficult for many students. Lack of support could be part of the reason that many young people become involved in the justice system at this age. New York City Police Deputy Inspector Wright of Brownsville supported this fact by saying that in Brownsville, middle school is often the age when problems with juvenile crime begin. Further, this population is especially important to target, since problems such as chronic truancy among middle school students have been shown to lead to long-term school disengagement and an increased risk of dropping out of school.³⁰

Since the majority of young people in the New York City public school system attend middle school in their neighborhoods, interventions affecting middle school students are primarily neighborhood-based. In order to help ensure that more middle school-aged young people have the education and support systems in place to succeed in high school and beyond, we recommend:

- *Youth service providers and educators should focus on programming that encourages smooth transitions from middle school to high school; and*
- *Educators and school administrators should consider creating additional K-8 or 6-12 schools.*

Youth service providers and educators should focus on programming that encourages smooth transitions from middle school to high school. Middle school-aged young people would benefit from programming geared to supporting them while in middle school and as they transition into high school. Following the model of programs like *Jump Start*, which helps young children prepare for and succeed in elementary school,³¹ we think this programming should serve three purposes: first, it should give middle school students early exposure to high school; second, it should offer more challenging and rigorous courses to youths in middle school who are academically prepared; and third, it should provide intensive interventions to youths who are in danger of dropping out of school. Some program models to consider include:

- *Gear Up*. The federally-funded Gear Up program provides early college awareness and supports teens in both middle and high school.³²

³⁰ Robert Balfanz, Liza Herzog, and Douglas J. Mac Iver, *Preventing School Disengagement and Keeping Students on the Graduation Path in Urban Middle-Grades Schools: Early Identification and Effective Interventions*, *Educational Psychologist*, (2007) 223-235.

³¹ *Jumpstart Outcomes*, Jumpstart. 9 Sept. 2009, 15 Apr. 2011

http://www.jstart.org/site/DocServer/Jumpstart_Child_Outcomes.pdf?docID=3981.

³² *Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP)*. U. S. Department of Education, 31 Mar. 2011, 15 Apr. 2011 <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/gearup/index.html>.

- *Citizen Schools*. Citizen Schools works with students to provide academic support and college preparatory workshops. It also brings adult volunteers from the community into schools to teach classes in specific skills.³³
- *Attendance Court*. The Attendance Court model provides middle schools with a new method to help students address chronic lateness and unexcused absences before they rise to the level where school officials must file a formal report alleging educational neglect. In these programs, trained staff work one-on-one with chronically absent young people and their families to address attendance problems.³⁴

Programs targeted at middle school students can also help young people transition to high school by allowing them to participate in tours and interviews in high schools, offering them a realistic sense of what to expect.

Educators and school administrators should consider creating additional K-8 or 6-12 schools. We propose that school planners and education policymakers consider establishing more schools that serve young people in different configurations than grade 6-8 middle schools do, either by grouping middle school students within elementary or high schools. Ms. Bermudez said in her interview that establishing schools to serve 6-12th graders together will address some of the problems young people face in the transition between middle and high school. We learned that the Teacher's Preparatory School in Brownsville is already serving students in grades 6-12, and we suggest other schools consider the benefits of following this model. For example, these schools will provide older youths with opportunities to serve as role models and mentors for younger youths within the school.

While some people might be concerned that grouping younger and older students will expose young people to negative influences earlier in their lives, we know that young people already spend time with older youths in their neighborhoods. Schools provide a structured and supervised environment in which young people can develop positive relationships with one another. Combining schools will also encourage pooling resources, which may provide students with access to additional social and recreational activities after school. This is important, as Ms. Bermudez referred to the necessity of providing youths with pro-social options and a "breadth of quality services."

³³ *Results*, Citizen Schools, 15 Apr. 2011 <http://www.citizenschools.org/newyork/>.

³⁴ *Attendance Court*, Center for Court Innovation, 15 Apr. 2011 <http://www.courtinnovation.org/project/attendance-court>.

2. Provide alternative education, job-readiness, and mentoring services to youths.

Young people in our focus groups expressed a need for education and training outside of the school system. We identified three areas where youths in Brownsville need increased support. First, youths need alternative educational services if they are no longer attending school and wish to obtain a degree. Second, youths need job-readiness programs to prepare them for the responsibilities that come with holding a job. Finally, youths need positive role models to encourage them to develop and pursue meaningful plans for their futures. With these three things in mind, we recommend that:

- *Alternative education services for youths no longer attending traditional high schools should be increased within Brownsville;*
- *Job-readiness programs should be made available to youths looking for jobs; and*
- *Young people should have opportunities for positive engagement with adults through mentoring programs.*

Alternative education services for youths no longer attending traditional high schools should be increased within Brownsville. We learned during our focus groups that young people want more support for completing GED requirements within the community. Currently, the neighborhood offers four Diploma Plus schools for older, under-credited youths, which allow graduates to obtain Regents Diplomas. However, these programs are options only for young people ages 16-20. As a result, both youths who stop attending school before reaching 16 and youths older than 20 who have not completed high school do not have the option of enrolling. In addition, the four-year graduation rates at these schools range from 6-13%,³⁵ indicating a need to give youths additional options to obtain degrees. Offering GED classes will allow older youths to attain diploma equivalents, a necessary step toward building their economic independence.

We recommend offering these classes outside the confines of traditional school buildings, as many young people who have left school have negative associations with them. Instead, these classes should be held in public spaces such as the Brownsville Recreation Center and public libraries and should be offered at different times of the day to accommodate work schedules and child-care obligations that may limit young adults' abilities to attend. In addition, these classes should be well-advertised so that young people know when and where they can enroll.

Lastly, we heard that in some cases, young people may be so far behind in their educations that they are not prepared to enroll in a GED program. In these instances, we recommend offering one-on-one tutoring until the individual is ready to move into a GED class. Tutoring would alleviate embarrassment that can be associated with below-average academic skills. We also think that relationships developed between tutors and students can have the same positive affect as the mentoring relationships addressed below.

³⁵ Data compiled from *Insideschools.org*, Center for New York Affairs, The New School, 18 Oct. 2010, 22 Apr. 2011 <http://www.insideschools.org>.

Job-readiness programs should be made available to youths looking for jobs. Young people in the focus groups described the sometimes frustrating experiences they have had trying to get jobs. For example, one young man said that he tried to apply for an open position at a nearby Chinese restaurant and the staff laughed at him: they didn't believe he was serious about working there. Some youths in the focus groups did have successful experiences finding work in the community; one mentioned working in a local library, and another said she worked for a child-care facility in nearby Bedford-Stuyvesant. Other young people said that they relied on their schools to help them find paid internships—usually in other communities—and the Department of Youth and Community Development lottery-based summer jobs program to find work. Some of the Diploma Plus schools in the area also offer students job training and vocational classes.³⁶ However, even with these resources, focus group participants agreed that they wanted more jobs and job training programs. As a result, we recommend:

- 1) Working with existing service providers in the Brownsville community to offer job skills workshops and training throughout the neighborhood, at times convenient for working parents, including nights and weekends; and
- 2) Partnering with existing employment programs to bring more jobs into the community. For example, the Department of Youth and Community Development summer jobs program could provide funding for local businesses to employ youths over the summer.

We were pleased to hear from Daisy Jackson, Chair of the Youth Services Planning Committee, Brownsville Community Board 16, that the Youth Services Planning Committee is working on a summer job initiative to help youths find paid work which will include job-readiness and a job-training curriculum. We hope that this effort succeeds and that similar programs follow.

Young people should have opportunities for positive engagement with adults through mentoring programs. We heard in several interviews that building positive relationships between adults and young people is one way of preventing youths from engaging in negative behaviors. For example, David Muhammad, former Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Probation, said that young people having healthy relationships with adults is one of the key ways to discourage recidivism. Yumari Martinez, Associate Director at the Vera Center on Youth Justice, said that engaging young people with positive support networks can help reduce crime and that mentoring can serve as a means to this end. Therefore, we recommend pairing more young people with mentors as part of their development. These adult mentors could be volunteers from within the community or from other parts of the city who are interested in working one-on-one with a teenager to support his/her positive development. Where possible, it would be helpful to pair youths with mentors who have had similar experiences growing up in the neighborhood. Because these would be individual partnerships, the relationship could take

³⁶ Ibid.

many different forms depending on the needs of the young person. For example, mentors could provide homework help, advice on navigating high school, assistance finding jobs, and when applicable, share personal experiences that mentees could learn from. These interactions could occur in person, over the phone, or through online programs like Skype. Mentoring programs could also engage family members and other adults to resolve conflicts and support youths, an approach that Deputy Inspector Samuel Wright of the New York City Police Department recommends. To get this program off the ground, we recommend that service providers in Brownsville look at other successful mentoring programs currently operating in the city, for example SummerSearch³⁷ and Minds Matter,³⁸ and discuss strategies for providing similar services in Brownsville.

