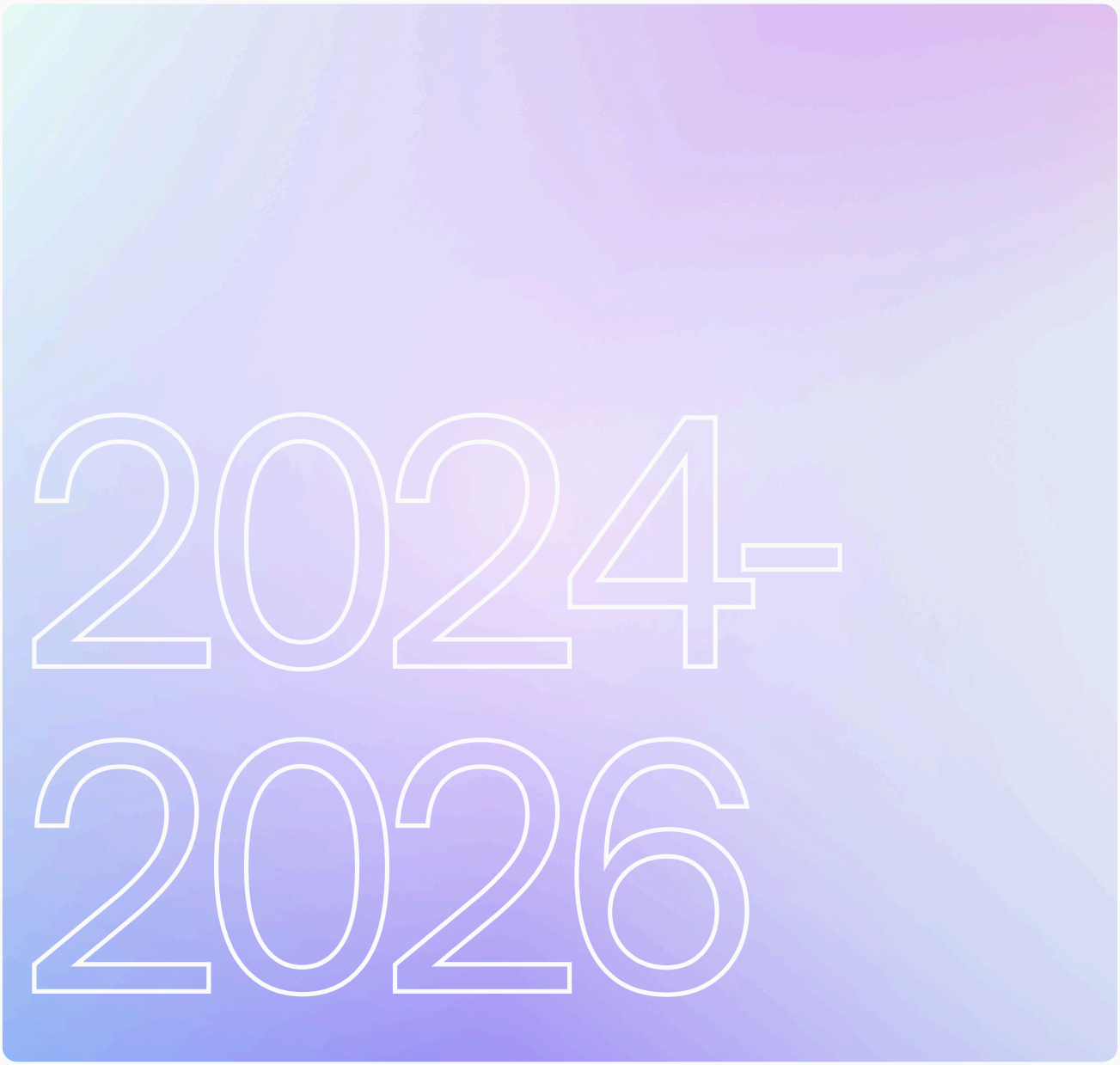
FINAL REPORT — 2024-2026

# Indigenous Youth Centred Justice Project (IYJP)

# Junior Youth Justice Advocacy



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# Overview of the Indigenous Youth Justice Project and Youth Justice advocacy

## The Indigenous Youth Justice Project (IYJP) is a national initiative delivered locally through the Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB). At OKIB, the project is implemented in partnership with:

- Native Courtworker & Counselling Association of BC (NCCABC)
- OKIB Public Safety Department
- OKIB Youth Leadership Council (YLC)
- Indigenous Policing Services (RCMP)
- First Nations Justice Council
- Local and regional youth-serving agencies

**The project is:**

- Preventative – acting early to reduce risk factors before youth become deeply involved in justice or child welfare systems.
- Culturally grounded – guided by syilx captikʷɬ, land-based teachings, and Indigenous law.
- Youth-centered – shaped by youth voice, youth experience, and youth leadership.
- Wrap-around – integrating court support, advocacy, cultural connection, aftercare, and system navigation.

