

Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado, 2024

Pursuant to 18-1.3-407(10)(b), C.R.S.

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

YOS Evaluation Team
April 2025



Forward

The Division of Criminal Justice is mandated by statute to conduct a biennial 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 2022 study recommendations

In 2022, the Division of Criminal Justice completed its biennial evaluation of the Department of Corrections Youthful Offender System (YOS). Researchers administered two surveys, one to staff (with a 34% response rate) and one to residents (with a 64% response rate), and conducted numerous interviews with YOS staff and officials. Multiple themes emerged from the study, which resulted in nine recommendations for improvements to the YOS program. YOS administrators were very responsive to the study recommendations, as discussed below.

1. **2022 Recommendation: Consistent consequences for negative behavior/accountability.** The vast majority of staff, 83.3%, feel that 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.

***2024 Response:** Administrators reported an increase in revocations in response to recent assaults, many of which are gang-related. In response, they have expedited the revocation process for more timely responses. Administrators indicated that this change has resulted in a decrease in fights. However, the legal process for revocations has been described as cumbersome and lengthy, and efforts are being made to improve its efficiency. The revocation process involves the sentencing judge, district attorney, and defense attorney. It was reported that staff are not consistently documenting events, making it challenging to build a revocation case. This inconsistency is also related to staff training issues. Residents may remain in the IDO unit for months while awaiting resolution, hindering their ability to progress significantly while the revocation process is underway. Additionally, the physical space required to segregate residents exhibiting negative behavior is insufficient, complicating timely responses.*

2. **2022 Recommendation: 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.



2024 Response: *It is not currently being utilized, but administrators are working on improvement. They did not find there was sufficient participation to make it worthwhile in its previous form. A recommendation from the prior council involved how confusing the step system was, and YOS is moving to a more simplified three-step system for resident progress.*

3. **2022 Recommendation: Impacts of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPa).** 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.

2024 Response: *The YOS contacted the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) to clarify how the JJDPa applied to juveniles convicted as adults, specifically regarding their ability to participate in programs alongside adult residents. The DCJ replied that juveniles could fully participate in programming with individuals aged 18 to 24, provided that the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) requirements were followed. This clarification significantly improved YOS operations and expanded the opportunities for juveniles to receive adequate programming while incarcerated. Juveniles can more fully participate in education, mental health programs, and recreation, which were previously very limited.*

4. **2022 Recommendation: 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 resume, and new ones explored to improve opportunities for those in Phase III, as well as post-release from YOS. 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.

2024 Response: *The YOS Administrators continue to seek opportunities to incorporate more trade skills, restorative justice, gang disengagement, recreational/creative, and reentry-focused programs (see Appendix A for the full list of YOS programming options). Career and technical education programs such as welding, graphic design, business programs, carpentry, computer systems, customer service, and foundation of CTE are still available. However, the cosmetology and automotive repair programs have been eliminated. New programs have been added, such as music and peer mentor programs. A full-time onsite psychologist has been hired to enhance psychological support by implementing new programs and addressing resident needs. The new psychologist has introduced additional options, including dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), cognitive behavioral therapy, Seeking Safety, Grief and Loss, and is looking to implement a DBT program for those with developmental delays. Efforts are ongoing to provide adequate*



programming for the small number of female residents, although challenges persist due to limited space for gender-segregated activities.

Administration and staff reported that a lack of physical space for all programs poses a constant barrier to expanding opportunities.

5. **2022 Recommendation: 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.

***2024 Response:** Twenty-three percent of staff at YOS rated the current level of morale as poor, and 6% described it as very poor. Similar to the 2022 recommendations, there remains a need for both administrators and staff to enhance communication. During interviews, the YOS Administrators emphasized their focus on improving staff communication and building rapport with their teams.*

6. **2022 Recommendation: 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.

***2024 Response:** The YOS Administrators reported a strong emphasis on the residents' education. Staff are working as a team in these common efforts. Separated graduation celebrations were held for the GED and the Second Chance PELL. The education staff team at YOS meets regularly to reassess each resident plan and target.*

7. **2022 Recommendation: 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.

2024 Response

The YOS Administrators reported using several assessment tools to develop a School Improvement Plan. It was reported the education staff are strongly committed to ensuring that residents have an academic plan reflecting their skills, and they regularly revisit this plan to monitor the residents' progress.

8. **2022 Recommendation: 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.



***2024 Response:** YOS continues ongoing efforts to ensure female residents have the same programming opportunities as male residents, although challenges persist due to limited space for gender-segregated activities.*

9. **2022 Recommendation: 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.

***2024 Response:** YOS previously offered gang disengagement classes facilitated by a non-profit community reentry organization. However, the contract was canceled due to difficulties in finding eligible instructors. Despite this setback, YOS administrators believe these classes are beneficial and remain committed to pursuing gang reduction and prevention programs, especially given the significant number of residents involved in gangs.*

As noted in Recommendation 1., administrators reported an increase in revocations in response to recent assaults, many of which are gang-related. Efforts are made to expedite the revocation process and ensure the security and safety of individuals who comply with the program.



The Current Evaluation

This report represents the eighth 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 the first of November of even-numbered years.

The first report was completed in November 2002. This and 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. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent systemic responses necessitated a delay in the 2020 report, completed in 2022. The 2022 report emphasized the perspectives of the residents, staff, and administrators involved in the program, as well as the resident profiles, and recidivism. Each of these reports included recommendations based on the study findings. The current report continues this tradition, reflecting data collected during 2024.

This 2024 report presents a broad picture of the YOS operations as observed from the perspective of the residents, staff, and managers. Division researchers surveyed staff (with a 34% response rate) and available residents (64% response rate) 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

The operations of YOS are generally consistent with the statute and reflect the intent of the original YOS legislation.¹ YOS has maintained a strong focus on providing General Education Diploma (GED) and Career Technical Education (CTE) opportunities. About 61.5% of residents said they would choose YOS again, 62% for sentence-related reasons, 35% for education/programs/activities, and 23% for a life changing transition. YOS administrators continue to expand vocational programming and opportunities for skill development and engagement. Additionally, concerns regarding the lack of consequences for negative behavior have prompted the administration to emphasize accountability.

Before fiscal year (FY) 2010, the average age of residents at intake was around 17 years. However, this average began to rise to 18 in 2010 and continued toward 19 through FY 2016, largely due to the influx of 20-year-olds and a few residents aged 21- through 23, while those under 16 were excluded. By FY

¹ 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.



2017, the average age dropped to 18, with very few older individuals admitted to YOS, and this trend persisted through FY 2022. The average age increased in FY 2023 to 19 with 20-year-old individuals making up the largest proportion of intake and remained through FY 2024. Table 3.3 and Figure 3.2 provide details on the age of residents at admission.

The majority of YOS staff (80%) consistently consider themselves to be role models, while 20% believe they serve as role models “sometimes.” With a dedicated staff, supportive administration, and the ongoing expansion of programs and activities, YOS is well-positioned to positively impact the lives of many residents. Between 2014 and 2017, approximately 90% of residents successfully completed their sentences at YOS. Successful completion decreased to 75% in 2018, remained around an 80% success rate through 2023, then dropped to 72% in FY 2024. YOS administrators attribute this decline in successful completion rates to two factors: a higher-need/higher risk population and the implementation of stricter accountability measures. The two-year felony reconviction rate for those who successfully completed the program is 26.0%, with 10.5% being reconvicted of a violent felony within two years. These outcomes are considered positive given the serious nature of the offenses committed by individuals sentenced to YOS.

2024 study recommendations

1. **Improve infrastructure.** The current infrastructure of the YOS facility presents several challenges. One significant issue is security; there is limited capacity to separate residents involved in conflicts, and the doors in the living areas cannot be locked. Additionally, the facility's lack of space restricts the expansion of programming. While the administration has several ideas for new programs, they often encounter difficulties implementing them within their current facility. This lack of space also negatively affects their ability to provide more programming for the female population. Improvements to the buildings and security infrastructure would require general fund allocation to replace the doors, build or expand the current programming space, and make other necessary improvements.
2. **Simplify the level system.** The current six-level system within Phase One is difficult to implement in such a way that staff and residents understand what is required to move up levels. YOS is currently in the process of moving to a three-level system and we recommend that the new system be implemented as soon as possible.
3. **Expansion of vocational trade programs.** Staff and residents report that implementing additional vocational trade programs would be very beneficial. Some suggested programs include plumbing, computer information systems, HVAC, electrical, graphic design, music production, and others. Certain trade programs, such as cosmetology and auto repair, have been eliminated, and it is recommended that YOS consider replacing these programs with new ones that are feasible within their current space and beneficial to residents' long-term career goals.



4. **Management and staff morale.** While the survey results indicate an improvement in morale, the number of correctional officers who participated was very low. Anecdotally, conversations with correctional officers indicated that their lack of motivation to complete the survey was related to the fact that prior surveys had not led to significant changes. Improving communication between staff and administration is critical. Additionally, enhancing communication between shifts so that consistent information is passed along should improve morale.
5. **Study the impact of the revised intake process.** YOS recently changed its intake process, from a “Zero Day” system which had a regimented component that set clear behavioral expectations but was perceived by some as overly militaristic. The current process includes team-building, coaching, and a more restrained style toward new residents. However, some staff have reported that this new approach has led to new residents not fully understanding all the requirements and expectations of YOS. It is recommended that the revised intake process be studied to identify any modifications that may be necessary.
6. **Female residents.** The efforts of YOS to create more equity in programming for female residents have been significant. However, many female residents still feel they do not have the same access to programming and educational opportunities as male residents. YOS should explore all possible options to address this disparity, whether it is perceived or real.
7. **Re-engage with a gang prevention program.** The majority of staff respondents , (71.4%) felt YOS did not deal effectively with gang issues. Administrators noted continued gang activity, which spills over into all aspects of the program. In particular, keeping residents with different gang affiliations separated in their housing assignments creates difficulties for YOS staff due to facility space constraints. YOS previously offered gang disengagement classes facilitated by a non-profit community reentry organization. However, the contract was canceled due to challenges in finding eligible instructors. YOS should re-engage in pursuing gang reduction and prevention programs, especially given the significant number of residents involved in gangs.
8. **Improve selection and training of new YOS staff.** Concerns have been expressed regarding the transfer of correctional staff from adult facilities to the YOS. These staff typically come from adult prisons, where they are trained in a control-disciplinary approach. It is recommended that YOS implement specific training and orientation programs to shift the focus from a control-disciplinary environment to a coaching and growth culture.
9. **Improve the revocation process.** The ability to respond to negative behavior in a swift and certain manner is essential, as these behaviors can disrupt the overall operation at the YOS. Improving the efficiency of the revocation process---where the original DOC sentence is reinstated---would enable the administration to manage a challenging population more effectively. This would require statutory changes, given the dual nature of the YOS and DOC sentences, where a lengthier sentence to DOC is suspended for the duration of the shorter YOS sentence.



