

MEASURING THE OUTCOMES OF THE Suffolk County JDAI Youth Committee

The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) is a network of juvenile justice practitioners and other system stakeholders across the country working to build a better and more equitable youth justice system.



Unity Circles



Evaluation designs, analysis and report
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Introduction

Goals of JDAI

The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) aims to:

- Reduce detention rates of low-risk youth
- Identify opportunities to reduce lengths of stay in detention through case-processing reforms
- Reduce racial and ethnic disparities
- Replicate JDAI with fidelity at the local level

Suffolk County JDAI Youth Committee

In support of these goals, multiple community partners in Suffolk County have been engaged since mid-2018 in design and implementation of a Youth Committee structure to:

- Amplify youth voice and engagement
- Align with national JDAI best practice
- Promote racial equity and inclusion

We envision the Youth Committee structure as a standing committee within every JDAI chapter of the juvenile justice system.

For youth to have an impact on racial and ethnic disparities, they need a voice at the table. The Youth Committee provides space at the table to influence best practice, while serving as one vehicle for active healing from the wounds of systemic racism and racial trauma.

The collective voice of young people engaged with supportive adults creates community, empowerment, and shared purpose.

The Suffolk County Youth Committee has found most energy through a focus on reducing racial and ethnic disparities. Providing this opportunity in an institutional setting, as well as giving youth an opportunity to advance their skill sets through our train-the-trainer model, we are building their capacity to have a tangible impact on these disparities.

When replicated, this model will afford an ongoing, formal structure for youth to speak to power and address racial and ethnic disparities.

Developing this model for JDAI ensures youth voice in advocacy for the next generation to reduce youth detainment, length of stay, and strengthen the effectiveness of diversion alternatives.



If we have a problem on the unit, I feel comfortable bringing people together to resolve issues. The restorative justice training helped me learn these skills.”

—Youth Co-Chair



Suffolk County JDAI Youth Committee, *continued*

Implementation

Each step of our process has been carefully reviewed, documented, and amplified through surveys, interviews, and evaluation. A curriculum was developed and tested for training youth leaders to participate effectively and as equals in a JDAI Youth Committee. Two youth co-chairs were prepared to share leadership of the Committee. Initially tentative, but increasingly enthusiastic adults also joined in this work.

While not completely derailing the process, the COVID-19 crisis slowed forward momentum. Proximity had been an important factor in building trust and community; proximity was lost, as was spontaneous networking. It proved a formidable challenge to coordinate virtual sessions. We could not achieve regular access to detained youth due to technology and staffing limitations.

Nonetheless, to maintain continuity, the committee has continued to meet bi-weekly throughout the pandemic, via a virtual platform. This feels like a win, as it is helping us think differently about materials that can be developed for replication in other regions.

Our two youth co-chairs felt we needed to focus on broadening our youth membership, both to bring multiple voices and perspectives to the table and in anticipation of their impending departures to the adult system. In June, one of the co-chairs transitioned to the adult system; the second youth transitioned in October. In addition, three of the youth committee members (youth ambassadors) transitioned into the adult system and were no longer able to remain engaged in the committee.

Within the limits imposed by the pandemic, we have been working to expand the Committee to include females (we started with only males) and a mix of detained, diverted, and committed youth. We have been actively recruiting through the networks of the court clinic, district offices, RFK Children, and other partners. We have encouraged current committee members to recruit youth who may be interested in joining the committee.

Accomplishments

Committee members were equipped with restorative justice practice and skills, through Restorative Justice Training, conducted over a virtual platform. The youth engaged in self-study, participated in restorative practices, and facilitated discussions to demonstrate mastery of content and concepts. The youth viewed and then debriefed the film, *Circle Up*, a restorative justice documentary about a group of Boston mothers who seek true justice for their murdered sons. This experience was particularly powerful for several of the youth. A healing space emerged as youth heard Janet's experience and shared their own lived experience, based upon the charges on which they had been detained.

Several additional trainings will be scheduled once a new cohort of ten or more youth can be convened.

Further accomplishments:

1. Established outcome measures to be utilized beyond the life of the grant
2. Merged with the Youth Advisory Council launched JDAI Youth Committee 2.0
3. Achieved adult engagement and investment in the program, evident in part by members bringing their learnings from this committee into their organizations and networks
4. Demonstrated leadership development, evident in part by two very powerful and emotional Goodbye Circles for our Co-Chairs as they transitioned into the adult system. We were inspired by how much their Youth Committee participation shaped them as young men and by their plans to use the skills and experiences they acquired to move forward in their lives.
5. Developed materials to share more broadly. The committee has been focused on capturing the essence of the work with the co-chairs and adults to assure that others can benefit from our learnings.

