

2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT



Big Wins for 'Ban the Box' Campaign To Widen College Access



DEAR SUPPORTERS AND FRIENDS,

After a decade of work spearheaded by CCA's Justice Strategies team and its partners to expose and dismantle barriers to higher education for people with criminal records, justice is finally dawning.

In May 2016, the U.S. Department of Education released landmark guidance that draws heavily on findings and recommendations from CCA's three major reports on the issue. The new federal guide, "Beyond the Box: Increasing Access to Higher Education for Justice-Involved Individuals," encourages colleges and universities to eliminate barriers to higher education for people with criminal history records.

U.S. Secretary of Education John King specifically cited CCA's work at a press conference announcing the new guide. CCA Senior Policy Fellow Marsha

Weissman and Vivian Nixon, cofounder

of the Education from the Inside Out (EIO) Coalition, of which CCA is a lead member, both were invited guests at the conference.

In September 2016, the campaign attained an even more meaningful threshold: the Board of Trustees of the State University of New York (SUNY), the nation's largest comprehensive university system, voted to "ban the box" asking about criminal history records in its admissions process. It thus became the first university system in the country to reverse a practice of conducting criminal history screening.

SUNY based its decision on the findings of CCA's case study, published in 2015, "Boxed Out: Criminal History Screening and College Application Attrition." Two-thirds of individuals with felony convictions who started applications to SUNY schools never finished

them, compared to an application attrition rate of 21% for the overall applicant pool. Citing "Boxed Out" repeatedly in the resolution establishing the policy change, SUNY recognized that the practice of asking about criminal history records was deterring qualified applicants, especially people of color, from completing the application process.

Access to higher education for people with criminal history records is a civil rights issue. In the context of a criminal justice system that disproportionately ensnares people of color, questions about criminal histories function as a tool of race-based exclusion. Our victories this year are precious because they promise to open doors to higher education for people who, as Secretary King put it, "were involved in the criminal justice system in the past but paid their debt to society."

In other heartening developments, CCA has received one of 18 federal "JRAP" awards designed to help young people up to the age of 24 who have been involved in the criminal justice system to overcome barriers to employment, education and housing. It has also received a grant from the New York City Council to increase the number of New Yorkers facing sentencing who will receive expert sentencing mitigation help, so that their sentences will be more fair and appropriate.

We may be at the start of reversing an era of mass incarceration and criminalization of communities of color that has plagued us for too long. Yet much work remains to be done. We see every day in the courts and in our service programs the tragic impact of an unjust, irrational system on people's lives. Please join us in our work to reduce reliance on incarceration and implement a more just and humane criminal justice system.

Handwritten signature of David Condliffe in black ink.

David Condliffe, Esq.
Executive Director

Handwritten signature of Daniel Arshack in black ink.

Daniel Arshack, Esq.
Board President



The CCA Justice Strategies team rejoices after SUNY's historic decision on September 14, 2016 to "ban the box." L-R: Luchele Chisunka, Marsha Weissman, Emily NaPier, Alan Rosenthal

on Admissions Applications— A Decade of Progress

This year's historic win with the State University of New York (SUNY) to ban the box was set in motion a decade ago when a client came to CCA after encountering a policy denying admission at a community college to certain applicants with felony convictions. That client's experience prompted Justice Strategies, CCA's research and policy advocacy division, to investigate the extent to which colleges across the country were screening applicants for criminal history records and the impact of such practices on access to higher education—especially for people of color. Since that encounter with a client 10 years ago, our work has fueled a national movement to restore the fundamental human right to education for people who have been "boxed out."

Justice Strategies expanded the scope of the movement last year by releasing, "Education Suspended: The Use of High School Disciplinary Records in College Admissions" and drawing attention to the ways in which college admissions practices contribute to the school-to-prison pipeline. Over the past year, we have worked with the Syracuse City School District and Chicago Public Schools, and both districts have now adopted policies prohibiting the disclosure of their students' disciplinary records to colleges. Director of Justice Strategies Emily NaPier said, "These concrete policy changes in New York and Chicago at both the college and high school level set an example for the rest of the country, and we will continue to work to make college access a reality for the millions of people across the country who are waiting for their second chance."