**According to the IYJP mandate, the core goals are to:**

- Reduce Indigenous youth recidivism
- Reduce or eliminate custody for Indigenous youth wherever possible
- Strengthen prevention, healing, and reintegration
- Support youth with dual involvement in care and justice
- Build community-based, culturally anchored alternatives to mainstream justice pathways

**At OKIB, these goals are enacted through:**

- Land-based healing and cultural connection
- Youth leadership development through the YLC
- Direct court and systems navigation support
- Resource development and community education
- Strong, coordinated partnerships across justice, health, education, housing, and community services

# Community Context and Rationale

**The Okanagan Indian Band is one of seven member communities represented by the Okanagan Nation Alliance and is part of the larger Syilx Nation, whose traditional territory extends throughout the Okanagan Valley and reaches across what is now known as British Columbia, Washington State, and parts of Idaho. The broader Syilx Nation includes communities on both sides of the colonial border, including the Colville Confederated Tribes in the United States. For generations, Syilx people have maintained deep relationships with the land, water, and natural systems throughout this territory, with governance systems, cultural teachings, and responsibilities rooted in these relationships.**

**The Syilx Nation's traditional territory spans approximately 69,000 square kilometres, stretching from the headwaters of the Columbia River, throughout the Okanagan Valley, and across significant waterways, hunting grounds, and traditional travel routes. The land continues to hold deep cultural, spiritual, and legal significance, with captikʷɬ (traditional stories), seasonal practices, and community responsibilities guiding relationships to land, animals, waters, and one another.**
**Located in the North Okanagan, OKIB is one of the largest First Nations communities in the region and serves a growing membership population, including a significant number of youth. Young people within the community represent future leaders, language keepers, parents, and changemakers. Supporting youth wellness is critical to ensuring long-term community strength and continuity of culture.**

**Like many Indigenous communities, OKIB continues to navigate the ongoing impacts of colonization, including residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, foster care involvement, systemic racism, poverty, and the erosion of language and cultural practices. These impacts continue to contribute to challenges related to mental health, substance use, housing instability, justice involvement, and barriers to accessing culturally safe supports.**

**At the same time, OKIB continues to demonstrate significant resilience through community-led healing initiatives, cultural revitalization efforts, and innovative programming designed to strengthen families and youth outcomes. Departments including Public Safety, Social Development, Housing, Education, Health and Wellness, and Youth and Family Services work collaboratively alongside community leaders, Elders, and partner organizations to address these challenges through prevention-focused and culturally grounded approaches.**

**Programs such as the Indigenous Youth Justice Project reflect this broader vision by addressing the root causes of harm while strengthening pathways toward healing, accountability, and reintegration. Through youth advocacy, cultural programming, restorative approaches, and strong partnerships, OKIB continues to build systems of care rooted in Syilx values of kinship, reciprocity, collective responsibility, and community wellness.**

**This work reflects a broader commitment to ensuring future generations remain connected to culture, supported by community, and empowered to thrive within their own homelands.**

# Community Context and Rationale

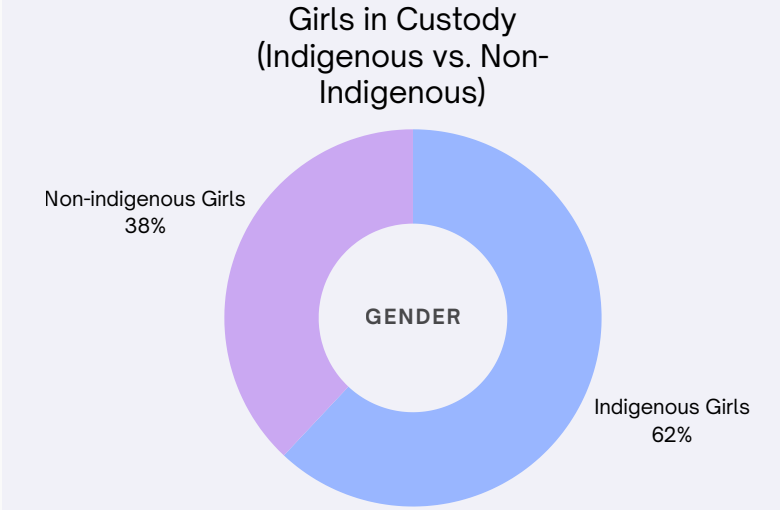
## Systemic Overrepresentation

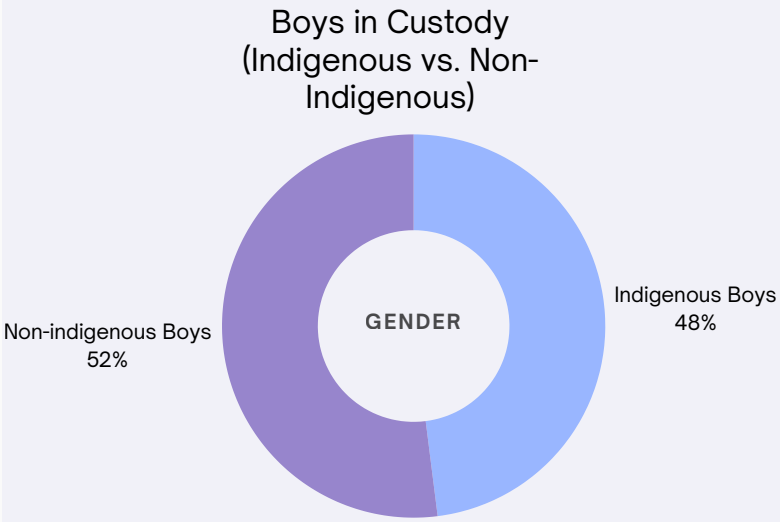
**Across Canada, Indigenous youth are heavily overrepresented in the justice system:**

- Indigenous youth are roughly 8% of the youth population, but about 50% of youth admissions to custody.
- Indigenous girls represent approximately 62% of girls in custody.
- Indigenous boys represent approximately 48% of boys in custody.
- Indigenous adults are about 5% of the Canadian population, yet 33% of federal inmates.

