



## DC YOUTHLINK

### INVESTING IN YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES TO PROMOTE PUBLIC SAFETY

August 2012

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*Launched in October of 2009, DC YouthLink is a District initiative that pairs DC youth that have criminal backgrounds with organizations in their home communities to provide them the supports and services they need to successfully transition into responsible adulthood. Unlike the past, when support services were scant, today, through DC YouthLink, youth are given access to a broad range of services and opportunities, from job training and school support to mentoring and substance abuse interventions.*

*Unsurprisingly for a large, first-of-its kind project, DC YouthLink had some challenges in its first couple of years. DYRS worked closely with its partners to resolve each identified hurdle. As a result, DC YouthLink has strengthened each year and its impact is increasingly evident.*

*DYRS youth today represent a significantly lower public safety risk than they did in any recent year. This is true across each of the primary public safety measures: homicides (zero year to date), re-arrests (down 32% from last year) and abscondence (down 24% from last year). Meanwhile more youth are having positive life outcomes. For example, fifteen youth enrolled in college in FY2011, more than in any other year on record. These outcomes are largely attributable to DC YouthLink and the community organizations now serving our youth.*

*DYRS continues to refine its oversight of the DC YouthLink initiative and is confident that the positive outcomes for youth and for the District will continue to grow.*

#### DC YOUTHLINK: INVESTING IN YOUTH AND INVESTING IN COMMUNITIES

DC YouthLink is a District initiative that pairs DC youth that have criminal backgrounds with organizations in their home communities to provide them the supports and services they need to successfully transition into responsible adulthood. Like the noted Milwaukee Wraparound project, it is an investment both in youth and in the youths' communities. At its core, DC YouthLink is built on the premise that a youth's neighbors and neighborhood, given the opportunity to develop capacity, are often better suited and more successful than any government agency at helping court-involved youth reintegrate into their community.

With this perspective, DYRS launched DC YouthLink in 2010 knowing that there would be a learning curve for its new partners, a need to

#### DC YouthLink in Numbers

DC YouthLink is a non-profit coalition of organizations that has partnered with DYRS to successfully reintegrate juvenile offenders into their communities by providing a host of supplemental services and supports to the youth and their families.

Launch date: **October 1, 2009**  
Total # of youth served: **1,007**  
# of community-based organizations that have participated: **54**  
% of youth avoiding re-conviction: **83%**  
Avg. hours of engagement per youth per week of: **5.2**  
# of youth paired with mentors: **653**  
# of youth enrolled in job readiness programs: **266**  
# of youth receiving educational support: **328**  
# of youth enrolled in substance abuse programming: **79**

build community capacity to meet the youths' needs effectively and transparently. Milwaukee Wraparound, after all, was started in 1995 and took nearly a decade to mature before gaining nation-wide attention and garnering awards for its innovation.

DYRS started by partnering with the Children's Youth Investment Trust Corporation (CYITC) to conduct financial oversight of the project. The agency then selected, through an open RFP process, two Lead Agencies, the Progressive Life Center and the East of the River Community-Police Community Partnership (ERCPCP), and asked them to identify local non-profits native to the youths' communities to provide the services DYRS young people need.

Upwards of 50 community organizations have come forward to work with DC YouthLink and support DYRS youth. As a result of extensive oversight, capacity building and accountability, some of these original community organizations have left the initiative. But many others have thrived, growing dramatically in their capacity to provide effective interventions for 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.

DC YouthLink is now in its third year and the initiative's development over that time has been marked. While hurdles have come and gone, DYRS, the Lead Agencies, the communities, and the youth are stronger today than at any time before. This is apparent when looking at public safety outcomes, youth development outcomes, and at overall system accountability.

The initiative is just one part of the way DYRS works to rehabilitate its youth. 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.

**PUBLIC SAFETY HAS IMPROVED SINCE THE LAUNCH OF DC YOUTHLINK**

There are many factors that influence the public safety outcomes for youth in the District of Columbia, including several that are beyond DYRS's control. Improvements in public schools, changes in policing strategies and fluctuations in unemployment are among the many variables that impact youth behavior.

