

Lane County
Department of Youth Services

Youth Courts
Program Evaluation

June 2004



Contact:

Linda Wagner, Management Analyst
541.682.4792
Linda.M.Wagner@co.lane.or.us

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FINDINGS IN BRIEF

Youth courts are community-based programs for primarily first-time juvenile offenders. Their function is to determine a fair and restorative consequence for these juveniles. While youth courts have grown in popularity and number, the number of rigorous evaluations on this diversion service is very limited. Research staff at the Lane County Department of Youth Services (Youth Services) conducted an evaluation of local youth courts as part of their on-going evaluation of all programs. The evaluation design included a comparison group of similar juvenile offenders who received a warning letter from Youth Services.

Findings indicate that youth courts graduates had significantly fewer crimes than the letter group. The difference is statistically significant with long-term follow-up. The percent and number of juveniles who did not re-offend during the follow-up period includes:

Follow-up Time	Juveniles Who Did Not Re-offend	
	Youth Courts	Letter Group (comparison group)
1-year	84.4% (140 of 165)	78.4% (163 of 208)
2-years	80.7% (117 of 145)	70.7% (133 of 188)
3 years	81.4% (48 of 59)	64.6% (53 of 82)

The evaluation also includes a cost / benefit overview. It found that at the two-year follow-up period the youth courts group was ten percent (10%) more effective at reducing crime. This efficacy produced over \$325,000 in cost savings when looking at the probability of re-offending.

These findings support national research concerning the need for appropriate responses for juvenile offenders along the entire continuum of acting out behavior. Findings of this nature have traditionally been met by a call for more severe responses for first-time offenders. This point of view is very common among audiences with limited exposure to research on effective delinquency interventions. That research has proven that intensive corrections responses with low risk offenders actually increases delinquency (this is discussed further with specific citations in the latter part of this report). Hence, findings from this report do not advocate for more *intensive* responses for low risk first-time offenders. Instead, it shows appropriate diversion responses for this population are more effective and cost efficient than the letter response.

I. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

Youth court programs are often referred to as “teen courts” or “peer courts.” For purposes of this report, the term “youth courts” is meant to be an all-inclusive term.

In 1994, there were 78 youth court programs in operation in the nation; as of February 2004, there were 897 programs in operation in 48 states and the District of Columbia. Agencies operating and administering youth court programs include juvenile courts, juvenile probation departments, law enforcement, private nonprofit organizations, and schools¹. Lane County has the following youth courts:

- Cottage Grove Peer Court
- Fern Ridge Peer Court
- Mapleton / Florence Peer Court
- Bethel Teen Court
- West Eugene Teen Court
- Oakridge Peer Court
- Springfield Together Peer Court

These programs are funded through a mix of federal formula grants from the Office Of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant funds) and, for some courts, local municipality funding.

Youth courts’ staff work with the Lane County Department of Youth Services (Youth Services) to identify juvenile offenders who are eligible for the program. Youth Services is the juvenile justice provider for Lane County. Juveniles eligible for youth courts commit certain types of criminal acts or behavior violations. The former (criminal activity) can include theft, trespass, criminal mischief, harassment, and other misdemeanor property crimes. The latter (behavior violations) can include possession of less than an ounce of marijuana, minor in possession of alcohol, and / or minor in possession of tobacco or status offenses like curfew violations. These offenders are typically first time offenders who do not have a pattern of lawbreaking activities.

The function of youth courts is to determine a fair and restorative consequence for the juvenile offender. The youth court is a diversion program in that juveniles receive these community-based services as opposed to interventions from the formal juvenile justice system (Youth Services), which is an incentive for program participation. Another benefit is that participants, after successful completion of the program, may petition Youth Services to have their record expunged (the record is removed from the system).

At the youth court, juvenile offenders appear in front of a group of peers who determine appropriate consequences for offenders, e.g., community service, restitution to victims, voluntary treatment for delinquency related problems (drug treatment, counseling), etc. The primary goal of working with juvenile offenders in these local youth courts is to provide a) accountability for their delinquent behavior and b) community restoration. The

primary goal for youth volunteers and participants in this program is to build leadership skills and civic responsibility.

As seen nationally, local youth courts use different models. Youth court models vary and can include having an adult judge, youth judge, peer jury, or youth tribunal models. All work with the juvenile justice provider to identify eligible youth and track program status for each individual.

II. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY:

Background - While Youth Courts have gained popularity around the nation, there has been limited focus on measuring program efficacy through rigorous evaluations. One notable national evaluation reportedⁱⁱ:

The findings of the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project indicate that teen courts and youth courts may be preferable to the normal juvenile justice process in jurisdictions that do not or cannot, provide meaningful sanctions for all youth, first-time juvenile offenders.

In all three sites, the Youth Court participants were less likely to commit new offenses and re-referred to the juvenile justice system. In two of the sites, this difference was statistically significant.

This national study used research methods not commonly applied to youth court evaluations including: a) based on a multi-site review of youth courts, b) tracked re-offense rates for participants and c) compared participants' rates to juvenile offenders receiving traditional responses from the juvenile justice system. The comparison aspect is particularly beneficial. Unfortunately, the follow-up time was limited to six months and the comparison group included a "mixed bag" of juveniles who received anything from a warning letter to informal adjustments from the juvenile justice system. While findings from this national study are very promising, further analyses are needed to either challenge or strengthen the confidence in these positive data.

The Lane County Department of Youth Services' (Youth Services) research and development coordinator provides data on juvenile crime including trend information, performance measures and program evaluations for all internal services for juvenile offenders and for external programs where providers have a contract with Youth Services. The review of local youth courts was conducted to answer local questions about program efficacy.

A key aspect of the local evaluation was to find a similar group of juvenile offenders who did not receive a youth court intervention and compare their re-offense rates to youth court participants' rates. The comparison group had to be as similar to the youth court

group as possible. Otherwise, any differences between the groups could influence outcomes and call any findings, positive or negative, into suspect.

To mitigate this issue, the local program evaluation used a comparison group that was as similar as possible to juveniles referred to a youth court in Lane County. The goal was to match for demographic items, type of offense and offense number. The comparison group, however, did not work with staff at Youth Services. Instead, they received warning letters from Youth Services. The letter response is typically utilized for juveniles charged with minor crimes which are closed at intake. It allows their families to deal with the delinquent activity or status offenses.

Sample – The first phase of sampling included the identification of all first time referrals to youth courts or Youth Services between 1999 and 2001. There were a total of 995 juveniles in this pool; 438 youth court juveniles and 557 juveniles referred to Youth Services. The sample of youth courts participants was selected from established courts. It was not feasible to conduct a “court by court” evaluation because the sample size at each court, and their respective follow-up time, was limited. Youth from various courts were combined into this single review. However, performance measures for each youth court is updated on a quarterly basis but not represented in this report.

The matching sequencing was based on referral number, type of crime, age at offense, race / ethnicity and gender. After that work, preliminary analyses were conducted in order to establish the evaluation sample.

That work eliminated cases that could not be included in the study because they were either:

- Active with a youth court
- Missing information or, for other reasons, could not be matched
- Had been referred for drug violations and went to an alcohol or other drug (AOD) diversion program in the community.

Juveniles with AOD violations were referred to Youth Services for minors in possession of alcohol, possession of less than an ounce of marijuana and / or tobacco referrals. These offenders did not typically receive a warning letter from Youth Services. Instead, they were referred to a diversion program in the community. In order not to confuse that group with those that received a “warning letter” they were removed from this study.

There were 174 juveniles with these AOD violations and who were diverted to an alcohol and other drug treatment program in the community. They had 57 counterparts who were referred to youth courts. The outcomes for these groups will be reviewed after the size of the youth courts group increases to a larger sample.

