

AN EVALUATION OF YOUTH SERVICE BUREAUS IN CONNECTICUT

REPORT

Prepared for the Board of Directors of the Connecticut
Youth Services Association

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**CENTER FOR APPLIED RESEARCH IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
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This report summarizes the results of an on-line survey administered to youth who attend Youth Service Bureaus (YSBs) throughout the State of Connecticut. The survey was developed and approved by the Board of Directors of the CONNECTICUT YOUTH SERVICES ASSOCIATION in consultation with staff from the University of Connecticut, Center for Applied Research in Human Development (the Center). The Center placed the survey on Survey Monkey, a frequently used service for administering online surveys. Separate links for each participating YSB program were developed by the Center and provided to the YSBs. The YSBs were then responsible for recruiting youth to complete the survey. All data were collected between February 26 and March 20, 2009. A total of 47 YSBs participated in the survey. A list of participating programs is included in the Appendix. The project was coordinated by Erica E. Bromley, MSW, Director of the Manchester Youth Service Bureau.

The survey first collected descriptive information of youth who attend YSB programs. This was followed by a series of questions on the participation patterns of youth who attend YSB programs. The survey also included the Youth Development Assessment Device (YDAD). This is a process evaluation measure that assesses the developmental quality of youth programs. Developmental quality refers to characteristics that have been identified in the research literature to be present in successful youth programs (Sabatelli, Anderson, Kosutic, Sanderson, & Rubinfeld, in press). The three program qualities measured by the YDAD are: (1) emotional safety and well-being – the degree to which youth feel safe and secure, (2) challenge and involvement – the extent to which youth are actively engaged and challenged by program activities, and (3) supportive environment – the extent to which youth feel respected, accepted, and supported by staff. Additionally, the survey included a set of items that asked youth how satisfied they were with YSB programs and activities.

Finally, three established measures were included. These measures assessed youth psychological and emotional well-being, sense of alienation, and level of parental involvement in youth's lives. Psychological and emotional well-being and sense of alienation are two outcomes that have been shown in the research literature to be influenced by participation in successful community youth programs. Further, it has been shown that youth who are psychologically and emotionally well-adjusted and less alienated are less likely to engage in negative behaviors such as delinquency, violence, and substance abuse (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Vandell, Reisner, & Peirce, 2007). It was expected that there would be a positive relationship between YSB program qualities and these outcome measures if YSBs were successfully reaching youth. The parental involvement (parental monitoring) measure was included to assess the extent to which parents play a role in their children having a successful experience in YSB programs.

The results of this survey are presented in a series of tables that follow. Explanations and summaries of the results are provided to highlight major findings. The first five tables provide summaries of the characteristics of all youth who completed the survey. However, only youth in grades six and higher were included in subsequent data analyses. This is because the reading level of most established measures included in the survey was age 12 and above. However, as the data in Table I indicate, most youth who completed the survey fell within this age (grade) range.

DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

Demographic Information about Youth Attending Youth Service Bureaus in CT

The data summarized in Tables 1 and 2 indicate that youth who attend YSB programs are predominantly female (60%), White (61%), and presently enrolled in middle school, grades 7-8 (24%) or high school, grades 9-12 (52%). Over 90% reside with their mothers and 63% also live with their fathers. Approximately 35% of the youth who responded to the survey reported being a member of an ethnic or racial minority group. The most frequently reported affiliation was Hispanic or Latino/a (14%), followed by Black or African American (12.5%), and multiracial (5%). This captures what we believe to be a representative cross section of the cultural and ethnic diversity characterizing Connecticut’s youth.

The largest percentage of youth (48.5%) reported attending YSB programs for more than a year. Twenty-seven percent (27%) reported being involved for less than 6 months. Most attended YSB programs after school (74%), but some also reported attending programs in the summer (23%), weekends (17%) and during school hours (14%). This speaks to the wide range of youth programs and activities being offered by the YSBs. The majority of youth attended YSB programs one day (55%) or two days (17%) per week. Most (82%) spent between 1 and 3 hours per day at the YSB.