**These numbers are not accidents or individual failures. They reflect:**

- Ongoing colonialism and systemic racism
- Intergenerational trauma from residential schools and the Sixties Scoop
- Child welfare involvement and early system contact
- Poverty, housing instability, and food insecurity
- Lack of culturally safe services and meaningful alternatives to incarceration



# Local Realities at OKIB

## Within OKIB, youth, families, service providers, and leadership have identified:

- Mental health stressors – grief, loss, anxiety, depression, unaddressed trauma
- Substance use and toxic drug crisis affecting families, peers, and caregivers
- Housing instability and transportation barriers that directly impact probation compliance, court attendance, school attendance, and access to programs
- Disconnection from land, language, and culture for many youth
- Negative experiences in systems – feeling judged, misunderstood, or unsafe in courts, police interactions, schools, and government offices
- Fragmented services that put responsibility on youth to navigate complex, adult-designed systems

The IYJP at OKIB was created to respond directly to these realities with a holistic, culturally grounded, community-led approach.



**Spotted Lake 2025**

# Program Data Summary

The following data reflects youth engagement and outcomes for the Indigenous Youth Justice Project during the current reporting period. Information is based on documented casework and monthly reporting.

Demographics

A total of 16 youth were supported through the program:

- 9 young women
- 7 young men
- Gender identity beyond male/female was not disclosed

Age distribution indicates:

- 0 youth aged 12–15
- 9 youth aged 16–17
- 7 individuals outside the 12–17 age range, including young adults receiving support

Program Engagement & Outcomes

- 16 youth successfully completed the program, reflecting informal completion or transition out of active support
- 0 youth voluntarily left the program
- 0 youth involuntarily exited the program
- 0 youth declined participation (limited tracking available)

Referrals & Ongoing Support

- 3 youth were referred to other programs
- 4 youth were referred to community agencies for additional supports
- 4 youth remain actively engaged in ongoing support and advocacy

Data Note:

Data is based on available casework and monthly reporting and reflects a period where formal tracking systems were still being developed. Numbers are approximate and represent relationship-based, ongoing engagement, rather than one-time service interactions.

# Role of the Junior Youth Justice Advocate (JYJA)

## Core Functions

The JYJA serves as:

- Youth-centered advocate
- Ensuring Indigenous youth maintain their human rights while navigating justice, education, health, and social systems.
- Supporting youth to understand what is happening to them and what options they have.
- Connector and navigator
- Linking youth and families with Native Courtworkers, Indigenous Policing, Public Safety, schools, housing, mental health supports, and community agencies.
- Helping youth move between systems without being lost in the process.
- Peer supporter
- Bringing lived experience, trauma-informed practice, and cultural grounding into every interaction.
- Meeting youth where they are, with non-judgmental, relationship-based support.
- Program builder and educator
- Designing and delivering workshops, youth presentations, rights-based tools, and resource guides.
- Supporting prevention and aftercare programming in collaboration with partners.
- Cultural advocate
- Grounding justice work in syilx worldview, land-based teachings.
- Ensuring culture is not an “add-on,” but central to how justice is understood and practiced.

# Role of the Junior Youth Justice Advocate (JYJA) cont'd

## Typical Activities

**The JYJA's responsibilities include:**

- Attending court with youth and community members
- Shadowing and collaborating with Native Courtworkers
- Supporting youth with probation, bail, and multi-agency meetings
- Facilitating youth workshops and school presentations
- Supporting YLC meetings and projects
- Designing and distributing youth-friendly justice and resource tools (e.g., QR codes, guides, pamphlets)
- Participating in cultural events, land-based camps, and exchanges
- Coordinating with agencies on crisis response, safety planning, and reintegration





Sage Harvesting 2025

# Program Model: Upstream, Midstream, Downstream.

## The IYJP JYJA at OKIB uses a three-part continuum:

- Upstream – Prevention & Early Intervention
- Midstream – In-System Support & Navigation
- Downstream – Aftercare & Reintegration

This framework aligns with both national IYJP goals and syilx teachings about responsibility, relationships, and the impacts of decisions over time.

**Upstream – Prevention & Early Intervention**
Upstream work focuses on:

- Strengthening identity, belonging, cultural connection, and leadership
- Providing education and resources before crisis or offence
- Building protective factors (positive peers, adult mentors, school engagement, services access)

Key elements include:

- Youth Leadership Council (YLC) leadership development
- What Happens Upstream (WHU) youth conference (300+ attendees)
- Cultural nights (drum, language, teachings)
- Youth panels and school-based engagements
- Mental health and wellness workshops
- What's Happening Downstream resource package (youth-oriented supports across BC)
- Land-based learning and cultural exchanges

**Midstream – In-System Support & Judicial Navigation**
Midstream focuses on youth who are already in contact with:

- Police
- Crown and defence
- Provincial or youth courts
- Child welfare authorities

Activities include:

- Being physically present in court with youth
- Helping youth understand charges, conditions, and processes
- Working with Native Courtworkers, Indigenous Policing, First Nations Justice Council
- Providing rights education and youth-friendly materials
- Advocating for cultural safety, fairness, and diversion where possible
- Supporting youth in hearings, probation meetings, and cross-system case planning

