

## THE NEW YORK REENTRY EDUCATION NETWORK (NYREN)

### 2014 CITY POLICY AGENDA: The Case for Expanding Educational Opportunities for Justice-Involved New Yorkers

*NYREN is a coalition of individuals from community-based organizations, government agencies, and higher education institutions who collaborate to transform education's role in reentry. We call on New York City's leaders to increase educational access and success for people with criminal justice system involvement as a strategy for empowering people to realize their full potential, lowering recidivism, saving taxpayers money, and creating safer communities in New York City.*

#### **Persistent Issues Plaguing the Criminal Justice System**

New York City spends \$168,000 to incarcerate a single person for one year.<sup>1</sup> Incarceration is not only expensive, it is often ineffective: 42% of those released from the NYC corrections system are re-incarcerated within a year, which further drains public and community resources.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, significant racial disparities exist within New York City's corrections system, where the population is 57% black and 33% Hispanic.<sup>3</sup>

These realities affect all New Yorkers. High rates of incarceration and recidivism are extremely costly to taxpayers, threaten the public safety of our city, and devastate the economic and social well-being of families and communities that are often already adversely impacted by poverty and racial injustice.

#### **Education is a Factor in Criminal Justice System Involvement**

The rates of education among adults in U.S. jails and prisons are lower than those of the general population, a factor that increases these individuals' likelihood of becoming involved in the justice system in the first place. Combined with the stigma of a criminal record, their lack of educational credentials, limited job skills, and/or inconsistent work experience make it difficult to find sustainable employment upon release. This cycle of unemployment and low-wage jobs exacerbates the conditions that can lead formerly incarcerated individuals to become re-incarcerated or to remain living in poverty.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Quality Education Lowers Recidivism and Saves Taxpayer Money**

According to a 2013 analysis of 30 years of research on correctional education in the U.S., incarcerated people who participate in education programs are 43% less likely to recidivate than those who do not. Post-release employment levels were 13% higher among those who had participated in education while incarcerated.<sup>5</sup>

Education not only prevents crime and alleviates poverty, it also saves the city money in the long term. Every dollar spent on educating incarcerated individuals saves four dollars in future

incarceration costs.<sup>6</sup> In New York City, justice-involved individuals pursuing higher education while supported by community-based education programs experience lower rates of re-arrest and re-incarceration.<sup>7</sup> Educational access and success coupled with services designed to support the needs of people coming out of jail and prison are powerful poverty reduction and justice reinvestment strategies that address persistent racial and economic inequalities within the criminal justice and education systems.

### **New York City Government Is Creating A Foundation for Education as a Successful Reentry Strategy**

New York City agencies and initiatives are becoming increasingly active leaders and participants in collective efforts and projects to increase educational access and success for justice-involved populations, as evidenced by the following efforts:

- **NYC Department of Education/District 79** focuses on students' transitions from detention settings back to the community. District 79 is deepening its collaboration with community-based reentry education providers to ensure that students have access to information about educational advancement after being incarcerated.
- **NYC Department of Correction** partners with the NYC DOE's Office of Adult and Continuing Education to offer a limited number of high school equivalency classes to individuals 22 years and older who are incarcerated at Rikers Island. The DOC also works to ensure the successful continuation of mandated educational services for individuals between the ages of 16 and 21. The DOC has begun to expand college readiness and college credit opportunities available to individuals incarcerated at Rikers Island.
- **NYC Department of Probation** recently created a Director of Education position and is establishing on-site GED classes, streamlining literacy assessments and referrals, and sponsoring forums on best practices in higher education access.
- **The Center for Economic Opportunity's Young Men's Initiative** provides resources for justice-involved youth through programs such as Justice Scholars and Community Education Pathways to Success that provide high school equivalency, mentoring, college access, and education support services.

### **City Policy Recommendations**

NYREN calls on Mayor-Elect de Blasio and his incoming administration to continue, strengthen, and expand upon the city's leadership by investing in education as a strategy for rehabilitation and successful reentry. Education is a cost-effective way to reduce recidivism, transform lives, place individuals onto a career path, and improve public safety. Implementing any one of these recommendations will improve the lives of justice-involved people and their families. However,

these recommendations taken as a whole comprise a comprehensive reentry and education strategy designed to make New York's neighborhoods safer and our economy stronger.

