



Incarcerated Youth at Play

Description:

Incarcerated Youth at Play, an initiative of the Actors' Shakespeare Project, provides juvenile offenders with both tools and support to transform their lives. The project engages youth and staff in the creation of ensemble productions, trains DYS teachers to integrate Shakespeare into their classrooms and supports youth in continuing their artistic development when they leave DYS facilities. Through Shakespeare's powerful words and deeply human characters, participating youth, ages 13-17, are able to give voice to their stories, develop social, artistic, pre-professional and literacy skills, and focus their talents, emotions and energies on positive behaviors and activities as they return to the community.

Location:
Cambridge, MA

Website:
www.actorsshakespeareproject.org

Founded: 2005

Current Budget: \$113,000

Geography & People Served:

Youth ages 13-17, teachers and staff in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system

Social Problem:

- DYS operates 95 programs, maintaining a committed caseload of over 2,300 youth on any given day and involving roughly 6,000 youth in its programs annually.
- Over the past 15 years, the number of committed boys has increased by 36% while the number of committed girls has increased 205%.
- The annual cost of incarcerating one young person in Massachusetts is \$37,000.
- 35% of the youth return to the system within one year of discharge.

Key Accomplishments & Social Impact:

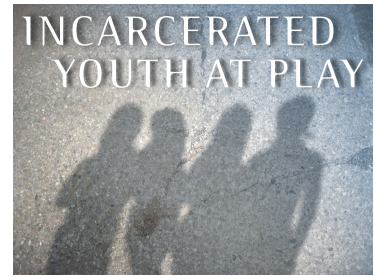
- Received an award from NFI Massachusetts for being a leader in working with girls in lockup.
- Provided training for 65 of 185 DYS teachers as part of Unlocking the Light, a statewide initiative to integrate the arts into DYS classrooms.
- DYS staff report that Incarcerated Youth at Play helps the girls develop positive behaviors, such as patience, cooperation, and the ability to compromise and be non-judgmental.
- Participating youth demonstrate improvement in critical social and pre-professional skills, including maintaining eye contact, listening respectfully, working as a group and giving constructive feedback.

Goals – 18 months (June 2007 – November 2008):

- Pilot a new education and mentorship program, Shakespeare on the Out, with 8-10 girls who are leaving DYS facilities.
- Launch ensemble performance programming at a boys' facility.
- Serve a total of 132 youth and lead training for 115 teachers.

Total Philanthropic Investment – 18 months: \$250,000

Incarcerated Youth at Play, 5/3/2007



Contact:

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Ways to Invest

In-Kind Support

- Data management and reporting system
- Website development and support
- A van
- A copier
- Rehearsal and workshop space that is accessible by the T
- Board member with leadership experience in Roxbury and Dorchester

Financial Support

- \$50,000** 12-month pilot of Shakespeare on the Out
- \$25,000** Part-time business manager and program support
- \$10,000** 12-week ensemble performance project for 10-15 girls and DYS staff
- \$5,000** 15 workshops with prominent guest artists from theatre and music
- \$1,000** Tickets, dinner and transportation for 10 youth for a season of Actors' Shakespeare Project (3 shows)

SOCIAL
innovation
FORUM Connecting Leaders, Skills,
Networks, and Capital

a Root Cause social enterprise

Need & Opportunity

Social Problem

Each year in Massachusetts approximately 18,000 to 20,000 juveniles are arraigned in court on criminal charges. After appearing in court, about 8-10% of arraigned youth are committed to the custody of the Department of Youth Services, the state's juvenile justice agency.¹ DYS operates 95 programs, including 62 facilities, ranging from staff-secure group homes to highly secure locked units, and 33 programs to serve youth who live in the community (residing with a parent, guardian, or foster parent or in an independent living program).² On a given day, there are over 2,300 youth on the DYS committed caseload.³ Roughly 6,000 youth cycle through DYS programs annually.⁴

Youth involved with the juvenile justice system are among the state's most vulnerable populations and are considered to be at high risk of long-term incarceration and dependency on government services. The annual cost of incarcerating one young person in Massachusetts is \$37,000.⁵ Currently, 35% of youth are returning to the juvenile system within one year of discharge.⁶ This process of circling back into government systems of care comes at a high financial and social cost. Failing to support these youth is a missed opportunity to focus their talent and energy to make lasting, positive contributions to the community.

Root Cause Factors

These hot days is the mad blood stirring through my body. This stress is too overwhelming. I don't want to deal with it anymore. I wish my life was more normal and without all these complications. I wish I didn't wake up hungry every day and go to sleep the same way. I wish I had a home to feel safe in, instead of living on these streets. I just wish I had the clothes and the money. I just wish.