Suffolk County JDAI Youth Committee, *continued*

Evaluation

Two measurement tools were customized for tracking outcomes linked to Youth Committee participation, both with the guidance and support of SEED Impact (www.seedimpact.org):

- Theory of Change on Its Feet™
- SEED Competency Ladders™ for social-emotional outcomes measurement

The remainder of this report presents these tools and preliminary results with intentions to:

1. Secure new funding for the Suffolk County JDAI Youth Committee to continue to build evidence for the validity and value of this approach
2. Encourage juvenile justice practitioners and other system stakeholders across the state and country to experiment with the Youth Committee model using these tools for visioning, planning, goal-setting, community learning, and evaluation



I have found more of a purpose in the work I do, knowing there’s a committee that takes pride in working with the youth and letting their voice be heard.”

—Youth Advocate



Theory of Change on Its Feet™
Model

Theory of Change on Its Feet™

The results in this section are based on data collected using SEED Impact's Theory of Change on Its Feet™. This framework guides our visioning, goal-setting, and ongoing assessment of annual performance.

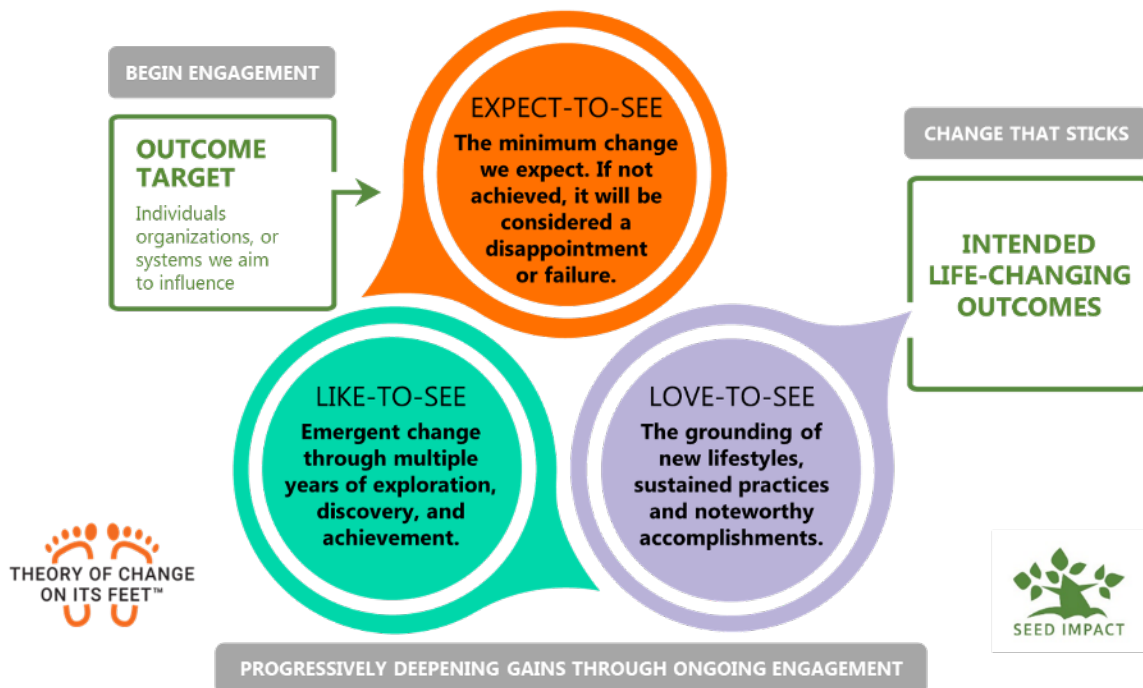
We first clarified our vision for the potentially transformational role that youth can play in shaping detention policies and practices. We then narrowed our focus to the categories of individuals we can directly impact through the work of the Youth Committee.

Four outcome targets were identified. For each outcome target, we defined measurable, progressive results that would reflect deepening engagement and realization of the Youth Committee's vision.

OUR OUTCOME TARGETS

- Youth Co-Chairs
- Youth Ambassadors on Youth Committee
- Staff/Adults on Youth Committee
- Leadership

Theory of Change on Its Feet™ Model



How it Works:

This framework makes it very easy and efficient to track rates of progress, as outcomes accumulate year-by-year. With increasing engagement, and as more individuals advance in their behaviors

and accomplishments, the tool reveals compelling outcomes data. As well, it codifies evidence of the increasing likelihood that long-range, life-changing outcomes will be realized.

