

# NEW YORK STATE ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION/AFTERCARE



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

## OFFICE OF CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

In 2011, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo gave his State of the State Address to a crowd of 2,200 people and received rousing applause for declaring that "incarceration is not an employment program." He argued that facilities that cost \$200,000 a year per youth and had recidivism rates of 90% were not working. New York State proceeded to close juvenile facilities and invest in alternatives to incarceration and residential placement, and in aftercare.

The mid-Hudson region in Newburgh, New York, 60 miles north of New York City is one area that implemented aftercare for kids coming home from secure residential placements. Newburgh is a community that ranks safer than only 5% of all American cities, and to address the safety and development needs of the youth in its care, the NY State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) used an array of service providers to reintegrate kids coming home from closed facilities or residential centers. OCFS in Newburgh describes itself as very hands on with the youth and relies on YAP to help the toughest kids move past hurdles or get out of limbo. It refers kids with the highest level of supervision needs who can benefit from out-of-the box thinking, availability and flexibility of a community-based program.

According to Annie Wellington, OCFS Supervisor for the Mid-Hudson region, many of the youth in its care often perceive that they will be thrown out of programs or sent back to residential. OCFS recognizes that, despite that perception, kids make it through when people refuse to give up on them. Their strategy is to respond to that resiliency and wrap a safety net around each kid so that when challenges arise, there is a plan in place to provide persistent support.

The partnership with YAP also serves a few other key purposes: It extends the reach of OCFS into the community, enabling more face-to-face contact with each youth. Importantly, OCFS also recognizes that each community has its own dynamic culture and part of that culture can be to keep outsiders out. Having street workers (Advocates) who hail from the same neighborhoods as the youth helps to reach the youth where they are and augments the services, helping OCFS achieve its goals of safety and positive youth outcomes.

In Newburgh, nearly all the youth served in the YAP program (96%) were in out-of-home placements when they were referred and 100% had at least one prior out-of-home placement. But, the success in Newburgh demonstrates that even youth with "high risks" can be safe, and even thrive, in the community: Eighty-two percent of the discharged youth and 94% of post-discharge youth lived in the community at the time of the last known contact. And, 82% were not arrested while in the program, and 69% were not arrested since discharge; whether arrested or not, nearly all still lived in the community.

*Source: Site visit with OCFS Mid-Hudson Staff, Annie Wellington, Beverly Watson, Julie Harris and Venita Barnett, January 7, 2014; Internal YAP outcome data for OCFS Mid-Hudson Advocate Program 01.01.11-12.31.13*