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June 2014

# The New York City Young Men's Initiative: Working to Improve Outcomes for Black and Latino Young Men

SUBMITTED TO:  
New York City Center for Economic  
Opportunity



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# The New York City Young Men's Initiative: Working to Improve Outcomes for Black and Latino Young Men

SUBMITTED TO:  
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**NYC Young Men's Initiative and NYC Center for Economic Opportunity  
Response to Metis Associates Evaluation of NYC Young Men's Initiative**

In August 2011, New York City launched the NYC Young Men's Initiative (YMI), a cross-agency enterprise designed to address disparities between Black and Latino young men and their peers across numerous outcomes related to education, health, employment and justice. YMI is funded by \$60 million in private investments over three years from Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Campaign for Black Male Achievement at the Open Society Foundations, as well as an ongoing investment of \$23 million annually in city dollars. In collaboration with the NYC Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), more than 20 City agencies and offices, and hundreds of community-based partners, YMI has implemented or expanded over 45 programs and policies that connect young men to education, employment and mentoring opportunities, improve health outcomes, and reduce criminal justice system involvement.

This evaluation report presents the findings of a cross-program evaluation of YMI conducted by Metis Associates, a national research and consulting firm headquartered in New York City. Under a subcontract with Westat, Metis Associates was commissioned by CEO to assess how YMI has influenced City agency programming and practices, to examine what effect YMI has had on young men of color, to identify best practices in serving the needs of Black and Latino young men, and to present recommendations for strengthening YMI moving forward. The evaluation is based upon qualitative assessments of six YMI programs, which had each been in operation for at least one year and were not undergoing other evaluation activities at the time the study began. The programs are AIM, Arches, and Justice Scholars (all three administered by the Department of Probation); IMPACT Peer Mentoring (administered by the City University of New York); Cure Violence (administered by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Health and Hospitals Corporation); and the Teen Health Improvement Program (administered by the Health and Hospitals Corporation). This evaluation was conducted in November and December of 2013, and draws upon interviews and focus groups with YMI and CEO staff, City agency representatives, service provider organization program directors, frontline staff and YMI program participants.

This report presents positive findings regarding changes in City agency programming and practice resulting from YMI. The evaluation shows that YMI has helped to prioritize the needs of young men of color at City agencies, bringing increased attention to the major issues affecting these populations. The evaluation also finds that YMI has enhanced networks and improved communications within city government, between city agencies and service providers, and among service provider organizations. Increased collaboration and sharing of best practices improve the City's capacity to provide high quality services. In addition, Metis Associates finds that youth input has been actively solicited to guide YMI and programmatic activities and priorities.

With regard to YMI's influence on young men of color, the evaluation presents encouraging findings on the outcomes achieved by YMI program participants. Frontline staff at service provider organizations



and YMI program participants report a range of positive attitudinal and behavioral changes, including increased self-efficacy, improved interpersonal and conflict mediation skills, and a greater sense of personal and community responsibility. In addition, staff and participants report reductions in recidivism and improved education and employment outcomes, including high school and high school equivalency degree attainment, improved job readiness and increased focus on post-secondary education and career goals.

The report identifies a diverse array of best practices in programming for young men of color. Most prominently, the evaluation finds that the formation of trusting, caring and consistent one-to-one relationships between frontline staff and program participants is essential to effective service delivery. The report also highlights a successful strategy for building strong relationships with participants: the use of 'credible messengers' – staff and mentors with backgrounds similar to participants – which is a central design component in several YMI program models. Additional best practices include the development of connections to community resources and cross-provider peer learning opportunities, two strategies that YMI and CEO have worked to facilitate among all YMI programs. Metis Associates also notes a variety of challenges in the implementation and operation of YMI programs, ranging from fundamental program management issues, such as program implementation and participant recruitment, to program-specific concerns, such as database design and the new New York State high school equivalency test. For each challenge identified, YMI and CEO, with support from our City agency and community-based partners, have worked to overcome obstacles, offering guidance, partnership management, technical assistance, program model modification and supplemental funding, where necessary. Moving forward, YMI and CEO will continue to work with our partners to address challenges as we strive to deliver the highest quality of services to program participants.

The report concludes with suggested program enhancements and recommendations. The report highlights a desire among City agencies and providers for greater connection across programs and across the YMI focus areas of education, health, employment and the justice system. Accordingly, Metis Associates recommends expanding opportunities for interagency and cross-provider communication and collaboration to build broader understanding and interconnection across the YMI agenda. With regard to programmatic services, the report recommends support for increased access to mental health services, as well as greater attention to building resilience among participants so as to facilitate successful transition out of programs. Finally, the report recommends YMI provide greater support for organizational capacity building of service providers by expanding opportunities for targeted professional development and technical assistance provision.

The findings of this report showcase YMI's ambitious mission. Through its comprehensive efforts to tackle the broad disparities slowing the advancement of Black and Latino young men, YMI has helped to reshape the way in which New York City addresses the needs of its young men of color. In the de Blasio administration and under the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives, the effort will be to refresh the focus of the work with a broader and more ambitious approach in line with Mayor de Blasio's vision for managing the city and addressing this challenge. There is tremendous opportunity for a "refreshed" YMI agenda to grow and thrive within Mayor de Blasio's administration of progressive



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policies and priorities. This is particularly true given the launch of President Obama's My Brother's Keeper and YMI's connection to this effort as a thought partner and contributor. The best practices, challenges and recommendation presented in this report will inform YMI's development as the initiative works to continue develop and enhance its efforts to turn the tide for New York City's young men of color.

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## Executive Summary

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Launched in 2011, the NYC Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) seeks to address disparities in education, employment, health, and justice outcomes between Black and Latino young men and white and Asian young men. More than 45 programs and city policies have been implemented, supported by city tax levy and foundation funds. Assisted by the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), the YMI programs follow proven approaches.

This report presents findings from a study commissioned by CEO and conducted by Metis Associates and Westat. The purpose of the study was to understand the influences of YMI on City agency programming and practice, identify the outcomes for participants that the YMI programs have achieved, describe best practices for achieving these outcomes and understand the challenges that programs have encountered, and make recommendations for program enhancements. The study examined these issues through the lens of six YMI programs, each in operation for at least one year, operating at capacity, and having had no previous formal evaluation:

- AIM (Advocate, Intervene, Mentor), under the auspices of the New York City Department of Probation;
- Arches – Transformative Mentoring, New York City Department of Probation;
- Justice Scholars, New York City Department of Probation;
- IMPACT Peer Mentoring for Young Adult Literacy, City University of New York;
- Cure Violence, New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and the Health and Hospitals Corporation; and
- Teen Health Improvement Program, New York City Health and Hospitals Corporation.

The YMI represents a significant commitment—financially as well as in focus—in the City’s efforts to improve the outcomes of young men of color. It aims to “change the narrative” from one of deficits to a strength-based approach and reflects a view of the interrelatedness of education, employment, health, and justice. The YMI initiative supports the implementation of evidence-based models and technical assistance to ensure fidelity to the models, while also recognizing that programs must be flexible in their design in order to respond to the specific needs and challenges of the youth they are serving.

The findings are based on information obtained during interviews and focus groups conducted in the last months of 2013 with the sponsoring City agencies, CEO and YMI staff,

program directors and frontline staff from provider agencies, and participants. Highlights of selected findings are provided below.

### The YMI's influence on City agency programming and practice

While City agency representatives and providers generally reported that it is still early to gauge the YMI's influence, within the City agencies that sponsor the YMI programs, YMI was seen as having:

- Prioritized the needs of Black and Latino young men;
- Created new networks, new programming, and neighborhood investment;
- Reframed and drawn attention to major issues affecting Black and Latino young men; and
- Provided opportunities for these youth to have a voice.

More work remains in building awareness and understanding of the larger YMI context among providers, particularly frontline staff.

### Participant outcomes

The YMI programs were reported by sponsoring agencies and providers as having resulted in positive outcomes for participants. The following outcomes for participants were identified across the programs.

- Increase in self-efficacy—confidence that participants can achieve their goals
- Improved communication and interpersonal skills
- Improved conflict mediation skills
- Greater sense of responsibility
- Reduced recidivism
- Improved education outcomes
- Improved employment outcomes

### Best practices

The importance of building relationships between frontline staff and participants was a common theme across all six programs. Best practices include:

- **Caring and consistent relationships.** Especially among youth who have been disappointed by adults in their lives, it takes time to establish a sense of trust and ensure that participants understand that the mentors and program staff are genuinely interested in helping them.



- **Community partnerships and connections to resources.** Being able to provide wraparound services and/or having partnerships with other organizations in the community is essential for connecting participants with necessary resources (e.g., education, employment, social, and health supports).
- **Opportunities for peer learning and cross-provider sharing.** Opportunities for stronger providers to share their strategies with less experienced providers were said to strengthen programs and performance.
- **Hiring mentors who mirror participants.** Effective participant engagement relies heavily on the one-to-one relationship between participants and frontline staff. Across the programs, the most effective relationships were characterized by participants being able to identify with their mentor because they share a similar background.
- **Close working relationships with probation officers.** The relationship between probation officers and staff is critical to effective participant recruitment and engagement, particularly for the justice programs.

## Challenges

Challenges were identified in the areas of start-up for new programs, recruitment (in particular obtaining referrals from probation officers for the justice programs), transitioning participants out of programs (building resiliency instead of dependency), developing relationships with hospitals (specific to the health programs), the new high school equivalency (HSE) assessment (for programs assisting participants in obtaining this credential), and motivating participants to change their behaviors.

## Suggestions for program enhancements

Sponsoring agencies and program directors suggested a number of enhancements, several of which are listed below.

- Connect the “menu of programs” so that providers can refer to one another as needed
- Enhance training for probation officers working with YMI programs on the nature of the YMI programs, their role in the programs, how to make appropriate referrals, and a relationship-based approach to youth development work (considered key, as relations with the officers are critical to the success of justice programs that rely on them for referrals, case management, and participant engagement)
- Increase access to mental health services
- Train instructors on the new HSE test and augment related supports as needed
- Build organizational capacity of providers, especially among the smaller organizations that have limited institutional capacity to address budgeting and contracting processes

## Conclusions and recommendations

We offer the following recommendations for improving YMI implementation and outcomes for Black and Latino young men.

**Sharpen focus on the YMI agenda.** While City agency representatives and providers generally reported that it is still early to gauge YMI's influence on City agency programming and practice, findings indicate the need to build awareness and understanding of the YMI agenda and the larger YMI context among providers, particularly frontline staff. Because young Black and Latino men represent a substantial portion of City agencies' and providers' service populations, consistent and continued messaging is needed to ensure that the YMI agenda retains its prominence among City agencies and providers. City agencies—those working closely with providers—are key to ensuring that providers, including frontline staff, continue to focus on the YMI outcomes. YMI should convene City agencies and their partnering provider organizations as an opportunity to strengthen messaging of the YMI agenda, foster interagency collaboration, and allow City agencies and provider organizations to share best practices and lessons learned from working with young Black and Latino men. The convening could also serve as a forum for publicizing the successes of YMI and to further propel the initiative.

**Pay closer attention to building resiliency among participants.** As frontline staff and participants strengthen bonds and participants find comfort and support in the safe spaces created by programs, it is natural that participants (and in some cases their families) come to depend on programs. It may be that programs need to pause and examine the messaging to its participants, create opportunities for participants to “practice” independence and decision-making while they still have the safety net of the program, and explore other effective ways to build self-efficacy among participants.

**Foster stronger relationships with probation officers.** The successful implementation of programs under the auspices of DOP, particularly those that rely on probation officers for referrals and case management support, depends so much on relationships with probation officers. Respondents suggested strengthening communications with probation officers, and providing training on YMI programs, to increase their understanding of how their clients can benefit from the programs, clarify the role of probation officers, and instill in them a more “relationship-based” approach to working with programs and participants.

We suggest that YMI bring these issues to DOP and create a plan for building stronger working relationships and partnerships among probation officers and programs, ensuring that participants are supported by their probation officers to engage in program activities, and ultimately that participants are achieving better outcomes.

**Strengthen the network of YMI programs.** YMI should consider how it can aid in establishing and strengthening relationships among YMI program providers, for example through convenings of organizations serving the same neighborhoods or the creation of a

directory. This would help to widen providers' networks of available supports for participants—enabling participants to meet their most critical, basic needs and ultimately create a more seamless path to achieving their goals.

**Work toward changing communities' negative perceptions of young Black and Latino men who have had criminal justice involvement.** CEO/YMI may want to consider funding or endorsing strategies and activities aimed at changing negative perceptions—and showcasing successes—of young Black and Latino men who have been involved in the criminal justice system. Such efforts could contribute to effective partnerships with community resources. The negative perceptions of young men involved in (or formerly involved in) the criminal justice system can curtail any program's ability to connect participants to the services and supports that they need to succeed in life.

## Introduction

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The NYC Young Men’s Initiative (YMI) was launched in 2011 by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg to address disparities in education, employment, health, and justice outcomes between Black and Latino young men and white and Asian young men. Indicators in these areas show that Black and Latino young men have lower graduation, college readiness, and employment rates, and higher felony conviction and recidivism rates. Attention to these disparities, highlighted in Mayor Bloomberg’s 2010 State of the City address, led to the appointment of the YMI Advisory Board and research into the extent of the disparities, their causes, and potential remedies.

