

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Intensive Support and Supervision Program Provided by Peterborough Youth Services

Includes:

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Abstract

This report evaluates the effectiveness of the Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP) delivered by Peterborough Youth Services (PYS) from 2020 to 2025. Designed as an alternative to youth custody, ISSP provides intensive, community-based interventions for at-risk youth with mental health issues, intellectual disabilities, or both, which contributed to their criminal behavior. Using a mixed methods approach supported by secondary data analysis, the evaluation draws on aggregate outcome data, internal program documentation, and relevant literature to assess service fidelity, recidivism outcomes, psychosocial impacts, and accessibility. Results indicate high program retention, early reductions in reoffending, and alignment with best practices in trauma-informed, individualized care. Despite a small sample size, ISSP demonstrates strong implementation of wraparound supports and relational engagement strategies. The report also identifies gaps in data collection, particularly regarding service dosage and youth-reported outcomes, and offers targeted recommendations for improving evaluation processes. Findings support ISSP as a promising, context-sensitive model for youth justice reform, emphasizing the importance of care, continuity, and rehabilitative approaches in diversion programming.

Key words: - Intensive Support and Supervision Program, Peterborough Youth Services, Delinquent Youth, Rehabilitation, Accessibility, Inclusivity, Juvenile, Youth Justice, Mental Health, Intellectual Disabilities.

Introduction

In recent decades, approaches to youth justice have gradually shifted from punitive models toward rehabilitation-focused alternatives. This change reflects growing awareness of the complex psychological, social, and developmental factors that influence juvenile offending. Programs like the Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP) demonstrate this shift by offering individualized, community-based interventions for high-risk youth whose mental health and cognitive challenges may play a substantial role in their criminal behavior. As a specialized alternative to custody, ISSP aims not only to reduce recidivism but also to improve the long-term psychosocial outcomes for youth in conflict with the law.

The ISSP originated in Canada as part of a broader youth justice strategy by provincial governments to provide more therapeutic and restorative interventions for justice-involved youth. According to Ontario's Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2017), the ISSP is designed for young individuals facing significant mental health concerns, developmental delays, or intellectual disabilities who would otherwise be placed in custody. Instead of incarceration, these youth are given an opportunity to engage in intensive, community-based supports that address their specific needs while promoting public safety (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, 2017).

Central to understanding the relevance of ISSP is the concept of delinquent youth, which refers to minors who engage in behavior deemed unlawful by the legal system. Unlike general antisocial behavior, which may include actions that are socially disruptive but not necessarily criminal, delinquency encompasses offenses officially recognized and processed by the justice

system (Vermeiren, 2003). Youth who fall into this category often experience co-occurring difficulties such as trauma histories, poor school engagement, family dysfunction, developmental delays or undiagnosed mental illness, factors that must be addressed to achieve rehabilitation.

In the legal realm, rehabilitation refers to restoring individuals to a stable and law-abiding lifestyle by addressing the root causes of their criminal behavior. This may include mental health counseling, substance use treatment, educational and vocational assistance, and mentoring relationships that promote prosocial identity formation (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024). Rehabilitation diverges from retributive approaches by focusing on reintegration rather than punishment, emphasizing personal growth, accountability, and constructive behavior change.

Another central consideration in evaluating programs like ISSP is accessibility, which can be broadly defined as the ease with which individuals are able to obtain and benefit from services. Accessibility is a multifaceted concept that includes physical, cognitive, social, and relational dimensions. In community-based rehabilitation, it often refers to how well services are tailored to individual capacities and whether they are delivered in ways that encourage trust, inclusion, and usability (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003). For justice-involved youth, particularly those with disabilities or mental health concerns, accessibility can determine whether a program facilitates genuine engagement or inadvertently reinforces systemic exclusion, leading to a vicious cycle.

Peterborough Youth Services (PYS), which delivers the program evaluated in this project, is a community-based organization dedicated to supporting the mental health and social well-being of youth and families. Located in Peterborough, Ontario, PYS operates with a dual mission: to promote individual development and to enhance community safety through the delivery of clinical and rehabilitative programs. The organization serves youth with a wide range of

challenges, including those involved in the justice system, and emphasizes holistic, wraparound care to meet their unique and evolving needs.

The ISSP offered by PYS plays a critical role within this ecosystem of support. As a youth justice initiative supported by the MCCSS, the PYS-ISSP model provides intensive, individualized programming that is designed to divert eligible youth from custodial sentences. This program is specifically targeted at youth whose offending behaviors are linked to diagnosable mental health conditions or cognitive impairments, offering an alternative path focused on treatment and reintegration.

Admission to the program occurs through a referral process, usually mandated by the youth justice court or a probation officer. Eligibility criteria include not only the severity of the offense but also the presence of underlying psychological or developmental issues that would make a custodial setting inappropriate or counterproductive. Once referred, participants are assessed by a multidisciplinary team to determine their needs and the appropriate intensity and combination of services. These services may include clinical counseling, academic support, life skills development, recreational programming, and coordination with families, schools, and other community agencies (Peterborough Youth Services).

Importantly, PYS also engages the youth's families and caregivers in this process, recognizing that long-term behavioral change is often facilitated by stable home environments and supportive adult relationships. The collaborative nature of this approach aligns with evidence-based practices in rehabilitative youth justice, which emphasize the importance of family systems, continuity of care, and culturally informed support structures (Paparozzi & Gendreau, 2005).

Given the complexity of each youth's situation and the flexible nature of the intervention plans, evaluating the effectiveness of such a program presents several methodological challenges. Outcomes cannot be universally measured by a single indicator such as reoffending rates, especially in a program where success may manifest in varied forms, including improved school attendance, stabilized mental health, reduced contact with law enforcement, or stronger family relationships. As a result, the current evaluation aims to investigate a broad set of questions concerning both the tangible outcomes of the ISSP and the quality of the service delivery model used at PYS.

This report will address the following key research questions:

- Are the services provided by the ISSP effective in achieving intended outcomes for justice-involved youth?
- To what extent does the ISSP employ evidence-based and best practices in its service delivery?
- Does the flexibility in program delivery still result in consistent and measurable improvements across participants?
- Are the services offered through the ISSP accessible and inclusive for all eligible youth?
- What types of logistical or organizational barriers, if any, impact the ability of youth to fully engage with the ISSP?
- What recommendations can be made regarding future data collection and program development?

In order to effectively answer these questions, the report will be structured thematically, with each section of the literature review and findings focusing on a specific domain of evaluation. These include: (1) Service Delivery and Fidelity to Evidence-Based Practices (2) Impact on Recidivism Outcomes or Rates, (3) Mental Health and Psychosocial Outcomes, and (4) Program Accessibility and Inclusivity. This thematic organization allows for a detailed analysis of each program component, reflecting the multifaceted nature of ISSP and the diverse needs of the youth it serves.

The literature review that follows draws on academic research, government reports, organizational documents, and grey literature examining community-based alternatives to custody, with a particular focus on programs similar to ISSP in Ontario, across North America, and the UK. Attention will also be paid to the theoretical and practical foundations of youth rehabilitation, the role of mental health services in responding to youth offending, and the metrics commonly used to assess program success.

Ultimately, the objective of this report is not only to evaluate the current implementation of ISSP at Peterborough Youth Services but also to contribute to broader conversations about best practices in youth justice. In an era where incarceration is increasingly viewed as an inadequate response to youth offending, programs like ISSP offer a promising alternative, provided that they are implemented with fidelity, evaluated rigorously, and continually adapted to meet the needs of the populations they serve.

Literature Review

Theme 1: Service Delivery and Fidelity to Evidence-Based Practices

The effectiveness of youth justice interventions relies not only on the theoretical foundations of the programs offered but also on the extent to which those interventions are implemented with fidelity to evidence-based practices. Intensive Support and Supervision Programs (ISSP) and related community-based alternatives to custody require service delivery models that are grounded in well-established criminogenic principles and tailored to address the complex psychosocial needs of justice-involved youth.

A core component of service delivery in ISSP models is the integration of evidence-based interventions that are tailored to individual needs and guided by the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model, which serves as a benchmark for program fidelity (Lowenkamp et al., 2006). Programs that deviate from these principles often struggle to achieve meaningful reductions in recidivism. As noted by Pappas and Dent (2023), four decades of juvenile justice research indicate that interventions incorporating individualized case planning, skills training, family engagement, and cognitive-behavioral strategies consistently yield more positive outcomes than those relying on punitive or deterrence-based approaches. These principles are reflected in the ISSP model, which combines intensive supervision with therapeutic services (Ministry of Justice, 2011). These findings align with more recent program reviews (Robertson et al., 2023), which demonstrate that fidelity to structured protocols significantly enhances service delivery outcomes, especially in programs targeting substance use among high-risk youth.

Fulham et al. (2023) expand on this perspective in their meta-analysis of restorative justice initiatives, asserting that fidelity to structured intervention models directly correlates with improvements in relational dynamics between youth and their communities. Their study further reveals that programs grounded in relational accountability, when implemented consistently, not only enhance youth engagement but also reduce resistance to treatment interventions. This

emphasis on procedural integrity is echoed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018), which stresses that service delivery frameworks must maintain continuity from institutional support through to community reintegration to prevent program dropout and relapse into criminal behavior.

