



WHAT WE LEARNED

About Youth Justice in B.C.

Phase One Engagement



Ministry of
Children and Family
Development



Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect and gratitude that this report was produced on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen peoples and recognize the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations whose deep connections to this land continue to this day, and who have lived on this land since time immemorial.

The Ministry of Children and Family Development sincerely thanks everyone who shared their thoughts, experiences, and advice to support future systemic changes to the youth justice system. By working together, positive, and impactful changes will be made for youth, families, and communities.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The primary focus of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (the Ministry) is to support the well-being of all children and youth in British Columbia - Indigenous and non-Indigenous - to live in safe, healthy, and nurturing families, and to be strongly connected to their communities and culture (2023/24 – 2025/26 Service Plan February 2023).¹ This Service Plan also identifies that the Ministry will continue to engage with partners and service providers, including Indigenous Peoples and leadership, to design a Youth Justice Service Framework (the Framework) that enhances youth justice services in B.C. to better support youth, victims, and community needs, and addresses factors that lead to the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth within the youth justice system.²

As the Ministry continues to work towards building youth-focused transition supports and services, the Strategic Initiatives (SI) Branch, Youth Justice Team is leading an engagement to inform the development of a new Framework. The goal of this work is twofold: on the one hand, it is to revitalize youth justice services in B.C.; on the other hand, it is to act on the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.

Partner engagement and consultation will build upon and be informed by the work of the following:

- The B.C. First Nations Justice Strategy,³ jointly developed by the B.C. First Nations Justice Council, First Nations communities in B.C., the Province of British Columbia, and justice system partners
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action⁴
- Métis Justice Strategy (forthcoming)
- The Aboriginal Policy and Practice Branch
- Office of the Ombudsperson, *Alone: The Prolonged and Repeated Isolation of Youth in Custody*⁵
- *Belonging in B.C.: A collaborative plan to prevent and reduce homelessness*⁶
- *A Pathway to Hope: A roadmap for making mental health and addictions care better for people in British Columbia*⁷

¹ Ministry of Children and Family Development 2023/24 - BC Budget 2023, <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2023/sp/pdf/ministry/cfd.pdf>, 9

² Recommendation #38 in the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action: “We call upon the Federal, Provincial, Territorial and Aboriginal governments to commit to eliminating the overrepresentation of youth in custody over the next decade.”

³ BC First Nations Justice Strategy - BCFNJC. https://bcfnjc.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/BCFNJC_Justice-Strategy_February-2020.pdf

⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action - gov. https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/indigenous-people/aboriginal-peoples-documents/calls_to_action_english2.pdf

⁵ Alone - BC Ombudsperson. https://bcombudsperson.ca/assets/media/OMB-Alone_Youth-in-Custody-06-11-2021.pdf

⁶ Belonging in B.C.: A collaborative plan to prevent and reduce homelessness - Housing <https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BelongingStrategy.pdf>

⁷ A Pathway to Hope - gov.bc.ca. https://news.gov.bc.ca/files/BCMentalHealthRoadmap_2019.pdf

To achieve these goals, the Ministry commits to developing and implementing a Framework that is informed by Indigenous communities, rights and title holders, justice and social sector partners, and youth with lived experience.

A two-phased engagement process is being implemented to gather relevant information and insights from partners. This report summarizes the feedback received during Phase One engagement. It reflects the Ministry's commitment to engaging in deeper consultation to understand how the youth justice system, and the services for youth interacting with the system, can be improved. This process ensures that the forthcoming Framework reflects the needs of those who will be impacted by the services and will be responsive to the new centralized approach to custody services in Burnaby.

Utilizing the Aboriginal Policy and Practice Framework (APPF) as the methodology for engagement, a cross-ministry team of advisors and youth justice subject-matter experts led the engagement sessions to understand the current environment, and to explore solution-focused opportunities for strengthening youth justice services. The Ministry engaged with approximately 340 justice and social-sector partners (i.e., the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Ministry of Attorney General, Surrey Police Service, and B.C. Prosecution Service). Engagements with youth with lived experience, Indigenous partners, and community service partners will be undertaken as part of Phase Two engagement. This report presents an overview of what was learned and allows participants to see how their input informs the improvement of youth justice services in B.C. It is important to highlight the profound impact that COVID-19 has had on the social sector broadly, including the operation of youth justice services. The Ministry continues to learn from this experience. The themes below reflect the key topics raised and provide a concrete pathway to inform future engagements.

