

*Evidence Supporting
YAP's Model*

Table of Contents

External Research Conducted	1
Incorporating Evidence-Based Practices and Interventions	2
COA Accreditation	4
YAP Is a Promising Practice	5
Ongoing Research on the YAP Advocacy Model	6
Compendium of External Studies	7

External Research Conducted

Twelve external studies have been completed on the YAP model. Of these, three were studies conducted by the funding agency; four were University-based studies; three were studies commissioned by a public agency conducted by external evaluators and one was an external study commissioned by YAP. Seven of the advocacy studies used pre-post test designs.¹ Four involved comparisons with other community programs.² One focused on YAP autism services and, using a quality of life survey instrument, found significant improvements in participants' feelings toward their school settings and feelings of hopefulness.³

The studies found YAP services to have higher program completion rates;⁴ lower rates of placement into juvenile facilities or residential foster care;⁵ lower re-arrest rates;⁶ lower numbers of youth who are AWOL⁷ and greater residential stability while in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems⁸ than comparison groups. In addition, young people in YAP programs achieved reductions in risks and needs;⁹ improvements in quality of life;¹⁰ positive results in education;¹¹ enhanced links with community activities;¹² and improvements in social behavior.¹³

These positive results were achieved despite the fact that YAP has long served a high-risk and high-service need population. For example, juveniles tracked in the Philadelphia study¹⁴ reported high service needs, low self-esteem, low levels of school and family bonding in comparison to similar programs that were evaluated. In addition, youth in the YAP's Tampa program¹⁵ were more likely to have had a history of outpatient mental health treatment, a history of running away, a history of family violence and a history of substance abuse in their biological families than comparable programs. Youth in the Tampa program were also less likely to have received school based mental health services or alcohol or substance abuse treatment prior to intake. Finally, in YAP Pennsylvania programs for youth with disabilities,¹⁶ over 37% of the youth studied have autism.

The most recently completed, formal and external study of the YAP model came from YAP's sister program in Ireland. In 2014 researchers engaged by Youth Advocate Programmes of Ireland published results from their longitudinal study which demonstrated a statistically significant and positive impact on the outcomes of YAP Ireland clients and families as measured by a series of phased Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires (SDQs).

YAP Programs achieved

- ✓ Reductions in risks and needs
- ✓ Improvements in quality of life
- ✓ Positive results in education
- ✓ Enhanced links with community activities
- ✓ Improvements in social behavior
- ✓ Improvements in recidivism

Youth and Families are provided with

VOICE, ACCESS and OWNERSHIP

of their own highly individualized service plans

Incorporating Evidence-Based Practices and Interventions

The YAP services model incorporates specific practice principles, strategies and interventions from the fields of **wraparound and advocacy/mentoring**, with more recent contributions from interventions supported by research in the growing field of **positive youth development**. What has evolved within YAP is a unique and multi-faceted holistic services model designed to achieve positive outcomes for the highest need youth, grounded in evidence to support links between strategies, interventions and outcomes.

YAP was one of the early adopters of Wraparound with the Wraparound approach serving as YAP's primary method of case assessment, service planning, and service coordination in working with high risk youth and their families. Within wraparound practice, youth and families are provided with access, voice and ownership of their own highly individualized service plans. Non-traditional services that build upon a youth's interest and assets are employed.¹⁷ Strength-based¹⁸ and solution-focused¹⁹ strategies are also utilized by staff to facilitate engagement and active participation. Identification of "exceptions" to problem behaviors occurs immediately. Positive and productive behaviors are reinforced and built upon through new opportunities. The practices have been built into our service model.

Key to successful wraparound is the development of engaged and sustainable family teams. Staff seek to identify the 4-6 members of the community in addition to professionals to serve as team members for families in trouble. The family team helps in the development of the services plan and provides a natural support system for the family as challenges arise. The cultivation of the team over the course of service delivery is a key priority, designed to ensure that gains made during service provision are maintained post discharge.

When compared to traditional practices, **high fidelity wraparound can produce significantly better outcomes** for children and families with significant needs.

There is a growing body of research illustrating the effectiveness of wraparound processes, especially when processes are implemented with high fidelity. When compared to traditional practices, High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) can produce significantly better outcomes for children and families with significant needs including increased permanency and stability for children; decreased restrictiveness of residential environments; improved behavior and mental health symptoms, improved school and child protective factors; increased family engagement and satisfaction with services; and increased family resources to support their own children.²⁰

In 2011, YAP began planning meetings with representatives from Vroon Vandenberg LTD to augment YAP Wraparound practices to be in line with recently adopted standards, processes and pathways associated with High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW). The collaboration with Vroon resulted in the development of over 130 worker competencies within the four phases of service. YAP is presently revising our employee training to include two tiers of competency certification in our adapted version of HFW.

