

Program offers youths a way out

YO Boston opens new headquarters

By Brian R. Ballou
GLOBE STAFF

Two months out of jail, Chandler Marsh slowly walked up to a lectern and started reading from a sheet of creased paper he had taken out of the pocket of his baggy blue jeans.

"If I wasn't working, I'd probably be bored, and when you're bored, you do stupid stuff," Marsh, 17, of Roxbury, said in a steady deep voice, his head tilted down as

he read to the crowd of about 60, including city officials.

Marsh was one of several dozen teenagers who attended yesterday's grand opening of the new Youth Opportunities Boston headquarters in Roxbury's Dudley Square. The program, also known as YO Boston, is funded by the city and a federal grant and offers youth who have been convicted of crimes a chance to get high school diplomas and jobs.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino lauded the program as a tool to reduce crime, particularly as the school year closes and teenagers

have more time on their hands.

"There are three things that make a very big difference in a young person's life," Menino said, standing behind the same lectern. "First, that we have someone who cares about us. Second is education. You can't get anywhere in life without at least a high school education. Third is a job. Some of you are facing long odds. It's all about working hard."

Police Commissioner Edward F. Davis told about two-dozen staff members, "We know the good work you do here prevents us

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Chandler Marsh spoke yesterday at the opening of the new headquarters of Youth Opportunities Boston in Roxbury as Mayor Thomas M. Menino (right) looked on.

City program offers troubled youths a way out

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from having to do more work on our end of the equation, which is always more desirable."

Youth Opportunities Boston was established seven years ago and has served about 3,400 youths, according to administrators. Last year, about 600 people enrolled, half of whom obtained jobs and 50 of whom earned a high school diploma or GED,

organizers said. This year, about 750 youths are enrolled.

The program also hosts a Community Transitions School for youths who want to return to the Boston public school system.

YO Boston began serving only court-involved youth in 2005.

"We're not talking about kids stopped for shoplifting," said Susan Lang, the program's deputy director. "We're talking about kids who have done some serious

crimes and who have served substantial time in jail."

Jane Tewksbury, the commissioner of the Department of Youth Services, said yesterday that the program is vital to giving young people in DYS custody a smooth transition back into society.

"The signature piece of our relationship with YO Boston and the Boston public schools is the community transition school here," she said. "It was established

to meet the challenge of kids returning to the community from DYS facilities and interested in returning to school. When they come to CTS and show up ready to learn, then we know that they're ready to go back to Boston public schools."

At 10,000 square feet, the new facility is slightly smaller than the old one at 2201 Washington St., but has six classrooms, double the number in the old building, as

well as a computer lab, office space, and conference rooms.

"They provide a great service to the city, working with a difficult population and sticking with them," Harold Sparrow, executive director of the Black Ministerial Alliance, said. "There aren't many other organizations in the city that do what they do. The kids caught up in the cycle of violence don't have a clear perspective, and that's what YO Boston offers."