

## **The Youth Monitoring Program: An Evaluability Assessment**

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### **Introduction**

Evaluability Assessment (EA) is systematic process that helps identify whether program evaluation is justified, feasible, and likely to provide useful information. It not only shows whether a program can be meaningfully evaluated, but also whether conducting the evaluation is likely to contribute to improved program performance. The Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center (JJEC) conducted an EA of the Youth Monitoring Program<sup>1</sup> (YMP) in February 2003 to determine if the program is in a position to partake in an evaluation. Prior to conducting the EA, JJEC met with some of the primary stakeholders of the YMP program including the Director and the Assistant Deputy Director of Human Services and several representatives of the Research Division of the Juvenile Court. In addition to this meeting, all documentation and program materials were obtained and reviewed prior to the EA. Staff interviews with the Assistant Deputy Director of Human Services, the Supervisor for the Probation Officers (POs), and four different POs were scheduled over a two-day period. Unfortunately, JJEC staff were unable to interview clients due to confidentiality issues. Please note that all identifying information of the program was changed for the purpose of this report.

Throughout the EA process, it was apparent that the YMP program had several strengths, although the one that stood out was the dedication and devotion the staff expressed toward the program. Not only did everyone who was interviewed speak highly of the program, but the amount of time and work that they put forth to help the clients was impressive. Also, all of the staff that JJEC spoke to have been working with the YMP program for multiple years and they expressed very high satisfaction with their current positions.

Currently the YMP program does not collect data specifically for the purpose of evaluation; however, data are collected and used for tracking information about probation cases. Every month the POs are required to submit caseload-related statistics to the Assistant Deputy Director of Human Services (e.g., how many clients he or she is currently serving and how many of his or her clients completed or dropped out of the program). The Program Manager compiles these statistics, along with additional data he voluntarily maintains (school attendance data, race, gender, number of youth being served who are 12 or younger, and the number of youth with bench warrants) and enters them into an “informal” management information system (MIS) in Microsoft Excel. Currently monthly statistical reports are compiled for the Human Services Division; however, none of these data are used beyond this purpose.

Because of the data currently being collected, as well as the dedication and consistency of the staff, the YMP program is very close to being ready to partake in an evaluation. To prepare for an evaluation, the primary area that the program should focus on is the formalization of data collection.

<sup>1</sup> The actual name of the program has been changed.

Overall, the data collection process needs to become an everyday protocol for all staff, and, if possible, maintained in a program-wide MIS. This would require that standardized forms be created for the reports, such as the PO's monthly report, and be made mandatory for all POs to complete. In order to ensure that all staff understand the purpose(s) of the forms, training should be provided. The body and conclusion of this report will provide more detailed information on what the YMP program should do to ready itself for an evaluation.

## **Program Information**

### Introduction

Both the program description and staff members interviewed described the YMP program as a six-month intensive community supervision and treatment program for juveniles. It was created by the Department of Human Services and is currently housed at one of its offices at 409 Easton Street. Staff and program documentation indicated that YMP provides youth with a chance to remain in the community, receive a wide variety of structured services, facilitate family support and involvement, and provide the Judiciary an alternative to commitment as well as an option for intensive services in addressing concerns of probation. All staff interviewed pointed out that for some youth, probation does not offer enough supervision, but confinement offers too much. Staff stated that the YMP program provides a solid option between these two dispositions.

The YMP program was created in 1998 because of the concern that no appropriate placements existed for juveniles whose needs were between probation and incarceration. Staff indicated that various stakeholders realized that certain youth needed slightly more supervision than probation offered, yet deserved more freedom and access to the community than those in confinement. Prior to the creation of the YMP program, youth with similar characteristics were sent to the City Supervision and Services Program, a life skills camp similar to a traditional boot camp. After a youth successfully completed the camp, he or she was sent back home, yet had to report daily to his or her PO until transition back into the community was complete. Primarily due to the high costs of this program, it was discontinued. Several of the staff that worked with the City Supervision and Services Program served on the planning committee for the YMP program.