**Downstream – Aftercare & Reintegration**
Downstream work focuses on:

- Housing and stability
- Re-engagement with community, culture, school, and work
- Long-term support after sentencing, custody, or care placements

Activities include:

- Housing navigation and support with applications or referrals
- Connecting youth with employment programs, training, and drivers licensing
- Linking youth to wellness supports (NOYFSS, YISH, CMHA, Friendship Centre, etc.)
- Peer support groups, mentorship, and land-based healing programs
- Ongoing check-ins and safety planning
- Encouraging continued involvement in leadership and cultural activities (e.g., YLC, drum nights, camps)

# Key Activities and Initiatives

## Youth-Led & Community Events

- What Happens Upstream Youth Conference

- 300+ attendees, including youth, families, schools, and community agencies.
-IYJP Indigenous advocacy, youth In action presentations. Jr firefighters, Awaken Program, OKIB YLC.
- Topics: disinformation & misinformation, navigating online, mental health, grief and loss, healthy relationships, gang prevention, self-advocacy, culture, and upstream responsibility.

- What's Happening Downstream Resource Package.

- A provincial resource guide targeting youth and families
- Includes crisis supports, legal resources, housing, employment, mental health, cultural programs, and online tools.

- Monthly drum nights and cultural gatherings

- Led YLC In collaboration with Birch Creek Drum group and syilx knowledge keepers.

- Create safe spaces for youth to connect, learn, and regulate emotionally.

- Land-based camps and leadership programs

- Komasket, Sun Valley Ranch, ReWild Ranch, Takla Nation cultural exchange.

- Focus on identity, culture, leadership, responsibility, and connection to tmxʷulaxʷ (land).

- Leadership intensives and relationship-building between youth and law enforcement in culturally safe contexts.



**Okanagan Lake**

# Key Activities and Initiatives cont'd

## Direct Youth Supports

- Case-specific support
- Court accompaniment
- Meeting preparation
- Coordinating with case workers and probation officers
- YLC activities involvement
- Leadership development
- Community project planning
- Peer-based prevention and advocacy
- Crisis response and referrals
- Safety planning for youth at risk of harm or exploitation
- Linking youth to emergency supports, counselling, and shelters
- Transition planning
- Supporting youth leaving custody, care, or high-risk environments to stabilize and reconnect with community.




What Happens Upstrream Conference Youth Panel 2024

# Activities Completed – Summary (2024–2025)

## Youth Justice Support & Systems Navigation

- Attended court with Indigenous youth and families (bail hearings, sentencing, first appearances, reviews).
- Explained court processes, conditions, and rights in youth-friendly language.
- Provided ongoing case support for probation check-ins, multi-agency meetings, Crown/defense communication, and crisis intervention.
- Supported youth during police interactions and coordinated with Indigenous Policing Services.
- Advocated for Gladue-informed, culturally safe outcomes for youth.
- Assisted youth in understanding and navigating income assistance, housing, school, and MCFD-related processes.
- Prevention workshops

## Prevention, Workshops & Community Education

- Presented and delivered presentation to the What Happens Upstream youth conference (300+ attendees).
- Created youth-friendly justice education resources for schools and service providers.
- Engaged in upstream prevention through weekly Youth Leadership Council (YLC) meetings and activities.
- Supported mental health awareness and emotional regulation workshops for youth, including Crisis Intervention training certification through CMHA.
- Gladue Writer Certification completed.

## Cultural Programming & Land-Based Learning

- Supported with and participated in monthly drum nights with Birch Creek Drum Group.
- Supported youth participation in syilx cultural teachings, ceremony, and community gatherings.
- Assisted with land-based cultural programs at Komasket, Sun Valley Ranch, and ReWild Ranch (equine therapy and healing).
- Participated Takla Nation cultural exchange programming for youth.
- Integrated syilx captikʷɬ, Four Food Chiefs teachings, and land-based learning into IYJP programming.

# Activities Completed – Summary (2024–2025)

## Aftercare & Reintegration Supports

- Assisted youth transitioning from custody or care with housing applications, referrals, and stabilization.
- Supported youth with employment pathways, resumes, job referrals, and drivers licensing steps.
- Facilitated connections to mental health supports (NOYFSS, CMHA, Youth Hub, OKIB HUB).
- Coordinated access to youth-friendly services including Friendship Centre, Teen Junction, IRSSS, etc.
- Provided ongoing check-ins, mentorship, and safety planning for youth returning to school, community, or family.

## Resource Development & Tools Created

- Developed the What's Happening Downstream (WHDS) Resource Guide containing 40+ youth supports.
- Created culturally grounded youth justice navigation tools (cards, pamphlets, digital QR resources).
- Produced materials for community workshops, conferences, and school education sessions.
- Supported organization of cross-agency events, youth gatherings, and cultural learning opportunities.

## Cross-Agency Collaboration & Partnerships

- Worked closely with:
- Native Courtworkers (NCCABC)
- Indigenous Policing Services – RCMP
- First Nations Justice Council
- OKIB YLC
- OKIB Public Safety
- OKIB Youth & Family Services
- School District 22 Indigenous Education
- NOYFSS, YISH, CMHA Youth Hub, Teen Junction, Mediate BC
- Vernon Friendship Centre, Community Futures, Native Housing
- syilx Elders, cultural mentors, Birch Creek Drum Group
- Participated in regular coordination meetings and referrals to enhance wrap-around supports for youth.

