

Safe and Successful Youth Initiative

Legislative Report – FY24



EOHHS

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Section 1: SSYI OVERVIEW

About the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative

The Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) is a program serving high-risk youth that is managed by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF). The program consists of two components: 1.) a Youth Violence Intervention Program and 2.) a Human Trafficking Intervention Program.

The SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program (SSYI YV) operates in the 14 Massachusetts cities with the highest levels of crime. The program is a police–community partnership focused on a small number of young people, ages 17 to 24, that local police have identified as substantially involved in gang activity, street violence, weapons violence, or crimes against persons. SSYI YV outreach workers—many with lived experience in the justice system—build relationships with these youth and then offer them pathways to redirect their lives through educational, employment, and behavioral health services. By integrating public health and public safety strategies, SSYI YV aims to eliminate youth and community violence.

The SSYI Human Trafficking Intervention Program (SSYI HT) serves youth of all genders, who are survivors or at risk of commercial sexual exploitation.¹ EOHHS contracts with three agencies to provide regional services. These services include survivor mentorship and case management; individuals with lived experience support survivors of exploitation and youth who are at risk of exploitation.

EOHHS contracts with Commonwealth Corporation and ForHealth Consulting® at UMass Chan Medical School to provide technical assistance, program management support, training, data management, data reporting, strategic planning and other services. Evaluation services for SSYI have been provided by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and WestEd.

SSYI Program Locations & Lead Agencies

SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program

1. **BOSTON:** Boston Public Health Commission
2. **BROCKTON:** Old Colony YMCA
3. **CHELSEA:** Roca
4. **FALL RIVER:** Greater Fall River RE-CREATION
5. **HAVERHILL:** UTEC
6. **HOLYOKE:** Roca
7. **LAWRENCE:** Lawrence Family Development (Lawrence Prospera)
8. **LOWELL:** UTEC
9. **LYNN:** Roca
10. **NEW BEDFORD:** NorthStar Learning Center
11. **NORTH ADAMS:** 18 Degrees
12. **PITTSFIELD:** 18 Degrees
13. **SPRINGFIELD:** Roca
14. **WORCESTER:** Worcester Community Action Council



SSYI Background

To combat youth and community violence in the Commonwealth, EOHHS/CYF launched the SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program in 2011. Following a competitive procurement, eleven cities with the highest levels of reported violent offenses were selected for participation in the program: Boston, Brockton, Chelsea, Fall River, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, Springfield, and Worcester.

The original SSYI YV model was informed by research conducted by the City of Boston Police Department in high crime neighborhoods. Findings indicated that incidents of violence were disproportionately driven by young men, shaping SSYI YV's initial focus on the highest-risk young men as the primary intervention group.

EOHHS geographically expanded the program through competitive grant procurements in FY2015, FY2018, and FY2019, establishing programs in Pittsfield, Haverhill, and North Adams, respectively. In FY2019, SSYI YV expanded its scope to include young women.

In the spring of 2020, EOHHS launched SSYI HT to support youth who have experienced or are at high risk of experiencing commercial sexual exploitation. In this program, three nonprofit organizations—My Life My Choice (a program of the Justice Resource Institute), Safe Exit Initiative (formerly Living in Freedom Together [LIFT]), and RFK Community Alliance (formerly Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps)—employ survivor mentors with lived experience to support youth survivors or youth at risk of commercial sexual exploitation.

SSYI is a nationally recognized youth violence prevention and intervention initiative.



In February 2021, SSYI YV was identified as a “Promising Program” by the U.S. Department of Justice and the National Institute of Justice and was selected for inclusion in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide.²

One program participant plans to start employment and career training this fall. He said: “I want to give myself a chance at life ... I am ready.”

Legislative Authorization and Appropriation

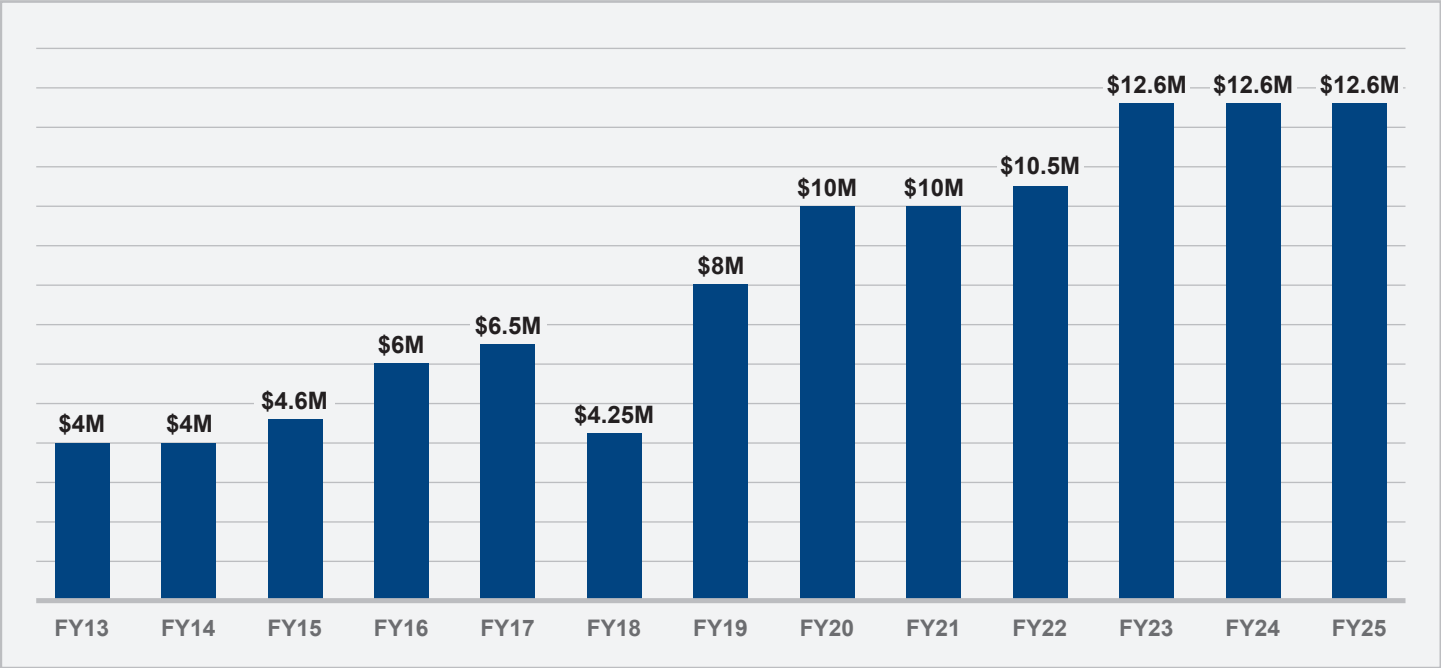
This fiscal year 2024 report is issued in accordance with the fiscal year 2025 General Appropriations Act, line item 4000-0005.