Through an innovative public-private partnership, YMI includes \$60 million in private investments over three years from Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Campaign for Black Male Achievement at the Open Society Foundations, as well as an ongoing investment of \$23 million annually in city tax levy funding, which has been baselined into perpetuity. As a result, since its inception, more than 45 programs and policies in nearly 20 city agencies and offices have been implemented. YMI also is supported by the New York City Center for Economic Opportunity (CEO), a mayoral office dedicated to improving the financial security of residents of New York City (and partner cities). CEO has helped to develop anti-poverty programs and policies, and oversees evaluations of these programs. Several CEO initiatives have been expanded under YMI. Each YMI (and CEO) program is evidence-based and follows proven approaches. YMI is also supported by the New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) which provides data support, including calculation of racial disparities on key citywide indicators.

This report, based on an interviews and focus groups with City agencies, selected non-profit program providers, and program participants, examines the influences of YMI on City agency programming and practices for improving the outcomes of Black and Latino young men, overall and within the context of six YMI programs. The evaluation also identifies best practices for achieving effective outcomes for Black and Latino men and offers suggestions of ways to enhance YMI programs.

## Focus of the study

In response to a request for proposals, CEO selected the Westat/Metis evaluation team to conduct a qualitative study of selected programs. Six YMI programs—in operation for at least one year, operating at capacity, and having had no previous formal evaluation—were selected by CEO and YMI for the study.

Based on the scope of work identified by CEO and YMI, the following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. How has YMI influenced City agency programming and practices?
  - a. To what extent has YMI been a vehicle for improving City agency programming for Black and Latino young men?
  - b. What programming and practice changes have resulted?
2. How has YMI influenced the young men served by the selected programs?
  - a. What are the observed and perceived outcomes of young men participating in the selected YMI programs?
3. Which program practices are associated with effective implementation and outcomes?
  - a. What program practices do City agency staff, program staff, and participants believe are essential for achieving more effective outcomes for Black and Latino young men?
4. What challenges and barriers did programs encounter (both in terms of implementation and outcomes), and how did they address them?

The six programs, along with their agency sponsors and outcome areas, are listed in Table 1; brief descriptions of the programs follow the table.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Programs selected for qualitative study**

Program	Sponsoring agency	Outcome
AIM (Advocate, Intervene, Mentor)	NYC Department of Probation	Justice
Arches – Transformative Mentoring	NYC Department of Probation	Justice
Justice Scholars	NYC Department of Probation	Justice
IMPACT (Improving My Progress At College Today) Peer Mentoring for Young Adult Literacy	City University of New York	Education
Cure Violence	NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation	Health
Teen Health Improvement Program	NYC Health and Hospitals Corporation	Health

**AIM (Advocate, Intervene, Mentor):** A court-mandated alternative-to-placement program that provides intensive one-on-one mentoring and advocacy for adolescents ages 13-17 on

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<sup>1</sup> Agency abbreviations used in the report include: DOP (Department of Probation), CUNY (City University of New York), DOHMH (Department of Health and Mental Hygiene), and HHC (Health and Hospitals Corporation).

juvenile probation who are facing violation of probation due to chronic absenteeism and/or chronic unresponsiveness to interventions and engagement strategies. Strategies include: frequent and consistent mentoring, strengthening relationships between youth and their families, connecting youth with community-based resources, participation in structured extracurricular activities, and family involvement. The program is delivered by five provider organizations.

**Arches – Transformative Mentoring:** A curriculum-based group mentoring intervention for young adults ages 16–24 who are on probation. The program uses a group cognitive-behavioral treatment approach to lead to changes in attitude (cognitive restructuring of thoughts and attitudes that put one at risk of engaging in criminal behavior) and on improving problem solving and social skills. The program is delivered by 19 provider organizations.

**Justice Scholars:** An education-based program serving court involved young adults ages 16-24 living in communities with high rates of poverty and incarceration and low rates of high school completion. The program offers multiple education tracks depending on need, career exploration, case management, and individual/group counseling. The program includes targeted instruction, work readiness, and support services and is delivered by six provider organizations.

**IMPACT (Improving My Progress At College Today) Peer Mentoring for Young Adult Literacy:** A peer mentoring model where HSE program graduates enrolled in college serve as mentors for current HSE students (high-risk youth) and provide peer support for other alumni enrolled in college. The program—which aims to increase HSE enrollment and pass rates and college transition and retention rates—is located at two community colleges; a third community college (the institution that developed the program model) provides technical assistance.

**Cure Violence:** A violence prevention program (formerly called CeaseFire) that focuses on behavior change and changing norms through “violence interrupters” who work on the streets to stop conflicts before they happen and outreach workers who re-direct highest risk youth away from life on the streets. The program is implemented by three provider organizations.<sup>2</sup>

**Teen Health Improvement Program:** This program aims to increase clinical staff implementation and adherence to best practices in adolescent care and increase positive health outcomes among adolescent/young adult patients through training of HHC staff, improving user-friendliness of HHC facilities, and youth engagement programming.

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<sup>2</sup> There are a total of six Cure Violence sites in New York City, three of which are funded by YMI.

## Methods and procedures

Information was collected through a review of documents about YMI and the six programs and through interviews or focus groups with the following groups:

- representatives of the sponsoring City agencies;
- provider agency program directors;
- frontline staff;
- participants; and
- CEO and YMI staff.

Interview guides and consent forms for each respondent group were developed by the evaluation team and reviewed by CEO and YMI staff. The evaluators conducted individual interviews and/or a small group interview with the deputy commissioners (or equivalent) and program directors of each sponsoring agency, as well as with YMI and CEO staff (separately).

For all programs except the Teen Health Improvement Program (which, unlike the others, does not offer direct services), a focus group was conducted at Metis's office with the program directors from the provider organizations. These focus groups were designed to obtain perspectives across providers. All providers from AIM, Cure Violence, IMPACT, and Justice Scholars (which are being implemented by six or fewer organizations) were invited to participate in a focus group. For Arches, 8 of the 19 providers were randomly selected to participate in a focus group.

To examine program implementation and outcomes at the site level, visits were conducted to two randomly-selected sites implementing programs involved in this study. During these site visits, the evaluators conducted one focus group with frontline staff and another with program participants, and observed the program space and activities that were being offered at the time.<sup>3</sup> At one IMPACT site, a focus group also was conducted with peer mentors. Parent consent was obtained for AIM participants (all of whom are under 18 years of age) to participate in the focus group. As an incentive, all program participants who attended a focus group received a gift card (bank card valued at \$25). For Teen Health, a telephone interview was conducted with one frontline staff person.<sup>4</sup> Table 2 lists the number of interview and focus group respondents. These activities were conducted in November and December, 2013.

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<sup>3</sup> Among the activities observed were a group art activity (AIM), group mentoring activity (Arches), and HSE prep sessions (Justice Scholars). During site visits where group activities were not scheduled to take place (e.g., IMPACT, AIM) or were not applicable (Cure Violence), observations were conducted to examine the physical space and interactions among staff and participants.

<sup>4</sup> The evaluation team attempted but was unable to conduct an interview with a second frontline staff person.

Table 2: Interviews and Focus Groups

Program	Number of respondents			
	Sponsoring agencies	Program directors	Site visits (2 per program)	
			Frontline staff	Participants
AIM (Advocate, Intervene, Mentor)	3	5	7	5
Arches – Transformative Mentoring	2 <sup>a</sup>	6	8	13 <sup>e</sup>
Justice Scholars	2 <sup>a</sup>	4	6	10
IMPACT	2	5 <sup>c</sup>	15 <sup>d</sup>	14 <sup>e</sup>
Cure Violence	3 <sup>b</sup>	3	9	12
Teen Health Improvement Program	5 <sup>b</sup>			
CEO and YMI staff	6			
Total Number of Respondents	20	23	45	54

<sup>a</sup> Both respondents addressed Arches and Justice Scholars.

<sup>b</sup> One respondent addressed both Cure Violence and Teen Health Improvement Program.

<sup>c</sup> Two sites were represented by two respondents.

<sup>d</sup> Includes a separate focus group that was conducted with seven peer mentors, in addition to frontline staff, at one site.

<sup>e</sup> Includes two female participants at the Arches program focus groups and five female participants at the IMPACT focus groups.



## The YMI Approach and Influence on City Agency Programming and Practice

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YMI represents a significant commitment—financially as well as in emphasis—in the City’s efforts to improve the outcomes of young men of color. It has brought together, under one tent, innovative and evidence-based programs that are operating under the auspices of more than a dozen City agencies. Also among its initial endeavors, YMI launched NYC Dads, the Mayor’s Fatherhood Initiative, in which City agencies came together to discuss how the City could engage and better serve fathers, building on their strengths to support children and families. The goals of the initiative include making all City agencies as “father friendly” as possible and championing the message that dads matter. According to YMI staff, in making young men of color a priority through its programming, YMI aims to intentionally “change the narrative” from emphasizing deficits to a strength-based approach.

YMI programs fall into four “buckets”: education, employment, health, and justice. Yet the YMI approach reflects a view of the interrelatedness of these domains. For example, programs that target young men involved in the criminal justice system may focus on employment, education, or health. YMI builds on CEO’s anti-poverty agenda, which aims to undo the cycle of poverty in New York City through innovative programs that build human capital and improve financial security. However, while CEO initiatives address three primary populations—only one of which is disconnected young people—YMI concentrates solely on one important segment of the disconnected youth population: Black and Latino males.

YMI supports the implementation of evidence-based models and technical assistance to ensure fidelity to the models. At the same time, the City recognizes that programs must be flexible in their design in order to respond to the specific needs and challenges of the youth they are serving. Thus, some programs that are geographically-focused use a place-based strategy or tailor their services to the organization’s strengths and expertise. For example, a program may respond to the specific issues of violence in their community or may provide some services directly while leveraging community resources for other services.

While City agency representatives and providers generally reported that it is still early to gauge YMI’s influence on agency policies and practices, they identified a number of ways in which YMI has shaped the delivery of services—and, by extension, the outcomes—for the target population. These have included establishing among City agencies a new priority for services (young Black and Latino males) and new programs to serve this population, and fostering greater collaboration among City agencies and with providers.

### **YMI has helped to prioritize the needs of Black and Latino men among City agencies.**

With both CEO and YMI in the Mayor's office, YMI has high-level support within city government. In each City agency, each YMI program has an assigned program manager who reports to an assistant commissioner (or equivalent), with involvement from the commissioner level as well. CEO holds regular meetings with the City agencies, monitors performance, and compiles monthly, quarterly, and annual reports. Before YMI, addressing the needs and outcomes of Black and Latino young men was not as prominent on the City's agenda. However, the support from the mayor and other high-level City officials has established the priority—a point emphasized by agency representatives. City agency representatives shared examples of increased attention to this population among City agency commissioners (e.g., making YMI programs a regular part of internal discussions). Furthermore, YMI funding has brought about recognition that there is a need to support community-based organizations working on the frontlines in order to improve outcomes for this population. This emphasis has enabled providers to hire staff dedicated to carrying out their programs.

*It makes a difference when you have the leadership at the top of the organization reporting to the Mayor on something and actually supporting an agenda like this. It absolutely changed things and made it more of a priority.*

—HHC representative

### **YMI has resulted in new networks, new programming, and neighborhood investment.**

Networks have been expanded and working relationships have been strengthened between City agencies working together on YMI programs. For example, DOHMH and HHC, which work together to implement the Cure Violence, reported that YMI helped to tighten their working relationship and improved communications.

The YMI funding also allowed City agencies to develop new programming as well as the infrastructure to carry out new programs. For example, through YMI, DOP developed new programs and contracted these out to providers in NeON (Neighborhood Opportunity

Networks<sup>5</sup>) neighborhoods. To develop the capacity in neighborhoods and manage the programs, DOP had to develop its own infrastructure. Thus, the agency hired contract managers and learned to design, contract, and procure providers. The agency benefitted from the advice of the City's Department of Youth and Community Development, which has a history of contracting out for youth services. And, this strategy has helped DOP to invest in the capacity of

*It feels like we've been building networks in new ways...I'd love to imagine that YMI has been about doing that—reconfiguring, reconstituting, reconnecting, coordinating, and not imposing a service.*

—DOHMH representative

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<sup>5</sup> A network of community organizations, government agencies, local businesses, and community residents focused on connecting probation clients who live in the target neighborhood to opportunities, resources, and services

the NeON neighborhoods. Another example of changes within DOP, resulting from implementation of the AIM program, was the creation of a new unit focused on screening alternative to placement programs—allowing for better matching of youth to programs.

*It's almost hard to think about the NeONs without the YMI programs in the sense that it allowed us to bring a set of resources to these local communities.*

*—DOP representative*

example, DOP staff reported a closer and more direct relationship with YMI programs than they have had in the past with programs to which they refer their clients, and they expressed the hope that this new influence would lead to stronger programs. In a focus group, providers of the Justice Scholars program also described their relationship with DOP as different from relationships they have had with other City agencies. The relationship was seen as one that is supportive and open to learning, understanding of implementation issues, and receptive to suggestions for changes and improvement. HHC representative also reported stronger relationships between HHC's central office and the hospital facilities, as well as across hospital facilities.

Although not an impact on the City agencies, networks among program managers at the different sites have also been formed or strengthened through YMI (e.g., among Cure Violence providers).

*By partnering with multiple City agencies through YMI, with YMI being the hub of many interconnected initiatives, it certainly widened our network, and our direct access to folks we might not have had otherwise...I have a whole new set of colleagues than I had three years ago...And from a program perspective, that's been really nice, to have support from a centralized place, with a centralized purpose.*

*—DOHMH representative*

**YMI has reframed and drawn attention to major issues affecting Black and Latino men, resulting in policy and practice changes.** For example, YMI has reframed how gun violence should be viewed—from an issue of justice to one of public health. In the Cure Violence program, YMI funds have supported the hiring of a new position of hospital responder, a modification to the national program model. These personnel respond to victims of shootings and stabbings, work with families of victims who are grieving to prevent potential retaliation, and find out what kinds of services they may need.

