

### JUVENILE JUSTICE



## Center for Youth Restorative Justice

Kalispell, Montana

200-250

Average number of students served during the school year

50%

Students from low-income families

#### Main funding sources:

- ▶ State and local government
- ▶ Foundation grants
- ▶ Community fundraising
- ▶ Program and service fees

## Serving as a diversion program that provides an alternative to juvenile detention

In the United States, involvement with the juvenile justice system can have a long-lasting negative impact on one's life. For young people placed in detention facilities, their education, their ties to society, and their lives are disrupted. Involvement with the justice system—regardless of incarceration—can have implications for one's future earning potential and career trajectory, limiting access one has to educational opportunities, career fields, and available supports.

Afterschool and summer learning programs can mitigate risk and support the development of protective factors that help keep young people out of the juvenile justice system. The afterschool field can also serve as alternatives to detention that keep youth from re-offending. Through programming opportunities, partnerships, and coordinated efforts, afterschool programs keep young people safe, connect them to the supports they need, and help build protective factors and positive social connections that lead to bright futures.

### Overview

The *Center for Restorative Youth Justice (CRYJ)* serves as a year-round diversion program for youth aged 12-18 in Kalispell, Montana, who have committed minor, low-level offenses. Participants are referred to the program through the county youth courts' juvenile probation officers and complete required programming by attending workshops up to three times a week after school. CRYJ takes a restorative approach and works to build relationships, increase participants' accountability and self-awareness, and decrease recidivism rates in the area.

### A typical day for students

During the school year, students participate in workshops at CRYJ three days a week, from 4 to 6 p.m. Some workshops build specific skills sets, such as workforce readiness, where young people learn how to write a résumé, conduct mock interviews with community business owners, and connect with employment opportunities. Other workshops encourage participants to express themselves through mediums such as visual art, letters to one another, and video projects. CRYJ also emphasizes the importance of building community through food. Program participants eat a meal together at least once a week and CRYJ offers

cooking classes that allow young people to better understand nutrition, branch out and try new foods, and learn to cook meals. During the summer, the program invites the community to a four-course meal that the students host in entirety, from decorating the space to preparing and serving the food.

## Outcomes

On average, the Center for Restorative Youth Justice serves between 200 and 250 youth each year, with a 97 percent program completion rate. An overwhelming majority (96 percent) consistently report that CRYJ had a positive impact on them and 92 percent demonstrate an increased level of accountability, reporting that the program helped them understand the effect of their actions on others. At the community level, CRYJ has helped to keep youth in the community and cut down on out-of-home placements. Chief Juvenile Probation Officer Nick Nyman remarked, “[Before CRYJ], we couldn’t spend money on community services because we spent almost all of it for [out-of-home] placements and our recidivism was off the charts. By focusing on community-based interventions, we’ve been able to drastically reduce the need for out-of-home placements.” The recidivism rate among participants who complete CRYJ is approximately 10 to 15 percent, compared to the national average of 55 percent.

## Program characteristics

Central to CRYJ’s approach is a commitment to restorative practices, which focus on strengthening relationships between individuals and social connections within communities. CRYJ supports youth who have committed a low-level offense by connecting them with peers and the greater community to divert them away from further involvement with the juvenile justice system. Young people begin the intake process with a conference with their family members and CRYJ staff to discuss the challenges youth are facing and what supports they need to overcome those challenges. During this meeting, youth create restorative agreements that outline the terms of their participation, including the number and types of workshops they will attend, the amount of community service they will complete, and any additional activities to accomplish the goals they set for themselves.

CRYJ seeks to build a space for young people to identify, communicate, and process their thoughts and feelings, and learn to create respectful dialogue with their peers. Youth, family members, staff, and community volunteers participate in weekly Community Impact Circles to share their thoughts and personal stories through a process that helps build trust, break down barriers, and foster understanding and accountability between offenders and community members. The program builds their participants’ resiliency and coping skills, connects youth to their community, and helps young people look forward and set positive short- and long-term goals in an effort to prevent future offending.



## Challenges

Each component that helps determine one’s prospects in life—education, employment, and future involvement with the justice system—can be adversely affected by involvement with the juvenile justice system.

**Educational attainment.** Youth in detention are more likely to be below grade level in academic achievement, suspended or been held back a grade in school, and suffering from learning disabilities. Young people who are incarcerated are also less likely to graduate from high school and involvement with the juvenile justice system may preclude youth from entrance to colleges and universities and access to financial aid.

**Employment.** A juvenile crime record can have an impact on young people’s future earning potential and future employment, as many employers consider prior criminal involvement when evaluating candidates. Prior criminal records are a contributing reason why 71 percent of young people aged 17 to 24 are ineligible to serve in the military.

**Future incarceration.** Young people involved with the juvenile justice system are up to 16 percent more likely than their non-involved peers to be incarcerated as adults.

Read [\*From Prevention to Diversion: The Role of Afterschool in the Juvenile Justice System\*](#) to learn more.

## The varying degree of roles that afterschool programs play

Afterschool programs can assist youth at-risk or involved with the juvenile justice system in many ways. Their role can vary depending on a number of factors, including the program's capacity, structure, and partnerships with other groups working with at-risk or justice-involved youth. Broadly, this involvement exists on a spectrum, with prevention being the most expansive category of activities and diversion focusing more specifically on one form of prevention; each of the three categories outlined build off of each other.

### UNIVERSAL

Afterschool programs can help keep youth out of the juvenile justice system by supporting the development of protective factors (such as positive self-concept, interpersonal skills, and ability to make responsible decisions, and providing protective factors) including access to caring mentors and a safe and supportive environment. Programs may also employ specific prevention curricula.

### PREVENTION

### SPECIALIZED

Afterschool programs can target their outreach and programming to connect with at-risk youth in the community and prevent them from getting involved with the juvenile justice system. For example, through partnerships with community stakeholders, such as schools, social workers, juvenile justice courts or probation offices, and/or law enforcement agencies, programs may receive referrals to reach youth who are in need of their services and supports.

### TARGETED PROGRAMMING

### INTENSIVE

Afterschool programs can serve as an alternative to out-of-home placements or typical probation program and focus on connecting youth with resources and supports that help address root causes of their behavior, redirect them, and prevent future offending. Programming is intentionally designed for this purpose and youth are explicitly referred to the program.

### DIVERSION

## Program history

The Center for Restorative Youth Justice began in 1997 as a peer court designed to provide a diversion program for first-time, minor offenders in response to the rise of juvenile crime in the county. After 10 years, internal conversations regarding the peer court shifted toward a restorative-focused, programming-centered approach. Since then, CRYJ has evolved to create its own unique diversion model that supports peer-to-peer connections and offers system-involved youth the opportunity to build skills, develop relationships with community members, and participate in volunteer service projects.

## Recommendations

*for serving as a diversion program that provides an alternative to juvenile detention:*

- ▶ Build programs that improve supportive networks for young people. For example, identify community volunteers who can also foster relationships outside of program hours (school and work environments, coaches and clubs, etc.).
- ▶ Emphasize consistent voice and choice, where youth can honestly express their perspectives and needs, feel respected and take ownership for how they spend their time, positively contribute to group time, and develop confidence in new experiences.



**Afterschool Alliance**

[afterschoolalliance.org](https://afterschoolalliance.org)