

# LIKE PART OF THE FAMILY

**BUILDING A CULTURALLY  
AFFIRMING PEER SUPPORT  
PROGRAM FOR SYSTEMS  
IMPACTED FAMILIES**



IMPACT JUSTICE 2019

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## ABOUT US

Impact Justice is a national innovation and research center advancing new ideas and solutions for justice reform. We work to dramatically reduce the massive number of youth and adults in our justice system, improve conditions and outcomes for those who are incarcerated, and provide meaningful opportunities for formerly incarcerated people to rejoin their communities. For more information, please visit [www.ImpactJustice.org](http://www.ImpactJustice.org).

## THE RESEARCH & ACTION CENTER

This report falls under the purview of the Research and Action Center. As a Center of Impact Justice, our research catalyzes community efforts to eliminate disparities and propel system change. We focus especially on the populations most impacted by disparities, including youth and adults of color, as well as members of the LGBTQ/GNCT communities.

## COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS FOR YOUTH

Community Connections for Youth (CCFY) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to empower grassroots faith and neighborhood organizations to develop effective community-driven alternatives to incarceration for youth. Located in the South Bronx, CCFY is focused on reducing the reliance on the juvenile justice system, which is harmful, ineffective, and costly, and utilizing strong community networks to care for youth and hold them accountable.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, written by Impact Justice's Research & Action Center, explores Community Connection for Youth's Parent Support Program (PSP), and its impact on the families involved in the program. The PSP trains parents<sup>1</sup> of systems involved youth to serve as parent coaches and provide a range of support for families. The PSP steps away from traditional parent programs that often leave parents feeling frustrated, harmed, and unable to operate within the juvenile justice system. Instead, it focuses on identifying what the family needs, meeting those needs, and helping them through the system.

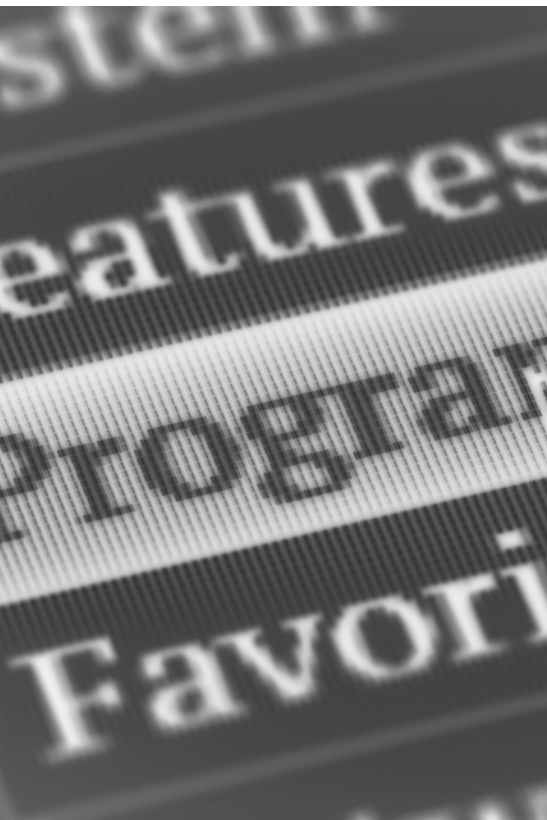
### The important findings are:

- **Parents reported an increased understanding of, and agency within, the juvenile justice system**
  - Youth whose parents participated in the PSP had better outcomes on their Violation of Probation filings than similar youth
- **Parents and youth noted an improvement in communication and families were more likely to handle conflicts within the home or through CCFY partners**
  - As a result of this improvement in communication, parents stated that they were less likely to call police or probation during a conflict
  - Parents also noted that, although their child's behavior had not changed, their ability to effectively parent and de-escalate conflict within the home improved
- **Parents and youth highlighted the importance of the PSP's holistic approach of care, from providing programming and workshops to being on-call for support and helping meet family needs**

<sup>1</sup> While most of the participants interviewed for this evaluation were parents, we recognize that families are diverse, and caregivers can include parents, grandparents, foster parents, and more. For clarity, in the following text, "parent" will refer to the youth's caregiver.

## INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

A common practice within the juvenile justice system is to require parents and caregivers of systems involved youth to participate in parenting programs and classes.<sup>2</sup> While there is significant evidence highlighting the importance of parent involvement and youth development, especially in education and mental health,<sup>3</sup> the practice within the juvenile justice system rests on the assumption that youth delinquency is primarily caused by poor and inadequate parenting. When parents participate in these parenting traditional programs, they cite feeling disrespected and blamed for the child's system-involvement or feel excluded and alienated by program staff.<sup>4</sup>



Even as some programs move away from the misconception that parents and caregivers of systems involved youth are negligent or incapable and towards a more collaborative and informed model that views parents as equal partners, most are still limited in their approach and rely on hegemonic conventions. For example, many programs take a race-neutral approach which ignores the historic and systemic racism and classism that families of color – who make up most of the justice system – must navigate.<sup>5</sup> The result of such practices is that these programs are ineffective for a significant portion of the population they intend to serve.

It is not surprising that many parents with systems involved youth report feeling alienated, isolated, ignored, and stigmatized and find it difficult to navigate the complex juvenile justice system. Many feel blamed for their children's behavior and have little hope of receiving help from anyone who truly understands their plight or is able to offer resources to help their youth.

2 Walker, Bishop, Pullmann, and Bauer (2015) "A Research Framework for Understanding the Practical Impact of Family Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System: The Juvenile Justice Family Involvement Model."

3 Ibid.

4 Justice for Families (2012) Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice.

5 Pennell, Shapiro, and Spigner (2011) "Safety, Fairness, Stability: Repositioning Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare to Engage Families and Communities."

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## THE PARENT SUPPORT PROGRAM

PSP was created in direct response to the frustrations felt by many family members with systems involved youth. In 2010, CCFY partnered with Justice for Families to create a report that outlined the experiences and needs of systems involved families. CCFY, using the data from that report, collaborated with the Probation/Parent Association, senior New York City Department of Probation officials, and family members involved in CCFY to create PSP (for more information see “History of PSP” below).



### HISTORY OF PSP

After the publication of the Justice for Families report in 2010, CCFY began meeting regularly with the New York City Department of Probation (NYC DOP) to address the myriad of needs and frustrations of systems involved families. NYC DOP set out to develop a program to increase parental engagement. They brought forth a program plan that had Common Sense Parenting® classes and Functional Family Therapy (FFT).

*“It is common for systems to just replicate themselves. [NYC DOP] did some research, developed a plan, and said this is what we’re thinking about doing. Usually, that’s it. But in New York, they listened. [NYC DOP] asked us what they should do instead.”*

**– Rubén Austria, CCFY Executive Director**

The CCFY team and family members explained that in order to address parental engagement, NYC DOP needed to create a program families trusted. NYC DOP also needed to deviate from the typical program that forces parents to comply with court mandates, but never supports or helps the impacted families. Out of this collaboration came PSP, designed as a holistic model that puts the needs of parents and systems involved youth at the center of the program and builds trust between families and systems partners.

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Through CCFY, parents of systems involved youth are trained to serve as Parent Coaches to support other families through a range of services and programming. The role of the Parent Coaches is to provide a continuum of support to parents throughout the juvenile justice process, beginning with arrests, and continuing through court appearances, probation, and, in extreme cases, out-of-home placement. The Parent Coaches provide three major services to families and youth:



Photo credit: Andre Whitehead



Photo credit: Andre Whitehead

- 1. Family Court Coaching:** Coaches provide on-site Coaching to family members navigating through the juvenile justice system. This includes explaining the Family Court process from intake through supervision, attending court appointments, and serving as a liaison with the NYC DOP staff to ensure that families and Probation Officers understand each other's concerns and work effectively together.
- 2. Group-Based Support:** CCFY's Parent Coaches conduct monthly program orientations, designed to attract family members to the program and share information about available services. Parent Coaches also facilitate weekly support groups and workshops for family members, drawing an average of 20 individuals per session.
- 3. Individual Family Support:** Perhaps most importantly, CCFY's Parent Coaches provide individualized support to families, including, but not limited to, navigating other systems (child welfare, education, mental health, housing, etc.) and accessing services from government and community providers. Parent Coaches are also on-call after normal business hours to provide support for families, especially in times of crisis.

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At the time of this evaluation, PSP had five Parent Coaches providing services to a number of families. Since there is no formal period of engagement and families are accepted on a continuous basis, it is difficult to estimate the exact number of families served during a given time period (for a more thorough breakdown, see “PSP By the Numbers”).

Parents are typically referred to PSP through NYC DOP once their child has had contact with the system. While many parents initially come only seeking advice relating to court or probation, they are also offered the range of services detailed above. It is not a mandatory program and parents are not required to attend a specific number of meetings to receive assistance. This contrasts with other parenting programs, where structure is imposed onto families without consideration for individual circumstance (work schedule, transportation barriers, or other obligations), which may curb clients' ability to fully engage in services. PSP services are provided free of charge to parents and youth.

