



SAN MATEO COUNTY **PROBATION DEPARTMENT**

THE ART OF YOGA PROJECT
ANNUAL EVALUATION

2022-2023



ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

Applied Survey Research (ASR) is a nonprofit social research firm dedicated to helping people build better communities by collecting meaningful data, facilitating information-based planning, and developing custom strategies. The firm was founded on the principle that community improvement, initiative sustainability, and program success are closely tied to assessment needs, evaluation of community goals, and development of appropriate responses.

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Program Description

The Art of Yoga Project (AYP) provides trauma-informed and gender-responsive programming emphasizing health education, character development, yoga, breathing techniques, meditation, creative arts, and writing for youths in detention in San Mateo County. AYP's evidence-based proprietary curriculum, *Wise Inside*, invites youths to develop accountability, well-being, and reflection through monthly themes. These include setting intention, living peacefully, celebrating diversity, respecting oneself, building resilience, honoring gender expansiveness, telling the truth, caring for oneself, knowing oneself, taking responsibility, managing one's emotions, and growing healthy relationships. This evidence-based curriculum guides each class and is delivered by well-trained, seasoned yoga and art instructors. The classes are delivered 2-3 times per week on both the units at the Youth Services Center-Juvenile Hall (Pine and Forrest) and at the Margaret J. Kemp Camp for girls (Camp Kemp).

Programmatic Challenges in Fiscal Year 2022-23

The intake unit at YSC-JH is a larger group with a more transient population, so it can be difficult for the AYP staff to get to know the youths and for them to get to know each other in a way that allows for optimal engagement. The larger group also results in more cross-talk among youth that is distracting for those who are trying to participate. Even with smaller groups at YSC-JH and Camp Kemp, there can occasionally be disengagement, side conversations, and other distractions. However, the AYP teachers manage the curriculum and provide flexible programming that takes these issues into account. Teachers often adjust their classes based on the presentation of the youths once they arrive. Teachers bring in a variety of activities for each class, so there are multiple opportunities for engagement and re-engagement when youth become dysregulated. Teachers return to movement, based on the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT), to refocus and regulate as needed. Sometimes teachers need to hold firm boundaries, emphasizing positive discipline. While the holding of boundaries has been successful in managing certain behaviors, the youths are usually so respectful of the AYP teachers and the yoga practice that they generally quiet down of their own accord.

Evaluation Methods

Programs provided by AYP are funded by San Mateo County Juvenile Probation's (Probation) Youthful Offender Block Grant (YOBG). AYP reports client, service, and outcome data to Probation and its evaluator, Applied Survey Research (ASR). The methods and tools used to collect this data from funded programs include:

- **Participants and Services:** Funded programs collected demographic data (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, etc.) and service data (e.g., type of services, hours of services, etc.) for individual participants. Program staff entered these data into their own data systems prior to transferring the data to ASR for analysis.
- **Outcomes:** AYP also collected three program-specific outcome measures to track progress toward the goal of improving the youths' outcomes:
 - Percentage of youths who report using tools for emotional regulation outside of class;
 - Percentage of youths who report an improvement in interpersonal skills and pro-social behavior; and
 - Percentage of youths who report increased self-awareness and self-respect.
- **Evidence-Based Practices:** YOBG-funded programs are encouraged to follow evidence-based practices. To augment Probation's knowledge of which programs are implemented by funded partners, each funded program provided a catalog of its practices. After receiving this information, ASR runs the cataloged practices reported through several clearinghouses to determine whether each practice is an:¹
 - Evidence-based theory or premise;
 - Evidence-based model, shown by multiple experimental or quasi-experimental studies to be effective;
 - Evidence-based practice or modality shown to promote positive outcomes; and
 - Evidence-based tool or instrument that has been validated (concurrent and predictive).

¹ For the full list of evidence-based practice clearinghouses used to evaluate programs, please see the YOBG and JJRBG Comprehensive Report for FY 2022-23.

Evaluation Findings

FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2022-23 HIGHLIGHTS

- AYP served 119 youths, who spent an average of 2.0 months in the program and received an average of 16.2 hours of service.
- AYP met its target goals for all three performance measures.