## **SECTORS AND AGENCIES MUST COLLABORATE, COORDINATE, AND ALIGN THEIR EFFORTS TO CREATE SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS**

**Recommendation 1:** Appoint a policy advisor in City Hall and convene an advisory task force to advise the Mayor and his cabinet on policies and practices related to educational access and success for those individuals who are or have been involved in the criminal justice system. This body should be chaired by and composed of leadership from community-based organizations, educational institutions, and government.

**WHY?** To effectively align city systems, avoid duplication of efforts, and maximize efficiency and resources, cross-system government planning and coordination will be required among the Department of Correction, Department of Education (including District 79 and the Office of Adult and Continuing Education), Department of Probation, Office of Human Capital Development, CUNY, Small Business Services, Center for Economic Opportunity, Human Resources Administration, Administration for Children's Services, Office of the Criminal Justice Coordinator, New York City Council, and community-based partners working on interrelated educational, criminal justice, and poverty reduction efforts and initiatives.

**Recommendation 2:** Create opportunities and mechanisms for New York City agencies to collaborate with one another and with community-based organizations and education institutions to share and track the educational status, planning, and progress of individuals involved in the criminal justice system.

**WHY?** Shared tracking and increased transparency and communication will allow city agencies and community-based education and reentry providers to be more efficient. This in turn will allow them to expand programming and to better support the educational goals of individuals who are or have been criminal justice involved.

## **EXPAND AND FUND EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS, FROM ADULT BASIC EDUCATION THROUGH HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY, COLLEGE AND BEYOND**

**Recommendation 3:** Fund, staff, and track the progress of a robust literacy and high school equivalency program that serves students on Rikers Island who are 22 and older, including those with learning and language needs.

**WHY?** A 1996 lawsuit mandated the NYC Departments of Correction and Education to make educational services available to all young people up to age 22 who are in the custody of the DOC. District 79 of the DOE operates East River Academy at Rikers Island to serve individuals 21 and under who are interested in educational services. However, there is no comparable availability of educational services to individuals 22 and older in DOC custody, even though research continues to demonstrate the importance of education in post-release employment outcomes and recidivism reduction.

**Recommendation 4: Create and staff college and career resource centers on Rikers Island, jointly administered by the DOE, CUNY, and the DOC, for college recruitment and career planning within corrections settings and for transitions into the community.**

**WHY?** Individuals supported by NYREN education programs, particularly those pursuing higher education, experience lower levels of re-arrest and re-incarceration. College Initiative and College and Community Fellowship (organizations that support people with criminal justice system involvement in pursuing higher education) report that their students have recidivism rates of 3.2% and less than 2%, respectively. New York State college in prison programs have also proven effective, with only 7.7% of incarcerated people who attended college classes re-incarcerated compared to the 29.9% recidivism rate for those who did not attend any college classes.<sup>8</sup> However, many incarcerated individuals not supported by such programs are unaware of their eligibility for college, the benefits of a college education, and the support systems available to help them navigate higher education as formerly incarcerated individuals. A resource center staffed by knowledgeable education advocates will increase the number of individuals that prepare for and enter higher education programs upon release.

## **CREATE A CULTURE THAT CHAMPIONS EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS**

**Recommendation 5: Encourage and incentivize criminal justice agencies to collaborate with community-based organizations and education institutions to design and implement professional development and training opportunities for front-line staff on education's critical role in successful reentry.**

**WHY?** Criminal justice agency and education institution staff can be misinformed about educational and financial aid eligibility for people with criminal justice system involvement. Additionally, some simply believe that current and formerly incarcerated individuals cannot succeed in education programs. Professional development will help to dispel misinformation, increase employees' understanding of the range of educational support services available to justice-involved people, and help them understand how to access and refer their clients to these services. This type of professional development would encourage staff to be champions of justice-involved people's educational success.

**Recommendation 6:** Incentivize workforce development and employment agencies that work with individuals involved in the criminal justice system to actively support their educational, vocational, and career aspirations.

