



# Stepping Up

Strengthening Police, Youth  
& Community Relationships

YOUTH  
JUSTICE  
BOARD





2014-15 Youth Justice Board members

## 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 established to give young people a voice in policies that affect their lives. Each year, a team of high school students 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.

Support for the Youth Justice Board has come from the Center for Urban Pedagogy's Making Policy Public Program, the New York City Council, the New York State Unified Court System, and the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation.

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.

June 2015

# Dear Reader

We are a group of teens who came together to study police-youth relations and early diversion options for 16—24 year-olds in New York City. We all had different reasons for joining the Youth Justice Board, but our goal is the same: to improve diversion programs and restore youth and community trust in police and the criminal justice system.

We come from many places, but we are all passionate about working for justice. We want to help expand diversion programs and improve short- and long-term outcomes for youth who are involved in the criminal justice system.

This issue is important to us because the quality of police-youth interactions affects us, our peers, and our families. Especially in the wake of recent deaths in Ferguson and Staten Island, it is important that youth and police begin working together to make sure that we support each other to succeed.

We met twice a week over many months to research this issue. We visited courts, conducted interviews with policymakers, judges, lawyers, police officers, and social workers, and held focus groups with young people who have experience with arrest and diversion programs. We then developed seven recommendations that we believe can improve the lives of young people, the police, and New York City communities.

As a group of determined teens, we hope that people take our recommendations into consideration and that they will be used in order to reduce youth arrest, improve public trust in police, and make communities safer for us all.

Sincerely,

**THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD**

# Acknowledgements

**THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED TO ALFRED SIEGEL, A DEVOTED SUPPORTER OF THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD PROGRAM AND A MENTOR TO ITS MANY STAFF, MEMBERS, AND ALUMNI.**

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# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
INTRODUCTION	5
RECOMMENDATIONS	9
A. EMPOWERING POLICE, YOUTH, AND THE COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT IMPROVED POLICING	10
B. IMPROVING POLICE-YOUTH CONTACT	14
C. IMPROVING DIVERSION PROGRAMS AND OUTCOMES	18
CONCLUSION	25
WORKS CITED	27
YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD MEMBER AND STAFF BIOGRAPHIES	29
APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH DESIGN	33
APPENDIX 2: THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD PROGRAM	35

# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the Youth Justice Board, an after-school program that engages New York City teenagers in studying public policy issues that affect young people. Since August 2014, the Youth Justice Board has focused on how young people who have been arrested, especially older teens, can avoid further justice system involvement and benefit from meaningful interventions while still being held accountable for their actions. As part of its research, the Board also explored community-level police-youth relationships. In the 2015-16 program year, the Board will work to implement many of the ideas contained in this report.

The Youth Justice Board focused its research on early diversion programs, which allow arrested young people an opportunity to have their cases resolved early in the criminal justice process. Over four months, the Youth Justice Board interviewed 33 experts and conducted three focus groups with young people who have had personal experience with arrest and diversion programming. The Youth Justice Board developed seven recommendations to increase and improve diversion programs and improve police-youth relations in New York City:

- A.** **EMPOWERING POLICE, YOUTH, AND THE COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT IMPROVED POLICING**
  1. Create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways.
  2. Consult with youth to develop community-specific resources that explain the work of police officers and the criminal justice system.
  
- B.** **IMPROVING POLICE-YOUTH CONTACT**
  3. Support youth after arrest by providing them with confidential access to social workers.
  4. Develop resources that improve police officers' interactions with LGBTQ youth and young women of color.
  
- C.** **IMPROVING DIVERSION PROGRAMS AND OUTCOMES**
  5. Provide youth with clear information about case process to facilitate engagement, transparency, and easy access to diversion programs.
  6. Include youth input on short-term diversion programming to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of young people.
  7. Expand diversion eligibility.

# Introduction

The Youth Justice Board's research and recommendations are part of a growing movement to consider how young people who have been arrested, especially older teens, can avoid further justice system involvement and benefit from meaningful interventions while still being held accountable for their actions. The Youth Justice Board researched misdemeanor arrest rates for 16–24 year-olds in New York City, existing options for law enforcement and criminal court when responding to these low-level crimes, and where there may be opportunities to expand efforts to divert cases from the traditional justice system.

The Youth Justice Board conducted its research within the larger context of police-youth relationships. The national conversation on police reform and community trust in law enforcement provided a timely backdrop for examining how police-youth relations affect not just a youth's first arrest, but the likelihood of additional arrests. During the course of the Board's research, significant emphasis has been placed on these issues on a national, state, and city level. In December 2014, President Obama established the Task Force on 21st Century Policing to examine how collaboration between police and communities could reduce crime and restore public trust in policing. The task force developed

recommendations for the president on this topic in the spring of 2015.<sup>1</sup> At the state level, New York Governor Cuomo's Commission on Youth, Public Safety, and Justice produced a set of recommendations that identified a need for age-appropriate responses for all justice-involved youth.<sup>2</sup> In New York City, Mayor Bill de Blasio and Police Commissioner William Bratton are focused on improving public safety and public trust in police in part by changing the relationship between the police and the community through new community policing initiatives, including those discussed in this report.

Despite recent legislative efforts to raise the age of criminal responsibility, New York is one of just two states that treat 16- and 17-year-olds as adults. Therefore, a 16- or 17-year-old who commits an offense in New York faces the possibility of a criminal record. Research has shown that justice system involvement at an early age can have long-term negative consequences for young people, such as increased school absences, diminished educational outcomes, reduced life-time earnings, and increased rates of recidivism.<sup>3</sup> While both misdemeanor and felony arrest rates for 16- and 17-year-olds in New York City continue to decrease steadily each year, in

1 | President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015). Interim Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.

2 | Commission on Youth, Public Safety, & Justice (2015). Final Report of the Governor's Commission on Youth, Public Safety, and Justice: Recommendations for Juvenile Justice Reform in New York State. Retrieved from [https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReportofCommissiononYouthPublicSafetyandJustice\\_0.pdf](https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReportofCommissiononYouthPublicSafetyandJustice_0.pdf)

3 | Child Welfare Watch (2013). Brushes with the Law: Young New Yorkers and the Criminal Justice System. Center for New York City Affairs at the New School 22, 2, 18, 23-24.

2014 there were over 14,000 arrests of 16- and 17-year-olds for misdemeanor offenses.<sup>4</sup>

City leaders have just begun to invest in diversion options that hold youth accountable for wrong doing while also helping them build skills and competencies to prevent future offending. Diversion programs are part of a continuum of programs in New York City that offer arrested young people off-ramps from the justice system. These include supervised release programs and alternative-to-incarceration programs, the latter of which may be open to young people both prior to and post-sentencing. The Youth Justice Board focused its research on early diversion programs, which allow arrested young people an opportunity to have their cases resolved early in the process, potentially before the cases even make it to court; adolescents exit the justice system without criminal convictions while still being held accountable for their unlawful actions.

The Youth Justice Board examined three small scale early diversion program pilots for 16- and 17-year-olds in New York City to understand how they work and how they fit into the justice system.

**Adolescent Diversion Program (ADP)**—an initiative led by New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman and launched in partnership with the Center for Court

Innovation—is a state-wide program in which nine diversion court parts specifically address the needs of 16- and 17-year-olds using targeted services. The local district attorney's office determines eligibility based on the nature of the offense and prior justice system involvement. Upon successful completion of mandated sanctions, participating youth are often eligible for either a Conditional Discharge (case dismissed after one year without a subsequent criminal incident) or an Adjournment in Contemplation of Dismissal (case dismissed and sealed after six months of avoiding re-arrest).

