

THE JUVENILE RESTORATIVE JUSTICE AND FAMILY INTERVENTION INITIATIVE

2022-2025

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Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the dedication of centers across Nebraska and the commitment of the staff who work with youth and collect and enter data to support this work. While we did not ultimately use county- or program-level data for comparison in this report, we are deeply grateful to the many programs and counties that generously granted permission for data use. Their willingness to collaborate represents an important foundation for future work. We also extend our sincere appreciation to the Douglas County Juvenile Assessment Center for sharing data.

We are especially grateful to the youth and families who chose to participate in the restorative justice process and generously shared their experiences. We also thank the colleagues who supported, reviewed, and provided feedback on this report, including Shannon Sliva for her thoughtful review and Ana Cienfuegos for her foundational contributions to the project. Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to Anne Hobbs, former director of JJJ, for her invaluable guidance and leadership on this project.

Grant Disclaimer

This project is supported by Grant #15PJDP-21-GG-03218-JRIX awarded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication/program/exhibition are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

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Executive Summary

Restorative justice (RJ) is an approach based on the principles of participation, accountability, reparation, and reintegration¹ to heal and repair harm caused by criminal activity. RJ programming can take many forms but typically involves bringing together those affected by a crime, including the responsible person, any harmed persons, and other stakeholders, to discuss the impacts and decide what can be done to repair the harm as much as possible. In juvenile justice settings, these meetings are called conferences and often result in written agreements that outline how the harm will be repaired. Restorative conferencing has been associated with lower rates of recidivism, increased community and victim involvement, improved satisfaction in the justice process, and increased perceptions of procedural fairness.²

This report explores the impact of the Juvenile Restorative Justice and Family Intervention Initiative (JRJFII), which utilized four specific restorative conferencing programs: Victim Youth Conferencing, Juvenile Justice Family Conferencing, Juvenile Justice Family Group Conferencing, and Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing, on rates of youth recidivism as well as overall satisfaction in the justice process. Specifically, this report examines descriptive, future system involvement (FSI), and satisfaction data from July 1, 2022, through April 2025. FSI was tracked for 861 cases that closed prior to March 16, 2024.

Since July 2022, the JRJFII has served 1,531 cases involving 1,453 unique youth, most of whom were unemployed (60.2%) and living in single-parent households (55.1%), with an average referral age of 14.3 years (range 5–17). Youth were most often referred for assault or crimes against a person ($n = 446$; 29.1%) or truancy/school absenteeism ($n = 444$; 29.0%), resulting in the highest participation in Victim Youth Conferencing ($n = 714$) and Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing ($n = 536$). Between July 1, 2022, and March 16, 2024 (during which FSI data was available), there were 655 cases in which youth reached a partial or full agreement and 206 cases in which they did not. Among the cases that reached a partial or full agreement, 15.0% ($n = 98$) had an FSI within one year, compared to 15.1% ($n = 31$) of cases that did not reach an agreement. Young men and youth of color had higher rates of FSI within one year. Of all the cases, 1,137 reached a full or partial agreement, and satisfaction with the process was high, particularly among youth supporters, who consistently reported even greater satisfaction than the youth responsible.

¹ Latimer et al., 2005

² Bergseth & Bouffard, 2013; Latimer et al., 2005; Leonard & Kenny, 2011; Barnes et al., 2015

Introduction

Youth, those under 18 years of age, are in the formative years of their lives. It is a critical time when their brains are not yet fully developed, and young people are dependent on their families. In Nebraska, many youth are at risk for involvement with the juvenile justice system. An internal query of court data for calendar year 2019 found there were 7,749 youth filed on, and a disproportionate number are Black, Indigenous, and people of color youth.³ In addition to the high number of youth entering the justice system, those who do are at significant risk of FSI and recidivism.

The Nebraska Supreme Court Rule § 1-1001(B) defines youth recidivism as occurring “within 1 year of being successfully released from a probation or problem-solving court program the juvenile has (a) an adjudication pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-247(1) or (2).”⁴ In this report, recidivism is defined as FSI for law violations in relation to the completion date (i.e., close date) of a youth RJ case processed through a center. From 2010 to 2015, first offense Nebraska juvenile probationers recidivated at a rate of 25.9%.⁵ The state is actively working to lower this number.

The JRJFI

The JRJFI is a statewide initiative made possible through a U.S. Department of Justice Office (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Fiscal Year 2021 Juvenile Justice System Reform Initiative grant. The Nebraska Judicial Branch’s Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation is the primary grantee with the Office of Dispute Resolution (ODR) assigned as the project manager.

The JRJFI was designed for youth under the age of 18, as defined by Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-245(11), that have committed an offense. These youth were referred at three tiers: Tier 1 referrals were pre-court and pre-diversion, typically referred by county attorneys, schools, or other local entities. Tier 2 referrals were court-diverted cases referred by county attorneys or courts at the pre-adjudicative stage, and Tier 3 referrals came from probation. The most common offense types included excessive absenteeism, assaults/mutual assaults, theft, vandalism/property damage, trespassing, disturbing the peace, disorderly conduct, and criminal mischief.

³ Juvenile Justice 2020. (n.d.). Voices for Children in Nebraska. Retrieved July 12, 2021, from <https://kidscountnebraska.com/juvenile-justice/>

⁴ Nebraska Supreme Court Rule §1-1001(B). Retrieved from <https://supremecourt.nebraska.gov/supreme-court-rules/chapter-1-administrativeoperations/article-10-uniform-definitions-recidivism-0>

⁵ Wiener, R. L. (2018, February 5). Recidivism rates for Nebraska juvenile probationers: 2010 to 2015. <https://supremecourt.nebraska.gov/sites/default/files/NE-Juv-Recidivism-Rpt-Feb-2018.pdf>

Mediation Centers

The JRJFII expanded restorative justice programming throughout Nebraska's 93 counties with services provided by regional mediation centers approved by the Office of Dispute Resolution. This report examines the impact of restorative justice conferencing on recidivism of youth who were referred to one of six centers across the state of Nebraska: Central Mediation Center, Concord Mediation Center, The Mediation Center, Mediation West, Nebraska Mediation Center, and The Resolution Center. These centers serve every county and judicial district. The level of participation in the JRJFII varied by center according to available resources.

Types of Restorative Conferencing Programming

The Nebraska ODR proposed the JRJFII to help reduce recidivism through the expansion of youth restorative justice programming. The types of restorative justice programming include: Victim Youth Conferencing, Juvenile Justice Family Conferencing, Juvenile Justice Family Group Conferencing, and Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing.⁶

Victim Youth Conferencing is a restorative justice dialogue model providing young people and those that they have harmed with a process to attempt to repair the harm resulting from an offense through safe, constructive dialogue.

Juvenile Justice Family Conferencing is a facilitated dialogue between a youth and their family that provides an opportunity for a safe conversation about concerns, responsibilities, and expectations all while developing a plan on dealing with identified issues.

Juvenile Justice Family Group Conferencing is a large group facilitated restorative dialogue between a youth who has committed an offense, the person who was harmed, and support systems for both the youth and the victim.

Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing is a group facilitation between a student, their family, and school personnel. The goal for this type of conference is to provide an opportunity to gain an understanding of the factors causing the student to be excessively absent and develop a plan to improve those factors allowing the youth to successfully remain in school.

⁶ For more information about the types of RJ programming, please visit:
https://nebraskajudicial.gov/sites/default/files/u7124/2023_04_26_OJJDP_Booklet_FINAL.pdf

Methodology

The University of Nebraska – Omaha’s (UNO) Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) the University of Denver’s Center for Rural School Health & Education (CRSHE), housed within the Morgridge College of Education, worked collaboratively to evaluate the JRJFII Program, focusing on youth who participated in one of the four types of restorative conferencing.

This evaluation examined key outcomes for youth participating in restorative conferencing. It also explored differences in outcomes across the four conferencing types, gathered insights from youth and parents about their experiences in the restorative justice process, and evaluated FSI and other outcomes for youth that participated in restorative programming.

Centers were required to enter data into the Nebraska Office of Dispute Resolution (ODR)’s Case Management System (CMS). This evaluation is based on the information all centers entered into the CMS as well as recidivism (FSI) data. Because each center enters data independently, there are occasional discrepancies in how information is recorded. This report aims to highlight, wherever possible, when such discrepancies or variations occur.

