

EVALUATION OF THE YOUTHFUL OFFENDER SYSTEM (YOS) IN COLORADO: A Report of Findings per 18-1.3-407, C.R.S.

July 2023



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Despite this assistance and cooperation, any errors or omissions are ours alone.

YOS Evaluation Team
June 2023

Forward

The Division of Criminal Justice is mandated by statute to conduct a bi-annual evaluation of the Youthful Offender System and present the findings and recommendations to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees. Many of the recommendations that accompanied prior reports have been addressed by YOS leadership, resulting in important programming modifications following the publication of these reports. We appreciate the response of YOS administrators to the findings of our evaluations.

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Executive Summary

DOC/YOS response to 2018 study recommendations

In 2018 the Division of Criminal Justice completed its bi-annual evaluation of the Department of Corrections' Youthful Offender System (YOS).¹ Researchers administered two surveys, one to staff (with a 69% response rate) and one to residents (with 88% response rate), and conducted numerous interviews with YOS staff and officials. Multiple themes emerged from the study which resulted in six recommendations for improvements to the YOS program. YOS administrators were extremely responsive to the study recommendations, as discussed below.

2018 recommendation 1. Education

The average age of incoming YOS participants has been increasing as a result of statutory modifications regarding YOS eligibility. YOS intakes are now, on average, just over 18 years old. YOS administrators should continue their efforts, currently underway, to examine existing educational programming and staffing to ensure that it is relevant to an older population.

Additionally, YOS administrators should continue their efforts to expand programming related to parenting since many of the YOS residents are parents of young children. This includes exploring ways to expand parent/family engagement opportunities.

Finally, given the lack of reliability of the TABE score due to residents not accurately completing the assessment, efforts should be made to discontinue its use with this population or to work closely with residents during testing to ensure the information they provide is accurate.

The GED program has effectively taken over from the previous high school curriculum. This is a more efficient and effective way to further education to this older population. In particular, the ability to segment the tests allows residents to continue their GED after release from YOS, which puts them on a sustainable path to complete GED requirements.

YOS continues to provide parenting courses that include Parents on a Mission and the Baby Think programs. They have worked to expand the availability of these programs to a broader population of residents.

The TABE testing has not improved since the 2018 recommendations. It continues to be an issue that should be addressed to effectively place residents into appropriate course levels. They do use information from schools, DYS, and other accessible assessment information to create the individual

¹ The report may be accessed here: https://cdpsdocs.state.co.us/ors/Docs/Reports/2018_YOSRpt.pdf

academic plan. It would be beneficial to standardize how the information is utilized so that the level of educational service needs can be tracked for future reporting.

2018 recommendation 2. Management and morale

The turnover of management staff at YOS in 2016 resulted in an organization in transition, affecting communication and morale. While morale has improved since the 2016 evaluation, it has not rebounded to pre-transition levels. Administrators should continue current efforts to communicate their vision and expectations to line and program staff to ensure that staff morale and the YOS program mission are not compromised as YOS evolves.

This continues to be an issue, also accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff turnover across all correctional facilities in the state has been a consistent problem, not just for YOS. Administration reports that they worked to give more consistent operational updates to staff, especially related to policy changes to reduce infection spread throughout the facility. However, staff reports on morale do not indicate that these efforts have been effective at boosting morale.

There has also been turnover at the administrative level, which can also give staff a perception of inconsistency. Each administrator has their own unique vision for how policy and protocol should be implemented. It is possible that morale has been negatively affected due to both staff and administration turnover.

2018 recommendation 3. Sanctions and family contact

Criminological research has found that family contact and support is a critical component of recidivism reduction. Administrators should encourage and promote family relationships, and should reconsider any sanction or earned “privilege” that limits family contact, in particular, phone contact.

The COVID pandemic also caused some significant changes to how family contact was achieved. In an effort to limit disease transmission, they moved to an entirely virtual system, where video and phone were the only ways that residents could stay in touch with family members. They did allow for more frequent contacts by video or phone, including a period where phone calls were unlimited and up to three video contacts were allowed per week. However, the costs may still have proven difficult for some families to afford.

They reported that sanctions were limited during COVID, which led to challenges when addressing resident behavior.

2018 recommendation 4. Mail

Administrators should investigate and resolve issues related to the delays in receiving mail, as reported by residents.

This was related to a specific staff performance-based issue. There were errors and delays in the mail delivery, and the person(s) is no longer with YOS. It is reported that mail is being delivered efficiently after this change there were no comments about mail delivery issues by residents.

2018 recommendation 5. Female residents

Despite substantial improvements in this area, programming for the female residents continues to challenge YOS. With the completion of the multipurpose building, efforts should continue to focus on expanding the female's access to programming and recreational activities.

They improved access to library services for the female population, college classes funded by Pell grants, and more opportunities for remote learning. However, the female residents who responded to the survey continue to express concerns about inequity in access to programming between genders.

2018 recommendation 6. Community engagement

The YOS management team should continue its work building and maintaining excellent relationships with community stakeholder employers who assist with job fairs, resume/interview skills, and hiring.

The pandemic limited YOS' ability to continue their established relationships with community stakeholders. At the time of the evaluation, they were in the process of resuming their efforts and hoped to get back to their previous level of engagement soon.

The Current evaluation

Legislation requires the DCJ to conduct an evaluation of the YOS every two years. This evaluation was originally scheduled for and commenced in 2020. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent systemic responses necessitated a delay. By 2022, restrictions put into place due to the pandemic were lifted such that researchers had access to the facility and the evaluation could be conducted. This report presents a broad picture of the operations of YOS as observed from the perspective of the residents, staff, and managers. Division researchers surveyed staff (with a 34% response rate) and 64% of available residents and analyzed quantitative data provided by DOC. From these multiple data collection efforts, various themes emerged to answer the research questions that guided the study.

Summary

Overall, the YOS operations are generally consistent with the statute and likely represent the intent of the drafters of the original YOS legislation.² Since 2018, YOS has continued to place a strong emphasis on General Education Diploma (GED) and Career Technical Education (CTE) opportunities. About 59% of residents said they would choose YOS again, 63.6% for sentence-related reasons and 34.8%³ for education/programs/activities. YOS administrators continue to expand vocational programming and opportunities for engagement and skills development. Additionally, concerns about the lack of consequences for negative behavior have resulted in a renewed emphasis on accountability by the administration.

Prior to FY 2010, the average age at intake hovered around 17 years, but began to increase toward 18 in 2010 and further toward 19 through FY 2016 due to the influx of 20-year old and a few 21- through 23-year old residents and the exclusion of those under the age of 16. In fiscal year 2017, the average age dropped back to 18 with very few of these older individuals admitted to YOS. This pattern has persisted through FY 2022. Table 3.2 and Figure 3.2 provide details on the age at admission of residents.

The majority of YOS staff (87.2%) reported that they consistently see themselves as role models, and another 10.6% saw themselves as role models “sometimes.” With a strong staff and administration, and the continued expansion of programs and activities, YOS is positioned to positively impact the lives of many residents. The proportion of residents successfully completing their sentence at YOS remained

² Prior DCJ evaluations in 2002 and 2004 did not make this finding. However, alignment with the statute has been a consistent finding in subsequent evaluations.

³ Compared with prior evaluation findings, education/vocational training appears to be less valued among residents.

around 90.0% between 2014 and 2017. This fell to 75% in 2018 and has continued at around an 80% success rate through 2022. YOS administrators believe this lower completion rate is due to two factors: a higher-need population, and the implementation of greater accountability measures.⁴ The 2-year felony reconviction rate after program completion is 26.0%, and 10.5% were reconvicted of a violent felony crime within 2 years. These are positive outcomes given the very serious nature of the YOS population.

2022 study recommendations

1. **Consistent consequences for negative behavior/accountability.** The vast majority of staff, 83.3%, feel like responses to negative behavior need to be improved to increase the accountability of residents. Residents also expressed concern about the lack of consistency which could be perceived as favoritism. YOS should review its discipline statistics on a quarterly basis. This should be done at the pod level so that discrepancies between housing units may be uncovered. If discrepancies are uncovered, the administration can work with the staff to address them and strive to improve consistency.
2. **Resident-staff council.** This council was designed to give residents a voice during their stay in YOS and improve resident-staff communication on their needs. This can lead to suggestions for improvement that administrators can consider. The administration indicated that this would become permanent, and we would recommend that this permanence be codified in a formal way so that it would continue even if different administrators were assigned to the facility.
3. **Impacts of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act.** The DOC should review the JJDPA to ensure juveniles receive the same services as adults in YOS. The segregation of juveniles is a significant issue and limits programming. The requirement for sight and sound separation limits housing options and significantly reduces the programming available to juveniles. It was noted by administrators that this means that juveniles are not getting the same benefits of the YOS program, which is antithetical to the purposes of YOS.
4. **Continue expansion of programming opportunities.** YOS should continue to seek out opportunities for more programming options in their current space, including virtual. Additionally, the community partnerships that were limited due to COVID-19 should resumed

⁴ In addition, YOS underwent significant organizational changes beginning in 2016 which may have in part contributed to a lower program success rate. Individuals on Phase III, in the community, fail YOS if they commit a new crime; the most common new crime is escape according to the DOC's FY22 Annual YOS Report (see <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdoc/departamental-reports-and-statistics>).

and new ones explored to improve opportunities for those in Phase III, as well as post-release from YOS entirely. The connections made in the community improve the networks that YOS residents have access to after they leave the residential phase of the program, and improve their chances of future employment.

5. **Management and staff morale.** Similar to the recommendations from 2018, there is a continued need for administrators and staff to improve communication. The issue of short staffing, which affected all DOC facilities, needs to be addressed to improve morale and reduce employee turnover.
6. **Education.** GED preparation and testing need to be consistently reinforced as a focus of the program. Additionally, the Pell Grant program should be maximized to increase the likelihood for residents to earn an associate's degree or make substantial progress toward the degree.
7. **Assessments.** It is important to accurately measure the educational level and needs of residents to track their progress and the success of YOS overall. There needs to be a renewed focus on ensuring that the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and other assessment tools are accurate representations of the residents' skills. It is no longer possible to track the educational level of residents due to the lack of validity of the residents' TABE scores.
8. **Female residents.** The attempts of YOS to create more equity in the programming for female residents have been substantial. However, there is still the perception among female residents that they do not have access to the same programming and educational opportunities as males. YOS should examine all possible options to address this disparity.
9. **Gang issues.** Among staff, 58.3% felt YOS did not deal effectively with gang issues. Administrators also noted a rise in gang activity, which spills over into all aspects of the program. In particular, keeping residents of different gangs separated in their housing assignments creates difficulties for YOS staff. The implementation of new gang reduction and prevention programs can improve the operations of YOS and the long-term outcomes of those who may be convinced to cease their gang activity.

Section 1: Introduction

Seventh evaluation in a series

This report represents the seventh evaluation of the Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC) Youthful Offender System (YOS) conducted by the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ). The Division is mandated to evaluate the program semiannually and submit the findings to the General Assembly on November 1 of even-numbered years. However, this mandate is not funded by the General Assembly, and evaluations are completed as resources become available. Additionally, the completion of the current evaluation was hampered by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the consequent restrictions enacted to contain the virus.

The first report was completed in November 2002. This and the subsequent reports have focused on recidivism rates, funding levels, comparisons of legislative intent to actual implementation, and characteristics of the YOS population. In addition, the 2004 and 2012 reports included information on the perspectives of residents, staff, and administrators involved in the program. The following two reports, prepared in 2014 and 2016, concentrated on legislative and DOC intent compared to actual implementation, the perceptions of residents and staff on a variety of topics, the comparison of the arrest and conviction histories of youth committed to YOS with those placed in other sentencing options, and an analysis of program failure and recidivism. The 2018 report focused on client profiles, recidivism, and more in-depth perspectives of staff and residents. Each of these reports included recommendations based on the study findings.⁵ The current report continues this tradition, reflecting data collected during 2022.

⁵*Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2002). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.; *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2004). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.; *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2012). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.; *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2014). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.; *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2016). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.; *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2018). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.

Organization of this report

Section One provides a brief overview of YOS and its enabling statute. Section Two specifies the research questions and describes the research methods employed for this study. Section Three presents the findings to the research questions as well as relevant additional findings, and recommendations for improvement are included in Section Four.

