toward *a movement*

Uniting Organizers and Direct Service Providers in a Movement for Juvenile Justice Reform

by Ruben S. Austria

Every spring since 1998, the Juvenile Justice Coalition has traveled from New York City to Albany to plead its case for juvenile justice reform, in an event called Advocacy Day. While participants include public defenders, policy analysts, community organizers, clergy, and parents, approximately 85 percent of the participants are young people who have been incarcerated. In 2005, more than 200 people made the trip. All morning and afternoon, teams of advocates met with more than 75 state legislators, outlining specific plans for reform. Every team had several youth who had been adjudicated delinquent and could offer personal testimony on the negative impact of incarceration or the positive effect of community-based alternatives.

At approximately 4:00 p.m., the group was preparing to depart the state capitol building to board homebound buses. Several youth, tired and hungry after a full day of presentations, stopped at a fast-food restaurant in the underground mall

RUBEN S. AUSTRIA is the founding director of BronxConnect, a faith- and community-based alternative-to-incarceration program for Bronx youth. Ruben's selection as a Robert Bowne Foundation research fellow in 2004 gave him the opportunity to write this paper. He earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from Cornell University and is a graduate of Columbia's Institute for Nonprofit Management. Born and raised in New York City, Ruben lives in the South Bronx.

that connects the capitol building to the state legislature. No one knows exactly how things spun out of control. Some say words were exchanged over "flagging," or openly displaying symbols of gang affiliation; others claim there was bad blood between two individuals who had been locked up together at Rikers Island. Whatever precipitated the disagreement, it erupted into a fistfight. The scuffle turned into a full-fledged melee as other young people jumped in to break up the fight or defend their friends. The brawl made its way through the concourse and into a parking garage, as youth leaders and staff members desperately sought to pull people apart. Within minutes, state troopers descended on the fracas, restoring order and bringing several youth and staff members into custody.

Miraculously, though those taken into custody were held for about 45 minutes, no arrests were made, and no one was seriously injured. By 5:00 p.m., all the participants had boarded buses back to New York City. The mood on the return trip, however, was gloomy. The purpose of Advocacy Day was to convince legislators to reform harsh policies that shuttle youth of color into the juvenile justice system. We had worked hard to present an alternate image of young people by introducing legislators to adjudicated youth who were now excelling in school, holding down jobs, and positively influencing their peers. Would anyone remember these images, or would the violent finale of the day simply confirm America's worst fears about urban youth of color?

As a member of the Juvenile Justice Coalition's steering committee, I am tempted to downplay the fight in hope of eventually eliminating it from public memory. Yet I begin my article with this incident because its implications force the youth justice movement to come to terms with an important reality. When two young men who have been incarcerated have a fistfight in the state capitol, we see how deeply intertwined are the personal and the political, and we are forced to reject the false dichotomy between individual transformation and social change. Direct service providers, who help adjudicated youth overcome personal challenges, and community organizers, who fight against systemic injustices, have at times clashed because of their differing orientations. As we work together, we are coming to realize that the struggle for justice on a societal level cannot be separated from the work of nurturing, healing, and developing our young people. In this article, I will describe some of the tensions between direct service providers and community organizers in New York City's juvenile justice movement and explore how working together to build a movement forces us to overcome the dichotomy between individual development and systemic change.

A View from the Trenches

In my work with adjudicated youth, I have witnessed both the personal struggles of young people and the systemic injustices perpetrated on America's "least favorite youth" (Rust, 1999, p. 3). In 2000, I started BronxConnect, a community-based alternative-to-incarceration program. My original intention was simply to help a few young people stay out of jail. Working from a justice-oriented faith tradition, I was not blind to how poverty and racism perpetuated the cycle of incarceration. Still, I looked at the work primarily in terms of individual development, desiring to help adjudicated youth overcome the many personal challenges they faced. As I spent time in the courts, however, I saw young people—almost exclusively African-American and Latino youth from poor communities—being shuttled through the system in a manner that virtually ensured incarceration. To be sure, many of these young people had committed crimes that rightly resulted in police intervention and court supervision. Yet I also saw hundreds of young people arrested and sentenced for reasons that might raise an eyebrow even of ardent supporters of tough-on-crime legislation. Young people were being arrested on charges of loitering for standing on a street corner and of criminal trespass for being inside an apartment building other than their own without ID. Incidents at school—a shoving match between two young people or the theft of a teacher's pen—that once were dealt with in the principal's office were now being turned over to the local police, with youth spending days and even months in detention.