To evaluate the JRJFII, we analyzed program data from ODR’s CMS. This report focuses on data for youth that participated in any of the four types of restorative conferencing programming. We examined youth demographics, program outcomes (including agreement completion, satisfaction for both participating youth and other support people), and FSI among discharged youth.

Results

Youth Referred to Restorative Approach

From July 1, 2022, through April 2025, data was examined for 1,572 cases referred to restorative justice programming through either Victim Youth Conferencing, Juvenile Justice Family Conferencing, Juvenile Justice Family Group Conferencing, or Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing.

Of these 1,572 cases, 41 were youth over the age of 18 at the time of referral and were not included in analyses for the JRJFII. Of the subsequent 1,531 cases, 78 were youth with multiple case entries, for a total of 1,453 individual youth. Seven youth had more than one program entry with the same dates provided for referral, enrollment, and discharge. These entries and dates were confirmed with each program to ensure that they were not duplicate cases. Youth with multiple program entries are included twice in demographic numbers

included in this report. Youth cases referred for restorative programming increased steadily for most mediation centers from 2023 – 2024, with only partial year data available for 2022 and 2025 (Table 1). See Appendix I for further graphical depiction.

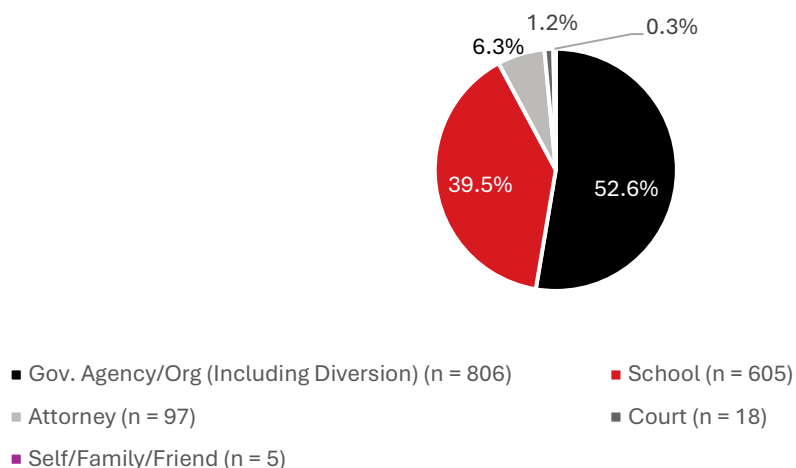
Table 1. Youth Cases Closed by Year and Mediation Center July 1, 2022 – April, 2025

Year	Yearly Total N	Total Percent of Cases	Central Mediation Center N (% of Cases for the Year)	Concord Mediation Center N (% of Cases for the Year)	The Mediation Center N (% of Cases for the Year)	Mediation West N (% of Cases for the Year)	Nebraska Mediation Center N (% of Cases for the Year)	The Resolution Center N (% of Cases for the Year)
July 1 – Dec 31, 2022	203	13.3%	66 (32.5%)	45 (22.2%)	80 (39.4%)	-	7 (3.4%)	5 (2.5%)
Jan 1 – Dec 31, 2023	482	31.5%	116 (24.1%)	131 (27.2%)	203 (42.1%)	6 (1.2%)	24 (5.0%)	2 (0.4%)
Jan 1 – Dec 31, 2024	614	40.1%	122 (19.9%)	218 (35.5%)	179 (29.2%)	41 (6.7%)	40 (6.5%)	14 (2.3%)
Jan 1 – April 30, 2025	232	15.1%	78 (33.6%)	75 (32.3%)	71 (30.6%)	5 (2.2%)	2 (0.9%)	1 (0.4%)
Total (Total %)	1,531		382 (25.0%)	469 (30.6%)	533 (34.8%)	52 (3.4%)	73 (4.8%)	22 (1.4%)

Referral Source

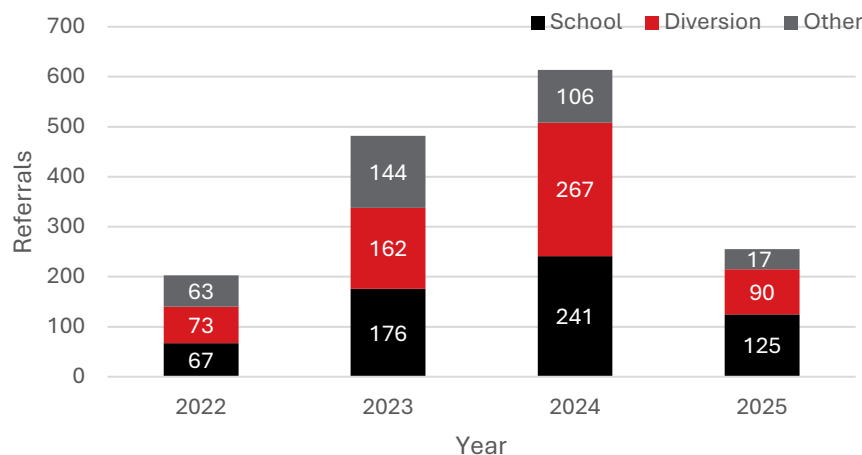
Youth were referred to restorative justice programming by a variety of sources. Figure 1 outlines the top-level referral source for each youth.

Figure 1. Top-level Case Referral Sources



Youth were most referred by schools ($n = 605$, 39.5%), followed by government agencies ($n = 806$, 52.6%). Of the government agency referrals, a total of 573 (37.4% of all cases) were referred from diversion specifically. Others were from probation ($n = 205$, 13.4% of all cases). Figure 2 illustrates that schools and diversion programs were the two largest referral sources across each year.

Figure 2. Source of Referral by Year



Data are reported below (Table 2) and categorized by each youth's current grade level at the time of referral for both school and diversion referrals, which accounted for 76.9% ($n = 1,178$) of all referrals. Current grade was either missing or unknown for 58 cases.

Table 2. Referral Source by Current Grade for Each Case

Current Grade	School n (% of Total School Referrals)	Diversion n (% of Total Diversion Referrals)	Total
Kindergarten	7 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	7
1 st	4 (0.7%)	0 (0%)	4
2 nd	16 (2.7%)	1 (0.2%)	17
3 rd	7 (1.2%)	0 (0%)	7
4 th	8 (1.4%)	1 (0.2%)	9
5 th	9 (1.5%)	6 (1.1%)	15
6 th	55 (9.3%)	22 (4.2%)	77
7 th	122 (20.7%)	37 (7.0%)	159
8 th	99 (16.8%)	90 (17.0%)	189
9 th	75 (12.7%)	99 (18.7%)	174
10 th	99 (16.8%)	115 (21.7%)	214
11 th	58 (9.8%)	92 (17.3%)	150
12 th +	31 (5.3%)	67 (12.6%)	98
Total	590	530	1,120

Race/Ethnicity by Referral Source

A majority of youth ($n = 819$, 53.5%) referred to restorative justice programming were White. Youth of Color were also represented (Black/African American, $n = 303$; Multiple Races, $n = 125$; American Indian/Alaska Native, $n = 35$; Asian, $n = 13$; Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, $n = 5$; Other Race, $n = 141$). Others did not specify race ($n = 81$, 5.3%). A total of 300 youth identified as Hispanic/Latino (Table 3).