³⁷ *About Us: Summer Search*, Summer Search, 29 March 2011 <http://www.summersearch.org/about/>.

³⁸ *About Us: Minds Matter*, Minds Matter, 29 Mar. 2011 <http://www.mindsmatter.org/index.asp>.

3. Ensure that health, mental health, and social service resources are available at appropriate levels.

We heard consistently during our interviews and focus groups that Brownsville is in need of more resources for young people, including health, mental health, and social services.

The Brownsville Partnership deserves credit for working to coordinate existing services within the community better. Part of its strategy for addressing challenges in the community includes “connecting Brownsville residents with new employment and educational opportunities.”³⁹

However, building a comprehensive network of services takes time, and our research indicates that there is still work to be done around this issue.

Youths in focus groups noted that they had to leave the community for health and dental services, job training, and mental health appointments, though they said they would like to have access to these resources closer to home. Accessible quality services can go a long way toward improving a community. Karen Yazmajian and Martin Feinman of the Legal Aid Society Juvenile Rights Division said in an interview that a range of mental health services, after-school activities, mentoring programs, tutoring, drug-counseling and home-based family services are particularly important resources for improving communities with high crime rates.

Unfortunately, in the current economic climate many of the agencies that typically provide community services are underfunded and are cutting their offerings, placing Brownsville in danger of losing resources, even as residents are asking for more. For example, former Probation Deputy Commissioner David Muhammad told us that the department now has fewer resources to help people with housing, education, drug treatment, jobs, and mental health problems. These issues are known within the Department of Probation as the “big five” challenges, due to their prevalence among individuals on probation. Since Brownsville is home to approximately 400 adults⁴⁰ on probation—one of the highest rates in the city⁴¹— the loss of these services affects residents considerably. In order to address the problems associated with a lack of some resources, we recommend:

- *The Brownsville Partnership, the Center for Court Innovation, and other local service providers should coordinate resources to ensure that an appropriate number of relevant services are available to residents and that community members are aware of these resources.*

³⁹ *Common Ground: Brownsville Partnership*, Common Ground 13 Mar. 2010, 9 May 2011 http://www.commonground.org/?page_id=466.

⁴⁰ In the New York State justice system, anyone 16 or older who is accused of committing a criminal offense is considered an “adult.”

⁴¹ Personal interview with former Deputy Commissioner David Muhammad, 2 Dec. 2010.

The Brownsville Partnership, the Center for Court Innovation, and other local service providers should coordinate resources to ensure that an appropriate number of relevant services are available to residents and that community members are aware of these resources. To ensure that the community offers young people adequate resources, we recommend that the Center for Court Innovation build on the community survey conducted in October, 2010 by surveying local service providers about the services they offer and the number of people using them. Once the Center has obtained a clear sense of what services are currently available and what services are lacking, this data can be used to inform a strategic plan designed to better coordinate existing services and fill in service gaps which would be implemented by local providers.

Concurrently, the Brownsville Partnership should continue convening local organizations as they work to streamline services. Including representatives from all partnering service provider agencies in these conversations will ensure that their staff members are informed about places they can make referrals outside of their agencies. This is particularly important for agencies that have had to cut services in light of recent budget crises, as they may now need to refer clients to external resources for services that they once provided themselves.

In addition, through this process, organizations currently offering duplicative services would become aware of each other. Our hope is that by streamlining resources, some service providers could alter their focus to address prominent issues within the community that are currently neglected. Organizations should also come up with ways to advertise their services to make sure that the resources in Brownville are being sufficiently utilized, for instance by distributing fliers or advertising on the proposed Brownsville community website (see recommendation 5, pg. 25).

In the long term, it would be ideal to have a “one stop” location in the community that provides many of these services so that residents would know where to go to get help when they needed it, no matter what their issue. The District Attorney’s expansion of the Back on Track Truancy program to Brownsville, which provides education and health services, parenting classes, and truancy prevention,⁴² is a very good start toward aggregating these services under one roof. However, these services are seriously underfunded and thus able to reach only a finite number of members of the Brownsville community.⁴³ Once established, the community justice center could be a good place to locate additional services, as we learned that justice centers have been effective multi-service providers in other communities. For example, the Red Hook Community Justice Center provides on-site domestic violence counseling, health care, and job training, while making referrals to other programs such as drug treatment when appropriate.

⁴² “BACK ON TRACK” Brooklyn DA Youth Crime and Truancy Reduction Program, Community Partners Commission Association, 22 Apr. 2011 <http://communitypartners-now.com/?q=/projects/back-track-brooklyn-da-youth-crime-and-truancy-reduction-program>.

⁴³ Anne Swern, personal email, 2 May 2011.

4. Provide programming for parents and families to help prevent foster care placement.

We learned that youths from Brownsville are frequently reported as abused or neglected and are more likely to become part of the foster care system compared to children in New York City overall.⁴⁴ According to Gladys Carrión, Commissioner of the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, “Being in foster care can be a risk factor for juvenile justice system involvement [which] can lead to criminal involvement.”⁴⁵ Youths who are involved in both the justice and foster care systems at the same time are known as “crossover youths.” New York City combined the Administration for Children’s Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice in 2010 in order to focus on serving these young people better.

“Being in foster care can be a risk factor for juvenile justice system involvement [which] can lead to criminal involvement.”

–Gladys Carrión, New York State Office of Children and Family Services

Young people in foster care face many social challenges, including not only an increased risk for justice system involvement, but also the often-difficult adjustment to life in a new home, and potentially a new school and neighborhood. Many child welfare experts agree that foster care should be a last resort for youths. As a result, we recommend taking steps to reduce the number of young people entering and remaining in foster care in Brownsville and across the city. To do so, we recommend:

- *Providing funding for supportive services to young people and families involved in the foster care system or at risk of foster care involvement; and*
- *Providing safe havens as a short-term solution for young people in crisis.*

Providing funding for supportive services to young people and families involved in the foster care system or at risk of foster care involvement. One tool commonly used to reduce the number of youths in foster care is purchased preventive services, through which contract agencies work directly with families to address some of the issues that contribute to children and teens entering care.⁴⁶ In 2009, 380 families in Brownsville’s Community District 16 received these services.⁴⁷ However, funding for these programs was recently reduced by about \$50 million across New

⁴⁴ *Keeping Track of New York City’s Children*, Citizens’ Committee for the Children of New York, (2010) 210-16.

⁴⁵ Commissioner Carrión said in her interview that 65% of young people involved in the juvenile justice system had previous involvement in the child welfare system.

⁴⁶ *CCC Continues to Advocate for Preventive Services*, Citizens’ Committee for Children, October 2010, 21 Apr. 2011 http://action.voices.org/site/MessageViewer?em_id=17684.0#B. See also http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/preventive_directory_nov2010.pdf for information about contract agencies offering purchased preventive services to Brownsville, including the Catholic Charities Neighborhood Services, Inc. and the Brooklyn Bureau of Community Service’s East New York and Bedford-Stuyvesant Family Centers.

⁴⁷ *Community Snapshot 2009, CD 16: Brownsville*, Administration for Children’s Services, 21 Apr. 2011 http://www.nyc.gov/html/acs/downloads/pdf/cd_snapshots/brooklyn_cd16.pdf.

York State.⁴⁸ As an investment that is both cost-saving for the state and has demonstrated improved outcomes for children and families,⁴⁹ we recommend restoring funds to these services and targeting interventions in communities that have a high rate of young people in foster care.

Providing safe havens as a short-term solution for young people in crisis. In some situations it may be unsafe for a young person to live at home with his/her family. Even in these cases, placing the young person in foster care may not be the only alternative. Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Director of Community Organizing at the Brownsville Partnership, said that, “Youth[s] need safe havens where they can stay when they are going through trouble with their families.”⁵⁰ These safe havens would provide a short-term, temporary living space for young people at a high risk of entering care while they address issues with their families in a structured environment without having to go through the Family Court system. The short-term nature of these programs usually allows young people to continue attending their schools and provides an end-date for the living situation, whereas foster care cases can go on for years.⁵¹

Across the country, agencies are beginning to institute “respite” programs to achieve this goal. The Center for Court Innovation founded New York City’s first respite program on Staten Island in conjunction with New York Foundling. Through a partnership with a local foster care agency, youths live temporarily in supportive foster boarding homes with families trained in Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care.⁵² Though this program is currently open only to teens with concurrent involvement in the juvenile justice system, a similar model could be used to serve more families in crisis, including young people who have not been arrested, with the goal of reducing the number of children and teenagers in foster care.

