

# IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW YORK'S CLOSE TO HOME INITIATIVE: A NEW MODEL FOR YOUTH JUSTICE



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The Center for Children's Law and Policy

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# FOREWORD

In 2010, the Annie E. Casey Foundation was approached by the Commissioners of the New York City Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Department of Probation (DOP) to assist the City as it sought to cement and further advance reforms to its juvenile justice system. Over the next few years, we had a front row seat as ACS, DOP, and other City agencies and community stakeholders pushed for passage of the Close to Home legislation and began to plan for its implementation. As such, we are pleased to be able to support the Center for Children's Law and Policy's report on the implementation of Close to Home by ACS.

While the circumstances that drove the push for Close to Home's passage were unique to New York, the City's efforts to reduce the use of out-of-home placement, expand its continuum of community-based alternatives, and introduce an array of residential placements that were small and near the homes of its youth, had significance well beyond the Empire State. New York City has been at the forefront of what we should all hope is a new wave of youth justice transformation. Virtually every state has reduced its use of confinement since the turn of the century, but Close to Home aspired for more. It sought to ensure that virtually all young people – even those who were deemed to require non-secure or limited secure placement – would be cared for near their home communities in smaller facilities that serve as a direct contrast to the prison-like facilities that were housing youth hundreds of miles from New York City.

From the outset, it was clear that successful implementation of Close to Home would require a tremendous lift from ACS, which would be reinventing itself on the fly and at a rapid pace. Having experienced the early days of Close to Home planning and implementation up close, it is hard to understate how big of a challenge this was, given the timeline that was set under the Close to Home agreement. That ACS' efforts have come so far in such a short period of time is a testament to the vision and persistence of the agency's leadership and staff. While there is surely still a long way to go, we hope that other jurisdictions will learn from New York City's experience - that bold ideas like Close to Home, ideas that raise expectations for how the juvenile justice system works with *all* youth – are worth pursuing.

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2012, the New York State Legislature and Governor Andrew Cuomo authorized a landmark initiative known as “Close to Home,” which was designed to align New York State and New York City’s juvenile justice system with research and nationally-recognized approaches to working with young people charged with crimes. In five years, the Close to Home Initiative has transformed the experience of youth who come into contact with the justice system in New York City. By shifting focus away from incarcerating youth in large, dangerous, geographically remote institutions, Close to Home has sent an important message: it is far wiser to keep youth in their communities and near their families, since those connections hold the greatest potential to help youth build new skills and stay out of trouble in the long term.

## Methodology

This is a report on why and how Close to Home began, the challenges it faced, the principles on which it is based, and what it has accomplished.

The Center for Children’s Law and Policy (CCLP) prepared this report, which was written by Executive Director Mark Soler and Deputy Director Jason Szanyi, at the request of the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS). CCLP is a nonprofit national public interest law and policy organization focused on reform of juvenile justice and other systems impacting troubled and at-risk youth. CCLP has assisted jurisdictions in over 30 states with efforts to improve their youth justice systems, and CCLP staff have conducted dozens of assessments of policies and practices in juvenile justice systems throughout the country.

This report is an assessment of ACS’s implementation of Close to Home. It is not an assessment of implementation by the state Office of Children and Family Services or by city agencies such as the Department of Probation and Department of Education, although it certainly reflects their efforts. The report also is not a formal scientific evaluation of the Close to Home initiative. Instead, the report focuses on implementation of Close to Home as envisioned by the implementing legislation and ACS’s proposed plans.

CCLP drew upon four primary sources of information when preparing this report:

**Document review:** CCLP reviewed a variety of documents to obtain context for the development of Close to Home and to frame interviews with stakeholders. These documents included planning documents prepared by ACS, ACS policies and procedure manuals, reports produced by other partner agencies, and other publications and news coverage related to the implementation of Close to Home.

**Interviews:** CCLP conducted in-person and telephone interviews with over 40 stakeholders, including current and former ACS staff members and officials at the Department of Probation, the Department of Education, the Law Department, the Legal Aid Society, the Children’s Defense Fund, and Close to Home service providers.

**Site Visits:** CCLP staff made on-site visits to one Non-Secure Placement program, one Limited-Secure Placement program, and one New York City Department of Education school that youth from Non-Secure Placement facilities attend.

**Data:** CCLP reviewed data provided by ACS and other partner agencies and incorporated that data where appropriate to provide additional context for the report and recommendations.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation provided funding for this report. The Foundation is familiar with Close to Home: several Foundation staff prepared data analyses and projections during the planning and early stages of Close to Home, and Foundation staff assisted with some of the reform efforts described below that preceded Close to Home. CCLP is also familiar with ACS and Close to Home. CCLP has provided technical assistance to ACS on its implementation of the Prison Rape Elimination Act and other aspects of its juvenile justice work, including some of the initial Close to Home plans and standards.

## THE NEED FOR CLOSE TO HOME: A FAILED JUVENILE JUSTICE MODEL IN NEW YORK

Close to Home was a transformative response to a well-documented problem. In September 2008, after years of concern about the treatment of youth in state custody, then-Governor David Paterson created a 32-member Task Force on Transforming Juvenile Justice to evaluate the effectiveness of New York State's juvenile justice system – particularly the use of incarceration and out-of-home placement for youth who were adjudicated for acts of delinquency. The Task Force, staffed by the Vera Institute of Justice, consulted with more than 200 individuals from agencies and organizations around the state and across the country, in addition to reviewing data and other information from the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) on the state's private and state-run facilities.

The following year, the Task Force released its findings and recommendations. The Task Force report began with the following statement:

**New York State's juvenile justice system has two primary responsibilities: to keep the public safe and to care for and rehabilitate young people. Since the 1980s, this system has relied on a punitive, corrections-based model to meet these responsibilities. On both counts this model has failed.<sup>1</sup>**

The Task Force found that New York State's existing approach to juvenile justice was failing in many critical ways. The system:

- **Invested millions of dollars in state-run institutions that did not protect public safety.** The Task Force found that New York taxpayers spent over \$200,000 each year per youth in out-of-home

placement. That money was largely ineffective in terms of public safety, with 75% of youth re-arrested within three years, and 89% of boys and 81% of girls re-arrested by age 28.

- **Exposed youth to dangerous and abusive conditions.** In 2009, the U.S. Department of Justice concluded an investigation of four of the state's juvenile facilities. The Department found that youth in the facilities were subjected to excessive force, inappropriate use of physical restraints, inadequate investigation of use of force incidents, inadequate mental health care, inappropriate and dangerous use of psychotropic medications, and inadequate substance abuse programming. The Task Force noted that many youth were physically brutalized for typical adolescent behavior such as slamming a door or refusing to get dressed. Staff often pushed a pin on their radios, known as "pin pushing," to summon a response team when youth didn't follow directions. As a result, many youth suffered serious injuries including broken bones and concussions.
- **Separated youth from family members who could be instrumental in helping youth avoid future contact with the justice system.** Nearly 75% of youth in institutional placements came from the New York City metropolitan area, yet many of those youth were placed in facilities hundreds of miles away from their families, making visits difficult if not impossible. For example, the Louis Gossett Jr. facility was more than 200 miles away from the City, and the two Tryon facilities (one for boys and one for girls) were 190 miles away.
- **Imposed barriers to achieving an education.** The credits youth earned in school at upstate facilities often did not transfer to the New York City Department of Education. This meant that youth returned home even further behind in their school work than they had been when they were sent away to placement.
- **Focused on custody and control instead of building skills that adolescents need to develop to be successful.** Many of the state's juvenile facilities were more like adult prisons than programs designed to work effectively with troubled youth. Facility staff focused on compliance with basic facility rules that had little applicability outside the walls, such as always walking in a single-file line with hands behind one's back. Programs spent far less time providing meaningful therapeutic interventions, measuring youth's progress toward treatment goals, and building key competencies such as strengthening commitment to learning and enhancing decision-making skills that would help youth re-enter their communities and become productive members of society.