**WHY?** Individuals with criminal justice system involvement report feeling forced to choose between education and employment for reasons that include having to focus on supporting their families' immediate economic needs and/or to satisfy multiple supervision requirements. Yet in the long term, increasing one's education level results in higher wages and a greater likelihood of securing sustainable employment. It is important for criminal justice and workforce agencies to have a balanced approach and provide supports so that justice-involved people can pursue education and employment jointly in order to satisfy their short-term employment needs and long-term career goals.

### **EMPLOY A COMMUNITY-BASED AND POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT APPROACH TO SUPPORTING THE NEEDS OF JUSTICE-INVOLVED YOUNG PEOPLE**

**Recommendation 7:** Expand community-based programs and interventions for 16 to 26 year-olds using a positive youth development framework that supports their social, emotional, developmental, and employment needs holistically while centralizing leadership development, education, and career planning.

**WHY?** Research demonstrates that young people are disproportionately impacted as victims of crime and justice-system involvement, in part because they are not fully cognitively and emotionally developed and are more susceptible to social and environmental influences. They also have tremendous potential to transform their lives.<sup>9</sup> Despite this reality, New York is one of only two states in the country that prosecutes 16 and 17 year olds as adults and places them in the adult criminal justice system. Additionally, our justice system fails to take into account that young people well into their 20s need guidance for life preparation. In recognizing the particular needs stemming from this population's age, cognitive and emotional development, and the impacts that poverty and criminal justice system involvement have on their lives, the city should direct extra resources to community-based organizations to support these younger individuals.

## NYREN Endorsing Organizations

Brooklyn Public Library	Education from the Inside Out Coalition
Center for Community Alternatives	exalt
Center for Employment Opportunities	The Fortune Society
Center for Institutional and Social Change at Columbia Law School	Future Now at Bronx Community College
College and Community Fellowship	Getting Out and Staying Out
College Initiative	John Jay College's Prisoner Reentry Institute
Correctional Association	Literacy Partners
Criminal Justice Initiative at Columbia School of Social Work	New York City Justice Corps
CUNY Catch at LaGuardia Community College	Osborne Association
The Doe Fund	Police Athletic League RISE
Drive Change	STRIVE International
DREAMS YouthBuild	SUNY-Queens Educational Opportunity Center
	Youth Development Institute

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### Citations

<sup>1</sup> NYC Independent Budget Office, "New York City by the Numbers - NYC's Jail Population: Who's There and Why?," 2012, accessed November 17, 2013, <http://ibo.nyc.ny.us/cgi-park2/?p=516>

<sup>2</sup> New York City Office of the Mayor, "Mayor Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor Gibbs and Correction Commissioner Schriro Announce New Jail-Based Community Reentry Program, Part of State of the City Promise to Further Reduce Recidivism" [Press Release], February 21, 2013, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/071-13/mayor-bloomberg-deputy-mayor-gibbs-correction-commissioner-schriro-new-jail-based>

<sup>3</sup> NYC Independent Budget Office, "New York City by the Numbers - NYC's Jail Population: Who's There and Why?," 2012, accessed November 17, 2013, <http://ibo.nyc.ny.us/cgi-park2/?p=516>

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education Office of Vocational and Adult Education, "A Reentry Education Model: Supporting Education and Career Advancement for Low-Skilled Individuals in Corrections," 2012, accessed November 11, 2013, <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ovae/pi/AdultEd/reentry-model.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> RAND Corporation, "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Correctional Education: A Meta-Analysis of Programs That Provide Education to Incarcerated Adults," 2013, accessed November 11, 2013, [www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR200/RR266/RAND\\_RR266.pdf](http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR200/RR266/RAND_RR266.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> College Initiative ([www.collegeinitiative.org](http://www.collegeinitiative.org)) and College and Community Fellowship ([www.collegeandcommunity.org](http://www.collegeandcommunity.org)), organizations that support people with criminal justice system involvement in pursuing higher education, report that their students have recidivism rates of 3.2% and less than 2%, respectively

<sup>8</sup> Knewton, "Breaking the Prison Cycle Through Education" [Infographic], accessed November 11, 2013, <http://www.knewton.com/prison-education/>

<sup>9</sup> Velazquez, Tracy. "Young Adult Justice: A New Frontier Worth Exploring," Chronicle of Social Change, 2013, accessed November 11, 2013, <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/xpanel/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/Young-Adult-Justice-FINAL-revised.pdf>