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YEAH Philly's Violent Crime Initiative: Outcomes, Expansion and Scalability

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout (YEAH Inc.) launched the Violent Crime Initiative (VCI) to support young people ages 15–24 in West and Southwest Philadelphia who have been arrested for violent offenses or gun crimes. Unlike traditional system-driven approaches, VCI provides voluntary, holistic, and flexible services that address both immediate needs (such as stipends, housing, legal defense) and long-term goals (employment, education, and community connection).

With support from the Neubauer Family Foundation, Temple University researchers conducted a two-phase participatory evaluation. This final phase focuses on three goals: (1) highlighting what makes VCI unique, (2) assessing outcomes for participants, and (3) examining readiness for sustainability and expansion. Taken together, the final report offers both a reflection on what VCI has accomplished and an evidence-informed look ahead. The report concludes with a set of recommendations for program refinement, data infrastructure development, and considerations for thoughtful expansion.

Sustainability and scaling are critical considerations for any social service organization seeking to extend its impact beyond a single community or cohort. Sustainability focuses on securing diversified, multi-year funding streams, solidifying community partnerships, and building organizational capacity to endure changing political and economic contexts, whereas scalability involves adapting core components such as staffing ratios, infrastructure, and service delivery models in a way that maintains fidelity while accommodating the unique needs of new settings. The evaluation was guided by nine questions, which structure this executive summary.

Q1. What are VCI’s key characteristics, components, and guiding principles?

VCI is grounded in the belief that violence is best addressed through trust-based relationships, not surveillance or coercion. Its distinctive features include:

- **Holistic case management and legal advocacy:** Staff provide individualized plans while also accompanying participants in court, advocating for decertification, diversion, or reduced supervision.
- **Trusted mentorship and emotional support:** Youth consistently report that staff “show up,” cultivating a no-judgment environment that encourages self-advocacy.
- **Unrestricted financial support:** Weekly stipends and flexible emergency assistance reduce stressors that drive re-offense.

- **Safe spaces and skill-building hubs:** The hangout, warehouse, and neighborhood market provide safe community anchors, vocational training, and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- **Confronting systemic racism:** Staff actively challenge bias in schools, courts, and probation while centering equity and justice.
- **Continuous learning:** Through data tracking, participatory feedback, and logic model refinement, VCI adapts to participant needs.
- **Building self-efficacy:** Staff intentionally coach participants to develop confidence, problem-solving skills, and self-advocacy, ensuring not only that immediate needs are met but also young people are equipped to navigate future challenges independently.

Together, these elements distinguish VCI from traditional programs by integrating legal defense, case management, and financial stabilization into a community-based model.

Q2. What is the extent of the violence problem being addressed by VCI?

The scope of youth violence in Philadelphia underscores VCI's importance. Each year, an estimated **3,200 arrests of youth ages 15–24** involve violent crimes, and **nearly 1,000** involve firearm violations. Applying citywide arrest proportions to the subpopulation relevant to the VCI eligibility suggests that annually in a year such as 2023 or 2024, **there would be roughly 184 arrests of young Black males and females for violent offenses, and 136 VUFA-related arrests in West and Southwest Philadelphia alone (totaling 320).**

If VCI were scaled citywide, it could potentially serve **3,000+ young people per year** arrested for violent or firearm-related offenses. These figures demonstrate both the magnitude of the problem and the significant potential reach of VCI.

Q3. What system gaps does VCI address and under what context does it work?

VCI fills gaps left by fragmented and punitive justice responses:

- **Juvenile and adult system navigation:** Few organizations that work with young people arrested for violent crimes simultaneously support the population across both systems; VCI does so seamlessly.
- **Court advocacy:** VCI provides independent legal advocacy, often securing less punitive sanctions/surveillance, decertification, or reduced sentences.
- **Community-rooted support:** Services are voluntary and neighborhood-based, contrasting with system-mandated programs that many young people distrust.

Contextual challenges include strained relations with juvenile court and probation, inconsistent information sharing, and skepticism from prosecutors. Nonetheless, VCI aligns with local and state reform goals (e.g., diversion, community-based alternatives, racial equity) and complements the DAO’s emphasis on reducing incarceration. At the national level, it reflects best practices promoted by OJJDP and other public health–oriented frameworks.

Q4. Does VCI achieve its stated outcomes?

Evaluation findings demonstrate promising outcomes:

- **Engagement:** Of 93 participants with complete data, most remained in VCI for over a year. Roughly half exited successfully, while one-quarter disengaged—rates consistent with programs serving high-risk youth.
- **Court outcomes:** VCI secured decertifications, diversions, and shortened supervision periods, “small wins” that represent meaningful reductions in surveillance/incarceration.
- **Education and employment:** Staff re-engaged youth in school (often after years of disengagement) and facilitated job readiness and placement, with YEAH itself employing many participants.
- **Re-arrest outcomes:** One-year violent re-arrest rates ranged from **30–39%**; by two years, 56% of youth had been re-arrested—a challenging but expected outcome given the high-risk profile. Importantly, **pre-post analysis showed a 39–41% reduction in arrests among VCI participants**, while a matched comparison group experienced only minor improvement when using any arrest as the outcome and increases for violent arrests. Table E1 highlights these findings.

Table E1. Pre-Post Differences in Arrests, VCI Participants vs. Comparison Group			
Group	Rate Ratio Post vs. Pre (exp)	Statistically Significant?	Interpretation
Any Arrest			
Treatment (VCI)	0.59	Yes	Arrest rate was 41% lower after program start compared to before.
Comparison	0.87	Yes	Arrest rate was 13% lower after pseudo-start compared to before start.
Violent Arrest			
Treatment (VCI)	0.61	Yes	Violent crime arrest rate was about 39–40% lower after program start compared to before start.
Comparison	1.10	Yes	Violent crime arrest rate was about 10% higher after pseudo-start compared to before start.

These findings indicate that, despite working with the city’s most difficult-to-engage youth, VCI significantly improves trajectories compared to peers.

Q5. What organizational and staffing structure sustains VCI?

VCI has evolved toward a **team-based case management model**, supported by specialized roles (legal coordinator, school engagement specialist). Key lessons include:

- Staffing must prioritize empathy, mission alignment, and long-term retention.
- Caseloads should not exceed 20 youth per case manager to maintain fidelity.
- A full-time attorney dedicated to juvenile cases is critical.
- Leadership must shift toward strategic oversight as frontline staff assume more direct service delivery.

This structure balances intensity with sustainability while preserving the relational core.

Q6. What are the bare bones costs and anticipated benefits of serving 200 youth annually?

Estimated bare bones **annual costs: \$2.8–\$3.0 million**. Largest expenses include staffing (\$1.1–1.2M) and stipends (\$1.04M).

Anticipated **benefits** include:

- **Justice system savings:** Avoiding 40 juvenile incarcerations per year could save **\$8 million annually** (at \$200,000 per placement).
- **Economic gains:** Youth diverted into employment could generate **\$1.08M in wages plus \$82,600 in payroll taxes annually**.
- **Reduced victimization costs:** Even modest reductions (20%) in assaults and robberies could save **\$120,000 annually in direct victimization costs**.

In short, benefits far outweigh costs, especially when factoring in secondary community gains.

Q7. Will changes be needed for maintenance or scaling?

Minimal programmatic changes are needed. Core elements—legal advocacy, stipends, case management, mentorship—should remain intact. Refinements include:

- Expanding staff and training pipelines.

- Formalizing tiered service models and “step-down” phases.
- Developing data-sharing agreements with courts and the DAO.
- Adjusting infrastructure to fit neighborhood contexts (satellite hubs vs. full-service sites).

Q8. What are potential challenges to scaling?

Key challenges include:

- **Workforce recruitment and retention** in a demanding field.
- **Funding sustainability**, given high per-youth costs and reliance on voluntary engagement.
- **Maintaining fidelity** to a high-touch model as caseloads grow.
- **Infrastructure constraints** such as space and technology.
- **External resistance** from courts or funders skeptical of grassroots models that challenge the need for constant, harmful, and inequitably-allocated surveillance.

Q9. What are solutions to these challenges?

VCI is already pursuing strategies to address these obstacles:

- **Strategic leadership:** Shifting founders’ time toward fundraising, partnerships, and advocacy while operational staff manage daily functions.
- **Phased “step-down” model:** Sustains relationships while managing caseloads.
- **Targeted youth programming:** Tailors supports for under-18 versus older youth.
- **Workforce pipeline:** Bootcamp onboarding, case review sessions, and university partnerships to build a pool of mission-aligned staff.
- **Data infrastructure:** Hiring a data manager, developing a fidelity framework, and integrating stipend and case management data.
- **Physical investment:** Renovating warehouse space for expanded vocational training.

These strategies lay the groundwork for both sustainability and thoughtful scaling. Much more detail is provided in the full report.

Conclusion

VCI provides a rare, community-rooted alternative for some of Philadelphia’s most marginalized and criminalized youth. The evaluation shows that VCI achieves meaningful outcomes: reducing arrests, strengthening education and employment pathways, and creating trusted relationships that courts and systems cannot replicate. Data collected by VCI staff also greatly suggest that there have been many successes with regard to reducing the number of juveniles placed, sentence length, transfers of juveniles to adult court, and probation surveillance.

Scaling VCI is feasible but requires deliberate planning: growing the workforce, strengthening data infrastructure, cultivating sustainable funding, and building trust with system partners. Even modest reductions in recidivism yield outsized economic and social returns. (Detailed recommendations can be found in the full narrative.)

VCI’s model represents a replicable blueprint for community-driven, relationship-centered violence intervention. With continued investment, it can not only transform the lives of youth in West and Southwest Philadelphia but also serve as a scalable innovation for other neighborhoods and cities seeking alternatives to incarceration.

Future Use of Research Data and Long-Term Plan for Evaluation

We recommend that the research team and YEAH staff maintain systematic data collection for the current VCI cohort of 93 participants, all subsequent enrollees since February 2025, and the established comparison group. Preserving these longitudinal data will enable robust five-year follow-up analyses. With an extended observation window, comparative analyses will gain statistical rigor, and distinctions between treatment and comparison groups may be more suitable for causal inference

Introduction

Addressing the needs of young people involved in and exposed to violence is critical for fostering safer communities and promoting long-term well-being and stability. In urban communities, many of these teens and young adults face significant, intersecting challenges, such as unstable or absent family support, trauma from witnessing or experiencing violence, school disruption, housing instability, lack of access to mental and behavioral health care, and limited economic opportunity. Yet, few systems provide the kind of holistic, flexible support that meets individualized needs in a meaningful and consistent way. YEAH Inc. (Youth Empowerment for Advancement Hangout), a community-based nonprofit organization rooted in West and Southwest Philadelphia, has sought to fill this gap. Through its Violent Crime Initiative (VCI), YEAH provides comprehensive and individualized support—including financial assistance—for young people ages 15 to 24 who have been arrested for violent offenses and/or gun crimes. VCI's goal is to meet young people where they are and offer the support necessary to reduce their involvement in the legal system and improve their overall well-being.

With support from the Neubauer Family Foundation, researchers from Temple University's Department of Criminal Justice conducted a two-phase participatory evaluation of VCI. The [first-year process evaluation](#) aimed to document the program's development and theory of change, assess current performance measures, and document program successes using narrative and participatory research methods. This final report builds on that foundation, integrating continued analysis and adding a focus on three interrelated goals:

1. Highlight the core components and strengths of the VCI that differentiate the initiative from traditional social service programs that serve young people.
2. Assess outcomes for participants related to criminal justice processes such as community-based supervision, arrest and re-arrest, using administrative and programmatic data to explore what changes are evident in system involvement for young people engaged with VCI.
3. Examine VCI's current strategies and readiness for expansion and sustainability and assess whether internal and external conditions—including organizational capacity, funding structures, and partnerships—support continued and scaled-up impact.