# Activities Completed – Summary (2024–2025)

## Youth Leadership (YLC) Activities

- Facilitated weekly YLC sessions focused on leadership, wellness, advocacy, and community involvement.
- Hosted and Provided Incentive based wellness centred prized for traditional stick game tournament with neighbouring splatsin nation.
- Mentored youth in public speaking, self-advocacy, and cultural identity.
- Supported youth in planning community events and participating in panels and cultural gatherings.
- Encouraged peer support, confidence-building, and positive social development.

## Program Support, Documentation & Administration

- Maintained youth case tracking, referral records, and follow-up documentation.
- Contributed to program planning for the IYJP pilot and community justice initiatives.
- Supported data collection for grant reporting, outcomes tracking, and evaluations.
- Assisted with coordination of meetings, workshops, cultural nights, and community events.




OKIB YLC 2025 March 08 Commmunity Info Day



OKIB YLC x Splatsin Nation Stick game Tournament 2025/2026

# WHU – Youth Justice Advocacy Presentation Summary

A presentation on Youth Justice Advocacy highlighted the role advocates play in protecting the rights of young people and supporting them as they navigate complex justice and social systems. The session explored systemic inequities contributing to the overrepresentation of Indigenous youth, including discrimination, intergenerational impacts, and limited access to culturally relevant supports.

Drawing from frontline work, the presentation shared examples of hands-on advocacy such as court accompaniment, helping youth understand their rights and legal processes, and providing consistent, relationship-based support. The goals of the Indigenous Youth Justice Project were emphasized, including improving fairness, supporting accountability without shame, strengthening reintegration, and ensuring access to culturally safe supports.

The importance of kinship, cultural connection, and community care was also highlighted as central to youth wellbeing. Youth leadership presentations reinforced that young people are not alone, and that having trusted advocates and supportive relationships can significantly change outcomes.

Media coverage of the What Happens Upstream conference highlighted the strong impact of youth-led spaces and the importance of youth voice in community healing. Youth participants expressed increased confidence and empowerment, with one youth sharing that “I have felt that my voice has been heard” and that they were “feeling more confident in speaking out.” Reflections from youth also emphasized themes of collective care and responsibility, with participants noting that “we aren’t just sitting around... we are trying to heal everyone and ourselves,” and highlighting the importance of “taking care of our community and the younger ones.”
These reflections reinforce the importance of culturally grounded, youth-led spaces that prioritize connection, kinship, and healing, while supporting young people to step into leadership and advocacy roles within their communities.

# Presentation Summary – Youth Justice Advocacy

Estimated Youth Supported (IYJP)

Over the reporting period, the Indigenous Youth Justice Project operates out of a small indigenous community, and has supported youth across prevention, court navigation, leadership programming, and reintegration services.

- Estimated unique youth served: 80–120 youth
- Estimated total youth contacts (annually) : 250–450 interactions
- Monthly youth contacts: approximately 15-20 per month
- Court accompaniments/Probation coordination or attendance: approximately 1–5 youth Annually

The What Happens Upstream (WHU) conference engaged 300+ attendees, including youth, community members, and service providers.

These numbers reflect relationship-based, ongoing support, rather than one-time service interactions, and are based on program activity, workshops, and frontline engagement during a period where formal tracking systems were still being developed.

"Having community partners is a great resource for youth."
— Resource Booth Attendee

"I was happy with everything I learned and very appreciative to be able to take part in it."
— Youth Attendee

# Presentation Summary – Youth Justice Advocacy

The Indigenous Youth Justice Project has supported youth and community members through direct advocacy, system navigation, and culturally grounded, relationship-based engagement. Program outcomes reflect both individual-level support and broader community impact.

Throughout the duration, the project supported approximately 5-10 individuals monthly through direct, case-based advocacy, including youth navigating court processes, probation requirements, and access to social supports. These cases often required multiple points of contact, including preparation, follow-up, and coordination with service providers, reflecting the intensive and ongoing nature of the work.

The program also facilitated 10+ referrals to external services, including justice agencies, social development, and community-based supports. This highlights the project's role in bridging gaps between youth and systems, ensuring access to appropriate resources.

In addition, the project provided 5+ direct justice-related supports, including court preparation, advocacy, and system navigation. Each interaction contributed to increased youth understanding of legal processes, improved confidence in navigating systems, and reduced barriers to participation.

Beyond individual casework, the project engaged approximately 80–120 youth through community-based initiatives, including resource sharing, outreach, and prevention-focused programming. These engagements supported increased awareness of available supports, strengthened connections to community, and reinforced the importance of culturally grounded approaches to youth justice.
Across all areas of work, outcomes include:

- Increased youth understanding of rights and justice processes
- Improved access to supports through referrals and advocacy
- Strengthened relationships between youth and service providers
- Reduced barriers to attending appointments and engaging with systems
- Increased cultural connection and sense of belonging

These outcomes reflect the value of hands-on, relationship-based advocacy, where consistent support and trust-building play a key role in improving youth experiences and long-term stability.
Note: Data is based on available monthly reporting and reflects a period where formal tracking systems were still being developed.

# Cultural Safety Education Training

As part of the Indigenous Youth Justice Project, ongoing involvement in cultural safety training has been an important component of both professional development and community impact. The jr. Youth Justice Advocate regularly participates in and supports two-day cultural safety training sessions led by respected facilitators Eric Mitchell and Chris Marchand, attending and assisting approximately one to two times per month.

