

# ISSUE BRIEF

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## The Oregon Youth Authority

The Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) is the state's juvenile corrections agency. OYA is responsible for the supervision, management and administration of youth correction facilities, state-operated parole and probation, and community placements for youth offenders.

OYA services are shaped to achieve public safety, accountability and youth reformation. They support positive adjustments while reducing the risk of future criminal activity.

OYA succeeds by investing in partnerships, actively collaborating with stakeholders, measuring progress and practicing stewardship of the state's assets, which include its youth.

### **OYA history and mission**

The passage of Senate Bill 1 in 1995 brought sweeping changes to Oregon's juvenile justice system. This legislation established the Oregon Youth Authority. It prescribed a tiered system of sanctions for juvenile offenders.

SB 1 was the culmination of the work of the 1993 Governor's Task Force on Juvenile Crime that was chaired by then-Attorney General Ted Kulongoski. Its focus was to expand the capacity of Oregon's juvenile facilities to meet growing needs and to ensure that juvenile offenders were held accountable throughout the juvenile justice system.

The task force decided that it was essential to separate state-level juvenile corrections from

the child welfare system and, therefore, OYA was created in 1995 as an independent agency.

OYA's mission integrates protecting the public and reducing crime by providing reformation opportunities to youth offenders in safe environments.

Through programs administered by counties and other community partners, services emphasize decisive intervention in delinquent behavior, certain sanctions for criminal actions, restitution to victims, and effective and evidence-based rehabilitation programs.

### **Youth in OYA custody**

OYA serves the state's most delinquent youth. These young offenders often have a variety of challenges such as substance abuse, aggression, sex-offending behavior, mental health diagnoses and gang influences. Youth reach OYA in one of three ways:

**Young offenders committed by juvenile courts:** OYA has legal and physical custody of youth who commit offenses between the ages of 12 and 18 and have been committed to OYA by county juvenile courts ("adjudicated juveniles"). These youth make up 80 percent of youth in OYA custody.

In committing young offenders to OYA, juvenile court judges determine whether a youth requires incarceration or out-of-home care. Youth who pose the greatest public safety risk are more likely to be placed in a

youth correctional facility. Youth who pose less risk to public safety but whose behaviors require out-of-home placement are committed to OYA for probation and placement (residential facility/treatment or foster care).

Youth offenders committed by juvenile courts may be supervised by OYA parole/probation staff up to their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday, when juvenile court jurisdiction ends

**DOC Youth:** Twenty percent of offenders OYA serves are in the legal custody of the Oregon Department of Corrections and physical custody of OYA. These comprise two groups: those who commit crimes while under age 18 and are waived to and convicted in criminal court, and those charged with a Measure 11 crime at age 18 or younger (collectively known as “DOC youth”).

DOC youth are all placed in youth correctional facilities. If their prison terms are not done by age 25, they are transferred to adult prison to complete their sentences. These offenders may also be transferred if they refuse to participate in correctional treatment programs or if they pose a danger to staff or other offenders.

### **Case planning**

OYA provides a continuum of services to youth in its custody that are designed to protect the public and reduce juvenile crime and further victimization.

DOC youth are transferred to OYA intake centers from the DOC intake center in Wilsonville. OYA’s male intake center is at Hillcrest Youth Correctional Facility in Salem. OYA’s female intake center is at Oak Creek YCF in Albany.

At the time youth offenders are committed to OYA by juvenile courts, each is assigned a juvenile probation/parole officer (JPPO) who acts as his or her case manager while in OYA custody, whether on probation, in an OYA facility or, following a term of incarceration, on parole. DOC youths’ cases are managed by a treatment manager in each facility.

Every youth admitted to OYA receives a risk/needs assessment, and that informs development of his or her correctional case plan, irrespective of whether the youth is incarcerated or in a community placement.

Designed to mitigate factors that drive youth to crime, case plans are a youth’s roadmap to reformation. They identify specific treatment targets and youth are matched to the most appropriate OYA treatment programs. Programs focus on thinking, behaviors, beliefs and skills, youth need to develop to become productive, non-criminal members of society.

Youth follow their case plans throughout a custody cycle. OYA places adjudicated juveniles in the least restrictive environment possible in which they can achieve their treatment goals.

Family involvement is a high priority for OYA. Whether a youth is on probation, parole or incarcerated, families are encouraged to participate in case planning by attending multidisciplinary team meetings, family conferences, and home visit check-ins.

