

FAITH IN THEIR FUTURES:

THE YOUTH AND CONGREGATIONS IN PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM OF THE KINGS COUNTY (BROOKLYN, NY)
DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE



NATIONAL FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE FIELD REPORT SERIES

SUSAN BLANK AND FRED DAVIE

OJDP PVP A PUBLICATION OF PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES

This report was prepared by Public/Private Ventures. It was supported by cooperative agreement No. 2000-MU-FX-K023 with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

Points of view or opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.

FAITH IN THEIR FUTURES:

THE YOUTH AND CONGREGATIONS IN PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM OF THE KINGS COUNTY (BROOKLYN, NY)
DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE



NATIONAL FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE FIELD REPORT SERIES

SUSAN BLANK AND FRED DAVIE

OJDP PVP A PUBLICATION OF PUBLIC/PRIVATE VENTURES

Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

Susan Blank is an independent consultant specializing in writing, editing and program documentation for nonprofit organizations. Fred Davie is P/PV's Vice President for Public Policy and Community Partnerships.

Board of Directors

Siobhan Nicolau, Chair
President
Hispanic Policy Development Project

Gary Walker
President
Public/Private Ventures

Amalia Betanzos
President
Wildcat Service Corporation

Ywonne Chan
Principal
Vaughn Learning Center

Mitchell S. Fromstein
Chairman Emeritus
Manpower Inc.

Christine L. James-Brown
President
United Way of Southeastern Pennsylvania

John A. Mayer, Jr.
Retired, Chief Financial Officer
J.P. Morgan & Co.

Matthew McGuire
Vice President
Ariel Capital Management, Inc.

Maurice Lim Miller
Director
Family Independence Initiative

Anne Hodges Morgan
Consultant to Foundations

Marion Pines
Senior Fellow
Institute for Policy Studies
Johns Hopkins University

Cay Stratton
Director
National Employment Panel,
London, U.K.

William Julius Wilson
Lewis P. and Linda L. Geysler
University Professor
Harvard University

Research Advisory Committee

Jacquelynne S. Eccles, Chair
University of Michigan

Ronald Ferguson
Kennedy School of Government

Robinson Hollister
Swarthmore College

Alan Krueger
Princeton University

Reed Larson
University of Illinois

Milbrey W. McLaughlin
Stanford University

Katherine S. Newman
Kennedy School of Government

Laurence Steinberg
Temple University

Thomas Weisner
UCLA

Acknowledgments

We thank Charles J. Hynes, Brooklyn’s District Attorney, for his commitment to making neighborhoods safe and providing youth with alternative sentencing programs—and for being bold and creative enough to initiate the Youth and Congregations in Partnership (YCP) project. It would have been impossible to write the case study without the tireless help of Joan Gabbidon, Senior Deputy District Attorney, and Deborah Lashley, Executive Assistant District Attorney, who, along with dedicated YCP social workers and support staff, are key to the execution of YCP and the community’s involvement in the project. We are grateful for all the hours Joan and Deborah spent answering questions, providing materials, reading drafts and meeting over conference calls to help produce this report.

We also thank members and staff of the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate Commerce, Justice and State Appropriations Subcommittees, who have been strong supporters of P/PV’s National Faith-Based Initiative (NFBI)—the demonstration in which the Brooklyn program participates. NFBI staff at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), who manage the federal share of the NFBI—including Gwendolyn Dilworth, Program Officer, J. Robert Flores, Administrator, and William L. Woodruff, Deputy Administrator—deserve special thanks for their support, assistance and dedication to this initiative.

We also thank the philanthropic community for its support: The Ford Foundation, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Pinkerton Foundation, and Atlantic Philanthropies.

At P/PV, sincere thanks to Jodina Hicks, who coordinated the meetings, conferences and information-gathering that laid the groundwork for the case study. Wendy Egelkamp developed the original concept and outline for the report. While she is no longer at P/PV, her influence on YCP and this case study remains central to our work. We also appreciate important contributions from others at P/PV: Shawn Mooring, who worked on early drafts of the outlines for the case study; Karen Walker, Shawn Bauldry, Molly Bradshaw and Tracey Hartmann, who managed and implemented data collection and tracking, adding to our ability to profile certain aspects of the program; and Gary Walker and Robert Penn, who offered support and valuable feedback on the final drafts. Alvia Branch and her staff at Branch Associates conducted extensive research and data collection for YCP, and Dr. Branch’s report, *Faith and Action*, provided direction for the case study.

We hope that the many NFBI supporters, along with readers of this report from the criminal justice and service provider communities, will find that its information confirms the wisdom and utility of investing in services for high-risk youth.

Contents

I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. ORIGINS OF THE YOUTH AND CONGREGATIONS IN PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM	5
III. THE PROGRAM AT A GLANCE	9
IV. THE ARCHITECTURE OF YCP	13
V. THE MENTORING EXPERIENCE	25
VI. CONCLUSIONS	31
ENDNOTES	33
APPENDIX: SITES AND LEAD AGENCIES IN THE NATIONAL FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE FOR HIGH-RISK YOUTH	35



“At first, he would sit and sulk and not talk to us, but now we’ve gotten to know him, he’s blossoming, he laughs and talks.” The church volunteer, a nurse and mother, reflects on her experience with a 17-year-old juvenile, who had been arrested for theft and whom she and four other fellow church members have adopted as a mentee. One of the mentors is an engineer and helps the young man with his math; another, who is Haitian, works with him on French—and all of the volunteers have been struggling to have him show up for sessions with homework in hand. This youth is the fourth mentee with whom the congregation has worked, so volunteers have learned to expect uneven progress. “Sometimes,” says the nurse, “it’s frustrating when you can’t reach the kids, but then we reassess our approach and figure something out.”

INTRODUCTION

This report is about an innovative local program, operated by the Kings County (Brooklyn, New York) District Attorney's Office, which aims to reduce criminal recidivism, subsequent adult criminality and self-destructive behaviors among young offenders. As its name suggests, Youth and Congregations in Partnership (YCP) relies heavily on religious organizations to work with young people. YCP's central activity, which is reinforced by other services, is mentoring of youth ages 13 to 19 by adult volunteers recruited from places of worship in Brooklyn. While YCP is defined as nonsectarian and forbids congregational proselytizing of youth, the program is built on a partnership between the District Attorney's office and local faith-based organizations.

Established in 1997, YCP has since 2000 been part of the National Faith-Based Initiative for High-Risk Youth (NFBI), a multisite demonstration program developed and managed by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV). The impetus for the demonstration was P/PV's interest in exploring whether faith-based organizations could become more consistently engaged as sources of help and guidance for youth who have been involved in criminal activity. In part, this interest arose out of a concern about the lack of creative thinking on the problems of such youth at a time when juvenile crime policy was becoming increasingly punitive. In addition, P/PV was aware of the assets and potential of faith-based organizations to help solve these problems. For example, while many social service agencies and other institutions have left the most distressed low-income communities, religious congregations remain a significant presence in these neighborhoods.

One model from the 1990s—a Boston, Massachusetts, group called the Boston Ten Point Coalition—suggested that religious organizations could make a difference in preventing juvenile delinquency. This broad-based ministry of African American religious groups reached out to gang members, stood with youth at their probation hearings and offered services to young people who seemed to deserve or need a second chance. Along with efforts of police and probation departments and other city agencies (partners with which the Ten Point Coalition worked closely), the Coalition is credited with having helped to bring about a dramatic reduction of Boston's crime rates in the mid-1990s.

