

### Youth Program Services: Performance, Equity, and Continuity

**Evaluation Purpose** YouthZone provides family strengthening services for youth and their parents in Garfield and Pitkin and West Eagle Counties. This independent evaluation report summarizes findings from a study of youths who in the majority came to Youthzone with a legal problem. It addresses these three questions:

1. How successful are programs with reducing risk factors that predict delinquency?
2. How equitable are programs in achieving similar outcomes for females and males, younger and older, and youth of different ethnicities?
3. How consistent is Youthzone in achieving desired youth outcomes?

External evaluation of Youthzone programs began in 1998. This is the seventh evaluation report in a series of triannual assessments of youth programs.

#### **Perspectives on Evaluation of Youth Diversion Programs**

During the 20 years since Youthzone's first formal evaluation, youth and their families have changed along with society and lifestyles. For example, relatively few girls were arrested and referred in 1998, while today, they represent more than 35 percent of referrals for diversion services. So too, juvenile crime is treated differently today than two decades ago with more attention to "serious" violations and less to "minor" infractions of the law. Nevertheless, each year, 1000's of children and teens are still arrested in Colorado communities and processed through one or another local courts.

For more than a decade in the late 90's and through about 2010 youth arrests in Colorado for violent crimes were declining. Since, these arrests in Colorado have been similar year-over-year or increasing slowly. Arrests for theft and property crimes have declined steadily as have arrests for drug-related offenses. Arrest rates differ, however, from county to county in Colorado.

In Garfield County, there has been little or no reduction in arrest rates for all types of infractions for more than a decade. Substance use/possession rates have risen about 25% during the last 10 years. These epidemiological data confirm common experience, that the issues of preventing delinquency and reoffending after arrest have not been resolved.

The root causes of juvenile crime are multiple and dynamic. The driving forces are better understood now than two decades in the past. While the causes of delinquency have always been considered varied, now, they have been specifically identified through research as risk factors existing simultaneously in communities, in families, in schools, and with a young person's peers. For example, in Garfield County, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment determined through youth survey data that the availability of substances as well as community laws and social norms (attitudes of parents and other adults) favorable toward substance use were much greater locally than in other areas of Colorado.

Social science has recently begun reporting factors in juvenile diversion programs that predict achieving successful gains in youth behavioral adjustment. Key performance outcome indicators include program completion, behavioral and attitudinal changes during program services, and success with diverting arrested youth from reoffending and further involvement in the justice system. Generally, research has not been conclusive regarding program best practices for impact on these key performance indicators. Nevertheless, it suggests, for example, that strengths-based, "therapeutic" interventions are more effective approaches to juvenile diversion than are "control-oriented" case management approaches involving check-in and behavioral monitoring with threats of consequences for non-compliance. Currently, effectiveness of Colorado's juvenile delinquency prevention programs is only estimated. Data are limited on program best practices that modify risk factors and

prevent reoffending. Even less is known about whether these are of equal benefit to youths of different genders, and social, ethnic, and demographic characteristics. More should and can be done. This Youthzone evaluation contributes to the success of its programs for youth and families, and offers information for sister organizations involved in juvenile diversion.

This report follows new research on effective juvenile diversion by identifying factors that decrease youths' risk

of failure, learning whether Youthzone is sustaining an effective approach with these factors, and finally determining if youths of different backgrounds have an equal chance of reestablishing a typical positive youth development and avoiding future problems. It suggests evidence-based ways of looking at common challenges and helps YouthZone be as accountable as possible to its funders, families, and the communities it serves.

## Evaluating Community-Based Youth Diversion Programs

**Evaluation Methods** Youthzone supplements usual youth intake procedures with information from the *YouthZone Screening for Positive Youth Development*® (“*Screening*”). The *Screening* tool covers a wide range of youth risk factors, e.g., trouble coping with stress and doing poorly in school. It measures internal and external assets – protective factors, e.g., positive self-esteem and resisting alcohol and drug use, that buffer influences causing delinquency. It contains 60 questions, of which seven are identifying and demographic, two ask the youth to assess the quality of their *Screening* answers, and 51 inquire about their assets and risks. It has a 7<sup>th</sup>-grade reading level and takes about 15 minutes to complete online.