Background and description of YOS

The Youthful Offender System (YOS) was established by a special session of the Colorado General Assembly in 1994 specifically to address youth violence. This special assembly was convened following a series of high-profile crimes committed by juveniles. YOS opened in 1994 on the grounds of the Department of Corrections' Reception and Diagnostic Center in Denver, and became a sentencing option for juveniles who were prosecuted, convicted, and sentenced as adults on or after June 3, 1994 for offenses committed on or after September 13, 1993. In 1998, YOS moved to Pueblo, and in 2006 it moved to its current location on the grounds of the Colorado Mental Health Institute.

YOS is an alternative to a traditional adult prison, and it exists as a separate entity inside the Department of Corrections, with a separate facility and a specially designed system of programming. The statute describing YOS specifies that the state must provide a sentencing option for "certain youthful offenders" who would serve up to seven years day-for-day (meaning no good/earned time would apply) while a lengthier sentence to DOC would be suspended for the duration of the YOS sentence. According to statute, YOS offenders are to serve time in a "controlled and regimented environment that affirms dignity of self and others, promotes the value of work and self-discipline, and develops useful skills and abilities through enriched programming."⁶ The statute directs DOC to develop a program that provides "separate housing for female and male offenders who are sentenced to [YOS] without compromising the equitable treatment of either."⁷ The statute mandates that program participants be housed separate "from and not brought into daily physical contact with adult offenders" and that these offenders be "subject to all laws and DOC rules, regulations, and standards pertaining to adult offenders..."⁸

The original target population for YOS was youth between the ages of 14 and 17 at the time of the offense, who were prosecuted in adult court (via direct file or transfer from juvenile court) and subsequently convicted as adults.⁹ In 2009, the General Assembly expanded the eligibility criteria for sentencing to YOS (H.B. 09-1122) to include those who were 18 and 19 at the time of the offense

⁶ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(1)(a).

⁷ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(1)(b).

⁸ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(1)(d).

⁹ C.R.S. §19-2-517 (direct file), §19-2-518 (court transfer).

(limited to Felony 3-6 violent crimes) and who were sentenced prior to their 21st birthday. This provision was repealed in 2012, but reinstated the following year.

In 2010, statute modifications precluded juveniles 14 and 15 years of age from direct file consideration with the exception of 1st degree murder, any felony sex offense, and habitual juvenile offenders. Subsequently, the passage of Senate Bill 2015-182 allowed DOC the discretion to transfer any offender up to age twenty-four years with a DOC sentence into YOS.¹⁰ With each of these changes, the average age at admission of the youth sentenced to YOS increased from 16.9 in FY 2008 to 19.0 in FY 2016. This average declined over the following two years, to 18.4 in FY 2017 and further to 18.2 in FY 2018. However, the average age of intakes rose slightly over the subsequent four years, during which it has consistently been between 18.6 and 18.7 years old.

Determinant YOS sentences range from two to 6 years for those convicted of felony classes 3 through 6. However, those convicted of a class 2 Felony may be sentenced for up to seven years.

The statute describes a three phase program based on “self-discipline, a daily regime of exercise, education and work programs, and meaningful interaction, with a component for a tiered system for swift and strict discipline for noncompliance...”¹¹ YOS staff are to be mentors and role models to promote socially acceptable attitudes and behaviors, and programming is to include problem-solving skills and cognitive behavioral strategies that have the potential to change criminal thinking and behavior.¹²

Additionally, the YOS program is intended to promote among youthful offenders a pro-social culture and provide an opportunity to gradually reenter the community. The enabling statute also specifies that DOC officials will staff the YOS with individuals “who are trained in the treatment of youthful offenders...trained to act as role models and mentors...”¹³ To this end, the statute requires the following specific program components:

- **Orientation Training Phase.** During this 30- to 45-day period, residents undergo a comprehensive battery of intake assessments, including a thorough needs assessment and evaluation. An individualized progress plan is developed, re-entry challenges are identified, and residents are acclimated to the facility. Orientation includes explanations of the full scope of YOS activities and behavioral expectations. When not involved in orientation or diagnostic activities, the offender participates in highly structured and regimented physical activities.¹⁴ This is a high security unit where all new arrivals to YOS are assigned.

¹⁰ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.5.

¹¹ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(3)(b).

¹² C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(3)(d).

¹³ C.R.S. § 18-1.3-407(3.5).

¹⁴ See *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2014*. (2015). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis. See pages 19-21.

- **Phase I.** This is the longest YOS phase, lasting from approximately eight to 75 months during which time a range of intense core programs, supplementary activities, and educational and prevocational programs and services are provided to offenders. Living units are staffed with multidisciplinary teams and security, discipline, education, treatment, and behavior modification is the shared responsibility of each staff member.¹⁵ Job assignments exist in food service, maintenance, janitorial service, teacher aide, library aide, recreation and laundry. Residents attend education courses in conjunction with having a work assignment. At any point in time, the majority of YOS offenders are in Phase I.

- **Phase II.** This component occurs during the last three months of institutional confinement; offenders remain under 24-hour supervision while on scheduled appointments and community service activities¹⁶ in the community. All residents participate in a monthly employment seminar which focuses on career planning, labor market information, interviewing skills, and job seeking skills. YOS administrators have worked consistently to expand the number of employers and community partners who work with this population in Phase II. Phase II staff assist residents in obtaining birth certificates, social security cards, and identification cards that will be necessary when offenders transition to the community.¹⁷

- **Phase III.** This final component of a YOS sentence consists of a period of six to 12 months of community supervision when the offender is monitored during reintegration into society. An offender's eligibility for movement from Phase II to Phase III is based on (1) the duration of the offender's sentence to YOS, and (2) demonstrated and documented positive behavior and program participation.¹⁸ Programming in Phase III includes education, employment, community service, drug and alcohol interventions, mental health treatment, restitution, and other activities as specified in the offender's transition plan. According to DOC's Administrative Regulation 250-06, caseloads of YOS Community Supervision Officers should not exceed 1:10, and supervision level is designed to focus resources on those who are at greater risk.

The statute specifies that the YOS include the following program elements:

- (a) Provide for teaching offenders self-discipline by providing clear consequences for inappropriate behavior;
- (b) Include a daily regimen of physical training, self-discipline exercises, educational and work programs, and meaningful interaction, with a component for a tiered system for swift and strict discipline for noncompliance;

¹⁵ This description is from *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2014*. (2015). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis.

¹⁶ All offenders sentenced to YOS are required to complete 100 hours of community service.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Note that those offenders with ICE detainees are ineligible for Phase III.

- (c) Use staff models and mentors to promote the development of socially accepted attitudes and behaviors;
- (d) Provide instruction on problem-solving skills including methods to reinforce the use of cognitive behavior strategies that change offenders' orientation toward criminal thinking and behavior;
- (e) Promote new group cultures which result in a transition to pro-social behavior; and
- (f) Provide offenders the opportunity to gradually reenter the community.¹⁹

Finally, as stated previously, the YOS statute mandates that the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) "independently monitor and evaluate"²⁰ YOS and present the findings to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees. This report presents the findings of the sixth YOS evaluation conducted by DCJ.

Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act 2018

The DOC has interpreted the 2018 revision to the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) to require complete sight and sound separation of juveniles from adults, including during programming. This has required modifications to YOS programming which have limited what juveniles housed in YOS have access to.

¹⁹ C.R.S. § 18-1.3-407(3)(a-f).

²⁰ C.R.S. § 18-1.3-407(10)(b).

Section 2: Research Questions and Study Design

Research Questions

The following questions guided the current evaluation:

1. Per Colorado Revised Statute §18-1.3-407(3)(a-f), is the current operation of YOS consistent with statute?
 - a. Does the system provide for teaching offenders self-discipline by providing clear consequences for inappropriate behavior?
 - b. Does the system include a daily regimen of physical training, self-discipline exercises, education and work programs, meaningful interaction, with a component for a tiered system for swift and strict discipline for noncompliance?
 - c. Does the system use staff role models and mentors to promote the development of socially accepted attitudes and behaviors?
 - d. Does the system provide offenders with instruction on problem-solving skills and the use of cognitive behavior strategies that change offenders' orientation toward criminal thinking and behavior?
 - e. Does the system promote the creation and development of new group cultures which result in a transition to prosocial behavior?
 - f. Does the system provide offenders the opportunity to gradually reenter the community?
2. What are the current and overall characteristics of the YOS population? Have these changed over time?
3. What are the new filing and conviction rates of individuals released from YOS?

Institutional Review Board Approval

Researchers obtained permission from an independent Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct surveys with YOS staff and residents. The process of gaining approval for contact with research subjects ensures that adequate steps will be taken to guarantee voluntary participation in the study and that privacy protections are in place.

Data Collection

Quantitative data concerning youth committed to YOS through June of 2022 were obtained from the Department of Corrections' Office of Planning and Analysis. Recidivism data were obtained from the Colorado Judicial Branch and Denver County Court.

Information regarding perceptions and concerns of both YOS administrators/staff and offenders was collected using self-administered questionnaires. Resident questionnaires were five pages in length with 23 items, 14 of which were open-ended questions to solicit more-in-depth information concerning resident perspectives. One hundred seventeen (117) residents participated in the survey, representing 63.6% of all available YOS residents. Staff questionnaires also contained 24 items, 16 of which were open-ended. Of the staff members available to participate, 28.7% returned completed surveys (n=48). Copies of the questionnaires are available in Appendix A.

Survey samples

Resident survey and descriptive information

Of the 117 residents surveyed, nearly half (48.3%) were in the ‘Phoenix Level’, the highest privilege level in the program (see Figure 3.1). No residents in community/non-residential status were included.

Table 2. 1. Privilege level of respondents

	N	Percent
Orientation	2	1.7%
Peer	19	16.4%
Pledge 1	11	9.5%
Pledge 2	6	5.2%
Pledge 3	13	11.2%
Pledge 4	9	7.8%
Phoenix	56	48.3%
Total	116	100.0%

These residents’ YOS sentences ranged from 1 to 12 years, with an average of 5.7 years. Their suspended DOC sentences ranged from one to 49 years, averaging 20.3 years. The average time spent in the YOS program at the time of this study was 26 months, ranging between 1 month up to 6 years.

Participants were between 16 and 25 years old, with an average of 20.6 years. All of the female residents were included - 6.9% of residents surveyed were female (N=8), and 4 were transfers from DOC to YOS.²¹

²¹ In 2015, the General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 15-182 which allows for the identification and placement of certain individuals who were directly sentenced to prison to be placed in YOS if under the age of 24, and DOC administrators believe they could benefit from the program.

Staff survey and descriptive information

Staff members surveyed comprised a wide variety of positions, though the majority were correctional officers (71.9%). However, other positions surveyed included wardens, administrative staff, and teachers.

Most had worked at DOC for at least five years (73.6%), and 46.2% had been with DOC for at least 10 years. Just under half (46.5%) had been with YOS for over 5 years, while 21.1% had been with the program for over 10 years.

Most had no experience working with juveniles prior to coming to YOS (74.5%). Of those that did have such experience, only 25.0% reported that it involved working with juvenile offenders.

However, 73.9% felt that their prior education or experience had at least 'somewhat' prepared them for working with this population. Most (81.3%) had taken at least some specialized training to work with youthful offenders since coming to YOS. Note YOS requires and provides annual training for staff on YOS procedures and programming and adolescent-specific topics.

Table 2. 2. Staff respondent positions

Position title	N	Percent
Academics	6	13.0%
Administrative Services	3	6.5%
Case Manager	1	2.2%
Correctional Officer	33	71.7%
Social Worker	1	2.2%
Support Services	1	2.2%
Warden/Associate warden	1	2.2%
Total	46	100.0%

Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were performed using Microsoft Excel and the statistical software package SPSS. Thematic content analysis was applied to the open-ended survey responses utilizing QSR International's NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

Limitations of this study

Time and resource constraints precluded researchers from observing routine activities conducted in the YOS setting, including program groups and program participants. Additionally, unlike prior evaluations, focus groups were not conducted. Finally, the non-residential clients in Phase III were not surveyed for this evaluation.

Section 3: Findings

This section begins with the research questions enumerated in Section 2, derived from the YOS statute, and follows the language put forth by the statute. Additional findings are included at the end of the section.