A number of changes in HHC policies and practices have resulted from YMI. To implement the new hospital responder position, HHC had to allow volunteers from the street (who have criminal backgrounds) to come into the hospitals, change the intake protocol for young gunshot victims, allocate time for training, and increase interdisciplinary practice because Cure Violence involves security, police, social workers, intake staff, clinicians, and others. Providers believed that the program changed the HHC's working relationship with the community for the better.

Furthermore, YMI has helped to bring more attention to adolescent medicine and the specific health needs of teens. The Teen Health Improvement Program began as a result of YMI. An HHC respondent commented, “I think culturally the biggest change is just that adolescent medicine is a thing.” At some HHC facilities, there are dedicated adolescent clinics. At other HHC facilities, adolescents are seen in regular pediatric primary care clinics, where practices meet the specific needs of teens to various degrees. According to the HHC respondents, YMI has also strengthened the agenda for addressing the needs of and improving the outcomes for Black and Latino young men.

The trainings provided through the Teen Health Improvement Program have helped HHC obtain teen-friendly designation from the DOHMH for two of its facilities; others have applied. As a result, these facilities are part of the DOHMH *Teens in NYC Guide*, which lists all of the city’s adolescent health or pediatric sites that offer teen-friendly care for sexual and reproductive health.<sup>6</sup> The adoption of the DOHMH guidelines for teen services was reported by HHC to have transformed the agency’s call centers to improve access to appointments and improved physical space by making them more teen friendly.

In addition, YMI has successfully advocated for policies to increase teens’ access to sexual and reproductive health services by increasing enrollment in the Family Planning Benefits Program, removing documentation barriers to enrolling in this program, and protecting teens’ confidentiality rights. YMI also supported the development and dissemination of criteria for teen-accessible services through the DOHMH.

**YMI has provided opportunities for youth to have a voice.** Youth engagement is an important aspect of YMI. The perspectives of youth have been solicited through four YMI youth forums that engaged 40 young people across the various programs; these youth helped to plan a larger YMI Youth Empowerment Summit.

In addition, active youth engagement is a key feature of the City’s Teen Health Improvement Program. Through this program, young people, primarily Black and Latino young men and women, have participated in a needs assessment process designed to improve adolescents’ access to quality healthcare, while also providing employment opportunities to the youth. The process has included a Teen Patient Satisfaction Survey administered by youth to teens after their doctor’s visit. Another component to the process is the Standardized Patient project, which assesses the communication skills of providers working with teens and provides them with training. In the Standardized Patient project, young people visit clinic facilities, act out a case and interact with a provider, and provide feedback about the communication and their level of

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<sup>6</sup> Since the time that interviews were conducted, an additional 14 clinics have received the teen-friendly designation (16 total have received this designation). This represents an increase of 33 percent in the number of HHC clinics designated as teen-friendly since the previous version of the *Teens in NYC Guide*.

comfort. A total of 134 providers have received the assessment, representing about half of the total; another cycle is planned.

The Teen Patient Satisfaction Survey was coordinated by HHC with the Mayor’s Youth Leadership Council—another venue for youth voice—which trains high school students from around the city to think about their role in city government and address policy questions.

**YMI’s sphere of influence is appreciated by providers, but may not yet be well-understood by frontline staff.** In the focus groups with providers of the justice programs, some of the program directors indicated their awareness of the larger YMI initiative and saw YMI as a larger version or a complement to their own program (for example, AIM). Directors of the Arches program were aware of the other YMI programs as a result of YMI meetings as well as from the DOP reporting system that lists all of the YMI programs. Again, the complementary nature of the specific program with the larger YMI initiative was noted. Yet, in spite of this awareness, and in spite of YMI stimulating greater collaboration among City agencies and between City agencies and providers, more work remains in building awareness and understanding of the larger YMI context among providers, particularly frontline staff. Across the programs, awareness of the entire YMI initiative among frontline staff was generally lacking.

Some frontline staff viewed YMI merely as a funding source, in some cases one that augments their core services. For example, according to frontline staff at one program site, the YMI service “became a nice wraparound for us. It was a wraparound program that offered services that we were not able to offer [otherwise].” As a further example, YMI funding allowed for program enhancements, such as the hiring of hospital responders in Cure Violence programs. Among some program directors, as well, YMI was seen as a network of programs funded by philanthropy.

## Participant Outcomes

### Overall, the YMI programs have resulted in positive outcomes for participants.

Frontline staff and participants, in particular, described in concrete terms the outcomes experienced by participants. As described below, a number of common outcomes emerged, including changes in attitudes and behavior and progress towards YMI's core outcome areas.<sup>7</sup>

- Increase in self-efficacy.** The most commonly reported outcome for participants was an increase in self-efficacy, or an increased belief or “confidence” that they can achieve their goals, such as getting a job or enrolling in or graduating from school. For example, Arches frontline staff observed that participants are beginning to see that their goals are realistic and can be achieved. Justice Scholars participants reported that the academic successes they experienced in the program gave them confidence that they didn't have before. One participant also commented, “I feel like [my plans] are more likely to come true now that I'm actually in this program.”
 

*I never thought I could go to college, before I didn't think I was fit for it. This has really built my confidence.*

*—Justice Scholars participant*

Sponsoring agency staff for IMPACT reported that there is an “invisible, intangible” outcome of peer mentoring for participants, which is that it allows young people to see that they “belong” in college or that they have equal opportunity to attend college, which most disconnected young people do not feel. Participants corroborated this finding, stating that because of their participation they felt more confident in their ability to succeed and have become more focused on learning. They see the importance of learning and how it can help their futures—while mentors added that the program has helped participants to stay focused on their goals.

There was consensus among Cure Violence participants that they gained an increased sense of self-efficacy and agency to change not only their own situations, but their neighborhood as well. Most participants agreed that Cure Violence gave them a “second chance” and that the program had positively influenced their future plans and goals (e.g., earning an HSE diploma, going to college, finding a job, living on their own).

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<sup>7</sup> The Teen Health Improvement Program is an exception. This program is expected to lead to the more immediate changes in the way providers interact and improvements in the user-friendliness of HHC facilities, which ultimately are expected to result in improved health outcomes.

Furthermore, they reported that the advice and support that they received from the program made them more confident about reaching those plans and goals.

- Improved communication and interpersonal skills.** Improved communication and self-expression skills among participants were noted by frontline staff and participants. Arches staff, for example, considered these skills to be the greatest outcomes of the program, especially considering how difficult it is for youth facing multiple barriers to discuss emotional topics. As a result of group mentoring and team building activities, Arches staff believe that participants communicate their feelings more effectively and openly, speak to one another more respectfully, and are better at communicating in contexts outside of the center, such as in school and when speaking to potential employers. Participants are beginning to understand that they are part of a larger community.
- Improved conflict mediation skills.** Especially for participants in DOP programs and in Cure Violence, gains in conflict mediation skills—for example, how to handle conflict, becoming “calmer,” and avoiding fights and retaliation—were reported by staff and participants. Certainly, this outcome is closely linked with improved communication and interpersonal skills. Frontline staff of Cure Violence have also seen a decrease in the need to mediate conflicts among participants as their time in the program increases. According to frontline staff, the program has helped to nurture relationships among participants who would normally not communicate with each other. A staff member observed, “They acted like friends and brothers and behaved very respectful of one another.” Further evidence of improved conflict mediation is the decreased number of shootings and gunshot and stabbing victims in Cure Violence communities that were reported by City agencies and providers.

*How my actions used to be, like they kind of helped me see a different way. So I don't want to react the same way in certain situations like I did before.*

—Cure Violence participant
- Greater sense of responsibility.** Participants across the programs also gained a greater sense of responsibility—personally as well as to their community—and became more oriented toward the future. AIM frontline staff shared success stories of youth who chose to make better, more responsible decisions, such as avoiding drug use. AIM participants also thought that the program taught them how to be more “responsible.” An Arches participant commented, “I love this program. This program basically made me change my ways. Now I just think bigger and just focus on my goals.” “We have a different outlook on education [now],” said one IMPACT participant.



- **Reduced recidivism.** The reduced likelihood of recidivism was reported by staff and participants, particularly for participants in DOP programs and Cure Violence. These programs helped to redirect participants from re-incarceration or further involvement

*They help me stay out of trouble and give me opportunities and sign me up for different programs that will keep me busy and away from a jail cell.*

*–Cure Violence participant*

with the criminal justice system. For some participants, better behavior led to a more lenient phase of probation requiring only monthly check-ins. Participants pointed out that what their mentors experienced while incarcerated, for example, made them want to do something better with their lives. According to Arches frontline

staff, participants have told them that they continue to come to the program because it keeps them out of trouble and off the streets.

- **Improved education outcomes.** Increased literacy and math skills, earning an HSE diploma, improved school attendance, graduating from high school, and enrolling in college were among the improved education outcomes reported by staff and participants across many of the programs. Such successes led to increased motivation and self-esteem among participants. In IMPACT, mentors have also experienced positive outcomes in the area of education, such as an increased focus on postsecondary career goals and improved academic performance.

- **Improved employment outcomes.** Many participants across the programs have already found employment as a result of the job readiness and job placement support that they receive through their programs. AIM, Arches and Cure Violence further advance the employment goals of YMI by employing ex-offenders as program staff. One Arches provider reported that his organization had hired ex-offenders for other programs as a result of seeing how well this worked for Arches. The benefit is two-fold: there is a benefit to the program in hiring ex-offenders who are able to work more effectively with court-involved young people because of their shared experiences; and a benefit to ex-offenders, who encounter difficulties finding employment. Over the long term, these experiences may help to change perceptions among the wider provider community as well as employers at large. IMPACT participants emphasized that the program is helping participants qualify for better jobs, ultimately improving their ability to provide for their families.

*I know for a fact that several of the mentors have used this as a first step to get them into the job market.*

*–YMI program provider*



## Best Practices, Challenges, and Suggested Enhancements

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With the exception of the technical assistance Teen Health Improvement Program, the programs included in the study employ an evidence-based mentoring or case management approach where intensive, individualized support is provided to participants to meet basic needs and to change the trajectory of their lives. All programs recognize that addressing the barriers that participants face is critical for program interventions to work. Recruitment strategies varied across programs, such as mandatory participation to meet probation requirements, relying on probation officers and courts for referrals, and utilizing peers and/or credible messengers to attract participants. Programs that relied on referrals from probation officers, such as Arches and Justice Scholars,<sup>8</sup> faced more challenges recruiting youth, especially during start-up.

Whether programs primarily seek to alter attitudes and behaviors, place youth on a road to educational and/or employment success, or strengthen social support networks, these programs ultimately encourage youth to envision a more positive future for themselves and try to provide or connect them to the supports they need to make that future a reality. Perhaps what one CUNY staff person remarked about the intangible impact of IMPACT peer mentoring can be said of all YMI programs, which is that YMI programs try to give young Black and Latino men a sense of opportunity that most of them do not have—that the programs plant the idea that they “belong” in college, for example, or that they can find and hold a job, and make healthier choices. The YMI programs essentially try to provide participants with a fuller sense of their options.

**Across all six programs, the importance of building relationships between frontline staff and participants was a common theme.** Building trust and a “safe space” for participants were essential for effective program implementation. Even in the Teen Health Improvement Program, personal connections—patient bonding with a health educator or healthcare provider, for example—was acknowledged by a provider as the “biggest draw” for engaging participants. Addressing basic needs and connecting youth to necessary resources was also important to help participants achieve better outcomes. Therefore, it is no surprise that the most effective practices for recruiting and engaging young Black and Latino men center on

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<sup>8</sup> Note that in Justice Scholars program participants are expected to include 40 percent probation clients who are referred from DOP, and 60 percent court-involved clients (not on probation) who are recruited directly by provider organizations.

dimensions of relationship-building and interpersonal connections as well as providers' partnerships and connections to resources in the community.

## Best practices

In this section, we highlight common best practices and point to program-specific strategies for effective program implementation and engaging young Black and Latino men. Detailed information about the goals, expected outcomes, and strategies of each of the selected programs can be found in the appendix.

**Hiring mentors who mirror participants.** For most of the programs, effective participant engagement relies heavily on the one-to-one relationship between participants and frontline staff (such as mentors/advocates in AIM, outreach workers in Cure Violence, peer mentors in IMPACT, case managers and life coaches in Justice Scholars). Across the programs, the most effective relationships were characterized by participants being able to identify with their mentor because they share a similar background (i.e., Black/Latino male from the community) and have overcome similar challenges. From a CEO staff member's perspective, having men on staff—men in case management roles, men in positive roles interacting with the program, who have the ability to connect with participants—is an effective strategy for engaging with this population.

Several of the program models, such as IMPACT and Cure Violence, are intentionally built on the use of peers or “credible messengers”—who serve as positive male role models—to work with participants in order to have the greatest impact.

- A key strategy for engaging youth in AIM is in the initial pairing with their mentor. To the extent possible, AIM tries to match mentors and participants according to shared interests or hobbies. As one program director commented, “In terms of engagement, I think, the magic sometimes is in the mentoring...that initial pairing.” Participants stressed the importance of having a relationship with a mentor who really understands them. As one participant stated, “[T]he mentors are mad cool, because they know how to relate to us. Because they know us individually. They know what type of things can motivate us.”