10. **Expand mental health and substance use curriculum.** YOS has hired a full-time, on-site psychologist who has introduced several evidence-based programs. However, dedicated funding for these programs is very limited and relies heavily on additional budgetary support from the YOS administration. These programs need more dedicated funding to continue growing and providing treatment for the YOS population, who often arrive at the facility with significant mental health and substance use issues.



Section 1: Introduction

This 2024 report is the eighth evaluation of the Colorado Department of Corrections (DOC) Youthful Offender System (YOS) conducted by the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ). The Division is required to evaluate the program semiannually and submit its findings to the General Assembly on the first day of November of even-numbered years. However, since this mandate is not funded by the General Assembly evaluations are completed as resources allow.

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 of 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 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 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 or 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."² 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."³ Program participants are housed separately "from and not brought into daily physical contact with adult offenders" but these offenders are "subject to all laws and DOC rules, regulations, and standards pertaining to adult offenders...."⁴

² §18-1.3-407(1)(a), Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S.).

³ §18-1.3-407(1)(b), C.R.S.

⁴ §18-1.3-407(1)(d), C.R.S.



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.⁵ 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 (limited to Class 3 through Class 6 violent felonies) 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 first-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.⁶ As a result 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 years, during which it has consistently been between 18.6 to 19.0 years old.

Determinant YOS sentences range from two to six years for those convicted of felony classes 6 through 3. 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....”⁷ 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.⁸

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....”⁹ To this end, the statute requires the following specific program components:

- **Orientation Training Phase.** During the first 28 to 45 days, residents undergo a comprehensive series of intake assessments, which includes a thorough needs assessment and evaluation. An individualized progress plan is developed, re-entry challenges are identified, and residents are acclimated to the facility.
The new “Kickstart” program emphasizes team building and increases coaching, compared to the previous “0-day” program, which focused more on regimented structures and behavioral

⁵ §19-2-517 (direct file) & §19-2-518 (court transfer), C.R.S.

⁶ §18-1.3-407.5, C.R.S.

⁷ §18-1.3-407(3)(b), C.R.S.

⁸ §18-1.3-407(3)(d), C.R.S.

⁹ § 18-1.3-407(3.5), C.R.S.



expectations in staff interactions. The Orientation Training Phase outlines the full scope of YOS activities and behavioral expectations. When the residents are not engaged in orientation or diagnostic activities, they participate in highly structured and disciplined physical activities.¹⁰ This is a high-security unit where all new arrivals to YOS are assigned.

- **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, and discipline, education, treatment, and behavior modification is the shared responsibility of each staff member.¹¹ 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; residents remain under 24-hour supervision while on scheduled appointments and community service activities¹² 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 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.
- **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.¹³ 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 a 1:10 ratio, and supervision level is designed to focus resources on those who are at greater risk of reoffending.

¹⁰ See *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2014*. (2015). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis. See pages 19-21. (All YOS Fiscal Year reports are available at cdoc.colorado.gov/about/data-and-reports/other-published-reports.)

¹¹ This description is from *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2014*. (2015). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis.

¹² All offenders sentenced to YOS are required to complete 100 hours of community service.

¹³ Note that those offenders with ICE detainees are ineligible for Phase III.



In addition to the phase structure, the statute further specifies that the YOS include the following program elements:

- (a) Teach 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;
- (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 with the opportunity to gradually reenter the community.¹⁴

Finally, as stated previously, the YOS statute mandates that the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) "independently monitor and evaluate"¹⁵ YOS and present the findings to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees. This report presents the findings of the eighth YOS evaluation conducted by DCJ.

¹⁴ § 18-1.3-407(3)(a-f), C.R.S.

¹⁵ § 18-1.3-407(10)(b), C.R.S.



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 the University of Southern Maine's 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. For a copy of the IRB approval please contact DCJ staff.

Data Collection

Quantitative data concerning youth committed to YOS through June 2024 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 consisted of seven pages with 31 items, 10 of which were open-ended questions to solicit more in-depth information concerning



resident perspectives. One hundred forty-six (146) residents participated in the survey, representing 63.6% of all available YOS residents. Staff questionnaires contained 23 items, 13 of which were open-ended. Of the staff members present to participate, thirty-five (35) returned completed surveys. Copies of the questionnaires are available in Appendix A.

Survey samples

Resident survey and descriptive information

Table 2.1 shows that, of the 146 respondents, 60.3% 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

Levels	Count	Percent
Orientation	15	10.3%
Peer	6	4.1%
Pledge 1	8	5.5%
Pledge 2	10	6.8%
Pledge 3	8	5.5%
Pledge 4	11	7.5%
Phoenix	88	60.3%
Total	146	100.0%

These residents' YOS sentences ranged from one to 10 years, with an average of 5.4 years. Their suspended DOC sentences ranged from one to 60 years, averaging 16.8 years. The average time spent in the YOS program at the time of this study was 23.5 months, ranging between 1 month up to 9 years.

Participants were between 17 and 25 years old, with an average of 20.6 years. All seven of the female residents on grounds were included (4.8% of the total sample). Nine of the male residents surveyed were transfers from DOC to YOS.¹⁶

¹⁶ 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

The overall response rate from YOS staff has declined over the years. In 2018, 111 staff completed the survey, which declined to 48 in 2022 and further declined to 35 in 2024. DCJ plans to implement changes to the survey administration to improve response rates for the 2026 evaluation. Additionally, in 2026, interviews will be conducted with correctional staff alongside administrative staff, to supplement the survey results.

Staff members who participated in the survey represented a diverse range of positions (see Table 2.2). The largest group was correctional officers, making up 37.1% of respondents, followed by correctional support trades personnel at 17.1%. The remaining participants included wardens, administrative staff, and teachers. Correctional officers reported that they were less likely to participate in the survey because they felt their feedback would not lead to any substantial changes. For comparison, in 2022, 71.9% of survey respondents were correctional officers.

Most staff members had worked at DOC for at least five years (66.4%), and 31.8% had been with DOC for at least 10 years. However, the majority (57.1%) had been in the YOS facility for less than two years, and fewer than 10% had worked with YOS for more than five years.

Most staff members had no prior experience working with juveniles before joining YOS (80.0%). Of those who did have such experience, 57.1% reported that it involved working with juvenile offenders.

However, two-thirds (64.7%) felt that their prior education or experience had at least ‘somewhat’ prepared them for working with this population. Additionally, most staff members (62.9%) had completed some specialized training to work with youthful offenders since their arrival at YOS. The YOS provides required annual training for staff on procedures and programming, along with adolescent-specific topics.

Table 2.2. Staff respondent positions

Position Title	Count	Percent
Correctional Officer	13	37.1%
Correctional Trades	6	17.1%
Administrative Assistant	5	14.3%
Manager/Supervisor	3	8.6%
Teacher	3	8.6%
Case Manager	1	2.9%
Liaison	1	2.9%
Librarian	1	2.9%
Mental Health	1	2.9%
Warden	1	2.9%
Total	35	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. It should be noted that efforts were made to survey non-resident clients in Phase III by contacting their parole officers and asking if they would consent to be contacted by ORS researchers. These efforts did not yield any response. Finally, anything short of a 100% response rate for study participants raises questions of sample bias. Approximately sixty-eight percent (68%) of the resident population and under twenty percent (20%) of the YOS staff agreed to participate in the study.



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.

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, regression to lower behavioral status levels¹⁷, and 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 the population" and special management consequences. The Code of Penal Discipline (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 violation. 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 current behaviors.

The YOS offender contract establishes a zero-tolerance policy for gang-related involvement or behaviors. This contract holds residents accountable through various options, including status changes, privilege restrictions, additional programming, and behavior contracts. If necessary, it can also serve as grounds for seeking revocation from YOS to DOC. Additionally, YOS can use a Violence Reduction Program, a cognitive intervention, as a sanction for actions associated with violent conduct that may be linked to gang-related behavior. However, this program has not been utilized in recent years. Additionally, 71.4% of staff members surveyed felt that YOS does not deal effectively with gang issues. Approximately 38.2% of residents felt there was gang activity occurring at YOS.

Regarding consequences for inappropriate behavior, nearly a third (63.4%) of the residents surveyed agreed such consequences were made clear. However, only 19.5% felt that those consequences were given out fairly.

When asked what they felt were the worst things about YOS, 17.2% indicated the discipline and rules were inconsistent. Twenty percent stated YOS could be improved by increasing consistency and consequences.

¹⁷ YOS has a behavior-based "level" system where those with higher status have greater privileges (see Figure 3.1).



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. During the Intake, Diagnostic, and Orientation (IDO) Phase (also referred to as the Orientation Training Phase (OTP), which takes place during the first 30-45 days of the YOS sentence, residents receive needs assessments and diagnostic evaluations. This process helps develop an individualized progress plan, identify future re-entry challenges, and acclimate offenders to the facility. The system promotes self-discipline by implementing clear consequences for inappropriate behavior.¹⁸

The physical exercises and activities the offenders undergo are designed to challenge and condition the offender both mentally and physically, break down negative gang affiliation and activity, and develop pro-social rapport between YOS employees and residents. Throughout the first 30 to 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.¹⁹

When asked what they believed were the best things about YOS, one in five (19.6%) residents mentioned the recreation opportunities, the gym, and weight training. The multi-purpose building has 13,941 square feet of space, including a gymnasium and an indoor workout area with cardiovascular machines and weights. The building housing Phase II and female offenders includes a walking track, basketball court, volleyball court, and stationary exercise equipment.

As required in statute, YOS offers GED preparation and certifications, Special Education (SPED), Career and Technical 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.

In 2020, Pell Grant eligibility for college tuition was restored to incarcerated individuals for the first time since 1994. The Pell Grant program has greatly expanded the post-secondary educational opportunities for residents and promises to improve the long-term outcomes of those released from YOS.²⁰ Almost 10% of YOS residents surveyed have participated in this program, and 22 inmates received associate degrees through the Pell program through FY23.

