

# SOUTH BRONX, NY

## NYC DEPARTMENT OF PROBATION ADVOCATE, INTERVENE, MENTOR (AIM)



An excerpt from YAP's Policy & Advocacy Center publication *Safely Home*

### CREDIBLE MESSENGERS

In 2012, the New York City Department of Probation issued a concept paper to create the Advocate, Intervene, Mentor (AIM) program, whose goal was to provide intensive community-based mentoring and advocacy for youth who would otherwise end up in state corrections. Specifically, it identified the target population as "high-risk youth on probation facing the highest probability of out-of-home-placement." In the concept paper for this program, NYC DOP articulated the importance of involving culturally competent community members in its program, in which it defined as a "credible messenger," or an "individual who is well respected and trusted in the community and has the ability to effectively relay the components of the program to the participants; thereby transferring knowledge, enthusiasm, and most importantly support for the initiative that will leave the participants and their families with a clear understanding of the program components and goals," and who would "have a high rate of success in reaching the target population."

In 2012, the NYC Department of Probation forged a partnership with YAP and Community Connections for Youth (CCFY), a grassroots community-based organization in the South Bronx, to help high-risk youth achieve personal and social success. Youth in the program were sentenced to YAP to keep them safe and in the community and avoid out-of-home placement in upstate NY. The targeted areas were located in the South Bronx, the poorest congressional district in the country. But the neighborhoods in the target area were also rich with culture, desire and resources to help and support its kids and families.

Together, YAP and CCFY recruited street workers from the community - credible messengers - who understood the community challenges facing many youth in the program and also the assets and strengths of the community that could be built in to support the youth and their families. These "credible messengers," many of them formerly incarcerated, are able to connect to the youth in ways that no one else can. These credible messengers work with Program Director, Doug Knepper, to build plans for the youth to avoid out-of-home placements, comply with the mandates of their probation and also develop into leaders empowered to make good and healthy choices.

CCFY has also demonstrated a commitment to supporting local partners to integrate youth in the program into existing youth development activities and networks of support. For example, CCFY helped to forge a partnership with a local community garden (Friends of Brook Park) where youth referred by the NYC Department of Probation could work side by side with adult mentors on a youth urban farming project. The collaboration also supports other grassroots community-based organizations like Friends of Brook Park to build its capacity to work with high-need youth. Together, CCFY, YAP and DOP have built a sustainable alternative to incarceration program that is truly rooted in the neighborhoods, depends on family and youth voice and choice and relies on community members to team up with the families and community organizations to help youth succeed.

*Source: Advocate, Intervene, Mentor Concept Paper,  
<http://www.nyc.gov/html/prob/html/contracting/concept.shtml>;  
Interview with Rubén Austria, Executive Director of CCFY*