Nevertheless, across the board, public safety data point to the conclusion that the District of Columbia has become a safer place since DC YouthLink was launched. DYRS youth now are better supervised, have more positive relationships and have more opportunities to succeed than ever before. As a result fewer are getting into trouble.

In 2010, DC YouthLink's first year, 21 youth under DYRS supervision were charged with homicide, though only 6 of these youth were receiving DC

**Strong Trends in Public Safety**

The data for the first seven months of calendar year 2012 show clear and significant public safety gains for DYRS youth.

**Calendar Year 2011 and 2012, January - June**

	2011	2012	% change
<b>Arrest Statistics</b>			
DYRS youth arrests	359	244	-32%
% of DYRS young people re-arrested	23%	18%	-22%
DYRS portion of city-wide arrests, under age 21	9.1%	7.9%	-13%
<b>Abscondence Statistics</b>			
Average daily abscondence pop	58	44	-24%
<b>Homicide Statistics</b>			
DYRS youth charged with murder	2	0	-100%
DYRS victims of murder	6	0	-100%

YouthLink services. In 2011 that number dropped to 8 youth. So far in 2012 there hasn't been a single DYRS youth charged with homicide. DYRS youth are also much less likely now to be victims of homicide. In 2010 11 youth were victims of homicide, in 2011 the number dropped to 8 and this year there have been no DYRS youth victims of homicide. These are strong and positive trends.

Likewise, DYRS youth are significantly less likely to be arrested than previously. From 2011 to 2012 fewer DYRS youth are being re-arrested and as a result DYRS youth represent a significantly smaller portion of overall crime in the District. The overall re-arrest rate for DYRS youth is down by 32% compared to this time last year. The downward trend in arrests is equally true when narrowing the focus to:

- Violent felonies (-21%)
- Robberies and Attempted Robberies (-26%)
- Drug felonies (-46%)

DC YouthLink has played a prominent role in the DYRS public safety improvements. Overall, 83% of DC YouthLink enrollees over the first year of review were in the community without being found guilty of a new offense.

Finally, the additional adult relationships made available through DC YouthLink, in collaboration with other new DYRS initiatives, have led to a significant improvement in the levels of supervision for DYRS youth. When DC YouthLink launched in 2010, nearly 1 in 12 DC YouthLink youth were on abscondence during a single day. Today that number has fallen to 1 in 65.

In every major measure of public safety, DYRS youth today represent a significantly lower public safety risk than they did in any recent year – a fact that is largely attributable to DC YouthLink and the community organizations now serving our youth.

### **A DIFFERENCE OF NIGHT AND DAY IN THE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO DYRS YOUTH**

Prior to DC YouthLink, only 1 in 4 DYRS youth had any kind of service made available to them in the community, and that service generally amounted to enhanced supervision through “intensive third party monitoring.”

Today, youth are given access to a broad range of services and opportunities, from job training and school support to mentoring and substance abuse interventions. With little exception, all DYRS youth in the community now receive the individual support of two or more of these services. And the services provided by DC YouthLink come in addition to the support provided from their DYRS Case Managers, mental health providers, school teachers, community members and families.

DYRS works with family members to identify the kinds of supports each youth receives, and DC YouthLink makes every attempt to meet the individual needs of each youth. DC YouthLink has provided services for over 1,000 District youth. It has paired over 650 youth with mentors, over 250 to job training programs, over 300 to educational support services, and 79 to substance abuse interventions.

As a result, youth are having greater success than ever before. Fifteen youth enrolled in college in FY2011, more than in any other year on record. So far this year, another 95 DYRS youth have earned work credentials, certifications and credits that will help them get good paying jobs as barbers, mechanics, food service workers or construction workers.