To find out whether a multisite, faith-based project could build on experiences such as the one in Boston, P/PV consulted extensively with religious leaders, and with representatives of juvenile justice and law enforcement agencies, community-based organizations, public school systems and foundations. Based on the encouraging results of those dialogues, P/PV decided to undertake a demonstration project that would further the understanding of the role that faith-based organizations can play in meeting the needs of youth at high risk of living lives marked by crime and violence.

Launched in 1998, the NFBI currently includes initiatives in 12 sites around the country (see Appendix for details). P/PV provides technical assistance to the sites and is carrying out research to examine the operational issues they face and the progress they make in meeting their goals.

While P/PV welcomed variation in sites' modes of service delivery, all programs were expected to reflect the following four features:

- **A focus on high-risk youth.** Sites agreed to target youth already involved in criminal or violent activities or considered likely candidates for such behavior.
- **Services appropriate for high-risk youth.** Sites agreed to develop programs with one or more of the following elements: mentoring, education and employment-readiness training.
- **Partnerships among faith-based institutions.** Sites were encouraged to include congregations from different faiths and denominations as partners. They were also expected to include small to mid-sized churches located in the target communities and to draw a significant proportion of their membership from the community residents.
- **Partnerships with the justice community.** Religious organizations were expected to develop relationships with juvenile justice and/or law enforcement agencies.

YCP fits these criteria, but differs from its fellow demonstration sites in one way. As indicated by the wording of the last bullet listed above (*Partnerships with the justice community*), P/PV expected that the originators of the projects would be faith-based organizations, which would then reach out to the justice community. But the source of YCP was a criminal justice agency, the Kings County District Attorney's Office, which then went on to recruit religious congregations to work with youth. P/PV decided that the variation should not preclude YCP from joining the demonstration. YCP's point of origin seemed less important than the fact that the program was characterized by the same three-way collaboration found in the other demonstration sites—a relationship that brings together faith-based institutions, community institutions and law enforcement agencies.

As YCP unfolded, both P/PV and the District Attorney's Office felt that a summary of the program's work and lessons would be of interest to a number of different audiences; these include practitioners in other demonstration sites and in similar programs, faith-based and other organizations that focus on high-risk youth, funders of such programs, public officials—and perhaps the most important audience, officials in the criminal justice system.

The case study presented here aims to give a clear picture of YCP to each of these audiences. Its main sources are extensive written information on the program, including P/PV site reports, as well as published and unpublished materials from YCP, and a series of interviews with YCP's executive director and program manager.

The church members get together for approximately an hour and a half each week with a teen who has been arrested for robbery. When they first began working with him, they discovered that he didn't know his multiplication tables. They have spent a great deal of time tutoring him in basic math, but what broke the ice was tennis games. "He was hesitant at first," says one of the mentors, "but I think I broke that down very quickly by getting him into sports...That got us to common ground."



ORIGINS OF THE YOUTH AND CONGREGATIONS IN PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

The high-risk juvenile offenders that YCP serves are a small percentage of all youth in Brooklyn, but the outlook for these young people is particularly bleak. According to a 1999 study, 77 percent of Brooklyn juveniles released from the custody of the New York State Division for Youth—now the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS)—were rearrested within 30 months of their release, over half for a violent felony.¹ A national study from the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) indicates a 56 percent recidivism rate for youth followed in a court records study of juvenile offenders in Arizona and Utah,² and the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice website³ reports that the 1998 recidivism rate for juveniles a year after release from a delinquency treatment program was 42 percent.⁴

YCP represents a response from within the criminal justice system to such high rates of recidivism. The Kings County District Attorney's Office's experience with young offenders convinced staff that youth who live in areas marked by economic deprivation and crime and who face a variety of pressures, such as school difficulties, gang culture, family instability and heavy peer pressure, are particularly vulnerable to committing crimes. By trying to counteract some of these negative patterns and influences, YCP aims to help adjudicated youth start on a path to productive adulthood.

While YCP reflects the ideas of many different individuals in Brooklyn's criminal justice system and faith-based communities, the program is strongly identified with the outlook of one individual—Charles J. Hynes, the Kings County District Attorney, who established YCP. In 1990, when Hynes assumed the position of District Attorney, Brooklyn was the fifth most violent municipality in the country, and both the New York metropolitan area and the country as a whole were witnessing a rapid increase in the number of public resources invested in the criminal justice system. Nevertheless, Hynes thought that society could not “prison build” its way to public safety. Moreover, he felt that his Catholic faith obligated him to try to give people a second chance.⁵

Prompted by these convictions, Hynes has led the Kings County District Attorney's Office in developing a number of intervention and prevention programs designed to short-circuit crime. Hynes says he has sometimes been criticized for this orientation

by criminal justice colleagues and occasionally in the press, but he is confident that his approach is the right one—namely, a district attorney’s office with a commitment to intervention and prevention as well as prosecution.

As part of his overall effort to build prevention capacity in Brooklyn, Hynes sought to develop programs that would meet the special needs of young offenders.⁶ In 1996, he turned to Senior Deputy District Attorney Joan Gabbidon to assist him. With Hynes then the President of the National District Attorneys’ Association, Gabbidon helped that organization develop a May 1997 Association-sponsored conference that focused on juvenile crime prevention. The meeting brought together experts from around the country to share information on leading prevention strategies. Gabbidon, who, like Hynes, is a strong supporter of intervention and prevention efforts, heard her views endorsed at the conference. “These experts knew jail alone was not the answer,” she recalls. “They affirmed that many of these young people could be rehabilitated if they were given additional support.”

One specific intervention that influenced the thinking of Hynes and Gabbidon was a Fort Wayne, Indiana, program, One Church, One Offender, which calls on congregations to adopt an ex-offender. While Hynes and Gabbidon were aware that the program model would need to be modified to serve youth rather than adults, they were attracted to its basic idea of establishing a link between a congregation and an offender.

To assist Gabbidon in shaping what would become the YCP model, Deborah Lashley, an Executive Assistant District Attorney and Chief of the Juvenile Crimes Bureau, was made part of the YCP team.⁷ Lashley, who later became responsible for the day-to-day operations of YCP, describes some of the frustration she has felt in watching youth come through the criminal justice system:

In some cases, I would see young people appear for a hearing without benefit of parents or guardians. It wasn’t necessarily that the parents didn’t care, but they may have been working long hours or overwhelmed with other problems. I felt that many of these youth needed extra supervision or care or we’d see them back in court.

With funding from the New York Community Trust, the District Attorney’s Office initiated YCP as a pilot project in 1997. YCP’s first year was primarily devoted to planning—which included drafting and redrafting of program guidelines on such complex issues as church/state separation and participation requirements—and to engaging key constituencies.

Early on, it was clear that two constituencies critical to implementing the program were the congregations that would be asked to commit serious volunteer efforts to mentoring and the criminal justice officials who would need to support the idea of diverting adjudicated youth to YCP. Planners therefore consulted regularly with an ad hoc YCP committee of representatives of the criminal justice system, including representatives from the Legal Aid Society, the probation department and judges. “We were aware,” says Joan Gabbidon, “that judges would not refer youth to YCP unless they understood it.”

The District Attorney's Office also invited congregations into the planning process. "When you include people in planning," Gabbidon observes, "they don't feel you've just made up some program and decided to force it on them."

By 1998, YCP had recruited 13 congregations to begin mentoring. The program was ready for operations.



THE PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

Mentoring is the backbone of YCP.

It is offered to youth for one year and is provided by teams of volunteers, known as “committees,” from participating congregations. Mentors on a committee are matched with a youth, typically at a three-to-one ratio.⁸ Youth usually meet with the mentors two or three times per week.