4000-0005 Safe and Successful Youth Initiative – Commonwealth of Massachusetts SSYI Budget

“For youth violence prevention program grants administered by the executive office of health and human services; provided, that the grants shall be targeted at reducing youth violence among young persons at the highest annual risk of being perpetrators or victims of gun and community violence; provided further, that these funds shall be made available to those municipalities with the highest number of annual youth homicides and serious assaults as determined by the executive office; provided further, that any new grants awarded from this item in fiscal year 2025 shall comply with the grant application requirements set forth in item 4000-0005 of section 2 of chapter 38 of the acts of 2013; provided further, that the executive office of health and human services may select the same evaluator in fiscal year 2025 as selected in fiscal year 2024; provided further, that funds may be set aside for the administration of these programs; provided further, that not later than February 7, 2025, the secretary of health and human services shall submit a report to the house and senate committees on ways and means detailing: (i) successful grant applications; (ii) the criteria used in selecting grant recipients; (iii) a set of clearly-defined goals and benchmarks on which grant recipients shall be evaluated; and (iv) outcomes and findings that demonstrate program success from the grant awards for fiscal year 2024...”

The SSYI budget has increased by 215 percent since FY13, the current funding for the program is \$12.6M.

SSYI State Budget Allocations FY13-25 (Earmarks Excluded)



Section 2:

SSYI YOUTH VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROGRAM IN REVIEW

SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program Grantees and Subgrantees

SSYI YV funded the following in FY24:

Grantee (FY24 Funding)	Lead Agency	Behavioral Health Provider	Program Partners Receiving SSYI Funds
City of Boston (\$1,316,453)	Boston Public Health Commission	Boston Medical Center, Bay Cove Human Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MissionSAFE • Youth Options Unlimited • InnerCity Weightlifting • More Than Words • Notre Dame Education Center
City of Brockton (\$500,000)	Old Colony YMCA	Old Colony YMCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete Labor and Staffing
City of Chelsea (\$614,430)	Roca	North Suffolk Behavioral Health Care Association	
City of Fall River (\$600,000)	Greater Fall River RE-CREATION	Solid Ground Psychotherapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MassHire Fall River Career Center • Bristol County Sheriff's Office • City of Fall River
City of Haverhill (\$613,203)	UTEC	UTEC	
City of Holyoke (\$689,093)	Roca	River Valley Counseling Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MassHire Holyoke Career Center
City of Lawrence (\$759,400)	Lawrence Family Development (doing business as Lawrence Prospera)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solo Moto & Autoglass
City of Lowell (\$838,265)	UTEC	UTEC	

Grantee (FY24 Funding)	Lead Agency	Behavioral Health Provider	Program Partners Receiving SSYI Funds
City of Lynn (\$594,170)	Roca	Children's Friend and Family Services, a division of Justice Resource Institute, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lynn Youth Street Outreach Advocacy (LYSOA)
City of New Bedford (\$659,856)	NorthStar Learning Center		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bristol County Sheriff's Office
City of North Adams (\$437,379)	18 Degrees		
City of Pittsfield (\$513,786)	18 Degrees		
City of Springfield (\$710,722)	Roca	Clinical & Support Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baystate Medical Center Hampden County Sheriff's Department MassHire Springfield Career Center
City of Worcester (\$700,000)	Worcester Division of Youth Opportunities		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Legendary Legacies Worcester Youth Center Worcester Community Action Council Laurie Ross City of Worcester

A very reserved participant was referred to the SSYI program from Probation for having a weapon in a school zone. He barely spoke to any of the staff or other participants when he first joined the Transitional Employment Program. However, he has been a consistent part of the program for almost a year, building meaningful relationships with many staff members and young people. His first son was born in March, which propelled him to stay committed to changing his life for the better. Two months ago, he completed his probation. Now, with no ongoing court matters, he remains an active member of the SSYI community through the work program and parenting classes.

– Chelsea Roca SSYI Staff Member

Who is the SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program Participant?

An individual between the ages of 17 and 24 **identified as the highest risk by local police**