**Project Reset**, an initiative of the New York City Police Department, in partnership with the Kings County District Attorney, New York County District Attorney, and the Center for Court Innovation, with the additional participation of the institutional defender agencies for Manhattan and Brooklyn, began piloting cases in March of 2015 in the neighborhoods of East Harlem and Brownsville, Brooklyn. In Project Reset, 16- and 17-year-olds charged with a non-violent misdemeanor from a select list of qualifying offenses (such as jumping a subway turnstile, shoplifting, or trespassing) and have no prior arrests are offered a two-day intervention that includes meeting with a counselor and community service. Participants who successfully complete the mandates have their cases dismissed by the District Attorney's Office.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Criminal Justice Systems (2015). Dispositions of Arrests Involving 16- and 17-year-olds. Retrieved from: <http://www.criminal-justice.ny.gov/crimnet/ojsa/dispo-youth-arrests/nyc.pdf>

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## Research shows that when people believe they have been fairly treated by the justice system, they are more likely to follow the law in the future.

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**DAT-Y** was a pilot program—created by members of the Brooklyn Task Force of the American Bar Association under the Racial Justice Improvement Project—with the involvement of Brooklyn Criminal Court, Bronx Defenders Services, the New York City Police Department, the Department of Probation, and the Department of Education—that provided diversion for 16- and 17-year-olds arrested for low-level misdemeanors (such as petit larceny, trespassing, and vandalism) and given a Desk Appearance Ticket (DAT). Participants who successfully completed a one-session social service intervention had their cases dismissed by the District Attorney’s Office.<sup>5</sup>

As illustrated by the programs studied by the Youth Justice Board, early diversion programs focus on providing targeted opportunities for young people who have committed low-level offenses and do not pose public safety risks.

The programs are often short-term, and are designed to be proportional to both the risk level of the youth and the severity of the offense. Studies have conclusively demonstrated that for the highest-risk offenders—those young people whose behaviors and beliefs make them most likely to reoffend—intensive monitoring and services can reduce the risk of continued offending. Conversely, low-risk cases have a lower chance of reoffending even in the absence of services, and therefore require minimal supervision.<sup>6</sup> Early diversion programs also create a moment of opportunity to engage young people in voluntary positive activities that extend beyond the life of mandated participation. Research shows that these programs can also help young people achieve better long-term outcomes. For example, the Adolescent Diversion Program has been successful in reducing the recidivism rates of those who demonstrated higher risk for reoffending.<sup>7</sup>

Developing opportunities for diversion programs is consistent with best practices of procedural justice research, which shows that when defendants are treated with respect by justice system players and believe their concerns have been listened to, they are more likely to feel the justice system is fair. This holds true irrespective of the outcome of the case,

<sup>5</sup> Services for DAT-Y were led by the Center for Court Innovation, the Department of Education, and Young New Yorkers.

<sup>6</sup> Andrews, D. A., & Dowden, C. (2006). Risk principle of case classification in correctional treatment: A meta-analytic investigation. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 50, 88-100. For more see Vincent, G.A., Guy, L.S., and Grisso, T. (2012). *Risk Assessment in Juvenile Justice: A Guidebook for Implementation*.

<sup>7</sup> Rempel, M., Hynynen Lambson, S., Cadoret C.R., & Walker Franklin, A. (2013). *The Adolescent Diversion Program: A First Year Evaluation of Alternatives to Conventional Case Processing for Defendants Ages 16 and 17 in New York*. Center for Court Innovation. Retrieved from [http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/ADP\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/documents/ADP_Report_Final.pdf)

and across different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. Further research shows that when people believe they have been fairly treated by the justice system, they are more likely to follow the law in the future.<sup>8</sup> Better feelings about the justice system can have other positive results as well. For example, someone who is a victim of a crime may be more likely to report the offense and seek help.

Diversion options that are specifically designed for older adolescents draw on emerging research that shows that human brain development continues through adolescence and is not fully complete until the mid-20's.<sup>9</sup> Young people typically experience increased emotional intensity and mood swings and are more likely to take risks and have immature or impulsive decision-making skills. Just as important, however, adolescents experience dramatic cognitive, social, and emotional growth, and therefore are uniquely responsive to rehabilitation and behavioral change. Increasingly, diversion programs build on positive youth development and positive youth justice models, which emphasize participants' strengths, seek to build core skills and competencies, and provide opportunities for youth to practice healthy behaviors.<sup>10</sup>

Jurisdictions and communities are also increasing the use of restorative approaches to assist young people in understanding the impact of wrong doing on their communities, and to give them the opportunity to be active participants in resolving disputes and repairing harm to the community.

From its examination of early diversion programming and community-level police-youth relationships, the Youth Justice Board developed recommendations that seek to improve outcomes for young people, communities, and law enforcement. The Board hopes the recommendations proposed in this report will spark further changes around this issue, and serve as a first step toward achieving this goal.

<sup>8</sup> Tyler, T. R., & Huo, Y. J. (2002). *Trust in the Law: Encouraging Public Cooperation with the Police and the Courts*. Russell Sage Foundation, 248. Skinnis, Layla (2007). Book Review: Tyler, T. R., & Huo, Y. J. (2002). *Trust in the Law: Encouraging Public Cooperation with the Police and the Courts*. *Criminal Justice Review*, 32, 456-457.

<sup>9</sup> Sowell, E. R., Thompson, P. M., Holmes, C. J., Jernigan, T. L., & Toga, A. W. (1999). In vivo evidence for post-adolescent brain maturation in frontal and striatal regions. *Nature Neuroscience*, 10, 859-861.

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz, R. (2000). *Juvenile Justice and Positive Youth Development*. *Youth Development: Issues, Challenges, and Directions*. Public/Private Ventures, 233-279. Benson, P. & Saito, R. (2000). *The Scientific Foundations of Youth Development*. *Youth Development: Issues, Challenges, and Directions*. Public/Private Ventures. Catalano, R.F., Berglund, M.L., Ryan, J.A.M., Lonczak, H.C., & Hawkins, J.D. (1998). *Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programs*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and National Institute for Child Health and Human Development. Bazemore, Gordon & Terry, Clinton (1997). *Developing Delinquent Youth: A Reintegrative Model for Rehabilitation and a New Role for the Juvenile Justice System*. *Child Welfare*, 74 (5), 665-716.

# Recommendations

The Youth Justice Board hopes its recommendations will spark conversations with community-based organizations, 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.

The Board's recommendations fall under three themes:

- A.** **EMPOWERING POLICE, YOUTH, AND THE COMMUNITY TO SUPPORT IMPROVED POLICING**
  1. Create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways.
  2. Consult with youth to develop community-specific resources that explain the work of police officers and the criminal justice system.
  
- B.** **IMPROVING POLICE-YOUTH CONTACT**
  3. Support youth after arrest by providing them with confidential access to social workers.
  4. Develop resources that improve police officers' interactions with LGBTQ youth and young women of color.
  
- C.** **IMPROVING DIVERSION PROGRAMS AND OUTCOMES**
  5. Provide youth with clear information about case process to facilitate engagement, transparency, and easy access to diversion programs.
  6. Include youth input on short-term diversion programming to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of young people.
  7. Expand diversion eligibility.