Theory of Change on Its Feet™ **Framework**

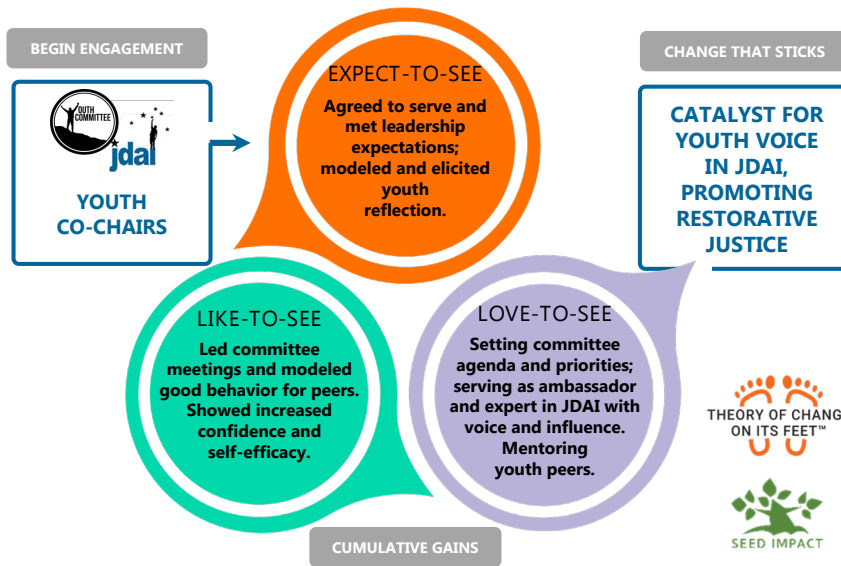
Customized by
JDAI SUFFOLK YOUTH COMMITTEE



THEORY OF CHANGE

Youth Co-Chairs

A formal structure is co-created within which youth co-chairs have voice and influence. Youth co-chairs make recommendations to influence structures and policy. They operate professionally and do not jeopardize the power that the Committee process is striving to achieve.



2020 OUTCOME PERFORMANCE

- 0 New youth serve as co-chairs
- 1 Led committee meetings & modeled behaviors for peers
- 1 Serving as expert in JDAI with voice & influence

50% increase in total outcomes since 2019

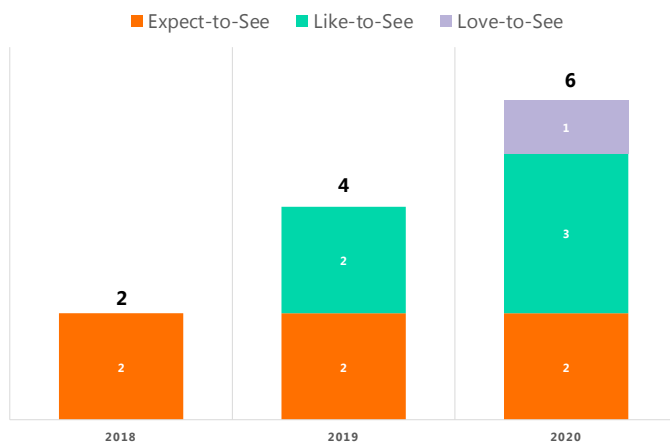


The adults

saw how effective we could be and our potential. We showed them that youth can do big things even within DYS."

—Youth Co-Chair

Youth Co-Chairs 2018–2020



Outcomes accumulating year-by-year

CUMULATIVE OUTCOMES | 2018–2020

2 Expect-to-See (33%)

New youth agreed to serve as co-chairs

3 Like-to-See (50%)

Led committee meetings and modeled behaviors for peers

1 Love-to-See (17%)

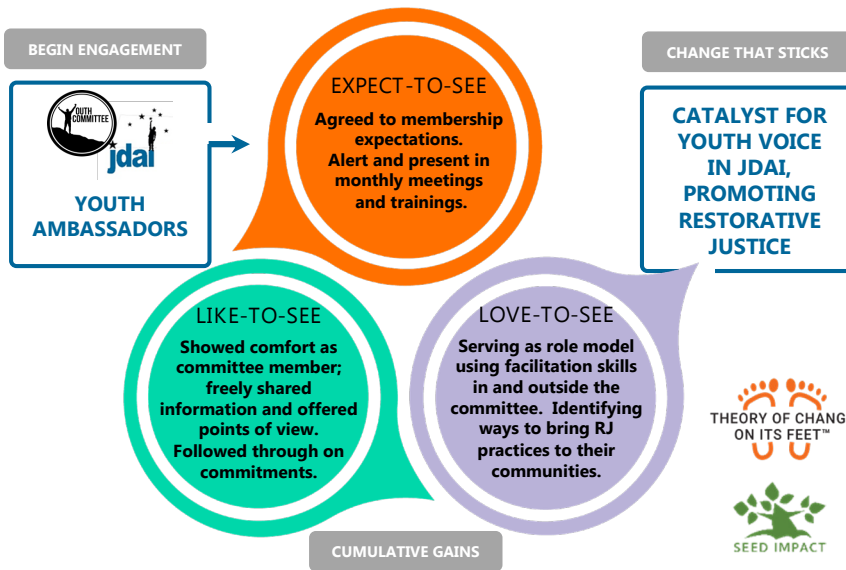
Serving as expert in JDAI with voice and influence



