
Our New Name

Many thanks to Nathaniel and Ashleigh Axios for donating time and energy towards designing our new print collateral and website!

This year has brought a special occasion to celebrate the life of our organization. After 10 successful years, we have outgrown the name **Mentoring Today** and have become Open City Advocates. With a new name comes new energy, understanding, and excitement about our work. Although mentoring remains a primary component of how we connect with youth, advocacy is the true linchpin of our program as our staff and volunteers zealously fight to ensure that the voices and choices of our clients are heard. And although most of our youth

have lived in Washington, DC, their entire lives, they do not feel that the city and its resources are open to them. Our mentor-advocates help bridge the divisions in our city and open doors for our youth. An open city also evokes ideas of transparency and accountability. Through our community partnerships, we are working to ensure that DC's juvenile justice system is effective, accountable to our city's youth, and transparent in its policies.

Honoring Our Youth's Champions

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Although there were a great many reasons to celebrate this past year, there were also moments to grieve. This July, I celebrated the life and mourned the passing of one of the greatest teachers and mentors in my life – Shirley Carson Ray. Shirley was a passionate and committed supporter of our work and donated dozens of times each year. With each birth of a new child or the passing of an old friend, she donated in celebration of life. With each check she sent, Shirley included a bit about the person whom she was honoring and, in this way, inspired me every day to remember the brevity of life and to give each day my all. In 2012, we honored Shirley as our Donor of the Year. To me, however, she will forever be my ballet teacher who taught me that life is less about the performance on stage and more about connecting with each and every person who turns their eyes in our direction. Towards the end of her life, Shirley confided in me that her greatest concern was that she hadn't given enough – there were more children in poverty, more people in jail cells,

and more of her very own neighbors who needed love and support. She gave every spare penny she had and she gave all the love in her heart, which was immense and eternal. Shirley Carson Ray understood that these youth are our children.



Shirley Carson Ray circa 1949

Join Open City Advocates in our mission. Treat the young people in our juvenile justice system like you would your own. Believe in them. Care for them. Invest in them.

The Cost to Our Youth and Our City if We Do Not Act

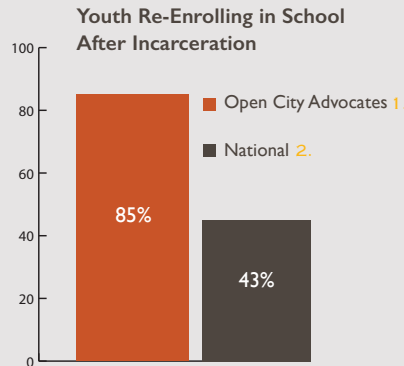
1. This includes all youth who have received our services.

2. Nationally, 43% of incarcerated youth in the U.S. never return to school at all. (Bloomberg, Bales, and Waid, *Education, Post Release Return to School, Employment and Crime Desistance Among Incarcerated Youth*, Nov. 3, 2006, College of Criminality and Justice, Los Angeles.)

3. See the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services' Specialized Reports at <http://dyrs.dc.gov/page/dyrs-specialized-publications>.

4. This includes all youth who completed our program from FY11 through FY14.

Over the past ten years, I've noticed that most people in our community don't take a lot of time to think about prisoners. They think a lot about crime and making sure that the neighborhood is safe for their kids. But other than calling the police when they see suspicious or criminal activity, they aren't sure what else they can do. And yet they can

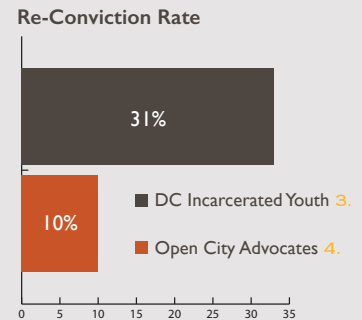
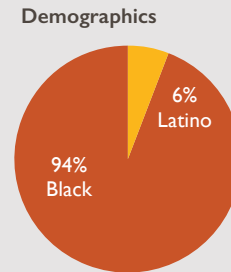


do something – they can invest in services that help our young people avoid a life of crime and instead achieve bright futures.

At Open City Advocates, we work to ensure a meaningful re-entry plan for each of our clients, who are often seen merely as a menace to the community. We then work to implement that re-entry plan by helping our participants re-enroll in school, obtain a job or vocational training, find safe and stable housing, and play a meaningful role in their family and community.

In the District of Columbia, it costs more than \$275,000 per year to lock up a child. That figure is even more shocking when we

know that 31% of youth are convicted of a new offense within a mere six months of release! In comparison, the youth who receive the services of Open City Advocates are reconvicted at just one-third that rate. The cost to support a young person in our program for a full year is \$5,700 – just



2% of the cost of locking them up and with triple the impact!

An investment in Open City Advocates makes our nation's capital safer, saves money, and tells our children that we have faith in them.

Keeping Our Eyes on Our Youth

Open City Advocates dreams of a day when our city opens its arms to all the youth within it. But the sad reality is that our city, like most communities around the country, continues to rely on incarceration far more than it invests in community-based programs. Given that reality, Open City Advocates is dedicated to going behind the barbed wire, to sit with our young people side by side, and to show them that they are not forgotten. They are our children. We also stand by their parents and families, bearing witness to the pain they feel as their children are pulled out of their arms by the justice system or by violence in the streets. We often lament the loss of the days when all the neighbors kept an eye

on the kids to make sure they were behaving and that they were safe. When we lock children away in juvenile institutions, we take away those eyes, often subjecting our youth to the most inhumane and unsafe environments. We at Open City Advocates make sure our young people know they are not forgotten and that they have family, friends, and a community that cares about them. And we make sure that the juvenile justice system hears the voices of those at its mercy and treats them with the dignity and respect they deserve. If ever my own children were in such dire need of services, I would want the same for them.