On a deeper level, Parent Coaches are true peers. They share similar backgrounds and experiences, understand the challenges of raising a teenager in the South Bronx, and can relate to those they serve as single parents, minorities, and immigrants. The Parent Coaches are also familiar with the fear, confusion, and isolation that accompany raising a systems involved youth and they work diligently to build rapport with families to engage them as soon, and as often, as possible. This is often a direct contrast to many other parent programs that offer race-neutral programming and are implemented by individuals who are not from impacted communities:

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

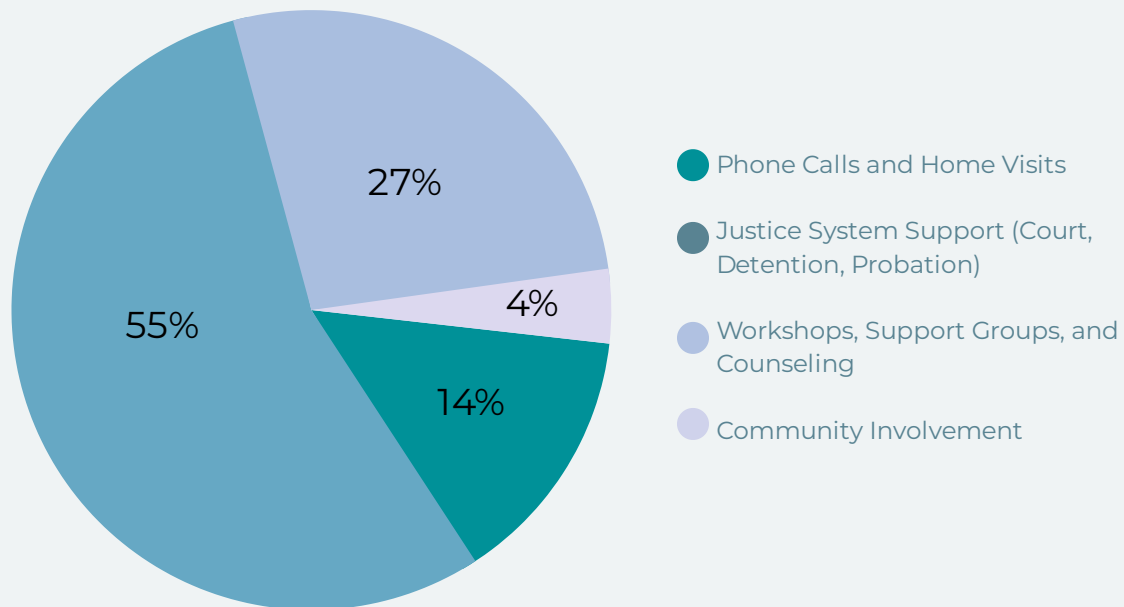




## PSP BY THE NUMBERS

In one month, five Parent Coaches reported spending 157.5 hours staffing the Bronx Family Court Office (where there is always at least one Parent Coach between normal business hours) and 185.5 hours supporting families out of court, including workshops and counseling, connecting with youth and families in justice system settings, such as probation offices, detention centers, or other court offices, and phone calls and home visits. The majority of Parent Coaches' time was allocated to providing support in courts, detention centers, and probation offices (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Out of Court Hours, by Support Type



The number of hours spent with parents and caregivers can vary greatly depending on families' needs. In one month, Parent Coaches logged 132.5 hours of support for individual family members (though CCFY estimates this number to be much higher because data entry wasn't standardized amongst Parent Coaches). The hours of support those families needed ranged from 1 to 24 hours. Most family members (11) needed 1 to 4 hours of support, but a few (4) needed 10 or more hours.

## EVALUATION

The RAC evaluated PSP using a mixed methods approach, incorporating interviews with program participants and quantitative outcome data. The research was framed by four research questions:

- Is there a reduction in violations of probation among youth whose parents participated in the program?
- Do parents feel they have acquired the skills to effectively de-escalate family conflicts?
- Do conflict de-escalation skills help families handle conflict internally or through community support, rather than through law enforcement?
- How does a culturally affirming program influence participants' family and justice outcomes?

## METHODS

The RAC conducted interviews with parents who participated in PSP and their respective youth. Interview questions focused on understanding the support and services delivered by PSP and assessing the perceived changes (if any) in family dynamics and relationships. Interviews lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes and were recorded, transcribed, and coded for themes. A Spanish-language interpreter was provided for those who needed translation services.

