

Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado:

Report of Findings per
18-1.3-407, C.R.S.

December 2016



COLORADO
Department of Public Safety

Colorado Department of Public Safety
Division of Criminal Justice
Office of Research and Statistics

Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado:

A report of findings per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407(10)(b)

December 2016

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

YOS Evaluation Team
December 2016

Forward

The Division of Criminal Justice is mandated by statute to conduct a bi-annual evaluation of the Youthful Offender System and present the findings and recommendations to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees. Many of the recommendations that accompanied the 2014 report were addressed by YOS leadership, resulting in important programming modifications following the publication of the report. We appreciate the response of YOS administrators to our 2014 evaluation findings.

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Executive summary

The current evaluation

In 2016, The Colorado Division of Criminal Justice undertook a semiannual evaluation of the Department of Correction's Youthful Offender System. This report presents recidivism rates and a broad picture of the operations of YOS as observed from the perspective of the residents, staff, and managers. Division researchers surveyed staff (with 68% response rate) and residents (with a 97% response rate), conducted interviews with YOS staff and officials, and analyzed data provided by DOC. From multiple data collection efforts, various themes emerged to answer the research questions that guided the study.

Summary

Overall, the YOS operations are generally consistent with statute and likely represent the intent of the drafters of the original YOS legislation.¹ However, the data collected for this evaluation occurred at a time of considerable organizational change at YOS. Concerns about the lack of consequences for negative behavior have resulted in a new emphasis on accountability by the administration, of both staff and residents. As with prior evaluation findings, education/vocational training is valued by both staff and residents; over 80% of residents said they would choose YOS again because of these opportunities. YOS administrators continue to expand the programming, and these improvements should continue as space becomes available in the multipurpose building (scheduled for completion in the spring of 2017).

The average age at intake increased between 2006 and 2013, which was to be expected due to changes in 2010 statute that removed most juveniles ages 14 and 15 from direct file consideration² and the 2009 statutory modification that extended the age of sentencing to

¹ Prior DCJ evaluations in 2002 and 2004 did not make this finding. However, alignment with statute has been a consistent finding in subsequent evaluations.

² C.R.S. §19-2-517.

include 19 and 20 year olds.³ Between 2013 and 2015 the age of YOS intakes remained very stable at approximately 18.8 years, but a slight increase has been observed in 2016. This is likely to continue with the advent of Senate Bill 15-182, allowing the transfer of offenders up to age 24 from DOC to YOS.⁴

The majority of YOS staff (80.2%) reported that they consistently see themselves as role models, and another 17.5% saw themselves as role models “sometimes.” With a strong staff and administration, and the continued expansion of programs and activities, YOS is positioned to positively impact the lives of many offenders. The proportion of offenders successfully completing their sentence at YOS has remained around 90.0% over the past three years. The 2-year felony reconviction rate after program completion is 25.7%, and only 11.7% were reconvicted of a violent felony crime within 2 years. These are very positive outcomes, especially given the very serious nature of the YOS population.

Recommendations

1. The average age of incoming YOS participants has been increasing as a result of statutory modifications regarding YOS eligibility. YOS intakes are now, on average, nearly 19 years old. YOS administrators should continue their efforts, currently underway, to examine existing educational programming and staffing to ensure that it is relevant to an older population. In addition, over one-third (38.2%) of YOS intakes in 2016 were functionally illiterate, reflecting the need for a wide range of educational programming necessary to meet the needs of this older population.

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

2. The recent turnover of management staff at YOS has resulted in an organization in transition. Administrators should make every effort to communicate their vision and expectations to line and program staff to ensure that staff morale and the YOS program mission are not compromised as YOS evolves.
3. Efforts to fill the vacant mental health position must be prioritized by YOS administrators. This recommendation was made in 2012, 2014 and now again in 2016. This is a critically important position, and survey comments from staff and residents reflect a broad recognition of this gap in services. Administrators should work with human resource officials to identify ways to attract qualified and committed applicants.
4. Concerns about gang activity were voiced by both staff and residents. The current review of YOS programming by DOC administrators as it relates to gang activity

³ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.

⁴ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.5.

should continue, and the historical practice of not recognizing gang-related behavior (described in the 2014 YOS evaluation report) should be reconsidered. Considerable research exists regarding gang intervention programming,⁵ and this material should be reviewed and incorporated into new programming at YOS.

5. Programming for the women continues to challenge YOS administrators despite ongoing efforts to improve services for this population. With the upcoming completion of the multipurpose building, efforts should focus on expanding the women's access to programming and recreational activities.
6. The YOS management team should continue its work building and maintaining excellent relationships with community stakeholder employers who assist with job fairs, resume/interview skills, and hiring.
7. YOS administrators should carefully document the outcomes of the new "youth transfers" pursuant to Senate Bill 15-182. This bill allows for the identification and placement of certain individuals who were directly sentenced to prison to be placed in YOS if DOC administrators believe they could benefit from the program.

⁵ See for example <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojdp/231116.pdf>

Section 1:

Introduction

Fifth evaluation in a series

This report represents the fifth evaluation of the Colorado Department of Correction's (DOC) Youthful Offender System (YOS) conducted by the Colorado Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ). The Division is mandated to evaluate the program semiannually and submit the findings to the General Assembly on November 1 of even numbered years. However, this mandate is not funded by the General Assembly, and evaluations are completed as resources become available.

The first report was delivered on November 1, 2002. This report focused on recidivism rates, funding levels, comparisons of legislative intent to actual implementation, and characteristics of the YOS population. The second report and third reports, prepared in 2004 and 2012 respectively, focused on these topics and also attempted to provide information on the perspectives of residents, staff, and administrators involved in the program. The following report, prepared in 2014, concentrated on legislative and DOC intent compared to actual implementation, the perceptions of residents and staff on a variety of topics, the comparison of the arrest and conviction histories of youth committed to YOS with those placed in other sentencing options, and an analysis of program failure and recidivism. Each of these reports included recommendations based on the study findings.⁶ The current report continues this tradition, reflecting data collected during the spring and summer of 2016.

⁶ *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2002). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics. ; *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2004). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.; *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2012). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.; *Evaluation of the Youthful Offender System (YOS) in Colorado: A Report of Findings Per C.R.S. 18-1.3-407.* (2014). Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Public Safety, Division of Criminal Justice, Office of Research and Statistics.

Admission criteria

Eligibility for the YOS program was modified on October 1, 2009 to include individuals who are 18 and 19 years old at the time of the offense but less than age 21 at the time of sentencing. This eligibility provision was repealed on October 1, 2012 but was reinstated during the 2013 legislative session.

In 2010, statute modifications precluded juveniles 14 and 15 years of age from direct file consideration with the exception of 1st degree murder, any felony sex offense, and habitual juvenile offenders. Additionally, the passage of Senate Bill 15-182 allowed DOC the discretion to transfer any offender up to age twenty-four years with a DOC sentence into and out of the YOS.⁷ With these changes, the average age of the YOS population at admission increased from 16.9 in FY 2008 to 19.0 in FY 2016. This trend is likely to continue with the advent of Senate Bill 15-182.

Important recent changes

The data for this study were collected in the spring and summer of 2016. Just prior to the start of the evaluation DOC administrators became aware of an incident involving excessive use of force. This prompted an investigation by DOC's Inspector General's Office. The investigation was followed by the reassignment of multiple YOS managers to other DOC facilities. This movement was accompanied by the relocation of DOC managers from other facilities to YOS. All incoming staff received 40 hours of YOS specific training and all YOS staff were retrained using DOC's Use of Force curriculum. Also, the oversight of YOS was moved from the Division of Parole to the Division of Prisons. Consequently the data were collected during a transition period at YOS in which many changes were underway and communication with staff was limited. These circumstances may impact the perceptions of both staff and offenders, as reported here.