In addition to the high costs, poor outcomes, and other problems outlined above, the Task Force found that many youth in juvenile justice facilities posed no significant risk to public safety. Instead of considering how to identify or create the community-based supports that were needed for youth to be successful, the system defaulted to a one-size-fits-all correctional approach.

The Task Force recommended a comprehensive set of reforms that would help New York State move away from a system that was "harming its children, wasting money, and endangering its public."<sup>2</sup> Recommendations included developing and using community-based alternatives to placement, limiting the use of institutional placement to a last resort, replacing large institutional facilities with smaller programs

that were rich with rehabilitative services and close to youth's homes, and identifying ways of supporting young people after they returned home from placement through effective aftercare services.

## LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR CLOSE TO HOME IN NEW YORK

The Close to Home initiative followed an important series of reforms, community-based partnerships, and programs that demonstrated better outcomes for public safety and youth in New York City.<sup>3</sup> These included:

- The launch of the first local alternative-to-placement program, Esperanza, by the New York City Department of Probation (DOP) in 2002, with the assistance of the Vera Institute of Justice. Esperanza offered a range of therapeutic programming, including programming for families.
- New York City's adoption of a detention Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI) in 2006, which helped guide decisions about which youth should be securely detained and which youth could be safely supervised in the community pending resolution of their case. The RAI helped New York City significantly reduce the number of youth in secure detention.
- The development of a range of community-based alternatives to detention for youth who the RAI determined could be safely supervised in the community, such as community monitoring and after-school programming and supervision.
- An expansion of evidence-based and community-based alternatives to placement through ACS's Juvenile Justice Initiative (JJI). Launched in 2007, JJI offered services, including family-based interventions such as Multisystemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy, to support youth and caregivers without resorting to out-of-home placement.
- The merger of the city's former Department of Juvenile Justice with ACS in 2010. The merger created the Division of Youth and Family Justice (DYFJ) at ACS, which allowed DYFJ to draw upon approaches, services, and relationships that ACS had cultivated through its delivery of child welfare services.
- The creation of a multi-agency collaborative led by ACS and DOP, the Dispositional Reform Steering Committee (DRSC), which received support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to identify reforms that would allow New York City to keep adjudicated youth close to their homes. One of the DRSC's most significant reforms was the adoption of a nationally-recognized evidence-based tool for youth on probation, the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS). The YLS is designed to assess a young person's individual criminogenic needs and risk of reoffending. A second major reform was the adoption of an objective decision-making matrix to guide decisions for adjudicated youth, which matched a youth's assigned risk score and the severity of their offense to the most appropriate programs and interventions. Together, the

YLS and the decision-making matrix helped New York City officials better direct the most intensive interventions to those youth who needed them the most while diverting other youth to community-based services that could meet their needs.

- DOP's adoption of an "Exploration of Alternatives" process in 2013, which was designed to allow DOP to propose alternatives to placement to the court and other parties in the form of a plan for community-based services and supports. Previously, DOP had been required to recommend a youth for placement before exploring possible alternatives, which many thought unnecessarily incentivized referrals to placement.
- In 2010, the pilot of the Brooklyn for Brooklyn (B4B) Initiative.<sup>4</sup> B4B was a partnership between OCFS, the Vera Institute, and the Missouri Youth Services Institute to develop regional models for placement that focused on working with youth in small therapeutic settings close to their homes. The successful pilot of B4B played a vital role in demonstrating that smaller local programs could, in fact, serve New York City's youth more effectively than large, remote institutions.

These reforms and others provided a strong foundation for Close to Home. The New York City reforms demonstrated that New York City youth could be better served by community-based services and supports when officials made the investment in those programs. In addition, during this period, arrests of youth in New York City declined significantly, including a 26% decrease in misdemeanor arrests and a 14% decrease in felony arrests from 2008 to 2012.<sup>5</sup> All of this meant that far fewer New York City youth were sent to state custody. From 2008 to 2012, New York City cut the number of youth admitted to OCFS custody by 52% to just 489 youth.<sup>6</sup> This smaller population made it feasible to create the continuum of care envisioned in the Close to Home initiative.

However, these reductions also dramatically increased the City's costs for the smaller number of youth ending up in state placements. How? State policy provided that local jurisdictions and the state should share the costs of youth placed in state-operated facilities equally. When the population of youth in OCFS facilities began to decline, in large part because of New York City's reforms, OCFS began raising its per diem rate to cover the costs of operating the same system that had existed prior to the reductions in placements. In fact, New York City ended up paying \$17 million more in 2012 than it had in 2010, even though there were far fewer New York City youth placed in state facilities.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, ACS was bearing the ballooning costs of placement while also trying to fund the new array of community-based alternatives. The exploding placement costs were drawing resources away from the effort to invest in more effective alternatives to placement.

Moreover, at the state level, the appointment of Gladys Carrión as Commissioner of OCFS in 2007 signaled a determined effort to reduce institutional placements and shift to community-based programs and services. Commissioner Carrión and her leadership team, which included Felipe Franco as the Associate Commissioner for OCFS's Division of Juvenile Justice and Opportunities for Youth, eventually closed 23 state facilities. However, New York state law required OCFS to keep facilities fully staffed for a period of time, even though the number of youth in the facilities dropped dramatically. Since the total cost of operating the facilities stayed the same, the cost per youth increased enormously. The issue came to a head in 2010, when newly-elected Governor Cuomo visited the Tryon facility, which was scheduled



to close, with OCFS Commissioner Carrión. They found 30 staff members on the campus, but no young people. “It is ridiculous,” said Governor-elect Cuomo. “With a \$9 billion deficit, we're paying 30 staff people to baby-sit an empty building.” The visit was widely covered by the press as an example of state fiscal irresponsibility.

For Governor Cuomo and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, it cemented their resolve to reform a fundamentally flawed system.

## THE NATIONAL CONTEXT FOR CLOSE TO HOME

Reforms in New York State did not occur in a vacuum. At the time of Close to Home's passage, a growing national consensus had emerged that the nation's reliance on large institutions to house youth in the juvenile justice system was failing on numerous counts. In 2011, the Annie E. Casey Foundation released a landmark report, *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*.<sup>8</sup> The publication noted that the reliance on youth prisons and correctional training schools could be “neatly summarized in six words: dangerous, ineffective, unnecessary, obsolete, wasteful, and inadequate.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition to demonstrating the systemic problems with the traditional youth corrections model throughout the country, the report outlined a path forward for ending the reliance on large out-of-home placements. Indeed, as the report noted, jurisdictions were already taking such steps:

**The idea of shuttering youth corrections facilities and substantially shrinking the number of youth in confinement may sound radical. But the reality is that in large swaths of the nation . . . it's already happening. Often prompted by lawsuits and revelations of abuse, or by mounting budget pressures, or by studies showing high recidivism, many states have slashed their juvenile corrections populations in recent years – causing no observable increase in juvenile crime rates.**

Several states had led the way in closing large facilities and developing smaller programs in the community. During the early 1970s, Massachusetts closed its large and sometimes brutal state facilities and created the nation's first statewide network of small, community-based programs. Missouri closed its two “training schools” in the 1980s and in the 1990s developed a continuum of small, intensive programs, none with more than 40 beds, situated regionally in the state so that youth were always within driving distance of their families.<sup>10</sup> The Missouri Model features individualized treatment plans, highly-trained staff, and an emphasis on preparing youth for re-entry to the community from the very first day of placement. By 2008, 85% of youth in state placements were involved in school, college, or employment at the time of their discharge from placement.<sup>11</sup>

Other states showed that effective local incentives could significantly reduce reliance on state commitments. In 1993, Ohio instituted a program, called RECLAIM Ohio, which provided financial incentives to counties to keep youth in their communities rather than committing them to state placements.

