



RESEARCH BRIEF

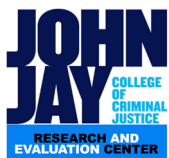
New York's "Close to Home" Initiative — Lessons Learned

New York's *Close to Home* initiative (**C2H**) is a policy reform that brings young offenders home from far-away correctional institutions to be served by programs closer to their families. New York implemented the first phase of C2H in 2012 for youth from the State's "non-secure" programs. A second phase, scheduled to begin in March 2015, will bring back youth from "limited-secure" programs that house more serious offenders. As C2H expands, policymakers need to consider strategies that were effective in Phase 1 and mistakes to be avoided in Phase 2.

The Research & Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice recently reviewed the outcomes of C2H. Researchers collected statistical information about the effort, interviewed some of the officials who designed and implemented it, and talked with private providers and advocates. The findings of [the study](#) include:

- Close to Home appears to be an effective strategy. The first phase of C2H stopped the placement of youth in the State's remote, non-secure facilities and relocated those services closer to the City. Even youth still requiring residential placement now have greater opportunities to maintain positive connections to their families and communities.
- Close to Home improved educational supports for justice-involved youth. School officials in New York City report that youth affected by C2H are taking and passing their Regents Exams at higher rates than before, and they are more often returning to their neighborhood schools following placement.
- The effectiveness of C2H cannot be assessed simply by tracking changes in the number of youth placements. New York City placements dropped sharply in recent years, but the decline started long before C2H.
- Several youth justice trends, however, are more positive in New York City than in other areas of the State (e.g., probation intakes and detention utilization). These differences suggest that C2H is at least not increasing the use of placement or undermining public safety.
- Some provider agencies believe the implementation of Phase 1 was rushed. Providers need time to prepare for new clients and new caseloads. The planning process for Phase 2 should allow for reasonable start-up time, and the City and State should support agency costs during start-up.
- City and State agencies should minimize the number of youth who are physically transferred from one setting to another in the midst of a residential stay. New placement facilities under C2H should be allowed to expand as they accept newly adjudicated youth rather than transferring youth already in placement.
- Operating high-quality placements is essential, but it is also important to limit the use of those placements to youth who require that level of intervention. Net-widening is an ever-present risk in the youth justice system.
- Residential staff in the youth justice system do difficult work. Agencies must recruit staff carefully and provide employees with ongoing training and professional development to ensure quality of care and to minimize turnover.
- Youth justice agencies should rely on evidence-based or evidence-informed service models whenever possible, but such models do not exist to address every youth and family factor that leads to crime and delinquency. Youth justice systems should deploy interventions suggested by adolescent development science and preventive principles (e.g., job supports, educational mentoring, participation in the arts, sports and physical activity, and an array of other interventions that develop young people's skills, interests, and opportunities).

As long-term outcome data become available, New Yorkers may learn that the Close to Home initiative brought real and lasting benefits to justice-involved youth and their communities. As of now, nobody is ready to call the initiative a complete success, but C2H retains strong support from State and City officials, practitioners, and advocates. The general consensus is that Close to Home is a promising reform that has already improved the quality of youth justice in New York City and New York State.



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FULL REPORT

Staying Connected:
Keeping Justice-Involved Youth
"Close to Home" in
New York City