

TRANSFORMING JUSTICE
THE IMPACT OF THE YOUTH
RESTORATIVE DIVERSION
INITIATIVE

IMPACT
REPORT
20
24

OUR STORY

A RESTORATIVE RESPONSE TO SYSTEMIC HARM

The **Youth Restorative Diversion Initiative** (YRDI) was created to address a powerful truth: all youth have potential. When they make mistakes, they deserve a path toward accountability and healing, not punishment.

Envisioned and developed in 2019, YRDI was launched in other jurisdictions in 2021 and brought to Arlington County in August 2023 by the **Center for Youth and Family Advocacy** (CYFA), in partnership with the **Arlington County Police Department** (ACPD) and the **Court Services Unit** (CSU). In 2024, **Arlington Public Schools** (APS) joined as a key partner, expanding access to restorative pathways and reinforcing the school system's commitment to equitable and non-punitive responses.

The YRDI provides a community-based, trauma-informed, and developmentally appropriate alternative to traditional disciplinary systems that often criminalize adolescence and disproportionately impact Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. It was designed to confront these long-standing disparities by centering restorative justice and youth leadership as tools for transformation.

Through CYFA's restorative programs, Promoting Empathy through Equitable Resolution (PEER) and Youth Peer Court (YPC), the initiative addresses the root causes of harm and connects youth to critical community-based supports. It empowers referred youth to take responsibility, repair relationships, and move forward with dignity. The YRDI is not just a program. It is an innovative public-nonprofit initiative driven by the belief that youth are not problems to be fixed. They are individuals full of promise and power.

"We believe that when a young person stumbles or makes a mistake, they should be met with compassion and opportunity to learn and grow, not consequences that may limit who they can become."

Devanshi Patel
Chief Executive Officer



Since its launch in August 2023 through December 2024, the YRDI has impacted 80 youth, ages 10 to 19, as well as their families and the wider community. Referred youth are diverted from formal legal proceedings and enrolled in either PEER or YPC, depending on the nature of the incident. The restorative process unfolds in four structured phases:



PHASE 1

INTAKE & WILLINGNESS

Youth and their caregivers receive information about the YRDI and voluntarily agree to participate. CYFA gathers contextual details to fully understand the incident's scope and impact.



PHASE 3

ACTION & SUPPORT

Youth work to complete their restorative actions with the guidance and support of CYFA's care coordination team, connecting them to community-based services, mentorship, and other necessary resources.



PHASE 2

RESTORATIVE PROCESS

Youth engage in a restorative justice conference (PEER) or a peer-led hearing (YPC), where, together with trained facilitators, they co-create a Restorative Agreement aimed at repairing harm and promoting accountability.




PHASE 4

COMPLETION & REFLECTION

Final evaluations are conducted, progress is reviewed, and the case is formally closed, often with a celebration of growth and learning.

The YPC is led by Ambassadors, who are high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors. These students gain early work experience, earn academic credit, and develop civic leadership skills. In addition to modeling accountability and empathy, these peer leaders promote positive peer influence within their communities.

At the heart of the YRDI are three core values:



Accountability
without shame

Repair rooted
in relationship

Growth
through
community
support

For youth, the outcome is more than just avoiding legal charges. It is an experience of being heard, seen, and supported. The goal is to help them recognize that their mistakes do not define them; it is their willingness to take responsibility for their actions that shapes who they become.

“CYFA believes that every young person deserves a chance to grow, heal, and thrive. Our approach is grounded in inclusivity by meeting youth where they are, valuing their experiences, and empowering them to take responsibility in a way that fosters connection and community. We are committed to ensuring that every youth, regardless of background, feels seen, supported, and respected throughout their journey of transformation.”