Table 1 – Background Information About Youth Who Attend YSBs in Connecticut

	%		%
Gender			
Male	39.8		
Female	60.2		
Household Composition		Grade in School	
Mother	90.2	k-3 rd	2.7
Father	62.6	4 th	7.7
Mother’s Partner	5.7	5 th	7.3
Father’s Partner	2.0	6 th	5.3
Foster Mother	0.5	7 th	10.9
Foster Father	0.4	8 th	13.1
Parents’ Friend	0.5	9 th	11.3
Grandmother	6.8	10 th	14.2
Grandfather	2.2	11 th	14.8
Uncle	1.8	12 th	11.6
Aunt	1.0	College	0.3
Brothers/Sisters	68.5	Not in School	0.8
Cousins	1.8		
Other Foster Children	0.3		

	%		%
Race/Ethnicity		Age	
Black or African American	12.5	Under 9	2.2
Latino/a or Hispanic White	5.6	9-10	10.5
Latino/a or Hispanic Non-White	8.7	11-12	15.1
Multiracial	5.2	13-14	25.2
Native American	0.8	15-16	28.4
Asian American	2.1	17-18	18.3
White	61.4	Over 18	0.4
Other	3.8		

Table 2 – Information About Youth’s YSB Participation

	%		%
How long have you been participating?		When do you attend?	
Less than 6 months	27.0	After school	73.9
6 to 12 months	24.5	Weekends	16.6
Over one Year	48.5	During school hours	14.1
		Summer	22.9
		Evenings	25.9
How many <i>days</i> each <i>week</i> do you attend?		How many <i>hours</i> each <i>day</i> do you attend?	
1 day	54.6	1 hour	26.7
2 days	16.9	2 hours	36.9
3 days	7.8	3 hours	18.6
4 days	6.0	4 hours	9.5
5 days	10.5	5 hours	4.7
6 days	2.6	6 hours	2.0
7 days	1.8	7 hours	1.6

Table 3 summarizes the responses and average score for each of the items on the Youth Development Assessment Device (YDAD). The average subscale scores on each of the three program qualities measured by the YDAD also are listed. The three subscales are: (1) Emotional Safety and Well-Being, (2) Challenge and Involvement, and (3) Supportive Environment. The vast majority of participating youth either *agreed* or *strongly agreed* with each of the items on this measure. Additionally, the average scores on all three subscales were above 5, indicating strong overall agreement that all three domains of program quality were present in the YSBs. The two strongest scales were Emotional Safety and Well-Being and Supportive Environment which were both well above 6 on the 7-point scale. This suggests that YSBs offer programs in which a large majority of youth feel safe and secure, and respected and supported by staff. A large percentage of youth also report that YSBs offer activities that are challenging and engaging.

Table 3 – Results form the YDAD Assessment Measure of Developmental Quality: Youth’s Experiences while in YSB Programs

Shows percentage (%) of youth from YSBs who chose each of the 7 response options. Mean scores for each subscale and item also are listed.	Population Average	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Slightly Disagree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
Emotional Safety and Wellbeing	6.45							
1. The YSB provides a safe place for kids my age.	6.48	2.0	.5	.6	2.8	5.2	15.5	73.4
2. The YSB offers a structure that makes me feel safe.	6.47	1.7	.7	.4	2.9	5.7	17.7	70.8
3. YSB staff believe in me.	6.43	2.2	.4	.8	4.3	4.4	16.7	71.1
4. The staff goes out of their way to make sure the Program is a safe place to go.	6.49	2.0	.4	.6	3.3	4.1	16.1	73.5
5. The things that I accomplish when I am at the YSB make me feel good about myself.	6.35	1.6	1.1	1.3	4.1	6.6	19.7	65.6
6. The YSB staff make me feel welcome.	6.51	2.2	.3	.8	2.7	4.2	14.8	75.0
7. The YSB Program is a place where I feel comfortable.	6.43	1.9	.6	1.1	3.0	5.8	17.0	70.5
Challenge and Involvement	5.80							
8. I am encouraged to help design activities that are offered at the YSB.	5.79	3.1	1.6	2.6	13.3	10.2	24.2	45.0
9. Going to the YSB and participating in activities there makes me feel part of my community.	6.20	1.8	1.4	1.3	5.6	8.8	22.9	58.3
10. When I am at the YSB, I feel like my ideas are heard and understood.	6.04	2.3	1.1	1.9	7.9	10.5	24.8	51.6
11. When I am at the YSB, I often work with other kids to accomplish challenging activities.	5.90	3.5	1.5	2.3	8.8	11.5	22.9	49.4
12. When I am at the YSB, I participate in making the rules.	5.27	7.4	3.2	4.0	17.7	11.7	19.5	36.5
13. I often work with YSB staff to plan activities and projects.	5.27	8.4	3.3	3.9	16.4	11.4	18.5	38.1
14. I am encouraged to learn new things when I am at the YSB.	6.12	2.4	1.5	1.3	7.9	8.9	19.4	58.7
Supportive Environment	6.35							
15. The YSB is a place where I feel respected.	6.28	2.2	.7	1.7	4.8	6.4	20.6	63.6
16. I like to go to the YSB because I feel like I am part of a group.	6.24	2.3	1.1	1.2	5.7	7.9	19.5	62.5
17. The YSB staff are good at working with kids.	6.54	1.5	.5	1.1	2.9	3.5	14.0	76.5

