

JUSTICE POLICY INSTITUTE DC'S YOUNG MEN EMERGING UNIT:

A STORY OF REFORM AND LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FRONT LINES



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DC's Young Men Emerging Unit: A Story of Reform and Lessons Learned from the Front Lines

THIS PAPER REFLECTS THE EXPERIENCE OF THE THREE AUTHORS DURING THE TIME THEY SERVED AS MENTORS ON THE YME UNIT

FOREWORD

Jurisdictions throughout the country have been exploring new approaches to the treatment and care of "young or emerging adults" age 18-25 years-old in the criminal justice system in recent years. This movement was galvanized by research showing that, while age 18 has traditionally signified the age of developmental maturity, brain development continues into the mid-20s. Moreover, developmental milestones associated with independence and maturity continue well past the 18th birthday.

There is a growing movement to create approaches specifically designed for emerging adults in the justice system. Reforms include new developmentally-tailored approaches to institutional care, court processes, community supervision, and community-based resources. This is in contrast to the common practice of treating justice system-involved emerging adults in the same way older adults are treated, despite their developmental differences. These age-appropriate approaches will result in improved public safety outcomes as well as enhanced safety in facilities for incarcerated young people and staff.

Washington, D.C. is one of several jurisdictions throughout the country pursuing such reforms. The developments in D.C. were a result of a work by policymakers, advocates, and practitioners over several years. The issue was raised initially in response to three factors:

Significant reforms to D.C.'s juvenile justice system over the past 15 years, including a strategy to handle youth under juvenile court jurisdiction based on the principles of positive youth development and restorative justice, utilizing developmentally appropriate strength-based approaches and practices designed to repair harm;

Lack of developmentally-appropriate programming for emerging adults in D.C.'s criminal justice system; and

The District's unique relationship with the federal government, under which those convicted in D.C. and sentenced to incarceration with more than 12 months to serve are transferred to the custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) and incarcerated in prisons across the

country (often very far from their families and communities in Washington, D.C.).

Further, in 2016 The Washington Post published a six-part, front-page series amid these discussions that focused on violent crimes committed by young adults and ascribed responsibility to the District's Youth Rehabilitation Act (YRA). The YRA was intended to allow for access to specialized rehabilitative programming, the possibility of a reduced sentence, and the sealing of records for those under 22 years of age sentenced in criminal court. The articles emphasized the inaccurate premise that young adults sentenced under the YRA were given light sentences and ultimately proceeded to commit subsequent violent crimes, assertions that were refuted. Despite the inaccuracies in the reporting, the news coverage resulted in significant controversy and attention, including hearings by the Washington, D.C. City Council under pressure to do away with or weaken the YRA.

Fortunately, Washington Mayor Muriel Bowser, the D.C. Council, and D.C.'s locally-elected Attorney General, with backing by advocates, took a measured approach and called for a study and an evaluation before initiating changes. The study confirmed the flaws in The Washington Post's reporting, but also led to a series of productive discussions among policy makers and advocates about how the YRA could be improved. Ultimately, legislation passed in 2018 that strengthened the YRA, including raising the age of eligibility to 25, which was consistent with the latest research.

Most importantly, the attention revealed a significant weakness in the YRA: a lack of developmentally-appropriate rehabilitative programming available for young adults, or as Councilmember Charles Allen put it, "there was no 'R' in the YRA." For example, although those sentenced under the YRA were supposed to receive specialized rehabilitative programming, no such programming was provided to those sentenced under the YRA. The Mayor was required to create and implement a strategic plan under the revised YRA to address the educational, workforce, healthcare, housing, family, and re-entry needs of this population, including restorative justice and diversion programs.

The District's Department of Corrections (DOC), encouraged by advocates, did not wait for the new law to take effect to initiate efforts to improve programming focused on emerging adults in its care. Approximately 30 percent of the population at the D.C. Jail was between the ages of 18-25, a group that had poor outcomes on several measures, including recidivism. In February 2018, the DOC launched a new program: the Young Men Emerging (YME) unit for young adults age 18-25. The DOC sent two delegations of staff to visit the Cheshire Correctional Institution in New Haven County, Connecticut as part of the planning and start-up process for the initiative. Cheshire, with the assistance of the Vera Institute, operates an innovative unit for emerging adults, known as the T.R.U.E Unit. A key component of the T.R.U.E unit is the role played by older people serving life sentences in Cheshire, who serve as mentors to the young adults on the unit. DOC staff were impressed with the mentors, though they knew that replicating such an approach in jail would not be possible since jails typically don't house people serving long sentences.

Around the time the YME was being launched, some have said by “divine intervention,” there was a group of individuals who were returned to the D.C. Jail from the FBOP for resentencing hearings. All of these individuals had served more than 20 years in prison for crimes committed when they were children or young adults. Six of these men – Joel Castón, Charles Fantroy, Halim Flowers, Momolu Stewart, Tyrone Walker, and Michael Woody – all in their late 30s to early 40s, were selected as the original mentors for the YME. Joel and Michael, the YME’s founding mentors, and Tyrone, who was released and now works as an Associate for the Justice Policy Institute, are the authors of this important paper.

