

Just Play: Empowering Youth In Our Cities

Play Smart. Play Hard. Play Safe.

Today's epidemic of violence in and around New Jersey's urban communities is adversely affecting today's young people. The combination of strong role models and extracurricular activities can play an important role in keeping children and teens out of trouble during their formative years. Unfortunately, some of the leading recruiting tools for gangs are offering susceptible adolescents the opportunity to be part of a community or organization which is why having a place to go and someone to look up to can make all the difference between staying on the path toward a bright future or falling into the trap of gang violence.

Creating a statewide initiative to give kids better after school options and positive role models will combat this problem and help reduce gang violence.

JUST PLAY: *Play Smart. Play Hard. Play Safe.*

Just Play is a statewide campaign that focuses on two distinct areas:

Youth Ambassadors for New Jersey's Inner Cities. Just Play will utilize New Jersey sports figures to serve as role models for the state's urban youth. These figures will serve as ambassadors to New Jersey's inner cities, showing youth that there are alternatives to violence.

- NBA legend Shaquille O'Neal will serve as the statewide ambassador, utilizing his background as a positive role model for kids, in addition to his active involvement in community and after-school groups, particularly the Boys and Girls Club. Shaq will help attract and oversee the involvement of other sports figures who will serve as ambassadors for specific urban communities. Urban areas targeted for this initiative include but are not limited to:
 - Trenton
 - Camden
 - Newark
 - Paterson
 - Asbury Park
 - Atlantic City
 - Jersey City
- Each Ambassador would assist with a public campaign aimed at highlighting why it's cool to get involved after school and to stay away from potentially violent activities or groups. This involvement would include PSAs, school visits, and active involvement and partnerships with existing afterschool, youth and/or community programs in their specific city.
- All participants will be asked to take the Just Play Challenge. Students within their respective cities will pledge ("I pledge to just play...") to stay in school, achieve great things, and avoid violence.

Creating Networks of Extracurricular Support for New Jersey Youth. Empowering our young people doesn't end when the school bell rings. It is imperative to ensure children get the support they need after school in order to succeed in the classroom and in the real world. The Christie Administration is proposing the creation of youth support networks to develop and strengthen partnerships among community based organizations, educators and other key stakeholders. The program's aim is prevention – to deter youth from becoming involved in delinquent or criminal behaviors, and to foster positive youth development by coordinating access to a range of services and programs to address individual needs and challenges.

- A total of \$500,000 in funding is being made available through a competitive process for community-based public organizations and non-profit private organizations to coordinate networks of support and assistance for urban youth by strengthening and/or developing partnerships with community organizations, educators and other key stakeholders.

- The centerpiece of the program is the creation of integrated networks of services and supports (the “Networks”) accessed through a single point of entry, coordinated and monitored by a lead agency with the assistance and guidance of a committee of partners and stakeholders.
- The Networks will be designed to support referrals from a variety of entities, including youth servicing agencies and organizations, police, prosecutors, and youth supervisors. The program will identify the needs of participating youth through a screening and assessment process and provide services or referrals as appropriate.
- A specific requirement of each Network will be to create and distribute a directory of afterschool programs, community programs, summer programs, and other opportunities for urban youth (in cities where such a directory does not already exist), which will provide urban youth and their parents information about the many opportunities that exist in the community.
- The formal Notice of Availability of Funds for this initiative will be released on November 4, 2013, and grants for the initiative will be awarded in early 2014.

CHRISTIE ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM WALLS

This youth support network builds upon already existing programs and initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of New Jersey’s at-risk youth championed by the Christie Administration, including:

Giving Families The Tools To Succeed. Family Success Centers are community-based grassroots organizations that provide services to meet basic needs ranging from day care and parenting classes to more complex needs such as accessing mental health support, domestic violence prevention and substance abuse services. The fiscal year 2014 budget reaffirms this commitment with **\$9.7 million** in state funds along with \$2.5 million in federal funds. The number of Family Success Centers in New Jersey has increased from 42 to **51**.

Providing Young People with Needed Help. The NJ 2NDFLOOR Youth Helpline is a statewide, 24-hour interactive telephone line for youth and young adults (ages 10-24), staffed by counseling professionals and specially trained volunteers. The overall goal is to promote healthy youth development by providing immediate interactive, respectful professional helpline services with linkage to information and services that address the social and health needs of youth. *Governor Christie’s fiscal year 2014 budget protects funding for NJ 2NDFLOOR at **\$791,000**.*

Increasing Funding for 24-Hour Mobile Response. Mobile Response and Stabilization Services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to help children and youth who are experiencing emotional or behavioral crises. The services are designed to defuse an immediate crisis, keep children and their families safe, and maintain the children in their own homes or current living situation (such as a foster home, treatment home or group home) in the community. *The Christie Administration is providing total funding of **\$14.1 million** in fiscal year 2014.*

Advocating for Abused Children. The Christie Administration has ensured that abused children have access to the resources needed to thrive, including:

- ***Child Advocacy Centers (CACs)*** are community-based, child-friendly, multidisciplinary services for children and families affected by sexual abuse or severe physical abuse. CACs bring together, often in one location, child protective services investigators, law enforcement, prosecutors, and medical and mental health professionals to provide a coordinated, comprehensive response to victims and their caregivers.
- ***Regional Diagnostic and Treatment Centers (RDTC)*** are located across the state. These four centers:
 - Evaluate and treat child abuse and neglect;
 - Provide resources for the region and develop additional resources within the region;
 - Conduct training and consultative services;
 - Provide emergency phone consultation 24 hours a day; and
 - Serve as a source for research and training for additional medical and mental health personnel dedicated to the identification and treatment of child abuse and neglect.

Providing Care for Adolescent Treatment Services. The current children’s system of care is being expanded to provide an integrated approach to services for adolescents with substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. The State has aligned

all mental health and substance abuse services for adults under the Department of Human Services and for children under the Department of Children and Families.

Providing Youth in Foster Care Internship Opportunities. The Transitions for Youth Summer Housing and Internship Program (SHIP) provides youth involved in foster care ages 18-21 the opportunity to receive quality housing and paid internship positions throughout the summer. Each member is assigned a SHIP Coach who is available to mentor, offer support and guide youth through program requirements, work with youth to pursue personal goals, and address any issues or concerns. *The Christie Administration protected State funding at over **\$420,000** in the fiscal year 2014 budget.*

Assisting Youth Preparing Employment. Many young New Jerseyans struggle to find their way to a stable career. The Department of Labor and Workforce Development has a variety of programs to help young people stay in school, prepare for future careers and to follow a path to a career, including:

- **Youth Transitions to Work Program** (YTTW) introduces New Jersey's youth to apprenticeship opportunities.
- **New Jersey Youth Corps** (NJYC) has 11 year-round, voluntary programs that engage more than 1,100 young adults into full-time community service, training, and educational activities.