¹⁸ See Footnote 17.

¹⁹ *Youthful Offender System Annual Report: Fiscal Year 2024 (2024)*. Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis.

²⁰ A meta-analysis published in 2023 found all types of prison education significantly reduced recidivism, with college programs resulting in the biggest reductions. There were also significant improvements in employment rates. Stickle, B. & Schuster, S. (2023). Are schools in prison worth it? The effects and economic returns of prison education. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 48, 1263-1294. doi.org/10.1007/s12103-023-09747-3



Special Education opportunities continue to be offered in GED course instruction, at a ratio of one teacher to seven students. This allows for additional attention to individual needs and focused learning. The ratio for residents receiving Individualized Education Plan (IEP) services is one teacher to three students. In FY23, 58 residents enrolled in the GED program and 22 successfully passed GED tests while at YOS. Over half (57.1%) of survey respondents entered YOS without a high school diploma or a GED. Of these, half completed at least one of the components of the GED, and almost a third (31.0%) completed all four components. An associate's degree was received by 6.1% (count = 9) and 9.4% (count = 14) participated in the PELL program while in YOS.

When residents were asked about the activities or programs most useful or important:

- 50.7% (count = 73) of respondents indicated that the residential phase of YOS was helpful in continuing their education.
- 47.7% of respondents felt that some component of educational programming was helping their release
- 14.9% indicated that they chose YOS for the education
- 47.8% felt education was the best thing about YOS.

The CTE programs include a variety of classes such as business fundamentals, carpentry and construction, computer informational systems, a customer service academy, foundations of CTE, graphic design, and core curriculum night courses (e.g. English composition, Algebra, Speech), and a permanent welding lab; A partnership with Red Rocks Community College offers a 10-hour course that results in an OSHA Safety Certificate.

A 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.

When asked what the best things about YOS were, 45.9% of the residents surveyed mentioned education, school, or college. When asked what parts of YOS were helping them prepare for the future, 40.9% said education-related programs, and 16.7% said vocation and work programs.

When asked what programs or activities have been most useful or important to them, 60.4% indicated education and school, and 28.1% stated vocational programming.

However, the majority indicated the main reason they chose YOS over prison was sentence-related (65.2% of respondents said the shorter sentence was their reason), while only 15.6% also stated they chose YOS for educational opportunities. Nonetheless, a full 91.7% intend to pursue further education after leaving YOS.



Two-thirds (64.5%) of the residents surveyed stated they would still choose YOS over the alternative. Of these, 14.3% attributed this to education. A few comments from residents suggested some areas for improvement in educational offerings including:

More class options

More college classes

Bring HS diploma back

More vocational trades, particularly CDL, HVAC, electrician trades, cosmetology etc.

Bring back the cosmetology/barber class, and the car repair/mechanical class.



c) Does the system include a component for a tiered system for swift and strict discipline for noncompliance?

Yes, a core component of YOS is its nine-level behavioral management system, which links behavioral expectations to privileges. Figure 3.1 provides a partial description of the expectations and privileges associated with the behavioral management system. To progress through the levels, individuals must adhere to YOS norms and expectations, which are posted in the housing units and communicated by the staff, as well as the *YOS Offender Reception and Orientation Manual*. YOS staff have the authority to immediately drop a resident's status based on their current and past behavior. Administrators report that this process is individualized and focuses on accountability and cognitive programming to address immediate and long-term behavior change. However, the administration is considering simplifying this system to a three-level system, making it easier for residents to understand and for staff to implement.

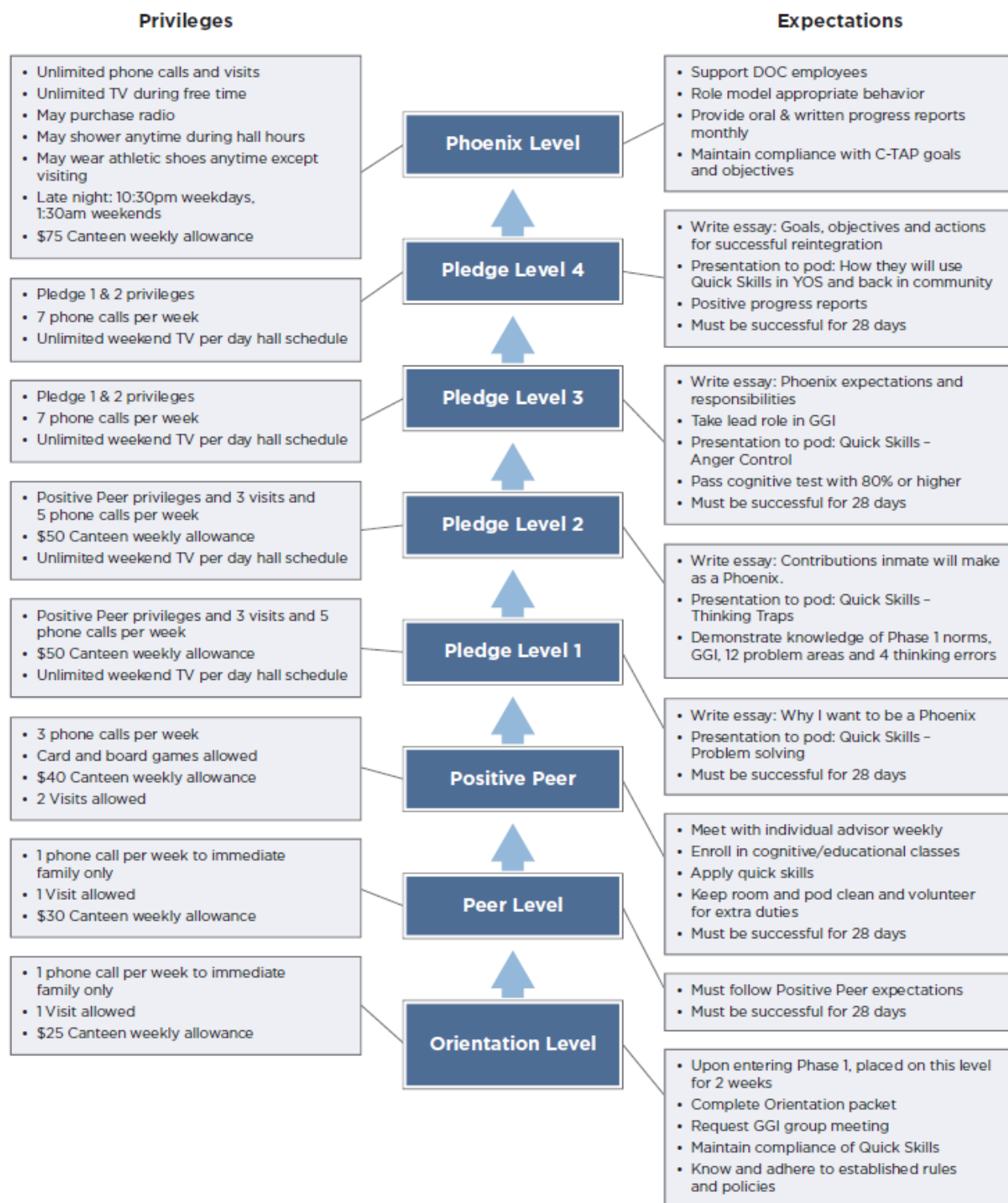
IDO consists of two pods: one for the new residents transferring into YOS, and another pod called the Classification Unit for remediation. This setup allows for residents to be separated from the general population due to behavioral issues. A person may be placed into IDO while awaiting a final decision on revocation to DOC, a process that can take several months. The YOS administration is working to improve the efficiency of the revocation process.

As shown in Table 3.1, most (63.4%) of the residents surveyed agreed there were clear consequences for negative behavior; However, only one-third felt the rules were clearly explained. Furthermore, only about one in five (19.5%) believed that consequences were administered fairly.

Table 3.1. Clear consequences for negative behavior

Survey questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
Rules are explained clearly	24.8	26.2	15.2	31.0	2.8
There are clear consequences for negative behavior.	12.4	13.1	11.0	53.1	10.3
Consequences for negative behavior are given out fairly.	31.9	27.14	21.5	18.1	1.4
Rewards for positive behavior are given out fairly.	35.4	36.1	10.4	15.3	2.8

Figure 3.1. YOS Status Levels, Privileges, and Expectations



d) 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 statutes and administrative rules and expectations to act as role models and mentors to YOS residents. The first paragraph of the YOS *Teachers Handbook* states: “Through your actions and spoken words, you will model the appropriate manner your students should behave and interact with others.” Most YOS employees who participated in the study take this expectation seriously. A significant majority (80.0%) of staff members responded that they consistently view themselves as role models for the YOS residents, and the remainder see themselves as role models 'sometimes.' Almost all (94.1%) believed their efforts at YOS had a positive effect on the residents.

Staff members identified several ways to fulfill the expectation of serving as role models, including:

Leading by example

Being a positive influence, and letting offenders know they can do better.

...communicating with the offenders on previous experience and business ownership.

I feel like I have great rapport with them and have the ability to share my experience with them.

I try my best to instill core values and remind them of consequences.

Seeing the example of making better choices...

Following through on aspects of creating positive habits.

About one-third (35.5%) of residents felt they had a good connection with their primary staff advisor, and 45.4% felt they could communicate with their advisor. However, only 6.9% felt the staff really cared about the residents (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2. Connection with advisor or staff

Survey questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have a good connection with my primary advisor.	10.6	18.4	35.5	28.4	7.1
I feel like I can communicate with my advisor.	7.8	19.1	27.7	36.9	8.5
Staff really care about residents	42.8	26.9	23.4	6.2	0.7

e) 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),²¹ Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens, sex offender treatment, anger management classes, victim empathy classes,²² substance abuse classes, Quick Skills (cognitive skill-building techniques), Baby-Think-It-Over,²³ and Thinking for a Change.²⁴ 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 later on. This allows residents to gain the skills needed to deal with anger issues early in their time at YOS, which can be valuable for dealing with the stresses of living in a prison environment. Additionally, it allows residents more time to practice these skills before release.

When asked what parts of YOS are helping them to prepare for their futures, the development of cognitive skills, life skills, coping skills, and people skills were all mentioned by multiple residents. When specifically asked if they had learned problem-solving skills, 40.0% responded in the affirmative.

