

## Promising Practices

### Employing Credible Messengers to Reduce Juvenile Recidivism Rates: The Arches Program

[Mentoring programs](#) for justice-involved youth are an effective strategy for reducing recidivism, especially when combined with other intervention methods. One effective mentoring program, spearheaded by New York City's [Credible Messenger Justice Center](#), is the [Arches Transformative Mentoring program](#) for youth (ages 16-24) under probation supervision.

With the help of [Bloomberg Philanthropies](#) funding, the program launched in 2012 as part of the [New York City Young Men's Initiative](#), which works to reduce racial inequities for young men of color. With support and oversight from the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity and the New York City Department of Probation, the program operates 13 sites across the five boroughs.

Arches stresses the importance of credible messengers, referred to as mentors: importantly, mentors are typically from the same neighborhoods as participants, have been formerly involved with the criminal justice system and have been part of similar programming in the past. The mentors are integral to the model, as are Arches' group mentoring sessions, led by mentors themselves, which are based on cognitive behavioral interventions. Other key elements include the availability of one-on-one sessions between youth and mentors and the evidence-based practice

of interactive journaling (IJ). As part of the group mentoring sessions, each participant receives a hot meal before the session and a MetroCard afterward. Participants typically take anywhere from 6-12 months to complete the program, which is marked by attending 48 group sessions and completing four IJ course books. IJ, based on cognitive behavioral therapy, incorporates [positive youth development principles](#).



Probation officers provide case management, and mentors, through group and individual sessions, help youth pursue their goals, repair relationships with family or friends and connect to educational, employment and/or job readiness opportunities. Mentors are available at all times of the day for one-on-one support and receive ample training on facilitation, including motivational interviewing. The Credible Messenger Justice Center is working toward developing an accreditation and certification process so that mentors completing the required programmatic training can use the experience for future jobs and/or academic credits. Another unique component of the Arches program is its stipend for youth, with participants receiving up to \$800 for attending and completing all group sessions.

### Evaluating Program Success

The Urban Institute evaluated the [Arches](#) program from late 2015 to mid-2017 and identified the program as successful in reducing recidivism. Relative to a control group, felony reconviction rates among Arches participants were 69 percent lower 12 months after beginning probation and 57 percent lower after 24 months.



Notably, these recidivism rates are driven primarily by participants under the age of 18, with that group finding the greatest impact from program participation. In addition to determining the program's impact, the Urban Institute conducted interviews with participants, mentors and stakeholders to determine ways the program can be improved—[see p. 48](#) to read best practices, lessons learned and recommendations for improving the Arches program.

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