



## DC YOUTHLINK

PROMOTING PUBLIC SAFETY, PREPARING  
YOUTH TO SUCCEED, & INVESTING IN DC

MARCH 2013

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In 2009, DYRS and the Children and Youth Investment Trust (CYITC) collaborated to launch DC YouthLink, a coalition of community-based organizations that provide a diverse array of services to court-involved youth in their home neighborhoods. By focusing on community-based interventions, DC YouthLink is at the forefront of a national trend in positive, community-based services and placements for youth committed to a juvenile justice agency. The initiative is based on the premise that youth are best served within the context of their home community and that building upon their strengths and the strengths of the community is the most effective way to enhance public safety.

In order to safely serve as many youth as possible in the community, DC YouthLink has three complementary objectives:

- DC YouthLink advances the rehabilitation of DYRS youth by connecting them to services, supports, and resources that help them succeed in a community setting.
- DC YouthLink enhances public safety by promoting DYRS youths' rehabilitation through structured activities and enhanced supervision.
- DC YouthLink invests in and builds upon the strengths of community-based organizations to create safe, strong environments that support youth who live there.

DC YouthLink is made up of two Lead Agencies that connect youth to Service Coalition members in the community. Youth are connected to DC YouthLink through DYRS's Youth Family Team Meeting (YFTM). At a YFTM the young person, members of his family, a DYRS case manager, a coordinator, and a care coordinator from DC YouthLink come together to discuss the youth's strengths and challenges and determine which services might best serve the young person. These services are then arranged through the Service Coalition.

Since its inception, DC YouthLink has grown from serving fewer than one in 10 youth of the overall DYRS population to now serving approximately half. In its first three years, over 1,000 youth have received services through DC YouthLink that range from job training and school support to mentoring and substance abuse interventions. Over this period, DYRS youth have become less likely to be re-arrested, less likely to abscond, and more likely to be engaged in structured, positive activities. More youth than ever are participating in work readiness training and entering post-secondary education.

DYRS and CYITC have also developed a system of oversight that includes regular reporting on youth engagement, site visits and case file monitoring, and financial reviews.

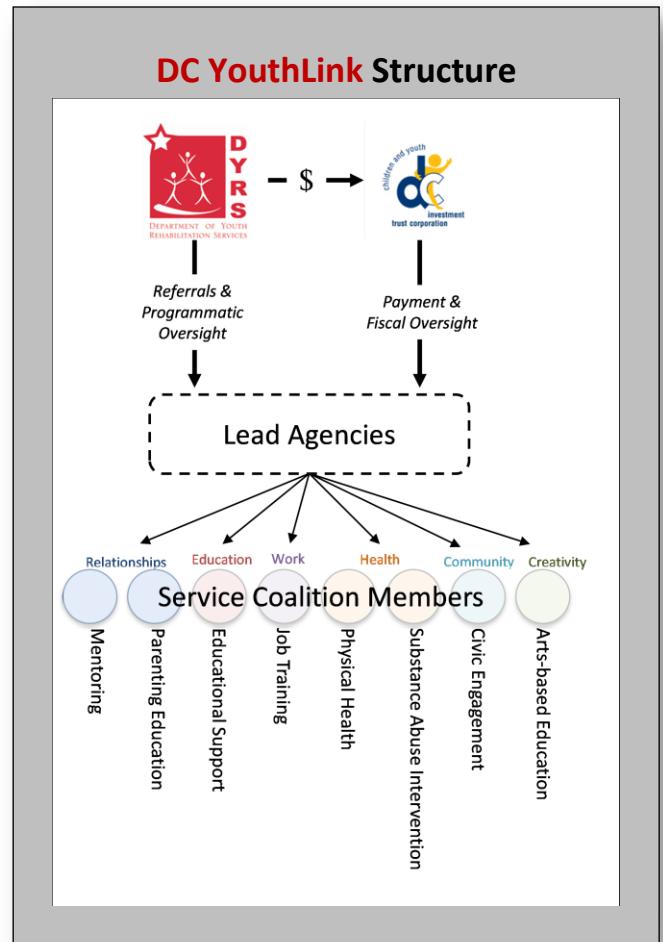
While DC YouthLink's results have been encouraging, it will continue to evolve and respond to both its success and challenges.