⁴⁸ *Oppose the Creation of the Primary Prevention Incentive Program: Restore Impacted Programs to their SFY 10-11 Funding Levels*, Citizens’ Committee for Children of New York, 4 Mar. 2011, 21 Apr. 2011
<http://www.ccnnyork.org/publications/ppipfinal.pdf>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ms. Ampry-Samuel suggested that these safe havens should not be limited to young people at risk of entering foster care, but could also serve youths that need to escape gang activity and gun violence on the street.

⁵¹ According to the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections at the Hunter College School of Social Work, the average length of stay for children in care in New York was 29 months as of December 31, 2010: *Facts About Children in Foster Care in New York*, National Foster Care Month, 17 March 2011, 6 May 2011
http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/state/New%20York.pdf.

⁵² *Staten Island Youth Justice Center*, Center for Court Innovation, 18 Apr. 2011
<http://www.courtinnovation.org/project/staten-island-youth-justice-center>.

5. Foster community relationships and promote opportunities through events, media, and social networking.

We heard during our interviews that Brownsville is in many ways a divided community. While residents talk about their neighbors being like family, rivalries among young people—including those affiliated with different gangs and those who live in different housing projects—were an issue that many adults familiar with the community frequently raised (see recommendation 6, pg. 28). These divisions within the community contribute to a larger issue: many youths in Brownsville expressed that they do not feel proud of the neighborhood where they live. Young people are sensitive to the perceptions of those living outside the

“If you feel like you’re part of a community, you’re less likely to want to bring damage to it.”

–Stefanie Siegel,
Paul Robeson High
School

community, and some assume that people think negatively of them because of where they come from. At the same time, residents of Brownsville that participated in our focus groups have few positive words for their neighborhood, saying “it’s dirty” and “there’s nothing to do here.” One young man in the focus group said that the way people treat the community perpetuates the problem. He told a story about a restaurant that had recently opened, and the pride his neighbors felt at having a nice new place to eat. Within a week, however, the restaurant was robbed and then refurbished with bullet proof glass, making it far less inviting.

Giving young people opportunities to engage with the neighborhood and with one another positively could help to foster a stronger sense of connectedness, give residents a sense of pride, and help them feel greater respect for the place they live. As Paul Robeson High School teacher Stefanie Siegel told us, “If you feel like you’re part of a community, you’re less likely to want to bring damage to it.” In order to promote positive relationships in Brownsville, we recommend:

- *Developing strategies to ensure that youths are aware of existing resources and opportunities in the community; and*
- *Hosting events to promote and celebrate the community.*

Developing strategies to ensure that youths are aware of existing resources and opportunities in the community. As stated in recommendation 3 (pg. 21), young people many not be aware of the opportunities available to them within Brownsville. While virtually everyone we spoke to agreed that the community needs more resources, it is also important to make sure that existing opportunities are both well-known and fully utilized, as participating in positive activities is one way to help young people develop strong peer relationships and feel proud of their neighborhood. To advertise opportunities available to young adults, we suggest using the following:

- *Social Media and the Internet*

Young people today find out about many opportunities available to them through the Internet and social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Tumblr. To keep teens informed about opportunities available to them in Brownsville, we recommend establishing an official website for the community. This site would list upcoming events and other opportunities including after school programs, GED classes, job training, scholarships, and sports teams that are available to young people living in the community. New information relevant to teens should also be streamed through Facebook and Twitter since many teens are already using these services. Ideally, this website would be developed by an organization that is knowledgeable about community events, such as the Brownsville Recreation Center or the new community justice center. Working on keeping the website and new media feeds up-to-date could also provide jobs or internships for local young people.

- *Newsletters*

As some young people do not have consistent access to the Internet, it is important to continue to use more traditional methods of disseminating information to reach them. We recommend publishing a semi-monthly community newsletter highlighting opportunities within and around the community. Following the model of Youth Communications, which publishes *Represent* and *New Youth Connections* magazines, young people could contribute stories and artwork to this publication, and experience the pride that comes with seeing their work in print. We imagine the content of these newsletters would be generated primarily by young people in Brownsville, with support from a local organization. The newsletter would be available in prominent public spaces in Brownsville including libraries and the Brownsville Recreation Center. We are confident that young community members would read the newsletter both as a means to keep themselves informed of community opportunities and to read their friends' work. Similar to the website, we see the creation and distribution of the newsletter providing jobs or internships for local young people. Publication of the newsletter could be managed by the community justice center possibly as part of a job-training program.

Hosting events to promote and celebrate the community. Residents of Brownsville all agreed that the annual "Old-Timers Day" block party is one of the best community events of the year. Hosted at the Brownsville Recreation Center and organized by Greg Jackson, Executive Director of the Brownsville Partnership, this event celebrates the community's long-time residents and welcomes back former community members. Young people said that this event is so successful because it is a fun afternoon where everyone can relax and enjoy themselves. Having more events that celebrate the community and promote residents coming together will help young people feel proud of the place where they live because they will see their neighbors at their best: telling stories, laughing, and having a good time. These events would serve as another venue to share information about available opportunities with Brownsville residents. Since running an event like this would be a large expense for a single organization, we recommend inviting local vendors to sell food at these events, which would provide a revenue stream for local vendors. A second option would be to organize these events "potluck style," which has two advantages.

B. Community Development

First, people would feel more invested in the event because they made a personal contribution to it. Second, it would distribute the cost of holding an event across the community, thus making it more feasible to hold multiple events each year.

6. Increase options for recreation to promote relationship building.

During our focus groups, when asked what they liked to do in their community, almost all youths expressed an interest in recreation as an extracurricular option. For many, this interest was specifically basketball, although others offered alternatives including dance classes, step classes, jump rope, and karate. Recreation as a worthwhile form of pro-social behavior is already

“If we had enough recreation centers, we could do away with prisons in New York City.”

–Greg Jackson,
Brownsville
Partnership

something that Brownsville community leaders stand behind. Greg Jackson, Executive Director of the Brownsville Partnership, told us in an interview, “If we had enough recreation centers, we could do away with prisons in New York City.” In this sense, recreation provides an alternative for youths who might otherwise engage in behavior that would put them at risk of ending up entangled in the justice system. With this information in mind, we recommend:

- *Recreational options in Brownsville should reflect the expressed interests of youths and be readily accessible across the neighborhood; and*
- *Middle schools and high schools in Brownsville should use recreation to increase students’ commitment to their schools and provide them with positive social options outside of school.*

Recreational options in Brownsville should reflect the expressed interests of youths and be readily accessible across the neighborhood. Information gathered during our focus groups with youths from the Brownsville neighborhood indicates that they want more safe places to play basketball and easier access to recreational resources in general.

- *Provide more basketball courts for youth in the neighborhood.* As mentioned above, the most popular form of recreation mentioned during our focus groups was basketball. Youths indicated that they played basketball at the Brownsville Recreation Center, in tournaments sponsored by parents in the community, and in less formal settings on the basketball courts around the neighborhood. That said, many of these youths stated that they wished that there were more venues to do this throughout the neighborhood. A number of basketball courts have recently been converted to playgrounds with equipment geared at younger kids, leaving fewer places to play basketball. One option to address this issue is to convert some of the vacant lots that youths mentioned as sites of illicit activity into basketball courts. Doing so would eliminate locations for such activity while providing youths who want to play basketball with places to do so.

We learned from Daisy Jackson, Chair of the Youth Services Planning Committee, Brownsville Community Board 16, that the Committee and the Board conduct outreach to youths from Brownsville to ask what they would like to see change in the community. This outreach is conducted through relationships the Community Board has with youth programs, schools, and other grass-roots organizations, as well as through engaging in door-to-door efforts to speak with community residents. Taking advantage of this already existing outreach network to evaluate potential sites, including parks around the neighborhood and vacant lots, is a simple way to make recreational options in Brownsville more closely reflect the interests of the players in the community.

- *Make recreational options accessible to youths across the neighborhood.* Many young people in our focus groups cited the Brownsville Recreation Center as an important community institution offering a number of recreation options, including dance classes, step classes, and karate, among others. Some, however, expressed concern about the distance the Brownsville Recreation Center is from many parts of Brownsville. Located in the southernmost section of Brownsville, the Recreation Center is not easily accessible for youths who live in the northern parts of the neighborhood. These youths often did not see the point of traveling all the way to the Brownsville Recreation Center and therefore did not have as many opportunities to participate in recreation as they would have liked. Brownsville is also home to a Police Athletic League Beacon, which runs recreational programming during the summer. The Beacon operates out of PS140, which is located closer to the center of the neighborhood than the Brownsville Recreation Center. When we interviewed Deputy Inspector Samuel Wright of the New York City Police Department's 73rd Precinct in Brownsville, he suggested that the Police Athletic League Beacon could be used to greater effect if it made programming available year-round. We suggest that the Brownsville Recreation Center consider partnering with the Police Athletic League Beacon to offer its services and programming at the Police Athletic League location. Similarly, the Brownsville Recreation Center can take advantage of its credibility among youths in the community to ensure awareness and encourage attendance at recreational events at the Beacon site.