To meet these goals, the Temple research team continued the use of a multi-method, participatory approach. Evaluation activities included sustained collaboration with YEAH's co-CEOs and staff, the involvement of Peer Researchers, and engagement with VCI participants. Methods included in-depth interviews with youth and staff; iterative and inclusive logic model development, participant observation at hangouts, events, and court hearings; review of and feedback on case management data; monthly strategy meetings with program leadership; and semi-structured interviews with staff from partner agencies. More details on the evaluation model can be found in the co-produced, open access journal article: [Collaborative Creation of a Logic Model and Performance Metrics for Evaluating a Violence Reduction Program](#) (Roman, et al. 2025). The collaborative evaluation model reflects the values of YEAH Philly—centering youth voices, local expertise, and trust-based relationships. Taken together, this final report offers both a reflection on what VCI has accomplished

and an evidence-informed look ahead. It concludes with a set of recommendations for program refinement, data infrastructure development, and considerations for thoughtful expansion. These recommendations are intended to be useful to YEAH Philly leaders and staff as they plan the next phase of their work to support young people most impacted by violence, disinvestment, and criminal legal system involvement.

Sustainability and scaling are critical considerations for any social service organization seeking to extend its impact beyond a single community or cohort. Sustainability focuses on securing diversified, multi-year funding streams, solidifying community partnerships, and building organizational capacity to endure changing political and economic contexts, whereas scalability involves adapting core components such as staffing ratios, infrastructure, and service delivery models in a way that maintains fidelity while accommodating the unique needs of new settings. To systematically assess these dimensions for VCI, we drew on two nationally known sources and tools: (1) the World Health Organization's and ExpandNet's *Scalability Assessment Table*¹ and (2) Milat and colleagues' (2020) Intervention Scalability Assessment Tool (ISAT) framework. We relied on these tables and tools for guiding questions—about reach and acceptability, delivery settings, implementation infrastructure, and organizational workforce readiness—to structure our analysis.

Our guiding questions are:

1. What are VCI's key characteristics, components, and guiding principles?
2. What is the extent of the violence problem being addressed by VCI?
 - What is the possible reach of the program within its current target area?
 - What is the potential reach of the program if it were expanded to neighborhoods across Philadelphia?
3. What system gaps does VCI address and under what context does VCI do its work?
 - Do the mission and goals of VCI align with strategic priorities across local, state and national contexts?
4. Does VCI achieve its stated outcomes?
5. What appears to be the optimal organizational and staffing structure to successfully maintain VCI's current operations?
6. What are the bare bones costs and anticipated benefits if VCI wanted to reach 200 young people annually in West/Southwest Philadelphia alone (without expansion to other neighborhoods)?
7. Will changes be needed to the intervention as it is maintained and as expansion and/or scaling proceed?
8. What are potential challenges to expansion and scaling up?
9. What are some possible solutions to these challenges?

A scalability assessment can both help to refine an intervention and address its potential for broader implementation, helping stakeholders identify low-scalability options early to save resources. (Low scalability refers to program features or components that are too resource-intensive, rigid, or context-

¹<https://expandnet.net/scaling-up-framework-and-principles/#:~:text=The%20scaling%20strategy%20is,four%20types%20of%20scaling%20up.>

specific to be expanded efficiently.) Below we first highlight the core elements of VCI and what makes it a worthy innovation to expand and potentially scale.

Understanding VCI's Innovation

Q1. What are VCI's key characteristics, components, and guiding principles?

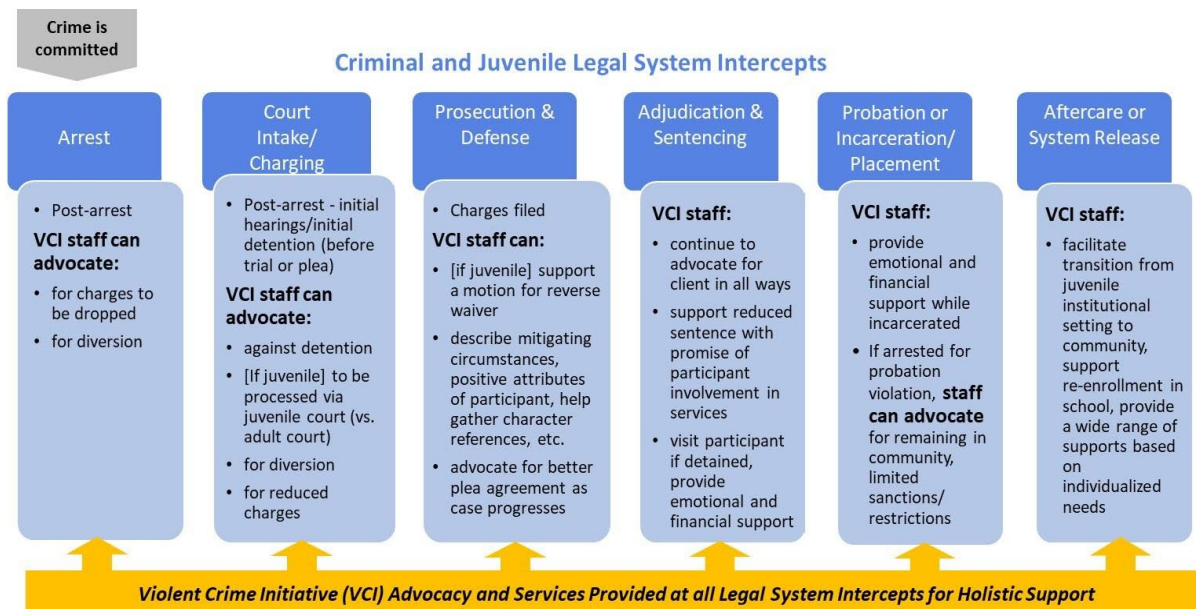
The theory of change or “logic model” for VCI is depicted in Figure 1. As discussed in the Year 1 process evaluation report and highlighted in the co-published journal article, the program’s primary aims are to reduce recidivism, address participants’ wide-ranging needs, and improve their overall well-being. VCI participants receive extensive assistance, including financial support, from a dedicated team of case managers, legal experts, and program coordinators who work to ensure these young people have the resources they need to succeed in the community. Participation in VCI offers a vital pathway for young people to break the cycle of violence and work toward self-sufficiency. VCI also includes goals at the community and society level. The last column in the logic model below describes these goals as fostering a neighborhood (i.e., at the local level) and society where there is much less racism, less mass incarceration, and where disparities in the adult and youth legal systems do not exist. Central to these goals is the empowerment of young people, ensuring they have a significant voice in policy change and inclusion. By working directly with young people involved in violence, VCI is including their young people in all levels of policy change, simultaneously treating violence as a public health issue, addressing root causes, and reducing violence.

A central strength of VCI is its unwavering commitment to legal advocacy, regardless of a participant’s justice system status (e.g., re-arrested, in detention, in short-term placement, awaiting trial, etc.). Participants consistently described staff as reliable and ever-present, stating that “staff showed up” or “were always there for me.” VCI staff not only accompany youth to court, but often play a direct role in securing less punitive outcomes, such as diversion instead of detention, reduced sentencing, or home supervision with community support in place of incarceration. These “small wins” represent meaningful program outcomes—reductions in surveillance, incarceration, and restrictions on liberty—that are often overlooked in traditional evaluations focused solely on recidivism or arrest metrics. We produced the graphic in Figure 2 to help capture both the scale and substance of VCI’s impact on youth trajectories through the justice system.

Figure 1. VCI Logic Model

Inputs/Resources	Project Activities	Outcomes: Learning/ Attitudes	Outcomes: Action/Behavior	Outcomes: Long-term, Aggregate/Societal Level
- 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 focus - Flexible funding – targeted to specific young person's needs - Employment opportunities	Core Components: - Court advocacy - Case management: needs-based, individualized and 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 support for: - Education - Documents/ID - Employment - Hobbies - New opportunities, experiences, travel	- Program satisfaction and trust - New skills and knowledge - Improved self-esteem - Positive mindset and attitude - New aspirations (e.g., interested in and sets long-term goals) - Motivated to achieve short- and long-term goals	- Achieved short-term goals; more focus on longer-term goals - Engaged in new hobbies - Enrolled in/completed post-secondary education or technical training - Fam./child reunification - Fewer conflicts - New positive relationships - Fewer arrests, completed probation, monitoring, etc. with no violations - Reductions in placement/incarceration - Fewer children sentenced as adults - Free from all government intervention (includes no police contact) Self-sufficiency	- 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
			Wellbeing	

Figure 2. VCI Touch Points across Criminal and Juvenile Legal Systems



Based on our process evaluation and continued stakeholder discussions, we believe the following elements are most central to VCI's identity and mission, and together, create a unique and innovative program:

❖ **Holistic and Goal-Driven Case Management Combined with Legal Defense/Support**

- **Court advocacy and legal defense:** Dedicated staff accompany participants to hearings, speak on their behalf, and help negotiate case outcomes (e.g., reduced charges, modified supervision). The relatively recent addition of a full-time attorney (who is currently prioritizing the complex juvenile court cases) is a critical enhancement, as navigating the juvenile justice system requires specialized legal knowledge, persistence, access to documents, and relationships in a system that is often opaque, fragmented, and difficult for families and advocates to penetrate without expert support. Importantly, staff also coach participants to understand the process and build the confidence to speak up for themselves in court, helping them practice self-advocacy skills that foster independence in future encounters with the justice system.
- **Individualized case management:** Continuous, needs-driven coordination—ranging from connections with education, vocational training, literacy, and mental health services to housing stabilization. Staff personalize goal plans, which usually include short-term goals (e.g., obtain vital documents, obtain driver's license, buy a car, re-enroll in school, etc.) and long-term goals (e.g., obtain and maintain independent housing, become employed in well-paying job, etc.). Goals are co-created with each participant and revisited regularly. Case managers deliberately use this process to build young people's problem-solving capacity and self-efficacy, ensuring that progress toward each goal equips participants with the tools to navigate similar challenges on their own in the future.

❖ **Emotional Support through Trusted Mentorship**

- ❖ Staff cultivate trusting, “no-judgment” relationships, emphasizing not just emotional support but the development of resilience, confidence, and independent decision-making, so participants increasingly see themselves as capable of handling challenges without constant external assistance.

❖ **Generally Unrestricted Financial Assistance**

- The program includes weekly stipends (\$100/week) to offset immediate material needs (food, clothing, rent) and reduce economic stressors that drive re-offense. Staff have the flexibility to make purchases that satisfy the immediate needs of participants (e.g., groceries, clothing, cell phone/service plan, beds) to reduce urgent barriers to engagement. Staff can also make payments related to restitution, legal fees, and emergency expenses (e.g., emergency rent) on an as-needed basis.

❖ **Safe-Spaces and Community Building**

- **Safe Hangout:** A dedicated hangout space where young people can gather, form peer bonds, and access supportive mentors.

- **Warehouse Hub:** A 7,000 sq ft facility outfitted for trainings (e.g., electrical, automotive, carpentry, etc.) that build marketable skills.
- **YEAH Philly Neighborhood Market:** In-house market (next door to the Hangout) gives young people hands-on experience with entrepreneurship, inventory management, customer service, and financial literacy. Completely run by teens and young adults from the neighborhood, it is a supportive environment for young people to build confidence, develop professional habits, and earn livable wages while contributing to the community.
- **Group Activities & Excursions:** Periodic trips and events (e.g., camping, Mudgirl obstacle race, cross-country and international trips, international cultural exchanges) that support bonding and expose young people to alternative environments, expand horizons, and reinforce pro-social identities.

❖ **Structured Skill-Building & Vocational Training**

- **In-house trainings** led by vocational experts: auto mechanics, carpentry, culinary arts, and life skills (budgeting, cooking, time management). A core training includes the two-day peer mediation and conflict resolution workshop, tailored specifically for young Black men and women to learn variations of identifying conflict and how to resolve conflict in their everyday lives.
- **Integration of research-based activities** such as peer-research trainings and focus groups to expose young people to systematic methods of inquiry and evidence-building, helping them develop critical thinking skills, strengthen their capacity for self-advocacy, and recognize the value of their own lived experience as a source of knowledge. (The findings generated through many of these activities also create a feedback loop for program leaders, offering direct insight into participants' needs and priorities and informing the continuous refinement of services.)