## I. DC YOUTHLINK IS AT THE FOREFRONT OF A NATIONAL TREND IN COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES AND PLACEMENTS FOR YOUTH COMMITTED TO A JUVENILE JUSTICE AGENCY.

Supported by research that says that rehabilitation of youth in the community is the most effective and cost-conscious way of protecting public safety and helping youth succeed,<sup>1</sup> juvenile justice systems across the country are relying less on secure confinement and more on community-based placements and services.<sup>2</sup> Placing court-involved youth in the community with structured and multi-dimensional services and supports is a recognized method of decreasing recidivism, while increasing youth engagement in education and work.<sup>3</sup>

DYRS’ mission is to serve youth in the least restrictive environment possible and, therefore, already had in place community-based programs. However, many relied heavily on supervision. Recognizing that placing youth in the community in structured activities that support youth’s development and keep them engaged in positive activities is a more effective way to help youth succeed and promote public safety, in 2009, DYRS and the DC Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation collaborated with initial support from local private foundations to create launch DC YouthLink (formerly the Lead Entity/Service Coalition Initiative).

DC YouthLink is a coalition of community-based organizations that works with DYRS to provide an array of services to youth committed to DYRS as they reintegrate into their communities. To more easily access the service providers that already exist in the community, DYRS partners with two community-based organizations, East of the River Clergy-Policy Community Partnership and the Progressive Life Center. These two “Lead Agencies” then partner with a network of local service providers, or the Service Coalition, to provide services. Such collaboration and investment in community partnerships among the Lead Agencies as well as across Service Coalition members is effective for supporting safer, stronger communities overall.



The basic structure of DC YouthLink is inspired by Wraparound Milwaukee and Wayne County, Michigan. Both systems were founded to reduce the number of youth in secure facilities, serve youth within the context of their home communities, and to achieve better outcomes for youth and their families. To do this, both systems contract with several “Lead Agencies” representing different geographic areas,<sup>4</sup> which then connect youth to service providers in the community. Wraparound Milwaukee and Wayne County’s Juvenile Assessment System/Care Management Organizations have been linked to decreases in recidivism, increases in education and work-related outcomes, and decreased substance use.<sup>5</sup>

## DC YouthLink in Numbers\*

Launch date: **October 1, 2009**

Total # of youth served: **1,110**

# of community-based organizations that have participated: **54**

% of youth avoiding re-conviction: **83%**

Avg. hours of engagement per youth per week of: **4.3**

# of youth paired with positive adults: **800**

# of youth enrolled in job readiness programs: **419**

# of youth receiving educational services: **387**

# of youth enrolled in behavioral health services: **310**

\*All data is from October 2009 – September 30, 2012. Re-conviction data is from April 2011 – September 2012.

While DC YouthLink took inspiration from best practices in Milwaukee and Wayne County, it is unique to the District of Columbia, operating with DYRS' distinctive Positive Youth Justice (PYJ) framework, and intentionally building upon community strengths to further improve public safety.<sup>6</sup>

PYJ applies positive youth development theories in a juvenile justice setting and uses a strengths-based approach to serving youth. In particular, this means that a young person can receive services in education, work, relationships, health, community, or creativity that are targeted to help them meet their developmental needs as they transition into adulthood.

Youth are connected to these services through a Youth Family Team Meeting (YFTM). A YFTM typically happens just before a young person is entering the

community. It includes the youth, his or her family, a case manager, a care coordinator from a Lead Agency, and a YFTM coordinator. During the meeting, the group discusses the youth's strengths and challenges and the care coordinator suggests services that fit those needs. After the YFTM, a young person is connected to a Service Coalition Member and together they develop an Individual Service Plan to guide service delivery.

