



SAN MATEO COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT

THE ART OF YOGA PROJECT
ANNUAL EVALUATION

2020 - 2021



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 (AOY) Project 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. AOY'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 ourselves, building resilience, honoring gender expansiveness, telling the truth, caring for ourselves, knowing ourselves, taking responsibility, managing our 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 held on Wednesdays and Saturdays at the Youth Services Center-Juvenile Hall (YSC-JH) in units Pine 5 and Forrest 3, and on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at the Margaret J. Kemp Camp for girls (Camp Kemp).

Programming was conducted exclusively via live stream at the beginning of the fiscal year (FY) 2020-21 due to COVID-19 shelter-in-place (SIP) guidelines. However, in May, AOY began slowly transitioning back to in-person classes. Initially, there was one class per week in person and one live stream at the YSC-JH Pine 5 and Forrest 3. In June, the program transitioned all classes at the YSC -JH and at Camp Kemp to in-person teaching. Youths enthusiastically received the return to on-site teaching. The facility staff were supportive and followed required Personal Protective Equipment and social distancing protocols to ensure a safe return for the AOY staff as well as protecting the safety needs for the youth and probation staff at both locations.

Programmatic Challenges in Fiscal Year 2020-21

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, programming was delivered in a virtual live stream format through Zoom for most of the year. Almost all challenges were related to program delivery in this context. For instance, adapting art classes at the YSC-JH and Camp Kemp to virtual classes was challenging because the youths needed individual art kits, as they could not share materials in the unit. The AOY staff both assembled and delivered individual kits to the facility to make this possible. AOY teaching staff also had to enlist the facility staff to help with setting up the art supplies, which could sometimes be problematic when staff could not locate supplies or when the supplies (like clay) were not in a useful condition. However, the teachers adapted the project to the available resources for such instances.

Virtual teaching provided other challenges, such as difficulty logging in for classes. Sometimes the internet would disconnect, leading to shortened classes. Often it was difficult for teachers to hear students because of the combination of masks and proximity to the camera and microphone. The youths were often easily distracted by what was happening in the room, and the AOY staff found it challenging to redirect attention back to the practice because they were not in person with the youths. The youths seemed genuinely grateful to continue their yoga practice each week despite the challenges.

Over the past year, the low numbers of youths served has presented another challenge for the program. For instance, AOY was able to lead classes only for girls housed at Camp Kemp, but not for Phase II or Girls Empowerment Program (GEP) youths. Due to COVID-19 social distancing protocols, Camp Kemp and GEP youths remain separated, so they could not practice yoga together.

Evaluation Methods

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

Participants and Services: Grantee 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: AOY 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
- 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 any new cataloged practices reported through several clearinghouses to determine whether the practices were:

- Evidence-based theory or premise
- Evidence-based model, shown by multiple experimental or quasi-experimental studies to be effective
- Evidence-based practices, or modalities shown to promote positive outcomes
- Evidence-based tools, or instruments that have been validated (concurrent and predictive)

Evaluation Findings

FY 2020-21 Highlights

- AOY served 40 youths, who spent six months in the program and received 15 hours of service, on average.
- AOY met its target goals for all three performance measures.

Profile of Youths Served

AOY served 40 youths for an average of 6 months in the program, and 15 hours of service per youth (Table 1). Six in 10 youths (60%) identified as Hispanic/Latino, 20% identified as Black/African American, 10% identified as Asian/Pacific Islander, 8% identified as White/Caucasian, and 3% identified as Other. Seven in 10 youths self-identified as male (70%), 30% self-identified as female, and 0% as transgender/other, and the average age of youths was 17.3 years old.

Table 1. AOY Youth Services

YOUTH SERVICES	FY 20-21
Youths Served	40
Average Hours Served	15.0
Average Time in Program (Months)	6.0

Program-Specific Outcomes

AOY met the target goals for its performance measures for FY 2020-21 (Table 2). Eighty-five percent (85%) of youths reported using tools for emotional regulation outside of class, and 87% reported improved interpersonal skills and prosocial behavior. The vast majority (94%) of youths reported increased self-awareness and self-respect.

Table 2. Program Specific Outcomes

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

Evidence-Based Practices

In FY 2020-21, YOBG programs were asked to provide the practices and curricula they employed. ASR then evaluated the cataloged programs to determine whether they were evidence-based or promising practices by running them through several evidence-based practice clearinghouses. Table 3 details the practices and curricula that AOY used in its programs.