The *Screening* measures the five factors listed in Fig. 1 that have been shown statistically to be sensitive to program effectiveness, completion, and client recidivism. A supplement provides trauma indicators in the areas of depression, self-destructive feelings, sexual victimization, and parents/adult rejection.

**Fig. 1. The *Screening* Tool Scores**

### **Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use**

Measures the youth's substance use, the potential harm of use, risk behaviors closely associated with extent of use (sexual activity and contact with police), and peer use of substances.

### **Optimism and Problem Solving**

Measures the youth's resilience in coping with setbacks in life, confidence, self-efficacy, and important skills for solving problems and setting and achieving goals, and optimism about his or her future.

### **School and Community Involvement**

Measures the youth's commitment to achieving in school, attendance, grades, and satisfaction with school, as well as his or her involvement in non-academic activities in school and the community.

### **Delinquency and Aggression**

Measures the youth's antisocial outlook toward rules and other people, as well as their readiness to engage in verbal and physical conflict and tolerance of use of frankly dangerous substances, e.g., illicitly obtained medication.

### **Self-Deprecation**

Measures the youth's perception of him or herself as a victim of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, tolerance of substance use, and thoughts and plans to attempt suicide.

Youth program staffs plan services according to *Screening* score norms compiled from 100's of previously-screened youth that identify a youngster as “at-risk.” Some high-risk youths are referred for formal assessment, e.g., those with high Alcohol or Self-Deprecation scores, trauma, or suicide risk.

In the results sections below, this report presents evaluation findings and interpretations.

## Results Section 1. Characteristics of Youth in the Evaluation Sample

This section of the report concentrates on 662 young people enrolled in Youthzone services between 2017 and 2019 and who completed a pre- and a post-*Screening*, both with valid results.

**Evaluation Group Demographics** The 662 children and adolescents – the “evaluation study sample” – were 35.5% female and 64.5% male. Only 5.1% were 12 years or younger and just 4.4% were 18. The mean age was 16 years. At intake, boys were slightly older than were girls.

Most youths (74.1%) attended a public middle or high school, with 1.4% home schooled, 15.6% in alternative school, 2.1% in a GED program and 5.0 % were not currently enrolled in school. (Some percentages do not add to 100 because of missing data.) Boys and girls were equally likely to be enrolled in a public school. Older youths were more often not attending a regular public school. Clients were 45.5% Caucasian or 43.0% Latino/Latina. Caucasian and Latino/Latina youth were of similar ages. Boys and girls were equally likely to be born in the US, with 12.3% born in another country.

The family structure of referred youth ranged widely, nevertheless, 38.4% were living with both of their birth parents and an additional 44.1% were living with one parent and a stepparent, in joint custody with their divorced mother and father, or in a single birth parent home. Only 5.1% were living in a setting where neither birth parent was present. Girls and boys were equally likely to come from a home in which both of their biological parents were present. Latino/Latina youth were more likely to be living with both of their birth parents than were Caucasian clients.

**Source of Referral to YouthZone** Of 662 youth, 0.8% came to YouthZone directly from law enforcement. Probation officers referred another 4.5%, 10.4% were referred by county courts, 9.2% from district courts, and 50.5% from municipal courts. Schools referred 14.1% of enrolled youths (as compared to 1% in 2016), and the remainder came on referral of other community agencies or were self-referred. Girls were more likely than boys to be referred by a probation officer. Ethnicity was unrelated to referral sources.

**Community of Residence** Clients in the evaluation study sample came from 26 communities across Garfield, Pitkin and West Eagle Counties and beyond. As shown in Table 1, those in the immediate area were most often from Glenwood Springs, Carbondale, and Rifle. Girls and boys were equally likely to be referred from these cities. Caucasian youth were seen less often than Latino/Latina youth in the Carbondale-Glenwood Springs area, but in about equal numbers elsewhere.