THEORY OF CHANGE

Youth Ambassadors

Youth Ambassadors commit to add their voice to the work of the Youth Committee. They build skills as facilitators and gain knowledge to advocate effectively for restorative justice. As ambassadors, they represent the Youth Committee and work to spread restorative justice practices in their communities.

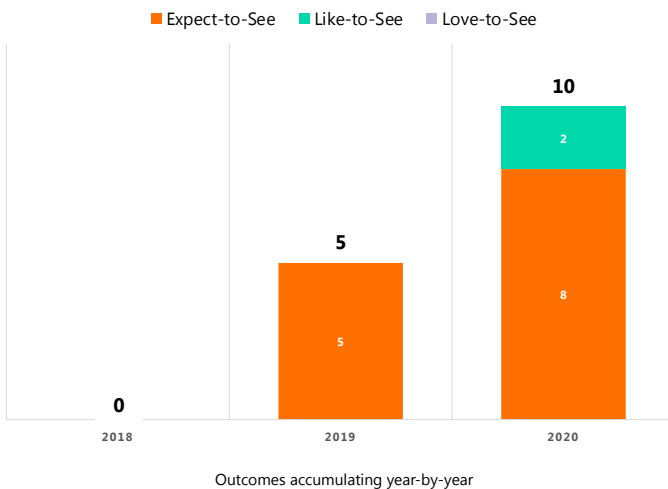


2020 OUTCOME PERFORMANCE

- 3 New youth participated in monthly meetings & trainings
- 2 Shared frequently & met commitments
- 0 Serving as role models & spreading restorative justice practice

100% increase in total outcomes since 2019

Youth Ambassadors 2018–2020



“This is important to me because I have cousins... I want things to be different for them. I think what we are doing here is a way that I can make things better for the next, you feel me?”

—Youth Ambassador

CUMULATIVE OUTCOMES | 2018–2020

8 Expect-to-See (80%)

Participated in monthly meetings and trainings

2 Like-to-See (20%)

Shared frequently and met commitments

0 Love-to-See (0%)

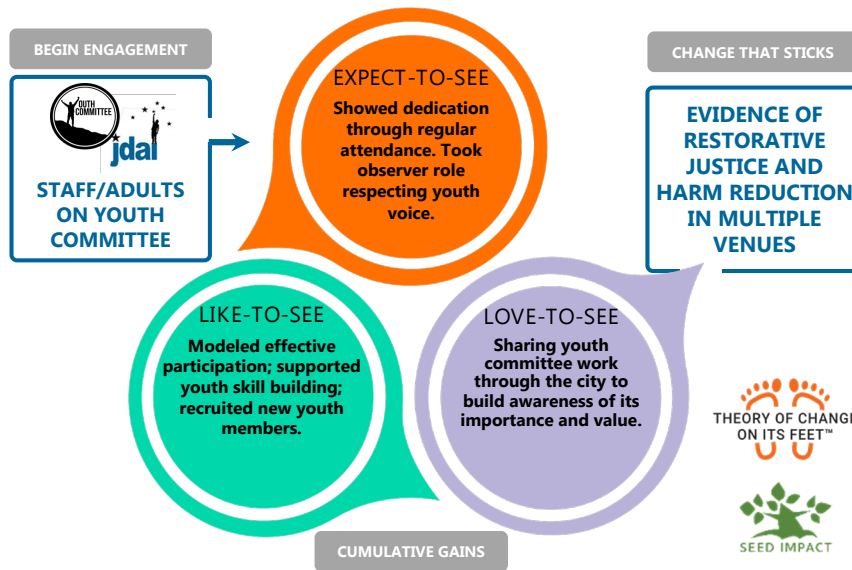
Serving as role models and spreading restorative justice practice



THEORY OF CHANGE

Staff/Adults on Youth Committee

Adults agree to serve on the Youth Committee and consistently demonstrate the ability to listen to youth and reflect back their contributions, using inquiry to achieve shared understanding. They bring youth insights, shared decisions, and lessons learned to the attention of workplace peers and community leaders.



