



Taking Initiative

The Credible Messenger Initiative represents one component of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services' (DYRS) approach to care coordination. DYRS recognizes that young people and families live in neighborhoods that are unique ecosystems, each with its own set of institutions, faith and community-based organizations, and social networks. The Credible Messenger Initiative stems from a core belief that individuals from the same communities, with the same lived experience as those they serve, are uniquely positioned to engage those young people and family members often considered the hardest to reach.

DYRS is aware that commitment with the agency represents only a brief period in a young person's life. Families, peers, neighbors, and local neighborhood institutions represent a far greater and sustainable influence that predates, and will outlive, their time with DYRS. Therefore, DYRS acknowledges that -whatever challenges young people are facing - the answer is in the community.

The Answer is in the Community

The Credible Messenger Initiative serves youth and families under DYRS supervision by contracting with six, neighborhood-based organizations who provide services to them, in neighborhoods most impacted by crime and incarceration; as well as one facility-based organization that provides services to youth while placed in a DYRS secured facility.

"Credible Messengers" are full-time employees of the six community-based providers whom DYRS has contracted to provide intensive transformative mentoring and life coaching to DYRS youth and their parents/adult care givers.

This takes the form of offering daily intensive support through evening group sessions, support circles, crisis intervention, and 24-hour responsiveness. In addition to Credible Messengers' work with individual youth and families, they also serve as mediators and peace brokers in their own communities and throughout the District.

Credible Messengers partner with DYRS Care Coordinators to develop and execute youth-centered success plans that support and guide young people on pathways to create and meet their goals. In short, this wraparound continuum of care through the Initiative includes but is not limited to: (a) Transformative Mentoring; (b) Parent Peer Coaching; (c) Restorative Justice Practices; (d) Economic Opportunities; and (e) Neighborhood-Based Programming.

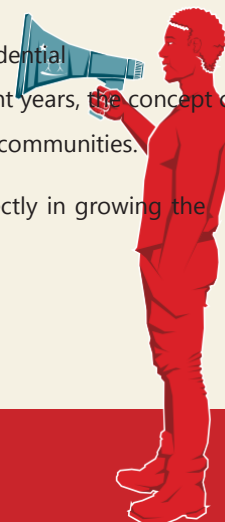
In addition, the Credible Messenger Initiative expands its mentoring and group services into assigned District of Columbia Libraries as well as Public Schools.

Justice Reinvestment

DYRS recognizes that criminal and juvenile justice investments in prisons, jails, and secure residential facilities also represent disinvestments in the communities most impacted by crime and incarceration. In recent years, the concept of "justice reinvestment" emerged as a strategy to redirect resources spent on incarceration back into communities.

Believing that the answer is in the community, DYRS practices true justice reinvestment by investing directly in growing the human resources in the neighborhoods where the majority of its young people reside.

The Credible Messenger Initiative, by creating employment for individuals who live, work, and worship in the same neighborhoods as the youth and families they serve, provides a direct investment in building the capacity of these communities.



The Credible Messenger Initiative utilizes a curriculum based on seven pillars that represent the essential foundation for developing a sense of self-worth. This curriculum is the basis for the group-mentoring sessions facilitated by the Credible Messengers, and the learnings from these sessions are meant to translate into youths' everyday lives.

Drawing from faith, culture, and historical traditions, the seven pillars include:



Pillar One: My Life Matters

This pillar helps young people see their inherent value and connection to the world. Participants piece together pertinent aspects of their lives from their personal identity, to their rich heritage, to their personal struggles. In this process, young people walk through the steps of seeing the precious quality of who they are.



Pillar Two: The Act of Forgiveness

This pillar engages young people in a supportive process to forgive themselves for mistakes they've made and embrace the power that comes from forgiving those who have hurt them. This pillar helps young people define forgiveness and value its importance.



Pillar Three: My Word is My Bond

"My word is my bond, and my bond is my word. When I give up my word, I give up my bond." This old street adage is the backdrop and the context for this pillar. Young people who are often subject to "playing it 50" (in other words, acting against their verbal agreement when it comes to street tension) are taught to see the importance of verbal integrity and credibility.



Pillar Four: My Family is My All

This pillar recognizes that all young people seek a sense of belonging and that regardless of the immense challenges and even abuses often found within many of their families, young people still want to go back home. Considering the saying "you don't always get to pick your family," this theme seeks to help young people reflect on the realities of family. It simultaneously aims to create something precious inside the participants so that they can pass along to their own offspring.



Pillar Five: The Impact of Absence

This pillar unearths the negative impact of parental or family absenteeism, and in some cases, the abuse that has resulted from the neglect of a caretaker. As young people share their experiences of broken trust, facilitators lead participants through bonding experiences that help them realize the similar pain they share with each other and fill the holes left by trauma.



Pillar Six: The Power of the Tongue

This theme comes from biblical wisdom that says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." This pillar guides participants to recognize the power of their words as formidable weapons that can either build up or destroy. Young people are helped to see that relationships can often house destructive elements such as gossip, negativity, and hurtful words. They are guided to reflect on how they can quell problems and build bridges through what they say.



Pillar Seven: What Love Looks Like

This pillar aims to establish "love in action" as an operating paradigm in the lives of young people. The theme zeros in on the question, "What does love look like?" Young people will learn to identify the many components of love and use it as a way of measuring their own interactions within their various contexts.

Initiative Providers

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| (1) East of the River Clergy Police Community Partnership | (3) Alliance of Concerned Men |
| (2) Far Southeast Strengthening Collaborative | (4) Sasha Bruce |
| (5) InnerCity Collaborative Community Development Corporation | (6) Life Deeds |
| (7) Grow Up Grow Out | |