

DELIBERATIONS

FALL/WINTER 2005

NEW DAY CUSTODY PROGRAM LAUNCH

Photo By: Rebecca Brown



CASES' new Day Custody staff

On September 22nd CASES launched its new Day Custody Program to serve misdemeanor offenders in Manhattan's Criminal Court.

Following the closure of the Community Service Sentencing Project (CSSP), the City asked CASES

to develop an intervention that targets the thousands of misdemeanor offenders who each year receive sentences that amount to fewer than five days of actual jail time. These "short stayers" are transported to Rikers Island only to be released a few days

later - incurring considerable expense with minimal punishment.

While their sentences are abbreviated, their list of service needs are very often protracted. Many face multiple challenges, including substance abuse, homelessness, mental illness, unemployment, and significant health problems. The Day Custody Program, in partnership with the New York City Department of Correction (DOC), is a sentencing alternative that holds these offenders accountable for their crimes while connecting them to the extended network of services they need and avoiding costly jail time.

Within a secure facility next to the Manhattan Criminal Court, the day custody sentence is served over three days. During that time offenders perform community service, receive a comprehensive needs assessment, and are offered introductory services and referrals designed to help them

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address the issues that may contribute to their illegal activities. Participants serve their sentence during the day and spend the night at a verified community address. All able bodied participants are required to perform community service. Additionally, each participant receives onsite treatment readiness counseling, including substance abuse and HIV/AIDS education. Participants may enroll in drug treatment onsite or immediately afterwards.

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PILOT PROGRAM FOR EMOTIONALLY DISTRESSED YOUTH COMPLETES SUCCESSFUL FIRST YEAR

This fall CASES' pilot project for youth with emotional problems completed its first year with remarkable results: participants increased their likelihood of successfully completing their alternative-to-incarceration mandate by 56%. The project serves youth drawn from the Court Employment Project (CEP) Supreme, CASES' alternative-to-incarceration program for Supreme Court youth. We developed this unique service model to address the prevalence of mental health issues among youth involved in the justice system and the many barriers that they face in receiving quality treatment. The new service model provides early mental health screening, referrals to CASES' social worker, comprehensive assessment services and, when appropriate, referrals to community providers of mental health services.

As a result of growing anecdotal evidence that mental health issues formed a significant barrier to success for many CEP participants, we set out to concretely identify the extent to which

emotional disturbance is present in CEP youth and the degree to which it plays a role in their successful completion of the program. When all CEP participants were screened over a one-year period, 69% showed signs of emotional distress, and 30% were at high risk for a more severe mental health problem. Further analysis showed that emotional disturbance serves as a strong predictor of program failure: young people who showed signs of emotional problems in at least three subscales of psychological distress on the mental health screening instrument administered to our participants were one-and-a-half times more likely to fail in the program than other participants.

CASES then designed and implemented this pilot program to specifically target CEP participants whose emotional problems were keeping them from successfully exiting the criminal justice system. After a one-year pilot period, CEP youth with emotional problems who receive mental health services are now graduating at a rate

comparable to those who do not show signs of emotional distress at intake. Youth who receive services at CASES and at community treatment programs seem to fare the best. Of the 37 CEP participants with emotional problems who participated in the pilot project and were linked to community treatment providers, 18 successfully completed CEP. Another 18 are still active. Only one has been unsuccessfully discharged.

This exceptional completion rate is due in part to CEP's Deputy Director of Case Coordination and Clinical Services, Linda Guzzo, who has worked to build effective relationships with community mental health providers and to educate them about the needs of court-involved youth with emotional problems. According to Linda, "By linking young people to the mental health services that they need, we are enabling them to fully reap the benefits of CEP programming, including school placement assistance, job readiness training, academic enrich-

ment, outdoor education, and GED preparation."

Two participants' stories further demonstrate the impact of CASES' new approach to court-involved youth with emotional problems. John came to CASES at age 16. As the result of a childhood that included the loss of his father to cancer and his mother's severe drug addiction, John suffered from depression and had difficulty managing anger. Through the new service model, John received a referral to a neighborhood mental health program, and we accompanied John and his grandmother to his first counseling appointment.

We also counseled Michael, who also had a difficult upbringing -- both his father and uncle were imprisoned, and at age 13 Michael's best friend died in Michael's arms as the result of gunshot wounds. These experiences left Michael feeling a mix of anger and

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346 BROADWAY, 3RD FLOOR NEW YORK, NY 10013
TEL. 212.732.0076 • WWW.CASES.ORG

IN THIS ISSUE: CASES INAUGURATES THE DAY CUSTODY PROGRAM; A SUCCESSFUL PILOT PROGRAM FOR EMOTIONALLY DISTRESSED YOUTH; A GIRLRISING PARTICIPANT PROFILE; AND A MEMORIAL TO A FORMER COURT EMPLOYMENT PROJECT (CEP) PARTICIPANT.