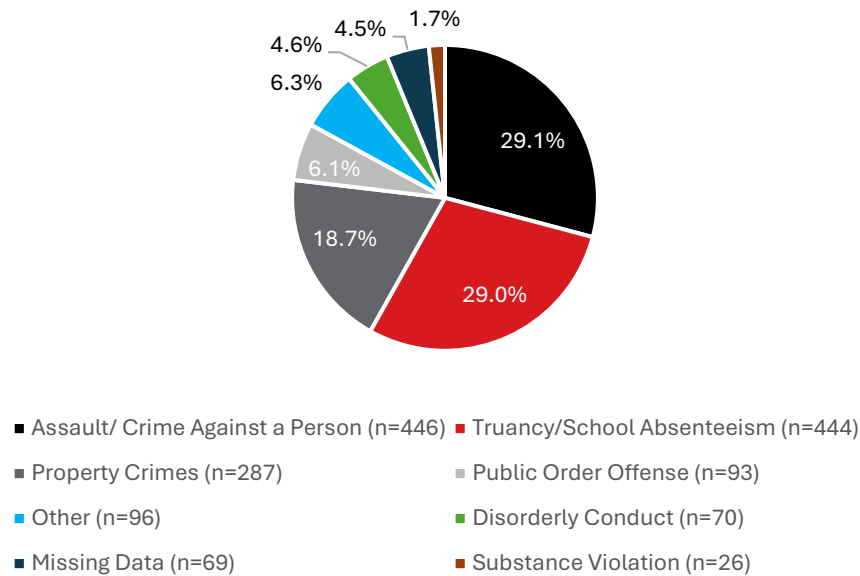
Table 3. Race/Ethnicity of Youth

Race/Ethnicity	Number of Youth	Percent	Hispanic/Latino (n, % of Youth of that Race)
White	819	53.5%	107 (13.1%)
Black/African American	303	19.8%	3 (1.0%)
Other Race	141	9.2%	116 (82.3%)
Multiple Races	125	8.2%	34 (27.2%)
Unspecified	81	5.3%	27 (33.3%)
American Indian/Alaska Native	35	2.3%	13 (37.1%)
Asian	13	0.9%	-
Missing	9	0.5%	-
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	5	0.3%	-
Total	1,531	100%	300 (19.6%)

Reason for Referral

Reason for referral to restorative justice programming were grouped into seven categories based on offense or violation type: 1) assault or crimes against a person (e.g., assault, sexual assault, hazing, etc.), 2) crimes against property (e.g., criminal mischief, theft, arson, unlawful occupancy, etc.), 3) crimes against public order (e.g., reckless driving, obstructing a peace officer, etc.), 4) Substance-related violations (e.g., minor in possession, DUI, etc.), 5) Disorderly conduct, 6) truancy and school absenteeism, and 7) “other” (e.g., unauthorized use of a financial device, carrying a concealed weapon, etc.). Youth were most often referred for assault or crimes against a person ($n = 446$, 29.1%) or truancy or school absenteeism ($n = 444$, 29.0%). Data on reason for enrollment is pictured in Figure 3.

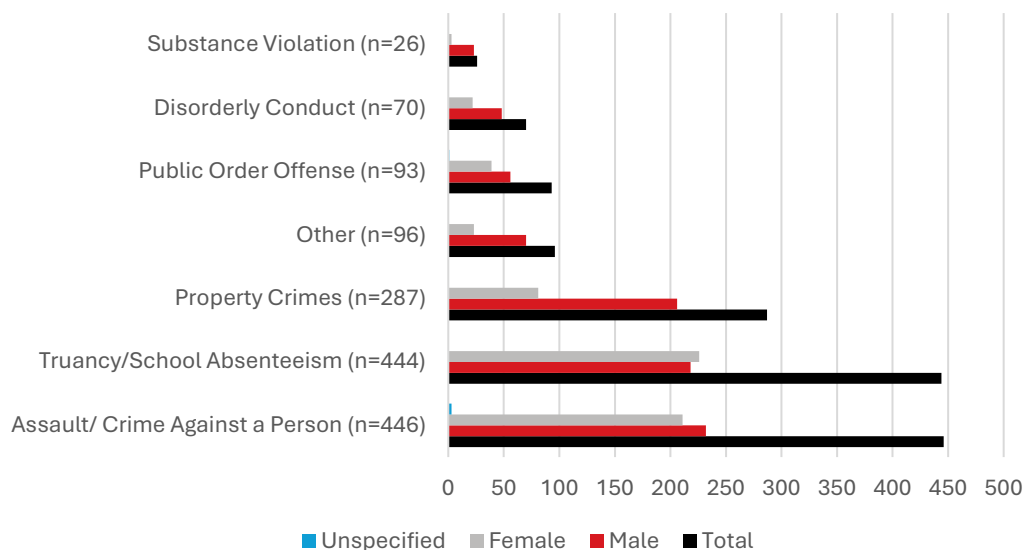
Figure 3. Reason for Referral



Sex and Reason for Referral

Of the 1,531 cases since July 2022, 41.7% ($n = 639$) of youth were female, 57.5% ($n = 881$) were male, and 0.7% ($n = 11$) cases were unspecified. Figure 4 outlines youth sex by reason for referral.⁷

Figure 4. Reason for Referral by Sex



⁷ Reason for referral data was missing for a total of 69 cases.

Age and Reason for Referral

The average age at referral for programming was 14.3 years old (range 5 – 17, standard deviation or SD = 2.1).⁸ Youth with substance use violations were on average older (sample mean or \bar{x} = 15.7, SD = 1.5) than those youth referred for truancy or school absenteeism (\bar{x} = 13.2, SD = 2.5). Data for each reason for referral can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. Age and Reason for Referral

Enrollment Reason	Age at Referral				
	Frequency	Average Age	SD	Min	Max
Assault/ Crime Against a Person	446	14.6	1.6	11.0	17.0
Truancy/ School Absenteeism	444	13.2	2.5	5.0	17.0
Property Crimes	287	15.0	1.9	7.0	17.0
Other	96	14.7	1.8	7.0	17.0
Public Order	93	15.2	1.3	12.0	17.0
Disorderly Conduct	70	15.0	1.4	12.0	17.0
Substance Violation	26	15.7	1.5	12.0	17.0

Other Demographic Variables

Other demographic information entered into CMS included data on youth employment, family size and income, and current youth residence information (Table 5). Most youth (n = 921, 60.2%) were not employed. The average family size was 4.7 persons (range 2 – 15, SD = 1.8). Data on family income in relation to the federal poverty level (FPL) was less reliable given the higher rate of data missing, not reported, or not applicable (n = 908, 59.3%). Regarding youth residence and custody/guardianship for youth, the majority of youth were reported to be in the custody/guardianship of a single parent (n = 844, 55.1%) with both parents being the next most common arrangement (n = 529, 34.6%).

⁸ Age at referral data was missing or unknown for 70 youth. Additionally, all youth 18 and older were excluded from analyses as this grant serves youth under the age of 18.

Table 5. Frequencies and Means for Demographic Variables

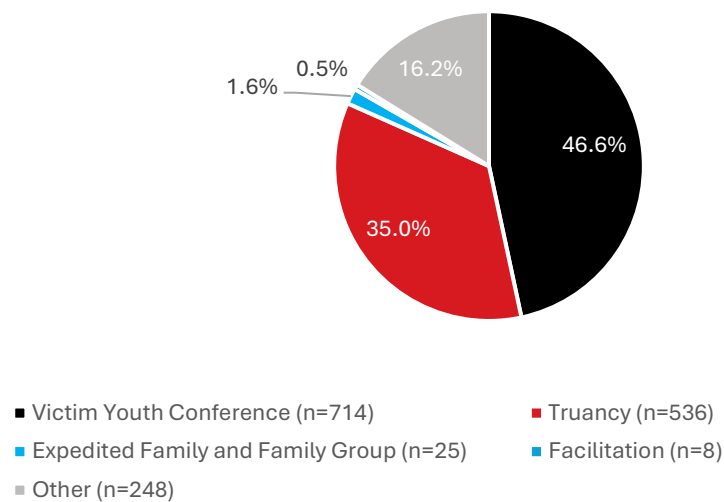
Variables	Frequency, Percent	Mean, SD
Youth Employed		
Yes	212, 13.8%	
No	921, 60.2%	
Unknown	383, 25.0%	
Missing	15, 1.0%	
Family Size		4.7, 1.8
Family Poverty Level		
100%	361, 23.6%	
125%	75, 4.9%	
175%	45, 2.9%	
185 – 285%	43, 2.8%	
>300%	99, 6.5%	
Not applicable (professional)	79, 5.2%	
Not reported	706, 46.1%	
Missing	123, 8.0%	
Custody/Guardianship		
Legal Guardian/ Other Adult	76, 5.0%	
Single Parent	844, 55.1%	
Both Parents	529, 34.6%	
Foster or Group Home	27, 1.8%	
Detention	7, 0.4%	
Lives on Own	4, 0.2%	
Missing	44, 2.9%	