Organization of this report

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

⁷ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.5; as of this writing, there have been 12 transfers from DOC into the YOS population.

Background and description of YOS

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

YOS is an alternative to a traditional adult prison, and it exists as a separate entity inside the Department of Corrections, with a separate facility and a specially designed system of programming. The statute describing YOS specifies that the state must provide a sentencing option for "certain youthful offenders" who would serve up to seven years day-for-day (meaning no good/earned time would apply) while a lengthier sentence to DOC would be suspended for the duration of the YOS sentence. According to statute, YOS offenders are to serve time in a "controlled and regimented environment that affirms dignity of self and others, promotes the value of work and self-discipline, and develops useful skills and abilities through enriched programming."⁸ The statute directs DOC to develop a program that provides "separate housing for female and male offenders who are sentenced to [YOS] without compromising the equitable treatment of either."⁹ The statute mandates that program participants be housed separate "from and not brought into daily physical contact with adult offenders" and that these offenders be "subject to all laws and DOC rules, regulations, and standards pertaining to adult offenders..."¹⁰

The original target population for YOS was youth between the ages of 14 and 18 at the time of the offense who were direct filed or transferred to adult court and convicted as adults.¹¹ In 2009, the General Assembly expanded the eligibility criteria for sentencing to YOS (H.B. 09-1122) to include those who were 18 and 19 at the time of the offense (limited to Felony 3-6 violent crimes) and who were sentenced prior to their 21st birthday. This provision was repealed in 2012, but reinstated the following year. In 2010, statute modifications precluded juveniles 14 and 15 years of age from direct file consideration with the exception of 1st degree murder, any felony sex offense, and habitual juvenile offenders. Additionally, the passage of Senate Bill 15-182 allowed DOC the discretion to transfer any offender up to age 24 with a DOC sentence into and out of the YOS.¹²

Determinant YOS sentences range from two to six years except that someone convicted of a class 2 Felony may be sentenced for seven years.

⁸ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(1)(a).

⁹ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(1)(b).

¹⁰ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(1)(d).

¹¹ C.R.S. §19-2-517 (direct file), §19-2-518 (court transfer).

¹² C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.5.

The statute describes a three phase program based on “self-discipline, a daily regime of exercise, education and work programs, and meaningful interaction, with a component for a tiered system for swift and strict discipline for noncompliance...”¹³ YOS staff are to be mentors and role models to promote socially acceptable attitudes and behaviors, and programming is to include problem-solving skills and cognitive behavioral strategies that have the potential to change criminal thinking and behavior.¹⁴

According to statute, the YOS program is intended to promote among offenders a pro-social culture and provide an opportunity for offenders to gradually reenter the community. In addition, the enabling statute specifies that DOC officials will staff the YOS with individuals “who are trained in the treatment of youthful offenders...trained to act as role models and mentors...”¹⁵ To this end, the statute requires the following specific program components (descriptions of phases were obtained from YOS documents):

- **Orientation training phase.** During this 30-45 day period, offenders undergo a comprehensive battery of intake assessments. Orientation includes explanations of the full scope of YOS activities and behavioral expectations. When not involved in orientation or diagnostic activities, the offender participates in highly structured and regimented physical activities.¹⁶ This is a high security unit where all new arrivals to YOS are assigned. This unit is also used for placement of YOS offenders assigned to punitive segregation, remediation,¹⁷ removal from population, and special management. This unit includes the Orientation Training Phase of YOS, which is a no-privilege, strict, and highly structured 28-day phase of YOS.¹⁸
- **Phase I.** This is the longest YOS phase, lasting from approximately eight to 75 months during which time a range of intense core programs, supplementary activities, and educational and prevocational programs and services are provided to offenders. Living units are staffed with multidisciplinary teams and security, discipline, education, treatment, and behavior modification is the shared responsibility of each staff member.¹⁹ Job assignments exist in food service, maintenance, janitorial service, teacher aide, library aide, recreation and laundry. Offenders attend education courses in conjunction with having a work assignment. At any point in time, the majority of YOS offenders are in Phase I.

¹³ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(3)(b).

¹⁴ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407(3)(d).

¹⁵ C.R.S. § 18-1.3-407(3.5).

¹⁶ See *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2014*. (2015). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis. See pages 19-21.

¹⁷ Remediation is a temporary classification for YOS offenders who have behaved inappropriately, and is available as a sanction from Phase 1 until discharge of sentence. Remediation may include a return to IDO, treatment intervention, restricted activities, house arrest, and up to 7 days of detention. It may be achieved by the Code of Penal Discipline process or as a YOS sanction (see DOC Administrative Regulation 250-11).

¹⁸ This description is from DOC's Administrative Regulation 250-11.

¹⁹ This description is from *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2014*. (2015). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis.

- **Phase II.** This component occurs during the last three months of institutional confinement; offenders remain under 24-hour supervision while on scheduled appointments and community service activities²⁰ in the community. All offenders participate in a monthly employment seminar which focuses on career planning, labor market information, interviewing skills, and job seeking skills. YOS administrators have worked consistently to expand the number of employers and community partners who work with this population in Phase II. Phase II staff assist offenders in obtaining birth certificates, social security cards, and identification cards that will be necessary when offenders transition to the community.²¹
- **Phase III.** This final component of a YOS sentence consists of a period of six to 12 months of community supervision when the offender is monitored during reintegration into society. An offender's eligibility for movement from Phase II to Phase III is based on (1) the duration of the offender's sentence to YOS, and (2) demonstrated and documented positive behavior and program participation.²² Programming in Phase III includes education, employment, community service, drug and alcohol interventions, mental health treatment, restitution, and other activities as specified in the offender's transition plan. According to DOC's Administrative Regulation 250-06, caseloads of YOS Community Supervision Officers should not exceed 1:10, and supervision level is designed to focus resources on offenders who are at greater risk.

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

- a. Provide for teaching offenders self-discipline by providing clear consequences for inappropriate behavior;
- b. Include a daily regimen of physical training, self-discipline exercises, educational and work programs, and meaningful interaction, with a component for a tiered system for swift and strict discipline for noncompliance;
- c. Use staff models and mentors to promote the development of socially accepted attitudes and behaviors;
- d. Provide instruction on problem-solving skills including methods to reinforce the use of cognitive behavior strategies that change offenders' orientation toward criminal thinking and behavior;
- e. Promote new group cultures which result in a transition to pro-social behavior; and
- f. Provide offenders the opportunity to gradually reenter the community.²³

²⁰ All offenders sentenced to YOS are required to complete 100 hours of community service.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Note that those offenders with ICE detainers are ineligible for Phase III.

²³ C.R.S. § 18-1.3-407(3)(a-f).

Finally, as stated previously, the YOS statute mandates that the Division of Criminal Justice (DCJ) “independently monitor and evaluate”²⁴ YOS and present the findings to the House and Senate Judiciary Committees. This report presents the findings of the fifth YOS evaluation conducted by DCJ.

²⁴ C.R.S. § 18-1.3-407(10)(b).

Section 2:

Research questions and study design

Research questions

The following questions guided the current evaluation:

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

Institutional Review Board approval

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

Data collection

Survey and interview data were collected in May of 2016. Quantitative data were obtained from the Department of Corrections in July of 2016. Recidivism data in terms of filings and convictions were obtained from the Colorado Judicial Branch and Denver county court. Qualitative data were collected from surveys of staff and residents and staff interviews.

Quantitative data

Recidivism and offender profile information required quantitative data. Recidivism was defined as a new felony or misdemeanor filing within two years of release from the YOS. Recidivism data were obtained from the Judicial Branch and Denver County.²⁵ Additionally, DOC's Office of Planning and Analysis provided client-level information on all YOS admissions through June of 2016.

