Turning it Around: A Program Evaluation of the Community Support Team Diversion Program at Youturn

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Abstract:

Community-based diversion programming as applied to justice-involved youth appears to be more effective than traditional custodial sentencing for reducing problematic behaviours. These programs are supported by the Youth Criminal Justice Act as an alternative to traditional court interventions. The Community Support Team (CST) program at Youturn, an Ottawa based youth-justice organization, is one such diversion program that aims to reduce recidivism risk levels of youth in conflict with the law. This evaluation analyzes CST program outcomes using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies with a focus on two key assessment tools: the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory 2.0 (YLS/CMI2.0) and the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS). The quantitative aspect focuses on pre and post statistical analysis of risk score data from the YLS/CMI2.0 and CANS, while the qualitative aspect evaluates staff responses to a questionnaire. The statistical analysis in combination with the questionnaire evaluation provides evidence that CST is successful in reducing recidivism risks.

Introduction:

The aim of this study is to provide both a summative and formative program evaluation of the community youth diversion program at Youturn, an Ottawa-based youth justice organization. More specifically, the research examines whether or not the Community Support Team (CST) program reduces behavioural risks associated with recidivism. Firstly, the research examines specific quantitative assessment tools used by Youturn to determine their effectiveness in reducing problematic behaviour while building strengths and capacity in youth involved with

the law. Secondly, the research aims to capture feedback from staff using qualitative analysis to gain insight into their experiences with the CST program. This summative/formative program evaluation therefore includes a mixed methodology of both quantitative and qualitative analysis with respect to effectiveness of the CST program. As researchers we are mindful that this study is set against the background of political pressure from all levels of government aiming to reduce youth crime while requiring agencies to provide evidence-based approaches to programming. As such, it is our hope that this study will assist Youturn in determining the effectiveness of the CST program and to identify and address any gaps in service.

The Community Support Team (CST) program at Youturn was developed by the Ontario Government as a community based alternative to incarceration for young people involved with the criminal justice system. The primary objective of CST is to assist service users in becoming productive community members through the acquisition of life skills, and to reduce recidivism risks. Youturn provides individualized case management approaches based on outcome scores of the following risk assessment tools; Youth Level of Service/Case Management 2.0 (YLS/CMI2.0) and Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS). As part of the study, both assessment tools were used to quantitatively analyze service users' pre- CST and post-CST risk scores to determine the effectiveness of the program in reducing risk levels. Additionally, qualitative research includes compiled staff responses to a confidential online questionnaire summarizing perceptions on the effectiveness of CST.

In Canada, diversion programs have been in place since the enactment of the 2003 Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) (Bala, Carrington, & Roberts, 2009). Principle objectives of the YCJA are to reduce court usage and custody sentencing while providing intervention programming for youth involved with the law (Bala et al., 2009). Many changes to the YCJA

are a result of applying a labelling theory lens to current legislation. This theory, developed by Edwin Lemert and Howard Becker (2007), changed youth justice approaches from a punitive to a more preventative system. Labelling theory outlines the process by which youth become delinquent, and how attaching a label can internalize negative aspects of the self (Bell, 2007). Criminal behaviour is interpreted as social deviance and "no matter what his or her other qualities, a person who has been labelled will be seen and responded to as a deviant" (Bell, 2007, p. 157). The Federal government incorporated this new theoretical paradigm by modifying the previous punitive based justice model of the Young Offenders Act by maintaining the legal rights of youth while also incorporating a rehabilitative component to sentencing (Corrado, Gronsdahl, MacAlister, & Cohen, 2010). It was through the YCJA that community based diversion programs, such as the CST program at Youturn, emerged as a means in which to decrease youth recidivism.

The conceptual framework of the research study involves youth crime, recidivism and diversion programs and the relationship between all three. In the study, youth crime is described as any crime committed by individuals between the ages of 12 and 18 years of age. Recidivism is defined as a return to court either as a result of additional charges or due to breaching probationary guidelines. This study will focus on the CST diversion program offered by Youturn. The research will analyze the CST program's effectiveness on the reduction of behaviours associated with recidivism risk. The independent variable is youth participation in the CST program measured at two points in time, the pre-test at the beginning of the program, and the post-test at the end of the program. The dependent variable are the scores on the YLS/CMI 2.0 and the CANS. Because we cannot predict whether the youth will score higher or lower on these instruments, we opted for a non-directional two tailed hypothesis (Grinnell Jr, Williams, &

Unrau, 2014). Additionally, the study includes a qualitative analysis using open ended questions in a confidential online-questionnaire for Youturn staff members. Hence the study's conceptual framework includes a mixed methodology analyzing the effectiveness of the CST program at Youturn.

There are several structural issues which have been identified in relation to this research. Using a macro lens, youth crime has been highly politicized due to public concerns over perceived increases in criminal behaviour in this population (Caputo & Vallée, 2010). All levels of government seem to be highly focused on this segment of the population. However, statistically the number of crimes committed by this population has in fact decreased since the inception of the YCJA (Caputo & Vallée, 2010). Despite this decrease, media has encouraged societal fears of criminalized youth, leading to increased political pressure to levy harsher punishments as well as further stigmatizing youth as primary targets of public fear (Caputo & Vallée, 2010). Finally, the YCJA further criminalizes youth by restricting justice alternatives in lieu of juvenile detention (The department of Justice Canada, 2013). Youturn's diversion programming provides an example of current legislative restraints where youth referred to this justice-alternative have only two options: the less intensive Community Support Team program or the Intensive Support Supervision Program. The lack of alternative programming severely restricts the choices available to youth.

Additionally there are further challenges to the provision of diversionary programming for justice-involved youth at Youturn. Firstly, there are overlapping jurisdictional issues regarding youth who are simultaneously under the care of the Children's Aid Society (CAS) and participants in the CST program. According to Caputo & Vallée (2010), this is an ongoing issue that has caused discontinuity of services for youth involved in CST due mostly to the highly

transient nature of this population. Moreover, Youturn has identified the lack of integrative services between CAS and the CST program as a barrier to the provision of ongoing programming to youth in their care. Secondly, Youturn has articulated a lack of Indigenous programming within the CST program. This is concerning as the Indigenous population has been traditionally marginalized with the current lack of culturally-appropriate programming appearing representative of continued oppression (Caputo & Vallée, 2010). This lack of culturally-specific programming also reduces opportunity for Youturn staff to increase cultural- competency when working with diverse populations. Thirdly, many CST youth are from low socio-economic backgrounds and have completed lower levels of education. This presents additional barriers to youth who wish to pursue post-secondary education upon discharge from CST. Research has shown a strong link between low educational attainment and poverty, which is an ongoing challenge for this population (Bryant, 2013).

Literature Review

Our literature review comprises three parts. We first begin with a historical review of the youth criminal justice system in Canada, followed by a brief overview of diversion programs currently in practice. After summarizing and critiquing recent research of an Ontario diversion program, we provide an overview of best practices on diversion programs and existing literature evaluating the effectiveness of diversion program. The literature review concludes with identification of existing research gaps and how our work may contribute to advancing knowledge related to diversion program as an alternative means to address youth crime.

History of the Youth Criminal Justice System in Canada

The history of the youth criminal justice system in Canada has witnessed three shifts, each characterized by different legislative principles and guiding philosophies (Minkes, 2007, p.342). The Juvenile Delinquents Act of 1908 (JDA) had an "emphasis on welfare" that "delinquent youths were a product of parental neglect and social disadvantage" (Samuels, 2015, p.13). Focusing on the needs of the young offenders as opposed to the seriousness of the actual crime itself, the JDA was criticized for its "lack of due process, the failure to resolve tensions between welfare and legal priorities, and the overuse of residential and custodial facilities" (Minkes, 2007, p.343). The JDA was in effect for nearly 70 years (Minkes, 2007, p.343).

The Young Offenders Act of 1984 (YOA) was created in response to the shortcomings of the JDA and was intended to promote diversion and alternative measures other than the use of formal judicial proceedings when dealing with young offenders (Samuels, 2015, p.16; Minkes, 2007, p.343; Doob & Cesaroni, 2004, p.26). However, diversion as "partially codified" (Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.469) in the YOA became problematic in practice. As Samuels (2015) points out, the lack of clarity and direction with reference to "what constituted diversion and how it should be used" (p.6) may have contributed to increased use of short custodial sentencing for minor offences such as "failure to comply with a community sentence" (Minkes, 2007, p.343) and breaching probation orders (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004, p.18) Coincidentally, the number of criminal charges against young offenders also increased with the introduction of the YOA (Samuels, 2015, p.16). This demonstrated that frequent use of short-sentence custody for non-violent youth offenders did not differentiate between the seriousness of offences. It is within this historical context that the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) was formally implemented in April 2003 (Minkes, 2007, p.340). The primary goals of the YCJA are to "divert young

offenders away from formal criminal justice procedures and restrict the use of custody to those convicted of serious violence" (Minkes, 2007, p.340). Whereas the YOA lacked clarity on its implementation of a diversion-focused approach to reducing youth crime, the YCJA specifies the importance of using "extrajudicial measures", including "community-based sentences and effective alternatives to the justice system for youth who commit non-violent offences" (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004, p.24). This approach aims to hold offenders accountable to crimes committed while proportionately balancing the consequences (Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.472).