❖ **Practices that Confront Racism and Systemic Injustice**

- **Racial Equity Lens:** VCI was intentionally designed to address the disproportionate impact of violence and justice system involvement on Black young people in Philadelphia. The program centers racial justice by actively working against racism and structural biases embedded in schools, courts, policing, and service systems.
- **Advocacy against Bias:** Staff and young people are trained to recognize and challenge both overt and implicit bias in courtroom decisions, institutional practices, and access to services. Whether pushing back against excessive probation terms or discriminatory school suspensions, the team prioritizes fairness, dignity, and youth voice.
- **Fearless Leadership:** VCI's co-CEOs are unapologetic in challenging the status quo and are unafraid of potential repercussions when confronting powerful agencies or institutions. Their refusal to compromise when advocating for participants—whether inside the courtroom or at the policy table—reinforces the program's integrity and commitment to justice.

❖ Data Tracking & Continuous Improvement

- Use of performance tracking software “QuesGen” to track demographics, performance metrics (e.g., risk and resiliency histories, service dosages, individual needs, diagnosis screenings etc.), and participant outcomes.
- Logic model co-developed with co-CEOs, refined through participant feedback, and used to guide ongoing program adjustments (e.g., adding Photovoice, closing out surveys).

The Evidence Base for VCI’s Model

While there are few fully developed, replicable community-based models across the country designed specifically for both juveniles and young adults arrested for violent crimes or firearm-related offenses, it is nevertheless possible to draw on evidence that key components of VCI are evidence-based and help drive its success in reducing incarceration and court supervision of young people. Below, we briefly highlight research and evaluations of programs that provide evidence for the effectiveness of two of VCI’s main components.

VCI’s integration of legal advocacy with individualized case management with the flexibility for comprehensive support reflects a growing evidence base in favor of melding **comprehensive social services with legal defense**. Within a public justice system framework, these types of integrated supports—which can be used to serve juveniles or adults—are known as “holistic defense.” Holistic defense combines legal representation with social supports like housing, education, and mental health and has been shown to improve case outcomes and reduce incarceration by addressing the underlying drivers of system involvement.

A large quantitative study in the Bronx (Anderson, Buenaventura, & Heaton, 2019) evaluated holistic defense with adults using administrative data from over 500,000 cases. Comparing outcomes between the Bronx Defenders (a holistic defense provider) and the Legal Aid Society (a traditional defender), researchers found that holistic defense reduced the likelihood of incarceration by 16% and cut sentence lengths by 24%. Over ten years, this resulted in nearly 1.1 million fewer days of jail or prison time—saving the city tens of millions of dollars. Although recidivism rates remained stable, the findings suggest holistic defense can reduce incarceration without compromising public safety or conviction outcomes. The average age of the sample was 32, but at least one-third of clients faced firearm-related charges and 18% faced violent charges—reinforcing the model’s applicability to higher-risk populations like those VCI serves.

We found two additional evaluations of holistic defense or legal services plus social services programs focused specifically on youth. A randomized controlled trial in a Southeastern U.S. city (McCarter, 2016) found that first-time juvenile offenders who received wraparound services in addition to court-appointed legal defense showed significantly better psychological functioning and delayed recidivism compared to youth who received legal defense alone. Improvements in functioning were seen across multiple indicators, including reduced depression, thought and attention problems, and aggressive behavior.

In Louisiana, a retrospective analysis of the Children’s Defense Team—a holistic defense model for juveniles operated by the nonprofit Louisiana Center for Children’s Rights—found similarly encouraging outcomes (Phillippi et al., 2021). Youth in the program were more likely to receive mental health services, achieve gains in education and employment, and experience better court outcomes, including earlier release from custody and lower adjudication rates.

Together, these evaluation studies highlight the effectiveness and positive cost return from integrating legal defense with comprehensive support services. VCI’s model, which includes a full-time attorney embedded within a community-based nonprofit but not solely focused on legal defense, nonetheless mirrors the best practices of these defense approaches and offers a locally grounded example of how holistic defense principles can be applied to reduce incarceration and improve life outcomes for young people.

Research also suggests that **providing financial assistance and/or monetary stipends** during programming can reduce recidivism. Although there have not been many evaluations that focus on the impact of financial assistance for those involved in the justice system, a few studies have reported positive reductions in recidivism and cost savings to society across programs that incorporate financial assistance. One study of a St. Louis-based reentry program (Wikoff, Linhorst, & Morani, 2012) found that participants in the six-month voluntary case-management program (which incorporated financial assistance) had lower chances of new convictions than a comparison group of individuals who did not receive the program.

Another program that incorporates financial assistance as a key component is Operation Peacemaker Fellowship. Operation Peacemaker Fellowship is violence reduction initiative launched by Richmond, California’s Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) that targets young Black males ages 16-24 at highest risk of being involved in gun-related violence. The 18-month program combines cognitive behavioral curriculum, one-on-one mentoring, and wraparound supports, as well as a motivational stipend of \$1000 per month that can be earned during the last nine months of the fellowship, if participants meet behavioral milestones. However, this program does not embed legal defense and support like VCI does.

The program’s positive outcomes are supported by several evaluations. A cost-benefit analysis (Huguet & Li, 2016) found that despite an estimated cost of about \$36,000 per fellow, Operation Peacemaker Fellowship yielded more than \$500 million in community benefits over five years, largely driven by reductions in homicide and incarceration—highlighting the model’s strong economic return. An impact evaluation (Matthay et al., 2019) found that Operation Peacemaker Fellowship was associated with a significant decrease in firearm violence (55% fewer deaths and hospital visits, 43% fewer crimes) during the 1996–2016 period in Richmond. (However, there were unexpected increases in non-firearm violence (annually, 16% more deaths and hospital visits, 3% more crimes). More rigorous, controlled studies are needed to establish effectiveness and understand long-term impacts. Nevertheless, these programs represent promising innovations with the potential for significant outcomes, particularly in reducing violence, incarceration, and associated public costs,

and they align closely with VCI’s mission to offer relationship-centered, non-carceral pathways that reduce violence and foster well-being.

The Scope and Context of the Problem Addressed

Q2. What is the extent of the problem being addressed by VCI?

In Philadelphia, there are at least several thousand young people between the ages of 15 and 24 arrested each year on violent crime and/or gun possession charges. Though city-level data broken down precisely by that age range isn’t published directly, we draw on available sources to approximate. As of August 16, 2025, the Philadelphia DAO’s arrest dashboard reports 4,611 total *violent* offense arrests year-to-date across all ages. The DAO’s definition in this statistic for violent offenses includes simple assault and other assaults among other well-known violent crimes such as robbery and aggravated assault.²

Drilling down further to understand the numbers of violent offenses attributed to young people, we must turn to some national statistics. Nationally, youth under age 18 accounted for just 7% of arrests for violent crime in 2020, and young adults aged 18–24 represented 21%. These proportions reflect broader dynamics that likely mirror local patterns: most violent crime arrests involve young adults rather than juveniles. If one applies the national proportions to the Philadelphia DAO-based figure for total violent crime arrests, then year-to-date, approximately 3,200 violent crime arrests likely involve youth ages 15–24 (conservative estimate).

VCI also serves those who have been arrested for charges related to the violation of the Uniform Firearm Act (18 Pa.C.S. Chapter 61), which include: (a) possession of a firearm by a person prohibited from doing so; (b) carrying a firearm without a license; (c) carrying a firearm in certain restricted areas like public streets or public property in Philadelphia; (d) possession of a firearm by a minor; and (e) straw purchases or unlawful sale/transfer of firearms. Publicly available data from the DAO and PPD do not include separate counts for juvenile vs. adult VUFA arrests. According to the Philadelphia Police Department’s (PPD) *100 Day Report* (April 2024), there were roughly 2,600 VUFA arrests (all ages) in 2023.³ Statistics computed directly by PPD’s Office of Data, Analytics, and Technology report 261 juvenile arrests for a VUFA offense in 2024. National arrest distribution for weapons law violations (FBI UCR, 2020) show that 9% of weapons law violations are for youth under 18 and roughly 27% for young people ages 18-24; hence if we apply the 36% (9 + 27) to Philadelphia’s 2023 VUFA total of 2,600, roughly 936 VUFA-related arrests are made annually of young people ages 15-24 (not taking into consideration the race of arrestee).

Because YEAH’s VCI program currently only serves young people living in West and Southwest Philadelphia—neighborhoods that together comprise approximately 18% of the city’s population, or

² https://data.philadao.com/Arrest_Report.html (downloaded August 20, 2025)

³ <https://www.phila.gov/media/20240411131032/PPD-100-Day-Report.pdf> (downloaded August 1, 2025).

282,000 residents—its eligible service population is substantial. Within these areas, there are an estimated 70,600 individuals between the ages of 15 and 24.

- Applying citywide arrest proportions to this subpopulation suggests that each year there are approximately 230 arrests of young people in West and Southwest Philadelphia for violent offenses and 170 arrests of young people related to VUFA violations. Then, taking into consideration the race of those arrested, Philadelphia statistics reveal that roughly 80% of young people arrested are Black. Applying this percentage, annually in a year such as 2023 or 2024, **there would be roughly 184 arrests of young Black males and females for violent offenses, and 136 VUFA-related arrests in West and Southwest Philadelphia alone (totaling 320).**

It should be noted, however, that these figures may overestimate the number of unique individuals affected, as multiple arrests within a year can involve the same person.⁴

Regardless of over-estimation, these figures, taken together, **indicate that several hundred young people annually in the program’s current catchment area alone likely encounter the types of arrests that VCI is specifically designed to address.** This underscores both the scope of the problem and the potential reach of the intervention in West/Southwest Philadelphia.

If VCI were to expand and become an option for all Black young people ages 15-24 arrested for violent offenses or VUFA offenses *across Philadelphia*, there could be an approximate pool of 2,560 (violent arrests) + 749 (VUFA) = 3,309.⁵

Q3. What system gaps does VCI address and under what context does VCI do its work?

In this section we describe how the intervention fits within the strategic context of national, state and local priorities and the context under which the program operates.

Local Context: Philadelphia’s Landscape and VCI’s Role

VCI was intentionally designed to fill critical gaps in the youth and adult justice ecosystems of Philadelphia, particularly in West and Southwest Philadelphia. YEAH’s hangout space and its newer warehouse serve as hyper-local safe havens, offering an innovative intervention rooted in place-based transformation and trusted relationships. Participants have repeatedly emphasized that it is the proximity of these spaces, variety of the programming, and the relationships that they have formed that keep them engaged.

Because VCI serves both youth under 18 and young adults up to age 24, its staff must constantly navigate the complexities of both the juvenile and adult legal systems. In Philadelphia, these systems

⁴ These figures include rape/sexual assault and other related sexual offenses, charges that are not part of the eligible charges for VCI. *To subtract rape/sexual assault, reduce the violent arrest charges by roughly 5%.*

⁵ For young people ages 15-24: 3200 violent arrests (*80% Black) + 936 VUFA arrests (*80% Black)=2560+749=3,309.

are fragmented and shaped by institutional mistrust, bureaucratic hurdles, and a scarcity of cross-system coordination. Findings from semi-structured interviews with staff and partners show that VCI has a number of collaborative and supportive partnerships—both informal and formal—with other community-based agencies and also with city departments that serve young people. However, these interviews reveal some tension between juvenile court (including juvenile probation) and VCI staff. Some of the respondents we interviewed reported that some court clerks, judges, hearing officers, juvenile probation officers and probation leadership staff for example, view VCI as a challenge to their authority and believe that community-based alternatives might erode both their legitimacy and funding. In addition, a few respondents reported that some prosecutors see VCI’s legal advocacy as an intrusion into their discretionary space, particularly when VCI legal attorneys and advocates challenge plea deals. These negative perceptions of YEAH by juvenile court staff and prosecutors have real consequences according to YEAH leaders: petitions are delayed, information is withheld, and court advocacy becomes challenging against bureaucratic resistance.