Shows percentage (%) of youth from YSBs who chose each of the 7 response options. Mean scores for each subscale and item also are listed.	Population Average	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Slightly Disagree (%)	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Slightly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
18. The YSB staff have answers when I have a question or a problem.	6.38	1.8	.5	.8	3.9	6.4	21.1	65.4
19. The YSB staff help me do what's right.	6.41	1.6	.5	1.2	4.5	5.5	17.3	69.3
20. The YSB staff provide me with useful information.	6.34	1.6	.6	1.2	5.4	5.8	20.7	64.6
21. I am able to be creative when I am at the YSB.	6.32	1.5	.5	1.1	6.5	6.8	19.0	64.6

Note: Scores range from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 7 indicating strong agreement.

The data in Table 4 indicate youth participants' satisfaction with YSB programs. All items in this section of the survey received an average score above 5, indicating strong overall agreement that youth felt satisfied with the YSB programs they attended. More specifically, the majority of youth were very or extremely satisfied with programs offered at the YSBs. Most found YSB programs "helpful." They also agreed that their parents were happy with YSB programs. The majority of youth also indicated that they would likely recommend YSB programs to their friends and would be upset if the YSB in their community no longer existed.

Table 4 – Satisfaction Questions for Youth Attending YSB Programs

Shows percentage (%) of youth from YSBs who chose each of the 7 response options. The mean scores for each subscale also are listed.	Population Average	Not at all (%)			A Fair Amount (%)			Extremely (%)
1. How helpful has attending the YSB been for you?	5.93	1.5	1.0	2.8	9.4	15.3	23.5	46.6
2. How satisfied are you with the programs offered at the YSB?	6.15	.7	.9	2.6	6.4	10.1	26.2	53.1
3. How upset would you be if the YSB in your community no longer existed?	6.08	3.1	1.7	3.9	6.3	7.6	15.3	62.1
4. How happy are your parents with the program(s) you attend at the YSB?	6.26	.5	1.0	1.8	6.2	8.5	22.2	59.7
5. How likely would you be to recommend the YSB to your friends?	6.25	1.2	1.0	2.5	5.1	8.7	20.3	61.3

Note: Scores range from 1 to 7, with 1 indicating not at all satisfied and 7 indicating extremely satisfied.

Table 5 summarizes youth scores on the two outcome (adjustment) measures included in the survey and the measure of parents' involvement with their children. The two outcome (adjustment) measures assessed youth psychological and emotional well-being and alienation. As noted earlier, Psychological and Emotional Well-Being and youth's Sense of Alienation are two outcomes that have been shown in the research literature to be related to participation in successful community youth programs. Youth who are psychologically and emotionally well-adjusted and not alienated are less likely to engage in negative behaviors such as delinquency, violence, and substance abuse (Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Vandell, Reisner, & Peirce, 2007). A measure of parental involvement (parental monitoring) was included in the survey because extensive research has shown the importance of parental and family involvement in promoting overall healthy adjustment and fostering youth engagement in youth programs (Anderson, Sabatelli, & Kosutic, 2007).

In general, youth who attend YSB programs appear to be well adjusted. They, on average, report a relatively high level of psychological and emotional well-being and a low level of alienation. Youth also report a high level of parental monitoring, suggesting that parents who send their children to YSB programs are well aware of their children's whereabouts and activities.

Table 5 – Youth Outcome and Parent Involvement

	Score Range	Population Average	SD ¹	Construct Description
Psychological & Emotional Well-Being	1-6	4.63	1.06	This scale assesses youth's general sense of psychological well-being.
Alienation	1-6	2.17	1.08	This scale assesses youth alienation including factors such as self-estrangement, powerlessness, social isolation, normlessness, and meaninglessness.
Parental Monitoring	1-5	4.25	.92	This scale measures how often parents know who their children are with and what they are doing when they are away from home

Note: Higher scores indicate higher levels of psychological and emotional well-being, higher levels of alienation, and greater parental monitoring. Relatively low scores on the measure of Alienation are indicative of higher levels of adjustment.