The purposes of advocacy and mentoring programs, such as YAP, for high risk youth are to reduce risk factors and increase resiliency--the capacity to overcome challenges and risk factors and avoid long term negative outcomes such as arrest. High risk youth who are involved with at least one caring adult are more likely to survive the negative effects of socioeconomic disadvantage, parental addiction, and exposure to violence and mental illness.²¹



The terms advocacy and mentoring are often used interchangeably.²² In the context of high risk youth, advocacy services entail mentoring and representation of the concerns and needs of the youth. While mentoring occurs informally through social networks and may provide positive role modeling through unstructured contacts, youth at-risk of institutionalization or youth returning to the community from placement require a structured and more formal approach.²³ Formal mentorship advantages include the autonomy to meet when mutually convenient for both mentor and youth, a high level of background screening for adult mentors/advocates, variable length of meetings, typically longer mentor commitments, and better matching of adult service providers to youth needs that result in mentor-mentee matches jointly choosing activities.²⁴ These key features have been incorporated into the YAP services model. Research also reveals programs often struggle to recruit caring adults for older, system involved youth. For example, programs involved in Public/Private Ventures, Inc.'s National Faith-Based Initiative, which served higher-risk youth, succeeded in attracting only a third of the mentors needed despite significant recruitment efforts. Sustaining a match with higher-risk youth who are often reluctant to trust a new adult and may test their commitment in a variety of ways can be particularly challenging.²⁵ Due to the challenges in recruiting volunteers and the commitment necessary to address the multiple service needs of juvenile justice involved youth, mentors of high-need youth need to be paid or receive stipends for their work.²⁶ With this research support, YAP has embraced paying advocates to ensure commitment and sustainability of relationships with youth.

In addition, advocate activities are driven by Positive Youth Development (PYD) best practice strategies and approaches. Advocates work intensively with their assigned youth for at times over 20 hours per week in providing and arranging for positive, pro-social activities. Goals and

YAP has embraced paying advocates that serve in a mentor capacity, to ensure commitment and sustainability of relationships with high need youth.

activities are individualized and are focused on youth making progress in attaining the 5 key developmental asset areas of adolescence: (1) competence, (2) confidence, (3) character, (4) connections, and (5) contributions.²⁷ Enhancing educational and vocational related skills and competencies is often a priority life domain area of advocate work. By focusing on these areas for high risk teens, enhancements in confidence, character and connections are often realized. In addition, through YAP's VOICE initiative, both current and alumni youth are viewed as "contributors" through involvement in community service and policy advocacy activities.

Finally, YAP has incorporated a number of evidenced-based group and individual interventions that both augment and complement our core wraparound/advocacy model. For example, YAP has incorporated ***Peaceful Alternatives to Tough Situations (PATTs)***, an evidenced based group intervention for older youth. The intervention, which uses cognitive-behavioral therapeutic strategies, is designed to help youth manage and reduce conflict and violent responses.

YAP is currently working with the Wyman Center to adapt its evidenced-based ***Teen Outreach Program (TOP)*** group intervention for use with youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. The TOP group services curriculum is an evidenced based teen pregnancy and truancy prevention and intervention program. YAP received funding from Annie E. Casey to adapt the TOP curriculum to serve high-risk, systems involved young people.

YAP also uses the Girls Circle/Boys Council, Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and other evidence-based interventions as appropriate in specific program sites.

YAP is COA Accredited

In 2009 YAP became accredited by the ***Council on Accreditation (COA)***. The COA accreditation process involved a detailed review and analysis of our operations and service delivery practices. ***YAP performance was "measured" against national standards of best practice.*** These standards emphasize services that are accessible, appropriate, culturally responsive, evidence based, and outcomes-oriented. Achieving COA accreditation supports the premise that YAP services are provided by a skilled and supported workforce and that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect.²⁸



YAP's accreditation was renewed in 2013 and we are recognized in the areas of Youth Development, Family Preservation, Outpatient Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Workforce Development.

YAP is a Promising Practice

Findings from external research studies contributed to YAP receiving recognition from a number of well-established government organizations and private foundations represented below:



The Annie E. Casey Foundation has identified the YAP wraparound/advocacy program model as a **“promising practice.”**



In a bulletin published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), YAP’s Tarrant County Advocate Program in Texas was recognized as a **“Best Practice Model”** for Alternatives to Secure Detention and Confinement of Juvenile Offenders.



