

JUNE 2024

YEAH

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT FOR ADVANCEMENT HANGOUT

THE VIOLENT CRIME INITIATIVE

YEAR 1 PROCESS EVALUATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



To foster safer communities, it is critical to respond to the needs of teens and young adults who are involved in and exposed to violence. These young people often face significant challenges and barriers related to their neighborhood environments, such as unstable and minimal family units, trauma from witnessing or experiencing violence, educational disruptions, unstable housing, lack of access to mental health services, and inadequate economic opportunities. While the availability of holistic services tailored to their needs is severely limited, YEAH Inc. (Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout) recognizes this large gap and provides comprehensive support and financial assistance to young people.



YEAH is a community-based organization working to empower, advocate for, and meet the needs of young people ages 15 to 24 based in West and Southwest Philadelphia. Kendra Van de Water and James Aye co-founded YEAH in 2018 to address the stark lack of safe, culturally supportive, and fun spaces for teenagers and young adults in Philadelphia. YEAH sought to address the root causes of violence by direct investments in the community and young people, and by providing safe and culturally relevant spaces for Black youth.

The **Violent Crime Initiative (VCI)**, which began to serve young people in late 2020, is a core program of YEAH. The VCI's work focuses on providing tenacious court advocacy and holistic, individualized case management to young people, ages 15 to 24, who are from West or Southwest Philadelphia and have been charged with a violent or gun crime in the juvenile or adult legal system. The main individual-level goals articulated by the VCI founders are to (1) assist young people in exiting out of the legal system and (2) support them to become self-sufficient. The organization's staff of case managers, legal experts, program/service coordinators and others provide extensive support and financial assistance to meet the diverse needs of participants.

NEUBAUER
FAMILY FOUNDATION



This document is a summary of a longer Year 1 Process Evaluation Report that provides a detailed overview of YEAH's VCI, highlighting its mission and approach. Funded by **The Neubauer Family Foundation (NFF)**, researchers in **Temple University's Department of Criminal Justice** conducted a community-based participatory process evaluation to help provide an independent analysis of VCI successes and outcomes.

The two-year process evaluation has three (3) main goals:

1. Document the VCI's theory of change using a collaborative, participatory approach grounded in the lives of young people touched by violence.
2. Examine the performance data and measures collected by VCI staff and work together to co-produce a refined set of performance data aligned with the logic model's inputs and outcomes.
3. Document program outcomes and successes.

The Year 1 process report focuses on describing the VCI's theory of change and its participants, as well as program strengths and successes that were evident in the first year of the process evaluation. This Executive Summary first shows the theory of change or "logic model," then describes the core activities of the program, then briefly describes the participants and some program successes.

The logic model shown in Figure E1 presents a diagrammatic flow of how the program works to achieve its objectives. The figure first depicts core inputs or resources, then the main activities, which are followed by three columns of outcomes along the dimensions of: (a) changes in learning and attitudes, (b) changes in actions and behavior, and (c) changes in longer-term aggregate or societal level outcomes. The constructs listed in each column of the logic model were derived from in-depth interviews with VCI youth, ensuring that the young people's experiences and their articulation of key activities and services, and youth outcomes, formed the basis of the VCI's theory of change. The research team met with young people to ask them about their perceptions of personal change and how their journey toward self-sufficiency was supported by being part of the VCI. The draft logic model was then presented to the co-CEOs; a series of back-and-forth conversations helped solidify the outcomes shown below.

FIGURE E1. PARTICIPATORY LOGIC MODEL - VIOLENT CRIME INITIATIVE

Inputs/ Resources	Project Activities	Outcomes: Learning/ Attitudes	Outcomes: Action/ Behavior	Outcomes: Long-term, Aggregate/ Societal Level
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kendra (co-CEO) • James (co-CEO) • Other staff • Trainers of skills • YEAH Philly attributes such as safe space provision, on location employment/training • YEAH Philly referral sources and partners • Room for mistakes and error without incarceration • Restorative justice for violent crimes • Flexible funding-targeted to specific young person's needs • Employment opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Components: • Court advocacy • Case management-needs-based, individualized holistic services • Community-building community service • Emotional support • Goal setting • Relationship building • Skill acquisition via in-house training and direct mentoring • Socializing, hanging out in safe space • Cash support/ financial assistance These above include: • Personal growth • Education • Documents/ID • Employment • Hobbies • New opportunities, experiences, travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program satisfaction and trust • New skills and knowledge • Improved self-esteem • Positive mindset and attitude • New aspirations (eg, interested in and sets long-term goals) • Motivated to achieve short- and long-term goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieved short-term goals; more focus now to longer-term goals • Engaged in new hobbies • Enrolled/completed post-secondary education or technical training • Family/child reunification • Fewer conflicts • New positive relationships • Completed probation, GPS monitoring, etc. with no violations • Free from all government intervention (includes no police contact) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy change at all levels to reduce mass incarceration, adult and youth legal system disparities • Reduced biases • More challenges against racism • Improved community relations • Increased sense of community • Youth-led movements: young people have central voice in policy change/inclusion • Reduced violence among community members when basic needs are met • Violence addressed as a public health issue and at the root cause
			Self-sufficiency	
			Wellbeing	