THANK YOU! WE GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE GENEROUS SUPPORT OF THE FOLLOWING FOUNDATIONS AND CORPORATIONS:

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ONE GIRL RISING: STACEY W., A PARTICIPANT IN THE GIRLRISING PROGRAM

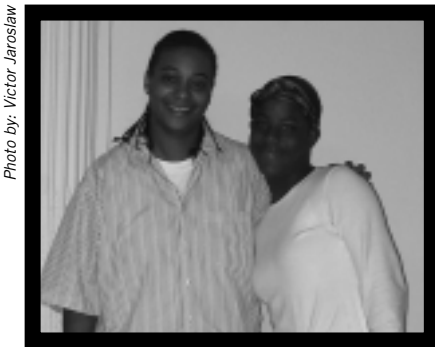


Photo by Victor Arcoslaw
Stacey W. and her case manager, Veronica Sims

Stacey W. will tell you that she has always had difficulty expressing herself. She did not feel confident enough to speak up in her middle school's classrooms, dominated by the antics of her male adolescent counterparts. Increasingly frustrated and alienated by her educational experiences, she was frequently late to class. Her troubles peaked in the fall of 2004 when, at the age of 13, she was arrested for an assault against another girl.

Instead of being sent to a juvenile detention facility, Stacey was sentenced to CASES' GirlRising program, an alternative-to-incarceration program specifically designed for court-involved

young women from Family or Supreme Courts. Recognizing Stacey's feelings of shyness, Veronica Sims, her case manager, told her, "Boys are seen, but girls are looked at." Thus began a relationship between the two that Stacey credits with helping her see new life opportunities and possibilities.

Stacey became immersed in the program, taking advantage of after-school academic support and participating in "open mic," an open forum in a girls-only space where she became more comfortable with public speaking. She participated in the interactive workshop series, TORCH (Teen Outreach Reproductive Challenge), which addresses body image, reproductive health and sexuality. She attended the 10-week Girls Empowerment Group, a safe place for young women to share their experiences and address some of the social and emotional issues that prevent them from making good decisions and maintaining positive self-esteem.

Over the course of her participation in the project, Veronica noted that the Daily Conduct Sheets that Stacey brought to CASES from school showed

significant improvement in her school attendance, classwork, homework and behavior.

Recognizing Stacey's feelings of shyness, her GirlRising case manager told her, "Boys are seen, but girls are looked at."

Art is what Stacey credits with giving her a voice and a way to express herself for the first time. Through art therapy, she explored her identity and her relationships with others and improved her peer socialization skills. She created

and designed boxes, frames and mosaics in an Art in Public Spaces class, taught by award-winning artist and CASES' staff member Sana Musasama. She also participated in digital imaging and graphic design classes at Art In General, a longtime CASES partner.

Stacey graduated from GirlRising on July 6, 2005. Stacey takes African dance classes, continues to participate in GirlRising open-mic events, and is working with Ms. Musasama to commission her mosaic artwork. She is attending the New School of Arts and Science in the Bronx and hopes one day to be an engine mechanic in her own autoshop. **C**



Photo by Loyal Miles
Luis Fuentes, Career Ex Coordinator, addresses graduates of CASES' Court Employment Project at a ceremony held November 2

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hopelessness, and his initial screening indicated that Michael experienced suicidal thoughts.

Following our referral, Michael began attending counseling in the community. He also joined a fatherhood program to learn to provide care for his 5-month old daughter. Both Michael and John successfully completed CEP and both continue to attend counseling. Michael is currently saving money for a move with his daughter and fiancée to Pennsylvania, where a job in construction awaits. "If it wasn't for this opportunity [CEP]," Michael told us, "I don't know if I'd still be around."

Now, after its first year, CASES' pilot project for emotionally distressed youth looks to build on the sort of successful outcomes experienced by John and Michael. Potential program objectives in the coming year include expanded counseling services and an enhanced focus on participants with both emotional issues and drug use disorders. **C**

Finally, each participant receives a discharge plan following a needs assessment. The discharge plan, created in consultation with the participant, includes at least one referral -- with a scheduled appointment -- to a needed community-based service provider. To encourage compliance, staff follow-up with participants two and four weeks after they successfully complete their sentences.

To supplement our ability to serve this needy population, we have established partnerships with a variety of service agencies. These include the Bowery Resident's Committee's Service Planning & Assistance Network (SPAN), which provides outreach, entitlements information and referrals to mentally ill individuals upon their release from City jails, and the Center for Employment Opportunities (CEO), which conducts presentations on-site and accepts referrals for workforce development skills training and immediate placement into short-term work assignments. We have formed collaborations with numerous health care,

PROGRAM UPDATES

Career Ex Expands

We are pleased to announce that the Career Exploration Project (Career Ex), our award-winning workforce development program for court-involved youth, is expanding significantly. Career Ex enables youth to obtain tangible job skills and employment experience by providing career guidance and training, challenging internships, and academic and support services. With a proven track record of success and high demand for the program among CASES' youth, Career Ex will expand by two program cycles and 30 participants to serve 120 youth annually. In eight years, Career Ex has served over 400 young people with outstanding and long-lasting results. The project received a 2000 National Juvenile Justice Award and in 2003 was honored for the second time by the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) as a best practice youth employment model.

