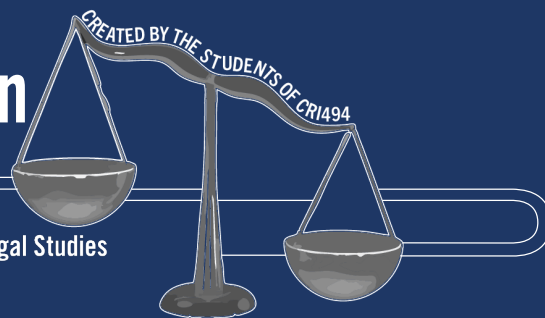


Toronto Youth Justice Diversion

Navigation Guide



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
FACULTY OF ARTS & SCIENCE

Centre for Criminology & Sociolegal Studies

Toronto Youth Justice Diversion Navigation Guide

Created by U of T Criminology Students in CRI494

Land and Community Acknowledgement

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

How to Use This Guide/How the Guide is Organized

This document is meant to provide an overview of youth diversion programs available in Toronto, preceded by discussions on the background and process/considerations that went into creating the guide (Parts 1-4). The guide itself (Part 5) includes detailed information on various programs, their locations, and contact details, making it easier for legal professionals and community workers to connect youth with appropriate resources. Users can navigate the guide by referring to the alphabetical tables that summarize program information, ensuring they can quickly find the relevant services needed to support young individuals in the justice system.

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTIONS AND RATIONALE

About the Guide and the Authors

Welcome to the Toronto Youth Diversion Guide

This resource is the result of the CRI 494 Local Justice Programs Collaborative Research Project led by Criminology students at the University of Toronto's Centre for Criminology and Sociolegal Studies (CrimSL), under the mentorship of Dr. Jacqueline Briggs. Our project aims to provide a comprehensive, accessible guide to the youth and young adult diversion programs available in Toronto— helping criminal justice practitioners, community workers, and legal professionals, as well as youth, their families and communities, to navigate the often complex landscape of youth justice.

Who Are We?

We are a team of Criminology students of diverse backgrounds dedicated to improving the accessibility and effectiveness of Toronto's youth justice system. Our work is grounded in the central belief that justice should be fair, accessible, and community-centred. We recognize the need for a justice system that not only holds individuals accountable but also provides them with the support necessary to address underlying issues, reduce reoffending, and reintegrate into society.

In creating this guide, we have collaborated with a diverse range of stakeholders, including academic scholars, legal practitioners, probation officers, and members of non-profit organizations. Through interviews and consultations, we gathered their insights and incorporated their valuable input to ensure that the guide is both comprehensive and responsive to the needs of those working within, and impacted by, the youth justice system.

Rationale for this Guide

Why This Guide?

We continue to face a justice system marked by systemic inequities and the over-representation of youth. Diversion programs offer pathways to accountability, growth, and empathy, moving beyond traditional punitive practices. This guide aims not only to provide practical insights but also to contribute to the ongoing conversation about reimagining Toronto's approach to youth justice. We invite you to envision and embrace change with us.

Navigating the youth diversion system can be a confusing and challenging process for both legal professionals and the young people they serve. Despite the existence of various diversion, alternative, and community-based programs, there has never been a clear, accessible resource that maps out these options in one place. This guide seeks to fill that gap by offering practical information about the programs and services available to youth and young adults in Toronto,

allowing practitioners to more effectively support these individuals in search of community and legal empowerment through engaging with specialized, restorative, and rehabilitative solutions.

Our Goals

Our primary goal is to create a user-friendly guide that provides detailed, updated, and clear information about youth and young adult diversion programs in Toronto. This guide aims to support practitioners in connecting young people with the right resources, reducing their involvement in the often retributive and overly punitive aspects of the formal justice system, and promoting positive outcomes for their future.

We advocate for several key principles of justice:

- *Restorative Justice*: focuses on repairing harm, fostering accountability, and engaging communities in the process of reconciliation.
- *Procedural Justice*: ensures fairness in legal processes, properly informing everyone, regardless of the differences of background, with respect, transparency, and impartiality.
- *Community-centred Justice*: recognizes that communities play a vital role in preventing crime and supporting rehabilitation.
- *Distributive Justice*: aims to ensure that resources and knowledge are distributed fairly, giving all individuals equitable access to the services they need.

Empowering Through Accessible Knowledge

A central goal of this guide is to bridge the knowledge gap between concentrated legal resources available and the dispersed youth who need access to them. By making information about diversion programs and community resources more accessible, we aim to empower youth, their families, and the public— giving them the tools and knowledge needed to make informed decisions and navigate the youth justice system more effectively with public support.

Scope and Definitions

The guide focuses on two main groups: youth aged 12 to 17, as defined under the **Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)**, and young adults aged 18 to 24, a growing category that is increasingly recognized as requiring support similar to that available for youth under the YCJA. This age range is seen as a critical transitional period, and research suggests that diversion programs for youth can also benefit young adults by helping to prevent further criminal involvement, reduce recidivism, and support long-term rehabilitation.

Research shows that brain development continues into the mid-20s, meaning that young adults often share many cognitive and emotional characteristics with adolescents. In particular, young adults may experience difficulties with emotional regulation, decision-making, and impulse control—similar to youth—making them more vulnerable to risky behaviours and criminal

involvement. As a result, they can benefit from justice system interventions that take these developmental factors into account, such as diversion programs designed for youth.

Hayek's (2017) Environmental Scan of Developmentally Appropriate Criminal Justice Responses to Justice-Involved Young Adults supports this idea, noting that interventions targeting youth—such as diversion programs—can also reduce recidivism, prevent further criminal involvement, and promote long-term rehabilitation in young adults. These findings have led to growing advocacy for expanding the definition of "youth" to include young adults up to age 24, recognizing the ongoing developmental processes that make this group more similar to adolescents than older adults in terms of psychological maturity.

By expanding the focus from youth aged 12 to 17 to include young adults up to 24, this guide highlights the need for developmentally appropriate interventions. Both groups face similar developmental challenges, making rehabilitation a more effective approach than punishment. Targeted interventions, such as youth diversion programs, aim to support their transition to adulthood, reduce recidivism, and address the root causes of criminal behaviour. This approach aligns with the broader goals of criminal justice reform—promoting long-term rehabilitation, improving individual outcomes, and building safer, more resilient communities.

In Summary

The Toronto Youth Diversion Guide is designed to be a practical, accessible tool for criminal justice professionals seeking to better understand and utilize the diversion programs available in Toronto. By providing clear, detailed information on alternative justice programs, we hope to support a system that prioritizes restorative, community-centred, and equitable practices. We aim to help divert youth and young adults away from the traditional justice system, empowering them with the resources they need to grow, reintegrate, and thrive.

PART TWO: BACKGROUND (LEGISLATIVE, POST-COVID AND DATA TRENDS)

Legislative Background

The Youth Criminal Justice Act

The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) is the federal law that guides youth justice in Canada. Enacted in 2003, the YCJA was a watershed piece of legislation that transformed the youth justice landscape in Canada. Under the previous Young Offenders Act, Canada had one of the highest rates of youth custody in the world (Canada, Department of Justice 2002; Doob and Sprott 2004 as cited in Bala et al., 2009). Responding to this issue, the YCJA was created with the intention of decreasing both youth's interaction with the courts and the reliance on incarceration through the use of diversion.

The term "diversion" encompasses a spectrum of responses which can be enacted at several levels of the Criminal Justice System (CJS). However, they broadly break down into two categories: Extrajudicial Measures (EJM) and Extrajudicial Sanctions (EJS). EJM's are more informal responses to youth offending which are defined by the YCJA as "measures other than judicial proceedings." In other words, the youth is diverted out of the CJS *before* reaching the court level. Outlined in s. 6(1) of the YCJA (2003), EJM's can include a warning from police or prosecutors, a caution from a police or prosecutors, or a referral to a community program/agency. Under s. 10(1), EJS's are used when "the young person cannot be adequately dealt with by a warning, caution or referral... because of the seriousness of the offence, the nature and number of previous offences committed by the young person or any other aggravating circumstances." (Youth Criminal Justice Act, 2003). In order for an EJS to be administered, the youth must accept responsibility for the offence. It is important to note that s. 10(4) of the YCJA states that, when made as a condition of an EJS, an acceptance of responsibility *cannot* be used as evidence against a youth in civil or criminal proceedings. EJS's can include counselling, attending a community program, victim-offender reconciliation, community service, and/or other formal measures (Bala and Roberts, 2006). If the youth fulfils the conditions of their EJS, the charge is dismissed.

Since the adoption of the YCJA, youth incarceration rates have dropped dramatically (Webster et al., 2019). In 2001/02 (the year before the YCJA was enacted) the youth incarceration rate stood at 16.62 per 10,000; in 2022/23, this rate had dropped to 2.52 per 10,000 (Statistics Canada). This marks a decrease in youth incarceration of almost 85% under the YCJA. Under the YCJA, the modus operandi of the youth justice system is diversion and, as such, the justice landscape has seen an increase in the number of diversion programs available to youth across Canada (Samuels-Wortley, 2022).

Within the Toronto context, the Toronto Police Service (TPS) has responded to the policy directives of the YCJA through establishing the Youth Pre-Charge Diversion Program (YPDP). Put into place in 2015, the YPDP centralized the diversion process through directing youth who

have been identified as likely to benefit from EJMs to the YPDP. Upon identification, the TPS and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services refer the youth to community partners that provide diversion programming.