2006 Client referred to CCA for help with admissions process after encountering a policy at a SUNY community college that denied admission to persons with felony convictions who resided outside the county.

2007 CCA develops and presents, in conjunction with the National HIRE Network, "Unchaining Civil Rights: You Can Call it What You Want to, It's Still Jim Crow," a website and presentation on the exclusion of people with criminal histories from education and other domains.

APR 2008 CCA releases, in conjunction with the National HIRE Network, "Closing the Doors to Education: Another Collateral Consequence of a Criminal Conviction."

NOV 2010 CCA releases the first national study on the issue, "The Use of Criminal History Records in College Admissions Reconsidered."

2012 Benay Rubenstein, a Soros Justice Fellow hosted by CCA, releases the documentary film, "Passport to the Future: Accessing Higher Education in an Era of Mass Incarceration."

2013 CCA becomes one of three lead organizations of the Education from the Inside Out (EIO) Coalition.

CCA releases "A Guide for Attorneys Representing College Applicants and Students During and After Criminal Proceedings."

JAN 2014 The Fair Access to Education Act, drafted in part by CCA and other EIO leaders, is introduced in the New York State Legislature.

SEP 2014 A *New York Times* editorial highlights CCA's report, "The Use of Criminal History Records in College Admissions Reconsidered" and endorses its recommendations and the Fair Access to Education Act.

MAR 2015 CCA releases its case study of the SUNY admissions process, "Boxed Out: Criminal History Screening and College Application Attrition."

A *New York Times* editorial endorses recommendations from CCA's report.

MAY 2015 CCA releases the first national study on how colleges rely on high school disciplinary records: "Education Suspended: The Use of High School Disciplinary Records in College Admissions."

A *New York Times* editorial endorses recommendations from the May report.

DEC 2015 The Syracuse (NY) City School District adopts a policy prohibiting the disclosure of student disciplinary records to colleges.

FEB 2016 The Associated Press releases a national print and video package on the work of CCA on the use of high school disciplinary records in college admissions.

APR 2016 *The Atlantic* publishes an in-depth article highlighting the work of CCA on the use of criminal history records in college admissions.

MAY 2016 The U.S. Department of Education releases "Beyond the Box" guidance, drawing heavily on CCA's work.

A *New York Times* editorial again highlights CCA's report "Boxed Out" and endorses "Beyond the Box" guidance from U.S. Department of Education.

JUN 2016 The U.S. Department of Education encourages colleges and universities to take the "Fair Access to Higher Education Pledge" and follow the "Beyond the Box" guidance.

SEP 2016 The SUNY Board of Trustees votes to remove questions about criminal history records from its admissions process.

Chicago Public Schools adopts a policy prohibiting the disclosure of student disciplinary records to colleges.

SENTENCING MITIGATION PROJECT GROWS IN BROOKLYN

CCA has been awarded a grant from the New York City Council to expand its sentencing advocacy services for clients facing possible prison terms. The funds will be used to hire and train staff to work with defense counsel in preparing clients for sentencing. The grant was awarded after Justice Joseph Zayas, Administrative Judge of the Queens County Supreme Court, noted the need for these services.

Sentencing advocacy services have been integral to CCA's programs both upstate and in New York City since the agency's founding. From July 2011-June 2012, these services saved clients approximately 41,530 days that would otherwise have been spent in jail or prison.

Limited funding, however, has made it challenging to serve even a fraction of the clients and families who are facing harsh sentences in court. The expanded program will focus on young people (male and female) ages 16-24 who are charged with criminal offenses, with a particular emphasis on those 16-18 years of age who are eligible for youthful offender status. A thorough investigation will be conducted into each client's history and circumstances. Comprehensive reports will be developed for the court, including recommendations, psycho-social histories, and evaluations of the strength and vulnerabilities of the client. Services will also include referrals to treatment, employment, vocational or educational programs, housing and other support services. We expect that 30 clients will benefit from these services in the course of a year.



Justice Joseph Zayas initiated the request to expand CCA's sentencing advocacy services.

EARNING A LIVING, DOING WHAT THEY LOVE

Rafael Quintana, 41, and Mark Mullervy, 24, came to CCA for help after being incarcerated. They made such positive impressions that they were hired after a short time to join CCA's staff. Both now draw on their personal experience to work as role models with youth, showing them how to stay healthy and safe in their communities.

