

Niagara Youth Court Screening Initiative

WHAT IS THE SYSTEM CHALLENGE?

About 65-70% of youth who come into contact with the justice system have one or more mental health challenges. Developmental disorders, intellectual disabilities, acquired brain injury, and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder are also over-represented in this population. **Many of these challenges go unrecognized among justice-involved youth.**¹ They are associated with school difficulties, unemployment, incarceration, and poverty. Early identification and intervention can help prevent some of these negative outcomes and lessen long term disability.² However, in many communities, there is **no consistent approach for identifying the needs of youth in the court system.**

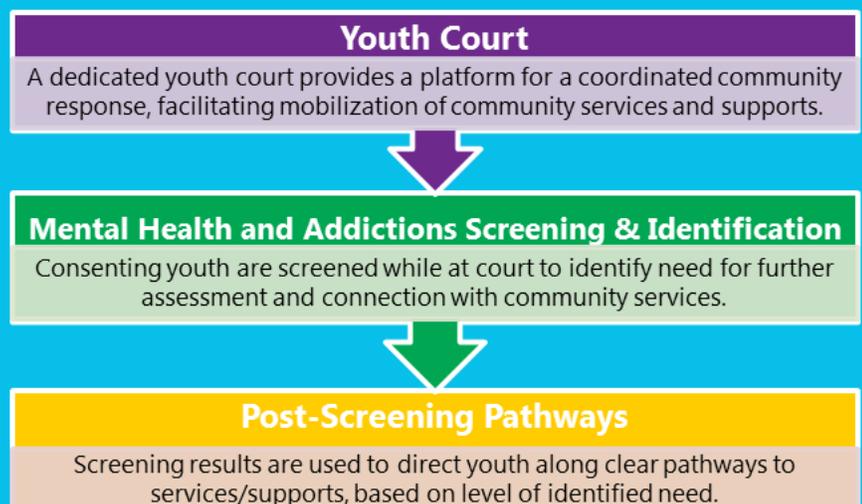
WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY?

A coordinated, cross-sector approach to early identification and intervention can help youth and their families receive the services and supports that best meet their needs.³ System stakeholders in Niagara identified a need for this type of approach to improve support for youth in the court system. They also saw the need for a dedicated youth court to better align with the Youth Criminal Justice Act. To address these needs, they developed the **Niagara Youth Court Screening Initiative (NYCSI)**. NYCSI supports early identification of mental health, addictions and other challenges among youth and helps them access appropriate services. NYCSI uses an evidence-based screening tool, the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2),⁴ and a semi-structured interview to identify youth needs. Based on youth needs and interest in receiving services, the NYCSI team connects youth with organizations in Niagara that can help provide support.

MORE ABOUT THE INTERVENTION

NYCSI involves a multi-agency team of mental health, addictions and justice service providers who are present at the St. Catharines court house during youth court sessions. This team helps youth determine if they would benefit from services in Niagara. They also facilitate transitions between different systems (justice, health, social, education, other), with the goal of improving outcomes for youth and families.

The NYCSI team offers screening in French, and includes a community service provider from the First Nations, Inuit and Métis sector.



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IMPLEMENTATION

NYCSI was implemented by the Niagara Youth Justice Service Collaborative with support from CAMH's Provincial System Support Program. The Collaborative consists of approximately 30 active members from the justice, education, health, Aboriginal services, child welfare, mental health, and addictions sectors. The Collaborative established a shared vision to support the development of a youth court in St. Catharines. This involves a dedicated time for youth court appearances separate from adult court, which acts as a platform for service providers to coordinate community services and supports for youth.

Based on the success of the intervention in St. Catharines, the Collaborative is beginning to explore implementation of a similar process in Welland, Ontario. There is also significant interest from across the province about the intervention and the implementation process.

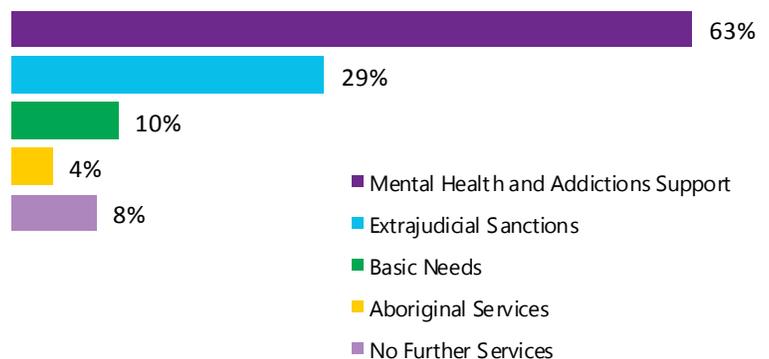
"The youth didn't just appear in front of the court that day. There is a story involved. The screening team is really important in developing an understanding of that story."

-Niagara Service Provider

OUTCOMES

Between May 2015 and July 2016, **29 youth courts were held and 81 of 100 eligible first-appearance youth were screened** by the NYCSI screening team. About 80% of these youth were identified as having possible mental health and/or addictions challenges. Over 75% of youth screened were male. About 9% of youth screened self-identified as Aboriginal. In addition, youth reporting more severe mental health and addictions challenges reported greater exposure to trauma.⁵

Referral Pathways



1. [Shufelt, J.S. & Coccozza, J.C. \(2006\). Youth with mental health disorders in the juvenile justice system: Results from a multistate, multi-system prevalence study. Delmar, NY: National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice.](#)
2. [The President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health. \(2003\) Achieving the Promise: Transforming Mental Health Care in America.](#)
3. [Stroul, B. \(2002\). Issue Brief—System of care: A framework for system reform in children's mental health. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center, National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health.](#)
4. [National Youth Screening and Assessment Partners. \(2016\). Mental Health Screening \(MAYSI-2\) & Assessment](#)
5. Based on a subset of data available July 25, 2016.

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