The above findings indicate that youth who attend YSB programs are doing well overall. However, it is also important to identify how different subgroups of youth experience YSB programs. The next set of data analyses examined differences between selected subgroups of youth who attend YSB programs.

STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT BETWEEN GROUP DIFFERENCES

The following tables provide information on how selected subgroups of youth responded to questions about their personal adjustment, experiences in the YSBs, length and frequency of participation in YSB programs, and satisfaction with their YSB. Here we were interested in learning more about how different subgroups of youth who attend YSB programs are doing. For instance, do males and females differ in terms of their adjustment or experiences in the YSB? Do older or younger youth differ in terms of their adjustment and experiences in the YSB? Does the length of time youth participate in YSB programs matter? How important is it for parents to be actively involved in their children’s lives? Does the level of parents’ monitoring of their children relate to their children’s adjustment and experiences in the YSBs? **Only variables with statistically significant differences between groups are listed in the tables below.**²

This information provides YSBs with more detailed information about the youth they serve. It is important to note again that these comparisons examine only youth in grades 6 through 12.

Gender Differences Among Youth Attending Youth Service Bureaus in CT

Table 6 summarizes the average scores for males and females on a number of factors related to youth personal adjustment and their experiences while attending YSB programs. Statistically significant gender differences were found for every item listed in the table below. With two exceptions, females reported significantly more positive scores than males. The two exceptions were that males reported higher scores on Psychological and Emotional Well-Being and Hours per Week of Attendance. Females reported significantly less alienation and more positive experiences in the YSBs overall, compared to males.

It should also be noted, however, that although these differences may be useful for comparison and program planning purposes, the scores of both males and females on these indicators were generally quite positive. That is, the fact that females scored higher than males on most measures may be useful information for the directors and staff of the YSBs. YSB programs seem, in general, to have greater appeal to girls compared to boys and this occurs in spite of the fact that males spend more time at the programs. It is very important to note, in addition, that these differences are not suggesting that males find the programs unattractive – the means scores for males are quite high, it is just that the scores for females are higher.

Table 6 - Gender Differences for Youth Attending YSBs

	Male Mean	Female Mean	df	t
Personal Adjustment Factors				
Psychological and Emotional Well-Being	4.66	4.50	914	2.19*
Alienation	2.20	2.06	643.7	2.04*
Youth Experiences at the YSBs				
Emotional Safety and Well-Being	6.32	6.53	701.7	-2.86**
Challenge and Involvement	5.69	5.97	714.8	-3.39**

	Male Mean	Female Mean	df	t
Supportive Environment	6.22	6.44	729.5	-3.02**
Attendance (hours per week)	6.98	5.05	672.3	4.05***
Satisfaction with YSB				
1. How helpful is YSB?	5.74	5.95	689.8	-2.24*
3. How upset if YSB did not exist?	5.76	6.29	657.0	-5.12***
4. How happy are your parents with YSB?	6.06	6.33	648.2	-3.30***
5. How likely to suggest YSB to friends?	5.99	6.38	662.7	-4.56***

Note: $p < .05^*$; $p < .01^{**}$; $p < .001^{***}$

Grade Level Differences Among Youth Attending Youth Service Bureaus in CT

The next table (Table 7) summarizes comparisons made between Middle School and High School students. Middle School students were defined as youth in grades 6th through 8th and High School students were defined as youth in grades 9th through 12th. **This table summarizes all indicators where a statistically significant difference between the two groups was found.**

The results indicate that Middle School youth reported higher levels of Alienation than High School youth. With regard to their experiences while attending YSB programs, High School youth reported feeling more challenged and involved in YSB activities and a greater sense of emotional safety and well-being from involvement at YSBs than Middle School Youth.

High School youth also reported that they would be more upset than Middle School aged youth if the YSB did not exist and that they would be more likely to suggest the YSB to a friend.

As was also noted above with regard to the comparisons by gender, these differences may be useful for comparison purposes, and for planning program improvement initiatives. However, the score differences between the two groups are relatively minor given the fact that scores in both groups were generally quite positive. It is important to keep in mind that the scores on the Youth Development Assessment Device range from 1 to 7 – with a score of 7 indicating high regard for the developmental qualities of the program. In this context, Middle school age youth, on the Emotional Safety and Well Being scale, for example, reported a mean of 6.33 out of 7 as compared to High School students who averaged 6.5 out of 7. These differences, though statistically significant, should not be interpreted as meaning the programs are not well regarded by the younger youth.