I met these six impressive men soon after the YME opened, and I had the honor and privilege of getting to know and work with them over the past two years. I watched as they worked in partnership with DOC leadership and staff, pouring their hearts and souls into developing the unit, and mentoring the young men in their care with a passion and commitment unmatched by any program staff I have seen in my 30-plus years in the field. I have been awed by what they have accomplished, and their achievement is further evidence of two important lessons for the field:

Implementing developmentally-appropriate programming for emerging adults designed and managed by those incarcerated in the facility is an effective correctional approach; and,

Locking away people for decades to serve long prison terms has resulted in a tremendous loss, predominantly in communities of color, of brilliant and committed people who, when provided proper resources, have much to contribute to a safe and healthy world.

This paper shares the story behind the successful launch of a specialized correctional unit for emerging adults by three of the people closest and most integral to the experience. It is offered as a guide for jurisdictions that are interested in developing similar programs. It is important to note that this report is not intended to justify the increased incarceration of emerging adults or those under 18 years of age, nor to supplant effective community-based alternatives to system involvement. There are too many young people locked away for too long, particularly young people of color. This paper is focused on providing useful information to encourage the creation of developmentally-appropriate, effective, and humane treatment for incarcerated emerging adults in the limited circumstances when no other alternatives are deemed possible.

Marc Schindler, Executive Director
Justice Policy Institute

Introduction

How the criminal justice system responds to criminal behavior by emerging adults¹ between 18 and 25 years old has been drawing increasing attention in recent years. These justice-involved young adults account for a significant percentage of those arrested and incarcerated. In Washington, D.C., young adults account for 24 percent of arrests and 26 percent of the daily local jail population; despite only representing 10 percent of D.C. population. Some of these young adults are pre-trial or awaiting transfer back into the community, while others are awaiting placement in the Bureau of Prisons after having been criminally sentenced. There is a constant flow of people in and out of jail and, unlike in prison, many people only remain in jail custody for a short period. Despite this variability, all young adults held in the DC Jail can benefit from hands-on mentorship.

This concept of mentorship is the cornerstone of the Young Men Emerging (YME) specialized correctional unit, located in the Washington, D.C. Jail. It is designed to empower the individuals currently incarcerated and change the culture of corrections by having those serving longer sentences mentor the younger incarcerated population and help them navigate the uncertainty of the justice system, their life as a justice-involved young adult, and what lies ahead. Some key lessons learned over the past two years since the launch of the YME include:

- Culture change in the YME unit has been driven by the leadership of the mentors;
- Some of the initial staff were not committed to the new model, which required significant culture change;
- Mentors had built-in credibility with the young adult population, which meant they were able to reach the mentees in a way that staff never could;
- Once the mentors were given a leadership role, they helped drive the necessary culture change among the staff.

T.R.U.E. Unit

Connecticut leadership was inspired to develop the T.R.U.E. Unit following a tour of a German prison during an international visit organized by the Vera Institute for Justice. The German facility placed young adults on the same unit as older individuals, who served as mentors. The unit employs small group discussions, classes, and has invested in other rehabilitative programming.

This approach was eventually incorporated into Connecticut's T.R.U.E. Unit. However, Connecticut took it even further by empowering mentors with autonomy in developing policies and practice on the unit. This has resulted in a structure of, "rules, incentives and long days of work and study, [...] the young men go through a series of stages, learning to confront their pasts, to be vulnerable around their peers, to resolve conflict through communication instead of violence, and to master basic life skills they have missed." These key components of the T.R.U.E. unit influenced the foundation of the YME.

¹ An evolving thread of research has drawn focus to the developmental similarities and implications for behavior among youth who are under 18 and those between the ages of 18 and 24 years old, commonly referred to as emerging or young adults. See: *Emerging Adults in America: Coming of Age in the 21st Century*, Jeffrey Jensen Arnett and Jennifer Lynn Tanner (Eds.) Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2006

A Brief History

The YME was not launched overnight. It started as an idea of the Washington, D.C. Department Of Corrections (DOC) Director Quincy Booth, who wanted to create a safe space for young adults inside the jail.² The objective of the unit would be to provide structure, develop trust, and create a sense of accountability within a therapeutic and rehabilitative environment. The initial goal was to transform each individual's behavior and better prepare them for their return to the community. Over time the YME evolved to include participation by emerging adults who were awaiting placement in prison (vs. awaiting release to the community), and the goal expanded to include preparing these young people for court orders requiring them to serve a term of imprisonment in the Bureau of Prisons. Further inspiration for this type of specialized correctional unit was the T.R.U.E.³(Truthfulness, Respectfulness, Understanding, and Elevating) Unit, which is run by the Connecticut Department of Corrections.

The concept of a young adult unit in the D.C. Jail was originally pitched to the Mayor as part of Director Booth's interview process for the Director of the DOC. After accepting the position in 2016,⁴ Director Booth developed a plan to move forward. Around the same time, justice reform advocates were encouraging the Mayor's office to implement reforms focused in young adults in D.C.'s justice system, including encouraging the District to work to keep young adults in the Jail after sentencing (vs. placement in the federal Bureau of Prisons) and creating a specialized young adult treatment-oriented unit. Director Booth started his effort by looking outside the District for best practices in other jurisdictions.