2020 OUTCOME PERFORMANCE

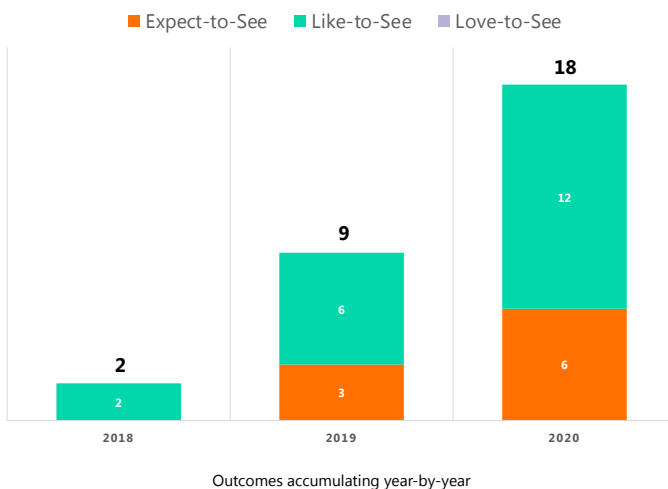
- 3** New adults participated & respected youth voice
- 6** Supported youth skill-building & recruitment
- 0** Sharing the work & increasing awareness

100% increase in total outcomes since 2019

 **Being part of the youth committee, I enjoy watching the youth take initiative and action...trying to make a change within themselves and also the community."**

—J.V., Youth Advocate

Staff/Adults on Youth Committee 2018–2020



CUMULATIVE OUTCOMES | 2018–2020

6 Expect-to-See (33%)

Began participating on a regular basis and respected youth voice

12 Like-to-See (20%)

Supported youth skill-building and recruitment

0 Love-to-See (0%)

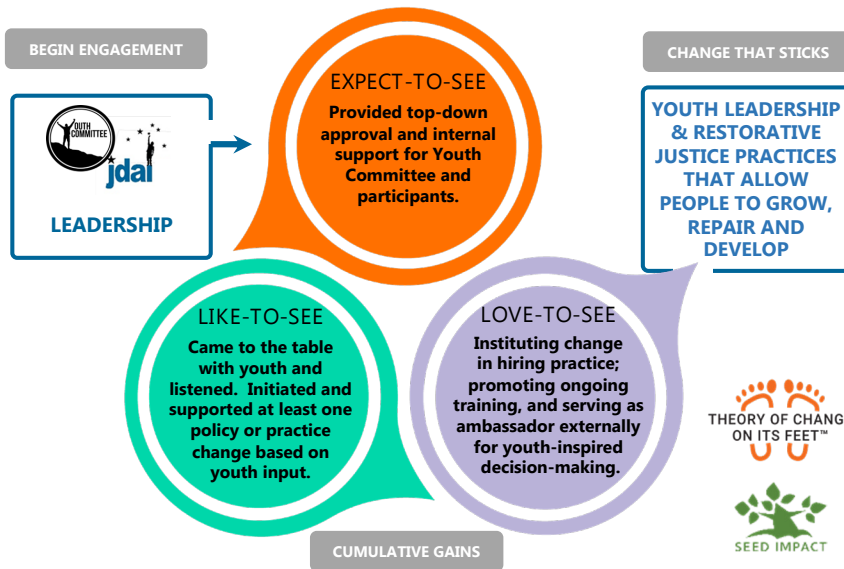
Sharing the work and increasing awareness



THEORY OF CHANGE

Leadership

Leaders demonstrate their support for the Youth Committee through occasional participation, requests for regular updates, provision of resources, and fair consideration and implementation of Committee recommendations.



2020 OUTCOME PERFORMANCE

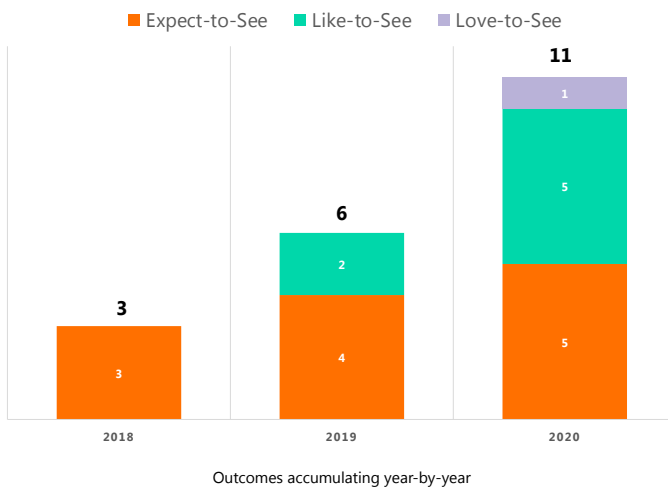
- 1** New leader provided top-down Committee approval & support
- 3** Interacted with youth & took positive actions
- 1** Instituting new policies or practices

83% increase in total outcomes since 2019

Seeing in youth their eagerness to learn, to apply it, and share back and teach others has given me hope and excitement to continue building their vision with them."