**Table 1. Youth Community of Residence (Garfield and Pitkin Counties)**

City Areas	Frequency	Percent
Aspen Area	37	5.9
Basalt Area	28	4.4
Carbondale Area	153	21.1
Glenwood Springs Area	156	24.7
New Castle-Silt Area	62	9.8
Rifle Area	129	20.4
Parachute Area	86	13.6
<b>Total of all communities</b>	651	100.0

The immediate needs of referred clients were not the same in each city area. Table 2 provides a snapshot into how youth behavioral challenges varied and may suggest the importance of ordering program priorities to match local need. Youth reports of use of alcohol and other drugs were greater in Aspen area communities as were

Optimism & Problem-Solving scores. Carbondale statistics for youth-reported problems followed closely those from the Aspen area. School & Community Involvement was a strength in the Rifle area as compared to other community areas. Delinquency and Aggression and Self-Deprecation were similar across city areas.

**Table 2. Youth Community of Residence**

City Areas	Priority Youth Issues
Aspen, Basalt, Snowmass Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistically significant greater prevalence of "Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use." Clients expressed greater "Optimism and Problem-Solving" as compared to</li> </ul>

City Areas	Priority Youth Issues
	youth in other community areas. Aspen youth report the highest substance use scores in the four city areas.
Carbondale Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carbondale clients were similar to Aspen area youth in their reported substance use, showing higher rates than in other city areas. Like Aspen area youths, Carbondale youths expressed higher “Optimism and Problem-Solving” as compared to youth in other community areas.</li> </ul>
Glenwood Springs, New Castle, Silt Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall, similar to other city areas in developmental challenges with “Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use,” “Optimism,” “Delinquency and Aggression,” and “Self-Deprecation.”</li> </ul>
Rifle, Parachute Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall, similar to other city areas in developmental challenges with “Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use,” “Optimism,” “Delinquency and Aggression,” and “Self-Deprecation.”</li> <li>Greater “School-Community Involvement” than among youth in other city areas.</li> </ul>

## Results Section 2. Youth and their Legal Offenses

**Youths’ Type of Legal Offense** In the study sample, about 84.9% of all youths in the evaluation sample arrived at YouthZone with a recent legal offense. In Table 3 these offenses have been grouped together across sexes,

age, ethnicities and communities to assist with gaining an overview of the type and seriousness of youths’ legal problems and to facilitate statistical analysis.

**Table 3. Type of Youth Legal Offenses at Intake**

Offense Type	Frequency	Percent
Offense – Alcohol and Drug Related (possession, use, distribution)	318	56.6%
Offense – Petty Theft (theft of item with value less than \$500)	90	16.0%
Offense – Property (criminal mischief, trespass, motor vehicle theft, breaking and entering)	64	11.4%
Offense – Person (assault and battery, harassment and menacing, use of weapons, resisting arrest, sexual assault)	71	12.6%
Offense – Traffic	9	1.6%
Offense – Miscellaneous (forgery, fraud, conspiracy)	10	1.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Statistical analysis found highly significant differences in charges against boys and girls. For example, girls had more arrests involving offenses against another person (e.g., assault) and petty theft. Boys were more often referred with substance misuse and property (vandalism) offences.

There were differences statistically among ethnicities and offenses. Latino/Latina ethnicity was associated with more offenses against another person. Caucasian youths had more property offenses.

A youth’s family type could be important for planning and evaluating services, however, evaluation found that

this factor was unrelated to charges incurred by youth as well as most other aspects of diversion services.

Traffic-related charges aside, there were significant differences in the average age of clients only with substance-related charges. More than 60% of youth 16 or older came with substance use involvement. Younger youths were more often involved with offenses against a person or property.

Evaluation also examined offense data to determine if communities in the YouthZone catchment area were using different criteria to charge youth. Analysis found few statistically significant differences across communities

in the offense for which youth were arrested. In the Aspen-Carbondale areas there were more arrests for substance-related problems, though arrests for all other types of charges occurred less often in these two community areas. Officials in city areas arrested youth in equal

measures for offenses against person, petty theft, property, and traffic. By far, the most common reason for a boy or girl to be arrested in the Youthzone catchment area was possession, use, or sales of illegal substances.

