Police, Youth, & Community Relations: Improving Outcomes and Restoring Trust through Youth Voice

A presentation by the Youth Justice Board
Coalition for Juvenile Justice Webinar
August 26, 2015
Presenters

Alex, Member, Youth Justice Board
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Agenda

► Overview of the Youth Justice Board program

► Background on early diversion programs and police-community relationships

► Presentation of select recommendations from *Stepping Up: Strengthening Police, Youth and Community Relationships*

► Panel discussion

► Question and answer session
The Youth Justice Board

- Founded by the Center for Court Innovation in 2004, the Youth Justice Board brings the voices of young people into local policymaking.

- During each two-year program cycle, a team of up to 20 young people ages 14-18 researches a current policy issue, releases recommendations, and works to implement select ideas.
Youth Justice Board Program Model

- **Research year (program year one):**
  - Conduct original research on the selected topic through interviews and focus groups
  - Distill key findings into policy recommendations
  - Publish recommendations in a report
  - Present recommendations to key policymakers

- **Implementation year (program year two):**
  - Work with community partners to implement select recommendations
The Youth Justice Board cont.

- In its 11-year history, board members have studied diverse topics including:
  - Reducing juvenile recidivism
  - Public school safety
  - The New York City foster care system
  - The New York City juvenile justice system
  - Reducing youth arrest rates
  - Improving school attendance
Sample Implementation Projects
available at www.courtinnovation.org/yjb

Information for youth in foster care

Comic for youth in the juvenile justice system

Video of a police-youth dialogue

Nexmove.org website for disconnected young people

Center for Court Innovation
Diversion Programs and Police-Community Relations

- The Youth Justice Board chose this topic for the 2014-16 program cycle.
- Coincides with pilot of new early diversion programs in New York City for young adult offenders.
- The Board proposed recommendations for improving relationships between police officers and young people in the communities they serve.
Youth Justice Board Member Introduction

Gabriella, age 17
Alumna

- Rising senior at Friends Seminary
- Joined the Youth Justice Board to learn more about youth in the criminal justice system
- Plans to attend college next fall and pursue work to improve the justice system with a focus on immigration law
Stepping Up: Strengthening Police, Youth & Community Relationships
Training Phase

- Focus on teambuilding
- Overnight retreat
Youth Justice Board Member Introduction

Alex, age 15
Returning member

► Rising sophomore at Bay Ridge Preparatory High School
► Joined the Board to improve his understanding of the criminal justice system
► Returning to the Youth Justice Board this fall
Training Phase

Background knowledge

► Criminal justice system
► New York City Family Court and Criminal Court
► New York City diversion programs
Training Phase

Skill-building

► Research Skills
  ► Interviewing
  ► Public Speaking
  ► Note-Taking
  ► Data Analysis
  ► Asset-Mapping
Fieldwork Phase

Interviews

► Completed 33 interviews
  ► New York City Police Department
  ► Brooklyn Defender Services
  ► Fortune Society
  ► Center for Court Innovation
  ► Fellow Board Members
Fieldwork Phase

Focus Groups

► Focus Groups
► Recruited young people ages 16-24 with justice-system experience
► Facilitated conversations about the justice system from young people with firsthand experience
Youth Justice Board Member Introduction

Kiana, age 17
Alumna

► Rising senior at Edward R. Murrow High School
► Joined the Youth Justice Board to understand the policies that govern the city and to be a voice for her peers
► Plans to be a teacher
Youth Justice Board Recommendations

A. Empowering Police, Youth, and the Community to Support Improved Policing
   1. Create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways.
   2. Consult with youth to develop community-specific resources that explain the work of police officers and the criminal justice system.

B. Improving Police-Youth Contact
   3. Support youth after arrest by providing them with confidential access to social workers.
   4. Develop resources that improve police officers’ interactions with LGBTQ youth and young women of color.

C. Improving Diversion Programs and Outcomes
   5. Provide youth with clear information about case process to facilitate engagement, transparency, and easy access to diversion programs.
   6. Include youth input on short-term diversion programming to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of young people.
   7. Expand diversion eligibility.
The Youth Justice Board

2014-15 Members
Recommendation: Create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways.

What we heard:

► “Often, the only time people speak to cops is if they’re stopped or calling 911.” – Justin Lenz, Inspector, 101st Precinct
Recommendation: Create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways.

Why this is important:
- Negative feelings on both sides cause community divisions
- Mutual fear between youth and police escalates interactions
Recommendation: Create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways.

How to implement this recommendation:

- Work with police precincts to strengthen police-youth relationships
- Conduct focus group to test engagement ideas

Ideas to consider:

- Organizing police-youth dialogues
- After-school programming
- Community block parties
- Sports and recreational activities
- Community asset mapping
Recommendation: Create regular opportunities for police and youth to interact in positive ways.

- Community asset-mapping
  - Map of a neighborhood that displays local resources
- Why it’s important:
  - Builds trust between officers and community
  - Humanizes youth and officers
- How it works:
  - Partnerships with local community-based organizations
  - Officers complete asset-map with local youth as a guide
Youth Justice Board Member Introduction

Stephanie, age 16
Returning member

► Rising sophomore at Manhattan Early College School for Advertising
► Joined the Youth Justice Board to take initiative on behalf of the many teens who don’t speak up about the issues they face
► Plans to pursue the arts and/or become a defense attorney
► Returning to the Youth Justice Board this fall
Recommendation: Support youth after arrest by providing them with confidential access to social workers.

What we heard:

► “Officers are often interacting with youth at a very traumatic moment…”

– Amy Albert, Coordinator, Brooklyn Adolescent Representation Team, Brooklyn Defender Services
Recommendation: Support youth after arrest by providing them with confidential access to social workers.

► Why this is important:
► An arrest experience without emotional support is frightening
► Fear and anxiety can have negative effects on youth fulfilling requirements of sanctions later
► Greater understanding will increase cooperation from youth
Recommendation: Support youth after arrest by providing them with confidential access to social workers.

► How to implement this recommendation:
► Work with precincts to create reference cards with contact information for social workers and other local resources for police officers to carry and give to young people.
Recommendation: Include youth input in short-term diversion programming to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of young people.

What we heard:

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

Why this is important:

- Punitive programs are not effective in deterring youth crime
- Young people want programming relevant to their lives
Recommendation: Include youth input in short-term diversion programming to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of young people.

Why youth input matters:
► Young people who have lived these experiences are experts in what they have been through and what would have helped them.
► For example, youth told us they found the process from arrest to starting a diversion program confusing.
► This knowledge led us to a possible solution: texting youth about the status of their cases.
Recommendation: Include youth input in short-term diversion programming to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of young people.

How to implement this recommendation:

- Survey participants
- Exit conversation with program planner
- Hire diversion program staff with diverse interests and experiences
Recommendation: Expand diversion eligibility.

► Why this is important:
  ► Decrease the number of young New Yorkers with a criminal record

► How to implement this recommendation:
  ► Increase the age range and offenses eligible for diversion programming
  ► Expand pilot programs to offer diversion throughout New York City
Panel Discussion: Youth Justice Board

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Questions and Answers
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If you require a certificate of completion for this webinar or you would like to hear about CJJ’s youth engagement work or future webinars, please contact:

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