The NYC DOP assisted with the project and analyzed arrest and violation of probation data (VOP)<sup>7</sup>. The data includes 109 youth whose parents were involved in PSP and a comparison group of 683 youth who were sentenced to probation in the Bronx and whose parents were not involved in PSP. The comparison group was selected through a technique known as propensity score matching. This technique relies on the identification of a comparison group which, to the greatest possible extent, matches the program group on a set of key characteristics. These characteristics include race,

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<sup>7</sup> This is a measure of compliance with conditions of probation, including obeying parents or caregivers.

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ethnicity, age, offense type, offense history, and other available information about the youth. This technique allows us to make comparisons which disaggregate the effects of CCFY's PSP program, and see any real differences between youth whose parents were involved in PSP and a group of statistically similar youth whose parents did not participate.

## FINDINGS

### Probation Data

The analysis of the probation data found that the CCFY youth were more likely to have a VOP filed within twelve months of probation start date than the comparison group. However, when this finding is placed in context, it is unsurprising that CCFY youth had higher rates of VOPs (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Variables in the Analysis by Treatment Group**

	CCFY	Comparison
<i>N</i>	109	683
Mean Age	14.8	14.8
Male	78	76.4
Race/Ethnicity		
White (non-Hispanic)	0.9	2.3
Black	41.3	54.3
Hispanic	56.9	41.9
Asian	0	0.3
Multi-racial	0.9	1.2
Seriousness of adjudication charge		
Class I	24.8	28.8
Class II	16.5	14.2
Class III	37.6	36.2
Class IV	21.1	20.8
Risk level		
Low	9.2	26.5
Moderate	77.1	62.1
High	13.8	11.4
Final Disposition <sup>8</sup>		
ACD	0.9	28.7
Level 1	21.1	21.1
Level 2	29.4	17.3
Level 3	31.2	14.5
ATP	17.4	18.4

<sup>8</sup> The final disposition of a youth ranges from ACD or adjournment in contemplation of dismissal, which defers the disposition for the youth as long as the youth does not engage in similar conduct or other acts prohibited by the court; probation that ranges from in severity from Level 1 to Level 3, and ATP or alternatives-to-placement, which allows youth to stay at home while receiving services through the community.

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Although race, age, gender, and seriousness of adjudication were similar across groups, there were differences between CCFY youth and the comparison group that increased the likelihood of VOPs. CCFY youth had higher risk levels than the comparison group, with 91 percent of CCFY at a moderate-to-high risk compared to 73 percent of the comparison group. Typically, high risk is associated with increased needs and an increased likelihood of reoffending. CCFY youth also had more severe levels of final disposition than the comparison group, likely as a result of the higher risk levels. Within the comparison group, one in four youth cases resulted in adjournment in contemplation of dismissal (ACD), which typically means that the case will be dismissed in six months if the youth complies with court mandates. The same was true for less than one percent of CCFY youth.

**Table 2: Violations of Probation (VOP) Outcomes by Group**

	CCFY	Comparison
N	108	641
VOP filed within 12 months	37 %	24.2 % *
VOP from new arrest filed	10.2	8.4
VOP from technical violation (absconder/parent depo) filed	3.7	5
VOP Disposition		
Out-of-Home Placement	6.5	9.2 †
Continuing Probation	23.8	12.8 *
Dismissal	8.3	3.3 †