Table 7 – Differences by School Grade Levels

	Middle School Mean	High School Mean	df	t
Personal Adjustment Factors				
Alienation	2.28	2.04	555.4	3.34**
Youth Experiences at the YSBs				
Emotional Safety and Well-Being	6.33	6.50	617.1	-2.19*
Challenge and Involvement	5.73	5.91	591.1	-2.04*
Satisfaction with YSB				
3. How upset if YSB did not exist?	5.92	6.17	583.4	-2.27*
5. How likely to suggest YSB to friends?	6.10	6.29	562.6	-2.19*

Note: $p < .05^*$; $p < .01^{**}$; $p < .001^{***}$

Differences Between Youth with High, Medium, and Low Attendance

In this section we examine differences based upon youth participants' rates of attendance in YSB programs. The assumption here is that youth who have attended YSB programs for longer periods of time are likely to report better personal adjustment and greater benefit from YSB programs. That is, not all youth, obviously, are fully engaged with the YSB programs and the opportunities they provide. It is possible, thus, that those who participate more might report different experiences of the programs. It makes sense, as well, that those who are more involved should benefit more and, hence, demonstrate higher levels of adjustment.

Youth were divided into three groups depending on the length of time they participated in their YSB (0-6 Months, 6-12 Months, and Over 12 Months). **Statistically significant participation differences were found for the indicators listed below in Table 8.**

Youth who participated in their YSB the longest reported the least alienation, highest levels of emotional safety and well-being in the YSB program, being most challenged and involved in YSB activities, and most supported by the YSB program staff. A statistically significant difference was found between youth involved for over 1 year compared with youth who had been involved less than 6 months. Youth who participated in their YSB for over 1 year also reported a significantly higher level of satisfaction with the YSBs when contrasted with youth who participated for less than 6 months.

Overall, longer participation in Youth Service Bureau programs translates into more positive outcomes, greater engagement, and more satisfaction with YSB programs. This finding is important to highlight because it means that programs need to provide continuity over time and maintain contact with youth in order for youth to maximally benefit. This is a finding that is consistent with the Positive Youth Development literature and speaks to the fact that the YSBs may be a very important community-based asset impacting in constructive ways on the developmental trajectories of youth (Benson, 2002; Eccles & Gootman, 2002; Lerner et al., 2005).

Table 8 – Length of Participation at Youth Service Bureaus and Mean Differences

	Less than 6 Months Mean	6-12 Months Mean	Over 1 Year Mean	df	F
Personal Adjustment Factors					
Alienation	2.33	2.12	2.02	2, 905	7.71***
Youth Experiences at the YSBs					
Emotional Safety and Well-Being	6.34	6.34	6.56	2, 921	5.42**
Challenge and Involvement	5.66	5.83	5.96	2, 911	4.94**
Supportive Environment	6.02	6.30	6.44	2, 912	4.62*
Satisfaction with YSB					
1. How helpful is YSB?	5.57	5.92	6.00	2, 900	8.30***
2. How satisfied are you with the programs offered at the YSB?	5.98	6.08	6.21	2, 901	3.19*
3. How upset if YSB did not exist?	5.70	6.08	6.28	2, 902	12.13***
4. How happy are your parents with YSB?	6.02	6.22	6.33	2, 898	5.40**
5. How likely to suggest YSB to friends?	5.97	6.20	6.37	2, 899	8.16***

Note: $p < .05^*$; $p < .01^{**}$; $p < .001^{***}$

Differences Between Youth with High, Medium, and Low levels of Parental Monitoring

Although not specifically related to the programming that occurs in YSBs, we also examined relationships between parents' monitoring of their children's out-of-the home activities, youth adjustment, and youth participation in YSB programs.

Parental monitoring has consistently been found in the research literature to be related to children's overall positive adjustment and less engagement in antisocial and delinquent behaviors (Jacobson & Crockett, 2000; Parker & Benson, 2004).³ Although not our major focus here, we were interested in knowing whether this same relationship between parental monitoring and youth adjustment applied to youth who attend YSBs. That is, do youth who have parents who know where they are and who they are with most of the time report feeling more adjusted than youth whose parents are less watchful? As indicated by results reported in Table 9, the answer to this question appears to be yes. Parental monitoring is positively related to the adjustment of youth who attend YSB programs.