Middle schools and high schools in Brownsville should use recreation to increase students' commitment to their schools and provide them with positive social options outside of school. Youths in our focus groups mentioned the relationship between schools and recreation. A number of youths said there is a need for recreational options after school. This presents an opportunity for schools in Brownsville to create a stronger sense of commitment among their students, especially given that many youths in the focus groups who go to school in the neighborhood did not express great attachment to their schools beyond the need to get a diploma. Setting up sports teams as representative of the Brownsville community is one way to make this connection. For example, the sports team might have a mascot or a cheer evoking pride in the neighborhood. These sports teams would not only provide students with forms of recreation after

school, but would also encourage attachment from both athletes and non-athletes. Sports events could be connected to other school-sponsored events like dances and social nights to provide more pro-social extracurricular options for all students. Community residents could be encouraged to attend team-sponsored events, like pep rallies and parades, creating a sense of unity and shared purpose between the neighborhood and the school. Indeed, organizing these to occur in collaboration with other important neighborhood events like “*Old-Timers Day*” is a useful way to draw large crowds and generate more support.

7. Engage youths from Brownsville in the development of the Brownsville Community Justice Center.

Community justice centers help resolve low-level offenses by applying restorative justice principles, which provide offenders with a means to repair harm to the community and address their underlying problems, such as drug addiction. Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Director of Community Organizing at the Brownsville Partnership, reminded us that it is important to consider how the justice center in Brownsville would differ from those in other neighborhoods. Since a major function of a community justice center involves responding to the service and support needs of neighborhood residents, each community justice center is a reflection of the community in which it is located. The best way to get an accurate sense of the community needs is to involve members of the community in the planning.

We learned from Center for Court Innovation staff that the Brownsville Community Justice Center will focus largely on offering diversions, services, and support for youths. We feel it is essential to ensure that youths are involved in the process of determining what these resources will look like. A similar sentiment came across during our interview with Daisy Jackson, Chair of the Youth Services Planning Committee, Brownsville Community Board 16. Ms. Jackson argued that youths will be empowered if they are actively involved and are consulted regarding the changes that are being made in the community because it will be more empowering for them than if changes are made only through adult-oriented channels. She added that youths should meet with each other and determine how they want their futures to play out, then relay their ideas through a collaborative channel for joint execution. Toward this end, we recommend:

- *A Youth Advisory Board should be established to ensure that the ideas and opinions of youths are included in the planning of the Brownsville Community Justice Center.*

A Youth Advisory Board should be established to ensure that the ideas and opinions of youths are included in the planning of the Brownsville Community Justice Center. To obtain input from youths, we recommend the creation of a Youth Advisory Board, with two primary responsibilities: first, to represent the ideas and opinions of Brownsville youths to the planners of the Brownsville Community Justice Center; and second, to keep youths in the community up to date not only about plans for the justice center but also about other opportunities available to them and their peers (see recommendation 5, pg. 25).

This Board could meet with staff responsible for planning the Brownsville Community Justice Center once per month to represent the ideas and opinions of youths from the neighborhood about the structure and functions of the justice center and discuss plans for its development. Information that youths on the Advisory Board learned during these meetings could be shared with the rest of the youth community through social networking sites or posted to a blog about the development of the Community Justice Center, perhaps in coordination with suggestions for

improving community relations. Periodically, the Board could meet with and make presentations to youths from the community about the information it had learned, possibly through schools or other community-based organizations where youths congregate, like the Brownsville Recreation Center. Likewise, these different outreach methods would provide the opportunity for interested youths who were not a part of the Board to communicate ideas, concerns, and questions they have about the development of the Brownsville Community Justice Center.

These frequent conversations with youths from the neighborhood also present an opportunity for the Youth Advisory Board to share information about community events, workshops, and other activities of interest outside the development of the Community Justice Center. Many youths in the focus groups expressed frustration at the lack of extracurricular options available in Brownsville. The Youth Advisory Board, with its connections to the planners of the Community Justice Center and the local organizations involved in that process, would be well-positioned to explore what extracurricular opportunities exist in Brownsville and to make sure that youths are aware of these opportunities.

Recruitment for the Youth Advisory Board would emphasize identifying young people who expressed serious interest in working to address the challenges facing the community. Similar to the Youth Justice Board, youths could be recruited through a process involving a written application and an in-person interview. An advisory board would also need dedicated staff to manage its day-to-day operation. The number of staff required and the schedule for staff would depend largely on how often the Board met and what responsibilities it undertook, though it might make sense to select staff from among the various affiliates of the Brownsville Community Justice Center planning team to ensure maximum buy-in for the work of the Youth Advisory Board.

8. Provide programming designed to transform negative peer pressure into positive peer support.

From our interviews, we heard many times that teenage group dynamics can have an effect on crime rates. Ana Bermudez, Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Probation, told us that “belonging is a basic human need,” in reference to the inclination youths have to seek each other out and form groups. Youths from Brownsville echoed the importance of group affiliation as a feature of the social dynamic of the neighborhood. Some youths are members of teams, groups of young people that

“Gangs are everywhere now; you can’t meet anyone who’s not in a gang.”

–Youth focus group participant

participate in social events together and otherwise express their collective affiliation. While many teams are simply social groups, some participate in criminal activity, moving them in the direction of a group dynamic more along the lines of a gang. Both city-level stakeholders and community leaders that we interviewed agree that the presence of negative peer pressure and violence due to gang affiliation among youths is a serious obstacle to change in Brownsville. In focus groups conducted with youths from the neighborhood, one participant said, “Gangs are everywhere now; you can’t meet anyone who’s not in a gang.”

While complex and often difficult to define, researchers identify five important features of gangs. For our purposes, the most helpful among these are: “Members share an identity, typically linked to a name, and often other symbols; members view themselves as a gang, and they are recognized by others as a gang; the group has some permanence and a degree of organization; the group is involved in an elevated level of criminal activity.”⁵³ Researchers also argue that the notion that gangs recruit most of their members is a myth. Instead, youths generally join for social reasons, “to be around friends and family members,” and for protection.⁵⁴ This impulse to join on account of friends and family members indicates the peer pressure component of these organizations: youths feel compelled to become part of a gang because the people that they care most about have already done so.

We heard from youths in our focus groups that disputes between gangs can escalate and become violent. This violence creates a fractured sense of community and makes it difficult for youths to move about their neighborhood without fear of overstepping gang-established boundaries, putting themselves in danger as a result. For example, Ric Curtis, Chair of the Anthropology Department at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, informed us that while the Brownsville Recreation Center is an excellent resource, many youths are afraid to travel there because of the housing projects they have to pass on the way and the hostile “turf” they have to traverse.

⁵³ Arlen Egley, Jr., James C. Howell, Christina O’Donnell, *Frequently Asked Questions About Gangs*, National Gang Center, 21 Apr. 2011 <http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/About/FAQ#q1>.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

Another unfortunate consequence of this social landscape is that many youths see no other way to get involved with their peers and end up joining a gang for lack of a compelling alternative. To address these issues, we recommend:

- *Brownsville community leaders should establish a peer-to-peer program that offers violence intervention and prevention; and*
- *Brownsville community leaders should establish a program that enlists influential youths to encourage and create positive change in their neighborhoods.*

Brownsville community leaders should establish a peer-to-peer program that offers violence intervention and prevention. Given that gangs often attract youths by using peer pressure, positive programs that make use of this same tactic provide youths with an appealing alternative. In particular, we heard from young people in Brownsville during our focus group that the neighborhood is very much concerned with local affiliations and that these are often a source of problems. One youth said, “If you know somebody who knows somebody, somebody might come after you.” A program that could take advantage young people’s connections to their peer networks and target important players when the possibility of violence arises could help to alleviate threats of violence to the community.

One program we learned about that uses this method is called Save Our Streets (S. O. S.). The program operates out of the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center, a program founded in the early 1990s in response to violence occurring in the community at that time. S. O. S is a community-based effort to end gun violence in the neighborhood. Based on the Ceasefire anti-gun violence model successfully pioneered in Chicago, the program applies public health strategies that have controlled tuberculosis and cholera to reducing violence. Though targeting adults, in practice the majority of Crown Heights residents targeted by S. O. S. interventions are young men in their early twenties.