Typically, Youth Services program evaluations include all youth referred to a program and tracks outcomes based on sub groups, e.g., those that graduate, non-graduates, and even those that never attend a program after they are referred to it.

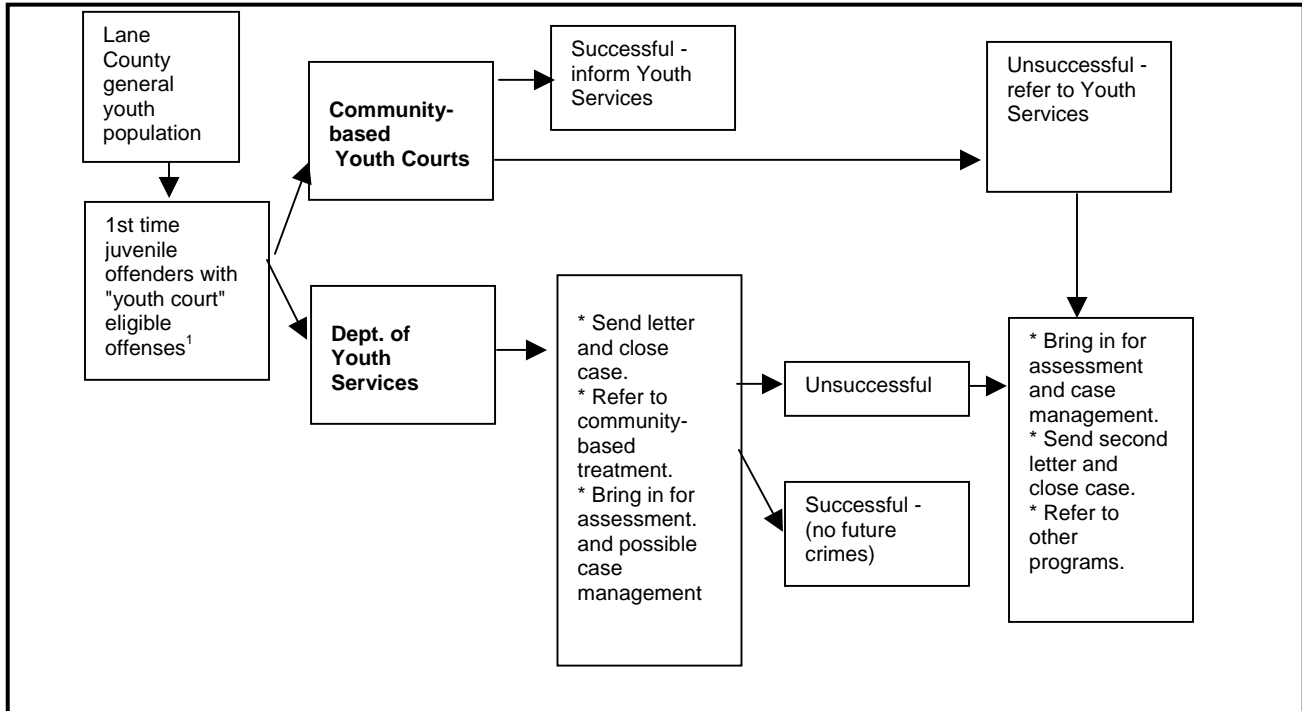
However, this was not feasible in this study. Youth courts participants experienced a high completion rate of 70 percent, which left a relatively small number of those who did not complete (55 was the total number). The comparison group did not have a similar sub-group. The letter group did not have completed or non-completed status for matching purposes. Therefore, in order to ensure a consistent application of standards between youth court participants and the comparison group, the evaluation focused on a comparison of outcome measures between graduates from youth courts and a similar group of juvenile offenders who received the letter.

After removing unusable data from the sample and completing the matching process, there was a group of youth courts graduates and a matched pool of offenders who received the warning letter. The latter sample was larger because there may have been more than one youth who matched a single youth court graduate. There was a total of 401 youth in the final study:

- 193 youth courts graduates
- 208 letter group.

Table one (1) represents the flow of juveniles to, and between, youth courts and Youth Services.

Table 1: Client Flow Chart



1 - Case management for other offenders is not represented in this chart.

Measurements and Analyses – Outcome measures for this study focused on post program recidivism (re-offense) rates. Clearly, youth courts efforts are broader than reducing future juvenile crime. Another primary focus of these programs is to increase leadership skills and civic responsibility for youth who volunteer in them (e.g., those who serve as judges, jury, etc.) and for offenders who participate in them. While that work is important, it is out of the scope of this project to conduct analyses of these measures.

"Recidivism" rates are the primary outcome measurement for Youth Services performance measures and program evaluations. Data on these rates are based on a standardized statewide definition of "re-offending" behavior. It includes all criminal referrals after an identified point in time, e.g., first referral or program intervention date, etc.

Analyses of recidivism data include tracking the following measures:

- Percent With No New Referrals (Do Not Re-offend) – This is used in all analyses but is the primary outcome measurement for juveniles engaged in the early parts of the system. This is the main measurement in this study.
- Percent With 1 or 2 New Referrals – These juveniles go on to commit one or two new referrals during the tracking time. They do continue in their delinquent behavior, but it does not become chronic. This is also tracked in this study.
- Percent Chronic Offenders – "Chronic" is defined as three or more new referrals during an identified follow-up period. It is the primary "system" or "decision point" measurement, e.g., when reviewing all juveniles referred to DYS or referred to a specific division. It is also included in this study.
- Percent Change In Recidivism – This measurement is used to look at changes in criminal behavior before and after an intervention. It is the primary measurement at the program level for juveniles involved in the juvenile justice system. Early diversion programs, like youth courts, are more focused on diverting them from the system. Hence, measures concerning non-recidivates and diversion from chronic delinquency are more appropriate for this study.

Recidivism data for youth courts graduates and juveniles in the comparison group were compared and chi-square analyses were conducted to test the statistical significance of the results.

Tracking Period – The groups were tracked for twelve (12), twenty-four (24), and thirty-six (36) months after the intervention date. Recidivism data in these time periods are cumulative and not single counts for those months. For example, of the total juveniles in this study (401), 373 had at least one year of follow up time. Of the 373, 333 had two years. Recidivism at the 24-month mark represents total criminal referrals for a time up to 24 months. One hundred and forty-one (141) of the 333 had an additional twelve months since the referral date and were tracked for a total of three years.

Most recidivism studies in juvenile justice track youth for one year. Two years is a significant follow-up period in the field, and three years or more are the exception in general research. There are studies, however, that track juveniles for more than three years but those research endeavors typically have incentives (money) to give to youth to stay in contact with the evaluators. Youth Services does not use funds for this purpose and ends follow-up time at the three-year mark. The numbers in each time period include:

Table 2. Sample Size per Follow-up Period – Criminal Group

Follow-up Time	Youth Courts	Letter	Total
12 months	165	208	373
24 months	145	188	333
36 months	59	82	141

While there were 401 in the total sample, 28 juveniles had less than one-year follow-up time. Each year has a significant number of participants for analysis purposes except for year three where the youth courts sample is marginal.

Evaluation Limitations – Outcome data for the three year follow-up time is weaker because of the lower number of youth courts graduates with that much follow-up time. It may be difficult in the future to track these youth beyond two years because of the expungement rates.

In addition, there were limitations in the matching process that are described in the following section.

III. POPULATION DESCRIPTIONS:

Despite meticulous efforts, it was not possible to completely match on all criteria. The matching on referral number, type of referral, and age was much stronger than on gender and race / ethnicity. Also, it was not possible to match participants on the voluntary nature of the youth courts program.

Referral Number – The groups were matched on the referral number. This item is relevant because additional referrals increase the probability of re-offending. To make sure the groups were as similar as possible, they had to be matched by referral number. Detailed information on referral number is not provided in this report, as these were an exact match on this item.