- Ingri Guevara, Community Coordinator

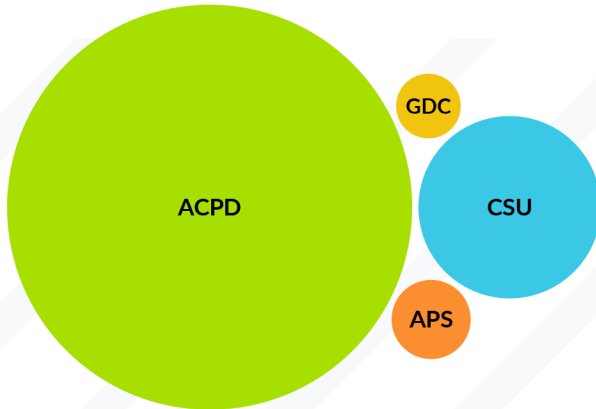


**Youth Peer Court
Video**



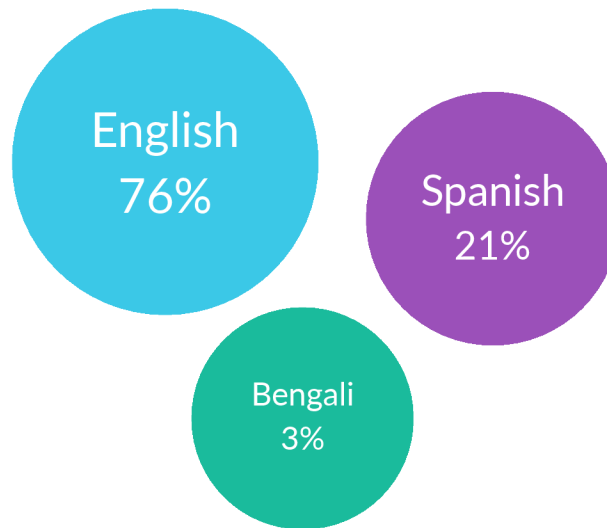
TOTAL REFERRALS ACCEPTED 97%

REFERRAL SOURCES

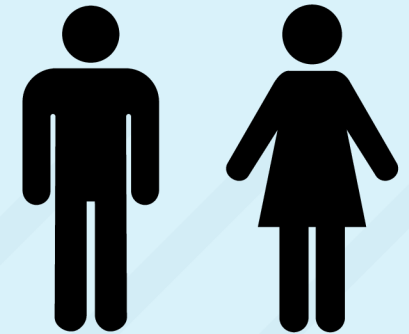


Arlington County Police Department 79%
Court Services Unit 16%
Arlington Public School 3%
General District Court 2%

LANGUAGES USED



GENDER IDENTITY



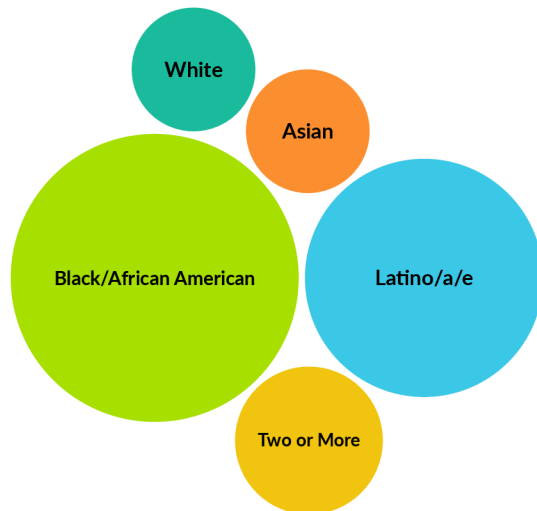
40%

60%

Youth Ages: 8-19

64% between 13-15

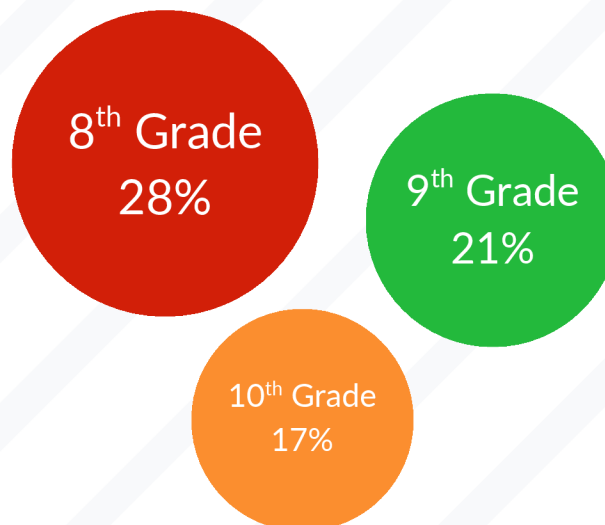
RACIAL & ETHNIC DEMOGRAPHICS



Black/African American 38%
Latino/a/e 26%
White 19%
Asian 7%
Two or more Races 10%