—V. Miranda
Grant Partner

Leadership 2018–2020



CUMULATIVE OUTCOMES | 2018–2020

1 Expect-to-See (80%)

Provided top-down approval and internal support for the Youth Committee

5 Like-to-See (20%)

Interacted with youth and took positive actions

5 Love-to-See (0%)

Instituting new policies or practices reflecting youth recommendations



Social & Emotional Competency

About Social and Emotional Competency

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development, as well as an accelerator of DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) work.

SEL competencies are retained and translate

to sustained effectiveness in multiple areas throughout life.

SEL has the potential to help mitigate the interrelated legacies of racial and class oppression in the U.S. and globally.

How We Measure SEL

The SEED Competency Ladders™ were customized to assess and accelerate SEL of both youth and adult members of the Youth Committee.

Detailed descriptions of the JDAI youth and adult ladders are available on request.

SEL KEY

We measure SEL across three domains. In each domain, progressive outcomes are defined and depicted as a results ladder that learners climb. Advances are measured in:



BEING

SELF-AWARENESS

Learners are more composed, capable, confident and self-directed. There is an elevation of spirit, more optimism about self and world.



DOING

SELF-EFFICACY

Learners make choices and take action. There is evidence of more able decision-making and readiness to take on bigger challenges.



RELATING

INTERACTION WITH OTHERS

Learners are more confident and comfortable interacting with others. There is evidence of peer encouragement and listening to youth and adults alike.

Youth with stronger SEL competencies are more likely to have:



College entrance & graduation

Career success

Positive work & family relationships

Better mental & physical health

Reduced criminal behavior

Meaningful contributions to society

Council of Distinguished Scientists National Commission on Social, Emotional and Academic Development, The Aspen Institute, Sept. 2017

How We Measure SEL, *continued*

Youth and adult participants of the Suffolk Youth Committee were assessed pre and post.

Pre-ladder assessments took place at the time of initial participation. The time range from pre to post varied for participants, based on when in 2019 they became active. This report tracks sample results over a 12 to 18-month period, culminating with Post-ladder assessments, in June 2020.

Ladder assessments were conducted by staff. In the future, our intent is to guide staff, youth, and adults to jointly assess SEL practices, and reflect together on ways to raise performance for the entire group.

Lower ladder stages reflect adjustment to the experience, and initial practice. The higher stages capture advancing levels of performance leading to excellence and thriving.

SEL GROWTH STAGES

5 THRIVE

4 EXCEL

3 PERFORM

2 ADJUST

1 RESIST



“This is really a great tool. I can’t wait to see how it all comes together” —JDAI Staffer

How SEL Findings are Presented

Due to COVID-19, only a small, non-representative sample of youth and adult participants has been assessed. The findings (next two pages) are presented to: 1) demonstrate the value of the

Youth Committee’s evaluation design, and 2) recommend future use of this approach to outcomes measurement by JDAI youth committees.



“It has been a blessing to see the two youth co-chairs evolve. They got into a lot of trouble and fights when they first came. The adult mentoring... and a culture that allowed the youth to feel safe, and heard played a huge role in their progressive development.”