– written by a young woman in DYS custody, her reflection on Shakespeare's line "Mad blood is stirring."

Incarcerated youth struggle disproportionately with a myriad of issues:

- *Fragmented families*: 55-75% of youth have received services through the child welfare system prior to their commitment to DYS, meaning they have experienced abuse, neglect or other family separation.⁷
- *Poverty*: The unemployment rate for the biological parents of DYS youth is over 50% and more than 40% of families are on welfare, compared with a rate of 4.8% for the general population.⁸
- *Violence*: 90% of girls have experienced some form of physical, sexual or emotional abuse.⁹
- *Mental health disorders*: National estimates indicate that 1 in 5 youth have been diagnosed with a serious mental health problem and many also struggle with substance abuse.¹⁰

With these serious personal challenges, many youth feel abandoned and overwhelmed, as described eloquently by the young woman quoted above. They are often mistrustful of adults and have poor coping skills, which leads them into more trouble, leaving them ill-equipped to handle personal or professional relationships, and causing them to give up on themselves as so many other people have.

The complexity of the juvenile justice system exacerbates the problem. A summary provided in a report from the Executive Office of Public Safety lists 35 possible decision points as youth move through the system that involve separate but interdependent organizations along the way including: city and town police departments, the public school system, nonprofit organizations, the Juvenile Court, the Department of Youth Services, the Department of

¹ When youth are "committed to DYS" it means they have been adjudicated "delinquent" for violating a state or local law or they have been adjudicated a "youthful offender" on an indictment for committing an offense which, if he/she were an adult, would be punishable by sentencing to state prison. In either case, these youth will be in custody until age 18 to 21, depending on the age of adjudication and the nature of the offense.

² Massachusetts Department of Youth Services. (Feb 17, 2007). Public Information Packet.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety, Programs Division (Dec 2004). Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Data and Information.

⁵ From the DYS 2005 Annual Report. Based on FY 2005 budget of \$86 million for residential care divided by a total committed caseload of 2,341.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Massachusetts Department of Youth Services. (Feb 17, 2007).

⁸ Ibid. And Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (Apr 24, 2007).

⁹ Based on reports from DYS staff

¹⁰ Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety, Programs Division (Dec 2004). From Coccozza, J. and Skowrya, K. (Apr 2000). Youth with Mental Health Disorders: Issues and Emerging Responses. *Juvenile Justice*, 7 (1): 3-13.

Social Services, the District Attorney's Office, and the Committee for Public Counsel Services.¹¹ The resulting transience and instability further deprive these youth of the continuity and sense of connection that adolescents need to reach adulthood successfully. A Boston youth service provider interviewed about the broader problem of youth who have experienced poverty and violence commented, "I don't think it's lack of motivation so much as a real sense of hopelessness. They have to survive huge systems with little power or control over their circumstances."¹²

Current Landscape

I could be bound in a nutshell yet call myself king of infinite space. - Hamlet

Shakespeare's depiction of outsiders along with the themes of his plays--*justice and revenge, the quest for power, family loyalties and betrayals, the seduction and truth of language, leadership under fire, the link between grief and violence, and the power of love and redemption in society*--resonate powerfully with juvenile offenders. There is strong research on the benefits of the arts for incarcerated youth, and in particular, the benefits of Shakespeare:

- The YouthARTS Development Project, a research initiative of the U.S. Department of Justice, offered arts opportunities to youth at risk in three cities and found decreased delinquent behavior and improved cooperation and attitudes about school. As an example, in Portland, Ore., while only 43 percent of the participants demonstrated an ability to cooperate with others at the start of the program, a full 100 percent did so by the end of the 12-week program. Attitude toward school also improved: there was only a 7.7 percent improvement in the non-arts group over the same period, compared with a 31.6 percent improvement among the youth involved with the arts program.¹³
- A three-year evaluation of an arts program in Washington State that brought in professional artists to work with incarcerated youth found that 60% of the participants reported they learned concrete vocational skills. In addition, staff reports of rule violations and misbehavior declined by 63% while youth were engaged in the program. The results also begin to suggest that involvement in the art workshops had longer term effects as evidenced by relatively low recidivism rates for participants. Of 24 follow-up youth, 16.7% committed a crime within six months after institutional release versus a comparative rate 32.9% for the general incarcerated youth population.¹⁴
- Research completed by Project Zero at Harvard's Graduate School of Education found that Shakespeare's plays can be effective at getting court-involved youth to engage deeply with their own experience. This process of youth "opening themselves through the study of Shakespeare--acting, working in creative communities, and linking self-knowledge to social and intellectual development"--is linked to all types of learning. Many youth reported that the intense review of Shakespeare texts in preparation for performing helped them not only master that difficult material but also improve their reading of other complex material such as math and physics texts.¹⁵