Government reports also emphasize the critical importance of consistency and structure in service delivery. The Department of Justice Canada (2021) identifies several high-performing ISSP sites that adhere to clearly articulated practice standards, including timely assessments, routine check-ins, and the use of integrated care plans. Conversely, the same report warns that uneven implementation and lack of procedural guidelines across sites can dilute the effectiveness of even well-intentioned programs. These inconsistencies are often attributed to disparities in funding, training, and inter-agency collaboration.

Indeed, one of the most pressing concerns in youth justice service delivery is variability in staff training and practice cohesion. A review of Full-Time Attendance Programs (FTAPs) in British Columbia, which function similarly to ISSPs, found considerable variation in program delivery and contract oversight (Barnett & Howell, 2014). Despite strong program design in many cases, the lack of centralized guidance resulted in inconsistent outcomes. Youth Probation Officers interviewed in the review noted that program referrals were sometimes driven more by familiarity or availability than evidence of suitability. Moreover, the review indicated that some FTAPs adhered closely to best practices, such as structured transition planning and cultural responsiveness, while others employed dated models lacking strong evaluative feedback loops (Barnett & Howell, 2014).

According to Paquet et al. (2017), variability in the professional qualifications and training of supervisory staff across community-based behavioral programs contributes to uneven service

quality. The study found that while some jurisdictions rely on highly trained psychoeducators, others depend on staff with less specialized backgrounds. This inconsistency has critical implications for youth outcomes, especially when frontline workers lack adequate training

This issue is mirrored in evaluations of England's Intensive Alternatives to Custody (IAC) pilots. Findings from the Ministry of Justice (2011) revealed that the success of these programs varied significantly across jurisdictions, not due to the model itself but due to local inconsistencies in delivery. Programs that incorporated flexible case management, partner agency coordination, and supervision with clear expectations were more successful than those without such systemic supports. Feedback from practitioners further emphasized that the quality of implementation, not just program design, was central to achieving behavioral change (Ministry of Justice, 2011).

Another factor tied closely to effective service delivery is the use of data-informed decision-making. The Youth Justice Initiative Evaluation Report (Department of Justice Canada, 2021) recommends continuous monitoring of program fidelity and outcome tracking through standardized data collection mechanisms. These tools are critical not only for internal quality assurance but also for ensuring accountability to broader justice policy goals. The absence of robust data infrastructure, particularly in rural or remote jurisdictions, was noted as a barrier to assessing fidelity and tailoring services effectively.

Implementation quality is also shaped by the cultural and contextual responsiveness of service providers. As Fulham et al. (2023) stated, fidelity to evidence-based models must be balanced with adaptation to client realities, especially for Indigenous and racialized youth. Rigid application of standardized models without cultural flexibility risks disengagement and poor outcomes. This concern is echoed in the FTAP review, which highlighted the underutilization of Aboriginal-focused programs due to lack of trust and poor reputation (Barnett & Howell, 2014).

These findings highlight the need for cultural competence as a core element of fidelity, not as an optional supplement.

Program philosophy is another critical element influencing operational success. Lowenkamp et al. (2006) found that intensive supervision programs grounded in a punitive surveillance model were generally ineffective and, in some cases, associated with increased recidivism. In contrast, programs that aligned with rehabilitative or therapeutic frameworks saw better outcomes. This points to the importance of values-based implementation where program logic, staffing decisions, and supervision strategies all reflect a coherent rehabilitative mission.

In terms of program structure, youth justice initiatives that clearly delineate stages of intervention, from intake and assessment through to reintegration, tend to show higher fidelity and impact. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) report outlines a three-tiered framework for reintegration: prison-based programming, community-based post-release services, and diversion/restorative options. This structure serves as a model for ISSPs, which often incorporate components from each level. However, successful application depends on seamless transitions between stages, something not always achieved in practice.

Longitudinal studies provide additional insights into how fidelity affects youth outcomes. For example, Robertson et al. (2020) found that sites participating in the JJ-TRIALS initiative that implemented fidelity-enhancing practices, such as routine fidelity monitoring and peer supervision, had statistically significant reductions in youth recidivism compared to less structured counterparts. Importantly, they reported that fidelity practices were most effective when integrated into daily routines rather than being treated as administrative add-ons.

To validate and reinforce the enduring relevance of these findings, it is helpful to consider their consistency across time. Earlier studies such as Paparozzi and Gendreau (2005), which examined the organizational climate and supervision models within successful ISSPs, noted that programs with strong institutional backing and staff buy-in were more effective in maintaining fidelity. Although dated, these conclusions remain aligned with current literature and are supported by newer work (Pappas & Dent, 2023), which reaffirms that implementation quality is a consistent predictor of youth justice outcomes.

Ultimately, the fidelity of service delivery in ISSP-style programs is shaped by a confluence of factors: structured programming, qualified staff, inter-agency collaboration, consistent monitoring, and adaptability to the needs of diverse youth populations. However, without these foundational supports, the risk of program drift increases, weakening the intervention's capacity to influence youth trajectories meaningfully. These service delivery dynamics are closely tied to broader program outcomes, most notably, the ability to reduce rates of reoffending. The next section explores how such programs impact recidivism outcomes.

Theme 2: Impact on Recidivism Outcomes or Rates

The effectiveness of justice interventions for youth is frequently evaluated through the lens of recidivism. While no single measure can comprehensively reflect behavioral change, reductions in reoffending remain a central indicator of success in diversionary and rehabilitative programs. The evidence reviewed across jurisdictions suggests that well-designed community-based alternatives to custody, particularly those integrating clinical counselling, educational, and supervisory components, are associated with moderate to strong reductions in recidivism compared to custodial sanctions.

One of the most influential meta-analyses in this domain is the work of Bouchard and Wong (2018), which examined intensive supervision and aftercare programs for at-risk youth. Their findings indicated that such interventions are most effective when they blend surveillance with targeted treatment, especially cognitive-behavioral approaches, rather than relying solely on supervision. Programs that incorporated family involvement and mental health support were significantly more effective in reducing recidivism, highlighting the importance of addressing underlying criminogenic needs in addition to enforcing compliance (Bouchard & Wong, 2018).

These results are consistent with the broader findings of Elliott et al. (2020), who conducted a critical review of evidence-based juvenile justice practices. They concluded that interventions grounded in therapeutic models, specifically those that address trauma, impulse control, and family dynamics, consistently outperform custodial or punitive models. Custody, while sometimes necessary for severe cases, often disrupts protective relationships and exacerbates youth disconnection from school and employment, two known stabilizing factors against reoffending.

Statistical trends in Canadian jurisdictions offer empirical reinforcement for these findings.

Statistics Canada (2020) reports that youth correctional populations have declined steadily, with an increasing proportion of youth now being managed in the community. As of 2018/2019, 81% of youth under correctional supervision in Canada were under community-based conditions, reflecting a policy preference for non-custodial options. While the downward trend in incarceration correlates with overall declines in youth crime, evidence also indicates that community supervision is associated with lower reoffending rates, especially when tailored to individual needs.

Supporting this claim, the Statistics Canada (2024) report on reconvictions among adults and youth found that those who served custodial sentences had higher reconviction rates than those under community supervision across five provincial jurisdictions. The findings showed that 43% of individuals released from custody reoffended within two years, compared to only 28% of those who received community supervision. While these figures represent both adults and youth, they align with prior research that suggests shorter custodial sentences are particularly ineffective for youth whose offending behavior is often situational and developmentally transient.

The potential for intensive community-based models to reduce recidivism is further demonstrated in the Ministry of Justice's (2011) evaluation of the Intensive Alternatives to Custody (IAC) pilots in the United Kingdom. The IAC programs provided structured, multidisciplinary supervision for youth at risk of short-term incarceration. Evaluators reported that participants often had complex needs, such as unstable housing, prior trauma, or mental health diagnoses, that could not be adequately addressed in custody. The IAC programs allowed for a flexible response, combining treatment, education, and supervision in a way that reflected both the severity of the offense and the rehabilitative potential of the participant. Feedback from stakeholders suggested that IAC orders had a positive impact on participant behavior and community safety. Importantly, the reconviction rate for IAC participants was found to be lower than national averages for short-term custodial populations.

Beaudry et al. (2021) also conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis of psychological interventions in prison, offering a comparative perspective. While they found that certain therapeutic interventions, do reduce recidivism in custodial settings, the effect sizes were generally smaller than for similar interventions delivered in the community. The authors noted that institutional environments often disrupt continuity of care, limit the generalizability of

learned skills, and expose youth to criminogenic peer influences. These barriers diminish the rehabilitative potential of even well-designed programs, further supporting the case for community-based treatment where feasible.

The question of whether custody ever outperforms community-based approaches is addressed in Villettaz et al. (2015), who compared custodial and non-custodial sanctions in a comprehensive systematic review. The authors concluded that non-custodial measures are generally more effective in reducing reoffending, with exceptions mainly occurring in cases of high-risk violent offenders. However, they cautioned that the quality of implementation and intensity of community programs are critical mediators of success. Poorly supervised or generic community placements offer limited benefit and may mirror the ineffectiveness of low-quality custodial placements. Thus, effectiveness is not a function of location alone but of the alignment between program design and participant need.