*You can come talk to them, they tell you, 'you can come talk to me. You can come relate to me if you have a problem, you come, sit down and we can find a solution together'...and that'd be the main thing, especially with, you know what I mean, a black community. Cause honestly speaking? A lot of us don't know how to deal with anger. You know, we go about anger the wrong way. Now if we get an opportunity to sit with people that have dealt with learning how to deal with anger and they provide the information that we need, we'll also learn that. Captivate it and then incorporate it into our lives as well.*

*—Cure Violence participant*

- In Cure Violence, using “credible messengers”—people who have overcome prior justice system and gang involvement, who participants can relate to—was cited by sponsoring agency staff, provider program directors, and frontline staff as one of the most effective strategies for improving the trajectories of young Black and Latino men engaged in and impacted by gun violence. As one City agency staff person commented, “To work with those who have done this before; to work with those who have walked their shoes; to work with those who have had similar backgrounds, and have now changed; I really do think that’s why the Cure Violence model works.”

As Cure Violence participants reported, outreach workers are people they can relate to because they have dealt with violence, may have served time in jail, and have been through what they themselves have been through. Oftentimes, outreach workers are just a little older than the participants. When asked why they decided to participate in Cure Violence, participants agreed that seeing the change in the lives of Cure Violence staff was a motivating factor. Through their mentors, they are able to see an alternative path for their lives.

- Program directors of Arches also reported that the credible messenger model, and the fact that it has not “over-professionalized” its work with participants, sets it apart from other programs. As one program director stated, “The kids have seen us invest in people like them, that [mentors] have spent their time in jail...and the mentors see themselves in the kids, and so there’s not this kind of divide between the professional and the kid.” Frontline staff reported that hiring mentors formerly involved with the justice system helped young people feel more comfortable because they could relate to them. Participants reported that hearing about the incarceration experiences of their mentors motivated them to do something better with their lives and provided positive inspirations.

*They give you a perspective of life...something that you can actually learn. Like for me, I think that I learned from people that already go – like, mentors, that was in jail, and they came home. Like, I don’t never want to be in their shoes. So, like, I’ll do other things to move me out of that position.*

*–Arches participant*

- According to program directors, one of the virtues of the IMPACT model is that the mentors bring back to the program their “lived experience.” Mentors are considered to be part of the population that YMI is intending to serve. Having gone through the program themselves, mentors provide “a model of student leadership.” “They are the face of IMPACT, they are the face of the YMI program, and they’re in college.” Program directors also reported that one of the most effective recruitment strategies is using mentors to recruit because the students can relate to them and vice versa.

**Caring and consistent relationships.** Another important aspect of effective participant engagement and a key contributor to successful outcomes across programs is that the staff-participant relationship is a caring and consistent one. This especially rings true for youth who have been mistreated and disappointed by adults in their lives. It takes times to establish a sense

of trust and ensure that participants understand that the mentors and program staff are genuinely interested in helping them.

- Arches program directors and frontline staff repeatedly emphasized how crucial it is to provide a safe space where participants feel heard and respected and know that people care about them. “We’re gonna care, not cure,” said one program director. DOP and program directors and frontline staff largely attributed positive changes in participants’ attitudes and behaviors to the influences of their relationships with their mentors and program staff. One coordinator explained, “You are creating a safe space for them to actually practice becoming who they want to be. One of our mantras is that if you can’t do it in practice then you can’t do it in the game, and the Arches groups are practice.”

*I've been inspired by Arches, in general, to get away from that whole judgment and diagnosing, but just to care. And just to start where they're at and focus on building that relationship, building that trust. And, which I haven't really seen in any other programs...as deep, as deep, I would say.*

*—Arches program director*

Frontline staff explained how their main strategy for “reaching” and recruiting participants is the care they show them. Participants reported that the program surpassed their expectations because of the care of their mentors, whom they initially expected to “just take them to court and provide them with legal advice.” Engaging youth is not easy work, however. Frontline staff reported that their first challenge is convincing participants that they can be trusted. Participants also reported how initially it was a challenge participating in groups because they were skeptical of disclosing their challenges and personal lives. According to program directors and frontline staff, it was necessary for them to repeatedly contact participants to develop trusting relationships and encourage them to participate in program activities. Although this strategy is successful, it required a considerable amount of time on the part of the mentors and program staff.

- AIM program directors indicated that having a mentor available 24/7 makes an immense difference in the lives of young people. In addition, AIM mentors offer honesty and consistency that participants have generally not experienced before. As a program director stated, “I think young people really pick up on the fact that they have a few people now that really do care about them and are...dedicated to go above and beyond. That makes a big difference for them. You know, when they sense that somebody’s really, really concerned about how they’re doing.” Participants considered their mentors to be the most helpful aspect of their participation in AIM, describing their mentors as role models who care about them, teach them how to make right decisions, and are people they can talk to. One participant shared, “I just like them...they make me smile when I’m not happy...when I’m depressed, I can go to them about something...if something’s wrong, and I can’t talk to my family member about it, I can automatically go to one of them.” A DOP staff person stated that that mentors use a “what it takes”

mentality when working with participants. Frontline staff reported that constant communication with participants—calling them regularly and talking with them about their struggles—is an effective strategy for engagement.

- In Cure Violence, program directors and frontline staff also noted that caring, trusting relationships and consistent, constant contacts were hallmarks of effective engagement. Consistent support helps to build trust. According to one program director, “At first they’re reluctant, because they’ve never seen someone go that far to try to help them, so a lot of times they’re skeptical at first until they notice that you’re consistent with it, and then they begin to trust.” This skepticism was also noted as a challenge, but once overcome, the rest falls into place. As described by frontline staff, trust opens the door to progress. “[W]ith that buy-in of them trusting us, we were able to work with them at their level.”

*He actually comes to my door sometimes checking on me. And it’s like, damn, they really care. And it’s like, no matter how much you don’t show the effort, they still gonna push forward to get you to, like, to cooperate, like, to go with them...it’s a vision that they’ve got. It’s not like you’re being led by the blind. It’s like, they’re going somewhere, they’re trying to stop something and start something new...they’re just teaching us how to grow up and be sensitive about stuff. Like, violence is really not the answer.*

—Cure Violence participant

Participants, who refer to outreach workers as their mentors or counselors, reported having genuine relationships with their mentors and feeling cared for by them. They also noted their mentors’ persistence. Their mentors, according to participants, help them change their mindsets about life and handling conflict. In addition, participants reported that although they are paired with a specific outreach worker, they often know multiple outreach workers and feel cared for by all of them.

*That love that they feel from us, that consistency that they see in us, that dedication that they get from us, and most importantly that ear that we lend to them, because you can always keep somebody engaged if you’re a listener.*

—Cure Violence frontline staff

- CUNY staff reported that peer mentors in IMPACT do “what it takes” to support students. Frontline staff reported that constantly and consistently reaching out and checking in with participants was the best strategy for motivating participants and keeping them engaged in the program. When identifying effective strategies for improving participant trajectories and outcomes, frontline staff at one site described the program as “family oriented” where they “kind of nurture [their] students a little bit more than probably typical programs.” This was cited as very beneficial—it makes students feel comfortable and recognizes that there are non-academic barriers to their HSE achievement. “Once they feel that they’re part of a family, they perform better.”

**Close working relationships with probation officers.** Particularly for the justice programs, which try to work closely with probation officers, the relationship with probation officers (and their supervisors) is key to effective participant recruitment and engagement.

- In Justice Scholars and Arches, DOP staff reported that they have worked to ensure that providers develop good working relationships with probation officers through regular meetings (between providers and probation officers) to discuss referrals, meet and greets, and breakfast events, for example. They also encourage probation officers to visit the programs and to make presentations about the programs at NeONs. Arches program directors and frontline staff expanded on this by reporting that they invite probation officers to program events, such as parties for the participants and events to introduce mentors to probation officers, regularly visit and email probation officers to update them on their clients' progress in the program (including when participants are not attending program activities, so that probation officers can follow up), hold monthly case conferences, and encourage mentors to communicate directly with probation officers about their clients' progress. They also helped to strengthen relationships between the probation officers and participants, by keeping abreast of what is required of participants to end their probation, and encouraging participants to comply with these requirements and complete all necessary paperwork. Arches frontline staff stressed that effective recruitment relies on developing a good relationship with the probation officer and “[making] their jobs as easy as possible.”

Program directors for Justice Scholars and Arches commented that these ongoing and regular engagement efforts have resulted in probation officers developing a greater trust of the programs and program staff. DOP staff and program directors were in agreement that when probation officers are more engaged in the programs, they are more likely to make referrals and help address implementation challenges. In some cases, the number of referrals increased after they worked to build relationships with probation officers and their managers. For example, one Justice Scholars program director reported that 80 percent of her referrals came from probation officers, which is twice what is recommended for the program. This program director attributed the successful referral rate to the strong relationships between her staff and the DOP manager.

**Community partnerships and connections to resources.** Being able to provide wraparound services and/or having partnerships with other organizations in the community is essential for connecting participants with necessary resources—such as education, employment, social, and health supports. These partnerships ensure that participants can take advantage of the available services and resources.

- Justice Scholars program directors reported that strong working relationships with partner agencies and organizations are key to their successful implementation of the program. Examples include partnerships with HSE testing organizations and organizations that provide clothing for job interviews. The absence of organizational relationships can create challenges for the programs. One provider noted that she is



challenged by a lack of access to internships for participants—not only because her organization does not provide this resource, but because she is unsure of where to find this resource in the community. Several providers reported that there are limited opportunities available for participants to take the HSE test once they are ready to do so (also mentioned by Arches frontline staff).<sup>9</sup> Although some providers have agreements with testing organizations that set aside seats for their participants, those that do not have these partnerships report that their participants must sometimes wait a month or more to take the HSE test. Recognizing the importance of providing a full complement of services, one program director noted, “...certainly I think the HSE class wouldn’t work unless we had the wraparound services, unless we had all of this stuff. Because it would [otherwise] just be school.”<sup>10</sup>

- In Cure Violence, being able to provide resources (e.g., jobs) to participants is one of the most effective strategies/activities for positively influencing outcomes of participants as well as for keeping participants engaged. As noted by one program director, “[Y]ou can’t just go in and ask a person to stop doing something that fed their families and kept food on their tables unless you’re prepared to...show that person another means.” Once trust is built with participants, it is extremely important to be prepared with resources to offer to them. Frontline staff also reported that it is difficult to convince participants to change their behavior or work on a goal without being able to offer a resource, such as a job. More established provider organizations may have an easier time of providing connections to resources in the community. A program director reported that they are always trying to stay attuned to all possible networks from which their participants can benefit. Nonetheless, frontline staff acknowledged that community perception of the program’s target population can limit some of the resources available to youth.
- In IMPACT, having connections with other college offices has helped to serve participants. The program has also successfully drawn on resources available at the colleges, such as obtaining fee waivers for students through COPE, a program offered by CUNY in collaboration with the New York City Human Resources Administration.

**Opportunities for peer learning and cross-provider sharing.** When asked about whether City agencies and providers had opportunities to communicate and coordinate with each other about which practices have been most effective in helping participants improve outcomes, CEO/YMI and sponsoring agency staff and program directors reported that such opportunities for peer learning were invaluable. YMI (and CEO) program directors have participated in a management course developed by CUNY at the request of CEO, which

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<sup>9</sup> Note that the issue of limited opportunities to take the HSE test was exacerbated by high demand for GED testing before the transition to the new HSE test.

<sup>10</sup> The Justice Scholars program includes educational services, tutoring, career exploration, case management, peer support, financial incentives, placement and follow-up services.

included training on staff management and human resources, budgeting and contract management, and leadership. As stated by a CEO representative, “It strengthens the program and performance of the program. Because you have providers who are doing well, operating a program, who are sharing what they’re doing with providers who may be struggling. So, that really encourages sort of cross-pollination of knowledge. So, I think that is all to the benefit of YMI, and the programs.” Looking across YMI programs, CEO staff thought DYCD, which has responsibility for Cornerstone Mentoring, the Young Adult Literacy Program, and the Young Adult Internship Program, have excelled at this in particular. They also cited Cure Violence.

- In Cure Violence, there are several opportunities for peer learning. DOHMH organizes monthly meetings of site program managers where sites share best practices, distribute information on practice to sites, and coordinates opportunities for program staff to shadow staff at other sites. These efforts have proven effective because staff implement best practices learned at or from other sites. In addition, DOHMH recently started an outreach worker supervisor meeting for middle management. Providers also support one another throughout the year by attending one another’s shooting responses (e.g., celebrating the life of gun violence victims, acknowledging the community’s loss, and calling for an end to violence), community activities, and other events. Cure Violence sites also have the advantage of learning about best practice from other communities across the country implementing the model (e.g., annual convening in Chicago, biweekly conference calls with Chicago programs). In at least one Cure Violence site, weekly meetings are held between staff and their supervisor and also among staff. During group staff meetings, the group may discuss conflict strategies, intervention contacts made with youth, and areas of the neighborhood where incidents have recently occurred.
- DOP staff and program directors of Justice Scholars and Arches reported that cross-provider program coordinator meetings are helpful for recruitment, engagement, and influencing outcomes because they offer opportunities for discussions of program strengths and weaknesses, strategies, and lessons learned. Some program coordinators attend learning committee meetings to learn about successful program strategies and share resources. In addition, Arches frontline staff indicated that communication between mentors is vital in order to stay updated on each participant’s situation.
- AIM program directors noted the value and helpfulness of bimonthly providers’ meetings, which are an opportunity for them to speak to each other about the program’s unique issues and challenges. Frontline staff also reported that they used to meet with staff from other sites, but that this practice had not occurred in quite some time. Unlike the program directors, frontline staff did not find these meetings very helpful. Each site, however, meets weekly to discuss cases and share their strategies for working with participants as well as challenges. This helps to keep mentors informed of what is going on with each participant, enabling them to provide assistance if needed, which according to mentors, happens often.



