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Social Welfare Policy & Services

Policy Position Paper

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As the Assistant Director of Community Programs for the Center for Community Alternatives' (CCA) Youth Services Department, I currently oversee youth programs in six high crime areas in Brooklyn, New York. The primary aims of these programs is to help justice involved youth (ages 16-24) develop professional readiness skills that will prepare them to become meaningfully employed. According to data from the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), evidence suggests that there is a direct correlation between youth who obtain employment and a reduction in both violent crime and incarceration (Heller, 2014; Gelber, Isen & Kessler, 2016; & Modestino, 2019). However, while SYEP is centered on providing opportunities to the youth during the summer months when crime waves tend to rise, my team and I at CCA are faced with the challenging prospect of serving this targeted demographic during other times of the year as well. Thus, this public policy paper briefly illustrates how we are showing up to address the plethora of ills plaguing underserved communities.

Our programs are servicing more than two-hundred youth annually. In addition to assisting them with job placement, we are also responsible for helping them get enrolled in credentialed programs as well as in academic institutions. Regarding the former, our youth have successfully obtained credentials in OSHA, SST, HVAC, Fireguard, among others. The acquisition of these credentials has led to the youth becoming employed in several industries. With respect to the latter, some youth obtained their GED/HSE diplomas and have pursued their college education also. Our youth ambassadors have engaged in civic engagements and community benefit projects such as voter registration drives, toy drives, blood drives, trash pickups, fresh food giveaways, health care product giveaways, stop the violence rallies, basketball tournaments, and other

constructive activities. These events are designed to help the youth understand the importance of being proactive in their communities.

An essential aspect of programing deals with helping the youth get connected to internships that help them acquire the skills needed to maximize their potential and increase their chances of gaining employment. Since we have connections with employers across the city, we are always made privy to any job fairs these employers may be hosting in search of potential recruits. Thus, our programs have become a reliable resource that the youth in these respective communities depend on.

CCA is a leader in the field of community-based alternatives to incarceration (communityalternatives.org). We have staff at the detention facilities—Crossroads and Horizon—to work with youth by preparing them to make the transition back out to society. Once released, our team then connects them to programs designed to empower them and decrease their likelihood of recidivating. Overall, we take an integrated approach to assist us in the arduous process of overcoming these challenges.

At every level of the process, we are addressing the needs of the youth on the micro, mezzo, and macro levels, respectively. By micro, we are conducting community outreach in the form of canvassing communities and passing out flyers which educate the people about the services our programs offer. We sign up potential participants who express interest in programming. By mezzo, we collaborate with local police departments to help us identify where there has been an increase in crime. Through this vital partnership with the police, we also work alongside stakeholders such as school administrators, business owners, religious organizations, and community-based groups, to host events which brings everyone in the community together. Finally, on a macro level, our agency meets regularly with representatives from the mayor's

office to lobby for more resources on behalf of our programs that statistics show is playing a significant role in helping to reduce youth violence, and unemployment within the community. Consequently, there is no doubt that we are showing out to address these ills.

References

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