MOST COMMON GRADES:

Referral age range began at 3rd Grade



RESIDENCY

Virginia 78%

District of Columbia 17%

Maryland 5%

MOST COMMON REFERRALS

Petit Larceny 33%

Assault & Battery (incl. domestic) 28%

Possession of Unlawful Substance 17%

Trespass (incl. computer) 9%

Nondelinquency 9%



The YRDI is not only transforming individual lives, it is also strengthening public systems:



The juvenile legal system sees reduced case volume and increased efficiency, allowing limited resources to be redirected to where they are most needed.



The Arlington County Police Department advances its community policing goals by referring youth to supportive services, positioning officers as connectors rather than enforcers.



Public resources are redirected from costly legal processes and detention toward prevention, education, and early intervention through the YRDI's cost-effective model.



Schools benefit from improved culture as YPC Ambassadors embed restorative values and conflict-resolution skills into their peer networks, supporting safer and more connected learning environments.



The broader community strengthens its foundation of trust and shared safety as restorative practices replace punitive responses, creating space for healing, equity, and collective accountability.

Together, these impacts demonstrate that restorative justice is not a peripheral solution. It is a powerful strategy for reimagining safety, justice, and opportunity across every level of community life.

“ —

The partnership with CYFA and the Youth Restorative Diversion Initiative allows our officers to connect with youth in a way that builds trust, reduces harm, and strengthens community safety.

-Deputy Chief Wayne Vincent, Arlington County Police Department

CULTURAL SHIFTS

TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY NORMS

The impact of the YRDI extends beyond individual participants. It is actively transforming the culture of how Arlington understands youth, harm, and accountability.



IN

SCHOOLS

Students who complete the YRDI programs return to school better equipped to handle conflict. The presence of YPC Ambassadors in schools fosters a climate where restorative values—like listening, respect, and repair—are modeled and normalized.



IN

FAMILIES

Caregivers describe deeper conversations, better communication, and stronger connections with their children. Parents report feeling empowered to support their youth through challenges rather than fearing legal consequences. This cultural shift toward healing over punishment strengthens the fabric of families and reinforces positive parenting.



IN

LAW ENFORCEMENT

ACPD officers report positive experiences with the program. Instead of relying on punitive responses, officers now refer youth to services that address the root causes of behavior. This shift fosters trust within the community and redefines police as allies in support, rather than adversaries.



IN

SYSTEMS

Community stakeholders—from schools to courts to service providers—are increasingly aligned around a shared belief that youth deserve opportunities to take meaningful accountability for their actions, not outdated approaches rooted in blame and shame. YRDI creates a new norm: accountability should lead to transformation, not a record. It shifts the system from control and compliance to compassion and connection.



“What we are seeing with the YRDI is not just programmatic success; it is a shift in mindset across systems. Schools, families, law enforcement, and service providers are embracing a new way of supporting youth that centers healing instead of punishment. When we replace fear with empathy and blame with dialogue, we do not just change outcomes; we change culture.”

-Zipporah Baldwin, Director of Programs

STRATEGIC GROWTH

AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Within its first year in Arlington, the YRDI expanded eligibility criteria and welcomed new referral sources, including schools. This growth was the result of intentional planning and strong collaboration with community and system partners.

CYFA prioritized a flexible, youth-centered approach rooted in restorative justice and adolescent development. The focus remained on meeting young people and families where they are, while building the trust and support needed to sustain meaningful accountability.

This implementation represents more than the expansion of a program. It reflects a cultural shift toward relationship-based accountability and a shared commitment to community-rooted justice.



“

In less than a year, we've done more than grow a program; we've shifted the culture of youth justice. We're demonstrating that by meeting young people where they are, adopting restorative practices, and fostering strong community partnerships, we can create lasting change that transforms systems, not just outcomes.”