Type of Referral – The type of crime is not a strong a predictor of future crime. However, youth were matched on this item to minimize any unknown bias from this characteristic. There was a relatively strong match on type of crime. The following percentages are based on:

- 163 total juveniles in the youth courts group
- 208 total juveniles in the letter group

Both groups had a majority of offenders with “theft” crimes:

- Youth courts = 64.4% (105)
- Letter group = 57.2% (119)

There was a similar representation of offenders with criminal mischief and trespassing.

- Youth courts for criminal mischief = 11.7% (19)
- Letter group for criminal mischief = 10.1% (21)
- Youth courts for trespassing = 4.3% (7)
- Letter group for trespassing = 5.8% (12)

The comparison or letter group has a higher representation of offenders with non-criminal offenses. These include referrals for curfew and tobacco violations:

- Youth courts = 11.7% (19)
- Letter group = 22.1% (46).

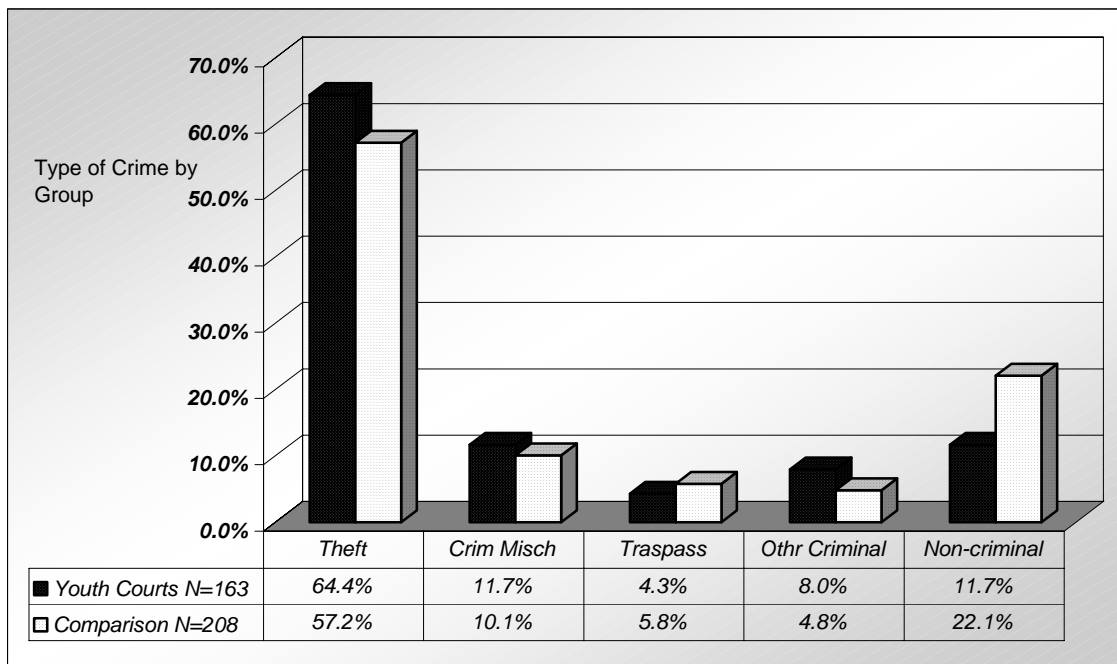
“Other criminal” includes mail theft, burglary 2, weapon charges, disorderly conduct, and harassment. Each of these crimes had less than five referrals respectively – most only had one or two.

Table 3 and Chart A on the following page illustrate this information.

Table 3: Type of Crime by Group

	Youth Courts	Letter	Total
Theft	105	119	224
Crim. Misch.	19	21	40
Trespass	7	12	19
Other Criminal	13	10	23
Non-criminal	19	46	65
Total:	163	208	371

Chart A: Type of Crime by Group:



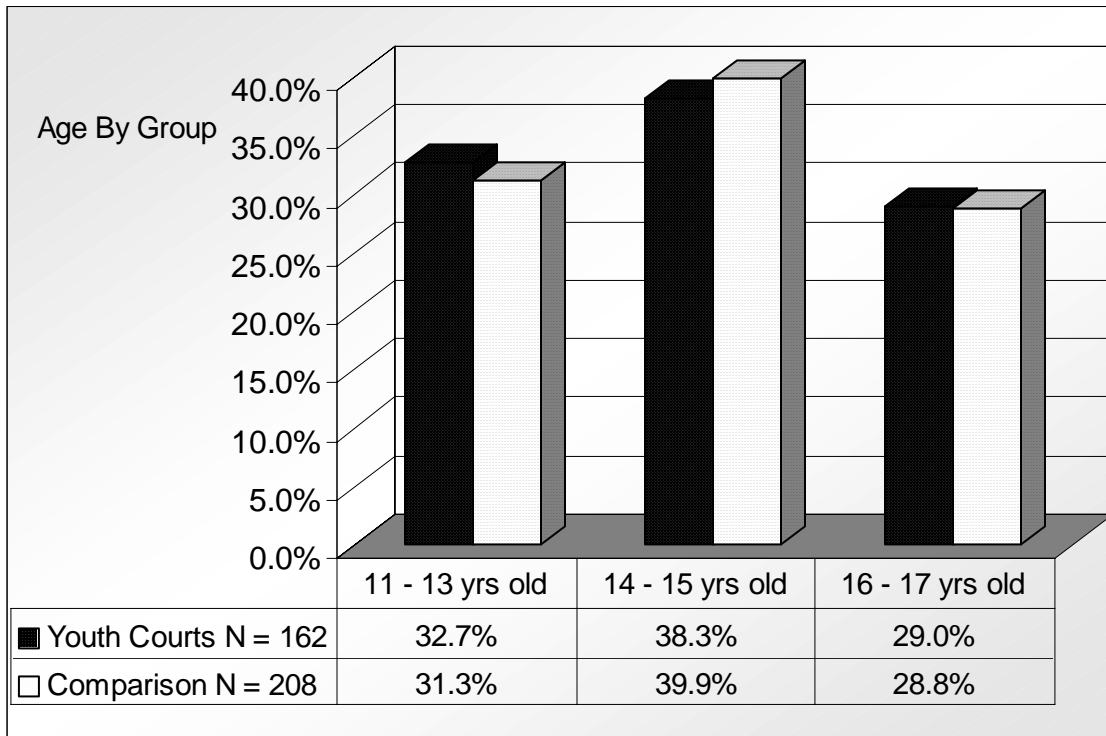
Age At Referral - There is a strong match by age at referral. Matching on age is important because research indicates that younger offenders have a greater likelihood of becoming chronic / serious delinquents.ⁱⁱⁱ Each group had between 31 and 33% in the 11 – 13 year old age group; 38 to 40% in the 14 to 15 age group and 28 to 29% in the 16 to 17 age group.

The table and chart below illustrate the extent to which participants in each group were similar based on age at referral; again showing the actual number and percentages.

Table 4: Age at Referral by Group:

	Youth Courts	Letter	Total
11 - 13 yrs old	53	65	118
14 - 15 yrs old	62	83	145
16 - 17 yrs old	47	60	107
Total:	162	208	370

Chart B: Age by Group:



Race / Ethnicity -. Matching on all the other factors and race / ethnicity was problematic due to the lower representation of ethnic minority youth in the matching pool. Youth Courts had ten ethnic minority youth and the letter group had two.

The table and charts below illustrate the extent to which participants in each group were similar based on race / ethnicity.