Qualitative data

Information regarding perceptions and concerns of both YOS administrators/staff and offenders was collected using self-administered paper/pencil questionnaires. Resident questionnaires were four pages in length with 21 questions, 12 of which were open-ended to solicit more-in-depth information concerning resident perspectives. One hundred sixty-five (165) offenders participated in the survey, representing 92% of all available YOS residents.^{26,27} Staff questionnaires contained 20 questions, 10 of which were open-ended. Of the staff members available to participate, 68% returned completed surveys.²⁸ Copies of the questionnaires are available in Appendix A.

²⁵ The inclusion of Denver County misdemeanor filings was made possible for the current report. This information was not available for prior reports.

²⁶ Surveys were not administered to YOS offenders in Phase III.

²⁷ In DCJ's 2012 and 2014 evaluations of YOS, resident response rates were 49% and 42%, respectively.

²⁸ In DCJ's 2012 and 2014 evaluations of YOS, staff response rates were 73% and 71%, respectively.

Analysis

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

Limitations of this study

Time and resource constraints precluded researchers observing routine activities in the YOS setting including program groups and program participants. Additionally, unlike prior evaluations, focus groups were not conducted. Finally, Phase III was not included in this evaluation.

Section 3:

Findings

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

1. **Per Colorado Revised Statute 18-1.3-407(10)(b), is the current operation of YOS consistent with statute?**
- a. **Does the system provide for teaching offenders self-discipline by providing clear consequences for inappropriate behavior?**

Yes, in general, YOS operations appear to be consistent with statute. Consequences for negative behaviors range from revocation to the Department of Correction's traditional prison system, to regression to lower behavioral status levels,²⁹ to negative chronological reports. For serious types of misconduct, disciplinary measures also include regression to the Intake, Diagnostic and Orientation Unit (IDO) for offenders receiving "removal from population" and special management consequences.

However, staff and offenders reported that there are few meaningful consequences for inappropriate behavior. Only one-third (36.6%) of residents reported that there were clear consequences for inappropriate behavior. The remainder said "no" or "somewhat." In prior years these evaluations have identified the use of chronological records (chrons) as a primary mechanism for providing incentives and sanctions. In addition, there was little use made of official Code of Penal Discipline (COPD) violations. With the management transition described in Section 1, the use of chrons has become less important than the official documentation of behavior and the accompanying due process that occurs with the use of COPDs. The use of COPDs was discouraged in the past because the sanction was not immediate and it interfered with YOS programming. This recent focus on COPDs

²⁹ YOS has a behavior-based "level" system where those with higher status have greater privileges (see Figure 3.1).

is occurring at the same time that a strongly articulated “zero tolerance” policy pertaining to disrespect of staff is being implemented.³⁰

Comments from the resident surveys include:

I think they wait too long to revoke people.

They let people here get away with too much and give people too many chances. Most of them screw it up.

I believe YOS gives too many chances to offenders who aren't complaint with the program and then it ruins it for those who are really trying to make a change.

Among the staff surveyed, 31.7% indicated “hold offenders accountable” when asked what they would do to improve YOS. This was a recurring topic in response to this question, and many staff commented on the need for consequences for offenders’ negative actions.

Be more consistent with all offenders. Hold offender accountable for their actions. All staff must confront offenders.

This program seems to need to be adjusted to the older population we now have at YOS. They need to be held accountable for all they do.

At YOS it is left up to staff sometimes to decide what to do and thus causes some inconsistencies in punishments and consequences.

Be stricter on employees and offenders. Hold people accountable and get back to discipline.... let's start revocating these few bad apples because all they do is spoil the whole lot. Discipline! Discipline! Discipline!

Maintain consistency between shifts, better communication and team work.

This age group needs to have a highly stricter environment to be consistent. Have consequences for negative behavior.

³⁰ In past evaluation reports, COPD information provided by DOC was analyzed and provided. However, during interviews with DOC administrators for this evaluation, the accuracy of these data came into question. Consequently the information is excluded from this report.



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

- ▶ *Does the system include a daily regimen of physical training, self-discipline exercises, education and work programs, and meaningful interaction?*

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

Regarding education and work programs, as required in statute, YOS offers both GED training and a high school diploma. Those with shorter sentences are enrolled in the GED program whereas those with longer sentences are admitted to Century High School, the YOS secondary school that operates with a letter of agreement through Pueblo School District 60. Century High School operates year-round in the facility with 16-week trimesters.

The Colorado Community College System has approved the YOS career and technical education programs. All YOS career and technical instructors are credentialed in their trade and up to 45 hours of course work is transferable to a Colorado community college toward an Associate of Applied Science degree.

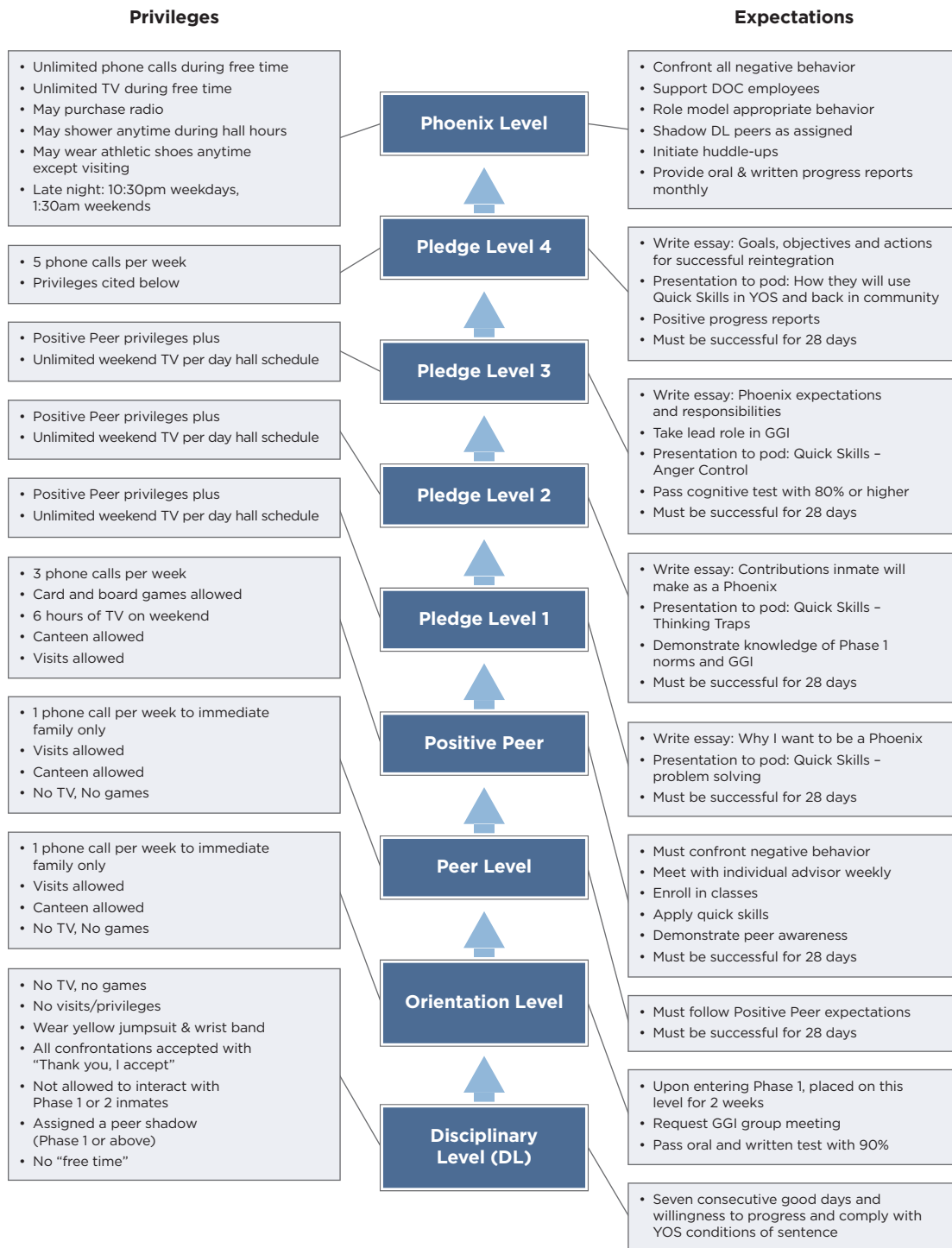
In surveys, 80.6% of residents mentioned educational or vocational programs as one of the best things about YOS. When asked what programs or activities have been most useful or important to them, 82.4% indicated education, school, or vocational programming.