-Heather Creelman, Director of Development

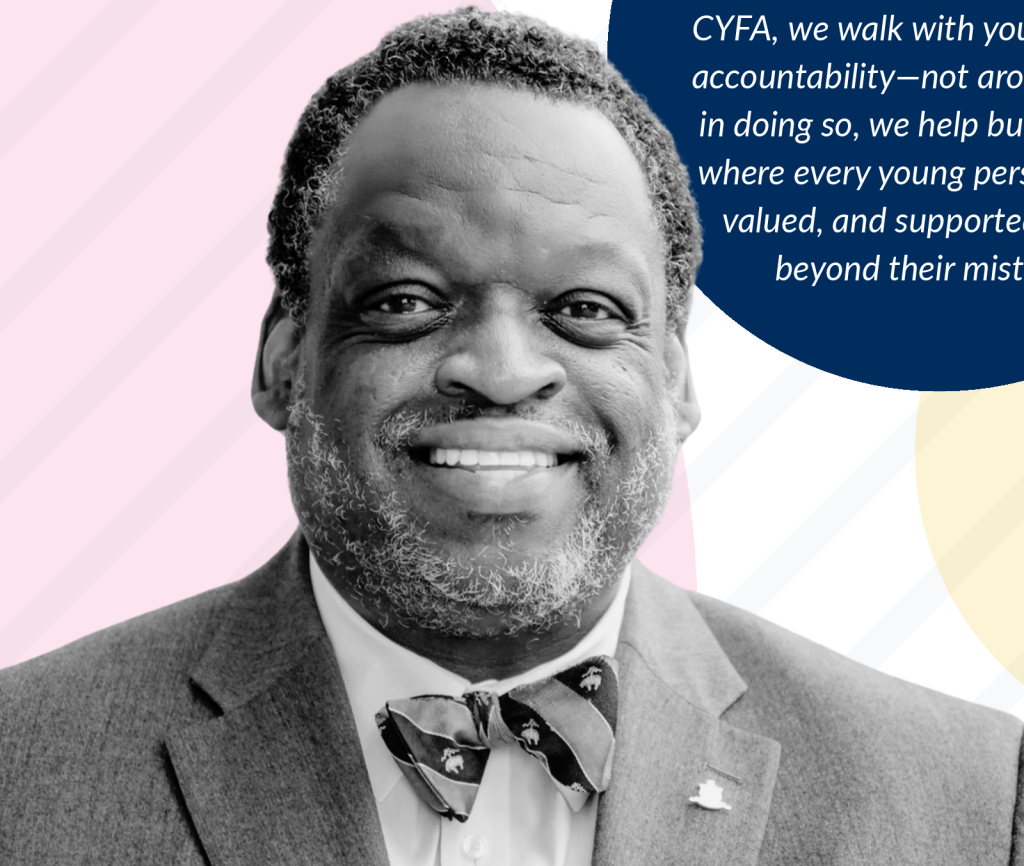
YOUTH POWER

COMMUNITY HEALING

The YRDI is more than a program; it is a promise to our youth that we see them, believe in them, and will walk with them through their hardest moments. It is proof that accountability and compassion can coexist, and that systems can change when we lead with love, not fear.

In 2024, CYFA supported youth, families, and the community in navigating harm, making amends, and reclaiming their futures, laying the foundation for lasting, generational change. We are committed to expanding this work, amplifying its impact, and ensuring that no young person is defined by a single mistake. We are not fixing kids. We are transforming systems. And we are doing it together.

“Restorative justice is not about giving young people a second chance. It’s about recognizing their humanity in the first place. At CYFA, we walk with youth through accountability—not around it—and in doing so, we help build a future where every young person is seen, valued, and supported to grow beyond their mistakes.”



Gregory Baldwin
Director of Restorative Practices



CYFA is deeply grateful to Arlington County for awarding its sole restorative justice grant to launch this important initiative. We also thank our dedicated partners for their ongoing confidence and collaboration in sustaining and expanding the work, including the ACPD, CSU, Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, APS, the Department of Human Services, and members of the broader community.

We are especially thankful to the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services for providing sustained funding, and to our local funding partners: Amazon, Dominion Guild, John Andelin and Ginger Geoffrey, Jeanne Broyhill and Joe Ventrone, as well as countless community donors whose generosity fuels our efforts.

Finally, we extend our deepest appreciation to our incredible YPC Ambassadors, who embody the values of community justice with cultural competence, professionalism, and empathy.