Table 5: Race / Ethnicity by Group

	Youth Courts	Letter	Total
Native American	2		2
Asian Pac Island	1	1	2
African American	2	1	3
Unknown	5		5
Caucasian	89	206	295
Total:	99	208	307

Chart C: Race / Ethnicity By Group

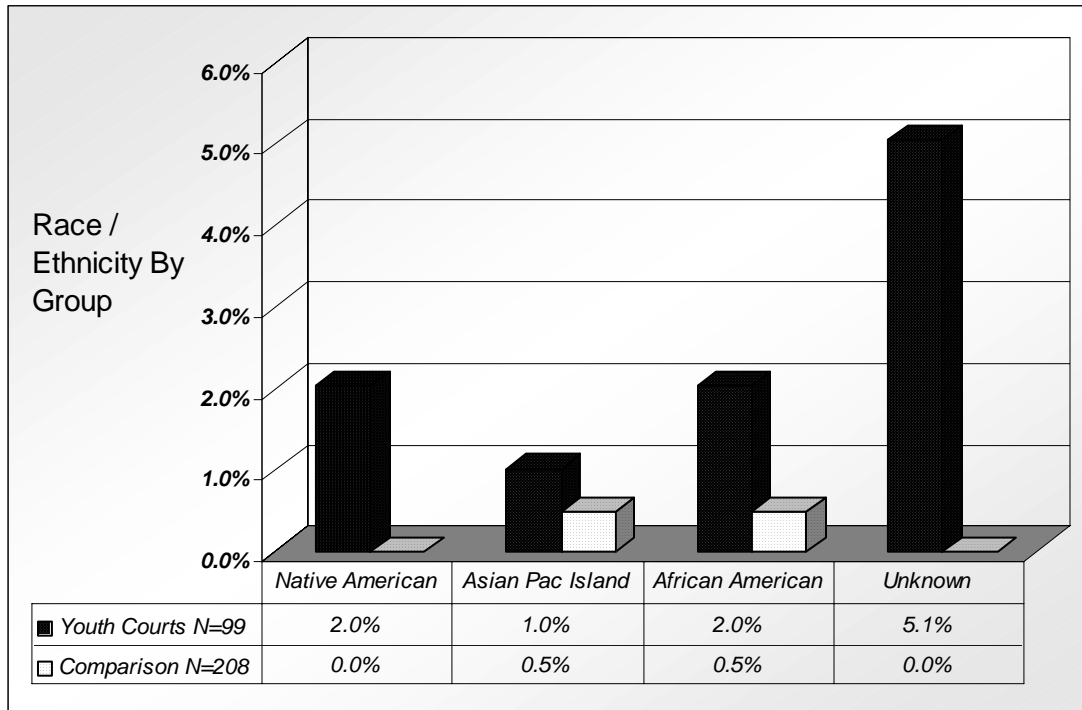
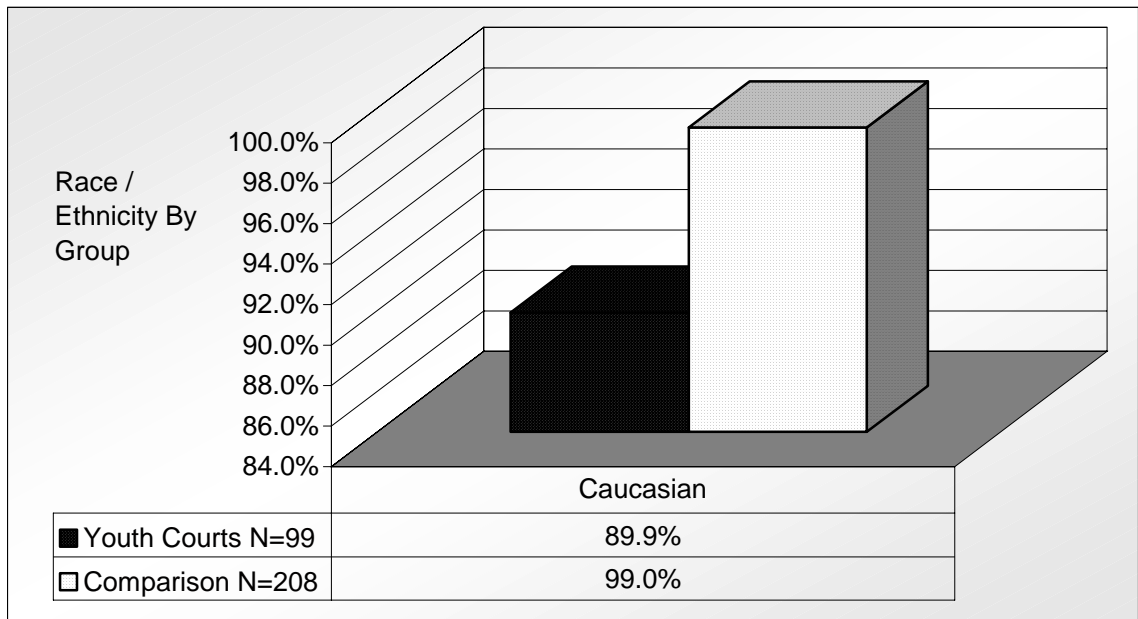


Chart D: Race / Ethnicity by Group – Caucasian Only



These data are presented on a separate chart because the larger percentiles dwarf smaller data on the previous chart.

Gender – The gender distribution between the youth courts and letter group had a propensity to bias the letter group in a positive direction because that group had a larger percentage of female participants. Youth Services baseline recidivism data indicates that of all juvenile offenders referred to Youth Services and tracked for twenty-four months, females were not as delinquent as their male counterparts. These findings are similar in national studies of juvenile offenders.

The baseline study of all Lane County offenders referred to Youth Services suggest the following for a twenty-four month follow-up period:^{iv}

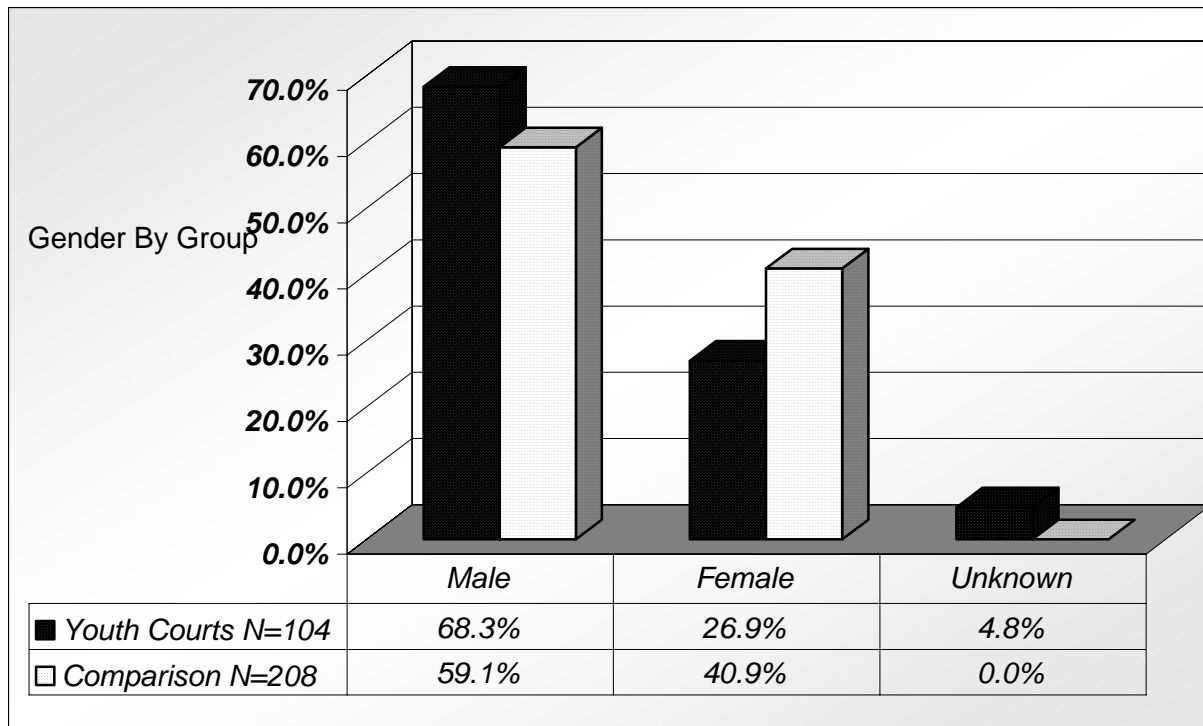
- 68.4% (320 of 468) of juvenile female offenders did not re-offend
- 53.5% (674 of 1,261) of juvenile male offenders did not re-offend

Hence, if the letter group did better than the youth courts participants on outcome measures, one could argue that their success was based as much on the lower risk group than on the impact of the letter response. As described in section “IV. Findings,” however, this was not the case.