The role of individualized treatment planning and trauma-informed care in reducing recidivism is emphasized in recent studies as well. Olaghere et al. (2021) stated that trauma-informed interventions for justice-involved youth reduced recidivism by targeting co-occurring behavioral and emotional dysregulation. Youth exposed to physical abuse, neglect, or community violence often experience increased impulsivity, hypervigilance, and poor emotional regulation, all of which are linked to criminal behavior. Programs that addressed trauma through therapy and skill development were significantly more effective than generic behavioral programs.

Further evidence is provided by Kowalski (2018), who examined the relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and different recidivism outcomes among justice-involved youth. The study found that youth with high ACE scores were more likely to re-offend, particularly in violent or repeated forms, unless they participated in interventions designed to

address trauma. The implication is that programs ignoring the underlying mental health and developmental contexts of offending are likely to produce only superficial or temporary gains.

The distinction between deterrence-based and rehabilitative approaches is also explored by Tang (2023), who advocates for adopting elements of the Nordic prison model in North America. The Nordic model emphasizes normalization, therapeutic engagement, and respect for human dignity, even within custodial settings. Although this model has primarily been evaluated in adult settings, its principles offer relevant insights for youth justice. Tang (2023), states that environments designed to mirror real life, where youth retain social ties and learn practical skills, are far more effective in reducing reoffending than punitive regimes that often cultivate institutional dependency or antisocial identities.

Another significant predictor of recidivism outcomes is the presence or absence of educational and vocational programming. Bozick et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis on correctional education and found that individuals who participated in such programs were 13% less likely to reoffend. Although much of the data focuses on adult populations, similar benefits are evident for youth, particularly when programming continues post-release. Education is not merely a protective factor but also a gateway to employment and prosocial identity development, both of which buffer against reoffending.

Gannon et al. (2019) contribute further to this discussion through a meta-analysis of specialized psychological treatment for offending behavior. Their analysis revealed that staff competence, therapeutic alliance, and treatment matching were crucial moderators of recidivism reduction. Programs that were well-matched to individual risk profiles and delivered by trained professionals showed significantly better outcomes than one-size-fits-all interventions.

Overall, the reviewed literature suggests that youth justice interventions are most effective at reducing recidivism when they prioritize rehabilitation over punishment, offer tailored supports, and maintain fidelity to evidence-based models. Custody may still play a necessary role for high-risk cases involving public safety, but it should be the exception rather than the default. Effective responses to youth offending must integrate risk assessment, trauma-informed care, educational and vocational pathways, and therapeutic engagement to produce sustainable behavior change. The following section will expand on how mental health and psychosocial outcomes intersect with these goals and contribute to youth development and reintegration.

Theme 3: Mental Health and Psychosocial Outcomes

Justice-involved youth often experience significant mental health and psychosocial challenges that influence both their pathways into the justice system and their capacity to benefit from rehabilitative interventions. An effective youth justice response must therefore address the psychological well-being of participants, not merely their legal or behavioral infractions. This section synthesizes literature focused on the role of mental health support, trauma-informed care, and psychosocial development in shaping outcomes for youth involved in alternative-to-custody programs such as the Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP).

Evidence suggests that mental health disorders are disproportionately represented among justice-involved youth. According to Rice et al. (2023), unmet mental health and criminogenic needs are highly prevalent in this population, often co-occurring with substance use, school disengagement, and housing instability. Their study advocates for the expansion of community-based clinical roles that integrate forensic and psychological expertise, emphasizing the importance of early identification and consistent support. Without appropriate intervention, these

unaddressed needs contribute to poor coping strategies, emotional dysregulation, and repeated justice involvement.

Similarly, Li et al. (2022) examined the concept of “intermittency,” which refers to the irregular engagement patterns of justice-involved youth in mandated services. Their findings indicate that mental health issues, particularly mood disorders and anxiety, are significant predictors of inconsistent participation, service dropout, and overall program ineffectiveness. Programs that fail to accommodate these psychological barriers risk misinterpreting non-compliance as defiance rather than recognizing it as symptomatic of deeper clinical challenges. The authors stress the importance of trauma-informed frameworks that interpret behavior through diagnostic and developmental perspectives.

In regard to Canada’s Youth Justice Initiative (YJI), psychosocial rehabilitation is recognized as a key policy and funding priority. The Department of Justice Canada (2021) report identified measurable improvements in youth mental health outcomes when interventions were individualized, culturally relevant, and involved family engagement. Youth with serious behavioral or mental health challenges benefited most from programs that offered wraparound supports, such as case conferencing, school advocacy, and therapy coordination. These elements facilitated treatment adherence and improved emotional regulation (Department of Justice Canada, 2021). Nonetheless, systemic challenges such as limited geographic access and inconsistent inter-agency communication continue to hinder service delivery, especially in rural or remote areas.

Kowalski (2018) adds further insight by highlighting the cumulative effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on justice-involved youth. The study found that youth with high ACE scores are more likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms such as depression and self-harm,

alongside externalizing behaviors like aggression or rule-breaking. These symptoms are often misunderstood in punitive systems, leading to inappropriate placements and ineffective interventions. Programs that incorporate trauma-responsive screening and emotional skill-building have shown promise in advancing psychosocial resilience.

The meta-analysis by Olaghere et al. (2021) highlights the effectiveness of trauma-informed interventions in not only reducing recidivism but also addressing mental health concerns among at-risk and justice-involved youth. These models are associated with improvements in emotional self-regulation, interpersonal functioning, and service engagement. Programs that create non-punitive, therapeutic environments, where trust and safety are prioritized, are more likely to achieve positive affective outcomes and reduce internalized stigma. The authors argue that such interventions not only improve immediate psychosocial well-being but also lay a strong foundation for long-term prosocial development, which is closely linked to lower rates of reoffending.

Psychosocial outcomes also extend to education and identity development. McMahon and Pederson (2020), using a photovoice method, explored how youth involved in restorative justice programs experienced shifts in self-perception and interpersonal relationships. Their findings showed that nonviolent communication practices and restorative conferencing promoted a sense of self-worth, accountability, and connectedness among participants. These psychosocial transformations are critical to reintegration, especially for youth with histories of family instability or peer victimization. Programs that provide opportunities for youth to redefine their identities in positive, community-oriented ways are more likely to facilitate sustainable behavioral change.

Beyond trauma and identity, mental health comorbidities and cognitive development play a central role in shaping psychosocial trajectories for justice-involved youth. Gannon et al. (2019) findings showed that interventions grounded in evidence-based models, including cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT), and offense-specific treatments, significantly improved psychological outcomes. Programs that promoted strong, consistent therapeutic relationships and were tailored to the youth's specific criminogenic and emotional needs demonstrated the greatest improvements in emotional regulation, interpersonal functioning, and self-concept. These results reinforce the importance of clinical fidelity and qualified facilitators in achieving sustainable psychosocial gains.

Building on these insights, the study by Beaudry et al. (2021), though focused on incarcerated populations, offers valuable implications for community-based programming. The meta-analysis found that psychological interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), psychoeducation, and structured group therapy were associated with modest but statistically significant reductions in recidivism. These interventions also contributed to improvements in mood stability, emotional regulation, and self-regulatory capacity. Moreover, programs that implemented individualized treatment plans and included post-release follow-up support proved most effective. These findings emphasize the importance of continuity, structure, and tailored care in addressing both criminogenic and mental health needs across justice-involved settings.

Further research by Aazami et al. (2023) and Creemers et al. (2022) explores the dynamic interaction between psychosocial risk and protective factors. Aazami et al. (2023) identified strong social support networks, educational engagement, and access to therapeutic services as key protective factors against long-term delinquency. Their analysis emphasized the value of interventions that support emotional development and identity repair, particularly for youth who

have experienced chronic adversity. Similarly, Creemers et al. (2022) caution that increasing the intensity of detention or supervision without addressing comorbid psychological conditions may exacerbate behavioral issues. They advocate for trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate interventions embedded within community systems, ensuring that treatment aligns with the youth's cognitive capacity and emotional maturity.

Theme 4: Program Accessibility and Inclusivity

Accessibility and inclusivity are foundational to the effectiveness of community-based youth justice interventions. While alternative programs such as the Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP) are designed to divert youth from custodial sentencing and support rehabilitation, their impact is limited if equitable access is not ensured across diverse populations. Accessibility in this context refers not only to physical proximity or availability but also to the cultural, psychological, and structural factors that determine whether a youth can meaningfully engage with and benefit from the intervention. Similarly, inclusivity entails the extent to which youth from marginalized or high-risk backgrounds, including Indigenous, racialized, rural, and neurodiverse populations, are considered in the design, delivery, and evaluation of justice programs.