1. Per Colorado Revised Statute 18-1.3-407(10)(b), is the current operation of YOS consistent with the statute?

a) Does the system provide for teaching offenders self-discipline by providing clear consequences for inappropriate behavior?

YOS operations appear to be consistent with the statute. Consequences for negative behaviors range from revocation to the Department of Corrections' traditional prison system to regression to lower behavioral status levels,²² to negative chronological reports (which provide documentation over time). For serious types of misconduct, disciplinary measures also include regression to the Intake, Diagnostic, and Orientation Unit (IDO) for offenders receiving "removal from population" and special management consequences. Additionally, the use of the Code of Penal Discipline (COPD) was less common during COVID-19 restrictions. The COPD sanctions at YOS include 30- and 90-day loss of privileges for a Class II and Class I violation, respectively. Residents also can be restricted to the housing unit for 15 days for a Class II COPD. Status level changes may also be used in addition to COPD sanctions to ensure that offender status (see Figure 3.1) is an appropriate reflection of negative behaviors.

The Offender Immediate Accountability Resolution (OIAR) process is specifically designed to address immediate accountability and long-term thinking and behavior change. At YOS, OIAR sanctions range from a verbal reprimand and/or a written assignment²³ to repayment for damages and/or loss of privileges. Progress Team Reviews (PTRs) can be conducted to address negative (and positive) behaviors and, if necessary, implement status-level changes. A focus of YOS staff seeking accountability is Cognitive Intervention Programming (CIP) in which residents are assigned to programs that focus on long-term individualized behavior change. Consequences include required participation in Guided Group Interaction (GGI), and Quick Skills and Thinking Errors, programs where residents may be assigned to participate in a specific module(s), such as anger management. Training for GGI and Quick Skills was conducted by a person with expertise in the system, and they made sure that the "train the trainer" model resulted in fidelity to the model.

²² YOS has a behavior-based "level" system where those with higher status have greater privileges (see Figure 3.1).

²³ These assignments are intended to be specific to the offender's problem behavior and should include a plan of action to address misbehavior.

The current YOS offender contract designates zero tolerance for gang-related issues, involvement, and/or behaviors. This contract expectation can be used to hold residents accountable through status changes, privilege restrictions, additional programming, additional behavior contracts, and if necessary, it can provide grounds to seek revocation from YOS to DOC. In addition, YOS is using the Violence Reduction Program, a cognitive intervention, as a sanction for actions that are associated with violent conduct and which may be tied to gang-related behavior. The YOS Intelligence Officer is delivering education modules related to Gang Intervention as well as meeting with residents individually to address issues. While gang-related issues are considered when making housing assignments, the expectation remains that residents must move past gang affiliations to remain at YOS. However, 62.2% of staff members surveyed felt that YOS does not deal effectively with gang issues.

On the part of residents, nearly three-quarters (74.1%) of those surveyed felt somewhat or definitively that there are clear consequences for inappropriate behavior. However, one-in-five (19.6%) indicated that 'discipline and rules are arbitrary' when asked what they felt were the worst things about YOS. One of the most common reasons residents gave for why they would not choose YOS again includes the perception that it has arbitrary rules (34.8%).

b) *Does the system include a daily regimen of physical training, self-discipline exercises, education and work programs, and meaningful interaction with a component for a tiered system for swift and strict discipline for noncompliance?*

Yes, YOS includes a focus on physical training and self-discipline, along with education, work programs, and meaningful interaction. At the Intake, Diagnostic, and Orientation (IDO) Phase (also referred to as the Orientation Training Phase (OTP)) which occurs during the first 30-45 days of the YOS sentence, residents receive needs assessments and diagnostic evaluations so that an individualized progress plan is developed, re-entry challenges are identified, and offenders are acclimated to the facility. The system provides for teaching residents self-discipline by providing clear consequences for inappropriate behavior.²⁴

The physical exercises and activities that the offenders undergo are designed to challenge and condition the offender both mentally and physically, drain counter-productive energies, break down negative gang affiliation and activity, and begin to develop pro-social rapport between YOS employees and the residents. Throughout the first 30-45 days, when not involved in orientation or diagnostic activities, the resident participates in highly structured and regimented physical activities. The limitation of idle time through physical activity is emphasized throughout the entire YOS sentence.²⁵

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ *Youthful Offender System Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2017* (2017). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis.

When asked what they believed were the best things about YOS, only 9.3% mentioned the recreation opportunities, the gym, and weight training. This was impacted due to restrictions placed on activities to lessen the spread of COVID. Less recreation was cited by 9.9% of residents as a change to policies from COVID-19 restrictions that were negative. The newer multi-purpose building has 13,941 square feet of space including a gymnasium and an indoor workout area with cardiovascular machines and weights. Upon the lessening of restrictions, this resource will become more readily available to residents, which should improve their perception of access to recreation. Improvements made prior to the 2018 report also include adding a walking track, basketball court, volleyball court, and stationary exercise equipment to the building housing Phase II and female offenders, which will also see more use upon the removal of COVID-19 restrictions.

Regarding education and work programs, as required in statute, YOS offers GED preparation and certifications, Career and Technology Education (CTE) programs, and vocational programming. After intake, an individualized academic plan is developed to address the needs identified during the assessment. The GED program provides an opportunity for residents to spend more time in CTE and vocational programs because a GED can be achieved at a faster pace than completing high school credits.

One change made during COVID-19 was the streaming of educational classes into living areas. When asked if this was useful, 35.8% of residents said yes while 64.2% indicated that streaming classes were not useful. Of those who found it useful, 15.2% of them referenced that they were able to take college classes.

In 2020, Pell Grant eligibility for college tuition was restored to incarcerated individuals for the first time since 1994. In 2021, seven residents received associate degrees using these funds. The Pell Grant program will greatly expand the educational opportunities for residents and promises to improve long-term outcomes of those released from YOS.²⁶

Special Education opportunities continue to be offered in GED course instruction, at a teacher-to-student ratio of one teacher to 7 students. This allows for additional attention to individual needs and focused learning. The teacher/student ratio for residents receiving Individualized Education Plan (IEP) services is one teacher to 3 students. Between July 2018 and May 2022, 91 residents successfully completed GED requirements.²⁷

²⁶ A study by the Bureau of Justice Statistics found that while 67.8% of state inmate releases were re-arrested within three years, only 14.0% of those who attained an associate's degree were re-arrested.

²⁷ It should be noted that assessment instruments used by YOS describe a high-need population regarding education. The assessment instruments used by YOS were not completed appropriately, so it is not clear what percentage of residents did not have a high school diploma/GED prior to entrance. Assessment data for recent intakes reflect that three-quarters of intakes reported that they were illiterate in English or functionally illiterate. Upon further examination by YOS administrators, it became clear that offenders were not spending the time necessary to answer the questions on the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) accurately; those with a high school diploma or GED, in particular, were completing the test in 10-15 minutes rather than the 90 minutes typically required. YOS uses additional assessment instruments to identify needs of offenders, including

Additional CTE programs have been added, including Introduction to Carpentry/Construction; a permanent YOS welding lab; mobile labs in welding and machining for females; and core curriculum night courses (e.g. English composition, Algebra, Speech).

A new Gladiator Training Program for Phase II residents provides individuals with an in-depth, visual, and hands-on experience of the concrete reinforcing “ironworking” trade. At the completion of this class, residents will have an opportunity to become certified, unionized, and trained ironworkers. This effort is in partnership with the Ironworkers Union, and jobs in this field are estimated to have a starting hourly pay range of \$17-\$20. The survey also found that 26.9% of residents indicated they planned to pursue welding for employment after release from YOS.

In surveys, when asked what were the best things about YOS, 57.4% of residents stated education, 10.2% said programs/activities, and 8.3% said vocational programs/work. When asked what parts of YOS were helping them prepare for the future, 56.6% said education-related programs and 11.3% said vocation and work programs. This impression of how well vocation/work programs were preparing residents for the future has decreased from the 36.8% reported in 2018, indicating that some residents may not be seeing the same value from these opportunities. It is possible that COVID-19 restrictions had an impact on the perception of these programs, as their availability was diminished.

When asked what programs or activities have been most useful or important to them, 72.1% indicated education and school, and 24.3% stated vocational programming. This was also lower than the 50.3% who indicated vocational programming as useful in 2018.

While the main reason given for choosing YOS over prison was sentence-related (63.6% of respondents said the shorter sentence was their reason), over one-third (34.8%) also stated they chose YOS for educational opportunities.

However, 17.1% of those surveyed expressed a desire for more or better educational/vocational options. A few comments from residents included these:

Give us more options for school.

No high school program, a lot of people could have had their diploma because they were close to graduating but they came here.

We need more focus on the education program, and not take from it but add to it.

More teachers and vocational classes.

the Level of Supervision Inventory (LSI). The LSI results for education/employment indicate a high need for education/employment services.

- *Does the system include a component for a tiered system for swift and strict discipline for noncompliance?*

Yes, a core component of YOS is the nine-level behavioral management system which links behavioral expectations to privileges. Please see Figure 3.1 for a partial description of the expectations and privileges associated with the behavioral management system. To progress in the level system, individuals are required to behave according to YOS norms and expectations. These norms and expectations are posted in the housing units and articulated by the staff and YOS *Offender Reception and Orientation Manual*. YOS staff can immediately drop a resident in status, depending on the individual's current and past behavior. Administrators report that this process is individualized, with an emphasis on accountability and cognitive programming to address both immediate and long-term behavior change.

Previously, when a resident was put on Disciplinary Level, they were sent back to IDO. However, this resulted in the troubled youth mixing with the new incoming youth. Consequently, IDO consists of two pods, one for the new people transferring into YOS, and another pod called the Classification Unit for remediation. Another change increased the amount of time those placed in the Classification Unit are allowed outside. Previously, when someone was on punitive restrictive housing, they were given only one hour out each day. This was increased to six hours per day.

Some staff expressed concerns about how the system for addressing noncompliance is working in practice.

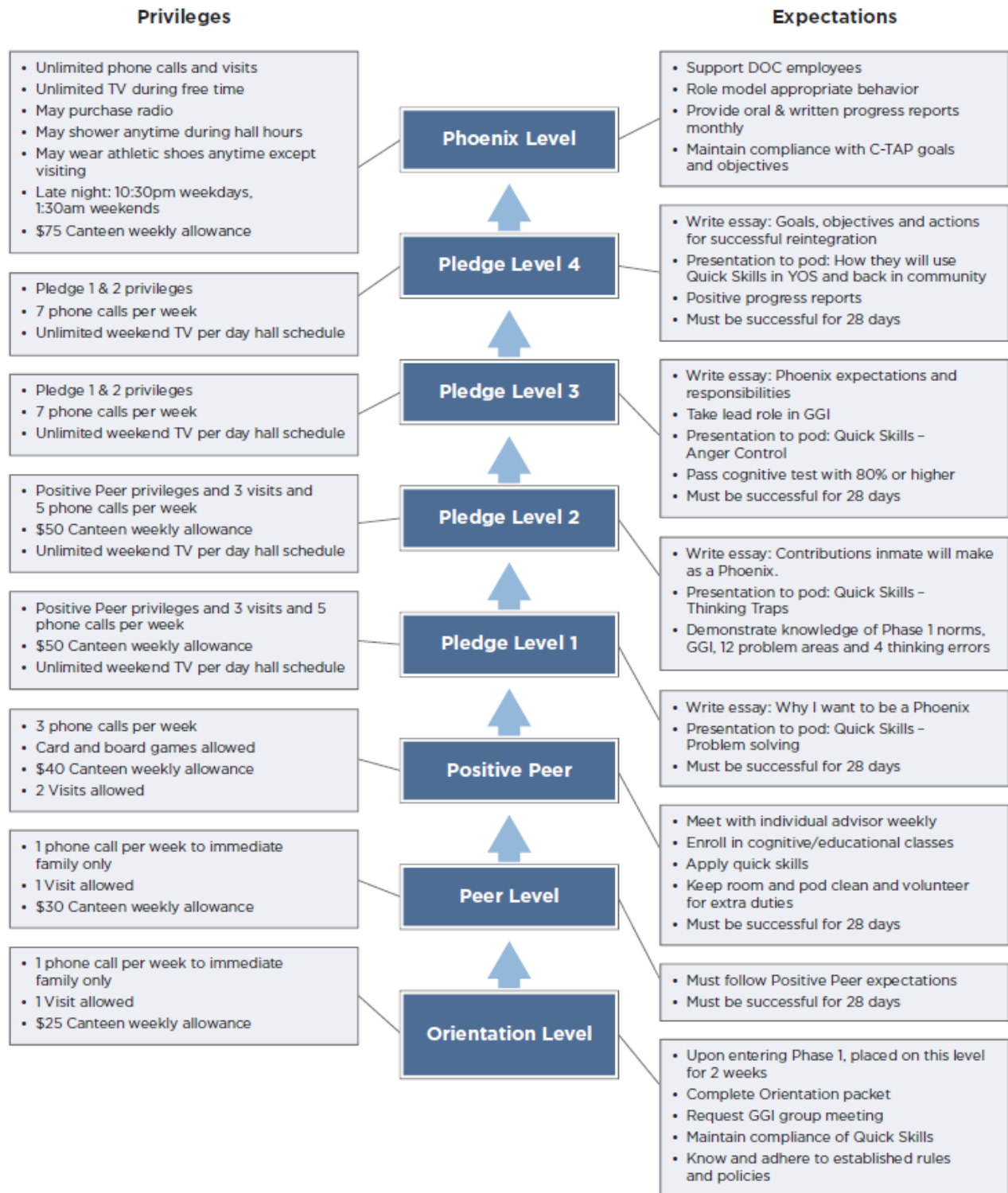
[We need to be] Holding them more accountable for their actions.