As a court-mandated alternative-to-incarceration program, BronxConnect sought to hold young people accountable for their actions, to diagnose and treat mental health disorders, and to provide educational support so adjudicated youth could develop skills and basic competencies. Yet staff members also saw how futile it was to treat the problem simply as individual pathology. Could we honestly tell ourselves we were serving youth in the best way possible, when for every ten young people we helped, hundreds more were being incarcerated? The question from the old parable comes to mind: Do you just keep pulling babies from

the water, or do you eventually march upstream to confront whoever is throwing them in?

Though we never changed our primary focus, the work of BronxConnect has become intertwined with local and national movements to change juvenile justice policies and practices that unjustly affect poor youth of color. This process has forced us to move into areas less familiar to traditional youth development practitioners. Like any other youth service agency, we are subject to subtle pressure to view young people as problems we are paid to fix. We could easily become another institution profiting from the continued misery of those we serve, never challenging the systemic forces that bring youth into our care. Youth organizers, on the other hand, view young people as the solution to problems caused by forces that the entire society is responsible to confront. Youth organizers place young people in positions of real leadership, reminding direct service providers that we too often relegate youth to passive dependency. Furthermore, the political analysis of youth organizers forces us to consider the big picture even as we continue our work with individuals.

However, as we build a youth-based movement for justice with those who are directly affected, we must integrate youth development principles into our work. Organizations like ours that emphasize individual development in a community context bring balance to the movement, as advocacy efforts can sometimes lose sight of the real people involved. These youth—despite their resilience, energy, and creativity—have often experienced more abuse and neglect than we can imagine, both in the streets and at the hands of a retributive justice system. Even well-intentioned efforts run the risk of exploiting the charisma and passion of young people for the sake of the cause, while failing to help them develop into healthy, competent adults. Partnering with agencies rich in services and infused with youth development practices can help organizers ensure that young activists are developing competencies in *all* areas of life.

Definitions

In this paper, I use the terms *direct services* and *organizing* to contrast the individual approach with the systemic approach. *Direct services* refers to intervention approaches that work directly with youth in the justice system. *Organizing*, on the other hand, refers to approaches that work on the systemic level. These labels cannot, of course, capture the complexity of the varied agencies in the movement. There are many areas of overlap, and an increasing number of agencies incorporate more than one approach.

Table 1

Individual Growth	Systemic Change
Youth intervention	Advocacy and research
Youth development	Community organizing

The left column of Table 1 shows two components of the direct services approach, which emphasizes individual change. *Youth intervention* is an approach that sees needs in a young person and aims to provide the appropriate remedy. In the context of juvenile justice work, this approach may include family therapy, anger management programs, or GED instruction. Direct service also includes *youth development*, whose practitioners, rather than concentrating on deficits, engage young people in activities that develop their strengths. In juvenile justice work, youth development might include, for instance, entrepreneurship programs that train young offenders to start their own businesses.

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The right column of Table 1 shows approaches that prioritize systemic change. *Advocacy and research* groups seek to change polices and practices by producing and disseminating information that demonstrates the need for reform. In juvenile justice work, this approach might involve conducting research on disproportionate minority confinement and sharing that information with city agencies. *Community organizing* groups focus primarily on empowering community residents to take control of the issues that affect them. Such an approach to juvenile justice might organize parents of incarcerated youth to meet with local elected officials.