Diversion Programs

This section outlines existing diversion programs as well as related YCJA legislation supporting the use of diversion programs as an alternative to custodial sentencing. This includes exploring alternate interventions as an appropriate means in which to address non-violent youth offences, identifying sentencing principles, as well as implementing the YCJA's emphasis on providing youth with community-based support services.

Among alternative measures identified in the YCJA are pre-charge diversion and post-charge diversion (Samuels, 2015, p.6). Pre-charge diversion, also known as extra-judicial measure (EJM), is offered at the discretion of police apprehending youth instead of formally laying charges (Samuels, 2015, p.6; Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.471). The police may simply issue a warning or caution, or refer the youth to community-based agencies for programs (Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.471). Conversely, post-charge diversion, also known as extra-judicial sanction (EJS), occurs when police lay charges against the youth and the crown prosecutor exercises discretion to divert the youth from judicial procedure (Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.471).

Guiding principles for extrajudicial measure are listed in Section 4 of the YCJA (as cited in Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.471). Specifically, section 4(a) stipulates that ''extrajudicial measures are often the most appropriate and effective way to address youth crime" (as cited in Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.471). Further, "the YCJA describes the youth justice system as trying to prevent crime by addressing the circumstances underlying a youth's offending, focusing on rehabilitating offenders, and 'ensuring that a young person is subject to meaningful consequences for his or her offence'" (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004, p.26). For youth who cannot be diverted from the justice system and receive a custodial sentence, "the custody and supervision order in the YCJA requires that a youth serve two-thirds of the sentence in custody and one-third supervised in the community" (Doob & Cesaroni, 2004, p.28).

The YCJA's guiding principles highlight the importance of identifying the needs of the youth and providing appropriate supports to assist youth in effective community reintegration. The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH, 2014) states that "most youth diversion programs follow a Risk/Need/Responsivity (RNR) approach, which involves screening for the young person's level of risk/needs and matching interventions/supports to these levels" (p.3). Some diversion programming services include "intervention to reduce reoffending, ongoing support, conflict mediation, resources for families" (CAMH, 2014, p.4), in addition to risk/needs assessment, case management planning, case conferencing, and "referral to appropriate, client-centred community services that are based on the youth's risk level and needs" (CAMH, 2014, p.6). Some of the commonly used assessment tools are "Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) – Screening Version (YLS/CMI-SV) to identify risk factors for crime" at the pre-referral stage, and "Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) – which assesses several life domains and helps set appropriate goals and develop an

effective case management plan; How I Think Questionnaire (HIT-Q) - which measures the youth's thinking errors" at post-referral stage CAMH, 2014, p.4). Community-based diversion program for youth represents a comprehensive approach to addressing issues of youth crime as it involves different stakeholders, including law enforcement authorities, local community agencies providing the services, family members and youth themselves (CAMH, 2014, p.6).

Finally, integral to the discretionary nature of diversion programming is that "past offending behaviour should not rule out an officer's decision to impose an extrajudicial measure" (Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.472). This point emphasizes that offenders should be held accountable to present offences, rather than past offences (Marinos & Innocente, 2008, p.474). Although the YCJA specifies the importance of formally instituting diversion programming as an alternative to the criminal justice system, the exercise of discretion by law enforcement authorities speaks to the variability of different potential extrajudicial consequences of youth committing similar non-serious offences. This has led some scholars to examine the issue of net-widening for offenders who would likely have been cautioned or warned by the police (Samuels, 2015, p.38; Garcia, 2008, p.4).

Summary and Critique of Samuels' Literature Review

The bulk of the literature review conducted for this research project draws on a recent research on pre-charge diversion programs in the Greater-Toronto Area (GTA) by Kanika Samuels. This section summarizes and provides critique of Samuel's most current literature review.

Samuels (2015) provides an extensively-researched history and explanation of labelling theory. She also explores the concept of net-widening as a result of the implementation of diversion programming as a covert form of social control by examining early Labelling

Theorists, Frank Tannenbaum (1938), Edwin Lemert (1951) and Howard Becker (163) (p.17). She describes how labelling theory has roots in Symbolic Interaction theory, which explicates that people "communicated via representational symbols including gestures, words and images" (Samuels, 2015, p.17). She then states that, "how others see us impacts our own self-image" (Samuels, 2015, p.18). Diversion programming is one example of how labelling theory has been incorporated into youth justice policy and programming, which aims to support youth by neither labelling nor identifying them as criminals (Samuels, 2015, p.17).

Samuels (2015) supports Tannenbaum's ideas that arresting youth would cause more crime than prevention, stating that "the application of the criminal label leads to negative stigmatization. Given a criminal label, a person will be treated differently by others (as a deviant, unworthy, untrustworthy, etc." (p.19). Furthermore, "social stigmatization associated with the criminal label changes an individual's self-concept and how they see themselves" (Samuels, 2015, p.19). Youth who view themselves in this way have limited opportunities to participate in a positive life. (Samuels, 2015, p.28). In summarizing Lemert's notions of *primary deviance* and *secondary deviance,* Samuels (2015) writes, "according to Lemert's (1951) interpretation, if the label and subsequent stigma is not placed on a youth the first time they are apprehended for a crime, they will not experience 'secondary deviance' or repeat criminality"(Samuels, 2015, p.20). She also documents the adverse impacts to youth educational and employment outcomes associated with a formal criminal (Samuels, 2015, p.25).

Samuels (2015) raises the question of the effectiveness of diversion programming in diverting youth offenders from the justice system to avoid a criminal label, as supported in labelling theory (17). Her paper is suggestive of the potential of an informal and non-criminal labelling process in place following the implementation of diversion program. There is now a

new language of diversion to describe and categorize youth who have committed offences but instead of going through the justice system, they are channelled into programs reserved for non-serious offenders. Matsueda describes informal labelling as a process through which individuals internalize interactions and perceptions of others in forming their own identity (as cited in Samuels, 2015, p.28). Samuels' is concerned that diversion programs are "being used as a tool to informally draw youth into justice system", also known as "net-widening" (2015, p.10). This echoes other critics of diversion programs who speak of police "capturing youthful behaviour that previous would have been ignored by the police or dealt with in an informal manner" (Samuels, 2015, 10).

Although Samuels' literature review on labelling theory and net-widening as they relate to diversion program is informative, it lacks an analysis of historical demographic information of marginalized populations and how interactions with the youth justice system is affected by structural inequalities such as race and class. Particularly, Aboriginal youth have higher likelihood of coming into contact with the youth justice system because of an "accumulation of individual and environmental risk factors" associated such residual effects as poverty, lower levels of employment and education, mental health and substance use issues, etc., from the legacy of colonization and residential schools (Kuehn & Corrado, 2011, p.234). The overrepresentation of Aboriginal youth in the court system is evident in the documentation of the rise of completed youth court cases in 2013/2014 in Yukon and the Northwest Territories, by 17% and 2% respectively (Alam, 2015, p.3). As is the case with Aboriginal youth, there is also an overrepresentation of Black youth in Ontario. Black youth are overrepresented in the youth justice system four-fold of what they actually represent in the general youth male population (Rankin & Winsa, 2013). Overrepresentation in the youth justice system is, however, not an

issue for "white" and other minority males in Ontario (Rankin & Winsa, 2013), thus confirming the disproportionalities associated with the intersection of race and criminal involvement for young males.

However, the link between poverty and punishment in Canada dates back to the adoption of the Elizabethan Poor Law in the 1700s, which formalized a punitive aspect in terms of vocational rehabilitation for the "able-bodied" poor (Guest, 2003, p.13). Douglas (2011) conducts a modern-times analysis of the relationship between "visible signs of poverty and marginality" as evidenced by youth homelessness and excessive ticketing and fining of minor offences such as "sleeping in the metro", "public loitering", etc., by the Police Service of Montreal. This highlights the common practice by Montreal police with regards to imposing excessive fines disproportionate to the level of severity of actual offences as well as the tendency to incarcerate those unable to pay them (Douglas, 2011, p.58), Douglas' research cautions the potentially discriminatory effects public policies may have on financially marginalized groups in society, particularly when it comes to criminal justice involvement.

Samuels' literature review and research focuses exclusively on pre-charge diversion programs where discretionary power lies with police. She neglects to mention other actors in the justice system that may hold discretionary power to divert youth from the criminal system. Lastly, Samuel's lack of critical engagement with issues of race and class in relation to criminal justice involvement would have allowed for more in depth analysis.

Our work focuses exclusively on a post-charge diversion program in Ottawa and our research team does not have access to a control group for youth who are not participating in diversion. Therefore, the comparison of the characteristics of youth offered pre-charge diversion and those channelled through the regular judicial process for similar minor offences with a

specific focus on the role of racialization in diversion program is not possible. Additionally, Samuels' inquiry of net-widening as it relates to an increase in diverted youth to pre-charge programming and a reduction in custody orders, represents a limited analysis of the impact of net-widening – that diversion program is potentially diverting much-needed community supports and resources away from assisting higher-risk youth who may benefit more from such intensive support to help reduce reoffending (Garcia, 2008). This now brings us to existing literature examining the effectiveness of youth diversion programming and best practices.