22% were involved in **high-volume, drug-related criminal activities**

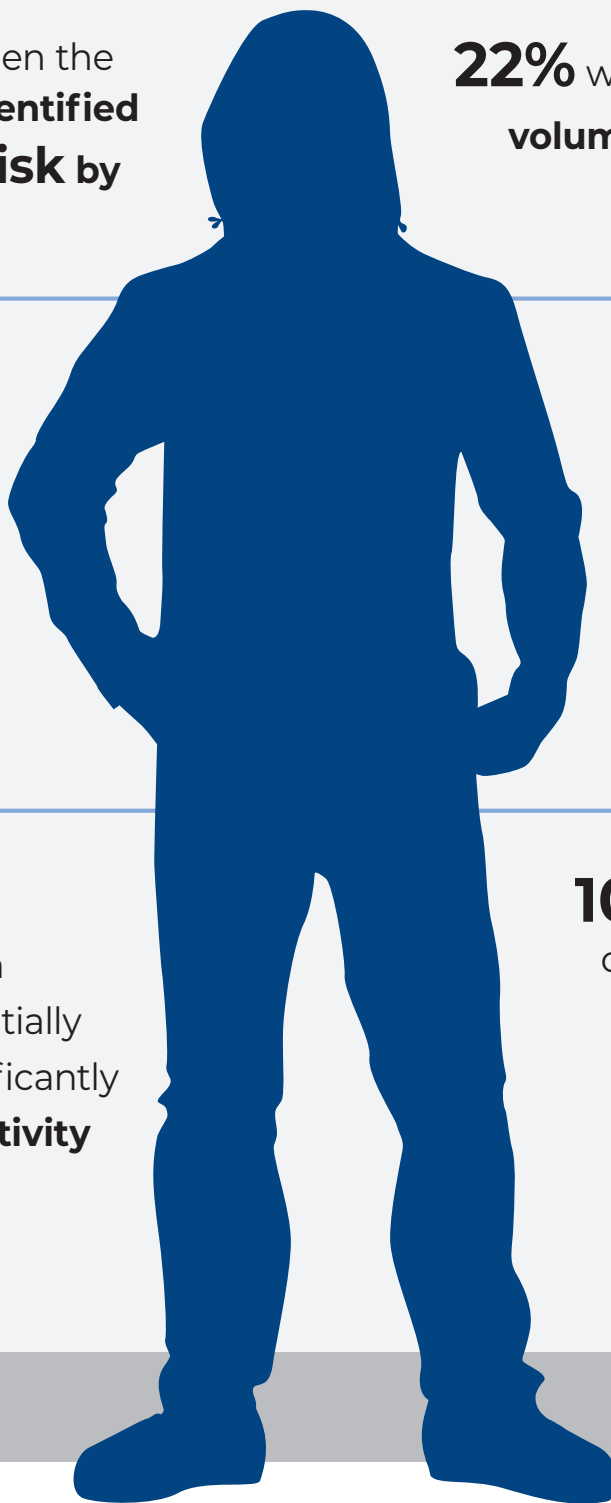
75% had repeatedly engaged in **weapons violence** or crimes against people

SSYI YV participants are **more likely to drop out of school, be unemployed, and/or live in poverty**

56% have a **leadership role in a gang**, were substantially **involved in** or significantly **facilitated gang activity** or **street violence**

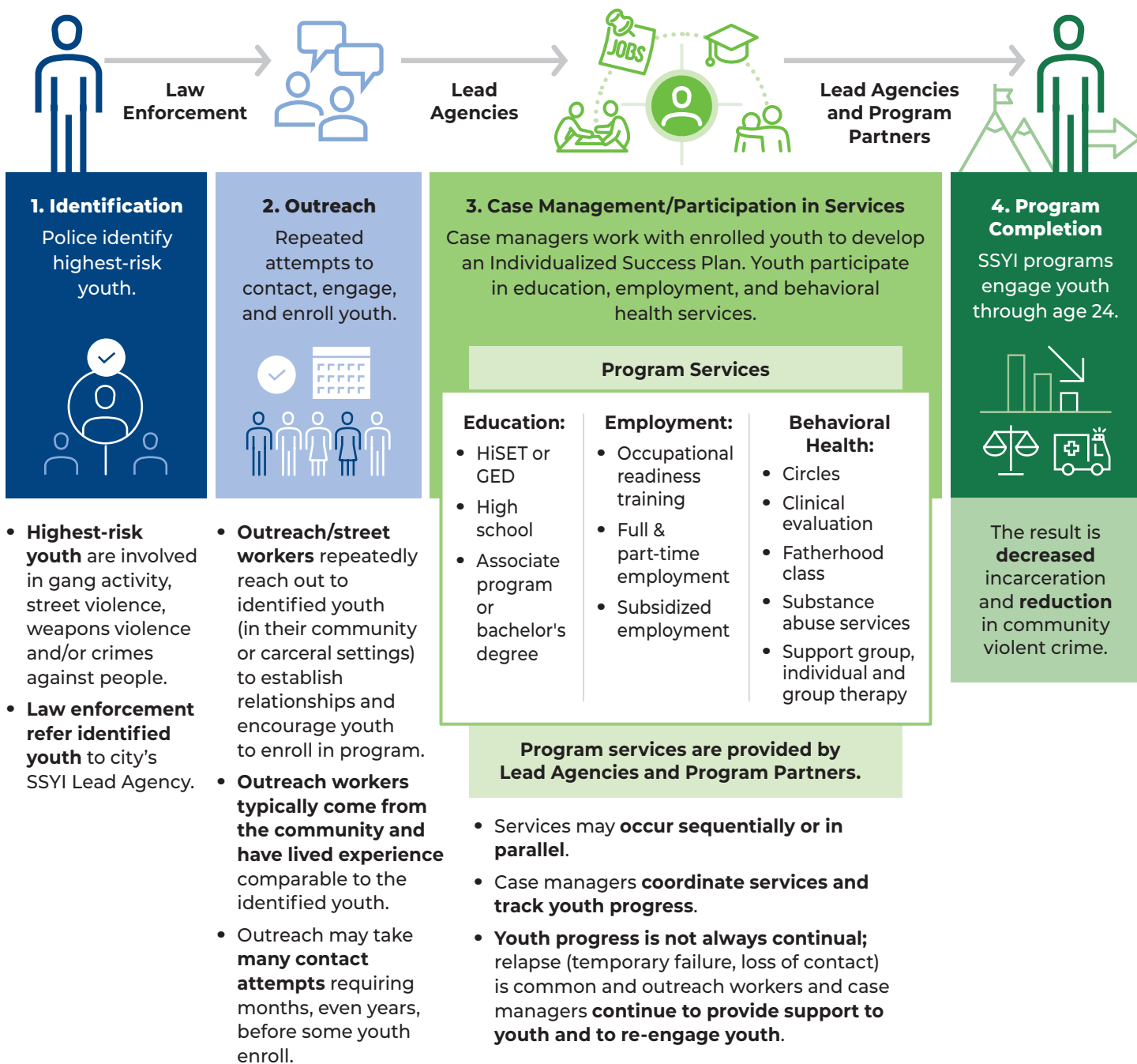
10% were **victims of weapons violence**

Note: Breakdown of program participants based on the reason they were referred to SSYI YV.