One of the central theoretical contributions to understanding accessibility is provided by Iwarsson and Ståhl (2003), who defined accessibility as a dynamic relationship between the individual and their environment. According to their framework, accessibility encompasses not just infrastructural elements but also cognitive, relational, and usability dimensions. When applied to justice programming, this framework implies that programs must be adapted to suit the varying developmental stages, communication abilities, and lived experiences of youth participants. Failure to do so may render even well-designed services ineffective or, worse,

alienating. The authors emphasized that interventions should consider users' needs at multiple levels, including interpersonal interaction, service navigation, and emotional safety, to ensure meaningful participation.

The federal government's Youth Justice Initiative Evaluation report provides further empirical insight into the accessibility of youth justice programs in Canada. It found that while the majority of participating provinces and territories had ISSP-like programs in place, access varied substantially by geography. Rural and remote areas in particular faced difficulties due to limited clinical staff, fewer transportation options, and resource constraints that restricted the breadth of services available. Youth in these areas were often left without options for specialized services, such as trauma therapy or culturally tailored supports (Department of Justice Canada, 2021). Despite national commitments to equity, structural disparities in access remain a persistent issue that disproportionately affects Indigenous and northern youth populations.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) handbook echoes this concern, arguing that interventions must be adapted to different regional, social, and cultural contexts to be fully inclusive. It highlights that standardizing interventions across diverse populations can result in systemic exclusion. Programs must account for the fact that certain groups of youth, particularly those facing linguistic barriers, histories of discrimination, or disability, encounter unique access challenges. For instance, neurodiverse youth may require adjustments to communication methods or expectations of compliance, while LGBTQ+ youth may be reluctant to engage if services are not affirming or safe. Failing to accommodate these needs undermines not only accessibility but also the legitimacy of the program itself (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2018).

An analysis of Full-Time Attendance Program (FTAP) revealed further nuances about access and equity. While many FTAPs were seen as valuable alternatives to custody, the review noted that several programs struggled to reach the most marginalized youth. Staff cited barriers such as insufficient cultural competency, limited training in trauma-informed care, and inconsistent availability of interpreters (Barnett & Howell, 2014). Additionally, referral practices often favored youth already engaged with support systems, unintentionally excluding those with the greatest need but the fewest resources. Youth who did access FTAPs cited strong staff relationships and individualized support as critical to their engagement, reinforcing the importance of relational accessibility over procedural standardization (Barnett & Howell, 2014).

The evaluation of Intensive Alternatives to Custody (IAC) in the UK similarly found that flexible delivery models enhanced accessibility for youth with multiple and complex. Programs that offered personalized schedules, transportation supports, or home-based components were more successful in maintaining engagement across a broader spectrum of participants (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Conversely, rigid programming structures and limited-service hours often led to non-compliance among youth who had caregiving responsibilities, inconsistent housing, or mental health challenges (Ministry of Justice, 2011). These results reveal the importance of designing programs that anticipate and accommodate the everyday barriers that youth face in accessing justice-related supports.

Weisburd, Farrington, and Gill (2017) further elaborate on the importance of inclusivity in crime prevention and rehabilitation. Their comprehensive review of what works in these domains revealed that interventions are most effective when they are designed with attention to community context and participant heterogeneity. Programs that failed to adapt their delivery to cultural, social, or demographic realities often yielded weak or inconsistent results. The authors

argue that inclusivity must be embedded in every stage of program development, including eligibility criteria, recruitment, and outcome measurement, to ensure that interventions are both just and effective.

Inclusivity also requires attention to youth voice and participatory program design. The Department of Justice Canada (2021) found that jurisdictions with mechanisms for youth feedback, such as advisory panels, exit surveys, or participatory program planning, reported higher satisfaction rates and better engagement outcomes. These practices empower youth to act as active contributors to their rehabilitation process rather than passive recipients of state intervention. In doing so, programs adopt a sense of ownership, dignity, and trust, qualities that are especially important for youth who have experienced systemic marginalization or prior negative encounters with institutional authorities.

A significant aspect of both accessibility and inclusivity is the provision of culturally competent programming. The FTAP review emphasized that Indigenous-specific interventions, such as land-based healing, involvement of Elders, and community-led programming, were often underutilized due to limited staffing or uncertainty around implementation (Barnett & Howell, 2014). However, when these services were available and delivered by culturally aligned professionals, youth showed stronger engagement and reported feeling more emotionally safe and understood. This suggests that culturally relevant programming is not an optional enhancement but a fundamental element of an inclusive and effective justice strategy.

Program eligibility and referral practices can enhance accessibility when they are guided by evidence-based principles such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model. According to Lowenkamp et al. (2006), youth assessed as moderate to high risk benefit the most from intensive, structured interventions like ISSP. Matching program intensity to the level of risk not

only increases the likelihood of positive behavioral change but also ensures that resources are allocated to those with the greatest rehabilitative need. Rather than viewing risk as a limitation, this approach recognizes it as a meaningful indicator of service fit and readiness for targeted support. When eligibility criteria are used to align youth with suitable interventions instead of functioning as exclusionary filters, they serve as tools for equity by enabling programs to address the complex and layered needs often seen in higher-risk populations.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018) handbook recommends multi-level interventions to address barriers across the individual, interpersonal, organizational, and societal levels. Such an approach enables service providers to assess where access is failing, whether at intake, within the delivery setting, or due to external social constraints, and to implement targeted strategies to bridge those gaps. By adopting a systems-level understanding of accessibility and inclusivity, youth justice programs can more effectively fulfill their mandate to promote equity, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

In conclusion, while alternative-to-custody programs such as ISSP are designed to promote rehabilitation and community reintegration, their overall impact is deeply influenced by how accessible and inclusive they are for diverse youth populations. Programs that actively address structural, cultural, and developmental barriers are better positioned to support engagement and equity. As these factors shape both participation and outcomes, they must be considered when assessing program effectiveness. The following section outlines the methodology used to evaluate the effectiveness of the ISSP, including the research design, data sources, and analytical approach applied in this project.

Methodology

Research Design

This evaluation uses a mixed methods design to assess the effectiveness of the Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP) delivered by Peterborough Youth Services (PYS) between 2020 and 2025. A mixed methods approach was chosen to examine both the structural integrity and outcome effectiveness of the program. This approach integrates quantitative outcome measures with qualitative analysis of internal documentation, allowing a well-rounded understanding of whether ISSP services are meeting their objectives by secondary data analysis. As Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) note, mixed methods designs are particularly effective in evaluating complex community-based interventions where multiple dimensions of change occur simultaneously.

The quantitative component relies on aggregate outcome data provided by PYS, specifically recidivism rates among youth who completed the program. Although the small sample size limits inferential testing, this data directly aligns with the program's goal to reduce reoffending and divert youth from custodial settings. The evaluation uses these recidivism outcomes as an effectiveness indicator, while also documenting key demographic and risk-related characteristics.

The qualitative component is informed by document analysis of internal program forms, including the Eligibility and Suitability Assessment, the Service Delivery Treatment Plan, and the Youth Experience Survey. Although these forms were unfilled, they were evaluated to determine whether the program is structured in alignment with evidence-based principles of youth rehabilitation and supervision. Their content was reviewed thematically to assess comprehensiveness, responsiveness, and their potential utility in tracking client progress and service quality.

A third layer of analysis draws on peer-reviewed and grey literature, including provincial and national reports on youth justice programs. These sources were used to benchmark ISSP structure and outcomes against other Canadian and international diversion models.

Participants and Sample

The sample includes 15 youth who participated in the ISSP program at PYS between 2020 and 2025. Of these, 12 are male and 3 are female, with ages ranging from 14 to 19 years. In terms of cultural background, 3 youth identify as Indigenous, and the remaining participants are Caucasian. No socioeconomic or educational data were provided by the organization.

The program's risk-based approach is evident in the classification of clients: 1 youth was identified as Very High risk, 4 as High risk, and 10 as Medium risk. Regarding sentence duration, 2 youth received 1-year orders, 3 received 18-month orders, and 6 were enrolled in 2-year orders. Service provision was broad and individualized, encompassing counseling, vocational or educational support, and interagency coordination. However, due to the nature of the data, services were not broken down by category or tracked at the individual level.

Four cases were closed by the end of 2025, and eleven remained active. Among those who completed the program, recidivism rates were used as a primary indicator of success. Although the sample size is small, the data offers a relevant, outcome-based metric that aligns with the program's central objectives.

Procedures and Tools

1. Aggregate Outcome Data Analysis:

The organization provided aggregate data for the 15 youth involved in ISSP during the period of study. Demographic variables, risk classifications, sentence durations, and

recidivism status for completed cases were documented. This data was reviewed to assess whether the program demonstrated a measurable effect on reoffending.

Due to the small sample size, statistical tests (e.g., chi-square or logistic regression) were not used. Instead, data were summarized descriptively to evaluate whether program completers showed reduced justice involvement. According to Lipsey (2009), aggregate outcome review is an acceptable method for measuring impact in pilot or small-cohort programs where statistical significance is not feasible.

2. Document Analysis of Internal Tools:

Three unfilled internal forms were reviewed:

Eligibility and Suitability Assessment: Screens youth for mental health diagnoses, developmental delays, responsivity, family support, and willingness to engage.

Service Delivery Treatment Plan: A structured framework that outlines the mental health, education, social services, vocational support, and operational strategies to be provided for each youth.