Despite these obstacles, VCI has achieved meaningful wins. Its legal team has secured case modifications that benefit youth, such as transferring youth from adult to juvenile court (i.e., decertification), shortened supervision periods, and community-based alternatives to incarceration. The addition of a full-time, staff attorney at YEAH—free from local court or government entanglements—has helped win the respect of some judges and probation officers. To attempt to further build trust, VCI staff have started spending time and getting to know prosecutors and juvenile probation officer supervisors outside of the courtroom to share information that demonstrates how participants are avoiding re-arrest. These efforts have chipped away at institutional mistrust; YEAH leaders and staff hope that continued direct communication will reframe their community-based care as a sound public safety strategy. VCI also hosts community training sessions and participates in relevant “neighborhood listening sessions” with City Council members to provide solutions to ongoing social issues within their district while fostering deeper community partnerships and sometimes unlocking (very) small-scale grants.



Campaign image copied from Instagram

Still, systemic and policy-driven barriers remain. Juvenile court records are often still difficult to access and discovery is withheld even when VCI’s attorney is listed as the counsel on record, limiting their ability to prepare comprehensive advocacy and defense strategies in advance. Because VCI does not have an official relationship or contract with Philadelphia’s juvenile court (i.e., VCI is voluntary and not in the suite of official program options as a mandated community-based provider for placement or diversion); while the Commonwealth’s juvenile laws state that the court must cooperate with entities or advocates working with the juvenile and at the request of the juvenile, the court chooses not to abide by the law without consequence. In the beginning stages of VCI, some judges and

probation officers wanted to work with the VCI team, but it changed when VCI staff disagreed with court recommendations that were harmful and soon began to advocate against them.

The juvenile court system lacks an oversight mechanism to enforce the current Juvenile Act, force reforms, or even ensure that reforms mandated by law are enforced. Although District Attorney Larry Krasner came into office with a strong commitment to expanding diversion options for young people, especially in cases short of the most serious violent offenses, the realities of Pennsylvania law and the rise in gun violence during the COVID-19 pandemic have shaped (and continue to shape) how those reforms unfolded.

For youth arrested for VUFA offenses, upon arrest, most juveniles are detained at the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center (PJJSC) while awaiting their hearing in juvenile court. It is the judge who determines the appropriate disposition, which may include probation or placement in a residential youth facility. At the current time, there are no diversion programs for juveniles arrested for VUFA violations. The District Attorney's Office attempted to pilot a juvenile diversion program for first time VUFA arrests, but the program was abruptly ended soon after it started, by a judge. With regard to violent offenses with firearms, state statutes mandate that the most serious violent offenses involving firearms be automatically filed in adult court, limiting the discretion of the DAO to apply juvenile-specific reforms in those cases. Nonetheless, Krasner has consistently voiced support for reducing the scope of Pennsylvania's "direct file" provisions, advocating both in court practice and in legislative debates to return more youth cases from adult to juvenile jurisdiction. This policy stance signals a commitment to ensuring that young people charged with serious offenses are still given access to rehabilitative and developmentally appropriate responses. It also suggests strong potential for initiatives like VCI, which could complement DAO efforts by providing structured, community-based alternatives that align with Krasner's broader vision of reducing youth incarceration and expanding pathways for growth and reintegration.

Across the juvenile legal system, the absence of a citywide monitoring entity has left a vacuum of accountability. Juvenile court policies appear to be applied inconsistently, risk assessments are sometimes bypassed, plea practices can be coercive, to name a few. Although the Office of the Youth Ombudsperson was created in 2019, this office focuses exclusively on improving the safety and quality of services for youth in residential placements. This speaks to the issues of separation of powers, as juvenile laws are created by the state yet implemented within a city, and there is no ability to ensure proper enforcement of the state laws. YEAH staff (and other community stakeholders) have remained frustrated with the decision-making aspects and related outcomes in juvenile cases—the unjustness, opaqueness, and lack of accountability. YEAH initiated a 2023 media campaign and produced a bus shelter advertisement that asked, "Who's watching the juvenile court judges?"

A recent example of the opaqueness of juvenile court processing and outcomes is that while the city may tout high numbers of youth being monitored via GPS in lieu of residential placement, this framing obscures a different reality: Philadelphia's juvenile alternatives may merely substitute one form of control for another. A recent Philadelphia Inquirer article highlighted how the city now monitors more teenagers by ankle-tracked GPS than any other U.S. locale—often for extended

periods and without periodic review of necessity.⁶ Location data appear to be funneled to law enforcement without warrants and used in investigations unrelated to these young people’s juvenile cases—raising privacy and civil-rights concerns. Research studies suggest that GPS has the potential to harm young people through constant scrutiny, stress, mandatory fees, and criminalization (i.e., arrests and incarceration) of technical violations (Crump, 2019; Gies, et al., 2013). VCI staff have expressed concern about the rising number of juveniles on GPS and have indicated that they are considering focusing more (as a priority) on serving youth under 18 who are referred to them, versus those who are older.

Do the mission and goals of VCI align with strategic priorities across local, state and national contexts?

Local Alignment. VCI’s work aligns with Philadelphia’s broader goals for public safety—often going beyond what the local government has operationalized. Mayor Cherelle Parker, who took office in 2024, made public safety a central focus of her administration. Parker appointed Adam Geer as the city’s first Chief Public Safety Director to lead a new Office of Public Safety and coordinate a citywide response to violence. With support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, Geer is attempting to build a “community violence intervention (CVI) ecosystem”—an approach that recognizes that no single program or entity can solve violence alone, and that success depends on coordinated, multi-sector partnerships with shared goals, referrals, and accountability. However, the city’s CVI approach appears to focus a lot on law enforcement-led or law enforcement-involved programs such as the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) and GVI-J (for juveniles).

VCI’s structure and impact align with priorities advanced by City Council, which approved an increased FY2026 anti-violence grant budget totaling \$30 million. However, this funding context is not without flaws. Philadelphia has been criticized for lacking transparency in how anti-violence grants are awarded. Most funds have historically been distributed on a reimbursement basis, placing a heavy financial burden on grassroots organizations without deep reserves. These complications have sometimes led to delays in grantee program start-up and underutilized funds. Even as grant allocations grow, equity and access in distribution remain key issues for the city’s nonprofit landscape. In addition, stakeholders interviewed reported that the growing number of violence-prevention programs in Philadelphia means increased competition for a finite pool of philanthropic dollars.

Finally, a key component of VCI’s strength is its rootedness in community. While city departments like the Department of Human Services express interest in diversion in principle, bureaucratic silos and policy rigidity make meaningful coordination difficult. VCI’s neighborhood-based model, by contrast, embodies the kind of relational and restorative intervention that many reform efforts aspire to—but have not yet materialized on a large scale.

⁶ <https://www.inquirer.com/news/philadelphia/a/juvenile-electronic-monitoring-gps-track-group-20250513.html>

State-Level Alignment: Pennsylvania’s Anti-Violence and Juvenile Justice Priorities. At the state level, VCI’s mission is supported, in principle, by the Pennsylvania Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Plan (2022–2026), which calls for increased use of community-based alternatives to confinement and emphasizes trauma-informed responses. Furthermore, the Juvenile Act (42 Pa.C.S.A. § 6301) mandates that juvenile court responses should emphasize rehabilitation, community protection, and the use of evidence-based, least-intrusive alternatives consistent with public safety.⁷ Additionally, Pennsylvania’s guidelines for pre-adjudication diversion encourage the development of structured diversion policies applicable to a broad range of offenses—not limited to nonviolent cases.

With regard to the state budgetary investment in anti-violence, in this current fiscal year, Governor Shapiro is calling for a \$10 million increase to the Violence Intervention and Prevention (VIP) program, bringing it to \$55 million and a \$10 million increase to the Building Opportunity through Out of School Time (BOOST) Program, totaling \$21.5 million. Shapiro also re-established the Pennsylvania Office of Gun Violence Prevention to coordinate a statewide strategy for reducing gun violence and crime. However, with regard to juvenile justice policy, there remains a wide gap between policy rhetoric and funding practice. In reality, Pennsylvania’s juvenile justice budget remains mostly siloed—fragmenting support for education, mental health, and workforce development—and offering minimal resources for integrated, community-driven initiatives like VCI. (YEAH has two VIP grants from PCCD; the most recent one will end in December 2025; YEAH staff have indicated that the VIP grants are not very flexible and there was a lot of back and forth with PCCD grant monitors to allow VCI staff some flexibility in using the funds for needed services for VCI participants.)

Despite these barriers, nonprofit agencies such as the Juvenile Law Center and the Youth Sentencing and Reentry Partnership, along with YEAH, continue to advocate for youth justice reform and directly press the courts and legislators to engage in actions or create laws that keep young people in juvenile court (as opposed to adult court), support diversion-oriented models. These organizations are good strategic partners in VCI’s policy environment. Their legal technical assistance and commitment to systems change have bolstered the visibility of holistic programming, though VCI staff have indicated that well-respected partners such as the Juvenile Law Center have made it clear that they are not willing to “get into any fights with juvenile court,” and could do much more to push for juvenile court accountability and fairness. YEAH Philly staff take every opportunity to testify in Harrisburg (as well as locally)—and critically, they bring and train young people to share their own experiences, equipping them to become powerful advocates for policy change.

VCI’s emphasis on skill-building and work readiness also appears to align with workforce development priorities established by the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. Vocational training in fields like electrical, culinary arts, plumbing, and auto mechanics positions VCI to leverage state apprenticeship programs and trade credentials, ensuring that youth exit the system with

⁷ <https://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/LI/CT/HTM/42/00.063..HTM>

tangible employment pathways. Yet, a continued focus on short-term placement metrics within state labor programs means that holistic wraparound models may still struggle to secure full buy-in or adequate long-term investment. It is also important to note that VCI operates in a state with a conservative majority in the legislature, where legislative dynamics result in a policy environment that favors permissive gun laws and limits innovative rehabilitative community-based solutions.

National Alignment: Emerging Best Practices. As discussed in the section “The Evidence Base for VCI’s Comprehensive Model,” VCI’s design and theory of change reflect some national trends in youth violence prevention and decarceration. The program closely aligns with priorities set (under more progressive federal administrations) by the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), including those identified in its Model Programs Guide: expanding community-based, trauma-informed alternatives to incarceration; addressing racial and ethnic disparities; and strengthening legal advocacy for youth.

Nationally there is growing recognition by scholars and community providers that traditional juvenile justice interventions—particularly those that rely on detention—fail to reduce recidivism and may increase trauma. Up until this current Trump Administration (beginning in 2025), national funders and agencies—including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services—had increasingly framed youth and firearm violence as a public health issue. This reframing supports models like VCI that target root causes: housing instability, poverty, school disconnection, and intergenerational trauma.

The Biden administration had expanded funding for community violence intervention (CVI) and justice-involved youth programming, including the development of the CVIPI (Community Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative) portfolio. This surge in federal support helped legitimize community-based models while providing critical resources to pilot and scale them. However, under the Trump administration, much of this funding dedicated to community-based agencies⁸ has been halted or withdrawn, creating a sharp policy and resource gap at the national level. This regression puts even more pressure on local and state actors to fill funding gaps and maintain program continuity. The lack of federal funding has also created intense competition for non-federal sources of funding.

Outcomes and Effectiveness

Q4. Does VCI achieve its stated outcomes?

Demographics of the Data Cohort

Working with the VCI staff, and pulling information from QuesGen, we were able to carefully track information for 93 individuals who have been and/or continue to be part of VCI. These 93 individuals

⁸ As of the writing of this report, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) released a solicitation for community violence intervention programming, but community-based organizations were not eligible to apply (only units of government were eligible).

are those who were referred to and accepted to VCI through February 10th, 2025. For the most part, individuals who were served by VCI and finished receiving services before July 2022 (“closed out”) are not included in the data cohort because the QuesGen information system was not up and running before then. The co-CEOs have indicated that between late 2020 (when the VCI began) and February 2025 the initiative has served roughly 175 young people. Hence, the 93 young people described in this report represent only about half of those served by VCI since inception and July 2025.

