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An Analysis of Programs to Engage At-risk Juveniles for the Clarksdale Boys of Color Initiative

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**An Analysis of Programs to Engage At-risk Juveniles
for the Clarksdale Boys of Color Initiative**

Harvard Law School Mississippi Delta Project

Fall 2014

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I. Introduction¹

This report aims to assist the Clarksdale Boys of Color Initiative (CBCI) in the development and implementation of programs and strategies to serve at-risk youth in Clarksdale, Mississippi. While this report was created specifically to assist CBCI, this report also aspires to be helpful to programs that are doing similar work in different communities, specifically rural areas within the Mississippi Delta Region (“the Delta”). The burgeoning problems facing young men from minority backgrounds are not unique to the Delta, and thus the solutions outlined in this report should be useful to communities around the country working to fight these problems.

At-risk youth are often ignored until their behavior develops into criminal or destructive behavior. Then they are blamed. Rather than simply reprimanding juveniles when they concede to the pressures of their environments, preventive and supportive methods should be undertaken to direct these juveniles into healthy and productive lifestyles. President Obama recognized the need for such programs when he established the My Brother’s Keeper Initiative (“MBKI”). The initiative is about “[h]elping more of our young people stay on track. Providing the support they need to think more broadly about their future. Building on what works – when it works, in those critical life-changing moments.”² This is also the goal of this report, working with these directives to find programs that can assist at-risk youths in actualizing change.

The White House launched MBKI to address the historical lack of opportunities for boys and young men of color.³ However, in launching MBKI, President Obama recognized that the country was not starting from scratch. Part of MBKI’s goal was to “build on [the] work” of the communities across the country who are already building programs “to help put these boys and young men on the path to success.”⁴ This report seeks to mirror MBKI’s founding philosophy: to harness the examples of these communities already doing this work to assist CBCI in its mission in the Delta.

To accomplish this mission, this report recognizes the interconnectedness and complexity of the challenges facing boys and young men of color. The historical lack of opportunity that MBKI seeks to address touches on multiples areas of people’s lives. One of the most glaring connections between different areas of these boys’ lives can be found between the mental health, school, and juvenile justice systems. The overrepresentation of students from minority

¹ This report was prepared by Amanda Savage and Seth Packrone, members of the Harvard Law School Mississippi Delta Project under the supervision of Desta Reff of Delta Directions. The following students from the Harvard Mississippi Delta Project were involved in researching and drafting the report: Maria Makar, Amalia Reiss, Joseph Resnek, and Katherine Taylor.

² *My Brother’s Keeper*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Feb. 27, 2014), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/my-brothers-keeper>.

³ *FACT SHEET: Opportunity for all: President Obama Launches My Brother’s Keeper Initiative to Build Ladder of Opportunity For Boys and Young Men of Color*, THE WHITE HOUSE (Feb. 27, 2014), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/02/27/fact-sheet-opportunity-all-president-obama-launches-my-brother-s-keeper>.

⁴ *Id.*

backgrounds in the special education system is a well-documented problem.⁵ Furthermore, studies have shown that as many as 70 percent of incarcerated juveniles have some kind of disability, including physical or mental health disabilities, compared to just 13 percent of public school students nationwide having some kind of disability.⁶ These statistics suggest that effective solutions to the challenges facing boys and young men from minority backgrounds must address multiple systems, including the education and mental health.

Accordingly, this report researched and analyzed four types of programs: recreational, community-based, mental health, and school and after-school programs. For each category, research is provided about pre-established, successful programs that are already operating in different parts of the country to serve as models. The commonalities between these organizations are highlighted and ways to launch similar initiatives are suggested. Recommendations for how CBCI can utilize this research to implement similar programs in Clarksdale are discussed. The goal of this report is to develop tangible strategies and program ideas that can be carried out nationwide but also specifically by the Clarksdale Boys of Color Initiative in the Mississippi Delta. While each of these programs is effective on an individual level, they are more effective when collectively used to comprehensively address issues boys of color face.

II. Contextualizing Clarksdale

This section seeks to provide a brief overview of some of the relevant demographics and statistics about the city of Clarksdale. In addition to laying out this information, this section hopes to paint a picture of the current situation facing Clarksdale and Mississippi's education and juvenile justice systems in order to illustrate the lack of opportunities for young men of color within these areas and the need for programs to address this deficit.

A. Demographics

Clarksdale is a relatively small, mostly African-American town in the Northwest corner of Mississippi. According to 2013 Census Bureau estimates, the population of Clarksdale is approximately 17,000.⁷ Almost 31 percent of Clarksdale's population is below the age of eighteen,⁸ exceeding Mississippi's average of 25 percent youth.⁹ Clarksdale has a higher proportion of juveniles than the rest of Mississippi, and 79 percent of Clarksdale's population is

⁵ Scholars have traced this overrepresentation back to the "tangled relationship of special education and resegregation" in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*. Beth A. Ferry & David J. Connor, *In the Shadow of Brown: Special Education and Overrepresentation of Students of Color*, 26 REMEDIAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION 93, 93 (2005), available at http://www.academia.edu/261595/In_the_Shadow_of_Brown_Special_Education_and_Overrepresentation_of_Students_of_Color; See generally RACIAL INEQUITY IN SPECIAL EDUCATION (Daniel J. Losen and Gary Orfield, eds., 2005) (2002).

⁶ Sue Burrell & Loren Warboys, *Special Education and the Juvenile Justice System*, JUVENILE JUSTICE BULLETIN, 1 (July, 2000), available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/179359.pdf>.

⁷ *State and County QuickFacts*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Dec. 4, 2014), <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/28/2813820.html>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

black or African-American, compared to 37 percent of the state as a whole.¹⁰ Furthermore, Clarksdale is a community of concentrated poverty, with a median household income of about \$25,000, compared to about \$39,000 for the rest of the state¹¹ and \$53,046 for the country.¹² Based on its demographics, Clarksdale is clearly an area that could greatly benefit from MBKI and the work of CBCI.

B. School Issues

The statistics describing Clarksdale's (and Mississippi's, more broadly) education and juvenile justice systems further demonstrate the need for the kind of programs that CBCI seeks to implement. For example, Mississippi spends over \$2,000 less a year per student than the national average. In 2011, the average national expenditure per-pupil in the United States was \$11,864.¹³ In Mississippi, the average expenditure was \$9,542.¹⁴ Lower spending per-pupil results in fewer special services and programs for Mississippi students.

The restricted resources available to Mississippi youth have resulted in a number of negative outcomes. Mississippi has one of the lowest high school graduation rates in the country, and Clarksdale's average falls even lower. In 2012, Mississippi ranked second to last among states (ahead of only Nevada) for the percent of students who graduate high school within five years.¹⁵ And in Clarksdale, the high school graduation rate is on the *decline*; from 2008 to 2012, Clarksdale's high school graduation rate dropped from approximately 72 percent to just below 56 percent, while the graduation in Mississippi as a whole steadily rose to 75.5 percent in 2012.¹⁶ Fewer of Mississippi's youth are graduating from high school on time (within four years) compared to the national average, with 32 percent of Mississippi students in 2012 missing the mark compared to only 19 percent nationally.¹⁷ The flipside of Clarksdale's depressed and declining graduation rates is an elevated dropout rate. In Clarksdale, dropout rates have nearly tripled from 2008 to 2012, rising from 11.9 percent to 35 percent (compared to only about 14 percent in Mississippi as a whole).¹⁸

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *State and County QuickFacts*, U.S. CENSUS BUREAU (Dec. 3, 2014), <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>.

¹³ *Per-pupil educational expenditures adjusted for regional cost differences*, KIDS COUNT DATA CENTER (July 2014), <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5199-per-pupil-educational-expenditures-adjusted-for-regional-cost-differences?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/2/26/true/867,133,38,35,18/any/11678>.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Graduation in the United States*, EDWEEK, <http://www.edweek.org/media/embargoed-graduation-in-the-united-states.pdf> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁶ *Graduation Rates*, KIDS COUNT DATA CENTER (Nov. 2013), <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7549-graduation-rates?loc=26&loct=2#detailed/10/7479/true/868,867,133,38,35/any/14680>.

¹⁷ *High School Students not Graduating on Time*, KIDS COUNT DATA CENTER (May 2014), <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7245-high-school-students-not-graduating-on-time?loc=1&loct=1#detailed/2/26/true/1024,937,809,712,517/any/14289,14290>.

¹⁸ *Dropout Rates*, KIDS COUNT DATA CENTER (Nov. 2013), <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7576-dropout-rates?loc=26&loct=2#detailed/10/7479/true/868,867,133,38,35/any/14722>.