Comments made by staff regarding the provision of instruction related to problem-solving skills and the use of cognitive behavior strategies included:

Encouraging positive behavior in the units with each other and staff.

Explain choices and consequences while helping them connect it to their lives.

Following through on aspects of creating positive habits and build from there.

I try my best to instill core values and remind them of consequences.

f) 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 a behavioral management and level system that allows individuals to earn privileges. This system is based on merit, where privileges increase with the offender's status level but may be lost due to problematic behavior or rule infractions. These behavioral expectations are articulated in the *Offender Reception and Orientation Manual* (2012). Privileges include visitation, telephone calls, television, radios, and canteen items. Both staff and residents have frequently

²¹ 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.

²² The curriculum for "Victim Impact: Listen and Learn" was developed by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs.

²³ 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.

²⁴ *Thinking for a Change*, developed by the National Institute of Corrections, is an evidence-based program.



expressed concerns about inconsistency in rule enforcement and inconsistency in general practice. These inconsistencies can significantly impact residents' status and privileges, making loss of privileges or lack of progress dependent not only on the offenders' behavior but also on the behavior of the staff.

As required by statute, YOS uses positive peer culture as a fundamental method for teaching pro-social behavior. Because peers are among the most influential factors in a young person's life, they may encourage or discourage antisocial behaviors. According to social learning theory, youth can develop self-worth, significance, dignity, and responsibility through a commitment to the positive values of helping and caring for others. They may learn how to behave appropriately or inappropriately through the observation of peers that they respect and look to for guidance. 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. If delinquency is influenced by one's peer group, individuals will respond to peer pressure for change, either positive or negative. 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 prosocial behavior;
- Individual members responding positively to the influence 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.²⁵

YOS has instituted a "peer mentor" system where a select group of current DOC inmates are brought to YOS to work with residents in the housing unit, at school, and in programming. If this is an effective program, it may be valuable to expand the program to include one peer mentor for each housing unit. It can be challenging to find the right people to act as peer mentors, so expanding the program may be difficult.

YOS uses the behavioral management and 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, prosocial behaviors intended by therapists and correctional personnel.²⁶ Thus, involvement and supervision/intervention of staff is necessary to ensure that positive

²⁵ See <http://www.troubledteenblog.com/2008/07/positive-peer-culture-adolescent-residential-treatment-philosophy/>.

²⁶ Dishion, T.J., McCord, J., & Poulin, F. (1999). When interventions harm: Peer groups and problem behavior. *American Psychologist*, 54(9), 755-764. doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.9.755



behaviors are being displayed and encouraged by the peer community.²⁷ It is in this context of instilling a positive peer culture that staff consistency becomes especially important.

The gang culture poses a significant challenge for the YOS. The administration reported an increasing number of residents who have been involved in gangs, sometimes as young as eight or nine years old. There are classes focused on gang involvement in the IDO phase, and they began working with Denver's Second Chance Center to talk to residents about gang disengagement. However, the difficulty in finding instructors who meet the YOS standards has led to a pause in this programming. Both residents and staff observed gang activity occurring within YOS, with 38.2% of residents surveyed reporting the presence of gang activity. Additionally, 71.4% of the staff surveyed felt that the YOS does not deal effectively with gang issues.

Comments made by staff emphasize this sentiment:

I don't feel YOS has offered adequate training in this area.

I believe we haven't yet come up with effective programming nor response to gang activity.

I have continually requested to explore gang disengagement programs to be brought back.

I don't feel staff are effectively trained to deal with these issues

g) 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,²⁸ 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.²⁹ 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 a YOS Community Supervision. Phase III involves six to 12 months of intensive supervision in the community. YOS contracts with community-based service providers for evidence-based services for 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

²⁷ See Footnote 26.

²⁸ See *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2020*. (2022). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis. Pages 22-29.

²⁹ See Footnote 28.



participation (those with positive behavior are released earlier, and have longer periods of time in Phase III).

Most residents (65.2%) felt at least some aspect of YOS was helping them prepare for their future. The parts of YOS most frequently cited as helping them in this preparation included education (40.9%), vocational training (16.7%), and cognitive/coping skills (7.6%).

When asked to rate the degree to which YOS is preparing them for the future, many responded 'fair to excellent' in terms of:

- Continuing their education (86.1%)
- Staying away from drugs (81.0%)
- Managing anger, stress and/or other emotions (58.2%)
- Getting a job (54.5%)
- Connecting with family and friends (46.1%)

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

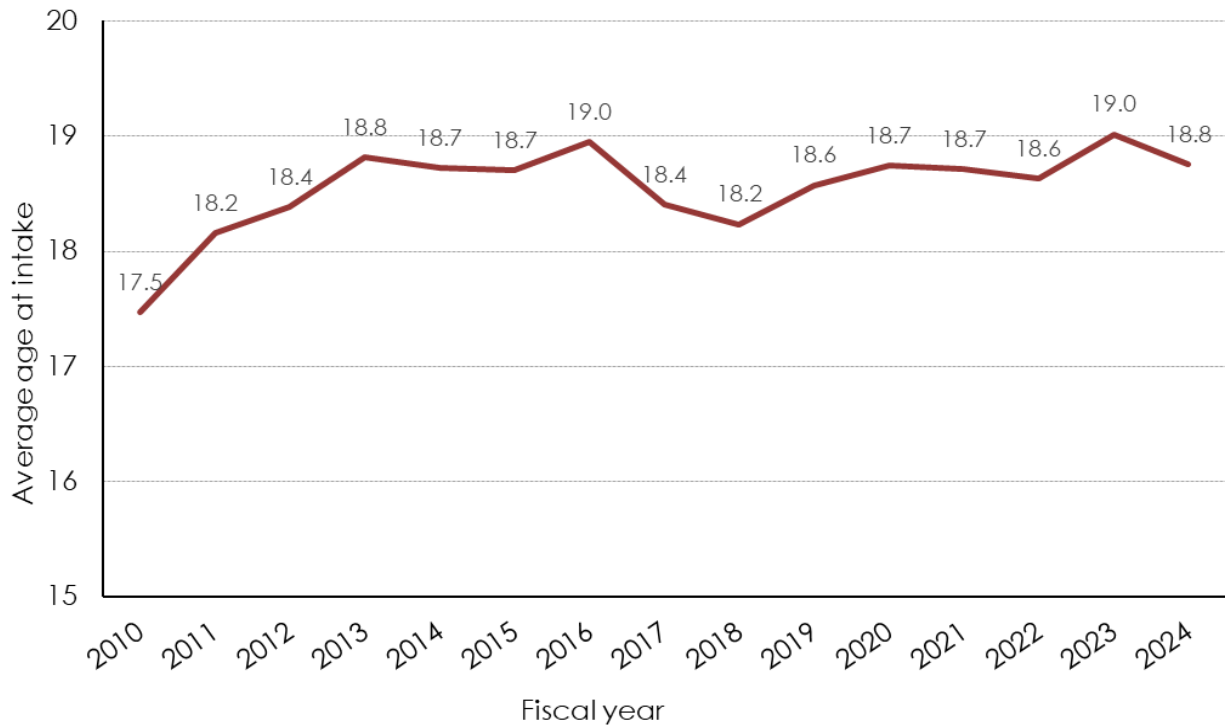
Over the past 27 years, the size of the population served by YOS has fluctuated. The largest end-of-year population was 298 in FY 1998. Over the following nine years, the population declined consistently, reaching 205 by the end of FY 2007, a 29.9% decline. Over the following four years, the end-of-year population increased by 28.7%, followed by a decline through FY 2017. Since then, the end-of-year population has fluctuated between 206 and 239 participants.

In large part, changes to the YOS population over time reflect statutory modifications that affected the program's eligibility requirements. The average age at intake began to increase in FY 2010, which was expected due to changes in the 2010 statute that removed most juveniles aged 14 and 15 from direct file consideration and the 2009 statutory modification that extended the age of sentencing to include 19- and 20-year-olds. 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. However, very few individuals over the age of 20 have been admitted to YOS.

Prior to FY 2010, the average age at intake hovered around 17 years. As seen in Figure 3.2, the average age 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 16 years old. In FY 2017, the average age dropped back to around 18, but increased in FY 2023 to 19 with 20-year-old individuals making up the largest proportion of intakes and remaining through FY 2024. Table 3.3 provides details on the age at admission for residents admitted over the past 10 years.



Figure 3.2. Average age at Intake, FY 2010-2024



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 86 females, or 4.2% of total intakes, have participated in the YOS program (data not presented due to small count).