\* $p < .05$ ; †  $< .1$

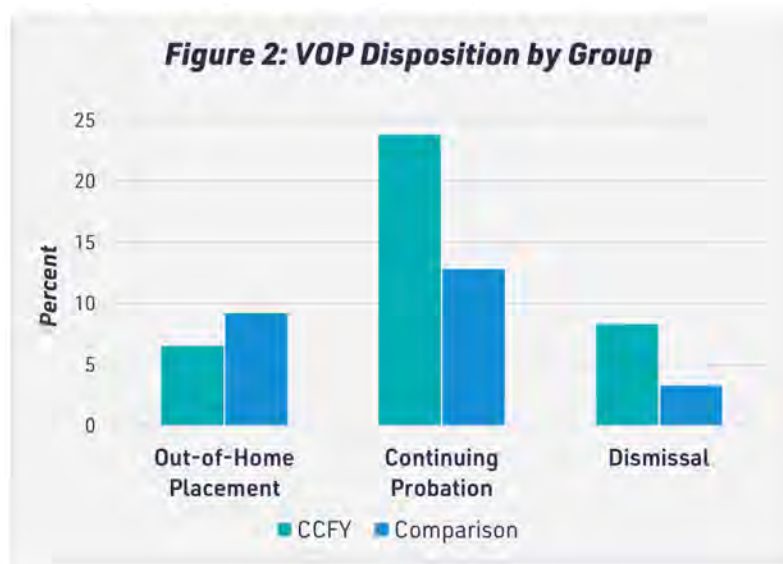


Despite higher rates of probation violations among CCFY youth, the comparison group tended to have poorer outcomes at their disposition hearings. CCFY youth had lower rates of out-of-home placements and higher rates of VOP dismissals than the comparison groups (see Table 1). These better outcomes for CCFY youth are likely tied to parents' participation in PSP program.

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As the qualitative findings outline below, parents participating in PSP reported an increased sense of agency and understanding within the juvenile justice system and highlighted the emotional and practical support from Parent Coaches as invaluable. Previous research shows that the complexities of the juvenile justice system often leaves parents feeling confused and helpless.<sup>9</sup> The programming and Parent Coaches of PSP informed parents and empowered them to effectively navigate the system and help their youth.

Additionally, even with greater incidence of re-offense, CCFY youth were more likely to continue probation after a VOP filing than the comparison group. In other words, CCFY youth were likely to see no change in their original disposition, despite a subsequent arrest or violation. This is likely due to several factors, including the above-mentioned factors, as well as the Parent Coaches' presence during court hearings. In subsequent conversations, NYC DOP explained that youth and parents wait approximately a month between VOP filing and a court appearance. Within this month, CCFY youth and parents meet with the Parent Coach to address the causes of the arrest with concrete actions, such as enrolling in a program or course. The CCFY parents and youth then bring those changes to the court hearing. In contrast, it is likely that the parents and youth in the comparison group are more likely to accept the VOP and disposition without objection.



9 Justice for Families (2012) Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice.

## INTERVIEW RESULTS

The interview results confirm what the probation data suggest and provide a richer contextual framework in which to interpret the overall results. Parents generally found PSP incredibly valuable for them and their families. Major themes emerging through the interviews are discussed below.

### Parent Findings

Three clear themes surfaced through interviews:

1. Parents felt supported through a culturally-affirming program;
2. The program provided skills and resources necessary to parent more effectively;
3. Parents felt increased agency and understanding within the juvenile justice system.

### Support in a Culturally Affirming Program

The interviews with parents highlighted a stark contrast between PSP and typical parenting classes found in the justice system arena. Parents involved in the latter reported feeling judged and isolated<sup>10</sup>, whereas parents and family members involved in PSP detailed the support and feeling of family throughout the program. Constant support and understanding from the Coaches was one of the most consistent sentiments discussed throughout the interviews:

*“The support . . . I can’t even – I could go on and on. I mean, very supportive, to the point where I could call at five a.m., ‘Oh, [Parent Coach], I have a problem because of such-and- such.’ And [they were] like, ‘Okay’ and [they] get on it right away.”*

*“All of them treated me the same. They don’t look down on me, nothing like that.”*

*“You know, we’re all working as a team. And there are things that they know that I don’t know . . . So it’s really like a team effort. That’s the way it works better, I think.”*

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<sup>10</sup> Justice for Families (2012) Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice.

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The support parents received through Parent Coaches went beyond help navigating the juvenile justice system. The Parent Coaches aided parents in meeting their basic needs for housing, food, or transportation, helping parents handle arrest, and acting as on-call counselors whenever parents or youth expressed the need for such assistance. Since Parent Coaches were on-call during non-business hours and on weekends, there was someone to help parents and youth whenever a crisis arose.

*“[The Parent Coach] helped me with . . . trying to get an apartment and stuff like that [sic], they were trying to talk to me, ‘cause sometimes I feel like I wanted to give up on stuff, and they said, ‘no, you can’t give up, you got to keep on going.’” – PSP Parent*

The parents also highlighted the significance of having similar backgrounds to the Parent Coaches. The Coaches had been in a similar situation and were able to offer advice. One parent said, “With the other people, the other parents’ experience, you learn also for yourself and, and we share moments together, you know. We cry together, we laugh together . . . It’s like sharing and learning from each other.”

Another parent stated, “the fact that she has experience as a parent whose child’s going through the system, and even that incarceration piece as well, it was easy for them to earn your trust . . . I’m relating to her as far as, like a parent, because we’re both parents.”

