

YouthZone 2013-2016 Program Evaluation Highlights

Evaluation Purpose

YouthZone’s view of positive youth development is that its staff and all members of Garfield, Pitkin, and West Eagle County communities have a responsibility for and benefit from the well-being of youth. This is especially true for young people who are struggling with fitting in at school, who have trouble with the law, or suffer from emotional or behavioral problems. Success with helping them overcome their problems means they can enjoy the same good life as their peers and that their communities can enjoy the contributions all young people can make to the lives of every resident. This evaluation is about youth served, but it is equally intended to empower their communities to contribute where they can to benefit youth and the quality of life of every person young and old.

Young People in the 2013-2016 Evaluation

Evaluation took a comprehensive look at 579 youth for its 2013-2016 statistical studies. In this sample from all clients served, 34.0% were female. The average age was 16, with 4.7% 12 years or younger and 3.5% age 18. Most clients were Caucasian (46.5%) or Latino (44.8%). In the sample, 45.3% were living with both of their birth parents and an additional 49.1% were living with one parent or a parent and a stepparent. 5.2% came to YouthZone

from law enforcement, probation, another community agency, or were self-referred. Another 11.9% were referred by county courts, 16.6% from district courts, and 66.3% from municipal courts.

Youth Screening for Adjustment and Behavior

Youth completed a 60-item survey when they began and ended services. These were scored in five topics.

YouthZone Screening Scale
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use (using illegal and illicit substances)
Optimism and Problem Solving (Hope for the future and confidence in solving life problems)
School and Community Involvement (school engagement and participating in activities)
Delinquency and Aggression (antisocial attitudes and behavior)
Self-Deprecation (trauma and abuse-related self-devaluation)

The table below shows how clients differed in these scores among the communities served by YouthZone. For example, youth responses showed that the use of alcohol and other drugs was greater in Aspen area communities. Optimism & Problem Solving scores were much the same

City Areas	Priority Youth Issues
Aspen, Basalt, Snowmass Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistically significant greater prevalence of “Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use” and more “Self-Deprecation,” or self-disapproval among youth than in some other community areas Similar to other city areas in developmental challenges with “Optimism,” “Delinquency and Aggression” Youth benefit from greater assets related to stronger “School-Community Involvement”
Carbondale Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Somewhat lower “School-Community Involvement” than in some city areas Overall, similar to other city areas in developmental challenges with “Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use,” “Optimism,” “Delinquency and Aggression,” and “Self-Deprecation”
Glenwood Springs, New Castle, Silt Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Somewhat lower “School-Community Involvement” than in some city areas Overall, similar to other city areas in developmental challenges with “Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use,” “Optimism,” “Delinquency and Aggression,” and “Self-Deprecation”
Rifle, Parachute Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Significantly less prevalence of “Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use” than in other city areas Similar to other city areas in developmental challenges with “Optimism,” “Delinquency and Aggression,” and “Self-Deprecation” Greater “School-Community Involvement” among youth

from area to area. School & Community Involvement was a strength in Aspen and Rifle as compared to other community areas. Delinquency and Aggression behaviors were equivalent area to area. Self-Deprecation was a more significant problem for Aspen area youth, a finding sometimes associated with higher levels of substance use. Analysis demonstrated that YouthZone clients from different communities all tended to benefit equally from YouthZone services.

The evaluation showed not only that services must be adjusted to match communities; programs would need to adjust to the characteristics of clients:

- More girls were referred than in the past. Fewer children under 13 have been enrolled in the last three years. The mean age is rising slightly.
- Data showed girls had more arrests for alcohol and drug issues and miscellaneous (fraud and

forgery) than boys did. Boys were arrested more often than girls were for property-related offenses.

- Caucasian youths were at greater risk for a substance-related charge. Latino clients were referred more often with offenses against other persons and less often regarding property-related offenses

Program Outcomes

Consistently, over the last six years, YouthZone’s programs and services have had positive outcomes on *Screening* factors empirically linked with legal reoffending. Overall, positive outcomes have been sustained from 2013 to 2016 as shown in the table below.

YouthZone Screening Scale	Intake Screening Mean	Discharge Screening Mean ¹
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use	23.8	22.2
Optimism and Problem Solving	21.0	19.5
School and Community Involvement	15.24	14.7
Delinquency and Aggression	15.5	14.2
Self-Deprecation	9.4	9.3

¹ All mean changes statistically significant

The 2016 evaluation found better results on the *Screening’s* Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug use scale across all offense referral types than occurred in the previous program evaluation. On the other hand, success with improving School and Community Involvement was less in the 2016 sample as compared to 2013.