Both the mentor/mentee ratio and the frequency with which adults and youth meet are higher than in standard mentoring programs, where the match is typically one-on-one and the schedule for mentoring sessions is at best once a week and often only once or twice a month. These features of YCP reflect the belief that the high-risk youth who participate in the program need an unusually intensive intervention to help them turn their lives around.

Rather than bringing in young people and congregations at set times, the District Attorney’s Office admits them to YCP on a rolling basis. Youth are referred to the program—typically by individuals involved in the criminal justice system—and selected for participation by the District Attorney’s Office.

Approximately 90 percent of youth selected for the program have been involved with the criminal justice system, and of that group, again about 90 percent have been arrested for a felony charge.⁹ Prospective enrollees can be referred to YCP at various stages of involvement with the criminal justice system—for example, at a point when they have been charged, during presentencing, or when they are already on probation.

YCP believes that the teens it does accept have strong needs for intensive mentoring to keep them from establishing a pattern of criminal activity. The mentoring relationship is designed to help youth reach goals that will further their rehabilitation. YCP social workers on the District Attorney’s staff screen and select prospective mentors who come forward from participating congregations and train the new volunteers. Once new participants are matched with mentor committees, the YCP social workers review program rules with the youth and, whenever possible, with their parents and guardians, and hold discussions with the mentors, parents and participants about the goals the youth should achieve. Following these initial discussions, youth sign contracts that specify the behavior they will follow and goals they

will pursue in YCP. Some contract stipulations are used routinely—for example, obeying program rules and attending school regularly. Others, such as treating parents more respectfully or getting to meetings on time, reflect goals that have been identified as important for individual youth.

YCP social workers oversee the mentors' work and provide case management services to youth and their parents. With clearances from the New York City Department of Education, the social workers also monitor participants' school performance and attendance. Using both referrals and its own resources, YCP provides youth and their families with additional services as needed, including education and career planning, family counseling, substance abuse treatment, recreational and arts experiences, and workshops for parents. YCP also sponsors mandatory group community service activities for participants.

To graduate from YCP, participants must stay in the program for one year, and during that time they must comply with the conditions that have been set for their participation. Besides following guidelines for YCP activities, cooperation can be defined to include meeting such probationary conditions as school attendance or participation in treatment programs. When youth do not comply, sanctions are applied. For example, participants may be given stricter curfews, or if they have been skipping school, they may be required to sign into every class. Sometimes a sanction can take the form of a service referral. For instance, a teen identified by a mentor or social worker as a substance abuser may be told that to stay in YCP, he or she must enroll in a drug treatment program. When youth have persistent patterns of not meeting program conditions, YCP reports back to the court, which then may impose additional restrictions on the youth.

On satisfactory completion of YCP, youth may have their sentences reduced, be placed on probation or have their cases dismissed, with decisions based on individual behavior and circumstances. YCP social workers follow up with youth for one year after they graduate from the program. Although mentors are not required to maintain a relationship with mentees after the year is over, they are encouraged to do so.

YCP'S RECORD

Of the 144 youth enrolled in YCP by late summer 2003, only 20 percent (31) were asked to leave the program because they had violated its guidelines. Another 34 left before completion for a variety of reasons that were not negative, including moving away from Brooklyn and being referred by YCP staff to other programs that were considered more appropriate for them based on specific needs. Of the remaining 79, 40 completed the full program year, and 39 were still enrolled. P/PV's experience with completion rates in interventions for high-risk youth suggests that the YCP rates are very solid.

Because YCP has not been examined by an experimental research study using a control or comparison group, there is no definitive research on whether it prevents youth from returning to the criminal justice system. However, YCP does track the status of graduates for at least a year after they leave the program. YCP graduates' recidivism rates are less than 25 percent, which compares very favorably with rates in New York and other states, ranging from 42 to 77 percent, as cited earlier in this chapter.

Other information about YCP graduates indicates that approximately 30 percent are either in school, attending a GED program or pursuing vocational training. Some 40 percent are working at full- or part-time jobs, while approximately 30 percent have graduated from high school and 15 percent are in college.¹⁰

YCP also has a good record with mentors: Seventy-five percent fulfill their one-year commitment, a "dedication rate" that favorably compares to all other mentoring programs P/PV has studied.



THE ARCHITECTURE OF YCP

RECRUITMENT OF CONGREGATIONS

Recruitment of congregations into YCP has been a labor-intensive process of relationship building. By early 2003 YCP had engaged 65 congregations in mentoring, with some 35 to 40 of them active at any one time.¹¹

As a first step in the recruiting process, the District Attorney's Office sends mass mailings to virtually all Brooklyn congregations. (During the pilot year, approximately 2,000 letters were sent.) Besides these standard letters of introduction, copies of the YCP newsletter, which is issued periodically, are also mailed to congregations. Mailings are followed by phone calls and scheduling of initial meetings with receptive pastors.

Staff share responsibilities for recruitment visits, but mainly they are conducted by Gabbidon and Lashley, who point out that pastors and their congregations see their presence as a sign that YCP is a high priority for the District Attorney and his office.

In structuring visits, staff respect pastors' schedules and concerns. Rather than asking a clergyperson to meet them at the District Attorney's Office, they travel to the congregation. Visits often take place on nights or weekends, and, in conjunction with their presentations, staff will sometimes attend services.

Typically, interested pastors delegate further exploration of YCP to one of their staff members or to a prospective volunteer or group of volunteers, and the District Attorney's staff schedule additional orientation meetings with those individuals. In all, there is at least one person in the District Attorney's Office who makes a YCP congregational orientation visit on almost any given week.

In addition to encouraging new congregations to join YCP, staff contact congregations already mentoring one youth to encourage them to take on a second, either after the youth has graduated or—if there is volunteer capacity to commit to more than one participant—while the congregation is still working with the first youth. Staff also reach out to congregations that have “taken a rest” after one mentoring experience to discuss their interest in resuming. A database allows staff to track the history of all recruitment contacts they have had with congregations through the various stages of the process.

Staff are also alert to possibilities for word-of-mouth recruitment. Court officials and even parents of adjudicated youth have brought YCP to the attention of their congregations. In addition, YCP staff comb their own personal and professional contacts to attract congregations to the program. For example, because the District Attorney's Office tries to be in close touch with Brooklyn clergy about a variety of issues, staff make it a point to talk with them about YCP when they approach the District Attorney's Office about other matters. In addition, many pastors and other people interested in the needs of high-risk youth have attended YCP's annual Brooklyn education outreach conferences, which focus on issues such as girls in the criminal justice system, youth with disabilities and other community outreach topics.

Occasionally, congregations are ready to join after a brief introduction to YCP, but "most don't immediately sign on the dotted line," notes Joan Gabbidon. Because the District Attorney's Office is known to many members of the religious community, some pastors are predisposed to a district attorney-sponsored program. But there are also doubts: Will involvement with the program lead the congregation to become an arm of the police or the law enforcement system? Will congregations be able to relate to or handle the young people assigned to them? And what about the level of effort that is called for?

Yet another source of hesitation, says Deborah Lashley, is "that many religious institutions...have their own programs, so you have to convince them why they should join someone else's." Gabbidon describes how she often makes the case that YCP is a natural extension, not a replacement, of a congregation's existing activities. "I say to them, 'You are already doing this work. We're just asking you to do it more systematically.'"

Clearly, the success of the recruitment depends on persistence. In one recruitment experience, the District Attorney's staff held six separate meetings with a church to discuss the possibility of the congregation joining YCP. For a year, there was no word about a final decision, but then the church's pastor called to say that the church had 10 volunteers ready to mentor. "Sometimes all of a sudden something clicks," says Gabbidon.

