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### **New Study Shows Promising Results in Reducing Youth Re-offending**

*John Jay College of Criminal Justice Evaluates Neighborhood-based Bronx Pilot Program for Court-Involved Youth*

(Bronx, NY) -- An independent evaluation of Community Connections for Youth (CCFY), a South Bronx non-profit organization, by the John Jay College of Criminal Justice found that that youth who participated in the South Bronx Community Connections initiative were significantly less likely to be re-arrested than similarly situated peers. The evaluation found that CCFY's neighborhood approach kept youth productively engaged in community networks of support well beyond the duration of their court mandates.

"Incarcerating youth has been a dismal failure," says Reverend Ruben Austria who founded CCFY in 2009. "Every dollar invested in putting youth through the juvenile justice system takes resources out of our communities. We are challenging juvenile justice systems to reinvest their resources in neighborhoods most impacted by incarceration to increase their level of partnerships with and financial support to neighborhood and grassroots organizations."

The evaluation showed that:

- Youth who were meaningfully engaged in the project's civic activities and supported by neighborhood-based coaches, mentors and peers for at least 60 days were significantly more likely to remain uninvolved in the justice system during the subsequent 12 months than a comparison group.
- Youth who remained active in the program for at least 90 days were the most likely to stay out of the justice system.
- Family engagement enhanced the probability that youth would continue the program beyond the court's requirement.



"There is clear evidence that the youth engaged in the South Bronx Community Connections were significantly more likely to remain uninvolved in the juvenile justice system during the following year than was a borough-wide comparison group," says Dr. Nancy Jacobs, the project's evaluator.

According to the report, between 2011 and 2013, more than 100 youth living in the South Bronx, who had been arrested on charges ranging from trespassing to assault, had their cases diverted to South Bronx Community Connections. Police officers, probation officers and prosecutors referred the youth, most of whom were first or second time offenders, rather than process their cases through the juvenile justice system. If youth completed 60 days in the program, their case was closed and their record sealed with no further system involvement.

The youth who participated in the program were connected to a local grassroots community organization in the South Bronx Community Connections collaborative, where they worked with adult mentors and other peers on community improvement projects. "The grassroots neighborhood approach has advantages over traditional interventions," says Raymond Figueroa, who runs The Urban Youth Farm and Brook Park, one of the SBCC collaborative partners. "We're in the neighborhood, and so we see the youth and they see us all the time. Rather than relying on short-term interventions from outside professionals, we get the youth connected to the men and women in the community whose relationships with them never expire," Figueroa said.

While youth worked one-on-one with their coaches and mentors, their parents were invited to participate in family strengthening activities led by CCFY's Family Organizer, Jeanette Bocanegra. While family members sometimes feel defensive, frustrated and even hostile, Jeanette is able to overcome this quickly. "Once I tell them that I'm a parent of a child in the system, they know I'm not judging them and then they're not afraid to open up," she said.

"South Bronx Community Connections showed me my leadership potential and gave me opportunities to do right by my community," says Crystalie Romero, who successfully completed the program, had her case closed and continued to participate voluntarily long after the court mandate ended. "Because of this program, I am in college today, not in jail."

New York City's leaders also recognize the program's impact for juvenile justice reform.



"The South Bronx Community Connections project shows that a collaborative, strengths-based approach can successfully divert young people from further involvement in the Justice system," says New York City Commissioner for Children's Services Gladys Carrion. "The findings presented in this report will be of great use as we continue our work to reform New York City's juvenile justice system."

CCFY received a \$1.1 million grant for the pilot program and evaluation from the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention federal formula grant from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.

*Community Connections for Youth's mission is to empower grassroots faith and neighborhood organizations to develop effective community-driven alternative-to-incarceration (ATI) programs for youth. Responding to the crisis created by the overreliance on youth incarceration, CCFY seeks to develop the power and capacity of directly affected communities to develop effective alternatives for addressing the problems of youth crime and delinquency.*

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