Contemporary Background: After the Covid-19 Pandemic

Lasting Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly strained Ontario's youth detention system. The closure of 26 facilities in 2021 reduced the number of publicly operated centres to just five—alongside 20 privately run transfer payment centres (Becken, 2024). This has left remaining facilities, such as the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre in Brampton, operating at, or above 100% capacity. The Roy McMurtry Youth Centre responded to the rise in demand by adding additional beds for its youth. However, the staffing at Roy McMurtry, and other youth detention centres, remain low, forcing current staff to work 12-16 hour shifts. Low levels of staffing has raised concerns about the safety and the mental health of staff and youth living in those centres. The upcoming 2025 closure of the Sudbury youth detention centre will likely worsen the overcrowding in Ontario youth detention centres, as displaced youth will be relocated further from their home communities to the already overcrowded facilities.

The Ministry of Children, Community and Services (MCCSS) mentioned that its detention centres are monitored to maintain appropriate capacity. They maintained that the routine operations of youth detention centres allow a transfer that is in line with the youth's best interests. Critics, including NDP MPP Monique Taylor, warn that these conditions undermine the youth's rehabilitation and exacerbate their mental health challenges (Becken, 2024). Geographic disparities also pose challenges for families, particularly in southwestern Ontario, where Simcoe is the nearest facility—a three-hour drive from Windsor. This distance undoubtedly creates financial and emotional stress for families, especially immigrants who may face language barriers.

Data Trends During the Covid-19 Period and Subsequent Years

Figure 1: Impact of YCJA on Number of Court Decisions

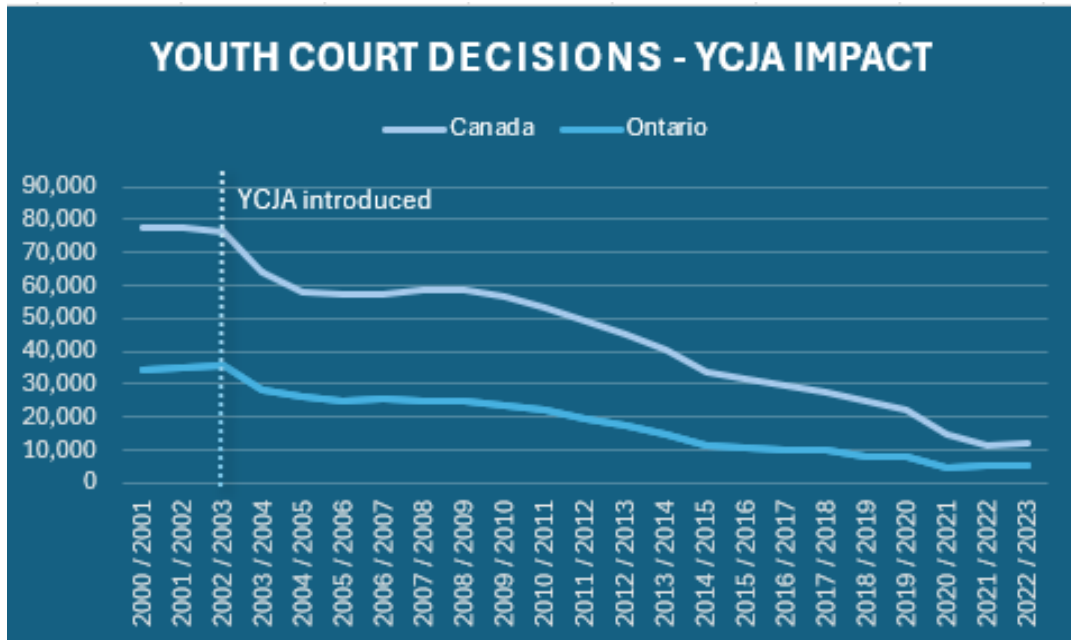


Figure illustrates the downward trend in the number of youth cases receiving a court decision over time in both Canada and Ontario, demonstrating a similar pattern in the country and the province. Contains data from shortly before the YCJA's enactment in 2003 and the resulting gradual decrease. Data from: Statistics Canada. (2024). Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS). Retrieved from

<https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&Id=155065>

Figure 2: Number of Youth Court Decision as Impacted by COVID

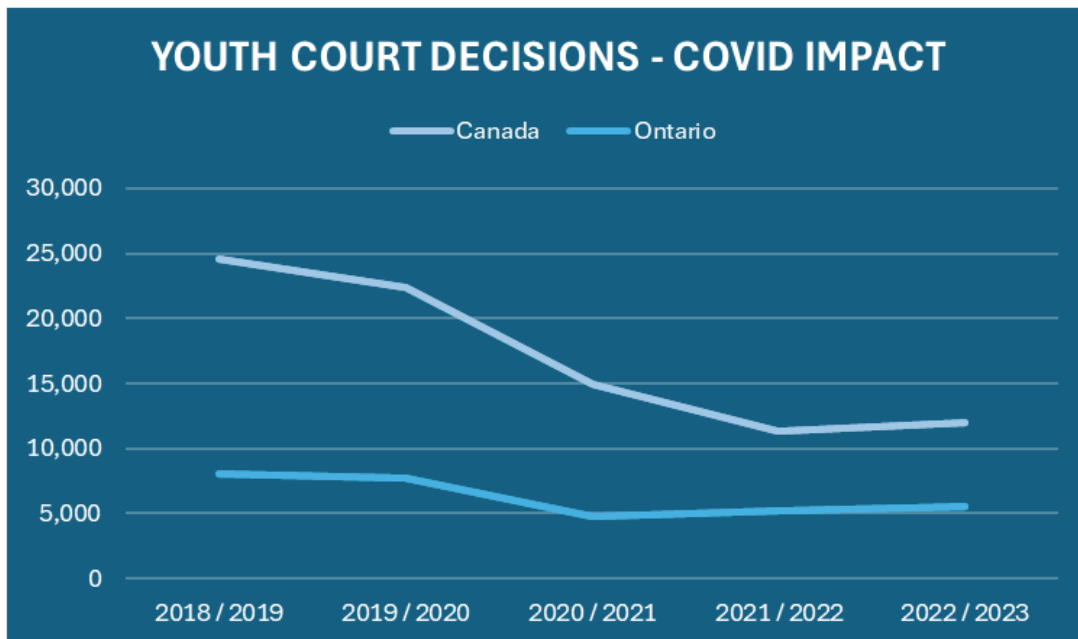
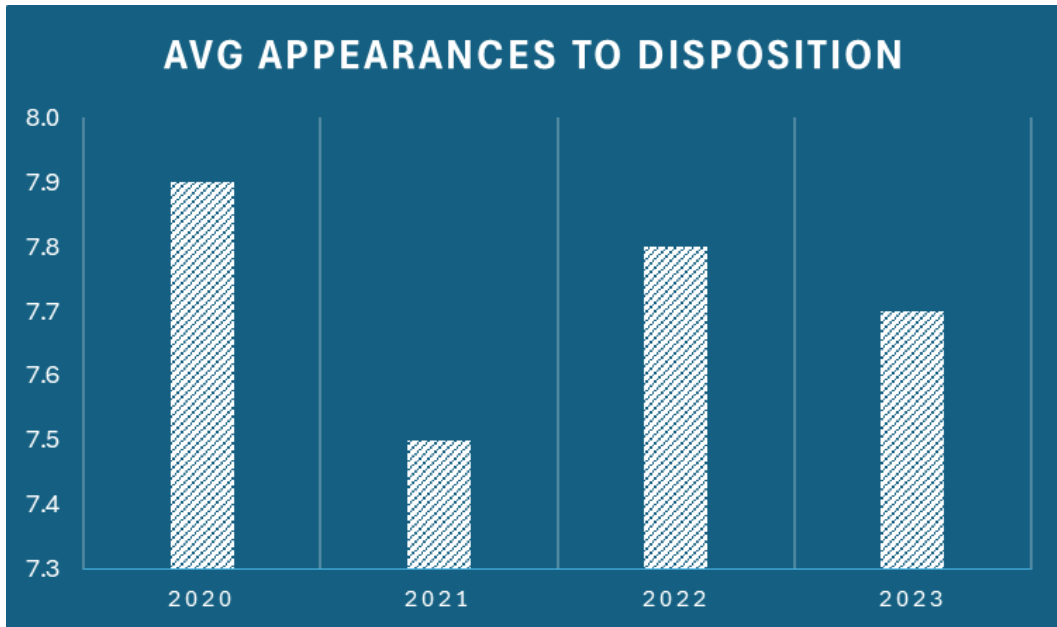


Figure displays the downward trend in the number of youth cases receiving a court decision over time in both Canada and Ontario. Trend shows a similar pattern in both Canada and Ontario. Data underscores the gradual reduction in court-decided cases as impacted by COVID. Data from: Statistics Canada. (2024). Integrated Criminal Court Survey (ICCS). Retrieved from <https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p2SV.pl?Function=getSurvey&Id=155065>

Figure 3: Comparison of Average Number of Appearances to Disposition Across Years



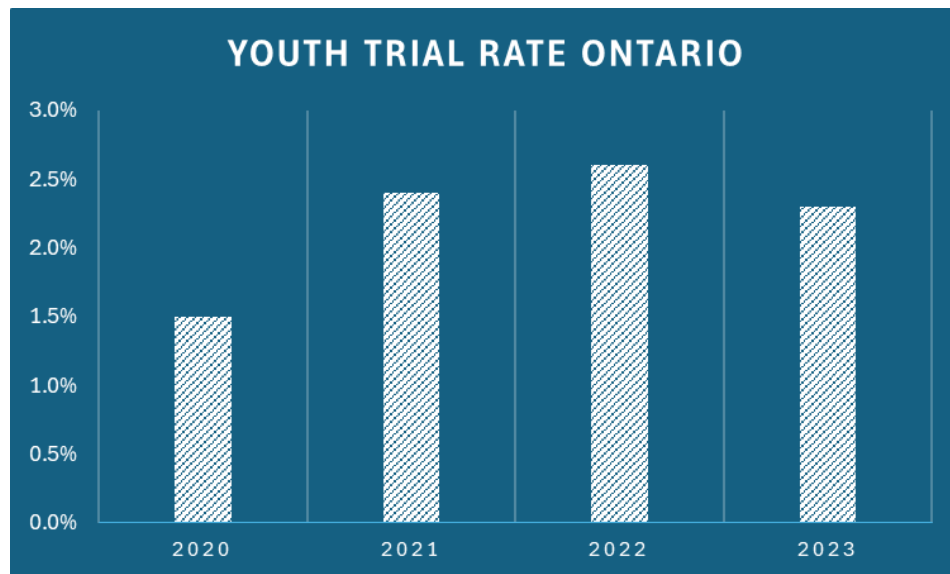
*Graph shows steep decline in 2021 in number of disposition appearances in youth court cases as measured by an average of all appearances. These cases are without a bench warrant.
Retrieved November 27, 2024, from <https://www.ontariocourts.ca/ocj/statistics>*