Commitment rates dropped by 36%.<sup>12</sup> In 2004, Illinois began a similar program, called Redeploy Illinois. In the first three years, commitment rates in the four pilot counties fell by 55%.<sup>13</sup>

In 1996, Wayne County, Michigan, took over responsibility for youth in the juvenile justice system from the Michigan Department of Human Services. The county developed a long-term strategy to provide a continuum of services options based on a youth's needs and risks, locate services close to youth's families, reinvest savings in community-based services and provide incentives for local responsibility, and create a contract-based, privatized service network focused on adaptability and resiliency. By 2014, the county had reduced the daily number of youth in detention from more than 500 to approximately 100, diverted an estimated 5,000 youth from the juvenile justice system altogether, reduced the number of youth in state commitment facilities from 700 to 2, reduced recidivism from 56% to 16%, and decreased residential care costs from \$115 million per year to approximately \$45 million.<sup>14</sup>

More broadly, in 1992 the Annie E. Casey Foundation started the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) to demonstrate that many youth incarcerated in local pre-adjudication detention facilities could be effectively supervised at home or in non-residential community-based programs without jeopardizing public safety. JDAI emphasized regular collection and analysis of data on detained youth, use of objective risk screening tools to control detention admissions, and development of community-based programs as alternatives to secure detention. JDAI is now in more than 250 jurisdictions in 39 states and the District of Columbia. JDAI sites have reduced the number of youth in detention by an average of 43%.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, in 2004, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation launched its Models for Change juvenile justice reform initiative. Over the course of ten years, Models for Change developed a set of basic principles for a fair, effective, and developmentally appropriate juvenile justice system, and supported reform efforts in four "core" states, twelve "action network" states, and a dozen other "replication" states around the country.

Close to Home was able to draw upon the strategies used and lessons learned from these earlier reform initiatives, and the reform efforts in New York City and New York State were on the leading edge of this emerging national trend. Indeed, just four years after the passage of Close to Home, the U.S. Department of Justice's National Institute of Justice highlighted New York State as one of seven jurisdictions from across the United States that had embraced a new and more effective model of youth justice.<sup>16</sup> To date, ACS has hosted international visitors from Australia, Singapore, England, South Korea, Norway, and Guam, as well as numerous juvenile justice officials from states throughout the U.S. who have wanted to learn from reforms, including Close to Home.

## PHILOSOPHY AND CORE PRINCIPLES OF CLOSE TO HOME

ACS has taken the leading role in launching and developing the Close to Home Initiative, in partnership with many city and state agencies and organizations. It is difficult to understate the enormity of the task

that ACS and its partners faced in 2012, which included the re-integration of hundreds of youth who had formerly been incarcerated in facilities throughout the state and the creation of a brand new city-wide network of Non-Secure Placements, Limited Secure Placements, and community-based service providers to support these youth.

**Non-Secure Placements (NSPs)** are small (8-13 bed) home-like facilities that house youth who judges determine are in need of out-of-home placement. Many programs are operated in retrofitted homes and brownstones throughout New York City's five boroughs.

**Limited-Secure Placements (LSPs)** are small (6-20 bed) placement facilities that have more restrictive security features than NSPs and are generally reserved for youth who are determined to be higher risk than those youth in NSPs.

### Close to Home's City-State Cost-Sharing Partnership

Close to Home's funding structure provides for a state block grant to New York City. The block grant is designed to cover half of the total costs of the services for youth expected to be served by the initiative. New York City covers the other half of the costs for Close to Home's services.<sup>17</sup> This funding structure mirrors the long-standing funding arrangement for youth placed in state-operated facilities. Under this arrangement, New York State and local jurisdictions share the costs associated with youth in state-operated placements equally, recognizing that youth in placement are the shared responsibility of state and local jurisdictions.

### Overarching Framework for Implementation of Close to Home

In ACS's work to implement the vision of Close to Home, agency officials have adopted two overarching frameworks for work with young people and families.

#### Risk-Needs-Responsivity

The Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) framework is a nationally-accepted approach to providing services and supportive resources to youth and families in contact with the justice system. It is designed to maximize the chance for positive outcomes. The three core elements of the RNR framework are:

**Risk:** The intensity of programs is matched to the level of risk posed by the individual, with youth deemed to be at higher risk of reoffending receiving more intensive services than youth deemed to be low or medium-risk.

**Needs:** Interventions target specific criminogenic risk factors and needs identified by objective, research-based instruments.

**Responsivity:** Services are tailored to individual youth based on their developmental needs as adolescents and are grounded in evidence-based and evidence-informed models that have been shown to reduce recidivism and provide effective services for youth and their families.

### **Positive Youth Development**

The Positive Youth Development (PYD)<sup>18</sup> framework focuses on offering youth and families an opportunity to engage in services that promote pro-social, vocational, and academic engagement; creative expression; and positive adult and peer mentoring. PYD is grounded in research and evidence from youth justice systems that suggests that youth are more likely to achieve positive outcomes when offered meaningful opportunities to build skills and capitalize on their strengths, as opposed to focusing on punishing youth for their shortcomings.

The PYD framework also recognizes that “[m]easuring positive outcomes in youth justice requires a shift away from recidivism as the sole indicator of program effectiveness.” Simple measures of recidivism fail to capture the range of positive outcomes that officials hope to see in young people – for example, the formation of positive and supportive relationships with other youth and adults, increased labor market readiness, and improved educational achievement.<sup>19</sup> Measuring outcomes according to a PYD framework “is more consistent with developmental science and offers a more suitable and comprehensive framework for measuring the effectiveness of youth justice services and systems.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Core Principles of Close to Home**

Within these two overarching frameworks, ACS has articulated seven core principles of the Close to Home Initiative, which appear on the following page.

### 1. Public Safety

- Intensive supervision of youth in well-staffed placements, as well as ongoing supervision and monitoring of youth on aftercare following their release, promotes public safety.

### 2. Accountability

- Officials strategically use data to inform policy and programming decisions and to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of the initiative.

### 3. Evidence-Based and Evidence-Informed Treatment

- Youth and families receive services that are targeted to individual risk factors and needs and that have a proven track record of achieving positive outcomes for public safety, youth, and families.

### 4. Educational Continuity and Achievement

- Educational achievement is a strong protective factor against future justice system involvement, so services support youth's educational engagement and progress while in placement, as well as a successful transition back to community schools.

### 5. Community Reintegration

- Youth develop ongoing relationships and connections with positive adults, peers, and community supports that are embedded in their own neighborhoods.