The key components of the S. O. S. strategy include outreach, community mobilization, and public education. The outreach component involves program staff with knowledge of the neighborhood “us[ing] positive peer pressure to redirect high-risk individuals towards school or jobs and help them think and behave differently about violence.”⁵⁵ The community mobilization element of S. O. S. uses existing neighborhood networks of influence to encourage change. In particular, community mobilization focuses on outreach to victims of violence to discourage retaliation. The staff leading this initiative were previously involved in these networks and use their knowledge and relationships to get to the source of developing violence. Public education also takes advantage of these neighborhood networks to spread messages through schools, businesses, churches, and other community institutions about the consequences of violence.

⁵⁵ *About Us: Save Our Streets Crown Heights*, Center for Court Innovation, April 2009, 21 Apr. 2011 <http://www.soscrownheights.org/>.

This peer pressure-oriented model is well-suited to neighborhoods like Brownsville, which struggle with high incidences of community violence. Brownsville has a substantial network of faith-based leaders and institutions that would work well with the S. O. S. model's emphasis on making that network a source for outreach.⁵⁶ Similarly, the intimacy of the Brownsville neighborhood suggests an environment where community mobilization and public education would be especially effective. Members of the program engaging in community outreach and mobilization already have a strong sense of the important players in the community and therefore could target their interventions to these individuals.

Brownsville community leaders should establish a program that enlists influential youths to encourage and create positive change in their neighborhoods. We learned about two programs that utilize the positive peer-pressure model with teenagers at the community level. These are the Youth ECHO program in Red Hook and Youth Organizing to Save Our Streets in Crown Heights.

- *Youth ECHO*

In 2008-2009, the Red Hook Community Justice Center ran a program called Youth ECHO, which identified influential young people in the Red Hook community and trained them to implement positive change in the neighborhood. The teenage Youth ECHO members met twice a week to learn leadership and community organizing skills. They then used these skills to develop projects designed to encourage positive values among their peers.

As noted above, the prevalence of gangs in Brownsville and the peer pressure they exert suggests an environment ripe for a program employing a strategy similar to Youth ECHO, as the program was originally conceived to combat “positive perceptions of youth crime”—or the social value that some youths attach to criminal action.⁵⁷ The peer pressure that gangs use to recruit and retain members can be combatted by program staff and by program participants while they engage in pro-social activities and address community challenges.

Given that at its core the Youth ECHO program model relies on influential youths to encourage and create change, recruiting the appropriate youths for the program is an essential part of making it a success. The initial program evaluation, *A Pilot Program on Youth Engagement: Lessons from Youth ECHO*, recommends that future recruitment efforts focus on attracting youths with strong leadership abilities, a commitment to the program, and a desire to make change in their neighborhood. These characteristics are more important than an individual's popularity or esteem among his/her peers, as possessing these qualities will not only ensure that participants are capable and willing to make an effort to encourage their

⁵⁶ *Brooklyn Community Board 16 Resource Directory: Religious Organizations*, Brooklyn Community Board 16, 4 May 2011

http://www.brooklyncb16.org/directory/?a=list&cat_id=31&letter=&dir_cat=31&btnaddval.x=25&btnaddval.y=8.

⁵⁷ Rachel Swaner and Elise White, *A Pilot Program on Youth Engagement*, Center for Court Innovation, Mar. 2009, 21 Apr. 2011 (1) http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/Youth_ECHO_1year.pdf.

peers to get involved in making things better, but also that they will remain committed to the program for its duration.⁵⁸ Though Youth ECHO is no longer operating under its original format, this lesson can be useful for new programs seeking to utilize positive peer pressure to make change.

- *Youth Organizing to Save Our Streets*

In March 2011, the Crown Heights Community Mediation Center piloted a new youth development program called Youth Organizing to Save Our Streets that adapts the S. O. S. model for a younger audience. The program encourages youths to become leaders and organizers in their neighborhoods with the explicit goal of promoting non-violence. It provides “community organizing, networking, public speaking, job training, and real-world work experience,”⁵⁹ all opportunities that youths in the Brownsville focus groups indicated they wanted. Like Youth ECHO, it uses positive peer pressure to address community issues. However, following the suggestion of the Youth ECHO evaluation, Youth Organizing to Save Our Streets recruits a diverse pool of young people, not just those who are already perceived to be influential with their peers.

We suggest that Brownsville community leaders consider these models when adopting programs designed to combat gangs, violence, and other negative outcomes associated with peer pressure in the community.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 10-11.

⁵⁹ *Who We Are: Youth Organizing to Save Our Streets (YO S.O.S.)*, Center for Court Innovation, March 2011, 4 Apr. 2011 <http://www.yosos.org/>.

9. Encourage better communication and stronger relationships between police and youths.

In a neighborhood confronted with challenges related to housing, crime, and gangs, the 73rd Police Precinct in Brownsville, as the institution most responsible for enforcing the law, is involved in all of these areas. Officers in Brownsville have received media attention for the “Stop, Question, Frisk” policy currently utilized by the New York City Police Department, which affects many officers’ interactions and relationships with residents.

A few youths in our focus groups allowed that “certain cops are good,” but the general consensus was not positive. Many felt that the police “harass you when you aren’t doing anything.” More generally, youths expressed uncertainty and frustration over how police choose to engage with the community. “When you need them,” one youth offered, “that’s when they’re least likely to be around.”

These attitudes toward the police and their role in the neighborhood suggest a need for better communication and stronger relationships between police officers and youths in the Brownsville community.⁶⁰ New York City Police Deputy Inspector Samuel Wright of the 73rd Precinct echoed this sentiment during our interview with him, conceding that the relationship between police and youths is not as strong as it could be. To address this issue, we recommend:

- *Brownsville community leaders should institute programs that encourage positive communication and increased relationship-building between youths and the police in the neighborhood; and*
- *The 73rd Police Precinct should consider youth attitudes towards their organization when encouraging positive encounters between young people and police officers.*

Brownsville community leaders should institute programs that encourage positive communication and increased relationship-building between youths and the police in the neighborhood. The clear disconnect expressed both by youths from the Brownsville neighborhood and Deputy Inspector Wright indicates a need for programming that provides

⁶⁰ Improved relationships between youths from Brownsville and officers from the 73rd Precinct could also encourage greater willingness on the part of community residents to testify after witnessing criminal behavior. Currently, the District Attorney’s Office faces a serious obstacle to obtaining critical testimony from community residents because of a commitment to “no snitching.” Despite the support that the District Attorney’s Office and social service agencies provide to witnesses and victims who agree to testify, including protection and relocation, “no snitching” remains a pervasive attitude among some members of the Brownsville Community. First Assistant District Attorney Swern calls this commitment to “no snitching” “one of the most troublesome issues in criminal justice.”

young people and police officers with opportunities to interact in an environment encouraging mutual understanding and respect. The strong interest in recreation as an extracurricular option on the part of youths in our focus groups suggests one possible direction for programming. For example, youths and police officers could participate in recreational programming together, playing on the same basketball teams as a way to encourage relationships of shared interests. Indeed, Brownsville is already home to a Police Athletic League Beacon program. Given that the Beacon operates only during the summer, increasing programming to span the entire year and making an effort to involve police officers from the 73rd Precinct would be one way to bring officers and neighborhood youths together.

The opinions expressed by young people about the decisions and strategies utilized by police officers suggests a need for a forum where these two groups can discuss and mediate the issues that divide them. During our site visit to the Red Hook Community Justice Center, we learned from former Director James Brodick about a program called the Police Teen Theater Project. The program uses improvisational theater to encourage youths “to discuss important community issues such as gangs, peer pressure, teen pregnancy, violence, and stereotypes.” The primary goals of the program are to “increase[e] trust and respect between local police and teens,” and to “[respond to] the negative stereotypes of these groups in the community.” Participants in the program, both youths and police officers, meet twice a week to develop acting skills under the guidance of the Falcon Artists Group. Using what they have learned, program participants create original content, including improvised scenes and journal entries.

The model for this program could be used with art, athletics, or music. The goals of the Police Teen Theater Project program seem appropriate to Brownsville and provide a framework that effectively responds to some of the issues youths raised in our focus groups regarding their relationships with the police.

The 73rd Police Precinct should consider youth attitudes towards their organization when encouraging positive encounters between young people and police officers. The attitudes youths expressed about their relationships with the police suggest not just the need for programming that will encourage mutual understanding and respect. The police department must also make extra efforts to be attentive to negative perceptions youths may have of police officers when encouraging positive encounters between young people and officers. When setting up events or programs that involve positive interaction between police officers and youths along these lines, the 73rd Precinct should allow a third-party to organize and host the event in a neutral space where youths feel comfortable going. Similarly, police officers participating in these events should not dress in uniform to discourage any negative associations youths might have with the police. At the same time, we feel it is important for young people attending these events to contribute to their success by refraining from wearing gang colors, bandannas, hats, or revealing clothing. Young people and police should communicate respect for one another through their actions, communication, and attire.