What all these approaches have in common is that they are typically *adult-led* efforts on behalf of youth. Youth organizing, which privileges the ideas and leadership of young people themselves, has the potential to

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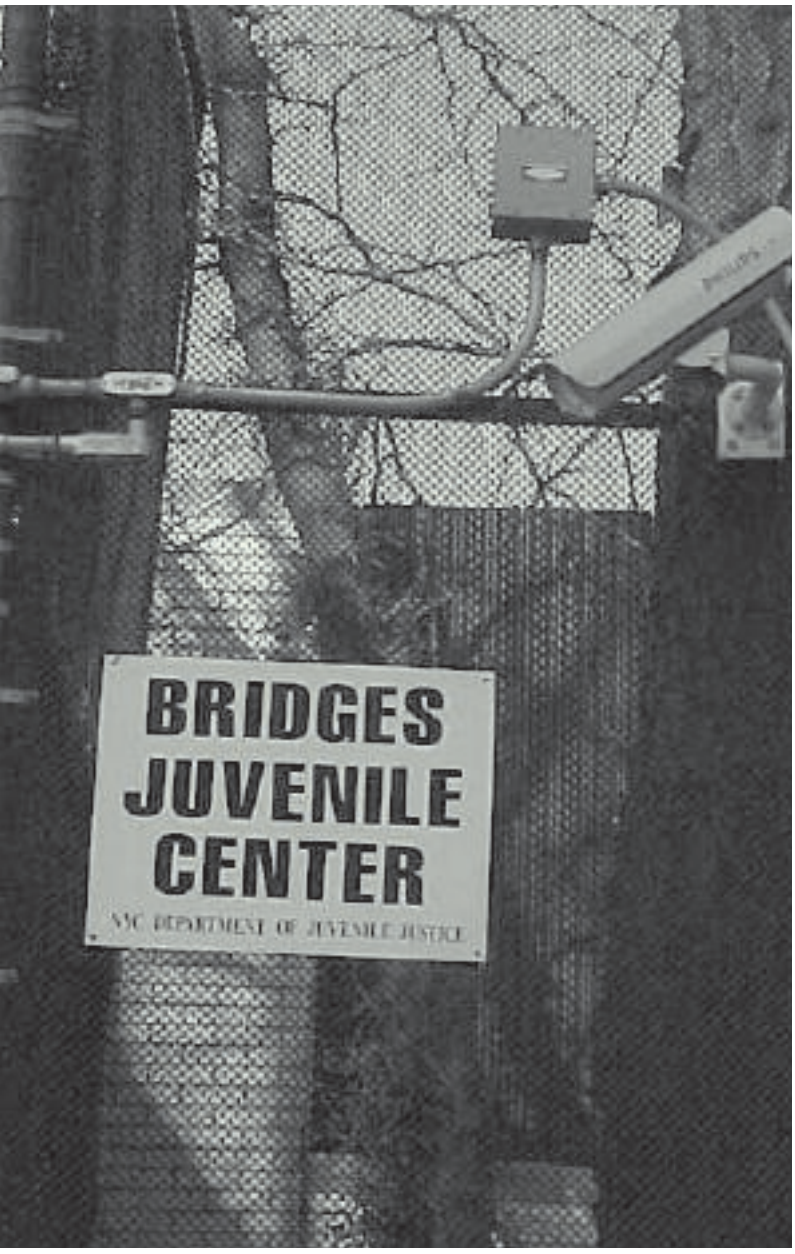
Youth Organizing

LISTEN, Inc. (2003) defines *youth organizing* as "a youth development and social justice strategy that trains young people in community organizing and advocacy, and assists them in employing these skills to alter power relations and create meaningful institutional change in their communities" (p. 9). Youth organizing provides young people with political education to understand how the systems they encounter affect their day-to-day lives, and then provides them with skills to challenge and change these systems. While taking many forms, youth organizing is often recognizable by the leadership of young people in planning and carrying out activities such as peer education, campaigns, and protests.