Program Engagement Model

The SSI Youth Violence Intervention Program uses an engagement model found to be successful in reaching and working with young people. This model relies on multiple points of engagement.



SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program Services

Key FY24 Data at a Glance



2,011

youth were identified by police as eligible for SSYI YV



1,070

participants were enrolled and received case management services



382

participants received education services (high school or alternative high school enrollment/graduation, such as HiSET or GED)



605

participants engaged in employment activities (obtaining unsubsidized jobs, skills, job retention, and career planning support)



702

participants received behavioral health services



194

participants were young women



89%

of eligible participants were non-white, including Hispanic/Latino youth



Equity

Services are monitored by race and ethnicity to identify and address potential disparity

Goals and Benchmarks

Grant agreements between EOHHS and SSYI YV grantees require recipients to demonstrate effective strategies for achieving annual performance targets.

Each fiscal year, Commonwealth Corporation collaborates with grantees to establish individualized performance targets. Progress is tracked throughout the year using Key Performance Indicator (KPI) reports, which are shared with both EOHHS program management and site operations. The annual performance targets in the table below represent the sum of targets for all sites, actual performance related to the target, and the percentage of the target achieved.



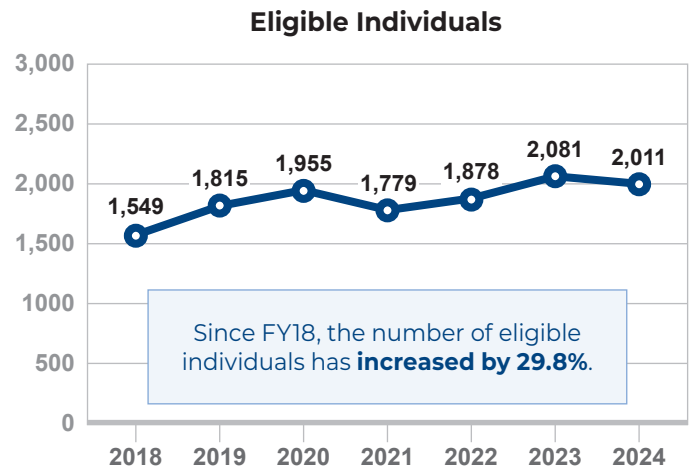
SSYI YV Goals and Benchmarks, FY24

Program Component	Target Description	FY24 Target	FY24 Actual Performance	FY24 % of Target Achieved
Identification	Number of youth who have been identified for participation in SSYI YV (referred to as eligible individuals)	1,786	2,011	112%
Intake/enrollment/case management	Number of eligible individuals who enroll in the program	1,029	1,070	104%
Occupational training and employment services	Number of youth who are participating in occupational training and employment services	756	605	80%
Behavioral health services	Number of youth who are participating in behavioral health services	740	702	95%

Identification

Police identify youth who are eligible for SSYI YV, following the eligibility criteria shared in the figure following.

In FY24, three-quarters of participants were determined by police to be eligible because they repeatedly engaged in weapons violence or crimes against people. More than half were eligible because they were determined by law enforcement to be in a leadership role in a gang, substantially involved in gang activities or street violence, or significantly facilitated gang activity or street violence.



Eligible individuals must meet the following criteria:

- ☒ Repeatedly engages in crimes against persons
- ☒ Repeatedly engages in weapons violence
- ☒ Is in a leadership role in a gang
- ☒ Is substantially involved in gang activity or street violence, or
- ☒ Significantly facilitates gang activity or street violence



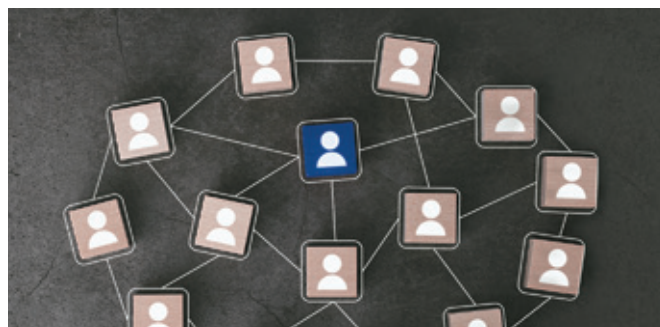
UTEC's Workforce Program gave one participant the structure and skills that prepared him for full-time employment and taught him how to advocate for himself. "Now I can teach my daughters these valuable life skills and be the best possible role model for them," he said.