# 1.

## Create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways.

The Youth Justice Board spoke with youth and police to understand from both perspectives why there are often poor relationships between the two groups. Many youth shared that they feel that police officers patrol neighborhoods they are unfamiliar with while demanding levels of respect they rarely demonstrate themselves. One focus group participant described his defensive approach to interacting with the police, explaining that in his view, “they’re a gang, just like any gang. They want to feel respected.”

At the same time, the Board learned that many police officers feel isolated in unfamiliar neighborhoods, and feel that neighborhood residents struggle to understand or appreciate their work. Deputy Inspector Justin Lenz described his experience as a captain in Red Hook, Brooklyn: “Often, the only time people speak to cops is if they’re stopped or calling 911.” Police officers also feel that well-intentioned officers who try to be respectful are hindered in their efforts by community members’ mistrust, stemming from previous negative experiences with a small number of different officers. A Brownsville, Brooklyn community affairs officer explained she feels she is judged unfairly for trying to do her job. When young people and community members don’t see police as being part of the community, police officers then find it

more difficult to get to know and serve the neighborhood and its people.

### **POLICE-YOUTH ENGAGEMENT**

The Youth Justice Board recommends that youth should advise officers newly assigned to precincts about their communities. By getting to know youth and other residents—the natural experts of any community—police officers can be better equipped to address their concerns and issues. This can take a variety of forms, from structured conversations, to collaborative projects involving police and neighborhood youth, to informal recreational activities. As Community Affairs Chief Joanne Jaffe explained, opportunities such as after-school programs and recreational activities “give officers and youth the opportunity to experience and see each other differently.”

These opportunities can also build on existing police efforts to move towards richer community engagement and collaborative policing efforts, including Neighborhood-Based Policing programs in Manhattan and Rockaway, Queens. According to Susan Herman, Deputy Commissioner, Collaborative Policing, through these programs officers that are assigned to small neighborhood sectors will spend up to 30 percent of their shifts off-radio, engaging with the community by attending meetings, visiting schools, and

getting to know the neighborhood so that police and community members can collaborate to improve public safety. As Deputy Commissioner Herman explained, “the key to decreasing tensions is changing the way we police.”

### **POLICE-YOUTH DIALOGUES**

One structured way to promote positive interactions is by holding police-youth dialogues—conversations that aim to build trust and understanding by allowing teens and police to speak honestly about their experiences in order to find common ground and learn from one another’s perspectives. These dialogues work best when both police and youth approach the conversation with the shared goals of having fun and learning about each other, rather than airing their respective grievances. Having a neutral facilitator lead the conversation can help ensure that everyone is able to participate fully. Linda Baird, Associate Director of Youth Justice Programs at the Center for Court Innovation, said that police-youth dialogues are most productive when facilitators meet separately with each group ahead of time to discuss their concerns, which are then addressed directly in the conversation.

Officers can wear civilian clothes to these dialogues, which makes them more approachable to youth, while youth can help by demonstrating respect in their tone and demeanor, even as they ask challenging questions. Deputy Commissioner Herman



Asset map of East New York by Gustavo, a member of the Youth Justice Board.

explained that, just as it is important that police learn about the communities they serve, it is also important for youth to learn about the police. From these dialogues, which are already being piloted in New York City, she said youth can explore questions such as, “why do we have police? What do they do for our communities?” Expanding the use of police-teen dialogues in New York City, particularly in impact zones, would be a positive step toward rebuilding trust between youth and police.

### **POLICE-YOUTH COLLABORATIVE ASSET MAPPING**

Another way to strengthen police-youth relations is to have them work together on a community asset map. Asset maps identify institutions like schools, libraries, precincts, as well as local leaders, as a means of listing the community’s existing resources in a single place.<sup>11</sup> These maps

<sup>11</sup> Kretzmann, J.L. & McKnight J.P. (1996). Mapping community capacity. Neighborhood Trust Innovations Network. Retrieved from [www.racial-equitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcknight.pdf](http://www.racial-equitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcknight.pdf)

can be used at first to understand a community, and eventually to build partnerships, as they offer a clear picture of what the neighborhood has to offer. Emily Gold LaGratta, Director of New Initiatives at the Center for Court Innovation, emphasized the importance of this type of close engagement, telling the Youth Justice Board, “by doing the groundwork and understanding the neighborhood, you develop partners.”

In Rockaway, Queens, Neighborhood Coordination Officers provide a pamphlet developed by the NYPD Office of Collaborative Policing that lists basic local and city-wide service resources relevant to the community. Building on this idea, youth and officers could regularly work together to create and update a community map to provide new officers with an overview of the area’s businesses, residents, and spaces. In turn, by working alongside officers, local youth would have the opportunity to learn about the NYPD, policing practices, and most importantly, the officers who serve their community. As a Board member who has been arrested previously on charges of graffiti explained, “I would love to show a cop around [my neighborhood] and show him all the cool things young people are doing.”

Establishing these key relationships early on in their posts to new neighborhoods will help officers integrate into the communities they serve. The community, on the other hand, will see and appreciate the officers’ sincere

efforts to learn about the people who live there. Community asset mapping can also set the stage for follow-up projects. For example, precincts can work with local youth to turn the original asset map into a neighborhood guide for residents that provides information on local resources and helps them understand their rights and police procedures. These guides could even include biographies of all the police officers who work at the local precinct.



Local youth explore Brownsville, Brooklyn.

# 2.

## Consult with youth to develop community-specific resources that explain the work of police officers and the criminal justice system.

Many young people do not feel comfortable when interacting with police officers. This discomfort can stem from a lack of understanding about why police might approach them, fear of arrest, and not knowing how to respond to police officers' questions. Misinformation about the justice system has the potential to magnify fear and misunderstanding.

Even when youth are aware of their basic rights, they might communicate them in a way that seems aggressive to police, which has the potential to escalate a routine police stop and can lead to arrest. Some focus group participants reported that they had this experience when interacting with police officers in their neighborhoods. Focus group participants felt that if youth had a better understanding of the justice system, they could be more proactive in developing stronger relations with police—ultimately moving toward a relationship rooted in trust and collaboration. Further, they reiterated the need for better understanding of the criminal justice system generally, with clear information on their rights and responsibilities when interacting with police and following arrest. They stressed the importance of making this information available to all youth, not just those who enter the system due to an arrest, as being better informed could help reduce the possibility of arrest in the first place.

### NEIGHBORHOOD-SPECIFIC RESOURCES AND GUIDES

The Youth Justice Board recommends that neighborhood-based community organizations develop local guides in consultation with youth and the police department that explain the role of police and the nuts and bolts of the criminal justice system. These resources should include relevant community resources that would help local young people navigate the justice system. By explaining the goals and missions of the various players within the criminal justice system, youth will have a better understanding of how the pieces fit together, and what they can do to have the most positive interactions with police on the streets.

Youth who have been involved in the system at any level are undeniably familiar with how the criminal justice system affects their lives. These youth should be included in the development of the resources along with youth who have not had justice system involvement. The youth can serve as consultants on how to make these resources more appealing and accessible to teens. These resources can take the form of pamphlets, posters, videos, or websites—whatever local community members feel would best meet their needs.<sup>12</sup> Through these projects, youth can take an active role in addressing issues confronting their communities, showcasing their leadership and helping to dispel negative perceptions of young people.

<sup>12</sup> For example, the 2014 Youth Justice Board worked in collaboration with the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP) and designer Greg Mihalko of Partner & Partners to develop [nextmovenyc.org](http://nextmovenyc.org), a mobile web app that provides disconnected youth with information on nearby resources that can help them complete their education or get a job.