The YMP Program is funded out of Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grant (JAIBG) funds as well as a match made by the Juvenile Court. The program funding cycle is 14 months.

### Program Design

As discussed earlier, the purpose of the YMP program is to provide juveniles an opportunity to remain in the community, receive services and intense community supervision. The program works closely with the judiciary, the juvenile, their families, community, school and any other concerned party interested in the juvenile's well-being. The following are considered key components of the YMP program:

- Educational referrals;
- Family counseling;
- Employment;

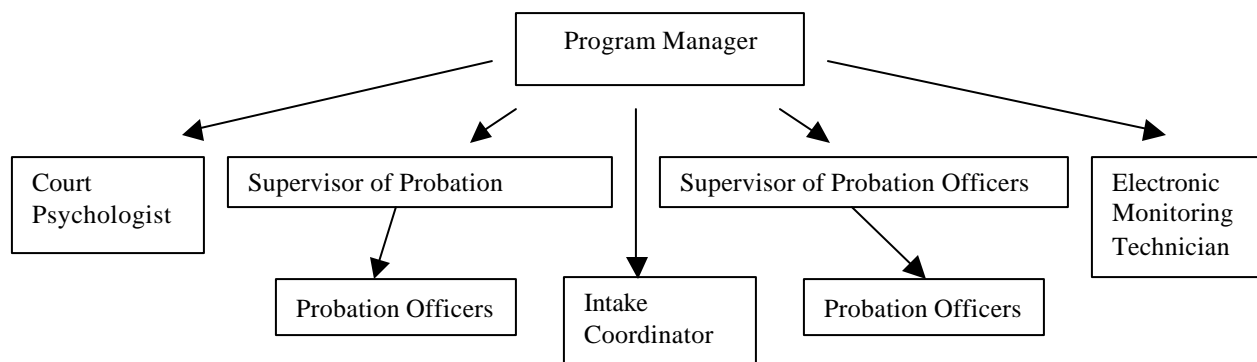
- Mental health education;
- Drug education;
- Telephone and home curfew check;
- Electronic monitoring; and
- Mentoring.

All of the staff interviewed were asked to describe how the YMP program operates from the time a youth is referred to the program to when he or she is terminated from the program. All staff described this process similarly. In sum, a youth is referred to the YMP program by either a judge in Juvenile Court or by a PO during a disposition hearing. A technician visits the youth at home within 7 days and hooks him or her up to an electronic monitor that tracks when he or she leaves and returns home. The monitor is required for a minimum of 30 days. If the youth complies with the conditions, the PO discontinues the electronic monitoring and places the youth in the Home and Community Probation (HCP) program, during which the youth receives phone curfew checks. If the youth does not comply, electronic monitoring continues and any other necessary actions are taken. When the program was created, police officers were supposed to accompany the POs on these visits; however, due to funding issues, this activity was cut. This change in program activities was not included in the program documentation, but it was mentioned by several staff members during interviews.

In addition to the electronic monitoring, at the outset of the program each youth receives an individualized treatment plan created by the court psychologist and the PO. The PO supervises, implements, and monitors the youth's progress and makes necessary changes. Throughout the program, each youth receives a variety of individualized services that may include therapy (individual, group, and family), mentoring, tutoring, job training, and job placement. During the six-month duration of the program, court reviews are scheduled by the PO every 60 days to discuss the youth's progress.

The staff believe that by implementing the activities of the YMP program, youth are less likely to re-offend. That is, the staff think that by limiting youths' freedom and providing more structure for youths, the likelihood of recidivism decreases.