- **Reconciliation:** Addressing the unique needs and experiences of Indigenous youth interacting with the youth justice system, emphasizing cultural safety and trauma-informed practices.
- **Collaboration and Service Gaps:** Enhancing collaboration among partners and addressing service gaps to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach.
- **Outcomes:** Evaluating the effectiveness of current practices and programs to improve outcomes for justice-involved youth.
- **Prevention and Early Intervention:** Implementing proactive strategies and interventions to reduce the likelihood of involvement, or further involvement, with the youth justice system.
- **Restorative Approaches:** Promoting restorative justice practices that prioritize healing and accountability.
- **Transition to Adulthood:** Supporting justice-involved youth with essential resources and guidance during their transition into adulthood.
- **Culture and Family:** Recognizing the importance of cultural identity, family support, and cultural belonging in the rehabilitation and reintegration process.
- **Service Delivery:** Emphasizing the importance of culturally safe and responsive service delivery.

The Ministry learned that linking systems across the social service and justice systems is critical to the success of youth justice. These systems must also improve care for youth with mental health and substance-use challenges and create opportunities to divert young people from the youth justice system. They must also improve services for Indigenous and racialized youth who are overrepresented in the justice system and enhance collaboration between partners, including community services, law enforcement, and across government. These systems include health, housing, mental health, education, and child welfare.

Phase Two Engagement will include discussions with youth with lived experience, Indigenous Peoples and leaders, service providers, and cross-government partners. After Phase Two, the Ministry will summarize the contributions and share what was learned, informing the draft Framework.

INTRODUCTION: YOUTH JUSTICE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Youth justice services in B.C. consist of three interconnected program areas: community youth justice, youth custody, and youth forensic psychiatric services. The program areas work collaboratively to provide comprehensive support, services, and treatment to justice-involved youth.

The following principles underpin a shared approach to Youth Justice Services:

Youth Justice Guiding Principles



- **Keeping Communities Safe:**

- Ensure the level of intervention into the lives of youth and their families will be the least required to protect society
- Recognize that preventing youth offending requires engaging the community in addressing the root causes of youth crime
- Acknowledge youth who offend are likely to have been offended against
- Understand the role of the community in supporting youth and victims of youth crime

- **Restoring Relationships:**

- Create cultural connections and a sense of belonging in youth
- Seek to repair and restore relationships harmed by youth crime (victim, family, school, community, peer, professionals, etc.)
- Treat victims of youth crime with courtesy, compassion, and dignity
- Ensure persons harmed by youth crime are empowered to have a voice in decisions affecting them

- **Supporting the Well-being and Rights of Youth:**

- Uphold youth's individual rights and dignity as a person
- Respect a youth's culture, customs, social views, spiritual beliefs, identity, and language
- Recognize the importance of family, caregiver(s), and community in providing youth with a consistent, structured, and caring environment

- **Encouraging Accountability:**
 - Ensure interactions are meaningful and within the youth’s capacity to understand based on their age, development, and individual circumstances
 - Through restorative justice, support youth to connect their behaviour to consequences
 - Reinforce respect for social and community values
 - Recognize that those who have caused harm have a responsibility to repair the harm⁸

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICE FRAMEWORK

The Youth Justice Service Framework (the Framework) is an opportunity to strengthen the vision for youth justice services in partnership with Indigenous Peoples, youth, families, youth justice professionals, and community partners. Indigenous communities, advocating for increased autonomy through self-governance, aim to actively contribute to this framework, ensuring that services and programs delivered by the Ministry align with a more youth-centered, culturally appropriate, and trauma-informed approach.

There are three key goals that drive the Ministry’s work on the Framework:

- Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples
- Community safety
- Providing supports for youth at risk of becoming involved or currently involved with the youth justice system⁹

A key step in achieving these overarching goals is to take what we learn from engagements and continue to work in partnership with Indigenous communities and in collaboration with social service and justice sector partners and service providers.

The Framework will help young people, families, communities, and partners understand the suite of justice services provided by the Ministry. It will also bring clarity to how young people in conflict with the law access these services and outline the intended outcomes for the services provided. The Framework plans to guide future enhancements of the Ministry’s youth justice services and programs and to assist ministry partners and others in their understanding of youth justice.

The Youth Justice Service Framework aspires to strategically shape the future improvements of the Ministry's youth justice services. The primary objective is to provide comprehensive support to individuals within the youth justice system and facilitate a smooth transition into young adulthood for these individuals. Youth Justice is dedicated to fostering ongoing, meaningful collaboration with partners and service providers to ensure a fulsome understanding of youth justice services.

⁸ Adapted from *Principles and Guidelines for Restorative Justice Practice in Criminal Matters*, 2018.

⁹ Ministry of Children and Family Development, Minister’s Mandate Letter. December 7, 2022.

