

# Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program

## A Spotlight on the Learning Labs

August 2024

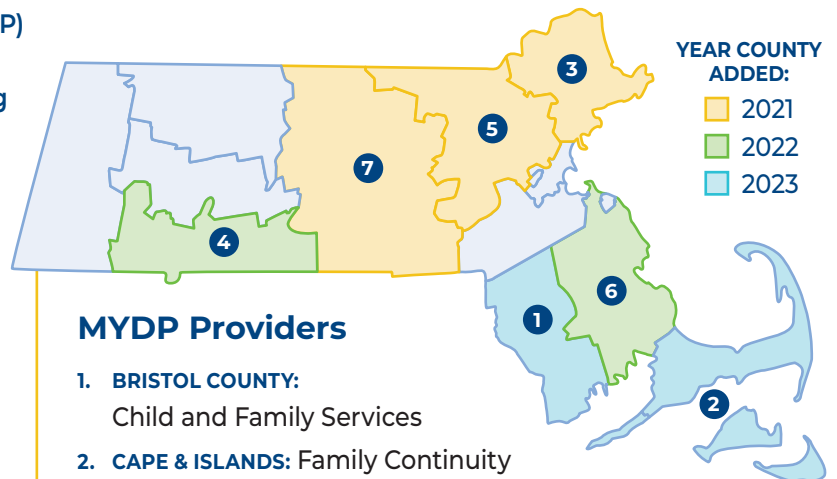


The Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP) began in three pilot sites: Essex, Middlesex, and Worcester counties, collectively called the Learning Labs. This brief describes the Learning Labs and includes data from January 2022 to May 2024.

The MYDP accepts referrals from police, district attorneys, clerk magistrates, and judges. MYDP Diversion Coordinators work with the youth to identify strengths and needs and develop an individualized diversion plan, which the Diversion Coordinator then helps the youth complete.

Diversion programming reduces youths' risk for recidivism and negative collateral consequences, such as academic failure.<sup>1</sup> MYDP works with youth who are legally eligible for diversion and recommends referrers particularly consider youth with lower-level offenses, first offenses, and/or who have complex needs and whose behavior may be due to those needs being unmet.

Since 2021, the MYDP has expanded to seven counties, with the eventual goal of expanding statewide.



### MYDP Providers

- BRISTOL COUNTY:** Child and Family Services
- CAPE & ISLANDS:** Family Continuity
- ESSEX COUNTY:** Family Services of the Merrimack Valley
- HAMPDEN COUNTY:** Gàndara Center
- MIDDLESEX COUNTY:** NFI Massachusetts
- PLYMOUTH COUNTY:** Old Colony YMCA
- WORCESTER COUNTY:** Family Continuity

### Learning Lab by the Numbers



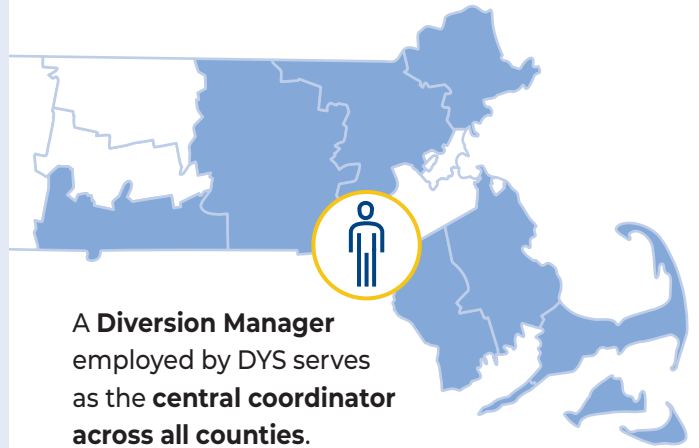
<sup>1</sup>Source: Wilson, H. & Hoge, R. (2013) The effect of Youth Diversion Programs on Recidivism: A meta-Analytic Review. Criminal Justice and Behavior. Vol. 40, No. 5, 497-518.

## MYDP Partnership and Process

The MYDP is a partnership between the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) and the Department of Youth Services (DYS), which administers the program through contracts with community providers who provide Diversion Coordinators.