Effectiveness and Best Practices of Youth Diversion Program

Current literature on evaluation of diversion programs are predominantly American (Stewart, 2008; Dembo et al., 2008; Gonzalez, 2014; Patrick & Marsh, 2005; Sullivan & Latessa, 2011; Jacobsen, 2013; Duvall, 1996). Literature on evaluation of the effectiveness of youth diversion program in Canada are emerging. Four of the eight articles reviewed in this research project containing Canadian content are extracted from graduate thesis (Proctor, 2007; Wilson, 2011; Coady, 2012; Samuels, 2015), with two others written by the same two authors (Wilson & Hoge, 2012a & 2012b).

After the first five years following the implementation of the YCJA, Bala, Carrington & Roberts (2009) identify "a very significant reduction in the use of courts and custody for adolescent offenders in Canada" (p.159). The evaluation of diversion program effectiveness focused solely on recidivism rates, overshadowing additional program outcomes such as "attitudes and values, school performance and adjustment, and mental health functioning" (Wilson & Hoge, 2012b, p.514). Nonetheless, a number of factors have been found to be associated with lower rates of recidivism for diverted youth and they may help inform best practices in guiding diversion programming. In a study of the effectiveness of the Ottawa

Community Youth Diversion Program (OCYDP), Wilson & Hoge (2012a) assert that successful completion of diversion programming is "a promising alternative to sentencing medium-risk youth to community supervision" (p.327) whereas youth who "dropped out" of OCYDP "had significantly higher recidivism rates than youth on probation" (Wilson & Hoge, 2012, p.326). Wilson (2011) identifies recidivism rates to be twice as high for those failing to complete diversion programming (p.ii).

In addition, Huehn and Corrado (2011) identify the importance of inter-agency collaboration in information sharing, the use of culturally appropriate/relevant risk assessment tools, and gender-specific risks and needs assessments and intervention (p.234-235).

Additionally, there are specific aspects to the delivery of diversion programs that may increase effectiveness:

> "Treatment effectiveness has been strongly tied to specific treatment approaches (e.g., cognitive behavioral therapy) and integrity of implementation (e.g., use of manuals, experience/training of caseworkers) and, under these circumstances, have demonstrated significant reductions in recidivism (Lipsey, 2009). Studies have also shown the importance of treatment locale, with greater results coming from treatment provided within the community compared to residential or secure locations (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Andrews et al., 1990; Smith, Goggin, and Gendreau, 2002)" (as cited in Wilson & Hoge, 2012, p.314).

In summary, factors such as community-based programming that targets risk levels of diverted youth, supports the successful completion of diversion program and applies gender and cultural-specific risk assessment tools and interventions may help inform best practices to diversion programming.

Future Research

In addition to identifying factors that contribute to the success of community-based diversion programs, future research on additional barriers preventing the full implementation of the YCJA's diversion philosophy may be warranted. Research by Marinos and Innocente (2008) on police attitudes toward pre-charge diversion programs across Ontario identifies that "police continue to be influenced by the seriousness of the offence, past police contact, and the youth's attitude" when diverting youth from the justice system (p.487). Additionally, the discretionary power inherent in the referral process by law enforcement has led some scholars to recognize limitations of the YCJA as disadvantageous for at-risk groups, such as Aboriginal youth (Hogeveen, as cited in Minkes, 2007, p.344) and marginalized youth (Smandych, as cited in Minkes, 2007, p.344).

Methodology Quantitative

Youturn measures the effectiveness of intervention programs offered by assessing youth risk both before and after program participation. The Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory 2.0 (YLS/CMI 2.0) and Child and Adolescent Needs and Strength (CANS) are assessment tools utilized by Youturn to measure program outcomes of CST prior to and after youth participation (Couture, L. September 17, 2016). Data gathered from these tools was provided to researchers on excel spreadsheets with the aim of conducting a CST program evaluation.

Statistical analysis

The YLS/CMI 2.0 and CANS surveys have a total of 20 combined categories designed to assess behaviours related to recidivism risk levels. These surveys capture youth responses before and after completing the CST program, assigning youth a pre and post intervention risk score for

each category. These pre and post scores were subsequently analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Specifically in this work, a parametric, paired t-test was applied to pre and post-test risk scores in each category to compare the means of participant group samples (144 for YLS/CMI 2.0 and 121 for CANS). The results determined whether the CST intervention affected behavioural risk scores related to recidivism risk.

Population

The study included the CST population which was comprised of participant intake and discharge YLS/CMI2.0 and CANS assessment risk scores. In this case, the YLS/CMI2.0 and CANS assessment procedures are requirements of the CST program intake protocols, and determine the level of intervention necessary to mediate risk behaviours from those participating in the CST program. When performing a summative and formative program evaluation, using the population within a specific program such as the CST is a common characteristic of research which studies the quality/outcome of the services being delivered, and provides information on how to improve programming (Grinnell, Williams & Unrau, 2014; Van de Sande & Schwartz, 2011).

Measures/Assessment tools

The YLS/CMI 2.0 and CANS are intake and discharge tools that aim to assess ongoing needs and strengths of youth participants. These tools include demographic information such as age and gender. Further, these tools identify whether changes in risk level occurred between CST intake and discharge.

Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory 2.0 (YLS/CMI 2.0)

The Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLSMI) is a short questionnaire designed to provide initial screening of risk and need levels in young people

involved in the justice system. This screening tool is used to provide feedback for diversion programming purposes, and to determine if further assessments are needed. In the CST program at Youturn, the YLS/CMI 2.0 is facilitated by staff with input provided by youth in an interview format.

The YLS/CMI 2.0 is divided into the following eight categories: prior and current offences, family circumstances / parenting; education/employment; peer relations; substance abuse; leisure/recreation; personality/behaviour and attitudes/orientation. These categories are rated on a five point scale ranging from 0 to 5. Zero showing a satisfactory situation meaning no intervention is needed, and five showing that a high need for intervention is warranted. Questionnaire outcomes guide intervention programming for youth in CST.

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)

CANS is a comprehensive assessment tool that is used in evaluating mental health of children, adolescents and their families (Lyons & Walton, 1999). The CANS has demonstrated an audit reliability of 0.85 and face validity. (Lyons & Walton, 1999). Face validity is established when the test in question, such as the CANS, demonstrates that it measures what it claims to measure (Lyons, 2009). As noted by Lyons (2009) and Lyons and Walton (1999), the CANS has been widely used as an assessment tool in adolescent programming, and is useful in communicating with judges about the needs and strengths of adolescents. The evaluative outcomes of CANS is used by Youturn to asses risk levels of youth participating in the CST program. Additionally, this quantitative tool is used both before and after CST participation to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention provided.

CANS is comprised of the following twelve categories: executive function; emotional regulation; social skills; acculturation; mental health needs; risk behaviours; educational needs;

youth justice; child/youth individual strengths; child and youth environmental strengths; parent/caregiver/family needs and strengths; family needs and strengths. The scoring of these categories is based on a tiered scoring method which determines the level of action needed for remediation (Lyons & Walton, 1999). The needs and strengths are segmented into separate sections and are individually rated. A rating of '2' or '3' on a CANS suggests that this area must be addressed in the intervention plan. A low rating of a '0' or '1' identifies a strength that can be used for strength-based planning, and a '2' or '3' indicates a need to focus on strength-building activities (see appendices for details).

Findings Quantitative

Results of the parametric, t-test used to compare the mean scores of the 20 combined categories of the YLS/CMI 2.0 and CANS surveys are as follows: 17 out of 20 categories were found to be significantly different pre vs. post, with 16 of the post-test means scores appearing to shift downward indicating lower risk post-test. These lower post-test means scores imply that the CST program has an effect in reducing risk behaviours affiliated with recidivism. Additionally the YLS/CMI 2.0 category of *Prior and Current Offences* (Figure 1) was found to be statistically significant, however results demonstrated an upward shift in the mean score post-test - indicating an increase in risk post-intervention. This category assesses the following youth charges: three or more prior convictions; two or more failures to comply; prior probation and prior custody (Hoge & Andrews, 2011). Upon further discussion with Youturn, it was learned that an increase in this category is not unexpected as youth participants cannot reverse charges already incurred (Couture, L. April 7, 2016). Moreover, additional charges received by youth while in the program are frequently of a non-violent nature; typically comprised of failing to comply with probation orders such as missing meetings or breaking curfew requirements (Couture, L. April

7, 2016). These increased charges, as assessed by the survey are then reflected by an increased score for this category, and consequently, indicate increased risk.

Lastly, the analysis identified the following three categories where post-test results were not statistically significant: YLS/CMI 2.0 *Attitudes/Orientations* (Figure 2) which assesses antisocial/pro-criminal attitudes; not seeking help; actively rejecting help; defies authority; and callous, little concern for others; CANS *Acculturation* (Figure 3) category examines language, identity, ritual and cultural stress (parent/caregiver); as well as CANS *Youth Justice* (Figure 4) which reflects seriousness, history, arrests, planning, community safety, legal compliance, peer influences, potential criminal behaviour and environmental influences. These findings showed a slight downward shift in the mean score post-test, however they could not be deemed significantly different. More specifically for these three categories it is not possible to reasonably conclude that the CST program has affected youth behaviours linked to increased risk of recidivism.

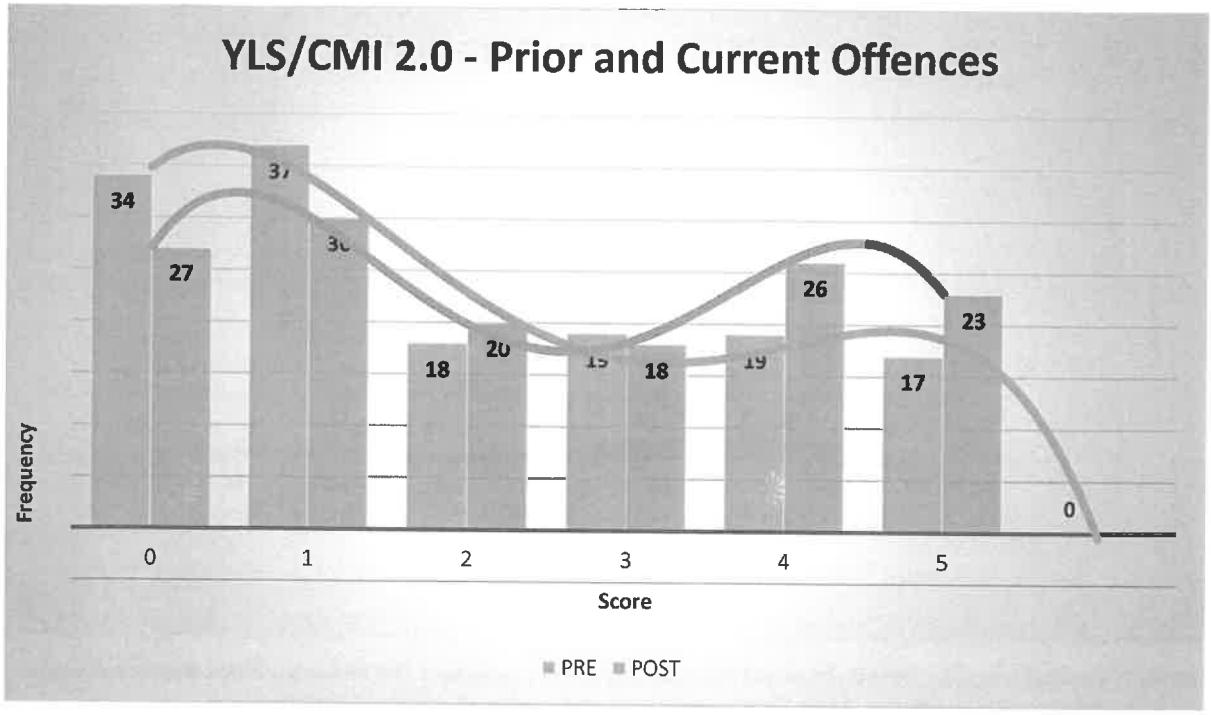

Figure 1. Identifies: Three or more prior convictions; two or more failures to comply; prior probation and prior custody. This histogram shows distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

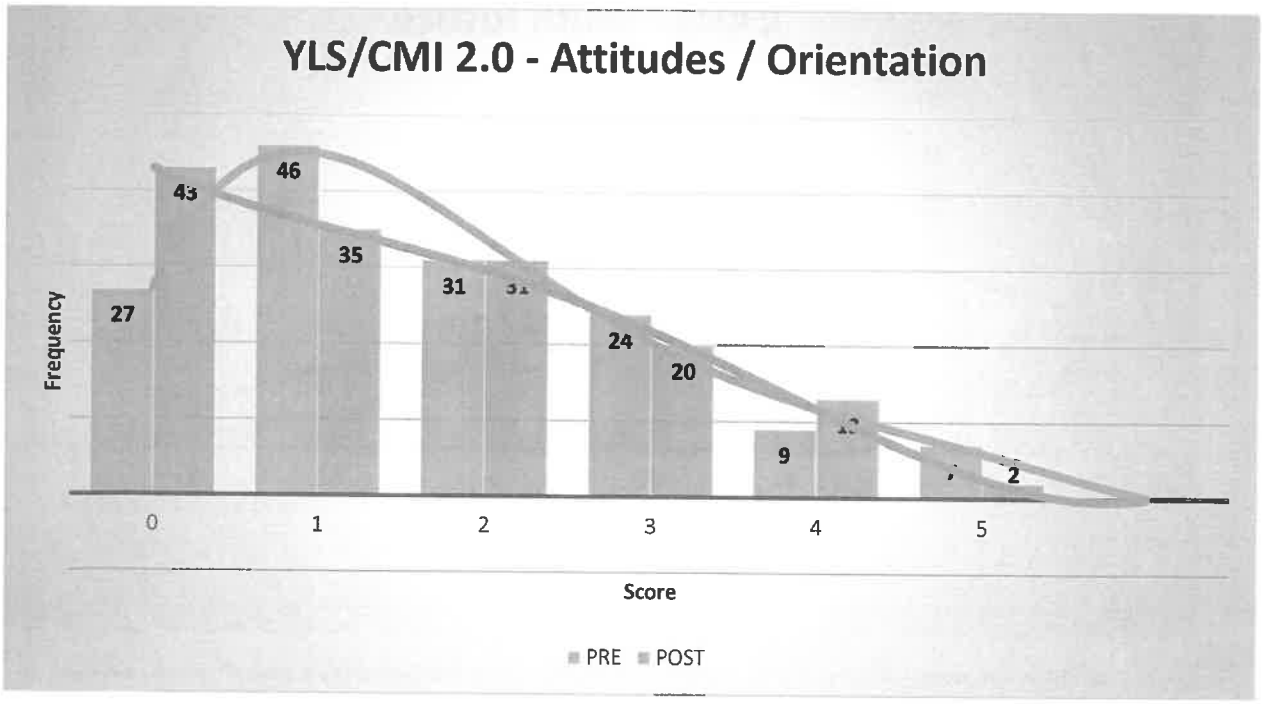

Figure 2: Identifies Antisocial/pro-criminal attitudes, not seeking help, actively rejecting help, defies authority and callous, little concern for others. This histogram shows distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

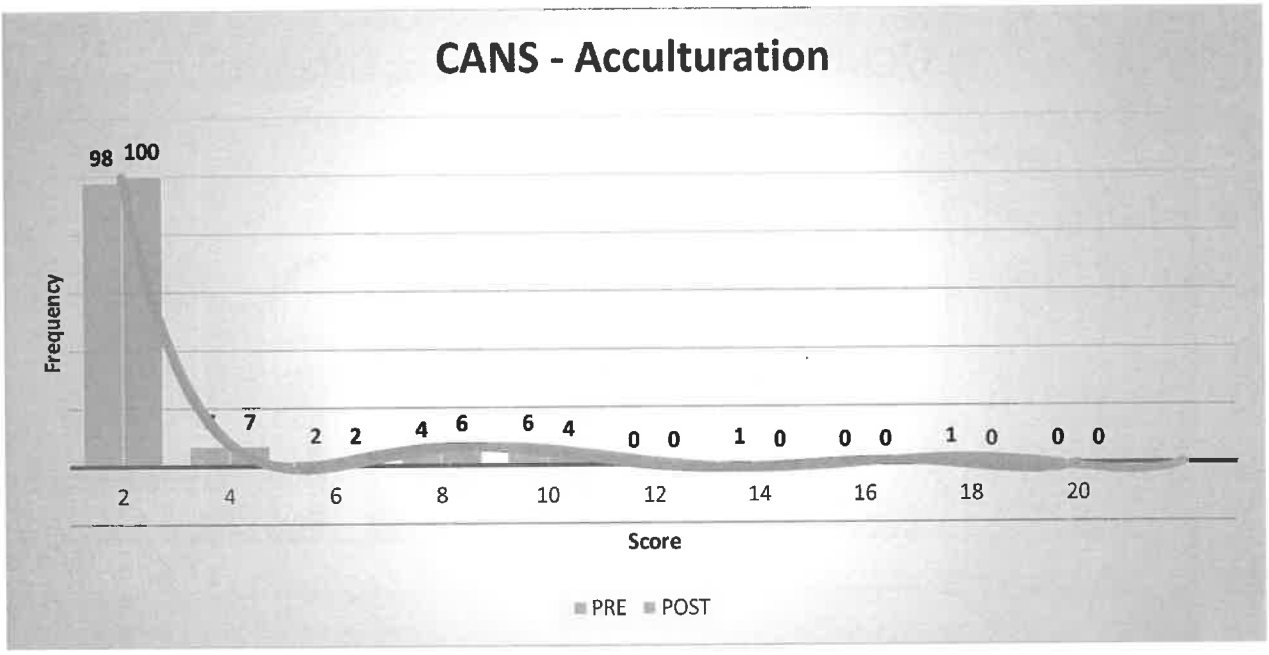

Figure 3: Identifies language, identity, ritual and cultural stress (parent/caregiver). This histogram shows distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

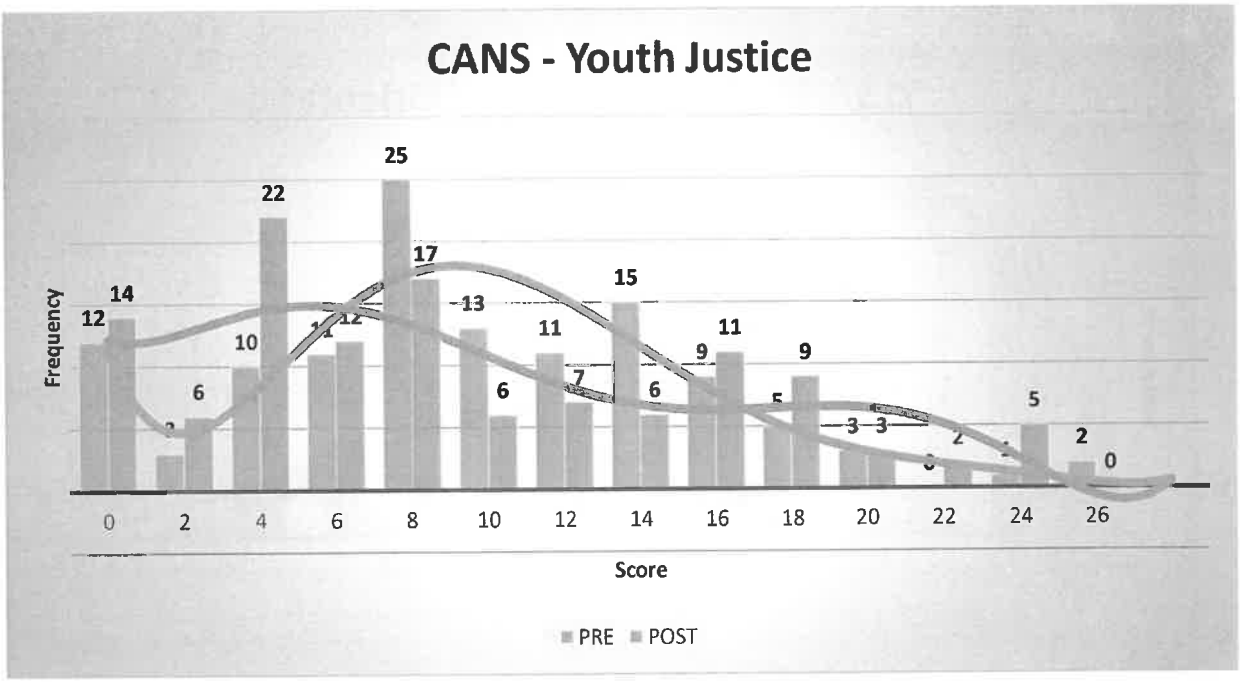

Figure 4: Identifies seriousness, history, arrests, planning, community safety, legal compliance, peer influences, potential criminal behaviour, and environmental influences. This histogram shows distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

Discussion Quantitative

Youturn's CST program largely seems to have a minimizing effect on behavioural risks associated with recidivism. These results appear to support current literature where "youth who completed a youth diversion program were less likely to offend than youth processed through the traditional court system" (Wilson & Hoge, p.24, 2013). Furthermore the "number of court-bound youth in Canada has declined significantly since the widespread adoption of diversion strategies" (Samuels, p.28, 2015).

The increased risk score in the YLS/CMI 2.0 *Prior and Current Offences* category could find support in labelling theory where the criminal label "becomes internalized and consequently increases one's risk of adopting a deviant lifestyle" (Samuels, p.6, 2015). Justice-involved youth may experience a criminal label as contributing to increased criminalization as they feel "ostracized by mainstream society and in turn gravitate to others that have adopted similar labels" (Samuels, p.6, 2015). Moreover, in continued association with others who have been similarly labelled, there is a risk of ongoing and increased criminal behaviour (Samuels, 2015). Lastly, questions in this category of the survey do not fully discriminate the severity of any additional charges from original offences. Thus, if additional, even minor offences are incurred it results in an increased score for this category. This would likely cause an upward shift in mean score demonstrating an apparent increase in risk of recidivism for this category.

For further research, assessing CST outcomes in each risk category may provide additional insight into the program's effectiveness. Current literature suggests that youth placed in programs that target their specific risk profiles (distinguishing between higher- and lower-risk youths) have a better chance to reduce recidivism than programs that did not (Samuels, p.24, 2015). Further investigation into the effectiveness of CST by gender of youth participants could

provide additional insight into the effectiveness of the intervention program as characteristics such as sex can play "a significant role in the probability of continued criminality" (Samuels, p.22-23, 2015).

The YLS/CMI 2.0 category of Attitudes/Orientation as well as the CANS categories of Acculturation and Youth Justice that do not show significant difference do not necessarily imply that these categories of intervention are not successful. Further analysis using larger sample sizes may show that these categories do in fact assist in reducing behaviours associated with recidivism risk.

Future analysis could include a directional statistical test to help confirm the directional shift in mean pre vs. mean post-category scores. The initial analysis involved a two-tailed non-directional hypothesis as an increase or decrease in score could not be assumed prior to investigation. Therefore use of a one tailed hypothesis is not justified. If a one tailed hypothesis t-test had been chosen and risk scores significantly decreased in the above categories as predicted, this would indicate that corresponding risk has also significantly decreased. Furthermore given the asymmetric shape of many of the category score distributions, a non-parametric comparison of medians test may also strengthen conclusions (Weinbach & Grinnell jr, 2010).

Lastly, future work could include a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach as this method "best encapsulates the structural approach to research" (Van de Sande & Schwartz, 2011, p. 65). Using PAR within a structural approach is an ideal amalgamation of theoretical frameworks which aims to research hidden barriers that maintain oppressive forces for justice-involved youth (Carniol, 2010). Furthermore, as noted by Moreau and Frosst (1993), unmasking hidden structures is a key pillar of the structural approach to social work. However due to

barriers presented by YCJA legislation and ethics requirements, it is recognized that future work involving PAR may prove challenging as current legislation mandates the protection of youth identity, requiring all youth participants to remain anonymous (Corrado et al., 2010). If future work involving a PAR approach can be utilised, it is the opinion of these authors that this research may provide valuable information benefitting both CST participants and Youturn's programming.

Qualitative Analysis

Our qualitative analysis focuses solely on the responses of Youturn staff of the effectiveness of the CST program as we were unable to include youth research participants aged 18 and over. Thirty staff members involved with the CST program were sent a link by email to seven survey questions hosted on Survey Monkey. There were seven responses for questions 1-5 and six responses for questions 6 and 7. Each question listed subsequently became a theme for the final report.

Impact of Community Support Team (CST)

Responses indicate that CST had positive effects on reducing youth recidivism. Participants also identify that staff were skilled in engaging youth and that CST provided positive outcomes versus other community services. *"I think the CST program helps reduce the risk of recidivism. Many have been unsuccessful in other programs; CST is able to meet the youth where they are at."*

Staff reported that empathetic and client-centred approaches are used in CST as counselling practices were viewed as assisting youth in reducing recidivism. Some responses indicate that CST works to build coping skills, and engage youth in meaningful dialogue and

pro-social activities. This was, in spite of some youth acquiring new charges while in the CST program, based on information collected by staff as it is their duty to report such activities.

CST impact on family relationships

A majority of staff respondents stated that CST has positively impacted client relationships with their families. Staff participants indicate that CST prepares and supports families as they engage with the challenges of diversion programming while also assisting families in the development of better problem solving skills. The CST program service delivery model incorporates the family as a means of informal and sustainable support. CST supports parents by helping youth in their environment, and within the school system as well. If families can overcome ambivalence about the program then they can explore the service models at CST. *"Families have often indicated great appreciation for our services- we're not always able to completely repair relationships or solve problems during our involvement (given the time and complexity of issues), but we prepare and support families as they take on this challenge with us."* CST is not consistently impacting the family relationships but for those who are engaged, it is effective, especially after the introduction of Collaborative Problem Solving.

CST impact on youth education and employment decisions

Staff mention that CST has had past clients who were terminated from the program and then return when they were ready to engage with program expectations. CST connects youth to employment and education settings through targeted individualized service delivery. Assisting youth with their emotional issues as well as, communication and problem solving skills, supports them when in the work force or at school. *"We will help the youth find the correct school placement and/or support them in their education goals."* One response indicated that CST does

not consistently impact service users' education and employment decisions if youth are not fully engaged in the program.

CST effectiveness on youth achieving personal goals

CST was described by staff-participants as a client-centred practice that encourages program-engagement to better support youth to work on issues they care about. Participants wrote that CST staff review desired goals with youth with an emphasis on reducing recidivism. Harm reduction was another identified goal. Lastly, skill building is used to support youth as they work towards their goals. *"As a client-centred service, CST strives to solely focus on the goals of their clients."*

CST impact on youth developing positive interactions and relationships

Staff participants identified that collaborative problem solving is used to assist youth with their interpersonal skills. Healthy relationships and interactions are addressed in counselling sessions. Staff also work on assisting youth in the development of social skills. *"Yes. We connect youth with positive pro social resources. We model positive interactions and relationships with them". "We challenge thinking errors and distortions when clients' ability to see positive features of others is hindered by their thinking style."*

CST effectiveness in informing youth about available community supports

Survey participants explained that knowledge of services is explored in initial meetings with youth. Youth are then referred to services needed and are provided with a continuation plan after they exit service. Youth are made aware of new services in the community. *"Since we are relatively short-term, we want to connect the youth with other resources."* Participants also stated that advocating may be needed and it is the workers' responsibility to explore service options for youth.

CST effectiveness in encouraging youth to seek out and utilize support from others.

Staff participants report that they work with youth to normalize the notion that all people require help in life and that they support youth to develop better ways in which to articulate their needs and concerns. CST staff also support youth by linking them to formal service providers through referrals, and look for ways to reduce barriers to these services (i.e transportation). Upon discharge, CST staff work to connect youth to long term services. *"We support and shadow our clients as they seek support, role play with them, accompany them to coach and support their needs if they feel stuck in how to articulate what they're doing/wanting."*

Further Qualitative Analysis

While reviewing answers to the questions, several words indicating different themes appear in different areas throughout the responses. Although the questionnaire did not ask for specific theoretical practices, the Socio- Ecological, Client-Centred and Collaborative Problem Solving models were described in various contexts in Questions 1, 2, 3 and 5. *"The CST is able to work with youth in the community and the agency's service model (Socio Ecological Approach/CPS)."*

The term *engagement* also repeatedly occurred throughout Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7. Engagement was used to discuss youth involvement with their own goals and used to describe how workers help youth engage with the program, *"A huge engagement piece is ensuring that they're working on the things they care about"*.

Although Question 7 focused on asking staff participants about how CST encourages service users to seek out supports, this concept of *support* was also mentioned in Questions 2 and 3. The answers describe how families are supported and how they are utilized as an informal support, *"We support employment and education decisions and goals."* The word "skills" was

also identified throughout the answers to the questions in Questions 1, 5 and 7 and was used to identify staff skills as well as youth skill development in areas of coping, interpersonal, social and encourage youth to positively articulate needs and concerns.

Triangulation

By incorporating a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative data collection, we were able to use triangulation to examine whether quantitative results would be supported by qualitative findings. Triangulation refers to seeking corroboration between two or more methods to verify results (van de Sande & Schwartz, 2011). In fact we found that qualitative data did predominantly support quantitative results. The findings of the YLS/CMI 2.0 and CANS assessment tool categories confirm staff survey responses in the following areas: Education/Employment, Peer Relations, Social Skills, Educational Needs, Parent/Caregiver Family Needs and Strengths, as well as Family Needs and Strengths. The YLS/CMI 2.0 category of Attitudes and Orientation did not confirm qualitative findings as quantitative results were not statistically significant.

Furthermore, additional studies have been completed using quantitative measures to evaluate the effectiveness of diversion programs. The quantitative portion of our research produced similar results as those found in research conducted by Wilson and Hoge (2012) which quantitatively assessed the Ottawa Community Youth Diversion Program. The purpose of this study was to test the effectiveness of youth diversion programming in reducing recidivism compared to youth placed in probation programming (Wilson & Hoge, 2012). Wilson and Hoge's analysis found that pre-charge and post-charge diversion programs, "are significantly more effective in reducing recidivism that the traditional justice system." (Wilson & Hoge, 2012, p.510).

Our attempts to qualitatively assess Youturn's CST program were limited to a small sample of seven staff participants who provided both their perceptions and insight into the effectiveness of CST. The qualitative findings support the original hypothesis that the program at Youturn is effective in reducing risk levels among youth participants.

Limitations

Completing a program evaluation focused on a specific population does have limitations. Research has shown that this method has a high probability of bias (Grinnell, Williams & Unrau, 2014). Firstly, the outcome of the population studied may not be representative of the entire youth population involved with diversion programs. As such, the conclusions may not be generalizable to the wider population (Grinnell, Williams & Unrau, 2014; van de Sande & Schwartz, 2011). Secondly, although the YLS/CMI 2.0 and the CANS assessment tools have been internally validated, the assessment procedure itself may have some limitations. The YLS/CMI 2.0 pre-test/post-test tool design may have influenced youth responses due to the "reactive effect" (Marlow, 2005). As noted by Marlow (2005), this phenomenon encapsulates the idea that the responder's familiarity with the test influences the post-test responses. Secondly, at Youturn the worker completes the YLS/CMI 2.0 and the CANS on the youth's behalf. Although completing the assessment for the youth may bridge any existing literacy gaps, one must recognize that there may be a "socially desirability bias" by youth to please the worker (Grinnell, Williams & Unrau, 2014). The ramification of this bias is that responses have a tendency to be more positive than if the test taker is left alone in the room (Grinnell, Williams & Unrau, 2014).

Furthermore, staff sample responses may have been influenced by sample bias. Sample bias occurs when the studied population does not have equal opportunity to participate in

research, thereby skewing research outcomes (Grinnell, Williams & Unrau, 2014). For example, the Youturn staff responses to the online questionnaire were voluntary. The voluntary response sample is known not to be as trustworthy as random samples (Grinnell, Williams & Unrau, 2014). Additionally, randomization is further reduced due to the small size of the staff sample (7 responses out of a possible 33). Small sample size skews research outcomes (Grinnell et al., 2014). Moreover, in the summative/formative program evaluation process, the randomization of staff participation would be nearly impossible to perform due to agency size. Finally, a vested interest of staff in providing positive responses to the CST program should be recognized as these responses may be tied to future funding.

Data was retrieved from the YLS/CMI 2.0 and CANS based on intake and discharge youth participant assessments. Data from youth participants that did not complete the program was automatically excluded by SPSS. Data analyzed was gathered from September 1st 2013 to February 1st 2016 (Couture, L. April 4, 2016). Data from the YLS/CMI 2.0 and CANS was comprised of 144 youth participants and 121 youth participants respectively. Less data in CANS is a result of the implementation of a new tracking method Youturn recently employed (Couture, L. April 11, 2016).

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Appendix A

Below are additional figures from YLS/CMI 2.0 categories showing distributions of the paired t-test results. These figures were requested by Youturn.

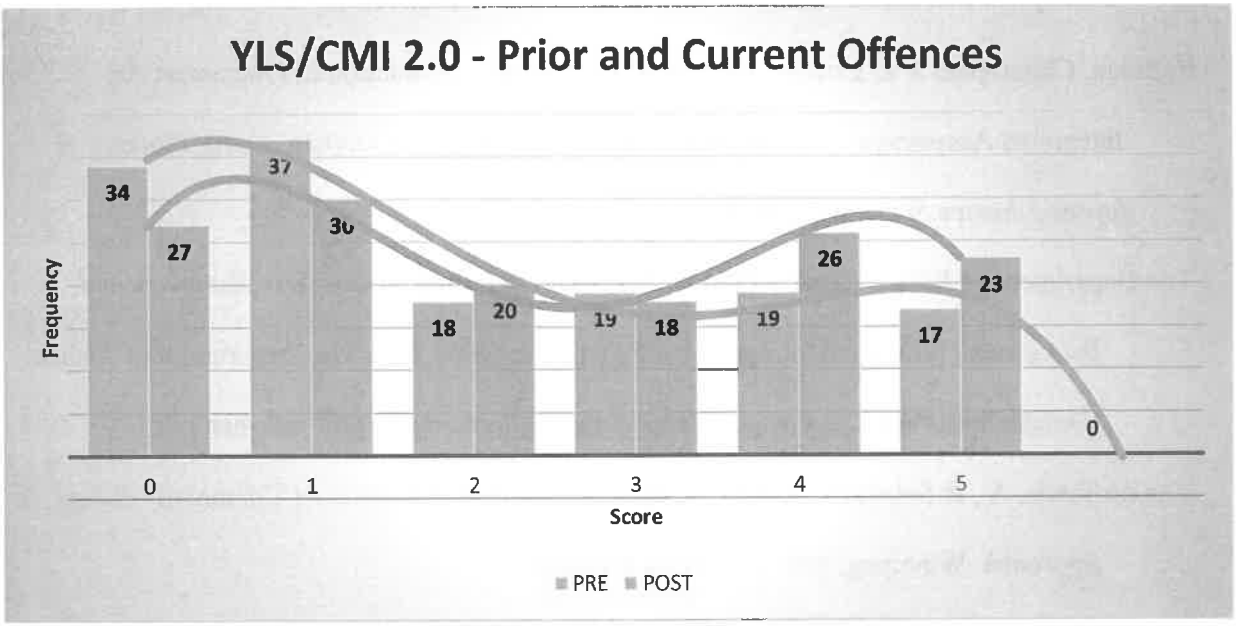

Figure A1: A histogram showing distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

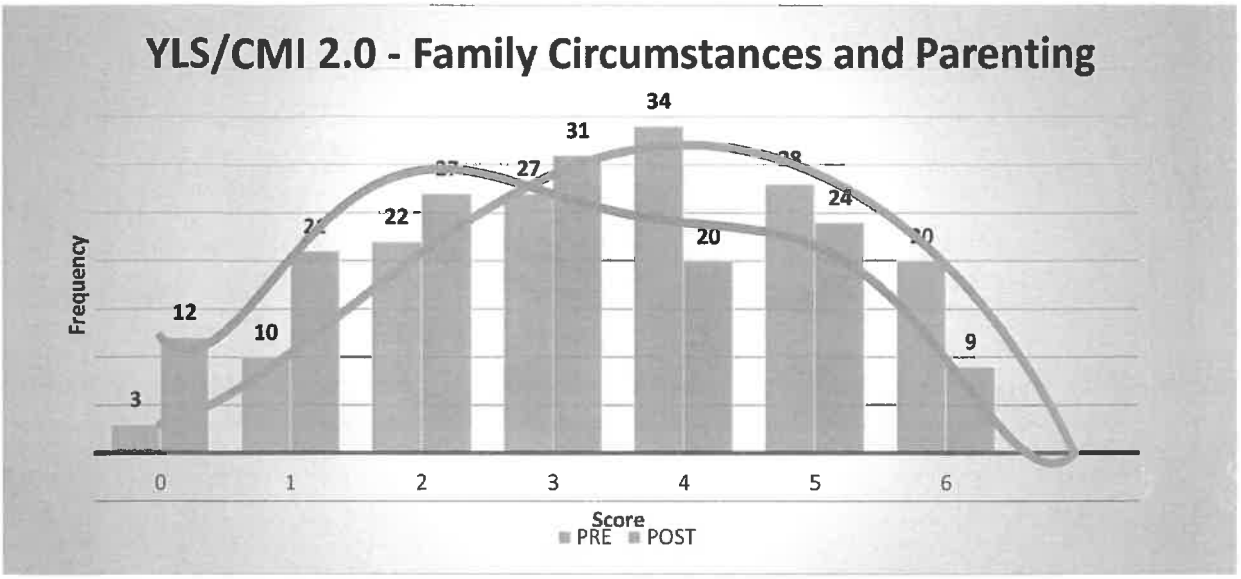

Figure A2: A histogram showing distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

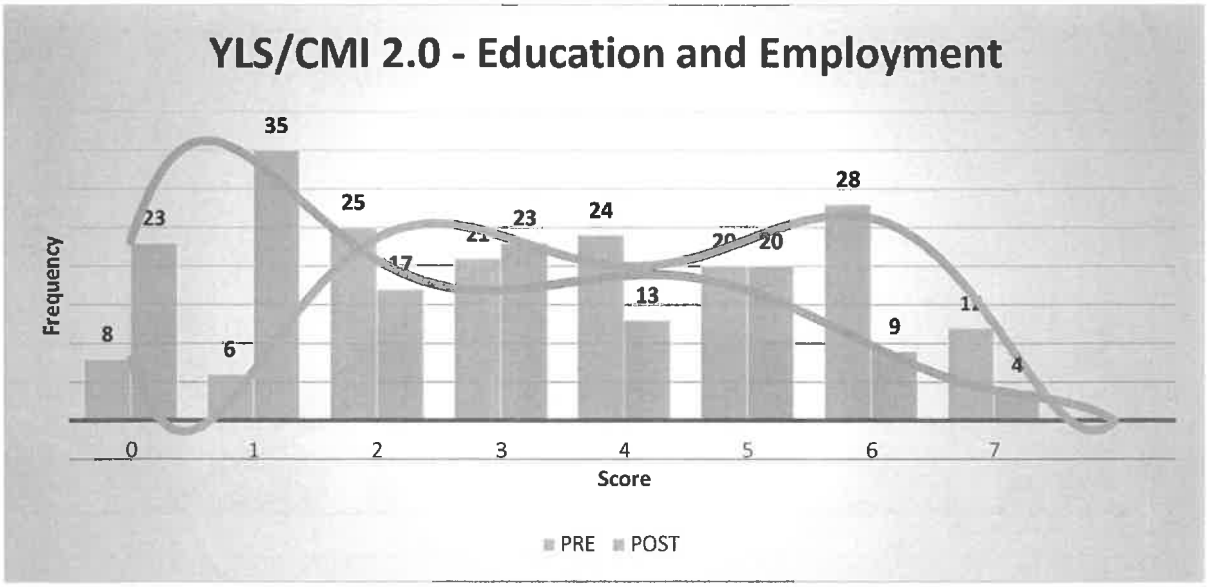

Figure A3: A histogram showing distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

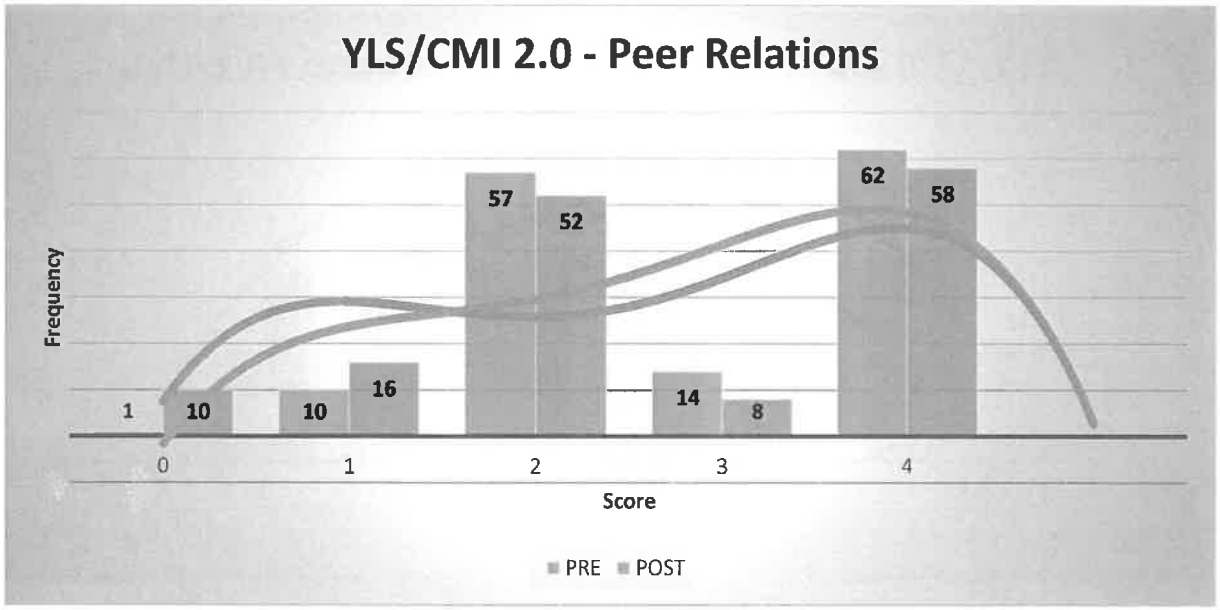

Figure A4: A histogram showing distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

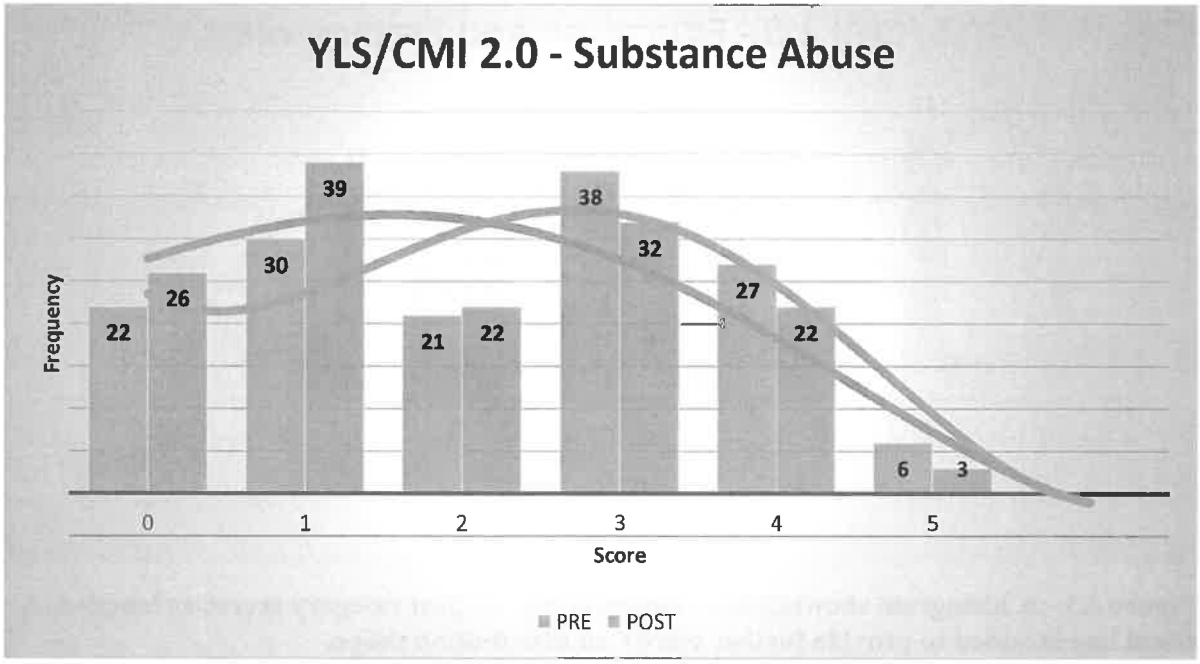

Figure A5: A histogram showing distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

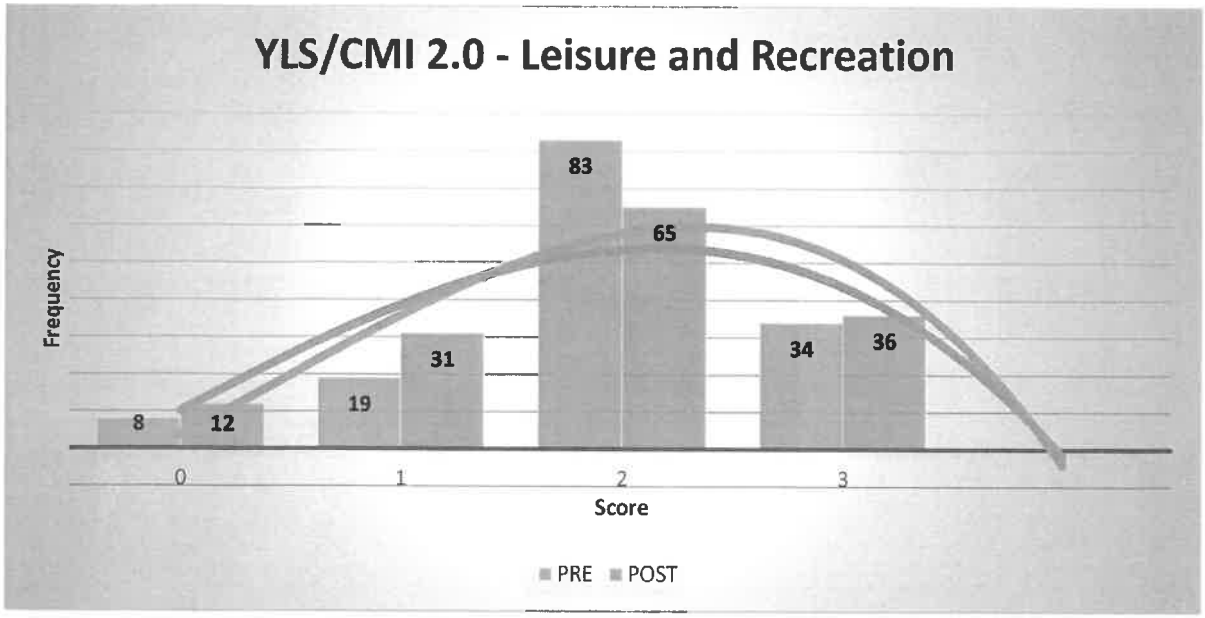

Figure A6: A histogram showing distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

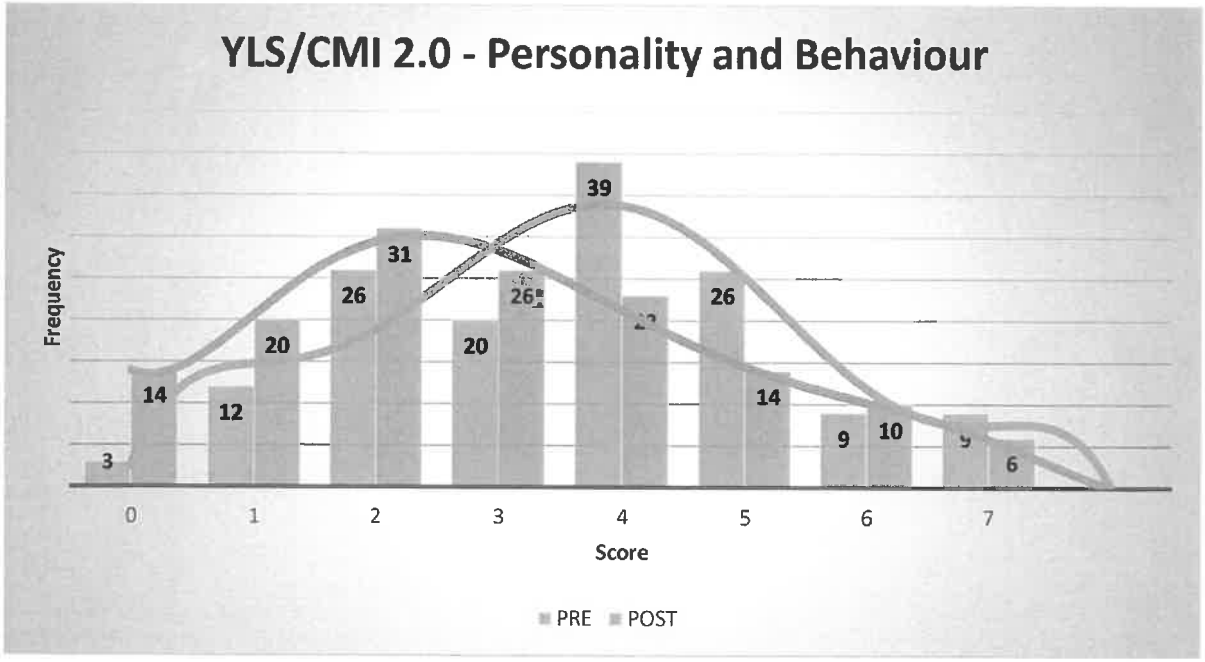

Figure A7: A histogram showing distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

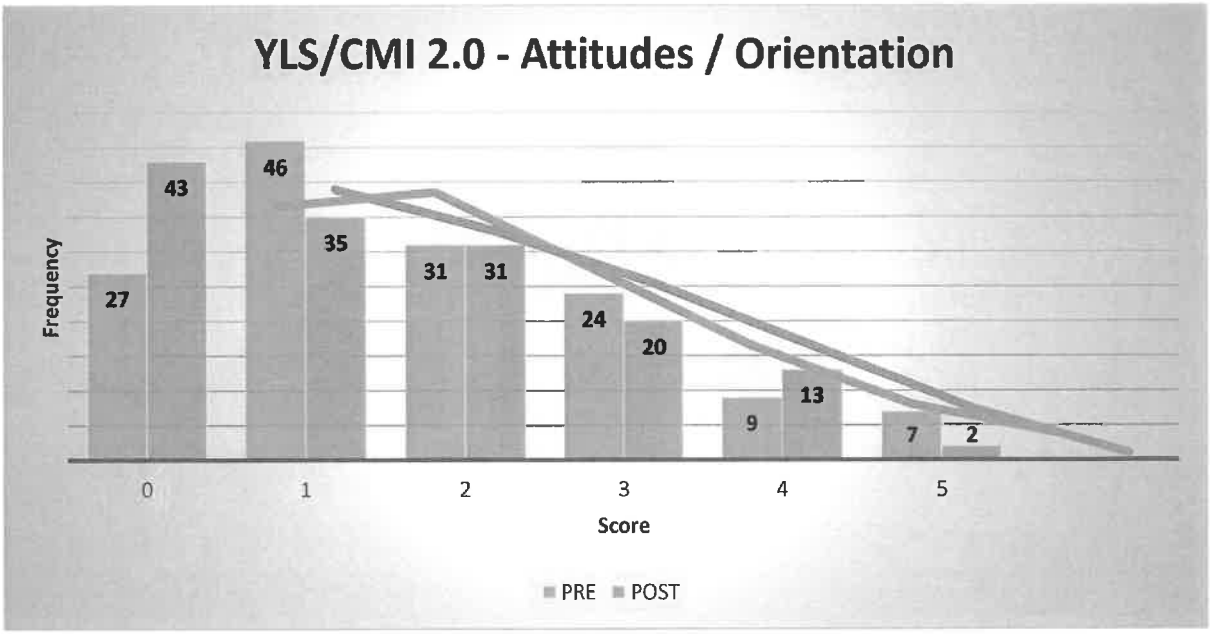

Figure A8: A histogram showing distribution of pre vs. post category scores as labelled. A trend line is added to provide further clarity on distribution shape.

Appendix B

The following tables show the p-values as well as an apparent shift in mean post-test for the CANS and YLS/CMI 2.0 assessment tools.

CANS (pre vs. post)		
CATEGORY	p-value	Mean shift
Youth Justice	0.448*	v
Acculturation	0.250*	v
Executive functioning	0.000	v
Emotion regulation skills	0.000	v
Social skills	0.000	v
Mental health	0.000	v
Risk behaviour	0.000	v
Educational needs	0.000	v
Child/youth individual strengths	0.001	v
Child/youth environmental strengths	0.003	v
Present caregiver family needs/strengths	0.250	v
Family needs & strengths	0.013	v

Figure B1: CANS table showing p-value and apparent shift in mean scores. *not statistically significant

YLS/CMI 2.0 (pre vs. post)		
CATEGORY	p-value	Mean shift
Prior & Current Offences	0.000	^
Family circumstances	0.000	v
Education/employment	0.000	v
Peer relations	0.002	v
Substance abuse	0.004	v
Leisure/Recreation	0.028	v
Personality/Behaviour	0.000	v
Attitudes/Orientation	0.056*	v

Figure B2: YLS/CMI 2.0 table showing p-value and apparent shift in mean scores. *not statistically significant.