Table 6: Gender by Group

	Youth Courts	Comparison	Total:
Male	71	123	194
Female	28	85	113
Unknown	5	0	5
Total:	104	208	312

Chart E: Gender by Group:



IV. FINDINGS

The youth courts evaluation questions are:

- What is the impact of youth court programs on recidivism and how do those outcomes compare to a similar group of juveniles not referred to youth courts?
- What are the costs / benefits of these outcomes?

Overall, youth courts graduates had lower rates of recidivism than the letter (comparison) group in long-term follow-up. The difference was statistically significant at the two and three year follow-up period. The findings are even more significant given the fact that youth courts graduates were predisposed, in some ways, to do worse than the letter group because of the uneven gender distribution (see previous two pages).

Findings are presented for the one, two, and three year tracking period. The analysis for each tracking period looked at the extent to which they had:

- No new referrals
- One or two new referrals
- Three or more new referrals (this is considered the chronic group)

Recidivism For One-year Follow-up – A summary of the one-year follow-up includes:

- Of the 401 juveniles in the study, 373 had a minimum of one-year follow-up. There were 165 in the youth courts group and 208 in the letter group. The remaining 28 had less than one year and were not included in these data.
- The youth courts group had the greatest percentage of juveniles who did not re-offend as compared to the comparison group. The difference is not statistically significant at the one-year follow-up.
- The youth courts group had a lower representation of offenders who went on to commit one or two additional new criminal referrals as compared to youth courts graduates.
- Very few offenders in either group became chronic offenders.

Table 7 and Charts F – H on the following pages illustrate this summary.

Table 7: 1 Year Follow-up

1 Year Follow-up	Youth Court Graduates (N=165)		Comparison letter Group (N=208)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Did not Re-offend	140	84.8%	163	78.4%
1 Or 2 New Criminal Referrals	21	12.7%	39	18.8%
3 Or More Criminal Referrals (Chronic Offenders)	4	2.4%	6	2.9%
Total:	165	99.9%	208	100.1%

