

Rising

Strengthening New York, Together

 **RISING**
GROUND
NEWSLETTER
Winter 2026

Expanding Our Reach Across New York City

Rising Ground's Fatherhood Initiative and our JustUs diversion program will deepen their roots in 2026.

Two Rising Ground programs are expanding to touch more lives across New York City. The Fatherhood Initiative helps non-custodial fathers develop healthy parenting practices and strengthen family bonds. JustUs assists girls and LGBTQ+ youth aged 13-18 who are involved in, or at high risk of involvement in, the juvenile legal system, setting them on a more pro-social path. Though they serve different populations, both programs share a common mission: guiding participants onto paths of positive change with resources and support to overcome challenges and thrive. The Bronx-based Fatherhood Initiative is expanding into Queens and Manhattan with a broader scope that now includes mothers. Meanwhile, JustUs is growing into The Bronx, initially doubling its capacity citywide, with further expansion possibly in the works.

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L-R: Fatherhood Initiative Director, Reginald Mitchell, Case Manager, Katie-Leigh Camacho, and person-supported, Shatek, at our Fall Benefit.



The JustUs team in Brooklyn showing their support of Domestic Violence Awareness Month.

195 Years of Strengthening New York

March 2026 will mark Rising Ground's 195th year – a significant milestone reflecting our remarkable history and evolution from an orphanage to a wide-reaching and impactful human services organization with deep roots across the Greater New York area.

Please join us at our annual Gala on **Wednesday, March 11, 2026** at the Tribeca Rooftop to celebrate the enduringly positive impact on the lives of thousands of children, adults, and families and to fortify our commitment to empowering individuals and strengthening communities.



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Expanding Our Reach Across New York City

Fatherhood Initiative: Building on Eight Years of Success

Director of the Fatherhood Initiative, Reginald Mitchell, says the new contracts represent a significant milestone, allowing our efforts to build on eight years of success strengthening families while dramatically expanding our reach. This expands the age of eligibility to include younger fathers as well as mothers. Our work remains centered around providing fathers with parenting and life skills to improve relationships with their children. Research has shown that stronger father-child relationships result in children being less likely to get into trouble at home, at school, or in the neighborhood, and more likely to exhibit self-control and pro-social behavior.

For the fathers, many of whom come to the program via the courts following an arrest, frequently for intimate partner conflict, the most compelling reason to commit to the program comes from a pointed question asked by Mr. Mitchell: "In 20 years' time, do you want your child to ask 'how are you?' or 'where were you?'"

This question eliminates much of the resistance men may have to being told how to parent, and any perceived challenge to their masculinity, getting to the heart of the work rooted in providing trusted support. The 10-week curriculum builds on men's strengths and examines any weaknesses, providing tools and support in those areas, while also emphasizing accountability and communication. It includes one-on-one and group sessions. Support also includes helping people obtain their GED,

resumé building skills, financial literacy workshops, and assistance with job placement, all with the goal of building a stronger foundation for family resilience.

Additionally, the work with fathers includes addressing underlying issues and trauma as we seek to avoid adverse impacts on next and future generations. Case managers provide anger management training and, when needed, refer participants to other Rising Ground services such as the Atlas program for family therapy, or our community mental health services.

Group outings foster real-life peer engagement as well as valuable opportunities to engage in fun activities with their children. Mr. Mitchell says community flourishes in these settings: "It might be a baseball game, a basketball game, or a pool outing. Sometimes we go bowling or just order in food. It's a chance to talk to peers. It's more comfortable because participants feel like they are not the only one going through something."

The groups often engage with past program participants.: "We may have an alumni dad with us at an event to share his story. They can often sway a lot of dads, encouraging them to think 'I can't give up now because if I say I really love my kid, then this should be a no brainer for me.'"

Mr. Mitchell says the program's consistency and availability of its case managers who stay in regular contact with the participants, is key to the program's success, as is fostering the mindset among participants that they are participating because they want to, not because they must.

"We remind these dads that, at the end of the day, there is no manual for being a parent. It is not that any one of us is winging it, but there will be things that come up that one may not have a remedy for right away. That's when having someone you trust and who is available to you can help."

With the expansion into Queens and Manhattan, Mitchell says the program will build on its proud history of improving lives, strengthening communities, and addressing persistent social challenges, now reaching even more families across the city.



Shatek (right) speaks about his experience in the Fatherhood Initiative with CEO Alan Mucatel (left) at our Fall Benefit.

JustUs: Helping Teenagers Find Community

JustUs is similarly placed as the program prepares to initially double its capacity, building on five years of proven success diverting young women from the juvenile justice system. Rising Ground launched the pilot program in 2020 in Brooklyn following the identification of a gap in services for young girls and female identifying youth who were involved in, or at risk of involvement in, the juvenile justice system. The first cohort gave the program its name as they recognized their own agency. The initial years of JustUs demonstrated that by addressing the environmental causes of girls' behaviors including truancy and fighting, and bolstering skills in economic sustainability, the girls could be successfully diverted onto paths of self-sufficiency and personal growth.

The expansion brings the program's total capacity to 96 participants across the two boroughs. JustUs in Brooklyn accommodates up to 48 girls with the length of time spent in the program ranging from six to nine months. The Bronx program, which also supports 48 participants and has bilingual staff, reflecting the community, began accepting referrals in late 2025. There is hope that the program may expand further in 2026.

In addition to offering individual counseling, JustUs has dedicated physical spaces where the girls gather. Program Director, Alexandra Wynters, says these spaces are crucial, providing a safe space outside of the home and away from school: "It's shocking to me that despite the social media they have access to and all the things offered within schools, so many young people are very lonely. For them to build healthy relationships, they need a safe physical location – a space where they can breathe, or have a little breakdown if needed, or eat, or rest, or connect with other people."

The program incentivizes engagement by offering a stipend to participants. This, alongside connecting the girls to internships – including a partnership with CUNY that allows them to gain college credits – and job opportunities, encourages them to focus on their future and work towards self-sufficiency. Group sessions cover topics ranging from financial literacy, resumé building, and job interview run-throughs to self-care focused activities or coming together for awareness and activism events, such as Denim Day

Young women supported by JustUs and staff celebrating Thanksgiving together in Brooklyn.



to support victims of sexual violence, mental health awareness month events, and LGBTQIA+ Pride. JustUs also offers college scholarships, providing five this year.

Ms. Wynters says that over the past five years JustUs has built a robust referral stream from current and past participants recommending the program to their friends and family.

"As youth build trust with their counselor, they are more open to learning and discovery. Then, as they heal, there comes a moment where they ask, 'What do I do with this newfound knowledge?' I think it is beautiful that a lot of them go back to their homes and into their communities, expressing their feelings to those around them and encouraging important but difficult conversations."

With the expansion to The Bronx, even more young women will have access to this transformative support.

Both Mr. Mitchell and Ms. Wynters are excited about reaching more people with their expanded work, proud of the caring teams they have built, the trust that has been earned, and the communities their efforts have fostered. The expansion represents Rising Ground's continued commitment to meeting critical unmet needs across New York City, bringing results-driven programs to more youth and families.

For more information or to inquire about making a referral, please contact the programs by email at Fatherhood@RisingGround.org and JustUs@RisingGround.org. ■