YOUTH JUSTICE SERVICES

For many years, B.C. has had the lowest per-capita youth custody rate in the country, and the rate of youth involved with the youth justice system has been declining for more than a decade.¹⁰ B.C. has the lowest youth crime rate in the country and a strong delivery system of youth justice programs and services.¹¹ The system is thoughtfully built and supported by a trauma-informed youth-centered care model. There is also extensive use of diversion to keep youth out of the formal youth justice system along with innovative approaches, such as community conferencing and respect for Indigenous customs and processes.

The average provincial cost for custody services of a young person is approximately \$2,090 per day or \$84,943 per stay. Youth have access to a range of programs in custody, including:

- Basic Programs: addressing the basic needs of youth (e.g., education, cultural /spiritual, recreational/leisure programs, and family visits)
- Core Programs: providing structured, interactive processes for youths (e.g., drug and alcohol counselling, pre-employment, and life skills training)
- Specialized Programs: responding to the distinct needs of youths (e.g., treatment services offered by Youth Forensic Psychiatric Services for youth with mental health needs)
- Reintegration Programs: supporting a youth's return to the community by providing community-based services (e.g., intensive support and supervision programs, reintegration leaves, and community-based transition options)

These costs are partly due to the reduced number of youth in custody, while operational costs have remained constant. However, the long-term impact of incarceration extends well beyond the year-to-year costs. The research brief, *The Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offender Study (2022)*, revealed two critical outcomes for youth who experience custody services: (1) continued offending through adulthood, and (2) mortality rates.¹² This situation presents an opportunity for strategic reinvestment, particularly with the recent closure of the Prince George Custody Center and centralization of services in Burnaby.

According to the Ministry's internal statistics, between 2013 and 2023 there was a 72 per cent decrease in the number of youth in custody. Consistent with these rates, B.C. has the lowest youth crime rate in the country and a strong delivery system of youth justice programs and services. Several factors contribute to low custody rates:

- An overall decrease of reported youth crimes across Canada.

¹⁰ B.C.'s Youth custody rate is 0.37 per 10,000 young people compared to the national rate of 2.37. 2021/2022.

¹¹ B.C.'s youth crime severity index is 37.4% lower than the national youth crime severity index. Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General Policing and Security Branch. *Crime Statistics in British Columbia, 2021*.

¹² McCuish, E., Lussier, P. & Corrado, R. *Cohort Profile: The Incarcerated Serious and Violent Young Offender Study*. *J Dev Life Course Criminology* 8, 315-355 (2022).

- The increased use of extrajudicial measures, extrajudicial sanctions, conferencing, and restorative justice under the Youth Criminal Justice Act that prove effective in diverting youth away from the formal justice system.
- Effective community-based services for youth, delivered by staff (e.g., Youth Probation Officers, Youth Forensic Psychiatric Services) and community agencies, including but not limited to:
 - Court-ordered medical or psychological assessments
 - Counselling and treatment
 - Intensive support and supervision programs
 - Mentoring/Elder support, day programs (e.g., alternate schools)
 - Full-time attendance programs

Indigenous youth are overrepresented at all stages of the youth justice system. That overrepresentation becomes more pronounced at the most severe end of the system (custody). There is a need to explore early opportunities to intervene and to change the trajectory for youth at risk of becoming involved with the youth justice system. There is also a need to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth involved with the system.¹³

¹³ IBM Cognos. Youth Community Count Dashboard. Retrieved August 1, 2023.



PHASE ONE ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

The Aboriginal Practice and Policy Framework (APPF) was used as the methodology for engagement. The APPF identifies a strength-based solution-focused process that ensures inclusion and equity for participants to engage and be strong contributors to the engagement. This engagement supports holistic approaches, restorative policies and practices, and, in this instance, restorative approaches to the Framework development. The Circle as a Restorative Process is represented by a series of interconnected quadrants, which are:

- Gathering the Circle
- Listening, Assessing and Finding Solutions
- Creating Security, Belonging, and Well-Being
- Keeping the Circle Strong

METHODOLOGY

Youth justice advisors and subject matter experts who acted as witnesses/scribes during the engagements, systematically analyzed the feedback to identify high-level themes about youth justice services. The results of each circle session were documented in individual reports, and codes were developed to categorize the information further. Once all the responses were coded, themes were developed and presented to the participants to confirm their validity in follow-up, Keeping the Circle Strong sessions.



ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITY

Representatives from youth justice, youth mental health, and the Ministry, representatives from the Provincial Association of Residential and Community Agencies (PARCA), justice sector partners (i.e., the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Ministry of Attorney General, Surrey Police Service, and B.C. Prosecution Service), and members of the Social Sector Advisory Committee were invited to participate in the engagement circles. The engagement process was informed by preliminary (pre-circle) conversations with youth justice staff and PARCA, and what we learned in validation with engaged participants (Keeping the Circle Strong).¹⁴

Engagements occurred during the pandemic, necessitating a shift to virtual environments. It is important to recognize that participating in virtual settings may impact an individuals' willingness to share their opinions or personal reflection.