We are not holding them accountable and we are releasing our residents knowing that they will create more victims.

Staff need to confront their negative behavior. Confront their foul language, cussing at staff. [which they believe is not effectively addressed]

When working or trying to address an offender's behavior via write-ups, progress team reviews, or any disciplinary actions through line staff, these decisions are often overturned by admin staff...

Figure 3.1. YOS Status Levels, Privileges, and Expectations



- **Does the system use staff as role models and mentors to promote the development of socially accepted attitudes and behavior?**

Staff are required by state statute and administrative rules and expectations to act as role models and mentors to YOS residents. The first paragraph of the YOS *Teachers Handbook* states the following: “Through your actions and spoken words, you will model the appropriate manner your students should behave and interact with others.”²⁸ Most YOS employees who participated in the study seem to take this expectation seriously. The majority (87.2%) of staff members disclosed that they consistently saw themselves as role models for the YOS residents. Another 10.6% saw themselves as role models 'sometimes.' This was consistent across all positions, including correctional officers, teachers, administrative, support, and maintenance staff. Only one respondent indicated that they did not see themselves in this role.

Several staff members also emphasized their mentorship role when asked how the goals and philosophies of YOS differed from those of DOC:

Making them feel like they have a purpose and can really be something if they take advantage of their opportunity here. Making them feel human rather than just an inmate.

I believe that coming [to work] each day with the same firm, fair, and consistent attitude and each day being a new day.

Communication and daily interaction can have a positive effect on residents. A negative situation can sometimes be turned around and de-escalated through positive interaction.

For those residents who are trying to benefit from the program, assuring the resident that we are here to help them in every way possible to help them be successful in society once they leave. Being a positive figure/mentor by displaying positive behavior.

- c) **Does the system provide offenders with instruction on problem-solving skills and the use of cognitive behavior strategies?**

Yes, YOS offers several types of problem-solving instruction and cognitive behavioral approaches, including Guided Group Interaction (GGI),²⁹ Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens, sex offender treatment, anger management classes, victim empathy classes,³⁰ substance abuse classes, Quick Skills

²⁸ YOS *Teacher Handbook*, page 6.

²⁹ GGI uses group dynamics and peer pressure to promote pro-social behaviors. See *Youthful Offender System Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2017*. (2017). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis.

³⁰ The curriculum for “Victim Impact: Listen and Learn” was developed by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs.

(cognitive skill-building techniques), Baby-Think-It-Over,³¹ and Thinking for a Change.³² Evaluating the delivery, content, and fidelity of specific program elements such as these is beyond the scope of this evaluation.

The provision of Anger Management training was moved to the beginning of the program rather than further on. This allows residents to gain the skills needed to deal with anger issues earlier on. Additionally, it allows them more time to practice these skills prior to release.

When asked what kind of skills to manage stress and anger they had learned, 64.1% of residents surveyed indicated that they had learned or developed a variety of coping skills while at YOS. Examples include:

I've learned self control to help me with all kinds of things.

I've also learned to examine both sides...

Being able to think about my actions before making them.

d) Does the system promote the creation and development of new group cultures which result in a transition to prosocial behavior?

A primary method of promoting pro-social behavior is the use of a behavioral management/level system to gain privileges, as discussed previously (see Figure 3.1). Privileges are earned under a merit system, and these increase with the offender's status levels but can be lost due to problematic behavior or rule infractions. Behavioral expectations are articulated in the *Offender Reception and Orientation Manual* (2012). Privileges include visitation, telephone calls, television, radios, and canteen items.³³ Inconsistency in rule enforcement, and inconsistency in general practice, was a concern frequently mentioned by both staff and residents. These inconsistencies, as discussed previously, can have important consequences for the residents' status/privileges, making loss of privileges or lack of progress dependent on staff behavior as much as offender behavior.

As required by statute, YOS also uses positive peer culture as a fundamental method of teaching pro-social behavior. Because peers are one of the most influential aspects of a young person's life, they can both encourage and discourage antisocial behaviors.³⁴ Social learning theory states that youth can develop self-worth, significance, dignity, and responsibility through commitment to the positive values

³¹ This Phase 2 program involves providing the offenders, both male and female, with computer-simulated infant dolls that cry when they need something (to be fed, changed, etc.). The women keep these dolls for a period of 4 weeks; the men keep them for one week.

³² *Thinking for a Change*, developed by the National Institute of Corrections, is an evidence-based program.

³³ *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2013*. (2014). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis.

³⁴ Brown, B., Clasen, D., & Eicher, S. (1986). Perceptions of peer pressure per conformity dispositions, and self-reported behavior among adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, 22, 521-530.

of helping and caring for others³⁵ and can learn how to behave appropriately or inappropriately through the observation of peers that they respect and look to for guidance.³⁶ Positive peer culture was developed with the assumption that as peers learn to trust, respect and take responsibility for the behaviors of others in the group they can influence each other in a manner that will decrease antisocial behavior and increase pro-social attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.³⁷ If delinquency is influenced by one's peer group, individuals will respond to peer pressure for change, positive or negative.³⁸ Within the construct of positive peer culture, peers will develop and maintain positive behaviors and characteristics including:

- A sense of belonging;
- A code of conduct that assures a safe environment and promotes pro-social behavior;
- Individual members responding positively to the influences of the group;
- Each member has a sense that they can significantly contribute in a positive manner to the group;
- Individuals demonstrate social responsibility to the group and the group assists in reinforcing pro-social behavior; and
- Criticism of maladaptive behavior.³⁹

YOS uses the behavioral management/level system to promote a positive peer culture, and those who reach Phoenix status become role models for other YOS residents. It should be noted, however, that implementing a positive peer culture is difficult with delinquent youth because, as researchers have found, juveniles are in fact learning from and being reinforced by the "leaders" in their community, and the behaviors may not be the positive, pro-social behaviors intended by therapists and correctional personnel.⁴⁰ Thus, involvement and supervision/intervention of staff is necessary to ensure that positive behaviors are being displayed and encouraged by the peer community.⁴¹ It is in this context of instilling a positive peer culture that staff consistency, then, becomes especially important.

However, gang culture is something that must be overcome. Administration reported that they are getting more residents who have been involved in gangs, sometimes from the age of eight or nine years old. At the same time, a third of staff members surveyed felt that the YOS does not deal effectively with gangs.

³⁵ Brendtro, L.K. & Vorrath, H.H. (1985). *Positive peer culture* (2nd Ed.). Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

³⁶ Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall; Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and actions: A social-cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

³⁷ Ryan, J.P. (2006). Dependent youth in juvenile justice: Do positive peer culture programs work for victims of child maltreatment? *Research on Social Work Practice*, 16(5), 511-519; Zimpfer, D.G. (1992). Group work with delinquents. *The Journal Specialist in Group Work*, 17(2), 116-126.

³⁸ Harstad, C.D. (1976). Guided group interaction: Positive peer culture. *Child Care Quarterly*, 5(2), 109-120.

³⁹ See <http://www.troubledteenblog.com/2008/07/positive-peer-culture-adolescent-residential-treatment-philosophy/>.

⁴⁰ Dishion, T.J., McCord, J., & Poulin, F. (1999). When interventions harm: Peer groups and problem behavior. *American Psychologist*, 54(9), 755-764.

⁴¹ Ibid.

There are classes regarding gang involvement in the IDO phase, and they are beginning to work with Denver's Second Chance Center to talk about gang disengagement. Useful training opportunities mentioned by staff included:

Additional training...that I feel would be helpful is adding a course that specializes in the mentality and culture that these offenders have (i.e., behaviors, maturity levels, respect level, etc.)

Situational training (regarding) Gangs, drugs

Some type of mental health training. Behavioral training.

e) Does the system provide offenders the opportunity to gradually reenter the community?

Phase II and Phase III are designed to gradually reintegrate the individual into the community. The Phase II component of YOS is referred to as pre-release,⁴² and it occurs during the last three months of incarceration at the Pueblo facility. It includes supervised scheduled appointments and activities in the community. A focus in Phase II is building on the academic skills acquired in Phase I, and residents participate in career planning and job-seeking skills. Individuals must attend classes in nutrition and food preparation, budgeting, and personal safety.⁴³ An important component of Phase II is the acquisition of important documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, and Colorado identification cards that are necessary for job applications and housing.

Community transition team meetings include YOS staff from Phase I, II, and III, clinical staff, the resident's educational advisor, family members, and relevant community service providers. These meetings occur during Phase II to develop an individualized supervision and reentry plan for Phase III, also called YOS Community Supervision. Phase III involves six to 12 months of intensive supervision in the community. YOS contracts with community-based service providers to provide evidence-based services to clients. According to DOC documentation, actual time in Phase III is based on (1) the duration of the individual's sentence to YOS, and (2) demonstrated and documented positive behavior and program participation (those with positive behavior are released earlier, and have longer periods of time in Phase III).

Most residents (71.7%) felt YOS was helping them prepare for their future after YOS. The parts of YOS most frequently cited as helping them in this preparation included education (by 56.6% of residents surveyed), vocational training (11.3%), and cognitive/coping skills (6.6%).

Two-thirds (68%) of residents surveyed had a specific plan for employment after leaving YOS. The table below outlines employment categories mentioned by residents surveyed.

⁴² See *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2020*. (2022). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis. Pages 22-29.

⁴³ Ibid.

Table 3.1. What employment do you plan to pursue after leaving YOS?

Employment category	N	Percent*
Artistic	4	5%
Business-Retail	17	21%
Other	5	6%
Professional	12	15%
Services	11	14%
Trades	65	81%
Non-employment	39	36.2%

*Note: Residents may indicate more than one type of employment category. Therefore, the percentage total is greater than 100%.

2. What are the current characteristics of the YOS population? Have these changed over time?

Over the past 25 years, the size of the population served by YOS has significantly fluctuated. The largest end-of-year population was 298 at the end of FY 1998. Over the following nine years, the population declined consistently, reaching 205 by the end of FY 2007, a 29.9% decline. Over the following four years, the end-of-year population increased by 28.7%, followed by a period of decline through FY 2017. Since that time, the end-of-year population has fluctuated between 206 and 234 participants. The FY 2022 average daily population (ADP) under facility supervision was 191, the Phase III non-residential ADP was 38, while the external capacity ADP (jail backlog) was 4.