Collective social action by young people is hardly a new phenomenon. From college students registering Black voters during Mississippi's Freedom Summer in 1964 to university students standing up to tanks in Tiananmen Square in 1989, youth have energized movements for social transformation. Revolutionary political movements such as the Black Panthers and the Young Lords sprang from the frustration of inner-city youth of color who took direct action to combat the racial injustices perpetrated on their communities. As Hosang (2003) points out, "[a]ll the notable U.S. social movements of the 1960s… drew their leadership and base from politically committed youth activists" (p. 3).

In the last decade, however, we have witnessed a new phenomenon: the emergence of independent youth organizing agencies. In the past, youth social change efforts usually remained unincorporated or functioned as junior divisions of adult organizing initiatives. In the 1990s, youth movements "became formally incorporated as nonprofit entities with independent budgets, dedicated staff, and organizational infrastructures" (LISTEN, 2003, p. 6). These independent youth organizations defined themselves not only by their focus on



issues of concern to young people, but also by their commitment to youth ownership of organizational development and decision making.

Often these youth organizing efforts were launched in urban areas among the most marginalized young people. Some theorize that the growth of youth organizing was a direct response to the increasing criminalization of youth (Hosang, 2003; Pintado-Vertner, 2004). In the 1990s, youth—particularly urban youth of color—became the targets of increasingly harsh justice polices. As young people were cast as "superpredators," the response was to build more detention centers, transfer juveniles to adult courts, and increase penalties for young offenders. Record numbers of youth entered the juvenile justice system. These practices, though traumatic and disruptive to young people, created common experiences—incarceration, police harassment, school suspension—around which disconnected youth could rally. Hosang (2003) suggests that this very hostility "created the conditions for the emergence of 'youth' as a *political identity,* a shared worldview that provided the basis for collective action" (p. 5).

Youth organizing, at its best, begins to bridge the dichotomy between efforts for individual and systemic change. Among the components in Table 1, youth organizing clearly is most closely connected to community organizing; it focuses on empowering those directly affected by the issues and on challenging unjust systems. Youth organizing also frequently involves research and advocacy, as young people gather data that they use to educate their peers and to plan direct action. However, youth organizing groups also achieve positive outcomes in individual growth. By treating "at-risk" youth as leaders and giving them a framework to address their most difficult experiences, youth organizing has engaged a cohort of youth that otherwise would have remained disconnected from social services and afterschool programs. The emphasis on leadership produces excellent youth development outcomes. When youth organizers plan a rally against the construction of a new detention center, the process requires youth to conduct research, apply for permits, prepare speeches, promote and advertise the event, write press releases, and negotiate with city authorities. The skills learned through such campaigns are often invaluable to a young person's development.

Youth organizing, by the nature of the issues it confronts, must also function as a youth intervention strategy. Youth campaigns, when they address such issues as police brutality, school inequalities, and juvenile justice reform, often attract youth who are marginalized and alienated from mainstream society. Youth organizers are quick to reject deficit-based thinking that views young people primarily in terms of their problems. However, the young people that youth organizing attracts—particularly youth involved in the justice system—frequently face multiple burdens: undiagnosed mental health issues, substance abuse problems, homelessness, and learning disabilities, to name a few. The very real needs of young people in the justice system means they require *more*—not fewer—direct services than advocacy groups usually provide.

Ideally, youth organizing should draw from both the individual and systemic approaches, resulting in a strategy that develops those directly affected into leaders and unifies the various schools of thought into one movement. LISTEN, Inc. (2003) summed up this idea in an equation: "Community Organizing + Youth Development = Youth Organizing." In real life, equations rarely work out this neatly. In the context of juvenile justice, very real tensions between organizers and direct service providers can threaten the work done by and on behalf of youth.