### **Youth correctional facilities**

Also known as “close custody,” OYA’s youth correctional facilities provide high levels of security and structure. Close custody facilities not only ensure public safety, but also provide reformation opportunities to youth who present an unacceptable risk in the community.

OYA’s close custody system comprises seven youth correctional facilities and four transition programs across the state. They provide high security, intensive accountability and reformation opportunities, and evidence-based treatment designed to meet the specific needs of youth while protecting the public from further criminal behavior.

Operating capacities range from 25 in the smallest transition programs to 270 at the MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility in Woodburn. Most housing units (cottages) accommodate 25 youth.

While in close custody, youth attend school and participate in treatment and programs. Youth live in dorm settings and many of their daily activities are conducted within their cottage, led by both OYA employees and contracted providers from the private, non-profit and government sectors. There are also a variety of opportunities to work, learn job skills and perform community service projects.

OYA has paroling authority for adjudicated juveniles. Parole is considered when youth have accomplished their goals or made significant progress toward completing their treatment plans.

DOC youth who complete their sentence in close custody are released to adult community corrections for post-prison supervision.

### **Probation and parole**

In the continuum of OYA services, state probation is used by juvenile court judges for youth who require out-of-home placement but do not require incarceration. Parole describes community supervision following a term of incarceration. These services are provided by OYA in all 36 counties.

The primary focus of OYA's parole and probation services is the case management and supervision of adjudicated youth no matter their placement: youth correctional facilities or community supervision. JPPOs provide continuity from admission through termination.

As the lead in managing each adjudicated youth, JPPOs determine treatment, programs and the most appropriate placement. Placement options in the continuum of services include residential treatment, foster care, and independent living. Multi-disciplinary teams guide case plans for youth.

Community residential services are provided by approximately 40 programs in communities around Oregon that range in size, specialty

and intensity. These contracted residential providers offer a full range of supportive services to youth, including mental health interventions and counseling, treatment for victims of abuse, physical and mental health care, religious/spiritual services if requested, recreational programs and work experience.

Foster care is a stepping stone for a youth offender to complete identified goals in his or her case plan and move toward being a responsible young adult. Youth served in foster care might be high-need/low-risk and don't require the higher level of care found in residential programs. Others might be transitioning out of a youth correctional facility and are not yet ready to return home. Foster care provides an appropriate bridge.

### **Partnerships**

OYA has many partners and values its collaborative relationships. County juvenile departments work closely with OYA to ensure adjudicated youth receive appropriate services.

OYA provides funding to counties so they can provide enhanced services to high-risk youth to prevent them from coming to OYA. OYA provides Diversion, Juvenile Crime Prevention (JCP) Basic Services, Gang Intervention and Individualized Services funds for these purposes.

Some examples of services provided by counties with these funds include:

- Sex offender treatment
- Wrap-around services
- Functional family therapy
- Treatment services
- Intensive supervision and monitoring

Eligibility criteria include high risk to re-offend, risk of commitment to OYA and a lack any other funding source (public or private) for the services.

OYA also provides funding to county juvenile departments for delinquency prevention and intervention services to meet the needs of youth offenders who might otherwise be committed to OYA. Multnomah County uses state funds to provide intervention programs for gang-involved youth.

**The OYA Advisory Committee** comprises representatives of juvenile justice partners and stakeholder groups that meet quarterly with OYA leadership. OYA uses information and advice provided by the group to improve services to youth offenders through communication, collaboration and informed decision-making.

OYA also has productive relationships with a range of stakeholders, agencies, non-profits, associations and others that enhance its work and effectiveness.

### **Minority Services**

Youth in OYA custody represent a cross-section of the population. To recognize and serve the distinct needs of diverse people, the Office of Minority Services provides culturally appropriate services to youth and their families. Gang intervention, translation/interpretation services, cultural support groups, special cultural events, tattoo removal -- all are services designed to enhance public safety.

Additionally, OYA has a minority youth transition program that assists youth to reintegrate into their communities.

### **OYA staff makes it happen**

OYA boasts a staff that is invested in making Oregon safer by collectively committing its professional energy to benefit youth. With a focus on personal responsibility and teaching youth to make positive choices for themselves, OYA staff are role models who help youth offenders become productive members of their communities. ◀



#### OYA Mission:

To protect the public and reduce crime by holding youth offenders accountable and providing opportunities for reformation in safe environments.

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