## **DYRS AND CYITC PROVIDE ROBUST AND TRANSPARENT OVERSIGHT OF THE DC YOUTHLINK INITIATIVE.**

In launching a new, robust community-support network, DYRS knew that there were going to be administrative challenges and a need for capacity building with its new partners. From the start, the agency established oversight systems designed to identify areas needing improvement and generate corrective actions. Over the first three years of this initiative, using these mechanisms DYRS successfully identified instances of providers providing incomplete documentation of the services they provided or making errors in their invoicing. In each instance the agency acted to correct the situation or impose sanctions.

The agency also found ways in which it could improve its internal processes, such as ensuring that DC YouthLink representatives are more consistently present at youths' case planning meetings. This has meant, for example, that the agency has gotten considerably better at making sure that all youth are matched with the services they need. As reported in the DC YouthLink Quarterly Performance Report, FY2012, Q1, 94% of enrolled youth in FY12 Q1 received services through DC YouthLink, up from 82% the year prior.

Among the tools and enhancements that DYRS, CYITC and the Lead Agencies regularly use to monitor the performance of the DC YouthLink service providers are:

- Regularized site visits of DCYL Service Providers to review program documentation facilities, and client records.
- Frequent auditing of individual youth files to ensure that services are provided in line with youths' individual treatment plans.
- New staff dedicated wholly to monitoring contract compliance
- Three layers of review (the Lead Agencies, DYRS and CYITC) of every invoice submitted from.
- Publication of a quarterly performance report detailing at length the services provided to DYRS youth.

Ultimately, these oversight mechanisms have worked to improve the DC YouthLink initiative, making it stronger each year. As DC YouthLink enters its fourth year,

## **A Mentor's Role**

*The following are excerpts from a DC YouthLink mentor's notes on his contacts with a DYRS youth. The names of the young man has been changed, and all identifying details have been removed.*

### **Nov 28, 2011 – Going to a job interview**

*Today I picked Michael up ... to take him to his job interview downtown. ... Along the ride we spoke about proper etiquette for a job interview. I reminded him to speak clearly, make eye contact and shake hands with a firm grip.*

### **Dec 4, 2011 – The responsibility of being a father**

*When I arrived Michael was having family time with girlfriend and son. I commended him for taking responsibility of his household. ... While watching the [Redskins] game we talked about football, our sons and plans for our son's future.*

### **Dec 28, 2011 – Gang involvement**

*Michael told me that a group of males pulled up on him and a friend around 9am. The group jumped out of the car and approached Michael aggressively, Michael admitted to running as Michael ran the group of men left a message for him saying that they would be back and if they catch Michael they will kill him. Michael down played the situation as if he was ok but I know him telling me what happened is his way of screaming for help. Tomorrow we will take the next steps in crisis intervention.*

### **Dec 30, 2011 – Affirming the relationship**

*Tonight I went to visit Michael. I wanted to talk to Michael and let him know that I am concerned with his life and the way things are playing out. Michael then told me that we are still cool and that he felt good to know that somebody really cares that much.*

### **Jan 2, 2011 – Expanding Horizons**

*Today I took Michael out with intentions of exposing him to a new crowd of people and new opportunity. Me and Michael left to visit the National Director for one of the top telecommunication and energy company. After listening to them speak Michael had a chance to introduce himself to young black men that have become millionaires in a matter of years and are willing to share their secrets of success with those who are dedicated to investing in their own future.*

DYRS is doing even more to ensure that its youth get high quality services and that District citizens can be confident that its funds are being used effectively and transparently. In direct response to the recommendations of agency's Council Oversight Chairman, Jim Graham, DYRS develop a new RFP process for our membership in the initiative, and has asked all community organizations to re-apply for inclusion. The process for selection of participation community-based organizations will be independent and transparent. The agency is also drafting a new manual that details policies and standard operating procedures for DC YouthLink for use in FY2013.

With each year, DYRS commits to further refining its oversight of DC YouthLink and continue strengthening the youth under its supervision and the communities to which they are returning.