Tensions in the Youth Justice Movement

When I began attending meetings on juvenile detention, I noticed a sharp, sometimes acrimonious divide between direct service providers and organizers. Tensions between the groups, though obvious, were rarely discussed directly and openly. A breakthrough came at a 2002 meeting, when Clinton Lacey, a respected leader in the youth justice movement, opened by saying:

> I'm really glad we could come together in cooperation, since we don't always trust each other. Organizers usually look at direct services and think, "You're just teaching youth to cope and that makes you complicit in the system." Meanwhile, direct services are looking at organizers and thinking: "Yeah, but your kids' lives are all messed up."

There was a tense moment of silence, and then we began to laugh. Clinton had broken the ice by stating plainly what everyone was secretly thinking. The contrast he evoked remains a critical area of tension in the movement. Thankfully, this tension can make all of us better youth workers.

Fault Lines

Clinton's statement highlights several fault lines that threaten to fracture the movement. The first fault line is the question of whether direct services help or hinder a social change movement. Community organizers, especially those influenced by Alinskian methods, come from a school of thought that views direct services as a tool of the oppressor designed to keep the poor passive and dependent (LISTEN, 2003). Instead of mobilizing the masses for change, organizers argue, direct services perpetuate the status quo by pacifying the suffering of the oppressed. Youth organizers rightly give young people a framework to fight systems that exploit them, instead of focusing on individual pathology. I think, for instance, of a young man who, prior to joining BronxConnect, had been mandated to several anger management classes. The classes never helped him. When he was exposed to youth organizing, he learned to channel his anger in a positive direction and became a leader in the youth justice movement. Youth organizers remind me that direct service providers commit a great injustice when their response to a young person's rage at being harassed by police, jumped in detention, or humiliated in school is to prescribe an anger management program.

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Direct service practitioners, on the other hand, rightly prioritize helping young people who have been incarcerated to overcome challenges in their lives. Recognizing the deep needs of youth in the justice system, we focus on individual growth and development—but sometimes at the expense of crying out for justice. I struggle, for instance, with the ramifications of BronxConnect's new performance-based city contract. When we started the program seven years ago, we operated on a shoestring budget, piecing together whatever funding we could find to pursue our dream—and we never held back from critiquing city agencies that were harming our youth. Now, as we earn a dollar amount for each unit of service provided, it feels almost as if we are doing business with young people as commodities. We are perhaps gentler in our criticism of city agencies. If we are not careful, BronxConnect will become another institution in this nation's broken juvenile justice system that processes young people through its various stages without ever setting them free. Working with organizers keeps me true to our original vision: to work toward the day when a program like ours is no longer necessary.

The second fault line has to do with youth leadership. Youth organizers, deeply committed to having

youth define strategies for juvenile justice reform, go to great lengths to ensure that their initiatives are youth-led and youth-controlled. As youth organizers put decision-making power back in the hands of youth, we see young people rise to a level of responsibility and efficacy that we never dreamed possible. I am continually reminded that many of us in youth service frequently violate young people's sense of agency by making decisions about what they need without their input. Youth organizers are critical of agencies that keep youth in positions of dependency, feeding them services without ever giving them the tools to challenge and confront the systems that oppress them.

Yet direct service providers also rightly question the wisdom of thrusting young people into leadership roles when their most basic needs remain unaddressed. Young activists have been known to neglect school or put off finding jobs to devote their time to the movement. I've seen young people I was mentoring and cultivating for leadership wind up back in jail after making their first brilliant public presentation. I wonder whether my pride at seeing them represent our program blinded me to deeper unmet needs. Alfonso Wyatt describes this phenomenon:

> How did youth work lose these promising young peer leaders? Too often, I fear, we adult youth workers are to blame. Unwillingly perhaps, we've committed a form of youth service malpractice. We're guilty of an egregious breach of basic youth development tenets by having failed to install… a realistic leadership development component for these youth… Perhaps no long-range plan was ever formulated for young peer workers. Maybe the adult staff became so caught up in the "adult-like" mannerisms of these young people, they missed important cues or cries for help. They did not perceive that even the seemingly most motivated peer leader can slowly drown in the same negative forces besetting many youth—hopelessness, anger, self-sabotage—in plain view of well-intended adults. (personal communication, November 11, 2005)

I am now extremely wary of thrusting youth into leadership roles before they are ready. Responsible youth workers, whether direct service providers or organizers, must care more about a young person's overall development than about his or her immediate contribution to the agency or the movement. Otherwise, we are guilty of exploiting young people for our own purposes.