- IMPACT frontline staff at one site noted that during staff meetings they discuss what is going on in and out of classrooms, and how they can improve their work with participants. Staff from another site described themselves as a close-knit family, and that part of their community mentoring approach was constant communication among mentors about their students. They created a phone application that allowed mentors to communicate as a group and schedule meetings.

Respondents cited other effective practices for working with the target population, including:

- **Engaging other influential people in the lives of participants.** Certainly, AIM utilizes this approach by working with the families of participants and encouraging them to support participants' goals. As an AIM frontline staff person stated, "We sometimes have expectations for these students, or we have goals, and they're not the same expectations [that are] at home." Therefore, the strength of the link between the program and the family is important to fostering participants' success. In Arches, program staff conduct home visits not only to identify participant needs, but to establish relationships with their parents and siblings. YMI staff have learned that connecting with the matriarch of the family, such as the maternal grandmother, is a helpful strategy for recruitment and engagement. Working with young men in groups has also been effective. In these cases, identifying the young man who is the influencer or lead in the group, and utilizing him to connect with the group has been a promising strategy. Similarly, Cure Violence targets the "key player" in the neighborhood (often among the "most dangerous" people in the neighborhood). A program director commented, "Once you get those top people, the rest pretty much just fall into place."
- **Training of mentors/frontline staff.** Arches program directors mentioned the importance of providing mentors with the proper training to help them develop the skills necessary to support and guide the mentees. A CEO representative also underscored the importance of training; in particular, ensuring staff are prepared to take advantage of fluid moments (e.g., providing orientation to new participants as they join the program), make appropriate referrals (e.g., HSE prep), and work with young men with criminal histories.
- **Incentivizing youth participation.** Financial incentives for attendance or continued participation and providing hot meals (which many participants lack consistently) were identified effective engagement strategies by Justice Scholars and Arches program directors. DOP staff reported that Arches sites are required to provide hot meals to support retention and promote bonding of the group members, and that the practice is encouraged in other programs.

## Challenges

**Start-up.** Start-up was a major challenge for new programs, not only for the programs included in this study, but for new YMI programs overall. As expected, many programs experienced considerable delays in their timelines and in meeting targets, some of which was due to delays in the procurement process. As stated by a CEO representative, “[W]hen there [are] new programs, and you are trying to make real something that has been on paper, no matter how much you've been informed by other programming and evidence, you do encounter hurdles.” Typical of CEO programs, YMI programs were on a compressed timeline, which placed a strain on City agencies. “We're trying to get things up and running, and make a difference within the current administration.”

To address this challenge, CEO worked with the Mayor’s Office of Contract Services and the chief contracting officers at each of the City agencies, to ensure that contracts were approved as quickly and smoothly as possible. In spite of this, however, there were still delays, particularly within DOP, which was new to contracting and had the added challenge of implementing several new initiatives. New to the procurement process, DOP had to build internal capacity (including staff assignments) for developing concept papers, writing and issuing Request for Proposals (RFPs) and managing the contracts. Getting input from potential providers posed logistical challenges as well.

Even with contracts in place, there were start-up delays on the provider side as well, for example, with regard to referrals and recruitment. Furthermore, delayed distribution of funds was a problem for small grassroots organizations that typically do not have reserve funds to fully implement. To address this, one Cure Violence provider developed a fiscal agent/financial support mechanism so that they would have money on hand until the funds came through. They also tried to obtain bridge loans and raise additional funds.

**Recruitment.** Recruitment of participants was particularly challenging for Arches and Justice Scholars. In general, these programs had a difficult time reaching the numbers of referrals expected from probation officers. In response, sites put great effort into building relationships with probation officers in order to boost referrals in addition to conducting their own recruitment.<sup>11</sup> DOP recognized that the agency should have undertaken a more coordinated, larger scale and better resourced effort to help DOP staff understand the goals and eligibility criteria of each program, and to equip probation officers with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to implement a more effective referral process.

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<sup>11</sup> In Arches, which serves probation clients exclusively, 100 percent of referrals are made by DOP. In Justice Scholars, program participants are expected to include 40 percent probation clients referred from DOP, and 60 percent court-involved clients (not on probation) who are recruited directly by provider organizations.

Program directors for AIM identified the process of referrals from family court as a challenge, citing that they received only a few referrals and at a slow pace when the program started. While a slow referral process is not unusual for court-mandated programs, small caseloads posed challenges to mentors, who are paid according to the amount of contact with participants.

**Transitioning participants out of programs.** Preparing participants to leave a program and move on to another phase of their lives was noted as a challenge by several programs. Commenting about AIM, a DOP representative stated,

*One of our biggest challenges is building resiliency, and not dependency, because we work so close with them...At times [the participants] want to hold on, and their families wants to hold on, and we have to transition him out. So I think that's what our challenge is with the agency. Making sure that our families and our kids are ready at the six or nine month mark.*

Provider agency program directors agreed that more thought and planning needs to go into building the independence of participants who would no longer have the same level of support after they transitioned out of a program.

Cure Violence providers have found it challenging to shift attention from participants with whom they have built strong relationships and who are doing well to focus on other participants with greater needs. As one program director stated, “We build really strong relationships with people, but at a certain time we've got to move on and get new people because that's the program. You got to have numbers and people want to see big numbers. That's actually, like, a problem, because you're making connections with people, that's why it's useful. We genuinely care about each other and the person who's benefitting...” One provider addressed this challenge by creating the life coach position (through separate funding). As described earlier, life coaches continue to work with participants (who are transferred from outreach workers) to assist them in reaching the next step towards their future goals.

In Arches, frontline staff at one site reported that participants continue to return to the program for support after completing their cohort (and in spite of no longer receiving monetary incentive), noting that participants feel they still need the support of the program or someone to talk to. While this highlights how much participants value the program, it also illustrates how participants continue to need supports.

**Relationships with hospitals.** For the health programs included in this study, establishing partnerships with hospitals, a critical partner, posed a major challenge. In Cure Violence, for example, at least one provider had a more difficult time getting buy-in from leadership at the public hospital (compared with another site). Establishing a relationship with the hospital took much longer. According to one HHC representative, the hospital initially did not understand how the program worked and was not receptive to the idea of bringing in individuals with criminal records (hospital responders) as volunteers. Frontline staff noted that communications

with hospital staff (who may be called after a victim has been discharged) was a challenge as well. In addition, provider organization program directors reported that they felt that they needed to prove themselves to HHC hospital staff, to show that they were “worthy of even being in the hospital.” As one program director stated, “[W]e’ve still got a long ways to go in terms of internally getting everybody to...understand the value that we bring to the equation, because we’re new to the table and they’re used to dealing with other educators and other doctors...we still kind of have to win them over and prove ourselves to be worthy. I think they’re beginning to see the value of us now since we’ve been involved with them for a couple of years and the relationship is getting better...they’re not 100 percent there yet, but I think everything just takes time.” According to the HHC representative, working with the hospital was made easier at another site because of supportive leadership at the hospital and because a hospital staff person was identified to implement the work.

HHC representatives for the Teen Health Improvement Program also reported that building trust between the HHC central office, which runs the program, and HHC facilities was a challenge. As a new program HHC had to promote the importance of the work among clinics, especially in the face of other concurrent initiatives and competing demands placed on providers. As one HHC staff person said, “If we get in the door, it’s because they’re letting us in the door.” To overcome this challenge, HHC tried to establish a strong presence in facilities and made sure to follow through with action. The HHC representative commented: “They get so many different initiatives coming from the central office...There may have been a teen initiative before, and it wasn’t followed through, so this is the first time they’re actually seeing, like, ‘Whoa, these people are actually following through, bringing us stuff, responding to our questions.’ So it’s been a slow process of getting them to trust us.” They also tried as much as possible to integrate program components with other competing demands on facilities—to make it “as easy as possible” for providers. For example, since HHC is in the process of achieving patient-centered medical home status, the program tries to integrate its work with what facilities must do to achieve this status. In addition, to foster better relations with and encourage participation from facilities, the program created an advisory panel composed of adolescent provider “champions” from each of the 17 facilities. “That was huge...finding those people, and then actually getting them together, and motivating them...convincing them to trust us, that we’re actually going to follow up.”

**New HSE assessment.** The new HSE test, which took effect in January 2014, was a major source of concern for IMPACT and Justice Scholars, both programs that specifically help participants obtain their HSE credential. The new, more rigorous test has many implications for these programs in terms of training instructors and providing support to participants to ensure their success. As described by CUNY staff, “The test is going to be more difficult. Right now there’s a lot of confusion about when it will actually start to be available. If students can’t get an HSE diploma, they can’t go to college, and those are the outcomes of the program...It’s a whole new paradigm for the test. Now students have to be able to come in with prior knowledge of social studies and science. The math is much more difficult. The writing is more like college-level

writing.” Program directors for Justice Scholars, who in addition to the new HSE test cited the challenge of the new Common Core Standards, reported that time and energy will need to be spent revising the curriculum and training instructors, as well as addressing participants’ needs for remediation.

**Personal motivation of participants.** Among frontline staff responses, breaking through to participants who are reluctant to change their behaviors was a common challenge. A Justice Scholars staff person noted, “[A] lot of it is will. You know, they have to see themselves making a change.” For example, Arches frontline staff found it challenging to get participants (who were brought to the program by their probation officers) out of their frame of mind—which is to continue with their lifestyle—and to change their thought processes. Among participants, personal motivation and responsibility—“staying focused, maintaining stamina, and not getting distracted”—were identified as challenges to achieving better outcomes (Cure Violence, AIM, and Arches). It can also be difficult to engage participants who are distracted by other priorities in their lives (e.g., staying alive, holding a job) or who are simply trying to meet their most basic needs.

Other common challenges were mentioned, including the following:

- **Adapting programs to local settings.** DOP staff for Arches and Justice Scholars reported that adapting the program to real-world issues to address site differences was a challenge. CUNY staff for IMPACT described the challenges of adapting the Future Now program model at the two program sites, which provide fewer hours of program services, because of budgetary and space constraints. The sites also have different campus cultures and student populations compared with the Future Now program site. Frontline staff at one of the IMPACT sites also cited various challenges with adapting the Future Now model (e.g., hours of the program, structured meetings with mentors, assigning specific mentors to students, etc.), but that these challenges were easily resolved to respond to the culture and needs of the community. CUNY was able to work with Future Now—which was struggling with the adaptation of their approach—to think through how to deliver technical assistance and scale up the program in a different environment. A CUNY representative reported, “There are some elements that are easy to transfer and some that are more challenging to transfer, and some that probably can’t be transferred and shouldn’t be transferred because they don’t apply so well to the new environment.” As described by a frontline staff member, the model “has transferability but still has to be adaptive to the culture.” According to CEO staff, variation among how providers deliver their programs is not uncommon because of the geographic area they serve or the composition of the target population (e.g., more youth in foster care), for example, yet some programs may have more flexible models than others.
- **Transportation.** Transportation for participants was cited as a challenge by frontline staff and participants across some of the programs (Cure Violence, IMPACT, and AIM).

This was particularly true for participants concerned with safety and “territorial” issues (Cure Violence and AIM). IMPACT staff cited a lack of funds for transportation. As discussed in the following *Suggestions for program enhancements* section, a number of respondents suggested more assistance in this area.

- **Neighborhood safety.** Particularly for participants involved in the justice system, the “environments” in which they live—unsafe neighborhoods, old neighborhood “associates,” and issues related to territoriality—presented challenges to their engagement in the program. For example, participants in Cure Violence reported that it was a challenge to participate in activities in neighborhoods where they “can’t go” because of territorial issues. Even for frontline staff, such as AIM mentors, unsafe neighborhoods and homes made it difficult to schedule home visits.
- **Negative peer interactions.** While many participants reported positive interactions with their peers in the program, some participants reported that engagement in programs was difficult because of negative interactions among participants. Getting participants to interact amicably with one another was also an oft-noted challenge among frontline staff. Negative behaviors can be disruptive to group processes (Arches, IMPACT, and Justice Scholars).
- **DOP Connect data system.** Program directors for Justice Scholars found DOP Connect—a new database system created for DOP’s YMI programs—to be challenging. While DOP Connect has undergone and continues to undergo technical modifications to improve functionality, reliability, and user experiences, at the time interviews were conducted, program directors reported that the terminology and definitions used by the system did not align with the various programs’ understanding of them (e.g., “inactive” was interpreted differently by DOP and providers). Other challenges with the system included its limitations in showing the complete story of participant growth (e.g., grade-level increases are measured only from one month to the next), and how outcomes reported through the system do not align with outcomes measured using data from in-house databases. Arches program directors also indicated that it was a challenge to use the reporting system. Recognizing that some of these challenges stem from data entry practices at provider organizations, DOP is planning to offer additional training to provider staff.

## Suggestions for program enhancements

The interviews with sponsoring agencies and program directors elicited the following suggestions for enhancing the programs.

**Connect the “menu of programs.”** As summed up by one HHC representative, something needs to be done to better connect the “menu of programs” so that providers can



refer to one another as needed (e.g., connecting Cure Violence participants with an employment or youth development program to help them get a summer job, connecting a young person leaving a probationary program to health care, etc.). “There are so many different components to addressing disparities among young Black and Latino men so it has to be interdisciplinary. One program is not sufficient...It takes all these programs together to make a difference...The most difficult part is how you connect this menu of programs where people are actually referring to each other as needed.” This could be said of all YMI programs, for which it is critical that providers have partnerships with organizations and connections to resources in the community so that they can refer participants (see Best Practices).