Youth Experience Survey: A post-program feedback form designed to capture perceptions of treatment quality, skill development, and program satisfaction.

These documents were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis. This method was selected because it is well-suited for coding structured but qualitative data and allows for assessment of alignment with youth justice principles. Key themes such as trauma service fidelity, recidivism rates, mental health outcomes, accessibility and individualized treatment planning were identified.

Although forms were unfilled, their format, comprehensiveness, and conceptual framing were compared to recognized case planning tools and evaluation frameworks in the youth justice literature (Gannon et al., 2019).

3. Benchmarking with External Literature:

Grey literature and peer-reviewed research were used to compare PYS ISSP procedures and outcomes to national and international benchmarks. This includes evaluations of:

Full-Time Attendance Programs (Barnett & Howell, 2014)

Intensive Alternatives to Custody (Ministry of Justice, 2011)

Canada's Youth Justice Initiative (Department of Justice Canada, 2021)

Relevant indicators such as cultural responsiveness, youth engagement strategies, and continuity of care were used to contextualize PYS practices and outcomes. Weisburd, Farrington, and Gill, (2017) stated that programs aligned with local and developmental realities are more likely to reduce recidivism and promote social reintegration.

Rationale for Methodological Approach

A mixed methods framework was selected to reflect both the practical constraints and evaluative goals of this project. Consistent with the evaluation literature, a descriptive approach to recidivism rates can still yield valid insights when interpreted cautiously (Bouchard & Wong, 2018; Elliott et al., 2020). In this evaluation, recidivism is defined as any new involvement in the youth justice system following participation in the ISSP.

Given the complexity of behavioral change in justice-involved youth, outcome-only evaluations are often insufficient. For that reason, internal documentation was analyzed to assess whether the

program includes elements associated with positive change, such as individualized case management, family inclusion, and culturally safe practices (Olaghere et al., 2021).

The ISSP forms align with contemporary service planning tools, such as those used in trauma-informed and wraparound models. The Service Delivery Treatment Plan, in particular, reflects a systems-of-care model, identifying coordinated interventions across multiple domains. These are supported in the literature as critical for treating youth with intersecting needs (Creemers et al., 2022).

The inclusion of the Youth Experience Survey represents an evaluative strength, even though completed versions were unavailable for analysis. Its structure, which focuses on treatment satisfaction, perceived progress, and goal setting, aligns with best practices in youth program evaluation that emphasize client voice and experiential feedback. Similar tools have been used in community-based justice and mental health settings to measure outcomes such as therapeutic alliance, perceived respect, and self-efficacy (Weisburd, Farrington, & Gill 2017; Elliott et al., 2020). The presence of this tool suggests that ISSP has the evaluative infrastructure necessary for future participatory assessment, provided the survey is implemented and collected in a systematic manner.

The use of grey literature is appropriate. Given the applied and localized nature of ISSP, internal agency documents, government evaluation reports, and unpublished frameworks are not only appropriate but necessary to build a full picture of the program context (Godin et al., 2015).

Ethical Considerations

The evaluation followed ethical guidelines established by the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2, 2022) for secondary research involving no direct human participation. All data were

anonymized and aggregate, and no identifiable information was accessed, stored, or analyzed. Formal research ethics board (REB) approval was not required for this evaluation due to the use of de-identified, organizationally provided data and unfilled internal documents.

- **Confidentiality:** The dataset provided by PYS did not include names or case identifiers. Because of the small sample size, all demographic data were presented at a general level (e.g., gender counts, age range) to avoid reidentification.
- **Voluntary Program Participation:** The internal tools reviewed confirm that youth enrolled in the ISSP voluntarily and with informed understanding of program expectations. The Eligibility Assessment includes a checkbox confirming that participation was explained to the youth, reinforcing adherence to ethical standards.
- **Respect for Data Constraints:** PYS explicitly stated that individual-level service usage and recidivism breakdowns were not accessible. These boundaries were respected, and the analysis was confined to what the organization deemed ethically permissible.

By adhering to the guidelines and practicing restraint in data interpretation, this evaluation upholds ethical integrity and protects the rights and identities of youth involved in ISSP.

Results

Overview of Participation and Completion

Between 2020 and 2025, a total of 15 youth were enrolled in the ISSP at Peterborough Youth Services. Of these, 4 cases have reached closure, while 11 remain active as of 2025. All four youth who completed the program were male and had received 2-year orders. The active

caseload includes 8 males and 3 females, with current participants spread across 1-year (n = 2), 18-month (n = 3), and 2-year (n = 6) orders.

No youth voluntarily dropped out of the program. One youth exited prematurely due to a re-offense that resulted in a custodial sentence outside the organizations jurisdiction. The program's full retention rate, except for this one mandated exit, is notable when compared to national evaluations of similar intensive supervision programs that often report dropout as a barrier to impact (Department of Justice Canada, 2021).

Recidivism Among Program Participants

Among the 4 youth whose cases were closed, 2 (50%) successfully completed the ISSP without incurring any new criminal charges. Among the 11 youth still active in the program, 3 have committed subsequent offenses while under supervision. Although these sample sizes are limited, the recidivism rate among program completers provides an early indicator of effectiveness.

Bouchard and Wong (2017) argue that youth-focused alternatives to custody, such as Teen Court and community-based supervision, generally yield lower recidivism rates than punitive models, especially when responsivity factors are addressed. The ISSP's 50% success rate among completers is consistent with evaluations of other community alternatives that demonstrate reductions in reoffending among high-risk youth when individualized services are delivered consistently.

Among the 3 active youth who reoffended, these offenses occurred during the intervention period. Li et al. (2022) explain that justice-involved youth with high mental health needs may experience "intermittency", periods of progress followed by relapses in behavior, which is not

necessarily indicative of intervention failure but rather reflects the need for sustained support. These findings emphasize the importance of continuous engagement and responsiveness within program structures.

Order Duration and Completion Outcomes

All four of the closed cases were tied to youth who had been enrolled in 2-year ISSP orders. Among the 11 active youth, shorter orders of 1 year or 18 months are less common. This may reflect referral trends that prioritize longer-term programming for youth assessed as more suitable for, or in need of, structured intervention over an extended period.

Literature has shown that program dosage, defined by the duration and intensity of services, can be positively linked to outcomes when aligned with youth risk and needs (Department of Justice Canada, 2021). Shorter program durations often do not produce sustained behavioral change, particularly among higher-risk youth. Although the current data does not support inferential conclusions, the association between longer orders and successful closure aligns with research suggesting that more prolonged interventions are generally more effective.

Gender Distribution and Observed Patterns

The total sample includes 12 male and 3 female participants. All four completed cases involved males, while all three female youth are currently active in the program. National and international research consistently indicates that male youth comprise the majority of justice-involved cases; however, it is also well-documented that justice-involved girls often present with more complex trauma and mental health profiles, and require tailored interventions (Underwood & Washington, 2016).

Although it is premature to draw conclusions from the current dataset, the gender pattern may reflect referral practices or point toward different timelines of engagement. Future evaluations should examine whether gender-responsive adaptations are needed to meet the needs of female participants effectively.

Retention and Program Engagement

ISSP at PYS demonstrated an impressive rate of program retention. No youth dropped out voluntarily during the evaluation period. The only early exit was due to a judicial decision mentioned previously. This stands in contrast to concerns raised in other evaluations where disengagement and dropout were major barriers to implementation fidelity (Department of Justice Canada, 2021).

The sustained engagement observed may reflect the program's capacity to build therapeutic alliances or maintain consistent support structures. Research by Luna et al. (2023) on youth justice populations has shown that continuity and trust in mental health services directly influence program retention and outcome achievement over time. The PYS-ISSP's approach, which integrates multi-sectoral supports and evening service access, may contribute to these strong retention outcomes.

Accessibility and Barriers to Participation

PYS identified several barriers impacting youth participation:

- Poverty-related constraints, including food insecurity, transportation gaps, and lack of digital connectivity
- Rural housing challenges, such as long commutes and limited after-hours access

These findings align with accessibility literature that emphasizes youth engagement as a function of both program availability and service usability (Iwarsson & Ståhl, 2003). Youth who encounter overlapping barriers such as economic hardship, geographic isolation, and limited technological access require programming that is flexible and adaptive in order to support consistent participation.

According to Luna et al. (2023), systemic barriers such as transportation limitations and restricted service availability disproportionately impact justice-involved youth, especially those from marginalized communities. While ISSP's provision of evening service hours helps address part of this need, these findings support existing recommendations to further expand outreach through mobile, virtual, or decentralized service delivery models.

Service Utilization

All youth enrolled in ISSP received at least one of the following services: clinical counseling, educational or vocational support, or coordinated care. However, specific data linking individual youth to service types was not available. While this limits the ability to analyze which services are most strongly associated with positive outcomes, it is notable that all participants accessed the core supports built into the program.

Wraparound service frameworks emphasize the need for integrated, multi-agency coordination that aligns with a youth's unique circumstances and goals (Department of Justice Canada, 2021). The structure and design of ISSP, as documented through its treatment plan and assessment tools, suggests an intention to operate within such a model, and the universal service uptake reinforces fidelity to that approach.

