

Positive Youth Development in Maine's Youth Justice System

The Maine Department of Corrections (MDOC) works toward the result that all justice-involved youth experience a fair, equitable, responsive system that contributes to positive youth outcomes. To do this, MDOC has adapted the framework of positive youth development (PYD) for its youth justice programming.



WHAT IS PYD?

Emerging from ecological systems theory, PYD considers the contexts in which youth act, and maintains that **all youth can develop positively when they are connected to the right supports and opportunities**. Justice-involved youth are often contending with greater environmental challenges than their non-justice involved peers. PYD interventions aim to build internal and external assets to help youth navigate their adolescence into a thriving adulthood.

External assets may include:

- ✓ Physical & emotional safety
- ✓ Family & community support
- ✓ Schools with accessible teachers, engaging curricula & clear expectations
- ✓ Positive peer relationships
- ✓ Constructive activities to participate in

Internal assets may include:

- ✓ Confidence & self-efficacy
- ✓ Commitment to learning
- ✓ Social skills
- ✓ A sense of personal responsibility
- ✓ A sense of right & wrong, integrity
- ✓ Positive self-image

THE FIVE C's commonly used to measure PYD...

Competence

Positive view of one's actions in social, academic, cognitive, health, and vocational areas. Competence in these areas may include interpersonal skills, school performance, nutrition, exercise, rest, work habits, career exploration, and decision making.

Confidence

A sense of positive self-worth and self-efficacy.

Character

Respect for societal and cultural norms, having a sense of right and wrong, and integrity.

Connection

Positive bonds with people and institutions (i.e., peers, family, school, and community).

Caring/Compassion

A sense of sympathy and empathy for others.

*Positive development in the Five C areas, combined with the development of **intentional self-regulation**, generally results in youth demonstrating **contribution** to themselves, their families, and the community.*

Intentional self-regulation

A combination of hope, self-efficacy, and resilience, intentional self-regulation motivates us to engage with connections and persist in behaviors that move us toward our goals, and to find work-arounds when progress is thwarted.



Contribution

Contributions to self, family, community, and to the institutions of a civil society.

THEORY INTO PRACTICE

PYD programming should include:

1. Adult-youth relationships that are positive and sustained for at least a year (i.e. mentoring),
2. Development of life skills (i.e. time management skills), and
3. Opportunities to use these skills as participants and/or leaders of valued community activities (i.e. serving as leader in organizing a volunteering program, athletic team).

To reinforce youth developing intentional self-regulation, programs should revolve around identifying goals that are meaningful to youth and leveraging their assets to make progress toward those goals. **This is key to youth believing through experience that they can forge and alter their own life course, make important changes in themselves and their path, and realize goals to build a fulfilling life for themselves.**

METHODS

Tracking positive outcomes for youth who pass through Maine's justice system creates a more complete profile of the resiliency and potential of this population than recidivism measures. MDOC administers a client exit review for youth completing probation to track positive outcomes in five areas: **education/vocation, employment, home/community, prosocial activities, and positive identity.** Education and employment data are similarly tracked for youth leaving Long Creek Youth Development Center. Youth leaving supervision are also encouraged to complete an anonymous client satisfaction survey to evaluate how they felt MDOC staff facilitated their positive development and successful completion of supervision.

POPULATION

- **132** client exit reviews were administered for youth completing probation from July 2017 through March 2018
- **13** committed youth were released from Long Creek from July 2017 through January 2018

RISK & NEEDS

MDOC administers the YLS/CMI risk/needs assessment at the beginning and end of supervision.

- **69%** of youth on probation saw their risk level **decrease.**
- Overall risk scores dropped **3.6** points, representing roughly a **32% decrease in risk** from start to end of probation.

Recognizing youths' capacity for positive development despite the persistence of some negative behaviors, the exit review tracks whether youth violated probation, and whether this resulted in incarceration or whether they and their JCCOs were able to manage those challenges with more support in the community.

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

82% of youth were referred to behavioral health services (BHS) to help them develop tools to address underlying conditions within their ecological systems that contributed to their justice-involvement, including substance abuse. Access to adequate services throughout Maine is a critical piece that ensures youth have the support they need to develop positively.

One third (33%) of referrals resulted in youth starting or continuing BHS.
Nearly half (45%) of referrals resulted in youth completing BHS.

HOME & COMMUNITY

- **86%** of youth had a positive relationship with a caring adult.
- **79%** of youths' family situation improved (family improvement is not exclusive to youth whose families were involved).
- **72%** of youths' families were involved.
- **70%** of youth had positive peer relationships.