As further illustration of this point, it was mentioned earlier that one Justice Scholars program director was challenged by a lack of access to internships for participants—not only because her organization does not provide this resource, but because she was unsure of where to find this resource in the community. As previously mentioned, providers of Justice Scholars also reported that it was a challenge to find spaces for their participants to take the HSE test. Bringing YMI programs together and strengthening their connections to one another could help to address this challenge.

**Train probation officers working with YMI programs.** Thus far, it is clear that strong relations with probation officers are critical to the success of justice programs that rely on probation officers for referrals, case management, and keeping participants engaged in programs. Justice Scholars program directors agreed that probation officers should be provided with training on YMI programs, how to make appropriate referrals, and a relationship-based approach to youth development work. Responses from Arches program directors implied a need to train probation officers on YMI programs and Arches in particular in order to increase their buy-in to the program and the likelihood that they would make referrals. In addition, greater clarity is needed with respect to the role of the probation officer as case manager. Training would also help in this regard.

**Increase access to mental health services.** Particularly for programs where mental health is a major issue among participants, HHC and program directors suggested that YMI work on providing more mental health initiatives through which staff can connect young people to necessary behavioral health care. In Cure Violence, the new training that credible messengers are receiving on motivational interviewing is intended to build their capacity to support participants in sustaining behavior change and engage with community mental health providers to make appropriate referrals. This makes it even more important to be able to connect participants to appropriate mental health services. Arches frontline staff reported that participants present with mental health needs that go beyond the scope of skills of mentors, and recommended formal partnerships with mental health agencies. In addition, they suggested formal mental health training for mentors so that they feel more equipped to identify participants with emotional and mental health needs and refer them to the appropriate services. The need for more mental health

services for teens was also cited by a health care provider participating in the Teen Health Improvement Program.

**Train instructors on the new HSE test and augment related supports as needed.**

For any program that assists young men in obtaining the HSE credential, it is extremely important that programs have the capacity to help participants succeed with the new HSE test and reach their college goals. This includes ensuring that instructors receive professional development to help prepare students for the new test and that programs augment supports as needed to meet new requirements. One CUNY staff person reported, “[I]f there is not significant infusion of assistance in the training of teachers to help their students prepare for this new exam, the ripple effect on helping young folks who may have lost out on aspects of their education along the way is going to be exponentially made worse.” According to IMPACT participants, their engagement in the program relied a lot on quality of teaching, which further emphasizes the need for adequate training of teachers. In addition, the counseling component of IMPACT will need to be augmented and strengthened, since the preparation for passing the HSE will be more challenging for participants.

**Build organizational capacity of providers.** Smaller organizations generally have more limited institutional capacity to participate in a large government project with multiple stakeholders and program components, and more demanding budgeting and contracting processes. As one DOHMH staff person suggested, YMI needs to address this by providing technical assistance on infrastructure building. For example, many smaller organizations lack the necessary fiscal infrastructure to manage program contracts, and therefore need a fiscal agent in place to access funds. Additionally, some organizations that have the necessary fiscal infrastructure nevertheless lack the cash reserves necessary to effectively deliver services. YMI should explore ways to expand fiscal management support and to expedite funding to smaller organizations, where needed. Program directors of Justice Scholars also suggested more organizational capacity building to enhance program implementation. DOP staff overseeing AIM also suggested building the capacity of potential providers in order to broaden the pool of providers that can provide YMI programs.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Note that all Arches providers receive technical assistance from Community Connections for Youth. Justice Scholars and AIM providers did not receive formal technical assistance.



Other suggested improvements include:

- **Provide transportation.** CUNY staff, frontline staff, and participants suggested providing participants at IMPACT sites with transportation assistance, which is offered by the Future Now site at Bronx Community College, to help with recruitment and engagement. Program directors reported that a lack of transportation for participants and families made it more difficult to engage with them. Frontline staff of Cure Violence thought transportation for field trips and activities for youth would be helpful. Due to former or current rivalries among youth, some youth may not feel safe or comfortable in particular geographic areas. Justice Scholars noted how assistance with transportation was extremely helpful to them.
- **Expand justice programs to other at-risk youth.** Based on the assumption that PINS (Persons in Needs of Supervision) involvement may be a precursor to delinquency and justice involvement, a DOP representative suggested assessing the risk of delinquency in PINS and possibly creating a program for those youth. In Arches, several program directors suggested allowing other at-risk youth to enroll in the program as a preventative measure, resulting in cost savings due to a reduction in incarceration and probation. Justice Scholars participants also suggested expanding the program to include other at-risk participants not currently eligible for program participation.
- **Provide more background information on participants to AIM and Arches providers.** In AIM and Arches, when a participant is referred to the program, program staff receive information pertaining to a youth's educational, demographic, and family information, along with mental health diagnosis and current and previous service providers. In addition, AIM program directors participate in weekly conversations with the DOP Alternative to Placement (ATP) unit, where other pertinent information is provided. In AIM, all of this information is essential to matching the participant with a mentor, which is key to successful implementation and outcomes. Nevertheless, program directors and frontline staff of AIM and Arches reported that they would like to receive additional background information on their participants (e.g., about other personal issues) that would help to provide further context for their interactions with youth.<sup>13</sup> Arches frontline staff also suggested that all incoming participants receive a full medical and mental health workup. Knowing the conditions of a youth's probation would also be helpful in order to enforce meeting requirements that could lead to reduced supervision requirements or release from probation.

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<sup>13</sup> Note that DOP makes a conscious effort to provide as much information as possible without violating confidentiality and disclosing protected information when a consent to release information has not been executed.

- **Support education-based programs in addressing the Common Core Learning Standards.** As noted earlier, the new Common Core Learning Standards presents a new challenge to education-based programs like Justice Scholars. Support is needed for the professional development of instructors and curriculum revision to address the new standards.<sup>14</sup>
- **Expand scope of services, particularly in the area of employment.** In addition to increasing the number of hours that programs work with participants, respondents across the programs made a number of suggestions related to expanding the scope of services and supports for participants. For example, Justice Scholars staff suggested expanding beyond HSE instruction to provide instruction on vocational and employable skills. Participants also suggested more support around money management, more math instruction, and more differentiated instruction. Cure Violence participants suggested expanding resources in general, especially job resources. Frontline staff also reported a need for more job resources or alternatives for minors who need extra income but find the job market limiting due to their age. The need for more job resources also came up among IMPACT staff. Arches participants, particularly those transitioning out of foster care, wanted more help with housing. They also suggested more activities, including art and handwriting, drivers education, and more field trips (including follow-up on field trips, such as lessons learned from documentaries).

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<sup>14</sup> Justice Scholars providers are now receiving technical assistance from the Youth Development Institute.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

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YMI has spurred the creation of new networks among City agencies and providers to deliver both new and expanded, evidence-based programming focused on improving outcomes of Black and Latino young men. Yet findings in this report suggest a need to build greater awareness of the larger YMI context among provider organizations, including frontline staff. The initiative has helped to reframe how communities view and address the risk factors affecting these young men—including violence and disconnectedness to necessary supports (e.g., social, health, education, employment) that could help change the trajectory of their lives. Reported increases in self-efficacy, positive changes in attitudes and behaviors, and gains in the areas of justice, education, and employment among participants provide early evidence of successful outcomes for participants of YMI programs.

The importance of trusting relationships—between frontline staff and participants, and programs and partners (e.g., probation officers, hospitals)—permeated throughout interviews and focus groups with sponsoring agency staff and program directors across the six programs included in this study. Such relationships are important for effectively working with at-risk Black and Latino young men and for successful implementation of programs. Connections to community-based organizations and institutions that provide necessary resources—including connections among YMI program providers—were also deemed important for participants to meet critical needs and achieve better outcomes. Upholding and strengthening these relationships and connections, as well as addressing the challenges encountered in implementation, are vital to the success of YMI programs.

Based on the findings in this report, the following are recommendations for improving YMI implementation and outcomes for Black and Latino young men.

**Sharpen focus on the YMI agenda.** While City agency representatives and providers generally reported that it is still early to gauge YMI's influence on City agency programming and practice, findings indicate the need to build awareness and understanding of the YMI agenda and the larger YMI context among providers, particularly frontline staff. Because young Black and Latino men represent a substantial portion of City agencies' and providers' service populations, consistent and continued messaging is needed to ensure that the YMI agenda retains its prominence among City agencies and providers. City agencies—those working closely with providers—are key to ensuring that providers, including frontline staff, continue to focus on the YMI outcomes. YMI should convene City agencies and their partnering provider organizations as an opportunity to strengthen messaging of the YMI agenda, foster interagency collaboration, and allow City agencies and provider organizations to share best practices and lessons learned

from working with young Black and Latino men. The convening could also serve as a forum for publicizing the successes of YMI and to further propel the initiative.

**Pay closer attention to building resiliency among participants.** Length of participation in programs is finite—programs have a limited amount of time to engage with participants, and participants have a limited time to receive program supports. As frontline staff and participants strengthen bonds and participants find comfort and support in the safe spaces created by programs, it is natural that participants (and in some cases their families) come to depend on programs. However, programs need to be mindful of how to build greater resiliency among participants (including strengthening relationships in their social support networks) and to sufficiently prepare them for the next step. Simultaneously, programs need to be able to connect participants to ongoing supports and resources in the community so that they can continue on a path to success. It may be that programs need to pause and examine the messaging to its participants, create opportunities for participants to “practice” independence and decision-making while they still have the safety net of the program, and explore other effective ways to build self-efficacy among participants.

**Foster stronger relationships with probation officers.** The successful implementation of programs under the auspice of DOP, particularly those that rely on probation officers for referrals and case management support, depends so much on relationships with probation officers. These relationships affect participant recruitment—being able to reach as many young people as possible who are in need of supports, engagement, and retention. Ultimately, it affects outcomes for young people. Respondents suggested strengthening communications with probation officers, and providing additional training on YMI programs, to increase their understanding of how their clients can benefit from the programs, clarify the role of probation officers, and instill in them a more “relationship-based” approach to working with programs and participants. We suggest that YMI bring these issues to DOP and create a plan for building stronger working relationships and partnerships among probation officers and programs, ensuring that participants are supported by their probation officers to engage in program activities, and ultimately that participants are achieving better outcomes.

**Strengthen the network of YMI programs.** As programs seek to establish and strengthen their ties to organizations and institutions that can provide necessary supports and resources for participants, YMI should consider how it can aid in establishing and strengthening relationships among YMI program providers. This would help to widen providers’ networks of available supports for participants—enabling participants to meet their most critical, basic needs and ultimately create a more seamless path to achieving their goals. As a start, CEO/YMI as well as program managers should seek ways to build awareness and broaden understanding among frontline staff of the larger YMI context and existing programs. CEO/YMI could also perhaps do more to convene providers working in the same target neighborhoods, for example, to share what services/supports they provide and best practices, identify common challenges for working with the target population, and problem-solve ways to address the challenges. It could be an

opportunity for providers to introduce their own connections to other providers, further widening the net of services and supports available to participants. CEO/YMI may also want to consider creating a directory or map of all the interconnected programs and supports, and making this available to YMI programs and their frontline staff.

**Work toward changing communities’ negative perceptions of young Black and Latino men who have had criminal justice involvement.** The negative perceptions of young men involved in (or formerly involved in) the criminal justice system—particularly by hospitals, institutions, and organizations—can curtail any program’s ability to connect participants to the services and supports that they need to succeed in life. Not only does this limit the activities that programs can make available to youth, but it presents a stumbling block for program implementation (e.g., mentors with criminal backgrounds face additional challenges when working with hospitals). As one frontline Cure Violence staff stated related to this issue, “[I]nstead of closing the doors and stealing their confidence away from them and breaking down their esteem, keep their confidence there and give them that support.” CEO/YMI may want to consider funding or endorsing strategies and activities aimed at changing negative perceptions—and showcasing successes—of young Black and Latino men who have been involved in the criminal justice system to pave the way for effective partnerships with resources in the community.

## Appendix: Program Goals, Expected Outcomes, and Strategies

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Although the six programs that are the focus of this study cut across YMI's four outcome areas, they are discussed here according to their primary designation in the YMI portfolio of programs. Drawing on existing reports, program-related documents, and responses of City agency staff and program directors, this section describes each program model, including the needs and issues each is trying to address, expected outcomes, participant recruitment, and services and supports provided to participants.

### Justice

The overarching goal of YMI justice programs and policies is to reform the juvenile and criminal justice systems to ensure interventions produce young people prepared for second chances. Three of the programs included in this study—AIM, Arches, and Justice Scholars—are new DOP programs that target youth involved in the justice system, including youth on probation facing probation violation and court-involved youth.<sup>15</sup> AIM and Arches use evidence-based mentoring approaches, while Justice Scholars is an education-based program that evolved from other CEO programs that have proved effective. All three programs redirect youth from harmful/risky behaviors (reducing recidivism is a common outcome for all three programs), address critical needs, and connect youth with resources that will help them achieve their educational and/or employment goals and create more positive social support systems within their communities. In all three programs, DOP probation officers play an important role in terms of recruitment and engagement of youth in the program.

**AIM:** AIM works with youth ages 13-18 on juvenile probation who are facing a probation violation due to a felony re-arrest or an out-of-home placement through a Family Court disposition. In addition to experiencing high odds of rearrests due to harmful/risky behaviors, this population faces a multitude of barriers, such as educational deficits and disengagement from the world of work. Not only are they a source of concern in terms of community safety, but they are among the most expensive populations to serve from a taxpayer perspective, in terms of policing, incarceration, hospitalization, and social services. Enabling them to improve their life trajectories will have positive effects on their communities, families, and peers, in addition to saving taxpayer dollars.