Furthermore, both within Clarksdale and Mississippi as a whole, males (the target population of CBCI and this report) perform far worse than their female counterparts. Statewide in 2012, 10.6 percent of female students dropped out of high school while 17.1 percent of male students did.¹⁹ In Clarksdale, 30.8 percent of female students dropped out while 39.5 percent of male students did.²⁰ Similarly, the high school graduation rates for male students in Clarksdale are lower and have declined further than the graduation rates for female students. From 2008 to 2012, graduation rates for males in Clarksdale dropped from 69.4 percent to 49.3 percent, while the rate for females only dropped from 75.5 percent to 61.5 percent.²¹

The impact of low high school graduation and high dropout rates on society as a whole is dire. The most recent census found that high school graduates earned \$7,840 less per year in income compared to high school dropouts.²² Compared to high school dropouts, each high school graduate contributes nearly \$200,000 in public benefit over the course of their lifetimes.²³ This public benefit is actualized through additional tax revenue and lower spending on government programs (such as housing or food stamps).²⁴ In addition, high school dropouts are more likely to be incarcerated—almost 60 percent of federal inmates dropped out of high school²⁵—a factor that has both social and economic implications. Overall, high school dropouts cost Mississippi over \$450 million per year in lost revenue and costs associated with welfare and incarceration.²⁶ Indeed, if Mississippi raised its male graduation rate by just 5 percent, the state could experience \$188 million in annual savings and revenue from crime-related expenses.²⁷ Education and engaging schools is an integral piece to reform and the programs outlined in this report seek to address these problems in Clarksdale by providing structures and supports to help its youth graduate from high school.

C. Juvenile Justice System and the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Problems in school are interrelated and compounded by problems within the juvenile justice system in Clarksdale, in Mississippi, and across the country. Indeed, Mississippi schools arrest

¹⁹ *Selected Kids Count Indicators for Clarksdale, Mississippi*, KIDS COUNT DATA CENTER (Nov. 2013), <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/customreports/7479/6121,6125,6168,7549,7576,8215>.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. 1 (Nov. 2011), <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/HighCost.pdf>.

²³ *Id.* at 4.

²⁴ *Id.* at 3–4.

²⁵ Bill Whitaker, *High School Dropouts Costly for American Economy*, CBS NEWS (May 28, 2010), available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/05/28/eveningnews/main6528227.shtml>.

²⁶ *Facts and Statistics*, ON THE BUS: MISSISSIPPI'S DROPOUT PREVENTION PROGRAM (2008), http://www.onthebus.ms/facts_and_stats.html (as cited in *Mississippi Kids Count: High School Graduation Rates 5*, HARVARD LAW SCHOOL MISSISSIPPI DELTA PROJECT (2010), http://www.ssrc.msstate.edu/mskidscount/downloads/Harvard/2010_2011/HS%20Graduation%20Rates%20FINAL.pdf).

²⁷ *Saving Futures, Saving Dollars: The Impact of Education on Crime Reduction and Earnings*, ALLIANCE FOR EXCELLENT EDUC. 9 (Sep. 2013), <http://www.all4ed.org/files/SavingFutures.pdf>.

students and refer them to the juvenile justice system at very high rates.²⁸ In 2012, the number of juvenile offenders in Mississippi was 14,690 (almost 2 percent of the state's child population).²⁹ Clarksdale fares even worse. Coahoma County, the county in which Clarksdale sits, has 315 juvenile offenders (nearly 4 percent of the child population).³⁰ In Clarksdale, this rate generally rises over the summer, with criminal activity increasing when youths are out of school and have more idle time.³¹

Research suggests that the state's juvenile justice system cannot adequately respond to the number of youths arrested. A report on the Mississippi juvenile justice system found problems with untimely appointment of counsel, excessive caseloads, inadequate resources, and an overwhelming amount of school referrals.³² Furthermore, the Southern Poverty Law Center settled a 2012 case against one youth correction facility in the state,³³ while the Department of Justice filed a civil rights lawsuit against another.³⁴ The dysfunctional juvenile justice system perpetuates the problems Mississippi youth face, as it fails to provide the rehabilitation they need to succeed socially and educationally and to avoid further contact with the criminal justice system.

Students who become involved with the Mississippi juvenile justice system are removed from the classroom and moved through the school-to-prison pipeline where a jail cell awaits them on the other end. Upon release, these students enjoy a narrower range of life opportunities. Research has shown that a first-time arrest doubles the odds that a student will drop out of school, and a

²⁸ See *Handcuffs on Success: The Extreme School Discipline Problem in Mississippi Public Schools*, ADVANCEMENT PROJECT, ET AL. 9 (Jan. 2013), <http://www.advancementproject.org/resources/entry/handcuffs-on-success>.

²⁹ *Selected Kids Count Indicators for Coahoma County, Mississippi*, KIDS COUNT DATA CENTER (Nov. 2013), <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/customreports/3927/7077,7691-7692>.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ See *Clarksdale: Small Town, Big City Problems*, MYFOXMEMPHIS (Sep. 5, 2013), <http://www.myfoxmemphis.com/story/23294060/clarksdale-small-town-big-city-problems> (describing how in a two-week period in the summer of 2013, seven shootings and two homicides occurred).

³² Patricia Puritz et al., *Mississippi: An Assessment of Access to Counsel and Quality of Representation in Youth Court Proceedings*, S. POVERTY LAW CTR. 8 (Fall 2007), available at <http://www.splcenter.org/sites/default/files/downloads/publication/MSassessment.pdf>.

³³ *Groundbreaking Settlement in SPLC Case Protects Incarcerated Children from Abuse in Mississippi*, S. POVERTY LAW CTR. (Feb. 27, 2012), <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/news/groundbreaking-settlement-in-splc-case-protects-incarcerated-children-from-abuse-i>.

³⁴ *Justice Department Files Lawsuit in Mississippi to Protect the Constitutional Rights of Children*, DEP'T OF JUSTICE (Oct. 24, 2012), <http://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-files-lawsuit-mississippi-protect-constitutional-rights-children>.

first-time court appearance quadruples these odds.³⁵ Further, youth offenders are two-thirds more likely to recidivate by the age of 25 than those who were never incarcerated.³⁶

The demographics and statistics presented in this section illustrate why CBCI's mission in Clarksdale, to build programs that can engage young men and boys of color, is crucial to improving the lives of young people in the Delta. So many of the discussed problems exist because youth are not engaged in school or in the community. It is CBCI's mission to engage youth that this report seeks to support, not only in Clarksdale and the Mississippi Delta, but in all communities where the education and juvenile justice systems are struggling to adequately engage young men and boys of color. The remainder of this report focuses on four types of programs (community-based programs, mental health programs, recreational programs, and school and after-school programs) and recommendations for implementation in Clarksdale.

III. The Programs

A. Community-Based Programs

Considering the interconnectedness of the challenges facing young men and boys of color, programs rooted in the community can provide some of the most effective solutions. While further integrating youth into their communities, community-based programs can help support youth's development by addressing their needs through coordination and collaboration among different systems that already exist. Community systems, from local businesses to the police to schools, can work together in community-based programs. The concept of community-based programming can also represent a safety net for youths when other systems fail. These programs can empower communities to come together to solve their own problems.

This section highlights and focuses on a single program, Roca, which exemplifies a successful community-based approach to reaching at-risk youth. Through building partnerships with other local stakeholders, Roca has ingrained itself in the community. These partnerships have enabled Roca to obtain buy-in from other parts of its local community in Chelsea, Massachusetts, such as local businesses willing to hire youth involved with Roca, and expanded its potential impact. While this section only focuses on one program, Roca is comprised of numerous elements, many of which could be adopted by CBCI within Clarksdale.

Roca

Roca ("Rock" in Spanish) is a non-profit, community-based organization based in Chelsea, Massachusetts.³⁷ Roca's goal is to help the highest-risk young adults (including street, court and

³⁵ Gary Sweeten, *Who Will Graduate? Disruption of High School Education by Arrest and Court Involvement*, 23 JUSTICE QUARTERLY 462, 473 (2006), available at http://www.masslegalservices.org/system/files/library/H.S.ed_and_arrest_-_ct_involvement_study_by_Sweeten.pdf.

³⁶ Emily Le Coz & Jerry Mitchell, *Prison is 'College of Criminality,'* THE CLARION-LEDGER (Oct. 20, 2014), available at <http://www.clarionledger.com/story/news/2014/10/20/prison-college-criminality/17595587/>.