Despite this evidence, arts play only a small role in the programs at Massachusetts DYS facilities. Incarcerated Youth at Play is aware of 10 other programs in the state that work with adjudicated youth at some point during contact with the juvenile justice system--in the courts, in lockup, or in the community. This does not include programs provided by volunteers or individual artists. Few arts organizations currently have the skill sets to work effectively over a sustained period because of the system's complexity, coupled with the unique needs of this youth population. In addition, it would not be possible for any one program to cover the system in its entirety.

Massachusetts has a long history of fostering innovation in services for adjudicated youth and has been recognized as a leader in the juvenile justice field since its creation of the nation's first juvenile corrections facility in 1846. Spurred in part by recent funding from the U.S. Department of Education to integrate arts into DYS

¹¹ Massachusetts Executive Office of Public Safety, Programs Division (Dec 2004). Figure 4a-2 Key Juvenile Justice Decision Points and Options, p. 105.

¹² Boston Youth Transition Task Force (Mar 2006). Too Big To Be Seen: The High School Dropout Crisis in Boston and America.

¹³ The YouthARTS Development Project (May 2001). Juvenile Justice Bulletin. Available: www.ncjrs.gov.

¹⁴ Ezell, M. (Sep 2003). An evaluation of an arts program for incarcerated juvenile offenders. *Journal of Correctional Education*. Available: FindArticles.com.

¹⁵ Sidel, S. Stand and Unfold Yourself: A Monograph on the Shakespeare & Company Research Study. In E Fiske (Ed.), *Champions of Change: The Impact of the Arts on Learning*. The Arts Education Partnership and the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, Washington, DC, 1999: 79-90.

classrooms, interest and support for expanding opportunities for arts participation within DYS from various stakeholders is increasing. A combination of public and private resources is needed to help effective programs deepen their work and improve their infrastructure and to support greater collaboration, coordination and knowledge sharing across arts organizations – allowing more youth to benefit.

Social Innovation in Action: The Incarcerated Youth at Play Model

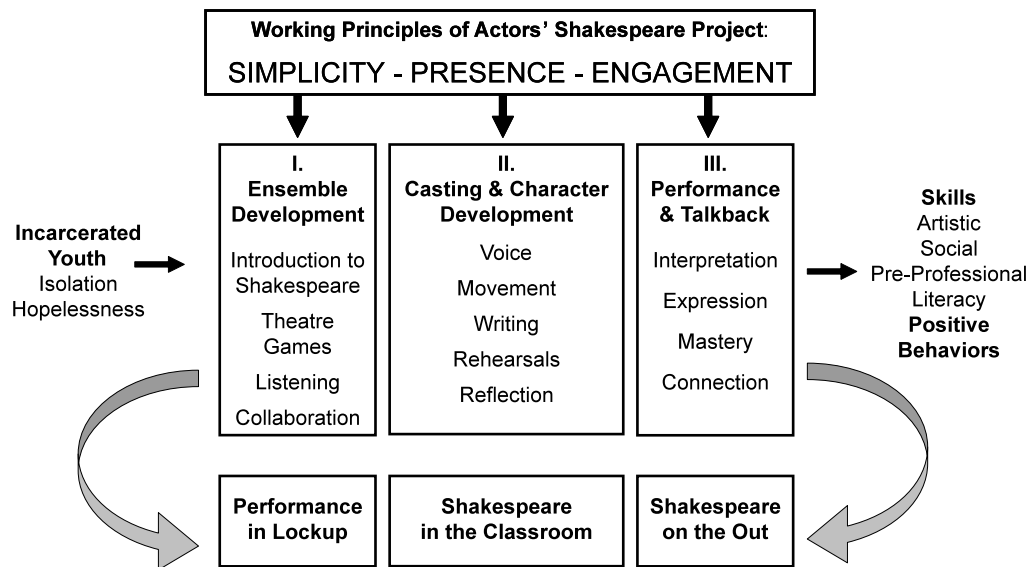
Starting as a pilot, volunteer-led program in August 2005, Incarcerated Youth at Play has become a cornerstone of the Actors' Shakespeare Project (ASP). ASP presents Shakespeare as a playwright who is urgently relevant today. By creating site-specific, fully professional productions in and around Boston that celebrate the relationship between actor, audience, and text, ASP engages communities in Shakespeare's words, stories, and deeply human characters. Through Incarcerated Youth at Play, ASP is tailoring its approach to the unique context of the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, working deeply with juvenile offenders to give them both tools and support to transform their lives. Based on ASP's mission, Incarcerated Youth at Play incorporates the following principles into all of its activities:

- *Presence*: Speaking freely, listening fully and responding to the space
- *Simplicity*: Focusing on story-telling, communication and committing to the expression of words in voice and body
- *Engagement*: Being in relationship with others

The graphic (below) shows Incarcerated Youth at Play's core approach to putting these principles into practice with youth. The work takes place over three phases:

- I. *Ensemble Development*: Establishment of process guidelines with DYS staff and youth, initial exposure to Shakespeare, theatre games, and problem-solving work in small groups.
- II. *Casting and Character Development*: Selection of a specific Shakespeare play, character assignment, voice and movement work, writing, rehearsals, and comprehensive reflection to examine the implications of Shakespeare's words and concepts.
- III. *Performance and Talkback*: A stage performance to an audience, which includes poetry and expository writing by the participants alongside Shakespeare's words to demonstrate mastery of concept and artistic expression through interpretation and portrayal of character.

By taking on Shakespeare's characters, making his words their words, and performing as an ensemble with caring adults, incarcerated youth begin to experience connection and restoration. They are able to transcend "what is" and imagine (even hope for) "what could be," often for the first time in their lives.¹⁶



¹⁶ From presentation by H. Mark Smith, YouthReach Program Manager, Massachusetts Cultural Council, March 27, 2007.

This approach is applied consistently in all of the programming that Incarcerated Youth at Play provides. Youth have the opportunity to experience Shakespeare during and after school while they are in DYS facilities, and beginning in 2008, as they transition back into the community:

- *Performance in Lockup*: Ensemble members--youth, DYS staff and teachers--participate in theater games; choral work; language, voice and movement work; text analysis; and journaling. The work culminates in a performance for other incarcerated youth, DYS staff, and guests.
- *Shakespeare in the Classroom*: Teachers receive training and coaching to integrate theater techniques, personal storytelling, and a performance of Shakespeare into their curricula. The training is designed to align with state academic standards and high school graduation requirements.
- *Shakespeare on the Out*: Youth who are transitioning from DYS back into the community participate in a year-long education and mentorship program designed in conjunction with their DYS social worker, teachers and parents. The program also includes participation in workplace training, Shakespeare classes and public performances. This will be piloted over the next 18 months with 8-10 girls.

In addition to the above activities, Incarcerated Youth at Play is also a member of several informal working groups across the state that are committed to promoting positive change in youth who are involved with the juvenile correctional system. Staff are part of key discussions with other arts providers, DYS program leaders and staff, judges, and policy makers about how best to address the needs of these youth and expand arts-based prevention and intervention programs.

Social Impact

I learned I am capable of doing things I never thought I would do.
- Participant in the CAMP Amesbury Performance in Lockup

Incarcerated Youth at Play recently completed a pilot evaluation based on a 2006 ensemble performance with girls in lockup. The evaluation used a combined approach developed by an external evaluator: pre- and post-participation assessment checklists, pre- and post-participation questionnaires for youth, interviews with staff, and review of youth portfolios (e.g. audio samples, journal writings, performance pieces). Together, the data indicate:

- During their time in the program, the girls went from using the following learned skills only on occasion to using them often:
 - Maintaining eye contact
 - Listening respectfully
 - Giving constructive feedback
 - Participating in discussion
 - Writing in their journals
 - Working as a group
- DYS staff reported that the program helped the girls develop positive behaviors, such as patience, cooperation, and the ability to compromise and be non-judgmental.
- The longer the girls were in the program, the more their negative behavior decreased.
- The girls learned to use the arts as a means to express themselves, and recognized this ability as an alternative to fighting. Many set concrete artistic goals for themselves for the first time.
- The girls realized they could do things they did not believe they could do, learning they could work through their fears, rely on each other, and take positive risks without being judged.

Based on lessons learned, the evaluation methodology and tools are currently being revised. Over the next year, Incarcerated Youth at Play will be refining how it tracks changes in the above social, artistic, and pre-professional skills and will add measures to capture changes in literacy skills. Incarcerated Youth at Play is seeking resources to build a data collection, analysis, and reporting system to begin to ascertain whether the participants are able to maintain changes in their behavior and, for those who leave DYS facilities, how they are relating to the larger community.