Table 3.3. Age at Intake, FY 2015-2024

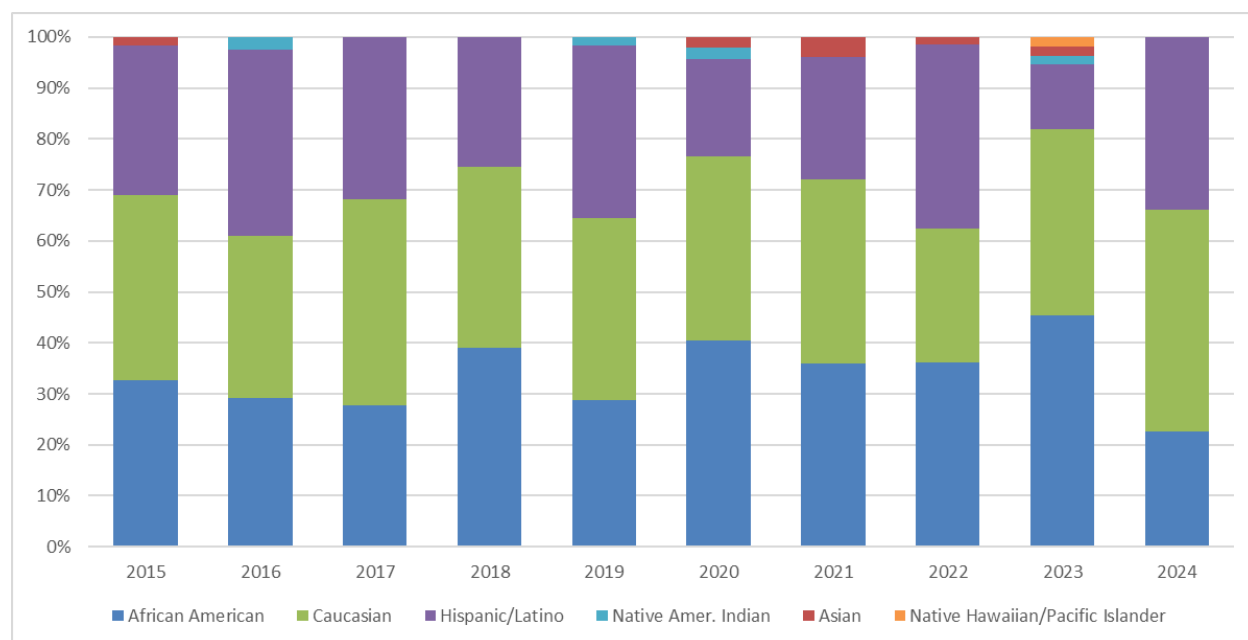
Fiscal Year	Count	15 years	16 years	17 years	18 years	19 years	20 years	21 years	22 years	23 years	Total
2015	57	-	-	8.6%	34.5%	34.5%	22.4%	-	-	-	100%
2016	41	-	2.4%	9.8%	19.5%	36.6%	26.8%	2.4%	-	2.4%	100%
2017	47	-	4.3%	21.3%	21.3%	38.3%	12.8%	2.1%	-	-	100%
2018	59	1.7%	6.8%	23.7%	22.0%	25.4%	20.3%	-	-	-	100%
2019	59	-	5.1%	6.8%	35.6%	33.9%	15.3%	3.4%	-	-	100%
2020	47	-	2.1%	12.8%	23.4%	31.9%	29.8%	-	-	-	100%
2021	50	-	-	10.0%	26.0%	48.0%	14.0%	2.0%	-	-	100%
2022	69	-	4.3%	14.5%	18.8%	39.1%	21.7%	1.4%	-	-	100%
2023	55	-	1.8%	10.9%	14.5%	32.7%	38.2%	-	1.8%	-	100%
2024	53	-	1.9%	13.2%	20.8%	35.8%	28.3%	-	-	-	100%
Total	537	0.2%	3.0%	13.2%	23.8%	35.5%	22.9%	1.1%	0.2%	0.2%	100%

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

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

While the racial/ethnic distribution varies year-to-year, intakes are roughly similar for Hispanic/Latino (33.3%), African American (32.1%), and Caucasian (31.9%). This is in contrast with overall demographics, where African-Americans comprise only about 4% of the overall Colorado youth population (see Figure 3.3 and Table 3.4)

Figure 3.3. Race and Ethnicity of YOS intakes, FY 2015-2024 (count = 862)



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

Table 3.4. Race and Ethnicity of YOS intakes, FY 2015-2024 (count = 862)

Year	Count	African American /Black	Asian	Caucasian	Hispanic /Latino	Native American Indian	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander
2015	58	32.8%	1.7%	36.2%	29.3%	0.0%	0.0%
2016	41	29.3%	0.0%	31.7%	36.6%	2.4%	0.0%
2017	47	27.7%	0.0%	40.4%	31.9%	0.0%	0.0%
2018	59	39.0%	0.0%	35.6%	25.4%	0.0%	0.0%
2019	59	28.8%	0.0%	35.6%	33.9%	1.7%	0.0%
2020	47	40.4%	2.1%	36.2%	19.1%	2.1%	0.0%
2021	50	36.0%	4.0%	36.0%	24.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2022	69	36.2%	1.4%	26.1%	36.2%	0.0%	0.0%
2023	55	45.5%	1.8%	36.4%	12.7%	1.8%	1.8%
2024	53	22.6%	0.0%	43.4%	34.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	862	32.1%	1.0%	31.9%	33.3%	1.5%	0.1%

The most common convicted offenses resulting in a YOS sentence since 2015 have been robbery, assault, and homicide. It is notable that the proportion made up of those convicted with homicide has increased since FY 2021 (see Table 3.5). Few admissions (8.1% since 2015) have resulted from non-violent crime convictions.

Table 3.5. Most Serious Conviction Charge, FY 2015-2024

Offense	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Homicide	12.3%	15.4%	10.6%	15.5%	20.3%	23.9%	32.0%	27.5%	43.6%	37.7%	24.2%
Kidnapping	-	-	-	6.9%	3.4%	-	2.0%	4.3%	5.5%	-	2.4%
Robbery	42.1%	35.9%	27.7%	39.7%	42.4%	41.3%	30.0%	30.4%	20.0%	18.9%	32.8%
Sexual Assault	-	2.6%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2%
Child Abuse	-	-	2.1%	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.9%	0.4%
Assault	24.6%	33.3%	44.7%	27.6%	23.7%	30.4%	22.0%	33.3%	30.9%	32.1%	30.0%
Menacing	3.5%	5.1%	2.1%	1.7%	1.7%	2.2%	2.0%	-	-	-	1.7%
Weapons	-	-	2.1%	1.7%	1.7%	-	-	-	-	-	0.6%
Escape	1.8%	-	2.1%	-	-	-	2.0%	-	-	-	0.6%
Burglary	8.8%	5.1%	2.1%	6.9%	3.4%	-	4.0%	2.9%	-	1.9%	3.6%
Theft	-	-	2.1%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.2%
MV Theft	1.8%	-	-	-	1.7%	-	-	-	-	-	0.4%
Controlled Substances	-	-	4.3%	-	-	2.2%	2.0%	-	-	-	0.8%

Offense	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Total
Organized Crime	1.8%	-	-	-	1.7%	-	-	-	-	3.8%	0.8%
Misc non-violent	3.5%	2.6%	-	-	-	-	4.0%	1.4%	-	3.8%	1.5%
Total %	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Total Count	57	39	47	58	59	46	50	69	55	53	533

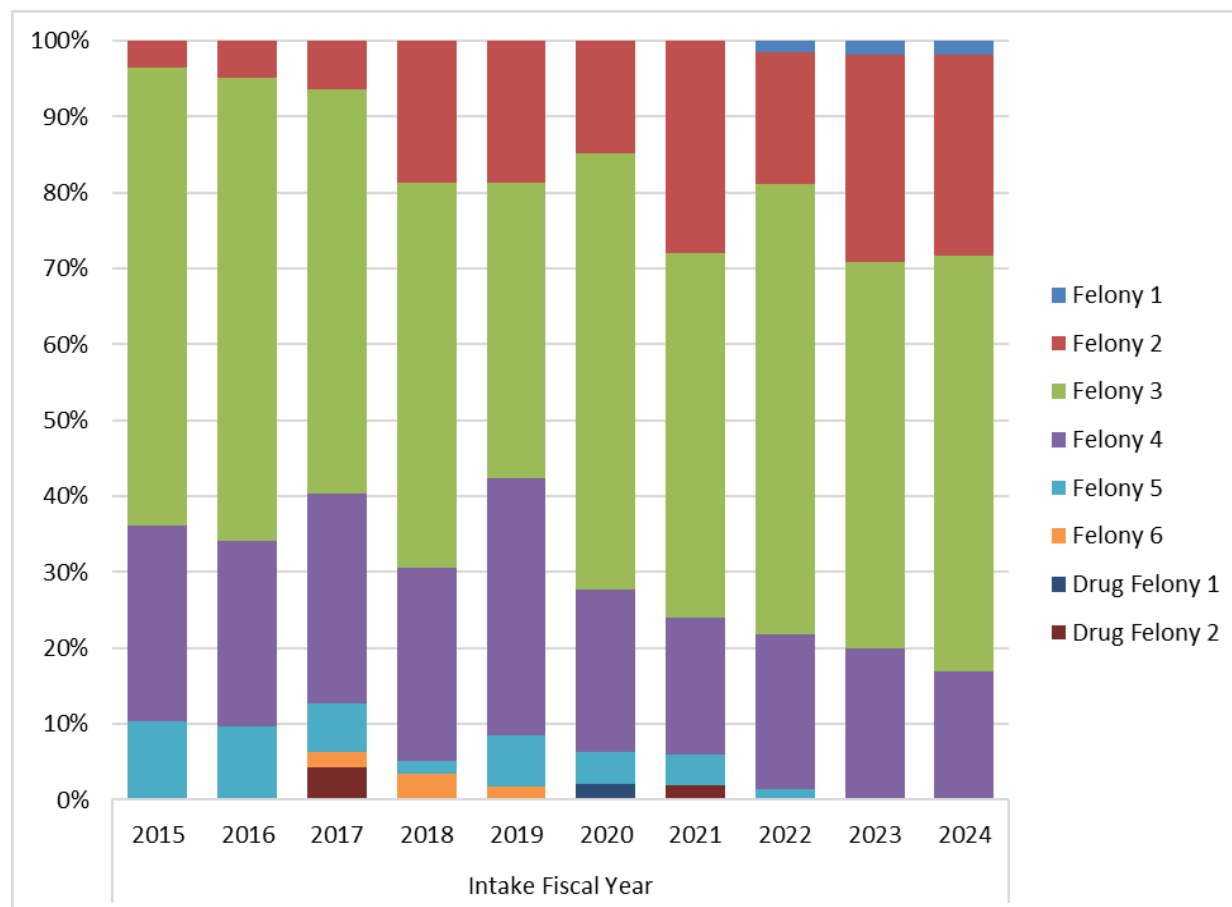
Data source: Data provided by the Department of Corrections Office of Planning and Analysis to DCJ for analysis.

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

Over half of these crimes are class 3 felonies (53.3%). Another 23.4% are made up of class 4 felonies. Convictions for class 5, class 6, or drug felonies have rarely resulted in a sentence to YOS. The severity of these crimes has increased since FY 2021, with larger proportions made up of class 2 felonies, and with 3 individuals admitted for class 1 felonies (see Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4. Felony Class of Most Serious Conviction Crime for YOS intakes, FY 2015-2024
(count = 538)



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 currently uses the Level of Service Inventory-Revised (LSI-R) as well as the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS). 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 3.6 shows the average 10-year LSI-R score (the higher the score, the greater the need). Figure 3.5 displays the total LSI score and average 10-year LSI score.