For native Spanish speakers, sharing a common language with the Coaches helped build rapport and increased the credibility of Coaches. These parents expressed the importance of being able to discuss the complex issues of court disposition in their native tongue, to more clearly describe the fights they had with their youth, or the “vergüenza” (shame) of their youth’s system-involvement.



**“We cry together, we laugh together . . . It’s like sharing and learning from each other.”**  
– PSP Parent”

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### Skills and Resources

Most parents discussed the value of learning new skills to parent more effectively. Through the interviews, we found that coaching aided parents in developing better communication habits with their youth; overcoming cultural, patriarchal, and intergenerational barriers; and creating a community to reach out to when conflicts arise. Interestingly, many parents reported that while their youth's behavior had not drastically changed, the relationship between parent and youth had improved. The improved relationship enabled parents to address conflict or tensions with their youth without involving probation or police. Parents reported calling probation officers and the police less frequently, if at all, after PSP. This shift in parenting practices suggests that through the coaching of PSP, parents begin to see themselves as experts in addressing, resolving, and enduring both their youth's behavior and system involvement. A sense of power is returned to the family and community, as opposed to the justice system.

As parents' reliance on probation and police decreased, parents reported an increase in access to a supportive community through Parent Coaches and other parents participating in PSP. Parents reported that a barrier to accessing resources outside of CCFY is perceived judgment from providers. In addition, navigating the network of services leaves them feeling "ganged up" on. On the other hand, PSP felt like an extension of family, understanding of their unique experiences. Parents found the following aspects of connecting with other parents and Parent Coaches most valuable:

- Sharing parenting tips, resources, and conflict resolution strategies with one another and providing feedback on how parents' behavior may hinder family dynamics at home;
- Celebration of newly-learned, positive behaviors, family achievements, and individual successes;
- The shared ethos, experiences, and understanding of culturally relevant programming. Participants were able to bring their authentic selves to programming without having to navigate racial/ethnic, language and class biases.





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Parents used terms like “hopeful,” “family-like,” and “less fearful” to describe their experiences with PSP community. Although participants’ mental health was not measured in the evaluation, the interview findings suggests a relationship between membership in PSP community and positive emotional health.

### Increased Agency within the Justice System

Parents of systems involved youth often report feeling overwhelmed and trapped within the complexities of the juvenile justice system. The parents interviewed discussed similar frustrations prior to their involvement with PSP. As illustrated by one parent,

*“There were issues with my daughter in school. The principal gave me a pamphlet to take to court and take out a PINS (person in need of supervision) on my daughter . . . I was basically told by the principal to put my child into the system . . . Before going with the papers to the court, [a Coach] and I sat down, with the colleagues and with everyone who worked here, and they told me, ‘do not do that, because that’s like setting yourself up for your daughter to fail even more.’ And, you know, I feel eternally grateful for that because I, I guess if I had done that it would cause even more problems with the system.”*

This experience was not unique. Many parents reported feeling discriminated against within the system. One parent stated, “They were just offering to take him straight to trial, which I don’t know if that’s fair or not, because he’s the only one going to trial, where everybody else that was involved with him was offered a program, he wasn’t.” The same parent discussed feeling confused and unable to assist her child through the complex processes, until connecting with PSP.

PSP Parent Coaches helped the parents handle any situations that arose – one parent, whose child was rearrested, was led to believe that she could not take her child home, until the PSP Parent Coach arrived and informed her of her rights – but, more importantly, the Coaches equipped parents with the skills and resources to understand and navigate the system on their own. The parents reported understanding more of the justice processes, which allowed them more agency within the system. The increased agency helped parents take on a greater advocacy role for their child.

## Youth Findings

Youth interviews, like the parent interviews, highlighted the supportive and positive CCFY environment and staff. The CCFY staff “actually care about” the youth and made them feel “like part of the family.” One youth articulated the difference between CCFY and other programs, “You come in here and you get straight, good vibes . . . people here really genuinely care about you, not like any other program [where] they do it because it’s [their] job.”