DOC Planning Process for Launch

There was an initial emphasis on identifying mentors, which drew inspiration from a presentation by the Vera Institute of Justice at Columbia University's Emerging

A Mentor's Perspective

"...A strategy that we applied across the board is remaining committed to the big picture. We understand that the work that we are doing is bigger than us and that we are changing lives. Being a mentor 24/7 has its challenges, but the rewards are much greater. To continue our educational achievements, we were very strict about our study time. However, during these times, we remained 'on-call' for any mentee that needed assistance because mentoring was our first responsibility.

If a mentee came to us while we were studying and we found out that it was not life threatening, we would address any immediate concerns and then ask them if we can come to get them when we are done reading our materials for school. We felt that it was all about the mentees at every stage of the YME, but we continued our own progression by balancing the two competing demands..."

² DC Department of Correction, Young Men Emerging Program Effective Date: April 9, 2018

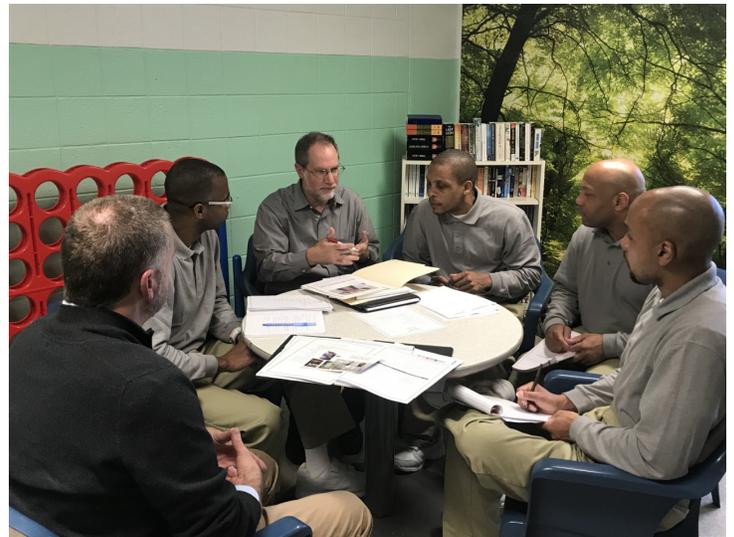
³ <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/05/08/the-connecticut-experiment>. See also; Vera Institute of Justice and MILPA partnered to develop the Restoring Promise initiative. In partnership, they work to reform the culture and climate of the prison system. This initiative is based off of the foundation and success of the T.R.U.E Unit. See, "Restoring Promise," Vera Institute of Justice, Accessed March 11, 2020. <https://www.vera.org/projects/restoring-promise-young-adult-reform-initiative>

⁴ <https://doc.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-names-quincy-booth-interim-director-dc-department-corrections>

Adult Justice Learning Community⁵ and Director Booth's and his team's initial visit to the T.R.U.E. Unit in Connecticut in 2017. Finding an analog for the foundation of the T.R.U.E. unit – residents incarcerated for long-term sentences who can serve as mentors to the young adults on the unit – was a challenge for the YME in its early days. Prisons are designed for longer-term incarceration; meanwhile, jails have a transient, short-term population. District leadership ultimately forged ahead by relying on trained staff to provide the necessary mentorship.

The staff were handpicked by the DOC executive team and were trained by the DOC's Training Academy and American University on topics including implicit bias, addressing trauma, and consideration for justice-involved young adults.⁶ The staff was selected on key characteristics, including: open-mindedness, effective communication and interpersonal skills, problem-solving, humility, and being seen as good role models by the younger population.⁷ After receiving initial training to work on a treatment-focused unit, in 2018 16 staff and administrators visited the T.R.U.E. unit a second time to better understand how to run an age-appropriate program for young adults.

The DOC staff were encouraged by what they saw and were particularly impressed by the role of mentoring. The staff from the T.R.U.E. unit helped DC leadership understand how to develop policies and practices to encourage the effectiveness, safety, and security of the unit. After two visits, D.C. leadership felt confident to work toward implementing its plan. The team engaged in planning and opened the YME unit in February 2018.



YME Mentors (L-R, Joel Castón, Michael Woody, Tyrone Walker, Charles Fantroy) meet with JPI staff to discuss policy advocacy related to addressing long prison terms and mass incarceration.

Impact of Mentors

Unfortunately, despite selecting the original staff with a focus on their ability to serve as mentors, problems arose in the YME unit soon after it opened. At one point early on, the YME unit was closed to undergo maintenance and the residents were temporarily placed in a “weekenders” unit.⁸ This unit was in disarray and the young adults were instructed to clean up the mess left behind by the weekenders. The young adults were frustrated and refused the staff's order to

5 The District is one of six jurisdictions participating in Columbia University's learning community focused on emerging adults in the justice system.

6 Temesghen Andemichael, Interview with Tyrone Walker and Marc Schindler, August 6, 2019.

7 Quincy Booth, Interview with Tyrone Walker and Marc Schindler, August 6, 2019

8 These units are specifically where people are sentenced to serve their time on the weekends and often lack many aspects of community of other units.

clean the unit. In addition, they would not actively participate in the available programming. The staff's initial reaction was to call in an additional security team to defuse the situation. However, the YME Program Analyst approached the situation differently by reaching out to two individuals who he believed could effectively communicate and resolve the YME issue without force.