³⁷ See *History*, ROCA, INC., <http://rocainc.org/who-we-are/history/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

gang-involved youths, high school dropouts, and young parents) in the most dangerous neighborhoods by employing an interventionist approach.³⁸ Through this approach, Roca targets their programming towards individual high-risk youth engaged in some level of criminal activity.³⁹ Roca focuses on helping youth who are “unwilling or unable to attend traditional programming, work or school.”⁴⁰ Roca’s overarching goal goes beyond simply engaging youth, but to also help them develop the soft skills necessary to maintain employment, finish their educations, and become successful young adults.⁴¹

Roca employs a three-phase model. Throughout each phase, there is a focus on building strong, “transformational relationships”—the sort of consistent, healthy, and supportive relationships that many of the targeted youth have otherwise lacked in their lives.⁴² In the first phase, *engagement*, Roca works on getting at-risk youth to participate in Roca programming, which includes a wide range of educational, rehabilitative, and vocational activities (discussed in further detail below).⁴³ Roca’s stated goal is to “re-engage[] [the young people] through positive and intensive relationships [through which] they can gain competencies in life skills, education and employment that keep them out of prison [and] move them toward living out of harm’s way and toward economic independence.”⁴⁴ Roca does aggressive outreach—often going into the streets and physically pulling kids out of harm’s way and personally imploring them to join—in order to get youth to engage with Roca programming.⁴⁵ Each youth is then assigned a caseworker who advises the youth on programs in which he should enroll.⁴⁶

In the second phase, *behavior change*, Roca staff work with participants to help them fully engage in the programming and conform their behavior to the requirements of the programming.⁴⁷ In addition to continuing to foster strong relationships with the youth, the overarching goal of this stage is to “provide programming and help [the young people] show up until they are ready to show up for themselves.”⁴⁸ This stage helps the youth learn from their failures in a safe environment and gradually change behaviors.⁴⁹ Roca participants develop life skills and learn to maintain the positive steps they have taken, even when they may not feel like it.⁵⁰

³⁸ *See id.*

³⁹ *See id.*

⁴⁰ *Roca Works*, ROCA, INC, <http://rocainc.org/what-we-do/roca-works/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Roca’s Interventional Model for High-Risk Young People*, ROCA, INC., <http://rocainc.org/what-we-do/roca-works/rocas-intervention-model-for-high-risk-young-people/> (last visited Jan. 9, 2015).

⁴³ *See id.*; *Truth, Trust and Transformation: The Next 25 Years*, ROCA, INC. 1, 11 (Annual Report 2013), available at <http://rocainc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Roca-2013-Annual-Reportsm.pdf>.

⁴⁴ *Proven Outcomes*, ROCA INC., <http://rocainc.org/what-we-do/proven-outcomes/> (last visited Jan. 10, 2015).

⁴⁵ Interview by Joseph Resnek with Jason Owens, Crisis Coordinator, Roca, Inc., on site in Chelsea, Mass. (Nov. 1, 2014), notes on file with interviewer.

⁴⁶ *Id.*

⁴⁷ *See Roca’s Intervention Model*, *supra* note 42; *Truth, Trust and Transformation*, *supra* note 43, at 11.

⁴⁸ *See Roca’s Intervention Model*, *supra* note 42.

⁴⁹ *Id.*

⁵⁰ *Id.*

In the third phase, *sustaining*, the youth relies minimally on Roca programming and meets with his caseworker only once a week.⁵¹ By this stage, the young person will likely be employed or be enrolled in school or another training program, and will have, through Roca’s assistance and programming, developed the life skills needed to continue to be successful.⁵² The young person will make weekly visits to Roca to check in and to help mentor newer members of Roca programming.⁵³

Results for at-risk youth who successfully complete Roca’s three-phase model are extremely positive. In 2014, Roca served 494 young men considered “high-risk,” 80 percent of whom were retained in the program.⁵⁴ Of the young men who were in the program for two years or longer, 92 percent had no new arrests, 98 percent had no new technical violations of court imposed requirements, and 89 percent sustained employment for 90 days or more.⁵⁵ To measure outcomes of Roca involved youth compared to similarly situated young men, Roca staff teamed up with the Harvard Social Impact Bond Lab and the Massachusetts Department of Administration and Finance to conduct a study of Roca’s effectiveness.⁵⁶ The control group was made up of young men involved with the juvenile or adult criminal justice system in Massachusetts.⁵⁷ The young men participating in Roca showed a 65 percent reduction in recidivism and 100 percent increase in employment, compared to the control group.⁵⁸

Much of Roca’s programming focuses on education and employment. At its main facility, Roca offers G.E.D. training, pre-vocational training, and life-skills classes.⁵⁹ One staff teacher teaches all of the classes.⁶⁰ Roca also offers “transitional employment” opportunities in the form of staff cleaning or secretarial jobs at headquarters, or a member of a work crew on Roca’s work-truck.⁶¹ Transitional employment is valued in Roca, because it helps youth *develop* skills needed for employment rather than setting them up for failure by throwing them, unprepared, into employment situations.⁶² Roca has also created and encouraged innovative entrepreneurial opportunities. For example, Roca has a full-time staffer that drives a 12-passenger van of Roca “workers” (doing their transitional employment) to worksites across the state.⁶³ Previously, the driver was typically paid out of pocket by the organization.⁶⁴ However, Roca has since made the work-truck a for-profit venture, offering its services to local businesses.⁶⁵ Now, many businesses

⁵¹ See *Truth, Trust and Transformation*, *supra* note 43, at 11.

⁵² See *Roca’s Intervention Model*, *supra* note 42.

⁵³ Interview with Owens, *supra* note 45.

⁵⁴ ROCA, INC., <http://rocainc.org> (last visited Jan. 12, 2015).

⁵⁵ See *id.*

⁵⁶ See *Truth, Trust and Transformation*, *supra* note 43, at 8.

⁵⁷ *Id.*

⁵⁸ *Id.*

⁵⁹ Interview with Owens, *supra* note 45.

⁶⁰ *Id.*

⁶¹ *The Key To Success – Roca’s Transitional Employment Program*, ROCA, INC., <http://rocainc.org/the-key-to-success-rocas-transitional-employment-program/> (Nov. 5, 2013); Jason Owens, Crisis Coordinator, Roca, Inc., Lecture at Harvard University: Winthrop Speaker Series (Nov. 5, 2014).

⁶² See *The Key to Success*, *supra* note 61.

⁶³ Owens, Lecture at Harvard University, *supra* note 61.

⁶⁴ *Id.*

⁶⁵ *Id.*

hire the Roca-truck on a freelance basis, which has made the work-truck profitable to the organization as well as helpful to the at-risk youth who are employed by it.⁶⁶

Other Roca programming is geared more towards higher-risk groups within the at-risk community, such as young mothers and gang members. “The Young Mother’s Project” targets high-risk young mothers facing issues like involvement with the criminal justice system, domestic violence, and/or disengagement with education.⁶⁷ In addition to helping young mothers develop employment skills and secure stable jobs or re-engage with school, this program helps them develop parenting skills and focuses on their personal wellness and how to foster healthy development in their young children.⁶⁸ Last year, this program served 106 young mothers.⁶⁹ Of those, 92 percent remained employed for 120 days or more.⁷⁰

For gang members, Roca offers a number of innovative programs. Two years ago, Roca added the position of “Crisis Coordinator.”⁷¹ Crisis coordinators are the critical liaisons between Roca and the local police department; the crisis coordinators work with the local gang unit in an effort to divert youth involved in or likely to become involved in gang violence to Roca rather than the criminal justice system.⁷² Now, as a policy, the Chelsea Police Department calls Roca’s crisis coordinator if a known member of Roca has been involved in gang violence.⁷³ Many times, if there is a gang incident involving a member of Roca, the crisis coordinator will be called to help intervene in the gang conflict, to stop the retaliatory gang crime from occurring.⁷⁴ In the words of current Crisis Coordinator Jason Owens, “If there’s a shooting in Chelsea I’m there at the crime scene, lifting up the white sheet to see if it’s one of my guys. If it is, I know who to call to make sure we get out in front of the retaliation.”⁷⁵ The city of Chelsea saw eight gang-related murders in 2012; in 2013 it saw only two.⁷⁶ Finally, this year, Roca was selected to head the Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Social Innovation Financing Project, wherein it will serve 1,302 high-risk young men on adult probation and transitioning out of the supervision of the Department of Youth Service and Juvenile Probation because of their age.⁷⁷

Roca’s three-tiered model typically spans four years.⁷⁸ In fiscal year 2014, Roca’s expenses totaled approximately \$8.3 million.⁷⁹ The majority of Roca’s revenue comes from government

⁶⁶ *Id.*

⁶⁷ *See Truth, Trust and Transformation*, *supra* note 43, at 16.

⁶⁸ *Young Mothers*, ROCA, INC., <http://rocainc.org/what-we-do/roca-works/young-mothers/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

⁶⁹ *See Truth, Trust and Transformation*, *supra* note 43, at 16.

⁷⁰ *Id.*

⁷¹ Owens, Lecture at Harvard University, *supra* note 61.

⁷² *Id.*

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *Id.*

⁷⁵ *Id.*

⁷⁶ *Id.*

⁷⁷ *Truth, Trust and Transformation*, *supra* note 43, at 18.

⁷⁸ *Id.* at 4.

⁷⁹ *Less Jail, More Future*, ROCA, INC. 1, 16 (Annual Report 2014), available at http://rocainc.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/2014_Roca_Annual_report.pdf.

contracts and private grants/contributions (47 percent and 35 percent, respectively).⁸⁰ However, the Roca model can likely be sustained at a much smaller level. Roca has the resources to maintain a multi-year commitment, but smaller groups with more limited resources can implement any of the individual Roca programs without adhering to the entire Roca three-tiered model.