Figure 4: Breakdown of Types of Youth Cases in 2024



Bar graph showing types of cases received in youth court and its proportional value to the total amount of youth cases. In cases where this is more than one charge, the data reflects the most serious charge. Offence types based on the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics categories. Data from: Ontario Court of Justice. (2024). Youth cases statistics, January-September, 2024. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from <https://www.ontariocourts.ca/ocj/statistics/>

Figure 5: Youth Trial Rates in Ontario as Compared by Year



Trial rate by percentage is the number of youth court cases disposed of that year over the total number of all disposed cases that year. Data from: Ontario Court of Justice. (2024). Youth cases statistics. Retrieved November 27, 2024, from <https://www.ontariocourts.ca/ocj/statistics/>

Summary of Figures:

Since the implementation of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) in 2003, the number of youth court cases has consistently declined. The trend saw a significant dip during the COVID-19 pandemic, with youth court cases being reduced by half. However, in the last two years, there has been a noticeable rise in the number of cases thus bringing the numbers back to pre-pandemic levels. The rise in youth court cases is significant for the operation of community justice programs. As the number of cases increase, it will be crucial to ensure that these programs can scale and adapt to the growing demand.

PART THREE: EXISTING PROCESS & LITERATURE

Overview of the Youth Diversion Process

Figure 8: Flow Chart of Youth Diversion Process

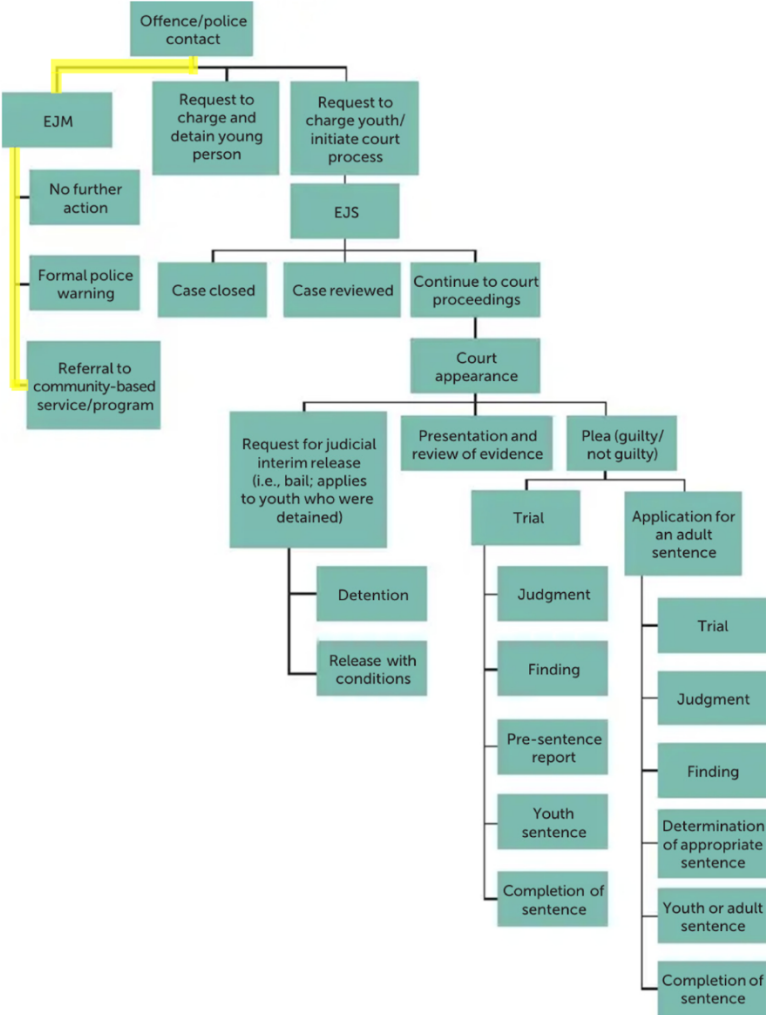


Figure 8: *The Fundamental Legal/Judicial Process for Youth in Contact with the Justice System.* From Adrienne Peters, “The Youth Justice System in Action” in *Youth Justice: A Canadian Overview*. Toronto: Oxford University Press Canada, 2024.

A youth that comes into contact with the criminal justice system may be given the option of diversion at numerous points of the judicial process. Police officers are encouraged to exercise a more thoughtful discretionary analysis for young people who have committed a crime, given the

life-long implications of a criminal record. A formal or informal warning is the earliest point at which diversion can occur. When a youth receives a warning, they are not formally entered into the criminal justice process.

Police can additionally rely on pre-charge diversion through extrajudicial measures (EJM). Pre-charge diversion addresses less serious criminal offences, such as minor shoplifting, assault, or mischief. Only youth aged 12-17 qualify for pre-charge diversion. These programs aim to reduce the amount of young people who have formally entered the system, by intervening at a crucial point in a young person's life for behavioural development. The police themselves can make referrals to community-based programs in accordance with pre-charge diversion requirements.

If the police decide to *not* move forward with pre-charge diversion, the youth enters into a more structured and institutional response. They can be detained and held in custody, or they can be charged and released into the custody of a parent or legal guardian. Police involvement from this point forward is extremely limited; the YCJA aims to refrain from labelling youth as "criminal" or "delinquent" through sustained police involvement. A youth often does not find out if they are able to enter into the diversion process until their first court appearance, at which point it is usually the Crown who offers the option of diversion. Qualification for diversion is determined based on the youth's criminal record, severity of the charge, and the cost of prosecution. The Crown can also take into consideration the likelihood of conviction, assessing public safety, and understanding what is in the public's interest.

If the Crown does not offer diversion, a Crown pre-trial can be scheduled. This option allows for a meeting with the prosecution to request diversion before the start of a trial. In doing so, the youth can offer a greater perspective into how they could benefit from diversion. The goal at this point in the process is to communicate with the youth and ensure that they understand the consequences of their conduct. Once a youth has been offered diversion, they must connect with the diversion office in the courthouse and meet with a diversion court worker. The worker will then inform the youth of the diversion program that they were recommended. It is possible for a youth to be recommended for a diversion program that they must pay for out of pocket.

Some courthouses offer a Direct Accountability Program, where a youth is connected with a community justice worker who provides them with an overview of their program. It is also possible for the youth offender themselves to advocate for their involvement in a diversion program. To do so, the youth must get into contact with the diversion court worker themselves and discuss the specific programs that they would like to pursue. If the youth agrees to diversion, their case will be postponed until the program has been completed. They will then be given a date upon which the youth must successfully prove that they have completed their diversion. Once the program has been completed, the Crown can choose to either stay or withdraw charges.

It is important to note that the youth can choose to drop out of diversion at any point during the process if they would prefer to instead move ahead with the route of traditional criminal justice. Further, if a youth in a diversion program is found to not be meeting the requirements of the program, or is taking too long to complete the program, the offer of diversion can be taken away.

Literature Review of Scholarly Studies on Youth Diversion

The scholarly discussion on youth diversion in Canada is lively and growing. The following section explores the key findings, themes, and further areas of research covered in the existing literature.

The Influence of the YCJA on the Youth Justice Landscape

One of the most significant impacts of the YCJA has been the decrease in youth incarceration (Webster et al., 2019). This trend aligns with the “declaration principle” of the YCJA which holds that the purpose of the youth justice system is to separate youth from adults, prevent crime through addressing causing behaviour, rehabilitate youths, and foster meaningful accountability (Bala et al., 2009). Within diversion practices, particular emphasis has been placed on the Risks-Need-Responsivity (RNR) model, a framework that matches youth with services based on risk (i.e. program intensity should align with the youth’s risk level), need (i.e. the program should address the youth’s specific criminogenic needs), and responsivity (i.e. the efficacy of the program is tied to the cognitive, behavioural, and learning strategies of the youth) (Finseth et al., 2022). However, Finseth et al. (2022) make the compelling point that this model does not account for strengths (i.e. qualities of the youth which will contribute to the efficacy of the program and guide their level of engagement) (Ibid.). While there exists common practices across the youth justice system, community programming, attitudes towards diversion, and discretionary practices differ, both by region and by individual justice practitioner (Bala et al., 2009).

Implementation of the YCJA by Criminal Justice Actors

The ways in which the YCJA is implemented by criminal justice professionals informs and shapes the realization of the diversion process. This begins with interactions at the police level. In their study on police perceptions and practices of distributing extrajudicial measures to youth, Marinos and Innocente (2008) found that a youth’s prior police contact made officers less likely to proceed with an extrajudicial measure. This marks a contrast between policy goals and real-world implementation, as the YCJA does not endorse progressive discipline. Similarly, as is outlined in the section below, the YCJA is not implemented uniformly amongst different sections of the population.