These sessions focus on increasing awareness and understanding of Indigenous history, intergenerational impacts of colonization, systemic barriers, and the importance of culturally safe and trauma-informed approaches within service systems. Through mentorship and hands-on involvement, JR Youth Justice Advocate supports the facilitation of discussions, helps create a safe and respectful learning environment, and contributes to conversations that challenge biases and strengthen accountability among participants.

This ongoing mentorship has strengthened ability to integrate cultural safety into youth justice advocacy work, particularly in supporting youth navigating systems that have historically been harmful or inaccessible. The experience has also deepened understanding of how education and relationship-building can contribute to broader systems change.

In addition to supporting the sessions, this work reinforces the importance of culturally grounded practices, kinship, and community responsibility within justice-related spaces. By participating in these trainings, It contributes to building more informed, responsive, and respectful systems for Indigenous youth and families.

“Just keep doing the great job youre doing! Keep fighting for yourselves! As Immagrants, women and people of colour, from different backrounds, and members of marginalized groups who face racism just for who we are. When you fight for yourselves, you also give us the power and strength to speak up about ourselves. Your work makes a real difference and It Is so Important.”

# Cultural and Legal Foundations

**Cultural and Legal Foundations**

The IYJP is not simply “culturally informed.” It is grounded in Indigenous law, especially syilx captikʷɬ and the work of leading Indigenous legal scholars.

**Indigenous Law – What It Means Here**

When we say Indigenous law, we mean:

- The legal principles that come from stories, teachings, ceremonies, protocols, and relationships to land, water, and community.
- These laws guide:
  - how harm is addressed,
  - what responsibilities people have,
  - how decisions are made,
  - how balance is restored when something goes wrong.

Indigenous law is not “less formal” than Canadian law; it is structured, logical, and legitimate, just expressed in a different form.

**Val Napoleon**

Val Napoleon is a leading Indigenous law scholar who:

- Helped create the Indigenous Law degree program at the University of Victoria.
- Shows that Indigenous stories are organized legal systems.

In simple terms, she teaches:

- Indigenous stories (like syilx captikʷɬ) contain rules, responsibilities, and consequences.
- These stories are not just cultural or spiritual – they are law.
- Communities can analyze and apply these stories to real-life problems today.

This validates use of syilx teachings as a legal and ethical framework for IYJP, not just as “cultural programming.”

# Cultural and Legal Foundations

**John Borrows**

John Borrows, an Anishinaabe legal scholar, explains that:

- Indigenous law is living, evolving, and land-based.
- Law is found in relationships, teachings, songs, ceremonies, and the land itself.
- Indigenous law can and should work alongside Canadian law, especially to improve justice outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

His work supports:

- Using syilx law to guide how you respond to harm, support youth, and design justice pathways.
- Viewing the land (rivers, salmon, bears, roots, berries) as teachers of law, not just environment.

syilx Teachings – How They Shape IYJP

syilx law is expressed through:

- captikʷɬ (traditional stories)
- long-standing community protocols
- relationships to tmxʷulaxʷ (land)
- intergenerational responsibilities

The Four Food Chiefs (as one example) carry legal principles:

- skemxíst (Black Bear) – Chief of the Animals
  - Teaches protection, courage, responsibility for the vulnerable, and planning ahead.
  - Legal principle: the community has a duty to protect youth and prepare for hardships.
- ntytyix (Salmon) – Chief of the Water Beings
  - Teaches perseverance, sacrifice, and responsibility to future generations.
  - Legal principle: decisions made today must protect youth and community downstream.
- sp̓iɬm (Bitterroot) – Chief of Underground Plants
  - Teaches humility, grounding, and survival in harsh conditions.
  - Legal principle: meeting basic needs (food, housing, safety) is a collective obligation.
- siyaʔ (Saskatoon Berry) – Chief of Above-Ground Plants
  - Teaches generosity, sharing, and community abundance.
  - Legal principle: wellbeing comes from sharing resources and supporting each other.

These teachings align directly with our three-part model:

- Upstream – taking responsibility early, planning ahead, and addressing root causes.
- Midstream – walking with youth through difficulty, accountability, and learning.
- Downstream – ensuring needs are met, relationships are repaired, and youth are supported to thrive.

Our work is therefore a modern expression of syilx law in action, supported by contemporary Indigenous legal scholarship.



# Partnerships and Network of Support

## The strength of the JYJA lies in relationships.

**Justice and Safety Partners**
Native Courtworker & Counselling Association of BC (NCCABC)
Indigenous Policing Services – RCMP (Constable Neil Horne)
OKIB Public Safety Department
First Nations Justice Council
These partners:
Support court accompaniment, diversion options, and culturally safe justice navigation.
Work with IYJP to reduce criminalization and advocate for fair treatment of Indigenous youth.
**Community Social Supports**
NOYFSS, YISH, CMHA Youth Hub, Teen Junction
Vernon Friendship Centre, Community Futures, Vernon Native Housing
OKIB departments – Social Development, Youth & Family Services, HUB, Pre-Employment
These partners provide:
Counselling and mental health services
Housing and income support
Employment and training
Youth-specific spaces and activities
**Cultural and Land-Based Partners**
Birch Creek Drum Group
ReWild Ranch (equine and land-based healing)
syilx Elders and knowledge keepers
Takla Nation cultural exchange partners
These partners ensure culture and land are central to healing, not secondary.
**Education and Youth Partners**
School District 22 Indigenous Education
Alternate Learning Programs and local schools
Youth Leadership Council (YLC)
These partners help:
Integrate upstream prevention into school settings
Support youth who are disengaged or at risk of school exclusion
Build leadership and advocacy skills among youth themselves.