In large part, changes to the YOS population over time reflect statutory modifications that affected the eligibility requirements. The average age at intake began to increase in FY 2010, which was to be expected due to changes in the 2010 statute that removed most juveniles ages 14 and 15 from direct file consideration⁴⁴ and the 2009 statutory modification that extended the age of sentencing to include 19 and 20 year olds.⁴⁵ In 2015, legislation was passed allowing the transfer of individuals up to age 24 from DOC to YOS, further increasing the average age of youth admitted to the YOS.⁴⁶

Prior to FY 2010 the average age at intake hovered around 17 years, but began to increase toward 18 in 2010 and further toward 19 through FY 2016 due to the influx of 20-year old and a few 21- through 23-year old residents and the exclusion of those under the age of 16. In fiscal year 2017, the average age dropped back to around 18, but has since rebounded with an average of about 18.5 years. Very few older individuals are admitted to YOS. Table 3.2 and Figure 3.2 provide details on the age at admission of residents.

⁴⁴ C.R.S. §19-2-517.

⁴⁵ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.

⁴⁶ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.5.

Regarding gender, historically the proportion of the YOS population made up of females has remained very small, with the number of annual intakes ranging between zero and 8. Since inception, only 83 females, or 4.3% of total intakes, have participated in the YOS program.

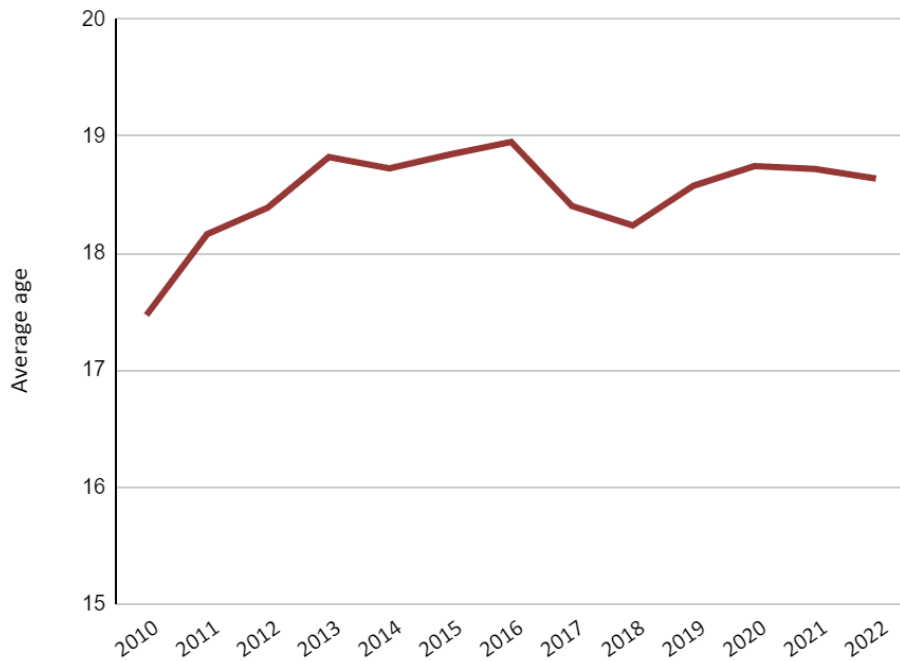
Table 3.2. Age at Intake, FY 2010-2022

FY	N	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	23	Total
2010	83	0.0%	2.4%	4.8%	12.0%	26.5%	34.9%	16.9%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
2011	68	0.0%	0.0%	1.5%	10.3%	19.1%	29.4%	22.1%	14.7%	2.9%	0.0%	100%
2012	77	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	3.9%	14.3%	29.9%	33.8%	16.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
2013	45	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.7%	31.1%	35.6%	26.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
2014	51	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	7.8%	33.3%	29.4%	27.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
2015	57	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.8%	35.1%	33.3%	22.8%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
2016	41	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	9.8%	19.5%	36.6%	26.8%	2.4%	2.4%	100
2017	47	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	21.3%	21.3%	38.3%	12.8%	2.1%	0.0%	100%
2018	59	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	6.8%	23.7%	22.0%	25.4%	20.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
2019	59	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%	6.8%	35.6%	33.9%	15.3%	3.4%	0.0%	100%
2020	47	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	12.8%	23.4%	31.9%	29.8%	0.0%	0.0%	100%
2021	50	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	10.0%	26.0%	48.0%	14.0%	2.0%	0.0%	100%
2022	69	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	14.5%	18.8%	39.1%	21.7%	1.4%	0.0%	100%
Total	753	0.1%	0.3%	0.8%	4.6%	14.7%	28.1%	31.7%	18.3%	1.1%	0.1%	100%

Data source: Data provided by the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis to DCJ for analysis.

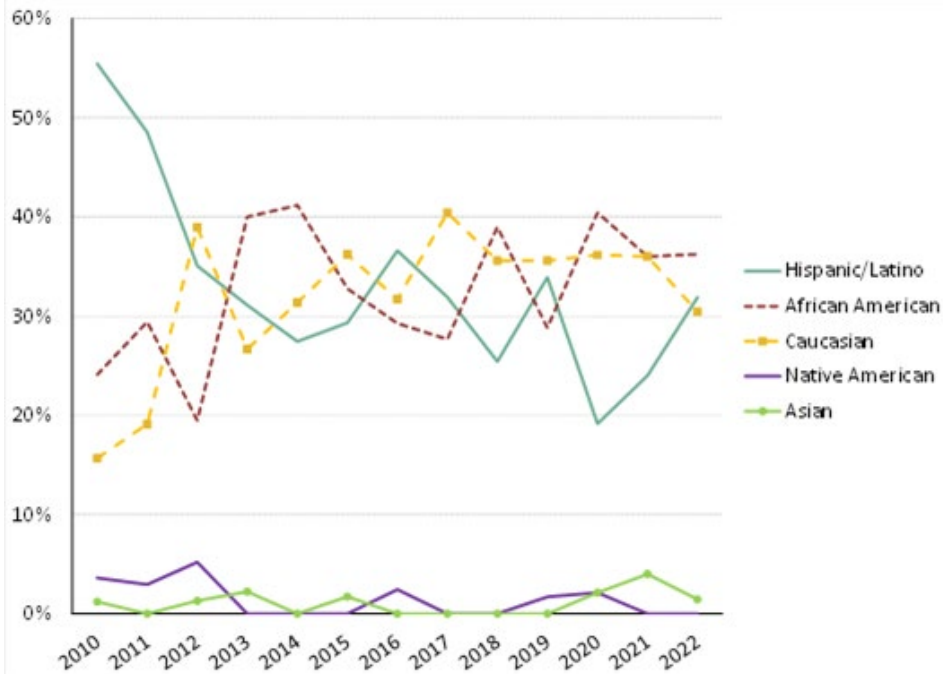
Note: The darker the color, the greater the proportion of individuals each year. One individual was excluded due to invalid data.

Figure 3.2. Average age at Intake, FY 2010-2022



Prior to 2011, the largest proportion of the YOS intakes by far was Hispanic/Latino, followed by Caucasians and African-Americans (see Figure 3.3). Since 2011, Hispanic/Latino admissions declined while African-American and White admissions increased such that these groups represented fairly equal proportions of intakes through 2022. This is in contrast with overall demographics, where African-American’s comprise only about 4% of the overall Colorado youth population.

Figure 3.3. Race and Ethnicity of YOS intakes, FY 2010-2022 (N=754)



Data source: Data provided by the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis to DCJ for analysis.

As shown in Table 3.4, the most common conviction crime resulting in a YOS sentence since 2014 has been robbery, followed by assault and homicide. The next most common conviction crimes include burglary, kidnap, and menacing. Very few admissions (11.7% since 2014) have resulted from non-violent crime convictions.

Most of these crimes are class 3 and 4 felonies. Felony 5, felony 6, or drug felonies have rarely resulted in a sentence to YOS. Additionally, approximately 12% of admissions were convicted of a felony 2 crime and only one individual has been convicted of felony 1 murder (see Figure 3.3).

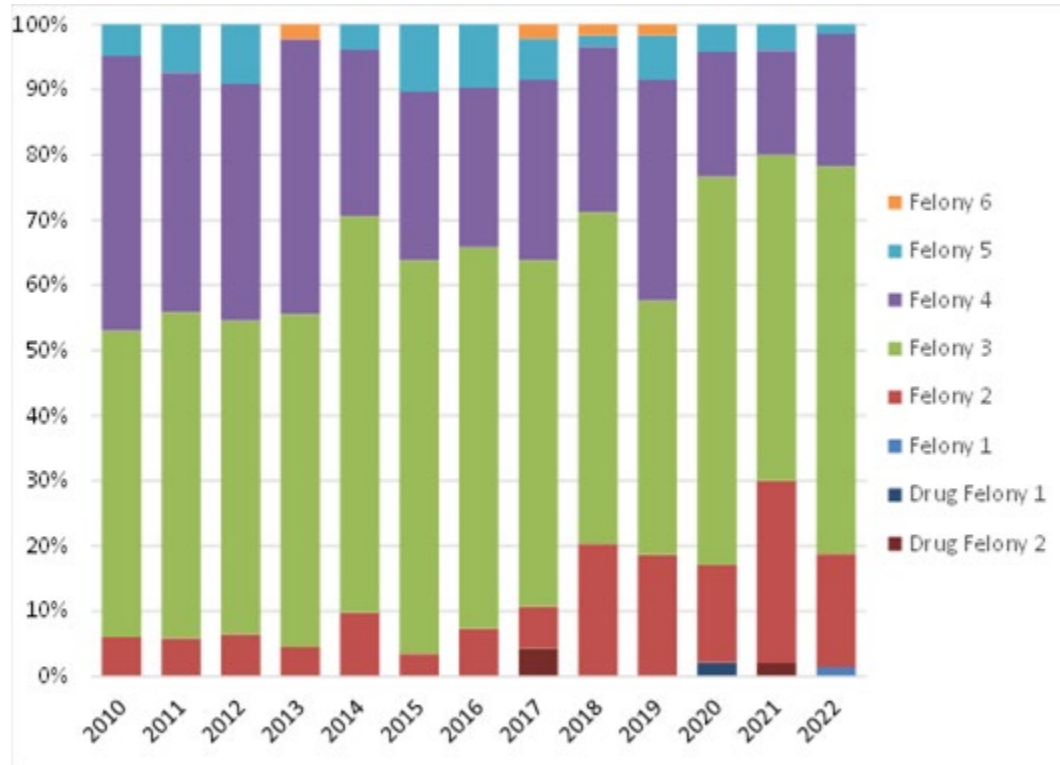
Table 3.3. Most Serious Conviction Charge, FY 2014-2022

	Fiscal Year									
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
Arson	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
Assault	21.6%	24.1%	31.7%	44.7%	27.1%	23.7%	29.8%	22.0%	33.3%	31.0%
Burglary	7.8%	8.6%	4.9%	2.1%	6.8%	3.4%	0.0%	4.0%	2.9%	5.0%
Child Abuse	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Contraband	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Controlled Substances	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	2.0%	0.0%	1.6%
Escape	3.9%	1.7%	2.4%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	1.7%
Homicide	9.8%	12.1%	14.6%	12.8%	15.3%	20.3%	23.4%	32.0%	27.5%	15.1%
Identity Theft	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Kidnapping	5.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	3.4%	0.0%	2.0%	4.3%	2.3%
Menacing	0.0%	3.4%	4.9%	2.1%	1.7%	1.7%	2.1%	2.0%	0.0%	2.3%
MV Theft	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Organized Crime	2.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Perjury	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Public Peace	0.0%	1.7%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Robbery	43.1%	43.1%	36.6%	27.7%	39.0%	42.4%	42.6%	30.0%	30.4%	36.2%
Sexual Assault	2.0%	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%
Theft	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Traffic	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.4%	0.1%
Trespassing/ Mischief	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.1%
Unspecified	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Weapons	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.1%	1.7%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total N	51	58	41	47	59	59	47	50	69	754

Data source: Data provided by the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis to DCJ for analysis.

Note: The darker the color, the greater the proportion of individuals each year.

Figure 3.4. Felony Class of Most Serious Conviction Crime for YOS intakes, FY 2010-2022 (N=754)



Data source: Data provided by the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis to DCJ for analysis.

To identify areas of risk and need, YOS uses the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R). The LSI-R is a 54-question semi-structured assessment measuring risk and protective factors in the areas of criminal history, substance abuse, education/employment, family, peer relationships, accommodation, and miscellaneous issues. Table 3.5 shows the average sub-scores for ten domains assessed by the LSI-R (the higher the score, the greater the need). The YOS continues to serve an increasingly high-need population, particularly in terms of educational and employment needs. The criminal history of those sentenced to YOS has also increased over the years, while needs related to family issues have decreased. Few have any positive and productive leisure time or recreational time activities.