# 3.

## Support youth after arrest by providing them with confidential access to social workers.

For many youth, arrest can be a stressful, confusing, and even traumatic experience. According to LaGratta, “the traditional process of arrest and court appearances is very intensive and can be quite stressful to the individual going through it, as well as to their family.” As Brooklyn Defender Services Staff Attorney Amy Albert explained, “officers are often interacting with youth at a very traumatic moment,” leaving both parties vulnerable to sudden and unpredictable escalation. Unlike police officers, who might participate in making multiple arrests daily, arrest is a uniquely terrifying experience for many youth, something not all officers necessarily take into account in the moment. Therefore, many young people enter the justice system with fear and anxiety. In some cases, this may indirectly lead to non-compliance with legal requirements and failure to complete mandated programming down the line. Margaret Wolk, policy director at the New York District Attorney’s Office, observed that, “among young people, there may be a fear of the courts, which stems from a fear of the unknown. When given a summons, for example, kids may not show up because they’re unclear about the process, consequences, etc.” It is more productive to support youth to succeed instead of scaring them into avoidance.

A Brownsville-based police officer acknowledged that support for young people should start during their interactions with police,

saying that, “officers should be more sensitive to a teenager’s needs.” While the NYPD Community Affairs Bureau’s Youth Services Section trains youth officers to help at-risk youth and provide access to special programs that address their needs, these officers are not usually involved in the kind of daily interactions that lead to arrest.

### **PROVIDE YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CONFIDENTIAL REMOTE ACCESS TO SOCIAL WORKERS**

The Youth Justice Board recommends that precincts work with local community organizations to provide youth with the option to call, email, or otherwise access youth-oriented service providers for confidential support throughout the youth’s involvement with the justice system. Trained social workers have the skills and experience to provide youth with the emotional support they need in a way that other adults in the justice system may not be able to due to lack of time, training, resources, or a conflict of interest. Focus group participants explained that, “social workers can understand where the youth [are] having issues and address [them].”

To facilitate this process, police officers can carry reference cards with a phone number or email address at which a social worker can be reached. It is important that it is clear to all parties involved that the social worker does not work for the police so that youth understand

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“Among young people, there may be a fear of the courts, which stems from a fear of the unknown. When given a summons, for example, kids may not show up because they’re unclear about the process, consequences, etc.”

—Margaret Wolk, New York County District Attorney’s Office

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that they are not at risk of incriminating themselves. These reference cards can also include contact information for other services that may benefit youth like housing, education, and extracurricular opportunities. Officers can use these cards any time they interact with young people and learn that they could use support, not just during an arrest, so that all youth who would benefit from social worker support are offered it. Providing youth with support as soon as possible can help them address any issues they are having, and hopefully help prevent them from getting involved in situations that may lead to arrest in the first place. The protocol for handing out these cards can draw from the example of Project Reset, which provides

scripts to officers to help guide their interactions with youth.

As each individual’s experience in the justice system will be different, having a support person from the beginning will help youth process and accept the situation, and consider the consequences of the decisions they make as their case moves through the system. Having this social worker assigned in the beginning is important as many cases—those given the option to attend Project Reset, for example—don’t ever get to court, and youth as a consequence are never assigned an attorney who can help them navigate the process. In addition, for youth who participate in diversion programming, having a social worker available for them to speak with from the moment of arrest through the completion of all mandates can increase compliance and raise rates of successful completion. “If there is not a system of care, [diversion programming] is not going to work” said Ramon Garcia, Assistant Commissioner of School Safety. Lastly, social workers can also help young people prepare to talk about their arrest and what comes next with their families, and help them deal with any personal issues that may have contributed to their arrest. Lastly, social workers can refer youth to longer-term support following the conclusion of their case.

# 4.

## Develop resources that improve police officers' interactions with LGBTQ youth and young women of color.

Despite growing awareness about gender- and sexuality-based discrimination, the Youth Justice Board learned that there are still many misconceptions about the best ways to be sensitive to LGBTQ youth and young women of color, particularly in the context of the justice system.<sup>13</sup>

As Brooklyn Defender Services Staff Attorney Molly Gallivan explained, police, like most people, “treat others based on assumptions.” A Youth Justice Board member elaborated, “I feel cops don’t understand how to approach a female that is LGBTQ. They approach [her] very aggressively when they assume [she] is a male, because of the way she looks.” These assumptions can lead youth to feel unfairly victimized and discriminated against, even when the officer means well. Another Youth Justice Board member said, “I’ve experienced it more indirectly as well—they congratulate me for getting this far in school—that I am different from the rest because I’m not the stereotype.” Another Youth Justice Board member described how, “as a female interacting with cops, I feel that I am not listened to—I am not taken seriously. They say, ‘sorry this happened to you, but maybe you should walk another way.’ I don’t want your remorse—I want you to do something.”

### CREATE PRACTICAL RESOURCES FOR POLICE OFFICERS THAT FOCUS ON THE NEEDS OF LGBTQ YOUTH AND YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR

The NYPD’s Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Liaison Unit, which works to address discrimination and foster strong relations with the LGBTQ community, should work together with community organizations, youth, and LGBTQ and women of color leaders to help officers interact positively with those who are most likely to feel marginalized because of their gender or sexuality. These efforts can build on existing work by the Gay Officers Action League, which empowers youth and police officers to develop curricula and materials that address discrimination. As Gallivan pointed out, police “need trainings to increase awareness of their own biases in order to better check their biases.”

While mandating training for all officers on this subject would be ideal, given the reality of the police training schedule, it might be more realistic to build and distribute resources for all police designed with the cooperation and input of youth and community-based organizations.

The NYPD’s Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Liaison Unit already works with community-based organizations to develop training and

<sup>13</sup> LGBTQ Youths in the Juvenile Justice System (2015). Model Programs Guide. Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved from <http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/litreviews/LGBTQYouthsInTheJuvenileJusticeSystem.pdf>. For more information see Crenshaw, Kimberlé (2015). Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Over-policed, and Underprotected. African American Policy Forum and Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies.

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“As a female interacting with cops, I feel that I am not listened to—I am not taken seriously. They say, ‘sorry this happened to you, but maybe you should walk another way.’ I don’t want your remorse—I want you to do something.”

—Youth Justice Board member

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resources; building on this to include a public resource development process that engages youth would help to ensure that the resulting product is more inclusive, and therefore more reflective of the general public’s concerns. These guides should help police communicate to LGBTQ youth and young women of color that their concerns are taken seriously. Resources should also be developed for LGBTQ youth and young women of color about their rights and how best to interact with officers.

Working with these populations is especially important, as LGBTQ youth and young women of color are more likely to be victims of domestic and sexual violence. Police must

earn their trust in order to support these individuals in reporting abuse and other crimes, which will in turn help police do their jobs.

# 5.

## Provide youth with clear information about case process to facilitate engagement, transparency, and easy access to diversion programs.