The YOS continues to serve a 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 3.6. Average Total and Domain Sub-scores on the Level of Supervision Inventory-Revised for YOS Intakes, FY 2015 - 2024

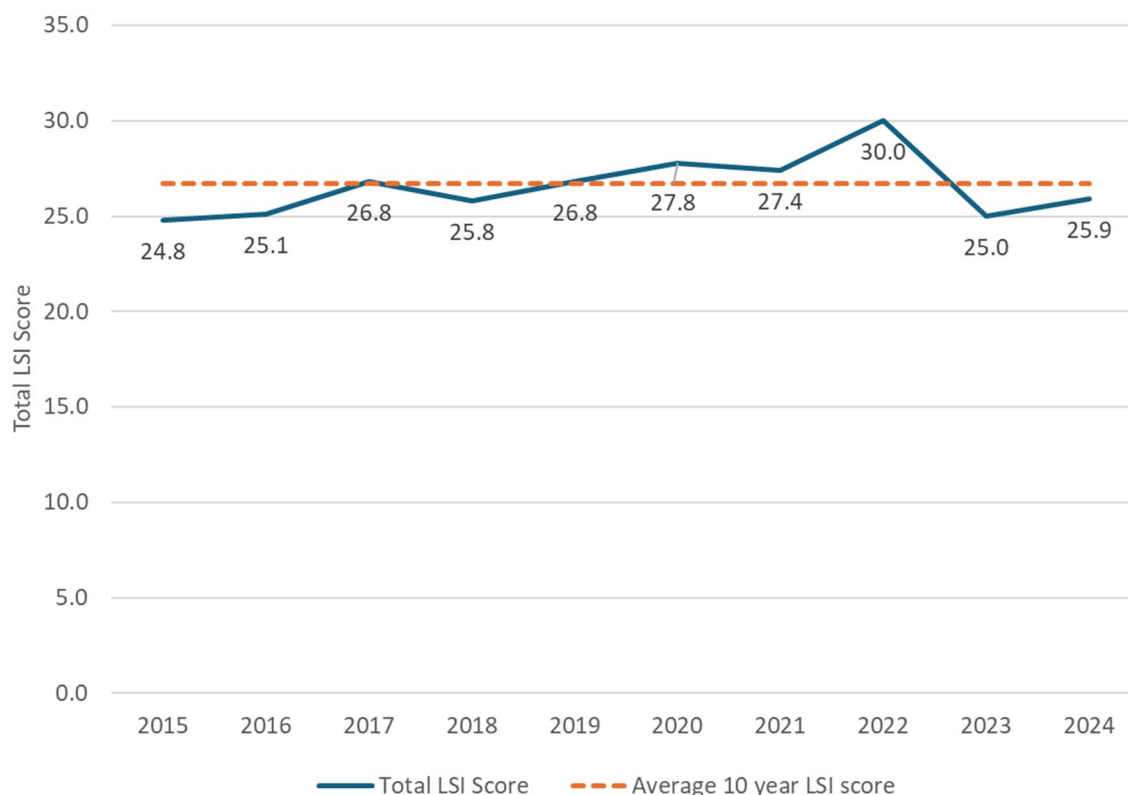
Domain/ Score Range (SC)	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	10-year average
Criminal history SC: 0-10	4.3	3.8	3.9	4.0	4.5	4.4	4.9	6.3	5.1	4.5	4.6
Education/ Employment SC: 0-10	6.1	6.7	6.7	6.8	6.9	6.9	7.1	7.5	6.9	6.7	6.9
Financial SC: 0-2	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.1	1.0	1.1	1.1
Family/ marital SC: 0-4	1.9	1.8	1.4	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.6	1.3	1.1	1.2	1.5
Accommodation SC: 0-3	1.3	1.0	1.8	1.4	1.5	1.3	1.2	1.5	0.8	1.3	1.3
Leisure/ Recreation SC: 0-2	1.6	1.7	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.8
Companions SC: 0-5	3.1	3.3	3.5	3.0	3.0	3.7	3.0	3.2	2.9	3.0	3.2
Alcohol/drug SC: 0-9	3.6	3.9	4.1	3.7	4.5	4.1	4.0	4.2	3.4	3.8	3.9
Emotional/ Personal SC: 0-5	1.5	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.0	0.9	1.1	1.3
Attitude/ Orientation SC: 0-4	1.8	2.0	2.0	1.8	1.8	2.5	2.0	2.0	1.4	1.5	1.9
LSI total score* SC: 0-54	24.8	25.1	26.8	25.8	26.8	27.8	27.4	30.0	25.0	25.9	26.7
Total Count	51	36	47	59	59	46	50	69	53	46	516

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.

The increase in the LSI total score in 2022 is primarily due to the increase in the criminal history subscore.

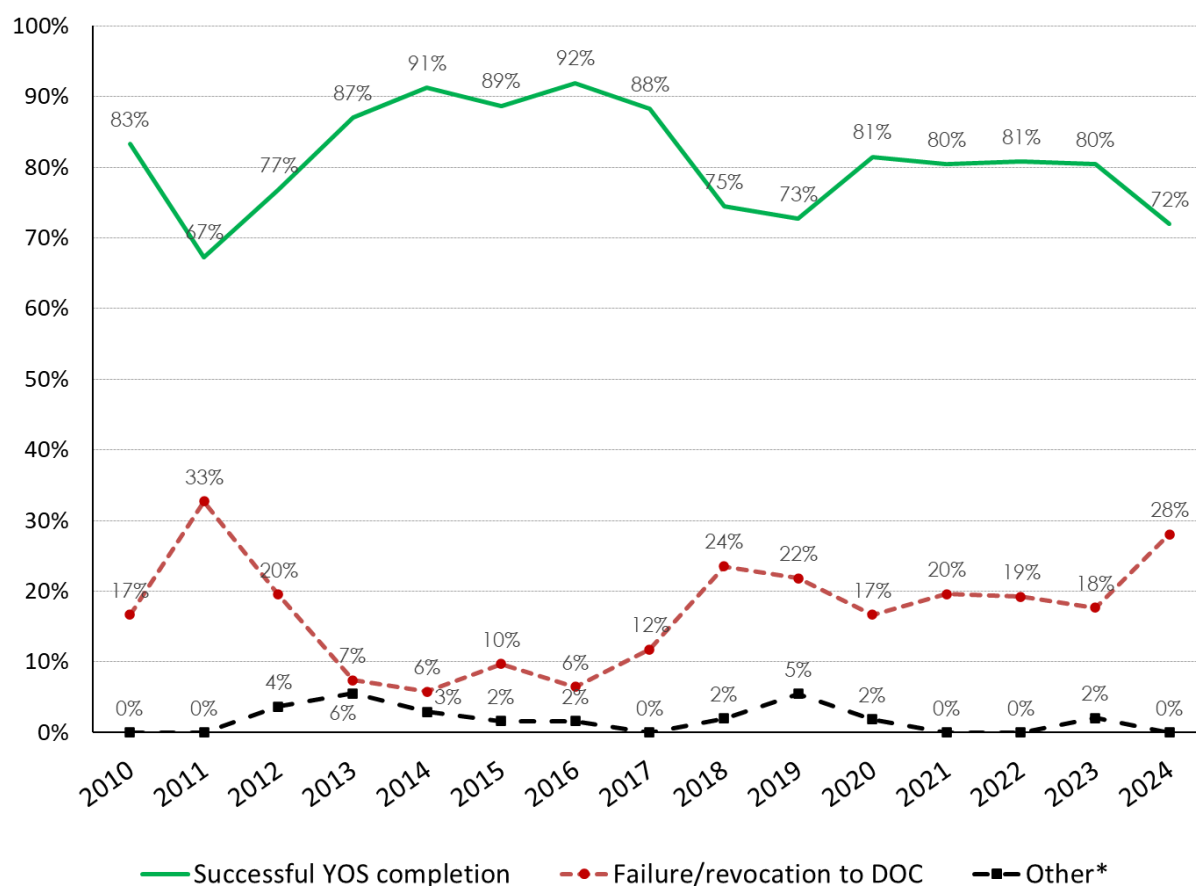
Figure 3.5. Total LSI score and average 10-year LSI score



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 81.1%, a very high rate of success for 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. As can be seen in Figure 3.6, successful terminations were very stable at approximately 80% between FY 2020 and FY 2023 but fell to 71.9% in the most recent year (FY 2024).

Figure 3.6. YOS Termination Types, FY 2010-2024 (count = 541)



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, and the deceased.

What is the recidivism rate of individuals released from YOS since FY 1995? Table 3.7 and Figure 3.7 display recidivism rates for the 1,221 individuals who have successfully completed YOS since its inception on July 1, 1995, and who have had at least two years at risk in the community. Of that group, 54.4% received a new felony or misdemeanor filing within two years following their discharge. Overall, 25.9% of this group had a new felony conviction (Table 3.7). About one in ten (10.1%) of those successfully released were convicted of a new violent felony crime within two years. There have been improvements in the recidivism methodology over the past several years. 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 71.1% of these discharges receiving a new felony or a misdemeanor filing. Less than half were convicted of a felony (42.0%), while 17.0% were convicted of a violent felony within 5 years of their successful termination from YOS.

Table 3.7. Recidivism Rate of Successful YOS Releases FY 1996-FY 2024

Type of offense	Within 6 months	Within 12 months	Within 24 months	Within 3 years	Within 5 years
New misdemeanor or felony filing	23.7%	39.5%	54.4%	62.3%	71.1%
New misdemeanor or felony conviction	18.0%	31.9%	47.3%	55.2%	64.8%
New felony filing	13.3%	22.4%	34.2%	41.3%	50.0%
New felony conviction	8.6%	16.2%	25.9%	32.1%	42.0%
Violent misd. /felony filing***	8.1%	14.6%	23.9%	28.0%	35.5%
Violent misd. /felony conviction***	5.6%	10.6%	18.6%	22.2%	28.8%
Violent felony filing**	5.3%	9.5%	15.4%	18.6%	23.8%
Violent felony conviction**	3.1%	6.4%	10.1%	12.4%	17.0%
Total N at risk	1366	1346	1303	1266	1182

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.