Table 3.4. Average Total and Domain Sub-scores on the Level of Supervision Inventory-Revised for YOS Intakes, FY 2013 - 2022

Domain	Score range	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	T o t a l
		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0	1	2	
Criminal history	0-10	4.0	3.6	4.3	3.8	3.9	4.0	4.5	4.4	4.9	6.4	4.1
Education/ employment	0-10	6.8	6.6	6.1	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.9	6.9	7.1	7.5	6.6
Financial	0-2	1.1	1.3	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.1
Family/marital	0-4	2.0	2.3	1.9	1.8	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.3	1.7
Accommodation	0-3	1.3	1.5	1.3	1.0	1.8	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.5	1.4
Leisure/ recreation	0-2	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.7	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.7
Companions	0-5	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.7	3.0	3.3	3.2
Alcohol/drug	0-9	3.7	4.8	3.6	3.9	4.1	3.7	4.5	4.2	4.0	4.2	3.9
Emotional/ personal	0-5	1.8	1.7	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.0	1.4
Attitude/ orientation	0-4	2.4	2.5	1.8	2.0	2.0	1.8	1.8	2.5	2.0	2.0	2.0
LSI total score*	0-54	28.0	29.2	26.5	26.8	28.2	27.0	28.2	28.9	28.0	30.1	27.3
Total N		44	44	51	36	47	59	59	46	50	68	718

Data source: Data provided by the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis to DCJ for analysis.

*For the total LSI score, DOC considers 0-12 low risk/need, 13-25 medium risk/need, and 25-54 high risk/need.

Other assessment instruments used by YOS also describe a high-need population. Table 3.6 outlines the academic status and needs of intakes between fiscal years 2010 and 2020. Note the proportion of those with a high school diploma or GED declined from a large majority to less than half in FY 2014.

Additionally, those considered functionally illiterate or illiterate in English represent an increasing proportion of the population, going from approximately a third of intakes to well over half between FY 2017 and FY 2019. This proportion fell to just over a third in FY 2020.

Unfortunately, changes in data systems and training issues rendered the assessment data unreliable in fiscal years 2021 and 2022, so assessment information from these years is excluded. This is unfortunate, as identifying whether the decrease in illiteracy observed in FY 2020 has continued with more recent admissions.

Additionally, the decrease in those with a high school diploma or GED observed in FY 2018 is likely an artifact of the fact that it was found that residents were not spending the time necessary to answer the questions on the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) accurately, particularly those with a high school diploma or GED. This calls into question the validity of the information presented for 2018, and possibly adjacent years, in Table 3.6.

Table 3.5. Academic Needs of YOS Intakes, FY 2010-2020

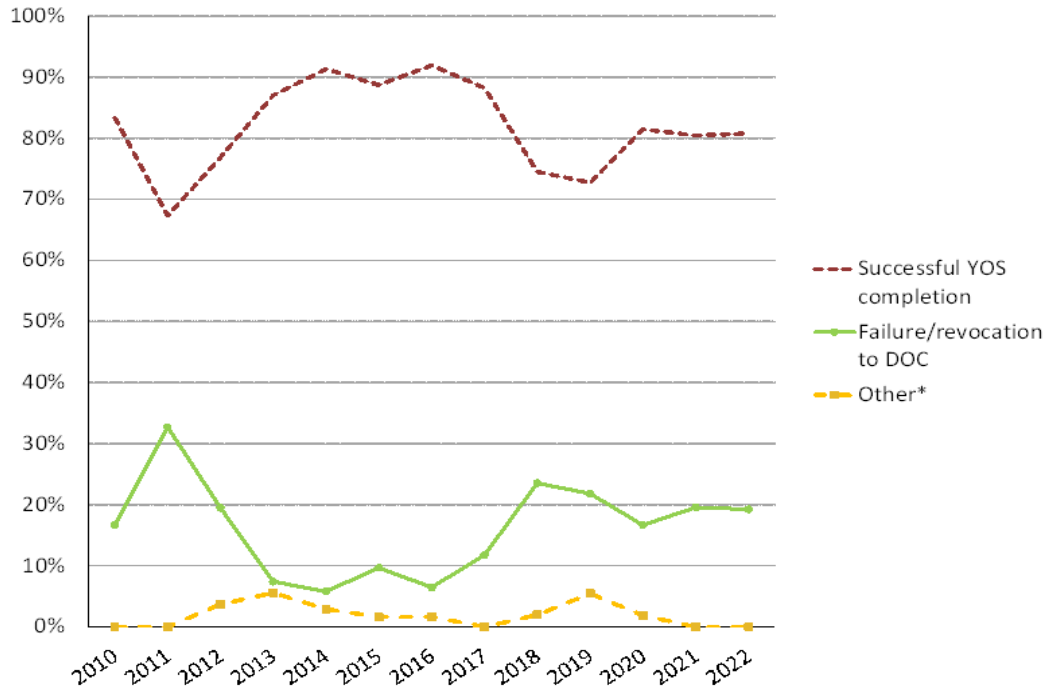
Fiscal Year	N	Have at least high school diploma/GED	Needs GED	Functional illiterate/illiterate in English	Total
2010	83	61.4%	7.2%	31.3%	100%
2011	67	91.0%	1.5%	7.5%	100%
2012	75	84.0%	0.0%	16.0%	100%
2013	45	80.0%	2.2%	17.8%	100%
2014	51	49.0%	9.8%	41.2%	100%
2015	56	44.6%	14.3%	41.1%	100%
2016	41	34.1%	26.8%	39.0%	100%
2017	44	31.8%	9.1%	59.1%	100%
2018	58	15.5%	8.6%	75.9%	100%
2019	58	31.0%	5.2%	63.8%	100%
2020	45	46.7%	17.8%	35.6%	100%
Total	741	49.5%	7.0%	43.5%	100%

Data source: Data provided by the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis to DCJ for analysis.
 Note: The darker the color, the greater the proportion of individuals each year.

3. What is the program completion rate of YOS participants? What is the recidivism rate of individuals released from YOS since 1995?

What is the program completion rate of YOS participants? Since FY 2010, success rates have averaged 82.1%, a very high rate of success with such a high-need population. Annually, the success rate has ranged between a low of 67.3% in FY 2011 and a high of 91.9% in FY 2016. The increase in Felony 1 and Felony 2 residents which started in 2018, from about 5-10% of the population to almost 20%, may have resulted in a population at higher risk for unsuccessful completion (Figure 3.4).

Figure 3.5. YOS Termination Types, FY 2010-2022 (N=738)



Data source: Data provided by the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis to DCJ for analysis.

*Other includes court-ordered discharges, discharges to probation, deceased.

What is the new filing rate of individuals released from YOS since FY 1995? Of 1,221 individuals who have successfully completed YOS since its inception on July 1, 1995, and who have had at least two years of time at risk in the community, 55.5% received a new felony or misdemeanor filing within two years following their discharge. Overall, 26.0% of this group had a new felony conviction (see Table 3.7). About one in ten (10.5%) of those successfully released were convicted of a new violent felony crime within two years. Please note YOS evaluations conducted prior to 2016 excluded filings in Denver County Court. In addition, traffic cases involving misdemeanors such as DUI/DWAI are included in the analyses presented here, whereas prior YOS evaluations did not include these types of cases. Therefore, the recidivism filing rate reported here can be expected to be higher than those published prior to 2018.

As expected, the new filing and conviction rates after 5 years in the community are much higher, with 71.9% of these discharges receiving a new felony or a misdemeanor filing. Less than half were convicted of a felony (42.2%), while only 17.3% were convicted of a violent felony within 5 years of their successful termination from YOS.

Table 3.6. Recidivism Rate of Successful YOS Releases, 2-year and 5-year post release

	2-year post-release recidivism	5-year post-release recidivism
New misdemeanor or felony filing*	55.5%	71.9%
New felony conviction	26.0%	42.2%
New violent felony conviction**	10.5%	17.3%
Number of residents	1,221	1,096

Data source: Court records were extracted from Judicial Branch’s Integrated Colorado Online Network (ICON) information management system via the Colorado Justice Analytics Support System (CJASS) and analyzed by DCJ.

*Denver County Court data are included here. Note prior YOS evaluations excluded filings in Denver County Court. Additionally, traffic cases involving misdemeanors such as DUI/DWAI are included, whereas prior YOS evaluations did not include these types of cases because of system capacity limitations. Therefore, the new filing rate reported here can be expected to be higher than pre-2016 reports.

**Crimes included are homicide (including manslaughter, vehicular homicide, criminally negligent homicide, child abuse causing death), felony assault (including 1st and 2nd degree assault, vehicular assault, felony menacing, felony stalking, felony child abuse, witness intimidation), kidnapping, robbery, weapons, sexual assault, and other sex crimes.

These recidivism rates are very encouraging, particularly the 10.5% 2-year rate of new violent crime convictions, given that most YOS sentences were the result of a violent crime, and considering the very high level of needs in this population.

Additional Findings

Impacts of COVID

The COVID-19 pandemic had significant impacts on the operations of YOS, as it did in all correctional facilities.

Education and programs were shut down in the first quarter of 2020, which created challenges in keeping residents occupied. According to the administration, this lack of activity led to an increase in gang activity in the facility, including fights and other types of gang activity.

The likelihood of a resident being revoked back to DOC was much lower during COVID-19 due to new regulations designed to reduce movement between facilities. This led to sanctions that were not consistent with those made in the past.

Other changes included allowing unlimited phone calls and video calls for residents, although there was still the customary cost for those calls. This was cited by residents as the top change due to COVID-19 that was positive, with 17.7% of residents indicating it was positive. Additionally, 15.6% reported that more sleep was a beneficial change and another 13.5% of residents reported that fewer demands from program participation was positive. However, these changes were cited by administrators as being negative, as they reduced the previous structure that was seen as beneficial to residents' behavior. Perspectives expressed by staff members included:

Been a strange few years due to COVID.

Program adjustment(s) that were made due to COVID restrictions resulted in a loss of consistency in program participation with the population. Staff were forced into a more custodial role than a mentor or supportive role...

COVID protocols did have a negative impact. Many programming opportunities were suspended/interrupted.

Programming was impacted when COVID protocols went into effect. Restrictions were lifted which allowed privileges to those who haven't earned them, creating a sense of invulnerability (sic)

Operational adjustments due to COVID were a challenge.

A potential positive consequence of the pandemic was the implementation of a staff-offender council, which has now become permanent. This council allows residents and staff to present their activities, with the goal of giving residents and staff a voice to work on improving YOS as a place to live and work.

Consistent Philosophy

To better understand the current organizational culture, two staff survey questions are explored below. As shown in Table 3.8, the survey captured perceptions by staff regarding whether there was a consistent philosophy between facility administrators and the line staff who work directly with residents. There is considerable variation depending on the year as to how staff perceive the philosophy between administration and staff as consistent. Whereas more than three out of four (77.2%) staff surveyed in 2014 reported at least a somewhat consistent philosophy existed, only 54.6% of those surveyed in 2016 felt the same. This went up to 71.1% in 2018 but then reached its low point in 2022, with 46.8% of staff indicating a consistent philosophical alignment (see Table 3.8). However, the participation rate in the 2022 survey was lower than in the past, which may have had an impact on these results.

Table 3.7. Do you think there is a consistent philosophy between facility administrators and line staff?

	2014 survey	2016 survey	2018 survey	2022 survey
Yes	42.1%	17.3%	42.1%	19.1%
Somewhat	35.1%	37.3%	29.0	27.7%
Not really	15.8%	24.5%	15.0	23.4%
No	7.0%	20.9%	13.1	29.8%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	99.1%*	100.0%

Source: Survey of YOS staff administered by DCJ.

*One respondent reported that they didn't know the answer to this question.

Some comments from staff revealed various concerns about differences in philosophy:

The administrative staff have a very good idea of the programs, but the line staff are usually in the dark on how to implement them because they are not communicated or enforced by administrative staff.

Struggling to know where the Administration is going with the program.

... I want to bring the philosophy and consistency back to this facility and work together towards a more productive and prosperous future for all involved.