Finally, as mentioned previously, food, recreation opportunities, and other incentives should be offered to youths for participating in the event. Given the hesitancy with which youths from Brownsville approach any interaction with the police, such incentives may help encourage participation and also set a positive, welcoming tone for the event and for future interactions between young people and police.

10. Establish coordination between the Brownsville Community Justice Center and the Crossroads Detention Center to better support youths involved in the justice system.

Over the past few years, New York City and New York State have made great strides toward reducing the number of justice-system involved youths who spend time in detention or placement facilities, both of which feel like jails.⁶¹ Recent developments in the juvenile justice system reaffirm the focus of the last few years on offering community-based alternatives to confinement. In an interview with Gladys Carrión, Commissioner of the New York State Office for Children and Family Services, we learned about a new program in Bedford-Stuyvesant called “Brooklyn for Brooklyn,” which provides services that include a day program, a residential facility and a robust aftercare program. Prior to establishing this program, most youths found responsible for committing an offense and sent to an Office of Children and Family Services placement facility went upstate, sometimes as far as seven hours from their families in New York City. The option for young people to remain in the city and return home at night marks a significant development in juvenile justice policy.

Crossroads Detention Center, located in Brownsville, is now one of only two juvenile detention facilities in New York City after the closing of the Bridges (Spofford) Detention Center in March 2011. As a consequence, Crossroads is poised to take on an increased number of arrested young people who are waiting for their cases to be resolved. These young people generally represent the highest risk of re-offending or missing a court date, as determined by the Risk Assessment Instrument administered after arrest by the Department of Probation. The presence of Crossroads in the Brownsville community offers opportunities for testing new reentry strategies for young people. We recommend:

- *Brownsville Community Justice Center planners should develop new alternatives to detention; and*
- *Brownsville Community Justice Center planners should offer services and supports for youths leaving the Crossroads Detention Center.*

Brownsville Community Justice Center planners should develop new alternatives to detention. Following the model of “Brooklyn for Brooklyn” and Alternative to Detention programs operated across New York City, planners of the Brownsville Community Justice Center should develop appropriate alternatives to detention for high-risk youths.

⁶¹ In the juvenile justice system, an arrested young person may spend time in a detention facility during the pendency of his/her case, and/or an upstate placement facility as the final case outcome. Family Court judges are responsible for making decisions about where young people will live during and after their court cases.

During our interview with Laurence Busching, Executive Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Youth and Family Justice at the Administration for Children's Services, we learned that the Division of Youth and Family Justice is working to reduce the number of youths mandated to more traditional, overnight detention facilities. Yumari Martinez, Associate Director at the Vera Institute's Center on Youth Justice, told us that research has shown that if young people stay closer to home with interventions that help strengthen their community and family connections, they will have better outcomes. The community justice center could provide close-to-home detention alternatives for a greater number of young people by providing youths with education and other services during the day while trained staff work with young people and families at night to ensure they are complying with court mandates. This program could utilize the strategies developed by existing Alternative to Detention programs, which help young people who have been arrested attend their court hearings and abide by curfew. Some youths in Alternative to Detention programs also participate in after-school activities including homework help, anger management, goal setting, and recreation. Ultimately, the goal should be to provide youths with the opportunity to remain in their communities during their court proceedings while receiving the oversight and support they would receive in a more traditional detention setting.

Brownsville Community Justice Center planners should offer services and supports for youths leaving the Crossroads Detention Center. The establishment of the Brownsville Community Justice Center provides a tremendous opportunity for planners to offer aftercare services to youths leaving the Crossroads Detention Center. Providing community-based programming targeted at youths returning to the neighborhood from Crossroads is an important strategy for helping them leave the justice system and stay out of it for good.

One of the primary problems youths face when they return to the community after spending time at a detention facility is the stigma that others associate with that experience. Mr. Busching said that many youths are confronted with negative stereotypes from peers, teachers, and school administrators aware of their detention facility stay. This can be a contributing factor toward recidivism, as youths become alienated and resistant to positive peer and adult influences. For this reason, it is important to provide youths with programming that will encourage successful reintegration.

One model for doing so uses community service-oriented programming to create environments in which justice system-involved youths work and interact with other youths from their communities. In an interview with Center for Court Innovation staff, we learned from Director of Implementation Raye Barbieri about a program called Harlem Hard H.A.T.S. that successfully reintegrates system-involved young people by engaging them in community service projects. The program "reinforces values such as honesty, responsibility, self-discipline, and respect for and service to others,"⁶² providing youths with the chance to take advantage of a positive social

⁶² *Harlem Hard H.A.T.S. Program Description*, Youth Futures Network, December 2010, 21 April 2011 <https://picasaweb.google.com/YFNYOUTH/ProgramDescription#5550999921356736930>.

opportunities. The program receives referrals from the Department of Probation as part of its recruitment strategy.

A related benefit of creating a program modeled on Harlem Hard H.A.T.S. is the positive effect on communities and on young people that comes from their engagement in service projects. This work “creates a supportive learning environment for youths to explore their interests, accept community responsibility, and gain and test leadership skills.”⁶³ Daisy Jackson, Chair of the Youth Services Planning Committee, Brownsville Community Board 16, said that Brownsville could use more neighborhood beautification projects, a suggestion mirrored by youths’ attitudes toward the community that came up in our focus groups. A program modeled on Harlem Hard H.A.T.S. could direct the efforts of participants toward community clean-up projects, providing a chance for youths leaving Crossroads to rid themselves of any associated stigma and an opportunity for members of the Brownsville community to get involved in making their neighborhood cleaner and safer.

⁶³ Ibid.

Conclusion

We would like to thank you for taking the time to read our report. These recommendations are important to us because we have worked very hard throughout the year in order to fulfill our goal of creating recommendations to reduce youth crime in Brownsville and improve the experiences of youths there. This report reflects our ideas and committed investment to the community.

As a result of our recommendations, we hope to see more recreational activities for youths, the development of positive leaders of all ages, and of course, a Brownsville Community Justice Center that welcomes many people with programs well-suited to their particular interests and needs. We also want youths to feel involved in the happenings of their community and included in new developments occurring across the neighborhood.

In 2011-12, the Youth Justice Board will work on implementing some of the ideas expressed in the recommendations. The Board will also take a more active role in the development of the Brownsville Community Justice Center. Ultimately, we hope our recommendations and the work of the Board next year will help reduce crime in Brownsville and improve the experiences of youths in that neighborhood and throughout the entire city.

Youth Justice Board Biographies

Alisha

Hello, my name is Alisha. I am 17 years old. I am a senior at Edward R. Murrow High School where I am a dance and communication arts major. I created choreography for my school dance production and I love to give others advice. I joined the Youth Justice Board because I love to help others make their lives and communities a better place. I want to be a lawyer and being in the Youth Justice Board has made me ready for the corporate world.

Chris

My name is Chris, and I'm from Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. I'm a senior at Brooklyn Technical High School, and I am still deciding where I want to attend college come September. I play guitar and write music in my free time, which I seem to have a lot more of in the second semester of my senior year. I started work with the Youth Justice Board in September and really like the progress we have made. I have a strong interest in urban development and have thus enjoyed my experience with the Youth Justice Board. I'm curious to see what next year's Board can do with all of our work.

Denisse

Hi! My name is Denisse and I am a senior at the High School of Fashion Industries. I consider myself a leader with many interests, including public policy and politics. These interests compelled me to join the Youth Justice Board. As a socially conscious person, I have assumed the role of ally, advocate, and activist in the communities that I am part of. Besides that, I'm fascinated by French culture and one day I will be the proud owner of a French bulldog named Vicuna.

Eghosa

Hello, my name is Eghosa and I am 17 years old. I have a passion for law as I feel it sets the foundation for society. I am a senior at Thomas Edison High School and will be attending Cornell University where I am planning on majoring in Policy Analysis and Management. I joined the Youth Justice Board because in my perspective it is the closest thing to being a superhero. This program encourages proactiveness, leadership, and awesomeness, hence my attraction to it. I enjoy volunteering, theater, and ethnic foods.

Kelly

Hi there, I'm Kelly and I'm attending the Bronx High School of Science. In the fall, I plan on majoring in political science at New York University. I joined the Youth Justice Board because I wanted to learn about the justice system. Being a part of the Youth Justice Board has not only taught me about my field of study, but it has also helped me enjoy it. I also enjoy shopping, training my Pokémon, and reading romance novels.

Keyonna

My name is Keyonna. I'm 16 years old and currently a junior at Frederick Douglass Academy VII High School in Brooklyn. I applied to the Youth Justice Board because I'm passionate about the law and I felt that by joining the Board I would learn more about the juvenile justice system and have a say in the Board's efforts to come up with recommendations to decrease the crime rate among youth in Brownville, where my school is located. After graduating from the Youth Justice Board I want to successfully graduate from high school and then attend the University of Maryland, where I plan to major in Law.

