

**NYC**<sup>TM</sup>  
**Administration for  
Children's Services**



**The New York City Council,  
Committee on Juvenile Justice  
January 30, 2015**

***“Oversight- Overview of the Division of Youth and Family Justice’s Services  
and Programs for Remanded Youth”***

**Testimony by  
New York City Administration for Children’s Services  
Jackie Sherman, Associate Commissioner of Planning, Policy and Performance  
Division of Youth and Family Justice**

Good morning Chair Cabrera and members of the Committee on Juvenile Justice. I am Jackie Sherman, Associate Commissioner of Juvenile Justice Planning, Policy and Performance. With me are Jennifer Romelien, Executive Director of Detention Program Services and Sarah Bass, Executive Director of Residential Placement. Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the programs and services that ACS and our partners provide to youth in our juvenile justice residences.

### **Overview of Juvenile Justice Programs**

The Administration for Children's Services' Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) oversees a continuum of services and programs for youth at every stage of the juvenile justice process. DYFJ promotes public safety and improves the lives of youth, families, and communities by providing child-centered and family-focused services, including therapeutic treatment, safe and secure custodial care, responsive health care, effective re-entry services, and educational opportunities. We, and our contracted partners, provide these services to youth in secure and non-secure detention facilities, non-secure placement residences, and community-based alternative programs.

Each year, the Division provides secure and non-secure detention services to young people awaiting the conclusion of their criminal or family court case. In 2014, DYFJ served approximately 2,000 youth in our 13 non-secure and two secure detention facilities.

Approximately two years ago, New York City launched Close to Home, a juvenile justice reform initiative that allows New York City youth who are found by a Family Court judge to have committed a delinquent act to receive services in or close to their home communities. ACS collaborates with nine local non-profit agencies to implement Non-Secure Placement (NSP) and provide services to young people at one of approximately 30 small, resource-rich residential programs in or near the five boroughs. In March of this year, ACS will launch Limited Secure

Placement; three providers will operate facilities at six sites in and near New York City, serving young people in need of a higher level of care and structure.

While out-of-home placement is a critical component of our system, it should be our last option. ACS offers two community-based alternative programs, which allow youth to receive services while remaining at home with their families. The Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI) links young people and families with intensive, evidence-based therapeutic interventions aimed at diverting youth from residential placement. The Family Assessment Program (FAP) serves families seeking to file PINS (Person In Need of Supervision) petitions in the New York City Family Courts. Through FAP, ACS works to address the concerns that brought the young people to our attention.

### **Stories of Justice-Involved Youth in ACS' Care**

The mission of detention is to ensure on time court appearances. While young people are in detention, we strive to expose them to positive programming and services to encourage them to get on the right path upon discharge from residential care. In contrast to detention, ACS and our provider partners are able to provide more intensive and therapeutic programming to youth in placement, as young people are in our care for a longer period of time. As such, we actively connect placed youth to programming that can be continued in the community while they are on aftercare. In order to vividly illustrate the type of programs and services that youth receive in our juvenile justice residential programs, we would like to share two examples of a typical day for the youth in our care. We will first share the story of a young person in a secure detention setting. The second story describes a youth's experience in one of our non-secure residential settings.

### **Secure Residential Settings**

It's Tuesday at 6:00am at Crossroads Juvenile Center. J., a 14 year old from Brooklyn who is awaiting adjudication of an allegation of robbery, wakes up to prepare for school. Had he been

required to appear in court that day, he would have woken up at 5:30am. Breakfast begins at 6:15am and J. gets ready quickly so that he can walk downstairs to the cafeteria with the other members of his hall. The group of 10 young men is escorted to the cafeteria by their assigned Juvenile Counselor. Juvenile Counselors, also known as JCs, are direct care staff that assist, coach and engage young people in every aspect of their day. After breakfast, a JC escorts J. and his hall mates back to their rooms to freshen up after eating breakfast. They gather in the common area so that they can be escorted upstairs to the school floor. Classes begin at 8:00am and end at 3:00pm. Each class is comprised of eight students who share similar levels of academic need; each period lasts 45 minutes. The school day consists of eight periods including lunch. During their time in detention, J. and his peers receive a standard Department of Education (DOE) curriculum that includes English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. J. and his peers also have access to laptops while in the classroom. As the school day comes to a close, J. requests a math tutor because he struggled with the day's lesson. In addition to tutors, DOE teachers work with high school students to help them prepare for Regents and English Language Arts examinations.

When J. returns to his hall at 3:10pm, he has the option to participate in several programs, including working with a DOE teacher to take credit recovery courses; visiting the library to check out a book; playing a group sport such as basketball, football, or baseball; or participating in movie night, bingo games or spades tournaments. Each program is designed to teach youth specific skills such as leadership, sportsmanship, self-esteem building, and engagement in positive activities with their peers. As the evening approaches, J. has dinner with his hall mates and then starts prepare for bedtime. Showers are taken and youth are able to quietly read, watch tv or play games until it's time for lights out at 9:30pm.

### Non-Secure Residential Settings

It's Thursday morning at a row house in the Bronx. To the average passerby, the home looks like all of the others on the block, however the community knows that six justice-involved young women reside in the home. S, a 15 year old resident, was found by a Family Court Judge to have committed an act of assault. She's been at the residence for three months and expects to be there for three more. S. wakes up at 6:45am to prepare for school and joins her house mates for breakfast in the home's dining room. The overnight staff have prepared breakfast and the youth and staff eat at the table together, family style. After breakfast, the group heads to the living room for a "circle up" exercise, in which staff lead the group in a discussion that encourages youth to acknowledge how they are feeling and what their expectations are for the day. These exercises are key components of the Missouri Approach, a highly regarded rehabilitative and therapeutic approach to addressing juvenile justice-involved youth. Many of our providers use this approach which is designed to challenge young people and help them make lasting behavioral changes that will prepare them for successful transitions back to the community. The approach stresses constant, close supervision of youth and features a group treatment process in which each member is held accountable for his or her actions by the other members of the peer group.