In her study about how police discretion impacts access to pre-charge diversion programs, Samuels-Wortley (2022). She finds that the discretionary nature of police decision-making leads to racial inequalities in program access, particularly disadvantaging Black youth. The author’s findings indicate that Black youth are disproportionately more likely to be charged than their White or other minority counterparts. The data reveals that Black youth are more likely to be apprehended and receive less cautions, in comparison to other non-racialized groups, indicating racial bias in police discretion.

The Experiences and Perceptions of Youth, Parents, and Communities

A young person's perception of their lawyer significantly influences their legal attitudes and opinions, with cognitive factors shaping how they view this relationship. Youth often feel the justice system is fair when they are satisfied with their lawyer, irrespective of the actual outcomes or fairness of the process (Peterson-Badali et al., 2007). They also see a lawyer's active involvement in the case as a sign of the lawyer's commitment. During a pivotal time when identity and autonomy are crucial, it is vital for young people to be treated with respect and sincerity. Therefore, lawyers who establish positive interpersonal connections with their clients and guide them respectfully through the legal process, with a client-centered approach, are generally seen as more satisfactory by youth.

There are also gender disparities in the youth criminal justice system, particularly regarding bail conditions in Toronto (Sprott and Doob, 2010). In some cases, girls are more likely than boys to be ordered into treatment programs as a condition of release, especially in non-violent cases. This raises concerns about the fairness and ethical implications of such treatment, as these decisions may reflect outdated, paternalistic views on gender and reveals a gap in understanding how factors like race or socio-economic status intersect with gender in shaping these decisions. This gender-based disparity is an important consideration for developing more equitable practices in the youth justice system.

While parental involvement can play a significant role in shaping legal outcomes for young people, and some improvements in parental participation may occur after an arrest under the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), parents are often not engaged in ways that are perceived as effective or meaningful (Peterson-Badali and Broeking, 2010). Two primary conflicts contribute to this gap between policy and practice: interpersonal conflict between youth and their parents, and the tension between the dual roles that parents must fulfill—socializing their children while also advocating for their legal interests in an adversarial system.

Community-based justice programs must actively engage local members and stakeholders to ensure that the programs reflect the community's needs and values. It is argued that the success of these programs should be assessed beyond traditional metrics like reoffending rates or sanctions (Landau, 2004). Instead, the community's experiences and perspectives should be central to the evaluation process. Research on criminal court diversion programs indicates that restorative justice approaches, which emphasize community involvement, are particularly well-regarded. Support for these programs is likely to grow when communities have positive experiences with them.

Future Areas of Research

While there has been considerable research done on various parts of the diversion process and decrease in youth incarceration, there is a notable lack of research on how to design programs that genuinely reflect the needs of a community, as well as whether such alignment is even achievable. Furthermore, discussions about incorporating community engagement as a metric for

evaluating program success are limited and underdeveloped. Another significant gap in research lies in the limited examination of how various factors, such as race and socio-economic status, interact with gender to influence bail conditions. Regular conferences that are held to discuss diversion and rehabilitation of youth by the YCJA engage youth and promote collaborative planning, but in order to improve their effectiveness, it is essential to address substantial obstacles related to organization, communication, resources, and support.

Impacts of Racialization and Indigeneity on Youth Diversion

Racialized and Indigenous youth face unique challenges in the justice system, including systemic biases and overrepresentation in formal justice processes. These issues must be addressed in youth diversion programs to ensure they are equitable and effective.

A. Insights from Evaluation Research

Samuels-Wortley (2021) highlights that Black youth are disproportionately surveilled, criminalized, and negatively treated by police, while Indigenous youth face systemic discrimination rooted in colonialism, including racial profiling and over-policing. Both groups report facing barriers to fair access to diversion programs due to racial bias within the justice system, resulting in harsher treatment and fewer opportunities for rehabilitation. Additionally, racialized youth say these programs often lack cultural sensitivity, failing to incorporate practices that resonate with their communities—such as Elder-led healing circles for Indigenous youth or culturally relevant support for Black youth. This cultural disconnect fosters distrust of the justice system, including diversion programs, which are viewed as biased and untrustworthy. As a result, these programs are less effective and harder for racialized youth to engage with, limiting their potential for rehabilitation.

Wortley and Gartner (2013) highlight the significant role of evaluation research in shaping Canada's criminal justice policies. Anthony Doob's work has been instrumental in promoting evidence-based approaches to evaluating youth justice programs, showing that well-implemented diversion programs can reduce recidivism and improve long-term outcomes. However, for these programs to be truly effective, they must account for the specific needs of racialized and Indigenous youth, who face distinct systemic barriers.

B. Racialization and Indigeneity in the Youth Justice System

Research shows that Indigenous and Black youth are disproportionately affected by policing and incarceration. In the 2022-2023 year, Indigenous youth made up 40% of youth admissions to provincial or territorial correctional services, despite only being 8% of the Canadian youth population. There are less comparable statistics available for Black youth, but Black adults have been seen to represent 9% of people in custody or under community supervision in the 2020-2021 year, although they represented only 4% of the Canadian population (Department of Justice, 2024; Office of the Correctional Investigator, 2023). Diversion programs offer a critical opportunity to intervene before formal justice processes, but their success depends on cultural sensitivity and holistic support. Programs should be designed to address the root causes of criminalization, such as socioeconomic deprivation and generational trauma, and should involve community members in the decision-making process.

Challenges to Implementation

Despite the potential benefits, challenges persist in effectively implementing diversion programs. Wortley and Gartner (2013) note that resistance from policymakers and practitioners—stemming from skepticism about research, historical reliance on punitive approaches, and internal pressures from organizational culture—can hinder the adoption of evidence-based strategies. Additionally, translating research findings into policy remains difficult. To overcome these barriers, it is crucial to provide clear, practical guidelines and specialized training to justice professionals on the needs of racialized and Indigenous youth.

Bridging the Gap with Evidence-Based Approaches

Encouraging evidence-based practices within the youth justice system is vital. By integrating research into policy and practice, we can better support racialized and Indigenous youth. However, this requires holistic and interdisciplinary collaboration between researchers, policymakers, and community organizations to ensure that diversion programs are both effective and culturally appropriate. Programs should focus on addressing underlying issues, such as systemic inequality while promoting long-term reintegration into society.

Call to Action

1. *Overcome Resistance to Evaluation Research*
Raise awareness about the value of evidence-based practices by sharing success stories and educating policymakers and practitioners on the benefits of incorporating evaluation research into decision-making.
2. *Translate Research into Actionable Policy*
Develop clear, practical frameworks to help policymakers integrate research findings into policies. Collaboration between researchers, legal professionals, and community stakeholders is essential for ensuring policies are both evidence-based and responsive to community needs.
3. *Inclusion of Racialized and Indigenous Voices in Program Design*
Engage Black and Indigenous youth in the creation and implementation of diversion programs. Their input is essential to ensure the programs are responsive to their unique needs, foster a sense of ownership, and build trust with the justice system, thereby enhancing program effectiveness and cultural relevance.
4. *Foster Collaboration Between Researchers, Practitioners, and Communities*
Strengthen partnerships across sectors to ensure diversion programs are culturally relevant and informed by the lived experiences of communities. Engaging local communities in long-term program design with continuous follow-ups and repetitive multidisciplinary evaluation enhances trust and ensures more effective, tailored solutions.
5. *Encourage a Culture of Evidence-Based Decision Making*
Promote continuous education and training for justice professionals on the importance of

using research and data. Support institutional efforts to prioritise evidence-based practices and allocate resources for ongoing evaluation and program improvement through community consultation.

6. *Require Cultural Competency Training for Justice Professionals*

Mandate comprehensive cultural competency training for all justice professionals. Ensure training addresses racial bias, systemic discrimination, and cultural differences to improve interaction, enhance accessibility, and promote equitable treatment and outcomes of youth in the justice system.

Youth diversion programs in Toronto must be designed with an understanding of racialization and Indigeneity to ensure equity and effectiveness. By incorporating research findings and considering the unique needs of marginalized youth, we can create diversion options that not only reduce recidivism but also foster community healing and positive social reintegration. By taking these actions, we can build a more effective, equitable, and community-centred youth justice system.

What can we learn from this literature about youth community justice programming in Toronto?

The research highlights critical areas where more information is needed to improve youth justice diversion programs in Toronto, particularly for Black and Indigenous youth. The following key points emerge:

Racial Disparities and Data Collection

Detailed data collection is essential to understand the participation and outcomes of racialized and Indigenous youth in diversion programs. This includes tracking access, barriers, and outcomes to identify systemic inequities. Comprehensive data will ensure these programs effectively reach and serve marginalized communities, helping to address the overrepresentation of Black and Indigenous youth in the justice system.

Cultural Sensitivity and Community Involvement

Youth diversion programs must be culturally relevant. This requires meaningful input from Black and Indigenous youth in the design and implementation of programs. This means integrating community-led practices, such as Elder-led healing circles for Indigenous youth or culturally relevant mentorship for Black youth. Complementary, cultural competency training for justice professionals is essential to reduce bias and ensure more equitable treatment.

Improved Coordination Across Justice Programs

A major barrier to effective youth diversion programs is the lack of coordination between justice programs, community organizations, and social services. According to the *Toronto Star* (O'Brien & Leon 2024), organizations report insufficient long-term funding, which forces community agencies to compete for limited resources instead of collaborating. To address this, there must be stronger inter-sector collaboration to ensure youth receive holistic support that addresses both their legal needs and underlying social issues.

Evidence-Based Policies and Practices

Policymakers must implement evidence-based guidelines to ensure diversion programs are effective and responsive to the needs of marginalized youth. This includes regular program evaluation and using research-based practices to continuously improve services. Programs should be designed to address not just the immediate legal issues of youth, but also the root causes of their involvement in the justice system, such as poverty, lack of economic opportunity, and housing instability.