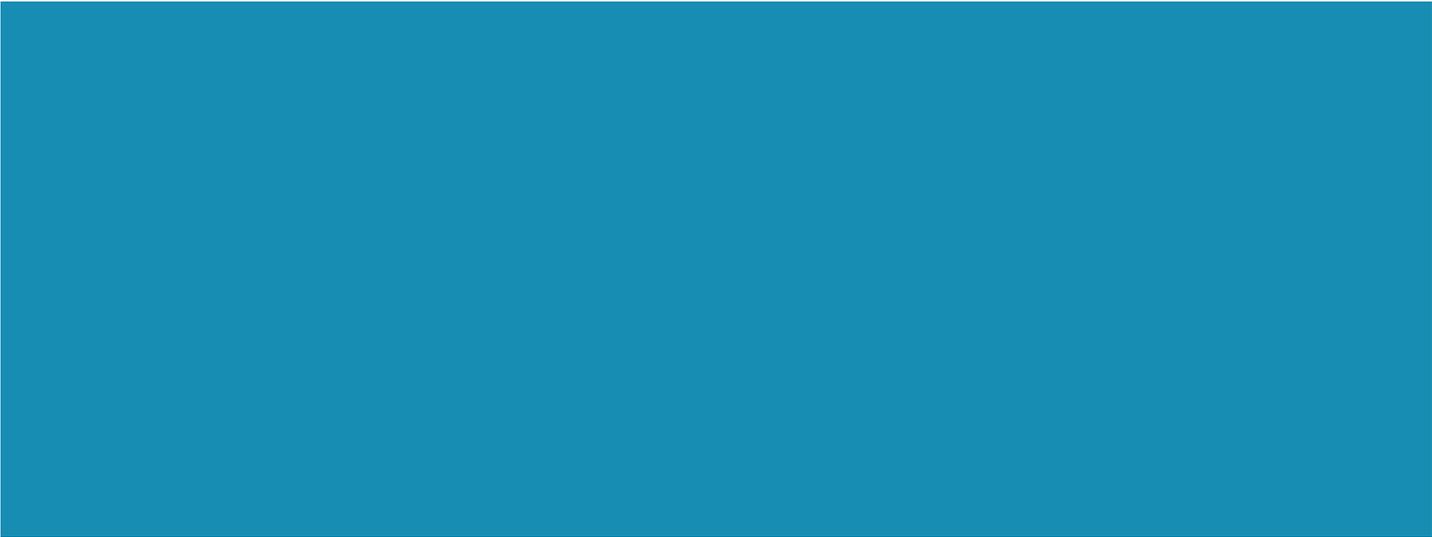
Youth who are eligible for diversion programs need clear guidance because they have usually had little previous contact with the justice system. For example, they are less likely to understand what is at stake should they fail to comply with the program requirements. The Youth Justice Board found that even though lawyers, service providers, and police officers explained the diversion process clearly during its interviews, focus group participants who had participated in diversion programs were unsure about how those programs were supposed to help them. One focus group participant, for example, thought that the diversion program he was assigned to was difficult to understand and navigate, and worried he was being set up to fail and end up in jail. Focus group participants said that not understanding how diversion works and what is expected of participants could lead to low rates of youth accepting the opportunity and successfully completing diversion programs. Giving young people a clear picture of the process and what is required of them upfront would help to minimize confusion.

Even short-term diversion programs that require minimal engagement, like Project Reset, can be confusing for youth, especially as these programs are targeted toward youth who have never been involved in the justice

system before. The process through which the NYPD and District Attorney's offices determine a youth's eligibility for the Project Reset diversion program can take up to two weeks. During this time, the decision-making process and the potential outcomes can be unclear to the youth. As mentioned previously, a lack of clear information has the potential to magnify fear and anxiety. Youth don't always understand that case processing takes time; all they experience is silence. Youth may cope with this by forgetting, moving on, or remaining stressed. Especially since they have not yet had an attorney appointed to advise them, youth may be unprepared to make the best decision when the opportunity for diversion is presented.

While youth should continue to enjoy the right to choose whether or not to complete diversion, they may not be considering all available information about arrest, court procedures, diversion programs, and the long-term impact of criminal records before making this decision. Several focus group participants remarked that they tried to comply with what was communicated to them about their diversion programs, but the long, unclear process often felt different from what they initially understood it would be like.<sup>14</sup> This was confusing for participants and led to resentment and resignation about never

<sup>14</sup> Focus group participants had participated in different types of diversion programs, not necessarily early diversion. Therefore, their experiences may have differed from those of youth who participated in early diversion.



leaving the system. One thing it is especially important for young people to understand is that if they do not comply with program expectations, their cases can return to the courts, adding significant time to what already feels to them like a lengthy process.

#### **TEXT PROGRESS UPDATES TO SYSTEM-INVOLVED YOUTH**

Justice system agencies should explore how diversion programs can develop simple ways to ensure clear, consistent communication that will support youth through the process. An automated text message with multiple language options, for example, is a low-cost solution that could help reduce confusion and anxiety on the youth's part while court partners deliberate on how to proceed with his or her case. Young people are much more likely to check and respond to text messages than to e-mails.

Once a youth enters a diversion program, the texts can serve as a progress report that marks progress against clearly defined goals and timeframes. For example, once a youth completes the community service portion of his or her diversion program mandate, the case manager can send a text message alerting the youth that he or she is 50 percent done. Just as important, the communication can help make the process more transparent, educating and engaging the youth at each step, which can in turn increase the likelihood that the youth will

understand the value of the program and complete diversion successfully. Text messages can also include positive encouragement, helpful tips, reminders about appointments, and links to resources and other long-term programs to help the youth regardless of their participation in the diversion program.

As a next step, early diversion program providers could try piloting an optional text message program for participants. Simply comparing compliance rates of youth who opt in to receiving text messages and those who do not over the course of a few months could provide valuable data. This could be used to determine whether text messages should be considered for adoption more broadly by additional justice system agencies, including the police department.

# 6.

## Include youth input on short-term diversion programming to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of young people.

Diversion programs are a valuable opportunity to deter youth from further justice system involvement. These programs are more valuable still if they include content youth find interesting and relevant to their lives. Focus group participants who had taken court-mandated workshops reported that they struggled to find them engaging or applicable to real-life circumstances. As Bronx Community Solutions Youth Justice Coordinator Rebecca Stahl explained, there is often a mismatch between services offered and the actual needs of youth. For example, she said that while anger management classes provide useful skills, “youth are struggling to deal with all the other challenges that they’re facing. We have to address those challenges first before we tell them how to manage their anger.”

The effectiveness of these short-term programs can be improved by focusing on young people’s personal development to equip them with the skills they need to improve their lives, without mandating too many services. For example, while a long-term program may allow for more services and programming, it also means that youth need to go for a much longer period of time without making a mistake to successfully resolve their case. Programs like Project Reset and the Adolescent Diversion Program seek to find a balance of working with low-level offenders for a limited timeframe by using broadly applicable skills,

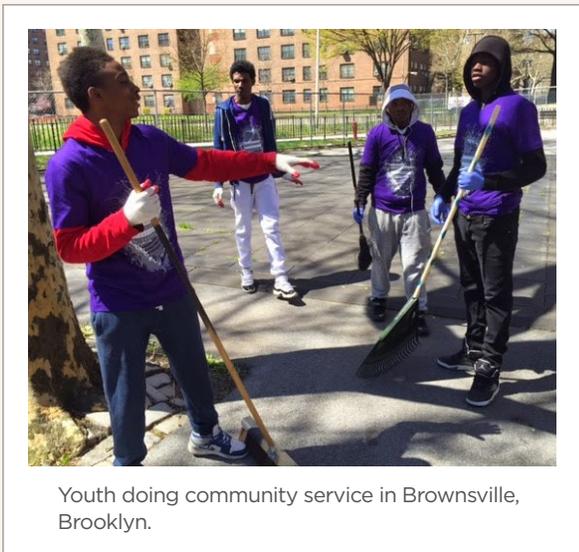
such as workshops on decision-making, conflict-resolution, and goal-setting to help a wide variety of youth from different backgrounds and with different needs.

