

# Evidence Summary

Community-based Diversion Program Models for Youth at Risk for Justice System Involvement

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## Introduction

In Canada, when anyone who is 12 to 17 years old has likely committed an offense, police have the choice of either charging them or diverting them away from the justice system. This can be done immediately (for example, by doing nothing, issuing an informal or formal warning, and/or involving the parents), or by arresting the young person and using pre-charge extrajudicial measures. If the officer decides to charge the youth, the Crown can use post-charge extrajudicial sanctions. In many cases, police or the Crown refer the youth to specific community organizations that offer diversion programs to address the young person's needs.<sup>1</sup>

This document contains brief summaries of three community-based programs and models for prevention and diversion of youth who are at risk for justice system involvement. These programs (two Canadian and one British) apply to youth regardless of whether or not they have mental health (MH) or addictions concerns. The aim is to give the reader a starting point in understanding possible program models.

Each summary reviews a number of program features, including the key components, sectors involved, and readiness for implementation. Where available, we provide evidence of the program's effectiveness. Given that risk/needs screening is a major element of these program models, we first briefly discuss screening tools.

The document was developed for the Justice Service Collaboratives of the Systems Improvement through Service Collaboratives (SISC) initiative in Ontario. It was produced by the Performance Measurement and Implementation Research (PMIR) team and the Evidence Exchange Network (EENet), which are part of the Provincial System Support Program (PSSP) at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). For other summaries developed for the Justice Service Collaboratives, go to <http://eenet.ca/products-tools/approaches-for-serving-justice-involved-persons-with-mental-health-concerns/>.

## Youth Risk Screening Tools

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.<sup>2</sup> See the following online documents for summaries of specific risk/needs screening and assessment tools used in Canada:

- Youth Risk/Need Assessment: An Overview of Issues and Practices:<sup>3</sup>  
[http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/yj-ij/rr03\\_yj4-rr03\\_jj4/rr03\\_yj4.pdf](http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/yj-ij/rr03_yj4-rr03_jj4/rr03_yj4.pdf)
- Tools to Identify and Assess the Risk of Offending among Youth:<sup>4</sup>  
<http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/tls-dntf-rsk-rprt/tls-dntf-rsk-rprt-eng.pdf>

Since justice-involved youth might also have MH/addictions issues, programs may wish to provide them more targeted mental health and addiction (MH/A) interventions based on additional assessments. For





a review of brief MH/A screening tools that can be used by non-clinical staff in justice or health care systems, see the EENet screening tools evidence summary ([http://eenet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/JSC-Screening-tools\\_APR2014FINAL.pdf](http://eenet.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/JSC-Screening-tools_APR2014FINAL.pdf))

## Youth Diversion Program Models

### Ottawa Community Youth Diversion Program (Canadian)

<b>Description / aim</b>	Pre-charge or post-charge screening and referral of youth to the Ottawa Boys and Girls Club (OBGC) to reduce re-offending and risk factors for crime.
<b>Populations</b>	Youth ages 12-17 who are referred by police as a pre-charge extrajudicial measure. Referrals can also come from the Crown as a post-charge extrajudicial sanction or from the youth (note that there are some eligibility criteria, and the youth must appear to be able to benefit from participation). Appears suitable for Francophone youth as the main standardized screening tools have French versions.
<b>Gap addressed</b>	Justice/MH – prevention and community referrals (police/court diversion to community).
<b>Key components</b>	<p>Services include: screening and assessment (using standardized measures), interventions to reduce reoffending, ongoing support, conflict mediation, resources for families.<sup>5</sup></p> <p>Referring officers use a RNR approach and the following tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A standardized warning template – ensures consistency in the various officers’ and investigators’ approaches to the pre-charge diversions);</li> <li>• Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) – Screening Version (YLS/CMI-SV) to identify risk factors for crime.</li> </ul> <p>After referral, OCYDP caseworkers use the following tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI) –assesses several life domains and helps set appropriate goals and develop an effective case management plan;</li> <li>• How I Think Questionnaire (HIT-Q) - Measures the youth’s thinking errors.<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Services, sectors, levels of care involved</b>	Justice sector and community services. Pre-charge diversion: The youth section of the Ottawa Police Service (OPS) for initial screening and referrals (can involve frontline officers, investigators, and school resource officers).





**Resources required**

Ottawa Community Youth Diversion Program (OCYDP) caseworkers are forwarded all referrals from the officers or Crown, who are trained in the screening tool. Program coordinators run the programs. Both officers and caseworkers require standardized screening tools (which must be purchased from the developers).

**Readiness for implementation**

The RCMP began widespread implementation of a program that was influenced by Ottawa’s youth diversion program, called the Youth Intervention and Diversion Program model. The RCMP program similarly uses the RNR model and standardized screening and assessment tools to inform case management strategies. However, the YIDP model has several additional components (e.g., youth referral to a cross-sectoral committee who complete a full assessment – see summary table in this document for more details).

**Effectiveness evidence**

A recent evaluation of the OCYDP suggests that the program is generally successful in reducing re-offending. This study compared a random sample of 170 medium-risk youth who completed the OCYDP (“diversion youth”) with a matched group of 208 youth sentenced to probation (“probation youth”). In addition to level of risk (assessed with the YLS/CMI), the groups were matched on age and sex. Results showed that the diversion youth re-offended significantly less after at least 18 months compared with the probation youth. There were no differences between the groups after shorter time periods (6 months or 1 year).

A related analysis showed that youth on probation were almost twice as likely as diverted youth to be re-convicted each month. This evidence is consistent with a recent meta-analysis by the same researchers.

However, one important finding is that youth who did not complete the OCYDP had significantly higher reconviction rates than those who fully or partially completed the program and those in the probation group.<sup>7</sup>

Aside from limitations reported by the researchers, the OCYDP coordinator, Tom Scholberg, noted that the study did not include tests before and after the program (i.e., pre-post results) (personal communication, September 6, 2013). The OCYDP brochure suggests several additional benefits of the program, including avoiding court, efficiency in addressing the youth’s issues, and cost effectiveness.<sup>5</sup>

**Contacts**

OCYDP Coordinator: 613-225-4093

**References and Resources**

Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa (n.d.). OCYDP brochure.  
 Houldsworth, M., & Scholberg, T. (2012). The Ottawa Police Service approach to crime reduction. *The Gazette*, 74(1). Available at: <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/gazette/vol74n1/coverstory-reportage-eng.htm#ops>  
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Note that the John Howard Society of Ottawa offers other diversion programming in Ottawa: [http://www.ottawa.johnhoward.ca/programs/youth\\_justice/#diversion](http://www.ottawa.johnhoward.ca/programs/youth_justice/#diversion)

### Youth Intervention and Diversion Program Model (Canadian)

<b>Description / aim</b>	This program model involves the RCMP and community partners. The model aims to reduce re-offending and address youth needs in a client-centred and relevant way. <sup>6</sup>
<b>Populations</b>	Canadian youth who are referred by police before they are charged. It is not specifically designed to support youth with complex MH and addictions needs. The process has been used with rural and Francophone youth.
<b>Gap addressed</b>	Pre-charge diversion
<b>Key components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RNR approach that matches resources/services to youth’s needs.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>• Standardized screening and assessment, uses tools for risk/needs assessment and development of a case management plan (e.g., the multi-purpose <i>Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory</i>).<sup>8</sup></li> <li>• Cross-sectoral Youth Intervention and Diversion Committees (YIDCs) with diverse community partners, covering all relevant areas of a region/province.</li> <li>• Case planning conferences among committee members and community programs officers (i.e., case conferencing) ensures youth are referred to appropriate services in an efficient, client-centred way while pooling resources and avoiding duplication of services.</li> <li>• Referral to appropriate, client-centred community services that are based on the youth’s risk level and needs.<sup>6</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Services, sectors, levels of care</b>	Justice sector and community services.
<b>Resources required</b>	Costs associated with most of the screening/assessment tools. Possible training costs for screening tools. Time and venue for committee members to hold regular case planning conferences.
<b>Readiness for Implementation</b>	The Youth Intervention and Diversion Program was launched in New Brunswick in 2009 and has since expanded to Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and British Columbia. The program is adapted from the OCYDP, which also uses the RNR approach and standardized screening/assessment tools but does not use a committee format. <sup>5,6</sup>



**Effectiveness evidence**

Beaton et al. (2013) reported, “Incidents of youth crime have dropped by almost one third, youth crime severity is down 30% and referrals to post charge extrajudicial sanctions are down by more than a quarter” (p. 10).<sup>9</sup> It is also promising that the RCMP has decided to expand the YIDP into at least four other provinces.

**Contacts**

No contact information available.

**References and Links**

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Beaton, Bourque, Whalen et al. (2013, April). SPOR-TRAM-EOI. Adolescent Connections Team – New Brunswick: SPOR-TRAM EOI. *Child & Youth Advocate*. Available at: <http://www.gnb.ca/0073/Child-YouthAdvocate/PDF/ACTTRAM-e.pdf>.

Boys and Girls Club of Ottawa (n.d.). Ottawa Community Youth Diversion Program brochure.

Hoge, R. D., & Andrews, D. A. (2013). YLS/CMI™: Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory – Description. Available at: <http://www.mhs.com/product.aspx?gr=saf&prod=yjs-cmi&id=overview>

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**Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion Model (British)**

**Description / aim**

This model, from Public Health England, is designed to find help for vulnerable children, youth, and families when they first come in contact with police, to divert them from the youth justice system to other community services. The aim is to identify high-risk children and youth and provide timely screening, liaison, and interventions.<sup>10</sup> The main priorities are to intervene early and to act as a single point of access.

The model involves collaborative decision-making, maintaining good connections, and sharing information among all individuals and services involved.<sup>10</sup> The Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion (YJLD) model is based on early intervention and public health approaches, and follows the key principles for action from the British government’s *Healthy Children, Safer Communities* strategy (<http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/tk/sh/features>).

**Populations**

Children and youth who are at risk for negative outcomes (developed and piloted in England).

<b>Gap addressed</b>	Pre-charge diversion and system navigation.
<b>Key components</b>	<p>The YJLD project team follows four steps for each youth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stage 1: Filter referral <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Identify at-risk youth at first contact with police or other workers (e.g., using a Youth justice liaison and diversion checklist to determine if the youth is within the scope of the project, and shows at least one risk factor indicating the need for screening);</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stage 2: Check service information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Check with other professionals and databases to find existing information about the young person to avoid duplication of work;</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stage 3: Screening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Use standardized and/or locally-adapted screening tools to determine the young person's need for health, social, and educational services and other supports (see <a href="http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/tk/id/tooltable">http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/tk/id/tooltable</a> for possible tools);</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stage 4: Assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Confirm any concerns identified in screening through a detailed assessment (e.g., completing a Common Assessment Framework (CAF) process of early intervention, holistic needs assessment, delivering integrated services/interventions, and reviewing progress – see <a href="http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130903161352/http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/integratedworking/caf/a0068957/the-caf-process">http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130903161352/http://www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/strategy/integratedworking/caf/a0068957/the-caf-process</a>;</li> <li>○ For more specialized assessment, the YJLD worker takes on a liaison role between the child/youth and specialist agencies (this can involve motivational or interim work to prepare the youth for appointments/assessment; liaison to ensure the youth is connected with needed services; accompanying the youth and family to appointments; tracking how things are going; and collaborating with the speciality agency to determine next steps or intervention);</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Stage 5: Interventions and pathways <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Can involve several support functions of YJLD workers (e.g., outreach work, mapping local services to develop care pathways, coordinating access to appropriate evidence-based services, potentially delivering brief interventions as an interim support, problem solving early issues with access to services, providing crisis response/support, advocacy);</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Other possible roles of YJLD workers include information sharing among partners, help with decision-making forums/opportunities, delivering training, and collaboration with adult sectors for transition-age youth.<sup>10</sup> (From <a href="http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/tk/identification">http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/tk/identification</a> and <a href="http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/tk/sh/functions">http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/tk/sh/functions</a>)</li> </ul>
<b>Services, sectors, levels of care</b>	Justice system and linkages to other community services.





**Resources required**

Hiring and training of a YJLD worker. Screening and assessment tools (possible costs for materials and training). Protocols and other governance documents (e.g., MOU, terms of reference, etc.).

**Readiness for implementation**

The Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network developed a practical online toolkit for starting a YJLD project: <http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/toolkit>. It contains detailed information about the model and covers topics such as identification, screening, and assessment; interventions and pathways; governance and sustainability; and measuring effectiveness (which includes suggestions for developing a logic model and a detailed list of possible indicators and outcome measures for evaluating the scheme (e.g., <http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/tk/mea/choosing>). The toolkit also contains several “top tips” for getting started, based on lessons learned in six UK pilot sites.<sup>10</sup>

**Effectiveness evidence**

Six YJLD schemes were piloted in 2007, to identify and support youth and families more systematically as they first enter the youth justice system. An independent team evaluated these schemes and published the results.<sup>11</sup> Several statistically significant findings and lessons learned were highlighted on the Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network website (<http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/r/gov>). The results suggest that diverted youth were less likely to re-offend and had some positive MH outcomes (e.g., improvements in depression and self-harm). One major barrier discovered was that partners needed to better collaborate and coordinate.<sup>10</sup>

Despite these encouraging results, the evaluators noted that there were several non-significant findings (e.g., no significant differences in overall re-offending rates between intervention and control groups). Although the results don’t support the YJLD schemes as being an evidence-based practice, the study identified many promising approaches and key elements.<sup>12</sup> For instance, research suggests that having protocols/MOUs in place can help youth access MH support, maintain strong connections with service providers across organizations or sectors, and ensure that these agencies follow effective and ethical information-sharing practices.<sup>13</sup>

**Contacts**

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Child and Maternal Health Intelligence Network (Chimat) (2013). *Youth Justice Liaison and Diversion*. Public Health England. Available at: <http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/yjld>

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Pakes, F., & Winstone, J. (2008). A site visit survey of 101 mental health liaison and diversion schemes in England. *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology*, 21(6), 873-886.

**Toolkit:** <http://www.chimat.org.uk/yj/toolkit>



*This is a living document and the information on which it is based may evolve over time. While great care was taken to prepare this summary, we acknowledge the possibility of human error due to search limitations and rapid timelines. Therefore, we do not warrant that the information contained in this document is fully current, accurate, or complete. If you have any comments or suggestions to improve its content, please inform your Regional Implementation Coordinator or contact [eenet@camh.ca](mailto:eenet@camh.ca).*



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