



## **Youth Leadership Academy Develops Leadership and Advocacy Skills While Also Reducing Recidivism**

The OnCare Juvenile Justice Project, part of Onondaga County's Department of Children and Family Services, provides community-based services and supports to young people with serious mental health needs that are involved in the justice system. In the summer of 2017, OnCare Juvenile Justice Project staff developed a Youth Leadership Academy that prepares youth to advocate for their own mental health needs, and take an active role in OnCare's governance structure. The 7-week academy allowed youth to develop their leadership and advocacy skills, discuss their mental health and justice system involvement, and support each other. At the end of the academy, youth partnered with OnCare staff to develop a fall leadership academy module. In addition to the things youth found helpful from the summer session, they added sessions on entrepreneurship, internet safety, anger management, evaluation activities and volunteer opportunities. The fall academy started on October 21<sup>st</sup> and will last for 12 weeks. It will be co-facilitated by some youth from the summer session. None of the youth that participated in the summer academy have been re-arrested since their participation, which is important to note because reduced recidivism is one of OnCare's project goals.