27% of youth were in home-based programs.

Most (83%) were in Regions I & II.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Of the 132 youth exiting probation...

| | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 89% White | 11% Youth of color | |
| 83% Male | 16% Female | 1% Transgender |

I found that with positive influence I was able to stay out of trouble and stay on the right path.

36% of youth violated probation, but **42%** of these youth were able to remain in the community without being detained or committed.

| Region | Probation Population | Referrals to BHS | Outcomes |
|------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| Region I | 33% of probation population | 77% of R1 youth were referred to BHS | 85% of referrals resulted in youth engaging in (starting, continuing, or completing) services |
| Region II | 34% of probation population | 82% of R2 youth were referred to BHS | 80% of referrals resulted in youth engaging in services |
| Region III | 33% of probation population | 86% of R3 youth were referred to BHS | 70% of referrals resulted in youth engaging in services |

Mentorship is one of several risk reduction services that are offered to youth. 16 youth were referred to mentors.

81% engaged with their mentors.

Two-thirds (67%) of engaged mentorships were in Region II.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A POSITIVE BOND

Akin to the client-therapist alliance that proves vital for progress regardless of treatment model, building rapport between youth and their JCCO is critical to the success of their work while under supervision. Instability within the family system is common among youth who become involved in the justice system, and the relationship with their JCCO may be one of few sustained, supportive relationships. While supervision is time-limited and correctional in nature, PYD prioritizes building positive, consistent relationships marked by mutual trust, respect, and clear boundaries.

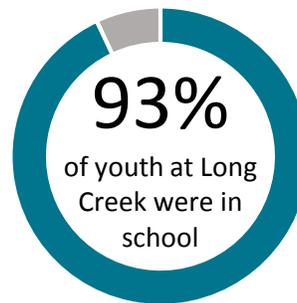


My JCCO has been working with me for a long time. He never gave up and always worked with me to help keep me in a right-minded position. I feel he is a huge part of my youth who helped me achieve beating my demons.

Over 90% of youth reported feeling that their JCCOs helped them connect with positive activities, create ways to stay out of trouble, find services, improve their communication skills, understand the impact of their offenses, achieve their goals, explore hobbies, build confidence, and address struggles with substance abuse.

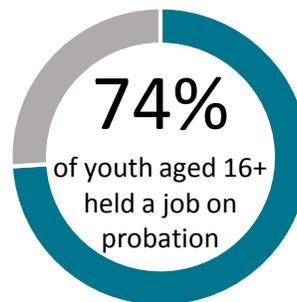
EDUCATION

- **93%** of youth released from Long Creek had engaged in their education, with 39% earning their high school diploma, and the other 54% being enrolled in school when they exited.
- **83%** of youth on probation were in school, spending an average of 74% of their probation (including summer months) in school.
- **67%** of those enrolled advanced a grade.



EMPLOYMENT

- **74%** of youth aged 16 or older held a job for an average of 55% of their time on probation. **90%** of those not working were in school.
- Region I youth were most likely to be connected with work, with **89%** of youth 16 or older holding a job while under supervision.
- **15%** of youth had a job at the time of their release from Long Creek.



PROSOCIAL ACTIVITIES

- **58%** of youth engaged in prosocial activities.
- **33%** of youth engaged in community service.
- **8%** of youth engaged in restorative justice.

POSITIVE IDENTITY

- **90%** of youth advocated for their needs and their goals while under supervision.
- **51%** had an identified hobby that they were interested and engaged in.
- **30%** were involved in a physical activity.

OPPORTUNITIES TO INCREASE POSITIVE YOUTH OUTCOMES

- ❑ Direct resources toward evidence-backed therapeutic services that engage in youth in all their systems and expand the reach of these services to be accessible in all areas of the state.
- ❑ Follow up to ensure that youth who are referred to services connect with providers in their area.
- ❑ Connect youth with community programs that focus on building sustained, supportive relationships.
- ❑ Instead of surveillance-based probation, spend supervision time engaging with youth in positive relationship-building activities in the community.
- ❑ Encourage prosecutors, judges, and probation staff to recommend community service as a positive youth justice intervention. Maintain local lists of community service opportunities.
- ❑ Recognize when resistance or noncompliant behavior is an attempt at self-advocacy.
- ❑ Use restorative practices to address challenging behavior before considering revoking probation.
- ❑ Encourage referrals to restorative justice programs.