Of the 65 congregations that have responded to YCP recruitment efforts, the largest number—approximately 85 percent—represent a variety of Protestant denominations. Of the others, approximately 10 percent are Catholic and 5 percent non-Christian.¹² Most YCP congregations have been predominantly African American; some have had a mainly Latino membership, although YCP is working to attract more churches with high concentrations of Latino congregants.

SELECTING YCP PARTICIPANTS AND MATCHING THEM WITH CONGREGATIONS

For youth, the path to YCP is typically through the court. Judges, attorneys—both from the defense bar and the District Attorney’s Office—and sometimes probation officers refer prospective participants to the program. Occasionally, referrals also come from other sources, such as social service agencies and truancy programs. Regardless of the referral source, the judge and Assistant District Attorney assigned to the case, parents or guardians, and the youth themselves must all agree to a YCP application.

Once youth are referred, YCP social workers conduct psychosocial assessments of them and interview their parents or guardians. In screening candidates for participation, YCP also reviews available materials from the courts, agencies with information about the youth and the Department of Education. Enrollees are selected based on these assessments, sources—such as probation reports, when available—and other feedback from consultations with members of the legal community who have been in contact with the youth.

Overall, approximately half the youth initially referred to YCP have been selected to participate in the program. As noted earlier, when choosing participants, the District Attorney’s Office disqualifies youth with patterns of violent crimes or serious mental illness. Staff also look for attitudes that signal youth are open to change and feel some remorse about their misdeeds. In the words of one of the District Attorney’s staff: “Admission of culpability is very, very important. The kids and parents who are in total denial don’t work out.”

One of the judges who works with YCP and gives the program very high marks nevertheless believes that it could “lighten up a little” in its admission criteria. In his opinion, a wider range of participants could benefit from YCP’s services. The District Attorney’s Office disagrees with the view that the program is overly selective, pointing out that most YCP youth have been charged with felonies and are typically characterized by other risks for poor outcomes, such as truancy, school failure, substance abuse and, for older youth, unemployment.

YCP staff decide which youth are assigned to which committees of new mentors. They weigh logistical factors, such as the convenience of a youth’s commute to a particular congregation, but they also take into account more intangible factors, such as teens’ specific needs and their cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and what is known about the personal styles of the new volunteers.

Although some matches are made very soon after youth are enrolled, most take more time—an approximate average of two months. Sometimes, staff delay the match for reasons related to the youth’s own situation—for example, he/she may be in the midst of an intensive educational testing and counseling or drug treatment program, or, as has happened on a few occasions, it may be unclear for awhile whether the youth’s family is moving away from New York City. Sometimes delays are caused by the search for a congregation that staff think is right for a particular youth—and underscoring

the congregational recruitment challenges, the need to do so can arise even when there are congregations already signed on because the waiting congregations turn out to be inconveniently located for the teen or otherwise not a good fit. During the time in which youth have enrolled in YCP but are as yet unmatched with mentors, they are monitored, assessed and counseled by YCP social workers, and sometimes receive other YCP services through referrals.

THE MAKING OF MENTORS

Screening Volunteers

Prospective mentors are usually identified by their pastor or fellow congregation members, although some approach the District Attorney's Office directly. Once prospective mentors come forward, the District Attorney's Office conducts a screening, which includes solicitation of references, fingerprinting and a records check to make certain volunteers have no history of child or sexual abuse. Other past crimes do not automatically exclude volunteers from mentoring. Instead, the District Attorney's Office takes into account the nature of the crimes, when they were committed and what has since happened in the candidates' lives.

An interview of the prospective volunteer is also a part of the screening process. The interviews are one way to identify people who seem unsuited to YCP—for instance, because they are really unprepared to make the time commitment involved, because they lack patience or seem too inclined to lecture teens, or because they are uncomfortable with a program that prohibits proselytizing.

Mentor Training

New mentors must attend an all-day training session. Originally, YCP contracted with one of its major program partners, Community Counseling and Mediation, to facilitate these trainings, but now they are conducted by YCP social workers, who are themselves certified mentor trainers. The current arrangement has the advantage of starting to cement the mentor/social worker relationship, which is important to the successful functioning of the program. The training, which is interactive and uses role-plays, is based on a Big Brothers Big Sisters mentoring curriculum that has been modified to meet YCP's needs. Mentors are also given a handbook that focuses on mentors' frequently asked questions about their role in YCP, along with other useful materials.

One important topic covered in the training is the nonsectarian nature of the program. Mentors are instructed not to put any pressure on youth to attend religious services or other religious events. They are told that they should bring the youth to these events only if the young people themselves express a desire to participate.

YCP also offers mentors follow-up training, and all three follow-up sessions held over the past 12 months have been well attended. They cover topics that mentors say

are of interest to them, such as how to strengthen mentoring relationships and how young people are exposed to the gang culture. At a recent session on hip-hop culture, a young mentee helped the main speaker with a presentation.

Mentor Reporting

Mentors are expected to file regular written reports on mentees' progress. Program social workers, who are responsible for monitoring this process, observe that even some conscientious and successful mentors are slow to meet reporting deadlines, and that frequent prodding is necessary. As in all volunteer programs, it can be difficult to bring these unpaid workers into compliance with reporting requirements, which, to the volunteers, are secondary to the program's main activities.

Keeping Mentors Engaged

As noted, YCP has a high retention rate for mentors—75 percent. Undoubtedly, one important reason for this is simply that the mentoring experience satisfies the volunteers' desires to make a contribution. But program managers also point to structural aspects of YCP that they think help to maintain a stable source of mentors. To start, *screening and initial training* play a role in assembling a group of mentors suited to the program. Once mentors are on board, a *high-profile annual recognition event*—for example, a Brooklyn Museum of Art gala—helps to build morale by delivering the message that mentor efforts are appreciated. On a more routine basis, the *opportunities that YCP offers mentors to support one another* serve as an antidote to frustration and discouragement. The congregational committee structure provides a natural opening to peer interaction. Mentors have also welcomed the chance to share ideas and problems with fellow mentors from other congregations, both at the follow-up training sessions and, more informally, when they attend cross-congregational outings for YCP participants.

A final factor important in cementing mentors' relationship with YCP is *the high level of support they receive from the District Attorney's staff*. This aspect of the program is discussed in the next section.

The YCP Staff

Members of the YCP staff team work closely together, often sharing responsibility for tasks as they arise. Since the program's inception, Senior Deputy District Attorney Joan Gabbidon has served as YCP Project Director. Deborah Lashley, the Executive Assistant District Attorney for the Juvenile Crimes Bureau, who has also been with the program from the outset, is responsible for its day-to-day management. Another staff member of the District Attorney's Office, the First Deputy Bureau Chief for the Juvenile Crimes Bureau, provides help to YCP by screening cases and writing the program's newsletter. The staff also includes two social workers. One, Emeline Frasier, has been with the program from the outset and has played an important role in shaping its services. Two support staff members round out the YCP team.

The social workers, who each carry a separate caseload of YCP youth, serve as liaisons to youth, parents and mentors. Two of their responsibilities—mentor training workshops and monitoring mentor reports—have already been discussed, but they play additional roles in the program. For example, they often meet with mentors and make regular calls to them. In fact, the social workers are available to mentors on a 24-hour-a-day basis for advice and guidance. A P/PV site report observes that this high level of support gives mentors confidence to know that they are not “left...on their own to work with high-risk youth.”

Social workers also call and meet with youth on their caseloads, and as a result many youth become close to their social workers as well as their mentors. Social workers are the main liaisons to participants’ schools, where they monitor youth’s attendance and performance. Finally, as discussed in the next section, social workers make calls to parents and run parent workshops.