Table 3. Evidence-Based Practices

PRACTICE	IMPLEMENTATION	RATING
Trauma-informed Practice	AOY brings mindfulness-based practices to system-involved youths for their healing and empowerment. All instructors are trained in the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics.	Evidence-based practice according to SAMHSA. ¹
Wise Inside Curricula (based on Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics)	AOY 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 AOY'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.	Although not recognized as evidence-based or promising practice on its own, curricula is informed by evidence-based model. ²

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 AOY for FY 2020-21 (Table 4).

¹ SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration). (2014). SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach, p10. Pub ID#: SMA14-4884. <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4884/SMA14-4884.pdf>

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.

Table 4. Client Success Story

Name of Client	Matthew
Age and Gender	17, male
Reason for Referral	Matthew is in detention at YSC-JH, unit Pine 5 and attends programming on a bi-weekly basis on the unit.
Client’s Behavior, Affect, and Appearance When They First Started in the Program	When Matthew first joined this program, he came to class intermittently (the program is optional) but seemed to be a relatively willing participant. At the same time, he was often easily distracted, engaged other class participants in conversation, and made a lot of jokes.
Activity Engagement and Consistency	Yoga and creative expression classes are optional for youths to attend on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Matthew has been opting to attend classes whenever he can since he was first placed on the unit over six months ago. He tried most of the yoga that was offered, but initially he did not seem inclined to take risks with movements that he was unfamiliar with. He also seemed to like participating in the creative expression (drawing, painting, and writing) and was willing to share what he created at the end of class but did not engage in much discussion. He has been one of the most consistent students, despite the challenges of participating in virtual programming.
Client’s Behavior, Affect, and Appearance Toward the End of the Program	After a few months of regularly participating in the program, Matthew began taking on a leadership role in class. For instance, at the beginning of class, the whole group starts by warming up the body and engaging the senses. Matthew started requesting to lead the group in some of the warm-ups. Then, after a few more months, he started leading the group in a sun salutation sequence, which is a series of yoga poses organized in a particular way to energize and strengthen the body. He has taken such ownership of his yoga practice that he began inviting the whole group to try and practice the sun salutation sequence together in silence, listening only to their breathing. This is an advanced approach to practicing yoga, as it requires the youths to know the sequence, to focus their attention, and to draw a strong connection between breath, movement, and mind. This helps to establish a powerful mind-body connection. Matthew also began leading the group in yoga games like Yoga Directions, while also putting his own spin on the game. His enthusiastic and joyful leadership has contributed significantly to the whole group's participation in class, as well as making class fun for everyone.
What the Client Learned as a Result of the Program	As a result of his time in the program, Matthew has been inspired by the teachings of yoga and wants to learn more about the mind-body connection, meditation, and tools to stay calm rather than react to challenging situations. He shared recently with a teacher that he started reading about meta-cognition to increase his self-awareness and to work on his goal of living a better life.
What the Client is Doing Differently in Their Life	In addition to stepping into a role as a leader in class, Matthew also engaged fully in the creative expression portion of class. He often shared his art, which included illustrations of himself or illustrations about his life, particularly of the challenges in his life.

Now as a Result of the Program	<p>He would sometimes make references to illegal activity or substance use. Initially, teachers would try to talk to him about his artwork and channel it in another direction, but he was not open to discussion. However, as time went on, he became more open to exploring not just his past, but also beginning to reimagine his future. For example, in one class, the students were asked to illustrate the past, present, and future. Initially, Matthew represented only his past and present but didn't illustrate his future. When one of his instructors asked him about his work, he said that he didn't know how it would turn out, so he left it blank. This led to a longer discussion between him and his instructor about envisioning a fulfilling and happy future. For the first time, Matthew was very open about how his past was filled with blood and pain, so he smoked marijuana to ease the pain. His present, although in juvenile detention, was filled with positive things like reading books and cultivating his passion for music and rap and yoga. Matthew's instructors have recognized that through his time in the program, he is now open to discussing his life's challenges, specifically in the context of making different choices about how to manage his feelings. He is now drawing on the tools he learned in yoga, such as meditation and breath awareness, to help him find greater inner calm.</p>
The Value of the Program in the Client's Words	<p>Matthew has shared with his instructors that the program is fun, it makes him feel strong, and he always feels calmer and happier at the end of yoga.</p>