—Chuck Mentos
Youth Development Specialist

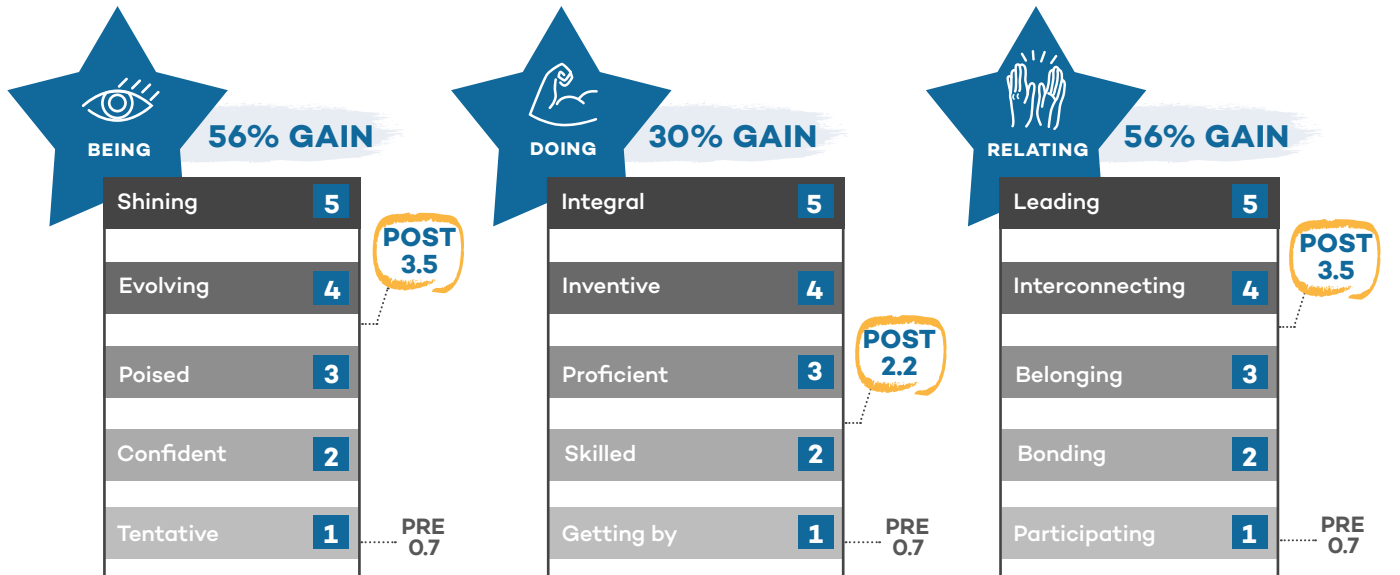
Sample A | Youth Participation & Staff Reflections

In each domain, the youth began in 2019 at an early stage between resisting and adjustment. By June 2020, significant SEL gains were observed.

Doing gains, while still strong, were lower due to COVID-19 and inadequate time to complete the full set of trainings.

47% GAIN
2019–2020

COMPETENCY LADDERS™ | Stages of Youth Growth



SAMPLE STAFF REFLECTIONS

- Sometimes he was really engaged, dialing-in, and evolving. He was self-reflective and taking stock. Other times, while he was still poised, comfortable, and willing to share; he was not really in a self-reflective mode, not taking it all in and considering how the experience was shaping his life. So, he only reached level 3 in a consistent way.
- He was a “zero” at the start, definitely not comfortable being with us. Now, I would put him at stage 2. He really wants to be a co-chair in the future. However, he is still getting comfortable in his own skin.

SAMPLE STAFF REFLECTIONS

- He was definitely at stage 1 at the beginning. Showed up at stage 3 when he left us in June. His facilitation skills were good; he was deeply committed to things he wanted to see through. He wanted to be heard and had a good way of communicating. We could have done a lot more with him if COVID had not hit. He was right there on the cusp of running his own meetings, but we just did not have enough time to teach to the depth we needed to reach with him.
- I feel he was a “zero” at the start. He would show up... but was somewhat disinterested. He could sometimes be more disruptive than engaged—he is a funny kid. He would pop in and out at times. Now, I think he would like to be at stage 2. He wants to be a leader and sometimes show more self-control.

SAMPLE STAFF REFLECTIONS

- He started at stage 1. He definitely wanted to participate. By June, he was nearly at stage 5. He fully embraced the values of the Youth Committee and was active in bringing them to life. He had a few bumps but was definitely a leader. When he was in a good place, given all the circumstances in his life, he was a real asset. He didn't care what others thought about him. He was going to do the right thing regardless.
- He started at stage 1 and was at stage 3 when he left. He identified with the group and felt a lot of pride with the committee. However, he did not advance to the place where he was considering how others could thrive.