To improve youth justice diversion programs in Toronto, there is a pressing need for better data, culturally responsive programming, improved inter-agency coordination, and evidence-based policies. Addressing these gaps will help ensure that diversion programs are equitable, effective, and tailored to the specific needs of racialized and Indigenous youth, ultimately reducing recidivism and supporting long-term community healing.

PART FOUR: METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

Method

The goal of this guide is to provide a comprehensive overview of programs in Toronto that are available and accessible for youth who are involved with the criminal justice system or are at risk. The guide highlights the types of programs that are available, as well as their locations and contact information so that they can be easily accessed by those who are in need of these program services or work to refer youth to diversion programs. In order to collect the necessary information from these programs, our researchers contacted the referenced programs and included the available information on their websites.

Our process for creating our navigation guide began with comprehensive data collection to identify relevant programs and inform our understanding of the youth criminal justice landscape. We initially studied Hayek's environmental scan, which assessed programs addressing the developmental needs of young adults involved in the U.S. criminal justice system (2013). Inspired by this approach, we conducted our own environmental scan of youth diversion programs across the City of Toronto.

We employed a multi-pronged strategy for data collection. First, we conducted a literature review, examining relevant publications that critique youth justice programs and the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA). We compiled an annotated bibliography of 24 articles to understand existing gaps in youth justice system and inform the guide's objectives. In parallel, we reviewed policy documents related to the YCJA to ensure that our guide aligned with current legislation.

To identify programs, we conducted extensive web searches using various search engines and databases. We also utilized social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, and Medium to reach out to community organizations and professionals in the field. This approach enabled us to identify up to 43 potential youth diversion programs within the five targeted districts.

Following the environmental scan, we compiled a list of the identified programs, including summaries of the services they offer, their geographic reach, and relevant contact information. Outreach was a key component of our process. We communicated with representatives from the selected organizations via telephone and email to gather detailed information about the specific services available, target populations, and program delivery. This direct contact allowed us to better understand the practical application of these programs and the communities they serve, ensuring that our guide would be both comprehensive and accurate.

Additionally, our team recorded a podcast that contextualizes youth justice and the YCJA, in order to draw attention to the relevancy of youth diversion. The podcast is hosted by two students in the class who conducted an interview with Zachary Levinsky, a professor who specialises in youth justice research at the University of Toronto. The interview with Professor Levinsky highlights key structures and policies within the youth criminal justice system, as well as inadequacies and implications of diversion programs for youth. The podcast also highlights

the processes of curating the navigation guide and gives insight to the experiences of the research team.

Limitations

It is important to address that this guide is not intended to serve as a research study, but rather a navigation tool created to improve accessibility to information about youth diversion programs in Toronto. The information presented here is based on publicly available resources and confirmed, where possible, through communication with program representatives to ensure accuracy and currency. However, we recognize that this approach has limitations, including potential gaps in data where programs may not have provided updated or detailed information.

Additionally, as a project that is undertaken by students, it also reflects the scope and resources that are available to us during the specific project period—which may not capture the full breadth of services or recent developments in the field. It is likely that there are other programs operating within Toronto that were not included within the guide. The project spanned roughly three months which posed limitations as to the scope of the scan. While every effort was made to include comprehensive details, this guide should not be seen as an exhaustive or definitive resource, but as a starting point for navigating youth justice diversion programs.

What We Found: Types of Programs Offered in Toronto

Counselling

Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)

Anger Management

Addictions Management/Treatment

Gender-Specific Programming

Case Management

Culturally-Appropriate Programming

Recreational Programming

Education Supports

Mentorship

Family-Engaged Programming

Anti-Theft Programming

Religious Services Supports

PART FIVE: THE NAVIGATION GUIDE

*Note that the information contained in listings with this symbol * are not yet confirmed by the youth justice diversion program. They will be updated as program representatives provide confirmation.

Name of Organization:		<u>Aboriginal Legal Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Community Council Program</u>	
Address:	211 Yonge Street, Suite 500, Toronto ON M5B 1M4	Phone Number:	416-408-4041 or 1-844-633-2886
Summary of Program:			
<p>The Community Council is a criminal diversion program for Indigenous persons before the courts — adults and youth — who live in Toronto. The project takes Indigenous persons charged out of the criminal justice system and brings them before members of the Indigenous community. The members of the Council are men and women who represent a cross-section of Toronto's Indigenous community. The focus of the Community Council is to develop a plan by consensus that will allow the accused to take responsibility for their actions, address the root causes of the problem, and reintegrate them into the community in a positive way.</p>			
Area Served:	Greater Toronto Area	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12 - 24 years old, specific youth group for 16 - 24 years old		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Addictions Management/Treatment		
	Case Management		

Name of Organization:		<u>Associated Youth Services of Peel*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Extrajudicial Measures Program (EJM)</u>	
Address:	160 Traders Blvd. E. Suite 100, Mississauga, Ontario, L4Z 3K7	Phone Number:	905-890-5222
Summary of Program:			
<p>The EJM Program's goal is to divert young persons away, pre-charge, from formal criminal proceedings and into a program of rehabilitation, specifically for young persons who have been involved in non-violent offences for the first time. The program is a structured and supervised program, taking into consideration the young person's interests, skills, and abilities. It aims to provide an effective and timely response to offending behaviour that is not judicial in nature, encourage the young person to acknowledge and repair harm caused to the victim and the community, and respect the rights and freedoms of young persons and be proportionate to the seriousness of the offence.</p>			
Area Served:	Peel or Caledon	Community Centre Based?	
Ages Offered:	12-17 years at the time of offence		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Recreational Programming		

Name of Organization:		<u>Associated Youth Services of Peel*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Extrajudicial Sanctions Program (EJS)</u>	
Address:	160 Traders Blvd. E. Suite 100, Mississauga, Ontario, L4Z 3K7	Phone Number:	905-890-5222
Summary of Program:			
<p>The EJS Program is a community-based program meant to divert young persons charged, away from formal criminal proceedings and into a program of rehabilitation. It is a structured and supervised program, taking into consideration the young person's interests, skills, and abilities. It aims to involve the community in addressing the rehabilitation of youth, reduce and/or eliminate the associated labelling of young people involved with the legal system through active involvement in the community and allow youth an opportunity to make amends for their illegal conduct.</p>			
Area Served:	Peel and Dufferin	Community Centre Based?	
Ages Offered:	12-17 years at the time of offence		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Recreational Programming		

Name of Organization:		<u>Associated Youth Services of Peel*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Halton/Peel Counselling Program</u>	
Address:	160 Traders Blvd. E. Suite 100, Mississauga, Ontario, L4Z 3K7	Phone Number:	905-890-5222
Summary of Program:			
<p>The Counselling Program provides individual and/or family counselling for youth who are on Probation or involved in Youth Justice programming at AYSP, and experiencing mental health challenges. It aims to support and empower youth to effectively manage their mental health concerns, improve youth's capacity to effectively cope and manage their emotions and behaviours, improve youth's relationships with family, peers and the community and assist youth and their families to understand, cope with and resolve the impact of past trauma.</p>			
Area Served:	Halton and Peel	Community Centre Based?	
Ages Offered:	12-19		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Family-Engaged Programming		

Name of Organization:		<u>Associated Youth Services of Peel*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Steps - Youth Community Counselling Program</u>	
Address:	160 Traders Blvd. E. Suite 100, Mississauga, Ontario, L4Z 3K7	Phone Number:	905-890-5222
Summary of Program:			
<p>The STEPS – Youth Community Counselling Program meets youth where they are at, providing support to youth experiencing on-going mental health challenges, who may be under-housed or homeless and/or likely to transition into adult services. This program utilizes a strength-based, client-centered approach, focusing on immediate needs and long-term goals. It aims to improve day-to-day functioning and overall well-being of youth and assist youth with an effective transition to other support systems as needed.</p>			
Area Served:	Peel	Community Centre Based?	
Ages Offered:	15-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Addictions Management/Treatment		
	Education Supports		

Name of Organization:		<u>Associated Youth Services of Peel*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Justice Committee Program (YJC)</u>	
Address:	160 Traders Blvd. E. Suite 100, Mississauga, Ontario, L4Z 3K7	Phone Number:	905-890-5222
Summary of Program:			
<p>The YJC Program provides an alternative to formal court proceedings when dealing with young people alleged to have committed certain offences and involves trained community members who meet in-person and/or virtual with persons harmed, accused young people and their parents/caregivers to negotiate an appropriate way for the young person to make amends for their actions. It aims to discuss what happened and help the young person better understand the motivation behind their actions, help the young person better understand the effect their actions had on the person harmed, their families, and the community and to determine as a group, what can be done to repair the harm caused by the offence.</p>			
Area Served:	Peel, Toronto and Dufferin	Community Centre Based?	
Ages Offered:	12-17 years at time of offence		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Mentorship		
	Family-Engaged Programming		

Name of Organization:		<u>Blake Boulton</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Blake Boulton Youth Outreach Service (BBYOS)</u>	
Address:	41 Blake Street, Toronto, ON M4J 3E2	Phone Number:	416-465-1410
Summary of Program:			
<p>BBYOS provides free psychotherapy and counselling, life skills training, and support to high-risk youth and families in both the Blake-Boulton neighbourhood and from across Toronto. Clients are referred to BBYOS through friends, family members, social service agencies, schools, health centres, hospitals, legal or court advocates, and other community network partners. Many of the clients face a wide range of challenges, including poverty, sexual and physical abuse, severe mental health struggles, addiction, and violence.</p>			
Area Served:	Blake-Boulton neighbourhood	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-25		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Anger Management		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		