# Evidence and Statistics Supporting the Work

## Why Prevention Matters

Research shows:

- A large portion of youth justice involvement is linked to preventable factors: trauma, family instability, school disengagement, poverty, and lack of supports.
- Culturally grounded programs can reduce involvement in justice by 40–60%, particularly when they combine culture, mentorship, and community.
- Land-based healing improves identity, emotional regulation, and connection, all of which reduce risk factors for conflict with the law.

Our upstream activities (WHU, YLC, drumming, land-based camps, exchanges, school presentations, resource guides) directly align with these evidence-based protective factors.

## Why Midstream Support is Critical

For youth already in the system:

- Court processes are often experienced as confusing, intimidating, and shaming.
- Youth who do not have advocacy are more likely to:
  - miss court dates
  - receive harsher sentences
  - agree to conditions they do not fully understand
- Court accompaniment and rights education:
  - reduce failures to appear,
  - increase diversion,
  - improve trust in legal processes.

Presence in court and collaboration with Native Courtworkers and Indigenous Policing directly addresses these issues.

## Why Aftercare Determines Long-Term Outcomes

Without downstream support, youth leaving custody or care often face:

- No stable housing
- Interrupted schooling
- No income or employment
- Mental health and substance use challenges
- Disconnection from family and culture

This significantly increases their likelihood of returning to the system.

Evidence shows that successful reintegration requires:

- Safe housing
- Stable adult relationships (mentors, Elders, advocates)
- Cultural connection
- Peer support
- Education or employment pathways
- Mental health and addiction supports
- Transportation

Our downstream activities match these best practices closely, placing JYJA in line with recognized “best practice” reintegration models for Indigenous youth.

# Outcomes and Emerging Impacts

While full long-term evaluation may still be in progress, documented and observed impacts include:

**Strengthened Youth Voice and Leadership**

- Youth are increasingly present in panels, workshops, planning tables, and leadership roles.
- YLC activities and youth panels ensure programs and policies reflect lived experience.

**Increased Cultural Safety and Connection**

- Drum nights, cultural teachings, land-based programs, and exchanges create spaces where youth feel seen, valued, and grounded.
- Youth are supported to reconnect with syilx teachings, captikʷɬ, and tmxʷulaxʷ.

**Expanded Prevention**

- Large-scale events (e.g., WHU) and resource tools (WHDS booklet, QR codes, presentations) provide early access to information and support.
- Youth and families have clearer pathways to services before crisis.

**Improved Justice Navigation**

- Youth report feeling less alone and more informed during court and legal processes.
- Stronger relationships with Native Courtworkers and Indigenous Policing help reduce harm in-system.

**Stronger Aftercare Networks**

- Youth leaving systems are more frequently connected to housing, wellness, school, work, and mentorship.
- This reduces the risk of returning to custody, and increases the likelihood of stability.

**Systems Change Momentum**

- Cultural safety training, cross-agency collaboration, and youth-informed recommendations are beginning to shift how local systems approach Indigenous youth.
- OKIB is emerging as a model of Indigenous youth justice transformation that could be shared with other Nations.

# Opportunities, Gaps, and Next Steps



OKIB YLC 2024 GOV trip to Victoria

## Despite the progress, several needs remain:

01 **Dedicated Youth Courtworker / Advocate Role**

A full-time, sustained position to continue and expand midstream support.

02 **Youth Justice Healing and Cultural Space**

A dedicated space for youth to access:

- cultural teachings
- ceremony
- counselling
- peer support

03 **Transportation Supports**

Reliable transportation for youth to attend:

- court
- probation
- school
- treatment
- cultural programs

04 **Youth Peer Navigator Team**

- Youth with lived or shared community experience trained to support peers through systems.

05 **Expanded Land-Based Justice Programming**

More opportunities for youth to participate in land-based healing that is explicitly linked to justice and reintegration.

06 **Enhanced Evaluation and Data**

Ongoing data collection to track outcomes, identify gaps, and support future funding and systems advocacy.

# Integrated Logic Model / Program Theory (Summary)

Inputs

- JYJA position (Vanessa)
- YLC youth leaders
- Native Courtworkers
- Indigenous Policing Services
- Public Safety Department
- syilx Elders and cultural mentors
- Partner agencies (NOYFSS, YISH, CMHA, Teen Junction, SD22, etc.)
- Land-based spaces and cultural sites
- Funding, transportation, training resources

Activities

- Upstream: WHU conference, workshops, cultural nights, leadership training, resource guide, school presentations, land-based programs.
- Midstream: Court accompaniment, rights education, case navigation, cultural safety training, crisis support, diversion advocacy.
- Downstream: Reintegration planning, housing and employment support, mentorship, land-based healing, peer groups, ongoing follow-up.

Outputs

- of youth supported in court
- of youth attending programs/events
- of cultural activities hosted
- of partnerships formalized or strengthened
- of resource guides distributed
- of prevention and education sessions delivered
- of justice personnel engaged in cultural safety training

# Integrated Logic Model / Program Theory (Summary)

Short-Term Outcomes

- Youth feel safer and more informed.
- Increased knowledge of rights and processes.
- Increased access to culturally safe supports.
- Improved trust between youth and service providers.