The majority of YOS residents (82.7%) reported that they would choose YOS again if given the opportunity. Of these, the most common reasons given for choosing YOS again was the reduction in time compared to their prison sentence (49.3%) and the educational opportunities (35.8%).

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

Yes, a core component of YOS is the nine-level behavioral management system which links behavioral expectations to privileges. Please see Figure 3.3 for a partial description of the expectations and privileges associated with the behavioral management system. To progress in the level system, individuals are required to behave according to YOS norms and expectations. These norms and expectations are posted in the housing units and articulated in the staff and *YOS Offender Reception and Orientation Manual*.

Figure 3.1. YOS status levels, privileges, and expectations





c. Does the system use staff role models and mentors to promote the development of socially accepted attitudes and behavior?

Staff are required by state statute and administrative rules and expectations to act as role models and mentors to YOS offenders. The first paragraph of the YOS *Teachers Handbook* states the following: “Through your actions and spoken words, you will model the appropriate manner your students should behave and interact with others.”³¹ Most YOS employees who participated in the study seem to take this expectation seriously. The majority (80.2%) of staff members disclosed that they consistently saw themselves as a role model for the YOS residents. Another 17.5% saw themselves as role models ‘sometimes’. This was consistent across all positions, including correctional officers, teachers, administrative, support and maintenance staff. Very few indicated that they did not see themselves in this role.

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

We are more like mentors than just officers.

At YOS offenders are mentored. At DOC, there is minimal contact.

We are mentors with youth and adults.

We are supposed to mentor and change lives.



d. Does the system provide offenders with instruction on problem-solving skills and the use of cognitive behavior strategies?

Yes, YOS offers several types of problem-solving instruction and cognitive behavioral approaches, including Guided Group Interaction (GGI),³² Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens, sex offender treatment, anger management classes, victim empathy class,³³ substance abuse classes, Quick Skills (cognitive skill-building techniques), Baby-Think-It-Over,³⁴ and Thinking for a Change.³⁵ Evaluating the delivery, content, and fidelity of specific program elements such as these is beyond the scope of this evaluation. While survey data revealed that some offenders valued these programs, GGI and Quick Skills require small groups and the physical plant, with 54-person pods, makes it difficult to pull together a meaningful small group. In particular, it is difficult for a small group to have the privacy

³¹ YOS *Teacher Handbook*, page 6.

³² GGI uses group dynamics and peer pressure to promote pro-social behaviors (*Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2013*, page 9). Offenders are assigned to a specific GGI group.

³³ The curriculum for “Victim Impact: Listen and Learn” was developed by the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs.

³⁴ This Phase 2 program involves providing the offenders, both male and female, with computer-simulated infant dolls that cry when they need something (to be fed, changed, etc.). The women keep these dolls for a period of 4 weeks; the men keep them for one week.

³⁵ *Thinking for a Change*, developed by the National Institute of Corrections, is an evidence-based program.

necessary to deal with problems that require GGI and Quick Skills. Interviews with YOS leadership indicate that GGI will soon be removed/terminated from the list of YOS programs.

Some offenders provided the following comments:

I've learned to stop and think objectively. I've learned how to take a step back, breathe and ask for help if I need it. I have also learned to find constructive ways to better develop myself like exercise, reading and working.

Just being around so many young offenders has made me realize I have to change or forever be caught up in a cycle of violence.

We have undergone classes that teach us about 'stuffing', escalating, and directing anger and the positives and negatives. We have been taught to stop and insert space, take a step back, talk slowly and much more.



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

A primary method of promoting pro-social behavior is the use of a behavioral management/level system to gain privileges, as discussed previously (see Figure 3.3). Privileges are earned under a merit system, and these increase with the offender's status levels but can be lost due to problematic behavior or rule infractions. Behavioral expectations are articulated in the *Offender Reception and Orientation Manual* (2012). Privileges include visitation, telephone calls, television, radios, and canteen items.³⁶ Inconsistency in rule enforcement, and inconsistency in general practice, was a concern frequently mentioned by both staff and offenders. These inconsistencies, as discussed previously, can have important consequences for the residents' status/privileges, making loss of privileges or lack of progress dependent on staff behavior as much as offender behavior.

As required by statute, YOS also uses positive peer culture as a fundamental method of teaching offenders pro-social behavior. Because peers are one of the most influential aspects of a young person's life, they can both encourage and discourage antisocial behaviors.³⁷ Social learning theory states that youth can develop self-worth, significance, dignity, and responsibility through commitment to the positive values of helping and caring for others³⁸ and can learn how to behave appropriately or inappropriately through the observation of peers that they respect and look to for guidance.³⁹ Positive peer culture was

³⁶ *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2013*. (2014). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis.

³⁷ Brown, B., Clasen, D., & Eicher, S. (1986). Perceptions of peer pressure per conformity dispositions, and self-reported behavior among adolescents. *Developmental Psychology*, 22, 521-530.

³⁸ Brendtro, L.K. & Vorrath, H.H. (1985). *Positive peer culture* (2nd Ed.). Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction.

³⁹ Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall; Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and actions: A social-cognitive theory*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

developed with the assumption that as peers learn to trust, respect and take responsibility for the behaviors of others in the group they can influence each other in a manner that will decrease antisocial behavior and increase pro-social attitudes, beliefs and behaviors.⁴⁰ If delinquency is influenced by one's peer group, individuals will respond to peer pressure for change, positive or negative.⁴¹ Within the construct of positive peer culture, peers will develop and maintain positive behaviors and characteristics including:

- A sense of belonging;
- A code of conduct that assures a safe environment and promotes pro-social behavior;
- Individual members responding positively to the influences of the group;
- Each member has a sense that they can significantly contribute in a positive manner to the group;
- Individuals demonstrate social responsibility to the group and the group assists in reinforcing pro-social behavior; and
- Criticism of maladaptive behavior.⁴²

YOS uses the behavioral management/level system to promote a positive peer culture, and those who reach Phoenix status become role models for other YOS residents. It should be noted, however, that implementing a positive peer culture is difficult with delinquent youth because, as researchers have found, juveniles are in fact learning from and being reinforced by the "leaders" in their community, and the behaviors may not be the positive, pro-social behaviors intended by therapists and correctional personnel.⁴³ Thus, involvement and supervision/intervention of staff is necessary to ensure that positive behaviors are being displayed and encouraged by the peer community.⁴⁴ It is in this context of instilling a positive peer culture that staff consistency, then, becomes especially important.

⁴⁰ Ryan, J.P. (2006). Dependent youth in juvenile justice: Do positive peer culture programs work for victims of child maltreatment? *Research on Social Work Practice, 16*(5), 511-519; Zimpfer, D.G. (1992). Group work with delinquents. *The Journal Specialist in Group Work, 17*(2), 116-126.

⁴¹ Harstad, C.D. (1976). Guided group interaction: Positive peer culture. *Child Care Quarterly, 5*(2), 109-120.

⁴² <http://www.troubledteenblog.com/2008/07/positive-peer-culture-adolescent-residential-treatment-philosophy/>.

⁴³ Dishion, T.J., McCord, J., & Poulin, F. (1999). When interventions harm: Peer groups and problem behavior. *American Psychologist, 54*(9), 755-764.