Table 1 shows the demographic data for the 93 young people who are part of this performance measurement “data cohort.” Twenty-two percent of the participants are 21 years of age or older, while those 14-17 and 18-20 comprise 52.1% and 36.6% of the group, respectively. Almost all participants are male (93.5%) versus female (6.5%). The table also shows that referral sources vary, with the attorneys and judges being the most common at 24.7%, followed by self-referrals at 18.3%. In terms of the legal case that was the impetus for their referral to the VCI, 29.0% of participants had their most proximal (pre-VCI) court case associated with the juvenile legal system, while 45.2% came into VCI with their closest but preceding case attached to the adult system, and 25.8% had cases in both the adult and juvenile system or they had cases that crossed over from juvenile to adult.

The average young person comes into VCI with multiple arrests (mean = 3.7). The age at first arrest shows the overwhelming number of participants were first arrested as juveniles (83.8%), with almost one quarter had their first arrest before the age of 14 (20.4%).

Regarding the index offense (i.e., the offense most closely tied to the referral) at referral, gun possession continues to be the leading charge at 41%, followed by robbery/robbery with a gun (23.6% combined). There was one individual referred after a homicide. Referrals for homicide are rare because the seriousness of the crime means that the individual will be detained pretrial and if guilty, will be incarcerated long term and not able to receive (or benefit from) services from VCI.

Although that data indicate that some individuals were referred to VCI with an index offense that was not considered a violent offense or gun charge (e.g., property or drug offense), all of these individuals (19; 20.4%) had a recent arrest for a violent crime or VUFA or had a pending/open case related to a violent crime.

Table 1. Basic Demographics at Intake

	N	%
Age at intake^a		
14-17	38	52.1%
18-20	34	36.6
21-24+	21	22.6
Sex		
Male	87	93.5
Female	6	6.5
Referral source		
Parent/grandparent	4	4.3
Attorney/judge	23	24.7
Probation officer	3	3.2
Case worker	2	2.2
Therapist	2	2.2
Counselor/social worker	4	4.3
Self	17	18.3
Other	24	25.8
Unknown	14	15.1
CJS/JJS system involvement at intake		
Juvenile justice system	27	29.0
Adult system	42	45.2
Both/crossover	24	25.8
2+ VUFA arrests pre-program ^b	11	11.8
2+ arrests for violent crime pre-program ^b	43	46.2
Mean number of arrests pre-program ^b	3.7 (mean)	
Age at first arrest^b		
<14	19	20.4
14-17	59	63.4
18+	15	16.1
Index offense (lead charge) at referral^b		
Homicide with gun	1	1.1%
Robbery with gun	19	20.4
Robbery	3	3.2
Aggravated assault with gun	4	4.3
Aggravated assault	6	6.5
Other assaults	3	3.2
Gun possession and related VUFAs	38	40.9
Property or other non-violent charge ^c	19	20.4

^aThe program originally accepted individuals younger than 15 but have since limited eligibility to 15 -24; the program also accepted one individual above the age limit due to special circumstances. ^bArrest data provided PPD. ^cAlthough the most recent charge for some may be a property or other non-violent charge, these individuals have an open charge for a violent crime or a recent arrest within a few months of the property crime charge.

Table 2 provides information on VCI participant status and case flow for the 93 individuals who are part of this data cohort. The table shows that as of July 1, 2025, 21.5% of participants were still enrolled in the VCI, while the overwhelming majority had been closed out for varying reasons, including the roughly 53% who had exited successfully (46.6%), aged out (4.1%), or moved out of the area (2.7%). Twenty-one percent were incarcerated or in placement. Noncompliance, the term VCI leaders use when a young person is not engaging with staff at all, coupled with participants who were not able to be reached by staff, was 26%. This percentage is not unexpected given these young people are among the most difficult to engage (according to decades of research) across any type of social service program. The duration of participation varies, with 52.7% of individuals being enrolled for 0-12 months, 22.6% for up to two years, and 24.7% for more than 24 months. It is important to note that during some of the time being served by VCI staff, the young person may have been incarcerated. The average length of time spent in the program is a little over a year—13.9 months.

Table 2. Case Flow for Participants Referred through 2/10/2025 (N=93)

	N	%
Open case as of July 1, 2025		
Yes, currently	20	21.5%
No	73	78.5
Months in VCI		
0-12 months	49	52.7
12+ to 24 months	21	22.6
< 24 months	23	24.7
Average no. months in VCI	13.9	
Of closed cases before July 1, 2025 (n=73)		
Closed successfully	34	46.6
Moved out of area	2	2.7
Incarcerated/placed	15	20.5
Noncompliant/lost contact	19	26.0
Aged out	3	4.1

Table 3 identifies monthly performance measures. These measures are not comprehensive but provide a snapshot of some of the core components and activities at VCI from month to month in the first half of 2025. Many of the numbers, for example taking in new referrals, are reflective of how many staff were available to take on more cases.

Table 3. Monthly Performance Measures, January 2025 through June 2025 – Core Inputs and Outputs						
	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25
VCI case processing						
Total active	27	27	29	33	31	40
New referrals	5	4	4	4	6	4
Intakes completed	4	2	3	3	3	4
Total closed this month	2	2	2	2	1	2
Referrals not accepted (Criteria not met/other)	1	1	*	1	2	1
Re-opened VCI (due to rearrest)	0	0	*	2	0	0
Court advocacy						
Juvenile court hearings attended	12	11	16	14	12	5
Adult court hearings attended	19	20	33	29	22	29
Denied entry to adult court hearing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Denied entry to juvenile court hearing	0	2	1	0	0	0
Motions filed by Sidney Tall	1	3	4	4	2	--
Motions filed by other Attorney	1	0	1	1	0	0
Waiting decertification	1	4	3	1	4	6
Visits while incarcerated						
JJSC visits	5	6	8	5	6	6
State facility visits	1	0	1	0	3	4
VCI stipends^a						
Number receiving stipend	5	7	6*	5	4*	2

*missing data or imputed; ^aThese stipend numbers show that stipend distribution data were inconsistently recorded so we will be developing a recommendation for the new research director to collect detailed stipend data.

Between January and June 2025, VCI maintained a steady flow of new participants while gradually expanding its caseload. Across the six-month period, the program received between four and six new referrals each month, completing two to four intakes monthly and closing a small number of cases (one to two) when participants' needs were met. Active caseloads rose from 27 participants in January to 40 by June, reflecting both consistent intake and limited case closures. A small number of referrals each month did not move forward due to eligibility criteria or other reasons. Some closed cases were opened, showing the commitment of VCI staff to stay connected with the young people they serve. The overall patterns here suggest VCI is

successfully engaging and retaining the majority of youth referred to the program, while managing a gradual increase in overall participant volume.

Although performance measures for all core components are not included here, court advocacy remained one of VCI's most intensive service components. Staff attended a high volume of hearings in both juvenile and adult courts—ranging from 11 to 16 juvenile hearings and 19 to 33 adult hearings per month. VCI staff were denied access to juvenile hearings in at least three cases over the six-month period but were never denied entry to adult hearings. Motions filed by VCI's staff attorney, Sidney Tall, averaged two to four per month, with additional filings by other attorneys (non-VCI-staff). Decertification cases (youth awaiting transfer from adult to juvenile court) ranged from one to six across the period, highlighting the complexity of participants' legal challenges and the dedication of VCI staff to work with youth who have committed serious crimes. Staff also conducted regular visits to youth in custody, both at the Juvenile Justice Services Center (5–8 visits monthly) and state facilities (up to four visits monthly).

The internal calendar, shared by VCI staff, shows a broad array of activities to support the young people in VCI. This fluctuates based on need. To provide a snapshot, in the month of July 2025 (not included in Table 3), VCI staff attended 24 hearings. A day in court can span from 1 hour to 8 hours, depending on the day, the judge in question, and the number of cases being addressed in a courtroom. In addition to attending court hearings, the legal coordinator and the VCI attorney may spend the afternoon visiting the young people who are incarcerated. In the month of July, 11 visits were scheduled with each being scheduled for an hour. The VCI attorney also spends time developing cases and meeting with witnesses who can testify on behalf of a VCI participant. In the month of July, this spanned over 28 hours of dedicated time. Other things that VCI staff do are connect young people with employment and education outlets.

Although educational needs vary greatly, YEAH's School Engagement Specialist reports working with a caseload of 56 young people over the course of a year, spending 10 to 15 hours per month per person with young people who have the most educational needs, and spending 2 to 5 hours per month on those who are the least engaged. The average young person in VCI comes to YEAH disengaged from education, with many not being engaged in school for several years prior. From the point of being disengaged to the first day of school, YEAH's school engagement staff spends about 24 hours per person solely to get them back into school.

For employment needs, young people sign up for training cohorts coupled with career readiness and programs like problem solving, financial literacy, and physical fitness which take place one to two times per week for six to eight weeks at a time for 25 to 32 hours of instruction. Outside of the cohorts, staff report spending an average of 10 hours per month per young person to support them with employment needs such as resume building, mock interviewing, purchasing clothes and uniforms, and applying for job opportunities. Taken together, these measures reflect VCI's intensive engagement in legal advocacy and general case management, with a consistent presence across multiple points of the justice system.

With regard to legal system outcomes where outcomes are tracked by VCI staff, Table 4 shows a range of legal system outcomes. Between January and June 2025, VCI’s advocacy likely contributed to several important legal outcomes for participants. Two young people were approved for decertification, meaning their cases were successfully transferred from adult to juvenile court. While the numbers are small, these cases are significant because they reflect the impact of VCI’s legal advocacy in ensuring that youth face developmentally appropriate proceedings. Notably, no participants were denied decertification during this period. In addition, three young people were approved for diversion—an outcome that provides them with alternatives to formal system involvement and represents a meaningful “win” for participants and their families.

At the same time, the data highlight ongoing challenges working with high-risk young people. Several participants were sentenced to adult state or federal prison during this six-month period, underscoring the serious charges faced by many participants. The data show that youth were routinely held in the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center for more than 14 days while awaiting hearings or placements, with the number rising from one in January to three in June. This prolonged detention illustrates a procedural injustice linked to the juvenile process: time spent in detention is not credited toward a youth’s sentence, even when they are held post-adjudication while waiting for a bed in a placement facility. A small number of youth were also held at state juvenile facilities for technical violations or for safety/housing reasons.

Figures 3 and 4 show the outcomes related to school and employment across participants. As stated earlier, case managers are trained to create detailed and structured plans to get participants connected/re-connected to work or school. The figures below highlight some successes here, with the overwhelming majority of participants getting connected to employment or jobs while in school. Significantly, YEAH itself has employed (in high-paying and mentored jobs) a quarter of participants.⁹

⁹ These outcomes are reported descriptively and without a counterfactual comparison group. As such, it is not possible to determine whether observed changes are causally attributable to YEAH. Nonetheless, the patterns shown here likely represent meaningful successes in connecting participants to school and employment opportunities.