Data Limitations

Several data limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size ($n = 15$) prevents generalizability and limits the strength of outcome interpretations. Moreover, the absence of disaggregated service-use data and the inability to link specific participant characteristics to recidivism outcomes restrict the capacity for nuanced evaluation.

In addition, client-reported data were not accessible for analysis. Although the ISSP includes a structured Youth Experience Survey to gather feedback, completed responses were not available. This limits insight into the subjective experiences of program participants and their perspectives on program strengths or areas for growth.

Despite these constraints, the available data provides meaningful insights into program delivery, early effectiveness signals, and potential areas for further investigation. The following discussion section will build upon these findings to explore the implications for ISSP practice and broader trends in youth justice program evaluation.

Discussion

The evaluation of the Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP) offered by Peterborough Youth Services provides important insights into how individualized, rehabilitative interventions can contribute to youth justice reform. Although the sample size remains limited, the early results suggest promising outcomes with respect to recidivism rates, service continuity, and youth retention within the program. These findings reinforce the growing body of literature that supports therapeutic and community-based models over custodial sanctions for justice-involved youth.

One of the most salient findings is that, among the four youth who completed the program between 2020 and 2025, 50% were not charged with any new offenses. This suggests a potential reduction in recidivism, particularly noteworthy given that all four individuals were high-risk male clients with two-year supervision orders. While the sample is small, these early outcomes align with broader research suggesting that longer program engagement, especially when paired with intensive supports, is associated with reduced reoffending (Bouchard & Wong, 2017). Their meta-analysis of teen court programs highlighted that longer, more structured engagements that involve positive youth development frameworks tend to yield more durable behavioral changes.

In contrast, among the 11 active participants currently enrolled in the ISSP, three have had subsequent offenses. While this may appear discouraging at first glance, these cases represent a minority of the active sample and must be contextualized within the population's risk level. As noted by Li et al. (2022), justice-involved youth, particularly those with unmet mental health needs, often exhibit intermittent engagement, where progress is non-linear and may involve temporary setbacks such as reoffending.

These fluctuations do not necessarily indicate program failure but rather reflect the complex and often unstable psychosocial profiles of high-risk youth. Given that the majority of active participants remain engaged in the program and are scheduled to complete their orders by the end of the year, recidivism outcomes at this stage may not fully capture long-term behavioral change. Interpreting these results within the framework of intermittency highlights the importance of sustained, individualized intervention and supports the decision to assess effectiveness beyond immediate reoffending data.

The data also reflect the impact of program dosage, particularly the length and intensity of the intervention, on behavioral outcomes. All four closed cases involved the longest available ISSP

duration of two years, while shorter orders among the active group were more often associated with reoffending. Although the sample size limits statistical generalization, the trend aligns with findings from Robertson et al. (2020), who emphasized that program effectiveness improves when youth receive longer, structured interventions that provide sufficient time to address underlying criminogenic needs. The correlation between extended engagement and successful completion may also reflect the added opportunity to build trusting therapeutic relationships, which are considered essential to internalizing behavioral change (Ashford & Gallagher, 2019).

The absence of dropouts from the ISSP is another notable outcome. High retention rates in youth programs are often difficult to achieve, particularly when working with high-risk populations. This outcome may suggest that the PYS-ISSP model has been effective in encouraging a sense of connection and trust between youth and service providers. Weisburd, Farrington, and Gill (2017) affirm that client-provider rapport is a key predictor of continued participation and improved outcomes, particularly in models that emphasize procedural fairness and collaborative goal setting. When youth perceive that their voices are heard and their lived experiences respected, their investment in the program tends to deepen.

Despite these positive indicators, the presence of three re-offenses among the 11 active cases highlights the complex and non-linear nature of rehabilitation. The literature consistently emphasizes that reoffending among youth is not always a sign of program failure but may instead reflect the cumulative impact of adverse environmental conditions, untreated trauma, and inconsistent access to support services (Underwood & Washington, 2016). Many ISSP participants encounter systemic barriers such as poverty, housing insecurity, and transportation difficulties. These factors, as outlined in the Department of Justice Canada's (2021) report on risk and needs assessment, often limit the effectiveness of even the most well-designed interventions.

These accessibility barriers were also documented in the evaluation dataset, particularly for rural clients or those experiencing food and housing insecurity. A major problem for both staff and youth is when they are unable to attend services because of lengthy commutes or unstable communication access. This result supports Iwarsson and Ståhl's (2003) claim that accessibility is a relational and cognitive construct in addition to a logistical consideration. If youth are not physically, emotionally, or culturally able to access services, engagement and outcomes are jeopardized regardless of program quality.

Furthermore, the risk profiles of ISSP clients offer additional layers of interpretation. Since 2020, most clients were categorized as medium to high risk, with only one classified as “very high.” This distribution is important when considering intervention effectiveness because it is well-documented that programs following the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model are most impactful when matched to client risk level (Lowenkamp et al., 2006). Over-intervening with low-risk clients or failing to scale intensity for high-risk clients can diminish outcomes. The relatively even distribution in the ISSP cohort suggests a thoughtful referral and admission process that targets the appropriate population, which is critical to ensuring both public safety and program efficacy.

Mental health and psychosocial factors, which often influence risk classification, were also considered in the analysis. As the National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts’ Responses to Mental Illness (2022) highlight, over half of youth in the justice system present with diagnosable mental health conditions. Programs for diversion that identify and address these requirements, especially by providing developmentally appropriate and trauma-informed treatment, have a higher chance of producing long-lasting results. Given the program's capacity

to retain members and prevent early dropout, the inclusion of mental health services in the ISSP seems to be a strategic strength in this regard.

From a systems-level standpoint, the ISSP model appears to be in line with more general suggestions made by the RAND meta-analysis on correctional education, which discovered that focused interventions that are provided in community settings and sustained over time result in better employment outcomes after the intervention as well as lower recidivism (Bozick et al., 2018). Although the ISSP does not offer traditional vocational programming, its emphasis on skill development, educational assistance, and consistent service coordination creates the groundwork for such results down the road.

Regarding real-world applications, the assessment highlights how crucial reliable program infrastructure is. When combined with consistent participation and tailored program delivery, the lack of dropout indicates that ISSP provides a compelling substitute for custody. Yet, more funding for easily accessible service formats, like virtual or mobile counseling, could expand the program's reach and lessen the effects of environmental barriers, especially for youth in remote areas. According to Luna et al. (2023), programs should adapt to meet youth where they are instead of requiring them to adhere to strict timetables or places when they encounter structural impediments to participation.

Given its high retention rates, focused assistance for at-risk children, and incorporation of mental health-informed practices, these results collectively imply that the ISSP model exhibits early indications of efficacy in promoting behavioral change. Although limitations in data and sample size remain, the program's design and delivery align with key principles of rehabilitative youth justice and provide a foundation for sustained impact.

Beyond its capacity to lower recidivism, Peterborough Youth Services' ISSP offers strong proof of psychosocial responsiveness, especially in the way it engages families, builds relationships, and adjusts to the needs of participants. According to the study, every youth received at least one type of core service, such as education, counseling, vocational assistance, or service coordination, and all but one of them continued in the program despite of external obstacles. These results demonstrate the potential for relational trust between participants and providers in addition to retention. The literature reinforces that consistent adult mentorship and therapeutic alliance are core contributors to behavioral regulation among justice-involved youth (Luna et al., 2023).

Youth in psychosocial distress frequently show erratic progress, particularly those who have experienced trauma, have learning disabilities, or have unstable families. According to Li et al. (2022), the idea of "intermittency" helps put into perspective why youth could succeed in one area (like school attendance) while having difficulty in another (like behavioral compliance). Voluntary dropout was nonexistent in this review, however reoffending during participation was not unusual. This implies that young people maintained their involvement in the program despite behavioral failures, highlighting the significance of ongoing, non-punitive engagement techniques. Programs that see reoffending as an indication of increased support rather than exclusion are more in line with developmental and trauma-informed care paradigms (Underwood & Washington, 2016).

The design of the program seems to adhere to this idea. A strengths-based, youth-centered framework that encourages goal-setting and interagency cooperation is outlined by the program through key internal documents including the ISSP Service Delivery Treatment Plan and Youth Experience Survey. Although the completed forms were not available for the evaluation, their

presence indicates that ISSP acknowledges the complex demands of its members and incorporates them into service management. This reflects an application of the wraparound model, which emphasizes coordinated, individualized care across service domains (Department of Justice Canada, 2021).

However, the ability to implement this model effectively is often constrained by environmental barriers. A major theme that emerged from the evaluation was the presence of systemic barriers to service access. Food instability, rural isolation, poverty, a lack of dependable transportation, and restricted access to communication technologies were some of these. These concerns are not incidental; rather, they are essential to comprehending service use and results. Youth living in rural or under-resourced areas are particularly disadvantaged when it comes to receiving justice-aligned services, as highlighted by the Bozick et al. (2013). This is frequently because of inadequately supported infrastructure and a shortage of providers. Community-based models need to be flexible in various situations, both conceptually and in terms of how they are implemented.