Recommendations

Given Clarksdale's limited resources, CBCI could consider operating just one of the many aspects of the Roca model. While the effectiveness of this community-based intervention would increase as more aspects of the Roca model are adopted, Clarksdale could see many benefits from implementation of just a single part of the program.

For example, CBCI could write a grant to start a work-truck program, or some similar entrepreneurial or job training program, in Clarksdale. This would require only a limited number of resources—for example, a truck and a supervisor—and it has the potential of paying for itself if partnerships are developed with local businesses. It would provide job training for the youth who participate, it would provide a valuable service for the community, and it would potentially earn money for CBCI.

Another aspect of Roca that is particularly well suited for Clarksdale is the role of crisis coordinator. Despite Clarksdale's size, gangs are a significant problem within the community. Having a point person for youth who are at-risk of gang involvement would be very useful and impactful in the city. If the role of a crisis coordinator was combined with a partnership with the local police, this could help keep youth out of the juvenile justice system and involved with productive activities, like the work-truck or some of the other programs that CBCI could implement.

B. Mental Health Programs

There is a growing need for mental health support in Clarksdale. In general, residents of the rural South face a number of continual challenges to obtaining quality health service. Higher rates of chronic health problems in rural areas compound the problem.⁸¹ This disparity further exists in mental health treatment. For example, the rural South suffers from a dearth of mental healthcare providers, as well as a low number of mental health referrals by health professionals, “cultural valuations or stigma of mental illness; and physical factors such as lack of transportation.”⁸² The lack of effective mental health services for high-risk youth can be seen in the overrepresentation of students with physical or mental health disabilities in the juvenile justice system. As previously mentioned above, while 13 percent of students enrolled in public schools have a disability, studies have shown that as many as 70 percent of incarcerated juveniles have a disability.⁸³

⁸⁰ *Id.*

⁸¹ Dr. Jeanne Fox et al., *De Facto Mental Health Services in the Rural South*, 6 J. HEALTH CARE FOR THE POOR AND UNDERSERVED 434, 440 (1995).

⁸² *Id.* at 442, 444.

⁸³ Burrell & Warboys, *supra* note 6, at 1.

This section highlights model programs to address youth mental health at both the preventive and intervention stage. These programs are specifically school-based. Considering the barriers to mental health services in the rural South (including mental health knowledge, transportation, and desire to seek mental health aid), utilizing the existing school infrastructure makes implementation feasible.⁸⁴ These programs produced improvements in school achievement, coping and problem-solving skills, and decreased symptoms of mental illness (such as depression, aggression, and anxiety).

Think Aloud

Think Aloud is a school-based mental health program that was piloted in the Denver Public Schools in the 1970s.⁸⁵ Think Aloud uses a cognitive-behavior approach, and focuses on hyper-aggressive boys aged 6 to 8 years.⁸⁶ Cognitive behavior therapy is a type of therapy that focuses on solving current problems and changing unhelpful thinking and behavior.⁸⁷ The approach uncovers individual beliefs and behavior patterns “to produce cognitive change—modification in the patient’s thinking and belief system—to bring about enduring emotional and behavioral change.”⁸⁸ Think Aloud provides a model of how to use this approach with youth.

The Think Aloud pilot program involves daily, 30-minute individual sessions over a six-week period led by regular classroom teachers.⁸⁹ The participants’ goals are to develop strategies to answer the following questions: “What is my problem, What is my plan, Am I using my plan, and How did I do?”⁹⁰ The project’s initial stage begins with “copycat” games, where teachers leading the sessions give the children words and actions to react to different situations.⁹¹ The teacher copies a child’s words and actions, and when the student has figured out what the teacher is doing, they switched roles.⁹² The teacher then explains that the game was intended to help the child learn to “think aloud” to help solve problems.⁹³

The program’s later sessions include versions of Simon Says, riddles, and other tasks that block impulsive reactions and encourage students to use reasoning skills to find a solution.⁹⁴ The intent of this progression is to first introduce children to easy, cognitive problems and then use “preliminary social games” to improve behavior.⁹⁵ These activities use “verbal mediation skills in dealing with both cognitive and interpersonal problems.”⁹⁶ Throughout the program, the

⁸⁴ Fox et al., *supra* note 81, at 454.

⁸⁵ Bonnie Camp et al., “*Think Aloud*”: A Program for Developing Self-control in Young Aggressive Boys, 5 JOURNAL OF ABNORMAL CHILD PSYCHOLOGY 157, 158 (1977).

⁸⁶ *Id.* at 157.

⁸⁷ Judith S. Beck, COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY: BASICS AND BEYOND 2 (2011).

⁸⁸ *Id.*

⁸⁹ Camp et al., *supra* note 85, at 160.

⁹⁰ *Id.*

⁹¹ *Id.*

⁹² *Id.* at 161.

⁹³ *Id.*

⁹⁴ *Id.* at 160.

⁹⁵ *Id.* at 161.

⁹⁶ *Id.* at 157.

teacher encourages the child to think aloud in the classroom, and asks the child to brainstorm ways thinking aloud could help with schoolwork and coexisting with peers.⁹⁷

After the six-week program, teachers' ratings showed improved prosocial behavior in the classroom and improved test performance.⁹⁸ The aggressive boys who had participated in the program were able to come up with as many solutions as the less aggressive boys and more solutions than the aggressive boys control group. This was an improvement from the repetitive and unproductive talk that aggressive children sometimes exhibit.⁹⁹ While formal training programs for Think Aloud do not appear to exist, schools can purchase a used copy of the program book to help guide them in implementing part or all of the program's strategies.

Teaching Kids to Cope

Teaching Kids to Cope (TKC) is an intervention stage program that shows how school-based programs can improve mental health.¹⁰⁰ Like Think Aloud, TKC is a cognitive-behavior based program. However, unlike Think Aloud, which targets younger juveniles, TKC is designed for rural adolescents age 12-18 with symptoms of depression or suicidal thoughts.¹⁰¹ TKC is a group-based program that consists of ten weekly group sessions that are 45 minutes long and take place during school.¹⁰² The group leaders are trained to address the following themes: confidentially, daily living topics, issues of identity, and affect regulation.¹⁰³

The program incorporates lectures, group discussions, role-play, film, group projects, and several other forms of engagement.¹⁰⁴ Each group session is essentially split into two parts: first, the adolescents are provided with information relating to issues, including teen stressors, self-image, coping, family relationships, peer relationships, and communication, then the students engage in experiential learning by articulating their problems and using concrete-problem solving tasks.¹⁰⁵

Since TKC's development in the 1990s, it has been implemented for approximately 2000 students in ten rural schools in the United States and internationally in Jordan for university students.¹⁰⁶ TKC's results have been studied in three rural schools in southwest Pennsylvania. Youth were chosen to participate in the study based on the results on two popular self-report instruments, the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS) and Coping Response Inventory-Youth (CRI-Y).¹⁰⁷ RADS scores, which measure symptoms associated with

⁹⁷ *Id.* at 161.

⁹⁸ *Id.* at 166.

⁹⁹ *Id.* at 165.

¹⁰⁰ Kathryn Puskar et al., *Effect of the Teaching Kids to Cope (TKC©) Program on Outcomes of Depression and Coping Among Rural Adolescents*, 16 J. OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENT PSYCHIATRIC NURSING 71, 71 (2003).

¹⁰¹ *Teaching Kids to Cope: Intervention Summary*, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION'S NATIONAL REGISTRY OF EVIDENCE-BASED PROGRAMS AND PRACTICES (Dec. 24, 2014) available at <http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov/ViewIntervention.aspx?id=83>.

¹⁰² Puskar et al., *supra* note 100, at 72-73.

¹⁰³ *Id.* at 77.

¹⁰⁴ *Teaching Kids to Cope*, *supra* note 101.

¹⁰⁵ *Id.*

¹⁰⁶ *Id.*

¹⁰⁷ Puskar et al., *supra* note 100, at 73.

depression, decreased 8.98 percent from pre-intervention to post-intervention, and scores continued to decrease in follow-up conducted after six months.¹⁰⁸ By the end of the program, students could use strategies to mitigate emotional reactivity and depressive thoughts.¹⁰⁹ These strategies “included thought reframing, distracting activities, talking to peers or family, relaxation, and problem-solving activities.”¹¹⁰ TKC participants also demonstrated significant improvement in coping skills and decreased depressive symptoms at the end of ten sessions, and these improvements were maintained a year after intervention.¹¹¹

The TKC group sessions can be led by “a professional with a bachelor’s degree in education, social work, child development, nursing, psychology, or other health-related field, and one year of experience working with children or adolescents.”¹¹² Thus, if implemented in schools, teachers with bachelor degrees in education would be qualified to lead the group sessions. It has been adapted to address anger, chronic illness, and transition problems in children.¹¹³ Implementation of the program involves a one-day on-site training and includes five implementation manuals, rights for use and duplication, and continuing technical assistance.¹¹⁴ These implementation steps cost approximately \$1,000 in addition to travel expenses for staff.¹¹⁵

Recommendations

Both of these programs use a cognitive-behavioral approach, a kind of therapy that focuses specifically on problem-solving techniques. Furthermore, both programs took place in schools and led to improved mental health in youth.