On page 13, Figure 1 captures the number of people who participated in Pre-Circle Orientation. Figure 2 shows the participants from the first phase of engagement, and Figure 3 shows the breakdown of participants by group.

During the engagement period, the Ministry shared information on:

- Youth Justice priorities
- Youth Justice principles
- Youth Justice data

Engagement questions differed by participant groups although all questions focused on the guiding principles (see Appendix A: Engagement Questions by Group).

Engagement sessions on the questions included:

- Four virtual sessions to obtain internal Ministry feedback
- 15 virtual sessions for internal youth justice and youth mental health staff
- Three virtual sessions for social sector partners
- Four virtual sessions for justice sector partners

¹⁴ 257 participants from the Service Delivery Division participated in the first keeping the circle strong session and 79 participants from PARCA, Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, and Ministry of Attorney General participated in the second keeping the circle strong session.

Figure 1: Number of Pre-Circle Orientation Participants

336

Figure 3: Participants by group. This includes pre-circle orientations (information only) and engagement sessions.

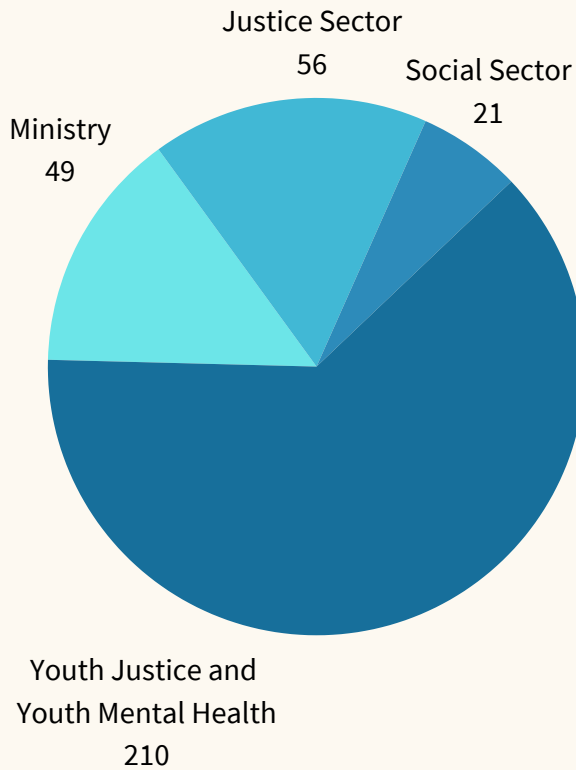
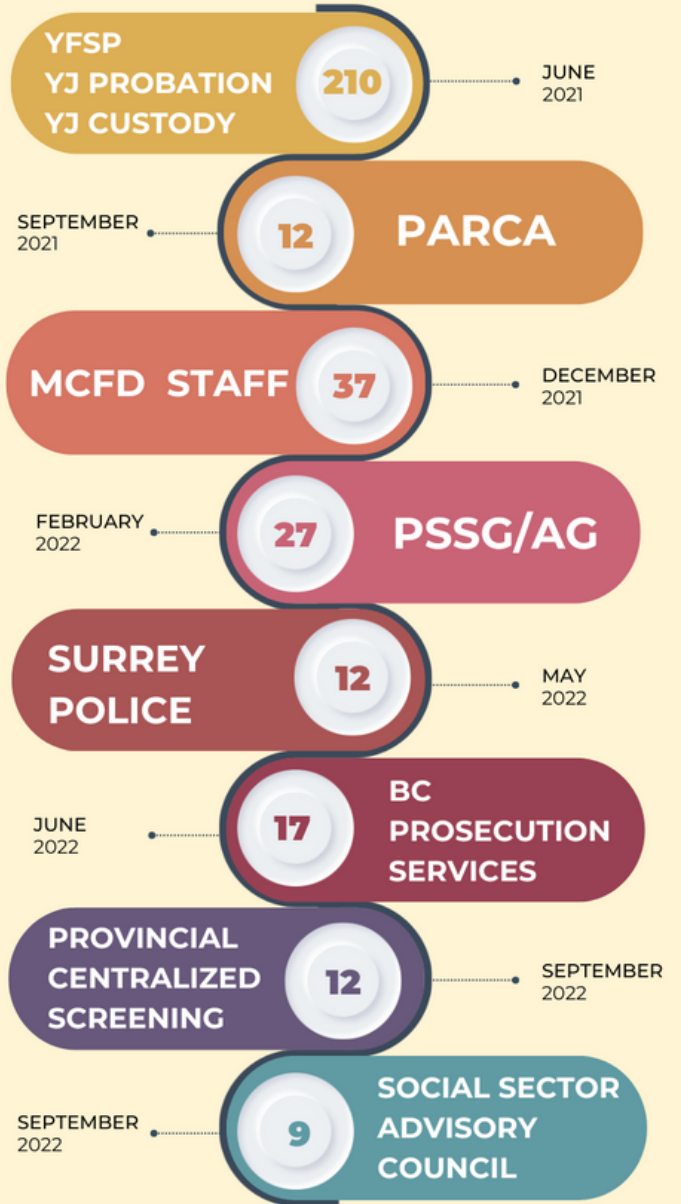