DC YouthLink youth are also connected to schools, employers, behavioral health service providers, recreation centers, and numerous other community services. In addition, it complements DYRS' workforce development opportunities, case management strategies, and community supervision efforts.

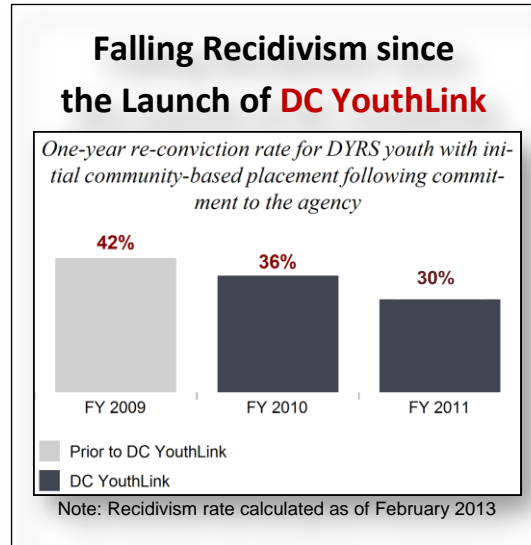
## II. DC YOUTHLINK EFFECTIVELY PROMOTES PUBLIC SAFETY BY INTENSIVELY ENGAGING YOUTH

DC YouthLink's growth from serving approximately 7 percent of the DYRS population to serving nearly half has been associated with a concurrent drop in recidivism, arrest rates and abscondence rates for DYRS youth. The growth of DC YouthLink as the primary model for youth engagement in the community has tracked with overall improvements in public safety.

DC YouthLink youth are staying involved in services and out of trouble. Recidivism rates, which measure the portion of youth who are convicted of a new offense within their first year of community placement, have decreased dramatically since the launch of DC YouthLink. For young people who placed directly in community-based placements, forgoing treatment at secure facilities, recidivism has fallen 13 percentage points between FY2009 and FY 2011, from 42 percent to 30 percent. This is the same period that DYRS youth engagement in DC YouthLink increased by 41 percentage points.

Similarly, the portion of DYRS youth living in the District who were re-arrested in 2012 dropped by 37 percent<sup>7</sup> compared to 2011. In addition, the percent of youth connected to DC YouthLink re-arrested fell seven percentage points between FY2011 to FY2012, from 27 percent to 20 percent, respectively. Reconviction rates also fell from 16 percent in the second two quarters of FY2011 to 10 percent in FY2012.

Youth are also staying connected to services and remaining in their placements in the community at higher rates than before. Early in DC YouthLink’s formation in 2010, nearly one in 12 DC YouthLink youth were on abscondence during a single day. By mid-summer of 2012, the number of youth on abscondence had fallen to one in 65.



Taken together, these increasingly promising public safety outcomes are happening at the same time that more youth are involved in DC YouthLink.

### **III. DC YOUTHLINK PREPARES YOUTH TO SUCCEED BY BUILDING ON THEIR STRENGTHS AND SUPPORTING THEM WITH TARGETED, COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES.**

Successful youth are contributing to the public safety and overall strength of the District of Columbia. DC YouthLink has been a key contributor to ensuring the success of court-involved youth. In FY 2012, youth were engaged in approximately four services each. Prior to DC YouthLink, fewer than a quarter of youth had any community-based services at all. Youth enrolled in DC YouthLink are enrolled in a wide array of services, most of which were previously unavailable through DYRS. As of the end of FY2012, this includes:

- 800 youth connected to a positive adult
- 419 youth enrolled in a job-readiness program
- 387 youth receiving educational support services
- 125 provided parenting classes or family reunification support
- 145 youth engaged in physical activity programming
- 61 youth participated in intensive gang intervention
- 41 youth involved in arts programming.

This holistic network of services works together to support youth in achieving important milestones, as well. As of the close of FY 2012, DC YouthLink youth have received 140 professional certificates and 84 high school credentials. In addition, 23 have enrolled in post-secondary education, 187 participated in an internship, and 56 were employed.