Conference Characteristics and Outcomes

Case Type

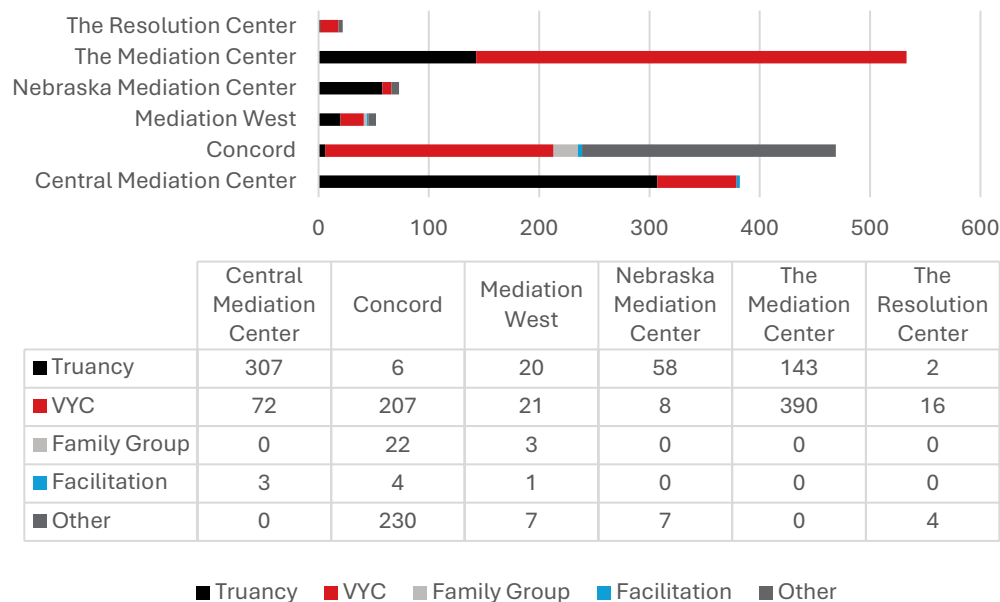
Cases referred for an RJ approach fell into four main types: Victim Youth Conferencing, Juvenile Justice Family Conferencing, Juvenile Justice Family Group Conferencing, and Excessive Absenteeism (Truancy) Conferencing. In CMS, however, these cases were entered under slightly different terms including victim youth conference, expedited family, family group conferencing, truancy, facilitation, and other, which reflect variations in how cases were recorded. Victim Youth Conferences and Truancy were the two most common RJ interventions. A total of 79 cases were referred more than once. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. Case Type Frequencies⁹



Case types seen by each mediation center can be found in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Case Type Frequencies by Mediation Center



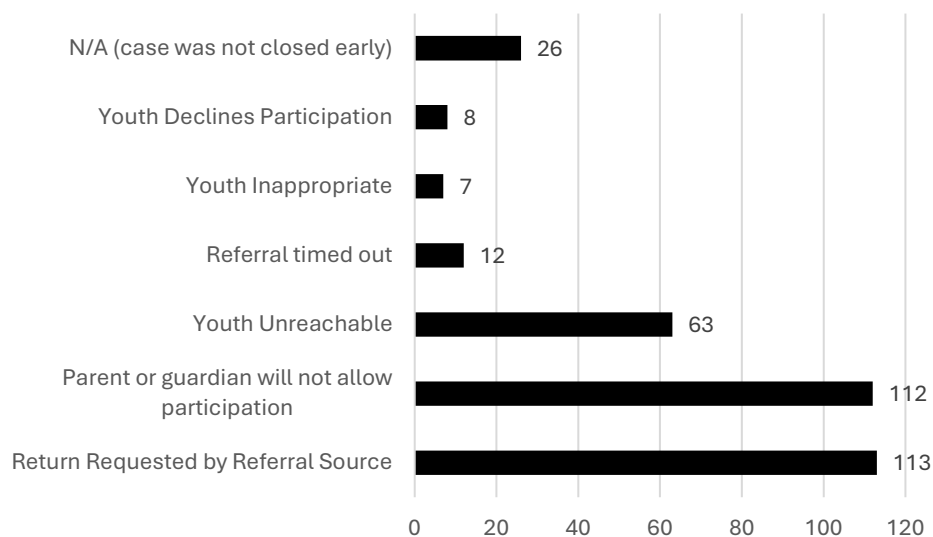
An RJ process took place for 1,179 cases (77.0%) of the 1,531 cases, and there was incomplete data for 11 cases (0.7%). A majority of the RJ processes that took place were

⁹ There are more Truancy and Absenteeism cases recorded under RJ Case Type (n = 536) than under Reason for Referral (n = 444), as some entries were left blank in the Reason for Referral field but still categorized under Case Type as a Truancy RJ process.

held in person ($n = 1,055$, 89.5%), but some were held virtually ($n = 92$, 7.8%), and a small percentage of processes were held in a hybrid format ($n = 32$, 2.7%).

Reasons that a youth was referred but did not complete an RJ process included the youth being unreachable, the parent or guardian would not allow the RJ process, the youth's referral timed out, return requested by referral source, the youth declined, or the youth was not an appropriate match for the referral type (usually because of age). The most common reason that an RJ process was not completed was that the case was requested back by the referral source, followed closely by the parent or guardian refusing. See Figure 7.

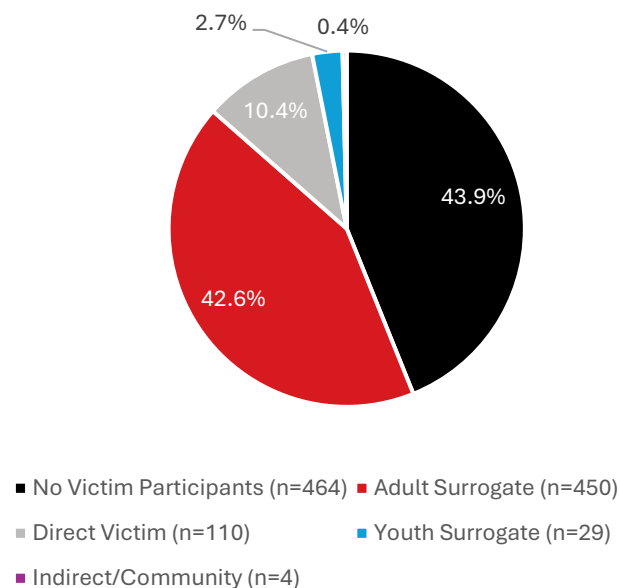
Figure 7. Reasons RJ Conferences were not Held when Referred



Victim Type at Conferences

One goal of RJ processes is to repair the harm caused to an individual, organization, or community. To do so, RJ processes aim to directly repair harm caused by youth to a victim. In total, 593 conferences had some type of victim present, including direct victims, indirect or community-level victims, and adult or youth surrogate victims. Data on victim participants was missing for 121 cases that participated in an RJ process. Data are presented below in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Victim Type at Conferences



Restorative Outcomes

After a conference was held, a total of 957 reparation plans were made. Reparation plans include some written concept for how to move forward, including either some service to the victim, an apology or reflection letter, financial restitution, services to the youth who caused harm, community service, addressing the reason for missing school, or other programming such as completion of the RYDE program¹⁰.

Outcome (Full Agreement, Partial Agreement, Facilitated Only, No Agreement)

In total, 1,137 cases reached a full or partial agreement¹¹. Frequency data can be found in Table 6.

¹⁰ The Restorative Youth Dialogue and Engagement (RYDE) program is offered by the Concord Mediation Center for pre-adjudicated youth. This curriculum -based program holds youth accountable for their actions; provides youth with the skills necessary to learn and understand how their choices created harms to victims and how those choices impacted the community; and allow youth to create a plan of repair through a reflection letter addressing harms and future behaviors.

¹¹ There is a difference between the 1,137 cases recorded as reaching full or partial agreement and the 957 cases with reparation plans, reflecting variations in how outcomes were entered into CMS by center. For example, some centers recorded an agreement as having occurred without also entering a corresponding reparation plan for truancy conference types. These differences are attributable to center-level variations in data entry practices.