YME Mentor Michael Woody and DOC Director Quincy Booth, meeting in circle on the YME.

Those two individuals were Joel Castón and Michael Woody.⁹ Rather than giving orders, they held a community conversation with the residents to better understand the situation. They learned that the residents were dissatisfied with their living conditions and felt disrespected by the staff. This was a conversation that could only happen among individuals who had the trust of and credibility with the young adult population. In the spirit of connecting with the young men, Joel and Michael led by example and joined in the cleaning detail.

This example reinforced the lessons learned in the T.R.U.E. Unit – it is most effective if the mentorship comes from within the jail population. Joel and Mike were both widely respected in the jail. It was only by chance that they were both in local custody in the D.C. Jail, each having been brought back to the District from the federal Bureau of Prisons to be close to their attorneys during appeals on their cases.¹⁰ The events of the “weekender unit” are an example of

their commitment to the young men, which resulted in the permanent placement of mentors on the unit.

Joel and Michael fit the mentor model established in the T.R.U.E Unit. They have credibility among the incarcerated population and have demonstrated the ability to grab the attention of young people and inspire change to assist in the ‘navigation of uncertainty of the justice system, life, and what lies ahead of them.’ Both previously held unofficial mentorship roles working with a similar vulnerable population while incarcerated in the federal system. During the early phase of the YME, the executive team often called on them to visit the unit to hold empowerment sessions. The continued engagement and credibility with the

“For any institution or facility who wishes to use the dynamic of having mentors, it should start by looking at the men who are probably already doing the work.”

- Founding Mentors
Joel and Michael

⁹ Joel Castón and Michael Woody have each served over 20 years in federal prison, and are in the DC Jail pending hearings in DC Superior Court on their individual cases.

¹⁰ The National Capital Revilization and Self-Government Improvement Act of 1997, adopted at a time when the District was facing a financial crisis, transferred most correctional responsibilities to the federal government. Now, all individuals sentenced to prison for a DC Code felony are held in a federal prison. This is often hundreds of miles away from the community. See, “Department of Corrections Closes Final Prison and Accomplishes Major Milestone,” Department of Corrections, Last Modified, November 19, 2001. <https://doc.dc.gov/release/departement-correc-tions-closes-final-prison-and-accomplishes-major-milestone>

young adult population made them ideal candidates to serve as mentors.

Collaborating Forward

Once their transfer to the YME Unit was official, Joel and Michael became the founding mentors for the YME and were given a seat at the table to discuss changes to internal policies and practices. The mentors became a liaison with the DOC executive team to assure that the YME didn't fall back into a punitive model of corrections. The development of internal unit policy often differed from existing policies in other units at the D.C. Jail. For example, it is common to lock residents in their rooms overnight. However, it is a practice in the YME to address questionable behavior and outbursts immediately. An internal YME informal policy states that mentees must have access to their mentors 24/7. This is different than in other units in the jail, where these engagements would have to wait until morning. That delay runs the risk of allowing a disagreement to turn into a more serious conflict.

Outside of policy change, the mentors have shifted other existing practices in the YME. For example, to rid the stigma of institutional life, the mentors pushed for reform around language and clothing. They began using people-first language such as community instead of unit, mentee instead of inmate, and team members instead of correctional officer. Equally important is the option to wear non-prison uniforms by staff and residents, which serves as a visual sign of the commitment to change the traditional punitive and demeaning indicators of "otherness" that are counter-productive to growth and rehabilitation.

By introducing these changes, it allows the mentors to approach the young adults from a different vantage point than a typical institutionalized prison culture. Following this paradigm shift, the mentors and the executive team continued to change correctional practices for these young adults.



A Mentor's Perspective

"...The interview process also acts as a tool to share information. Throughout the orientation, we connected with young adults who 'were not ready' for the structure of the YME unit. Based on this self-recognition, many of those young adults would take time to reflect and return to the next orientation process with a new perspective. At this point, they were ready to join the community. This was important to us because we wanted to spread the word of the YME across the jail, but also wanted to engage those who are ready to change..."

YME Program Design

When the mentors joined the YME, there was no official handbook detailing daily activities, performance measures, or programming. The mentors initially drafted internal policies that included an orientation process, room inspection protocol, programming hours, and a process of handing out work assignments. Upon approval, it allowed for a smoother operation of the community with the flexibility to grow.

One of the primary purposes of the YME structure is to keep the young adults occupied, engaged, and progressing. The following section will detail the components that make up the YME unit and daily engagement.

Orientation

Before the implementation of an official orientation process, mentees were selected by the YME Program Analyst and Case Manager. Since then, it has become an increasingly more involved process. Mentors created a recruitment flier seeking those who are willing to engage in therapeutic programming. Today, mentees who are interested in joining the YME community meet with the Deputy Director, Program Analyst, Case Manager, Unit Commander, Mentors, and Mentees. The YME developed a point system where they can gauge an individual's interest and score individuals on personal mannerisms, eye contact, openness, and honesty. After the interview process, candidates are screened by the DOC staff concerning custody level, age, and disciplinary history. There is no type of case that is barred from the YME. Each case is assessed on an individual basis. In some instances, Case Managers will recommend a young adult from the maximum-security unit at the Central Detention Facility to be placed in the YME if they are confident that they will succeed and experience meaningful growth. Due to limited space, the YME is reserved for the most promising candidates.



