

# Diverting Destinies:

## Case Study on the Impact of Community Based Organizations as an Alternative to Detention

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### Introduction & Background

The juvenile justice system was designed to rehabilitate youth and provide second chances within the legal system. Over time, it has become a more punitive structure that disproportionately impacts youth of color and those from low-income communities (Javdani, 2019; Nutakor, 2023).

For example:

- While around one million youth are arrested each year, Black youth are arrested at double or triple the rate as their White counterparts (Alves, 2024; Javdani, 2019).
- Alves (2024) highlights that thousands of minority youth are detained and enter a cycle of recidivism without analysis of what systems exist within their personal context that could lead to these disproportionate statistics.
- The youth is penalized rather than receiving the support needed to thrive. YES' diversion services work to combat these overlooked measures to aid in support as a mechanism to provide these children with positive role models through mentorship and 24 hour surveillance.

### Results

#### Risk Assessment

May 2025			July 2025		
Community	Level	Score	Community	Level	Score
Peer Challenges	No issues with peers	1	Peer Challenges	No issues with peers	1
Extracurricular Involvement	Not involved in activities	5	Extracurricular Involvement	Somewhat involved in activities	2
Drug Use or Association	Not using or associated with drugs	1	Drug Use or Association	Not using or associated with drugs	1
Delinquent Friends	4 or more delinquent friends	5	Delinquent Friends	1 delinquent friend	2
Safety Level	Somewhat safe	2	Safety Level	Safe	1
Fighting Status	Does not fight	1	Fighting Status	Does not fight	1
MH Service Compliance	No court mandate for service	0	MH Service Compliance	No court mandate for service	0
Stakeholder Communication	Highly communicative	1	Stakeholder Communication	Highly communicative	1

### Discussion & Limitations

#### Discussion

- YES provides a shift from punitive systems to restorative solutions with a focus on socioeconomic factors that may lead to life outcomes.
- Research participant shares that with YES' support, they have been inspired and motivated to push for success with the support of mentors, and peers on a good path.

#### Limitations

- Only reflective of one student.
- Only reflective of two months of participation with YES.
- Certain personal details were omitted to protect participant confidentiality.

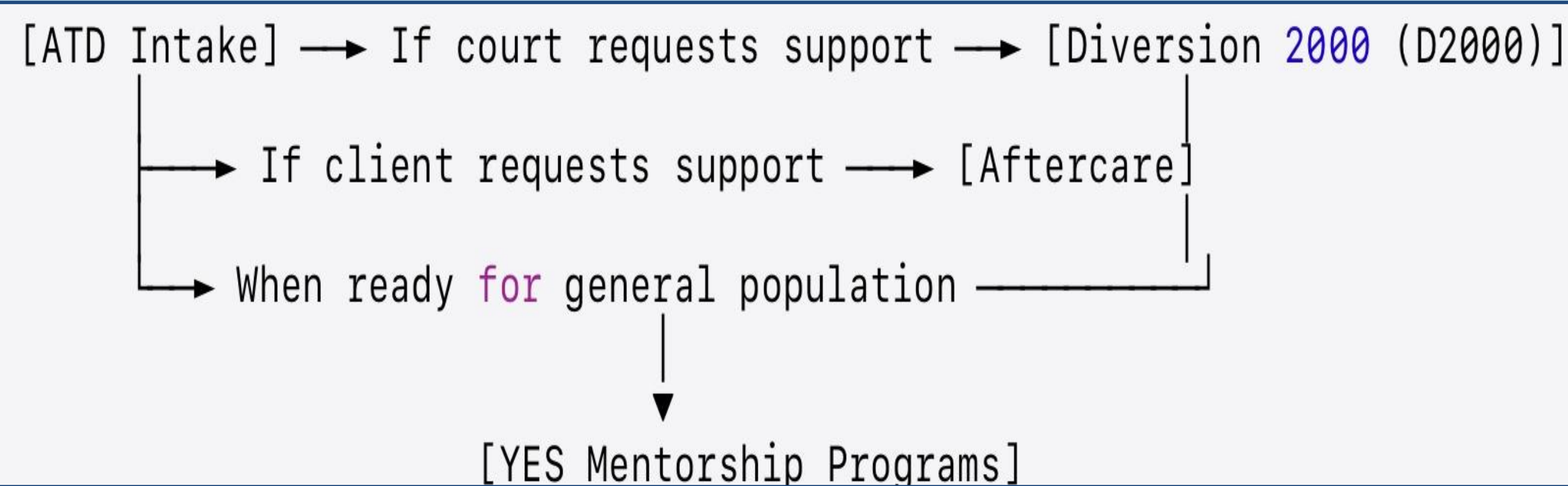
### Organizational Context

- For over 25 years, Youth Enrichment Services (YES), a nonprofit in Pittsburgh, PA has served as an alternative to detention for court involved youth.
- YES provides holistic services and interventions (home, school, community) that are grounded in harm reduction.
- Interventions include: mentorship, weekly wellness checks, workshops, and home and school visits further promote success within students' social contexts.

## Mentoring and Intervention as an Alternative to Detention Addresses Root Causes: Case files and student anecdotal responses show that YES's trauma-informed, culturally responsive approach to diversion supports students in identifying and addressing personal and environmental triggers that contribute to conflict and crime.

### Conclusions

- This collected research amplified the impact of diversion programming through the eyes of a youth participant in Youth Enrichment Services (YES). The participant described how the program provided positive structure through trips and activities that kept them engaged and away from negative influences within their community. They expressed that YES helped put their mind toward career-oriented goals.
- The participant contrasted their experience with YES to their experience with the juvenile justice system, stating that YES made them feel supported, while the justice system stigmatized them and made them feel as though they would never get off probation.



### Method

#### This study aims to understand the two month impact of YES' diversionary interventions for court - involved youth through a case study approach

- One client was selected for this study
- Youth case files were reviewed to track progress towards home, school and community goals
- Monthly risk assessments were reviewed to observe reductions in community-level risk factors. These risk factors were measured on a likert scale of (1) low risk to (5) high risk
- An interview was conducted to gain a nuanced understanding of the students experiences with YES.

### Qualitative Data: Interview Themes

- The student credited YES with keeping them out of trouble by offering structured activities, trips, and **positive distractions from negative influences**. Their involvement in the program broadened their perspective and made them more future-oriented.
- Since joining YES, the student reported **focusing more on themselves and their goals**. They highlighted feeling more hopeful about graduating high school and pursuing a medically oriented career or a trade.
- The participant described feeling genuinely supported by YES staff, who listen and offer meaningful conversations. **They contrasted this with feeling judged and underestimated by their probation officer.**

### References

- Javdani, S. (2019). Critical issues for youth involved in the juvenile justice system: Innovations in prevention, intervention, and policy. *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 47(2), 67-75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2019.1575564>
- Alves, C. V. (2024). The impact of community-based programs and restorative justice on reducing black youth involvement in the juvenile justice system. *Undergraduate Review*, 18, 114-125. [https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad\\_rev/vol18/iss1/14](https://vc.bridgew.edu/undergrad_rev/vol18/iss1/14)
- Nutakor, J. A., Zhou, L., Larnyo, E., Addai-Danso, S., & Tripura, D. (2023). Socioeconomic status and quality of life: An assessment of the mediating effect of social capital. *Healthcare*, 11(5), 749. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11050749>