### 6. Family Engagement and Collaboration

- Services emphasize family support and engagement, as families play a vital short and long-term role in youth's treatment and rehabilitation.

### 7. Permanency

- Services are structured to develop, support, and maintain connections between youth and family members, as youth will ultimately return home after any time in placement.

## CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING CLOSE TO HOME

At the time of Close to Home's passage in 2012, ACS and its partners faced a monumental undertaking: creating a new continuum of juvenile justice placements and services in New York City that would allow for the return of hundreds of youth who were in state custody at that time. Additionally, the legislation set a very aggressive timetable for reform. ACS was required to ensure that the first set of placements for youth were open just five months after Close to Home was signed into law. By contrast, it had taken decades for New York State to create a juvenile justice system that had earned the labels of "ineffective," "inefficient," and "counterproductive."

Moreover, juvenile justice itself was a new endeavor for ACS. ACS was a child welfare agency that had only recently assumed responsibility for juvenile justice services in New York City following the merger of ACS and the New York City Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) two years prior in 2010.

This meant that at the time of Close to Home's passage, ACS was still acclimating to its responsibilities in the juvenile justice system. For example, ACS had almost no experience running residential facilities for young people in the justice system prior to Close to Home. Prior to the merger with DJJ, ACS operated just one 24-hour facility for children – a relatively small child welfare facility. Upon merging with DJJ in 2010, ACS assumed responsibility for operating three secure juvenile detention facilities and overseeing a network of non-secure detention facilities. While ACS was in the process of learning how to operate and oversee those facilities, ACS had to begin adding oversight of 30 brand new Close to Home placement facilities throughout the New York City area.

***All stakeholders interviewed for this report agreed that Close to Home represented a better and more informed approach to working with youth and families in contact with the justice system. Not a single person expressed a desire to return to practices prior to the initiative.***

The rapid timeline for the rollout of Close to Home, coupled with the inherent difficulties involved in a reform initiative of this scope, meant that there have been major challenges during the implementation of the initiative. This was particularly true in the early years of implementation, when ACS and its provider agencies were just beginning to serve in these new roles. Additionally, an initiative such as Close to Home, which is focused on serving youth in the least restrictive setting consistent with public safety, involves understanding and assuming the risk that some youth will continue to get in trouble despite the best efforts of all involved. This is especially true given the years of work that had been focused on limiting system involvement to those youth with the most serious needs and challenges.

All stakeholders interviewed for this report agreed that Close to Home represented a better and more informed approach to working with youth and families in contact with the justice system. Not a single person expressed a desire to return to practices prior to the initiative. Indeed, all of those interviewed offered suggestions for how to further enhance Close to Home moving forward.

The challenges facing Close to Home during the last five years have been significant, including:

- Overcoming initial resistance by OCFS facility staff and upstate communities over the impending loss of local jobs, and resistance by local communities in New York City to having new programs for justice-involved youth in their neighborhoods.
- Meeting the legislative requirement to develop a plan in five months that included how ACS would provide a continuum of evidence-informed, high quality community-based and residential programming; establish availability of all needed resources, including location of services and availability of providers; provide necessary and appropriate staffing; monitor quality of services; seek and receive ongoing community and stakeholder input; ensure staff working directly with youth received appropriate training; monitor the use of restraints, particularly mechanical restraints; ensure youth would receive educational, behavioral, mental health, and substance abuse services; develop gender-specific programs and policies to meet the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth; develop programs that were culturally responsive; reduce the disproportionate placement of youth of color in residential programs; reduce the number of youth who were absent without leave from placement; engage in permanency and discharge planning for youth who leave placements, including access to adequate housing, health insurance, education, and employment; develop comprehensive aftercare services; and develop plans to reduce recidivism.
- Soliciting and responding in detail to public opinions on the proposed plan for implementation of Close to Home through a comment period and a series of public forums held in all five New York City boroughs.
- Identifying the risk level and needs of hundreds of youth; determining whether currently-available programs met the risk and needs, and, if not, what kind of new programs were needed; and projecting the capacity necessary for each type of program.
- Managing the legal transfer of custody of hundreds of youth from state to city custody through negotiations with OCFS and hundreds of court hearings.
- Creating the staffing and infrastructure within ACS to manage the various aspects of implementation of Close to Home.
- Launching the first set of Non-Secure Placement facilities within just five months of Close to Home being signed into law, when the law required youth to begin returning from state custody.
- Opening over 30 Non-Secure and Limited Secure Placement facilities in the New York City area during the last five years, including negotiating contracts with many different providers; identifying and buying suitable buildings; retrofitting and renovating the buildings to meet city, state, and federal standards and codes; and managing delays under enormous time pressure.

- Recruiting and contracting with over a dozen community-based service providers, many of whom had little experience with youth in the justice system, to operate general and specialized placement facilities that offered a comprehensive continuum of medical, mental health, and other evidence-based and evidence-informed services and supports. This included working with a diverse group of providers to develop common expectations and standards about the quality of care and culture of the placements. In programs that required new staff, interviewing potential employees under tremendous time pressure to open programs was “like speed dating” according to some stakeholders interviewed for this report.
- Addressing the immediate needs of young people who had just spent many months in secure correctional environments, including identifying the youth’s treatment and supervision needs based on files and records provided during the youth’s transfer and initial assessments completed by ACS and Close to Home service providers.
- Developing a comprehensive set of policies, plans, standards, and performance measures to govern the two types of placement facilities that were created by Close to Home, as well as a structure and process for monitoring and supporting programs within ACS. There was a need for model service plans, monitoring instruments and schedules, quality assurance standards, and a set of policies and procedures to govern ACS and provider responsibilities under Close to Home.
- Coordinating with the New York City Department of Education to create community-based schools for youth in Non-Secure Placement, in addition to arranging for on-site educational services for youth in Limited-Secure Placement.<sup>21</sup>
- Developing a system of aftercare for youth who remained under supervision of ACS and the Family Court following their release from placement, in order to promote a successful transition back to families and communities.

The tasks above would have presented a daunting challenge for any city or state juvenile justice agency in this country. However, over the course of the last five years, ACS and its partners have positioned New York City and New York State as a national model for youth justice through the implementation of Close to Home.

## CLOSE TO HOME’S ACHIEVEMENTS

The achievements of Close to Home fall into three categories: fulfilling the vision of Close to Home, meeting the challenges presented by implementation of the initiative, and implementing the seven Core Principles of Close to Home.



## Fulfilling the Vision

Close to Home has clearly achieved its two fundamental goals:

1. Removing New York City youth from large, dangerous, expensive, and ineffective facilities far from youth's homes; and
2. Bringing the great majority of New York City youth home to New York City or the immediate area.

In addition, Close to Home has accomplished what is perhaps most critical to its success: achieving consensus among all stakeholders on the core vision and basic principles of the initiative and maintaining their support throughout the implementation process.

## Meeting the Challenges

Close to Home was able to meet the challenges outlined above in large part due to dedicated leadership at ACS and the support of numerous state and local partners. At the state level, this includes administrators at OCFS and the support of the judiciary, including former New York Court of Appeals Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman and the Family Court's leadership team, among many others.

Within ACS, sustained support at the Commissioner level was critical, beginning with Commissioner John Mattingly, who supported many of the reforms that made Close to Home possible, and Commissioners Ronald Richter and Gladys Carrión, who managed the launch and early years of the initiative. It also includes the dedication and leadership of current ACS Commissioner David Hansell, who is working to strengthen and build upon Close to Home's early successes as the initiative matures.