As shown in the logic model, in addition to the individual-level goals that support youth self-sufficiency and wellbeing, the co-CEOs envision that the VCI, and YEAH's other programs and activities will foster systemic changes and community empowerment to achieve a more equitable and just society. The VCI is a core part of YEAH's larger efforts to help reduce mass incarceration and legal system disparities by promoting policy change at all levels, while addressing the biases and racism that disproportionately affect historically underserved communities. YEAH staff prioritize improving community relations, strengthening the sense of community, and ensuring that violence is addressed as a public health issue, targeting root causes such as unmet basic needs. Additionally, all of their programmatic efforts emphasize the importance of youth-led movements, where young people are given a central voice in driving policy change and inclusion efforts.



THE VCI'S CORE ACTIVITIES

VCI leaders have developed a well-rounded, case management-based program that is made up of the following core activities:

- **Court Advocacy** – Court advocates, or case managers accompany young people to their court dates to go on the record and speak to judges and prosecutors to provide updates related to young people and advocate for steps of progression including termination of supervision, curfew vs. house arrest, etc. Court advocacy includes providing social and emotional support and coaching to help young people speak in court for themselves and manage the stress of their legal system and street involvement.
- **Case Management, Holistic Services and Supports** – YEAH staff provide comprehensive and continuous support to young people at any stage of their involvement with the legal system. Staff meet them at home, in jail, in the community—wherever is needed, both physically and emotionally.
- **Financial Assistance and Cash Stipends** – Young people receive a \$100 weekly stipend while they remain actively engaged in the VCI. YEAH often pays restitution and legal fees for VCI participants, provides and pays for basic needs (groceries, clothing, furniture, etc.). Educational, vocational or training costs and fees are also paid by YEAH.
- **Community Building/Community Service** – Staff offer young people a wide range of potential community service activities, such as participation in community justice events, YEAH's pet food giveaways and their free vet clinics. Almost all efforts are compensated.
- **Emotional Support, Social Support, and Safe Spaces** – Much of the steadfast advocacy and unrestricted case management support creates an environment where participants feel emotionally supported. YEAH's hangout space provides a safe place where young people can congregate or engage in social activities.
- **Goal Setting** – Participants engage in structured goal setting with staff using a personalized approach, considering the unique circumstances, strengths, and complexities of each participant.
- **Relationship Building** – By providing ongoing support, monitoring progress, and adjusting plans as needed, staff are ensuring that participants have the necessary tools and relationships to navigate social challenges and build a foundation for a positive future.
- **Skill Acquisition** – YEAH staff arrange and provide in-house trainings for young people to build important life skills and obtain certification in work-related skills. Examples of trainings include peer-led mediation and conflict resolution, entrepreneurship, car mechanics, and culinary arts.

VCI DEMOGRAPHICS AND PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Working with the VCI staff, and pulling information from their case management tracking system, the research team identified and collected data on 62 individuals who were still part of VCI in April 2024 and/or those who had been referred and accepted to VCI after June 30th, 2022, who have been and/or continue to be part of VCI. The 62 young people described in this report represent about 35% of those served by VCI between its inception and May 2024.

The figures below highlight selected demographic data for the 62 young people who are part of this performance measurement “data cohort.” More information on these participants can be found in the full report. Many of these participants (58%) are aged 19 and older, while those aged 14-16 and 17-18 comprise 29% and 13% of the group, respectively (Figure E2). Almost all participants are male (94%) versus female (6%) (Figure E3).