Name of Organization:		<u>Central Toronto Youth Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Enhanced Extrajudicial Sanction*</u>	
Address:	65 Wellesley Street East, Suite 300, Toronto, ON, M4Y 1G7	Phone Number:	416-924-2100
Summary of Program:			
This program is for youth that have been referred by a Youth Court Probation Officer, the Crown, and/or Duty Counsel for diversion. It supports youth within the context of their community through counselling, skill development, and establishing support systems.			
Area Served:	Central Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Case Management		

Name of Organization:		<u>Central Toronto Youth Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Family Focused Outreach*</u>	
Address:	65 Wellesley Street East, Suit 300, Toronto, ON, M4Y 1G7	Phone Number:	416-924- 2100
Summary of Program:			
This program serves the families of youth who are involved in the Youth Justice System. Counsellors provide support in navigating the system, develop healthy family dynamics and parenting skills, provide additional resources, and support the family in coping with their situation.			
Area Served:	Central Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Family-Engaged Programming		

Name of Organization:		<u>Central Toronto Youth Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Relationship Skills for Violence Prevention - Central Toronto Youth Services*</u>	
Address:	65 Wellesley Street East, Suit 300, Toronto, ON, M4Y 1G7	Phone Number:	416-924-2100
Summary of Program:			
This program provides support for youth who have engaged in domestic and/or sexual violence offences. The program runs for 10 weeks and uses counselling and group work to address and amend offending behaviours, promote healthy relationships, and educate on consent. Youth can be referred by their probation officer as a form of diversion.			
Area Served:	Central Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Case Management		

Name of Organization:		<u>Central Toronto Youth Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>R.I.T.E.S. Youth Justice Program</u>	
Address:	65 Wellesley Street East, Suite 300, Toronto, ON M4Y 1G7	Phone:	416-999-9527
Summary of Program:			
<p>This program provides culturally specific services for Black youth involved in the justice system. Guided by research on programming for Black youth, the R.I.T.E.S. Youth Justice Pilot Program utilizes an anti-oppression framework grounded in Africentric value systems, a trauma-informed approach, anti-Black racism, stress management, and strengthening racial identity. Tailored to individual needs, the program provides counselling, resource mapping, skill building, and community engagement.</p>			
Area Served:	Central Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Mentorship		
	Anger Management		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Education Supports		

Name of Organization:		<u>Central Toronto Youth Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Justice Mental Health Access*</u>	
Address:	65 Wellesley Street East, Suit 300, Toronto, ON, M4Y 1G7	Phone Number:	416-924- 2100
Summary of Program:			
This is a short-term consultation service that assists youth who probation officers believe need mental health support in order to function in the community. It involves an assessment and short-term counselling. Youth probation officers and Youth Mental Health Court Workers can make referrals.			
Area Served:	Central Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		

Name of Organization:		<u>Central Toronto Youth Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Justice Outreach Program (YJOP)*</u>	
Address:	65 Wellesley Street East, Suit 300, Toronto, ON, M4Y 1G7	Phone Number:	416-924- 2100
Summary of Program:			
<p>This program assists youth serving a sentence order and can be referred by youth probation officers. The YJOP provides counselling, reintegration, and skills development through an outreach approach in which youth receive these supports in their communities. This program is specifically designed for youth who are considered to be in the moderate to high range of the Risk/Needs assessment and have had prior issues with conventional support programming.</p>			
Area Served:	Central Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Case Management		

Name of Organization:		<u>Central Toronto Youth Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Justice Substance Use*</u>	
Address:	65 Wellesley Street East, Suit 300, Toronto, ON, M4Y 1G7	Phone Number:	416-924- 2100
Summary of Program:			
This program is available both in-house at all Toronto youth probation offices and in communities where youth live. Substance use counsellors engage in harm reduction, counselling, and education for youth and their families.			
Area Served:	Central Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Case Management		
	Addictions Management/Treatment		

Name of Organization:		<u>Child Development Institute</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Stop Now And Plan (SNAP)</u>	
Address:	197 Euclid Ave Toronto, ON M6J 2J8	Phone Number:	416-603-1827, ext. 3143
Summary of Program:			
<p>SNAP® (Stop Now And Plan) is an evidence-based, family-focused program designed to help children and youth develop emotional regulation, self-control, and problem-solving skills to manage disruptive behaviour. The program is now an internationally recognized model for assisting children and their parents to effectively manage their emotions and "keep problems small." Core programs include SNAP Boys and SNAP Girls, which support children ages 6-11 exhibiting aggressive or antisocial behaviour. For older youth, SNAP Youth Programs and SNAP Boys Youth Leadership Services offer ongoing support for youth aged 11-18, helping them navigate social and emotional challenges. SNAP Youth Justice targets males aged 12-19 involved in the justice system, aiming to reduce recidivism and prevent gang involvement. Other specialized programs include SNAP Schools, SNAP for Aboriginal Communities, and Camp Wimodausis, which cater to cultural-specific populations.</p>			
Area Served:	Greater Toronto Area	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	6-19		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Anger Management		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Education Supports		
	Family-Engaged Programming		
	Case Management		

Name of Organization:		<u>Direct Your Life*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>GAME (Guidance Awareness Mentorship Employment/Education)</u>	
Address:	91 Bellevue Ave, Toronto, ON M5T 2N8	Phone Number:	437-259-6626
Summary of Program:			
<p>GAME aims to establish participants with strong leadership skills, meaningful employment connections as well as guide them to a healthy and successful transition back into society. Through the program, participants will develop these skills through Interactive leadership-building activities, as well mentoring and coaching from people with lived-experience. These activities are meant to help participants connect and engage with each other to strengthen their leadership and communication skills while having fun and building capacity within themselves.</p>			
Area Served:	GTA	Community Centre Based?	Yes
Ages Offered:	Cannot confirm		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Case Management		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Direct Your Life*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>One on One Support</u>	
Address:	91 Bellevue Ave, Toronto, ON M5T 2N8	Phone Number:	437-259- 6626
Summary of Program:			
The One on One service supports rehabilitation and reintegration of Black youth and adults in conflict with the law, including involvement in criminal activity, the justice system, and street level violence. The individualized program addresses the issues leading to criminal behavior and the services are provided based on the participants risk and needs.			
Area Served:	GTA	Community Centre Based?	Yes
Ages Offered:	Cannot confirm		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Anger Management		
	Addictions Management/Treatment		
	Case Management		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Direct Your Life*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Sports Leadership Program</u>	
Address:	91 Bellevue Ave, Toronto, ON M5T 2N8	Phone Number:	437-259- 6626
Summary of Program:			
<p>The Sports Leadership Program helps youth establish strong leadership skills, and meaningful connections. The program aims to assist participants in developing these skills through interactive leadership-building activities, as well mentoring and coaching from people with lived-experience. These activities are meant to make the participants connect and engage with each other to strengthen their leadership and communication skills while having fun through sports and building capacity within themselves. The workshops are broken down into three different themes: Mental Toughness, Coachability, Mental Execution.</p>			
Area Served:	GTA	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	Cannot confirm		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Recreational Programming		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Outreach Workers (YOW)</u>	
Address:	62 Orchard Park, MAAT Youth Innovation and Cultural Centre	Phone Number:	(416) 281-0262
Summary of Program:			
<p>East BGC has multiple services on board at the community centre. Offering in-person mostly, hybrid to accommodate needs for individuals. There are resources for marginalized youth (12–21 years old) who have not been able to successfully interact with school-based community organizations. However, the centres’ programs are catered towards individuals up until 29 years old.</p> <p>The Goal is to develop positive relationships, reconnect them with the neighbourhood, and give access to mental health resources. Must live in the surrounding neighbourhood and postal code of M. Their strategies and tools include 1:1 support with a mental health & support worker on site, Adult Employment Programs, and after-school/evening programs.</p>			
Area Served:	East Scarborough	Community Centre Based?	Yes
Ages Offered:	12-21		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Anger Management		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Case Management		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Recreational Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		

	Family-Engaged Programming
	Religious Services Supports

Name of Organization:	<u>Elizabeth Fry Society</u>
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Name of Youth Diversion Program:	<u>Direct Accountability Program (DAP)</u>
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Address:	For Organization - 215 Wellesley St. E, Toronto, ON, M4X 1G1	Community Centre Based?	No
	For DAP - 10 Armoury St., Toronto, ON, M7A 0B9		

Summary of Program:

The Elizabeth Fry Society offers programs exclusively for women who are in contact with the criminal justice system. The organization offers a wide variety of services, including counselling, housing supports, employment services, and community-based support. The organization's overarching goal is to reduce the criminalization of women in their targeted communities. Their Direct Accountability Program in particular is available for female offenders who have committed minor offenses, such as theft under \$5,00, minor assault, and the like. The participant must complete multiple community-based sanctions, including counselling, treatment programs, adherence to supervision conditions, community service, and more. The Elizabeth Fry Society's DAP program is run out of the Ontario Court of Justice.