...staff try and hold our offenders accountable for their wrong behavior and actions, while the administration stops most efforts by staff to do this.

Staff Morale

Staff morale has varied over the years. In 2016, a few (18.3%) of the staff surveyed considered the morale among YOS employees to be good or very good, whereas almost a third (30.2%) said that morale was poor or very poor (see Table 3.8). This was in contrast to the findings of DCJ's 2014 evaluation, in which nearly two-thirds (63.4%) of the staff respondents reported that morale was good or very good, while less than 10% said that morale was poor or very poor. In 2018, 43.2% of staff considered morale to

be good or very good, and only 24.9% thought it was poor or very poor. During the most recent survey, only 12.5% of the staff reported that morale was good or very good, while 62.5% reported it as poor or very poor. This is the largest percentage reporting this low level of morale and is concerning.

Some factors that may contribute to this apply to many correctional facilities. In particular, the issues with staffing levels were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic across the country and were cited as affecting morale by 50% of respondents. The lack of consistency in programming due to COVID-19 protocols also led staff and administrators both to be concerned about how they would provide residents the stability needed to help them succeed while in YOS and prepare them for eventual release. An administrator commented that “I think the morale has taken a toll on staff because of COVID-19 and staff turnover.”

Over six-in-10 (62.5%) staff cited “management issues” as the main issue for low morale, with 46.9% of those who felt morale was poor citing lack of support from the administration:

Line staff are burned out...They're feeling the lack of support from administration

Staff do not feel valued.

The staff don't feel heard or appreciated.

The administration did report that they worked to improve their outreach to staff, including more regular communication. These include quarterly video chats, weekly rounds through the facility, and attending staff roll calls. They have set up a portal for staff to provide confidential feedback, but it is unclear how this information is acted on.

Table 3.8. YOS staff perceptions of morale

	2014 survey	2016 survey	2018 survey	2022 survey
Very good	19.1%	2.4%	8.1%	4.2%
Good	44.3%	15.9%	35.1%	8.3%
OK	27.0%	51.6%	31.5%	25.0%
Poor	8.7%	21.4%	18.9%	35.4%
Very poor	.9%	8.7%	6.3%	27.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Survey of YOS staff administered by DCJ.

Staff were asked how important different factors were to their morale. The reasons most frequently cited as somewhat or very important, most were staff turnover, staff communication, and willingness to respond to staff concerns, which were endorsed by 100% of respondents. Administrative communication (97.9%), consistent policy (97.9%), administrative turnover (95.7%), and resident behavior (95.8%) were also considered critical to staff morale.

Table 3.9. Importance of Various Factors on Staff Morale

	Not important at all	Not very important	Somewhat important	Very important
Administrative Turnover	0.0%	4.3%	36.2%	59.6%
Administrative Communication	0.0%	2.1%	2.1%	95.8%
Consistent Policy	0.0%	2.1%	12.8%	85.1%
Staff Turnover	0.0%	0.0%	18.8%	81.3%
Staff Communication	0.0%	0.0%	8.3%	91.7%
Willingness to Respond to Staff Concerns	0.0%	0.0%	10.4%	89.6%
Resident Behavior	4.2%	0.0%	20.8%	75.0%
COVID-19 Restrictions	4.2%	16.7%	35.4%	43.8%

Comments from staff who reported lower morale provide some insight into the array of issues that can affect morale, including organizational change.

Staff are tired from the COVID pandemic. Staffing shortages, call offs, offender attitudes.

Programming was impacted when COVID protocols went into effect. Some restrictions were lifted which allowed more privileges to those who haven't earned them, creating a sense of "you can't do anything to me."

Lack of communication

No accountability of offenders. No support from upper management.

We tend to be short-staffed often, and numerous call offs lead to working doubles.

They don't hold the offenders accountable any more.

Training and skills

Despite the somewhat lower level of morale at YOS, most staff reported that they feel equipped to work with this population. A majority of YOS staff (73.9%, similar to 75.4% in 2018) respondents stated that they felt their education or experience adequately prepared them to work with this population, and 81.3% had taken specialized training to work with youthful offenders since they started working at YOS. YOS provides a 40-hour orientation training curriculum that includes a focus on youth development. Some types of training include the QuickSkills curriculum, Working Together, and Guided Group Interaction.

The QuickSkills training tools were revised to be more age-appropriate, as the age of the YOS population has increased. They also improved the training by bringing in the person who developed the program to

train the staff directly for one week. The goal is to create a train-the-trainer model, where peers provide training with fidelity to the model. They also held dynamic security training.

When asked what additional training would be useful, staff most frequently mentioned the topics of juvenile development/cognition, drugs, and gangs. Administrators believe that mandatory, rather than optional, trauma-informed training could help improve staff's ability to interact with this population. They intend to implement a more thorough trauma-informed care program specific to the YOS population.

The importance of education

Both staff and residents acknowledge the value of the educational and technical programs at YOS. Over seven in ten (72.1%) of residents reported that educational opportunities were the most useful or important thing about YOS. Nearly one-quarter (24.3%) of residents reported that the vocational and work opportunities were the most useful programs. The reinstatement of the Pell Grant program by the Federal Department of Education was specifically cited by both residents, staff, and administration as a valuable addition to YOS. Education and vocational training were consistently mentioned when residents were asked what activities or programs have been most useful or important to them:

Business, graphic design, and Pell Grant

The YOS barbershop taught me how to cut hair and that's the most useful program I've been offered in my opinion

The education. I've taken a variety of classes. They offer automotive, welding, graphic design, business, and much more

Getting my GED and my associate's degree.

The second chance Pell program has been the most important to me. Also just getting my GED was a big accomplishment.

The NCCER [construction] courses, also the maintenance crew helps teach a lot of hands on.

Welding, PELL: college classes, OSHA, Foundations. Basically all the college classes and vocational classes, trade school stuff.

The legislative representative program through the Second Chance Center; this gives us hope of change.

Computer information systems class and the graphic design class and those classes are important to me because they taught me skills that I will use throughout my career and life.

In addition, residents were asked if (and why) they would choose YOS again. Just under sixty percent (58.8%) reported that they would choose YOS again. While the largest percentage (63.6%) said this was due to the shorter sentence, 34.8% said it was due to the education and programming available. Over one-third (37.9%) of those who would choose YOS again indicated it was to change their lives and improve their transition. Many also appreciated the opportunities YOS provides:

YOS has a lot of opportunities and resources to help you be successful here and in the community

Because I am almost home and I got my GED fast here

Throughout my time being incarcerated I've changed in a good way and being here at YOS provides me with some opportunities that I am for sure going to take advantage of.

For school and the opportunity to have a career when I get out.

YOS administrators established a Gladiator Training Program for Phase II residents which will provide individuals with an in-depth, visual, and hands-on experience of the concrete reinforcing “ironworking” trade. At the completion of this class, residents will have an opportunity to become certified, unionized, and trained ironworkers.

The COVID-19 pandemic made continuing relationships with community stakeholders difficult. These connections are being re-established now, which will improve the opportunities for residents to gain skills that are useful upon release.

Why Residents Would Not Choose YOS Again

The most common reasons residents gave for why they would not choose YOS include the perception that it has arbitrary rules (34.8%), the program design (34.8%), and that they feel they are treated poorly or in a childish way (28.3%).

Safety

One question in the resident survey asked “Do you feel safe at YOS?” A little over seventy percent (71.9%) of survey respondents reported that they felt safe or somewhat safe at YOS (see Table 3.10). This compares to 88.8% in 2018. This reduction in the perception of safety could be due to several factors. One possibility is that when residents and staff reported that there were fewer consequences for misbehavior that it affecting on how safe people felt from other residents.

When asked what made residents feel safer, 43.0% of the survey respondents said that self-reliance and the ability to defend themselves made them feel safe. However, only 4.3% said that some staff made them feel safe. When asked what made them feel unsafe, 17.5% said “some residents or gangs” and 33.3% said “some staff.” Some also said that nothing made them feel unsafe (17.5%).

During interviews with administrators and discussions with staff, the implementation of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 2018 (JJDP A) was reported as a significant issue for the programming and logistics of the juvenile YOS residents. One of the core requirements of the JJDP A relates to the “sight and sound separation” of juvenile and adult inmates. Very few residents are under 18 years old, and the juvenile offenders’ separation presents significant programming and logistic challenges, more emphasized with the female population due to limited space. One staff member expressed concern that compliance with this requirement would completely segregate juvenile residents and lock them in a cell while adult residents attend programs and activities in the YOS.

Table 3.10. Do you feel safe at YOS?

	2014 survey results (n=79)*	2018 survey results (n=142)	2022 results (n=114)
Yes	64.6	59.9	54.4
Somewhat	21.5	28.9	17.5
Not really	10.1	7.0	16.7
No	3.8	4.2	11.4

*Note that in 2014 the response rate was 42% compared to 88% in 2018 and 64% in 2022. Results from the 2016 evaluation are unavailable because this question was not included in the questionnaire.

COVID-19 Mediation Protocols

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the operations of YOS. In April of 2020 they moved to remote programming and education, at least through the first months of the pandemic. There were also changes to some expectations in the facility, including a later wakeup time and loosened restrictions on hair and other personal grooming. They also removed limitations based on status for phone and video communication with family, although the standard costs for these services still applied. The administration and staff reported that the more flexible regimen led to residents becoming more defiant in the facility. Throughout the pandemic, YOS isolated residents who were infected with COVID-19, which also created some special challenges with this population. YOS faced a significant challenge to keep residents engaged and productive while also keeping social distancing and other disease transmission mitigation protocols.

There was also a sense that YOS became somewhat disengaged from community partners due to restrictions on the part of YOS and the community partners. This included canceling the job fairs and other activities that gave residents and community partners opportunities to interact. At the time of this evaluation YOS was re-establishing these partnerships.

Finally, DOC wanted to mitigate transfers due to COVID-19 restrictions. This led to residents feeling like engaging in detrimental conduct would not result in transfers to adult DOC facilities that may have occurred in previous times.

Programming for females

YOS continues to make efforts to ensure compliance with the statute regarding access to comparable programs, recreation and education for the female residents. Regarding education, GED instruction is available to all YOS residents including the women. Females also have access to post-secondary core classes offered in the evenings and video-conferencing is available for women to participate in graphic arts and business courses. Cosmetology was removed as a programming option for females. When asked if they would still choose YOS over adult prison, five of the seven women in YOS indicated they would still choose to come to YOS rather than DOC. Six of the seven mentioned the educational opportunities as being the most useful and best things about YOS.

Since the 2016 report, a driving simulator and two welding simulators have been installed in the women's housing unit in Building 26. As of July 2018, all of the women at YOS had completed both the welding and machining labs through Pueblo Community College, which gives them the same certificate standing as the men. Additionally, everyone in Phase I, including the women, have access to a simulator forklift certificate.

As for recreation, in the past two years Building 26 (which includes housing for the women and Phase II residents) has seen improvements including the addition of a walking track, stationary equipment and a basketball court. The women have access to the multi-purpose gym building and library three times a week, which is the same as the male residents.

One of the criticisms from the women during past evaluations was that they did not have the same opportunity as the men to have jobs to make money inside the facility. In the past two years a few work opportunities have been made available to the women including janitorial jobs in the administrative buildings. The required separation of men and women inside the facility continues to impede and restrict the possibility of work in other areas like the kitchen and library.

Despite these improvements, the women report feeling "locked up" in Building 26, and continue to express the need for greater parity with the men.

Some additional survey results include:

5 out of the 8 female survey respondents would not choose YOS again

...this program does not benefit the female offenders and we are isolated.

The females don't get the same education opportunities as the boys do. Females don't get the same job opportunities as the boys

After being here for a while it's literally the same as regular prison for us females. We don't get the same opportunities as the boys. We are stuck in our unit 24/7 and forgotten about by the higher ups. We'd be better off in regular prison. At least we'd be able to do things.

It is notable that all of the female residents surveyed indicated that they felt the treatment of and programming available to females was the worst thing about YOS:

...the program works out only for male offenders. Females don't get anything similar to the boys, and we are so isolated.

Not getting equal education and job opportunities as the males.

...I feel like females are always being left out of opportunities and not being offered classes.