After the circle up, the girls board the residence's van and are transported to Bronx Hope, one of two standalone DOE schools that exclusively serve justice-involved youth. The group circles up before classes begin at 8:20am to set expectations for the school day. Throughout the school day, S. and her house mates transition together among eight classes taught by DOE teachers. Provider agency direct care staff remains with the youth throughout the day and provide support in the classroom. At the end of the school day, the group boards the van and is transported back to their residence. Upon arrival at 3:30pm, S. and her house mates head to the living room for another circle up to debrief about their day. The residence's morning and evening staff participate in the exercise

so that all staff are aware of the triumphs and challenges residents experienced that day. The girls then change out of their school clothes, eat snacks at the dining room table and complete their homework until 5:00pm. Afterwards, the girls participate in a 45- minute group therapy session.

S. and her house mates are looking forward to their evening programming, which is geared toward building self-esteem, encouraging community engagement and most of all, strengthening family ties. Through positive activities and strong role models, we hope to develop the skills young people need to redirect their lives in a positive direction when they leave our care. Today, Carnegie Hall artists are coming to the residence to work with S. and her house mates on a songwriting project that will conclude with the group performing for their families and staff. This program structure is important because it allows the youth to apply coping and social skills to every-day situations, just as they will need to when their time with us concludes.

At 7:00pm, S. and her house mates meet in the dining room for dinner. The residence's cook has prepared dinner for the group and the youth and staff eat together family-style. After dinner the youth complete their chores which include cleaning the dinner table, mopping the floors, emptying the trash and making sure that the recycling is in the correct bin.

After all of the girls have completed their chores, they are able to participate spiritual services, or read in the living room. At 9pm, S. and her house mates move upstairs to take showers, call their family members and get ready for bed.

### **Services and Programs for Young People in Juvenile Justice Residences**

ACS and our partners provide a number of services throughout the juvenile justice continuum, including education, health, and mental health services. Through our partnership with the Department of Education (DOE), all justice- involved youth in residential settings attend classes taught by DOE teachers or receive transferable DOE credits while attending a State Approved Non-Public School. ACS meets the range of mental health needs of our youth, either by offering mental

and behavioral health services onsite or establishing referral and treatment arrangements with community-based mental health providers.

We have found that young people thrive when expressing themselves through the arts and humanities. To that end, we have partnered with numerous organizations such as Voices Unbroken, which provides writing-based creative workshops and builds literacy skills. We also work with Healing Arts from Montefiore Medical Center to bring together artists and youth to design and paint murals and artwork. Through our partnership with High Five/Art Connection we bring young people in non-secure residential settings to theater and productions as well as museums and other art programs. Our collaboration with Carnegie Hall brings professional musicians to work with youth to compose and produce music, culminating in a concert.

To build life skills and empower youth to reach their potential, we partner with the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence, NYU, New York Cares, and Day One, to educate young people about intimate partner violence, various forms of abuse, healthy relationships, and sexual health. We also work with the Girl Scouts Council of Greater New York, which provides financial literacy, leadership development, career exploration, and college preparation workshops. Columbia University's Literacy Advocacy Program also provides tutoring and develops problem-solving and critical reasoning skills.

Recreational activities are also a critical component of programming for young people. In addition to a range of arts and humanities programs, ACS works with Yoga for Yoga and the Lineage Project to offer weekly yoga sessions. We also partner with Row New York, a unique summer program that introduces youth to rowing and provides academic success programming.

Organizations such as Exalt Youth offer structured classes, individualized support, and paid internships while youth are in placement, as well as a supportive alumni network to help prevent further justice system involvement. Additionally, ACS is collaborating with the Kings County

District Attorney's Office to implement the Gender-Responsive Re-entry Assistance and Support Program (GRASP), an evidence-informed, re-entry program that focuses on transitioning young women from residential placement back to the community. GRASP social workers work with young women in residential care to provide gender responsive skill-building groups, individual team and group mentoring, educational advocacy and tutoring, job placement, job readiness training, and paid internships.

### **Investment in Our Staff**

ACS is committed to supporting our juvenile justice staff. We expect our staff, as well as the staff of our provider agencies, to be examples to the young people in our care. These staff serve as mentors, dinner companions, motivators, mediators, referees, role models, and guides on the journey away from the actions that brought young people to our attention. Whether assisting youth with their homework or de-escalating problematic behavior, staff use every opportunity to teach positive behavior and encourage growth. In order to accomplish this, intensive training is provided to staff on a regular basis.

Since 2013, ACS has partnered with Bellevue Hospital Center and the NYU Langone Medical Center to train all secure detention staff in dealing with the various types of trauma that up to 90% of young people in the juvenile justice system have experienced. The intensive four week training increases staff's ability to identify trauma exposure and work with traumatized youth and reduces secondary trauma issues among staff.

Staff participate in numerous additional training opportunities, addressing topics such as LGBTQ awareness, sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation, adolescent development, safe crisis management, safety and security, building relationships, conflict resolution, problem solving and decision making, mental health, and gang awareness.



## **Closing**

Thank you for the opportunity to share the important work we are doing to address the needs of young people in our juvenile justice programs. We appreciate the Council's ongoing support as we continue to strive toward improving services for the City's most vulnerable youth. Our colleague Sonia Galarza, Director of In-Kind Contributions and Pro-Bono Resources, will now present several programs that we provided to justice-involved youth in 2014. We are happy to take your questions at the conclusion of Sonia's presentation.