The third fault line is the issue of adult involvement. Young organizers rightly protest the lack of youth representation in decisions that affect them. As James Warwin, founder of The Brotherhood in Harlem, put it, "If you had a problem in the black community, and you brought together a group of white people to discuss it, almost nobody would take that panel seriously… But every day, in local arenas all the way to the White House, adults sit around and decide what problems youth have and what youth need without ever consulting us" (LISTEN, 2003, p. 6).

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Yet I have seen this logic taken far beyond what is healthy for young people. In its extreme form, adult involvement is cast as a threat to youth self-determination, and youth liberation is seen as the rejection of adult-defined standards of behavior and morality. This logic, appropriate for anti-racist or anti-imperialist movements, makes little sense for youth in our communities. Too many young people, especially those who have been through the justice system, have never had the benefit of healthy community and family. As a resident of the South Bronx who deals with young people not just in program settings but on street corners and stoops, I rarely see young people suffering from *too much* adult involvement. Families have been shattered by drugs, long prison sentences, and even murder; too many young people have been left to fend for themselves. Young people, particularly youth in the justice system, need stronger and more consistent adult involvement in their lives as we raise them up to be leaders and decision makers.

The final fault line is tension over personal accountability and responsibility in the context of a discriminatory justice system. The tension emerges when, for example, a young person risks violating his

or her probation for continuing to fail drug tests. Why does an inner-city Black or Latino youth get a prison sentence, youth organizers argue, while a suburban white youth gets sent to a drug rehabilitation program? As a service provider and community member, I ask the same question about the broader inequalities, but my immediate issue is, "How do we help this young person stay drug-free so he or she won't spend the next 12 months locked away?" I cannot afford to excuse or rationalize youth misbehavior because I believe the consequences are unfair. Knowing just how discriminatory the system is forces me to do *more,* not less, to see that young people avoid the pitfalls that await them. I must challenge them and hold them accountable, even when they don't like it. There is a certain ideology, says Victoria Sammartino, that says:

> Young people have to be empowered to make their own decisions, so you can never challenge them on fundamental things like going to school, or not staying out all night, or telling them they can't smoke weed. But then you're functioning like a permissive parent, which is part of the reason these kids are in trouble in the first place! It's about social justice and societal change, but *God!* It's about these kids' lives too!" (personal interview, May 21, 2005)

I am thankful that organizers and direct service providers have reached the point where we can discuss these issues without rancor. In 2001, when I first became involved in juvenile justice reform, I wondered if we would ever overcome our prejudices to work together effectively on behalf of youth. The story that follows is one example of the way we have worked together to build a movement and achieve real victories in the struggle for juvenile justice.

Building Synergy

In 2001, New York City planned to expand two recently opened juvenile detention facilities. The proposal, coming at a time when funding for youth services was being cut across the board, was too egregious to ignore. The city planned to add 200 additional beds, at a cost of $68.6 million, despite the fact that the average daily population in the city's three detention centers was well below capacity.

Two coalitions led the fight against detention center expansion: the Juvenile Justice Coalition, composed primarily of adult professionals including legal advocates, direct service providers, and policy analysts; and the Justice 4 Youth Coalition, a youth-led group deliberate about keeping those directly affected in control of decision making. Though different in culture and philosophy, the two groups were united in their opposition to the expansion.