– UTEC Lowell-Haverhill SSYI Staff Member

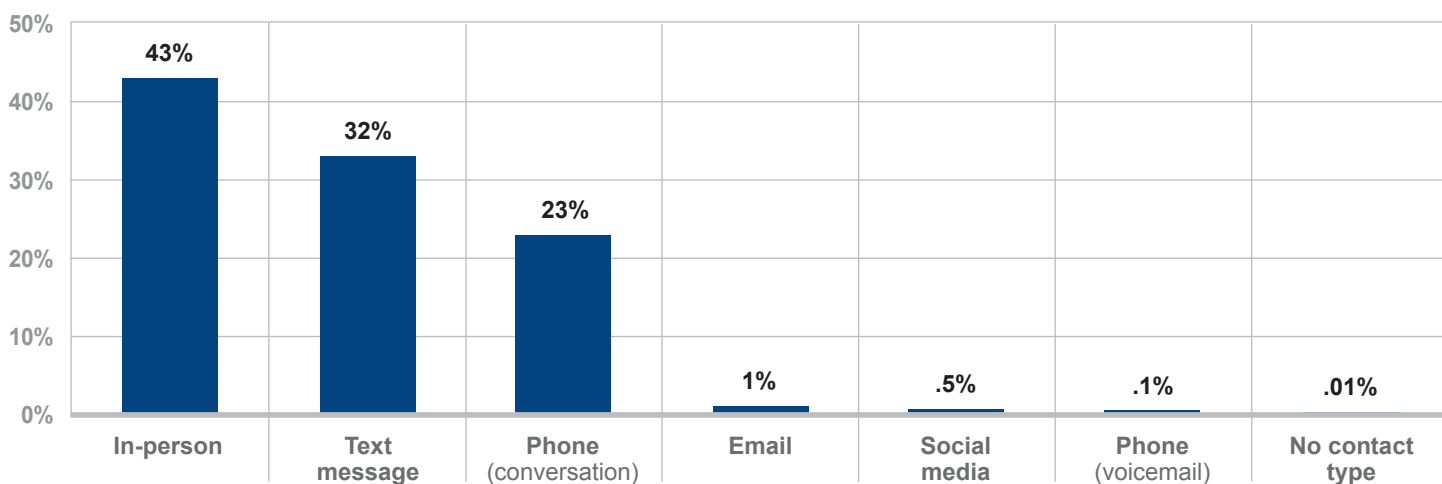
Outreach

There were 32,634 contacts made to Eligible Individuals (all genders) by SSYI YV staff in FY24.

In many instances, multiple contacts are needed to engage these youth. In-person contact, text messages, and phone conversations are the three most frequent methods of communication.



Successful Contacts of Eligible Individuals by Contact Type, FY24

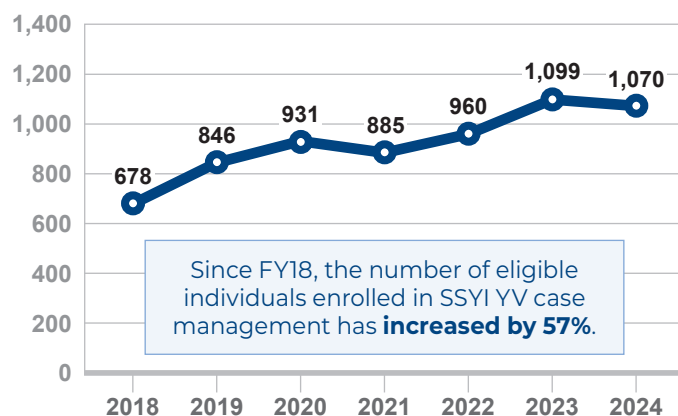


Intake, Enrollment and Case Management

In FY24, a total of 1,070 young people (all genders) participated in an intake process and formally enrolled in the program.

Enrolled youth received an evidence-based or evidence-informed assessment, an Individualized Success Plan, and case management services.

Number of Participants Receiving Intake, Enrollment, and Case Management




Educational Services

Case managers coordinate with local service providers to engage youth in educational programs. In FY24, 382 youth received educational services.

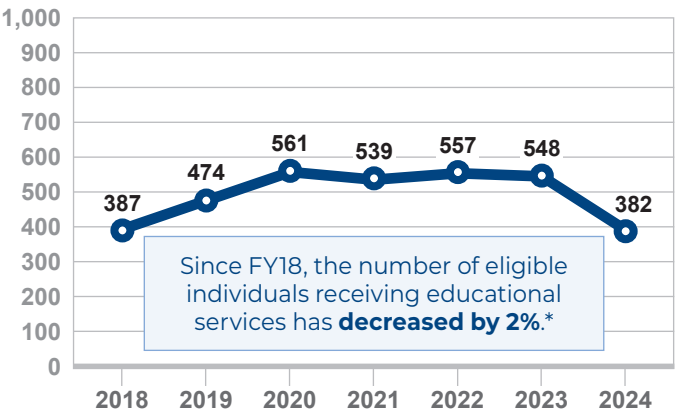
The primary focus of educational services is to support and maintain high school or alternative high school enrollment and facilitate graduation. Services may also include assistance with the attainment of HiSET or GED qualifications, providing an alternative pathway for educational attainment.

In FY24, SSI YV adjusted its approach to tracking educational data, now excluding occupational trainings which are categorized under employment data. This change ensures the educational data more accurately depicts secondary and post-secondary educational support services.

The educational service mix changed in FY24 with a **higher percentage of participation in high school.**



Number of Participants Engaged in Educational Activities

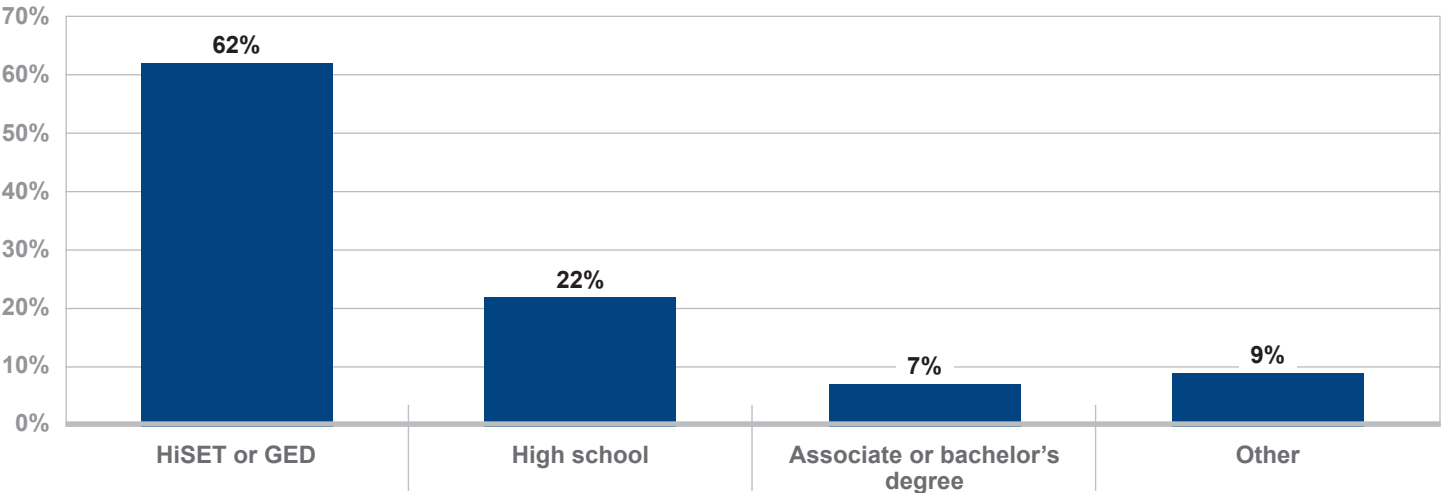


Since FY18, the number of eligible individuals receiving educational services has **decreased by 2%.***

* This is due primarily to changes in how data is collected, and program policy changes regarding who receives educational services.