PROFILE OF YOUTHS SERVED

AYP served 119 youths for an average of 2.0 months in the program, and 16.2 hours of service per youth in FY 2022-23 (Exhibit 1). Two-thirds (69%) of youths served identified as Hispanic/Latino, 11% identified as Black/African American, 8% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander or White/Caucasian, and 4% identified as another race. Seven in 10 youths self-identified as male (71%), 28% self-identified as female, and 1% as transgender/another gender identity. The average age of youths was 16.5 years old.

Exhibit 1. Youth Services

YOUTH SERVICES	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23
Youths Served	40	78	119
Average Hours Served	15	14.6	16.2
Average Time in Program (Months)	6	3.3	2.0

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

AYP met all of its target goals for its performance measures for FY 2022-23 (Exhibit 2). Eighty percent (80%) of youths reported using tools for emotional regulation outside of class, 85% reported improved interpersonal skills and prosocial behavior, and 85% of youths reported increased self-awareness and self-respect.

Exhibit 2. Program Specific Outcomes

PERFORMANCE MEASURES	FY 20-21	FY 21-22	FY 22-23 TARGET	FY 22-23 RESULTS
Percentage of youths who report using tools for emotional regulation outside of class	85%	83%	75%	80%
Percentage of youths who report an improvement in interpersonal skills and pro-social behavior	87%	84%	75%	85%
Percentage of youths who report increased self-awareness and self-respect	94%	85%	75%	85%

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

In FY 2022-23, YOBG-funded programs were asked to provide the models, curricula, or practices employed in their programs. ASR then evaluated the given information to determine whether they were evidence-based or promising practices by running the items through evidence-based practice clearinghouses including SAMHSA Evidence-Based Practices Resource Center and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide. Exhibit 3 details the practices and curricula that AYP used in its programs.

Exhibit 3. Evidence-based Practices

PRACTICE	IMPLEMENTATION	RATING
<p>Neuro-sequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT)</p>	<p>Wise Inside Curricula (based on Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics): AYP combines yoga, meditation, and expressive arts as part of essential therapeutic interventions to regulate traumatized individuals’ nervous systems and bring them back into balance. The program is based on the Child Trauma Academy’s evidence-based Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) to address the particular needs of system-involved youths. NMT guides AYP’s class sequencing by addressing emotional dysregulation, common in traumatized youths. Their class structure mirrors “bottom-up” brain development by first regulating the brainstem (“survival brain”) through sensory integration and self-regulation, then the limbic system (“feeling brain”) through relational activities, and finally the prefrontal cortex (“learning brain”) through cognitive activities. Another way to explain this sequencing is with the “three R’s” described in the NMT — Regulate, then Relate, then Reason.</p>	<p>Although not recognized as evidence-based or promising practice on its own, the curricula is informed by an evidence-based model.²</p>
<p>Trauma-Informed Practice</p>	<p>AYP brings mindfulness-based practices to system-involved youths for their healing and empowerment. All instructors are trained in the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics which included trauma-informed practice.</p>	<p>The Trauma-Informed approach is evidence-based practice according to SAMHSA.³</p>

CLIENT STORY

Each year, staff at funded programs provide client stories to help illustrate the effect of services on their clients. The following is a client story provided by AYP for FY 2022-23 (Exhibit 4).

² Perry, B.D. (2009). Examining child maltreatment through a neurodevelopmental lens: Clinical application of the neurosequential model of therapeutics. *Journal of Loss and Trauma, 14*, 240-255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15325020903004350>

³ SAMHSA. (2014). SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, p10. Pub ID#: SMA14-4884. <https://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Concept-of-Trauma-and-Guidance-for-a-Trauma-Informed-Approach/SMA14-4884>