### Diversion Coordinators:

- Conduct an intake with youth referred to the program
- Conduct evidence-based risks and needs assessments
- Develop a diversion agreement
- Match youth to services based on identified needs
- Provide ongoing case management and mentoring



A **Diversion Manager** employed by DYS serves as the **central coordinator across all counties.**



## MYDP Process



### Referral by:

- Police
- Clerk Magistrate
- District Attorney (DA)
- Judge

### Diversion Coordinator:

- Obtains consent to intake from youth and parent/guardian
- Conducts evidence-based Risk/Needs Assessment

### Diversion Coordinator:

- Builds agreement with youth including target time frame
- Diversion Coordinator, youth, and parent/guardian:**
- Agree to terms

### Diversion Coordinator:

- Connects youth to services
- Monitors youth progress

Ideally, within the target time frame:

- **Successful:** Case closed
- **Unsuccessful:** Youth referred back to formal system/court

## MYDP Outcomes

A youth is considered successful in the MYDP if they:

1. Make meaningful progress on/complete diversion requirements AND
2. Avoid other unlawful activities.

The four ultimate outcomes of MYDP are to:

1. Reduce future offending and increase public safety



2. Support positive youth development



3. Promote and ensure equity



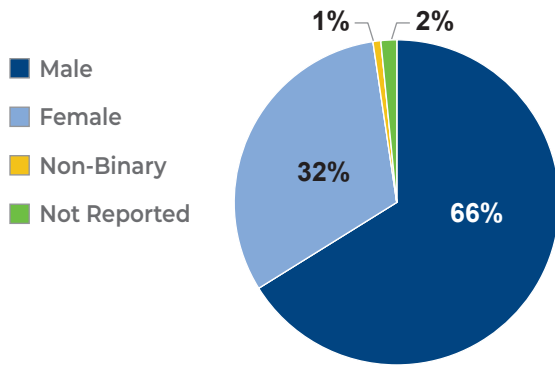
4. Hold youth responsible for their actions



## Who are the youth participating in the MYDP?

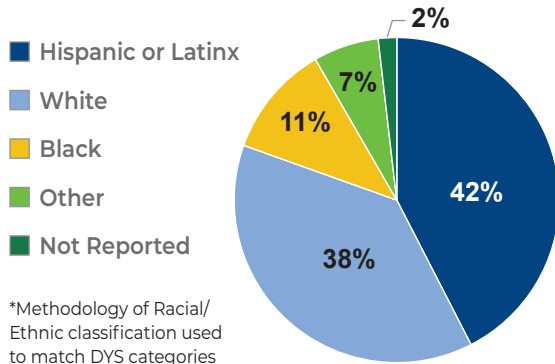
In the first two and a half years of programming, 471 youth were referred to the Learning Lab counties (Essex, Middlesex, and Worcester). Of those, 384 went through an intake process as of April 30, 2024.

**Gender of MYDP Learning Lab Participants**

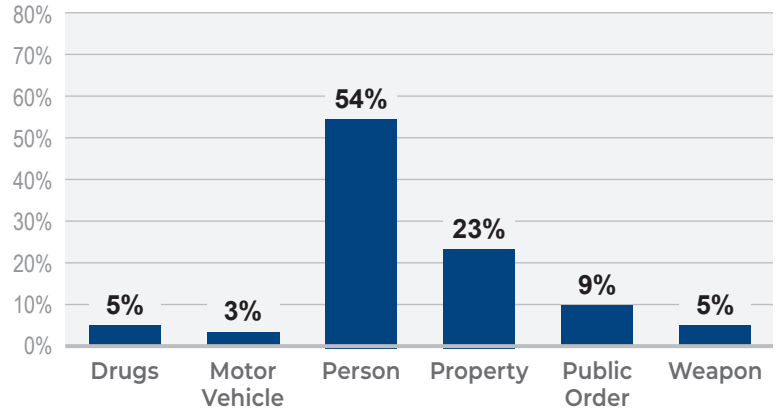


7% of MYDP participants identified as LGB+.

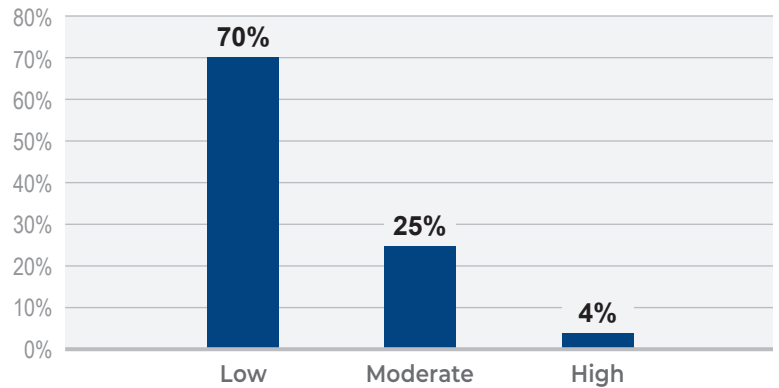
**Racial/Ethnic\* Distribution of MYDP Learning Lab Participants**