While many youths were involved in other CCFY programming, apart from PSP, it was necessary to look at how the relationships between youth and their parents changed as a result of PSP. Generally, the program was found to have positively altered the relationships between youth and their parents. The youth described their parents as calmer, raising their voice less, and, as a result, they were able to approach their parents more often. As one youth stated,

*“This program really helped me, like, it helped me get that communication with my mother, you know what I’m saying? Before, me and my mom used to argue. We used to scream at each other. This program has given – they gave workshops on how to speak to your child . . . How to communicate with your teenager, stuff like that. So I listened and my mom listened so we both like . . . we used that and we communicated so now we [are] great.”*

“**You come in here and you get straight, good vibes . . . people here really genuinely care about you.**  
– PSP Youth”

Photo credit: Amelia Frank



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Interestingly, and in line with findings within the parent interviews, it was the relationship and the ability to communicate effectively that changed between youth and their parents. After PSP, youth's behavior hadn't changed, and many youth discussed engaging in the same behavior that previously led to physical altercations or fights with their parents. However, youth reported that their parents were "more understanding" after participating in the program. Youth also described their parents as supportive of their dreams and goals, reinforcing the successes of PSP in empowering parents with the advocacy skills and emotional bandwidth needed to uplift their children's dreams, possibility, and potential.

The youth interviews supported findings from CCFY's previous evaluation, which detailed positive outcomes and outlooks for youth involved in other CCFY programming. The youth expressed feeling ready to move away from involvement with the juvenile justice system and were more interested in discussing their dreams of becoming musicians, actors, or lawyers than reflecting on how they navigate probation. Although youth were apathetic when discussing their systems-involvement, they remained optimistic about a future unsullied by it. Many articulated clear short- and long-term goals and aspirations and how they perceived themselves contributing to society. Few seemed concerned with any potential negative impacts stemming from their involvement with the justice system.

Many youth identified CCFY (and PSP for their parents) as instrumental in helping them reflect on their systems involvement. Youth recognized the role of race and environment as contributing factors for their arrest. They also accepted responsibility for the actions that led them into the justice system. Despite any conflict in the home - some that resulted in a violation of probation - or their parents' own system involvement, none of the youth faulted their parents for their own contact with the system.

## CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the juvenile justice system, many parents with systems-involved youth often feel socially isolated, blamed, and punished for their youths' systems involvement. Parents feel they do not have agency or understanding of the system, which leads to negative outcomes for their youth.<sup>11</sup>

The Parent Support Program, like CCFY's other programs, was designed to counter traditional parenting classes, which are often harmful to youth and families. PSP focuses on providing systems involved parents and youth support and guidance as they navigate the complexities of the juvenile justice system. Unlike many parenting classes, PSP offers parents a Parent Coach who is also a peer. Parent Coaches are parents of formerly systems involved youth and come from the same community as the parents they coach. The parents involved in PSP described the Parent Coaches as family and appreciate their ability to connect on a deeper level.

The program also had a positive impact on CCFY youth, including better outcomes than comparative youth. The program showed a decrease in out-of-home placements for youth involved, as well as more dismissals of violations of probation. These better outcomes highlight one of the key themes in parent interviews: PSP allowed parents more understanding and agency within the system, allowing them to navigate the system, which, in turn, led to better outcomes for their youth.

Through the interviews with parents and youth, program observation, probation data, and discussions with staff, four recommendations were developed. They are outlined in detail in the next pages.

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<sup>11</sup> Pennell et al. (2011); Burke et al. (2014); Justice for Families (2012); Osher and Shufelt (2006); Schaffner (1997)

**RECOMMENDATION 1:**  
BUILD COMMUNITY POWER TO INCREASE THE  
CAPACITY OF THE COACH TEAM

Interviews with coaches, parents, and staff revealed a high reliance on the Program Director, with some reporting having access to the director almost 24 hours per day, seven days per week. While there is value in serving families as crises occur in their lives, instead of strictly during business hours, unfettered access to the Director puts the Director at risk of burnout and hinders coaches from establishing credibility, problem-solving acumen, and developing their skillset.

PSP Parent Coaches and the Director are a small team, managing a large caseload of families with shifting needs. However, additional support comes from several parents who remain connected to PSP and CCFY even after a formal coaching period. Many of these parents expressed gratitude for PSP's work and role in their families' lives and a desire to "give back". Tapping into this network of parents could help alleviate the Coaches' and Director's caseload and build community power.

We encourage CCFY to consider building out the coaching team. One option is through internship opportunities for parents who are interested in becoming Parent Coaches. Through such a model, PSP could create a scaffolding system in which parents who have received a certain number of coaching hours are eligible to shadow current Parent Coaches as interns for a pre-determined length of time. Once parents have graduated from their internship, they could be hired as Parent Coaches and receive their own caseloads.