The credentials and level of experience of the YCP professional staff members give them strong formal qualifications for operating the program. For example, the attorneys who work on the program have been assigned to it from the highest levels of the District Attorney’s Office, while the social workers hold MSW (Masters of Social Work) degrees and, as noted, are certified mentor trainers.

“When one of our young women was in crisis, both the social worker and Deborah Lashley spent all night at the hospital with her...This is not a job for people only willing to work 9 to 5.”

—Joan Gabbidon, Senior Deputy District Attorney

Asked what other characteristics of the professional staff they have found most critical to operating YCP, Joan Gabbidon and Deborah Lashley cite:

- **Dedication.** YCP staff members strongly believe that the kind of high-risk youth who join YCP can be helped to rehabilitate themselves. Staff are willing to devote extra time and effort to the program, and often work after hours and on weekends.
- **Collective familiarity with relevant service systems.** Staff must be able to turn to a variety of service systems, such as the school and health and child welfare systems for help in meeting the needs of YCP youth and families. While individual YCP staff members have more expertise in some of these systems than others, overall the staff feel they can navigate all major systems that are important to participants.
- **Receptivity to the concerns and cultures of religious institutions.** Some YCP staff members, like the program itself, are secular in orientation, but they respect all religious outlooks. That respect is essential for working with congregations, which are the mainsprings of YCP mentoring.

REACHING OUT TO FAMILIES

YCP sees its young participants not as isolated figures but as part of families (or in some cases, foster families) who have a profound influence on the youth.¹³ One purpose of YCP's outreach to these families is simply *to offer them help* that makes it easier to provide good care to their children. Outreach is also intended to influence parents' attitudes. While many parents wholeheartedly welcome the YCP intervention, others are more ambivalent. A YCP social worker observes that there are parents who discourage or at least do not actively encourage the bonds between their children and mentors—sometimes because they fear the relationship signals that they themselves have done an inadequate job of child-rearing. For this and other reasons, the program tries to actively *enlist parents as its partners*.

The program has two systematic ways of connecting with families. First, one responsibility of YCP social workers is *to call parents regularly* to discuss how the youth is doing and offer help with problems. Frequency of calls varies: Some parents are called monthly, but when the social worker is helping with a complicated problem, such as facilitating a youth's transfer to a new school, there may be many calls in one week. Social workers are also receptive to offering referrals and guidance on family needs, such as a housing or court problem, which may concern other extended family members besides the youth or the immediate family.

Second, YCP sponsors *parent workshops*, which are held every other month and facilitated by program social workers. Topics of recent sessions have included sex education, family budgeting, building family relationships and how to recognize gang involvement of youth. One popular session invited attendees to play dramatic games focused on interpersonal issues.

Workshops, which provide baby-sitting, money for carfare and refreshments, have been well attended, with approximately 12 to 15 parents at each session, and a core group of approximately 10 who regularly attend. Initially, participants tend to be shy, but parents who continue to attend “come to see it as a haven,” according to Joan Gabbidon, who adds that they appreciate the interaction with other parents who share their concerns. Also, for some parents, the face-to-face contact with a social worker, whom they would otherwise know primarily through phone conversations, makes it easier to call for help.

THE YCP ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In operating YCP, the District Attorney's Office stands at the nexus of relationships between five sets of actors—youth, families, congregations, the criminal justice community and outside organizations that provide services to youth. Given the complexity—and sometimes delicacy—of these relationships, it is perhaps not surprising that the District Attorney's Office maintains the decision-making power for the program. But as YCP matured, the District Attorney's Office decided to establish an Advisory Committee that would give other groups a more systematic way of voicing opinions about program plans and directions.

The Advisory Committee, which has been meeting three times a year starting in early 2002, now consists of 15 members. They include mentors, pastors, two parents, two YCP graduates, a retired probation officer, a legal aid attorney and representatives of two organizations that work with YCP youth—ArtShare, an arts group for youth, and Community Counseling and Mediation, a mental health services provider. In light of this mixed representation, it has taken time for members to feel comfortable voicing their opinions, but increasingly they have been willing to speak out.

Thus far, the Advisory Committee's input has focused on two main areas: mentor recruitment and plans for program events. Members have recently made several suggestions about how to strengthen recruitment. One of the YCP graduates suggested that graduates accompany staff on recruitment visits. Another suggestion was to produce a program video. The District Attorney's Office plans to follow up on these recommendations.

One of the program events that members discussed was a picnic, originally planned only for mentors. The Advisory Committee endorsed expanding its scope by inviting youth and families to attend. YCP followed this advice, and the more inclusive picnic was a great success, giving the teens, mentors, family members of both teens and mentors, and YCP staff an opportunity to mingle in a warm, relaxed setting.

YCP RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY

A number of judges, attorneys, probation officers and other members of the criminal justice community who come in contact with YCP know and respect the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office and, therefore, have a higher level of trust in this intervention and prevention program than one operated outside their system. Deborah Lashley also observes that before YCP was established, some judges were already interested in securing more help from the faith-based community for the youth who came before their benches. She recalls a speech given by a judge at a kick-off celebration for YCP:

“He remembered that when he first began in Family Court he had a sort of Boys Town expectation that members of the clergy would come into his courtroom to plead on behalf of youth—but it seldom happened. He said that one reason he favored YCP is that he did think there was a stronger role for congregations to play.”

Now that the program has been established for some time, attorneys are increasingly receptive to YCP enrollments. But initially, some attorneys—like some of Hynes's staff members—were skeptical about whether young offenders would want to join a program that requires them to attend two or three weekly sessions when they knew that otherwise they might be held only to monthly probation meetings. However, as attorneys became convinced that YCP was a better alternative than probation or detention for their clients, they became key to convincing juveniles and their parents to consider the program.

Despite YCP's success in encouraging this kind of receptivity, program managers continually work at maintaining and strengthening the relationship between the criminal justice community and the program. Their ongoing efforts include:

- Inviting any judges with connections to YCP and its cases, along with probation office managers, defense attorneys and heads of the Legal Aid Division, to such YCP events as graduations and mentor appreciation celebrations;
- Ensuring that a YCP social worker appears in court to personally apprise a judge of the progress of a YCP case rather than sending only a written report on a youth;
- When appropriate, asking mentors to accompany social workers to these court appearances to provide additional information on the case;
- Sending materials that indicate progress being made by YCP youth—for example, pictures of community murals they helped to create or copies of their awards or certificates—to judges who supervise their cases;
- With the understanding that youth referred to YCP are subject to screenings, remaining receptive to all referrals judges make to the program;
- Suggesting other possible referrals for youth whom judges refer to YCP and who are not accepted into the program; and
- Using committee meetings within the criminal justice community as opportunities for YCP to share information about its work.

YCP PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

YCP has reached out to a variety of community partners and other organizations for help in serving participants. In most cases, YCP youth are referred selectively to these organizations, with program social workers identifying appropriate services for particular youth and following up with the participants and providers once referrals are made. When youth do not follow up on referrals, social workers talk to them about why an appointment was missed and offer to arrange transportation or otherwise remove obstacles that keep them from meeting their commitments. The social workers also often contact parents to discuss the situation, stressing, when appropriate, the importance of the youth keeping appointments in order to remain in good standing in YCP.

Some of YCP's partner groups focus on youth's mental health and developmental needs. The nonprofit group Community Counseling and Mediation (CCM) has been a YCP partner from the outset and has played a very important role in providing services to youth. CCM is on 24-hour-a-day call to YCP and is available to answer questions about mental health concerns from YCP mentors, youth and parents. Medical fellows from the Adolescent Medicine Department of Coney

Island Hospital provide lectures and workshops to YCP youth and parents on such topics as sexual development, HIV/AIDS and nutrition. The Brooklyn Center for Psychotherapy offers participants psychological assessments and treatment, including outpatient substance abuse services.