### Results Section 3. Intake-to-Discharge Changes in Screening Scores

When all 662 clients who completed valid pre- and post-*Screenings* were compared on their five intake and discharge scores, very highly significant improvements

were revealed. Pre and post means and significance of statistics are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4 Statistical Significance of Pre-Post YouthZone Screening Score Changes for All Clients**

(This analysis included all 662 youths combined. It shows the statistical significance of changes in their mean intake and discharge scores on the *Screening* survey)

YouthZone Screening Scale <sup>1</sup>	Intake Screening Mean	Discharge Screening Mean	Significance of F Statistic <sup>2</sup>
Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use	23.7	21.5	****
Optimism and Problem Solving	21.5	18.5	****
School and Community Involvement	15.34	13.3	****
Delinquency and Aggression	15.6	14.0	****
Self-Deprecation	9.6	9.3	***

<sup>1</sup> Higher scores indicate lower functioning in the *Screening* score scales

<sup>2</sup> Statistical significance levels: \*\*\* = p < .01, "highly significant," \*\*\*\* = p < .001 "very highly significant"

It is critically important to establish that Youthzone services are equitable, that they work about as well for younger and older, for both boys, and girls, and youth of different ethnicities. The following comparisons help determine program equity.

#### Pre-to-Post Screening Score Change and Age

- *Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use* As expected, older clients had higher levels of initial and final substance use than did younger clients. The group of above-the-median age clients was at a greater risk for substance use than were younger clients even at the end of services. Change pre-to-post for these two age groups was the same. Both improved to an equal and statistically significant extent.
- *Optimism and Problem-Solving* Younger and older clients had similar scores initially on the Optimism and Problem-Solving scale. Both younger and older clients improved equally on the *Screening*.
- *School and Community Involvement* Younger clients initially reported slightly higher School and

Community Involvement scores, but both older and younger clients made very similar gains over time.

- *Delinquency and Aggression* Younger and older clients scored similarly on the Delinquency and Aggression scale when they enrolled. By the time they had completed services, however, younger clients had shown significantly greater improvement pre-post.
- *Self-Deprecation* Younger and older youth reported similar levels of Self-Deprecation at intake and both groups showed similar degrees of improvement during services.

YouthZone services created benefits that were equal for youth of all ages. Evaluation studied other client characteristics as these may have influenced their intake and discharge screening scores.

#### Pre-to-Post Screening Change and Gender

- *Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use* 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.

- *Optimism and Problem-Solving* Girls reported slightly higher Optimism and Problem Solving when they enrolled than boys did and girls improved their scores more than boys by the end of services.
- *School and Community Involvement* Girls reported slightly lower initial scores on School and Community Involvement than boys did. There were no differences, however, in the extent of positive change pre-to-post between the sexes. Nevertheless, at the conclusion of services, girls still scored more favorably than boys on this *Screening* scale.
- *Delinquency and Aggression* Girls showed higher scores on Delinquency and Aggression at intake, but then showed more improvement over time than did boys.
- *Self-Deprecation* Girls initially showed more sadness, depression, and low self-esteem than did boys. From pre-post their self-assessment improved more, but girls still showed greater Self-Deprecation at the end of services than boys.

groups improved during services and to an equal extent.

- *Optimism and Problem-Solving* The three evaluation ethnic groups: Caucasian, Latino/Latina, and Other reported similar scores at intake on the Optimism and Problem-Solving scale. All three progressed during services and to an equal extent.
- *School and Community Involvement* Latino/Latina youth, more than Caucasians or Other ethnicities, scored higher initially on School and Community Involvement. These groups improved in equal degrees by the end of services.
- *Delinquency and Aggression* Caucasian youth had higher scores in this area than did the other ethnic groups, and showed more improvement from pre-post, though all three ethnic groups reduced delinquent attitudes and behavior significantly.
- *Self-Deprecation* Only small differences were seen initially in Self-Deprecation scores among ethnic groups. The small changes pre-post that were observed were to a similar degree for all three groups.

Some differences in program benefits for boys and girls suggest the importance of considering gender when individualizing programs for boys and girls.

### Pre-to-Post Screening Change and Ethnicity

- *Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use* When they came to YouthZone, the level of substance abuse involvement was the same for Caucasian, Latino/Latina, and youth of other ethnicities. All

### Pre-to-Post Screening Change and Type of Legal Offense

Understanding YouthZone’s effectiveness in changing the adjustment and risk behaviors of clients with different types of legal offenses is also important to planning and evaluating services. Statistical results of this study issue are arranged in Table 5.