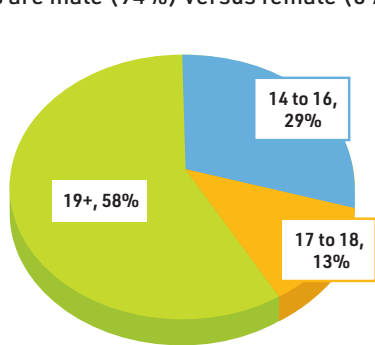


Figure E2. Participant Age

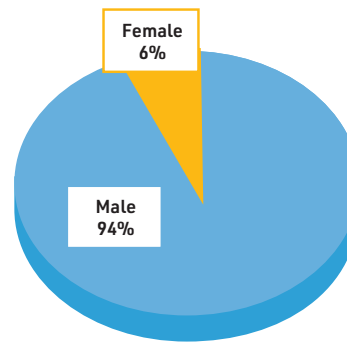


Figure E3. Participant Sex

The VCI serves young people who intersect with the criminal and juvenile legal system at various points from arrest through to adjudication and placement/incarceration. Young people can be referred to VCI (or self-refer) at any stage. Figure E4 shows the variety of statuses for young people as they start being part of VCI. This wide array of intersection points, or statuses means that VCI staff must be well versed in all the processes and procedures of both the criminal and juvenile legal system. They must interface with law enforcement stakeholders across a wide array of offices and departments. Roughly one-third of participants come to the VCI with an open adult case and roughly a quarter enter VCI with an open juvenile case. Overall, in terms of the legal case that was the impetus for their referral to the VCI, 94% of participants had their most proximal (pre-VCI) court case associated with the juvenile legal system, while 6% came into VCI with their closest but preceding case attached to the adult system (not shown). The average young person comes into VCI with multiple arrests (mean = 3.9; not shown).

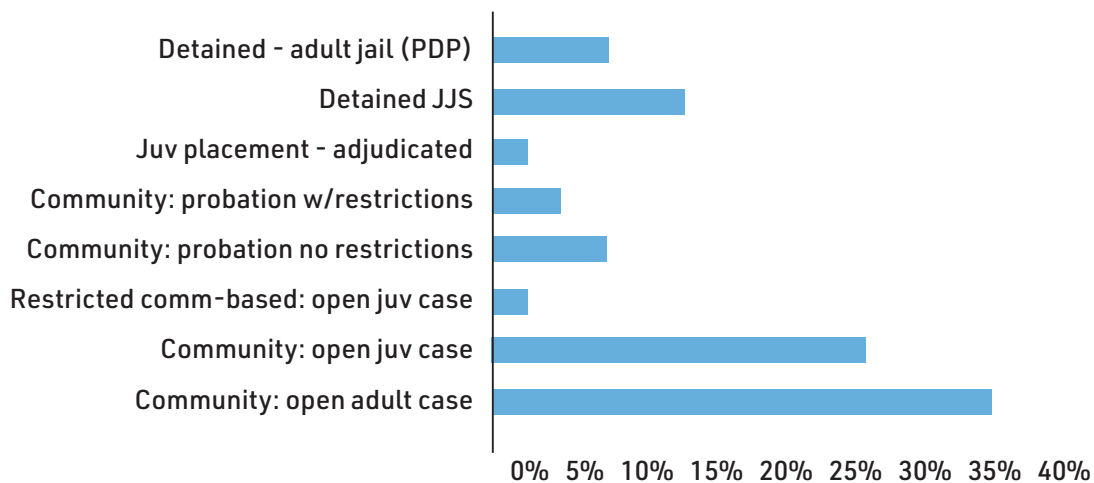


Figure E4. Participant Status at VCI Referral

VCI STRENGTHS AND SUCCESSES



**SINCE THE INCEPTION OF VCI IN LATE 2020,
THE PROGRAM HAS WORKED WITH ROUGHLY
175 YOUNG PEOPLE.**

The research team's first-year analysis of the data collected—across all research tasks—makes clear that the initiative has many strengths, and the co-CEOs have built an innovative initiative that relies on evidence-based principles of human service delivery with marginalized young Black people. Since the inception of VCI in late 2020, the program has worked with roughly 175 young people. The 62 individuals whose information is included in the demographics and performance measurement section of the Year 1 Process Report ("data cohort") only represent those young people who were still participating in the VCI as of April 2024 and those who had been referred after June 30, 2022—when staff began use of their detailed client tracking system.



LOW LEVELS OF RECIDIVISM

Preliminary data analysis from the research team on the VCI participant cohort shows that 61% of the data cohort had at least one arrest following their referral. This is not surprising because many of these arrests stemmed from pre-referral incidents or occurred during early VCI program involvement. But notably, in a focused subsample of 23 participants who completed or were closed out of the program (and not incarcerated for earlier cases), only 8.7% (2 individuals) were re-arrested, suggesting promising outcomes. This figure is significantly lower than the Pennsylvania and national averages for recidivism rates for juveniles and adults, where one-year recidivism rates are around 30-40%. The VCI recidivism analyses should be considered preliminary for a number of reasons, but primarily because they do not include calculations using a matched comparison group (comparing the recidivism rate of VCI young people against a similar sample of young people who were not part of VCI).

