

# Suffolk groups help juvenile offenders

August 2, 2011 by YAMICHE ALCINDOR / [yamiche.alcindor@newsday.com](mailto:yamiche.alcindor@newsday.com)

An 11-year-old boy goes to an out-of-state detention center and comes out a gang member.

A troubled girl is treated at a faraway group home but returns to a dysfunctional family.

Two providers of children's services say they have seen such scenarios occur too often with their kids. They have created a new program that will use intensive in-home therapy, volunteering, interactive workshops that will teach job skills and sports to keep juvenile offenders from five Suffolk County communities out of such facilities.

"You can't work with a kid in isolation," said David Hegarty, executive director of Hope for Youth, an [Amityville](#)-based provider of children's and family services that is leading the initiative. "The goal is to look at these kids holistically and be ready to intervene across all aspects of that child's life."

The Hope for Youth Community Reinvestment Program, funded by a \$593,988 state grant and slated to begin Sept. 1, will work with 45 youngsters from ages 11 to 15 in [Brentwood](#), [Central Islip](#), [Bay Shore](#), [Wyandanch](#) and [Huntington Station](#), officials said. Nonviolent youths who have had contact with the criminal justice system are eligible. Those accepted will be required to participate for three to five months or face being sent away.

Hope for Youth plans to do intensive in-home therapy with the youths and their families. Participants will be required to spend at least 15 hours a week attending work readiness, mentoring and other programs at Youth Enrichment Services, a [West Islip](#)-based nonprofit.

"We want to keep our kids with us," YES executive director MaryAnn Pfeiffer said.

A kid kept in his home community will not return from a facility with worse behaviors such as gang affiliation, she said. Contributing family issues will also be addressed, she said.

Once students complete the mandatory program, she hopes her staff can remain involved with youths and their families by integrating them into YES' ongoing programs. Education and Assistance Corp., the [Long Island](#) Advocacy Center, and the Center for Restorative Practices will offer pregnancy prevention workshops and educational evaluations, officials said.

The [New York](#) State Office of Children and Family Services awarded Hope for Youth the grant in April 2010 but has not released the funds, said Susan Steele, a state spokeswoman. The program's start date has been pushed back several times as state officials make contract revisions and other adjustments, she said. Officials last week were in the final stages of

completing the contract and planned to send it to Hope for Youth for signing in the next few days, she said.

Charles Weiss, principal probation officer for Suffolk County, said his office needs options such as the reinvestment program, which he added would save thousands of dollars keeping children out of costly, often out-of-state facilities.

"Unless we have a program like this, there's not a lot we can say to the court to say we don't have to lock the kid up," he said. "This keeps them in an environment where they can be successful."