Area Served:	Toronto and GTA		
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Ages Offered:	Available for young women aged 18+
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Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling
	Anger Management
	Addictions Management/Treatment
	Gender-Specific Programming
	Case Management

Name of Organization		<u>Fernie Youth</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES)	
Address:	437 Port Union Rd, Scarborough, ON M1C 2L6	Phone Number:	(416) 284- 3711
Summary of Program:			
<p>The TYES program encourages and supports participants to develop the appropriate skills to address and manage the effects of trauma and violence, and work productively towards their goals. This program will support Young Adults (YA) 18 to 29 on Probation and/or Parole that have a firearm conviction and/or have been identified as being involved in gang activity. They accept referrals from the Probation and Parole Officers of the Toronto Anti Guns and Gangs Unit (TAGGU) and other Toronto Youth Equity Strategy Programs.</p> <p>The Fernie Case Manager will work with participants, along with their Probation/Parole Officer and others from the participant's support team to complete a Needs Assessment and Service Plan. Service Plans will identify goals and targets that may include: living in a stable environment, improving relationships with family and positive friends, engaging in school and/or employment, participating in recreational activities, improving physical and mental health, addressing any addictions issues, learning new life skills and addressing involvement in the criminal justice system.</p>			
Area Served:	Scarborough	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	18-29		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Case Management		
	Recreational Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Fernie Youth</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Transition Service (YTS)</u>	
Address:	437 Port Union Rd, Scarborough, ON M1C 2L6	Phone Number:	<u>(416) 284-3711</u>
Summary of Program:			
<p>YTS serves youth aged 12-21 at risk of involvement with the law as well as those already involved with the Youth Justice System. Staff visit every youth justice facility in the Greater Toronto Area to support young people on their journey to reintegration. In collaboration with community resources, families, schools, and probation officers, Fernie addresses the youth's short and long-term needs to reintegrate and reduce their risk of re-offending. Youth being referred to the YTS Program are required to participate for a minimum of 3-months. We accept referrals from Probation Officers, Social Workers, Custody Facilities and other professionals working with youth. We also accept self-referrals from youth who are in need of our services. Previous youth justice involvement is a requirement for participating youth.</p>			
Area Served:	Scarborough	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-21		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Education Supports		

Name of Organization:		<u>For Youth Initiative*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>RISE Diversion Program</u>	
Address:	1652 Keele St #108, York, ON M6M 3W3	Phone Number:	(416)-653- 3311
Summary of Program:			
<p>RISE is a 15-session diversion program that supports youth 12-17 who have interacted with the criminal justice system. It supports court mandated youth in fulfilling their obligations to meet Extrajudicial Sanctions (EJS) and community service orders by participating and engaging with FYI staff or mentors.</p> <p>RISE intervenes and disrupts violence by bringing focus back to the individual and highlights important influential areas of their life that lead to a positive, goal-oriented future.</p>			
Area Served:	Greater Toronto Area	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Recreational Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Family-Engaged Programming		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>John Howard Society of Toronto*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Crossroads Youth Program (CYP)</u>	
Address:	1669 Eglinton Avenue West Toronto, ON M6E 2H4	Phone Number:	416-925-4386 (extension 230)
Summary of Program:			
The CYP offers support services aimed at preventing youth from engaging in criminal behaviour. Targeting African Caribbean youth aged 16 and older at risk of criminal involvement, the program provides individualized case management and group activities focused on social and personal development. It includes culturally relevant programming to address the needs of Toronto's most marginalized communities and offers support to families and communities affected by youth violence.			
Area Served:	Greater Toronto Area	Community Centre Based?	Yes
Ages Offered:	16 years old and older		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		
	Family-Engaged		
	Case Management		

Name of Organization:		<u>John Howard Society of Toronto*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Helping Individuals Plan Positively (HIPP)</u>	
Address:	1669 Eglinton Avenue West Toronto, ON M6E 2H4	Phone Number:	416-925-4386
Summary of Program:			
<p>HIPP is a youth-centred program for individuals aged 17-24 at risk of engaging in criminal behaviour. Through a flexible, person-centred approach that emphasizes effective communication, cultural relevance, and holistic support, HIPP aims to help young people build skills to achieve educational, employment, and personal goals, reducing the likelihood of legal conflicts. The program focuses on proactive solutions to youth violence and strengthens families and communities.</p>			
Area Served:	Greater Toronto Area	Community Centre Based?	Yes
Ages Offered:	17-24		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Anger Management		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		
	Family-Engaged		

Name of Organization:		<u>KIP (Kids with Incarcerated Parents) Canada*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Diversion Program - Breaking the Cycle</u>	
Address:	432 Horner Avenue, Etobicoke, ON M8W 2B2	Phone Number:	416-505-5333
Summary of Program:			
<p>Breaking the Cycle employs a strength-based, trauma-informed and restorative justice-based approach to youth currently in conflict with the law, or who have experienced family involvement with the criminal justice system. The program entails mandatory 12-week rehabilitative workshops accompanied by a complimentary workbook youth are required to complete. Breaking the Cycle also offers individual and family support (in-person and virtually) and follow-up monthly support circles aimed at building protective factors, fostering resilience and reducing recidivism.</p>			
Area Served:	Toronto	Community Centre Based?	
Ages Offered:	12 - 17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Mentorship		
	Family-Engaged Programming		

Name of Organization:		<u>Level Justice</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Black Youth Justice Program</u>	
Address:	720 Bathurst Street Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4	Phone Number:	778-997-0528
Summary of Program:			
<p>The Black Youth Justice provides culturally relevant justice education and mentorship on the legal system for Black youth. It aims to increase accessibility to the Canadian legal system and inspire a passion for justice and related fields. Facilitators who identify as Black lead the program, offering lessons and activities such as discussion circles, mock trials, and lawyer visits. Like the Indigenous Youth Outreach program, it is part of a broader effort to address the overrepresentation of Black individuals in the justice system and the underrepresentation of the Black community in justice administration.</p>			
Area Served:	Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	11-18		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Level Justice</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Indigenous Youth Outreach</u>	
Address:	720 Bathurst Street Toronto, Ontario M5S 2R4	Phone Number:	778-997-0528
Summary of Program:			
<p>The Indigenous Youth Outreach offers justice education and mentorship for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit youth. It aims to increase knowledge of justice systems and foster a passion for law through justice-based activities. Created to address Indigenous communities' unique challenges, the program provides a space for education while celebrating Indigenous culture and traditions. By acknowledging the disproportionate representation of Indigenous peoples in the criminal justice system, the program seeks to address systemic racism, colonial legacies, and the barriers faced by Indigenous individuals. It also provides reports on the program's outcomes.</p>			
Area Served:	Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	9-18		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Lumenus Community Services*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Lumenus Mental Health, Developmental, and Community Services</u>	
Address:	1126 Finch Avenue West, Unit 16 Toronto, ON, M3J 3J6	Phone Number:	+1 (833) 586-3687
Summary of Program:			
Lumenus offers a number of different programs for children and youth with autism. One of these programs is an "Urgent Response Service" which offers up to 12 weeks of personalized services for children and their families. The program is specifically designed for autistic children/youth at risk of harm, which can include harm to themselves or others. In order to participate, children must be between the ages of 0-18, have an autism diagnosis, and be registered with the Ontario Autism Program. The program can include sessions with the child, their family, clinicians, and other professionals to prevent the escalation of risk to the child and others.			
Area Served:	North Toronto	Community Centre Based?	Yes, Lumenus Community Services
Ages Offered:	0-18		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Case Management		

Name of Organization:		<u>Native Child and Family Services of Toronto</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Scarborough Youth Program</u>	
Address:	156 Galloway Rd, Scarborough, ON M1E 1X2	Phone Number	416-969-8510
Summary of Program:			
<p>Located at the Scarborough Child and Family Life Centre, the Scarborough Youth Program provides support and advocacy for Indigenous youths aged 16-29; assisting both youths that have interacted with other parts of the Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST) and Indigenous youth that recently arrived in Toronto. They provide a wide variety of drop-in services including support from Elders and Knowledge Keepers; as well diversionary supports pertaining to youth outreach, advocacy, and justice, along with bridging programs to improve access to education. It is also important to note that the NCFST also has an location in the Downtown Toronto Area, located right beside Toronto Police Headquarters at the Bay Street and College Street intersection, providing even more access to specialized services in the downtown core.</p>			
Area Served:	Assistance for youth who are required to appear at the following court locations: 311 Jarvis Street, 2201 Finch Avenue West, 1911 Eglinton Avenue East	Community Centre Based?	Yes, connected to the NCFST and is operated out of the Scarborough Child and Family Life Centre.
Ages Offered:	16-29		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Education Supports		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Peacebuilders International</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Restorative Youth Circles</u>	
Address:	Suite 6-106, 10 Armoury St, Toronto, ON M7A 0B9	Phone Number:	416-960-0105
Summary of Program:			
<p>The Restorative Youth Circles program is a diversion program available for justice-involved youth ages 12-18. The program involves a four-part process. First, youth engage in an intake interview and needs assessment. Second, youth participate in peer circles with other youth. Third, youth engage in individual circles on a one-to-one basis with staff who collaborate with them to prepare and submit a written reflection to the Court. Finally, a staff report and the youth's reflection are shared with the Court. Youth can be referred to the program via two routes: informal diversion, where the youth is referred by a justice system/community actor or a self-referral; or formal diversion where the program acts as an extrajudicial sanction assigned by the Crown or Justice Professionals such as Probation Officer.</p>			
Area Served:	Assistance for youth who are required to appear at the following court locations: 311 Jarvis Street, 2201 Finch Avenue West, 1911 Eglinton Avenue East	Community Centre Based?	Yes, connected to the MLSE LaunchPad
Ages Offered:	12-18		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Reconnect Health Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Mental Health and Justice Prevention Case Management</u>	
Address:	1281 St Clair Ave West, Toronto, ON M6E 1B8	Phone Number:	416-248-2050
Summary of Program:			
<p>The Mental Health and Justice Prevention Case Program is offered by Reconnect Health Services, a not-for-profit healthcare provider that supports young people aged 16 and up who require mental health and addiction services. The program provides case management to youth who are dealing with mental illness, including concurrent/dual diagnoses or cognitive disabilities, and who are currently involved in the criminal justice system or at imminent risk of involvement. The Prevention program serves the Toronto Central Local Health Integration Network and North Etobicoke.</p>			
Area Served:	North Etobicoke	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	16 and up		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Addictions Management/Treatment		
	Case Management		