In Clarksdale, similar programs to Think Aloud and TKC could be implemented in schools, churches, or summer camps. Or, they could be implemented in less formal community-based settings, such as informal meetings put together by CBCI in gyms, recreation centers, or other donated space. Since the evidence suggests that some rural families have difficulty in obtaining mental health services for their children, providing access to sessions like Think Aloud or TKC in Clarksdale itself is critical. Furthermore, these programs could be paired with existing mentorship initiatives like Mayor Bill Lockett’s Mentors for Life. While wholesale implementation of these programs would be most effective in achieving positive mental health outcomes, elements of the program could be adopted in isolation. For example, group discussions focused on the depressive symptoms that TKC addresses could easily be implemented in existing programs. Or the self-reflective, verbal approach that Think Aloud encourages could be adapted to many classroom activities for younger children.

By implementing these programs for all children, even those without identified mental health needs, CBCI could start to transform the stigma around mental health issues as well as increase

¹⁰⁸ *Id.* at 75.

¹⁰⁹ *Id.* at 78.

¹¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹¹ *Id.* at 79.

¹¹² *Teaching Kids to Cope*, *supra* note 101.

¹¹³ *Id.*

¹¹⁴ *Id.*

¹¹⁵ *Id.*

positive coping behaviors. Furthermore, the combination of these programs provides a particularly attractive solution because Think Aloud is aimed at younger children while TKC can help older youths.

C. Recreational Programs

Recreational activities are particularly helpful for engaging at-risk youth. Recreational programs provide a healthy outlet for energy and aggression and teach valuable social skills, while filling the gaps of time in youth's lives that could otherwise be spent pursuing other, more destructive behaviors. In a 2002 California survey involving chambers of commerce and mayors, more than 80 percent agreed that recreational centers and programs reduced crime rates in their own communities.¹¹⁶ In another survey conducted in 2000, 71 percent of respondents believed these recreational programs benefited youth involved in hard situations, such as youth who had encountered the juvenile justice system, 66 percent believed the programs helped prevent underage drinking, and 64 percent thought they helped decrease illegal drug use.¹¹⁷

This report examines three programs that have succeeded throughout the country that can serve as models for CBCI: Second Round, Corral, and Midnight Basketball. As stated, Clarksdale experiences a crime spike during summer, coinciding with schools' summer break. Indeed, during a two-week period in the summer of 2013 seven shootings and two homicides took place.¹¹⁸ This surge in criminal activity needs to be prevented, and recreational programs are one way to do this. Designated programs would provide activity and structure to students over the summer and reduce this dangerous idle time. Recreational activities, if instituted in Clarksdale, could divert youth's attention from undesirable behaviors towards more beneficial conduct.

Second Round

Second Round is a program provided by Haven House, an organization that provides services to youth in Raleigh, North Carolina.¹¹⁹ Second Round was launched in 2006 to serve as a gang prevention and intervention program¹²⁰ and now also services youth with substance abuse problems, aggression issues, criminal records, and school behavioral issues.¹²¹ It leverages boxing and a high set of standards in working with youth. Second Round targets youth ages 10 to 21 years and services are provided at no cost to qualifying participants.¹²² In order to enroll in the program the youth must attend two phases of orientation with a parent or guardian.¹²³ To remain

¹¹⁶ *The Health and Social Benefits of Recreation*, CALIFORNIA DEP'T OF PARKS AND RECREATION, 23 (2005), available at <http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/795/files/benefitspercent20finalpercent20onlinepercent20v6-1-05.pdf>.

¹¹⁷ *Id.* at 30.

¹¹⁸ *Clarksdale: Small Town*, *supra* note 31.

¹¹⁹ *Second Round*, HAVEN HOUSE SERVICES, <http://www.havenhousenc.org/programs/second-round> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹²⁰ *New Member Orientation: Second Round Boxing*, HAVEN HOUSE SERVICES, 4, <http://www.havenhousenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2R-Powerpoint-Final-Revised-10-26-131.pdf> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹²¹ *Second Round*, *supra* note 119.

¹²² *New Member Orientation*, *supra* note 120, at 16.

¹²³ *Id.* at 6.

in the program, participants must either be employed or in school.¹²⁴ In addition, the youth must not engage in any criminal activity, and when applicable, must comply with any terms of probation or parole, and improve their grades in school to C's or better and avoid suspensions.¹²⁵

During the week, the facilities are open Monday through Thursday from 3:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., and the program features a beginner workout session, an intermediate/advanced session, open gym time, and a homework tutoring program.¹²⁶ During the workouts, the youth participate in various fitness activities including weight lifting and boxing.¹²⁷ After a participant has been in the program for several months, and depending on the recommendation from the mentors, they can qualify to begin competing and traveling around the state to amateur boxing competitions.¹²⁸ In turn, these youths also serve as leaders and mentors to the newer participants in the program.¹²⁹

While engaging youth through the physical elements of the program, Second Round's broader goal is to help the youth develop prosocial skills that will translate into better outcomes in the community.¹³⁰ More specifically, Second Round focuses on helping youth develop self-discipline, teamwork and leadership skills, and healthy living.¹³¹ Participants learn these skills through working with program staff, complying with the program requirements, being a member of a team, and engaging in the process of practicing boxing in order to improve. These skills are immediately put to use through the engagement with school or employment that the youth participating in Second Round are required to have.

During the 2012-2013 fiscal year, Second Round served 158 youth.¹³² 94 percent of participants that took part in the Second Round boxing program did not have any new complaints or charges brought against them during the year following their completion of the program.¹³³ The program cost \$700.65 per participant.¹³⁴ Haven House (the non-profit that Second Round is a part of) is funded in three ways: 73 percent comes from government support, 15 percent from charitable contributions, and 12 percent from program-generated support.¹³⁵

Corral

Corral is a program that operates in Cary, North Carolina, which is a suburb of Raleigh.¹³⁶ It is a faith based non-profit that was founded in 2008 by Joy Currey, to be a place where hurting girls

¹²⁴ *Id.* at 8.

¹²⁵ *Id.*

¹²⁶ *Id.*

¹²⁷ *Id.* at 9.

¹²⁸ *Id.* at 17.

¹²⁹ *Id.*

¹³⁰ *Second Round*, *supra* note 119.

¹³¹ *Id.*

¹³² *2012/13 Annual Update*, HAVEN HOUSE SERVICES, 2 (Oct. 26, 2013), available at http://www.havenhouseenc.org/wp-content/uploads/HavenHouse_2014_annualreport.pdf.

¹³³ *Id.*

¹³⁴ *Id.*

¹³⁵ *Id.*

¹³⁶ CORRAL, <http://corralriding.org> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

could experience healing.¹³⁷ Corral has three main components: “Equine Assisted Psychotherapy,” “Join the Herd,” and the “Riding Academy,” all focused on serving at risk girls who have exhibited aggressive or antisocial behavior, struggled academically, or have unstable home environments.¹³⁸ Corral’s aim is “to help these girls work through their struggles, avoid risky behaviors and move forward successfully in life.”¹³⁹

Equine Assisted Psychotherapy mixes the expertise of mental health professionals with equine specialists and horses in order to aid girls, ages 10 to 18 years, in constructive manners to cope with and understand the struggles in their lives.¹⁴⁰ Girls enjoy time with the horses while having challenging conversations with the professionals, who encourage them to take initiative to work towards change.¹⁴¹ The program aims to balance difficult discussions with the joy found in working with the horses.¹⁴²

Join the Herd is a program that must be completed before a member enters the Riding Academy.¹⁴³ Join the Herd meets for two hours once a week for eight consecutive weeks.¹⁴⁴ While the girls work with the horses, leaders focus on improving the girls’ emotional intelligence by teaching them how to better evaluate perceptions, communicate with others, and set boundaries for themselves.¹⁴⁵

The next step is Riding Academy, which is aimed at girls from age 11 to 15 years and is comprised of two sessions every week.¹⁴⁶ Girls must come one day after school for three and a half hours where they receive individual riding lessons and private tutoring.¹⁴⁷ Every Saturday during the school year the girls also come to the barn from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.¹⁴⁸ During this time the girls must complete chores around the farm to help care for the horses, then they participate in a variety of horse-related activities including trail riding, showmanship, and drill team.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, one parent or guardian for each girl is required to attend a support group at the farm once a month.¹⁵⁰ Throughout the rest of the week the facilities are open if the girls need a safe place to come or additional help with schoolwork.¹⁵¹ The program aims to inspire and enable girls to make changes in their lives that lead them away from unhealthy lifestyles.¹⁵² The

¹³⁷ *About Us*, CORRAL, <http://www.corralriding.org/about> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹³⁸ *Id.*; *Riding Academy*, CORRAL, <http://www.corralriding.org/programs/ridingacademy> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹³⁹ *Our Girls*, CORRAL, <http://www.corralriding.org/about/ourgirls> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁴⁰ *Equine Assisted Psychotherapy*, CORRAL, <http://www.corralriding.org/programs/eap> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁴¹ *Id.*

¹⁴² *Id.*

¹⁴³ *Join the Herd*, CORRAL, <http://www.corralriding.org/programs/jointheherd> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁴⁴ *Id.*

¹⁴⁵ *Id.*

¹⁴⁶ *Riding Academy*, *supra* note 138.