Chart F: 1-Year Follow-up – Percent Did Not Re-offend

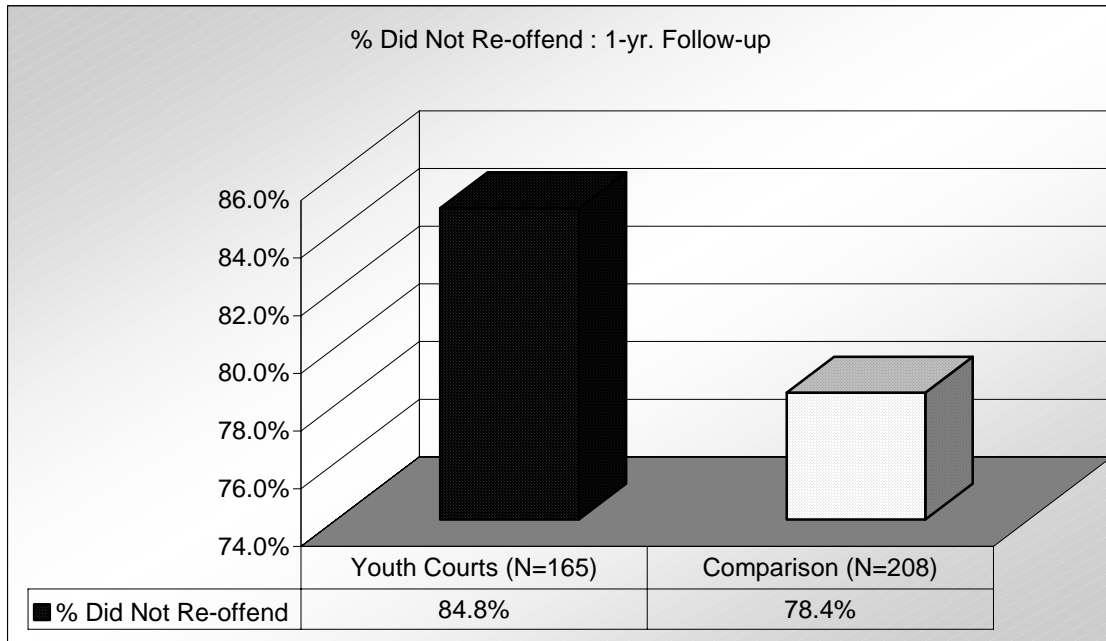


Chart G: 1-Year Follow-up – Percent With 1 or 2 New Criminal Referrals

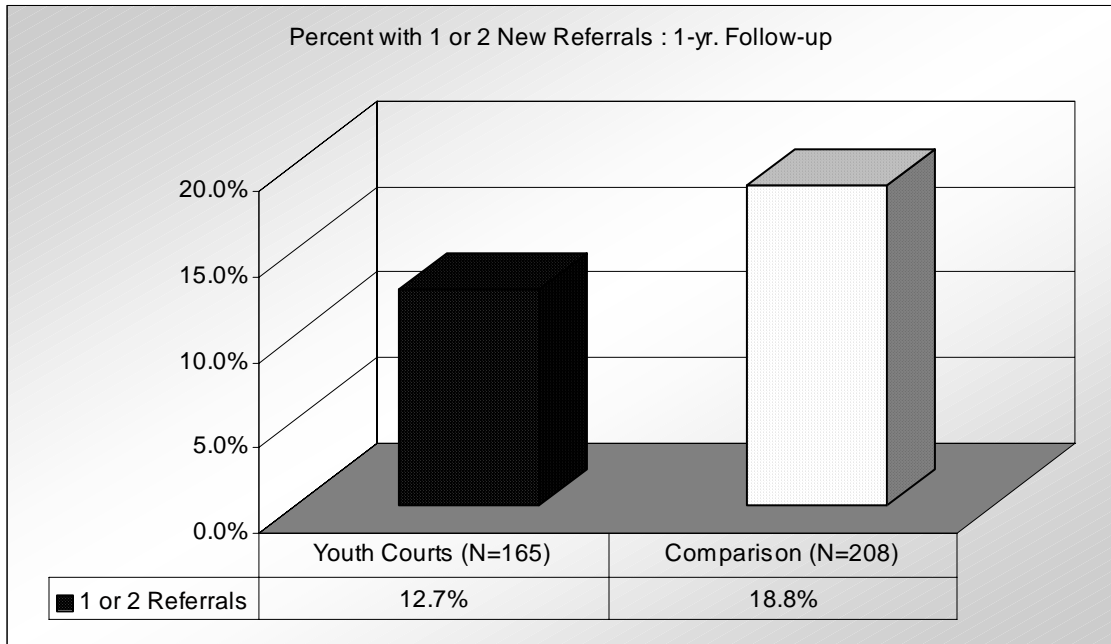
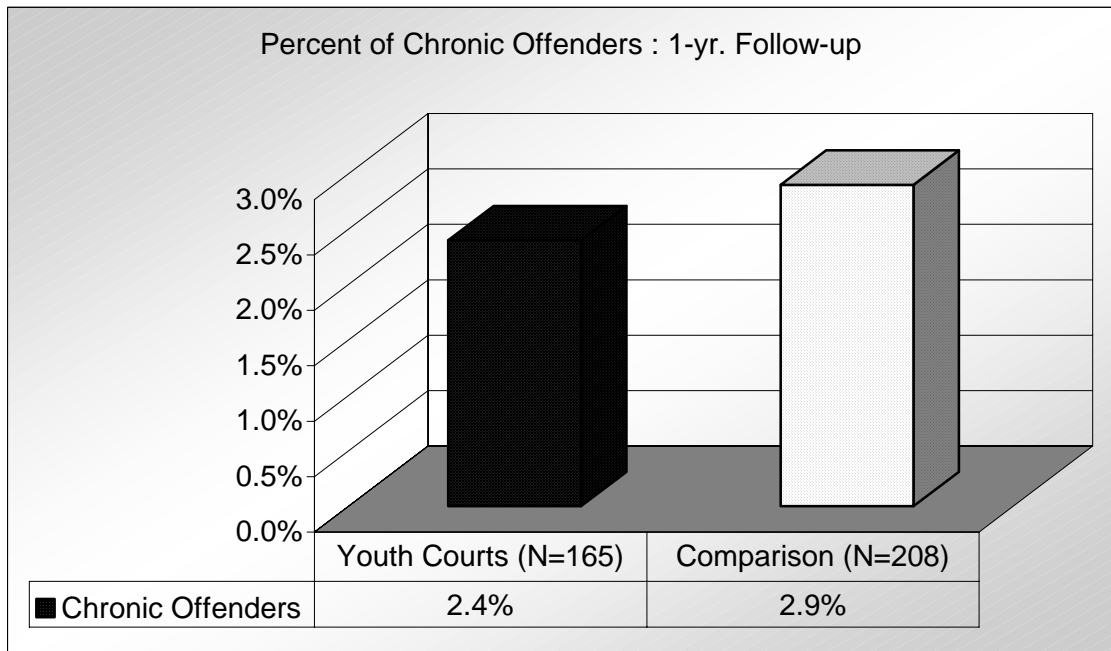


Chart H: 1-Year Follow-up – Percent of Chronic Offenders



Recidivism For 2-year Follow-up – A summary of the two-year follow-up includes:

- There were 333 juveniles with a minimum of two years follow-up period. The youth courts group had 145 juveniles and the letter group had 188.
- The youth courts group had the greatest percentage of juveniles who did not re-offend as compared to the letter group. Though slight, the difference is statistically significant at the two-year follow-up.¹
 - 80.7% (117) of the youth courts group did not re-offend
 - 70.7% (133) of the letter group did not re-offend
- The youth courts group had less representation in offenders who went on to commit one or two additional criminal referrals:
 - 15.2% (22) of juveniles in the youth courts group
 - 23.4% (44) of the letter group
- Very few offenders in either group became chronic offenders (3 or more new criminal referrals):

This part of the study also pulled in another group as a point of reference – not a comparison as they were not matched on demographics, etc. Instead, it included all first time offenders referred to Youth Services regardless of disposition. Some cases may have been closed, some sent a letter, and others diverted to community-based diversion programs or brought in for an assessment. A review of this group at this point is important when looking at the question, “Overall, how many first time offenders become chronic?” It provides a point of reference. A summary of the chronic offenders includes:

- Both the youth courts and the letter group had fewer juveniles in the chronic group than baseline data. The reason(s) for this difference is unknown without further analysis of those data.
- 4.1% (6) of juveniles in the youth courts group became chronic offenders
- 5.9% (11) of the letter group became chronic
- 9% (92 of 1,022) of first time offenders become chronic offenders after two years (based on all first-time offenders referred to Youth Services regardless of disposition)

Table 8 and charts I – K illustrate this summary.

¹ p <.05

To follow is a table and charts that illustrate this information.

Table 8: Two-year Follow-up

2 Years Follow-up	Youth Court Graduates (N=145)		Letter Group (N=188)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Did not Re-offend	117	80.7%	133	70.7%
1 or 2 New Criminal Referrals	22	15.2%	44	23.4%
3 or more Criminal Referrals (Chronic Offenders)	6	4.1%	11	5.9%
Total:	145	100%	188	100%