Our other purpose in examining parental monitoring was to determine whether there was a relationship between parental monitoring and the kinds of experiences youth reported having in their YSB. More specifically, is there a connection between parents' vigilance (monitoring) of their children and the kinds of experiences youth report having in the YSB? Again, the answer appears to be yes. Youth who reported receiving the most monitoring from their parents reported the highest scores on every indicator listed below

in Table 9. Parental monitoring was associated with greater perceptions of safety, involvement, and support when attending YSB programs, and a higher level of satisfaction with YSB programs. This finding is important to highlight because it suggests that parents may play an important role in determining the quality of experiences youth have in YSB programs.

Table 9 - Level of Parent Monitoring and Mean Differences

	Low	Medium	High	df	F
Personal Adjustment Factors					
Psychological & Emotional Well-Being	4.38	4.58	4.75	2, 909	12.15***
Alienation	2.32	2.09	1.91	2, 908	17.84***
Youth Experiences at the YSBs					
Emotional Safety and Well-Being	6.25	6.54	6.61	2, 913	12.34***
Challenge and Involvement	5.67	5.89	6.03	2, 906	8.53***
Supportive Environment	6.13	6.45	6.53	2, 909	15.03***
Satisfaction with YSB					
1. How helpful is YSB?	5.59	5.84	6.17	2, 909	18.03***
2. How satisfied with YSB?	5.86	6.10	6.40	2, 903	21.09***
3. How upset if YSB did not exist?	5.79	6.16	6.37	2, 904	15.23***
4. How happy are your parents with YSB?	5.96	6.21	6.51	2, 900	22.31***
5. How likely to suggest YSB to friends?	5.96	6.28	6.49	2, 901	18.02***

Note: $p < .05^*$; $p < .01^{**}$; $p < .001^{***}$

WHAT VARIABLES MOST INFLUENCE YOUTH ADJUSTMENT?

In this section we were interested in finding which set of variables included in the survey were most predictive of positive youth adjustment. All variables identified in earlier analyses as being related to the outcome variables of Psychological and Emotional Well-Being and Youth Alienation were included here. Multiple regression was used to determine whether factors such as youth gender, age, length of participation in YSB programs, the quality of youth's experiences in YSB programs, and the degree of parents monitoring and involvement in their children's lives all contribute to youth adjustment.^{4,5}

The tables below list in order of most predictive, those variables found to contribute to youth reports of Psychological and Emotional Well-Being and Sense of Alienation. Variables used in these analyses included Gender, Age (Middle vs. High School), Emotional Safety and Well-Being, Challenge and Involvement, Supportive Environment, and Length of Participation.

Psychological and Emotional Well-Being

Table 10 shows that youth who reported the highest Psychological and Emotional Well-Being were those who felt challenged and involved in YSB activities; and supported, accepted, and respected by staff in their YSB program. These indicators of YSB program quality were significant even after controlling for differences in youths gender and age. Furthermore, as was suggested in previous analyses, the degree to which parents closely monitor their children's whereabouts and peer associations was a factor in predicting positive youth adjustment.

Table 10 - Variables Predicting Youth Psychological and Emotional Well-Being

	B	SE B	β
Step Four (Complete Model)			
Gender	-.21	.07	-.10**
Age	-.04	.02	-.08**
Length of Participation	.01	.04	.01
Challenge & Involvement	.24	.04	.28***
Supportive Environment	.11	.05	.11*
Parental Monitoring	.09	.04	.08*

Note: $R^2 = .007$ for Step 1(Gender, Age); $R^2 = .009$ for Step 2 (Length of Participation); $R^2 = .150***$ for Step 3 (YSB Qualities); $R^2 = .156^*$ for Step 4 (Parental Monitoring). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Youth Alienation

Table 11 indicates that youth who reported the least alienation were those who experienced the YSB as providing a Supportive Environment (supportive, accepting, respectful staff) and had participated in YSB programs the longest. Once again, the degree to which parents closely monitor their children's whereabouts and peer associations was a factor in predicting positive youth adjustment, in this case youth alienation.

Table 11 - YSB Variables that Predict Lower Levels of Alienation

	B	SE b	β
Step Four (Complete Model)			
Gender	-.07	.07	-.04
Age	-.03	.02	-.05
Length of Participation	-.10	.04	-.08*
Challenge and Involvement	-.03	.04	-.04
Supportive Environment	-.11	.05	-.12*
Parental Monitoring	-.23	.04	-.22***

Note: $R^2 = .008^*$ for Step 1 (Gender, Age); $R^2 = .023^{***}$ for Step 2 (Length of Participation); $R^2 = .058^{***}$ for Step 3 (YSB Qualities); $R^2 = .103^{***}$ for Step 4 (Parental Monitoring). * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings from this survey of youth who attend Youth Service Bureau programs provide important information about who attends YSB programs, their patterns of participation, the extent to which they experience YSB programs as providing them a quality experience, their general satisfaction with YSB programs, their overall level of adjustment, which groups of youth appear to benefit most from their participation, and the important role parents may play in determining youth's overall experience in YSB programs.