Other community partners assist with employment activities. YCP has established a special relationship with the nonresidential Brooklyn Center of the federally funded Job Corps program. Both P/PV and the Center for Community and Faith-Based Initiatives (CCFBI) of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) have assisted YCP in developing this relationship. Like YCP itself, P/PV and the CCFBI were aware that the kind of high-risk youth served by YCP typically are not accepted into Job Corps programs, and that in the relatively rare cases in which they do gain admission, it tends to be only after unusually lengthy screening processes.

To make it easier for YCP participants to take advantage of Job Corps career-readiness services, the Brooklyn Job Corps Center has formally affirmed its willingness to work with YCP youth and expedite their enrollment. In return, YCP has agreed to match non-YCP youth served by this Job Corps Center—including young people with no criminal justice involvement—with a YCP congregational mentor team.

In another facet of YCP's partnering activities, the nonprofit Magnolia Tree Earth Center has managed landscaping/horticultural community service projects for participants. The Magnolia Center is now planning an entrepreneurial program for YCP youth that will focus on such activities as sales of houseplants.

One of YCP's most enduring and important partners, the ArtShare Project, has provided services that have helped to shape and define the overall spirit of the program. Through ambitious community mural projects, ArtShare, a nonprofit organization that provides art therapy to court-involved youth through instruction in art techniques and design, has been responsible for developing and operating the mandatory group community service activities for virtually all YCP youth. This work is described in more detail in the next section.

The ArtShare Project

Thus far, almost 40 YCP participants have taken part in two ArtShare community mural projects, and a third project began in fall 2003. The first project, completed in 2000, was associated with a community revitalization initiative in Brooklyn's busy Myrtle Avenue shopping area, where the local Merchant's Association and the Design Department of Pratt Institute, a prominent art school close to the neighborhood, wanted to discourage graffiti. To prepare for the project, YCP youth worked alongside adult volunteers at graffiti removal. Then, over a five-month period, YCP participants devoted three to five hours every Saturday, first to a series of art lessons provided by ArtShare, and subsequently, under ArtShare's supervision, to the design and painting of a colorful 13' x 65' mural that is now prominently displayed in the neighborhood.

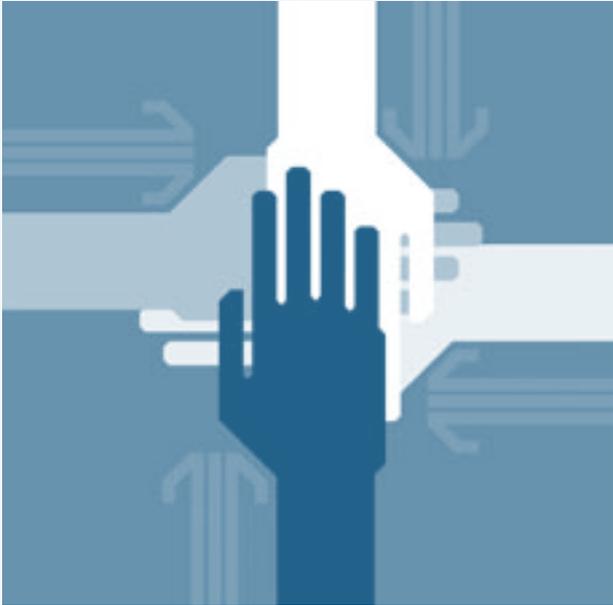
“I learned many things working with ArtShare. The best part was the friends I gained and learning that if I put my heart into something, anything is possible. I never thought about art before, but now I catch myself thinking about drawing more and more.”

—YCP participant

The second project began in October 2001, with 20 YCP teens joining residents of Brooklyn’s Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood in a massive full-day cleanup and bulb-planting of the area’s Crispus Attucks Park. Besides ArtShare and YCP, the event was sponsored by a variety of groups, including the YCP partner organization Magnolia Tree Earth Center. Over the following nine months, ArtShare guided YCP youth through a program of art lessons followed by the design and installation of a Crispus Attucks mural in the beautified park. For this second project, youth were called on to learn about Attucks and his contributions, and were asked to present their plans for the mural to the local community board and to revise them on the basis of feedback from members.

ArtShare projects are supervised by skilled staff, including the organization’s director, Ellen Lauter, who is a social worker and art therapist; another art therapist who is also a social worker; and a professional muralist. Both these staff members and YCP staff cite multiple benefits of the projects. They include opportunities for the youth to gain mastery of new skills and exposure to art; a chance for them to work cooperatively—which for many is a new or rare experience; and a way for community residents to interact positively with high-risk teens.

One quality of the projects that stands out is their seriousness. Besides being led by professionals, they last for many months, giving youth both a grounding in art techniques and time to get accustomed to working as a team. Moreover, knowing that while teens are required to attend they sometimes do fail to meet that commitment or meet it grudgingly, both ArtShare and YCP staff make special efforts to keep them engaged: During the past two projects, youth were given Friday-night and Saturday-morning reminder calls about their Saturday sessions, and were provided with breakfast or lunch at the sessions. Also, staff worked hard to establish an atmosphere that was both fun and caring. YCP staff visited the Saturday classes, conveying the message that they were proud of the teens’ accomplishments.



THE MENTORING EXPERIENCE

Mentoring relationships are at the heart of YCP. This chapter briefly describes the structure and dynamics of YCP's mentor/mentee relationships.

Perhaps the most fundamental point to underscore is that this group of youth has a more serious set of issues to address—and a more forbidding history—than the youth who typically enter traditional mentoring programs. Thus the structure, content, attitudes and approaches of the mentoring relationships are critical to understand for others who may wish to establish similar programs.

STRUCTURING THE TEAM APPROACH

The general expectation that mentors will be in contact with youth two to three times a week leaves room for many different patterns of interaction, and YCP tells mentors that, in general, each committee should establish the ones that work best for its members and the mentee. “We like the committees to own the mentoring relationship,” explains Deborah Lashley. Most often, committees arrange a schedule dominated by meetings of one adult at a time with the youth, but some committees decide to work with youth in groups of two or sometimes even three.

The division of responsibility among mentors is determined by the expertise and interests of the different adults and the needs of the mentee. For example, if a youth is having trouble in math, a mentor with good math skills might arrange to meet with the youth for homework help, while another committee member may take the lead in spending time with the mentee in recreational activities.

Regardless of the teams' patterns, YCP does strongly suggest that members meet as a group with one another and with the mentee at least monthly. (Some committees always hold their group meetings with mentees; others choose to hold two kinds of group meetings—adult-only meetings and group sessions with mentees.) Often group meetings that include the youth take the form of a movie trip, a dinner out or other recreation. The group meetings give the mentors an opportunity to discuss issues and problems with one another. And when youth are part of the group, they are able to experience the mentors in a team organized on their behalf.

YCP asks a committee to designate one member as a contact person with its social worker. Often that person is the one who organizes the group meetings and other committee activities. As noted, social workers assigned to specific mentees are in charge of monitoring the mentor/mentee relationships. Thus, when mentors have differences of opinion about a situation, social workers typically meet with them to help them reach consensus about it.

DYNAMICS OF THE MENTORING RELATIONSHIP

The following discussion summarizes some of the important patterns that characterize YCP mentoring relationships.¹⁴

The mentoring relationships encompass a variety of settings and activities.