The YMP program currently has a staff of nine full-time people. All of the program staff have been working at the program for a minimum of two years. Each year staff members receive in-house training and attend various national conferences. The hierarchy is as follows:



## Program Target Population

In order to be eligible for the YMP program, youth must be at least 14 years of age, city residents, and have no pending charges in any jurisdiction. Youth are subject to rejection from the program if they have serious psychological/psychiatric or medical disorders that would limit full participation in the program, or need inpatient substance abuse treatment.

According to program documentation and the staff interviewed, the YMP program is designed for adjudicated delinquent youth (male or female) with one or more of the following issues:

- Have been involved in violent crime,
- Are court-ordered curfew violators,
- Are loss of contact cases (cases that are lost, misplaced, or end up in another court),
- Have serious truancy issues,
- Are not in compliance with conditions set by the court, and
- Present special concerns (with approval of the electronic monitoring supervisor).

A variety of youth with a wide range of issues are involved in the YMP program. Several staff who were interviewed stated that more often than not, these youth fit within the ideal target population; however, sometimes the court refers juveniles to the program who have issues involving sex offenses, serious mental health problems, and/or serious drug issues. This often creates problems because of the special services they require that the YMP program cannot provide. Usually the POs can present those cases to the referring judge to attempt to reject youths who are inappropriate for the program. If another program is more suitable for the youth, the probation officer tries to reach an agreement with the judge so that the youth is appropriately placed?

## Referral Process

Juveniles are referred to the YMP program in one of two ways:

- Judge's decision during a hearing
- PO's recommendation to a judge at a disposition or probation revocation hearing

According to the YMP program manual and descriptions given by staff, the referral process is as follows:

1. If a PO recommends the program at a disposition or revocation hearing, a referral should be sent to the YMP Intake Coordinator three days prior to the said hearing, along with a copy of all social information and the affidavit.
2. POs referring participants discuss requirements with all pertinent parties to facilitate full cooperation and compliance with program rules and regulations prior to disposition.
3. The court orders the respondent into the program as a special condition of probation. As an additional condition, electronic monitoring is ordered.

4. After disposition, the respondent must sign the program contract in court. The judge, the attorney, and the parent or guardian are also required to sign the contract.
5. Once the contract is signed, the YMP Intake Coordinator takes the respondent and his or her parents and/or guardians to the program office.

Based on discussions with the staff members, this process not only works well, but also is also consistently and continuously followed.

### Stakeholders

There are many stakeholders vested in the design of the YMP program and its success. Some of these include: city residents, Juvenile court staff, the Department of Employee Services, the Youth Services Administration, the Department of Mental Health, and the school system.

According to the Assistant Deputy Director of Human Services, all of the stakeholders work well together; however, he said that sometimes the YMP staff members feel that there is a need to break down certain barriers because of the competition among agencies. At the time of the interviews, staff members could not come up with any specific examples of competition.

### **Planning For a Program Evaluation**

Evaluation is a key component in the process of program development and management. It is a useful tool for juvenile justice program managers to identify what results they are producing and how the activities engaged in are geared toward producing those results. Juvenile justice program managers need information about what their programs are trying to accomplish, how their programs are functioning, and what results they are producing in order to confirm that their program is both effective and is serving the intended population. In order to help program managers learn to effectively plan for evaluation-related activities, JJEC has published a series of evaluation briefings on specific topics. The first in this series, entitled, "Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation: An Overview" provides a discussion of the suggested seven-step process for evaluation. Below is a description of each step, as well as a discussion of the accomplishments the YMP program has made in each area.

#### 1) Define the problem

Programs are developed to address particular problems or needs. In the juvenile justice field, these problems or needs are related to the prevention or reduction of delinquent behavior. Juvenile justice programs are created to reduce delinquency and change the attitudes and behaviors that are related to delinquency.

As stated earlier, the YMP program was created because of the concern that no appropriate placements existed for juveniles whose needs were between probation and incarceration. Because of the lack of appropriate placement, many juveniles seemed to recidivate due to either a lack of supervision or being placed in the wrong type of supervision. By providing an option in between probation and incarceration, program planners believed that they could reduce the rate at which youth were recidivating. The staff members interviewed did not say how the YMP program planners came to the

conclusion that this was a problem. Regardless, since 1998 when the YMP program was created, the program goal has remained the same because the identified problem is still a concern.