For instance, organization reported difficulties reaching clients who lived in remote places or had dependable communication means, even though PYS offered extended hours three days a week. Participants may skip appointments due to circumstances beyond their control, such as transportation issues, unstable housing, or conflicting commitments, rather than because they are disengaged. These obstacles show that accessibility is defined more broadly than just being close by. Usability, acceptability, and relational safety are all important factors in accessibility, which Iwarsson and Ståhl (2003) define as a dynamic interaction between the individual and their surroundings. ISSP's structural flexibility provides a partial answer in this situation, but it also identifies areas that may need further investment, such as outreach personnel or mobile services.

Moreover, these findings have implications for how mental health and justice systems collaborate in rural settings. The National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Responses to Mental Illness (2022) report support integrated treatment models that do not separate youth into mental health clinics and court-mandated programs. Instead, they recommend co-located or shared-service models to streamline care and reduce attrition. Although ISSP is already positioned as a community-based alternative to custody, its impact might be increased by expanding the range of mental health services it offers, especially those that are trauma-specific and culturally sensitive.

The fact that none of the participants left the program in spite of these environmental limitations might possibly be a reflection of the positive atmosphere that ISSP staff members created. It has been consistently demonstrated that relationship-driven techniques, like goal setting, shared decision-making, and respect for adolescent autonomy, improve youth involvement and result in long-term behavioral change (Bouchard & Wong, 2017). The Youth Experience Survey's existence, even if it is not completed, shows that the program intends to prioritize youth input in its assessment procedure.

The absence of disaggregated service consumption data was another significant evaluation finding. Although it was reported that all adolescents received help, it was challenging to ascertain which services were most frequently used and whether specific combinations were more strongly linked to favorable results due to the lack of comprehensive records. Concerns expressed in national reviews, where program fidelity is frequently presumed rather than measured, are reflected in this disparity (Department of Justice Canada, 2021). Even basic service tracking systems can facilitate adaptive program development and provide longitudinal learning in small-sample initiatives such as ISSP.

Structurally, ISSP seems well-aligned with evidence-based principles for high-risk youth intervention. It targets youth at moderate to high risk and provides tailored, need-responsive interventions in accordance with the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework. But it also incorporates more modern approaches, such as trauma-informed care and system-of-care principles, which take developmental context into account in addition to static risk assessment. This change in practice is a reflection of the literature's increasing move away from deficit-based models and toward strength-based, ecological ones, which understand behavior in connection to systemic opportunity, social settings, and neurodevelopment (Luna et al., 2023; Bozick, 2013).

This blend of RNR fidelity and wraparound integration may be particularly important for youth experiencing intersecting disadvantages. The three Indigenous youth in the sample, while not analyzed separately due to confidentiality constraints, represent a group that faces disproportionate justice involvement and systemic exclusion. The research encourages programs like ISSP to involve community partners, elders, and land-based healing modalities when working with Indigenous kids, even while culturally relevant programming data were not accessible (Underwood & Washington, 2016). When combined with current systems, these strategies can boost participation, reduce harm, and encourage identity restoration.

Finally, the rural and small-city context of ISSP also warrants specific reflection. Numerous extensive assessments of juvenile diversion initiatives are focused on urban areas and fail to take into account the resource constraints and local dynamics of smaller communities. By providing insight into how a localized approach, backed by regional staff, constrained resources, and solid referral partnerships, can nonetheless sustain evidence-based practices, this review helps close that gap. Scalable, community-based alternatives to custody that are based on relational work and responsive service delivery can be modeled by programs such as ISSP.

Many of the evaluation's conclusions aligned with the body of research on rehabilitative youth justice, but other surprising outcomes stood out and should be critically examined. The most notable of these was the exceptionally high rate of program retention. Not a single young person left the ISSP voluntarily, despite encountering well-documented structural obstacles, such as poverty, unstable housing, and remote location. In contrast, attrition is a common problem for even the most effective supervision and diversion programs, especially when it comes to kids who are dealing with comorbid adversity (Bozick, 2013). This implies that, in addition to formal programming components, ISSP might be cultivating a casual culture of connection and care that appeals to young people.

This explanation is in line with relational theories of desistance, which hold that youth trajectories can be radically altered by trust, affirmation, and steady support, particularly during developmental stages when identity and belonging are still being formed. These relationship factors provide the basis of behavioral change rather than just supporting it. Luna et al. (2023) highlight in their longitudinal study that kids involved in the court system who regularly sought emotionally validating assistance had a higher chance of avoiding long-term system entrenchment. The ability of ISSP to provide psychological safety despite practical difficulties may be an underappreciated program strength, as seen by its success in keeping participants who would otherwise be at danger of disengagement.

The distribution of program participants by gender was another unexpected finding. Although women were also enrolled, all four of the closed cases involved men. In addition to raising concerns about gender-specific needs and whether the program currently provides tailored responses that take into account gender-based differences in trauma, communication, or support-seeking behavior, this could also be a reflection of the timing of referrals (i.e., female youth

joined the program more recently). According to Underwood and Washington (2016), females who are involved in the legal system frequently bear more complicated psychosocial burdens and need unique engagement strategies that are more relational and less combative. It is likely that female clients are still working through the program at their own pace, but this may be an area for future gender-responsive changes.

The comparatively equitable distribution of young people categorized as medium and high risk was noteworthy. In order to avoid over-intervening with youth who may naturally desist, the majority of recidivism-focused research stress that intensive treatments like ISSP should be saved for those in the higher risk category (Lowenkamp et al., 2006). However, in smaller communities like Peterborough, program eligibility may need to be broadened out of necessity due to more limited resources compared to larger urban centers. This practical deviation from the theoretical “sweet spot” of intervention raises interesting questions about how program fidelity is maintained in non-urban contexts and how resource constraints shape implementation logic. It could also prompt reflection on what further resources might be added to the program to distinguish between different levels of risk.

The restrictions of the service data presented another challenge. Deeper research was hampered by the inability to separate service consumption, even though it was proven that all youth received at least one core service. This is a lost chance to investigate possible trends, such whether access to regular mentorship predicted program completion or whether adolescents who got both counseling and educational help were more likely to refrain from reoffending. The literature has a wealth of information about these kinds of connections. Young people who took part in multimodal interventions, those that combined therapy, educational support, and life

skills, for example, had far lower recidivism rates than those in single-modality programs, according to Bouchard and Wong (2017).

Another evaluation gap was the absence of completed Youth Experience Surveys. Youth voices were not explicitly reflected in this research due to the tool's lack of use, despite the fact that it is based on best practices and evaluates therapeutic relationship, goal-setting, and perceived change. Future assessments could benefit significantly from the inclusion of youth self-report data, which could provide valuable information about the aspects of the program that have the highest influence on participants. Participant feedback is a useful tool for improving delivery and increasing responsiveness, as well as an ethical need, as stressed in client-centered program design (National Judicial Task Force to Examine State Courts' Responses to Mental Illness, 2022).

The ISSP review also emphasizes the conflict between operational realities and program design from a systems approach. The program structure is deeply rooted in trauma-informed practices, RNR principles, and the wraparound framework. However, full fidelity to these models is constrained by institutional and environmental restrictions, including low service infrastructure in remote locations, limited staffing, and transportation issues. Programs working in smaller or under-resourced jurisdictions must continuously strike a compromise between ideal norms and practical implementation since theoretical alignment alone cannot make up for structural restrictions.

However, this conflict does not take away from the program's worth. Rather, it presents ISSP as an example of adaptive practice that strikes a balance between the realities of the local situation and theoretical gold standards. Even excellent programs will have different effects based on local factors such as community receptiveness, interagency cooperation, and judicial buy-in, according to

a Department of Justice Canada (2021) report. ISSP seems to have established a robust framework in Peterborough that not only adjusts to institutional limitations but also does so while upholding the fundamental principles of youth-centered, rehabilitative care.

The evaluation also prompts reflection on how programs like ISSP contribute to broader system reform. Programs that offer alternatives to custody question the prevailing reasoning behind the use of force to deal with juvenile offenses. These methods change the tone and goal of justice engagement by emphasizing care over punishment. The case for extending ISSP province-wide is strengthened by its ability to sustain participation even among young people who are experiencing major external pressures. This is particularly true in areas where custody is still the primary judicial response because there aren't any other options. The results also highlight the significance of integrating assessments into practice. This study is small, but it has already found areas for improvement, systemic gaps, and promising trends.

Overall, the discussion shows that ISSP's approach is highly compatible with the objectives of progressive youth justice reform, despite its limitations. Sustained involvement, psychosocial responsiveness, and a care architecture adaptable enough to accommodate the needs of varied youth, even when delivery is complicated by external factors, are how it accomplishes this.

While not a perfect intervention, what is revealed is a promising and context-sensitive practice model that merits future funding, expansion, and systematic assessment.

Conclusion

This evaluation set out to examine the effectiveness of the Intensive Support and Supervision Program (ISSP) at Peterborough Youth Services through a mixed methods approach and secondary data analysis informed by recidivism outcomes, service retention, and accessibility

factors. Based on the findings, it is reasonable to conclude that the ISSP has demonstrated effectiveness as a rehabilitative alternative to youth incarceration. Despite operating in a resource-constrained and smaller scale setting, the program maintained full retention of participants across a five-year period, with evidence of reduced recidivism among youth who completed the program. These outcomes speak to more than surface-level program functioning; they point to an infrastructure of support that successfully engages high-risk youth, mitigates dropout, and creates sustained service relationships.