**Table 5. Statistical Significance of Pre-Post Screening Change Within Type of Legal Offense**

(This analysis included 562 youth separated into type of intake legal offense – the columns. It shows the statistical significance of changes in their mean intake and discharge scores on the *Screening* survey)

YouthZone Screening Scale	Significance of F Statistic for Pre-Post Change			
	Substance-Related Offense?	Property Offense?	Person Offense?	Petty Theft Offense?
Alcohol, Tobacco, & Other Drug Use	****	***	**	***
Optimism & Problem Solving	****	****	****	****
School & Community Involvement	****	ns	**	***
Delinquency & Aggression	****	****	****	****
Self-Deprecation	*	ns	ns	*

<sup>1</sup> Statistical significance levels: ns = “not significant,” \* = p <.10 “borderline significant,” \*\* = p <.05 “significant,” \*\*\* = p <.01, “highly significant” \*\*\*\* = p <.001 “very highly significant”

These results can be appreciated by looking down each of the Significance columns in Table 5 for each offense type:

- *Substance Offense Youth* The 318 youths who came to YouthZone with a substance-related offense (see Table 3) made substantial gains in four-of-five *Screening* scales. They reduced their substance use, though did not eliminate it. Their Optimism & Problem-Solving, School, and Delinquency self-assessments improved and there was marginal improvement in Self-Deprecation.

- *Property-Offense Youth* 64 youths with a property or 58 with a person offense showed similar improvements in adjustment and behavior as those with a substance-related offense.
- *Person Offense Youth* Youths referred with an offense against another person progressed with reducing risk behavior during services.
- *Petty Theft Youth* The 133 petty theft offense clients improved on all five *Screening* scales: Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Use, Optimism & Problem Solving, School and Community Involvement, Delinquency and Aggression, and Self-Deprecation.

## Results Section 4. Outcomes of Individual Youthzone Programs

Results Section 3 presented outcomes for all youth combined from all Youthzone programs. Section 4 studies youth outcomes for individual Youthzone programs. Evaluation measured the significance of pre-to-post

*Screening* scale changes among just those clients enrolled in one of four programs. Programs were selected when they had included at least 30 clients with valid pre- and post-*Screening* surveys. Statistical results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6. Statistical Significance of Pre-Post *Screening* Score Change for Five Individual Programs**

(This analysis compares pre-post changes on the *Screening* tools scales for clients who were enrolled in specific Youthzone programs total attendance of 30+ clients during the evaluation period)

<i>Screening</i> Scale	Significance of F Statistic for Individual YouthZone Programs			
	Seeking Safety (N = 56)	Substance Use: Class (N = 98)	Restorative Justice (N = 126)	Saturday Useful Public Service (N = 142)
Alcohol, Tobacco, & Drug Use	****	****	**	****
Optimism & Problem Solving	****	****	****	****
School & Community Involvement	***	****	****	****
Delinquency & Aggression	****	****	****	****
Self-Deprecation	ns	ns	ns	ns

<sup>1</sup> Statistical significance levels: ns = “not significant,” \* = p <.10 “borderline significant,” \*\* = p <.05 “significant,” \*\*\* = p <.01 “highly significant” \*\*\*\* = p <.001 “very highly significant”

Youthzone assigned clients to programs based on an assessment of their needs and other circumstances. Accordingly, the program outcomes shown in Table 6 represent change for those enrolled, for example, in Seeking Safety. Evaluation found that none of the pre-post changes on *Screening* scales were negative, nor that clients worsened from enrollment to completion of services. Findings show that each program yielded very positive results for clients in four of the five *Screening* scales. No program appeared to be more effective than any

other in *Survey* results. In terms of greater success with preventing reoffending (8.4% overall) programs ranked: #1 Restorative Justice, #2 Substance Abuse Class, #3 Saturday Useful Public Service, and #4, Seeking Safety. Analysis did not match programs according to the challenge presented by their clients, likely a significant factor in inter-program success rates.

These results show the value of individualizing interventions for youth with legal offense histories.

## Results Section 5. Comparison of Evaluation Results 2016 and 2019

This section reviews changes in pre-post *Screening* scales from surveys collected from youths during 2014-2015-2016 and 2017-2018-2019. It addresses the consistency of program benefits for youth.