Everything is pushed to the back when it comes to the girls: school, medical, yard, and job opportunities.

Youth transfers

In 2015, the General Assembly enacted Senate Bill 15-182, which allows for the identification and placement of certain individuals who were directly sentenced to prison to be placed in YOS if DOC administrators believe they could benefit from the program. Between November 2018 and May 2022, 24 residents were youth transfers.

Evidence-Based Practice Implementation

The YOS sees a need for consistent trauma-informed treatment for residents. While staff training on trauma-informed care is required in some DOC facilities, it is optional for YOS staff.

Quick Skills is a cognitive-behavioral skill-building package written expressly for adult corrections clients. The YOS brought the developer of the Quick Skills platform to observe how the Quick Skills training was being done and assess whether they were providing fidelity to the model. The goal of YOS is to establish a peer-training model, where certain trained staff can provide quality training, with fidelity, to other staff.

YOS also uses the evidence-based Guided Group Interaction (GGI) model, which directs the dynamics and strengths of the peer group toward constructively altering and developing group members' behavior. They are also working on creating a "train the trainer" model for those who will facilitate GGI.

Conclusion

In sum, the YOS operations are generally consistent with the statute and likely represent the intent of the drafters of the original YOS legislation. While the data collected during this evaluation shows mixed outcomes compared to 2018, it should be interpreted with the understanding that the COVID-19 pandemic caused significant disruption to YOS operations. The YOS administration and staff showed creativity and a willingness to modify policies and procedures to accommodate the moving targets brought up by the pandemic. They tried to maintain the health and safety of the facility while maintaining the operations and keeping residents engaged.

The changes required by COVID-19 protocols caused issues for both residents and staff. There was a perception that consequences for rule violations were lessened. The likelihood of a resident being revoked back to DOC was much lower during this time due to new regulations designed to reduce

movement between facilities. This led to sanctions that were not consistent with those made in the past. This uncertainty had impacts on staff morale as well as resident behavior.

As with prior evaluation findings, education/vocational training is valued by both staff and residents; 58.8% of residents said they would choose YOS again, often because of these opportunities. YOS administrators continue to expand the programming, including for the women residents. The reintroduction of the Pell Grant program to pay for college classes after an almost 30-year hiatus was seen by residents and staff as a very positive improvement in educational opportunities.

The majority of YOS staff (87.2%) reported that they saw themselves as role models, and another 10.6% saw themselves as role models “sometimes.” With a strong staff and administration and the continued expansion of programs and activities, YOS is positioned to positively impact the lives of many offenders. The proportion of offenders successfully completing their sentence at YOS remained around 90.0% between 2014 and 2017. This fell to 75% in 2018 and is now consistently around 80%; YOS administrators believe this lower completion rate is due to two factors: a higher-need population and the implementation of greater accountability measures.⁴⁷ The two-year felony reconviction rate after program completion was 26.0%, and only 10.5% were reconvicted of a violent felony crime within 2 years. These are very positive outcomes, especially given the very serious nature of the YOS population.

⁴⁷ In addition, YOS underwent significant organizational changes beginning in 2016 which may have in part contributed to a lower program success rate. Individuals on Phase III, in the community, fail YOS if they commit a new crime; the most common new crime is escape according to the DOC’s FY22 Annual YOS report (see <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdoc/departmental-reports-and-statistics>).

Section 4: Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this report, the following recommendations are presented:

1. **Consistent consequences for negative behavior/accountability.** The vast majority of staff, 83.3%, feel like responses to negative behavior need to be improved to increase accountability of residents. Lack of consistency is also something that residents are concerned about, as this can also be perceived as favoritism. YOS should review its discipline statistics on a quarterly basis. This should be done at the pod level, so that discrepancies between housing units may be uncovered. If discrepancies are uncovered, administration can work with the staff to address them and strive to improve consistency.
2. **Resident-staff council.** This council was designed to give residents a voice in their stay in YOS and also improve resident-staff communication on their needs. This can lead to suggestions for improvement that administrators can consider. The administration indicated that this would become permanent and we would recommend that this permanence be codified in a formal way so that it would continue even if different administrators were assigned to the facility.
3. **Impacts of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act.** The DOC should review the JJDA to ensure that juveniles can receive the same types of services as adults in YOS. The segregation of juveniles is a significant issue and limits programming. The requirement for sight and sound separation limits housing options and greatly reduces the programming available to juveniles. It was noted by administrators that this means that juveniles are not getting the same benefits of the YOS program, which is antithetical to the purposes of YOS.
4. **Continue expansion of programming opportunities.** YOS should continue to seek out opportunities for more programming options that can be implemented in their current space, including virtual. Additionally, the community partnerships that were limited due to COVID-19 should be brought back and new ones explored to improve opportunities for those in Phase III as well as post-release from YOS entirely. The connections made in the community improve the networks that YOS residents have access to after they leave the residential phase of the program, which improves their chances of future employment.
5. **Management and staff morale.** Similar to the recommendations from 2018 there is a continued need for administrators and staff to improve communication. The issues of short staffing, which affected all DOC facilities, needs to be addressed to improve morale and reduce employee turnover.

6. **Education.** GED preparation and testing is something that needs to be consistently reinforced as a focus of the program. Additionally, the Pell Grant program should be maximized to increase the likelihood that residents will be able to earn an associate's degree or make substantial progress toward the degree.
7. **Assessments.** It is important to accurately measure the educational level and needs of residents to be able to track their progress and the success of YOS overall. There needs to be a renewed focus on ensuring that the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and other assessment tools are accurate representations of the residents' skills. It is no longer possible to track the educational level of residents due to the lack of validity of the residents' TABE scores.
8. **Female residents.** The attempts of YOS to create more equity in the programming for female residents have been substantial. However, there is still the perception among female residents that they do not have access to the same programming and educational opportunities as males. YOS should examine all possible options to address this disparity.
9. **Gang issues.** Among staff, 58.3% felt YOS did not deal effectively with gang issues. Administrators also noted that there has been a rise in gang activity, which spills over into all aspects of the program. In particular, keeping residents of different gangs separated in their housing assignments creates difficulties for YOS staff. The implementation of new gang reduction and prevention programs can improve the operations of YOS and also the long-term outcomes of those who may be convinced to cease their gang activity.

APPENDIX A

YOS Evaluation: Resident Survey

Please fill out the survey as honestly as possible and please write as neatly as you can.

1. Gender (please circle) a. Male b. Female
2. Age ____
3. I am (please circle the ONE you most identify with)
 - a. White
 - b. Hispanic
 - c. Black
 - d. Asian
 - e. Native American
 - f. Other

If you identify with more than one race/ethnicity please list the others here (excluding what you circled above): _____

4. How long have you been in YOS? ____Years ____Months
 - a. Did you transfer to YOS from DOC? ____Yes ____No
5. What was your original DOC sentence? ____Years ____Don't know
6. What is your YOS sentence? ____Years
7. What level of privileges have you reached? (please circle ONE)
 - a. Orientation Level
 - b. Peer Level
 - c. Pledge Level 1
 - d. Pledge Level 2
 - e. Pledge Level 3
 - f. Pledge Level 4
 - g. Phoenix Level

8. Why did you choose YOS over adult prison?

9. If you could choose over again, would you still choose YOS? a. Yes b. No

What is the reason for your answer above?

10. Does your family participate in the program? a. Yes b. No

If yes, in what way does your family participate in YOS?

11. What YOS activities or programs have been most useful or important to you?

12. What kind of coping skills have you learned to help manage stress and anger?

13. If you had the opportunity to use drugs today, would you? a. Yes b. No

If yes, why?

14. Do you find working with your primary advisor helpful?

- a. Yes
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not Really
- d. No

15. Do you feel there are clear consequences for inappropriate behavior?

- a. Yes
- b. Somewhat
- c. Not Really
- d. No

16. Do you feel safe at YOS? a. Yes b. Somewhat c. Not really d. No

a. What makes you feel safe at YOS?

b. What makes you feel unsafe at YOS?

17. Is the video streaming of educational classes useful to you?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Why?

18. What employment do you plan to pursue after leaving YOS? ____ Don't Know

19. What parts of YOS are helping you to prepare for your future after YOS?

20. What do you feel are the BEST THINGS about YOS?

21. What do you feel are the WORST THINGS about YOS?

22. We understand that COVID-19 required YOS to change some policies and procedures to reduce the spread of the virus through the facility.

a. What is the BEST part about these changes?

b. What is the WORST part about these changes?

23. What suggestions do you have for improving YOS?

Thank you very much for your time completing this survey!

APPENDIX B

YOS Evaluation: Staff Survey

Instructions: Please complete the survey to the best of your knowledge. If a question does not pertain to you, please write N/A (not applicable) next to the question. If you need more room to write, feel free to use the back of the page.

1. Job title _____
2. Employment status: a. State employee b. Contract employee
3. Work shift: a. Day b. Swing c. Graveyard d. Administrative
4. Gender: a. Male b. Female
5. I consider myself (please circle the ONE you most identify with)
 - a. White
 - b. Hispanic
 - c. Black
 - d. Asian
 - e. Native American
 - f. Other

If you identify with more than one race/ethnicity, please list the others here (excluding what you circled above): _____

6. Highest education
 - a. High school diploma
 - b. GED
 - c. Some college (including Associate's degree)
 - d. College degree (including Bachelor's degree)
 - e. Some graduate school
 - f. Graduate degree

What was the focus/major of your highest degree? _____

7. How long have you been working with the Colorado DOC? ____years ____months
8. How long have you been working at the YOS? ____years ____months
9. Prior to this job, did you have experience working with juveniles?

a. Yes b. No

If yes, did this experience include juvenile offenders?

- a. Yes b. No

If applicable, describe the work you've previously done with juvenile offenders.

10. Do you feel that your education/experience adequately prepared you for working with this population?

- a. Yes b. Somewhat c. Not really d. No

What additional training would be useful?

11. Do you expect to finish your career at YOS?

- a. Yes b. Probably c. Maybe d. No

12. Do you see yourself as a role model for the YOS residents?

- a. Yes b. Sometimes c. Not really

13. Do you feel that your efforts at YOS have a positive effect on the residents?

- a. Yes b. No

What types of efforts have a positive effect on the residents?

Are there any efforts that have a negative effect or could be improved?

14. Have you taken specialized training courses to work with youth offenders since beginning your work at YOS?

- a. Yes b. No

If yes, please list the topics you've taken training classes on

15. What areas are you interested in learning about (or learning more about) in regard to working with offenders in this age group?

16. How would you describe the current level of staff morale at YOS?

- a. Very poor b. Poor c. OK d. Goode. Very good

Please explain why you feel this way.

How important are each of these factors impact staff morale?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all
Administrative turnover				
Administrative communication				
Consistent policy				
Staff turnover				
Staff communication				
Willingness to respond to staff concerns				
Resident behavior				
COVID restrictions				

17. Do you think there is adequate communication across **shifts and phases**?

- a. Yes b. somewhat c. not really d. No

Please explain your answer.

19. Do you think there is adequate communication between **staff and administration**?

- a. Yes b. Somewhat c. Not really d. No

Please explain why you feel this way.

20. Do the goals and philosophies of YOS differ from those of DOC?

- a. Yes b. No

If yes, please describe how they differ.

21. Do you think there is a consistent philosophy between facility administrators and line staff who work directly with residents (note, this is separate from communication referred to in Question 18)?

- a. Yes b. Somewhat c. Not really d. No

Please explain why you feel this way.

22. We understand that COVID 19 has led YOS to make some changes to policies and procedures to reduce the spread of the virus throughout the facility. These next questions ask about your perceptions of these changes.

a. Do you think these changes were effective at reducing the spread of COVID?

- a) Yes b) Somewhat c) Not really d) No

Please explain why you feel this way.

b. Do you think the policies were implemented effectively?

- a) Yes b) Somewhat c) Not really d) No

Please explain why you feel this way.

c. Are there changes that were put in place that you think should be kept after the virus-based restrictions are lifted?

- a) Yes b) No

Please explain what changes you think should be kept or reversed.

d. Are there other practices that could have been put in place to better prevent the spread of COVID?

Please describe which practices you think could have been effective?

23. Do you feel that YOS deals effectively with gang issues?

- 1) Yes 2) No

Please explain why you feel this way.