Table 4. Justice System Outcomes, Recorded by VCI Staff						
	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25
Approved for decertification	1	1	0	0	0	0
Denied decertification	0	0	0	0	0	0
Approved for diversion (adult or juvenile)	1	1	0	0	0	1
Committed to state placement facility (juvenile)	0	0	1	0	0	0
Sentenced to state/federal prison (adult)	1	1	1	0	1	1
Held at JJSC more than 14 days	1	1	1	1	2	3
Juvenile held at adult facility (RCF)	0	0	0	0	0	1
Held at juvenile state facility	3	1	1	0	1	1
Held for technical violations	1	0	0	1	0	0
Held for safety/housing	0	0	1	0	0	0

Figure 3. Educational Outcomes for School Age Participants (n=52)

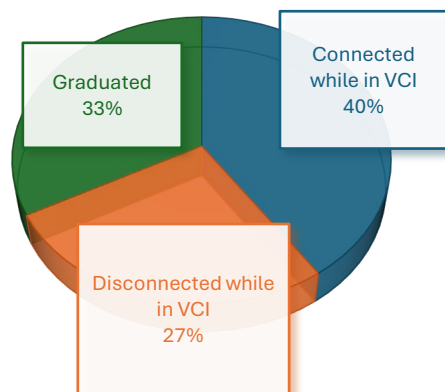
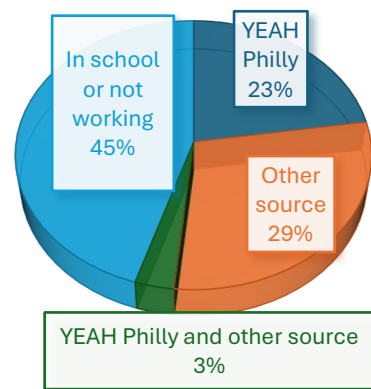


Figure 4. Employment Outcomes (n=93)



VCI Re-arrest Outcomes

The analyses presented in this section are based on arrest history information that PPD provided to Temple researchers through April 25, 2025. Table 5 presents re-arrest percentages for violent crime (which includes VUFAs) among VCI participants, measured at different follow-up periods. In the full treatment sample (N = 93), thirty percent (30.1%) were re-arrested for a violent crime or VUFA within one year of program entry. When restricting to the subsample of participants who had at least a full year of follow-up time before the censoring date of April 25, 2025 (n = 69), **the one-year re-arrest percentage was a bit higher, at 39.1%**. Looking over a longer horizon, among the subset of participants who had at least two full years of follow-up (n = 50), more than half (56%) experienced a re-arrest for a violent crime or VUFA within two years of program entry. These patterns highlight how estimates of re-arrest vary depending on the available follow-up period, with higher percentages observed when restricting to participants with complete exposure time. In addition, and not surprisingly, as time increases (i.e., from one year to two years), more participants are re-arrested—this is typical for recidivism numbers recorded for all types of social service and rehabilitation programs around the country (Howell & Lipsey, 2004).

Table 5. Re-Arrest Percentages, Violent Crime or VUFA

Arrested for violent crime or VUFA within 1 year , full sample (N=93)	30.1%
Arrested for violent crime of VUFA within 1 year , Subsample who had >=365 days before censoring (April 25, 2025) (N=69)	39.1
Arrested for violent crime or VUFA within 2 years , subsample who had >=730 days before censoring (April 25, 2025) (N=50)	56%

Note: Censoring means that arrest data only include arrests up through April 25, 2025, even though VCI participation for many participants goes past that date.

Pre-Post Outcome Data – Re-Arrest for Violent Crime

Table 6 assesses the pre-post outcomes for VCI participants, which compares the arrest rate before enrollment into VCI versus with the arrest rate after starting VCI. Put simply, we use a basic regression model to compare arrest rates for the pre-program (PRE) and post-program (POST) periods, adjusting for exposure time. This table also shows the pre-post arrest outcomes for a counterfactual—or comparison group. The criteria for inclusion in the comparison group

were all arrests for individuals using the following eligibility criteria¹⁰:

1. **Age** – males and females between 14 and 24 years old in 2020.
2. **Geography** – individuals who never had a recorded home zip code in seven excluded areas which equate to West and Southwest Philadelphia (19104, 19131, 19139, 19142, 19143, 19151, 19153).
3. **Offense history** – had at least one arrest for a serious violent offense, defined as: homicide, manslaughter, robbery, aggravated assault, or violation of the Uniform Firearms Act (VUFA).
4. **Race** – restricted to Black individuals.

Table 6. Pre-Post Differences in Arrests, VCI Participants vs. Comparison Group					
Group	Period Effect (Post vs PRE)	Rate Ratio (exp)	95% CI (Rate Ratio)	p-value	Interpretation
Any Arrest					
Treatment (VCI)	POST vs PRE	0.59	0.46, 0.75	<.0001	Arrest rate was 41% lower after program start compared to before.
Comparison	POST vs PRE	0.87	~0.83, 0.92	<.0001	Arrest rate was 13% lower after pseudo-start compared to before start.
Violent Arrest					
Treatment (VCI)	POST vs PRE	0.61	0.45, 0.82	0.0010	Violent crime arrest rate was about 39–40% lower after program start compared to before start.
Comparison	POST vs PRE	1.10	1.03, 1.18	<.0001	Violent crime arrest rate was about 10% higher after pseudo-start compared to before start.

¹⁰ These sets of characteristics produced a very large comparison group (n=6919) so we instead drew a random sample of 50% from the list of possible comparison group members. Then, from PPD we obtained records on arrests and incidents (fields included nature of the offense, arrest and corresponding dates). After looking at the offense histories of the comparison group, we additionally dropped all comparison group candidates who had histories (before their “pseudo”-program start date) of homicide and/or rape—as these individuals would likely be incarcerated (assuming that they were found guilty of the charge) and not be the on street and hence not viable candidates for comparison. They are also not viable candidates for comparison because VCI does not normally consider homicide and sexual assault as eligible charges. This brought the comparison group down to n=1821. The table computes outcome using the entire sample derived from the PPD data (n=1821); we did not use statistical matching procedures. Reasons for not doing so can be found in the appendix.

Across both outcomes, **VCI participants show markedly greater improvement from pre- to post-period than the comparison group.** For any arrest, the VCI group's rate fell by 41% after program start (Rate Ratio [RR]=0.59, 95% CI: 0.46–0.75; $p<.0001$), versus only a 13% decline in the comparison group (RR=0.87, ~0.83–0.92; $p<.0001$). For violent arrests, the contrast is even sharper: VCI participants experienced a ~39-40% reduction post-start (RR=0.61, 95% CI: 0.45–0.82; $p=0.0010$), while the comparison group's violent arrest rate increased by about 10% (RR=1.10, 95% CI: 1.03–1.18; $p<.0001$). In short, post-program changes among VCI youth are both larger in magnitude and favorable in direction, indicating substantially better outcomes for the VCI treatment group than the comparison group.

Future Use and Long-Term Plan for Evaluation

We recommend **retaining the comparison group data** for possible use in five-year follow-up analyses. Over a longer window, differences between treatment and comparison groups may become more visible and stable. At that point, additional covariates (if obtainable) and longer outcome periods would strengthen the rigor of comparisons. Until then, our analytic strategy emphasizes within-treatment-group outcomes and trajectories rather than potentially biased statistically-based comparisons.

Potential for Expansion and Scaling

Q5. What appears to be the appropriate organizational and staffing structure to successfully maintain VCI's current size?

The co-CEOs have learned over time that the most effective staffing model is one that prioritizes a team-based case management structure and hiring of individuals who are passionate about and committed to the mission of YEAH Philly, VCI, and the intense nature of the work. Staff who are empathetic, level-headed and stable in their roles are better positioned to provide mentorship, case management, and advocacy in a consistent way that builds trust with young people. Ideally, case managers and counselors should be embedded long-term, but first hired provisionally, giving both staff and the program time to assess fit, mission alignment, and the capacity to build sustained rapport with participants. This type of careful development of staff can reduce participant confusion, ensure continuity of care, and foster an environment where staff can fully align their professional identity with VCI's relational and justice-oriented mission.

Early Staffing Challenges

When VCI first launched in late 2020, the intent was to build a staff capable of offering mentorship, peer support, case support, and data collection. By 2021, staffing was minimal (2.5 positions), but the program grew quickly, reaching eight staff by 2022. These early years revealed several challenges:

- **Turnover in case management roles:** The position of case manager had been particularly difficult to sustain. With higher pay and quality benefits, the role still has been the hardest to fill.
- **Role misalignment and instability:** Some staff were hired into positions that did not fit their skills or the program's needs, leading to role redefinition or attrition. For example,

VCI initially hired an in-house trauma counselor, but this proved unsustainable, as the young people did not want to meet with them consistently, and was later shifted to a contracted role.

- **Over reliance on program founders:** Staff often deferred to James and Kendra for decision-making and participant rapport, increasing their workload and limiting the autonomy of caseworkers. Participants themselves also came to rely primarily on the founders, seeking their guidance and support rather than building relationships with their assigned case managers. This dynamic created bottlenecks, weakened the role of caseworkers, and added to the emotional and administrative burden carried by the founders.
- **Emotional toll and work–life balance:** Case management spills into evenings and weekends, with staff struggling to maintain boundaries and sustain their energy.

Staffing Adaptations and Stable Structure

These issues had led to high turnover in case management positions—an area critical to long-term program success. The founders are keenly aware of this and have been making regular adjustments to increase the tenure and stability of case management staff (and all staff):

- **Team-based case management:** Instead of designating one staff member as the sole case manager, VCI shifted toward a collaborative approach in which multiple staff share responsibility. This model lightened the burden on individuals, ensured continuity when staff transitioned, and gave the attorney, interns and other staff a more holistic understanding of participants' circumstances.
- **Role creation aligned with skills:** Rather than forcing staff into pre-set roles, YEAH began creating positions based on candidates' expertise (e.g., Daniel Loeb as Legal Coordinator, Stephanie as School Engagement Specialist). This has increased role fit, staff satisfaction, and retention.
- **Stratification by population:** To reduce the burden on the staff attorney, the plan is for him to focus almost exclusively on juvenile versus adult cases, since the juvenile cases are more complex and juveniles often have cases that span both systems—creating even more complexity.
- **Stable, long-term staff:** As of June 2025, core positions are filled by empathetic, committed and competent staff who have voiced intentions to remain in their roles, providing stability and continuity for YEAH and VCI participants.

Q6. What are the bare bones costs and anticipated benefits if VCI wanted to reach 200 young people annually in West/Southwest Philadelphia alone?

Costs

In total, to maintain bare bones costs to run VCI and the in-house workforce development opportunities at YEAH warehouse would require at minimum **roughly 3.0 million annually** to serve 200 young people in West Philadelphia. This does not include the relatively new education component. This figure also assumes that no other program (like the Hangout, the Market, etc.) is operating so that all budgetary items (for things like the mortgage and maintenance, etc. for those programs) would be for VCI. In other words, we developed this estimate as if YEAH's only program was VCI, but included its corresponding components that VCI participants can engage in.

- Staffing: \$1.1M–\$1.2M
- Facilities/maintenance: \$150K–\$200K
- Mortgages (3 houses/businesses): \$108K
- Programming/trainers/supplies: \$150K–\$200K
- Stipends (\$100/week for first 6-9 months): \$1.04M
- Housing subsidies for 1 year for 80 participants (e.g., Kate's Place): \$192K
- Group travel/trips for young people – domestic and international: \$80,000
- Van and auto insurance: \$12K
- Flexible participant support for fees, bail, restitution, trainings, education and vocational classes, etc: \$150K–\$175K

Staffing and stipends represent the largest share of the budget, with housing supports and mortgage obligations adding significant ongoing costs. Together, these investments provide a comprehensive, stable, and holistic model for engaging 200 youth annually in violence prevention and intervention.

Anticipated Direct Benefits

Below we take a quick look at the anticipated and direct benefits simply from reducing re-arrest by 25%, keeping an estimated 40 young people from being incarcerated and providing them with the job skills and the opportunity to work:

- Reduction in re-arrest:
Lower recidivism rates: If violent crime re-arrest rates are reduced from approximately 53% to 40%, that represents a 25% reduction in the likelihood of re-arrest. Even this modest shift would significantly reduce caseloads in the courts, probation supervision, and police engagement with repeat offenders.

At an estimated **\$15,000–\$25,000 per re-arrest avoided** (including jail days, probation supervision, and court), lowering re-arrest rates across 200 participants would generate substantial annual cost savings to the justice system. In fact, with regard from diversion from juvenile placement, if VCI successfully diverts **40 young people per year** in West/Southwest Philadelphia from incarceration, the avoided costs are dramatic. With juvenile incarceration estimated at **\$200,000 annually per youth**, assuming those 40 young people avoided a one-year residential placement, this amounts to an annual savings of **\$8 million** ($\$200,000 \times 40$).