¹⁴⁷ *Id.*

¹⁴⁸ *Id.*

¹⁴⁹ *Id.*

¹⁵⁰ *Id.*

¹⁵¹ *Id.*

¹⁵² *Id.*

Riding Academy provides constructive activities for the girls to be involved in and helps them build beneficial relationships, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills.¹⁵³

Corral's success in helping at-risk girls stems from helping them develop strong, trusting relationships both with the mentors and the horses.¹⁵⁴ The girls develop courage and confidence through overcoming their fears and gaining respect for the horses and the program.¹⁵⁵ Corral also intentionally limits the number of participants so that each girl can get individualized mentorship from staff.¹⁵⁶

Each of Corral's programs is provided to the girls for free.¹⁵⁷ The results have been overwhelmingly successful: 68 percent of the girls who participated improved their GPA, 75 percent improved their emotional intelligence, and 85 percent had reduced behavioral incidents in school.¹⁵⁸ All of the participants significantly reduced the disruptive behavior that caused them to be referred to the program initially.¹⁵⁹

For the 2013-2014 fiscal year, 14 girls completed an entire year in the Corral program.¹⁶⁰ When they joined the program, 92 percent of the girls suffered from depression or suicidal thoughts or actions, 85 percent had experienced trauma or neglect, and 79 percent had failed at least one course in school.¹⁶¹ By the end of the year, 92 percent of the girls had C's or higher in school.¹⁶² None of the girls had any new interactions with the court system.¹⁶³ The cost for Join the Herd is \$700 per participant, while the Riding Academy costs \$6000 per participant for an academic year.¹⁶⁴ Every horse involved in the program costs an additional \$5000 for upkeep.¹⁶⁵ Individual grantors and donors sponsor these programs.¹⁶⁶

Midnight Basketball

Midnight Basketball is an extremely successful program that has sprung up across the country, including in Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina, and it has a chapter pending in Meridian, Mississippi.¹⁶⁷ Midnight Basketball targets boys between the ages 13 to 25 years who are at risk of engaging in criminal activity, abusing drugs, or becoming

¹⁵³ *Id.*

¹⁵⁴ *Why Horses?*, CORRAL, <http://www.corralriding.org/about/whyhorses> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁵⁵ *Id.*

¹⁵⁶ *How it works*, CORRAL, <http://www.corralriding.org/about/howitworks> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁵⁷ *Riding Academy*, *supra* note 138.

¹⁵⁸ *How it Works*, *supra* note 156.

¹⁵⁹ *2013-2014 Annual Report*, CORRAL, <http://www.corralriding.org/about/annualreport> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁶⁰ *Id.*

¹⁶¹ *Id.*

¹⁶² *Id.*

¹⁶³ *Id.*

¹⁶⁴ *Id.*

¹⁶⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶⁶ *Riding Academy*, *supra* note 138.

¹⁶⁷ *Chapters*, ASSOC. OF MIDNIGHT BASKETBALL LEAGUE PROGRAMS, <http://ambpl.com/basketball/chapters/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

involved with a gang.¹⁶⁸ G. Van Standifer founded the program in 1986 as a response to growing crime rates in Glen Arden, Maryland where he was serving as Town Manager.¹⁶⁹

The two components of Midnight Basketball's outreach are workshops and basketball. The organization provides workshops that are mandatory for the boys to participate in if they want to play basketball.¹⁷⁰ By tying participation in basketball to participation in the workshops, Midnight Basketball motivates youth who may not otherwise be interested in the workshops to fully participate in them. The workshops are on a wide range of topics, including interviewing, employment, drug and alcohol abuse, college financial aid applications, working towards a GED, and interpersonal relationships.¹⁷¹ The second part of the program is basketball. The basketball coaches are all leaders in the community.¹⁷² Youth to adult ratios are kept low, which allows mentorship and respectful relationships to form.¹⁷³ The most unique element of the basketball program is that it operates from 10:00 p.m. to 2:00 a.m., because this is the time frame when the youth would be most tempted and most likely to participate in gang or criminal activities on the street.¹⁷⁴

Former NBA San Antonio Spurs player, James Silas, serves as the National Director for the Association of Midnight Basketball League Programs (AMBLP) as well as the director of a chapter in Austin, Texas.¹⁷⁵ This individual chapter has served over 1,500 participants and is now in its 19th year of operation.¹⁷⁶ The programs' success has been highlighted and supported by two Presidents. In 1990 President George H. Bush, in his 1,000 Points of Light Program, named Midnight Basketball the 124th Daily Point of Light.¹⁷⁷ President Clinton believed in the program enough to include funding for Midnight Basketball as part of his \$33 billion crime bill.¹⁷⁸

In addition to Midnight Basketball's broad support and continually growing list of town chapters, it is a low-cost program. "Midnight basketball is cost-effective since schools and gyms ordinarily

¹⁶⁸ *Vision/Mission Statements*, ASSOC. OF MIDNIGHT BASKETBALL LEAGUE PROGRAMS, <http://amblp.com/basketball/association-midnight-basketball-league-programs-vision-mission-statements/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015); *What is MBL?*, ASSOC. OF MIDNIGHT BASKETBALL LEAGUE PROGRAMS, <http://www.amblp.com/what-is-mbl/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁶⁹ *The History of AMBLP*, ASSOC. OF MIDNIGHT BASKETBALL LEAGUE PROGRAMS, <http://amblp.com/basketball/history/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁷⁰ *The Midnight Basketball League Story*, ASSOC. OF MIDNIGHT BASKETBALL LEAGUE, <http://midnightbasketball.org/about.html> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁷¹ *What is MBL?*, *supra* note 168.

¹⁷² *Id.*

¹⁷³ *Id.*

¹⁷⁴ *Id.*

¹⁷⁵ *National Director*, ASSOC. OF MIDNIGHT BASKETBALL LEAGUE PROGRAMS, <http://amblp.com/basketball/officers/national-directors-education/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁷⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷⁷ *The History of AMBLP*, *supra* note 169.

¹⁷⁸ Larry Copeland, *Crime-bill Foes Call Preventive Programs "Pork." On the Streets, There's Another View. They Cry Foul at Assault on Midnight Basketball*, PHILLY.COM, Aug. 18, 1994, available at http://articles.philly.com/1994-08-18/news/25843281_1_midnight-basketball-crime-bill-nighttime-basketball-league.

stand vacant at night.”¹⁷⁹ The program can operate out of facilities already existing in schools or other available gymnasiums with the participation of the community.

Recommendations

Though each features a different recreational activity, Second Round, Corral, and Midnight Basketball have common characteristics. Each program combines free recreational activities with mentorship, guidance, and supervision to youth in need. All three programs leverage an enjoyable and appealing activity in order to bring youth into an environment where they will be challenged to grow, change, and succeed through healthy adult relationships. Recreational activity, whether boxing, horseback riding, basketball, or something else entirely, can draw at-risk teens in. The fact that the programs are offered free of charge further appeals to youth who do not have the money or resources to pay for more traditional sports leagues or activities.

The safe recreational centers keep the kids off of the street and in a structured environment. This leads to better outcomes for the youth, because “[s]tructured activities offer fewer opportunities to engage in deviant behavior because youth are engaged in doing something (as opposed to nothing like hanging out, for example) that is engaging and positive.”¹⁸⁰ Furthermore, each organization provides some sort of leadership development or mentorship to accompany the recreational aspects of its program. Whether this takes the shape of workshops, tutoring, therapy, or simply time spent with committed and caring adults, this seems to be a critical aspect to improve behavioral issues and walk through tough life choices with the juveniles.

The mentoring relationships involved in each program are critical to maximizing the positive impact of recreational activities. Mentors provide positive guidance and nurturing interactions, crucial to the young people’s success.¹⁸¹ It is important that these relationships be fostered on a consistent basis; specifically, evidence has shown that mentoring relationships are necessary for at least one year to encourage success in the recreational programs.¹⁸² It is therefore of critical importance that the programs be committed to facilitating ongoing relationships with their programming, commitment, and funding.

CBCI can apply these strategy and program ideas to Clarksdale and the Delta Region. The Corral methodology of utilizing horses as a connection to youths could be utilized in Clarksdale, especially in a rural area with open land. Even outside of using horses, which may not be cost effective, the Riding Academy’s method requiring girls to be responsible for chores in order to participate in the activities can be implemented with any type of recreational activity in order to promote responsibility. Whether that means cleaning up the gym after practice, or helping staff

¹⁷⁹ Acel Moore, *It’s Newt Gingrich, Not Blacks, Who Needs A Sermon About Crime*, PHILLY.COM, Aug. 16, 1994, available at http://articles.philly.com/1994-08-16/news/25842919_1_crime-bill-midnight-basketball-assault-weapons.