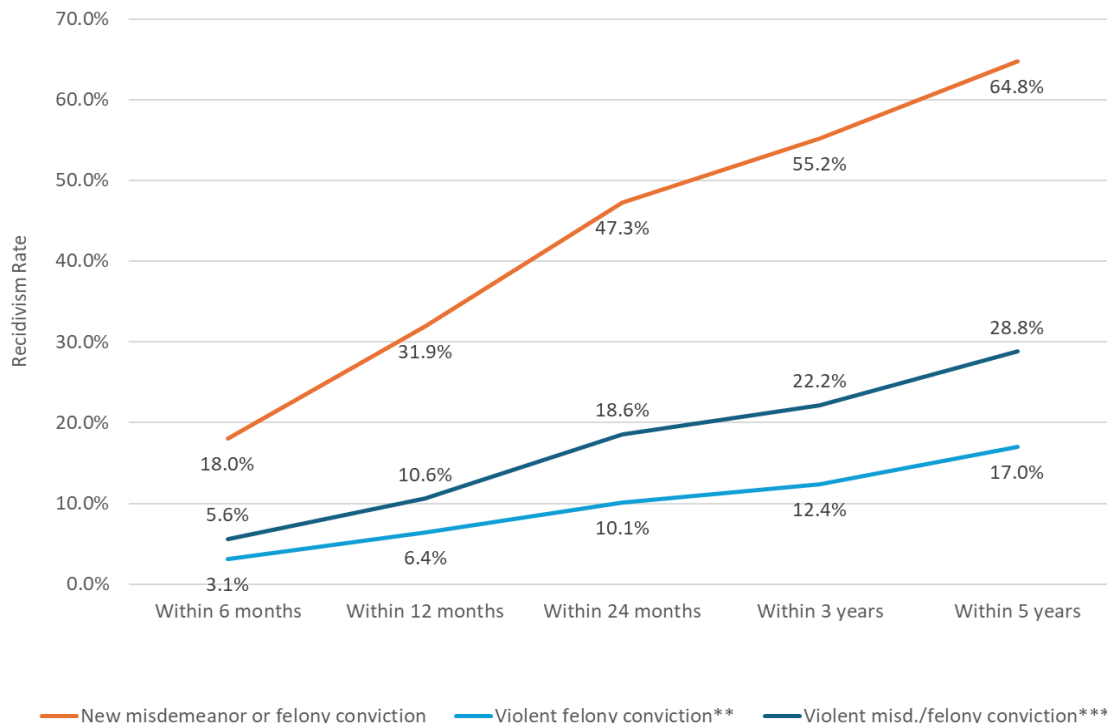
*Denver County Court data are included here. Note prior YOS evaluations excluded filings in Denver County Court. Additionally, traffic cases involving misdemeanors such as DUI/DWAI are included, whereas prior YOS evaluations did not include these types of cases because of system capacity limitations. Therefore, the new filing rate reported here can be expected to be higher than pre-2018 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.

***Violent offense includes all misdemeanor and felony 'violent' crime -which includes misdemeanor assault cases.

Given the serious nature of the convictions YOS residents were sentenced for initially and the higher risk and needs of the population, finding a 12.4% rate of new violent crime convictions 3-years post successful discharge from the program is encouraging.

Figure 3.7. Recidivism Rate of Successful YOS Releases, FY1996-FY2024



Additional Findings

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 has been considerable variation over the last six years regarding the perception of consistency in philosophy between the line staff and the administration. In 2018 71.1% of staff members surveyed reported they felt that at least somewhat consistent philosophy existed. In 2022 only 46.8% of those surveyed felt the same. This rate increased to 67.7% in the most recent survey, an encouraging finding. The relatively low response rate in 2024, especially compared to prior years, does indicate that caution should be used in interpreting trends in staff surveys.

Table 3.8. Do you think there is a consistent philosophy between facility administrators and line staff?

Responses	2018 survey	2022 survey	2024 survey
Yes	42.1%	19.1%	16.1%
Somewhat	29.0%	27.7%	51.6%
Not really	15.0%	23.4%	19.4%
No	13.1%	29.8%	12.9%
Total	99.0%*	100%	100%

Source: Survey of YOS staff administered by DCJ.

*One respondent reported that they did not know the answer to this question.

Some staff members expressed sentiments supporting the consistency in philosophy:

Everyone wants the population to be successful and for staff to stay safe at work.

Everyone has the same goal of pointing the offenders in the right direction

I believe the philosophy is consistent but the best way to get there is not agreed upon.

However, others expressed thoughts regarding the differences in philosophy between the staff and the administration:

...higher ups don't hold offenders accountable.If staff hold offenders accountable, higher ups should back staff.

The population is not being held accountable for their actions. ...This program is not doing the offender population or society any justice.

(there is) too much turnover. Every time we (have new administration) they all have their own plans. No clear vision.

I think the facility administrators and staff are on different pages on how the facility is ran and what the purpose is.

Staff morale

Staff morale has varied over the years (Table 3.9). The percentage of staff reporting good or very good morale has ranged from a high of 63.4% (2014) to a low of 12.5% (2022). The results of the 2024 survey indicate 32.4% of staff identified morale as good. Unlike past years, no one reported morale as very good.

Table 3.9. YOS staff perceptions of morale

Morale	2014	2016	2018	2022	2024
Very good	19.1%	2.4%	8.1%	4.2%	0.0%
Good	44.3%	15.9%	35.1%	8.3%	32.4%
OK	27.0%	51.6%	31.5%	25.0%	38.2%
Poor	8.7%	21.4%	18.9%	35.4%	23.5%
Very poor	0.9%	8.7%	6.3%	27.1%	5.9%
Total %	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Count	116	110	111	48	34

Source: Survey of YOS staff administered by DCJ.

Some factors that may contribute to this apply to many correctional facilities. In particular, the issues with staffing levels have been reported by the DOC.

The administration did report that they worked to improve their outreach to staff, including more regular communication using quarterly video chats, weekly rounds through the facility, and attending the 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. Staff were asked about the reasons for their morale level and their responses are reported in Table 3.10. The reasons most frequently cited as somewhat or very important were staff turnover, staff communication, and willingness to respond to staff concerns, which were endorsed by 100% of respondents. Administrative communication (94.3%), staff communication (94.3%), and consistent policy (91.4%) were most cited as ‘very important’ reasons for morale level. Resident behavior was cited by 57.1% as a very important reason for morale down from 75.0% in 2022. Administrative turnover being cited as a very important reason for morale decreased, from 95.7% in 2022 down to 61.8% in 2024.

Table 3.10. Importance of Various Factors on Staff Morale

Factors on staff morale	Not very/not at all important	Somewhat important	Very important
Administrative Turnover	0.0%	38.2%	61.8%
Administrative Communication	0.0%	5.7%	94.3%
Consistent Policy	0.0%	6.8%	91.4%
Staff Turnover	2.9%	22.9%	74.3%
Staff Communication	0.0%	5.7%	94.3%
Willingness to Respond to Staff Concerns	0.0%	14.3%	85.7%
Resident Behavior	0.0%	42.9%	57.1%

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

Staff shortages play a big part in staff morale.

Morale depends on the shift. Days-poor, swings-good, graves-very good.

I believe that inconsistencies amongst staff create undue stress on staff.

Staff feel there is a lack of support in their decisions to enforce rules or to use programmatic measures towards accountability for their actions. Communication is lacking often times

There is a large gap between administration and correctional staff blue [correctional officers].*



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 (65%) respondents stated that they felt their education or experience adequately prepared them to work with this population, and 63% 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 developer of the program to train the staff directly for one week. The goal is to create a train-the-trainer model, where peer staff 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 offered at YOS. Sixty percent of residents reported that educational opportunities were the most useful or important aspect of YOS, while 28% reported that vocational and work opportunities were the most useful programs. Additionally, approximately 80.5% of residents agreed or strongly agreed that the in-person educational classes were valuable, whereas only 47.9% found the streaming educational classes valuable. Education and vocational training were consistently mentioned when residents were asked which activities or programs have been most useful or important to them:

The mental health and PELL programs

PELL, Restorative Justice, Weight Pile

The life skills/Anger Management classes and the classes such as PELL or carpentry

My GED and my program and my earn time

GED and Gladiator class. I now have an education and somewhere to work when I get out.

Probably the vocational programs, Gladiator, Osha, Business, Welding

Me getting my education meaning all the trades I can get.

In addition, residents were asked if they would choose YOS again and why. Just over sixty percent (61.5%) reported that they would choose YOS again. While the largest percentage (62.3%) said this was due to the shorter sentence, 35.1% said it was due to the education and programming available. Under



one-quarter (23.4%) 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 is trying to help me and I for one need and appreciate that help.

Gives me a second chance at life.

Education, I like the opportunities for further job experience.

The programs are beneficial, and you don't have to be in prison as long.

YOS gives you a second chance to do right, get an education, jobs, a head start on life.

I've learned a lot while being here and I believe I'll be successful upon my release.

YOS administrators continue to see new educational and technical training programs. For example, they recently 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

When asked, two-thirds (61%) indicated that they would choose YOS again over adult prison. Of those who stated they would NOT choose YOS:

- 30% attributed this to 'bad staff'
- 30% felt the program was ineffective
- 21% felt they had been misled, and the alternative choice would have been better.
- 19% made reference to the negative impact of the program

Safety

Residents were asked, "Do you feel safe at YOS?" Fewer than half (42.6%) of survey respondents reported that they felt safe or somewhat safe at YOS (see Table 3.11), substantially less than prior surveys indicated. (71.9% of those surveyed in 2022, and 88.8% of those surveyed in 2018 reported they felt safe at YOS).

Residents were more likely to report fear of being physically assaulted by other residents (18.8%) than physically assaulted by staff (8.6%) or sexually assaulted (7.1%). Nearly sixty-percent (58.9%) feel like they have to be able to physically protect themselves at YOS.



Table 3.11. Safety

Survey questions	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree
I feel safe at YOS.	16.3%	12.8%	28.4%	27.0%	15.6%
I worry about being hit, punched or assaulted by other residents.	37.7%	24.6%	18.8%	11.6%	7.2%
I worry about being hit, punched or assaulted by staff.	48.2%	28.8%	14.4%	4.3%	4.3%
I feel like I have to be able to physically protect myself.	14.2%	13.5%	13.5%	29.8%	29.1%
I worry about being sexually assaulted.	66.0%	19.1%	7.8%	2.8%	4.3%

Programming for females

When surveyed, 4 out of the 6 female respondents indicated they would not choose YOS again. The most common complaints related to isolation, and the lack of access to opportunities available to the male residents. The YOS Administration reported that they implemented two new programs to try to improve engagement and reduce feelings of isolation. They implemented a peer mentor by bringing in inmates from the La Vista female adult prison nearby. Administration reported that the females in YOS did not engage the adult inmate and the program was halted. Additionally, they had a dog that lived in the female housing area. Unfortunately, the dog passed away and they have not replaced it. Administration voiced concern that the female residents did not engage with the dog. It is difficult to ascertain if these are accurate conclusions without direct conversation with the residents because “engagement” can be a difficult thing to ascertain.