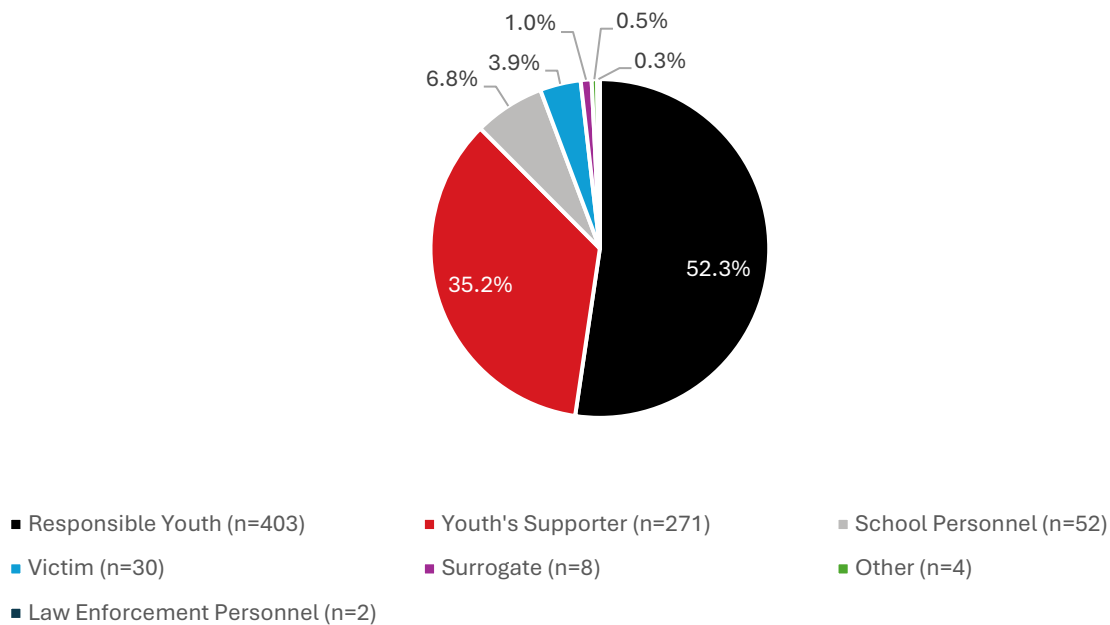
Table 6. Outcomes of the RJ Processes

Variables	Frequency, Percent
Full Agreement	1107, 72.3%
Partial Agreement	30, 1.9%
Unsuccessful/One or More Parties Chose not to Participate	268, 17.6%
Not Appropriate	44, 2.9%
Resolved Prior to Mediation	37, 2.4%
Facilitated Only	31, 2.0%
Not reported	14, 0.9%

Satisfaction with process

Mediation Centers gathered 770 evaluative survey responses from youth, youth supporters, victims, and victim surrogates. Youth supporters include parents, guardians, and school officials. See Figure 9. In some cases, more than one person responded to the survey (e.g., the responsible youth and school official or surrogate victim may have all filled out the survey). In total, 400 of the 1,531 cases reported here had one or more evaluative responses, for a total of 770 evaluation responses.

Figure 9. Respondent Type to Evaluative Survey (n = 770)



Overall, 94.8% of participants reported being satisfied or extremely satisfied with their RJ process. Many felt they had the opportunity to express their views and emotions, experience regret, and were treated with respect. Table 7 presents the response frequencies.

Table 7. Evaluation of the RJ Process

Construct	Response Rates (n = 770)
	% Agreed or Strongly Agreed¹²
During the conference, I felt I had an opportunity to express my views.	95.3%
I feel that I was treated with respect throughout the process.	97.1%
I feel the conference allowed me to express my emotions in a safe environment.	94.0%
During the conference, I felt regret or saw other people who expressed regret for what happened.	74.9%
After the conference, I have a better understanding of the impact of my behaviors on others. ¹³	88.6%
	% Very or Somewhat Satisfied¹⁴
Overall, my satisfaction with the conference is...	94.8%
Overall, my satisfaction with the agreement (reparation, attendance, or family plan) made during the conference is...	87.9%

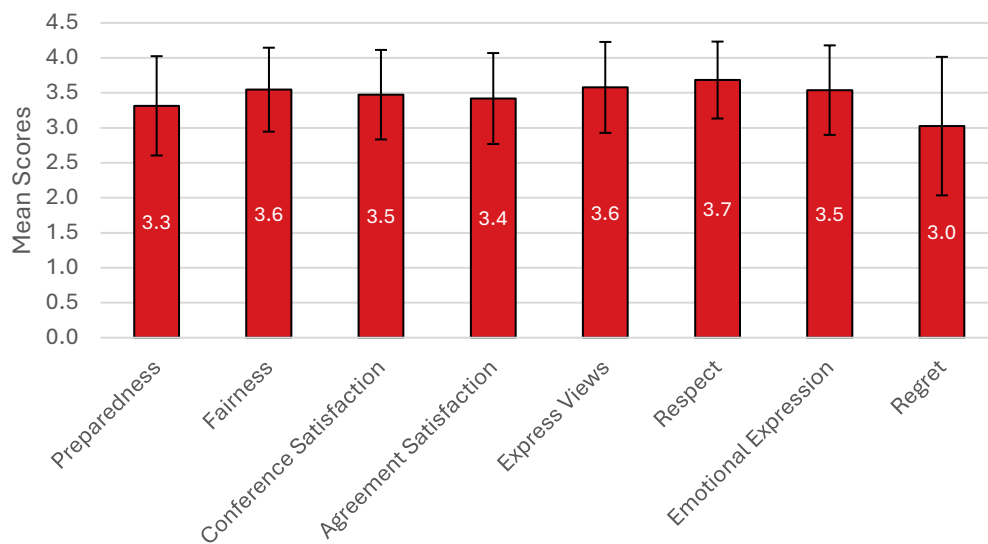
Participants were also asked about overall level of preparedness for the RJ process and how fair they felt the process was (See Appendix II for these frequencies broken out). Mean scores and standard deviations for each evaluative question are below in Figure 10. In addition, independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine differences in satisfaction based on conference outcomes and participant roles.

¹² Likert scale options: strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, or strongly agree

¹³ Impact of behaviors on others was only asked of the responsible youth (n = 403)

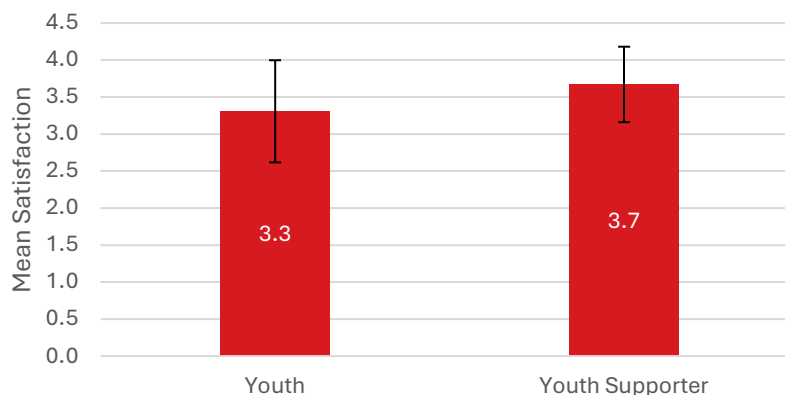
¹⁴ Likert scale options: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, satisfied, very satisfied, or not applicable because no agreement was made

Figure 10. Mean Scores with Standard Deviations for Each Evaluation Scale Domain



There were no statistically significant differences in satisfaction with the restorative justice process amongst those that completed an agreement and those that did not. An independent samples *t*-test revealed significant differences in overall satisfaction with the conference between youth for whom the conference was for ($\bar{x} = 3.3$, $SD = .7$) and youth supporters in attendance ($\bar{x} = 3.7$, $SD = .5$); $t = -7.87$, $p \leq 0.01$). See Figure 11.

Figure 11. Conference Satisfaction by Participant Type¹⁵

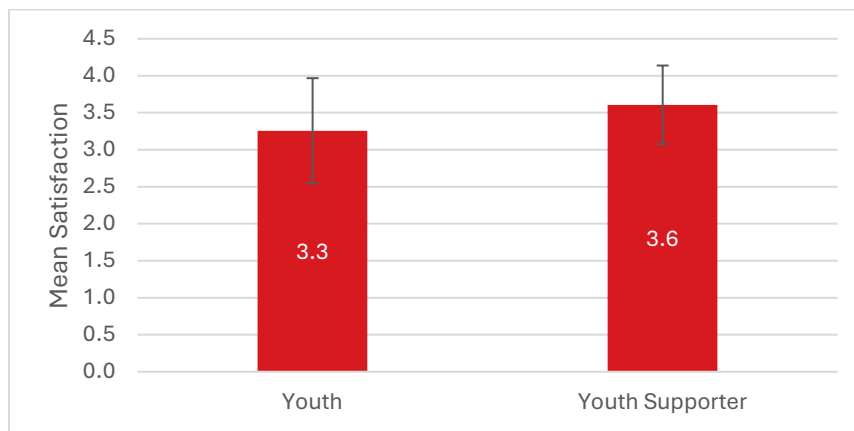


Significant differences were also found in overall satisfaction with the agreement between participant types such that youth reported significantly lower satisfaction ($\bar{x} = 3.3$, $SD = .71$) compared with youth supporters ($\bar{x} = 3.6$, $SD = .5$); $t = -7.20$, $p \leq 0.01$). See Figure 12.