¹⁸⁰ Peter Witt and Linda Caldwell, *The Rationale for Recreation Services for Youth: An Evidenced Based Approach*, NAT’L RECREATION AND PARK ASSOC., 37 (2010), available at http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications_and_Research/Research/Papers/Witt-Caldwell-Full-Research-Paper.pdf.

¹⁸¹ *Id.* at 20.

¹⁸² *Id.* (citing J. E. Rhodes and D. L. Dubois, *Understanding and facilitating the youth mentoring movement*, 20 SOCIAL POLICY REPORT 3-11 (2006)).

with everyday office tasks, this can be used to teach the youth the value of hard work and to teach them job skills. Incorporating mental health professionals into programs can also be beneficial to aid in counseling the youth. The Saturday portion of the Riding Academy can also be simulated to keep boys occupied on the weekend when there is no school and temptations are likely to be high.

While horseback riding programs could require an infusion of resources, boxing and basketball recreational programs can be implemented in existing facilities. In Clarksdale, The Coahoma County Expo Center is already established as a recreation center with basketball courts.¹⁸³ Furthermore the Clarksdale Municipal School District has several gym facilities. A bill passed in Mississippi two years ago, H.B. 540, limits the liability of schools that open their facilities up to the community for recreational use.¹⁸⁴ This would further decrease costs and increase the likelihood that schools would be willing to participate and contribute to the program. One other alternative in Clarksdale would be to look for funds to finish the downtown gym in the Coahoma County Higher Education Center. The gym is centrally located, currently vacant, and could be a great resource for the community. The presence of these gyms would allow a Midnight Basketball program to begin immediately with very low costs. More modification would be necessary to ready the facilities for boxing practices, but with some additional funding, this would certainly be feasible.

Mentoring programs intertwined into these recreational activities could also be specifically tailored to the needs and challenges facing the boys in the region. Tutoring opportunities could also be incorporated to help young men improve their grades, finish high school, and even consider higher education. Leaders from the community can take part in teaching classes or workshops for the boys before practices or games to provide them with tangible work advice and skills, as well as coaching and mentoring the boys in the recreational activities. Considering the challenges facing young boys of color in Clarksdale, Clarksdale's existing infrastructure suited to these programs, and the evidence demonstrating the high impact these recreational programs can have, investing in recreational programs could potentially be a low-cost but highly effective strategy for CBCI.

D. School and After-school Programs

The aim of in-school and after-school interventions vary widely, from delinquency and substance use prevention to increased academic and social success. Mentoring programs have been proven to have a positive effect on decreasing juvenile delinquency and crime.¹⁸⁵ Targeted in-school curricular programs have also been proven to reduce substance abuse, risky behavior, and

¹⁸³ *Coahoma County Expo Center*, COAHOMA CNTY. YOUTH OUTREACH, <http://clarksdaleinfo.com/upcoming-events-expo-center-coahoma-youth-outreach/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁸⁴ H.B. 540, 2012 Leg., (Miss. 2012).

¹⁸⁵ *Practice Profile: Mentoring*, NAT'L INST. OF JUSTICE: CRIMESOLUTIONS.GOV, <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/PracticeDetails.aspx?ID=15&outcome=192#192> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

truancy.¹⁸⁶ Community school programs have enjoyed similar results, improving students work habits, grades, and graduation rates, among other things.¹⁸⁷

Considering the available educational data for Clarksdale, including the decreasing graduation rate in Clarksdale and its relationship to limited life opportunities and increased incarceration rates for youths,¹⁸⁸ school and after-school programs should be an area of focus for CBCI and its work in Clarksdale. Furthermore, because school programs represent only an addition to an already existing institution, rather than creating brand new systems and infrastructure, they can be very cost-effective. This section focuses on two programs—one curricular and the other a community-school program—each of which has been proven to be effective in various settings and in rural cities in particular.

LifeSkills® Training

LifeSkills® Training (LST) is a classroom-based curricular program focused on violence prevention, tobacco, alcohol, and drug-abuse prevention.¹⁸⁹ LST is designed to increase students' knowledge of the adverse consequences of substance use, teach self-management and social skills, and help students resist substance abuse and aggressive behaviors.¹⁹⁰ Instead of merely preaching to students about the dangers involved with substance abuse, LST incorporates activities in the classroom that help youth develop the confidence and skills needed to avoid peer pressure and cope with anxiety associated with it.¹⁹¹ The five core elements of LST include a cognitive element, a self-improvement component, a decision-making component, an element for coping with anxiety, and a component aimed at improving social skills.¹⁹²

LST is intended to be implemented in school by classroom teachers (or in other educational programs like summer school).¹⁹³ The curriculum itself is available for purchase, and there are online or in person training sessions intended for the teachers who will be implementing the LST programs.¹⁹⁴ LST has separate curriculum programs appropriate for elementary, middle, and high

¹⁸⁶ See e.g., *Program Profile: LifeSkills® Training*, NAT'L INST. OF JUSTICE: CRIMESOLUTIONS.GOV, <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/ProgramDetails.aspx?ID=186> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015); *Practice Profile: School-Based Bullying Prevention Programs*, NAT'L INST. OF JUSTICE: CRIMESOLUTIONS.GOV, <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/PracticeDetails.aspx?ID=20> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015); *Practice Profile: Targeted Truancy Interventions*, NAT'L INST. OF JUSTICE: CRIMESOLUTIONS.GOV, <https://www.crimesolutions.gov/PracticeDetails.aspx?ID=10> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁸⁷ *Community Schools Results*, COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, <http://www.communityschools.org/assets/1/AssetManager/Community%20School%20Results%202013.pdf> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁸⁸ See *Graduation Rates*, *supra* note 16.

¹⁸⁹ *Program Overview: Overview*, BOTVIN LIFESKILLS® TRAINING, <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com/overview.php> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁹⁰ *Id.*

¹⁹¹ *Id.*

¹⁹² *Program Profile: LifeSkills® Training*, *supra* note 186.

¹⁹³ *Program Overview: Implementation*, BOTVIN LIFESKILLS® TRAINING, <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com/overview.php?t=implementation> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

¹⁹⁴ See generally BOTVIN LIFESKILLS® TRAINING, <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

school students.¹⁹⁵ While prices for the program depend on the specific program being purchased and how many student guides are needed (for example, a curriculum set for the full three-year middle school program, which includes a teacher’s manual and 30 student guides, costs \$625), materials can be re-used from school year to school year.¹⁹⁶

Two studies have been conducted about LST, in 1995 and 2003. The studies found significant positive effects on reducing substance abuse and the initiation of substance use.¹⁹⁷ Given the relatively low cost of the program, a recent study by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy indicated that this program produced \$37.52 in benefits for every \$1 spent.¹⁹⁸

Samples of the LST curriculum for elementary, middle, and high school students are available on the program’s website.¹⁹⁹ Funding opportunities are outlined on the LST website, which could help provide the resources needed to implement this curriculum.²⁰⁰

Communities in Schools

Communities in Schools²⁰¹ (CIS) was started in 1977, and now has about 200 affiliates throughout the United States.²⁰² CIS uses a site team, led by a coordinator to implement a model that includes an annual needs assessment, planning with school leaders, and general and specific evidence-based services including tutoring, counseling, job shadowing, and service learning.²⁰³ CIS focuses on bringing community sources to schools by positioning site coordinators inside schools to evaluate students’ needs and get them appropriate services.²⁰⁴ According to the program’s founder, Bill Milliken, “It’s relationships, not programs, that change children.”²⁰⁵ CIS utilizes volunteers and partnerships with local businesses, health care providers, and social

¹⁹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁹⁶ *Price List*, BOTVIN LIFESKILLS® TRAINING, <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com/2014-PHP-Price-List.pdf> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015)

¹⁹⁷ *Program Profile: LifeSkills® Training*, *supra* note 186. Other curricular programs can be found at crimesolutions.gov, including, among others, Wyman’s Teen Outreach Program and Too Good for Drugs.

¹⁹⁸ *Return on Investment: Evidence-Based Options to Improve Statewide Outcomes*, WASH. STATE INST. FOR PUB. POLICY 7 (Apr. 2012), http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1102/Wsipp_Return-on-Investment-Evidence-Based-Options-to-Improve-Statewide-Outcomes-April-2012-Update_Full-Report.

¹⁹⁹ *See Programs*, BOTVIN LIFESKILLS®, <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com/> (last visited Jan. 28, 2015) (to find the samples, hover mouse over “Programs,” select the desired program, and look for the linked pdf documents on the left side of the page).