YME mentors and mentees preparing for legislative discussion with the DC Council.

Criteria for Mentee Community Members

Initially, YME only admitted residents who were within 90 days of their release, which limited the program's scope primarily to re-entry work. However, this policy would have prohibited people like the current mentors from participating in the program if it were available during their initial years of incarceration. Thus, the mentors sought to expand those who are eligible to participate by also including emerging adults who would potentially be sentenced to a prison term in the BOP. This, in turn, expanded the goal of the unit from re-entry preparation to also include guiding younger individuals into their next placement. Now, the program is open to all young adults in the custody of the jail as long as they meet the requirements outlined above.

Behavior Tracking System

One of the first internal policies to be developed by the mentors was a behavior tracking system. Applying an effective and equitable accountability component was warmly welcomed by both the staff and the mentees. The system includes both informal and formal interventions, which are determined by the mentors and staff.

Informal: A mentee might receive an informal conversation with one or more of the mentors. This would be followed up by a meeting with staff members. These engagements are intended to determine why the behavior occurred and ways to avoid it in the future.

Formal: A mentee could also receive a formal 'pull-up' which goes into a mentee's file as an infraction. After three 'pull-up' citations, the mentee could be formally removed from the unit.¹¹

A Mentor's Perspective

"...There is not much physical contact between staff and residents within the housing units in the Central Detention Facility and the Central Treatment Facility. You won't even see anything as simple as a handshake. Some will speak, but only if addressed by staff.

The YME is so much different from the rest of the jail and the BOP. The YME made us feel human. It gave us a full sense of dignity and it showed us that people can have this tremendous sense of love. When one of the mentors lost one of his nieces while he was incarcerated in the BOP, he was simply called to the chaplain's office for a brief conversation.

When this same mentor lost his other niece while he was mentoring inside the YME, the Deputy Director of Operations and the Warden came to the unit to check on him and gave him hugs while he cried on their shoulders. That was the most humane thing that I've witnessed in over 20 years of incarceration. They showed him love and encouragement. You will never see that inside the BOP or another prison setting..."

These practices were developed in place of traditional correctional responses that might include a disciplinary report or placement in a segregation unit. Devising a non-punitive response system

¹¹ A pull-up is an informal institutional infraction. It was the Case Manager, Program Analyst, Community Officer who brought the complaint, one Mentor, and the Mentee. We came together as a community to talk with the mentee about his conduct on the unit. Often times we also have a conversation with the officer. YME used pull-up as a way to talk to the mentees about their behavior versa an officer writing an incident report which will automatically expulsion them from the community.

acknowledges that the young adult mentees are at a different level of maturity than adults and need to be held accountable, but without harsh punishment.

As of May 2020, two mentees have been issued a formal pull-up and subsequently removed from the YME unit at the staff's request. An additional six were removed from the unit for their participation in a physical altercation. No mentors have received a misconduct order. This behavior modification approach, relying on informal interventions and incentives (vs. punishment), has resulted in a very safe environment. This is compared to the Central Detention Facility where the Corrections Information Council reports 1,402 violations in 2018.¹²

Education

In the preliminary stages of the YME, education programming was not available to the mentees (even though all of the mentors were enrolled in educational programs, including college courses offered at the D.C. Jail). The mentors concluded early on that providing educational opportunities for mentees on the unit was necessary for the young adults to achieve the goals they were seeking. This commitment to the importance of education was a result of the mentors' experience of having pursued an education during their terms of incarceration, which included having been in prison when Pell Grants were still available for incarcerated individuals.

They understood that education is a cornerstone to success. After conversations with the executive team, Individualized Education Programs, GEDs, and other higher education

opportunities became available for both mentees and mentors. For those entering the YME without

a high school diploma, a GED program is now part of their required programming. For those that desire a higher education, Ashland University, the University of District of Columbia, Howard University, and Georgetown Prison Scholars Program offer opportunities, which is rare in a jail setting. Regardless of a mentee's length of stay at the YME, exposure to education can spark an interest in additional opportunities later in life.

"Education while incarcerated is the single most transformative measure in terms of successful re-entry."