Demographically, differences between 2016 and 2019 samples were small. The same proportions of girls and boys, ages, ethnicities, and types of offenses were present in both samples. Family structure of referred clients has changed little over the years. About half live in homes with both birth parents. Community referral of youth has shifted very slightly. Relatively speaking, the Aspen area

sent about the same number of youths during the two evaluation periods. Slightly more referrals in the evaluation sample were from Carbondale. The Glenwood Springs New Castle, Silt areas had a larger percentage of total referrals in 2019 as 2016. Type of legal offense did not differ across the years.

Table 7 presents the results of the statistical comparison of program benefit consistency. On the whole a comparison of 2016 and 2019 evaluation results confirmed consistent and improving benefits for youthful clients.

**Table 7. Statistical Significance of Pre-Post Screening Score Change for 2016 and 2019**

<i>Screening Scale</i>	<b>Significance of Change Difference Between 2016 – 2019<sup>1, 2</sup></b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Alcohol, Tobacco, & Drug Use	**	2016 sample clients and 2019 sample clients had equivalent levels of substance use problems when initially screened. By the end of their programs, 2019 clients had shown a 15% significantly greater improvement in this area than did the 2016 clients.
Optimism & Problem Solving	****	2016 sample clients had higher Optimism at intake than did 2019 clients, however, 2019 clients showed significantly greater improvement during Youthzone services, with greater Optimism at the end of service than did the 2016 clients.
School & Community Involvement	****	2016 sample clients and 2019 sample clients had equivalent levels of Involvement when initially screened. By the end of their programs, however, 2019 clients had shown a 10% significantly greater improvement in this area than did the 2016 clients.
Delinquency & Aggression	ns	2016 sample clients and 2019 sample clients had equivalent levels of Delinquency when initially screened and both samples showed equivalent and significant gains during services. The <i>difference in pre-post change</i> between 2016 and 2019 was not statistically significant.
Self-Deprecation	ns	2016 sample clients and 2019 sample clients had equivalent levels of Self-Deprecation when initially screened and both samples showed equivalent and significant gains during services. The <i>difference in pre-post change</i> between 2016 and 2019 was not statistically significant.

<sup>1</sup> Two-way Analysis of Variance with Repeated Measures.

<sup>2</sup> <sup>1</sup> Statistical significance levels: ns = “not significant,” \* = p < .10 “borderline significant,” \*\* = p < .05 “significant,” \*\*\* = p < .01 “highly significant” \*\*\*\* = p < .001 “very highly significant”



## Program Evaluation Summary

**Evaluation Purpose and Perspective** This report presents findings from an independent evaluation of Youthzone programs that served clients during 2017-2018-2019. The evaluation was designed to measure three program factors:

1. Programs' success with reducing risk factors that predict delinquency;
2. Program equity with similar outcomes for females and males, younger and older, and youth of different ethnicities; and
3. Consistency in Youthzone in achieving its desired youth outcomes.

*Success with Delinquency Risk Reduction* Trouble with the police, appearance in court, and possible probation monitoring are unexpected and highly stressful experiences for youth and parents. Parents may alternate between self-blame and distress with their child. Young people may be confused, embarrassed, angry, and fearful. Though these evaluation findings will do little to ease these emotions, parents and youth can be reassured of excellent support from Youthzone case managers.

Evaluation found that when youths' respect of the law were measured, the average young person showed significant progress. Use of substances declined, though abstinence for alcohol and marijuana were not complete. Clients felt more optimistic about their futures by the end of services and their involvement/investment in school rose significantly. Attitudes and behavior associated with delinquency softened for most youngsters.

Youthzone offers several programs, each designed to meet the particular needs of a client. Evaluation found that once assigned, most youths progressed, with no one program being of greater efficacy than another. Thus, youths' substance use issues improved in any and all program paths. Similarly, evaluation analysis found that regardless of a youngster's type of offense, steady progress was equivalent for all types of reasons for referral.

Youthzone programs are effective for most, but not all youth and families. Some youth/family clients resist full participation in recommended activities. Some complete activities, but are essentially unchanged in their attitudes and behavior at the end of services. Some reoffend dur-

ing services and some reoffend later and return for a second round of Youthzone assessment and interventions. Similarly, while overall individual programs benefit enrolled clients, some are resistant to these interventions and complete them with an outlook similar to that at the time of their enrollment. Previous Youthzone evaluations have seen that some case managers are more effective with certain clients than are other managers. More work is needed to optimized programs for youth and families. The same conclusion would apply, of course, to most healthcare, social service, or educational endeavors, favorable outcomes for the majority is a goal, not a given.