Maria

Hey! My name is Maria. I'm a junior attending Francis Lewis High School in Queens. I joined the Youth Justice Board because of how much it has proven to help young people and my desire to be part of making change. When I graduate I wish to pursue a career in the law because I have always taken a great interest in policy and law. I enjoy taking pictures and listening to music. I have a passion for drawing because I consider it to be an outlet for my creativity. One of my goals for the future aside from attending law school will be to travel a fair amount and to get to know other cultures better. I also consider myself fairly ambitious and it is this ambition that has driven me to participate in the Youth Justice Board. I have grown as a person since the beginning of the Youth Justice Board while engaging in policy change and representing the youths of New York City.

Maya

My name is Maya and I am a sophomore at Edward R. Murrow High School. I grew up in Brooklyn, and when I found out about the Youth Justice Board and its focus on Brownville, I realized there was a lot I didn't know about my own borough, and so I joined. The Youth Justice Board has made me really interested in studying law in college. I enjoy learning new things, especially about new places. Recently, I traveled to Europe and was very fascinated by how different it is from America. In the future, I hope to work with the justice system, improving people's lives.

Shastri

Hello, my name is Shastri. I'm 16 and currently a high school senior at Greater New York Academy in Woodside, Queens. I live in Hollis, Queens. After I graduate high school, I plan to major in Pre-Med/Biology in college. I joined the Youth Justice Board because I was born and raised in New York City and I felt like I needed to give back to the community that made me the person I am today. As a Youth Justice Board member, I gained a greater knowledge of the juvenile justice system and how to work with others.

Tishawn

Hi, my name is Tishawn. I live in Brooklyn and attend George Westinghouse High School. After high school, I plan on studying network administration, which includes installing hardware and updating software. I like to play soccer, listen to Vybz Kartel and LIL B, and learn new things

about the computer for fun. I joined the Youth Justice Board because I want to help make an impact on the Brownsville community.

Victoria

Hello, my name is Victoria. I am 19 years old and I live in the Bronx. I joined the Youth Justice Board because of my passion for law and helping others. I go to college for paralegal studies and I want to be a lawyer. I enjoy hanging out with my family and friends, music, writing, poetry, playing basketball, boxing, and martial arts. I know three forms of martial arts: jiu-jitsu, capoeira, and gojuru. That's how I got my name from my friends: Knock Out King (K. O. K.). I hope to have a positive impact on the youth I come in contact with.

Linda Baird, Program Coordinator

Linda Baird is the Program Coordinator of the Youth Justice Board. Ms. Baird is responsible for curriculum design, lesson planning, outreach to program partners, facilitating Board sessions, and supervising a Program Associate and interns. Ms. Baird oversaw the development of the Youth Justice Board's curriculum and operations toolkit, published in 2009, and *I Got Arrested! Now What?*, an informational comic book designed for youths involved in the juvenile justice system. Prior to joining the Center for Court Innovation, Ms. Baird served as an AmeriCorps Teaching Fellow, working with young people in Boston, Massachusetts, and as the National Policy Coordinator at The After-School Corporation in New York City. Ms. Baird earned a B.A. from Sarah Lawrence College and a M.Ed. from Lesley University.

Colin Lentz, Program Associate

Colin Lentz is the Program Associate for the Youth Justice Board and Youth Justice Programs, both projects of the Center for Court Innovation. Mr. Lentz creates curriculum, materials and serves as a facilitator for the weekly meetings of the Youth Justice Board. He is also responsible for the day-to-day management of the Board. Mr. Lentz also works with the recently created Youth Justice Programs project, which seeks to improve the coordination and collaboration of youth programs under the Center's umbrella, as well as develop strategies for reaching out to youth populations in need across New York City.

Emily Mottadedeh, Youth Justice Board Fellow

Emily Mottahedeh is the 2010-11 Youth Justice Board Fellow, specializing in foster care research. As a Fellow, Emily worked one on one with the Youth Justice Board as it created recommendations for youths in Brownsville. She will be graduating from CUNY Hunter College in May 2011 with a degree in Media Studies and English. Emily has held several positions and fellowships in areas relating to child welfare, including the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, the New York City Public Advocate's Office and the Center For Court Innovation. Emily hopes to pursue a master's degree in Social Work, and continue working in the areas of social work and advocacy.

Appendix 1: Research Design

Prior to conducting their fieldwork, Youth Justice Board members learned about juvenile crime and the neighborhood of Brownsville, Brooklyn. Members also received training in skills such as interviewing, note-taking, teamwork, and focus group facilitation.

Interviews

The Youth Justice Board met with a wide range of stakeholders and community leaders to understand both juvenile crime and the social landscape of Brownsville. Members, working in small groups, conducted 19 interviews with 35 participants, including:

Administration for Children's Services

- Laurence E. Busching, Executive Deputy Commissioner, Division of Youth and Family Justice

Brownsville Community Board

- Daisy Jackson, Youth Services Planning Committee Chair, Community Board Representative

Brownsville Partnership

- Alicka Ampry-Samuel, Director of Community Organizing
- Greg Jackson, Executive Director

Center for Court Innovation

- Raye Barbieri, Director of Implementation
- Alfred Siegel, Deputy Director
- Emily Gold, Senior Planner
- James Brodick, Project Director, Brownsville Community Justice Center

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc.

- Rebecca Scheer, Senior Policy Associate for Research and Data Analysis

Community Justice Centers

Bronx Community Solutions

- Saudi Encarnacion, Youth Development Coordinator
- Mandolin Restivo, Deputy Project Director
- Orleny Rojas, Resource Coordinator
- Elizabeth Swan, Resource Coordinator

Harlem Community Justice Center

- Debbie Boar, Task Force Coordinator

- Honorable Ruben Martino, Judge
- Susanna Osorno-Crandall, Manager of Juvenile Justice Initiatives
- Sally Sanchez, Case Manager

Midtown Community Court

- Becca Chodos, Director of Workforce Development
- Danielle Malangone, Deputy Director of Social Service and Planning
- Jonah Schwartz, Clinical Director

Red Hook Community Justice Center

- James Brodick, former Project Director

Crown Heights Community Mediation Center

- Ife Charles, Deputy Project Director
- Achisimach Yisrael, Outreach Worker, Save Our Streets
- Lavon Walker, Outreach Worker, Save Our Streets

John Jay College of Criminal Justice

- Ric Curtis, Professor and Chair of the Anthropology Department

The Legal Aid Society

- Karen Yazmajian, Assistant Attorney-in-Charge, Juvenile Rights Division
- Martin Feinman, Attorney-in-Charge, Juvenile Rights Division

New York City Department of Probation

- Ana Bermudez, Deputy Commissioner for Juvenile Operations
- Shamira Howie, Special Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner for Juvenile Operations
- David Muhammad, former Deputy Commissioner for Adult Operations
- Patrick Van Sluytman, Executive Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner of Adult Operations

New York City Police Department, 73rd Precinct

- Samuel Wright, Deputy Inspector

Office of the Brooklyn District Attorney

- Anne Swern, First Assistant District Attorney

New York State Office of Children and Family Services

- Gladys Carrión, Commissioner

Paul Robeson High School

- Stefanie Siegel, English Teacher and Coordinator of Student Affairs

Vera Institute of Justice

- Yumari Martinez, Associate Director, Center on Youth Justice

Site Visits

The Youth Justice Board visited community justice centers in the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan. During site visits, Board members sat in on court proceedings, spoke with community court staff and judges, and observed community court programming.

Focus Groups

The Board conducted focus groups with 28 young people. Board members recruited participants through Brownsville community youth programs and youth leaders, Brooklyn high schools, and their own social networks. Members planned and facilitated the focus groups. They asked participants a range of questions about their experiences living, working, and going to school in Brownsville, about services and supports within the community, and for suggestions for how to make the neighborhood safer and more engaging for youths. The members also sought feedback from focus group participants on the Board's ideas for policy recommendations.

Synthesis and Analysis

After each interview, site visit, and focus group, members identified key information learned and presented this information to the entire group. Members then discussed how each interview fit into the larger context of making Brownsville a safer, more supportive neighborhood for young people. As their body of knowledge grew, members reviewed common challenges and recurrent issues and themes. The Board then prioritized areas where they, as young people, could contribute meaningful insights and ideas. With these priorities, members researched approaches other communities have used to address similar issues and what community leaders and residents of Brownsville are currently doing to combat these challenges, eventually developing their own ideas to address these issues. Finally, staff at the Center for Court Innovation advised the Board on which ideas were strongest and would be most consistent with the goals of City agencies and Brownsville community leaders. The recommendations presented in this report are the Board's final product of the 2010-2011 year.