Chart I: Two-year Follow-up – Percent that did not re-offend

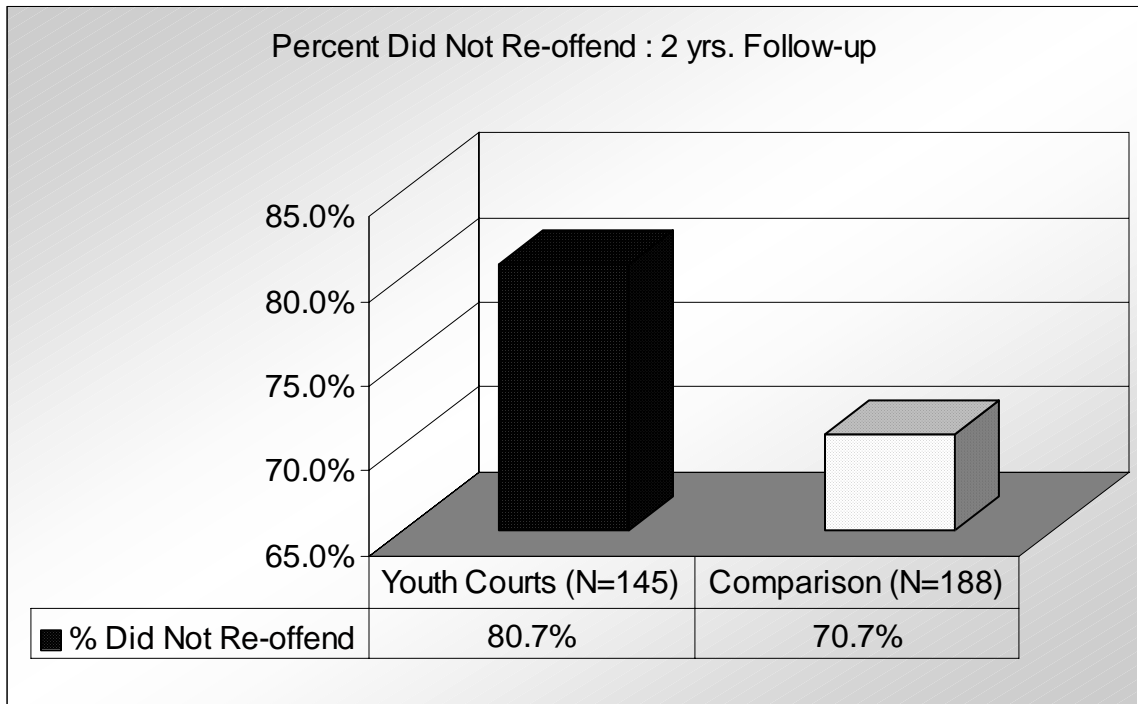


Chart J: Two-Year Follow-up – Percent with one or two Criminal Referrals

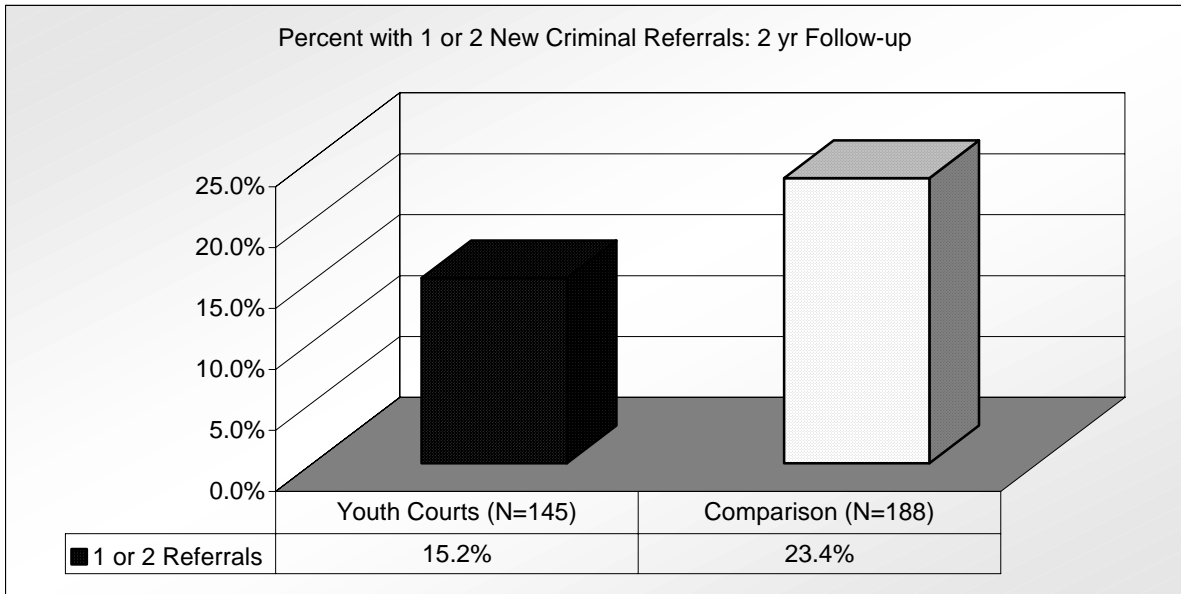
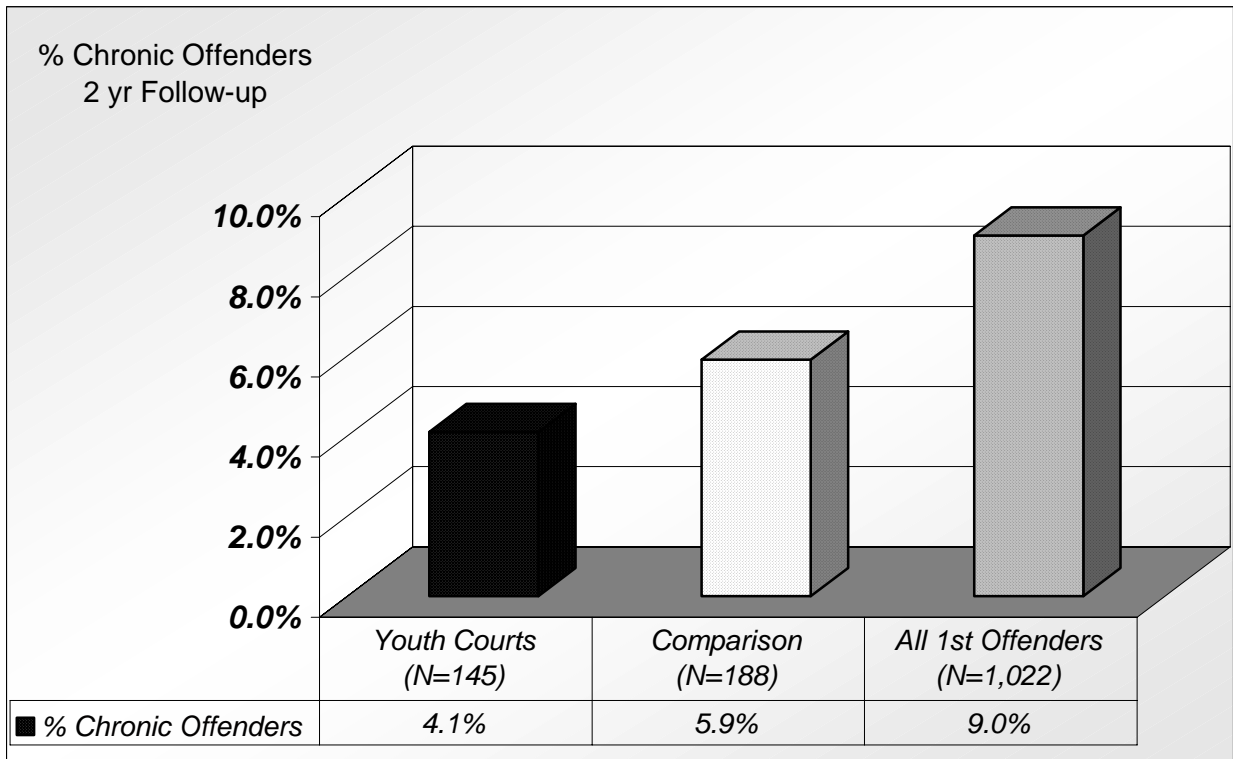


Chart K: Two-year follow-up – Percent Chronic Offenders



Recidivism For 3-year Follow-up – A summary of the three-year follow-up includes:

- Of the 401 juveniles in the study, 141 had a minimum of three-years follow-up. There were 59 in the youth courts group and 82 in the letter group. The number of youth in the youth courts group is at the threshold for a strong enough sample size (sixty and above is needed). In addition, the numbers in each follow-up category (did not re-offend, 1 or 2 new referrals, 3 or more new referrals) become very small.
- The youth courts group had the greatest percentage of juveniles who did not re-offend as compared to the comparison group. The difference is statistically significant at the three-year follow-up.²
 - 81.4% (48) of the youth courts group did not re-offend
 - 64.6% (53) of the letter group did not re-offend
- The letter group had a greater representation of juveniles who went on to commit one or two additional new criminal referrals.
 - 13.6% (8) of the youth courts group did not re-offend
 - 26.9% (22) of the letter group did not re-offend
- Very few of offenders in either group became chronic offenders.
 - 5.1% (3) of the youth courts group became chronic offenders
 - 8.5% (7) of the letter group became chronic offenders

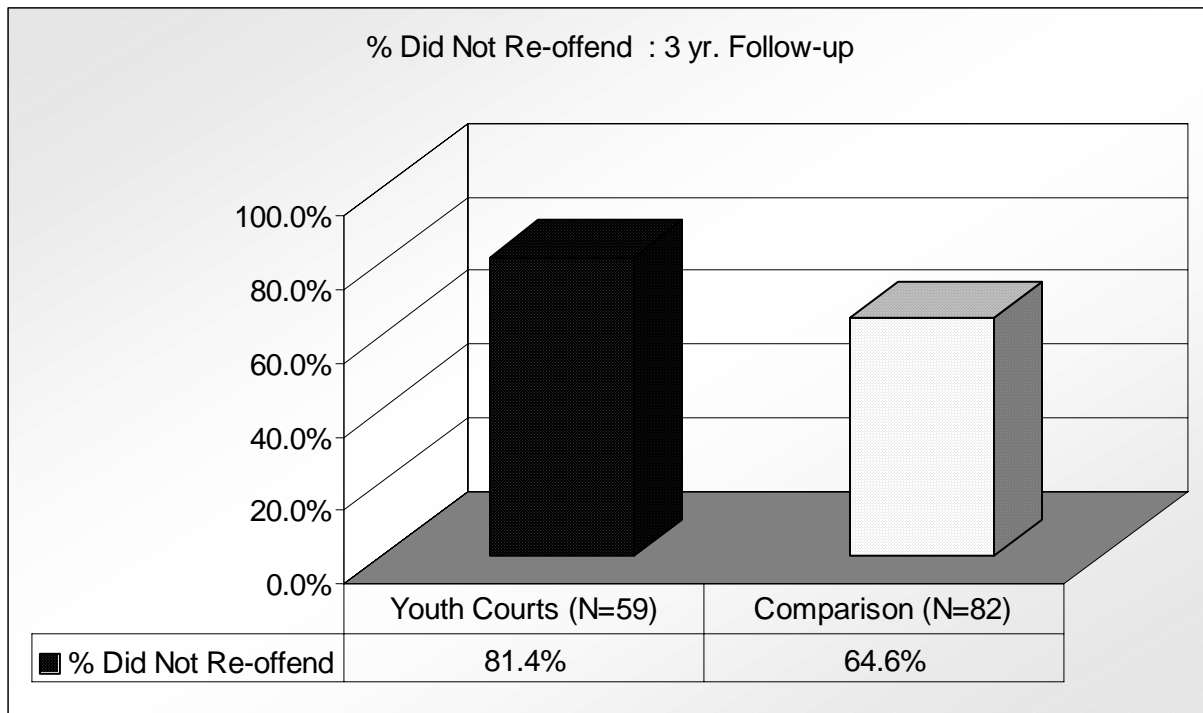
Table 9 and Chart L illustrate this summary.