Figure 2: Phase One Engagement Participants



Total Participants = 336





WHAT WE LEARNED

KEY THEMES

This section of the report summarizes what we learned by key themes:

- **Reconciliation** – Addressing the unique needs and experiences of Indigenous youth interacting with the youth justice system, with a focus on cultural safety and trauma-informed practices. Participants emphasized the importance of incorporating Indigenous traditions, language, and healing practices to support rehabilitation and reintegration.
- **Collaboration and Service Gaps** – Enhancing collaboration among partners and addressing service gaps to ensure a coordinated and holistic approach. Participants emphasized the need for improved communication, coordination, and information sharing among agencies, service providers, and community organizations.
- **Outcomes** – Evaluating the effectiveness of current practices and programs to improve outcomes for justice-involved youth and to promote community safety, inclusive of extrajudicial measures. Participants stressed the importance of evidence-based decision making, continuous improvement, and focusing on positive outcomes.
- **Prevention/Early Intervention** – Implementing proactive strategies and interventions to reduce the likelihood of involvement, or further involvement, with the youth justice system. Participants highlighted the need for early identification of risk factors, increased investment in prevention programs, and improved access to mental health services and support networks.
- **Restorative Approaches** – Promoting restorative justice practices that prioritize healing and accountability. Participants emphasized the importance of involving victims, families, and communities in the justice process and providing opportunities for justice-involved youths to make amends and gain a deeper understanding of the harm they have caused and the importance of learning.
- **Transition to Adulthood** – Supporting justice-involved youth during their transition into adulthood, providing the necessary resources and guidance for long-term success. Participants emphasized the need for comprehensive transition plans, including educational and vocational support, housing assistance, mental health services, and mentorship programs.
- **Culture and Family** – Recognizing the importance of cultural identity, family support, and cultural belonging in the rehabilitation and reintegration process. Participants highlighted the need for culturally relevant programming, Indigenous-led initiatives, and the involvement of families and communities in decision-making processes.

- **Service Delivery** – Emphasizing the importance of culturally safe and responsive service delivery in the youth justice system. Participants highlighted the need for staff training on cultural competency and trauma-informed care, the creation of safe and supportive environments, and the implementation of trauma-informed interventions to meet the needs of all young people.



THEME 1: RECONCILIATION

“The importance of reconciliation be present; listen deeply and compassionately; acknowledge truths of colonialism, and of systemic and institutional racism; through relationship building, co-create services for First Nations, Métis and Inuit youth.”



Reconciliation emerged as a significant and powerful theme during the engagement sessions, reflecting the collective recognition of the importance of addressing historical injustices and fostering relationships with Indigenous communities. Participants highlighted the need for a genuine and meaningful reconciliation process, where Indigenous community partners take the lead addressing their priorities for enhancing community-based programs and integrate their cultural values of kinship and interconnectedness as essential components. Facilitating the shift in the administration of justice services for Indigenous youth towards Indigenous organizations and service providers aligns with the principles of the BCFNJC and MNBC justice strategies. This endeavor highlights the broader objective of decolonization and the restoration of authority and responsibility for justice services to First Nations communities.

The engagement sessions underscored the significance of Indigenous leadership in youth justice initiatives. Participants emphasized the importance of Indigenous-led youth justice groups that involve community members and Elders in decision-making. For example, participants recommended the establishment of community justice groups, where justice officials collaborate with community members and Elders to develop culturally appropriate interventions. This recommendation is in line with the TRC Calls to Action #38 and a number of the focus areas of the B.C. First Nations Justice Strategy.¹⁵

“We need to create space for healing. We need programs that incorporate elders and traditional practices to restore our youth's sense of identity and connection to their culture. Culture is healing.”