*Equity of Program Benefits* More boys than girls are arrested and referred to Youthzone's diversion program. For each girl, two boys are enrolled. Over the seven program evaluation reports since 1998, differences among youth served in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age have grown smaller. Most youngsters have much in common with one another today, nevertheless, monitoring program benefits to assure that all clients share equally in benefits is a reasonable concern.

Pre-post *Screening* score changes were similar for youngsters of different ages, though some risk factors were more common among older youths. Substance use and school attachment were more problematic for older clients, so older teens showed greater progress. Younger and older clients showed gains in their delinquency attitudes and behavior and this was particularly true for young clients, an encouraging finding for prevention of future delinquency.

Female clients made more progress with substance use than did males. A similar finding applied to acquiring optimism and problem-solving skills. Girls progressed further than did boys. Girls reattached to school more quickly than boys.

Program benefits appeared in equal measure for three ethnicity groups: Caucasian, Latino/Latina, and Other ethnicities.

Youthzone enrolls youngsters of varying backgrounds and evaluation found equitable program benefits for gender, age, and ethnicity.

The evaluation also analyzed whether family type contributed to youth problems and how family type influenced the results delivered by Youthzone services. Program benefits were received equally by clients from a wide range of home situations.

*Program Outcomes Consistency* Society changes, law enforcement and courts change policies, communities grow and evolve, and diversion programs experience staffing turnover. Maintaining consistent results through all of these influences is a great program challenge and prompted the evaluation's focus on outcomes consistency. Further, it is reasonable to hope that with experience, Youthzone may become more effective in operating programs, allocating resources, and matching youth to program purposes. The evaluation investigated these issues by comparing outcomes from the 2016 and 2019 Study samples.

The 2019 evaluation found that not only did Youthzone sustain its previous performance levels with reducing risks for delinquency, its success rate improved with reducing substance use, encouraging optimism and health problem-solving, and encouraging school engagement. It significantly increased program outcomes from the three previous evaluation years.

Most families will discover that their boy or girl will have a better outlook on themselves and life and will be more likely to align their behavior with reasonable expectations following participation in Youthzone programs.

Though not a focus of this evaluation, in previous evaluations slightly less than 10% of clients in the evaluation samples has been rearrested after the initial offense that led to their Youthzone referral and before court-ordered services were completed. Some clients re-offended within days of their admission. Among all Youthzone clients, these are probably at greatest risk for future per-

sonal, family, social, and vocational maladjustment. Success with them in the present could avoid much suffering and personal and social costs. The planned 2022 Youthzone evaluation will be devoted primarily to the questions of predicting and preventing recidivism, using data from 2014-2022 as a base of prediction data.

Finally, while evaluation established that, on average, youthful clients gained assets and reduced risk behaviors while receiving Youthzone services, not all clients made these gains and not all clients improved their adjustment equally in all programs. Evaluation calculated the performance of four programs in reducing risk factors, strengthening protective factors, and lowering the likelihood that a client would reoffend. All programs had some effectiveness with these outcomes. Of particular note were findings for Youthzone's group intervention for substance use. Scientific reports of successful interventions with delinquent youth substance use in Colorado community agency settings are uncommon. There are limited evidence-based practice standards for these interventions. Most diversion programs make some effort to reduce substance use, however, seldom are these systematized. Currently, evaluation determined that not only did youth enrolled in the group intervention designed for them reduce their substance use, they became more optimistic, more involved at school and in the community, and their delinquent and aggressive behaviors declined.

Few youth serving programs in the region – or across the state for that matter – are informed about their programs' effectiveness and where modification is needed and where services are working well. Nearly all service agencies rely on a leap of faith that what they promise, they are delivering. Youthzone, however, has adopted evaluation practices to assist in building evidence-based services and focusing administration, case managers, the organization's board and the community on where additional attention can improve outcomes.

### ***Acknowledgement***

Evaluation recognizes current and past case managers and supervisory staff, who have contributed ideas to the design and improvement of the evaluation, and who have been dedicated to following the screening process, that makes this program assessment possible.