⁴⁴ Ibid.



f. Does the system provide offenders the opportunity to gradually reenter the community?

Phase II and Phase III are designed to gradually reintegrate the offender into the community. The Phase II component of YOS is referred to as pre-release,⁴⁵ and it occurs during the last three months of an offender's incarceration at the Pueblo facility. It includes supervised scheduled appointments and activities in the community. A focus in Phase II is building on the academic skills acquired in Phase I, and offenders participate in career planning and job seeking skills. Offenders must attend classes in nutrition and food preparation, budgeting and personal safety.⁴⁶ An important component of Phase II is the acquisition of birth certificates, social security cards, and Colorado identification cards that are necessary for job applications and housing.

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



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

In large part, changes to the YOS population over time are a reflection of statutory modifications that affected the eligibility requirements. The average age at intake increased between 2006 and 2013, which was to be expected due to changes in 2010 statute that removed most juveniles ages 14 and 15 from direct file consideration⁴⁷ and the 2009 statutory modification that extended the age of sentencing to include 19 and 20 year olds.⁴⁸ Between 2013 and 2015 the age of YOS intakes remained very stable at approximately 18.8 years, but a slight increase has been observed in 2016. This is likely to continue with the advent of Senate Bill 15-182, allowing the transfer of offenders up to age 24 from DOC to YOS.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ See *Youthful Offender System: Fiscal Year 2013*. (2014). Colorado Springs, CO: Colorado Department of Corrections, Office of Planning & Analysis. Pages 22-26.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ C.R.S. §19-2-517.

⁴⁸ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.

⁴⁹ C.R.S. §18-1.3-407.5

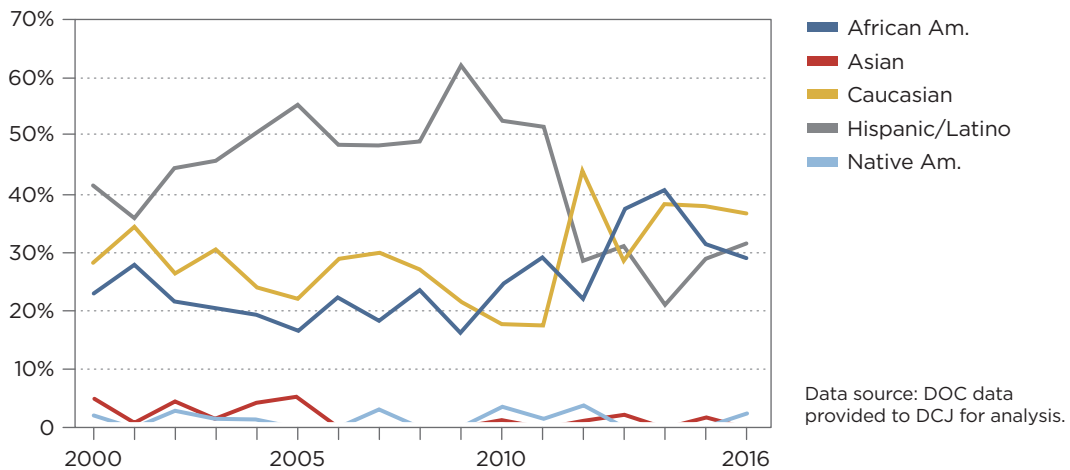
Table 3.1. Age at intake, FY 2006-2016

FY	N	Age at intake									Total
		14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	23	
2006	58	0.0%	3.4%	17.2%	36.2%	43.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
2007	60	0.0%	6.7%	16.7%	38.3%	31.7%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
2008	59	0.0%	6.8%	25.4%	35.6%	30.5%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
2009	61	1.6%	4.9%	13.1%	45.9%	32.8%	1.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
2010	84	2.4%	4.8%	11.9%	26.2%	35.7%	16.7%	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
2011	68	0.0%	1.5%	10.3%	19.1%	29.4%	22.1%	14.7%	2.9%	0.0%	100.0%
2012	77	0.0%	0.0%	3.9%	14.3%	31.2%	33.8%	16.9%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
2013	45	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	4.4%	33.3%	35.6%	26.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
2014	52	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	7.7%	32.7%	28.8%	26.9%	1.9%	0.0%	100.0%
2015	58	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	8.6%	34.5%	34.5%	22.4%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
2016	41	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	7.3%	22.0%	36.6%	26.8%	2.4%	2.4%	100.0%
Total	663	0.5%	2.7%	9.8%	23.1%	32.7%	19.2%	11.3%	0.6%	0.2%	100.0%

Data source: DOC data provided to DCJ for analysis.
The darker the color, the greater the proportion of individuals in the cell.

Prior to 2011, the largest proportion of the YOS population by far was Hispanic, followed by Caucasians and African Americans (see Figure 3.2). Since 2011, Hispanic admissions declined while African American and White admissions increased such that these groups represented fairly equal proportions of intakes. Currently, the largest proportion of intakes was Caucasians, followed by Hispanics.

Figure 3.2. Race and ethnicity of YOS intakes, FY 2000-2016 (N=1,085)



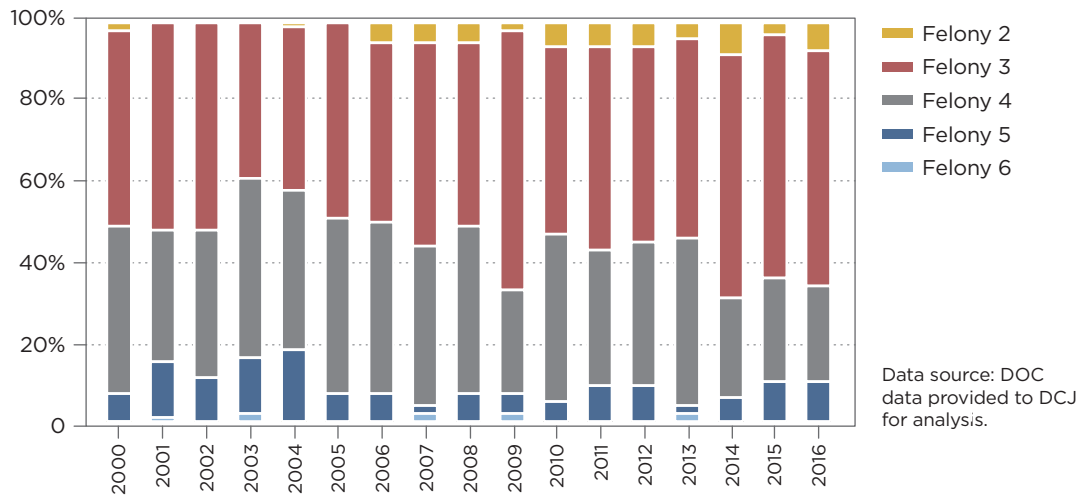
As shown in Table 3.2, the most common conviction crimes resulting in a YOS sentence since 2010 have been robbery, assault, and murder/homicide. In terms of felony class, Felony 3 and Felony 4 crimes are the most common. Felony 5 or 6 crimes rarely result in a sentence to YOS. The same is true for Felony 2 convictions (see Figure 3.3).