The engagement sessions also revealed a strong desire for a reconciliation-focused approach within youth justice services, acknowledging the deep-rooted historical and ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous youth and their communities. Participants stressed the importance of

¹⁵ B.C. First Nations Justice Strategy, B.C. First Nations Justice Council, 2020.

cultural healing, land-based programming, and initiatives led by Indigenous communities. We learned that one approach is creating healing spaces and restoring the sense of identity and connection to culture among Indigenous youth. Cultural terminology and concepts that resonate with Indigenous youth were identified as crucial in creating a welcoming and culturally relevant environment.

THEME 2: COLLABORATION AND SERVICE GAPS

“Improve cooperation and information sharing to better support youth across systems; strengthening existing partnerships and establishing new ones to reduce gaps in services.”

We learned that collaboration across partners is a concern and that service gaps within the youth justice system must be addressed. Participants highlighted the need for improved cooperation, information sharing, and coordination among various justice and social sector partners.

Participants emphasized the importance of interagency collaboration, where representatives from different sectors, such as justice, education, and health, come together to develop integrated approaches to supporting youth. This collaborative effort ensures that services are coordinated and aligned to provide comprehensive support across various domains.

Consistent information collecting and sharing was a major theme of the engagements. We learned that partner agencies want greater collaboration and information sharing. Participants said that while information sharing must meet the privacy requirements of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, greater access to information would help identify trends, strengths, and areas for improvement.



THEME 3: OUTCOMES

“Youth leaving our services demonstrate reduced frequency and severity of offending and positive gains across multiple social domains.”

The Outcomes theme focused on measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of Youth Justice Services’ interventions. Participants discussed outcome-driven practices and services that track the progress of youth involved in the justice system, with a focus on achieving specific outcomes. By adopting this approach, Youth Justice Services can better assess the effectiveness of interventions and make informed decisions to improve the lives of young people involved in the justice system.

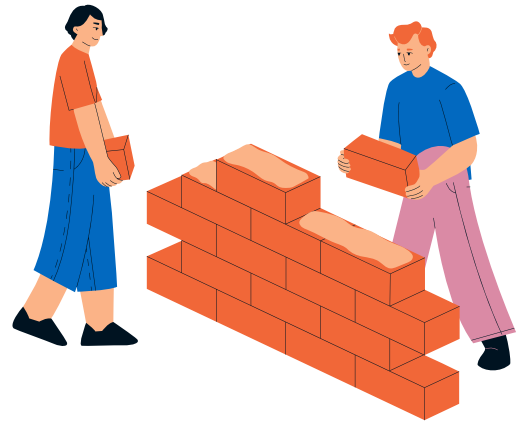


Participants shared a need for meaningful indicators that capture the positive changes experienced by youth. These indicators could encompass improvements in education, employment, mental health, cultural knowledge, and community involvement. Tracking these indicators over time would help assess the long-term impact of interventions and support evidence-based decision making.

One participant said, *“The goal is for youth to be connected to support systems like education, family, community sense of pride, identity, having goals and hope for future.”* By adopting outcome-focused approaches and tracking meaningful indicators, the Youth Justice Service Framework aims to ensure that the interventions provided positively impact youth across various social domains.

Recommendations put forth by participants included implementing consistent information collection, conducting regular evaluations of programs and services, and utilizing the insights gained to inform evidence-based decision-making processes.

THEME 4: PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION



"Create stronger partnerships across social, education and health services for earlier identification of youth at risk."

We learned that prevention and early intervention should be an important goal of the Youth Justice Service Framework. Participants believe that strategies addressing the root causes of involvement in the youth justice system, particularly its social determinants, should be a priority focus, with practical action that engages communities in meaningful programs. As there is no "one size fits all" solution, we learned that Youth Justice Services would benefit from working closely with communities to develop solutions that meet their unique needs.

Participants recommended investing in community-based prevention programs that empower youth, their families, and provide alternative pathways away from criminal activity. Strengthening collaborations between schools, community organizations, and justice agencies was seen as critical in creating a comprehensive support network for at-risk youth.

We learned that including cultural connections in this network can significantly enhance the efficacy of interventions. By engaging cultural organizations, Youth Justice Services can offer unique opportunities for youth to explore their heritage, express themselves creatively, and gain a deeper understanding of their place in the world. We learned that these experiences can bolster self-esteem and resilience, and can promote positive behavioural changes.

Participants called for strengthened partnerships across systems of care which would support early identification of youth at risk of getting involved in the youth justice system. Participants recommended Indigenous-focused training, life skills training, and programs that provide safe spaces and interactions with positive role models.

Participants strongly supported wraparound services. Wraparound services that address the holistic needs of youth through a multidisciplinary approach—integrating education, mental health support, family assistance, and community-based programming. There was an emphasis on the need to use or establish after-school programs that offer tutoring, mentorship, recreational activities, and the inclusion of cultural programming.