The early months of 2002 saw a flurry of activity aimed at stopping the planned expansion. The Justice 4 Youth Coalition staged rallies and protests in front of City Hall. As the protests grew more visible, the New York City Council convened hearings to explore the wisdom of expanding the centers. Adult members of the Juvenile Justice Coalition testified at City Council hearings, while Justice 4 Youth brought hundreds of young people to protest outside. Policy analysts dispassionately described numerical trends, alternative-to-incarceration programs talked about their success rates, and youth activists hollered—but we were all saying the same thing: Stop putting kids in jail. The diversity allowed each facet of the movement to remain at the level of confrontation they were most comfortable with, while still contributing to the larger cause. When I took the microphone at hearings, I outlined my arguments against expansion quietly and respectfully. The director of an alternative-to-incarceration program can't publicly berate a city agency with which we partner. Yet as I took my seat, I silently cheered the next youth presenter who aggressively lambasted the city's plan.

We don't know what eventually tipped the scales, but, in June 2002, the city announced that it was canceling the expansion. Stunned disbelief was followed by rejoicing throughout New York's youth justice community. As Malikah Kelley, a youth organizer, wrote in her 2002 article on the campaign: "The city's decision to cancel the expansion plan showed us that we have real power in influencing policy changes, and in building a citywide movement, led by youth" (p. 23).

Through the process of working together, something changed in the relationship between organizers and direct service providers. We began to relate to each other as brothers and sisters in a common struggle. Four key factors have facilitated the development of a united youth justice movement:

- Cross-agency collaboration led by youth
- Co-enrollment of youth across programs
- Hybrid organizations
- National networks that provide the opportunity to build relationships locally

The collaboration encouraged by these factors should also be possible in other areas where direct service providers and organizers need to work together to effect change.

Youth-led Collaboration

It was the young people who spearheaded inter-agency relationships. If the fight on Advocacy Day sprang from conflict between two young people who had been incarcerated together, seeds of cooperation grew from a different kind of relationship formed at Rikers Island. Chino Hardin, a youth organizer with Prison Moratorium Project (PMP), reconnected on the outside with a fellow inmate who was involved with Friends of Island Academy, a direct service agency: "Me and Liz were locked up together, and then we met on the steps of City Hall. I told her about PMP and she told me about Friends" (personal interview, May 17, 2005). Youth from both agencies began attending each other's meetings and learning from each other. Friends of Island Academy offered their space as a meeting site for the Justice 4 Youth Coalition, which is associated with PMP. Clinton Lacey, then the associate executive director of Friends, recalled, "It made sense, and it seemed more beneficial to everyone. At Friends we offered space and bought some pizzas and they brought 40 kids to the room… just those kinds of small things that go a long way" (personal interview, May 14, 2005). Eventually, the two organizations entered into a formal partnership. PMP provided political education to Friends participants, while Friends offered GED classes, counseling, and job placement to young PMP activists, some of whom were fresh out of jail. Eventually linkage agreements were signed, but according to Hardin, the friendships between young people were what made the bridge-building possible: "Different individuals became part of both organizations. The politics came later... meetings with executive directors… but the relationship building came first" (personal interview, May 17, 2005).

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Co-enrollment

As a result of such relationships and of work together in campaigns such as the one to fight detention center expansion, a number of young people were co-enrolled in more than one program. Young people served as role models to adult staff members, who sometimes let politics and competition for funding divide them. Larenz Suggs, a BronxConnect graduate who is now a youth organizer with PMP, put it this way: "Okay, these two guys at Advocacy Day fought with their fists… but is that so different from two programs fighting over which one is better… or fighting over funding?" (field notes, May 16, 2005). When youth are co-enrolled, it makes agencies less likely to criticize each other. Following the fight at Advocacy Day, youth leaders were quick to cut off suggestions that any particular organization was to blame, insisting that the whole movement shared responsibility.

Co-enrollment makes programs more accountable to the youth they serve and to each other. Youth from a direct service agency may begin to push for increased youth ownership and decision making when they see what is possible from peers in youth organizing circles. Meanwhile, connections with direct service agencies can influence organizing groups not to minimize young people's needs for services as they provide political education and leadership training. When youth are co-enrolled, it is more likely that *all* their needs, from basic education to political awareness, can be met.