Quintana, known to his friends as "Q," was incarcerated for 10 years in a prison in Connecticut. Released in September 2015, he came to live with his sister in Brooklyn and was directed to CCA's Crossroads program by his parole officer. When he learned that CCA also had programs for youth who had been arrested, he asked if he could help. He was soon placed in a mentoring project.

Laurel Rinaldi, Director of Youth Development and Special Projects, said, "From the beginning, Q had an amazing ability to engage youth. He would walk into a group who were bored and restless and he'd bring out board games. In a short time, he'd have them opening up."

Q's dedication and rapport with the youth was so notable that Rinaldi soon hired him in a staff position. He is now a full-time compliance monitor in the Alternative to Detention (ATD) program, working with juvenile-justice-involved youth ages 11-16 who are mandated to the program by Brooklyn Family Court. He said, "I never had a father, so being a kind of father to the youth means a lot to me. I love working with them. I would do this for free. I want to give something back."

Mark Mullervy has been involved in CCA since he was 20, when he was charged with a crime allegedly related to gang involvement in Brooklyn. He joined Brooklyn Justice Corps, a CCA program that engages young adults with criminal justice histories in community service projects. He helped repaint a church in Bushwick. "That meant something to me because Bushwick was the community where I was charged with a crime," he said. At the same time, CCA staff helped him with his case. He said, "Eventually, my case was dismissed partly because of the way the CCA staff stood up for me."

After asking about permanent positions at CCA, Mark was hired as an outreach worker in New Roads to Health, a new federally funded project that prepares youth to become peer leaders and educate their communities about STD and substance abuse prevention.

He said, "When I was young, I went from home to home. I never had a stable family. Now I wear a jacket and button shirt to work. I want the youth to know the streets have nothing to offer them. The people here are my family. I feel love here. I participate. There's nowhere else I'd rather be."



"I would do this for free. I want to give something back."

—Rafael Quintana



"I want the youth to know the streets have nothing to offer them."

—Mark Mullervy

CCA and Syracuse Housing Authority

WIN FEDERAL GRANT TO ASSIST COURT-INVOLVED YOUTH

A new federal grant is making it possible for CCA and the Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA) to help Syracuse youth and young adults remove the barriers to employment and education that are a frequent consequence of criminal convictions. The grant is one of just 18 in the nation awarded in spring 2016 under a new joint initiative of the U.S. Departments of Justice and Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

New York State received three of the 18 grants, and HUD chose Syracuse as the site of its press conference. The grant will provide assistance to 80 individuals in Syracuse up to the age of 24 who either live in public housing or would be living in public housing if it were not for their criminal records.

Two participants in CCA services, David Lefler and Alec Hanreck, spoke at the press event. Lefler said that he grew up in foster care and had to steal when he was young to get enough to eat. He enrolled in a program run by CCA's Reintegration Services while he was incarcerated in a county facility. He said, "I have been taught ways to stay out of the justice system and avoid situations that would put me back there." Lefler now has a job and is able to see his 3-year-old child twice a week.

Alec Hanreck was denied a job because of a criminal record, but after enrolling in CCA's Parent Success Initiative, he was helped to file a complaint with the Division of Human Rights. As a result, he not only got the job, but the company changed its hiring policy. He said, "I don't know if I would have kept persevering if not for the program. Now I have graduated college with a Bachelor's degree and am looking forward to my second chance."

Syracuse Housing Authority is the lead agency for the grant. CCA staff, including Heather Crimmins, CCA's attorney for the Juvenile Reentry Assistance Project (JRAP), provides legal services to participants. Community outreach will be conducted at SHA sites and other community locales to identify and engage eligible participants.

"After a court appearance or a conviction, young people encounter obstacles to housing, education and employment that can send them into a permanent downward spiral," said Kelly Gonzalez, CCA's Director of Advocacy Services.

"This new grant will help us give critical assistance that will reduce barriers and open up productive futures."