Table 3.2. Most serious conviction charge, FY 2010-2016

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
N	84	68	77	45	52	58	41
Accessory to a crime	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Arson	4.8%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Assault	2.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Assault 1st	15.5%	10.3%	11.7%	15.6%	17.3%	10.3%	19.5%
Assault 2nd	26.2%	17.6%	18.2%	24.4%	3.8%	13.8%	12.2%
Burglary	1.2%	4.4%	13.0%	2.2%	9.6%	8.6%	4.9%
Controlled substance	2.4%	2.9%	2.6%	2.2%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Court and corrections	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Escape	1.2%	4.4%	3.9%	0.0%	3.8%	1.7%	2.4%
Ethnic intimidation	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Extortion	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	2.4%
Harras stalking w/rest ord	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Kidnapping	0.0%	2.9%	0.0%	0.0%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Menacing	1.2%	2.9%	6.5%	0.0%	1.9%	3.4%	4.9%
Motor vehicle theft	0.0%	1.5%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%
Murder	10.7%	4.4%	5.2%	2.2%	9.6%	10.3%	9.8%
Offenses relating to custody	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%
Organized crime	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%
Other homicide	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Other related homicide	2.4%	1.5%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	1.7%	4.9%
Public peace	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Robbery (aggravated)	26.2%	36.8%	29.9%	35.6%	34.6%	41.4%	29.3%
Robbery	3.6%	1.5%	2.6%	8.9%	5.8%	1.7%	7.3%
Sexual assault	0.0%	2.9%	1.3%	0.0%	1.9%	0.0%	2.4%
Theft	1.2%	0.0%	1.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Weapons	1.2%	0.0%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Wrongs to children	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	2.2%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Data source: DOC data provided to DCJ for analysis.
The darker the color, the greater the proportion of individuals in the cell.

Figure 3.3. Felony class of most serious conviction crime for YOS intakes, FY 2000-2016 (N=1,085)



To identify areas of risk and need, YOS uses the Level of Service Inventory (LSI). The LSI is a 54 question semi-structured assessment measuring risk and protective factors in the areas of criminal history, substance abuse, education/employment, family, peer relationships, accommodation, and miscellaneous issues. Table 3.3 shows the average subscores for ten domains assessed by the LSI (the higher the score, the greater the need. YOS continues to serve a high-need population in terms of educational needs, and most have no positive and productive leisure time activities.

Table 3.3. Average subscores on the LSI for YOS intakes, FY 2014-2016

Scale	2014	2015	2016
N	51	57	41
Criminal history	38.2	44.2	40.7
Education/employment	74.1	75.1	74.1
Financial	57.8	43.9	40.2
Family/marital	31.0	32.5	22.6
Accommodation	72.1	73.4	69.4
Leisure/recreation	93.1	90.4	81.7
Companions	62.7	57.2	61.0
Alcohol/drug	41.9	38.9	39.2
Emotional/personal	18.7	25.2	27.8
Attitude/orientation	54.4	56.5	60.4
LSI total score*	27.9	27.8	26.6

Data source: DOC data provided to DCJ for analysis.

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

Other assessment instruments used by YOS also describe a high-need population. Table 3.4 outlines the academic status and needs of intakes since 2010. Note the proportion of those with a high school diploma or GED has declined from over half to approximately a third, while the proportions of those needing a GED has increased, more than doubling from 12.8% to 26.5% in the most recent year. Those who are considered functionally illiterate or who are illiterate in English represent a large proportion of the population, currently 38.2%. This represents a significant challenge for YOS administrators: the population with at least a GED requires more college classes or non-academic activities, while those with higher needs require an intense academic environment at much lower grade levels.

Table 3.4. Academic needs of YOS intakes, FY 2010-2016

FY	N	At least high school diploma or GED	Needs GED	Functional illiterate/illiterate in English	Total
2010	80	53.8%	6.3%	40.0%	100.0%
2011	67	70.1%	9.0%	20.9%	100.0%
2012	72	50.0%	12.5%	37.5%	100.0%
2013	45	66.7%	2.2%	31.1%	100.0%
2014	47	53.2%	6.4%	40.4%	100.0%
2015	39	48.7%	12.8%	38.5%	100.0%
2016	34	35.3%	26.5%	38.2%	100.0%
Total	384	55.2%	9.9%	34.9%	100.0%

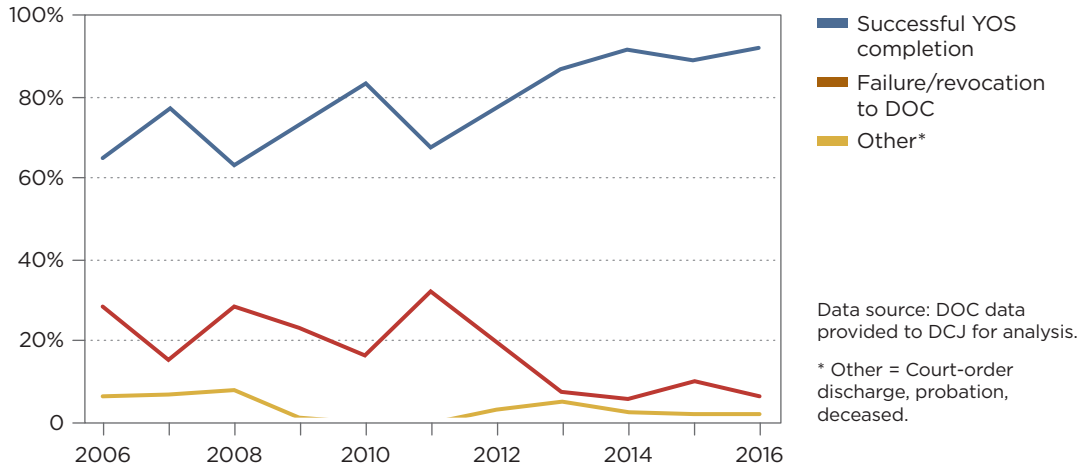
Data source: DOC data provided to DCJ for analysis.
The darker the color, the greater the proportion of individuals in the cell.

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

► *What is the program completion rate of YOS participants?*

In FY 2016, 91.9% of those who were discharged from YOS successfully completed their sentence, the highest success rate observed to date. Across the 10 years prior to FY 2013, success rates averaged 72.5%. However, this increased to 87.0% in FY 2013, and has remained around 90.0% during each subsequent year (see Figure 3.4). However, it is expected that this may decline in upcoming years due to recent policy changes concerning disciplinary sanctions, wherein behavior previously resulting in a temporary regression may now result in a permanent revocation to DOC.

Figure 3.4. YOS termination types, FY 2006-2016 (N=671)



► *What is the new filing rate of individuals released from YOS since FY 1995?*

Of 995 individuals who have successfully discharged from YOS since July 1, 1995 with at least two years of time at risk in the community, 57.6% received a new felony or misdemeanor filing within the first two years post-discharge; under half of these (44.5%) were actually convicted of a felony (see Table 3.5). About one in ten (11.7%) of those successfully released were convicted of a new violent felony crime within two years.

Table 3.5. Successful YOS releases 2-year post-release recidivism (n=935)

	New misdemeanor or felony filing*		New felony conviction		New violent felony conviction**	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
No	396	42.4%	695	74.3%	826	88.3%
Yes	539	57.6%	240	25.7%	109	11.7%
Total	935	100.0%	935	100.0%	935	100.0%

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

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

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

These recidivism rates are very encouraging, particularly the 11.7% rate of new violent crime convictions given that most YOS sentences were the result of a violent crime, and considering the very high need level of the population.

Additional findings

Organization in transition

Recent changes within YOS management (described in Section 1) seem to have resulted in feelings of unease among many YOS employees. This was expressed by survey respondents as follows:

This survey comes at a time of flux & change. Staff are nervous for the future.

Lots of changes going on with little knowledge of what's going on.

There is a lot of change and uncertainty in YOS.

Staff need empowerment. Currently going through big changes. Staff need support and reassurance.

Recent changes have put all staff on the defensive. Don't know what to expect day to day.

The staff questionnaire included two questions that may provide insight regarding the organizational culture at the time researchers were on-site collecting data. As shown in Table 3.10, the survey captured changing perceptions by staff regarding whether there was a consistent philosophy between facility administrators and the line staff who work directly with residents. Whereas more than 3 out of 4 (77.2%)⁵⁰ of staff surveyed in 2014 reported at least a somewhat consistent philosophy existed, only 54.6% of those surveyed for the current evaluation felt the same (see Table 3.6).