Many of those who were interviewed emphasized the particular value of having former administrators from OCFS in leadership roles at ACS, including Commissioner Carrión and Felipe Franco, Deputy Commissioner of the Division of Youth and Family Justice. The initiative's success has clearly depended upon many individuals who have served as administrators and managers within ACS during the planning, launch, and evolution of Close to Home. However, many of those interviewed noted in particular the importance of continued and sustained leadership from Deputy Commissioner Franco over some of the most critical years of implementation of Close to Home.

As noted above, the initial challenges facing ACS and its partners were numerous and complex, and meeting them was a process that several people described as "building a plane while flying it." Yet the initiative has persevered, grown, learned from its mistakes, and provided many important benefits to children and families. As part of Close to Home, ACS and its partners:

- Submitted a 143-page plan for approval by OCFS just 10 weeks after the Close to Home legislation was signed.
- Responded in detail to public comments on the plan and held public forums in every borough of New York City.

- Determined the risk level and needs of all returning youth, and matched youth as closely as possible to appropriate programs.
- Managed the legal transfer of custody of hundreds of youth from state custody to city care.
- Created new divisions, new responsibilities, new training, and new policies and procedures within ACS to manage the implementation of Close to Home.
- Launched the first set of Non-Secure Placement facilities by the start-up date for the initiative, just five months after the law was passed and signed by the Governor.
- Contracted with more than a dozen community-based service providers to open more than thirty Non-Secure and Limited Secure Placement facilities in New York City, including programs that specialize in helping youth who have developmental disabilities, youth who engage in fire-setting behaviors, youth with problematic sexual behaviors, youth with serious emotional disturbances, and youth who have substance abuse and addiction problems.
- Weathered an initial spate of AWOLs by returning youth, which was sharply reduced in the second year of the initiative and which has continued to decline in succeeding years of the initiative.
- Developed a comprehensive set of policies, plans, standards, and performance measures to govern the two types of placement facilities that were created by Close to Home, as well as a process for monitoring providers and maintaining quality assurance.
- Partnered with the New York City Department of Education to establish two new community-based school programs for youth in Non-Secure Placement, in addition to providing on-site educational services for youth in Limited-Secure Placement.
- Created an aftercare process for youth who remained under supervision of ACS and the Family Court following their release from placement.

## Implementing the Seven Core Principles of Close to Home

Many of the most significant improvements fall within the seven Core Principles of Close to Home, as articulated by ACS.

### 1. Public Safety

Close to Home depends on the supervision of youth in well-staffed and secure placements. As mentioned in the Challenges section above, Close to Home required the launch of the first set of Non-Secure Placements for youth returning from state custody within just five months of Close to Home being signed into law. ACS and its providers saw a high number of youth AWOL from placement in the first year of Close to Home's implementation. This is not surprising, given that most youth were transitioning from

***Year-over-year improvements in safety measures indicate that ACS and its provider agencies have become more experienced and skilled at managing the youth population.***

locked correctional facilities hundreds of miles from their homes to staff-secure but unlocked placements in New York City, most of which were near public transportation. Moreover, as also noted above, some Close to Home providers had little to no significant experience with youth in the justice system.

AWOLs have, however, fallen dramatically, with an 82% decline of AWOLs from youth in Non-Secure Placements from 2013 to 2016. Year-over-year improvements in safety measures indicate that ACS and its provider agencies have become more experienced and skilled at managing the youth population.

Close to Home also depends on high-quality supervision and monitoring of youth on aftercare following their release from placement. In recent years, ACS has relied on agency Permanency and Placement Specialists (PPS) and a group of aftercare providers that use evidence-based family therapy programs to support youths' transition home. As described below, ACS has plans to strengthen and streamline the provision of aftercare services by ensuring that youth are supervised by the same providers that worked with them while in placement, as opposed to having a separate set of aftercare providers who work with youth following their release. This continuity should strengthen connections with youth as they transition back to the community. Nevertheless, ACS released 836 young people onto aftercare from 2014 to 2016, and during that same time period, just 64 youth had their aftercare revoked for violations of terms of release, such as a new arrest.

Additionally, in 2015, ACS partnered with Cure Violence, an evidence-informed public health model that identifies and engages youth at highest risk of gun and gang violence. Cure Violence employs "Credible Messengers" to defuse street disputes and offer emergency crisis intervention, mediation, mentorship, and counseling. Cure Violence serves youth who reside within specific neighborhoods, and provides linkages to community-based pro-social activities to prepare youth for return home. In line with national best practice, Credible Messengers use an asset-based approach to engage youth and facilitate conflict mediation sessions in residential and school-based settings.

Close to Home is a relatively new initiative. Indeed, the program's Limited Secure Placements had their first full year of operation in 2016. Efforts to measure recidivism through re-arrest, re-adjudication, or involvement with the adult criminal justice system often take years to establish baseline data and coordinate and link data sets. As described below, now that ACS and its providers are operating the full continuum of programs envisioned by Close to Home, officials can pursue a meaningful research agenda designed to look at recidivism as a public safety outcome, along with other indicators of program success.

***ACS released 836 young people onto aftercare from 2014 to 2016. During that same time period, only 64 youth had their aftercare revoked for violations of terms of release, such as a new arrest.***

## 2. Accountability

The complexity and scope of the tasks needed to create a new array of community-based placements and services for New York City youth cannot be understated. As a new initiative, Close to Home began with several mechanisms in place to provide for accountability of the initiative to the public, as well as the accountability of providers to ACS. These accountability measures included annual public reports by ACS on a series of key metrics related to Close to Home's implementation, regular on-site visits and reviews by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, and ACS's development of comprehensive plans for implementation of services following extensive review of and response to public comment.

Over the last five years, ACS has also built its internal capacity to monitor outcomes from the Close to Home initiative, including through regular reviews and assessments of provider performance. At the beginning of the initiative, ACS's limited staffing resources were focused primarily on getting facilities up and running and putting services in place for youth and families. This was necessary in view of the tight timetable for youth returning from state custody. However, this also meant that certain aspects of oversight, including contract monitoring and the capacity for routine on-site visits, were not fully developed in the early years of the initiative. This contributed to incidents such as AWOLs and assaults, incidents that led to investigations and recommendations from agencies including the New York City Comptroller and the New York City Department of Investigation.

Today, ACS has more than 20 staff who have part-time or full-time responsibility for oversight of providers and other services offered as part of the Close to Home – staffing that was made possible in part because of additional state and city funds dedicated to increasing oversight. This investment in oversight is reflected in data demonstrating an over three-fold increase in ACS staff visits to providers from 2015 to 2016, as well as the across-the-board increases in safety measures described above.

***Nearly 80 percent of Close to Home sites expressed a positive and consistent relationship with their local police precinct.***

ACS's implementation plan for Close to Home also provided for accountability to the communities in which Close to Home placements would be located. Stakeholders generally agreed that more outreach could have helped ease early tensions with community members who resisted placement of facilities within their neighborhoods. All ACS Close to Home sites do, however, have Community Advisory Boards (CABs) that include representatives of the surrounding neighborhood. In 2016, 93 percent of Close to Home sites held at least one CAB meeting, with an average of three to four CAB meetings each. Moreover, nearly 80 percent of Close to Home sites expressed a positive and consistent relationship with their local police precinct.