- Improved economic mobility:

Training in trades, as YEAH's warehouse does, increases participants' employability—reducing unemployment and reliance on public assistance. If we quantify the **monetary benefits from employment** of 40 youth who would otherwise be incarcerated but now are instead **working in the community**:

- **Baseline PT-to-FT:** \$18/hour, 30 hrs/week, 50 weeks
- **Baseline PT-to-FT:** **\$1,080,000** total ($=\$18 \times 30 \times 50 \times 40$)
- **Employer payroll taxes (additional local economic activity)**
- Add ~7.65% employer FICA on wages:
- Baseline PT-to-FT: **\$82,620**

Quick take: A reasonable baseline for 40 employed youth is ~**\$1.08M/year in wages**, plus ~**\$82.6k** in employer payroll taxes.

- Reduced direct victimization:

Each of aggravated assault costs the public on average \$37,515/year in direct medical costs (emergency department, recovery care, long-term care, and behavioral/mental health care up to 1 year) according to a recent study by Dr. Roman and her colleagues at NORC at the University of Chicago (Roman et al. 2024). Each robbery victimization costs \$16,784. If the program reduced recidivism by 20% over one year, and VCI participants were typically responsible for seven (7) aggravated assaults each year and 20 robberies (based on real data), a 20% reduction in one year alone (assuming reduction is distributed equally across these two crimes) would mean **about 1–2 fewer aggravated assaults** and **4 fewer robberies** per year. This translates into an annual cost savings in direct victimization costs of **\$119,657**.

If recidivism declines, neighborhoods benefit from reduced cycles of violence, which in turn strengthens property values, supports local business activity, and fosters civic engagement. If VCI were to expand to multiple neighborhoods, demonstrated success at multiple VCI sites can also attract foundation and donor investment, creating a multiplier effect in which every dollar invested yields multiple dollars in public savings. Beyond these direct system and economic benefits, reductions in incarceration prevent secondary harms such as family disruption, reduced wellbeing, and weakened community ties while also freeing policing resources to focus on prevention and community trust-building.

Q7. Will changes be needed to the intervention as it is maintained and as expansion and/or scaling proceed?

Overall, only minimal changes likely will be needed to VCI’s core intervention model as the program is maintained and scaled. The evidence to date suggests that VCI’s fidelity to its high-touch, relationship-based approach—anchored by legal advocacy, trust-driven case management, and financial support/stipends—has been central to its effectiveness. These core components will remain unchanged. However, several refinements are anticipated as VCI grows.

Staffing adaptations will be the most significant. Scaling to serve more young people will require additional case managers, attorneys, and site directors (for new neighborhood locations), as well as formalized training and supervision systems to sustain quality and prevent burnout. A workforce pipeline strategy is being developed, including structured hiring processes, a four-week “VCI Bootcamp” for onboarding, and quarterly case review sessions. These measures will help ensure new staff are both technically prepared and aligned with VCI’s relational mission. Maintaining caseload caps of ~20 participants per case manager is a priority to prevent scale-up penalties and preserve the intervention’s intensity. While many case management organizations have caseloads of 35 to 40 people, it may also turn out that, given the intensity of services provided, a 20-person caseload may still be too high to maintain and will have to be decreased.

New partnerships and/or more effort and time invested to cultivate relationships across the court systems, defenders, prosecutor’s office and the police department will also be needed, particularly to increase information flow about court cases. Currently, gaps exist in timely access to arrest charges, case dispositions, and probation updates, particularly for juvenile cases. As VCI expands, developing data use agreements or memoranda of understanding with the Defender Association, District Attorney’s Office, and local courts will improve case tracking and allow staff to tailor advocacy more effectively. These agreements can also strengthen evaluation capacity and transparency with funders.

Other anticipated changes are largely structural and strategic rather than programmatic. For example, as the co-founders continue to shift their focus from direct service to strategic leadership, operational staff will assume greater responsibility for administration, freeing leadership to pursue long-term partnerships, policy advocacy, and continued investment in obtaining diversified funding streams. Similarly, the program may adjust service delivery formats—such as hybrid case management or “step-down” models of lighter-touch support—to accommodate participant needs without compromising fidelity. Currently VCI uses an informal model of stepping down high risk participants to moderate and lower levels of case management, but these procedures should become more formalized. Finally, expansion into new neighborhoods may require flexible infrastructure models: some sites may mirror the full-service warehouse in West Philadelphia, while others may rely on smaller satellite hubs anchored by trusted community leaders.

In sum, scaling VCI is feasible with careful planning, but will require **staffing growth, new court-system partnerships, and stronger internal systems**. The intervention's defining elements—voluntary engagement, unconditional stipends, legal advocacy, and holistic case management—will remain intact, ensuring that VCI's core innovation is preserved even as the program grows to reach more youth.

For geographic expansion beyond West/Southwest Philadelphia, they have discussed first identifying key stakeholders/neighborhood leaders who not only understand the complex mission of serving high-risk young Black men and women, but are also embedded in their own neighborhoods, have a strong community reputation and are respected by young people. They would like VCI to become a replicable blueprint and have discussed branching into high-need neighborhoods such as parts of North Philadelphia. They also discussed the possibility that if they were not able to partner with individuals who had a physical location or some type of hangout that resembled YEAH's hangout, then they could go with a model of having at least one lead case manager and court advocate in different neighborhoods where the focus would be providing comprehensive services to roughly 20 young people without a large space for a location-based hangout. Essentially, expanding VCI would not mean expanding the hangout. It is anticipated that young people would be able to visit the offices of new spaces if needed, but there would not be hangouts like the one that exists on Walton Street.

Q8. What are potential challenges to expansion and scaling up?

Several challenges are anticipated as VCI considers expansion and scaling beyond its West Philadelphia site. **Staffing/workforce recruitment and retention** is among the most pressing: scaling to serve 500 youth annually would require roughly 25 case managers plus attorneys and support staff, all of whom must be trauma-informed, culturally competent, and aligned with VCI's relational philosophy. Recruiting such staff at scale will demand strong partnerships with local universities, training institutes, and community networks, as well as expanded onboarding and supervision systems to prevent burnout and turnover.

Funding sustainability poses a second challenge. VCI's high-touch model, which includes weekly stipends and intensive legal advocacy, comes with significant per-participant costs. Many funders prefer short-term or system-aligned grants, whereas VCI relies on voluntary engagement and independence from court mandates. Without multi-year commitments from philanthropic or public funders, scaling could strain resources and compromise stability. In addition, some prospective donors perceive VCI's budget as too large for a grassroots organization, requiring careful framing and cultivation to overcome.

Program fidelity will also be difficult to maintain as additional sites are launched. Ensuring consistent delivery of core elements—weekly stipends, court advocacy, and individualized case management—will require standardizing training, codifying protocols, and conducting quarterly fidelity checks (and more frequently at first) across sites. Expanding too quickly could dilute the

program's effectiveness if new staff are not adequately trained or if caseloads exceed recommended limits.

Infrastructure limitations may also constrain growth. Securing suitable physical spaces in new neighborhoods could be cost-prohibitive, requiring creative alternatives such as co-location in existing community facilities or smaller satellite hubs anchored by trusted local leaders. However, the founders note that they do not plan to have new physical locations similar to the Walton Street hangout—just office space where the neighborhood lead staff (for the new neighborhoods) could meet with young people. Finally, **external risks**—including shifts in funding priorities, opposition from neighborhood residents or any continued tension between YEAH and juvenile court stakeholders, or the sudden loss of a major donor—could disrupt scaling plans and undermine stability.

Taken together, these challenges highlight the need for **deliberate, phased expansion**, paired with careful investment in staffing/workforce pipelines, long-term funding strategies, and fidelity frameworks to preserve the program's core innovation during growth.

Q9. What are some possible solutions to these challenges?

The co-CEOs have been working diligently to strengthen their organizational infrastructure. They recognize that expansion necessitates formalizing internal roles, robust HR practices, and data-management systems, which in turn will enhance VCI's overall effectiveness.

Strategic Leadership and Operational Efficiency

YEAH Philly is making intentional shifts to increase organizational efficiency and sustain long-term impact. One of the most important changes involves realigning internal operations to free up the co-founders—Kendra and James—to focus more intensively on strategic leadership. As the program has grown in size and visibility, administrative and coordination responsibilities have consumed a significant portion of leadership bandwidth. By redistributing these tasks among newly hired operations staff, the co-founders will be better positioned to strengthen external partnerships, cultivate long-range funding opportunities, and advocate for systemic policy change.

Participant Structure and Service Delivery Models

To support long-term participant growth while managing caseloads sustainably, YEAH is implementing a phased “step-down” model. Under this approach, young people can remain in the high-intensity phase of the program for up to two years. After that, they transition into a lighter-touch engagement tier that includes monthly check-ins with a designated case manager. This structure ensures continuity of care while encouraging greater autonomy and independence among participants as they stabilize.

Flexibility is also being increased through remote and hybrid options. Recognizing that consistent in-person attendance can be disrupted by work obligations, housing transitions, or

family instability, YEAH is piloting virtual case management and online skill-building modules. These innovations help maintain engagement, accommodate diverse schedules, and reduce dropout due to logistical barriers. The hybrid offerings reflect YEAH's commitment to meeting participants where they are—literally and figuratively.

Youth Development and Age-Specific Programming

YEAH is developing more targeted programming to reflect the different developmental and legal needs of youth under 18 versus young adults. In late 2024 and 2025 YEAH staff held conversations with principals and vice principals across West and Southwest Philadelphia to understand how these stakeholders perceived the legal system challenges and the complexity of issues facing their students. These discussions (and others) led to a priority focus being a bit more redirected to school-age young people and those who would be under the purview of juvenile court. The co-founders believe that there are fewer resources for juveniles than for adults involved in the legal system. They want to be able to engage with young people before they become more entrenched in the adult system. This thinking dovetails with the research evidence that suggests the juvenile legal system involvement in and of itself leads to (i.e., has a causal effect on) adult legal system involvement.

To further clarify and individualize support, the program is implementing age-based tiers. For participants under 18, the focus will center on reconnecting to school, planning for long-term academic and vocational success, and supporting family reunification. For those 18 and over, services will emphasize probation navigation, job readiness, financial literacy, and skills needed for independent living.

With these structural refinements, YEAH staff have indicated that they intent to remain committed to maintaining inclusive eligibility. The program will continue to serve young people with violent charges or histories of serious violence—regardless of formal system status. This philosophy ensures that young people who fall through institutional cracks still have access to support, and reinforces YEAH's identity as a community-based alternative to the carceral-based juvenile and adult carceral systems.

Physical Infrastructure and Capacity Expansion

To meet growing demand and expand its hands-on programming, YEAH is undergoing a \$2 million renovation of its Southwest Philadelphia warehouse space. The transformed facility will include designated trade-training zones for electrical work and automotive mechanics—fields with strong earning potential and immediate workforce relevance. Once complete, the space will be able to accommodate 35 to 40 young people at a time, creating an immersive environment where education, mentorship, and skill-building intersect.

These physical improvements are not just about capacity—they signal YEAH's belief in creating environments that reflect dignity, opportunity, and stability. For young people accustomed to chaotic or unsafe spaces, the upgraded warehouse is a powerful symbol: a community investment in their futures, built on the same streets they walk every day. YEAH staff have been writing

grants to secure funding to expand the pipeline of programs/services/trainings offered at their warehouse.

Staff Training Planned or in Place

VCI has established a structured, intentional approach to hiring and onboarding to ensure that new staff align with the organization's mission and are prepared to support its high-needs participant population. All applicants participate in a multi-stage hiring process that begins with a video-response exercise, in which candidates respond to scenario-based prompts. These scenarios are designed to assess judgment, cultural competency, and conflict-resolution skills in situations similar to those encountered in the field. Candidates who advance beyond this stage participate in multiple rounds of interviews, including sessions with peer staff members and young people. This peer-led component helps assess not only qualifications but also cultural fit and internal team cohesion. To improve efficiency and keep applicant pools active, VCI is implementing a firmer structure for recruitment cycles. This includes setting fixed application deadlines and aiming for a one-month turnaround from application to offer. These changes are designed to ensure timely hiring decisions and reduce candidate drop-off due to delays.