¹⁵ Youth supporters include parents, guardians, and school officials. Youth $n = 403$; Youth Supporter $n = 328$

Appendix III has qualitative feedback written by participants about why they would or would not recommend the program to others.

Figure 12. Agreement Satisfaction by Participant Type



Future System Involvement (FSI)

To examine the impact of restorative programs on preventing youth from moving deeper into the system, this report evaluates whether each youth was filed on in court for a law violation after being discharged from the restorative program. ODR calculated FSI using data obtained from the Nebraska's JUSTICE State Trial Court case information. Data included all juvenile and adult cases between July 1, 2022 to March 16, 2024, including sealed records. For the purposes of this evaluation, the Nebraska Supreme Court's definition was used to calculate recidivism for the cases included in this time period. If a youth had more than one offense that met these criteria, the first offense following discharge from the program was included as the measure of FSI.

Across a subset of all cases, from July 1, 2022 through March 16, 2024 when FSI data was gathered ($n = 861$ cases), a total of 15.0% ($n = 129$ cases) had FSI within one year of discharge from a restorative program. In this time period, 655 youth fully or partially completed an agreement within the conference attended, and 206 did not. FSI rates did not differ substantially between individuals who fully or partially completed an agreement (15.0%, $n = 98$) and those who did not (15.1%, $n = 31$).

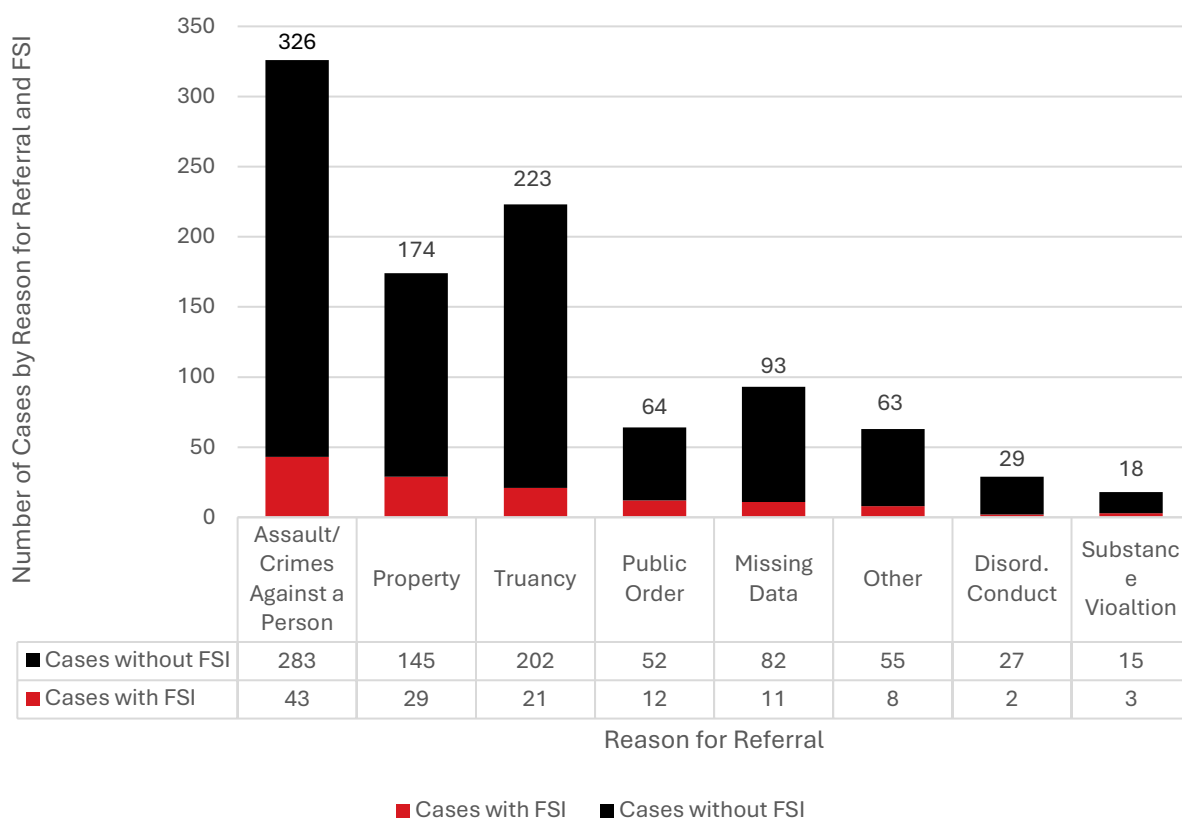
FSI rates differed between youth who were court-ordered to attend programming and those who were not. Among the 138 court-ordered youth, 110 participated in an RJ conference, and 23.2% ($n = 32$) had FSI within one year. In contrast, among the 722 youth who were not court-ordered, 568 participated in an RJ conference, and 13.4% ($n = 97$) had FSI within one year. Timing of conferences held may be an important consideration here. Delays between a court order and the conference could affect how youth engage in the process. This may

be an area for additional evaluation to determine whether earlier, upstream referrals, even prior to probation, could better support youth engagement and outcomes.

Of the 861 cases during this time period, 679 involved an RJ conference, and 101 of these cases (14.9%) had FSI within one year. Among the 174 cases where no RJ conference was held, 27 cases (15.5%) had FSI. Eight cases had missing data regarding whether an RJ conference occurred, and one of these youth (12.5%) had an FSI within one year.

Figure 13 shows original reason for referral and FSI rates. Data are presented for the youth referred to a center for RJ ($n = 861$) during the period from July 1, 2022, through March 16, 2024, when FSI data was gathered.

Figure 13. Reason for Referral and Future System Involvement for each Case from July 1, 2022 through March 16, 2024



Future System Involvement by Sex, Race, Grade in School, and RJ Outcome

During the time period of July 1, 2022 through March 16, 2024, there were 238 law offenses across the 129 cases with FSI. Table 8 shows the distribution of frequencies of FSI by sex for each case.

Table 8. Total Cases with FSI within 1 year by Sex

Sex	FSI		
	Yes	No	Total
Female	40 (10.7%)	335 (89.3%)	375
Male	89 (18.6%)	390 (81.4%)	479
Unspecified/Unknown	-	7 (100%)	7
Total	129 (15.0%)	732 (85.0%)	861

Table 9. shows the distribution of frequencies of FSI by race/ethnicity for each case. According to the data, White youth experience the lowest rates of FSI (13.8%). Of the 171 cases where youth identified as Hispanic or Latino, there were 28 cases (16.4%) where youth recidivated within the year.

Table 9. Cases with FSI within 1 year by Race / Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	FSI		
	Yes	No	Total
White	63 (13.8%)	392 (86.2%)	455
Black/African American	29 (16.3%)	149 (83.7%)	178
Other Race	14 (17.1%)	68 (82.9%)	82
Multiple Races	13 (17.3%)	62 (82.7%)	75
Unspecified	8 (19.5%)	33 (80.5%)	41
American Indian/Alaska Native	-	16 (100%)	16
Missing	-	7 (100%)	7
Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)	5
Asian	-	2 (100%)	2
Total	129 (15.0%)	732 (85.0%)	861

Table 10. shows the distribution of frequencies of FSI by age range for each case. Youth in 9th and 10th grade had higher rates of FSI than younger and older students.

Table 10. Cases with FSI within 1 year by Grade Level

Grade Level	FSI		
	Yes	No	Total
K–5 th Grade	-	30 (100%)	30
6 th	6 (13.6%)	38 (86.4%)	44
7 th	14 (14.1%)	85 (85.9%)	99
8 th	20 (13.9%)	124 (86.1%)	144
9 th	27 (18.2%)	121 (81.8%)	148
10 th	25 (18.7%)	109 (81.3%)	134
11 th	19 (16.8%)	94 (83.2%)	113
12 th + ¹⁶	9 (12.0%)	66 (88.0%)	75
Missing	9 (12.2%)	65 (87.8%)	74
Total	129 (15.0%)	732 (85.0%)	861

Table 11 presents the distribution of FSI by RJ case outcome and further details the types of outcomes that did not result in a full or partial agreement.