²⁰⁰ *See Funding Opportunities*, BOTVIN LIFESKILLS® TRAINING, <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com/grants.php> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

²⁰¹ COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

²⁰² *Find Your Affiliate*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/about/where/#state> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

²⁰³ *Our Work*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/our-work/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

²⁰⁴ *FAQ*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/faq/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

²⁰⁵ *Our Story*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/about/our-story/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

service agencies to provide students with food, school supplies, healthcare, counseling, academic assistance, or even just a mentor.²⁰⁶

CIS focuses on providing “students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life.”²⁰⁷ To accomplish this, CIS involves four steps. First, the school system reaches out to CIS, and in response, CIS provides a site coordinator to work with the school.²⁰⁸ Through a collaborative effort, the site coordinator and the school identify students who are at risk of dropping out.²⁰⁹ Then, by assessing the school and students’ needs, the site coordinator develops a plan and builds a team with local businesses, social service agencies, health care providers, and volunteers.²¹⁰ After the needs assessments is completed and the team is assembled, CIS provides students with the support they need both inside and outside of the classroom for less than \$200 per year per child.²¹¹

A recent national evaluation found that CIS schools demonstrated positive effects on dropout and graduation rates, as well as consistent improvement in attendance and academics.²¹² According to CIS’s latest impact report, by the end of the 2012-2013 school year, 84 percent of students in the program met their academic goals and 75 percent met their attendance goals. Furthermore, 96 percent of case-managed 12th graders graduated from high school.²¹³ The CIS model utilizes site coordinators, as well as a large volunteer base, leading to services that have a return of \$11.60 for every \$1 spent.²¹⁴ Currently, CIS utilizes a network of over 40,000 volunteers to reach 1.3 million students each year.²¹⁵ There is not currently a statewide office for Mississippi. In order to start a local affiliate, CBCI would need to connect to the CIS national office to inquire as to the process.²¹⁶

²⁰⁶ *Id.*

²⁰⁷ *Id.*

²⁰⁸ *Our Work*, *supra* note 203.

²⁰⁹ *Id.*

²¹⁰ *Id.*

²¹¹ *Donate*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/help/donate/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

²¹² *Five-Year National Evaluation Executive Summary*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, 4–5 (Oct. 2010), available at <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/about/publications/publication/five-year-national-evaluation-executive-summary>.

²¹³ *Changing the Picture in America: Communities In Schools Spring 2014 National Impact Report*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, (2014), available at <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/about/publications/publication/National-Impact-Report-Spring-2014>.

²¹⁴ *Changing the Picture in America: Communities in Schools Spring 2014 National Impact Report*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, available at <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/about/publications/publication/National-Impact-Report-Spring-2014>.

²¹⁵ *Communities in Schools: Answers and Fast Facts about Communities in Schools*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/faq/> (last visited Jan. 25, 2015).

²¹⁶ *Communities in Schools: Start a Local Affiliate*, COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS, <http://www.communitiesinschools.org/about/where/starting-affiliate/> (last visited Jan. 25, 2015).

Additional School Programs

In addition to LST and CIS, two other successful school-based programs that could be considered by CBCI for implementation are the Children’s Defense Fund’s (CDF) Freedom Schools program and the Young People’s Project (YPP). CDF’s Freedom Schools program provides summer and after-school enrichment through a model curriculum focused on academic enrichment, family involvement, civic engagement, and health.²¹⁷ The Freedom Schools program targets students “who might otherwise not have access to books” by providing opportunities for after-school and summer “reading enrichment.”²¹⁸ CDF accomplishes this in partnership with religious organizations, local colleges and universities, schools, and juvenile justice facilities, all in an attempt “to curb summer learning loss and close achievement gaps.”²¹⁹ Freedom Schools’ impact ranges from social-emotional gains to academic improvement: program evaluations show that the program raised children’s self-esteem and significantly increased standardized reading achievement test scores (especially for African American middle school boys).²²⁰ YPP, founded in Jackson, Mississippi, includes school, after-school, and community-based components.²²¹ The program revolves around the Algebra Project, a middle school math literacy program that also develops school and community change.²²² A 2008 study found that YPP Jackson alone has prepared over 500 high school and college students to do math literacy work.²²³ In comparing Delta districts where teachers had participated in the project against those that did not, Algebra Project students performed at a higher level on grade 6 test scores.²²⁴

Recommendations

Curricular programs like LST and community schools programs such as CIS have several advantages for implementation in Clarksdale. Both are used across the country, including in rural communities. Both have been rigorously evaluated and have shown to be effective in making positive changes in the behavior of students and reducing dropouts. Both programs are grounded in school but are also flexible. LST is taught in school, but can be implemented by teachers, school counselors, or other program providers. CIS’s site coordinators utilize teachers, volunteers, and a wide variety of interventions to effectively assist students. Both programs are geared toward building the social and academic capacity of students so that they can function more effectively and safely in their communities in addition to excelling academically.

It will be more intensive to implement a CIS-style program in Clarksdale than a curricular program, but CBCI is exactly the kind of community and school-based coalition that works best in implementing this sort of program. If implementation of the entire CIS program seems

²¹⁷ *CDF Freedom Schools® Program*, CHILDREN’S DEF. FUND, <http://www.childrensdefense.org/programs/> (last visited Jan. 11, 2015).

²¹⁸ *Id.*

²¹⁹ *Id.*

²²⁰ *Children’s Defense Fund: Program Impact*, CHILDREN’S DEF. FUND, <http://www.childrensdefense.org/programs/freedomschools/> (last visited Jan. 25, 2015).

²²¹ *Jackson, MS*, THE YOUNG PEOPLE’S PROJECT, <http://www.typp.org/mississippi> (last visited Oct. 7, 2014).

²²² *Id.*

²²³ *Id.*

²²⁴ Mary M. West, *The Algebra Project: Overview of Research & Evaluation*, THE ALGEBRA PROJECT, 3 (April 7, 2007), available at http://www.algebra.org/articles/07AP_RESULTS.pdf.

unrealistic, CBCI should help schools implement particular aspects of the program that will improve outcomes for youth. In particular, CBCI should help foster connections between community members and schools, through creation of community tutoring and mentoring programs in schools. CBCI should look not only at CIS, which does not yet operate any programs in Mississippi, but also at the Coalition for Community Schools, which has many resources for communities looking to facilitate community schools.²²⁵ The Coalition for Community Schools, operated out of the Institute for Educational Leadership, is a diverse network of national, state, and local education organizations and community school networks as well as government and philanthropic actors who work together to promote the development of community schools.²²⁶

LST is relatively inexpensive, transferrable, and proven to be effective. The curricular materials can be purchased and reused for many years, and the program can be implemented in elementary, middle, and high schools. If CBCI wants to quickly implement a proven program in schools, it could focus on having schools institute LST or a similar curricular program, while gathering resources to implement a CIS-like program over time. Furthermore, elements from successful programs like YPP and CDF could also be integrated into CBCI's school-based efforts. Considering the recent trends in graduation rates in Clarksdale and the potential impact of these school-based programs, including reduced juvenile justice and substance abuse rates, school-based reforms should be an area of focus for CBCI.

IV. Conclusion

The challenges facing young men and boys of color in Mississippi and all over the nation are complex. President Obama's My Brother's Keeper Initiative and local programs like the Clarksdale Boys of Color Initiative demonstrate that there is support across the country to attack these complex challenges. While there is no silver bullet program or approach to help youth completely overcome these challenges, there are evidence-based practices that can help lead the way forward. Communities, like the challenges they face, are unique, and thus the solutions, if they are to be effective, must also be unique and locally rooted. However, there are principles that can be drawn from the programs mentioned in this report that can be adapted to any community struggling to engage young people.

²²⁵*How to Start a Community School*, COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, http://www.communityschools.org/resources/how_to_start_a_community_school1.aspx (last visited Jan. 11, 2015). For more information on the concept of community schools in general, please visit *What is a Community School?*, COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, http://www.communityschools.org/aboutschools/what_is_a_community_school.aspx ("A community school is both a place and a set of partnerships between the school and other community resources. Its integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development and community engagement leads to improved student learning, stronger families and healthier communities. Community schools offer a personalized curriculum that emphasizes real-world learning and community problem-solving. Schools become centers of the community and are open to everyone – all day, every day, evenings and weekends.") (last visited Jan. 28, 2015).

²²⁶*About Us*, COALITION FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS, <http://www.communityschools.org/about/default.aspx> (last visited Jan. 25, 2015).

The Clarksdale Boys of Color Initiative has a great opportunity to make a strong impact in the lives of at-risk young men and boys of color. Whether CBCI decides to focus on engaging local businesses in supporting a work-truck, using existing facilities to start a new chapter of Midnight Basketball, or implementing new mental health programs as part of a community schools approach modeled after the Communities in Schools program, building support in the Clarksdale community is key. It is critical to engage young men and boys of color both in the programs and the process, since their voices are the most important aspect of making these efforts successful. Given the decreasing graduation rates in Clarksdale and the associated increased incarceration rates and decreased life opportunities for those who fail to graduate, implementing programs that will engage young men of color is crucial. The creation of the Clarksdale Boys of Color represents a great opportunity to improve the lives of these young men, and the sooner CBCI starts implementing these programs (or others like them), the better.