Table 3.6. Do you think there is a consistent philosophy between facility administrators and line staff? (n=110)

	2014 survey results	2016 survey results
Yes	42.1%	17.3%
Somewhat	35.1%	37.3%
Not really	15.8%	24.5%
No	7.0%	20.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Survey of YOS staff administered by DCJ.

⁵⁰ This compares to 86% of staff respondents who participated in the 2012 evaluation.

Comments from staff also revealed concerns about a shift in philosophy that might accompany the organizational changes.

There have been a lot of changes in command staff and workers wonder what that means for our mission.

The administration recently changed, most people were transferred out leaving us with new staff that isn't familiar with YOS

This change in the view of philosophical consistency may be linked to the shift in morale among YOS staff respondents. Few (18.3%) of the staff surveyed for the current evaluation considered the morale among YOS employees to be good or very good, whereas almost a third (30.2%) said that morale was poor or very poor (see Table 3.7). This is in striking contrast to the findings of DCJ's 2014 evaluation, in which nearly two thirds (63.4%) of the staff respondents reported that morale was good or very good, while less than 10% said that morale was poor or very poor.

Table 3.7. YOS staff perceptions of morale

	2014 survey results	2016 survey results
Very good	19.1%	2.4%
Good	44.3%	15.9%
OK	27.0%	51.6%
Poor	8.7%	21.4%
Very poor	0.9%	8.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Survey of YOS staff administered by DCJ.

Reasons cited for the current levels of morale were attributed mainly to the recent and ongoing changes in staffing and management, uncertainty regarding the future of the organization, and perceptions of organizational problems.

The vast amount of changes have negatively affected morale.

When I first arrived morale was good. Recently there has been a lot of movement of staff with no warning. Staff feel insecure of their positions. The lack of communication or "warning" of a move makes staff feel unappreciated and undervalued.

Most of the administration has been removed. No reasons given to us at the lowest level. This can be very disturbing not knowing our future or direction.

Despite the current “unsettled” environment at YOS, staff reported that they feel equipped to work with this population. A large majority of YOS staff (82.0%) respondents stated that they felt their education or experience adequately prepared them to work with this population, and 77.8% had taken specialized training to work with youthful offenders since they started working at YOS.

The importance of education

Both staff and residents acknowledge the value of the educational and technical programs at YOS. Nearly four out of 5 (79.4%) resident respondents reported that the educational opportunities were the best thing about YOS.⁵¹ When asked what activities or programs have been most useful or important to residents, education and vocational training was consistently mentioned:

The educational program has been of the most use and of the most important to me because education was the biggest reason I decided to come here.

High school, getting my diploma was very important to me, as are the college programs.

My high school diploma is worth anything I might be required to endure.

The best thing is the opportunity offered to get a better education.

In addition, residents were asked if (and why) they would choose YOS again. Many appreciated the opportunities YOS provides this population:

YOS gives a second chance and with that chance comes so many opportunities, especially education.

I chose to come here because it gave me a second chance to live my life and gave me opportunity to better my education and life skills.

The reason is, even though things are a little tough here, I feel like 4 years of hard work and getting education is better than 10 years of being a bum learning how to be a better criminal in prison.

I'm no longer gang banging and have college credits and a high school diploma thanks to YOS.

The technical and career classes have given me an education I would have never pursued.

⁵¹ Note that the most frequent answer to this question about reasons for choosing YOS again was “less time” (84.3%).

When residents were asked in the questionnaire what they would recommend for improvements to YOS, education continued to be recognized as central to the YOS experience.

Keep the schooling and the Incentive Pod. Add to the schooling with more hands on skills like plumbing, electrical and body work on automobiles.

College classes are the most important and the technical classes like welding, automotive, HVAC, CISCO and construction are useful for building skills and career choices.

Most definitely the technical/college courses

YOS administrators continue to engage community partners in job training, mock interviews, and job placement in both Phase II and Phase III. In one heartening example of these partnerships, one youth interviewed with a company that suggested he practice his interviewing skills and then return for a second meeting. The company hired the individual who later had substance abuse problems. The company put him on FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act) status to protect his job while he completes inpatient drug treatment. This company manager has been particularly proactive and invested in helping those in Phase III.

Additionally, YOS administrators have recognized the value of the popular welding program at YOS. A new hands-on, full-time, mobile welding lab is being constructed on the YOS grounds. Previously, YOS contracted with Pueblo Community College for the use of mobile welding lab but its availability was limited. YOS has also purchased five additional welding simulators as part of the expansion of the welding program.

Improvements in education have also affected the women residents at YOS. Following a recommendation from DCJ's 2014 YOS evaluation report, YOS launched a virtual classroom in March 2015 which allows the women to participate in business classes that were previously only available to the men. The women can now attend these interactive classes (the instructor wears a headset and microphone). However, this solution is no substitute for on-site teachers. Two women said this about the video streaming:

... we have limited time with teachers and they don't really come up to answer homework questions.

...and it can be difficult without having the teacher there to fully explain a question.

Also, since the 2014 evaluation, YOS has hired an additional graphics arts instructor to expand this well received program. This allows for a dual focus on both computer graphics and production. The program also is now available to women.

Improvements in the physical space

YOS administrators continue to make important efforts to improve the physical plant and expand space for residents and staff. Structural improvements since the 2014 evaluation include the following:

- The completion of a secure bathroom specifically for those under age 18
- Large window replacements that improved line-of-sight visibility on all cell doors in Building 8 (the dormitory rooms)
- The installation of a private (soundproof) attorney-client meeting room in the visiting area
- Additional security cameras were installed in Building 26 (housing the women and Phase II residents)
- Construction continues on the large multipurpose building, greatly expanding the availability of useable space for a variety of purposes, including a 10,000 square foot gymnasium, library expansion (with computers, a law library room, and a work room), and an expansion of the barber shop.

Gang concerns

The topic of gangs came up numerous times in the surveys of both staff and residents. When asked what additional training would be useful, training regarding gang affiliations and dynamics was mentioned by several staff members. Some staff felt that gang issues were on the rise. One staff member stated:

.... Right now, we have some very hard gang members that should not be here.

Residents also expressed concerns about gang activity. When asked what the worst things about YOS were, several residents mentioned problems with gang behavior.

The inappropriate behavior of some offenders, many affiliated gang members.

Many staff members mentioned the desire to obtain training on gang-related issues, reflecting what some perceived as an increase in gang activity at YOS. YOS administrators reported similar concerns, and new policies may be implemented regarding gang activity, including disrespectful behavior toward staff.

Mental health services

In prior evaluations (2002, 2004), DCJ found a lack of mental health services at YOS. While this was not a finding of the 2012 evaluation, the topic came up again during the 2014 and this 2016 evaluation. During the most recent survey, several staff members mentioned the

need for enhanced mental health programming when asked how they would improve YOS. One employee stated:

I would get back to programming, offering more cognitive re-direction classes to change negative behavior. I would also address the mental health issues because many offenders could benefit from better mental health services and groups.

Additionally, several staff members expressed a desire for more training regarding mental health and cognitive programs.

Fortunately, YOS has successfully filled the social worker position associated with the sex offender treatment program.

Programming for females

A common criticism of YOS is the differential programming available to the female residents. The separation of men and women is a fundamental safety decision; comingling of males and females requires the supervision of both male and female staff. But this separation leads to inequities, and makes female-only programming cost inefficient given that it applies to less than 4% of the YOS population.

Problems with the inequities are apparent in DOC's 2014 YOS report. The report describes Bible study and sewing as central to female-specific programming, including providing the women with the "opportunity" to repair YOS offender clothing.