Table 11. Cases with FSI within 1 year by RJ Process Outcome

Reparations	FSI		
	Yes	No	Total
Partial or Full Agreement	98 (15.0%)	557 (85.0%)	655
Unsuccessful Completion ¹⁷	22 (17.6%)	103 (82.4%)	125
Not Appropriate	5 (14.3%)	30 (85.7%)	35
Resolved Prior to Mediation	-	20 (100%)	20
Facilitated Only	2 (9.5%)	19 (90.5%)	21
Not Reported	2 (40.0%)	3 (60.0%)	5
Total	129 (15.0%)	732 (85.0%)	861

Because of differences in reporting timeframes, aggregate versus individual-level data availability, and variation in which counties and programs provided data, we determined that a comparative analysis could not be conducted. Details about these data challenges and their implications are discussed in the Limitations section.

¹⁶ Not including any youth over the age of 18

¹⁷ Includes parties who chose not to participate, 1st or 2nd party decline, no agreement, party not available/nonresponsive

Outcomes by Case Type

Victim Youth Conferencing

Of the 714 cases that were referred for Victim Youth Conferencing, an RJ process was held for 83.5% of cases ($n = 596$). Of the 714 total cases, 554 cases (77.6%) resulted in a full agreement, and 24 cases (3.4%) reached a partial agreement. Additionally, 84 cases (11.8%) did not result in an agreement, including instances where no agreement was reached, a party declined to participate, or a party was unavailable or unresponsive. Another 10 cases (1.4%) were resolved prior to facilitation or were not reported, 25 cases (3.5%) were deemed not appropriate for the RJ process, and 17 cases (2.4%) were facilitated.

For the 714 cases referred for Victim Youth Conferencing, there were 352 completed evaluation surveys at discharge. Of these 352 surveys, 94.3% ($n = 332$) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the conference and 86.9% ($n = 306$) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the agreement reached.

A reparation plan was made for 590 cases (82.6%) including agreements for reflection letters, goals for how to handle the situation differently in the future, and commitments to pro-social activities. Within the period when FSI was measured, a total of 474 cases completed a VYC. Of these, 80 cases (16.9%) had FSI within a year of discharge.

Juvenile Justice Family Group Conferencing

In total, 25 cases were referred for Juvenile Justice Family Group and Expedited Family Group Conferencing. An RJ process was held for 56% ($n = 14$) of the cases. Of these, each case either came to a full agreement ($n = 9$, 64.3%), or the process outcome was marked as “facilitated only” ($n = 5$, 35.7%). A reparation plan was made in 8 cases and included services to the offending youth such as referrals to additional programming and the creation of a communication plan. Two youth had FSI for a law violation within one year of discharge, and no evaluation surveys were completed for these cases upon discharge.

Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing

Of the 536 cases that were referred for Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing, an RJ process was held for 62.3% of cases ($n = 334$). Of these 536 cases, a total of 328 cases (61.2%) resulted in a full agreement, and 5 cases (0.9%) reached a partial agreement. Additionally, 155 cases (28.9%) did not result in an agreement, including instances where no agreement was reached, a party declined to participate, or a party was unavailable or unresponsive. Further, 28 cases (5.2%) were resolved prior to facilitation, 18 cases (3.4%) were deemed not appropriate for the RJ process, and 2 cases (0.4%) were only facilitated.

Of the 536 cases referred for Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing, there were 32 completed evaluation surveys at discharge. Of these 32 surveys, 96.9% ($n = 31$) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the conference and 93.8% ($n = 30$) were either satisfied or very satisfied with the agreement reached. A reparation plan was made for 137 cases including agreements for improving school attendance, goals for handling similar situations, and truancy prevention agreements.

Within the timeframe of July 1, 2022, through March 16, 2024 when FSI was measured, a total of 202 cases were referred, and of those cases, 21 (10.3%) had FSI for a type of law violation within a year of discharge.

Limitations

A primary limitation of this evaluation was the availability and comparability of data across programs. While counties and programs were generous in sharing data and granting permission for its use, much of what was able to be provided was in aggregate form rather than at the individual level. Without individual-level data, we were unable to conduct propensity score matching or other comparative analyses as originally planned.

In addition, the data available to us represented different time periods, different case definitions of FSI, and, in some instances, overlapping youth populations. For example, county attorneys have discretion in how they administer diversion, and many RJ referrals originate from diversion. Some diversion programs may also incorporate restorative elements. As a result, some cases included in the RJ dataset may also appear in the diversion dataset. Without individual-level data, it was impossible to separate these cases. The FSI data for RJ programs also covered a slightly different timeframe than the diversion data, making direct comparisons difficult.

These constraints highlight the challenges of conducting rigorous, statewide analyses without coordinated and standardized data sharing systems. A consistent, statewide structure for aligning definitions, collecting individual-level data, and sharing information across counties and programs would allow for a stronger evaluation of programmatic impact on youth outcomes. While the data we did receive provides valuable context, it cannot be used to draw causal or comparative conclusions between diversion and RJ processes.

Finally, because random assignment of youth to diversion or RJ programming was not possible, selection bias may be present. Youth or families who opt into RJ may differ in meaningful ways from those who do not (e.g., differ in their understanding of RJ, family support, etc.), which could influence outcomes. Certain models of restorative practice,

such as family group conferencing, were also underutilized during the study period, further limiting the ability to compare outcomes across all restorative approaches.

Conclusions/Recommendations

Overall, findings from the JRJFII Initiative suggest that restorative conferencing, particularly Victim Youth Conferencing and Excessive Absenteeism Conferencing, achieves high rates of agreement completion and participant satisfaction. In many cases, reparation plans were developed to address harm and improve future behavior. FSI within one year of discharge was relatively low, especially for youth that participated in an RJ conference, although limitations in comparative data constrain the ability to draw causal conclusions. These results reinforce RJ as a valuable strategy for addressing harm and fostering positive outcomes for both participants and the broader community.

At the same time, the findings highlight areas for growth. Youth reported lower satisfaction than support people, and many parents choose not to participate. Youth of color and young men were more likely to experience FSI. Youth were also less satisfied with the agreements reached than with the conferences themselves, and fewer reported understanding the impact of their behavior. Centers could explore these differences, ensure youth voices are central, and provide additional support to reduce disparities. Centers could also consider the collection of qualitative data that helps to capture key issues such as disparities in access or outcomes, differences in satisfaction, to understand reasons for refusal to participate in an RJ conference, and reasons for FSI.

The findings also highlight the need to thoughtfully define what constitutes “success” in restorative processes, which may include not only reduced recidivism but also the extent to which harmed parties feel heard, agreements are reached and completed, and participants are satisfied with the process.

In addition, developing stronger evaluations of RJ outcomes will require more reciprocal data sharing across state agencies and counties, along with consistent and coordinated data collection practices, to ensure more comprehensive and comparable measures are available in the future.

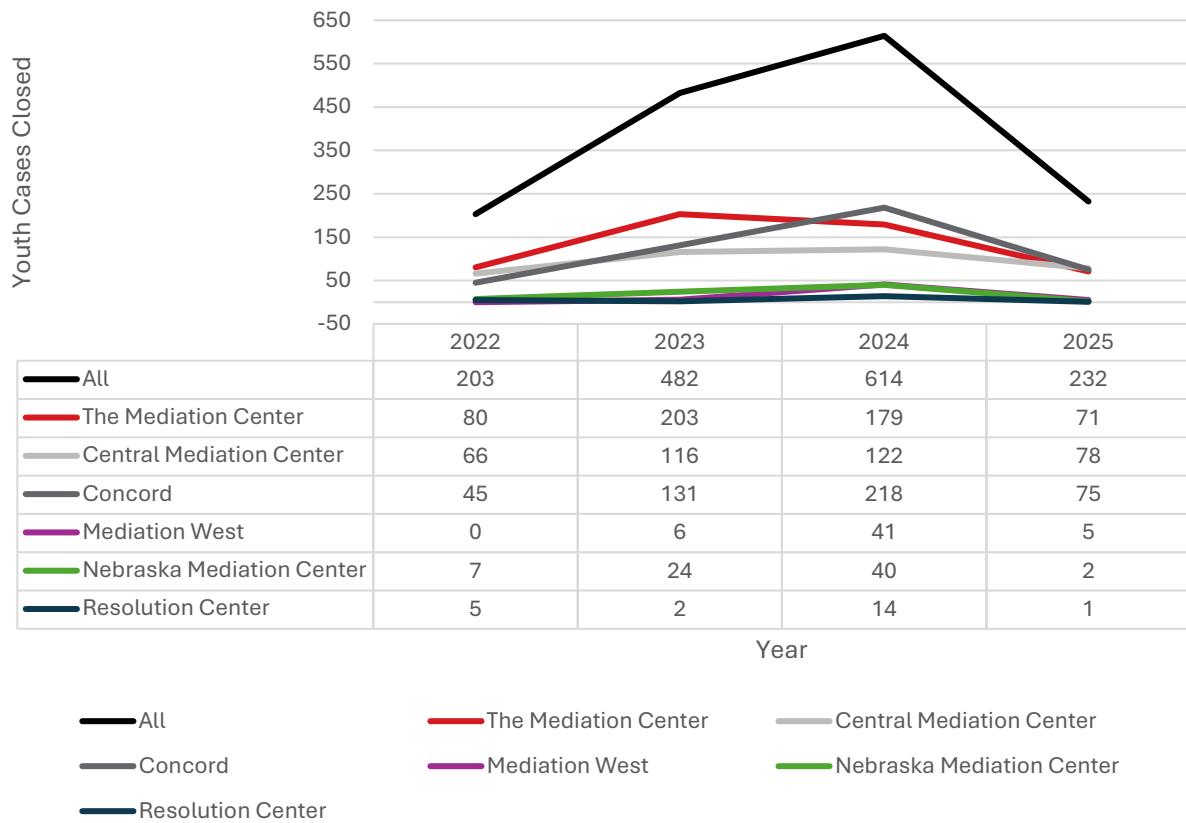
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Appendix I