Trauma-informed approaches were highlighted as essential. Participants stressed the importance of shaping interventions on trauma healing, resilience, and restorative justice

principles. We learned that land-based activities and cultural ceremonies are practices that can support healing and resilience among youth.

THEME 5: RESTORATIVE APPROACHES

“Expand restorative justice – needed at all stages across YJ continuum of services; Enhance training to support greater use of RJ across all communities in B.C.”

Participants underscored the potential of restorative justice, particularly restorative justice practices that are grounded in Indigenous cultures. We learned that youth justice needs to continue the shift away from punitive measures towards healing, restoration, and reintegration.

Some participants raised the need for culturally appropriate sentencing processes and alternatives to custody, promoting the work of recovery and mending relationships through dialogue. We learned this approach would foster open communication, understanding, healing, accountability, and change.

Participants also stressed the importance of developing healing plans for youth in the justice system. Healing plans would be used to identify the youth’s strengths and support needs. This may include incorporating cultural healing practices, counselling, mentorship, and educational opportunities.



THEME 6: TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

"Ensure youth receive support during critical transition to adulthood; stretch the mandate to reach youth earlier and support them longer wherever possible and appropriate."



Throughout the engagement sessions, participants focused on transitioning to adulthood and stressed the importance of being well-informed about the critical issues facing justice-involved transition-age youth. For example, justice-involved youth, particularly those with mental health problems, are involved in multiple systems of care. With a little over 1,000 young people interacting with the youth justice system daily, nearly one-in-five are also involved in the child welfare system.¹⁶ We learned that the services and programs for young people transitioning from youth justice and transitioning to adulthood are often fragmented and not designed for their specific needs.

One key point highlighted by participants was the importance of maintaining support and services as youth transition into adulthood. This includes access to education, employment, housing, counselling, and cultural resources. The participants mentioned that transition programs connecting youth with community resources and mentors during this critical period can be highly beneficial.

Participants recognized the importance of providing developmentally appropriate services through a life skills program. We learned that such services should include social and life skills, job training, and vocational skills.

Addressing the challenges faced by youth transitioning out of the youth justice system requires collaborative partnerships with BC Corrections and community justice organizations. This collaborative effort aims to ensure the delivery of age-appropriate support and services tailored to meet the needs of emerging adults, specifically those aged 18-24, who become involved in the adult justice system.

¹⁶ IBN Cognos, November 2023

THEME 7: CULTURE AND FAMILY

“Being culturally safe and responsive, and inclusive of youth’s families; foster connections to community and culture; approach family and community as partners.”



The importance of culture and family was emphasized in the engagement sessions. Participants noted a need to support culturally safe and responsive environments and, specifically, the importance of incorporating families into a youth’s care both during and after youth justice involvement.

We learned that we must increase First Nations representation in the Ministry’s Youth Justice Service. Acknowledging Indigenous leadership and their unique perspectives, knowledge systems, and relationships with their communities is essential to ensuring that their perspectives are integrated into decision-making processes and policymaking.

Participants noted the need for First Nations people in youth justice roles, such as justice officials, counsellors, and support workers. Increasing the number of First Nations or Indigenous Peoples within the administration of the Ministry’s youth justice service would foster a sense of belonging and harmony with Indigenous communities.

Participants recognized the importance of inclusive involvement, specifically involving families and community members to help justice-involved youth. Family conferencing, where families, community members, and justice officials collaborate to develop plans for youth, was identified as a valuable practice.

Several responses recognized that culture and family connections are valued by all youth. Participants emphasized the importance of programming that preserves and revitalizes cultures, languages, and traditions. Responses also highlighted the need for interventions such as land-based healing, where youth could reconnect with their cultural identity and traditional teachings. We learned that programs should create a sense of connection and community for youth, where they can be proud of their heritage and feel a strong sense of belonging.

Participants identified the need for support systems that allow youth to maintain a connection with their families and communities. They acknowledged that these connections play a vital role in the rehabilitation and well-being of young people.

THEME 8: SERVICE DELIVERY

“Creating a system of support and emphasizing cultural safety at every point of contact requires the involvement and cooperation of family, caregivers’, staff and all those involved in the youth’s life”

During the engagement sessions, participants highlighted the importance of a service delivery system that is accessible, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the needs of justice-involved youth.

Cultural safety was a key aspect, and the need for staff to receive training on cultural competency and trauma-informed care was discussed. By understanding and respecting the unique cultural needs of Indigenous youth, staff can create environments that foster a sense of belonging and cultural identity. This includes incorporating Indigenous languages and cultural practices into programming and ensuring facilities reflect Indigenous cultural values and aesthetics.

