

# SOUTH BRONX, NY COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH



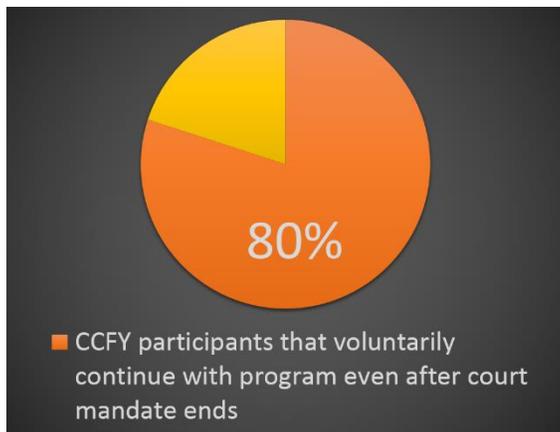
An excerpt from YAP's Policy & Advocacy Center publication *Safely Home*

## COMMUNITY CAPACITY & POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Community Connections for Youth in the South Bronx is a leader in developing community capacity for juvenile justice reform. By empowering grassroots faith and community organizations to serve young people in the justice system, it quite literally creates community connections for youth that have proven effective in reducing recidivism. An independent evaluation by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice found that youth engaged in CCFY's court diversion program were 33% less likely to be arrested than youth in a comparison group.

CCFY uses a youth development approach that prioritizes strength-based assessments and intake processes. The process focuses on how to tap into what really matters to the youth in an effort to connect him or her to sustainable resources and supports and generate ownership and even enthusiasm for being a part of the community. While youth are mandated to CCFY's program for an average of 60 days, 80% of participants continue to engage voluntarily even after their court mandate ends. In fact, 42% of youth mandated to CCFY's programs stayed active with the program voluntarily for more than 6 months.

CCFY also recognizes families as primary resources and the most important parts of a child's success. Many of the families are in crisis, and in large part, the juvenile justice system has been created to address that crisis. According to Executive Director, Rubén Austria, it is not about finding the best way to "treat" the kids, but the best way to develop family and community networks. CCFY engages family members in support networks and leadership development opportunities. Families start to feel capable to support other families, feeling the impact of an intentional and robust community. The growth of CCFY's parent support network led the NYC Department of Probation to offer CCFY a contract to provide parent peer coaches for families currently going through the juvenile justice system.



In its efforts to grow community competence, CCFY has committed to incubate smaller grassroots organizations that lack independent capacity to get or maintain government funding but whose ability to connect to young people in the juvenile justice system is, according to Rubén, "off the charts." CCFY aims to support these organizations so that they can learn to formally partner with the justice system as they continue to be central to supporting all kids in the community.

*Source: Jacobs, N. Community Connections for Youth: A Report Covering the First Three Years of an Innovative Grassroots Approach to Pro-Social Adolescent Development in a Neighborhood of Chronic Disadvantage*  
John Jay College of Criminal Justice (June 2012)