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<sup>15</sup> Court-involved refers to individuals who may have been arrested but not necessarily convicted of a crime.

As described by DOP staff and program directors, one of the main goals of AIM is to keep participants in the community instead of receiving an out-of-home placement, and to help them transition to adulthood. As noted in the program’s most recent quarterly report, expected outcomes for participants include remaining felony arrest-free both during and up to 12 months after completion of the program, having an identifiable positive social support system outside of the family unit (e.g., school/education, employment, pro-social use of leisure time), and reconnecting with their family support system or developing a viable one.

AIM’s target population requires interventions far more intensive than traditional youth programs. As such, the AIM program model capitalizes on evidence-based Positive Youth Development interventions that include: frequent and consistent mentoring, strengthening relationships between youth and their families/educational institutions, and participation in structured extracurricular activities.<sup>16</sup> In addition, working with the youth’s family provides expanded opportunities for engaging youth. As one DOP representative noted, “AIM is one-on-one, individualized, and youth-centered but family engaged.”

Youth are referred to the program through the Family Court as a requirement of their probation and are paired with a paid advocate who serves both as a mentor and resource specialist. Special attention is paid to pairing youth with an advocate with whom they will be able to build a strong relationship. The role of the advocate is to educate and empower participants and their families to foster alternative behaviors more conducive to personal and social success. Responding to the needs and interests of participants, advocates/mentors provide highly individualized support to participants as well as their families. They meet with participants for a minimum of seven hours per week and are available 24/7 to participants and their families for crisis management and intervention. As described by participants, mentors talk with them about life (e.g., school, family), counsel and give advice (e.g., about changing behavior and being a leader and not a follower), visit them at home or in school, and do fun, recreational things with them. They explained that AIM helps participants to set goals and then supports them in developing a plan for achieving those goals.

Using a “what it takes” approach to mentoring, advocates offer flexibility in terms of where and when meetings are held to accommodate participants. As one program director noted, “We have to respond to their needs. The idea is that they haven’t really succeeded in other programs...rather than expecting [the participant] to meet what we expect programming to look like, we have to tailor to each child.”

In addition to one-on-one mentoring, advocates build and strengthen social bonds between the young probationer and the community in which he or she lives. On a day-to-day basis,

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<sup>16</sup> The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (2010). *Positive Youth Justice: Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development*. Washington, D.C.: Butts, Jeffrey A., Gordon Bazemore, & Aundra Saa Meroe.



advocates connect participants with community-based resources and facilitate healthier relationships with known institutions, such as the participant’s school (e.g., getting them involved in school activities, ensuring they get to school on time, checking in with school guidance counselors regarding academic and behavioral progress). As one advocate explained, “[T]he main issues [with the participants] are with truancy and cutting class, so it’s important that we’re in the school and that they know that we’re there.” Participants described receiving supports in applying to colleges and applying for financial aid. Advocates also help connect youth to employment (e.g., contacting local businesses about job placement opportunities, applying for a job, resume writing, job interview preparation, and obtaining necessary documents for employment) and civic engagement opportunities (e.g., community service projects, such as volunteering in soup kitchens). Finally, they help participants connect to health and mental health resources, such as anger management counseling and physical examinations.

To further encourage family involvement and support, a number of sites offer parent outings and family team meetings. Family team meetings can involve anyone that is a part of the participant’s life and typically occurs at the participant’s home. Together, the team creates a plan for the youth that identifies goals and resources available to meet those goals. Ideally, family team meetings are held monthly to assess progress and make changes to the plan.<sup>17</sup> The meetings provide an opportunity for the program to continuously engage families in the program and in the successes of their children. One site offers a 12-session parent support group.

Finally, AIM also offers group recreational activities, such as field trips to sporting events, concerts, and museums as a way of building social skills among participants, but also to reward participants for good school attendance or other positive behaviors. Structured group activities are offered as well, such as a multi-week art project<sup>18</sup> that the evaluation team observed at one site. Some sites may provide more regular group activities than others.

**Arches:** Arches uses a transformative mentoring approach with justice-involved youth ages 16-24 to change cognition and thinking that often precede the ability to avoid maladaptive behaviors and achieve concrete successes in education and employment. Drawing on research and evidence that group cognitive-behavioral treatment approaches are effective at reducing future criminal behavior among young adult offenders, Arches uses group mentoring to transform the attitudes and behaviors that led to participants’ criminal activity and to prepare them to succeed at education, work, and civic participation.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Frontline staff described how they conduct weekly home visiting sessions.

<sup>18</sup> The purpose of the art project was to strengthen participants’ understanding of academic subjects (i.e., math, science, social studies) and enhance self-expression through art.

<sup>19</sup> Golden, Lori, “Evaluation of the Efficacy of a Cognitive Behavioral Program for Offenders on Probation: *Thinking For A Change*,” University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas, 2002.

As described by DOP staff and in the program's most recent quarterly report, expected outcomes of the program include behavioral changes resulting in increased well-being and the capacity to make good choices, the development of positive and productive relationships, and the avoidance of self-destructive associations and behavior. Reduction in recidivism is also an expected outcome. Ultimately, these outcomes will lead to participants becoming positive, self-sufficient contributors to their families and their communities.

The core components of Arches are: 1) a group process where participants become an important support system for each other; 2) an evidence-based curriculum centered on cognitive behavioral principles delivered by culturally appropriate mentors; 3) case management provided by DOP probation officers; 4) mentors who are available for support, advice, and guidance; and 5) incorporation of positive youth development values, principles, and practices.

Referrals to the program are made primarily by probation officers. DOP staff described recruitment and engagement as a complex process of building a trusting relationship with potential clients during the intake visit. According to program directors, in some organizations, Arches program coordinators are actively involved in recruitment. For example, some providers post fliers in the neighborhood and make presentations at local high schools and HSE programs to advertise directly to local youth. Some agencies offer incentives (e.g., movie tickets) to current participants if they are able to refer a friend who meets the program criteria.

Program directors and frontline staff reported that program activities include mentoring groups and teambuilding sessions, one-on-one mentoring, group recreational and arts activities, case management, and advocacy. Mentoring groups are held twice a week for six months. The program uses a 1:4 mentor/young adult ratio for group mentoring activities that incorporate a cognitive behavioral curriculum. A hot meal is provided and participants receive a stipend for each group session they complete. Because youth have a history of violence and need to learn more productive ways of interacting, frontline staff reported how teaching communication and self-expression skills was an important aspect of the group sessions. The evaluation team observed a group mentoring activity that focused on self-expression and communication. Participants were engaged in relating with their peers through a conversation about what they have learned about themselves and each other, what they share in common, what they would have done differently to avoid being arrested or incarcerated, and the changes they have made in their lives to avoid future arrest and incarceration. Participants record goals, thoughts, and reflections (what makes them upset, how to treat others, etc.) in a journal, which frontline staff indicated was a useful tool for framing group mentoring discussions.

Through one-on-one mentoring, mentors provide additional support, advice, and guidance (e.g., developing personal goals, help with school or HSE preparation, resumes, finding a job, how to speak with potential employers). Frontline staff and participants described how mentors are in constant telephone contact with youth to remind them, for example, to follow up on a job lead or attend a group mentoring session. In addition, participants reported that they received

assistance with housing and clothing. Examples of recreational and arts activities include attending basketball games, trips to the movies and to museums, and participating in martial arts and other activities of interest to the youth.

As described by program directors, it is the role of probation officers to provide case management services, including needs assessments and referrals to educational, employment, housing, and substance abuse services, among others. However, in many instances program staff step in with referrals and ensure participants' needs are met. Program directors emphasized the importance of addressing each individual's needs with an appropriate mix of services. Advocacy activities include writing letters to the courts and to probation officers on behalf of participants and helping participants navigate probation requirements. To encourage continued participation in the program, some providers provide incentives, such as a restaurant gift card, if a participant attends for two months or more.

DOP makes provisions for ongoing training and technical assistance to mentors. Program coordinators provided training to mentors, which included workshops on life skills, motivational point-of-view, reflective listening, and building relationships with mentees. They also provided guidance on how to address specific issues and convened mentors for discussions of specific cases and sharing of mentoring strategies.

**Justice Scholars:** Justice Scholars is an education-based program serving court-involved young adults ages 16-24 living in communities with high rates of poverty and incarceration as well as low rates of high school completion. Court-involved young adults face a multitude of challenges returning to their communities, frequently confronting the same issues that led them to an arrest. Many have poor literacy skills and require job-readiness training for employability. Without appropriate intervention, odds are high that they will recidivate.

Building on best practices and the successes of several CEO programs that serve disconnected and court-involved youth (including the Young Adult Literacy Program and NYC Justice Corps), Justice Scholars seeks to place court-involved young adults on a path to educational and employment success. The program offers multiple education tracks, including options for young adults who are: of compulsory high school age or eligible for HSE classes, in need of basic education classes, or ready for postsecondary education. The program places youth into different educational tracks based on age and an educational assessment at intake: Basic Education, High School, HSE, and Postsecondary. According to DOP staff and program coordinators, some providers offer all tracks, whereas others are able to offer only one or two tracks (i.e., HSE and Postsecondary). For those in the High School track, sites monitor school attendance through guidance counselors and school personnel. For those in the HSE track (which represents the majority of participants) sites offer an onsite HSE program. Those in the Postsecondary track receive assistance with college applications and other enrollment supports.

Expected outcomes of the program include improvements in literacy and numeracy skill levels of one or more grade levels for those in the Basic Education track, placement into continued education activities or unsubsidized employment, attainment of an HSE or high school diploma or continued enrollment in educational programming, and reduced recidivism.

By design, 40 percent of referrals for new participants should come from probation officers, and 60 percent should be court-involved youth (not on probation) who are recruited directly by provider organizations. Some coordinators reported receiving more than 40 percent of referrals from probation officers (one cited 80%). However, some coordinators reported that they had to recruit most new participants themselves by going to the courts and speaking with young offenders, and then getting probation officers to approve their enrollment. Frontline staff also reported that participants are recruited by current or past participants through word of mouth. Staff also recruited youth by passing out fliers around the neighborhood and at courthouses, sending email blasts to current participants, and distributing materials at service fairs held by DOP or at community events.

Program directors and frontline staff reported a number of services available to participants including:

- Classroom instruction around HSE preparation;
- Workshops on topics such as life skills, financial literacy, computer literacy, sexual health, time management, career exploration, and college and job readiness;
- Tutoring, although participation rates were reportedly not high;<sup>20</sup>
- Community service, cultural awareness, and civic responsibility events that are organized by sites about twice per month, including film viewings/discussions and trips to museums;
- Educational planning;
- Enrichment activities, including field trips to museums; and
- Case management services from a case manager or life coach to address critical needs (e.g., housing, substance abuse, family issues, financial issues, obtaining identification documents, purchasing clothing for work, toiletries, etc.). According to DOP staff, case management services are helpful for keeping participants engaged, particularly for those who don't have a probation officer.

At one site, a family worker (supported by separate funding) provides additional support by serving as a liaison between participants and families to ensure that families support participants' educational goals (e.g., relieving them of childcare so that they can focus on school). Another site

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<sup>20</sup> Tutoring is not available at all sites, but sites may be planning to offer this in the future.

offers etiquette classes provided by a volunteer. Yet another site emphasizes several career preparation activities, including typing and computer skills courses (increasing their chances of obtaining employment/internships within the community organization), one-on-one meetings with a guidance counselor, and workshops provided by partner organizations. Program directors reported that these workshops are generally well-attended. Some sites connect participants to legal services to help them address outstanding warrants or other legal issues.

Justice Scholars is a six-month program with a minimum of six months follow-up service period for all participants. To encourage continued engagement in the program, programs offers financial incentives during the program and follow-up period based on attendance rates, educational accomplishments, weekly meetings, and monthly follow-up meetings. According to DOP staff, stipends increase with each milestone achieved. Some sites offer incentives (e.g., gift cards) to encourage participation and retention. Providing a hot meal (which many participants lack consistently) was also identified as an effective engagement strategy. DOP staff reported encouraging all sites to provide meals to support retention and increase bonding of the group members.

## Education

The goal of YMI education programs and policies is to reduce the achievement gap in schools through targeted strategies that improve outcomes for young men of color. IMPACT replicates the successful Future Now peer mentoring model on CUNY campuses to close the gap on HSE pass rates and matriculation into college among at-risk young men of color.

**IMPACT:** Young Black and Latino men, compared to their white and Asian counterparts, are more likely to drop out of school. For many at-risk young men for whom a traditional high school degree is out of reach, the HSE is their only option. Yet HSE pass rates in New York City are dismal (only 48.1% compared to the national average of 72.6%), and even those who do earn an HSE diploma face several obstacles to enrolling and/or succeeding in postsecondary education.<sup>21</sup>

IMPACT seeks to increase HSE enrollment and pass rates for this population and to bolster college transition and retention through an innovative peer mentoring model developed at Future Now, an HSE and college success program located in Bronx Community College. Two CUNY campus-based HSE programs were chosen as pilot sites to replicate the Future Now/IMPACT model. Future Now at Bronx Community College provides technical assistance for the replication. As CUNY staff reported, “the goal of IMPACT is to enhance the outcome of HSE students” and “to get more young men to go to college.”

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<sup>21</sup> *Failing the Test*, by Sarah Brannen, Center for an Urban Future, September 2011.