Youth who attend YSBs are generally a diverse group. The most common profile is a White, female, most likely enrolled in high school (or perhaps middle school), who resides with her mother and father. However, roughly one-third of youth who responded to the survey reported being a member of an ethnic or racial minority group. The age range of participants varied from as young as 9 years to over 18 years of age.

The most common participation pattern was for youth to attend a sponsored program after school, one or two days per week, for 1 to 3 hours per day. Almost half had been attending programs offered through their YSB for more than a year. However, here again, there was considerable variation as to how youth utilized YSBs. Almost a quarter of youth attended YSB programs in the summer and one-fifth attended YSB programs on weekends. Another group (14%) attended YSB programs during the school day. This speaks to the wide range of youth programs and activities being offered by the YSBs.

An important consideration is the extent to which YSBs can be considered to be promoting developmental quality. Developmental quality is the extent to which a program provides a set of program components that have been found to facilitate positive youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002) and academic achievement (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2004; Sabatelli, Anderson, Kosutic, Sanderson, & Rubinfeld, in press).

The data from the Youth Development Assessment Device are clear in supporting the conclusion that the YSBs are indeed offering programs high in "developmental quality." One of the best sources of information on the overall quality of a youth program is the youth who actually attend the program. When surveyed, a large majority of the youth who attend YSB programs reported that these programs provide a place where they feel safe and secure; opportunities for active engagement in challenging activities; and a supportive environment where they feel accepted, respected, and supported by program staff. This means that the programs stand a chance of truly impacting, in positive ways, the development of the youth who regularly participate in the programs offered by the YSBs. This later assertion was supported by the regression analyses that found YSB program qualities to be significantly associated with the youth adjustment scales included in the survey.

These findings are further supported by a series of satisfaction items in which youth were asked to report their overall satisfaction with YSB programs. The majority were very or extremely satisfied with programs offered at the YSBs and found them to be very or extremely "helpful." They also reported that their parents were happy with YSB programs. The majority also indicated that they would likely recommend YSB programs to their friends and would be upset if the YSB in their community no longer existed.

Overall, the level of adjustment of youth who attend YSB programs appears to be quite high. However, the nature of this one-time survey did not allow us to examine whether youth who choose to attend YSB programs are those who are doing well to begin with or whether participation in the YSB actually led to improvement in their psychological or emotional adjustment. However, based upon several group comparisons we were able to make, it is clear that some groups of youth seem to benefit more from their participation than others. For instance, youth who have been involved in YSB programs longer report being more adjusted (less alienated) than those who have been involved for a shorter period of time. The longer youth are in YSB programs, the more likely they are to report having a high quality experience and feeling more satisfied overall with the program. This is an important finding because successful programs are: (a) able to keep youth engaged for

longer periods of time and (b) more likely to have positive effects on youth adjustment the longer youth are engaged in the program (Granger, Durlak, Yohalem, & Reisner, 2007; Little, Wimer, & Weiss, 2008).

Another interesting contrast was between males and females who attended YSB programs. Although the reason for this is unclear, females reported significantly more positive experiences in YSB programs and more satisfaction with YSB programs than males even though females attended fewer hours per week. Similarly, High School youth reported more positive levels of adjustment and greater engagement, participation, and feelings of safety in YSB programs than Middle School youth. These findings must be interpreted in light of the overall findings that youth of both genders and all grades reported generally positive experiences in YSB programs. However, such findings may be most useful in conducting program reviews or developing program improvement strategies. One such planning consideration for instance, is whether current programming is deliberately being directed towards males/females or high school/middle school youth as part of a deliberate strategy for reaching this target audience or whether new programs needed to reach a broader range of youth.

Although not specifically related to the programming that takes place in YSBs, we also examined the role of parents in fostering youth engagement in YSB programs and youth's overall psychological and emotional adjustment. Consistent with a large body of research on this subject, youth who reported receiving the most monitoring from their parents were most likely to be well adjusted, and to report being more fully engaged in YSB programs (feeling safe, actively involved in activities, supported by staff). This suggests that YSBs may obtain positive benefits by offering programs to less engaged parents to support their efforts to be more actively engaged in monitoring their children's friends and activities.