Appendix 2: The Youth Justice Board Program

The Youth Justice Board is an after school program that gives young people a voice in policies that affect their lives. Each year, a team of youths from across New York City investigates a current juvenile justice or public safety issue, formulates policy recommendations and works to implement its recommendations. The program has two primary goals: first, to help members develop leadership, knowledge, and civic engagement skills that will benefit their communities, their families, and their futures; and second, to contribute young people's perspectives to public policy discussions. The project aims to foster ongoing dialogue between policymakers and informed youth leaders.

In the first year of the program's two-year cycle, Board members conduct extensive research on a selected issue, develop and publish informed policy recommendations, and present them to policymakers and key stakeholders. During the second year of the program, members work to implement the recommendations. Each year new teens are selected to join the program based on their experiences with the topic of study, personal interest in the issue, and commitment to working on a long-term project. After completion of the project, many alumni stay engaged with the program and pursue other civic engagement activities in their neighborhoods or at school.

How It Works

At the beginning of the program, a topic of study is selected after surveying youths and policymakers about relevant and timely issues. A four-phase curriculum builds the Board members' teamwork, research, and presentation skills and helps members develop substantive and actionable policy recommendations.

Training: During the first weeks of the program, members receive intensive training on research strategies, consensus building, listening, interviewing, and public speaking. Members also learn how local government works. The training phase includes a kick-off weekend retreat that provides members with background information on the topic and lays a foundation for teamwork.

Fieldwork: The Board designs and implements a research plan that includes interviews, focus groups, and site visits with a wide range of stakeholders. During this stage, members meet with professionals in the field, community stakeholders, experts, and public officials. Members design and lead focus groups of young people affected by the issue under investigation to learn how this issue affects their peers.

Policy Development: The Board's research culminates in the development of targeted policy proposals. The Board issues a final report and presents its policy recommendations directly to government officials and policymakers. In past years, the Board has presented to the New York City Department of Education, the Mayor's Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator, the New York City Council, New York City Family Court, the New York State Assembly, the New York

State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, and the New York State Judicial Training Institute.

Implementation: The Board works to influence practice in the field by convincing decision-makers to implement its recommendations. Strategies include campaigning directly to officials at key agencies, piloting initiatives, and collaborating with stakeholder organizations.

Youth Justice Board Publications and Selected Activities

Stop the Revolving Door: Giving Communities and Youth the Tools to Overcome Recidivism (2005) The first Board focused on improving the reentry process for young people returning to New York City from upstate placement facilities. Its report recommended improvement of the reentry planning process in three areas: timing, responsiveness to individual needs, and coordination among city and state agencies.

One Step at a Time: Recommendations for the School Community to Improve Safety (2006) Through an analysis of their own experiences and interviews with a variety of stakeholders, Board members studied New York City public school safety. The Board published ten recommendations in three categories: prioritizing positive relationships with school safety personnel, expanding responses to conflicts and negative behavior, and giving students a formal voice in safety policies and procedures. The Board presented its recommendations at a kick-off event that included officials from the Office of the Mayor, the Department of Probation, the Police Department, and the Department of Education. The Board created a toolkit to help schools develop student school safety advisory boards that was used by five high schools. Additionally, Board members participated in a Department of Education youth working group on school safety.

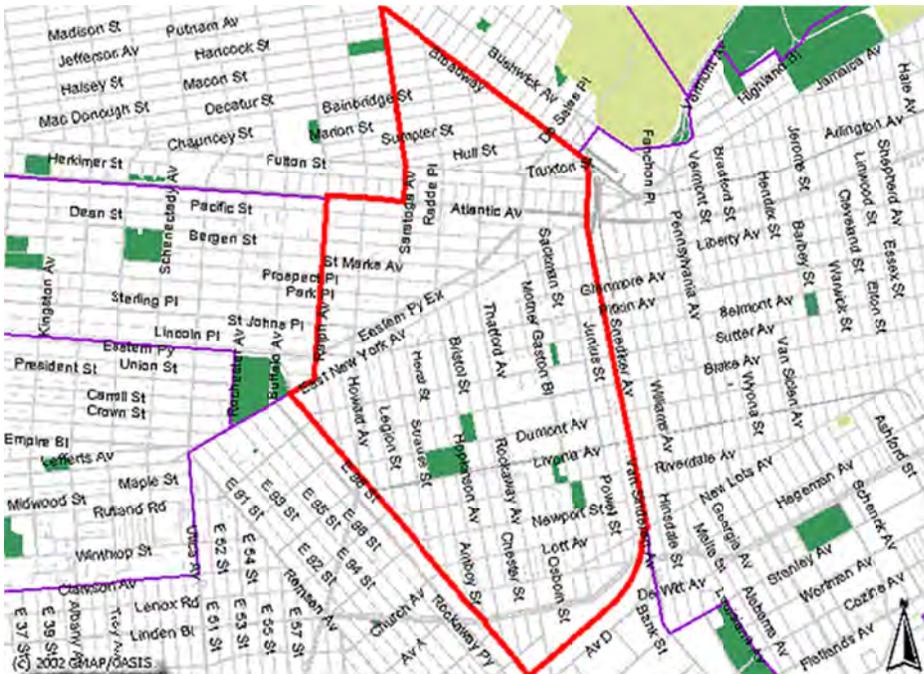
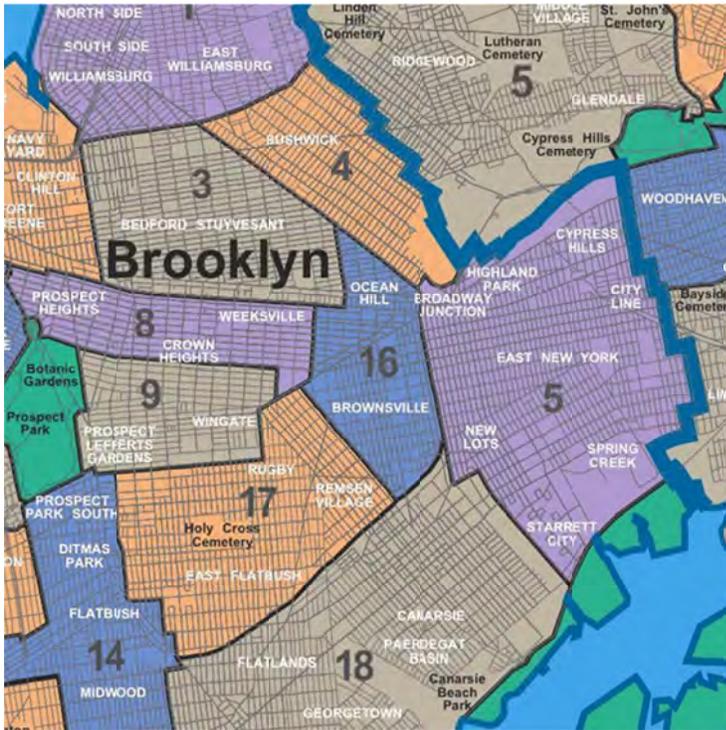
Stand Up, Stand Out: Recommendations to Improve Youth Participation in New York City's Permanency Planning Process (2007) The Board studied youth involvement in the permanency planning process—the process by which New York City Family Courts determine permanent living arrangements for young people in foster care. The Board developed 15 recommendations in three categories: preparing young people to take more active roles in their cases; creating stronger partnerships between lawyers for youth, caseworkers, and young people; and creating court environments that facilitate meaningful youth involvement. During the second year of the program, members developed and led informative workshops for young people in foster care and designed and published informational materials about the permanency planning process. The Board also advised the New York State Permanent Judicial Commission on Justice for Children on the design and content of the State's first family court waiting area dedicated exclusively to teens' use.

Strong Families, Safe Communities: Recommendations to Improve New York City's Alternative to Detention Programs (2009) The Board studied New York City's Alternative to Detention programs, which provide services and support for young people who would otherwise be

detained while awaiting adjudication of delinquency matters in New York City Family Court. The Board developed ten recommendations in three categories: provide youth and families with the tools they need to participate meaningfully in delinquency cases; maximize use of resources to ensure young people receive appropriate supervision; and increase the availability of individualized services in Alternative to Detention programs. During the second year of the program, the Board focused on giving arrested young people more information about the juvenile justice process. The Board published a comic book called *I Got Arrested! Now What?*, which the New York City Department of Probation is distributing to all arrested juveniles during probation intake. The Board also developed and led workshops for teens in Alternative to Detention programs in Queens and on Staten Island.

For more information, please visit us online at www.courtinnovation.org/youthjusticeboard.

Appendix 3: Brownsville Maps⁶⁴



⁶⁴Brooklyn Community Board 16 Resource Directory: Maps, Brooklyn Community Board 16, 12 May 2011
<http://www.brooklyn16.org/maps/>.

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