While church is the most common meeting place for mentors and youth, mentors also arrange other kinds of sessions. Some visit youth's homes, others take them to their workplaces and many invite the young people to outings—to museums, sporting events, movies and restaurant meals. Among other activities, P/PV interview transcripts refer to mentors who tutor youth, help youth fix a computer, discuss youth's schooling with parents, watch a video on teen behavior with youth, and talk with youth about the nature of different jobs.

"Sometimes the mentor committee is almost a microcosm of a family. One mentor is more like the aunt and another person is more the one the youth pals around with."

—Deborah Lashley, Executive Assistant District Attorney

The team mentoring approach has been very useful for both mentees and mentors.

Besides helping to ensure that youth are in frequent contact with mentors, the team arrangement has other advantages. First, mentors are able to support one another in the often hard work of building a relationship with a high-risk youth. One mentor, who had previously worked with other YCP participants, made it clear that he saw few signs of progress with his current mentee: "...each one is different but this one is the hardest one...I find it hard to penetrate, he just doesn't listen. We talk to him."

In discussing how he wanted to proceed, the mentor highlighted a potential value of team mentoring: "Discouraging sometimes...because I see those three ladies giving up on him. I tell them no, we're not giving up...we'll keep working."

Assigning three adults to a youth increases the likelihood that a youth will form a strong bond with at least one mentor. For example, when asked if he had a closer relationship with any mentors than with others, one participant said, "The one that works at a church...[I] connect with...[that person]...better than others."

Finally, YCP managers note the instances in which two or three mentors work together with a youth, giving that teen a chance to observe a kind of adult cooperative behavior that is often missing from the lives of YCP participants.

Interviews with mentors reveal less focus on the specific offenses that brought youth to the program than on their current needs, strengths and problems.

When one volunteer was asked to describe his mentee, he spoke at length about the youth's academic deficiencies and the young man's pleasure in discovering he could learn more than he thought he could. The mentor also touched on his childhood and a health problem. Only later in the interview, when the mentor was specifically asked about the offense the youth had been charged with, did he answer briefly, "He was with another youngster in some type of robbery."

The sense of proportion that comes through in this mentor's comments is not unusual. Mentors give matter-of-fact information about youth's criminal justice problems but do not dwell on them. Instead, they are more interested in focusing on issues that are important for most teens whether or not they have been involved with the law—particularly, personal goal-setting, personal responsibility and self-expression.

Mentors are capable of seeing mentees as complex human beings.

One question that naturally arises about YCP is whether adults who for the most part do not have professional backgrounds in working with high-risk youth will avoid stereotypes about their mentees and see them as more than simply people in trouble. Mentor interviews, of which the following statements are representative, indicated that YCP mentors are indeed able to develop nuanced pictures of the youth with whom they work:

"He is a young man. When I first became involved...I had this mental picture of this young kid, but he's a man. He has a child. Struggling in his relationship with his significant other as well as his mother."

"She is 16, very active in sports, plays basketball every day, socially developed...A little introverted and laid-back when we first met her. Vibrant personality and well rounded. Times when she's kind of on the low side, but she's easily brought out."

"He is a nice young man who didn't have the guidance he needed. He was allowed to roam...and got with the wrong company or in the wrong place at the wrong time...Didn't go to school until he was 9 or 10."

Rather than making sweeping, generalized statements about how YCP has completely turned youth around, mentors tend to point to specific, incremental signs of progress.

Mentors are both hopeful about what mentees can accomplish and have a realistic appreciation that change often consists of discrete small or medium-sized steps:

“Positive...is him seeing other African American and Hispanic men in a professional setting...I think that left an impression. I’ve shown up several times at his court appearances...I think he looks at me more like a friend rather than a mentor.”

Asked if he could see changes in a youth, one mentor replied:

“Only from his own expressions...he used to tell you over the period of a week that he couldn’t do his homework. Now he does the homework...all the time...and now he says he’s not as overwhelmed as he used to be.”

Faith and other related beliefs about the obligation to improve the world are central to the decision to mentor.

People who offer to mentor YCP youth come from diverse backgrounds and walks of life. They include teachers, businesspeople, mechanics, social workers, police and corrections officers, homemakers, pastors, office workers, college students and retirees. A number of them are parents who have raised their own children. Some live in the neighborhoods where the congregations are located, others in the suburbs. Some were themselves troubled teens, but many were not.

What the volunteers have in common is their commitment to faith and to positive adult involvement in the lives of troubled youth. For example:

“I believe that Christ calls us to not just do for ourselves but for others.”

“I grew up on the streets of Brooklyn...I always had guardian angels, so to speak, so I never did anything really bad, but I was only a hair’s breadth away. Based on that, I have an appreciation for any group that wants to work with these endangered youth.”

Noting that the program is secular, a P/PV site representative nevertheless recalls that when she heard a group of new mentors introduce themselves at a training session, it was clear that religious faith is a powerful motivator for a decision to work with YCP. Other sources of inspiration are the desires to improve communities and “to give back.”

Youth who experience the entire YCP program are generally very positive about their mentors. A common pattern is to move from wariness to increasing comfort with and appreciation for the adults.

Comments from two YCP youth at a program graduation illustrate the positive feelings a number of youth express about the mentors:

“Thanks to my mentors...They helped me walk through with my head up.”

“They helped me make the right decisions, achieve good goals and continue to college.”

But very often the relationships are shakier at the outset. A YCP social worker describes a common pattern:

“In the beginning it has a lot to do with our kids...flaking out on the mentor, testing the mentor. We have to really, in the beginning, let the mentors know that it’s common that kids will not show up for appointments...”

While the program anticipates this behavior, youth are clearly given the message that it must change. Youth newly enrolled in YCP are surprised to discover that a social worker immediately speaks with them if they miss a mentoring appointment. While this kind of tight supervision might be expected to alienate youth, Joan Gabbidon says that often it begins to bond them to their mentors (and to the entire program). Ms. Gabbidon notes that many YCP youth, who can benefit from additional adult supervision, are pleased to discover that they are surrounded by a team of caring adults who all work together on their behalf.

According to staff, a second factor that builds positive mentoring relationships is youth’s growing understanding of mentors’ roles. One social worker observed that youth come to appreciate that adults are giving their own time to the relationship:

“The fact that the mentors are volunteers is so meaningful to kids. There is a day that they realize that the mentors are not being paid, and that’s when they turn around.”

One of the attractions of mentoring programs is that they rely on a straightforward and understandable intervention—pairing a youth with a caring adult. In fact, the success of this seemingly simple strategy depends on a great deal of careful orchestration. Unlike the typical informal personal relationship, mentoring is formally structured: Once recruited, mentors must be trained, matched with youth, supported and monitored. These administrative challenges, which are common to all mentoring programs, are particularly formidable in YCP, with its use of team mentoring and its expectations for very frequent contact between youth and adults. YCP has a strong record of accomplishment in meeting these challenges. Equally important, evidence available for this report suggests that, in general, YCP mentors take their roles very seriously and that rather than succumbing to simplistic views of the youth as wrongdoers, they work hard to understand the complexities of mentees’ lives.



CONCLUSIONS

The story of YCP is in many ways the story of a successful effort to find new resources to address longstanding needs. The young offenders who come to YCP have often gone without the level of systematic support and supervision from caring adults that can help them turn their lives around. While traditional nonprofit service organizations are certainly one locus for this kind of intervention, in today's tight-budget environment these agencies often find themselves stretched to the limit simply providing programming to less troubled youth.

But YCP reminds us that the universe of institutions that can work with high-risk teens is not necessarily fixed. In this program, justice agencies and congregations—two institutions that are often viewed as being at the margins of the service provider community—stepped up to the challenges of assisting teens who need a second chance.