Figure 14 below shows the number of cases closed by year across each Mediation Center from July 1, 2022 – April 2025.

Figure 14. Youth Cases Closed by Year and Mediation Center July 1, 2022 – April 2025



Appendix II

The figures below depict responses on evaluative surveys about overall preparedness ahead of the RJ conference as well as how fair participants felt the conference was.

Figure 15. Self-Reported Preparedness for Conference

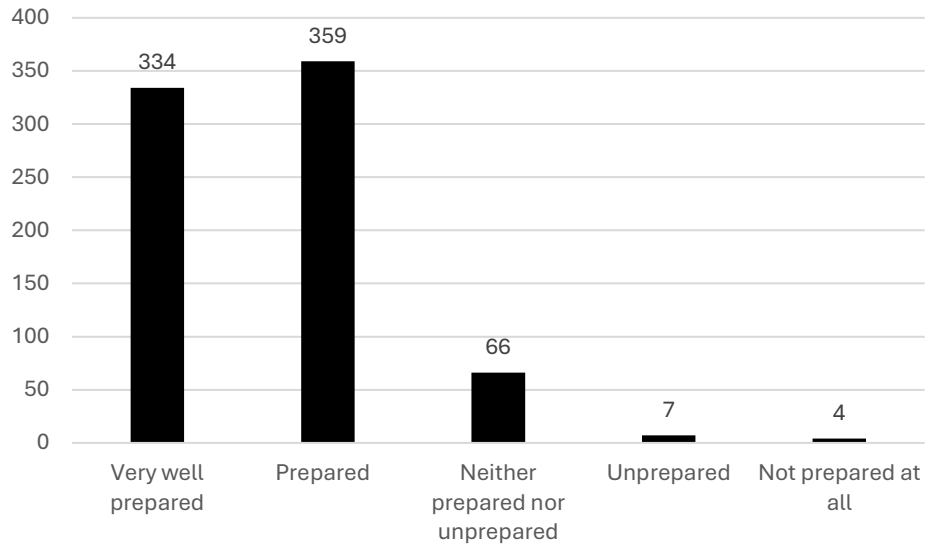
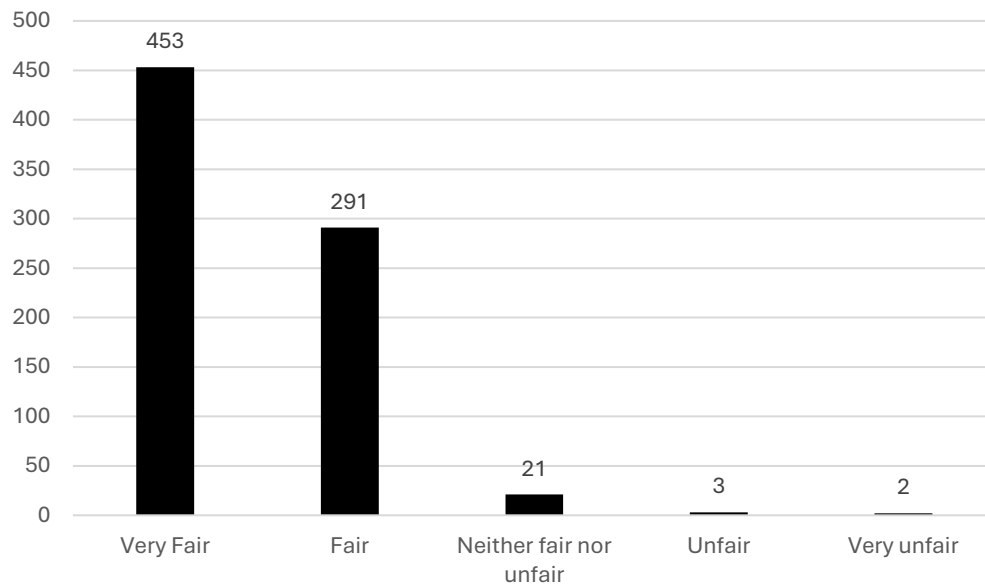


Figure 16. Perceived Fairness Level of the Conference



Appendix III

Participants (youth, victims, and youth supporters) were asked, “Why would you recommend or not recommend this program?” Responses were thematically organized for clarity and comprehensiveness, and select examples are provided below. Duplicate responses have been omitted.

1. Participant Reasons for Not Recommending the RJ Programming

- *“Personally, I don’t like it. I can’t talk.”*
- *“Because I do not want to.”*
- *“They team up against you, or it feels like it.”*

2. RJ Conferencing Offers a Second Chance

- *“[This process] keeps kids from having a record at a younger age”*
- *“[This is a] good program for kids 1st offense”*
- *“Everyone makes mistakes and you can show you grow from your mistake”*
- *“a great idea to give kids a second chance prior to being involved in the legal system”*
- *“Changing someone’s life to create a better living for themselves is great”*

3. RJ Offers Community Connection and a Chance for Reflection

- *“They help connect family and school”*
- *“Great way to reflect on the situation”*
- *“[This process] helps individuals reflect on their impact on others”*
- *“[This process] helps to put the problems behind you”*
- *“It helped me move forward”*
- *“It helped me understand and think through what happened and what went wrong”*
- *“It is a great way to reflect on their actions and understand how to better themselves”*
- *“This program provides meaningful opportunities for reflection for all parties and brings feelings of closure and understanding.”*

4. RJ Offers a Safe Space to be Heard

- *“It’s easier to talk with impartial mediators present.”*
- *“You can speak openly and be heard and know every side of the story”*
- *“It is a safe environment to talk to somebody.”*
- *“The people here are very nice/kind”*
- *“They really make u realize things ... made me feel heard and valued.”*
- *“They are very respectful and kind”*

- *“It gives you another chance”*

5. Process & Outcome Clarity

- *“It helped to summarize everything and get us all on the same page.”*
- *“It was a much better outcome and more useful than something like probation, which would probably be more ‘punishment’ oriented.”*
- *“Allows everyone to come together in one setting face-to-face and get on the same page.”*
- *“It is a good way to express what you went through when the situation happened and the reasoning for doing it.”*
- *“It gives both parties the option to express their thoughts and feelings and clear up any misunderstandings.”*

6. Personal Growth & Accountability

- *“It helps you understand your emotions and why you did it.”*
- *“It helps you understand the situation way better and view it in different ways”*
- *“Talking helps people process through tough situations and feelings.”*
- *“This program helps very much so I would recommend it.”*
- *“They helped me understand what happened and to get over it”*
- *“It reminds the youth a situation doesn't define you or who you are or will be.”*
- *“Taking accountability is the first step in making a change to behaviors.”*

7. Praise for Staff

- *“The ladies are fantastic!”*
- *“[The staff were] extremely kind, patient, understanding”*
- *“Fantastic mediator”*
- *“The staff ... were so passionate and care about helping. Thank you.”*
- *“Facilitates open and honest discussion”*