Additionally, all Close to Home providers now participate in the nationally recognized Performance-based Standards (PbS) program, which requires regular reporting of data on key indicators of facility operations, youth perceptions of safety and support while in placement, and family member satisfaction with services. Participation in PbS will allow ACS and its Close to Home providers to compare their

performance to benchmarks established by other placement facilities around the country, providing an additional measure of accountability.

Too much oversight can be counter-productive. As described in more detail below, there was consensus among stakeholders that, while oversight of Close to Home providers is necessary, the number of oversight entities and the evolution of oversight and monitoring practices has led to inefficiencies and a focus on process (as opposed to measures of performance and youth-focused outcomes). The “Sustaining and Strengthening” section below outlines recommendations to address those concerns.

### **3. Evidence-Based and Evidence-Informed Treatment**

Close to Home's long-term success depends on youth and families receiving services that are targeted to individual risk factors and that have a proven track record of achieving positive outcomes for public safety, youth, and families. ACS has been able to promote this principle in several ways. First, providers that are operating placement facilities are using widely recognized models for working with young people in custody. Many Close to Home providers are implementing the pillars of the Missouri Model, a nationally recognized approach that is one of the most-replicated in juvenile justice reform efforts in the U.S. The Missouri Model is grounded in working with youth in small, home-like settings that provide intensive support to youth. Programs focus attention on youth's individual treatment needs and progress toward treatment goals – something that is not possible in large youth corrections facilities. ACS worked closely with national experts to adapt the core pillars of the Missouri Model for use in Close to Home.

Close to Home has also allowed ACS to contract for specialized placements that target youth with specific risk factors and service needs. For example, Close to Home providers operate programs that focus on youth who have been diagnosed with developmental disabilities and serious emotional disturbance, youth who have demonstrated problematic sexual behaviors, youth with substance abuse and addiction needs, and youth who have engaged in fire-setting behaviors. ACS can also adjust contracts with providers to respond to changing trends in referrals to Family Court. This specialization and flexibility was not possible for New York City's youth prior to Close to Home.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, ACS is integrating the use of a nationally-recognized tool, the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS), to help guide treatment and service plans for youth as part of Close to Home. The Department of Probation has used the YLS to make recommendations for Family Court judges for many years. ACS is planning for full implementation of the YLS by March of 2018, which will help ACS further tailor services and supports for youth as part of Close to Home.

***Many Close to Home providers are implementing the pillars of the Missouri Model, a nationally recognized approach that is one of the most widely-replicated in juvenile justice reform efforts in the U.S.***

#### 4. Educational Continuity and Achievement

Because educational achievement is one of the strongest protective factors against future involvement with the justice system, Close to Home's programs are designed to support youth's educational engagement and progress while in placement, as well as a successful transition back to community schools following release from placement. Through a partnership with New York City's Department of Education (DOE), ACS has ensured that, except for a small number of youth who are in placements just outside of New York City, all youth are receiving fully transferable credits while in placement. This did not happen when youth were in OCFS placements prior to Close to Home. Additionally, youth are engaged in DOE-approved curricula, making it more likely that youth can successfully transition back to a community school following their release.

Many youth entering Close to Home arrive with a history of disengagement from school, and many arrive with profound educational deficits and special education needs. As mentioned above, the juvenile justice system prior to Close to Home exacerbated this problem, as youth's credits in placements often did not transfer, leaving them even further behind than they had been before. As part of Close to Home, however, ACS and DOE have demonstrated progress in re-engaging students and making educational gains. Most youth in Close to Home placements attend one of two community-based schools operated by DOE's District 79, collectively referred to as Passages Academy. Of the 177 youth enrolled in Passages Academy during the 2016-2017 school year, youth earned an average of 9.3 credits (up from 6.3 during the 2013-2014 school year) and passed 91% of their courses (up from 68% during the 2013-2014 school year). Additionally, among middle school students eligible for promotion at the end of the school year, 93 percent of youth were promoted at least one grade level.

***Most youth in Close to Home placements attend Passages Academy, operated by the New York City Department of Education. During the 2016-2017 school year, youth earned an average of 9.3 credits and passed 91% of their classes, continuing year-over-year improvements in both areas.***

Close to Home has generated many other benefits that are not as easy to quantify but that certainly promote a positive educational experience. For example, youth attending Passages Academy attend a community-based school designed to look and feel like a New York City public school. Youth must get into the routine of preparing for a regular school day, including traveling to and from school and completing homework. By contrast, many youth in juvenile facilities attend school in a highly artificial and structured setting that is far from what they would encounter in a community-based school. By working to normalize the educational experience and put educational services at the center of youth's day, Close to Home has taken new steps to promote a successful transition back to the youth's home school or another appropriate community-based school.

As mentioned below, ACS, DOE, and Close to Home provider agencies are continuing to partner to identify opportunities to further enhance the educational services provided to youth while in placement and beyond. These efforts also include identification of opportunities to promote a successful transition to a community-based school during aftercare and after the end of a youth's supervision. Measuring the effectiveness of these efforts may yield additional insights about the educational services provided to youth through Close to Home.

## 5. Community Reintegration

Young people have the best chance of avoiding contact with the justice system if they have ongoing relationships and connections with positive adults, peers, and community supports that are embedded in their own neighborhoods. As implemented by ACS, Close to home has prioritized placing youth in neighborhoods close to or within easy traveling distance of their home, transitioning youth back home as soon as practicable (consistent with public safety), and connecting youth to pro-social activities and opportunities that they can continue to access following their time under Close to Home supervision.

The development of small, community-based programs throughout New York City has made it much more common for youth to receive services from a provider within traveling distance to a youth's home. Even for those youth not assigned a placement in or adjacent to their home borough, stakeholders noted that Close to Home providers were much more familiar with city-wide and locally-available resources in a youth's own community than staff in upstate facilities had been prior to Close to Home.

***Over 150 youth in Close to Home participated in the 2017 New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Three NSP facilities became SYEP worksites.***

Additionally, the ability to identify and connect youth with community-based supports, including a youth's own network of family members and other supportive adults, has meant that youth can be released from placements in shorter periods of time than if they were assigned to fixed periods of incarceration, irrespective of their progress in placement or the strength of their aftercare plan. For example, the median length of stay for youth in Non-Secure Placement facilities is about seven and a half months, and the median length of stay for youth in Limited Secure Placements just over six months. Close to Home has allowed youth to return home as soon as practicable, consistent with public safety, with a plan for ongoing community-based supports.

Finally, the fact that youth in Close to Home placements are in facilities that are located within and immediately around New York City means that ACS, provider agencies, and youth can capitalize upon programs and services available in their communities. For example, over 150 youth in Close to Home placements participated in the 2017 New York City Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). Three NSP facilities even became SYEP worksites, including special placements with New York City Department of Design and Construction and a local salon with a nationally recognized stylist. SYEP has allowed youth to gain valuable work experience in New York City, which holds the potential to translate into longer-

term employment opportunities. Such partnerships simply were not possible when youth were in facilities hundreds of miles away from their own neighborhoods.

## **6. Family Engagement and Collaboration**

There is no question that Close to Home's efforts to bring youth closer to their families has yielded more opportunities for parents, caregivers, and other relatives to stay connected to their children, observe their progress while in placement, and partner in treatment and programming activities. For example, regular visitation simply was not an option for many family members prior to Close to Home. Research has indicated that increased family contact is correlated with fewer behavioral problems and improved academic performance of youth while in placement.<sup>22</sup> Close to Home aligns with this research, as well as the core value of putting family members at the center of youth's rehabilitation and treatment. No matter where family members within New York City are traveling to visit with their child, there are many more opportunities for interaction thanks to Close to Home.