The US based National Council on Crime and Delinquency recognized YAP’s Florida programs as an **“evaluated and promising program.”**



The America Youth Policy Forum identified YAP as a **“promising program.”**



The National Gang Center noted YAP as having **“an effective program structure.”**



The Research & Evaluation Center at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York has recognized Youth Advocate Programs as a **“Gold Medal Program”** that is informed by the science of adolescent development and built around the concepts of the Positive Youth Justice Model.

Ongoing Research on the YAP Advocacy Model

RESEARCH FUNDED BY OJJDP “BEST PRACTICE IN MENTORING” GRANT

In late 2011 the University of Texas/San Antonio (UTSA), in collaboration with YAP, received one of five “Best Practice in Mentoring” research grant awards from the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). Data collection from four YAP sites (in Camden NJ, Las Vegas, Lebanon PA, and Toledo OH) was completed in 2015. The final technical report from this quasi-experimental study, which is being directed by UTSA’s Michael Karcher, Ph.D., is expected in late 2016. Using a recurrent institutional design model, Dr. Karcher has preliminarily indicated that participation in YAP appears to be related to large and consistent improvements in youth misconduct, educational engagement, and employment pursuit. Moreover, these changes were found at discharge from YAP and maintained twelve months post-discharge.

YAP’S WORK WITH THE JOHN JAY COLLEGE OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In mid-2011 YAP began collaborating with Jeffrey Butts, Ph.D., an expert in positive youth development and the Director of the Research and Evaluation Center at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice. Work with Dr. Butts and his staff helped YAP to fine-tune its theory of change and logic model, and produce a series of “issue Briefs” in 2014 that addressed various aspects of YAP services and programs. Subsequently, Dr. Butts and John Jay were awarded a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation that is enabling them to study YAP programs in Baltimore MD, Orlando FL, and Fort Worth TX. These efforts are being undertaken to improve YAP’s current services and with the hopes of undertaking a randomized control trial in the near future.

YAP’S WORK WITH ADVANCED METRICS AND THE UNIV. OF MARYLAND

YAP employs the CANS (Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths) assessment tool in our juvenile justice, child welfare, and truancy programs in Maryland, Ohio and Pennsylvania. The CANS assessment tool evaluates how clients are progressing in a number of life domains, strengths, emotional needs and risk behaviors. YAP has engaged Steve Herr, Ph.D., to analyze our CANS data. Dr. Herr is affiliated Applied Metrics and formerly with the University of Maryland. It is anticipated that the CANS data will allow Dr. Herr and U. of Md. to produce and hopefully publish the results of their research and thus provide further evidence of the effectiveness of the YAP wraparound advocacy model.

YAP’S WORK WITH THE CHICAGO CRIME LAB

Chicago Crime Lab researchers are conducting a comparison group study of YAP youth in Chicago that is funded by a grant from the “Get In Chicago” Foundation and will focus on the degree that positive community linkages can contribute to positive youth development and reduced recidivism.

Compendium of External Studies

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- ¹ COA, 2006; Comisky, 2006; Jameson & Cleary, 2004; O'Brien, 2004; Travis, 2001, 2003
- ² Rea, Prior & Davis, 2003; Tarrant, 2002; THINK, 2003; Jones, Harris & Bachovchin, 1997
- ³ Ferris and Conroy, Outcomes of Involvement in an Individually Designed Support Program for Youth in PA, Best Practices in Mental Health, Vol. 12, No. 1, March 2016.
- ⁴ Rea, Prior & Davis, 2003; Tarrant, 2002
- ⁵ Tarrant, 2002
- ⁶ Jones, Harris & Bachovchin 1997; Rea, Prior & Davis, 2003; Tarrant, 2002; THINK, 2003
- ⁷ Jones, Harris & Bachovchin, 1997; Rea, Prior & Davis, 2003
- ⁸ THINK, 2003
- ⁹ Jones, Harris & Bachovchin, 1997; O'Brien, 2004
- ¹⁰ COA, 2006
- ¹¹ Jameson & Cleary, 2004; O'Brien, 2004; Rea, Prior & Davis, 2003; THINK, 2003
- ¹² Jameson & Cleary, 2004
- ¹³ Jameson & Cleary, 2004; THINK, 2003
- ¹⁴ Jones, Harris & Bachovchin, 1997
- ¹⁵ THINK, 2003
- ¹⁶ COA, 2006
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