Participants Educational Activities by Type, FY24



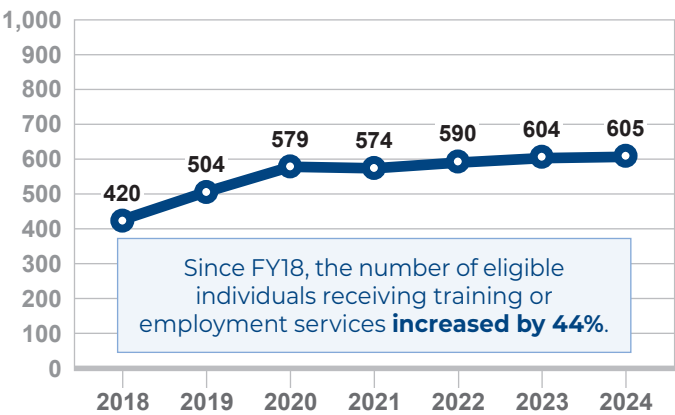
Note: Percentages are rounded, and the "other" category includes older, pre-FY24 categories that are being phased out.

Occupational Training and Employment

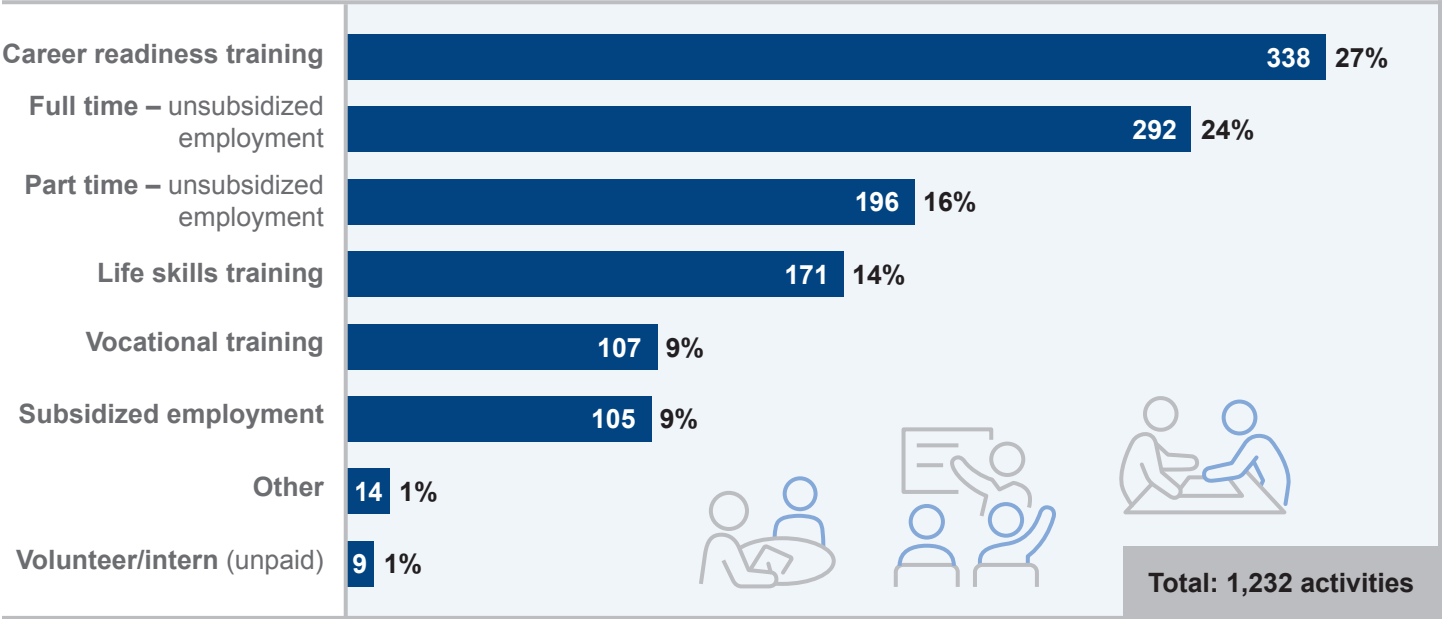
Occupational training and employment provides youth with an economic path to a safer future. In FY24, 605 youth received occupational training and employment services.

SSYI YV offers occupational training and employment services, which equips young people with both soft and hard skills needed for workplace success. Participants who initially enroll in transitional or subsidized employment services receive SSYI YV program support to transition into obtaining and maintaining unsubsidized, competitive jobs. Ongoing support includes regular communication with their case managers, problem resolution assistance, job retention strategies, career planning, and skill development.

Number of Participants Engaged in Occupational Training or Employed



Eligible Participant Employment Activity, FY24



Note: Percentages are rounded, and the “other” category includes older, pre-FY24 categories that are being phased out.

Behavioral Health Services

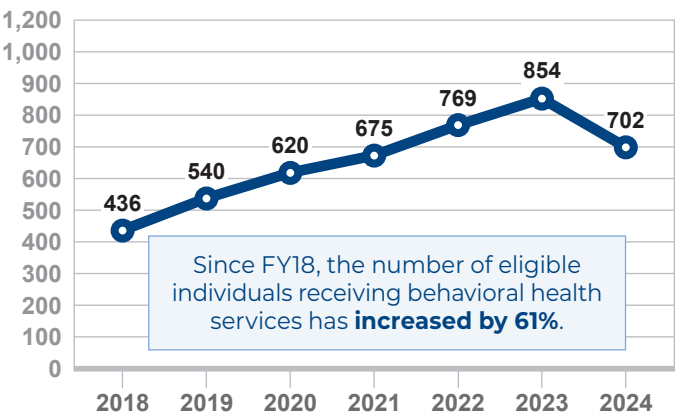
Many SSYI YV participants have experienced trauma and may struggle with behavioral health challenges, including substance use disorders.