Name of Organization:		<u>Salvation Army*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Salvation Army Correctional and Justice Services</u>	
Address:	1 Greensboro Dr #301, Etobicoke, ON M9W 1C8	Phone Number:	416-304-1974
Summary of Program:			
The Salvation Army operates two open custody detention facilities for youth, as well as a pre-charge diversion program for young people ages 12 to 17 years old. Participants are referred from a variety of sources including probation officers, defense counsel, Provincial Courts, Metro Toronto Police Service, The Parole Board of Canada, and Correctional Services Canada.			
Area Served:	Toronto, north to Barrie and Muskoka, Lindsay and east to the Kingston area.	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-17		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Open Custody Detention Facilities		
	Pre-charge Diversion Program		

Name of Organization:		<u>Springboard Services</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Springboard Youth Community Justice Programs</u>	
Address:	800 - 2 Carlton St., Toronto, ON M5B 1J3	Phone Number:	416-615 - 0788
Summary of Program:			
<p>Springboard Youth Community Justice programs deliver programming to young people aged 12-24 in Ontario, providing alternatives to formal court processes and/or custody. These programs engage young people in further developing their skills and seek to repair harm caused where possible. Available programs include the Attendance Program, Education and Community Partnership Program (ECP), the Youth Connect, Youth Court Action Planning Program (YCAPP), the Youth In Transition Worker Program (YITW), and the Youth Justice Committees (YJC). Springboard Services' Terry Fox house is a 24/7 live in program for male youth, ages 12-17 at the time of their charge, who have received a detention or open custody order from the courts. The program is focused on increasing prosocial skills, creating bridges to their communities, and helping them through this critical transition.</p>			
Area Served:	Greater Toronto Area	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-24		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Anger Management		
	Addictions Management/Treatment		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Case Management		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Recreational Programming		
	Education Supports		

	Mentorship
	Family-Engaged Programming

Name of Organization:		<u>Strides Toronto</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Outreach Worker Program</u>	
Address:	100 Consilium Place, Scarborough, ON M1H 3E3; 1940 Eglinton Avenue East, Scarborough, ON M1L 4R1	Phone Number:	416-438-3697 (extension 1905)
Summary of Program:			
<p>Strides Toronto offers various programs including their Youth Outreach Worker Program which serves at-risk youth and their families. The program is free and requires no referral. Having recently relocated their main offices to Scarborough, the program provides youth with individualized programming to meet their specific needs. They aim to improve accessibility to various programs and services within the community by helping youth and their families overcome language and cultural barriers. Specialized YOWs offer support to various cultural groups including but not limited to Syrian, Afghan, or Tamil youth. They provide clinical services and intervention in various areas like mental health, addiction, and trauma. Through outreach, they also strive to remove the stigma and fear associated with accessing services like mental health.</p>			
Area Served:	Scarborough	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-21		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Culturally Appropriate Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>TNG (The Neighbourhood Group)</u> <u>Community Services*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Justice Services</u>	
Address:	Multiple locations across Toronto	Phone Number:	647-336-8035
Summary of Program:			
<p>The Youth Justice Services program at TNG Community Services supports youth navigating the criminal justice system. Designed to help first-time or minor offenders, the program offers two pathways: Extrajudicial Measures, enabling participants to avoid court through community service and educational workshops, and Extrajudicial Sanctions, which assist youth and their families in navigating court proceedings while working toward charge withdrawal. With a strong history of collaboration with the courts, the program aims to give youth a second chance while fostering accountability and positive community engagement.</p>			
Area Served:	Toronto	Community Centre Based?	No
Ages Offered:	12-18		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Case Management		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Tropicana Community Services*</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>START for Life Skills Training (Success Through ART® Aggression Replacement Training®)</u>	
Address:	1385 Huntingwood Drive Scarborough, Ontario, M1S 3J1	Phone Number:	416-439-9009
Summary of Program:			
<p>The START for Life program is a 10-week life-skills series designed to help participants strengthen their communication and social skills. Based on the ART® (Aggression Replacement Training) cognitive-behavioral approach, the program focuses on three primary components: Social Skills Training, Anger Control Training, and Moral Reasoning. Social Skills Training equips individuals with practical techniques to navigate anger-provoking situations. Anger Control Training offers strategies to manage emotions effectively. Moral Reasoning promotes a fair and realistic world outlook by encouraging participants to explore different perspectives in everyday scenarios. Through reflective discussions, role-playing, demonstrations, and tailored individual sessions, participants develop skills to reduce aggressive and violent behaviour while improving their decision-making capabilities. Upon completing the program, participants will receive a certificate of completion.</p>			
Area Served:	Greater Toronto Area	Community Centre Based?	Yes
Ages Offered:	18+		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Anger Management		
	Culturally-Appropriate Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		

Name of Organization:		<u>Turning Point Youth Services (in partnership with Help Ahead Toronto Intake Services)</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>PATH Program</u>	
Address:	95 Wellesley Street, East, Toronto ON M4Y 2X9	Phone Numbers: Help Ahead Toronto (general inquiries): 1-866-585-6486	TPYJ Office: 416-925-9250
<p>The PATH Program (PATH) assists youth (generally aged 12 to 18) who have been involved in the youth criminal justice system and have been referred by the court and/or probation services. The program is located at our 95 Wellesley Street East site or in the community, and offers a range of services designed to help youth enhance self-awareness, develop skills and strategies, increase supports and decrease the risk of re-offending in a safe and supportive environment. Services are tailored to the unique needs of each youth and may include SNAP-YJ (Stop Now and Plan, Life PATH program, Girls PATH program, individual counselling (including trauma-specific counselling), and The Arson Prevention Program for Children (TAPP-C) that provides assessment and intervention for youth. Offered by TPYJ intake team.</p>			
Area Served:	Toronto – Youth and their families living in an M postal code area. Exceptions with Ministry approval	Community Centre Based?	Yes
Ages Offered:	0-18, some programs offer assistance and support until the age of 24		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Addictions Management/Treatment		
	Mental Health and Wellbeing		
	Education Supports		
	Housing Support		

Name of Organization:		<u>West Scarborough Neighbourhood Community Centre</u>	
Name of Youth Diversion Program:		<u>Youth Justice Services (YJS)</u>	
Address:	313 Pharmacy Avenue, Scarborough, ON M1L 3E7	Phone Number:	(416) 755-9215
<p>Youth Justice Services (YJS) provides a range of trauma-informed programs aimed at enhancing the well-being of young individuals. Recognizing the diverse needs of youth, YJS offers employment initiatives that help participants build valuable job skills, improve their chances of employment and foster a sense of responsibility. YJS also incorporates workshops, seminars, and recreational activities that promote social interaction and personal development, allowing youth to experience positive, structured engagement. Together, these programs create a supportive environment that encourages resilience, self-growth, and a brighter future for every participant.</p>			
Area Served:	Scarborough and East York (specifically servicing divisions 41, 42, 43, 54, 55)	Community Centre Based?	Yes
Ages Offered:	12-18 (willing to work with 18+ on a case-by-case basis)		
Types of Youth Programming Available:	Counselling		
	Restorative Justice (circles, reflections, group discussions)		
	Anger Management		
	Gender-Specific Programming		
	Case Management		
	Recreational Programming		
	Education Supports		
	Mentorship		
	Anti-Theft Programming		
	Religious Services Supports		

PART 6: CONCLUSION

Closing Thoughts

In closing, we hope this guide serves as a valuable resource for those navigating the complexities of Toronto's youth justice system. By providing detailed and accessible information on the various diversion programs available, our goal is to empower legal professionals, community workers, and other justice actors to make informed decisions that prioritize the well-being and future of young people. The programs featured here emphasize restorative and rehabilitative justice, focusing on healing, accountability, and reintegration, rather than solely on punitive measures. These approaches align with the belief that justice should not only address the harm caused by crime but also promote the growth and positive transformation of the individual involved.

Diversion programs offer young people the opportunity to make amends for their actions, repair harm to victims and communities, and develop the skills needed to move forward in a positive direction. These programs are grounded in the principles of restorative justice, which values repairing relationships, building empathy, and fostering personal responsibility. We believe that by centering these principles, we can support young people in transforming their lives while reducing their chances of reoffending and enhancing public safety.

The guide represents just one step in reimagining youth justice in Toronto— one that moves beyond the traditional punitive system and embraces alternatives that emphasize rehabilitation, empowerment, and community-based solutions. Together, through collaboration, innovation, and a shared commitment to fairness, we can create a justice system that is compassionate, effective, and responsive to the needs of young people.

Directions for Future Work

- *Cross-Jurisdictional Comparisons of Diversion Models*
By examining diversion programs in other cities or provinces with restorative justice frameworks, future work could highlight successful practices and innovative strategies that could be adapted to Toronto's context. This comparative approach could help inform best practices and identify gaps in the current system.
- *Building a More Integrated Justice and Social Services Model*
Strengthening collaboration between youth justice programs and social services— housing, education, employment, mental health care— is essential for providing holistic support to youth involved in the justice system. Cases are often complex and youth often require support in more than one area. Future research could explore how these sectors can work more seamlessly together to support long-term outcomes for youth.
- *Reducing Systemic Barriers to Access*
Future research may identify and address systemic barriers—such as socio-economic inequalities, geographic disparities, and qualification-related challenges—that limit

marginalized youth's access to diversion programs. Ensuring these programs are accessible to all youth, regardless of background, is essential for their effectiveness.

- *Evaluating the Role of Family and Peer Support*
Incorporating family involvement and peer mentoring into diversion programs could enhance their rehabilitative potential. Future studies could explore the role of social context, including family dynamics, peer influence, and community engagement in the success of diversion initiatives.

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Next, we sincerely thank the youth justice diversion programs that generously shared information with us via phone or email. The details you provided were integral to creating a comprehensive and accessible navigation guide. These programs you provide are vital to our community, and we deeply appreciate the impactful work you continue to do to support youth and their families.

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