#### **IV. DC YOUTHLINK INVESTS IN AND BUILDS UPON THE COMMUNITIES OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, PROMOTING STRONG, SAFE COMMUNITIES NOW AND IN THE FUTURE.**

DC YouthLink is built on the premise that a youth's neighbors and neighborhood are often better suited and more successful than any government agency at helping court-involved youth reintegrate into their community. By investing in youth-serving organizations in our youth's home neighborhoods, DYRS supports youth currently committed to DYRS, as well as developing the resources that help youth stay out of the justice system and keep youth from entering the justice system in the first place.

Since its launch in October 2009, DYRS has invested \$13 million in local groups supporting court-involved youth through DC YouthLink, money that might otherwise have been spent on out-of-state residential placements for these youth. Through financial investment and enhancement of community partnerships, DC YouthLink creates a sustainable network of local organizations and agencies that work together and with government agencies to support safe, strong communities.<sup>8</sup> A community strengthened by collaboration is the best and safest environment for a young person to continue to succeed. Positive life outcomes for individual youth further improve the strength and safety of the community as a whole.

To meet the high expectations associated with effectively serving DYRS youth, DC YouthLink has worked with more than 50 organizations to support DYRS youth. A number of these organizations have remained with DC YouthLink since its inception, growing in their capacity to provide effective interventions for more youth who need it the most. This growth has benefited both the youth these organizations serve and the communities they grew out of, improving public safety while providing new jobs and new skills in neighborhoods that have the most to gain by them.

#### **V. DYRS AND CYITC USE A ROBUST OVERSIGHT SYSTEM THAT ANTICIPATES AND RESPONDS TO AREAS OF CONCERN, WHILE ENSURING HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES FOR YOUTH.**

DC YouthLink, DYRS, and the Children and Youth Investment Trust Corporation work together to ensure the delivery of high-quality services to court-involved youth through a variety of mechanisms. Regular administrative monitoring, processes for ensuring quality, and regular reporting are the basis for a robust system of oversight, but are part of the continuous refinement of strategies to ensure high-quality services that support public safety and the success of DYRS youth.

One of the biggest changes to the system of oversight is a new process for identifying Service Coalition Members. In FY2012, DC YouthLink developed a request for proposals (RFP) to identify and formally partner with Service Coalition members to serve as a core network of service providers in the community. Service Coalition members had always been identified based on their ability to provide appropriate services to DC YouthLink youth, but the RFP process formalized the process and allowed for outside reviewers to choose the providers that best fit DC YouthLink's needs. In addition, the new service acquisition process included payments for the achievement of milestones, including high school graduation or earning employment.

While the new Service Coalition development process lays the foundation for high-quality service delivery, DC YouthLink also employs other strategies to regularly review and monitor youth engagement in services. In particular, in 2012, DC YouthLink developed a set of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to guide the administration of DC YouthLink at the Lead Agency and Service Coalition level,

setting expectations and allowing for subsequent assessment of the adherence to those expectations. The SOPs come into full effect in 2013, but formally reflect the following existing oversight strategies:

**Regular data reviews:** Each week, DYRS generates a summary of DC YouthLink enrollments and youth activities. This regular review of data enables DC YouthLink to assess the engagement of youth in services and make adjustments to ensure that youth are receiving the services they need. DC YouthLink also regularly compiles and publicly reports on youth engagement and public safety.

**Monitoring services:** The DC YouthLink team conducts site visits, reviews cases in DYRS' data system, and regularly reviews invoices in comparison to service delivery.

**Ensuring quality:** In 2012, DC YouthLink worked closely with experts to develop a set of best practices to guide mentoring service delivery. In addition, the SOPs also include a series of briefs that outline best practices in service delivery in other areas. In FY 2013, DC YouthLink plans to develop a custom system of comparing service delivery to these best practices, further establishing a system of improvement and quality assurance.