Families play a vital short and long-term role in youth's treatment and rehabilitation. Close to Home has made it much easier for ACS and its providers to engage in evidence-based family therapy models, such as Multi-Systemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy, which help stabilize the youth's home environment prior to and upon their return. These evidence-based treatment models are widely used throughout the country because of their documented long-term effects on improved family dynamics, reduced recidivism, and long-term cost savings for the justice system.

Additionally, in 2016, ACS developed a new cadre of Family Engagement Conference Facilitators to help promote Family Team Conferencing at critical decision points within a youth's supervision under Close to Home. Family Team Conferencing can be very effective in developing service plans while youth are in placement and responding to incidents such as re-arrest or missed curfews. The Family Team Conferencing model is a nationally-recognized approach that prioritizes decision making in collaboration with the youth's family, his or her support circle, and service providers. Research shows that youth and family members are more likely to engage with services and programs when they feel they have had a meaningful voice in the planning process.

***In 2016, 79% of youth in Close to Home placements successfully transitioned home to a parent or family member.***

## **7. Permanency**

As implemented by ACS, Close to Home focuses on structuring services to develop, support, and maintain connections between youth and family members, recognizing that youth will ultimately return home after their time in placement. One major achievement of Close to Home is the simple fact that almost all youth in Non-Secure Placements and Limited Secure Placements are just a subway or bus ride from family members. Even if youth are not placed in a facility in their neighborhood or home borough, family members have greater opportunity to visit their child in placement, participate in family activities and



programming, see their child make progress with their treatment goals, and meaningfully contribute to a plan for the youth's discharge.

All of these are important to achieving the ultimate goal of reuniting youth with their families following their time in placement. In 2016, 74% of youth were successfully transitioned from placement to their parents, and an additional 5% of youth were successfully transitioned to a family member other than a parent or legal guardian.

## SUSTAINING AND STRENGTHENING CLOSE TO HOME IN THE FUTURE

All stakeholders interviewed for this report offered insights and recommendations for improving the effectiveness of Close to Home in the coming years. The common themes among these recommendations are outlined below, along with stakeholders' insights about lessons learned during the implementation of Close to Home to help guide reform efforts in other jurisdictions.

### Opportunities for Improvement

As noted earlier in this report, although all of those interviewed offered recommendations for strengthening Close to Home moving forward, not a single person expressed a desire to return to the system that existed prior to Close to Home. That said, the following emerged as areas of potential improvement.

- **Strengthening aftercare.** The time following a youth's release from placement is critical, as it is the period in which youth transition from a highly-structured daily program to a time when youth must apply new skills, strategies, and insights in their own communities. All stakeholders agreed that this is an important time for young people and families in Close to Home. Many expressed concerns with the way aftercare had been structured in previous years of the Close to Home initiative. Criticisms included the fact that some youth transitioned to a different service provider for aftercare services following release from a facility, which did not take advantage of trust the youth had built with program staff while in placement. The transition required transfer of the information about a youth's case to yet another new person in the youth's life. Others expressed concern about potential overlap and confusion about roles and responsibilities between ACS's own Permanency and Placement Specialists versus the contracted aftercare providers. ACS has already arranged to allow the same LSP provider to provide aftercare services following a youth's release, which responds to many of these concerns. ACS is also exploring replication of this approach for youth in NSPs.
- **Re-enrollment and re-engagement with community schools.** As described above, youth entering Close to Home often enter the program with a history of unmet special education needs and a history of poor attendance. While many youth in Close to Home placements are accumulating credits, passing courses, and advancing grade levels, many stakeholders expressed a desire to strengthen the supports available to ensure that youth will re-enroll and

attend school following release from placement. For some, this meant focusing more on having youth attend courses according to their ability and grade level while in placement (as opposed to attending classes by facility), which would better prepare youth for the educational experience they are likely to encounter when re-enrolled at their home school. Others recommended re-enrolling youth in their home schools while they are in placement to help increase the likelihood of a successful transition. ACS has plans to pilot both of these recommendations in the coming months.

- **Using evidence-based tools to further individualize case planning.** As mentioned above, the New York City Department of Probation and ACS use a nationally recognized risk and needs assessment, the YLS, to determine the risk level assigned to youth, as well as particular treatment needs. Although the YLS is in place, many stakeholders believed that the tool was not being used to its fullest extent to tailor service plans to youth's individualized treatment and rehabilitation needs. ACS is in the process of re-training its Permanency and Placement Specialists on implementation and use of the YLS, and officials will be conducting audits of the YLS's implementation later this year.
- **Improving community-based services for girls.** Although females represent a relatively small number of youth entering Close to Home placements, many recognized that girls often struggle in the small number of placements available to them. Stakeholders believed that more could be done to meet girls' needs in the community, particularly since girls' offense histories generally reflect minor charges more often than boys who end up in placement. There was consensus on the need to study the population of girls entering Close to Home (and the juvenile justice system more generally) with an eye toward meeting needs earlier and before contact with the justice system.
- **Identifying and tracking additional indicators of the effectiveness and impact of Close to Home's services.** As discussed above, Close to Home and ACS have developed a series of oversight and accountability measures, including annual reports that provide routine information about the operation of Close to Home facilities and other youth outcomes. Most stakeholders requested additional and more regular information on outcomes associated with Close to Home, including improvements to reading and math skills, avoidance of future contact with the justice system, and successful employment or pursuit of post-secondary education opportunities.
- **Streamlining and Focusing Oversight of Close to Home Programs and Services.** Stakeholders recognized the importance of transparency and accountability to taxpayers and community members for outcomes associated with the Close to Home program. However, many expressed concern that the multiple agencies and entities that are engaged in oversight activities bring unnecessary redundancy. Moreover, the time spent preparing for reviews by one agency or another has limited the ability of providers to focus on enhancing services as opposed to simply reporting on current practices. Other stakeholders expressed a desire to streamline process measures (e.g., length of stay of youth in placements, number of youth

enrolled in courses) and move toward meaningful outcome measures that capture the deeper impact of Close to Home. These measures might include improved relationships with family members and increased connections with positive adults and peers in their community.

- **Obtaining qualitative information from youth and families about the strengths and shortcomings of the Close to Home program.** Many of those interviewed expressed an interest in obtaining insights from youth and family members who had participated in and received services, to better understand what youth and family members valued about the program and where they experienced the need for improvements or additional supports. Through participation in the Performance-based Standards program referenced above, providers have begun to collect some data on youth and family member satisfaction. ACS also plans to convene focus groups with youth, family members, and providers later this year.

## Lessons for Other Jurisdictions

Close to Home has been cited by researchers, juvenile justice professionals, advocates, and public officials as a model for realigning the juvenile justice system with research and nationally-recognized best practices. As the call for more efficient and effective youth justice systems continues to grow throughout the country, six themes from the implementation of Close to Home emerged that should inform efforts to replicate the initiative.