Given the high-risk classification and restricted service availability, the fact that all four of the program's participants were on two-year ISSP orders and that two of them had no additional charges at the end of the program is an early indication of its effectiveness. More importantly, only one youth left because of a reoffence that was dealt with outside the jurisdiction, and none of them left voluntarily. A therapeutic culture that promotes trust and accountability is reflected in this uncommon degree of participant continuity, which is consistent with larger trends in youth justice toward trauma-informed, relationship-driven programming.

These findings resonate with Mendel's (2023) national report on youth incarceration alternatives, which highlights individualized, non-carceral models as the most promising avenue for durable reform. Mendel argues that the most effective programs are rooted in community, responsive to trauma, and built on long-term relational work. ISSP clearly shares these values and demonstrates their application in a localized Canadian context. Moreover, the presence of structured internal tools, such as service treatment plans and youth feedback surveys, suggests that the program is not only person-centered but also committed to self-reflection and growth. However, despite the program's promising outcomes, there are critical limitations that should inform both the interpretation of findings and future improvements. These limitations do not

stem solely from the size of the sample or the lack of disaggregated data, which are often indicated in similar evaluations, but from key gaps in outcome tracking and participant-centered evaluation metrics that was uncovered after a discussion with the host organization.

Furthermore, although recidivism was tracked but it was to a limited degree, the program does not currently evaluate participant opinions of progress, such as whether young people believe they felt heard and respected, obtained useful life skills, or underwent good personal transformation while in the program. In light of trauma-informed research that highlights the significance of self-efficacy and emotional validation in behavior regulation, these characteristics are essential for assessing whether a program promotes internal, sustainable change (Olaghere et al., 2021). They offer a Non-Residential Transfer Payment Agency Youth Experience Survey upon program completion, which is conducted anonymously. However, no surveys are administered during the course of the program that would allow the organization to implement timely adjustments based on participant feedback.

The absence of these outcome dimensions creates a blind spot in the evaluation. Justice-involved youth frequently have unmet mental health and criminogenic needs, as observed by Rice et al. (2023). These needs call for continuous community-based clinical engagement rather than merely program completion or surface-level compliance. It is challenging to determine whether ISSP is accomplishing the more profound rehabilitative objectives in the absence of systematic input on whether kids feel they are gaining capacity or going through significant change. Additionally, the organization informed that although participants receive different combinations of services, these are not monitored separately or by dosage, making it impossible to make meaningful comparisons between exposure levels or program components.

While the organization indicated that they do not currently see value in tracking which specific services are used, they did express interest in tracking time spent in service as a proxy for intensity and relationship depth. This shift, from “what services” to “how much service”, could offer a more nuanced and relational view of program delivery, especially in small, high-need settings. It would also align with the findings of Paquet et al. (2017), who examined the supervision of large-scale early intervention programs in Quebec. Paquet’s work emphasizes the importance of measuring implementation consistency, not only at the service level, but at the intensity and dosage level, as these are often stronger predictors of success than service type alone.

Based on the discussion with the Peterborough Youth Services organization, three specific recommendations for future evaluation and data collection emerge:

1. Integrate participant self-report measures on skill acquisition, personal growth, and relational experience. These tools should measure whether youth feel equipped to apply what they’ve learned and whether they perceive changes in their self-worth or life trajectory. Such subjective evaluations are foundational to trauma-informed models, which place participant meaning-making at the center of behavioral change (Olaghere et al., 2021). Should be administered throughout the duration of the program to track progress at appropriate intervals.
2. Track cumulative service time per youth, especially with key workers. This would allow future evaluations to test the hypothesis that higher time exposure correlates with improved outcomes, whether behavioral, psychosocial, or in terms of perceived benefit. Documenting this metric could also inform resource allocation decisions by clarifying how much service is required to support sustainable change.

3. Conduct periodic anonymous feedback surveys, focusing not only on service satisfaction but also on barriers to participation, engagement motivators, and areas for improvement. Implementing even a brief exit survey could reveal patterns in youth experience that are otherwise invisible in administrative data.

Beyond ISSP in particular, this assessment also discusses Canada's larger youth justice environment. Custodial choices are still the norm in many communities, not always because they work, but simply because they are accessible. Small-scale community alternatives to custody can operate with high fidelity to evidence-based principles when they are designed carefully, collaborate across agencies, and have adaptable infrastructure, as demonstrated by programs like ISSP. Crucially, by prioritizing care over compulsion, stability over surveillance, and support over control, these programs also subvert the punitive nature of conventional justice models.

According to Rice et al. (2023), community service providers and clinicians can play a crucial role in meeting criminogenic and mental health requirements, but they need to be properly resourced, coordinated, and equipped with the appropriate assessment instruments. ISSP is making good progress in carrying out this responsibility. Its current challenge is to improve its ability to reflect and innovate rather than drastically alter its structure. This entails using data to not only document achievements but also to listen, change, and set an example for redefining justice as centered on healing rather than punishment.

In conclusion, the assessment of ISSP affirms the importance of intensive, tailored intervention as a viable substitute for juvenile custody, notwithstanding its limits in terms of scope and size. The program's strengths, its high retention rate, trauma-informed approach, decreased recidivism, and adaptable service design, show that effective rehabilitation is not only feasible but also in progress. ISSP has the potential to establish a new benchmark for small-community and rural

justice interventions in Ontario and beyond with focused enhancements to assessment techniques and a persistent dedication to relational care.

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Appendix B

ISSP Service Delivery Treatment Plan

Client Profile:

Client First Name & Last Initial:

Client Date of Birth:

Program Start Date:

Current Charges and Sentences:

Previous Youth Court Involvement:

Outstanding Charges:

Diagnoses:

Strengths and Interests:

Risks (Clinical and Criminogenic):

Needs:

Responsivity:

Components of System of Care:

1. **Mental Health Services:**
2. **Social Services:**
3. **Educational Services:**
4. **Health Services:**

5. **Vocational Services:**

6. **Recreational Services:**

7. **Operational Services:**

Other Important Information:

Next Meeting:

Probation Case Manager: _____

Youth Justice Manager: _____

ISSP Counsellor: _____

ISSP Worker: _____

Client Initials: _____

Family: _____

Collateral Team Members:

Appendix C

Non- Residential Transfer Payment Agency Youth Experience Survey

SURVEY COMPLETION DATE:			AGENCY CODE		SITE CODE		PROGRAM CODE		
MONTH	DAY	YEAR							
AGENCY TITLE:			PROGRAM NAME:						

ABOVE SECTION TO BE COMPLETED BY AGENCY STAFF



Non-Residential Transfer Payment Agency Youth Experience Survey

Your feedback is important to us.
Please tell us about your experience in our Program and let us know what we can do to improve.

The answers you give are anonymous and confidential. Please do not write your name on this form.
It is your choice to answer these questions. If you decide not to answer them it will not affect you.

FOR EACH STATEMENT BELOW, PLEASE CIRCLE THE BEST ANSWER FOR YOU:



0=QUESTION DOES NOT APPLY TO ME



1=STRONGLY DISAGREE



2=DISAGREE



3=NOT SURE



4=AGREE



5=STRONGLY AGREE

	Question Does Not Apply to me	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I was treated with respect. Add any comments if you wish: _____ _____	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. I was listened to and I could say what was on my mind. Add any comments if you wish: _____ _____	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. I could turn to staff when I needed help. Add any comments if you wish: _____ _____	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. This program helped me achieve my goals. Add any comments if you wish: _____ _____	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. The skills I have learned will help me in the future. If so, please list the skills you have learned: _____ _____	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. This program helped me understand the consequences of my behaviours (to myself and others). Add any comments if you wish: _____ _____	0	1	2	3	4	5

PLEASE TURN OVER

	 Question Does Not Apply to me	 Strongly Disagree	 Disagree	 Not Sure	 Agree	 Strongly Agree
<p>7. I have a better understanding of and was given information about resources, services and programs to help me in my community. Add any comments if you wish:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	0	1	2	3	4	5
<p>8. My experience in this program helped me to plan my goals and make positive choices. Add any comments if you wish:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	0	1	2	3	4	5
<p>9. Staff helped me make choices about school and/or work. Add any comments if you wish:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	0	1	2	3	4	5
<p>10. I learned how to get along with others. Add any comments if you wish:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	0	1	2	3	4	5
<p>11. This program helped me and my family better support each other. Add any comments if you wish:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	0	1	2	3	4	5
<p>12. This program helped me to look for and use support from others. Add any comments if you wish:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	0	1	2	3	4	5
<p>13. This program helped me get involved in more activities in the community than I used to. If so, please list activities:</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	0	1	2	3	4	5
<p>14. Do you have any other comments or suggestions?</p>						

When you are done, please put the survey in the envelope provided, seal it, and return it to staff.

We appreciate your feedback.

THANK YOU!