Expanding the coaching team by creating an internship program could provide numerous benefits, including:

1. Decreased reliance on the Director;
2. Increasing the team's capacity to serve more families, particularly as a preventative model for families whose youth are at-risk but not systems involved;
3. Building social and economic power within the community by expanding the knowledge base around system advocacy and providing employment opportunities;
4. Expanding parent and youth engagement in PSP and CCFY on a more consistent, long-term basis.

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During the interviews, some of the Coaches and many of the parents discussed having positive relationships with probation officers or having successfully advocated for youth on school issues. The evaluators recommend organizing the Coaches and caseloads by Coaches' strengths, interests, and experiences. Should PSP adopt and expand the internship model, oncoming prospective parents can be paired with Coaches with similar interests and strengths to coach families whose needs are aligned with their skillsets. According to this model, families could be organized (with system involvement being the baseline) by school-related challenges, or housing and food needs, or substance abuse and mental health. Matching families to Coaches by opportunity/need and strength/skillset (in addition to other important factors, such as language) would allow Coaches to hone their strengths and provide in-depth coaching.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:** ESTABLISH A 24/7 COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAM

The ability to receive coaching outside of business hours is inherent to the value and effectiveness of this program. However, as mentioned above, constant access to leadership by Coaches and parents is not sustainable, scalable, or replicable. Additionally, many program staff and Coaches continue to face the long-term effects of having had a systems involved child, as well as working other jobs and raising families. While we believe it is in the program's best interest to continue responding to crises irrespective of the time they may occur, it is also in the best interest of staff and Coaches to maintain work-life balance by establishing a 24/7 crisis response team.

The crisis response team would be comprised of the Program Director and Coaches and, like other first-responder models, the crisis response team would require team-members to rotate through on-call shifts. This team would be available to assist families in conflicts, such as a fight with a child, an arrest or detention, or any other emergency that arises after business hours or during weekends.

Ideally, CCFY would establish a phone number for families to call after hours, as opposed to calling a Coach's or the Director's personal cell number.

The evaluators see the community crisis response team's potential impact of:

1. Decreasing the demand on Coaches and therefore reducing the risk of fatigue;
2. Reducing reliance on the Director;
3. Lessening the likelihood of parents calling law enforcement on their children in response to conflicts and, instead, first utilizing community-based resources.

### RECOMMENDATION 3: OPERATIONALIZE ON-CALL SERVICES

A recurring theme that emerged from the interviews was the flexibility of PSP. Participants valued the ability to call and talk with someone at any time, not just during business hours, and PSP's and CCFY's willingness to respond to most crises, even those unrelated to the juvenile justice system. Many crises were resource- and finance-related, arising from circumstances such as a lack of employment or an inability to purchase groceries. The evaluators recommend CCFY operationalize informal programming to address non-justice related emergencies and increase organizational support for staff who respond. This could be done in several ways.

CCFY could consider seeking additional funding to establish an emergency response fund. This fund could then be used for on-call services – used at the staffs' discretion to help families in need of housing, food, cash stipends or bail. Staff could work with parents to determine an allocation process that is fair, equitable, and confidential. This would alleviate the pressure for CCFY and staff to pull funding from other resources – including staff's personal finances.

CCFY could also broker new, and invest in current, community partnerships so referrals for housing, legal support, and resources are streamlined and outsourced, whenever it would benefit CCFY's participants. As it stands, CCFY makes very few referrals to outside organizations. Operationalizing the on-call services and making referrals to organizations with services that CCFY does not provide could strengthen PSP. This would also strengthen the broader network of South Bronx community providers working to address families' needs.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:**  
AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Currently, New York is implementing an initiative that will raise the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18 years old. Although it is too soon to know if, or how, this will impact parents of systems involved children, CCFY should consider continuing to collect data from PSP parents and their children to determine how raising the age of accountability may impact the effectiveness of PSP on families.

This evaluation interviewed parents and their youth during, or soon after, their involvement with PSP. An evaluation that looked at the program over a larger span of time would provide more detailed insight into PSP's impact on family dynamics and the longer-term implications of the program, particularly for youths' systems involvement.

Finally, the quantitative data provided by NYC DOP for this analysis only explores how many formal programs, workshops, and other events parents attended. It offers no analysis of the out-of-hours support Parent Coaches gave families that was not structured or programmed. These informal services are a unique component of PSP and were highlighted by parents as a core benefit of PSP. We recommend gathering information on key data points from these services and more closely examining their effects on parent and youth outcomes.





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# LIKE PART OF THE FAMILY

**BUILDING A CULTURALLY  
AFFIRMING PEER SUPPORT  
PROGRAM FOR SYSTEMS  
IMPACTED FAMILIES**



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