### **INCORPORATE YOUTH INPUT ON DIVERSION PROGRAM SERVICES**

Diversion programs can be improved by involving youth, particularly those who have participated in the program or have prior justice system involvement, in meaningful conversations on how the programs can be more responsive and more engaging for participants. According to Josh Laub, Department of Education’s Director of Youth Development for District 88, it is important for adults to “invite young people to the table to claim their future.” Through this engagement, youth will also see that they are a part of the ongoing conversation about how to improve the criminal justice system.

Youth input can take many forms, from simple surveys upon program completion to structured conversations with program planners to joining youth courts to guiding other young people whose mistakes have led to their arrest. For example, the Youth Justice Board’s focus groups were a forum where youth shared their ideas for diversion programming, such as opportunities to learn about their rights and responsibilities within the justice system. Focus group participants expressed interest in sexual health education,

professional development, and study skills. While opportunities like these may not seem like they would address the offense that resulted in the youth’s arrest, programs that provide practical skills and knowledge that youth want can help engage more youth, while helping them develop the kinds of skills necessary to succeed in their lives.



Youth doing community service in Brownsville, Brooklyn.

#### **PARTNER WITH NYC DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION DISTRICT 79 TO PROVIDE EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

Diversion programs can provide opportunities to connect youth with educational assistance beyond the mandated expectations of the program. The diversion program staff should be prepared to support youth who are behind on school credits or need help returning to school.

For example, Hon. George Grasso, Supervising Judge, New York City, said that a Department of Education-associated youth worker who was involved in DAT-Y, another early diversion, post-arraignment program, provided assistance to youth who were interested in taking the TASC to obtain their High School Equivalency Diploma. Taking that one step further, diversion programs could work with the Department of Education’s District 79—which serves students who have special circumstances including being over-age and under-credited, or involved in the justice system—to provide access to specialized educational resources. By making referrals and setting youth up with appointments with counselors at the nearest Department of Education Borough Referral Center, diversion program staff can help connect youth with direct services that are responsive to their needs.

Focus group participants also spoke about the difficulty of juggling competing obligations across school, court appearances, and diversion programs. A focus group participant explained that, “choosing between school and the program isn’t fair,” suggesting instead that programs should work with participants to accommodate school and extracurricular obligations. As court obligations often occur during school hours, diversion programs, especially those that begin post-arraignment, can work with District 79 to provide program participants with beneficial educational resources that can

supplement their ability to catch up or avoid falling behind in school.

#### **DIVERSION PROGRAM STAFFING**

The Board also recommends that diversion programs hire staff with diverse interests and lived experiences to increase staff's ability to connect with participants, even within the limited timeframe of the program. While early diversion programs for low-level offenders are not designed to provide in-depth, long-term services, the staff at these programs might be the first friendly, empathetic face that youth encounter in the justice system, and therefore might be in the best position to make a difference. For example, staff could link youth to longer-term voluntary services on-site and in the community after completion of the program.

Brooklyn Defender Services Supervising Attorney Lisa Salvatore explained that many youth could benefit from longer engagement, as “the impulsivity of a 16-year-old isn’t outgrown by a [workshop]—it takes time.” Focus group participants also expressed a desire for post-program follow-up from counselors and program staff, explaining that, “follow-up is important. When you develop a relationship with your counselor, then they can have a genuine check-in with you. It becomes ‘I’m checking in on you because I do care.’” One participant explained further:

“When people invest time in you and show they support you, it makes you want to do better.”

# 7.

## Expand diversion eligibility.

Experts agree that adolescent brain development—specifically, the functions that help manage risk, peer pressure, and decision-making—continues well past the teenage years and through age 24. Meanwhile, the data suggest that nearly 50 percent of Black males in New York City will have been arrested before age 24.<sup>15</sup> Practitioners are beginning to acknowledge the difference in adolescent brains as they develop appropriate policies. For example, the New York State Commission on Youth Public Safety and Justice proposed that courts grant “Youthful Offender status in criminal cases against offenders who are under 21 if the youth has no previous felony finding.”<sup>16</sup> This would allow for 19- and 20-year-olds to enjoy the same opportunity for sealed records as 16-, 17-, and 18-year-old first-time offenders.<sup>17</sup>

Despite widespread acknowledgement that 16- and 17-year-olds need to be offered the chance to participate in diversion programming that will help them develop pro-social skills, connect to services, and address any underlying issues, youth above the age of 17 are often not offered such opportunities.<sup>18</sup> All young people up to age 24 should have a fair chance to learn from their

mistakes without permanent consequences. As one focus group participant emphasized, there is not much difference in the likelihood of making mistakes that can lead to arrest between age 16 and 18, saying: “When you’re 16, you’re going to be foolish and do dumb things. But it can also happen later, too. My first mistake was at 18.” Diversion opportunities are especially important for youth who are in foster care, have not graduated high school, or are unemployed. These youth are more vulnerable to arrest and the long-term consequences associated with arrest.<sup>19</sup>

### **EXPAND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SHORT-TERM DIVERSION FOR A WIDER VARIETY OF LOW-LEVEL OFFENSES AND THROUGH AGE 24 ACROSS NEW YORK CITY**

Courts and other criminal justice system stakeholders should provide the chance to participate in short-term diversion programming through age 24 across all of New York City. The early outcomes associated with Project Reset are promising. According to project staff, nine of 10 Reset cases in Brownsville are completed or still pending, and in Harlem, six of eight Reset cases are completed or pending. Expanding Project Reset through age 24 and across all boroughs would

<sup>15</sup> Associated Press (2014). Study: Nearly half of black men arrested by age 23. USA Today. Retrieved from <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2014/01/20/nearly-half-arrested/4669225/>

<sup>16</sup> Commission on Youth, Public Safety, & Justice (2015). Final Report of the Governor’s Commission on Youth, Public Safety, and Justice: Recommendations for Juvenile Justice Reform in New York State. Retrieved from [https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReportofCommissiononYouthPublicSafetyandJustice\\_0.pdf](https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReportofCommissiononYouthPublicSafetyandJustice_0.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Youth Offender & Sealing (2012). New York State Unified Court System. Retrieved from [https://www.nycourts.gov/courts/7jd/courts/city/criminal/youthful\\_offender\\_sealing.shtml](https://www.nycourts.gov/courts/7jd/courts/city/criminal/youthful_offender_sealing.shtml)

<sup>18</sup> Commission on Youth, Public Safety, & Justice (2015). Final Report of the Governor’s Commission on Youth, Public Safety, and Justice: Recommendations for Juvenile Justice Reform in New York State. Retrieved from [https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReportofCommissiononYouthPublicSafetyandJustice\\_0.pdf](https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/governor.ny.gov/files/atoms/files/ReportofCommissiononYouthPublicSafetyandJustice_0.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Dryfoos, Joy G. (1991). *Adolescents at Risk: Prevalence and Prevention*. Oxford University Press.



provide greater access to short-term diversion for more youth who might benefit from these programs.