However, the majority (83.3%) of the female survey respondents mentioned that the programs, education, the Pell program and the college opportunity were the best things about YOS.

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. In May 2024, 9 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.

The YOS has a psychologist on-grounds full time, and they are working to improve the number of evidence-based practices (EBPs) provided to residents. These include dialectical behavior therapy (DBT),

cognitive behavioral therapy for criminal thinking, Seeking Safety, Grief & Loss, and a DBT program for residents with developmental delays.

Additionally, they are implementing a new staff training program to understand the development of the adolescent brain. The differences in developmental pathways can be difficult to understand and this staff curriculum seeks to give them an additional perspective on the topic.

Conclusion

Overall, the YOS operations are generally consistent with the statute and represent the intent of the original YOS legislation.

As with prior evaluation findings, education/vocational training is valued by both staff and residents; 61.5% of residents said they would choose YOS again, 62% for sentence-related reasons, 35% for education/programs/activities, and 23% for change-life-transition. YOS administrators continue to work to expand vocational programming and opportunities for skill development and engagement.

The majority of YOS staff (80%) reported that they saw themselves as role models, and another 20% believe they serve as role models “sometimes.” Only one-third of residents (35.5%) felt they had a good connection with their advisor, 45.4% believed they could communicate with their advisor, and only 6.9% felt the staff really cared about the residents. With efforts dedicated to enhancing communication with staff and residents, a supportive administration, and the continued expansion of programs and activities, YOS is positioned to positively impact the lives of many offenders.

The successful terminations were stable at approximately 80% between FY 2020 and FY 2023 but fell to 71.9% in FY 2024.

The low recidivism rates for felony violent crime are very encouraging. The 12.4% 3-year rate of new violent crime convictions is promising, given that most YOS sentences were the result of a felony violent crime, and considering the very high level of needs in this population.

In response to recent assaults, many of which are gang-related, YOS administrators’ focus on expediting the revocation process and ensuring the security and safety of individuals who comply with the program. Additionally, YOS administrators seek to resume gang disengagement classes as they believe it is beneficial to the YOS population considering the number of residents involved in gangs.

As this evaluation was conducted, the YOS administrators were transitioning from the current nine-level behavioral management system, which links behavioral expectations to privileges to a more simplified three-level system. If implemented, the new system will be described in the next 2026 YOS evaluation.



Section 4: 2024 Study Recommendations

Based on the findings presented in this report, the following recommendations are not intended to serve as budget requests or legislative proposals from the DOC, CDPS, or the Executive Branch.

1. **Improve infrastructure.** The current infrastructure of the YOS facility presents several challenges. One significant issue is security; there is limited capacity to separate residents involved in conflicts, and the doors in the living areas cannot be locked. Additionally, the facility's lack of space restricts the expansion of programming. While the administration has several ideas for new programs, they often encounter difficulties implementing them within their current facility. This lack of space also negatively affects their ability to provide more programming for the female population. Improvements to the buildings and security infrastructure would require general fund allocation to replace the doors, build or expand the current programming space, and make other necessary improvements.
2. **Simplify the level system.** The current six-level system within Phase One is difficult to implement in such a way that staff and residents understand what is required to move up levels. YOS is currently in the process of moving to a three-level system and we recommend that the new system be implemented as soon as possible.
3. **Expansion of vocational trade programs.** Staff and residents report that implementing additional vocational trade programs would be very beneficial. Some suggested programs include plumbing, computer information systems, HVAC, electrical, graphic design, music production, and others. Certain trade programs, such as cosmetology and auto repair, have been eliminated, and it is recommended that YOS consider replacing these programs with new ones that are feasible within their current space and beneficial to residents' long-term career goals.
4. **Management and staff morale.** While the survey results indicate an improvement in morale, the number of correctional officers who participated was very low. Anecdotally, conversations with correctional officers indicated that their lack of motivation to complete the survey was related to the fact that prior surveys had not led to significant changes. Improving communication between staff and administration is critical. Additionally, enhancing communication between shifts so that consistent information is passed along should improve morale.
5. **Study the impact of the revised intake process.** YOS recently changed its intake process, from a "Zero Day" system which had a regimented component that set clear behavioral expectations but was perceived by some as overly militaristic. The current process includes team-building, coaching, and a more restrained style toward new residents. However, some staff have reported that this new approach has led to new residents not fully understanding all the requirements



and expectations of YOS. It is recommended that the revised intake process be studied to identify any modifications that may be necessary.

6. **Female residents.** The efforts of YOS to create more equity in programming for female residents have been significant. However, many female residents still feel they do not have the same access to programming and educational opportunities as male residents. YOS should explore all possible options to address this disparity, whether it is perceived or real.
7. **Re-engage with a gang prevention program.** The majority of staff respondents , (71.4%) felt YOS did not deal effectively with gang issues. Administrators noted continued gang activity, which spills over into all aspects of the program. In particular, keeping residents with different gang affiliations separated in their housing assignments creates difficulties for YOS staff due to facility space constraints. YOS previously offered gang disengagement classes facilitated by a non-profit community reentry organization. However, the contract was canceled due to challenges in finding eligible instructors. YOS should re-engage in pursuing gang reduction and prevention programs, especially given the significant number of residents involved in gangs.
8. **Improve selection and training of new YOS staff.** Concerns have been expressed regarding the transfer of correctional staff from adult facilities to the YOS. These staff typically come from adult prisons, where they are trained in a control-disciplinary approach. It is recommended that YOS implement specific training and orientation programs to shift the focus from a control-disciplinary environment to a coaching and growth culture.
9. **Improve the revocation process.** The ability to respond to negative behavior in a swift and certain manner is essential, as these behaviors can disrupt the overall operation at the YOS. Improving the efficiency of the revocation process---where the original DOC sentence is reinstated---would enable the administration to manage a challenging population more effectively. This would require statutory changes, given the dual nature of the YOS and DOC sentences, where a lengthier sentence to DOC is suspended for the duration of the shorter YOS sentence.
10. **Expand mental health and substance use curriculum.** YOS has hired a full-time, on-site psychologist who has introduced several evidence-based programs. However, dedicated funding for these programs is very limited and relies heavily on additional budgetary support from the YOS administration. These programs need more dedicated funding to continue growing and providing treatment for the YOS population, who often arrive at the facility with significant mental health and substance use issues.

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. Good e. Very good

Please explain why you feel this way.

How important are each of these factors impacting staff morale?

Factors	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				



Factors	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all
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.

24. If you could improve YOS, what would you change?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!



APPENDIX C

● EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

- High School Equivalency (GED)
- Special Education (SPED), to include Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)
- Career and Technical Education
 - Business Fundamentals
 - Carpentry
 - Computer Informational Systems
 - Customer Service Academy
 - Foundations of CTE
 - Graphic Design
 - Welding
- Prison Education Programming (formerly known as the Second Chance PELL Grant Program)
- Grant Funded Partnership – Colorado College
 - Through a grant-funded program, Colorado College sends PhD-level Professors to YOS during the Spring and Winter semesters to offer general education, college-level courses to qualified residents in the evenings.
- Contracted Partnerships
 - Red Rocks Community College
 - OSHA 10-hour Certification Class
 - Crystalline Silica Safety
 - Hazards in the Workplace
 - Trenching
 - Power Tool and Jobsite Safety
 - Ironworkers Union of Denver
 - Gladiator Program (Rebar tying course)
 - Colorado Department of Transportation
 - Flagging Certification

● MENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMMING

- Anger Management (SAMHSA)
- Drug and Alcohol
- Living Skills
 - Making Decisions
 - Refusal Skills
 - Setting and Attaining Goals
 - Hygiene and Self-Care
 - Interpersonal Skills
 - Education
 - Sexual Health
 - Values and Responsibilities
 - Managing Money
 - Parenting and Child Development



- Securing Housing
 - Looking for Work
 - Stepping Up, Stepping Out (Classification Unit)
 - Commitment to change
 - Volume 1
 - Volume 2
 - Volume 3
 - Dialectical Behavior Therapy (Standard Edition)
 - Seeking Safety
 - Corrective Actions
 - The Con Game
 - Values and Responsible Living
 - Thinking Errors
 - My Change Plan
 - Real Life Parenting Skills
 - Building Trust
 - Handling Anger
 - Setting Rules
 - Grief and Loss
 - Transgender Resilience
 - Trauma in Life (Females)
 - Traumatic Stress and Resilience (Males)
 - Victim Impact
 - Outpatient and Enhanced Outpatient Substance Use Treatment
- **RECREATION**
 - Photograph Program
 - Depending on the event, residents can purchase pictures each quarter to send home to their families.
 - Outside Food Program
 - Barber Shop Program
- **LIBRARY SERVICES**
 - Interlibrary Loans
 - Interfacility Holds (Pilot Program)
 - Read to the Children Program
 - This program provides the residents the ability to select a book and read the item to an approved family member. The resident fills out an application and sends it to their case manager for approval. The case manager will send it to the library to keep on file. The books are donated to the facility, or the resident may have their family purchase a book and send it to the facility if the title is not available in the donations. The library staff will record the resident reading the book, create the recording using the PowerDirector19 program, and burn onto a DVD. The DVD and the book will be sent to the resident's approved family member. The resident will pay for the cost of mailing the book and DVD. The resident may participate monthly.

- o Deposit Collections
 - The library provides the living units with books no longer part of the library's collection for accessibility to reading material when the library is not open.
- o CCTV
 - The library utilizes digital channels for recreational and/or educational programming when the library may not be accessible.
- o Creative Programs
 - Crocheting
 - Musical Instruments
 - Piano
 - Ukulele(s)
- o Puzzles
- o Board Games
- o Nintendo Switch
- o Launchpads
- o Chromebooks
 - Access for students that would like to work on college courses, career plan through various CDOC-approved applications, etc.
- o Individual CD Players
- o Individual DVD Players
- **VOLUNTEER SERVICES**
 - o Alcoholics Anonymous
 - o Alpha
 - o Catholic Services
 - o Iron Man
 - o Jehovah's Witness
 - o New Horizons Ministry
 - o New Life Ministry
 - o Search for Truth
 - o Spiritual Journey
 - o Christmas Donations for the residents
 - o Family Day Event (summertime)
 - o WeCare (Parents' Association)