Case managers connect youth to behavioral health services, which are provided by SSYI-funded or external clinicians. In FY24, 702 youth received behavioral health services.

Behavioral health services continue to be a significant component of SSYI YV, with **more than 35%** of participants receiving behavioral health services.

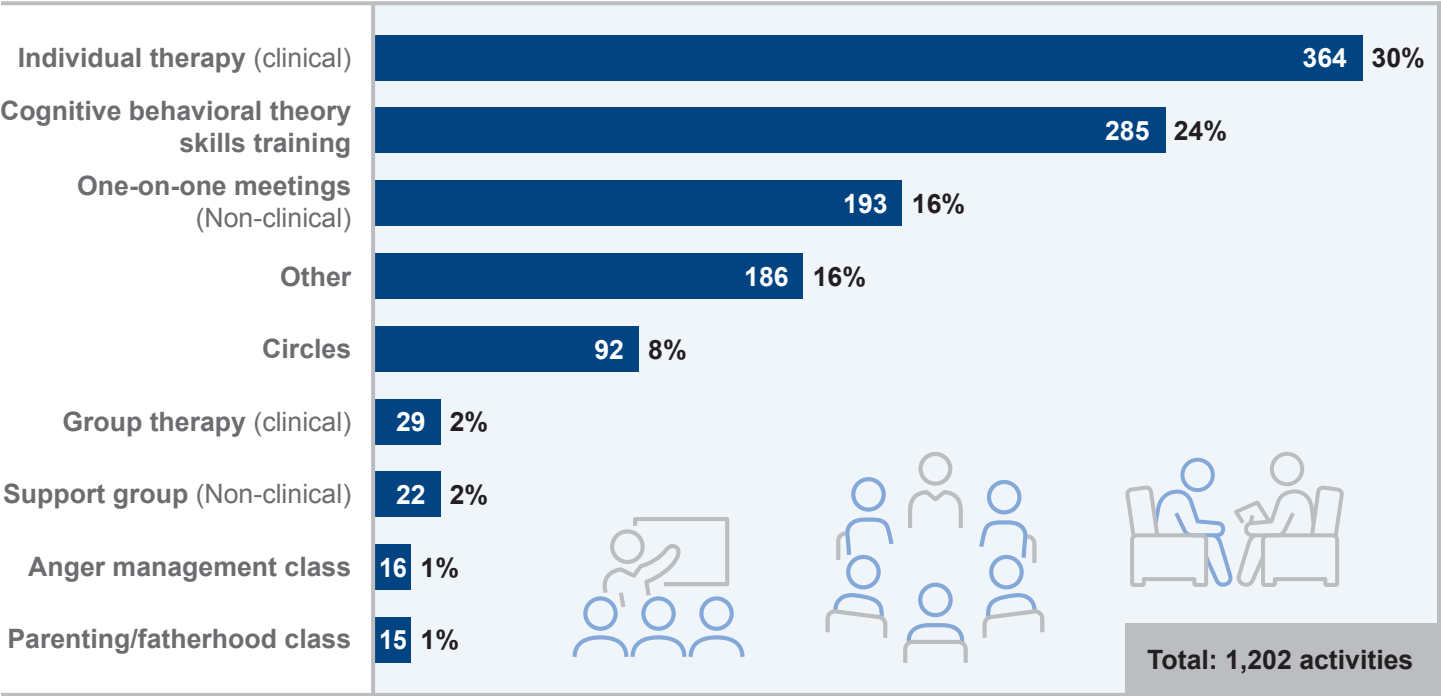


Number of Participants Receiving Behavioral Health Services



A statewide Clinical and Behavioral Health Affinity Group allowed staff to share best practices and receive professional development.

Behavioral Health Services Breakdown, FY24



Note: Percentages are rounded, and "Other" included 154 'fill-in' responses and 32 pre-FY24 categories that are being phased out.

Program Participation Among Young Women

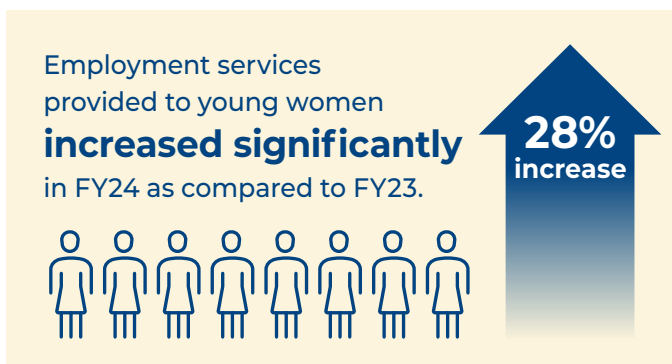
There were 194 SSYI YV-eligible young women in FY24, the majority of whom are receiving employment and behavioral health services.

Program Component	FY24
Eligible young women	194
Enrolled in case management	112
Educational services	39
Employment services	95
Behavioral health services	74



“A young woman who participated in the Springfield SSYI program is now working full-time as a certified peer specialist. She is interested in furthering her education and considering higher education in social work. This young woman is determined to create safety, honesty, love, and accountability for her daughter. She is an exceptional example of resilience, dedication, and ambition, and her future is filled with faith, hope, and excitement.”