Motivated by both the teachings of his Catholic faith about transformation and by a pragmatic understanding that building more prisons does not necessarily result in rehabilitation, District Attorney Charles Hynes looked to Brooklyn religious groups to help his office reach out to young offenders. Scores of local congregations responded, providing several hundred mentors to work with YCP youth.

This outcome was by no means inevitable. Both institutions could have defaulted to positions of indifference and condemnation—the District Attorney by focusing only on law and order, and the congregations by condemning youth as sinners. Instead, Hynes was willing to invest in intervention and prevention. And inspired by the teachings of compassion for outcasts and by the recognition that troubled teens are by extension their parishioners, congregations responded by becoming YCP partners. Still another strength of YCP has been the fact that the District Attorney's Office and congregations have managed to harmonize different organizational cultures, creating a partnership that works.

The partners recognized that YCP would need to dig deep—and indeed its model of intensive mentoring and professional supervision has turned out to be a good fit with the needs of participants.

The YCP model deserves consideration by many local justice agencies and congregations that have so far been mainly untapped resources for operating second-chance interventions. In some ways, young offenders are no strangers to these institutions. Justice agencies continually interact with these youth, and many congregations are based in the neighborhoods where they live. The new step taken by YCP is for these institutions to join forces to invest in the futures of young people who have made mistakes but who can be supported and guided to move in new directions.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Bruce Frederick. *Factors Contributing to Recidivism Among Youth Placed with the New York State Division for Youth, Research Report*. (New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, 1999), 4. While YCP youth differ from the youth covered in this study because they are diverted, rather than being detained by OCFS, the experiences of YCP program managers suggest that the two groups are very similar. For example, there is very likely no major discrepancy in the levels of offenses between the two groups. Some youth detained by OCFS are accused of misdemeanors and others of felonies.
- 2 Howard N. Snyder and Melissa Sickmund. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: A National Report*. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1995), 158.
- 3 See <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/statsresearch/keytrends.html>.
- 4 Personal communications to Susan Blank from Daryl Fox, Information Analyst, OJJDP Clearinghouse, and Catherine Arnold, Communications Director, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice.
- 5 In an interview with Fred Davie, the District Attorney shared his philosophy on alternative means to reducing crime and the influence of Catholic social teachings on the need to develop these alternative programs.
- 6 In the early years of his tenure, District Attorney Hynes began Project Legal Lives, an in-school education program focused on prevention. Following the start-up of YCP, other programs to combat juvenile delinquency have been developed from his office. These include Trauma Troopers II, a six-month intervention program focused on a medic-First Aid curriculum; TRACK (Truancy Reduction Alliance to Contact Kids), a truancy prevention and intervention program; and a federal anti-gang initiative (the G.R.E.A.T. Program), in which detectives go into public schools. The District Attorney's Office has found it useful to invest in a range of different program models to meet the needs of youth. In addition to specific programs that help with prevention and intervention, the District Attorney has social workers on his staff to work with youth. Finally, besides programs targeting youth, the District Attorney's Office has developed others directed primarily toward adults. These include DTAP (Drug Treatment Alternatives to Prison); Comalert, a program for ex-offenders; and the AWARE (Abused Women Active Response Emergency) Program.
- 7 Former Executive Assistant District Attorney Ross Rhodes was also involved in the planning, design and implementation of YCP.
- 8 Some congregations assign as many as five volunteers to a youth, but generally, committees maintain the three-to-one ratio.
- 9 YCP has admitted a small number of high-risk youth who have not had contact with the criminal justice system—for example, teens with records of school truancy or, in a handful of cases, youth referred by other programs because they have serious socialization problems. The program automatically excludes applicants with previous patterns of serious mental illness or violent crime—for example, sex offenders, and youth charged with or convicted for arsons or homicides.
- 10 These statistics add up to more than 100 percent because some youth fall into more than one category; for example, a YCP graduate may be in school and working part-time. At the same time, it should be noted that some graduates have achieved none of these outcomes, in some cases because they were still too young to have reached milestones such as high school graduation, earning a GED or holding a job.

- 11 Some congregations are continually active; others do a mentoring stint and then either stop or often pause before accepting another youth. Among the congregations counted as active, most are mentoring, but some may be waiting for an assignment of a youth after having assembled a committee and agreeing to participate.
- 12 Although YCP has yet to find an appropriate match, one mosque is prepared to mentor and its spiritual leader sits on the YCP Advisory Committee. A Brooklyn synagogue has expressed interest in YCP, but as of this writing, has not joined.
- 13 For the sake of simplicity, the rest of this section uses the terms “parents” and “families” to cover both birth parents, and foster families and other guardians.
- 14 The discussion is based on transcripts of 18 interviews with YCP mentors, social workers and youth; on Susan Blank’s interviews with the program managers; and on a few YCP materials that focus on youth and/or mentors.

APPENDIX: SITES AND LEAD AGENCIES IN THE NATIONAL FAITH-BASED INITIATIVE FOR HIGH-RISK YOUTH

Site Location/ Name of Program	Name of Lead Agency/ Year Established	Mission	Neighborhood/ Citywide	Initiative Established
Baton Rouge, LA Baton Rouge Walk-Of-Faith Collaboration	Beech Grove Baptist Church	Faith- Based	Neighborhood- Based	2001
Bronx, NY BronxConnect	Urban Youth Alliance (1970)	Youth	Neighborhood- Based	1998
Brooklyn, NY Youth and Congregations in Partnership	Kings County District Attorney's Office	Criminal Justice	Borough-wide*	1997
Cleveland, OH Project Restoration	Clergy United for Juvenile Justice (1997)	High- Risk Youth	Neighborhood- Based	1997
Denver, CO Positive Connection	Grace & Truth Full Gospel Pentecostal Church	Faith- Based	Citywide	2000
Detroit, MI High-Risk Empower Initiative	Rosedale Park Baptist Church	Faith- Based	Neighborhood- Based	1999
Fresno, CA One By One High-Risk Youth Mentoring Initiative	One by One Leadership Foundation (1994)	Multi- Issue	Citywide	2000
Indianapolis, IN Indianapolis Ten Point Coalition	Indianapolis Ten Point Coalition (1999)	High- Risk Youth	Neighborhood- Based	1999
Oakland, CA Building, Equity, Discipline and Respect for Our Community (BEDROC)	Westside Economic Development Corporation (1993)	Multi- Issue	Neighborhood- Based	1998
Philadelphia, PA Southwest Youth and Family Network of Philadelphia	African American Interdenominational Ministries (1996)	Multi- Issue	Citywide	1998
Seattle, WA JOY! Initiative	Church Council of Greater Seattle (1919)	Multi- Issue	Citywide	1999
Washington, D.C. East of the River Clergy, Police, Community Partnership	East of the River Clergy, Police, Community Partnership (1999)	High- Risk Youth	Neighborhood- Based	1996

* The program serves youth throughout Brooklyn, one of the five boroughs of New York City.
(Adapted from the *Faith and Action* Report, Alvia Y. Branch; edited by Britt Butterfield)



Public/Private Ventures

2000 Market Street, Suite 600
Philadelphia, PA 19103
Tel: (215) 557-4400
Fax: (212) 557-4469

New York Office

The Chanin Building
122 East 42nd Street, 41st Floor
New York, NY 10168
Tel: (212) 822-2400
Fax: (212) 949-0439

California Office

Lake Merritt Plaza, Suite 1550
1999 Harrison Street
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel: (510) 273-4600
Fax: (510) 273-4619

<http://www.ppv.org>