Once hired, new staff complete a four-week "VCI Bootcamp"—an intensive orientation that prepares them for the multifaceted responsibilities of their roles. The training covers trauma-informed care practices, instruction on how to use VCI's case management data system (QuesGen), guidance on navigating Philadelphia's juvenile and adult court procedures, and protocols for administering financial stipends to youth participants.

Ongoing learning is built into VCI's culture through monthly "Case Rounds." These sessions allow case managers to present particularly challenging cases to the broader team—including leadership—for collaborative problem solving and shared learning. This structure not only builds staff capacity but also promotes a reflective, team-based approach to service delivery.

Recommendations

Many of the recommendations outlined below build on ideas that have already been discussed internally by YEAH Philly leadership and staff. Several emerged directly from conversations with the co-CEOs, who continue to refine the long-term vision for VCI, while other recommendations reflect the perspectives of frontline staff who engage daily with participants and navigate the program's operational realities. The recommendations therefore represent a synthesis of practitioner insight, leadership priorities, and research-informed strategies designed to strengthen VCI as it maintains fidelity to its core mission and explores opportunities for sustainable growth and expansion.

1. **Develop a fidelity framework for core program elements.** VCI's success stems from a high-touch, relational model. To expand and/or scale without dilution, YEAH should:

- a. Define core components that must remain unchanged across replications (e.g., stipends, legal advocacy, trust-based engagement).
 - b. Create fidelity checklists and implementation guides for case management, legal support, and youth development.
 - c. Pilot fidelity monitoring tools and quarterly site audits to ensure alignment with core values and practices.
2. **Invest in staffing/workforce sustainability and leadership pipeline.** As growth occurs, staff burnout and leadership bottlenecks could undermine the model. Suggested steps:
 - a. Expand middle management capacity (e.g., team leads or program directors) to support frontline staff.
 - b. Codify supervisory protocols and support structures.
 - c. Launch a “relational workforce” case manager training institute that builds a pool of community-based, case management professionals with lived or adjacent experience.
 - d. Develop a *formalized* internship pipeline in partnership with local universities, creating structured pathways for graduate and undergraduate students (e.g., social work, public health, law, criminal justice) to serve as case management or legal interns. This would provide VCI with a consistent source of talent, expose students to community-based violence intervention, and build a longer-term workforce pipeline aligned with VCI’s mission.
3. **Clarify tiered service model based on age and system involvement** (juvenile vs. adult system).
 - a. Refine tiered tracks with clear goals, timelines, and transition protocols.
 - b. Formalize a one-year or two-year (or test other/shorter timelines) “step-down” model to allow for continuity without overextending resources. After six months with a new step-down process, reflect on and revisit the step-down model for tweaking, if needed. Relying on the case flow-related performance metrics is very important here—as currently, roughly one-quarter of the VCI data cohort studied lose contact or are designated “non-compliant.”
 - c. Create playbooks for “light touch” follow-up phases and alumni engagement.
 - d. For participants who have cases in both juvenile and adult court systems, create a systematic method to gather detailed information on advocacy, legal and case management protocol for these young people. Because these participants often represent the highest-risk and most difficult-to-serve population, documenting VCI’s successes with them is particularly important. Even incremental progress or favorable case outcomes in this subgroup can be considered meaningful program “wins,” and systematically tracking them will allow the organization to both acknowledge these achievements and demonstrate their value to funders, stakeholders, and the broader field.

4. **Formalize and systematize data collection and reporting across all program components.** To improve internal decision-making, support external advocacy, and enhance eligibility for competitive funding, YEAH should continue to place emphasis on strengthening its data and reporting infrastructure:
- a. Very recently (August 2025), YEAH hired a full-time data manager dedicated to expanding and improving the data management system who will not only track outcomes but also provide formative feedback to staff, develop data protocols and trainings and meet regularly with all staff. This person should be carefully introduced to all staff and Strong data practices will allow the organization to celebrate internal wins, adjust services in real time, and demonstrate successes externally to funders, partners, and the broader public. The data manager could take primary responsibility for developing MOUs and data use agreements with partner agencies and for regularly obtaining criminal justice system data from city government agencies to strengthen evaluation and reporting. This person would work closely with the social media director to translate data and outcomes into accessible stories and products for local and national dissemination.
 - b. Expand data entry manual and create a clear codebook that helps systematize and define all fields. Create a video training and booster sessions to train all staff on the new data entry manual.
 - c. Obtain and record formal charges at referral arrest/index arrest (arrest that brought participant to VCI) and provide any case documentation on index arrest where possible. (Suggestion to create a separate QuesGen table for index arrest and enter all information on this arrest). To do this consistently, YEAH may have to develop new partnerships with court, defense agency and/or police department staff that involve data use agreements and memorandums of understanding. Where any gaps exist for contacts in Montgomery and Delaware Counties, cultivate relationships with their court staff to obtain pertinent info when participant referral has arrests from other counties.
 - d. During VCI participation, consistently track dosage of all key activities. This includes engagement in workshops, mentoring sessions, vocational training, and court appearances. (Much of this information is currently captured in monthly reporting outside of QuesGen and not within QuesGen).
 - e. Specify definitions and coding for fields that match logic model outcomes across legal, behavioral, educational, and economic domains. (Much of this information is currently captured in monthly reporting outside of QuesGen and not within QuesGen).
 - f. For each participant, at program exit, record any disposition of legal cases, educational/employment status, and other pertinent information that relates to reason for exit.

- f. Build into QuesGen additional automated prompts for progress notes, missed appointments, and outcome updates. Consider applying for technology-related grants or including budget items in future grants for technological advancements for efficiency in data gathering, maintenance and reporting. Develop or adapt mobile applications that can be used on staff smartphones or tablets to record data immediately during outreach, workshops, or court accompaniment. Such apps can include features that flag missing or incomplete data fields, send reminders for follow-up documentation, and allow for offline data entry with later synchronization.
 - g. Integrate data tracking the stipend payments and related payments for participation in YEAH-related activities and community service with the case management system. These payments could be systematically linked to the QuesGen platform to provide a complete record of engagement and support. This can be accomplished by generating a monthly export from the payment system and importing it into QuesGen, ensuring that financial supports are tracked alongside case progress and program participation. Integration will allow staff to monitor whether stipends are reaching participants consistently, assess correlations between payments and engagement, and provide funders with transparent reporting on resource allocation.
 - h. Relatedly, in addition to stipend and YEAH-related incentive and activity payments, VCI should implement a systematic method to capture all other direct financial expenditures for each participant, creating a reliable cost-per-participant figure. Because stipends and these other payments such as bail, or subsidized housing make VCI a comparatively high-cost intervention, documenting these investments alongside participant outcomes will be critical. A clear cost-per-participant statistic not only strengthens internal decision-making but also allows the program to demonstrate value to funders, policymakers, and community stakeholders by showing how resources translate into measurable reductions in arrests, court involvement, and other harms.
 - i. Consider partnering with Adam Serlin to use his (Be the Variable) performance measurement system called PERFORM. Discuss costs and benefits with regard to abandoning QuesGen software in favor of PERFORM.
5. **If possible, strengthen relationships with juvenile probation while preserving VCI's core values.** Given the persistent tensions between VCI and Philadelphia's juvenile probation system, YEAH leadership should pursue opportunities to improve communication and build trust with juvenile probation officers and court staff. This does not mean aligning the program with coercive mandates or compromising its philosophy of voluntary, relationship-based engagement. Rather, it involves identifying shared goals—such as reducing re-arrest and keeping young people safely in their communities—and demonstrating through data and case examples how VCI advances these objectives. Structured strategies might include continuing ride-alongs and information-sharing initiatives, hosting joint learning sessions, and developing limited-purpose agreements that facilitate information flow without formalizing VCI as a probation “program option.” By framing VCI as a complementary partner rather than a competitor, YEAH can reduce bureaucratic resistance while maintaining its independence and credibility with young people. We do recognize that the co-CEOs have tried

numerous methods to improve their relationship with court and probation staff—continued emphasis on this may help reduce current obstacles.

6. **Continue to make efforts to partner with the Philadelphia DAO to develop a community-embedded diversion strategy for juveniles charged with VUFAs** (and 18-24 first time VUFA charge diversion program). To maintain voluntary participation while accessing public dollars, YEAH can continue to press the DAO to:
 - a. Design a voluntary diversion program that operates independently of formal mandates but is recognized by juvenile court as a valid alternative.
 - b. Offer clear program entry points for pre-charge, post-arrest, and post-adjudication youth—while avoiding entanglement with punitive surveillance (e.g., electronic monitoring).
 - c. Position itself as a preferred diversion partner by documenting reductions in system involvement and recidivism.

Conclusion

VCI's operational and philosophical model is deeply aligned with best practices and evidence for decarceration, racial justice, and increased public safety. Given the high cost of juvenile and adult incarceration and harms from incarceration, even a small reduction in recidivism brings large cost savings and benefits to individual participants and the community as a whole. At the state level, it offers a real-world implementation of community-based alternatives called for in Pennsylvania's juvenile justice reform plans. And locally, it fills urgent gaps left by fragmented court processes, under-resourced public defenders, and probation models that prioritize surveillance over support. VCI also aligns with the progressive policies of the Philadelphia DAO.

While scaling is conceptually feasible—given the replicable logic model, data systems, and strong leadership—actual implementation will hinge on (1) recruiting and training a larger workforce, (2) creating strong policies, procedures and trainings that allow the co-CEOs to decrease their direct interaction time with participants and move their time to sustainability and expansion; (3) securing stable partnerships with trusted and committed leaders in other communities in Philadelphia, and (4) locking in multi-year funding.

Despite systemic challenges—especially around funding, information-sharing, and cultural resistance from court actors—VCI has created a platform to have a strong strategic blueprint for scalable, place-based violence prevention that can be adapted to serve other high-need neighborhoods. The program's continued development will not only contribute to improved life outcomes for participants, but also provide a replicable model for jurisdictions across the country seeking to dismantle youth and young adult incarceration pipelines and build community-rooted systems of care.

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Appendix

When considering rigorous program evaluation, a common approach is to construct a matched comparison group so that outcomes for program participants can be compared against a statistically similar set of nonparticipants. However, the feasibility and validity of such an approach depend heavily on the availability of rich, reliable data across multiple domains of justice system involvement and exposure. In our case, the limitations of available data make such an approach problematic at this stage. As described in this report, we only utilized a large comparison group without statistical matching. We did, however, match on general eligibility criteria for VCI.

Decision Not to Use Statistical Matching at This Stage

Without court supervision (probation, GPS surveillance, home confinement, or any juvenile or adult court dispositions), detention, and incarceration data, matches based only on arrest and incident records risk being biased. Arrest data are shaped not only by offending but also by police surveillance, discretion, and community–law enforcement tensions. This increases the risk of **differential police contact** between groups, weakening the credibility of any matching exercise. A more robust matching design would require variables beyond arrests—for example, correctional status, social service involvement, or neighborhood-level exposures.

Given these limitations, we are not using a matched comparison group for the impact data shown within this report. Two reasons are central:

1. **Matching created power limitations** – the treatment group is only 93 participants, which is insufficient for adequately powered propensity score or coarsened exact matching designs, especially when balancing on multiple dimensions. It was relatively impossible to know going into the matching routines how limiting the power issues would be—matching involves finding comparison individuals who have the same (full) set of characteristics as the treatment group.
2. **Bias concerns** – the comparison group is defined narrowly by police records, without key covariates to control for differential exposure to supervision or incarceration.

In summary, we lack sufficient, pre-treatment covariates to model selection into the VCI program, and VCI youth are subject to systematically different surveillance and policing intensity than comparable youth citywide. Those structural differences violate key statistical matching assumptions—common support/overlap and ignorability—making ‘good’ matches unlikely and increasing the risk of residual and even amplified bias from bad matches. Rather than present a quasi-experimental estimate that overstates precision, we report a transparent, non-causal two-proportion comparison of violent re-arrest (yes/no) with confidence intervals and show the same analyses for the large comparison group. This framing avoids the false credibility of poorly balanced matches, makes our limitations explicit, and still provides decision-relevant information on outcome frequencies for VCI participants.