UNMITIGATED, HOLISTIC SUPPORT

Overall, the VCI's greatest strength is represented by the totality of its theory of change—that VCI staff meet the young person where they are—literally and figuratively—by providing as many supports and services that they can or have access to (and depending on participant needs). VCI services and supports can be provided at all stages of a young person's involvement in the criminal or juvenile legal system. The VCI accepts cases and individuals that other organizations find themselves unable to work with. This full service, unmitigated advocacy support enables the program to best serve the unique, specific needs of each person for as long as they remain engaged and in need. The inclusion of a dedicated court advocacy component ensures that participants receive fair representation and guidance as they navigate the criminal and juvenile legal systems.

GENUINE ENGAGEMENT AND STRENGTH-BASED FOCUS

The support of the co-CEOs and VCI staff is essential for building trust with participants, helping to engage young people involved in the legal system who often have a deep mistrust of authorities. By showing genuine care and commitment, staff create a sense of safety that encourages youth to participate in the program and access available resources.

A focus on establishing trust is key to a strength-based approach in case management. YEAH CEOs train staff to actively involve participants in their own care, using validated assessment tools to set goals and create achievable timelines that foster a sense of empowerment. This aligns with best practices in strength-based programming, and research by the American Psychological Association indicates that such an approach can reduce recidivism and improve behavioral outcomes.



TRUSTED STAFF

VCI staff are essential to the program's success, providing personalized support and resources to meet young people's needs and help them overcome challenges to achieve their goals. Particularly, the co-CEOs establish themselves as reliable sources of support, fostering relationships through personal interactions with the participants. Importantly, the trust between staff and participants empowers young people to reach out at pivotal moments for genuine guidance where both parties leave feeling respected and heard.



FINANCIAL SUPPORT

When basic needs like housing, education, and training are met, participants can focus on skill-building, employment, and community engagement. This holistic approach increases their chances of success and fosters security, enabling them to progress and work toward a positive future.

Few social services offer financial support to high-risk juveniles due to systemic, bureaucratic, and resource-related challenges. Many agencies face strict budget constraints and funding limitations, prioritizing structured programs like counseling, educational support, and vocational training over direct cash assistance, which is often seen as harder to manage and justify to funders.



DIRECTLY CONFRONTS RACISM AND INJUSTICE

YEAH (and the VCI) has emerged as a community-based, young people-focused organization that can directly confront racism and injustice by actively incorporating principles of equity and advocacy into their core operations, particularly through court advocacy and case management. The VCI works with a young population that regularly faces marginalization and has been exposed to violence and adversities associated with poverty. These young people experience discrimination and inequity in education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, perpetuating cycles of poverty and disadvantage. The constant threat of violence, whether in their communities or through interactions with law enforcement, exacerbates trauma and stress, hindering their ability to thrive. Staff recognize that the government systems created to serve youth and their families can exacerbate risks that led to their involvement in crime in the first place. The organization challenges and exposes the systemic harms of government institutions. YEAH co-CEOs carefully choose their partners and collaborators to ensure that partner organizations can be trusted to genuinely serve a young person's best interests. VCI staff prioritize a safe environment through regular check-ins, proactive intervention strategies, and comprehensive support services.

YOUNG PEOPLE AND STAFF WORK TOGETHER TO ENSURE THAT YOUTH RECEIVE FAIR TREATMENT AND REPRESENTATION WITHIN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM. THROUGH SUSTAINED EFFORTS TO HIGHLIGHT AND RECTIFY INSTANCES OF DISCRIMINATION, YEAH NOT ONLY SUPPORTS INDIVIDUALS BUT ALSO CONTRIBUTES TO BROADER POLICY SHIFTS TOWARDS EQUITY AND FAIRNESS. THIS COMMITMENT TO CONFRONTING RACISM AND INJUSTICE CAN FOSTER RESILIENCE, AND HELP YOUNG PEOPLE NAVIGATE FUTURE CHALLENGES.

CONCLUSION



The VCI is an innovative approach that uses evidence-based practices and principles to meet its stated goals. The initiative's operational framework, characterized by personalized and holistic needs assessments, goal setting, and continuous monitoring, ensures that services are both responsive and adaptive to the evolving needs of participants. By addressing both immediate and long-term needs, the VCI not only provides immediate support but also empowers young people to build a foundation for a safer and more productive future. It is notable that the co-CEOs are working to achieve goals at the individual level, the local neighborhood level, and across Philadelphia. The strategic integration of resources, coupled with steadfast dedication to supporting young people where they are, further enhances the VCI's capacity to deliver achievable and sustainable outcomes. Moving forward, the insights gained from the participatory research processes (described in the full report) will assist in supporting ongoing improvements that allow the VCI to be sustained and grow, ultimately contributing to the promotion of individual wellbeing and safer communities.

**FINAL RESEARCH REPORT FORTHCOMING IN
SUMMER 2025**