Clients involved in Restorative Justice program showed very favorable responses to their participation. Youth assigned to Useful Public Service reported positive change in all areas of emotion and behavior assessed by the *Screening* tool.

It is critically important to establish that YouthZone services are equitable, that they work about as well with younger and older clients, boys, and girls, and youth of different ethnicities. Evaluation found YouthZone services created benefits that were equal for youth of all ages. Some differences in program benefits for boys and girls suggested the importance of considering gender when individualizing programs for boys and girls. Similar benefits were seen for youth of different ethnicities.

Youth Reoffending For boys and girls, above average *Screening* scores predicted the likelihood that they would reoffend before completing their YouthZone Program. Less than one-in-ten of enrolled clients reoffended during their months with YouthZone. Statistically, boys were more likely to reoffend than girls. Youth age was not correlated with reoffending. Older, but not younger, Latino clients were almost twice as likely to be arrested again before their YouthZone services ended. Evaluation found most reoffending youth were marijuana users, and that these clients were about twice as likely to be rearrested as non-users were.

Youth Substance Use Experience and youth surveying have both shown that client substance use contributed substantially to the causes for their referral, affected progress in services, and increased the likelihood they would get in trouble again. Evaluation looked closely at some facts about youth substance use to help inform case managers and programs.

- Boys and girls were at equivalent levels of substance use at intake and girls' reduction in substance use was nearly identical to boys by the time they left YouthZone services.
- Among the 271 youth who came to YouthZone with a substance-related offense most made substantial gains in three of five *Screening* scales. They reduced their substance use, though did not eliminate it, their Optimism & Problem Solving self-assessments showed that their sense of self-efficacy rose and the Delinquency and Aggression score improved.
- The Substance Use Class for substance-using clients was highly effective. Substance use declined and except for Self-Deprecation, other areas of risk and protective attitudes and behavioral improved.

During 2013-2016 there has been a shift among clients to greater consumption of substances, with fewer clients having no marijuana use and some using it more regularly. Now, essentially every other boy and girl at intake will be a substance user of one degree or another. About one-in-four clients 16 years and older were dependent/habitual users. Among YouthZone clients, ethnic status did not seem to influence their access to and use of marijuana nor does their type of family.

When youth's behavioral and legal problems are intertwined with their use of marijuana, their condition when arrested and referred to diversion was more serious and, though they did progress toward a more typical youth development during diversion, ended services with lower levels of adjustment and greater risk for reoffending than non- or occasionally-using clients.

The YouthZone client who was using marijuana regularly and sought its intoxicating effects – as compared to the youth who never used or only experimented occasionally with peers in a social setting – did indeed benefit from their program services, but concluded their involvement with more behavioral risk factors present that were seen among non-users at the time of their enrollment. These

statistical facts are an additional argument for diversion programming specifically for and with an evidence-base of effectiveness with young people using marijuana regularly.

Client Histories of Trauma and Neglect In a special report, evaluation looked closely at clients with histories of traumatic experiences, extended toxic stress, and neglect. Review yielded the concerning result that the weightier a client's trauma history – as seen from their perspective – the more troubled they were in terms of alcohol use, lack of hope, school involvement, delinquency, and personal valuing. Trauma-affected youth not only had more serious problems at intake, but even after showing progress in their programs, showed more adjustment problems than non-trauma affected youth at the time of their discharge.

These relationships were so striking statistically that the supplemental report recommended YouthZone considering a special track of programs for those who are been arrested and then found with a trauma history. Knowing a youth's trauma history and providing the correct intervention may be essential to the prevention of delinquency.

Conclusion

For the worried and frustrated youth in trouble and for their family, it is deeply reassuring to be received at YouthZone by a caring case manager working in a well-run organization dedicated to positive youth development. Effective services mean also that programs are validated, individualized, and are equitable according to the young person's background. Prevention of delinquency is more than providing informed, effective support to individual teens and their parents. It involves informing, inspiring, and challenging communities – one by one – in the unique qualities of their own youth and building capacity to reduce social and economic risk factors and promoting meaningful protective factors for youth. Results of this evaluation confirm the value of YouthZone's efforts for its troubled youth as individuals, family members, and residents of their communities.