Research has shown that peer mentoring is associated with higher HSE pass rates and with greater transition to and retention in postsecondary studies.<sup>22</sup> Future Now/IMPACT trains HSE program graduates who are enrolled in college to serve as mentors for current HSE students and to provide peer support for other alumni enrolled in college. Peer mentors themselves mirror current HSE students who also fit the YMI target population<sup>23</sup>—disenfranchised, formerly incarcerated and/or at-risk; all mentors were former participants in the program. According to City agency staff and program directors and frontline staff, peer mentors provide ongoing support to current HSE students in a variety of ways: attending classes and making sure students are on track; helping students in the classroom when needed; tutoring; providing “college knowledge” workshops on topics such as admissions, financial aid, and CUNY entrance exams; walking students to offices in the school; advocacy; and constant communication through social media. Peer mentoring is shared (or “community style”) in that a student does not have a specific mentor. This is a key characteristic of the IMPACT model. As one City agency staff person described, “They’re kind of around, just physically present, and students may gravitate to one mentor or another.” In addition to working with participants, mentors attempt to work in the community more broadly by participating in community events, such as AIDS and cancer walks.

There is also a leadership development component for peer mentors. According to City agency staff and program directors, peer mentors are not only staff, but also recipients of services as well. They are part of the population that YMI is intending to serve. As noted by CUNY staff, they are “young people themselves who need support, who need counsel and advisement about ‘how do you teach? How do you help students?’...they require supervision and that’s been terrifically helpful.”

Classroom instruction in core content areas of the HSE is also a major component of the IMPACT model. For some participants, their teachers have been most important for helping them achieve the goals of the program. In at least one IMPACT site, where IMPACT is part of workforce development, participants receive employment services, including assistance with resume development, job interviewing, and finding a job. Frontline staff described how IMPACT goes beyond preparing youth to take the HSE or transitioning to college by providing motivational support and building the resilience of participants “to stick to it” whether it’s through classroom instruction or mentoring.

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<sup>22</sup> *The relationship between college experience and academic performance among minority students*. By T. Saenz. *The International Journal of Educational Management*. 13/4 [199-207] 1999.

<sup>23</sup> HSE students include both those that fall within the YMI target population, but also those who do not (e.g., immigrants taking ESL classes or who were educated in their home country, but are seeking credentials in the U.S., high school dropouts). According to one provider, it works better to mix the population when providing services, but they keep track of who the YMI students are.



As described by providers and participants, recruitment to the program largely occurs through word of mouth through friends or relatives (“legacy enrollment”). For example, one individual may join the program, obtain an HSE diploma, and then start “bringing the family” or other individuals close to them from their cultural community to participate as well. Providers viewed mentors as effective recruiters because “students can relate to them and vice versa.” Recruitment of mentors is a major emphasis of the providers. When asked about recruitment of HSE students to the program, program directors focused most on how to get mentors to participate. One powerful mechanism for the recruitment of mentors was the visibility of branded t-shirts (which say “Improving My Progress at College Today”) that mentors wear to identify themselves as peer mentors and role models.

City agency staff and program directors described how programming differs between the two campuses piloting the program, primarily due to differences in culture between the two sites. According to respondents, one campus has a stronger community and the Caribbean culture imbues the program with a more “family-oriented” atmosphere. There the programming is less structured to match the culture. It was clear from respondents that the programs have been well tailored for each community, and this adaptation has been an effective aspect of implementation.

## Health

YMI health programs and policies seek to improve the health of young men and their families, encourage more fathers to be involved in the lives of their children, and break the cycle of premature fathering. A replication of the Chicago-based CeaseFire program, Cure Violence takes a public health approach to ending gun violence, mobilizing communities to reduce and prevent youth violence through leveraging young men of color to act as “credible messengers” of an anti-violence message and partnering with public hospitals in high-violence areas. The Teen Health Improvement Program is a new HHC technical assistance program that seeks to enhance knowledge and skills of HHC health care providers regarding adolescent health in general, and sexual and reproductive health in particular.

**Cure Violence:** Cure Violence is a violence prevention program that works with communities that have high levels of gun violence. The program seeks not only to change behavior among the youth at highest risk of victimization and perpetration, but also to mobilize communities to reject violence as a social norm. Cure Violence has been replicated in several cities across the US and internationally, and has an evidence base showing its success at reaching program objectives. The program is being replicated at six sites in New York City, three of which are funded by YMI. Expected outcomes of the program include a reduction in the number of shootings/homicides, changes in violent behavior and attitudes about violence among high-risk youth, and increases in referrals of youth to education, employment and/or other social and health services.



As described by DOHMH and HHC staff, “credible messengers”—including hospital responders, violence interrupters, and outreach workers—are responsible for recruiting and engaging with youth to stop conflicts and re-direct them from life on the streets. These frontline staff come from the community and have themselves experienced violence. When youth are hospitalized due to an act of violence—a stabbing, shooting, vicious beating—hospital responders arrive at the hospital to be with victims and their families in order to prevent retaliatory violence and to recruit youth to the program.<sup>24</sup> Violence interrupters, who “keep their ears on the ground,” are on the streets, mediating conflicts, redirecting youth from violent situations, and identifying victims and perpetrators of violence who could be served by the program. They also interact with local businesses and try to maintain a presence in the community.

Following recruitment, outreach workers work one-on-one to meet individual needs and change behaviors. As described by frontline staff, outreach workers create plans for each individual based on their specific needs as they strive to build a lifestyle that does not include gun violence. Typically working with a caseload of 10–20, the outreach workers also help to mediate conflicts that arise and prevent retaliatory violence. They work to develop trusting relationships with participants, seek to understand the root of their violent behavior, and support them in addressing the issue either directly or by providing access to other resources. After learning about participant’s interests and needs, they provide wraparound services and/or connect youth to the appropriate services and supports—educational, employment, physical/mental health, social, etc. As one frontline staff person stated, “[W]e do our best in trying to help them reach [their] goal, step by step.” Employment—becoming part of the mainstream workforce—was cited by program directors as the top need identified by participants. As a result, sites place a lot of emphasis on employment. For example, one site created a 10-week Neighborhood Volunteer Corps to support employment, and outreach workers usually carry and distribute employment resource materials, such as job postings.

Mental health needs (e.g., depression) also abound. As described by DOHMH staff and program directors, Cure Violence helps to address participants’ complex histories, needs, and issues, which may otherwise prevent changes in norms and behaviors. “Hurt people hurt people...[T]here are other underlying things that have happened in this young person’s life...[W]e find that a lot of our young people have been traumatized, and are walking around so desensitized.” Outreach workers connect participants to “tranquility, peace, and a time away from heat.” They show them that there is a “better choice.” Outreach workers may also be out in the community, building relationships with youth and awareness of the Cure Violence program in the neighborhood. Program activities also include excursions and recreational activities, keeping participants off the street and giving them opportunities to “get out of their

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<sup>24</sup> The hospital responder position was created as a result of YMI funding. In the Chicago model, hospital social workers connect victims of violence to the program.

usual environments” (which participants acknowledged kept them out of trouble). In addition, the program provides services and supports to families of victims and shooters.

In one site, a life coach position was created (through separate funding) for participants who are “doing well.” These participants are transferred from outreach worker to life coach, who continues to work with that young person to take them to “the next level in that’s person’s life” (e.g., career counseling, exposure to other things in the city, etc.). Recently, frontline staff have begun receiving training in motivational interviewing to enhance their work with participants.

As described by DOHMH staff, mobilizing the community to reject violence as a social norm takes on “reactive” and “proactive” forms. Reactive mobilization includes working with the community to respond to a shooting, for example, helping the community heal, celebrating the victim’s life, mourning their death, and then acknowledging that the violence cannot continue. This involves families, school leaders, and community faith-based leaders. Proactive mobilization brings the community together at events (e.g., arts festival) where materials are distributed and voices in the community speak up against violence. It also includes building coalitions to end violence. As described by participants, staff are present in the community (e.g., in the park, on the street corner)—even late into the night—to interrupt and diffuse violence and ultimately make the streets safer. Participants agreed that staff have a good relationship with the community. One participant called them “guardian angels” and another likened them to “neighborhood watchers.”

**Teen Health Improvement Program:** Teen Health Improvement Program seeks to address the disparities in unintended pregnancies and STI/HIV rates that persist among teens in high-poverty neighborhoods, especially among Black and Latino youth who have higher rates of pregnancy than their white peers.<sup>25</sup> Latino men are more likely to have a child than their White (2.5 times) or Black (2 times) peers<sup>26</sup>, while rates of chlamydia<sup>27</sup> and the incidence of HIV are much higher among Blacks compared to their peers.<sup>28</sup> Adolescents are less likely to obtain healthcare compared to younger or older people; young men, in particular, are less likely than

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<sup>25</sup> Teen Pregnancy in New York City: 2000-2009. New York, NY: New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/ms/ms-nyctp-2000-09.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Young Men’s Initiative: Report to the Mayor from the Chairs. Aug. 2001.  
[http://www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2011/young\\_mens\\_initiative\\_report.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/om/pdf/2011/young_mens_initiative_report.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> 2009 data from New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Accessed through EpiQuery: <https://a816-healthpsi.nyc.gov/EpiQuery/STD/index.html>

<sup>28</sup> New York City HIV/AIDS Annual Surveillance Statistics 2010. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Accessed at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/downloads/pdf/ah/surveillance2010-tables-all.pdf>

women to receive sexual health services.<sup>29</sup> Exacerbating these bleak statistics is the fact that primary healthcare providers often miss opportunities to identify and address sexual healthcare needs of young people, especially young men.<sup>30-25</sup>

HHC has the unique ability to serve a large segment of the adolescent population through its wide network of hospitals and clinics.<sup>26</sup> As described by HHC staff, in order to improve teen health outcomes and their access to the highest standard of healthcare for adolescents, the Teen Health Improvement Program: 1) trains HHC providers to provide the most up to date, best practices in sexual and reproductive healthcare to adolescents; 2) works with facilities to make them more teen-friendly (systems improvement); and 3) engages youth to inform and shape staff development and systems improvement activities.

Early on, the program engaged youth in a needs assessment to inform professional development and training activities and systems improvements. As a result, the program implemented two innovative staff development projects that actively engage youth (who gain valuable job and life skills in the process)—the Teen Patient Satisfaction Survey and the Standardized Patient Project. Coordinated with the Mayor’s Leadership Council, the Teen Patient Satisfaction Survey involved hiring and training youth (mostly young Black and Latino men and women) to administer the survey on iPads to teens leaving their doctor’s visit. The endeavor was highly successful (response rate of 76% and reached about 25% of all patients seen during the survey period). According to the one provider who was interviewed, feedback from the survey—seeing that the youth needed a more teen-friendly waiting room—was “really helpful.”

For the Standardized Patient Project, the purpose of which was to assess the communication skills of providers working with teens and to provide them with feedback, HHC trained youth on best practices and what should be taking place during a visit to a provider. These youth would then visit facilities, act out a case and interact with a provider, and provide feedback on how

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<sup>29</sup> Marcell AV, Klein JD, Fischer I, Allan MJ, Kokotailo PK. Male adolescent use of health care services: where are the boys? *J Adolesc Health*. Jan. 2002; 30 (1): 35-43.

<sup>30</sup> Marcell AV, Bell DL, Lindberg LD, Takruri A. Prevalence of STI/HIV counseling services received by teen males, 1995 to 2002. *J Adolesc Health*. 2010; 46(6):553-559.

<sup>23</sup> Ma J, Wang Y, Stafford RS. U.S. adolescents receive suboptimal preventive counseling during ambulatory care. *J Adolesc Health*. 2005; 36(5):441.

<sup>24</sup> Lafferty WE, Downey L, Holan CM, et al. Provision of sexual health services to adolescent enrollees in Medicaid managed care. *Am J Public Health*. 2002;92(11):1779-1783.

<sup>25</sup> Lafferty WE, Downey L, Shields AW, Holan CM, Lind A. Adolescent enrollees in Medicaid managed care; the provision of well care and sexual health assessment. *J Adolesc Health*. 2001;28(6):497-508.

<sup>26</sup> In 2011, HHC served more than 850,000 youth between the ages of 11–24, of which more than one third (36%) were males.

comfortable the provider made them feel and how well the provider communicated with them. To date, 134 providers (mostly primary care providers) have undergone the assessment, representing half of the total number of providers.

The program offers onsite, group-level training to sites, focusing on three areas: 1) minors' rights to confidential care; 2) STI screening and treatment guidelines for adolescents; and 3) contraceptive care for adolescents. As described by HHC staff, the training teaches pediatricians what questions to ask their adolescent patients, resulting in a more positive experience for the patient that will hopefully encourage them to return. In the future, HHC plans to offer this training online as well through modules related to adolescent healthcare services. They will also begin to address long-acting reversible contraceptives, and expanding their use among adolescents. It was anticipated that the next wave of training would focus more specifically on young men.

Results of the needs assessment, which included focus groups with youth, pointed to many ways in which waiting rooms could be made more teen-friendly. Many youth cited a lack of reading materials in waiting rooms, and that the presence of babies (because pediatric patients include infants and younger children) made them feel uncomfortable. As a result of this feedback, the program purchased and furnished facilities with teen-friendly patient education reading materials (e.g., magazines, newspapers, newsletters, etc.) and other resources (e.g., models of genital area, contraceptives) for waiting rooms, audio-visual equipment (e.g., televisions and DVD players), teen-friendly patient education videos, and bulletin boards and dry erase boards for posting information.

To strengthen relationships with providers and further inform staff development and systems improvements, the program created an advisory panel composed of adolescent provider "champions" from each of the 17 facilities. This created an opportunity for sites to "talk to each other." The panel guides their work and decision-making regarding what needs to be addressed and how HHC can improve adolescent health across the corporation. In addition, the program plans to host a summit to provide additional staff development opportunities and allow sites to share information on what they have done to improve care for adolescents.