**Distribution of Offense Type Among Referrals to MYDP Learning Labs**



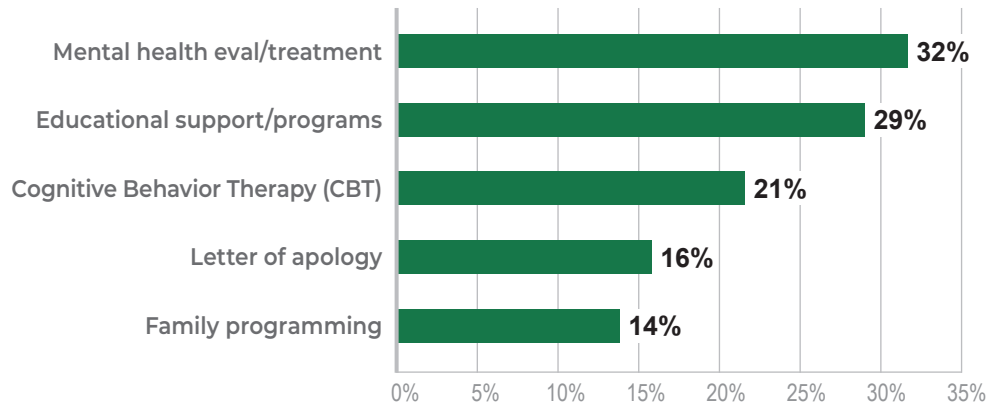
**Distribution of Risk Level Among Screened MYDP Learning Lab Participants**



## What services did youth in the MYDP Learning Labs receive?

Youth in the MYDP are provided with services that align with the needs identified during the evidence-based intake screening.

**Most Frequent Diversion Requirements for MYDP Learning Lab Participants**



## 87% of closed diversion cases were successful.

**Youth in the MYDP are set up to succeed.** The program is tailored to the youth's specific needs and strengths, and Diversion Coordinators work with youth to develop achievable goals. This helps build a youth's confidence in their own ability to be successful — a feeling of efficacy that can carry over into other parts of their life. If a youth is struggling, the Diversion Coordinator will offer extra support. Youth who have not succeeded in the program are those who are non-compliant with the program requirements despite repeated outreach from their Coordinator. If a youth is arrested on a new charge or repeatedly non-compliant, the Diversion Coordinator will work with the original referrer to decide whether the case should be closed or if diversion services should continue. In some situations, a case may be closed because the youth's parent withdraws them from the program or the charges against the youth are dropped.



## What Youth and Referrers Say

### Success stories

*[Youth] was referred to individual counseling and in-home behavioral services as part of their diversion agreement. The youth and family participated in the services during the course of the diversion period. The Diversion Coordinator and [youth] worked on strategies to avoid peer pressure, how to say "no" and build boundaries. [Youth] has worked on strengthening their family relationships and improving their communication skills. [Youth] continues to work on his decision-making and problem-solving skills and is motivated to make better choices in the future.*

*[Youth] made efforts to improve his behavior in school, improved grades significantly, and passed for the year. He also engaged in weekly individual therapy. [Youth] identified strategies to avoid peer pressure, how to set boundaries, and developed coping skills. He wrote two letters of apology, one letter to the victim of his alleged offense, and youth also wrote an apology/thank you letter to the referrer, a police officer who allowed him to participate in the diversion program.*

### Youth satisfaction

*The Diversion program is one that will help you realize your mistakes and learn from them. It helped me admit that I had to change, and it changes a person for the better.*

– MYDP Learning Lab Participant

*The youth diversion program is a program to help you not only not have a record it gives you a chance to be better, it opens up your mind and helps you think differently to avoid mistakes in the future.* – MYDP Learning Lab Participant

### Referrer satisfaction

*I think it is a valuable resource, and I think in time, as it kind of becomes, hopefully, a permanent part of the process, [and] some of... the officers become more in tune to that being the first option — I think that would even be better.*

– Police referrer

*This is the purpose of the Juvenile Court. It's to provide assistance and help to these families and children. We don't want to give children records, we want to provide the resources that they need to make better choices and become active, positive citizens in our community. And having [the MYDP] as a tool has really improved that.* – Judicial referrer

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For more information about the MYDP, contact:

**Daniele Rose**  
MYDP Program Manager,  
Department of Youth Services  
[Daniele.M.Rose@mass.gov](mailto:Daniele.M.Rose@mass.gov) | 617-960-3332

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