- **Investments in reforms to divert youth away the justice system and to provide pathways out of the system made Close to Home possible.** Close to Home represents the latest in a line of innovations in how New York City and New York State have approached youth in trouble with the law. Those interviewed for the report made it clear that the work that had been done to dramatically reduce the number of youth in out-of-home placements and increase alternatives to involvement with Family Court made it possible for ACS to implement Close to Home. Jurisdictions considering their own Close to Home efforts should build on similar reforms to downsize their systems and make them more efficient and effective.
- **Visionary and dedicated leadership was necessary at all levels of government and at all levels of the initiative.** Close to Home was an enormous undertaking for New York State and New York City, particularly for ACS and its network of providers. Stakeholders interviewed made it clear that the vision and commitment of city and state leaders, and leaders within ACS and its partners, was crucial for Close to Home to weather the initial challenges and to improve year after year. Jurisdictions considering their own Close to Home reforms should ensure that their leaders are well-informed and onboard for the long haul.
- **More planning time could have avoided many initial problems.** Politics is the art of the possible, and Close to Home was enacted when the stars aligned at the state and city levels for vision, leadership, resources, and commitment. But ACS had only assumed any responsibility for juvenile justice services two years prior, and the agency had just five months from the date Close to Home was signed into law to the date that the first programs received youth returning from state custody. The initiative paid a price for the short preparation period. In hindsight, the timeline

was unrealistic, particularly given the need to negotiate contracts with providers to operate multiple placements and the need to identify, renovate, and permit buildings to house youth. Many stakeholders said that an additional six to nine months of planning time would have helped anticipate and reduce some of the problems that emerged early on in the initiative's implementation. However, stakeholders also noted that the legislation created an urgency behind dramatic structural changes to the youth justice system – changes that might have been slowed or stalled by political considerations had the timeline not been as aggressive as it was. Others noted that it took the lived experience of running a new set of placement facilities to enable ACS to craft policies and procedures that would reflect real-life operations. Jurisdictions considering their own Close to Home reform effort should provide an extensive period of planning and preparation in order to avoid some of the initial pitfalls that New York encountered.

- **Close to Home had to rely on relationships with some providers that had little or no experience with juvenile justice – a fact that presented short-term challenges but offered longer-term benefits.** As ACS recruited providers to operate the array of Non-Secure and Limited Secure Placements, many agencies responding to the agency's request had deep histories of working with at-risk and troubled youth, especially youth in the child welfare system. However, many did not have much or any direct experience with youth involved with the justice system, let alone working with youth in a secure residential setting. Stakeholders interviewed acknowledged that some providers' relative unfamiliarity with the youth population, coupled with a lack of time for adequate recruiting and training, led to initial problems such as altercations and AWOLs. However, most stakeholders stated that having providers that were focused on non-punitive, non-correctional therapeutic approaches to working with youth was an overall benefit in the long term, particularly given the poor outcomes associated with traditional youth correctional models. Stakeholders also emphasized the importance of requiring partnerships with non-profit providers (as opposed to for-profit entities) so as to avoid creating improper financial incentives for the placement of youth and retention of youth in placement longer than necessary.
- **Although the Close to Home legislation provided for community input in the form of public forums and the opportunity to comment on proposed plans, more outreach was needed to community members in advance of siting and opening placements.** ACS and its partner agencies invested significant amounts of time and energy in hosting forums for community members to provide input about the proposed plans for Close to Home. Public hearings occurred in every borough in New York City, and ACS responded in detail to public comments received by the public, advocacy organizations, and public officials. Nevertheless, stakeholders interviewed acknowledged that more work was needed to engage communities in which ACS and its provider agencies were planning to open Non-Secure and Limited Secure Placement facilities. Although provider agencies are required to convene Community Advisory Boards for all Close to Home sites, those interviewed for this report acknowledged that more on-the-ground conversation, education, and alliance-building would have helped counter the “not in my backyard” sentiment that existed among residents in many neighborhoods.

## CONCLUSION

In five years, the Close to Home Initiative has transformed the experience of youth who come into contact with the justice system in New York City. By prioritizing investments in programs and resources within and around the neighborhoods in which youth live, Close to Home has begun to realign New York State's youth justice system with research and nationally-recognized best practices that give youth the best chance of becoming productive and law-abiding members of society.

As is expected with implementation of any initiative on the scale of Close to Home, ACS and its partners agencies have faced challenges over the past five years. However, the efforts described in this report to implement Close to Home and overcome those challenges have made New York City and New York State national models for reform. The work done to date has created a solid foundation upon which officials can continue to build a more effective, efficient, and equitable youth justice system for all New Yorkers.

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<sup>1</sup> Charting a New Course: A Blueprint for Transforming Juvenile Justice in New York State, December 2009 (a report of Governor David Paterson's Task force on Transforming Juvenile Justice).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 10.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer J. Ferone, Annie Salsich, and Jennifer Fratello, *The Close to Home Initiative and Related Reforms in Juvenile Justice*, January 2014 (Vera Institute of Justice). This report contains more detailed information about reforms in New York City that occurred prior to implementation of Close to Home.

<sup>4</sup> Reagan Daly and Ben Estep, *Current Thinking: Brooklyn for Brooklyn Initiative*, October 2011 (Vera Institute of Justice), <https://archive.vera.org/blog/brooklyn-brooklyn-initiative>.

<sup>5</sup> Division of Criminal Justice Services, Office of Justice Research and Performance, *Juvenile Justice Annual Update for 2012*, May 2013, <http://www.criminaljustice.ny.gov/ofpa/ij/docs/JJAG-5-21-2013.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey A. Butts, Laura Negredo, & Evan Elkin, *Keeping Justice-Involved Youth "Close to Home" in New York City*, John Jay College of Criminal Justice Research and Evaluation Center (March 2015), <https://johnjayrec.nyc/2015/03/16/stayingconnected>.

<sup>8</sup> Richard A. Mendel, *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*, October 2011 (Annie E. Casey Foundation).

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 5.

<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Mendel, *The Missouri Model: Reinventing the Practice of Rehabilitating Youthful Offenders*, 2010 (Annie E. Casey Foundation).

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 31.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> National Association of Counties, *County Leadership in Juvenile Justice Reform: Wayne County, Michigan* (December 2014).

<sup>15</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation, *JDAI at 25: Insights from the Annual Results Reports, 2017* (Annie E. Casey Foundation).

<sup>16</sup> Patrick McCarthy, Vincent Schiraldi, and Miriam Shark, *The Future of Youth Justice: A Community-Based Alternative to the Youth Prison Model*. *New Thinking in Community Corrections Bulletin*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, 2016. NCJ 250142.

<sup>17</sup> The legislation provides an avenue to adjust the block grant formula if increased demand for Close to Home's services exceeded the initial estimates, based on probation intake numbers.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey A. Butts, Gordon Bazemore, and Aundra Saa Meroe, *Positive Youth Justice: Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development*, 2010 (Coalition for Juvenile Justice).

<sup>19</sup> Jeffrey A. Butts, Emily Pelletier, and Lila Kazemian (2018). *Positive Outcomes: Strategies for Assessing the Progress of Youth Involved in the Justice System 1*. New York, NY: Research and Evaluation Center, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York.

<sup>20</sup> *Id.* at 15.

<sup>21</sup> ACS has also coordinated with two other school districts, Greenburgh Eleven Unified School District and Mount Pleasant Cottage School Unified School District, for youth in placements just outside of New York City.

<sup>22</sup> Sandra Villalobos Aguledo, *The Impact of Family Visitation on Incarcerated Youth's Behavior and School Performance: Findings from the Families as Partners Project*, April 2013 (Vera Institute of Justice).