

CREATIVE TRANSITIONS

Integrating the Arts Into the Juvenile Justice System

A project of the Hampshire Educational Collaborative in partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services and the Massachusetts Cultural Council



“The Creative Transitions initiative demonstrated that arts programs are valued by young people and DYS youth workers, and that these programs have the potential to produce an array of positive experiences and outcomes for young people in DYS facilities.”

CYC/Brandeis report

Overview:

In 2005, a statewide task force was formed in Massachusetts to integrate the arts throughout the Commonwealth's juvenile justice system. This coalition believed that arts programs have the potential to produce an array of positive experiences and outcomes for young people in Department of Youth Services (DYS) facilities. In the spring and summer of 2008, the Creative Transitions demonstration project developed and tested tools, protocols, approaches, and relationships that could support integrating arts and cultural opportunities within a number of DYS programs across the state.

Examples of Creative Transitions Programs:

- **Barrington Stage Company** in Pittsfield hired graduates of its court-mandated Playwright Mentoring Project as interns at the theatre, assisting in production and arts management.
- **Community Music School of Springfield's** hip hop and drumming programs, developed in secure treatment facilities, were introduced to community reentry centers in Springfield and Holyoke.
- **Trinity Boston Foundation's Street Potential** provided positions (with stipends) to alums and current participants of their program, supporting court-mandated young people who had shown leadership in the program.



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The Evaluation

The Center for Youth and Communities (CYC) at Brandeis University conducted an evaluation of the Creative Transitions initiative over a six-month period during the summer and fall of 2008. The report concludes that “on the whole, the Creative Transitions initiative was a successful endeavor that has enhanced the lives of many young people who participated.”

The report noted the skills, passion, and commitment of the adults involved. The artists “were eager to stretch themselves in terms of learning and adopting new techniques to better reach youth and bring art into their lives...” The DYS youth workers, too, “were committed to making the programs work” and “primarily saw Creative Transitions as an effective way that youth could manage their emotions and expand their horizons.”



Key Impacts

Youth gained new skills and expanded their horizons. (“The artists and the art experience sometimes provided experiences that the kids otherwise would not have had. The art piece has been critical in providing for their needs.” - DYS youth worker)

Youth developed alternative ways to regulate their emotions and express their feelings. (“Art can be described as a clinical intervention. Art activities can be private and non-verbal. They can defuse anger and stress, and support mental health.” - mental health clinician)

Arts programs helped to take young people’s lives away from negative activities. (“Art gives youth a chance to have fun again and be young.” - DYS youth worker)



Recommendations for Promising Practices

The most successful programs

- Are collaboratively planned and managed, with DYS staff and managers working closely with artist-educators through the program.
- Are highly engaging for the youth at the start and are flexible, following the needs and ambitions of the young people, as they progress.
- Are offered in environments conducive to confidentiality and safety.
- Showcase the young people’s work in a culminating event whenever possible.
- Are designed to be sustained, long-standing opportunities for young people to be engaged in the arts and creative development.