

Inspired by childhood mentor to serve local youth

"The secret sauce is love," said Chris Sutton when asked how Youth Advocate Programs (YAP), Inc. effectively empowers young people to succeed while connecting their parents and guardians with tools to firm their foundation. Sutton said the inspiration for his work is his childhood mentor, a family friend who gave him opportunities to visit places that expanded his interests.



Chris Sutton

A former car wash owner, Sutton joined Chicago YAP 10 years ago as an Advocate. He has worked with hundreds of young people over the years. Most are youth who would have otherwise been incarcerated or in other out-of-home placements.

Today, Sutton is Program Director of Chicago's Choose to Change (C2C) program. Funded in part by the Chicago Sports Alliance, C2C is an innovative youth violence prevention program jointly delivered by YAP and Children's Home & Aid with rigorous evaluation from the University of Chicago Crime Lab. Preliminary results suggest participation in the program leads to dramatic decreases in arrests.

Learn more about Chris and his work on www.TheNeighborhoodAdvocate.org.



Abriana, 15, and her YAP Advocate, Kayla Alexander, pose for a recent photo outside their local YAP office.

With support from her Advocate, 15-year-old Abriana is on a positive path to success

Abriana is sticking to her plan of learning from the mistakes of her past and taking steps towards a positive future. In November, the 15-year old Los Angeles Youth Advocate Programs (YAP), Inc., participant told us that a year before getting into the program, she expected that she would grow up to be a "low-life." But that has changed.

Since working with her YAP Advocate Kayla Alexander, Abriana said she's on a path she never expected. Her grades have improved, she's off probation and plans to go to college. Abriana said her family life is better, too.

An alternative to youth incarceration and out-of-home placement, YAP provides community-based services that help youth identify their strengths and connect their families with tools to firm their foundation.

The Advocate model is the foundation of YAP's actual intervention with youth and families. Advocates are paid, trained and weekly supervised caring adults recruited from the same communities as the youth and families they serve. They are positive role models, easily relateable to the youth they serve who use their shared cultural identity as a natural bridge to develop a trusting relationship that is essential in engaging youth

and families in a positive change process.

Advocates help youth work to achieve their own individual goals and implement the individual service plan that is developed with each family. Available 24/7, Advocates provide services at times and locations when they are most needed, allowing for highly individualized and effective intervention. During their assigned hours – up to 30 hours per week – Advocates provide intensive supervision, mentoring, coaching, brokering and modeling through purposeful individual, family and, at times, group activities.

Advocates help youth and families meet their obligations to judges, probation officers, case managers and other referring entities, thus avoiding further penetration into the system. Advocacy services also include assistance with part-time employment, constructive use of leisure time, community service and connections with appropriate community resources. Advocates help young people and families expand their horizons and inspire them to set and achieve new goals.

Learn more about Abriana's progress and YAP's Los Angeles program at www.TheNeighborhoodAdvocate.org.