Further, broadening the scope of offenses eligible for diversion would allow more young people to leave the system without a criminal record. Currently, 27 offenses are eligible for diversion through Project Reset. Six of them are related to controlled substances and drug paraphernalia, four are related to petit larceny and theft of services, and the remaining 17 are for quality-of-life offenses like possessing an open container of alcohol. Expanding diversion opportunities to include more non-violent misdemeanor offenses could lead to decreased rates of recidivism while ensuring that youth receive the appropriate level of services in response to their needs.<sup>20</sup>

Early diversion programming for a wider range of youth can help communities grow stronger by reducing the barriers to services, jobs, and education that come with a criminal conviction.<sup>21</sup> Currently, there are too many people in New York City for whom these basic opportunities may be permanently out-of-reach due to youthful mistakes. Diversion programs offer a real opportunity to change that, and expanding them will benefit young people and communities alike.

<sup>20</sup> Lee, C.G., Cheesman, F., Rottman, D., Swaner, R., Lambson, S., Rempel, M., & Curtis, R. (2013). A Community Court Grows in Brooklyn: A Comprehensive Evaluation of the Red Hook Community Justice Center. National Center for State Courts.

<sup>21</sup> Child Welfare Watch (2013). Brushes with the Law: Young New Yorkers and the Criminal Justice System. Center for New York City Affairs at the New School 22, 2, 18, 23-24.

# Conclusion

We would like to thank you for taking the time to read our report. This report is important to us because we have worked very hard throughout the year to fulfill our goal of creating recommendations to improve police-youth relationships by improving police-youth interactions and expanding access to early diversion programs throughout New York City. This report reflects our ideas and committed investment to young people and stronger communities.

In the 2015-16 program year, the Youth Justice Board will work on implementing some of the ideas expressed in the recommendations. As young people, we know how important it is to not only feel safe in our communities, but to trust and communicate effectively with the adults who serve our communities. By involving young people in public conversations on pressing public safety issues, adults can ensure that problems are being addressed from every perspective possible. Just as importantly, adults can ensure that young people are involved in finding solutions from the beginning.

Ultimately, we hope our recommendations and the work of the Youth Justice Board next year will help answer the question of what comes next after the current anger at the state of police-youth relations subsides. We believe that any attempt at formulating an answer to this question must involve meaningful youth participation and input.



Youth Justice Board members on their annual retreat at Camp Vacamas.

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# Youth Justice Board Member and Staff Biographies

## ALEX

Alex is a freshman at Bay Ridge Prep High School in Brooklyn. At 14, he is the youngest member on the Youth Justice Board. Alex joined the Board because he wanted to improve his understanding of the criminal justice system. He hopes that through the Board's work he will be able to make a positive change. Alex enjoys studying American history through re-enactments as well as practicing martial arts. In addition, Alex also tries to make a positive change by volunteering for political candidates.

## ASHLEY

Ashley Thompson is a 15-year-old sophomore at Friends Seminary. In her free time she enjoys baking, running, dancing, and gardening. Ashley joined the Youth Justice Board to gain additional knowledge about the justice system. She said, "issues involving the youth in New York City are particularly important to me and I wanted the opportunity to give my input." Ashley hopes to study law and become a defense attorney in the future.

## BRYAN

Bryan is a 17-year-old and attends Brooklyn Preparatory High School. He is a member of the National Honor Society and enjoys playing volleyball and writing poetry during his free time. Bryan originally joined the Youth Justice Board due to encouragement from his guidance counselor, Mrs. Marks, to get involved with extracurricular activities that would benefit him while he applies to college. He was surprised to get much more than he expected:

"I have learned more from the YJB than I ever expected to. I've even made strong friendships with young individuals through the program."

## CHALA

Chala is a 15-year-old student who attends Springfield High School. Chala has many talents; she is a songwriter, singer, clothing designer, and dancer. Using her talents, she ministers at her church through dancing with other young adults. Chala believes that helping one another is beautiful and loves to help others anyway she possibly can, which is why she joined the Youth Justice Board. Prior to joining the Youth Justice Board, Chala was sad and began to doubt her future becoming more than her present circumstances. After applying and being accepted to the Board, Chala became proud and happy to have such an opportunity to make change and feel important. Chala has said this about the Youth Justice Board: "I thank God every day for my opportunities. To be able to make a change makes me happy, and I am very thankful for life and everything that comes my way."

## CHRISTEL

Christel is a 17-year-old New Yorker of Central-African and French descent. She is a senior at Broome Street Academy Charter High School in SoHo and has had a knack for politics and debate since she can remember. Because of this, Christel decided to join the Youth Justice Board. In the fall, Christel plans on studying international relations and journalism in college. In her spare time, Christel is a journalist and consultant for two online

magazines. She loves to read, watch and analyze films, and go to museums.

#### **GABRIELLA**

Gabriella is currently a junior at Friends Seminary. She joined the Youth Justice Board to learn more about youth in the criminal justice system and considers the Youth Justice Board an excellent way for young people to implement change. Gabriella plans to attend college and continue to work on improving the justice system.

#### **GAYENA**

Gayena is 17-years-old and is a junior at the High School for Public Service in Brooklyn. She enjoys reading, traveling, volunteering, trying new foods, and hanging out with her friends. Gayena decided to join the Youth Justice Board because she felt that the voices of youth were unheard, especially when it comes to issues pertaining to youth. She thought that was unfair and wanted to help make a difference. Gayena hopes that other young people will realize that their voices and opinions are important, and that they should be taken seriously because they matter. Gayena aspires to become a pediatrician and later volunteer with Doctors Without Borders.

#### **GUSTAVO**

Gustavo is a 18-year-old from East New York, Brooklyn. He attends Urban Assembly School of Music and Art in Downtown Brooklyn and is a senior, excited for the next step in his life: college. His greatest passion is creating visual art through acrylic paintings and creating his

own typography. Gustavo has had some negative and positive experiences but thanks to that he is the young man he is today. He wants to show New York City how engaged and powerful our young minds are when working to make a difference. Gustavo is very motivated, outgoing, and enjoys being physically active.

#### **JOESHIN**

Joeshin is 15-years-old and attends the Renaissance Charter School in Jackson Heights. He enjoys browsing social media and prides himself on being open to new adventures. Joeshin joined the Youth Justice Board because he thought that it would be a great way to make a difference in youths' and adults' lives. "I like to help people and resolve conflict between two parties." Joeshin plans on attending college and becoming a guidance counselor for a high school.

#### **KIANA**

Kiana is a junior at Edward R. Murrow High School in Brooklyn, New York. Kiana is an active participant not only in her community but in her school as well. Kiana involves herself in numerous outside hobbies, such as music production, singing in her church choir, tutoring youth from Pre-K through 5th grade, and volunteering at homeless shelters. She is also a member of her student government in school, and helps influence school policy, regulate a wide range of student activities, encourage student activism, and coordinate various events to better her school. Kiana joined Youth Justice Board to get involved in an organization that through the Youth Justice Board program. She

would help her understand policies that govern the city while allowing her to be a voice for her peers to speak out about the problems youth encounter every day. Kiana wants to be a teacher in the near future.

#### **LOUSINDA**

Lousinda is currently a high school senior, planning to attend college in the fall semester of 2016. At 17-years-old she has had a very adventurous life. She enjoys being extremely athletic, and devoted the past six years to playing basketball on an organized team. She joined the Youth Justice Board with intentions of advocating for youth and having a say in police relations with youth. Lousinda has always been interested in public relations and politics. She said, “the Youth Justice Board gave me a voice I didn’t know I had.” In the future, Lousinda hopes to apply the skills she learned through this program to her college career and life beyond college. She also sees herself advancing in the workforce and making a difference. “Everything is attainable as long as I keep my focus on it; nothing’s impossible.”