2) Implement evidence-based programming

After a problem is identified, a solution, in the form of a policy initiative or program, needs to be implemented. Ideally this policy or program should be demonstrated to be an effective solution to the problem. This can be done by identifying research and evaluation studies on similar populations and juvenile justice programs.

It is not known whether research was conducted on similar type of programs when the YMP program was created. The YMP program design was based on the successes and failures of the City Supervision and Services Program, which, as mentioned earlier, was discontinued because of high cost. Although it was uncertain whether the City Supervision and Services Program was ever formally evaluated, staff members who were interviewed all spoke highly of it and assumed it was effective.

3) Develop a program logic model

A logic model is a tool used to visually describe the linkages between program goals, activities, and expected outcomes. JJEC recommends using the following components:

- **Goal-** Broad statement about what the program intends to accomplish. It is also the intended long-term outcome of the program
- **Objectives-** Specific statements about what the program hopes to achieve. Objectives are well defined, specific, and measurable, and are derived from the goal(s).
- **Resources-** Means available to achieve objectives (e.g., money, staff).
- **Activities-** The program efforts conducted to achieve the identified objectives.
- **Process Measures-** Data used to demonstrate how well activities are implemented. These include product of activities and indicators of services provided.
- **Outcomes-** Actual change(s) or lack thereof in the target (e.g., clients or system) of the program that are directly related to the goal(s) and objectives. Outcomes may include intended or unintended consequences. There are 3 types:
  - Initial:** Immediate results of the program
  - Intermediate:** Results following initial outcomes
  - Long Term:** Ultimate impact of program. The long-term outcome relates to achievement of the goal.
- **Outcome Measures-** Data used to measure how well the objectives and goal are achieved.
- **External Factors :** Factors outside the program that may affect program operation and outcomes. Conversely, the program itself may affect elements of the larger system in which it operates.

Currently the YMP program does not have a formal logic model in place. Program documentation contains goals, objectives, and activities; however, there are no measures in place to determine whether the activities are completed and whether or not the program

meets its objectives. If evaluation is a concern, it is important for a program to establish a logic model. Appendix A lays out a suggested logic model for the YMP program. This particular logic model does not include two frequently used categories –resources and external factors. Often the resources category is used to explain the costs of running the program (a facility, staff, staff time, etc). The external factors category is frequently used to show how outside factors might influence a program, such as the economy or city politics. We recommend the YMP program add these to the logic model.

#### 4) Develop measures

There are two different types of measures that should be developed as part of the evaluation process. These are:

- **Process Measures:** Data used to demonstrate how well the activities are implemented. These include product of activities and indicators of services provided.
- **Outcome Measures:** Data used to measure how well the objectives and goal are achieved.

As stated above, the YMP program does not currently monitor program implementation or whether the objectives are met. These components are crucial in determining the effectiveness of a program.

#### 5) Collect and analyze data

Once measures are selected, data must be collected and analyzed to determine whether the program's objectives have been met. Currently the Assistant Deputy Director of Human Services maintains an informal database composed of client data that are submitted each month by the POs. This is an excellent start toward a fully computerized tracking system utilized by all program staff. In addition, the YMP program is fortunate in having access to the Research Division within the Juvenile Court. We suggest that Research Division staff be used for advice on collecting and analyzing data for the program, as well as for conducting a program evaluation in the future.

#### 6) Report findings

Once the data are analyzed, the analysis results should be reported. Because the YMP program is partially funded by JAIBG, it is already required to report certain information. A process and/or outcome evaluation, however, would require collecting more comprehensive information, which could lead to additional funding in the future.