Exhibit 4. Client Success Story

Name of client	Justeen (pseudonym)
Age and gender	18, female
Reason for referral	Justeen is at Camp Kemp and attends programming three times a week.
Client’s behavior, affect, and appearance when they first started in the program	When Justeen first joined the program, she would participate intermittently. She often presented with a hood covering her face and did not seem comfortable making eye contact. She was influenced by her peers and seemed to seek out cues for when it was okay to engage. During class, program staff encouraged participants to share how they were feeling and to respond to check-in and check-out questions that reflected on monthly program themes. Justeen would often pass on these opportunities to share or would be smug in her responses. When she said how she was feeling, it was often “bored,” “tired,” or “waiting for this class to be over.” Initially, it was difficult to get to know Justeen, however, sparks of engagement and potential became more noticeable, and staff continued to welcome her into the yoga circle each time she came to class.
Activity engagement and consistency	Attendance at yoga and creative expression classes is generally required on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, with special Saturday classes being offered at the end of each month. If her participation was lacking or she was disruptive, she would be asked to return to her room. Initially, this was sometimes the case. There were other times when her mood and energy were low, particularly a period when she was not sleeping and physically did not seem capable of engaging. However, more recently her attendance has been consistent, and she is much more engaged.
Client’s behavior, affect, and appearance toward the end of the program	In March of this year Justeen began to open up. She has become a leader and positive role model for other youths in the group, actively engaging in movement, sharing her feelings, and contributing to group discussions. Even when Justeen was having a bad day, she generally did not negatively influence other youth and was content to be on her mat and in the space. Sometimes, she was even able to shift her mood and participate positively in aspects of the program. When she did make poor behavioral choices, she was often able to regain control of herself. While experiencing the emotional ups and downs that are a natural part of life, she was comfortable to express her feelings. Justeen initially had difficulty looking the teachers in the eye; she now relates to the teachers in a way that exhibits mutual trust, respect, and care. She often greets them when they arrive, thanks them for being there at the end, and helps to clean up and pack everything away. When she was unable to attend class recently, she made an effort to come say hello to the teachers.
What the client learned as a result of the program	Justeen appears to have gained humility and an appreciation for what staff are doing in the AYP program. She shared that pigeon is her favorite pose. Staff honored Justeen in that class by doing pigeon as a group. After one class, she checked out by saying, “I’m tired because that was a lot of yoga, but I enjoyed it.” She has told staff that she does yoga outside of class, and it shows in her practice. Beyond just doing yoga, Justeen has developed greater body awareness. She can now notice subtle changes in how her body feels when she shifts her position in a pose. She can recognize what works for her and what does not. Justeen is more receptive to continued learning and open to her own growth. In a class when Justeen had some physical pain, we suggested taking a deep breath focusing on the area of pain. She closed her eyes, was breathing deeply, and responded that it felt great. Staff invited her to think about how she can use her breath in other situations, both on and off the yoga mat. During an especially emotional time, staff reminded Justeen that sometimes yoga can help with those feelings and that she has access to the poses and breathing exercises she has learned whenever she wants. She smiled and said she would do some in her room later. With increased confidence and self-efficacy, Justeen willingly applies her learning to support others. She leads poses, games, or closes the class using the ritual way. She also provides support that is more emotional. In one class when a new youth shared that she doesn't care about or trust other people, Justeen quickly offered, “you don't have to, but we got you.”

<p>What the client is doing differently in their life now as a result of the program</p>	<p>With greater mindfulness and focus, Justeen is planning for her future. She is engaging in discussions that help her reflect on and build the skills she needs. In one class she shared that she was reading “What Happened to You,” by Dr. Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey, and how much she is learning about victims of trauma. During a lesson on self-care plans, Justeen shared the importance of sleep, eating well, and coming with a positive mindset. She talked about finishing high school and going to college. During discussions, Justeen recognized that she has had to work hard to complete high school, shared that she felt victorious making it to Phase III, and dreamed out loud of an aspiration to become a travel nurse to help people. More and more, Justeen is showing up “optimistic,” and when she is having feelings of being “numb,” “hateful,” or “irritated,” she seems better equipped to work through those feelings. After a recent journaling exercise, responding to the prompt “why do you do the things you do?” Justeen shared that her negative feelings come from anger and her positive feelings are because she is working toward a better life. Justeen recently graduated high school and gave a speech at the graduation ceremony. Some of the AYP teachers were present and described her as poised, strong, and eloquent, but also humble, grateful, willing to acknowledge past mistakes, and ready to look forward to her future.</p>
<p>The value of the program in the client’s words</p>	<p>Justeen has acknowledged that while she used to not look forward to yoga, now “I am able to do it.” In recent classes, Justeen has presented much more positively, describing herself as feeling, “relaxed,” “content,” “serene,” “peaceful,” “respected,” “hopeful,” “excited,” “energetic,” “confident but impatient,” and “aware.” AYP staff know the real value of the program shows up more organically through her ability to access tools that help her to notice and manage her behavior, emotions, and thoughts in the moment, as well as in the pursuit of longer-term goals for her future.</p>