#### **NAUSHIN**

Naushin is an 18-year-old senior at Hillcrest High School in Jamaica, New York. She realized she always wanted to bring positive changes to individual lives. After learning how things work in society, she decided her change could come through being part of the Youth Justice Board. Naushin said, “I want my opinion to reach out to government to make a difference in our communities.” She believes youth opinion

should matter because young people are the future, and the Youth Justice Board gives her the opportunity to let her voice be heard.

#### **NEIL**

Neil is a 16-year-old sophomore attending Brooklyn Technical High School. Neil plays soccer and is on the mock-trial team. He joined the Youth Justice Board in order to make a difference with the way youth are treated as members of today’s society, especially throughout New York City. “I’ve lived here all my life and I’ve seen where modifications can be made to improve my city—just imagine NYC taking small steps towards being a utopia for youth.” In the future, Neil hopes to become a district attorney to address legal issues that occur throughout New York City. He wants to be the district attorney that the city needs, not the district attorney that the city deserves.

#### **STEPHANIE**

Stephanie currently attends Manhattan Early College School for Advertising. She is 15-years-old and loves to dance, act, and sing. Stephanie believes that most teens are overwhelmed by all the issues they are facing today and won’t speak up, which led her to take the initiative to become a part of the Youth Justice Board. After this program, she plans to continue joining as many programs that give youth a voice in change as she can. Stephanie’s future revolves around the arts but she is also interested in becoming a defense attorney, a position she feels is the right fit for her as a result of the knowledge she has gained

is currently working on her image as an artist writing songs, but wants to continue to help youth.

**NICHOLAS CHUNG**  
**PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

Nicholas Chung is the Youth Justice Board program coordinator at the Center for Court Innovation. He has also worked on the Adolescent Diversion Program at the Staten Island Youth Justice Center. He is interested in improving access to meaningful civic engagement and social change through design-thinking and behavioral science. He earned his B.A. from Brown University and his M.A. from Columbia University.

**LISA-MARIE WILLIAMS**  
**PROGRAM ASSOCIATE**

Lisa-Marie Williams is the program associate for both the Youth Justice Board and Youth Justice Programs at the Center. Prior to joining the Center for Court Innovation, she led Mayor Bloomberg's Service in Schools initiative with the New York City Department of Education, assisting teachers around the city in integrating service-learning into their classroom curriculum. As program coordinator, Lisa-Marie was able to help expand the number of New York City students involved in community service, reaching 600,000 students between 2011 and 2012. She is passionate about justice reform, youth development, and sustainability planning for a better future for generations to come. Lisa-Marie earned her Bachelor's in forensic psychology with a minor

in criminology. She also holds a Master's in Public Administration through John Jay College's National Online Inspector General Program with a concentration in inspection and oversight.

**MARY WALLE**  
**PUBLIC ALLY**

Mary Walle is the Youth Justice Board Public Ally at the Center for Court Innovation. As an AmeriCorps member in Public Allies New York, she has developed her skills in program design and facilitation. Prior to joining the Center for Court Innovation, Mary worked with the New York Immigration Coalition, expanding outreach efforts to undocumented New Yorkers through the city-wide DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) Initiative. She is passionate about asset-focused individual and community development to create meaningful social change. She earned her B.A. in History with a minor in community action and social change from the University of Michigan. Mary dedicates her work with the Youth Justice Board to the men and boys with whom she co-created original theatre through the Prison Creative Arts Project at her alma mater.

# Appendix 1: Research Design

Prior to conducting their fieldwork, Youth Justice Board members learned about the criminal justice system and how it applies to 16–24 year-olds in New York City. Members also received training in skills such as interviewing, teamwork, and focus group facilitation.

## INTERVIEWS

The Youth Justice Board met with a wide range of New York City stakeholders and community leaders. Members, working in small groups, conducted 21 interviews with 33 participants:

### Brooklyn Defender Services

- Amy Albert, Coordinator, Brooklyn Adolescent Representation Team
- Molly Gallivan, Staff Attorney, Brooklyn Adolescent Representation Team
- Lisa Salvatore, Supervising Attorney, Brooklyn Adolescent Representation Team

### Center for Court Innovation

- Linda Baird, Associate Director, Youth Justice Programs
- Raye Barbieri, Senior Director, Youth and Community Programs and Planning
- Courtney Bryan, Director of Criminal Justice Operations
- Emily Gold LaGratta, Deputy Director, Training and Technical Assistance
- Manuel Larino, Senior Resource/DWI Coordinator, Bronx Community Solutions

- John Megaw, Deputy Project Director, Harlem Community Justice Center
- Rebecca Stahl, Youth Justice Coordinator, Bronx Community Solutions

### Fortune Society

- Mariana Rios, Director of Alternative to Incarceration
- Amanda Berman, Senior Director, Court Advocacy

### John Jay College of Criminal Justice

- Jeffrey Coots, Project Manager, From Punishment to Public Health

### Legal-Aid Society

- Irwin Shaw, Attorney-in-Charge, Manhattan Office

### New York City Criminal Court

- Justin Barry, Chief Clerk, Counsel to Administrative Judge, and Citywide Drug Treatment Court Coordinator

### New York City Department of Education

- Joshua Laub, Director of Youth Development, District 88

### New York City Police Department

- Keoma Boone, Community Affairs Officer, 73rd Precinct
- Josh Carvajal, Detective, Juvenile Robbery Intervention Program, 73rd Precinct
- Ramon Garcia, Assistant Commissioner, School Safety Division

- Carl Haymer, Detective, Juvenile Robbery Intervention Program, 73rd Precinct
- Susan Herman, Deputy Commissioner, Collaborative Policing
- Joanne Jaffe, Chief, Community Affairs Bureau
- Louise Johnson, Deputy Director, School Safety Division
- Justin Lenz, Inspector, 101st Precinct
- Jesus Pinto, Deputy Inspector, Community Affairs Bureau
- Angel Rodriguez, Youth Officer, 73rd Precinct
- Beatrice Shafidiya, Sergeant, Juvenile Robbery Intervention Program/Early Diversion Pilot, 73rd Precinct
- Frank Vega, Deputy Chief, Community Affairs Bureau

#### **New York County District Attorney's Office**

- Nitin Savur, Assistant District Attorney
- Margaret Wolk, Deputy Director of Strategic Planning

#### **New York State Unified Court System**

- Hon. Alex Calabrese, Judge, Red Hook Community Justice Center
- Hon. George A. Grasso, Supervising Judge, New York City

#### **Times Square Alliance**

- Tom Harris, Sr. Vice President, Security and Operations

#### **FOCUS GROUPS**

The Youth Justice Board designed, recruited for, and ran three focus groups for young people who have been arrested and had participated in diversion programs. Nine young people participated in the focus groups.

#### **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 expanding diversion and improving police-youth relations across New York City. 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 city leaders and police officers in New York City 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 youth and the police. The recommendations presented in this report are the Board's final product for the 2014-2015 year.

# Appendix 2: The Youth Justice Board Program

## THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD

Launched by the Center for Court Innovation in 2004, 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 youth 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

Each program cycle, a topic of study is selected after surveying youth and policymakers about relevant and timely issues. Topics that the Board has studied include: juvenile re-entry; school safety; the permanency planning process for youth in foster care; juvenile alternative to detention programs; youth crime; and school truancy. A four-phase curriculum builds 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, 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 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 Families, 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.

For more information and  
to download the Youth Justice Board's publications,  
please visit:  
[www.courtinnovation.org/yjb](http://www.courtinnovation.org/yjb)

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