In the future, DC YouthLink plans to work with an outside evaluator to formally assess the effectiveness of DC YouthLink. Currently, DC YouthLink is in the process of reviewing its available data to determine if a formal evaluation by an outside evaluator is possible.

DC YouthLink's system of oversight is a reflection of the commitment to achieving improved public safety by ensuring high-quality services that support youth success in the community. DC YouthLink continues to refine its processes to respond to its successes and challenges.

## VI. CONCLUSION

DC YouthLink is just one way that DYRS works to help youth succeed. While DC YouthLink continues forward, the agency is simultaneously working with the schools, the police, mental health experts, job coaches and other professionals to provide many other supports and services for its youth. In partnership with sister agencies and community stakeholders, these interventions are having important, positive, lasting impacts on the District of Columbia.

And while DYRS will always be refining the DC YouthLink model, the agency is fully committed to those elements that have been central to the initiative's success. The initiative will keep emphasizing a strengths-based approach to youth rehabilitation drawn from the Positive Youth Justice framework. DYRS will continue to make engagement of youths' home communities as well as engagement of local community-based organizations central to DC YouthLink approach. And the DC YouthLink team will maintain and improve its oversight of DC YouthLink.

With this approach, DYRS will continue to meet its mission of improving public safety and giving court-involved youth the opportunity to become more productive citizens.

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<sup>1</sup> Mendel, Richard (2011). *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*. Baltimore, MD: Annie E. Case Foundation.

[www.aecf.org/OurWork/JuvenileJustice/~/\\_media/Pubs/Topics/Juvenile%20Justice/Detention%20Reform/NoPlaceForKids/JJ\\_NoPlaceForKids\\_Full.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/OurWork/JuvenileJustice/~/_media/Pubs/Topics/Juvenile%20Justice/Detention%20Reform/NoPlaceForKids/JJ_NoPlaceForKids_Full.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Evans, Douglas (2012). *Pioneers in Juvenile Justice Reform: Achieving System Change Using Resolution, Reinvestment, and Realignment Strategies*. New York, NY: John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

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<sup>3</sup> National Research Council. (2012). *Reforming Juvenile Justice: A Developmental Approach*. Committee on Assessing Juvenile Justice Reform, Richard J. Bonnie, Robert L. Johnson, Betty M. Chemers, and Julie A. Schuck, Eds. Committee on Law and Justice, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

<sup>4</sup> Wraparound Milwaukee, Program Overview, Accessed December 14, 2012.

<http://county.milwaukee.gov/WraparoundMilwaukeeP7890.htm> and Wayne County Juvenile Services System, Juvenile Justice Reform, Wayne County, Michigan (Detroit, MI: Wayne County Juvenile Services, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Wraparound Milwaukee Quality Assurance, *Wraparound Milwaukee Quality Assurance/Improvement Annual Report 2011* (Milwaukee, WI: Wraparound Milwaukee, 2012).

[http://county.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cntyHHS/Wraparound/Quality-](http://county.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cntyHHS/Wraparound/Quality-Assurance/2011QAQIAnnualReport.pdf)

[Assurance/2011QAQIAnnualReport.pdf](http://county.milwaukee.gov/ImageLibrary/Groups/cntyHHS/Wraparound/Quality-Assurance/2011QAQIAnnualReport.pdf) and Wayne County Juvenile Services System, *Juvenile Justice Reform, Wayne County, Michigan* (Detroit, MI: Wayne County Juvenile Services, 2012).

<sup>6</sup> Butts, Jeffrey A., Gordon Bazemore, and Aundra Saa Meroe. *Positive Youth Justice: Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development*. (Washington, DC: Coalition for Juvenile Justice, 2010)

<sup>7</sup> Annual Report, 2012 (forthcoming)

<sup>8</sup> Robert Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earl, *Neighborhood Collective Efficacy – Does it Help Reduce Violence?* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 1998).

[www.wjh.harvard.edu/soc/faculty/sampson/articles/1998\\_NIJ\\_ScienceReprint.pdf](http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/soc/faculty/sampson/articles/1998_NIJ_ScienceReprint.pdf)