The YMP program is required to complete and submit a Quarterly Subgrantee Programmatic Report to OJJDP on a quarterly basis. Prior to the EA, JJEC was given a copy of the report for the second quarter of 2001. In this report, the program was required to answer the following questions:

- What program goals and objectives were accomplished during this period?
- What program activities took place during this period?
- What problems were encountered in this quarter, how did they delay the operation of the program, how were they handled?
- How did these problems and delays affect the program?
- Is the program still perceived to be beneficial to your agency?
- What activities took place in support of your evaluation of the program?

Because the YMP program is required to submit answers to these questions, data is automatically being collected. From an evaluation perspective, the program would benefit from storing these data in the database maintained by the Deputy Director of Human Services. Additionally, it is very important that all program staff share information about the program and know about the database and what is maintained in it.

#### 7) Reassess program logic

After findings have been reported, it is crucial to take a step back and look at a program's impact overall. This means using the results of the report to consider if the program logic model or implementation needs modification. The evaluation process is a circular one, in which the data analysis leads to conclusions about how well the program has fulfilled its objectives. Reassessing program logic, design, and operation after the evaluation report is produced not only shows where the program needs improvement, but it also reveals a program's strongest assets.

If the YMP program follows through with the evaluation process, the information obtained would be beneficial in identifying its strengths as well as areas that could be improved to better serve clients. For example, several of the staff interviewed stated that a large percentage of the youth being served have drug and (or) alcohol problems. All of these staff members believe that the YMP program would benefit if there were a residential alcohol and drug detoxification program available in the city.

Each evaluation step is crucial in the process and contributes to successful evaluation planning. Should the YMP program choose to participate in an evaluation, the first two steps are already completed and the third is well on its way. This puts the YMP program in a very good position in terms of being ready for an evaluation.

### **Program Readiness for Evaluation**

An EA is primarily conducted to assess whether a program is ready to partake in an evaluation. Therefore, one possible outcome is that some additional work needs to be done prior to a program's participation in an evaluation. More often than not, a program is not fully ready because of issues related to the program design and/or implementation. Based on the interviews with YMP staff as well as the documentation provided by the YMP program, we concluded that a program design is in place for the YMP program, but it is not clearly presented or up-to-date. As noted earlier, a logic model was created for the program by JJEC; however, this model only identifies the major goal of the program, three objectives, and several activities. The program should also identify process and outcome measures to ensure that what is supposed to be



happening is indeed occurring. Suggested process and outcome measures are shown in Appendix A. However, these are merely suggestions based on the information obtained during the EA. The YMP program staff should create a logic model based on how the program currently is operating.

The YMP program documentation needs updating. The documentation states, for example, that the Municipal Police Department provides police escorts for the POs when they conduct the HCP visits. Program staff pointed out that this no longer occurs, however, due to funding issues, although the home visits still occur just as frequently as before. Several program staff members also mentioned that a large mentoring component discussed in the documentation was terminated temporarily. If such important program components are not updated in the documentation and the documentation is provided for a process evaluation, it would appear that the program was not following through with its stated activities. However, if details such as this are updated, these types of problems should not arise.

In terms of program implementation, the YMP program is very strong. It appears that the program primarily serves the population for whom it was designed, it has most of the resources identified in the program design (this could be strengthened by maintaining a current program design), the activities are being carried out as identified in the program manual, and, as mentioned earlier, the program has the capacity to provide data for an evaluation.

### Recommendations

The YMP program has many strengths, including the dedication and commitment of its staff. It is unusual in the juvenile justice field to have such a low turnover rate for the staff of a program. All staff interviewed spoke very highly of all facets of the program and were supportive of its design. All of the staff understood the main goal and objectives of the program, and knew the activities that they needed to carry out in order to help meet them.