David Lefler and Alec Hanreck

The New York State system is particularly harsh as youth are automatically prosecuted as adults at the age of 16 and can be sent through the adult system when they are as young as 13. Under the new grant, CCA will assure that youth who are eligible for youthful offender status will receive that designation and the protections that go with it. Participants will also learn how to respond to questions on employment applications and will receive assistance obtaining Certificates of Rehabilitation, which prospective employers must consider in an applicant's favor. Legal assistance to correct mistakes in criminal records is also a feature of the program. A recent study of the criminal records of a sample of CCA clients showed an error rate of 83%, including many that could bar an individual from a job, housing, or education.

Holly Leicht, HUD regional administrator, said, "It's difficult for anybody to transition from the criminal system back into society but we feel youth are a particularly challenged population because they didn't have the skills before they went into the system to navigate that world."

"Every day I get letters from families that can't find housing, from people who are re-entering...There are just not enough resources to go around for all the people who are in need."

The new project will help fill the gap for young people in Syracuse.

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CCA is grateful to all its private and public supporters. Your belief in the work we do is vital to the struggle for reintegrative justice.

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New Board Members Named

CCA welcomed two new distinguished New York City professionals at its June 2016 meeting.



RICHARD RAYSMAN is a law partner in the New York City office of Holland and Knight. He concentrates on computer law, outsourcing, complex technology transactions and intellectual property issues. He is a regular guest columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*, writes a monthly column on Technology Law for the *New York Law Journal*, and is a member of the Practical Law Company Advisory Board for Intellectual Property and Technology. He was named "Best of the Best" in 2015 by Legal Media Group's *Expert Guides*, selected by Chambers USA as a leading outsourcing lawyer, and named by Super Lawyers as a top practitioner. Through his career, he has demonstrated a personal commitment to the issues that are close to CCA's mission.



C. GLENN SCHOR is the founder and CEO of Treeline Companies. With long-term roots in Brooklyn and Long Island, he has over 35 years of experience as a developer, investor and attorney. Mr. Schor directs investor relations and is responsible for property acquisitions and financing at Treeline. He is actively involved in a variety of business, educational and philanthropic organizations, including the Real Estate Board of New York, Building Owners and Managers Association, Brooklyn Law School Alumni Association, the Economic Assistance Corporation, and Friends of Israel's Disabled Veterans.

OUR MISSION

The Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) is a leader in the field of community-based alternatives to incarceration. Our mission is to promote reintegrative justice and a reduced reliance on incarceration through advocacy, services and public policy development in pursuit of civil and human rights.



Men's Wearhouse and Internship Program Make Clothing Drive a Success

In summer 2016, CCA/Syracuse was selected by Men's Wearhouse for their national clothing drive for the eighth year in a row. Men's Wearhouse, a national chain, dedicates its annual drive to helping men and women who are transitioning back into the workforce, including those with past criminal histories. The stores' customers donate gently used clothing and receive a discount on purchases of new clothing. CCA collects the donated clothes and invites its participants to "shop" for merchandise suitable for job interviews or work.

As the event has become bigger and more popular, a summer college intern program has become critical to its success. The internship program has its roots in CCA's involvement in the United Way of Central New York, which connected CCA with SRC, a national technology company based in Syracuse. The interns are the college-age children of SRC employees, attending schools such as Niagara University and Rochester Institute of Technology.

The students find the internships helpful to earn money for their college expenses, gain work and experience, and add to their resumes. In turn, they make a vital contribution to keeping the clothing drive on track, as well as providing assistance with such ongoing projects as program data analysis.

Mike Pasquale, Director of Reintegration Services, said, "We're very fortunate to be part of the annual Men's Wearhouse clothing drive along with SRC's internship program. The drive has grown tremendously and it is a lot of effort to stay on top of it. In the beginning, we had



Ed Maddox, case manager, Thomas LoSecco, 2016 intern, and Patricia Taylor, employment trainer, keep things moving at the Men's Wearhouse clothing drive

only a few racks to display the clothes. Now we have a real closet where we can display the clothes attractively. That's important because this year alone, we received 1100 items of clothing to distribute."

The interns enjoy the mix of hands-on work on the clothing drive and more traditional office work, and CCA participants appreciate their help and the opportunity to shop at no charge.

Christine Abaté, Deputy Director, added, "It's been great to have the internship program coincide with our growing need for assistance with employment programs. The collaboration with United Way and SRC is an important model of a community working together to benefit everyone."



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