Professor Marc Howard,
Georgetown University



¹² N.A., District of Columbia Department of Corrections: 2018 Inspection Report (Washington, DC: Corrections Information Council, 2018). https://cic.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/cic/page_content/attachments/DOC%20FY%202018%20Report%205.21.19%20FINAL.pdf

Unit Aesthetic

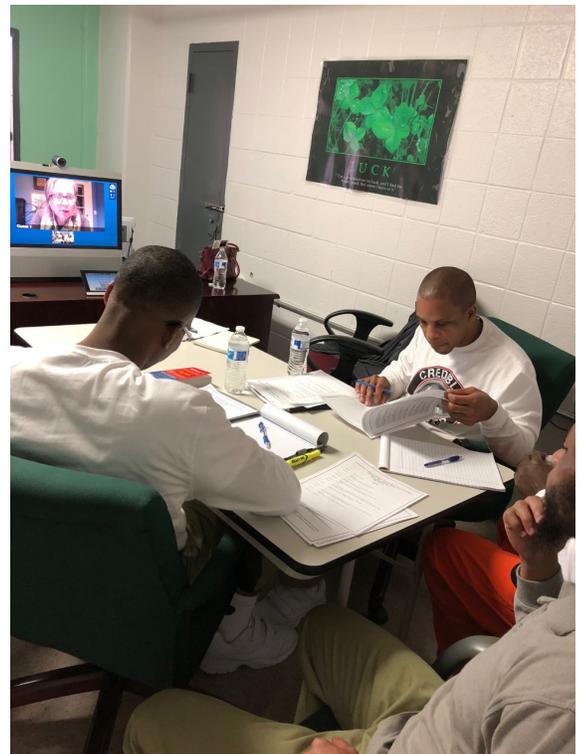
To reinforce the difference between the YME and a traditional correctional setting, the unit was renovated and redesigned by the community. Unlike a traditional correctional unit, the walls are bright, vibrant, and decorated by mentors and mentees. When you enter the unit there is a banner that reads, "YME STAND UP: Welcome to our Community – What happens in this city, sets a standard for the Nation." Some rooms function as an expression room, where chalkboard-like wallpaper is hung for art, self-expression, and even daily reminders.

The residents have also established a Wall of Fame, which highlights visitors to the unit. This includes representatives from the Mayor's office, D.C. Council, and other local residents. There is also a wall that is dedicated to the families of YME residents who have visited. This represents a reminder for everyone that care and love are waiting for them beyond the justice system.

Additionally, the residents retrofitted cells into workforce development opportunities, including a barber shop. The utility of an on-unit barber shop went beyond basic grooming opportunities. The mentors were able to facilitate barbering classes to provide the necessary skills to mentees for potential employment after their incarceration. Additionally, utilizing the barbershop advances an individual's financial literacy and budgeting skills as they have to pay for the service. This workplace and business opportunity model represents a profound culture shift when compared to a typical correctional setting.

Training for Staff and Mentors

The mentors actively participate in the training of staff who are assigned to work in the YME community. All staff must participate in five days of training that covers various topics, including an overview of adolescent development, group communication, and counseling. In the curriculum, the current YME mentors hold empowerment sessions with prospective staff members, which is necessary to create a partnership that will sustain the YME community. While DOC training is mostly standardized across the jail facilities, these unique efforts on the YME to include the perspective of the mentors result in a positive relationship that promotes problem-solving together.



In addition, mentors have been trained as Credible Messengers through a partnership with the D.C. Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, the District's juvenile justice agency. This

training included lessons on self-care and its importance, how to notify your team members when something goes wrong, how to rely on the community to solve problems, and how to build relationships with mentees.

Work Detail Payment

Initially, no resident within the YME community was awarded payment for their work detail. The most common work position is cleaning the unit, which is often a seven-days-a-week position. Due to the lack of available paying positions, some indigent mentees were unable to access basic needs, including hygiene products. This resulted in a series of thefts between residents. Staff argued for unit dismissal, but the mentors took a different approach.

The mentors took the unfortunate story of theft to the executive team and requested that cleaning detail become one of the paying positions on the unit to provide the necessary independence to all YME community members to access basic needs and avoid interpersonal confrontation, including theft. Now, all detail workers in the community can receive compensation and the mentors are gaining experience through hiring placements and maintaining payroll. In addition to cleaning detail becoming a paid position, mentors are now compensated for their work.

Publications

The success of the YME has garnered the attention of national and international visitors. To prepare for their visits, community members developed informational brochures and flyers to highlight the experience of the YME community.

The founding mentors created the TRi.A.D. Chronicles, which is a newsletter that highlights the activities that take place on the YME, with contributions from mentors and mentees. The focus is on the guests who visit the YME, accomplishments of the mentees, and different classes available by the YME mentors. The publication provides a product for visitors and families that explains the inner-workings of the mentor/mentee relationship.

All of the published materials are further enhanced by photo documentation. A Case Manager and Correctional Officer donated cameras to the community, which is further evidence of the strong relationship staff have with YME community members.



YME mentors and mentees presenting certificate of appreciation to DC Councilmember Charles Allen, following legislative discussion on pending legislation.

Certificate

A signature component of YME's hospitality is to award outside visitors with a certificate of appreciation to further recognize these important inside-out partnerships. Additionally, the mentors provide certificates to the mentees to acknowledge their improvements. There are no set standards for a certificate, but the purpose is to celebrate all achievements, large or small, which can help to boost morale and self-confidence.

Creativity

The mentors knew that encouraging creativity among the mentees would provide an opportunity for emotional expression. Initially, the YME mentors introduced playwriting, acting, and a mock radio station.

These activities provide needed experience and courage to speak in front of an audience, which ultimately impacts self-advocacy and self-learning. Being part of a play or writing is a way for mentors to demonstrate that time can be effectively utilized through expression. An example of the power of creativity occurred for one mentee when he was dropped from a performance due to his lack of enthusiasm for the play. After the performance, he became encouraged to explore his own creativity by writing his own play. Since that initial exploration of expression, he has written several other plays.