In terms of being ready for an evaluation, the YMP program is in a very good position since it just started its fourth year of providing services to youth, it has fairly secure annual funding, and its staff are invested in the well-being of the program. Given its overall strength, the program stands to benefit immensely if its data collection methodology is improved. The program should refer to the seven-step process for evaluation noted earlier in this report, as well as the JJEC briefing that discusses these steps. In addition, the YMP program should produce a program logic model, possibly starting with the sample in Appendix A. Once all identified stakeholders of the program agree upon a logic model, a majority of the data (process measures and outcome measures) that need to be collected must be identified and the data sources selected. (For example, if an activity of the program is, “youth will meet with PO twice a week for one month,” then the program needs to have the POs document all meetings with the youth in order to measure whether they are occurring or not.) Staff should be aware of why certain data are collected and what they will be used for. This will make it easier for them to comply with the data collection requirements and help make the process a habit. While some data collection is currently taking place, the data are not being kept in an MIS. Such a system is crucial to have in place in order to manage and store the data, as well as to identify and resolve problems with data

collection. We also recommend the program update its documentation to reflect changes related to HCP visits and mentoring.

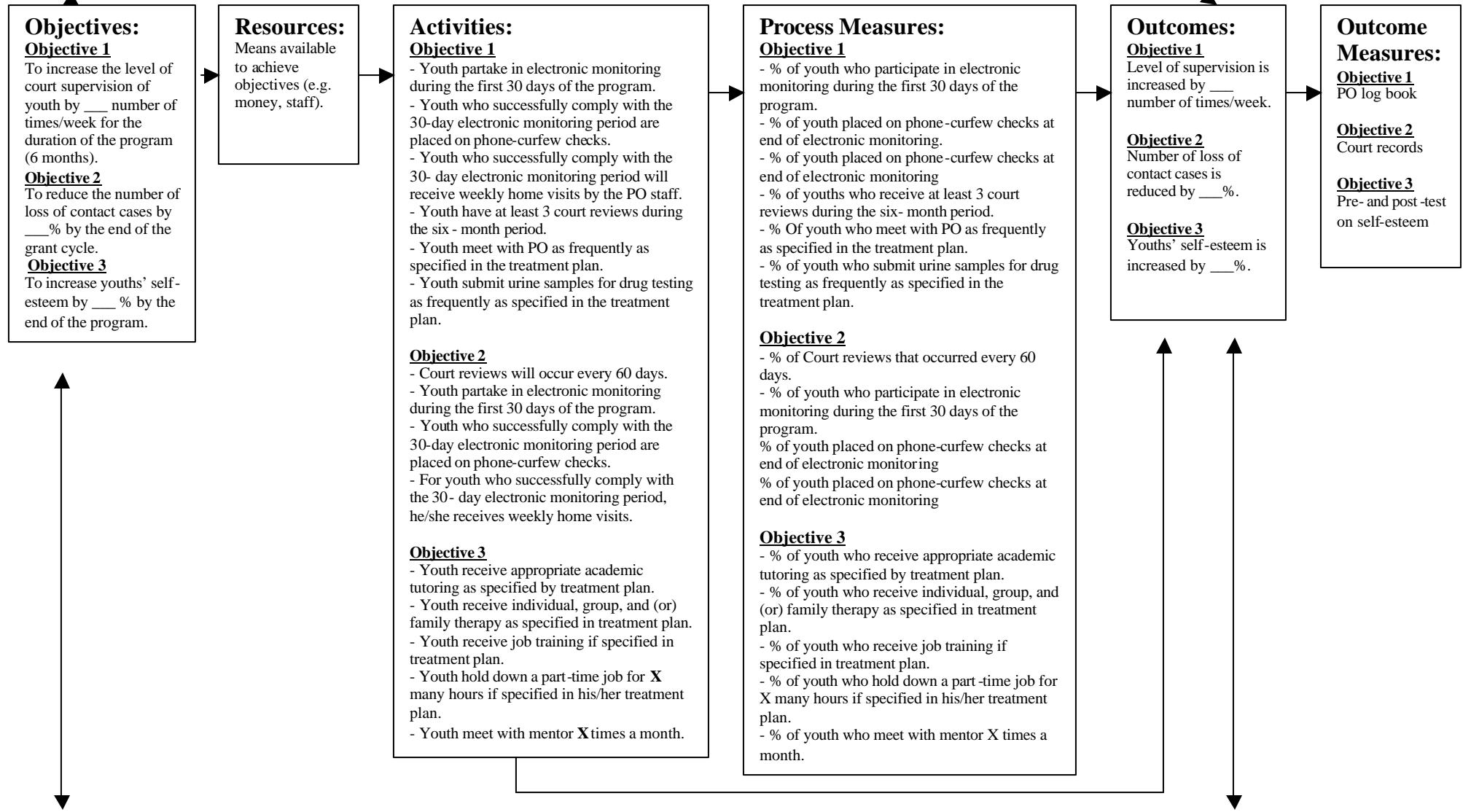
## **Conclusion**

As stated earlier, the YMP program is in a good position in terms of its readiness for evaluation. All of the staff are well qualified and properly trained to operate the program. During the interviews, each staff member mentioned that he or she felt that there was more than adequate in-service and outside training provided for their positions. Additionally, the rationale behind the program is coherent and plausible, and appears to be the thrust behind the services that are provided. Finally, the services that are provided are done in a timely fashion and reflect what the target population needs.