Hybrid Organizations

A growing number of agencies in the youth justice movement integrate the goals of individual change and systemic development. Many of these agencies, which often began as grassroots community-based movements, are led by individuals who come from the same background as the youth they serve: Many are people of color in their 20s or 30s who grew up and still live in the neighborhoods where their organizations are headquartered. Perhaps they earned their GEDs in prison and then completed college degrees and professional training after release. They are youth activists by background and adult professionals in their current work life as organizational leaders.

One of the best examples of a hybrid organization is GEMS (Girls Educational and Mentoring Services), a Harlem-based organization dedicated to fighting the

commercial sexual exploitation of adolescent girls. Rachel Lloyd, the executive director of GEMS, was inducted into prostitution at the age of 17, left "the life" at 19, and founded GEMS at the age of 23. While GEMS provides direct services for girls who have been sexually exploited, it also trains its members to educate and advocate on the local and national level. GEMS is currently leading the effort to pass state legislation to protect minors under the age of consent who are picked up for prostitution. Rather than charging such youngsters with a crime, the legislation would send them to supportive services. Rachel Lloyd swears by the importance of girls speaking out for justice as an essential aspect of healing and recovery. "However," she says, "in my first week out of 'the life' I didn't need to speak out. I needed a place to live. I needed clothes, food, and people to love me" (personal interview, May 2, 2005).

National Networks, Local Relationships

While local coalitions stopped the expansion of the juvenile detention centers, a national movement for youth justice helped bring about the unity that characterized this local effort. The Community Justice Network for Youth (CJNY, www.cjny.org), a national coalition of organizations working with youth of color in the justice system, has provided local advocates with opportunities to gather with like-minded folks from across the country. CJNY's national conferences allow organizers and direct service providers not only to engage in constructive dialogue during formal sessions, but also to "hang out" and build relationships during free time. At CJNY, many of us experienced a sense of solidarity and family that we had never before felt in the work.

CJNY models the ethics of unity amid diversity. Refusing to promote a single ideology, CJNY demonstrates that diverse entities can rally together for the sake of young people in the justice system. One conference included presentations both from a Louisiana coalition that had organized to shut down the notorious Tallulah Juvenile Detention Center and from the deputy commissioner of Missouri's juvenile justice system, who explained the state's decision to eliminate large juvenile prisons in favor of a therapeutic model that places youth in small group homes. Conference participants began to grasp that victory in this movement would require those who rally against the juvenile justice system to break bread even with those who administrate it.

Developing "Love Warriors"

The fight at Advocacy Day is a reminder that even as the youth justice movement wrestles against oppressive forces from without, it must also confront and heal within. While we want ultimately to see the day when the juvenile prisons are largely unnecessary, getting to that day requires transforming not only policies and practices, but also the lives of individual young people. Individual development and systemic change are both clearly necessary.

Direct service providers like me have much to learn from youth organizers. As we help young people develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to succeed, we often fall short of promoting genuine youth ownership and decision making. In the midst of caring for those we serve, we must always ask ourselves whether we are doing enough to challenge the systemic injustices that make our programs necessary.

Organizers can also learn from direct service providers. Youth in the justice system—whose development has been under constant attack from poor schools, violent streets, neglectful foster care, traumatic jail experiences, and shattered families—often face a steep growth curve. Confronting the systemic factors that have hindered young people's development is not in and of itself a solution for their present needs. Adjudicated youth also need basic education, job skills, and character development in an atmosphere of discipline and love.

Building a unified juvenile justice movement means moving continually toward both collective empowerment for systemic change and care for the individual. Direct service providers and organizers will each continue to operate in our own unique orientations, but we must work together to build our young people into leaders of free and self-determined communities. We must put aside our differences for the sake of helping young people develop into what Alfonso Wyatt (1999) calls "love warriors": healed and transformed leaders who fight oppression, injustice, and violence with the tools of spirit, hope, and love.

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