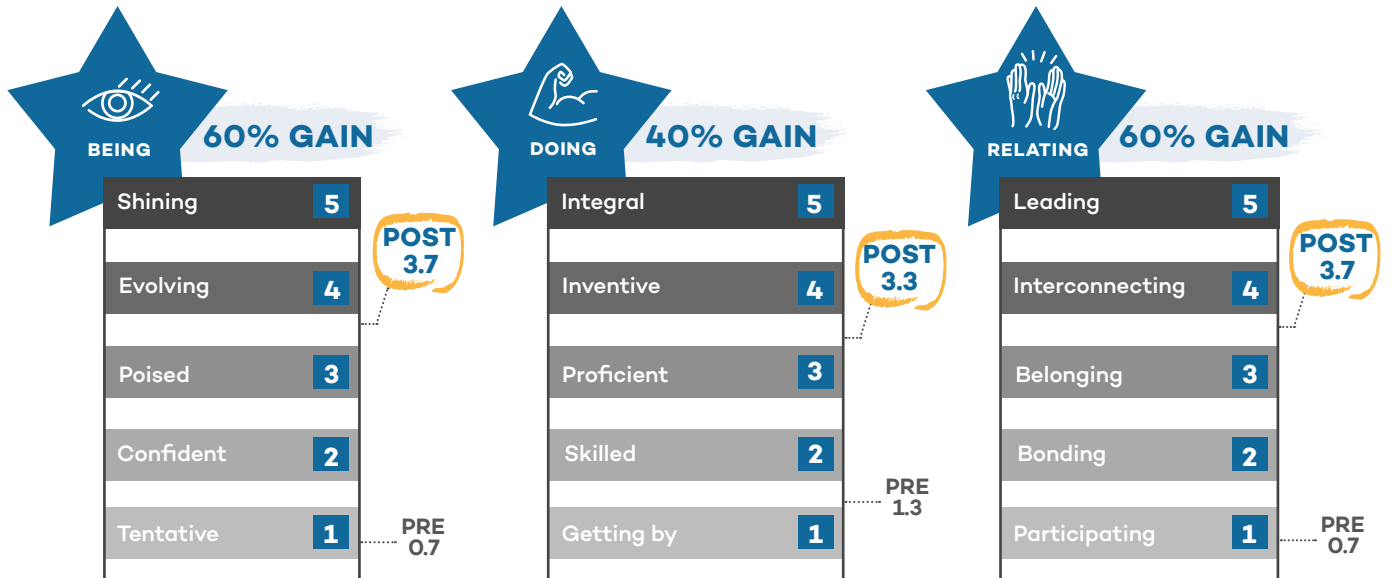
Sample B | Adult Participation & Staff Reflections

In each domain, the adults began at an early stage between resisting and adjustment. By June 2020, significant SEL gains were observed. Doing gains,

while still strong, were lower due to COVID-19 and inadequate opportunity to fully complete the Committee's intended work.

53% GAIN
2019-2020

COMPETENCY LADDERS™ | Stages of Adult Growth



SAMPLE STAFF REFLECTIONS

- She started fairly low on the ladder. Did not hide that it just felt like more work for her. Now, she is between stage 3 and stage 4. She knows how to draw out the best of youth and is a really good listener. She really hears what the youth have to say. What keeps me from assigning a stage 4 is that she can be more “gung ho” about the importance of youth voice outside of the committee.
- She started out at stage 1 and at this point is at stage 4. She comes to the committee, not only to participate, but also to recruit the youth for other venues. She continually seeks out ways to bring youth voice to everything. She might actually be at stage 5; stage 4 for now, however at the cusp.

SAMPLE STAFF REFLECTIONS

- She was at stage 1 and is now at stage 3. She listens to young people and is pretty consistent and measured in how she represents them in different spaces. She is not yet at the stage of drawing out their thinking, not yet getting them engaged to bring out the best versions of themselves.
- She started out at stage 2 and is now at stage 4, excelling. She is really able to draw out the thinking of youth and help the conversations move toward action. She encourages them to think of activities they can do based on what they just shared. She has taken a real interest in the Youth Committee, and she is a fierce advocate for youth voice in her larger role.

SAMPLE STAFF REFLECTIONS

- She was a “zero” at the start, reluctantly agreeing to participate. Now she’s stage 3. She takes a lot of pride in what we have been able to accomplish.
- She started out at stage 1, hopeful but waiting to see what type of community could be built with the youth. She is now at stage five! She really believes in this work and it seems to have energized her role and work outside the Committee as well. She is continually making connections and building relationships that bring youth to the table in new venues. She brings a lot of good culture to our group. She follows through when youth have requests. There is real connectivity that she brings to the Youth Committee.



Supportive Feedback



Being part of the Youth Committee is inspiring. I leave every meeting reminded of how important youth voice is in advocacy. I hope that youth continue to take up space, challenge systemic issues, and use their voices and lived experiences to change the narrative.”

—*Ivana Boyd*
Policy Associate, Citizens for Juvenile Justice



It has been a blessing to see the drive and care the youth co-chairs have shared towards making sure their peers learn from their experiences.”

—*V. Miranda*
Lead Facilitator for Unity Circles, Grant partner providing Restorative Justice Training for Youth



Amplifying youth voice is crucial to equity and to knock down barriers that are holding our youth back. Not having a fair chance to prosper... hurts them. They say it is so tough to survive; they wish they felt safe and wish they knew then what they know now. They are motivated on teaching and mentoring others that look like them. This is just the beginning to real meaningful changes.”

—*Chuck Mentos*
Youth Development Specialist



To learn more about the Suffolk Youth Committee partnership, its vision and goals, contact: **Nate Harris** at Trinity Boston Connects.

To learn more about the committee's approach to **SEL outcomes measurement** and **Theory of Change** on Its Feet™ (all-in-one visioning, goal-setting, and outcomes tracking), contact **SEED Impact**.