In order to finalize the preparations for an evaluation, the YMP program should create a program logic model to lay out the program's goal and objectives, what activities the program will provide in order to accomplish these, and, finally, how it will monitor these activities. Once these are agreed upon by all stakeholders and put into place, the YMP program will be ready for evaluation. Because the Juvenile Court has a research division that is responsible for conducting research and evaluation activities involving court services programs, the YMP program should be able to obtain ample support when preparing and planning for an evaluation. In addition, resources on evaluation-related material that may be of use to the YMP program can be found in Appendix B.

# The Youth Monitoring Program: Proposed Logic Model

**Goal:** To reduce recidivism by providing juveniles who would normally be committed an opportunity to remain in the community and become more productive citizens.



**External Factors:** The program operates within a larger system. Factors within the system may affect program operation and outcomes. These are external factors. Furthermore, the program may affect elements of the system in which it operates.

## Suggested Evaluation Resources

*The following resources are recommended as tools to help the YMP program plan for an evaluation. Some provide hands-on information about creating a program design, conducting a cost-benefit analysis, and building a program logic model. Others are included because they are well-designed process and/or outcome evaluations of alternatives to secure confinement programs.*

Aos, S. (2002). *Cost-Benefit Analysis for Juvenile Justice Programs*. Washington, DC: Justice Research & Statistics Association.

**<http://www.jrsa.org/jjec/about/publications/cost-benefit.pdf>**

Dietrich, W., Boyles, C., and Colling, S. (1999). *Colorado Regimented Juvenile Training Program Evaluation Report*. Denver, CO: Division of Youth Corrections, Office of Research and Evaluation.

Greenwood, P. W., and Turner, S. (1987). *The VisionQuest Program: An Evaluation*. Santa Monica, CA: The RAND Corporation.

The Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center Web site: **<http://www.jrsa.org/jjec/>**

Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center. (2002). *Juvenile Justice Program Evaluation: An Overview*. Washington, DC: Justice Research & Statistics Association.

**<http://www.jrsa.org/jjec/about/publications/program-evaluation.pdf>**

Juvenile Justice Evaluation Center. (2001). *Strategies for Evaluating Small Juvenile Justice Programs*. Washington, DC: Justice Research & Statistics Association.

**<http://www.jrsa.org/jjec/about/publications/strategies.pdf>**

Sontheimer, H. and Goodstein, L. (1993). *An Evaluation of Juvenile Intensive Aftercare Probation: Aftercare Versus System Response Effects*. *Justice Quarterly*, 10(2), 197-227.