CASES Becomes Official GED Site

CASES has been granted status as an official GED testing site. In the past, youth preparing for and taking the test were referred to off-site locations. Now, young people reporting to our program can take the GED predictor test and the GED test at our conveniently-located central location.

counseling, medical, education, and housing providers as well. These crucial linkages offer hope that repeat offenders might find services that can

meet their needs and reduce their likelihood of return to the criminal justice system. **C**

IN MEMORIAM: CASES MOURNS THE LOSS OF KESHAWN JAMAAL SEELEY

A former CASES participant and active alumnus of the Career Exploration Project, Keshawn Jamaal Seeley was tragically killed on July 15, 2005, a random victim of gun violence.

When Keshawn entered CASES at the age of seventeen, he had already experienced a lifetime of hardships. He and his siblings had been placed in foster care years before and by age fourteen Keshawn had run away and dropped out of school. After a period of living on the streets, he was soon arrested and eventually directed to CASES.

At first withdrawn, Keshawn soon became an active participant in the Career Exploration Project, CASES' job-readiness training and paid internship program for court-involved youth. When he expressed a desire to work with children, CASES staff placed him in an internship at Art Start, a non-profit that runs several art-based programs for children and adolescents.

Keshawn began at Art Start as a student administrative intern. He stopped using drugs, found stable housing, and completed Career Ex and CASES with honors. He enrolled in Art Start's Media Works Project, working on an anti-violence poster campaign with the

World Studio Foundation. Art Start ultimately hired Keshawn as a Program Assistant, and he was subsequently promoted to Director of the Art in the Shelters Program. In that capacity, he recruited volunteer artists to develop workshops for over 75 children in the shelter system.

As a volunteer, Keshawn led workshops for teenagers released from prison at Covenant House and at numerous city high schools. In May 2002, Keshawn was recognized as an Urban Hero at the Catalogue for Giving's annual benefit. He was a gifted writer and was winner of the NYC Administration of Children's Services Teens in Foster Care Literary Contest. In addition, Keshawn served on Career Ex's Advisory Board and was regularly a guest speaker in the program's classes. Over the last few years at Art Start, Keshawn personally supervised nine interns from Career Ex.

Jennifer Scarborough, Keshawn's case manager, maintained contact well after his graduation, and says of him, "What I most remember about Keshawn, was that he asked so little of others but was quick to give so much of himself. He inspired me every day when I came to work." **C**

LETTER FROM THE CEO

In October, at the Howie T. Harp Peer Specialist Training Center's annual graduation, CASES received an award presented by Chrystal Woodson, a Howie T. Harp graduate and Peer Specialist with the Nathaniel Project -- our alternative sentencing program for individuals with severe and persistent mental illness.

CASES alternative-to-incarceration programs form a hub for the considerable treatment, employment, education, and social service needs of the participants that we serve. Successfully navigating and coordinating the web of public systems and private non-profit service providers that, with CASES at the core, form the basis of participants' permanent movement away from justice system involvement is a complex task. Add in participants' distrust of these systems and services, along with a pervasive sense of hopelessness, and the task becomes seemingly impossible. However, with perspective and guidance provided by individuals who have experienced these challenges firsthand, participants' odds of success increase.

The Nathaniel Project is at the forefront of a growing movement to integrate peers as staff and experts in jail and prison diversion programs. In this context, a "consumer" or "peer" is a person who has a mental health condition and, perhaps, a history of involvement in the criminal justice system.

Peers are able to connect with participants in a way that other staff members are not. Through this connection, participants are able to improve social functioning and self-esteem and access the social supports they need. Peers can effectively train participants to advocate for themselves and access self-help resources. Not only do peers model success for clients, they also increase optimism about the chances of positive outcomes among other staff.

The concept of pairing individuals who have successfully tread the path of recovery with those who are just embarking on it is not new. But within the context of jail and prison mental health diversion, the model is novel and could not be more relevant. Peers have an immediate credibility that is invaluable in reaching out to CASES participants who face so many unique and sometimes overwhelming challenges.

With gratitude and admiration, I thank Chrystal and the many other peers and program graduates who have been willing to share their wisdom and give us the hope we need to do this work successfully.

JOEL COPPERMAN

CASES NEEDS YOUR SUPPORT!

Your contribution is vital to the work of CASES. Help us to address the root causes of criminal justice involvement and bring new opportunities to individuals with multiple barriers to success. Send a check to CASES, Attn: Development, 346 Broadway, 3rd Floor West, New York, New York 10013.

If you are interested in learning more about CASES' programs, please consult our website: WWW.CASES.ORG.

To make a donation, please contact Loyal Miles at (212) 553-6335 or send an e-mail to lmiles@cases.org.