Organizational & Program Health Measures

Incarcerated Youth at Play is tracking the data below to measure the program's growth and development:

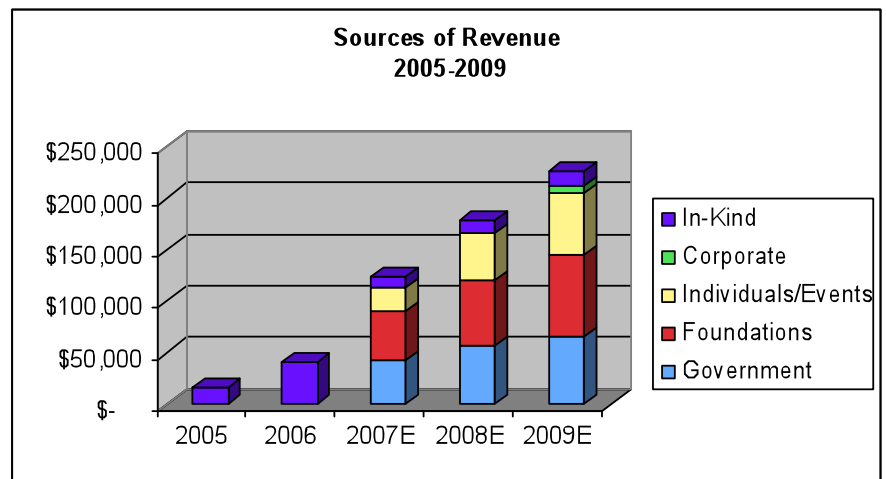
	2006	2007E	2008E	2009E
Number of DYS facilities	1	5	6	6
Number of youth participating in ensemble productions	9	38	80	85
Number of youth transitioning to community through Shakespeare on the Out	0	6	8	10
Number of teachers trained	0	65	65	65
Number of teachers/other staff participating in ensemble productions	3	5	12	12

Financial Sustainability

What began as a volunteer-led pilot effort with one group of girls has now developed into a spectrum of programs for girls and boys, teachers and staff. Seeking to incorporate lessons learned and improve its ability to create lasting outcomes for participating youth, Incarcerated Youth at Play will begin to slow its growth over the next two years to focus on program depth and capacity building. Changes include: lengthening the Performance in Lockup curriculum from four weeks to 12 weeks, adding Shakespeare on the Out to ensure ongoing support for youth transitioning back into the community during probation, and adding staff to provide administrative support. Projected budget growth to support this work is shown in the table below:

	2005	2006	2007E	2008E	2009E
Total Budget	\$17,720	\$40,953	\$112,519	\$159,968	\$205,013
FTEs	0.2	0.35	1.75	2.3	2.3

Over its first two years, Incarcerated Youth at Play was supported wholly by ASP. 2007 is the first year that Incarcerated Youth at Play has its own designated funding. The initiative continues to be an integral part of its parent organization, and benefits tremendously from ASP infrastructure. In addition, ASP makes a deliberate effort to align its professional productions in Boston with all of its education and outreach programs whenever possible, including Incarcerated Youth at Play. As an example, the organization engages actors who are in the professional productions to work with Incarcerated Youth at Play and includes information in the performance programs, reaching thousands of audience members. To ensure long-term financial sustainability, Incarcerated Youth at Play is building a diversified base of government, foundation and individual support, as shown in the chart (right).



Leadership

Lori Taylor is the founder of Incarcerated Youth at Play and the Director of Education and Outreach for Actors' Shakespeare Project. Before working with ASP, Lori served as the Director of the Teacher Residency Program at The MET in Providence, R.I., a teacher training program that targets young adults from urban communities who aspire to be teachers. She worked for nine years at The Cambridge School of Weston, where she taught history, was Dean of Faculty, and founded The Shakespeare Ensemble. Taylor received her M.A.T. from Brown University in 1993, where she helped create S.P.A.C.E., an arts program at the Swearer Center that works with incarcerated women in Rhode Island.

ASP is led by the Executive Director, Sara Stackhouse, and Artistic Director Benjamin Evett, who work closely with the board, the Director of Education and Outreach, the Marketing Director, and the ASP Resident Company (of actors and teachers). The ASP Board has 11 members with experience in law, business, public relations, philanthropy, and the arts.

Key Funders

Incarcerated Youth at Play has received funding from a variety of sources, demonstrating support for the organization's approach and results to date:

- Barr Foundation
- Clare and Geoffrey Nunes Foundation
- Cloud Foundation (in-kind)
- Hampshire Educational Collaborative -
Unlocking the Light
- Harman Family Foundation
- Hunt Alternatives Fund
- Parker Family Foundation
- Massachusetts Department of Youth
Services