² P < .05

Table 9: Three-year Follow-up

3 Years Follow-up	Youth Court Graduates (N=59)		Comparison letter Group (N=82)	
	Number	%	Number	%
Did not Re-offend	48	81.4%	53	64.6%
1 or 2 New Criminal Referrals	8	13.6%	22	26.9%
3 or more Criminal Referrals (chronic Offenders)	3	5.1%	7	8.5%
Total:	59	100.1%	82	100%

Chart L: Three-year follow-up – Percent did not re-offend



Cost / Benefit Background –Research on the costs and benefits of delinquency reduction programs is very limited and incongruent. The state of Oregon is working on a cost / benefit formula for state funded juvenile justice programs. In the interim, Youth Services has developed very simplistic calculations in order to quantify the cost of juvenile crime and crime reduction efforts. The youth courts study included a cost savings review and used the following proxies to determine that savings:

- The cost of a single referral is \$9,265. It is based on costs to a) victims; b) the juvenile justice system; c) law enforcement; and d) court costs including defense, prosecution, etc. It is considered very conservative and is used consistently as a local cost proxy.
- The average cost of the youth court program is \$197 per youth
- The average cost for Youth Services to send out letters and track outcome of youth diverted to community services is \$236 per youth

The juvenile corrections costs are “fully loaded” costs as they include costs for personnel, indirect costs, building costs, training, etc.

The two-year tracking time was used because the sample size at three years is limited. The youth courts and letter groups had different sample sizes at year two so the cost calculations used the total sample size at two years (333) and the percent known to re-offend in each group. Those data included:

- 333 total juveniles at the two year follow-up period
- 64 youth courts graduates did re-offend (based on findings that showed 19.3% of that group had subsequent referrals – $19.3\% \text{ of } 333 = 64$)
- 98 letter juveniles did re-offend (based on findings that showed 29.3% of that group had subsequent referrals)

Findings - The youth courts group was ten percent (10%) more effective at reducing future juvenile crime. This efficacy produced \$325,530 in cost savings after two years when looking at the probability of re-offending. The group that did re-offend created the following costs:

- \$605,568 for the youth courts group
- \$931,098 for the letter group
- \$325,530 savings by the youth courts group

Table 10 on the following page illustrates these findings.

Table 10: Cost / benefits based on re-offending population

Total Number of Juveniles at Two Years = 333	Youth Courts	Letter
Cost Variables:		
Cost per referral:	\$9,265	\$9,265
Intervention Costs	\$197	\$236
Recidivism Variables:		
% DID re-offend	19.3%	29.3%
# DID re-offend (based on % who did not re-offend of the total group of 333 juveniles)	64	98
Costs:		
Total intervention costs	\$12,608	\$23,128
Post crime costs	\$592,960	\$907,970
Total Costs	\$605,568	\$931,098
Cost Savings (after 2 years)	\$325,530	

V. SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Summary - Findings in this study indicate youth courts graduates had significantly fewer crimes than juvenile offenders with a letter response from the juvenile justice system. This corroborates findings from the national study quoted at the introduction of this report:

The findings of the Evaluation of Teen Courts Project indicate that teen courts and youth courts may be preferable to the normal juvenile justice process in jurisdictions that do not or cannot, provide meaningful sanctions for all youth, first-time juvenile offenders (p.4)

The emerging youth courts evaluations indicate that a strategic response is more effective and cost efficient than a non-response (letter) even for low risk first time offender and / or offenders with a low probability of becoming chronic. It greatly supports the need to have appropriate diversion services for first / second time offenders.

This work does not suggest that first-time juvenile offenders should be referred to more severe parts of the juvenile justice system. It has long been known that more intensive corrections responses for low risk offenders actually increases delinquency.^v It also does not suggest that higher risk juvenile offenders should be referred to youth courts. There is no research on the efficacy of these programs for that population. What it strongly suggests is similar to national research - The key to effective delinquency reduction is to identify the correct response based on the juvenile's risk and need. For low-risk, first-time offenders, that includes diversion responses that hold youth accountable for their delinquent behavior and provide skills necessary for them to change that behavior.

Recommendation – It is recommend that Youth Services and community partners continue to build effective responses for first-time offenders that 1) reduce the likelihood of second and third time victimizations and 2) do this work through cost efficient programs.

Youth Services will continue to track outcome measures for all internal / external programs including diversion services such as Youth Courts. Also, tracking a larger sample for the three-year follow-up period would be very beneficial especially since the smaller sample size in this study suggested a significant benefit to the community at that period. Unfortunately, expungement practices may pre-empt this opportunity for long-term tracking

In closing, it is important to emphasize that one or two program evaluations with positive findings on a specific program does not produce a statement about “best practices.” A meta-analysis is needed to establish that threshold. A meta-analysis is a review of all the separate program evaluations of the same program, e.g., outcome findings from all

the separate evaluations of youth courts in the nation are studied in a meta-analysis. It includes an analysis of all the findings from each of those evaluations to determine which findings are consistent and which are unique to a specific study. The consistent findings help to determine if positive outcomes are a definitive statement about the program and build the case for a “best practices” statement.

Fortunately, there are close to a thousand youth courts in the nation to provide study areas. Also, Oregon has youth courts in many jurisdictions. Each of the thirty-six counties utilize the same information system that Youth Services used for this study. With moderate resources, other counties could replicate this study to look at the extent to which outcomes are replicated. This effort would also address the important need to have a larger sample of ethnic minority juveniles in the sample.

ⁱ Source: National information about Youth Courts was taken in part or total from the National Youth Court Center Web Page www.youthcourt.net. National Facts and Stats.

ⁱⁱ Source: Jeffrey A. Butts, Ph.D., Urban Institute (DC) In Session. The Newsletter of the National Youth Court Center. Summer, 2002. Volume 2. Number 3.

ⁱⁱⁱ Source: Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington. Editors. Child Delinquents: Development, Intervention, and Service Needs. Sage Publications, Inc. 2000.

^{iv} Source: Department of Youth Services recidivism reports. 2000 report of recidivism by gender and follow-up period of twenty-four months. Printed on 01/18/2004.

^v Sources: Eddy, J.M., and Swanson-Gribskov, L. (1998). Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention In the United States: The Influence of Theories and Traditions on Policies and Practices. In T.P. Gullota, G.R. Adams, and R. Montemayor (Eds.), *Delinquent Violent Youth* (pp 12 – 52). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

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