YOS has female-specific programs and services designed to better meet the needs of the female offender population and male-specific programs designed to better meet the needs of the male population. Female offenders participate in many group sessions that are geared specifically towards female adolescent development. Services by outside agencies are provided in conjunction with mental health staff to ensure psychotherapy is reinforced by all providers and that continuity of care issues are protected. There is currently a Chaplain's bible study held in the female unit on Tuesday evening. In addition to studying the Bible, the group discusses life issues and problems. Once a month, Epiphany holds a reunion in the female unit as well. A sewing program was implemented by one of the YOS academic teachers in September 2009. This class has continued to teach skills from basic personal sewing, to professional seamstress and commercial upholstery. Female offenders who complete the sewing class are eligible to repair YOS offender clothing. Construction of a Life Skills Lab was completed during FY11. This lab is available to the female offenders at least one day per week, providing an opportunity for the offenders to learn daily meal preparation, budgeting, shopping, cooking and cleaning.

When asked if they would still choose YOS over adult prison, half of the women surveyed indicated they would not choose YOS (3 of 6). This is in stark contrast to the male residents;

only 15.8% of the males expressed the same sentiment. Women gave the following reasons for why they would not choose YOS again if given the opportunity:

I chose YOS because of the benefits the pamphlet claimed the females have at YOS. But that was not true.

My reasoning for my answer is the females get treated very unfairly. We are overlooked in everything because we are such a small group. We do not get the full benefit of the program like they promised before we got here.

If I could have gotten a less sentence to DOC I would take it in a heartbeat due to not enough females. We have no movement, no privileges and only limited class/college opportunities.

Prison would have been a lot easier than dealing with all the drama and being constantly accused by staff. In prison I could have done my own thing.

We don't have any activities in this program at all. The program that we have here is called Iron man and they force us to participate even if we don't want to. It's supposed to be life skills.

I barely get to do anything and I don't like how the boys get more opportunities just because they are a bigger group.

The few numbers of women sentenced to YOS will always pose a significant challenge regarding their programming. Video streaming of the men's educational classes into the building where the women reside was introduced in March of 2015. The women surveyed had mixed opinions on the usefulness of this approach. Some indicated that having face to face contact with teachers would be more beneficial, while others felt that it was useful. In addition, the recent expansion of women in the management ranks at YOS may help address what some of the YOS female residents experience as sexism.

Conclusion

In sum, the YOS operations are generally consistent with statute and likely represent the intent of the drafters of the original YOS legislation.⁵² However, the data collected for this evaluation occurred at a time of considerable organizational change at YOS. Concerns about the lack of consequences for negative behavior have resulted in a new emphasis on accountability by the administration, of both staff and residents. As with prior evaluation findings, education/vocational training is valued by both staff and residents; over 80% of residents said they would choose YOS again because of these opportunities. YOS

⁵² Prior DCJ evaluations in 2002 and 2004 did not make this finding. However, alignment with statute has been a consistent finding in subsequent evaluations.

administrators continue to expand the programming, including video-streaming for the women residents, and the multipurpose building (scheduled to open in the spring of 2017) will further enhance these efforts.

The majority of YOS staff (80.2%) reported that they consistently see themselves as role models, and another 17.5% saw themselves as role models “sometimes.” With a strong staff and administration, and the continued expansion of programs and activities, YOS is positioned to positively impact the lives of many offenders. The proportion of offenders successfully completing their sentence at YOS has remained around 90.0% over the past three years. The 2-year felony reconviction rate after program completion is 25.7%, and only 11.7% were reconvicted of a violent felony crime within 2 years. These are very positive outcomes, especially given the very serious nature of the YOS population.

Section 4:

Recommendations

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

1. The average age of incoming YOS participants has been increasing as a result of statutory modifications regarding YOS eligibility. YOS intakes are now, on average, nearly 19 years old. YOS administrators should continue their efforts, currently underway, to examine existing educational programming and staffing to ensure that it is relevant to an older population. In addition, over one-third (38.2%) of YOS intakes in 2016 were functionally illiterate, reflecting the need for a wide range of educational programming necessary to meet the needs of this older population.

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

2. The recent turnover of management staff at YOS has resulted in an organization in transition. Administrators should make every effort to communicate their vision and expectations to line and program staff to ensure that staff morale and the YOS program mission are not compromised as YOS evolves.
3. Efforts to fill the vacant mental health position must be prioritized by YOS administrators. This recommendation was made in 2012, 2014 and now again in 2016. This is a critically important position, and survey comments from staff and residents reflect a broad recognition of this gap in services. Administrators should work with human resource officials to identify ways to attract qualified and committed applicants.
4. Concerns about gang activity were voiced by both staff and residents. The current review of YOS programming by DOC administrators as it relates to gang activity should continue, and the historical practice of not recognizing gang-related behavior (described in the 2014 YOS evaluation report) should be reconsidered. Considerable research exists regarding gang intervention programming,⁵³ and this material should be reviewed and incorporated into new programming at YOS.

⁵³ See for example <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/231116.pdf>.

5. Programming for the women continues to challenge YOS administrators despite ongoing efforts to improve services for this population. With the upcoming completion of the multipurpose building, efforts should focus on expanding the women's access to programming and recreational activities.
6. The YOS management team should continue its work building and maintaining excellent relationships with community stakeholder employers who assist with job fairs, resume/interview skills, and hiring.
7. YOS administrators should carefully document the outcomes of the new "youth transfers" pursuant to Senate Bill 15-182. This bill allows for the identification and placement of certain individuals who were directly sentenced to prison to be placed in YOS if DOC administrators believe they could benefit from the program.

Appendix A:

Resident questionnaire

YOS Evaluation: Resident Survey

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

1. Gender a. Male b. Female

2. Age _____

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

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

4. How long have you been in YOS? _____ Years _____ Months

5. What was your original DOC sentence length? _____ Years _____ Don't know

6. What is your YOS sentence length? _____ Years

7. What level of privileges have you reached? (please choose ONE)
 - a. Disciplinary Level (DL)
 - b. Orientation Level
 - c. Peer Level
 - d. Pledge Level 1
 - e. Pledge Level 2
 - f. Pledge Level 3
 - g. Pledge Level 4
 - h. Phoenix Level

8. Why did you choose YOS over adult Prison?

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

What is the reason for your answer above?

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

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

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

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

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

If yes, why?

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

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

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

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

16. FEMALES ONLY: Is the video streaming of educational classes useful to you?

- a. Yes
- b. No

Why?

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

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

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

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

21. What suggestions do you have for improving YOS?

Thank you very much for your time completing this survey!

Appendix B:
Staff questionnaire

YOS Evaluation: Staff Survey

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

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

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

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

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

7. How long have you been working with the Colorado DOC? ____years ____months
8. How long have you been working at the YOS? ____years ____months
9. Prior to this job, did you have experience working with juveniles?
 - a. Yes b. No

10. If yes, did this experience include juvenile offenders?
a. Yes b. No

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

11. Do you feel that your education/experience adequately prepared you for working with this population?
a. Yes b. Somewhat c. Not really d. No

What additional training would be useful?

12. Do you expect to finish your career at YOS?
a. Yes b. Probably c. Maybe d. No

13. Do you see yourself as a role model for the YOS residents?
a. Yes b. Sometimes c. Not really

14. Have you taken specialized training courses to work with youth offenders since beginning your work at YOS?
a. Yes b. No

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

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

16. How would you describe the current level of staff morale at YOS?
a. Very poor b. Poor c. OK d. Good e. Very good

Please explain your answer.

17. Do you think there is adequate communication across **shifts and phases**?
a. Yes b. somewhat c. not really d. No

Please explain your answer.

18. Do you think there is adequate communication between **staff and administration**?
a. Yes b. somewhat c. not really d. No

Please explain your answer.

19. Do the goals and philosophies of YOS differ from those of DOC?
a. Yes b. No

If yes, please describe how they differ.

20. Do you think there is a consistent philosophy between facility administrators and line staff who work directly with residents (note, this is separate from communication referred to in Question 17)?
- a. Yes b. Somewhat c. Not really d. No

Please explain your answer.

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

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey!