



Alberta Youth Justice Committee Needs Assessment Results

January 2025



Assessment conducted by the Calgary Youth Justice Society in
collaboration with Constellation Consulting Group



Executive Summary



Youth Justice Committees (YJCs) are community-based alternatives to the court system for young people ages 12 to 18 in Alberta who are facing criminal charges. YJC's aim to help youth move past a criminal offense or offenses by finding appropriate consequences that ensure they are accountable for their actions while providing opportunities for personal growth and community connection (i.e. 'holding youth accountable without holding them back').

First established in Alberta in 1993 under Section 69 of the *Young Offenders Act*, YJC's have a long history of diverting young people away from formal justice system processes in Alberta. Since April 1, 2003, YJC's have continued to operate, now under Section 18 of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA), with 45 YJC's currently operating across the province (incl. YJC's in Indigenous communities; YJC's that serve multiple municipalities/towns/counties; and multiple YJC's operating in the province's large urban centres).

With a desire to ensure *all* young people in Alberta have access to a YJC to take responsibility for their actions if they are involved in a crime, Alberta Justice partnered with the Calgary Youth Justice Society and Constellation Consulting Group in 2024 to undertake a needs assessment study of YJC's in Alberta. The needs assessment team engaged with one law enforcement agency with a provincial lens, two probation officers and 39 YJC's operating in the province. The needs assessment also included a brief review of existing literature/research and statistics. The current report presents findings from the needs assessment along with considerations for future directions.

In conversation with YJC's across the province, the needs assessment revealed that the individuals involved in delivering YJC opportunities to young people in Alberta are passionate about their work and dedicated to ensuring youth have access to high quality opportunities for community-based justice. While YJC's discussed different challenges that their work presents, they all emphasized the benefits of having YJC's available in their communities and a strong desire to work through challenges to ensure the opportunity continues to be available in years to come. Further, an opportunity to further engage and learn from YJC's serving Indigenous communities to better understand their distinctive perspectives on youth community-based justice and to foster opportunities for collaborative knowledge-sharing with the broader YJC community of practice in Alberta was identified.

Ultimately, the needs assessment revealed:

 Key Learnings	 Implications from Learnings
<p>Limited resources and the reliance on volunteers to run YJC's can make some tasks like volunteer recruitment and training, administration, awareness, and/or evaluation difficult, which may slow down their response time.</p>	<p>YJC's may have difficulty undertaking any additional work towards increasing consistency or making changes without additional resources and any additional support or resources would likely be greatly appreciated and well-used.</p>
<p>Many YJC's are struggling with low referral rates (particularly groups serving rural, Northern, and/or Indigenous communities). Having a low number of referrals not only means there may be young people missing the opportunity to participate with a YJC, but it is also impacting volunteer retention and community awareness of the program.</p>	<p>Support for increasing referrals and educating communities (incl. schools, law enforcement, and the justice system) may be needed to generate an increase in referrals while at the same time ensuring the YJC is equipped to manage an increase in referrals.</p>
<p>Many YJC's do not have formalized policies, processes, procedures, and/or documentation to guide their work. This is more common in smaller communities.</p>	<p>Support for development of key processes or documentation may be needed to ensure all YJC's have a baseline standard of practice without overburdening volunteers with the task of developing these things on their own.</p>
<p>The young people who are being referred to YJC's in Alberta face complex family, life, and identity-related situations. At the same time, smaller communities may lack resources for young people or YJC volunteers may be unsure of the existing resources in the community that may benefit youth.</p>	<p>The existence of YJC's in Alberta provides young people facing complex situations with an opportunity to avoid criminal justice system involvement and to pursue personal advancement opportunities. Those involved in referring youth (e.g. crown, probation, law enforcement) and the YJC volunteers who work with referred youth may need additional training or resources to understand the complexities young people are facing and what can be done to support them.</p>

Based on the key learnings from the needs assessment, ideas for moving forward with YJC's in Alberta emerged. These ideas are envisioned as a *process* of evolving towards a future state wherein all youth in Alberta can access opportunities to take responsibility for their actions through a YJC process, no matter where they live in the province. The process is suggested to start with continued support and capacity building with current YJC's (e.g. development of an Alberta Youth Justice Network, creation of a province-wide volunteer management program), followed by steps to further strengthen and expand YJC's in Alberta (e.g. creation of specialized YJC programs to address serious offences, increase YJC's capacity to engage with victims, revitalizing YJC's that have been discontinued, supporting community groups interested in establishing a new YJC in their community). Ultimately, there is a vision for Alberta's YJC's to provide a consistently high-quality opportunity for all youth in the province to access community-based justice when crime occurs.

Acknowledgements

We would like to sincerely thank all of the YJC representatives, justice, law enforcement, and government personnel who supported the creation of this needs assessment by sharing their expertise, perspectives, and stories.

With the Calgary Youth Justice Society and Constellation Consulting Group headquarters based in the area currently called Calgary Alberta we acknowledge with gratitude that we are on the traditional territories and home of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations (Chiniki, Bearspaw, Goodstoney), and the Otipemisiwak Métis Government (Districts 5 and 6).

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1.0 Introduction & Background

Youth Justice Committees (YJCs) are community-based alternatives to the court system for young people ages 12 to 18 in Alberta who are facing criminal charges. YJC's aim to help youth move past a criminal offense or offenses by finding appropriate sanctions that ensure they are accountable for their actions while providing opportunities for personal growth and community connection. YJC's help young people understand the impact of their actions and take responsibility for their behavior. By emphasizing community involvement and rehabilitation over punitive measures, YJC's seek to reduce recidivism and support positive youth development, ultimately contributing to safer and more supportive communities across Alberta. YJC's also provide valuable sentencing advice to youth courts, helping them tailor appropriate and meaningful consequences for young people who are charged with a crime. This approach is envisioned as an opportunity to ensure youth are held accountable for their actions without ultimately holding youth back from future opportunities.

First established in Alberta in 1993 under Section 69 of the *Young Offenders Act*, YJC's have a long history of diverting young people away from formal justice system processes in Alberta. Since April 1, 2003, YJC's have continued to operate, now under Section 18 of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA). YJCs are primarily driven by volunteers, with dedicated community members playing a key role in their creation, implementation, and ongoing operation. These volunteers are committed to supporting youth in making positive choices and fostering a stronger, more supportive community. The positive impact of YJC's is experienced by multiple individuals and groups, including young people, their families, victims, volunteers, the justice system, and the community.

With a desire to ensure the availability of high-quality YJC options for all young people in Alberta and recognizing the significant societal and social changes that have occurred since the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2024 Alberta Justice partnered with the Calgary Youth Justice Society (CYJS) and Constellation Consulting Group to undertake a needs assessment study of YJC's in Alberta. The purpose of the needs assessment was to gather information from multiple sources to better understand the history and current state of YJC's in Alberta such that appropriate actions can be pursued to ensure all youth in the province have access to YJC's, when appropriate. The current report presents findings from the needs assessment along with considerations for future directions.

2.0 Needs Assessment Methods

The needs assessment explored multiple sources of information to garner a fulsome picture of YJC needs and opportunities in Alberta. Overall, the assessment used a strengths-based approach, seeking to respect community wisdom and expertise and build on collaborative opportunities for knowledge sharing. Specific methods included:

- Review of available statistics on youth crime and the use of YJC's in Alberta from sources such as Statistics Canada and Alberta Justice.
- Review of external literature on the benefits/limitations of a restorative justice approach to youth crime.
- Interviews/surveys with **39** YJC representatives across Alberta (see Appendix B for a list of groups engaged). This included:¹
 - **7** groups who serve large urban communities (population over 100,000).
 - **11** groups who serve small urban communities (population of 10,000 to 100,000).
 - **3** groups who serve rural communities in Southern Alberta (population under 10,000 located South of Calgary).
 - **15** groups who serve rural communities in Central Alberta (population under 10,000 located between Calgary and Edmonton).
 - **9** groups who serve Northern remote/rural communities (population under 10,000 located North of Edmonton).
 - **9** groups who serve Indigenous communities.
- Interviews with **2** probation officers in Alberta.

See Appendix B for a full list of participating Youth Justice Committees. Survey/interview questions available upon request.

2.1 Needs Assessment Limitations

It is recognized that within any research initiative there are limitations. While attempts were made to decrease the limitations in the current needs assessment, it is nevertheless recognized that biases or oversights have not been eliminated using the chosen methods. Specifically, limitations include:

- **Limitations in responses received.** While the inclusion of a variety of YJC groups from different community sizes and regions is valuable, the sample size of 39 YJC representatives may not fully capture the diversity of experiences across all Alberta communities. Despite multiple attempts to engage key partners, responses were not received from eight YJCs, and one law enforcement agency with a provincial perspective

¹ Note: Groups may be included in more than one category as they may serve more than one type of community (e.g. Indigenous and Northern rural/remote; large urban and Southern rural)

provided statistical data. Additionally, two probation officers participated in the process. This limited engagement may affect the generalizability of the findings, particularly in relation to the perspectives of the justice system and law enforcement, highlighting a potential area for future engagement and research.

- **Limitations in available program data.** Currently, the data on the total number of referrals to YJCs across the province is self-reported by the committees, which may lead to overrepresentation or underrepresentation of actual referral numbers. Additionally, the methodology does not incorporate longitudinal data, which would provide a deeper understanding of trends over time, especially regarding the effectiveness of YJCs and the impact of community-based justice practices. Future improvements to reporting processes could enhance data accuracy and provide more reliable insights moving forward.
- **Limitations in congruency between data timeframes.** While YJC's and Alberta Justice typically track statistics based on a fiscal year calendar (April to March), comparable crime statistics recorded by Statistics Canada are reported based on a calendar year. Further, referrals to YJC's may not happen immediately, resulting in a time lag between encounters with law enforcement and/or charges laid and YJC referrals being recorded. This impacts the reliability of comparison data looking at YJC referrals compared to youth encounters with law enforcement and/or youth charged with a crime (Section 4).
- **Potential limitation related to willingness to work with the Calgary Youth Justice Society:** Since the interviews with probation, law enforcement, and YJC's were conducted in collaboration with the Calgary Youth Justice Society, there may have been information not shared or individuals not interested in being involved due to inhibition around providing information about processes and results to another youth justice organization (i.e. perception of competition or lack of authority).

3.0 What We Learned from the Literature

Defining Restorative Justice

Traditional ‘retributive justice’ views crime as a violation of the state that requires *retribution* through pain and punishment.² ‘Restorative justice’, by contrast, views crime as a violation of *relationships* that obliges offenders to *repair harm* done.³ Restorative justice emphasizes:⁴

- Meaningful accountability of *harm-doers*.
- The wellbeing and healing of *victims of harm, communities, and harm-doers*.
- Ways for *the community* to collectively deal with the consequences of harm.

Ultimately, restorative justice provides an opportunity to address the impacts of harm between people. It is a process that provides a forum to discuss, through the help of a facilitator, the causes of harm-doing, the circumstances of harm-doing, and the impacts of harm that is done.⁵

While restorative justice approaches are often used in the context of the criminal justice system to address harm caused by crimes, the process can be used in any setting where conflict and harm exist (e.g. the process can be used to resolve conflict in schools, at work, and beyond).⁶ Although restorative justice opportunities are most often applied within the justice system to less serious crimes and/or crimes committed by young people, restorative justice can also be used with adults and in the context of addressing the harm caused by more serious crimes.⁷

Key tenets of restorative justice are:⁸

- It is always voluntary.
- It requires informed consent from all parties involved (e.g. victims, offenders, community members).
- It respects all parties involved.
- It holds the person responsible for harm accountable.
- The harm-doer must accept responsibility for the harm they have created.

Under Section 18 of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA). Youth Justice Committees (YJC’s) are one type of restorative justice opportunity available to young people ages 12 to 18 in Alberta.

² ARJA (2015)

³ ARJA (2015)

⁴ ARJA (2021)

⁵ ARJA (2021)

⁶ ARJA (2015)

⁷ ARJA (2015)

⁸ Calhoun & Borch (2002)

Benefits of Restorative Justice

Research suggests that restorative justice opportunities result in positive outcomes for offenders, victims, the community, and the justice system, including:⁹

- *Victim* needs are taken into account to a greater extent than in a traditional ‘retributive’ justice process.
- *Victims* typically experience a high degree of satisfaction with outcomes of restorative justice processes across contexts and seriousness of offences.
- *Offenders* feel that they are being given a chance to take responsibility for their actions and directly repair harm caused.
- *Offenders* can be given the opportunity to avoid criminal charges that can cause long-term complications, such as difficulty finding employment or housing.
- *Victims and the community* experience more meaningful reparations for harm done (e.g. beyond monetary reparations).
- *The justice system* operates more efficiently, with reduced costs and fewer delays related to escalating legal issues.
- *Judges in the justice system* gain valuable contextual information for decision making, should the case go to court.
- Empathetic understanding is increased across involved parties.

Examining the benefits of restorative justice opportunities for young people available through Section 19 of the YCJA specifically, research has highlighted that these opportunities:¹⁰

- Increase involvement and buy-in of youth in their case.
- Help address the diverse and complex needs of youth (e.g. youth who are under the authorities of both child welfare services and the Criminal Justice System, youth with cognitive disabilities).
- Increase collaboration between justice actors and social systems for better case planning.
- Can reduce/eliminate charges for young people (ultimately impacting their subsequent life opportunities).
- Can reduce recidivism.

Limitations of Restorative Justice

Despite the many researched benefits of restorative justice, there are nevertheless limitations, including:¹¹

- *Harm doers* may be insincere in their participation.
- *Harm doers* may still be dangerous and require incarceration.

⁹ Calhoun & Borch (2002), Gaudreault (2005); Borgen (2018); Yoder et al. (2013); DeHart et al. (2021)

¹⁰ Paquin-Marseille, L., & Higgison, K. (2022).

¹¹ Gaudreault (2005)

- Restorative justice opportunities may lack a substantial analysis of both the offender and victim beforehand to determine if the process is right for them (to resolve this limitation, it is recommended that a thorough assessment of fit is undertaken prior to the commencement of the process).
- Restorative justice programs may not spend enough time psychologically preparing victims and offenders for the restorative process (to resolve this limitation, clear processes and procedures that allow for significant preparation time are needed).
- Because volunteers are often used to facilitate restorative justice opportunities, volunteers may feel underqualified to undertake the process (e.g. they must be able to assess the offender’s motivation and commitment, and they must understand the phases of criminal victimization, post-traumatic stress, and the ways victims respond to loss and grief) (to resolve this limitation, it is recommended that standardized volunteer screening and training is in place).
- *Victims* may feel pressured to take part in the restorative justice process or may not feel properly supported through the process.

Canadian Perspectives on Restorative Justice

Despite the fact that restorative justice opportunities have been available in Canada for many years, researchers suggest that restorative justice continues to ‘operate in the margins’, at least in part due to a lack of awareness and understanding of restorative justice by both criminal justice system partners and the general public.¹²

Research conducted by the Department of Justice Canada has shown that up to 85% of Canadians are not familiar with restorative justice.¹³ While men and women express similar levels of familiarity with restorative justice, a higher proportion of Indigenous-identifying individuals report familiarity with the concept of restorative justice. Overall, younger Canadians (aged 18 to 34) are more aware of restorative justice than Canadians aged 35 old or older.¹⁴ While most Canadians have little awareness of restorative justice, when researchers describe the restorative justice process, up to 87% of individuals indicate that they would support the use of restorative justice, depending on types of crime involved.¹⁵ Concerns expressed by Canadians over the use of restorative justice centered around: (1) skepticism over the effectiveness of the process; (2) concerns about re-victimization; (3) concerns over burden on victims; and (4) potentially more lenient consequences for crimes.¹⁶

¹² Evans, J. (2024, September)

¹³ Evans, J. (2024, September)

¹⁴ Evans, J. (2024, September)

¹⁵ Evans, J. (2024, September)

¹⁶ Evans, J. (2024, September)

On the community and law enforcement professional side, while 89% of police and 92% of victim service providers report awareness of restorative justice opportunities, 33% of police and 22% of victim service providers say there are challenges with accessing restorative justice programs in their communities. These individuals speculate that this could be due to a lack of restorative justice programs within communities, limited capacity of restorative justice programs due to availability of funding/resources, and/or limited knowledge of restorative justice opportunities, including a possible lack of knowledge or ‘buy in’ from criminal justice system partners who can make referrals into restorative justice programs.¹⁷

Indigenous Restorative Justice

Overall, the final report from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People’s highlights the fundamentally differing world views of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada on both the substantive content of justice and the process of achieving justice.¹⁸ While each Indigenous culture in Alberta is unique, the overall tenets of restorative justice have typically been embedded within perspectives on justice within Alberta’s Indigenous communities for hundreds of years.¹⁹ In response to the misfit between colonial justice systems in Canada and Indigenous worldviews, and building on traditional approaches to justice in Indigenous communities, many of these communities are advocating for and/or actively pursuing/implementing restorative justice processes, programs, and/or systems. While these efforts vary from community-to-community are not advanced without challenges, they nevertheless present opportunities for better alignment of justice with Indigenous values, traditions, history, and culture.²⁰

Restorative Practice as a Form of Restorative Justice

Restorative Practices are a set of strategies that can transform environments and help communities respond more effectively to unacceptable behaviour.²¹ Restorative Practices are less structured/formal than Restorative Justice initiatives, and may not include work with victims.²² Restorative Practices often focus on upstream prevention measures as well as measures to repair harm and prevent future harm from happening.²³ Within Alberta, the work undertaken by YJC’s often falls within the realm of Restorative Practice, with some YJC’s implementing more formal Restorative Justice processes (see Section 5 for more details on the approaches to operation of YJC’s in Alberta).

¹⁷ Evans, J. (2024, September)

¹⁸ Roulal Comission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996); Mandamin (2021).

¹⁹ Asadullah (2024)

²⁰ Mandamin (2021).

²¹ Government of Alberta. (n.d.)

²² Lanark County Community Justice (n.d.)

²³ Government of Alberta. (n.d.)

4.0 Youth Justice in Alberta

Number of YJC's in Alberta

In Alberta there are currently 45 Youth Justice Committees (YJC's) operating across the province. In previous years, the number of YJC's was greater, with a drop in the number of functional Committees happening around the time of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Community Development Approach

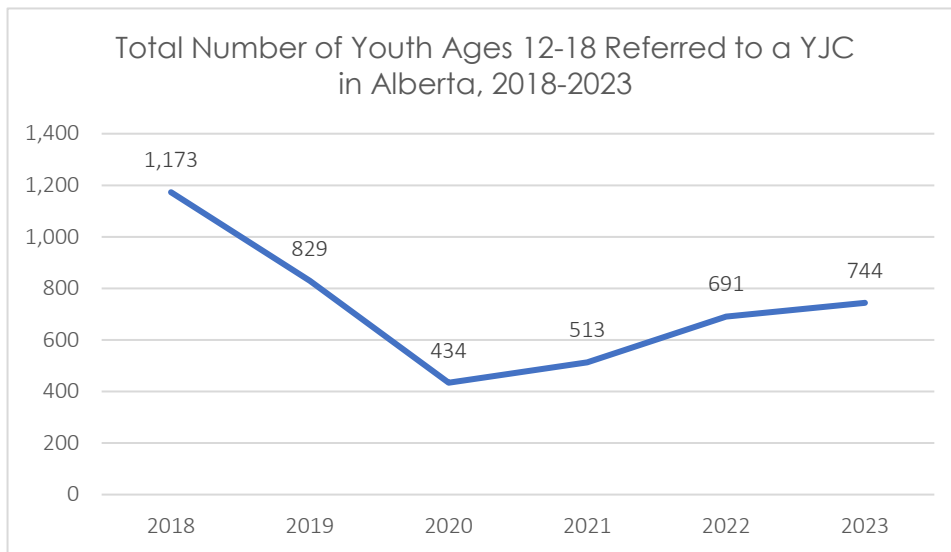
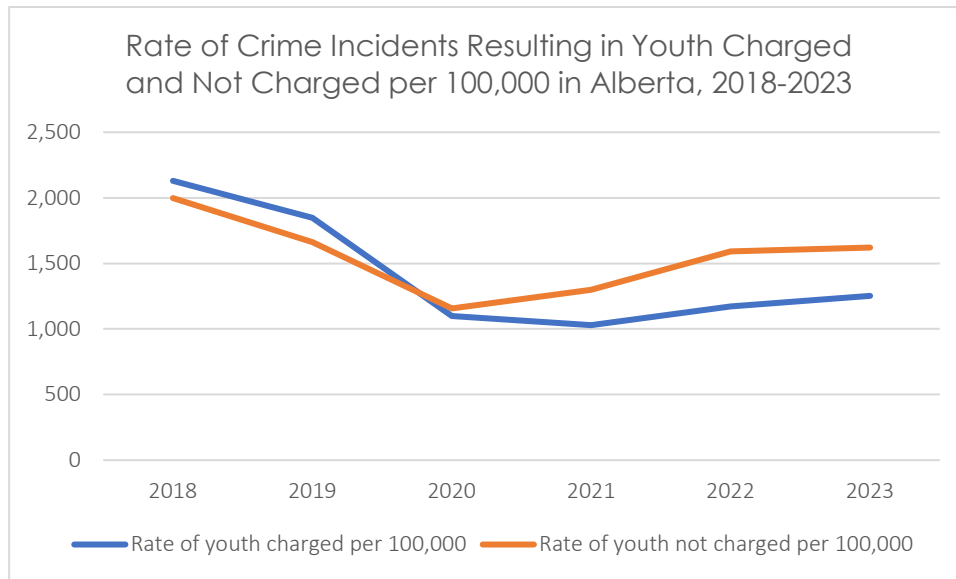
The development of Youth Justice Committees in Alberta has supported and encouraged a community development approach, whereby communities are supported to operate YJC's in a way that reflects the individuality of each community and reflects the strengths and needs of the community it services. While YJC's are required to operate within established boundaries to ensure consistency across the province, it also respected and identified that there will be differences between YJC's.

Trends in YJC Referral and Youth Crime in Alberta

Since 2018, there has been an overall decrease in the incident rate per 100,000 of youth involved in criminal activity (incl. youth ultimately charged with crimes and youth not charged with crimes). Since 2018, there has also been an overall decrease in the number of youth referred to YJC's (pre- or post-charge).

The number of youth per 100,000 charged and not charged with crimes as well as the number of youth referred to YJC's with all saw a significant drop in 2020 followed by a gradual increase to 2023. While the number of young people per 100,000 involved in criminal incidents who were not ultimately charged has recovered to near pre-pandemic levels, and the number of young people per 100,000 charged with crimes has increased, it has increased at a slower rate.²⁴

²⁴ Criminal incident data from Statistics Canada (2024) Table: 35-10-0183-01; YJC referral data based on self-reported data provided by YJC's to Alberta Justice. Note: Criminal incidents are counted based on a calendar year, while referrals are counted based on a government fiscal year (April 1 to March 31). Referrals received by YJC's typically lag offenses by 30 to 60 days (e.g. an offence occurring in November 2023 will likely be reported to a YJC in January or February 2024). Criminal incidents may include incidents/charges not eligible for referral to YJC's (e.g. murder).



As of 2023, while the absolute number of YJC referrals has increased to near-2019 levels, the distribution of referrals suggests that this is likely due to an increase in the number of referrals received in large urban centres like Calgary or Edmonton, rather than a full resumption of previous levels of YJC referrals across the province. In fact, multiple YJC's in smaller rural and/or Northern communities have received very few or *no* referrals in the last year despite charges being laid against youth in these communities.²⁵

²⁵ Note: Criminal incidents are counted based on a calendar year, while referrals are counted based on a government fiscal year (April 1 to March 31). Referrals received by YJC's typically lag offenses by 30 to 60 days (e.g. an offence occurring in November 2023 will likely be reported to a YJC in January or February 2024). Criminal incidents may include incidents/charges not eligible for referral to YJC's (e.g. murder).

Community Name	Number of YJC Referrals Received in 2023 ²⁶	Number of Youth Criminal Incidents Recorded in 2023 ²⁷
Claresholm, Stavely, Nanton	0	9
Cochrane	9	73
Didsbury	0	59
Lacombe	6	26
Olds	1	22
Ponoka	3	36
Strathmore	9	71
Sundre	3	22
Valleyview	2	19
Vermillion	0	38

In some Indigenous communities, recent developments in culturally responsive restorative justice programs may also be contributing to a reduced number of referrals to YJC's, though youth are likely still receiving alternative measures (and arguably more culturally aligned alternative measures) through their community's restorative justice programming.

²⁶ Estimated by YJC's

²⁷ Statistics Canada (2024) Table: 35-10-0183-01. Criminal incidents may include incidents/charges not eligible for referral to YJC's (e.g. murder).

On-the-Ground Experiences

Conversations with YJC's in Alberta that took place as part of the needs assessment process highlighted the dedication of YJC's in providing an innovative, strength-based approach to youth behaviour. Our conversations revealed that YJC's in Alberta are deeply committed to seeing youth as individuals with potential, not just as 'offenders', and designing interventions that help them learn, grow, and reconnect with their community. Some examples YJC's shared during our conversations included:

The Power of Music

In one smaller Northern community in Alberta a grade 10 student was involved in an incident that led her to being referred to the local YJC. Working with the young person, the YJC discovered that she was a talented and passionate guitar player. Rather than punishing her for her mistake, the YJC sanctioned her to provide three community guitar performances: one at a community dinner, one at a senior's event, and one at her school. The sanction connected her to her personal strength and interest in music, while enabling her to positively connect with and contribute to her community.

Meaningful Connection

One youth who had stolen a fundraising tin was referred to their local YJC. Rather than asking for retribution or sending the young person for punishment, the YJC sanctioned them with an unexpected and constructive consequence. The sanction required the youth to work alongside a local teen outreach worker to roll all the fundraising change that was collected. This approach turned a negative incident into an opportunity for meaningful conversation and connection between the young person and the outreach worker.

Creative Expression

One young person referred to a YJC was found to be struggling significantly with bullying at school, but did not have the writing skills to express himself fully through something like an essay. Instead of requesting the young person write an essay as had initially been the intention of the Committee, he was instead sanctioned to use his artistic abilities to express himself by drawing a cartoon about his feelings, anger, and potential solutions.

Career Exploration

In one smaller community, a young person was sent to a YJC after a concerning incident. The YJC learned that the young person was interested in military careers, so they were sanctioned to visit the military office in the nearest urban centre to learn about the application process and report back. This helped the young person begin to take steps to pursue their goals and move towards their future aspirations rather than experience a potentially career-ending punishment for their actions.

5.0 What We Learned from Alberta's YJC's

To better understand the current state and experience of YJC's across Alberta, the needs assessment team reached out to representatives (e.g. volunteers, staff) from 45 YJC's across Alberta. In total, responses were received from **39** YJC's. The following sections present the results from this engagement.

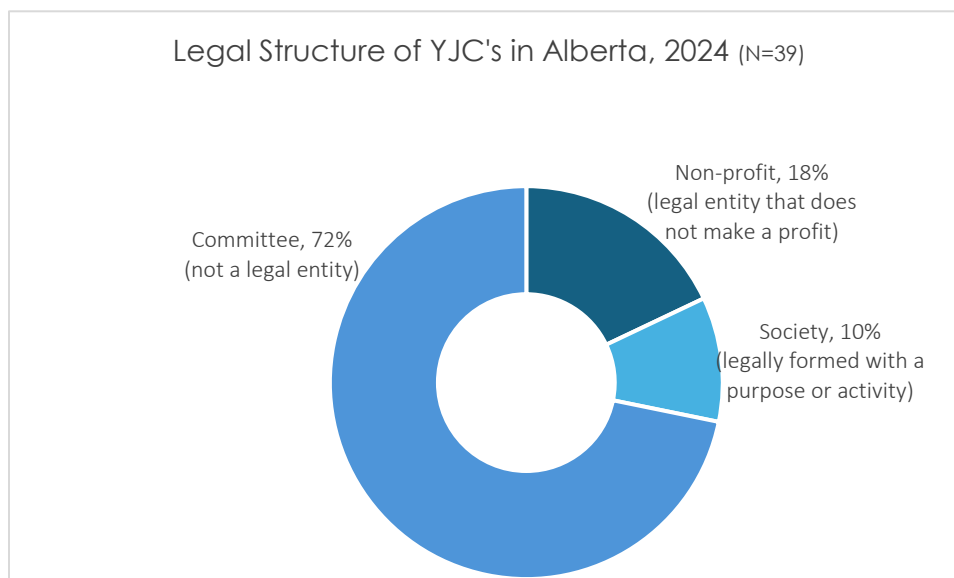
5.1 YJC Structure and Functioning

History

Most YJC's currently operating in Alberta (77%) have been operational for 15+ years, with 23% of YJC's having formed since 2010. When asked how their committee began, YJC's indicated that there was oftentimes a passionate community member, law enforcement personnel, probation officer, municipal employee, or non-profit organization that spearheaded the YJC's launch and initial operation.

Structure

Most YJC's (71%) reported being structured as a committee without a specific legal status (i.e. not a society or a non-profit organization) and 28% of YJC's mentioned having any paid staff (full- or part-time) to support the Committee (e.g. a coordinator). In total, 55% of respondents indicated that they were sure their group had a copy of the Ministerial Order giving them authorization to undertake their work with young people, and less than half indicated that they had either by-laws (47%) or a YJC Constitution (44%) to guide their work. Of those YJC's indicating they had by-laws and/or a YJC Constitution, 29% indicated the documents had been reviewed/updated within the last five years. These results suggest that YJC's in Alberta may need support in developing standardized documentation to guide the structure of their groups.



Financial Management

While one group indicated they have no financial management responsibilities as they do not have any financial resources, others indicated that a treasurer (50%), chairperson (37%), or other responsible party (e.g. program staff, government, etc.) was responsible for the group's financial matters. In total, 75% of YJC's reported that all financial dealings required 2+ signatures. While results suggest that, for the most part, YJC's in Alberta are functioning responsibly with respect to their finances, multiple YJC's interviewed through the needs assessment expressed some uncertainty around how the funds allocated to them could be spent (e.g. Can YJC's use the money to buy thank you gifts for volunteers?; Are YJC's restricted to using the funds for rent and office supplies?, etc.).

Partnerships

YJC's across Alberta reported having numerous partnerships to advance the goals and success of their initiative. Most commonly, YJC's indicated that they partnered with:

1. Law enforcement (police, RCMP, etc.) (82% of respondents).
2. Individuals working within the justice system (Crown, lawyers, probation officers, etc.) (76% of respondents).
3. a.) Schools or School Resource Officers (SRO's) (39% of respondents).
b.) Non-profit organizations (39% of respondents).

YJC's also reported partnering with different levels of government (municipal, provincial, federal) (24%), Indigenous partners (13%), and other public services (21%). Examining differences in types of partnerships in different communities, YJC's operating in Indigenous communities reported fewer partnerships overall, and far fewer partnerships with law enforcement and the justice system. Conversely, YJC's in Indigenous and rural communities were more likely to report partnerships with schools/school resource officers and Indigenous partners, while groups serving urban communities were far less likely to report partnerships with Indigenous partners.

YJC Education and Awareness

Awareness of the existence and purpose of YJC's is essential for obtaining referrals and for young people to accept the opportunity when it is presented. While broad awareness of YJC's can be key to the success for Committees, 24% of YJC's indicated that they do not have strategic strategies to raise awareness about their program, with multiple individuals indicating that they struggle to find the time/resources for undertaking education/awareness activities to promote the program locally. This may point to an opportunity to create a province-wide education and awareness campaign to ensure that even in smaller or less well-resourced communities, the youth, law enforcement, and justice system partners in these communities are aware of the opportunity to engage with YJC's.

Of the YJC's indicating that they undertake some form of promotional activities, the most common activities reported were:

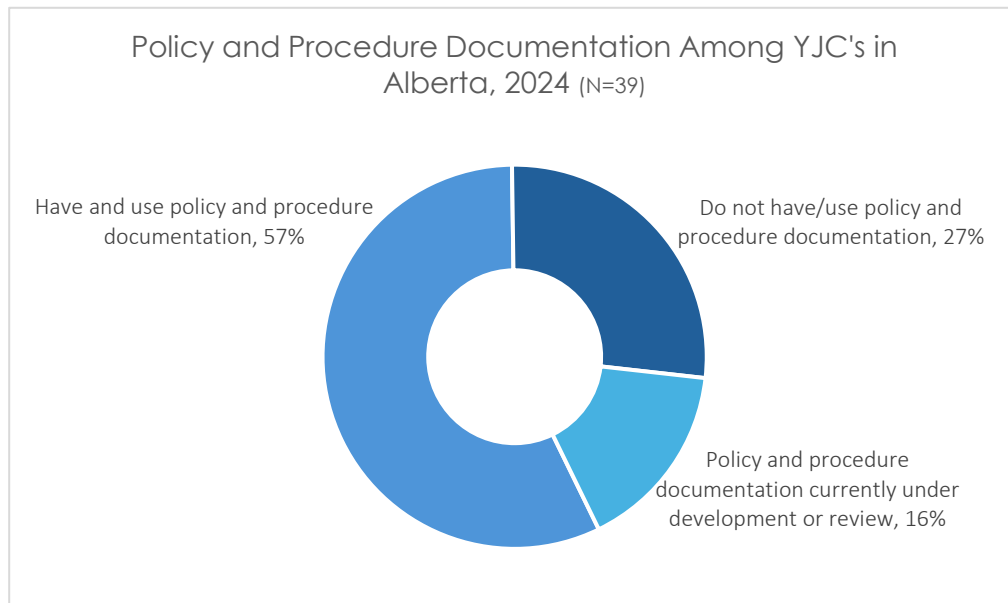
1. Engagement sessions with community organizations (29% of respondents).
2. Distribution of promotional materials (e.g. brochures) (26% of respondents).
3. Engagement sessions with schools (24% of respondents).
4. Engagement sessions with law enforcement (24% of respondents).
5. Word of mouth (21% of respondents).

Other less commonly reported promotion activities included: presentations; engagement sessions with justice system partners (e.g. Crown); engagement sessions with municipal government staff/decision makers; newspaper ads; websites; and social media.

5.2 YJC Processes and Procedures

Policy and Procedure Documentation

In total, 27% of YJC's indicated that they do not use any type of policy/process/procedure documentation to guide their work, and another 16% indicated that they were currently developing/revising their policy and procedure documentation. This may be an area of concern with respect to the consistency of YJC's across the province and may point to a need for support of YJC's to develop consistent and high-quality policies and procedures.



Of the YJC's that reported having/using policy and procedure documentation, materials included:

- Training manuals (either internally developed or provided by Alberta Justice).
- Scripts (i.e. what to say during conversations with youth).
- Policies (either internally developed or provided by the province or program/organization that oversees their operation).
- Forms (e.g. referral forms, application forms, consent forms, etc.).
- Brochures/presentations.

Receiving Referrals

YJC's most commonly reported receiving referrals from:

1. Crown or probation (90% of respondents).
2. RCMP or police (64% of respondents).
3. Government (e.g. Victim Services, Children's Services, etc.) (15% of respondents).

Other referral sources included community organizations such as, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, and the Elizabeth Fry Society (8%). While 19% of urban-based YJC's reported that they received referrals from Correctional Centres, no rural or Indigenous YJC's reported the same. Similarly, 13% of urban YJC's reported that they received self-referrals based on a vision/mandate to do so within their programs, while no rural and Indigenous reported the same. This may point to additional community promotion needs in rural and Indigenous communities.

Working with Young People After a Referral

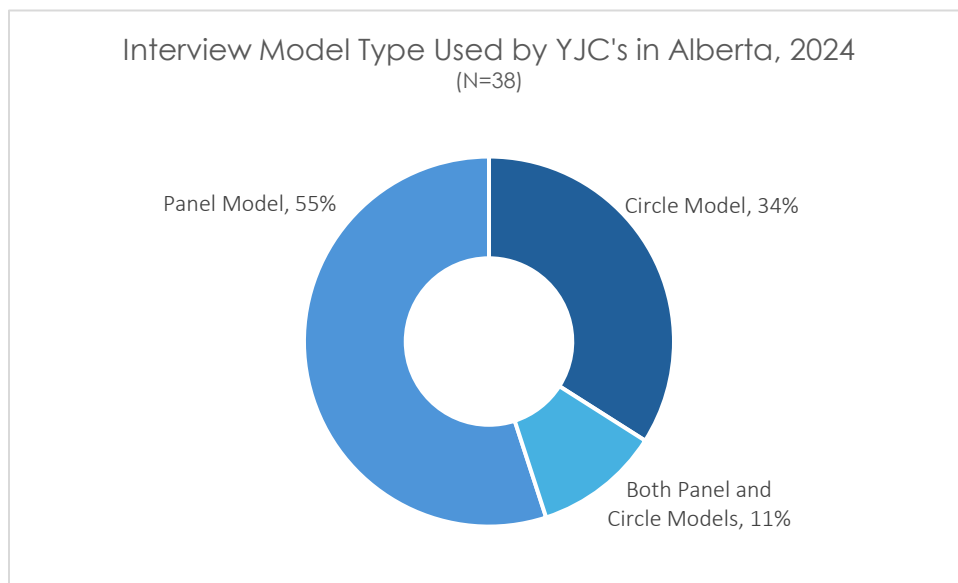
Once a referral is received, YJC's reported that they typically have 1-3 months to complete their work with a young person, with possible extensions to the timeline, if needed.

YJC's in Alberta typically use either a 'circle model' or a 'panel model' for their work. A circle model is based on the tradition of talking circles, often rooted in Indigenous cultures. In this model, participants sit in a circle, and a talking piece is passed around to ensure everyone has a chance to speak without interruption. The circle typically includes the harm doer, the victim of harm, families, and/or community members, along with a trained facilitator or facilitators. The goal is to create a safe space for open dialogue, where participants can share their feelings and work together to find a resolution that repairs the harm that was caused.

In a panel model, a group of trained volunteers form a panel to work with the youth who caused harm. The panel assesses the case, meets with the youth and their family, and develops a plan that may include community service, restitution, or other restorative actions. The panel model is more structured and formal compared to the circle model, with the panel taking a more active role in guiding the process and ensuring accountability.

Ultimately, both models aim to hold youth accountable, repair harm, and prevent future offenses, but they differ in their approach to community involvement and the level of formality in the process.

In total, 55% of YJC's in Alberta indicated that they use a panel model, 34% indicated they use a circle model, and 11% indicated that they use either model, depending on the situation. Another 11% of YJC's commented that they lack capacity to use a circle model, possibly indicating an area where support could be provided. YJC's described the panels/circles as being facilitated by staff, volunteers, or a combination of staff and volunteers. Most YJC's (92%) said that their work is undertaken in-person, while 5% indicated that they conduct interviews online and 3% indicated that they use a combination of online and in-person approaches.

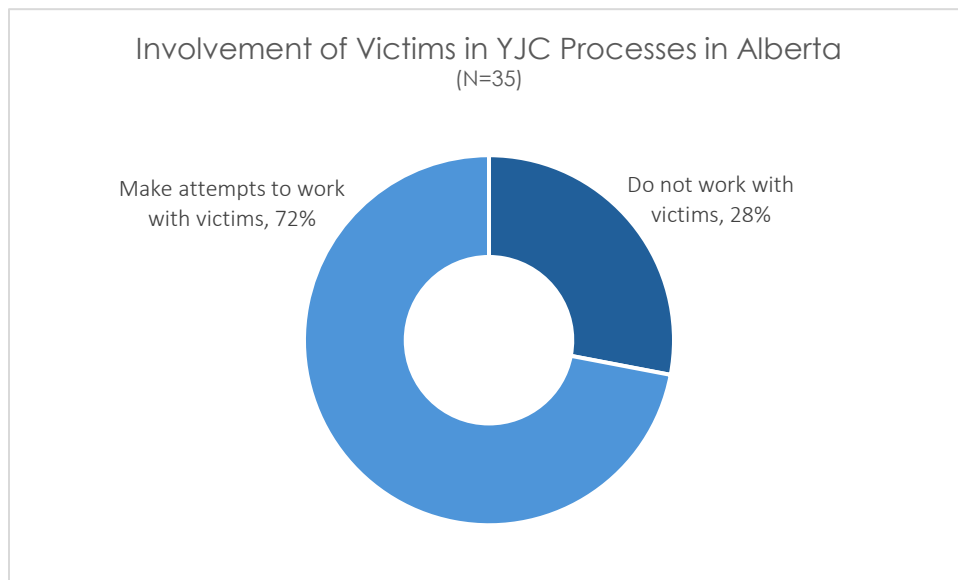


While the YJC process *can* involve victims, it is not required that victims are involved.²⁸ In total, 72% of YJC's in Alberta indicated that they make attempts to work with victims, however 39% of these groups said there is often low uptake from victims. The way victims are involved also varies from group to group and can include:

- Outreach to victims (53% of YJC's indicated they do this).
- Victim attendance at panel/circle meetings (44% indicated they offer this opportunity).
- Provision of statements from victims (36% of YJC's indicated they include this).
- Connection of victims to supports (14% of YJC's indicated they provide this).
- Input from victims on the sanctions set by the YJC (7% indicated they include this).

²⁸ Note: Victims Services across Alberta have a mandate to work with victims of 'attacks against persons' crimes, however they do not work with victims of other sorts of non-violent crimes (e.g. property crimes).

Of the 28% of YJC's who said they *do not* work with victims, 40% indicated that victim involvement was not possible due to a lack of capacity within their committee. Another 20% of Committees not working with victims indicated that they were often supporting youth who had committed 'victimless crimes' (e.g. shoplifting from a big box store, vandalism of public property, smoking marijuana, etc.). Further, while research suggests that restorative justice processes that involve victims can have positive impacts on both victims and the process of holding young people accountable, several YJC's in Alberta who currently or formerly involved victims described negative impacts from victim involvement (e.g. violence against youth, screaming at the meeting, etc.). This may point to a need for additional support or resources for YJC's, so they are better able to work with victims to achieve the best results possible.



Whether YJC's involve victims or not, both youth and their parents/families/caregivers are typically involved in the process. Most YJC's in Alberta (94%) said they work with youth and their caregivers together, while 6% indicated their work with youth and caregivers happens separately. Some groups indicated that involving caregivers in the same meeting as youth can result in challenging dynamics (e.g. the youth being unwilling to be forthcoming about the harm they have caused), in which cases caregivers may be asked to leave. While parents are often the 'caregivers' involved, other support people may include Elders, older siblings, grandparents, etc.

After meeting with youth, their caregivers, and other impacted parties (e.g. victims, community members, etc.) the YJC typically determines sanctions for the young person. The sanctions are designed to hold the youth accountable for their actions, repair the harm done to the victim and the community, and help the youth learn from their mistakes. Some YJC's indicated that their group has a list of sanctions that they can choose from, while others indicated that the youth and/or family are involved in determining the sanctions.

The most common types of sanctions set for youth by YJC's in Alberta were described as:

1. Community service.
2. Personal goals/development activities (e.g. vision board, making meals for families, learning life skills, getting support in school).
3. An apology (verbal or written).
4. A written reflective essay.

Other types of less commonly issued sanctions included: accessing mental health or addictions support; creative projects; mandatory school attendance; and/or curfews. While financial restitution is a possible sanction, it is typically not used with youth (36% of YJC's in Alberta reported having issued financial restitution sanctions, with this type of sanction being slightly more common in rural and Indigenous communities).

While 'community service' was the most commonly YJC-issued sanction reported, many YJC's said that it can be difficult to find appropriate community service placements for youth, particularly in rural areas.

Time and Resources Required

The time required to complete work on a YJC file ranged significantly between Committees, from as little as 1.5 hours to as much as 30+ hours. YJC's in Alberta estimated that, on average, their volunteers spend approximately six to nine hours on each case that is received, including review of the file, meetings, and follow-up. YJC's estimated that they have approximately two meetings with youth and their caregivers per case, however the number of meetings was reported to vary from as little as one to as many as ten. Overall, many YJC's – particularly those serving rural and Indigenous communities – felt that their resources were stretched, and that additional resourcing could likely help them increase referrals and standardize processes/practices.

5.3 Perspectives on Youth Served through YJC's

YJC's indicated that the youth they serve are on average ages 14 to 16, though most Committees indicated they had worked with individuals as young as 12 and as old as 18. In total, 15% of YJC's reported also serving young people over the age of 18 as per their program mandate.

Reflecting on the experiences of youth served through YJC's, respondents indicated that they often face complex home and life situations and implications from intersectional identities. YJC's mentioned that youth referred to their committees often experience:

1. Difficult family situations (70% of YJC's mentioned this).
2. Substance use and addictions concerns (24% of YJC's mentioned this).
3. a.) Mental health concerns (21% of YJC's mentioned this).
b.) Poverty (21% of YJC's mentioned this).

Within Indigenous and rural communities, YJC's more prominently mentioned difficult family situations (incl. experiences of family violence) and isolation/boredom/lack of supervision, while in urban areas addictions, mental health, and bullying were more common along with complexities related to experiences of racism, immigrant/refugee identity, and peer pressure. YJC's working in Indigenous communities specifically highlighted a lack of connection to identity, spirituality, or culture as an important issue impacting youth in their communities.

5.4 Defining and Measuring 'Success'

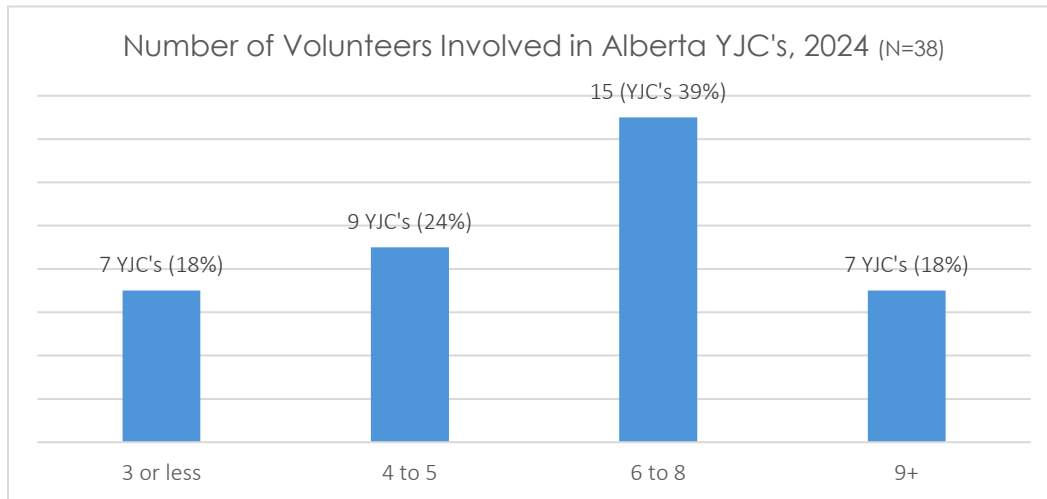
In total, 81% of YJC's said that for them, completion or partial completion of YJC-issued sanctions would indicate 'success' in their program. In addition, YJC's felt that cases could be considered 'successful' if the young person involved had increased their self-awareness, become connected to resources, or supports, and/or expressed remorse for their harmful actions. Overall, 28% of respondents indicated that a lack of recidivism would be their main indicator of success. Conversely, YJC's felt that if the young person was not cooperative with the process, did not complete their sanctions, did not express remorse, or demonstrate personal growth, and/or ultimately went on to do further harm, that the case would be considered 'unsuccessful'.

In total, 39% of YJC's said they had no formal processes for assessing the longer-term impact of their work, though several groups noted that they have had no results to assess in recent years due to a lack of referrals. While many YJC's indicated that they do not assess their results, they nevertheless felt that they would like to engage in more assessment activities including things like reviewing recidivism rates, gathering feedback from youth and their caregivers, and gathering feedback from victims. This may be an area where additional support or resourcing for YJC's could be helpful.

Of the YJC's who indicated that they assess results in some way, most indicated that they keep records of outputs (e.g. number of files received, number of files returned, number of youth seen through the program, attendance records, demographics, etc.). Some groups also indicated that they track outcomes including successful/unsuccessful program completion, recidivism rates, and experiences of youth, caregivers, and/or volunteers.

5.5 YJC Volunteers

On average, YJC's reported involving approximately 12 volunteers in their work, however the number of volunteers ranged from as little as two to as many as 100, with larger urban centres typically involving higher numbers of volunteers.



Volunteer Recruitment

In seeking volunteers for their program, 43% of YJC's said they used ads, social media, and open houses to recruit volunteers, while 49% said volunteer recruitment primarily happened via word-of-mouth. In Indigenous and rural communities, word-of-mouth recruitment was more commonly reported, while in urban communities, recruitment via other means was more common.

In total, 61% of YJC's said that their program had a role description for volunteers, including things like information on the length of the commitment, age requirements, desired skills/expertise, and the requirement of a reference check. Of the YJC's who did not have a role description, most said that a formal role description did not exist because they accept volunteers primarily via word-of-mouth referral and explaining the volunteer opportunity verbally. This may indicate an area where YJC's could be supported to share effective practices and increase consistency in processes.

While numerous groups reported having a volunteer role description and promoting the opportunity publicly, 24% of YJC's indicated that they had a formal application form (note: no Indigenous communities had formal application forms in place), with another 24% indicating that volunteers were interviewed as part of the application process. This may indicate another area where additional support could provide YJC's with volunteer application infrastructure to increasingly standardize processes across the province.

Volunteer Onboarding and Training

Once a volunteer is accepted to a YJC, most committees require the volunteer to sign an Oath of Confidentiality (92%) and have a Criminal Record check (97%) completed along with a Vulnerable Sector Check (87%). Other documentation required of volunteers by some YJC's included: Child Intervention checks (53%); signature of Code of Conduct documentation (34%); and Conflict of

Interest declarations (24%). While approximately one third of groups with requisite documentation/checks for volunteers reported requiring the documentation/checks to be updated at least annually, others had less frequent renewal requirements and another 20-30% did not require documentation/checks to be renewed at all. This may point to an area where volunteer processes could again be more standardized across the province to help assure the safety of both the youth and volunteers involved in YJC's.

	Criminal Record Check	Oath of Confidentiality	Vulnerable Sector Check	Child Intervention Check	Code of Conduct	Conflict of Interest
Proportion of YJC's Requiring	97%	92%	87%	53%	34%	24%
Renewal timeframe:						
Annual (min)	38%	29%	37%	29%	50%	33%
Every 2 years	28%	4%	30%	35%	25%	33%
Less than every 2 years	13%	0%	10%	18%	0%	0%
Never	22%	67%	23%	18%	25%	33%

Once a YJC volunteer has completed any required documentation, they are 'onboarded' or trained in different ways by YJC's across the province. Most commonly, YJC's reported training volunteers using:

1. Observation/shadowing with existing volunteers (51% of YJC's).
2. a.) Verbal explanation of volunteer responsibilities/committee processes (43% of YJC's).
b.) Official training materials (e.g. from Alberta Justice) (43% of YJC's).
3. Training manuals/materials developed internally (29% of YJC's).

After the initial training/orientation for volunteers, most YJC's (87%) said they provide ongoing training and/or mentoring for individuals involved. Specific topics targeted by ongoing volunteer training included: active listening; trauma-informed practice; Indigenous practices; community mental health; and issue-specific topics (e.g. Indigenous gang involvement). Several YJC's noted, however, that resourcing often poses a barrier to offering ongoing training. Others mentioned that they struggle with logistics (e.g. distances) and lack of engagement from volunteers.

Overall, initial as well as ongoing training of volunteers may be an area where additional support could be provided to increase capacity among YJC's in Alberta. YJC's mentioned desiring volunteer training related to: RCMP referrals; restrictions related to Section 19 of the YCJA (e.g. eligibility related to severity of crimes, etc.); learning disabilities; relationship building; and listening.

Volunteer Retention

Most YJC's reported experiencing at least some challenges with volunteer retention, with rural and Indigenous communities being more likely to report challenges. One reason volunteer

retention may be challenging is a lack of referrals keeping volunteers engaged and feeling impactful in their community. Of the YJC's who reported challenges with volunteer retention, 72% indicated that they had received less than 10 referrals to their committee in the last year (including some committees who had received 0 referrals). At the same time, ongoing volunteer training does not seem to reduce volunteer retention challenges, with 80% of groups experiencing retention challenges also reporting that they provide ongoing training opportunities for volunteers.

Overall, YJC's mentioned repeatedly that, with limited resources, reliance on volunteers for all aspects of YJC functioning (incl. promotion, administration, recruitment, evaluation, etc.) led to situations where volunteers were 'stretched thin'. These situations likely also impact volunteer retention rates, as volunteers may ultimately resign from their roles if they feel overwhelmed with the duties they are tasked with.

5.6 YJC Successes and Challenges

Reflecting on what is currently working well among YJC's in Alberta, respondents highlighted the dedication and skills of the staff and volunteers involved, highlighting that their passion for and commitment to restorative justice for young people was both inspiring and important for keeping YJC's operational. YJC's also felt that they have been successful in creating positive outcomes for young people throughout the province; increasing their self-awareness, decreasing their likelihood to be involved in crime, and reducing the long-term consequences of mistakes made (e.g. receiving a criminal record that ultimately would impact employment opportunities, education opportunities, housing access, etc.). YJC's went on to mention their successes in developing positive and supportive partnerships with law enforcement, the community, and other justice system partners.

Reflecting on difficulties encountered, the top three challenges articulated by YJC's were:

1. Low or no referrals (54% of YJC's).
2. Ensuring volunteers have the right skills and training to undertake the work (27% of YJC's).
3. a.) Volunteer recruitment and retention (24% of YJC's).
b.) Lack of community services available (24% of YJC's).

Other identified challenges included: low community awareness/understanding of YJC's (16%); limited funding (14%); program maintenance/management (14%); lack of youth interest (8%); late access to files (8%); lack of victim engagement (3%).

In rural and Indigenous communities, low rates of referrals and lack of technology/internet access were highlighted as particularly difficult challenges. Within Indigenous communities,

challenges related to within a society shaped by a Western conception of justice that adheres to a Western system of justice were also brought forward.

Considering ways to address the challenges that were highlighted, YJC’s suggested:

Identified Challenge(s)	Possible Solution(s)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low or no referrals to the YJC. • Low community awareness/understanding. • Late access to files. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing more information about YJC’s to the community, law enforcement, and individuals working within the justice system. • Building relationships with community, law enforcement, and individuals working within the justice system. • Receiving clarity from Crown/RCMP/probation around why they are not making referrals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer recruitment and retention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the number of paid staff supporting volunteers. • Providing more time and capacity building for volunteers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring volunteers have the right skills and training to undertake the work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing training opportunities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited funding. • Program maintenance/management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing funding. • Increasing the number of paid staff.

Some YJC’s also mentioned that it would be helpful to connect with other YJC’s to address challenges, while others felt that there were conditions within their community that were creating challenges (e.g. lack of access to internet, lack of community services, cultural misalignment of Western justice systems) that were systemic and not likely to be easily fixed.

5.7 Perspectives from YJC’s Serving Indigenous Communities

In total, 9 YJC’s involved in the Needs Assessment reported serving Indigenous communities across the province (either exclusively or in addition to non-Indigenous communities) (23% of respondents). Overall, these YJC’s highlighted the importance of flexibility in implementation of YJC’s in their communities to support the creation of opportunities for YJC processes and approaches to reflect the unique characteristics, specific cultures, and unique community conditions experienced in different Indigenous communities. Ultimately, YJC’s serving Indigenous communities articulated the potential for a fundamentally different approach to youth restorative justice in their communities based on Indigenous cultural histories and community dynamics. This points to an opportunity to further engage YJC’s serving Indigenous communities to better understand their distinctive perspectives on youth community-based justice and to foster opportunities for collaborative knowledge-sharing with the broader YJC community of practice in Alberta.

5.8 YJC Perspectives on the Role of Alberta Justice

YJC's expressed appreciation for the support they currently receive from Alberta Justice and indicated that the already-established community of practice activities are helpful as they navigate the intricacies of delivering community-based justice opportunities locally. Overall, YJC's indicated a high degree of trust in Alberta Justice and most felt that Alberta Justice would be well-positioned to continue to support YJC's across the province, with opportunities for expanded support highlighted. Reflecting on the role of Alberta Justice in supporting YJC's, respondents felt the most important types of support that Alberta Justice would be well-positioned to provide were:

1. a.) Funding (37% of YJC's).
b.) Advocacy (incl. education and awareness of YJC's with RCMP) (37% of YJC's).
2. Developing/leading/supporting a community of practice (26% of YJC's).
3. Developing standardized documentation for use by YJC's (24% of YJC's).
4. Providing training, expertise, data related to the implementation of restorative justice (21% of YJC's).
5. Developing a volunteer training manual for use by YJC's (18% of YJC's).

Notably, YJC's serving Indigenous and rural communities were more likely to articulate a need for funding, while YJC's serving urban communities were more likely to be interested in advocacy support. Several YJC's serving Indigenous communities also expressed concern with regards to standardized processes, procedures, and/or documentation, articulating concern that province-wide standardization would be too prescriptive and not responsive enough to the unique needs of their communities.

Reflecting on the types of training opportunities that would be of interest, YJC's suggested topics such as: volunteer management; communicating with media; volunteer engagement; liability insurance; supporting older youth (ages 18-21). One group also mentioned it would be helpful to have training resources available in French.

When asked whether they felt a formal province-wide Youth Justice Network could be helpful in Alberta, 82% of YJC's said 'yes' or 'maybe'. Desired offerings from a provincial Network included:

- Roundtable opportunities to share ideas, questions, and best practices.
- Networking opportunities.
- Mentorship/peer support connections.
- Training opportunities.
- Standardized processes, procedures, and/or documentation.
- An online space (e.g. chat board, social media space) for discussion, promotion, and announcements.
- An annual conference.

While there was significant support among YJC's for a province-wide Network, some mentioned that it would be more beneficial for them if there were multiple regional Networks, particularly in the context of rural, remote, and/or Indigenous communities with specific geographic and cultural contexts and related needs.

Overall, as Alberta Justice advances communications and education work with communities and partners across the province, ongoing communication back will be essential to ensuring progress is recognized and concerns or innovative ideas can continue to be brought forward.

6.0 What We Learned from Probation Officers

The needs assessment team connected with two probation officers working in two different Alberta communities, due to the low response rate, the specific offices that were engaged will not be named, and the generalizability of the results may be limited.

Challenges

While the two probation officers engaged through the needs assessment indicated deep believe in YJC's and restorative justice opportunities for young people, they noted that there are currently challenges related to YJC's in their communities, including:

- Turnover of volunteers, law enforcement officials, probation officers, and other staff leading to lost knowledge and interruptions in the continuity of YJC functioning and referrals.
- Situations where officers are engaging in administration of their own informal sanctions for youth rather than referring to the community's YJC.
- Low number of volunteers leading to a slower-than-ideal justice process through YJC's.
- Increasing complexity experienced by young people, including increasing complexity related to addictions, and increasingly violent crimes being committed.
- A lack of resources for youth in the community, including limited transportation options.

Ideas for Addressing Challenges

In response to the challenges they had identified, the probation officers involved in the needs assessment had numerous suggestions for support and actions that could address some challenges:

- Undertaking more promotion of YJC's to increase public profile, support, and referrals.
- Having clear, standardized policies, procedures, guidelines, and documentation for YJC's (e.g. policy for when volunteer record checks need to be renewed; guidelines for the involvement of caregivers; policies related to volunteer boundaries with youth; clear role descriptions; a standardized volunteer application form).
- Providing training to volunteers and RCMP (e.g. training on referral processes and restorative justice opportunities; training related to boundaries).
- Creating processes for YJC's to report back to law enforcement on their work.
- Developing a list of resources/programs for young people and how to access them.
- Increasing knowledge and training related to restorative justice models and then increasing victim involvement.



Overall Comments on YJC's

Overall, the probation officers involved in the needs assessment expressed significant support for YJC's and mentioned that the current community of practice calls were helpful in their communities. They emphasized the role probation can play in the YJC landscape and indicated interest in ongoing involvement. Ultimately, probation officers felt that YJC's offer an important opportunity for young people in Alberta, provided the process is smooth and timely.

7.0 Conclusions and Considerations for the Future

With a desire to ensure *all* young people in Alberta have access to high quality restorative justice opportunities if they are involved in a crime, Alberta Justice partnered with the Calgary Youth Justice Society and Constellation Consulting Group in 2024 to undertake a needs assessment study of YJC’s in Alberta to better understand the current state of YJC’s in the province, what challenges groups are facing, and how Alberta Justice might support in addressing identified challenges. The needs assessment involved 39 YJC’s serving 36 communities (4 YJC’s serve one urban community) across the province, as well as two interviews with probation officers and a brief review of existing literature/research and statistics.

The assessment found that the individuals involved in delivering YJC opportunities to young people in Alberta are passionate about their work and dedicated to ensuring youth have access to high quality opportunities to take responsibility for their actions if they are involved in a crime. While YJC’s discussed different challenges that their work presents, they all emphasized the benefits of having YJC’s available in their communities and a strong desire to work through challenges to ensure the opportunity continues to be available in years to come. Ultimately, the needs assessment revealed:

 Key Learnings	 Implications from Learnings
<p>Limited resources and the reliance on volunteers to run YJC’s can make some tasks like volunteer recruitment and training, administration, awareness, and/or evaluation difficult, which may slow down their response time.</p>	<p>YJC’s may have difficulty undertaking any additional work towards increasing consistency or making changes without additional resources and any additional support or resources would likely be greatly appreciated and well-used.</p>
<p>Many YJC’s are struggling with low referral rates (particularly groups serving rural, Northern, and/or Indigenous communities). Having a low number of referrals not only means there may be young people missing the opportunity to participate with a YJC, but it is also impacting volunteer retention and community awareness of the program.</p>	<p>Support for increasing referrals and educating communities (incl. schools, law enforcement, and the justice system) may be needed to generate an increase in referrals while at the same time ensuring the YJC is equipped to manage an increase in referrals.</p>
<p>Many YJC’s do not have formalized policies, processes, procedures, and/or documentation to guide their work. This is more common in smaller communities.</p>	<p>Support for development of key processes or documentation may be needed to ensure all YJC’s have a baseline standard of practice without overburdening volunteers with the task of developing these things on their own.</p>



Key Learnings

The young people who are being referred to YJC's in Alberta face complex family, life, and identity-related situations. At the same time, smaller communities may lack resources for young people or YJC volunteers may be unsure of the existing resources in the community that may benefit youth.



Implications from Learnings

The existence of YJC's in Alberta provides young people facing complex situations with an opportunity to avoid criminal justice system involvement and to pursue personal advancement opportunities. Those involved in referring youth (e.g. crown, probation, law enforcement) and the YJC volunteers who work with referred youth may need additional training or resources to understand the complexities young people are facing and what can be done to support them.

Based on the key learnings from the needs assessment, the following considerations for moving forward have emerged. These considerations are envisioned as a strategic *process* of evolving towards a future state wherein all youth in Alberta are able to access YJC's, no matter where they live in the province.

1. Continue to support current YJC's and build capacity for growth, through:

- Further engagement with Indigenous communities and YJC's serving Indigenous communities to better understand different Indigenous perspectives on community-based youth justice in Alberta.
- Development of an Alberta Youth Justice Network to provide a community of practice for YJC's and collaboration with the justice system and law enforcement partners that guide provincial YJC priorities.
- Support YJC programs with volunteer management, training, and awareness building with law enforcement and justice partners.
- Creating a centralized website offering resources for YJCs, victims, parents, partners, and youth.
- Outreach and training with law enforcement, people working in the justice system, and communities.
- Development of standardized training for YJC volunteers.
- Requirements of Alberta Justice in supporting YJC's by defining:
 - The minimum training requirements.
 - The timelines for responding to a referral.
 - Support in building YJC's capacity to work with complex files.
 - The boundaries for law enforcement, probation officers, and other justice partners that prevent potential conflicts of interest.
 - The boundaries and constraints for YJC's (e.g. clear definition of roles and responsibilities).
 - The required governance documentation including proper storage.
 - Which volunteer checks (criminal, vulnerable, child intervention) are required and how often.
 - The coverage committees are given under WCB and liability insurance for volunteers and community service placements.

2. Further strengthen YJC's in Alberta and seek opportunities to expand the program, through:

- Identification and sharing of best practices through the Alberta Youth Justice Network.
- Building connections with Alberta youth serving agencies to accept YJC referrals.
- Supporting and strengthening YJC's capacity to work with youth who have complex needs and youth who are facing a serious offence.
- Development of output and outcome measurement capacity so that all YJC's can move towards capturing more information on the impact of their work (e.g. exit surveys with people involved in the YJC process, updated, and organized provincial statistics shared regularly, etc.).
- Development of capacity for working with victims (e.g. training, paid staff, etc.).
- Providing and increasing access to resources for YJC's.
- Tailoring supports and building learning opportunities based on the unique perspectives and cultural/community contexts in different Indigenous communities across the province.

3. Strategic Directions Towards Equitable Opportunities for Effective Youth Justice in Alberta:

- Province-wide coverage by YJC's (i.e. any youth in any part of Alberta can access a YJC, if needed).
- Broad awareness of YJC's across the province and their function, particularly among people working in the justice system and law enforcement.
- Consistent referrals to YJC's across the province (incl. community referrals, direct referrals by law enforcement, etc.).
- A regularly updated website that provides resources for YJC's, victims, parents, YJC partners, and young people.
- A strong and supportive community of practice with appropriate resources and supports for YJC's across the province.
- A clear strategic approach to ensuring YJC effectiveness and availability across the province.
- Ongoing knowledge exchange between and among YJC's serving Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

To conclude, we would like to sincerely thank all the YJC volunteers in Alberta for their hard work, passion, and dedication to bringing accountability opportunities to young people who are involved in crime. Your work is truly transformational. We would also like to once again thank all of the YJC representatives, law enforcement personnel, probation officers, and government staff who kindly took the time to support the creation of this needs assessment.

Appendix A: Resources Consulted

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Appendix B: List of YJC's Engaged

- Alexander Youth Justice Committee
- Alexis Justice Committee
- Buffalo Lake Metis Settlement Youth Justice Committee
- Calgary Youth Justice Society
- Camrose and District Youth Justice Committee
- Claresholm, Stavely, Nanton Youth Justice Committee
- Cochrane and District Youth Justice Committee
- Edmonton Youth Justice Committee Society
- Youth Restorative Action Project (YRAP) (Edmonton)
- Just-Us Girls Youth Justice Committee (Edmonton – females only)
- Caravan Youth Justice Committee Society (Edmonton, focus on francophone youth)
- Elizabeth Metis Settlement Youth Justice Committee
- Fort McMurray Youth Justice Committee
- Fort Saskatchewan and Area Youth Justice Committee
- High Prairie Youth Justice Committee
- High River & District Youth Justice Committee
- Jasper Youth Justice Committee
- Lac La Biche Youth Justice Committee
- Lacombe Youth Justice Committee
- Leduc Regional Youth Justice Committee
- Community Justice Committee Lethbridge
- Olds Youth Justice Committee
- Oyen Youth Justice Committee
- Paddle Prairie Youth Justice Program
- Ponoka Youth Justice Committee
- Red Deer Youth Justice Committee
- West Central Alberta Justice Committee (Serving Rocky Mountain House and West)
- Siksika Nation AASITAPI Youth Justice Committee
- Slave Lake Youth Justice Committee
- St. Albert Youth Justice Committee
- Stettler Youth Justice Committee
- Community Justice Committee of Stony Plain and Area
- Strathcona County Youth Justice Committee
- Strathmore Youth Justice Committee
- Sundre and District Youth Justice Committee
- B.E.S.T. Community Youth Justice Committee (Sylvan Lake)
- Valleyview Youth Justice Committee
- Vermilion Youth Justice Committee
- Whitecourt Youth Justice Committee