Participants were clear that safe, supportive, and trauma-informed environments are necessary, and that physical spaces should seek to provide respect and emotional security. Equally important was the role of staff in building trusting relationships with youth, providing emotional support, and acting as mentors and positive role models. We learned the importance of establishing spaces where young people feel understood, supported, safe, and empowered.

Recognizing the prevalence of trauma among justice-involved youth, participants agreed with the need for trauma-informed interventions and emphasized the importance of utilizing evidence-based practices that promote healing, resilience, and the development of effective coping skills. We learned that taking a trauma-informed approach means considering the unique experiences and needs of youth, inclusive of gender diversity, who are impacted by early childhood adversity.

Participants also shared experiences working with a limited availability of community-based services and expressed a need for an expansion of the services described above. Continued engagement with partners and service providers will help identify communities' needs in B.C.



CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

Ongoing engagement and collaboration with Indigenous communities, leaders, youth, and community-based partners is required to develop and implement the Framework, including required changes to policy, regulations/legislation, and strategies to move toward enhancing the youth justice system. This engagement is also an opportunity to explore how the Framework supports creating or strengthening the services aligned with the B.C. First Nations Justice Strategy, the forthcoming Métis Nation Justice Strategy, and the TRC Calls to Action.

To engage youth with lived experience, the Strategic Initiatives Branch, Youth Justice Team is partnering with McCreary Centre Society to canvass the views and experiences of justice-involved youth or youth at risk of justice involvement. The aim is to canvass the perspectives of at least 100 youth aged 12 to 19 from across B.C. A GBA+ process will include a survey, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews to ensure the voices of youth with diverse lived experiences are the drivers of youth justice services. Additionally, the Ministry will lead community engagements with provincial umbrella organizations, inclusive of multicultural and immigrant/refugee agencies to ensure that the voices of Black Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) groups are represented in the future of the Ministry's youth justice services.

The Ministry would like to express its heartfelt appreciation for the invaluable insights and knowledge shared during Phase One engagement. Participants' dedication and willingness to collaborate have been instrumental in gaining this knowledge and contributing to the improvements impacting the lives of youth, families, and communities interacting with the justice system in B.C.

APPENDIX A:

ENGAGEMENT QUESTIONS BY GROUP

Participants from PARCA were asked to share ideas on the following:

1. Thoughts about the ideal outcomes for youth that support a modern and trauma-informed youth justice system.
2. Opportunities to collaborate on achieving these outcomes consistently and addressing existing service gaps for community and custody.
3. In reflecting on reconciliation and your role as leaders in youth justice, share your ideas on addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the justice system.

Ministry participants were asked to share ideas related to four questions:

1. What is required to ensure that Youth Justice Services is as culturally safe and responsible as possible as a service area?
2. Take a moment to think of the youth in your family, neighborhood, or community. If they found themselves in conflict with the law, what services and outcomes would you like to see from their involvement in the youth justice system? What could we (the Ministry) measure to know if we achieved that result?
3. Looking at the four youth justice priorities, choose one (or more) and share your ideas on how youth justice can successfully reach the important goals established.
4. In your experience, how may Youth Justice Services in the Ministry best support collaborating with rights holders, partners, and the community to support youth, victims, and communities?

Youth justice, including youth forensic participants, were asked to share ideas on the following four questions:

1. In your opinion, what are the top one, two, or three principles that guide youth justice services?
2. Identify a gap in services (within youth justice, across ministry services, or with external partners) you've noticed in your area.
3. Of the youth justice strategic priorities, what are the challenges of meeting the priority in your role and/or in your area of the province?
4. Building on your response to question three, think five-to-ten years from now, how could the youth justice work you do shift to provide better services, and therefore better outcomes, for youth and communities?

Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General and Ministry of Attorney General representatives were asked to share ideas on the following questions:

1. What is required to ensure that Youth Justice Services is as culturally safe and responsible as possible as a service area?
2. Take a moment to think of the youth in your family, neighborhood, or community. If they found themselves in conflict with the law, what services and outcomes would you like to see from their involvement in the youth justice system? What could we (the Ministry) measure to know if we achieved that result?
3. Looking at the four youth justice priorities, choose one (or more) and share your ideas on how youth justice can successfully reach the important goals established.
4. In your experience, how may Youth Justice Services in the Ministry best support collaborating with rights holders, partners, and the community to support youth, victims, and communities?

The Social Sector Advisory Committee was asked to share ideas on the following question:

1. What is required to ensure that Youth Justice Services are as culturally safe, responsive, and inclusive as possible, considering the diversity of youth accessing services and in support of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+)?