The radio show, Trill Talk Radio, provides an opportunity for expression through rap lyrics, interviews, and performances. The YME community members have autonomy over their radio show concepts. Examples of the work include conversations around culture, artistic expression, therapeutic sessions, and group therapy. Outside of creativity, it teaches mentees to take initiative outside of normal group time and do things on their own.

These creative efforts also continued as mentors were released and returned to the community. For example, Halim Flowers helped produce a short film about the YME following his release. Halim's work on the film with Unchained Media Collective, a social impact media production company that he co-founded while incarcerated, is a great example of the potential for people who have experienced the YME to continue to speak out about the need for an age-appropriate approach for emerging adults in the justice system.

Banking System

The founding mentors created a banking system for YME residents to develop a healthy relationship with money and to teach life skills. The YME bank opens during business hours, which was deliberately chosen to provide mentees with an extra incentive to wake up early. Banking transactions consist of making deposits and withdrawals to earn incentives. Community members can earn money by performing various tasks designed to foster the concept of being a good

community member. The following is a list of tasks that community members perform to earn YME money:

Unit Restoration Project - \$500	Leading Group Discussion - \$80
On Unit Painting - \$250	Reflections - \$40
On Unit Buffing - \$100	Taking initiative - \$30
Writing Assignment - \$120	Greeting Guest (s) - \$25



YME banking started as a fun and unique idea to encourage life skills, financial literacy, accountability, and responsibility. The mechanics of the system teach the mentees to write a check, fundamentals of credit and debit cards, and ultimately how to have a relationship with a bank. The first creation of YME money was welcomed with great elation and was quickly embraced by staff and residents. To give the banking system validity, the founding mentors invented different services or goods for which the mentees could spend their YME money.

The mentors developed opportunities ranging from commissary materials to entertainment opportunities. Currently, YME money is accepted for: Barber Shop, Movie Night, Xbox Privileges, Radio Privileges, Music, the TRi.A.D. Chronicles Newsletter, and the YME Store.

For particular transactions, including the Xbox or Radio, a library check-out and oversight system was developed by the mentors. This provides equity in terms of usage of certain items and ensures that all mentees can access the incentives. Additionally, the YME Store provides goods outside the traditional prison commissary that was made possible by an initial investment by Arnold Ventures.

Outreach, Community Partnerships, and Civic Engagement

To advance best practices in mentorship, engaging outside assistance has been instrumental to the daily curriculum. The mentors have become co-facilitators with groups such as Free Minds Book Club,¹³ Insight on the Inside,¹⁴ Inside Out,¹⁵ and The HOPE Foundation.¹⁶

¹³ Free Minds Book Club is an organization that uses books, writing, and creativity to engage young incarcerated individuals in their educational potential. They connect them to necessary resources while incarcerated and upon re-entry to explore their educational and career aspirations. See more, <https://freemindsbookclub.org/>

¹⁴ Insight on the Inside operates in the Washington DC area and is a series of classes focused on advancing the mindfulness and meditation of those currently experiencing justice involvement. Their classes range from yoga to informational sessions concerning substance abuse. See more, <https://www.insightontheinside.com/>

¹⁵ Inside Out is a partnership between local universities and the DC jail to provide university education opportunities. As part of this experience, it brings campus-based students into the facility to participate in class. Howard University, University of District of Columbia, and Georgetown all currently run Inside Out programs.

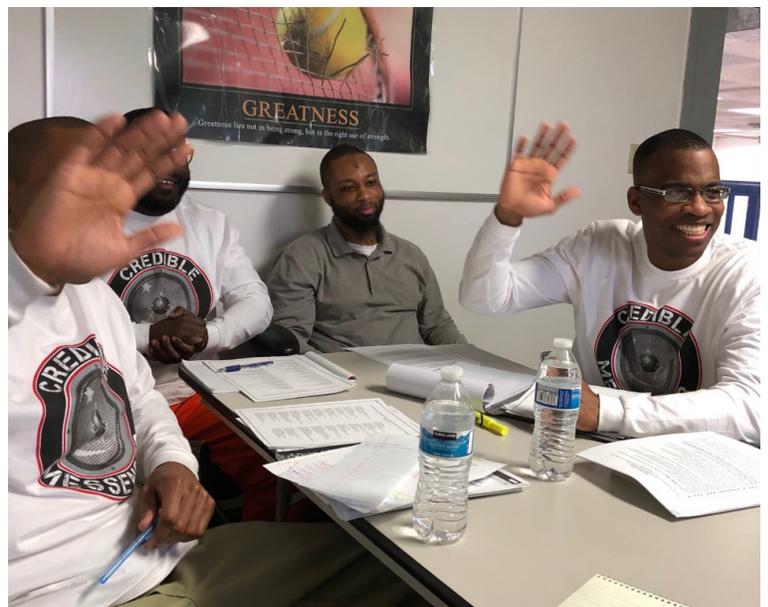
¹⁶ The Hope Foundation provides re-entry support to ensure anyone returning to the community has exposure to workforce development and training, substance abuse treatment services, and mentoring. Their vision is to ensure anyone coming home is self-sustaining. See more, <https://hopereentrynetworkdc.org/home/>

Mentor involvement in programming is vital. Mentees observe the mentors' attentiveness and emulated the passion and behavior. Mentors continue to lead by example and represent positive behavior during all programs.