Medium-Term Outcomes

- Reduced recidivism and system contact.
- Improved stability in housing, school, and wellness.
- Increased participation in cultural activities and leadership.
- Justice and social service agencies implement more culturally safe practices.

Long-Term Outcomes

- Decreased overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in custody.
- Stronger, community-led alternatives to mainstream justice.
- Intergenerational healing, leadership, and resilience.
- Justice practices more aligned with syilx values and Indigenous law.

# Conclusion

The Indigenous Youth Justice Project at OKIB is a holistic, culturally anchored, youth-driven initiative that:

- Prevents harm before it happens,
- Stands beside youth when systems are unavoidable, and
- Ensures youth are supported, not abandoned, when they return home.

Through the role as Junior Youth Justice Advocate, and through the collective work of partners, Elders, and youth themselves, OKIB is building a locally relevant, nation-leading model of Indigenous youth justice.

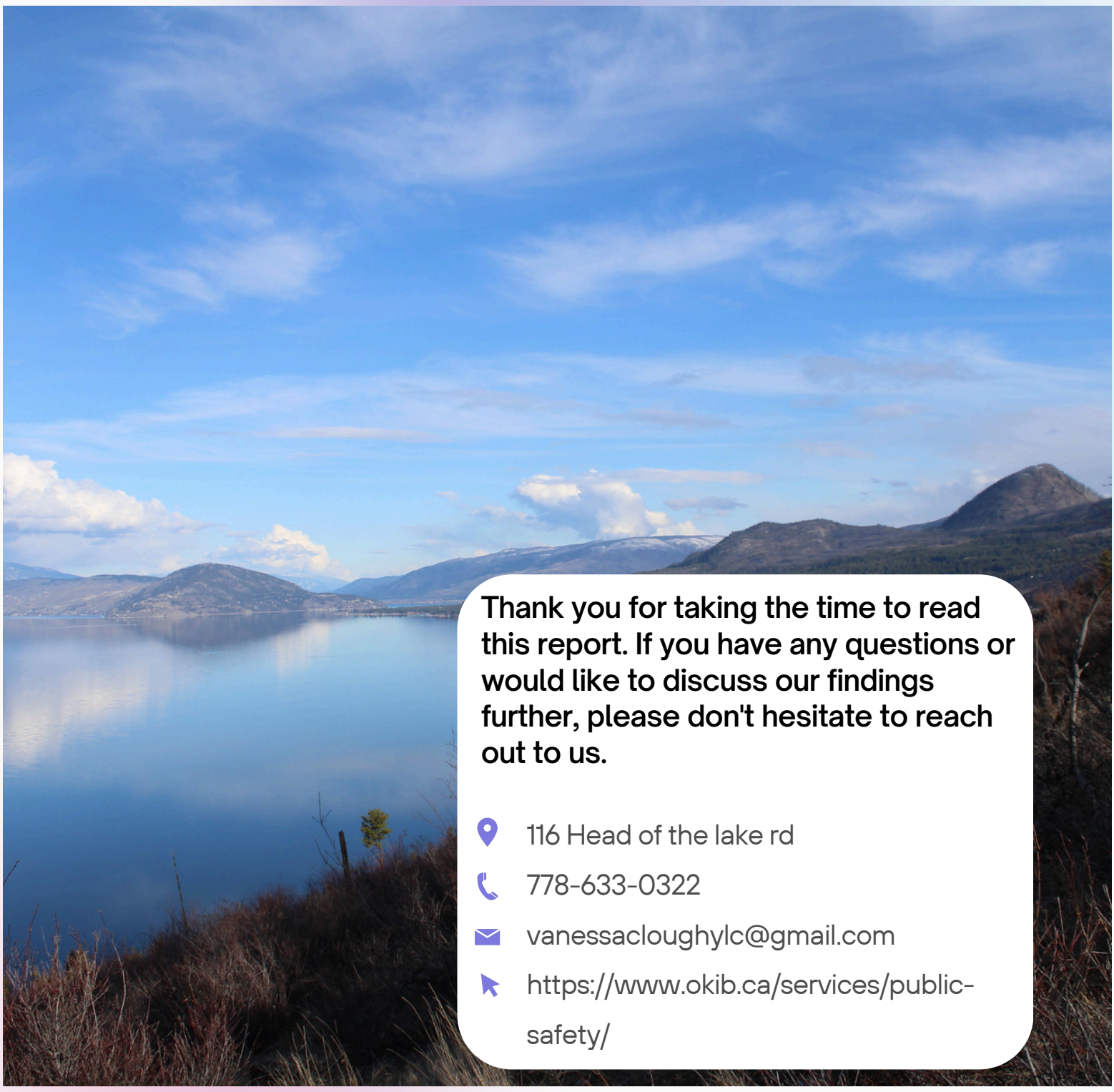
This report demonstrates that:

- Culture is not an add-on – it is central to justice.
- Indigenous law is active and practical – it guides real decisions.
- When youth are supported with connection, advocacy, and community, justice shifts from punishment to healing.



**Okanagan Lake**

# Thank you!



**Thank you for taking the time to read this report. If you have any questions or would like to discuss our findings further, please don't hesitate to reach out to us.**


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