In sum, YSB programs appear to be offering an important and valuable service to young people in their communities. YSB programs appear to provide youth an experience that promotes a sense of safety; engages youth in stimulating activities; and provides supportive, accepting, and respectful relationships with program staff. Such program characteristics are associated with positive youth adjustment. This is especially the case when youth participate in YSB programs over a longer period of time.

RESEARCH NOTES

1. Standard deviation is a measure of the dispersion of the data or how tightly the data clusters around the mean. One standard deviation in either direction of the mean accounts for about 68% of the participants. Since the standard deviation for each of the variables in Table 5 is about one, we can say that about 68% of the participants who filled out the survey had scores ranging one unit above and one unit below the mean score for each variable. These standard deviations indicate that the data are relatively tightly clustered around the mean.
2. Differences between subgroups were examined using paired *t*-tests or one-way ANOVAS
3. Youth were divided into three groups based on their scores on the parental monitoring scale. Percentile scores were used to create low, medium and high monitoring groups. The high monitoring group consisted of those youth who reported that their parents knew where they and who they were with are most of the time. There were 336 youth in the low parental monitoring group, 136 in the medium parental monitoring group and 315 in the high parental monitoring group. The groups were not split evenly because a number of youth reported the same mean score for this variable.
4. Regression analyses provide researchers with a way of exploring the combined AND independent relationships among a set of predictors variables as these impact on outcome indicators. Put another way, regression analyses allow us to explore how a combination of family and YSB factors covary with youth adjustment. At the same time, these analyses provide us with the opportunity to explore the unique contribution of each of these “predictor variables” while simultaneously controlling for the influences of the other predictor variables.
5. Hierarchical regression was used so that the order of predictors entered into the regression equations could be controlled. Demographic variables of gender and age were entered first so that their effects would be statistically controlled when examining other predictors. Length of participation in YSB programs was entered next, followed by measures of the developmental quality of YSB programs. These were the Challenge and Involvement and Supportive Environment scales from the YDAD instrument (the Emotional Safety and Well-Being scale was not included due to multicollinearity issues). Finally, scores on the Parental Monitoring scale were added last in order to examine the extent to which family factors predict youth adjustment with all other predictors controlled.

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APPENDIX

We would like to thank the following Youth Service Bureaus for their participation in this evaluation:

ANDOVER, HEBRON, MARLBOROUGH
ANSONIA YOUTH SERVICE BUREAU
ASHFORD YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU
AVON YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU
BRANFORD COUNSELING CENTER
BRISTOL YOUTH SERVICES
CHESHIRE YOUTH AND SOCIAL SERVICES
COLCHESTER YOUTH SERVICES
COVENTRY YOUTH SERVICES
THE DEPOT-DARIEN
DERBY YOUTH SERVICES
EAST HARTFORD YOUTH SERVICES
ELLINGTON YOUTH SERVICES
ENFIELD YOUTH SERVICES
FARMINGTON YOUTH SERVICES
GLASTONBURY YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
GREENWICH YOUTH SERVICES-UNITED WAY
GUILFORD YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
HAMDEN YOUTH SERVICES
HARTFORD YOUTH SERVICES
LYME YOUTH SERVICES
MADISON YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
MANCHESTER YOUTH SERVICES
MANSFIELD YOUTH SERVICES

MERIDEN YOUTH SERVICES
MIDDLETOWN YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU
MONTVILLE YOUTH SERVICES
NEW BRITAIN YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
NEW HAVEN YOUTH SERVICES
NEWINGTON YOUTH SERVICES
ORANGE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES
ROCKY HILL YOUTH SERVICES
SHELTON YOUTH SERVICE BUREAU
SOUTH WINDSOR YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
SOUTHBURY-MIDDLEBURY YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES
STRATFORD COMMUNITY SERVICES
SUFFIELD YOUTH SERVICES
THE BRIDGE FAMILY CENTER-WEST HARTFORD
TOLLAND HUMAN SERVICES
TORRINGTON AREA YOUTH SERVICES
UNITED SERVICES
VERNON YOUTH SERVICES BUREAU
WATERBURY YOUTH SERVICE SYSTEM, INC.
WESTPORT DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
WILTON YOUTH SERVICES
WINDSOR LOCKS YOUTH SERVICES
WOODBIDGE HUMAN SERVICES