Mentors and mentees have also partnered with organizations working to improve the justice system by participating in several events, including meetings via video conferencing. These activities have provided important civic engagement opportunities for mentees and mentors and ensured that policy discussions include those most directly impacted by the issues.

In March 2019, the D.C. Council held an unofficial hearing on the 'Second Look Amendment Act of 2019,' which is legislation that would offer potential sentencing relief to those who have served at least 15 years in prison and were under 25 years old at the time of their arrest. This would apply to many of the current YME mentors. Their involvement in this hearing with Council Member Charles Allen added a critical voice to the policy conversation that too often has been ignored.

In November of 2019, two mentors and two mentees participated via video in a stakeholder meeting on Washington, D.C.'s Youth Rehabilitation Act Strategic Plan. The mentors and mentees were able to present their perspective on the need for an institutional and community continuum of care for young adults. This is just one example of how outside organizations have engaged the YME to advance justice reform.



YME mentors participating via video in national convening on advocacy related to addressing long prison terms.

Culture Change on the YME Unit

Normalcy

One of the key things that helped redefine the culture on the YME was simply creating a sense of normalcy. Developing a banking system or improving unit aesthetics serve to incentivize and reinforce positive behavior that leads to change and transformation. This normalcy also provides the mentees with a sense of what it is like to function in society as a productive citizen. The normalcy is also extended to those mentees who are awaiting transfer into the Bureau of Prisons by representing the values of a positive community member, regardless of the placement in the justice system.

Personalized Space/Ownership

Seeing photos on the wall that depict the different events in which a mentee has participated in is empowering. Each mentor and mentee has the opportunity to personalize their rooms with photographs of loved ones, art, and other self-expression materials that make it their space. This practice is not allowed in other parts of the jail or most other facilities across the country. Having goals and aspirations in clear view as a reflection and constant reminder of your purpose for being in the YME unit is a great motivator. Daily verbal and positive acknowledgments are impactful when trying to change the mentality of young adults. The certificate and ceremony process that recognizes a person's growth and development encourages them to want to do more.

In a typical jail or prison that strips you of everything and leaves you feeling humiliated, you need to feel that you are a part of a community even though everything around you is suggesting the opposite. When allowed to influence how the space you occupy looks, it can restore a certain degree of dignity.

Humanizing

These efforts at culture change help humanize those who are incarcerated. The normalcy and empowerment help residents who are still suffering from an identity crisis to find themselves. When you can see yourself through the reflection of others who are putting forth the effort to improve themselves, you are helping to restore dignity and respect. The option to wear different attire is another powerful way to humanize an individual. This helps one's self-image, which ultimately translates to self-worth and self-love as well as self-confidence.

YME by the Numbers

According to the DOC, between April 2019 to May 2020, 78 young adults have been on the YME unit, spending an average of 84 days, with a maximum length of stay of 387 days. Generally speaking, the time shared on the unit is short and the population is often mixed in terms of their next placement. During that same timeframe, 19 young adults were ultimately placed in a federal facility, 16 were released into the community upon a court order after their time with the YME, and two were released to the custody of Maryland and Virginia.

Six mentees were removed for violating program protocol, three were removed for various disciplinary reasons, and an additional four were removed for possession, or suspicion of contraband. No mentors have received misconduct violations while on the YME unit. This unit provides a safe environment for staff and residents to engage in untraditional correctional tactics.

A Mentor's Perspective

"...As part of institutional security, the executive team requires a periodic lockdown check of each unit. While it is an infrequent occurrence on the YME unit, when it does happen, staff are taken aback. During one of these mandatory lockdowns, a YME staff member observed as the residents were being escorted from the cell in handcuffs that it "reminded him that they were still in a jail setting." Because of the humanizing aspects of the YME community, the staff is used to seeing individuals in khakis and polo shirts, not in restraints, and wearing traditional jail garments..."

Despite research supporting a longer length of treatment, the YME is striving to engage as many young adults as possible. Regardless of the impending placement or the potential length-of-stay on the unit, the mentors can provide meaningful skill-building guidance.

Goals of YME Moving Forward

The YME started as a pilot program. Since its inception, the concept of blending mentorship and counseling to reach the young adult population has proven to be a sound practice. The insight gained from this bold initiative has provided the framework to scale the YME throughout the facility. Presently, the DOC has followed the leadership and advice of the YME founding mentors to open a new unit at its other jail, the Central Detention Facility. The founding mentors have been instrumental in every aspect of this endeavor by providing mentor and staff training, and executive consultation. Future initiatives should replicate the YME model throughout the city, including a community-based YME to help young adults avoid further justice involvement. The intention of the YME program should be to engage a young adult as long as they require mentorship, regardless of their position in or out of the justice system.

The overarching goal of YME is to transform the DOC into one that is equitable and humane. This will ultimately make our city safe from the inside and the outside.

JPI is dedicated to reducing the use of incarceration and the justice system by promoting fair and effective policies.

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