– Springfield Roca SSYI Staff Member

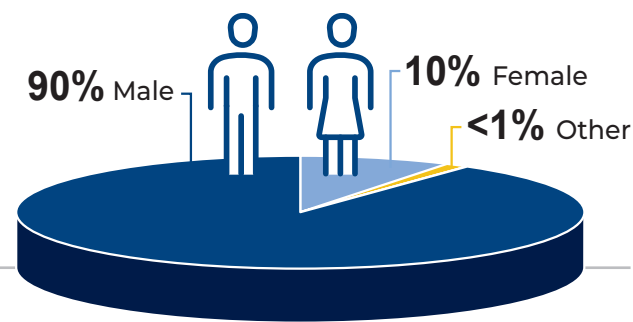


Program Services by Selected Demographics

The SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program collects gender, race and ethnicity data that, when combined with service participation statistics, can be used to monitor potential disparities and guide equity efforts.

Eligible Youth by Gender

The gender of youth involved in SSYI YV continues to be primarily male. In FY24, 90 percent of participants were identified as male and 10 percent as female.



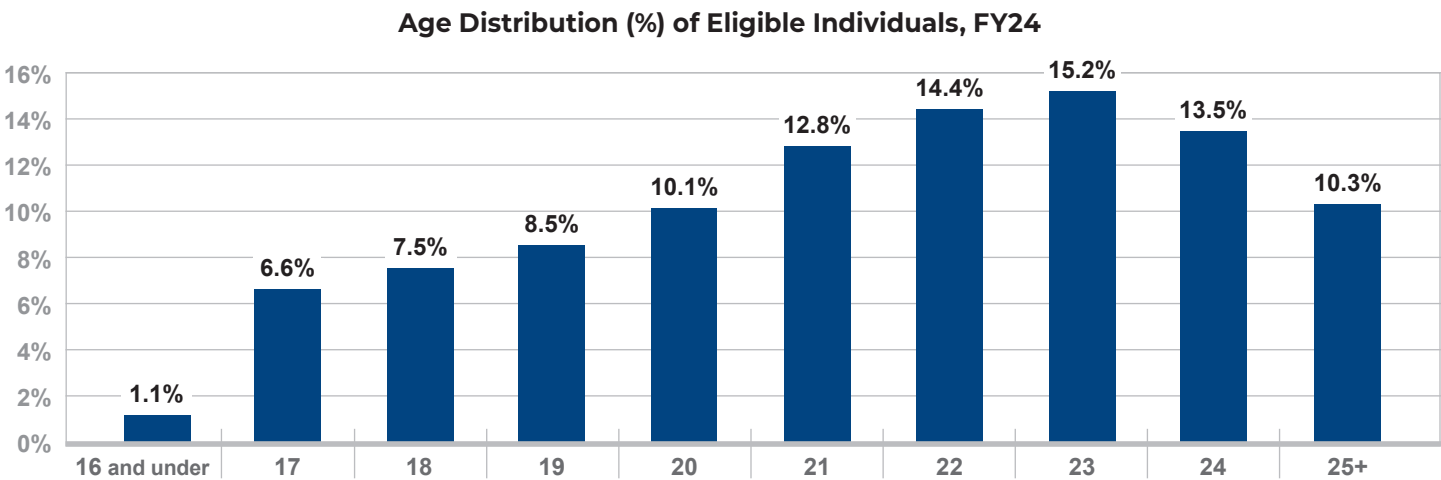
Eligible Youth by Age

During FY24, the SSYI YV saw participation across the eligible age range (17 to 25), with a significant majority (65 percent) of individuals being between 20 and 24 years old.

Individuals under age 17 may be eligible to participate in SSYI YV with EOHHS approval, provided that they have been identified as among the highest risk by the police department and their enrollment is expected to benefit both the individual and the community. Participants over age 25 may be allowed to continue receiving services and case management for an agreed-upon time frame, with approval from EOHHS.

In FY24, participants aged 21 and older had the highest engagement levels.

- For males, engagement peaked between ages 21 and 24, then declined after age 25.
- For females, age 21 had the highest engagement, followed by ages 23 and 24.



Eligible Youth by Race and Ethnicity

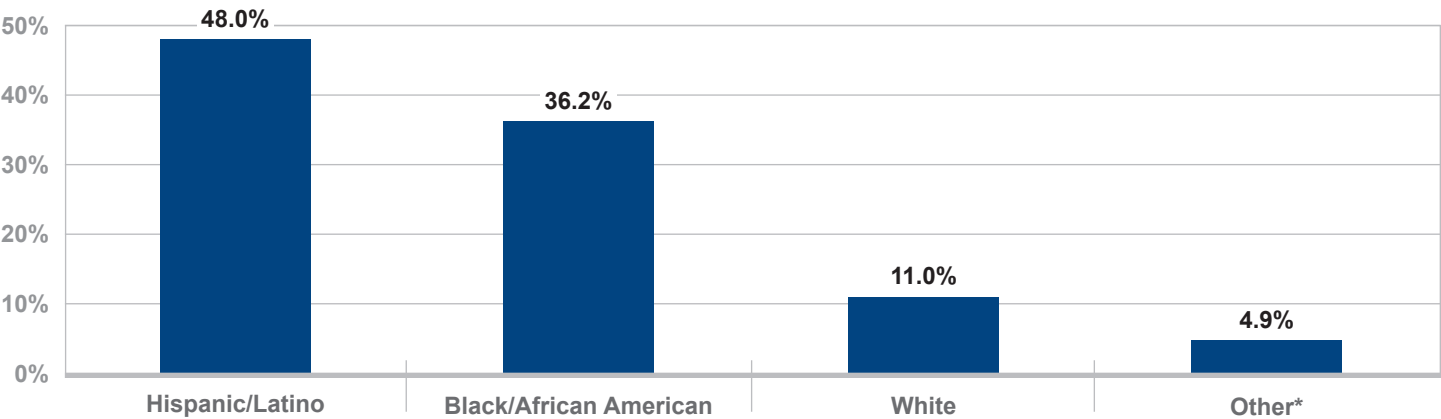
SSYI YV participants self-report race and ethnicity during the intake process. Data is collected using a two-question format—one for race and one for ethnicity—allowing participants to select multiple categories.

Race and ethnicity data is available for 79 percent of participants (both male and female).

Data is presented in two ways:

- 1. **Prevalence Order Format** – Each participant is counted once in their primary race/ethnicity category. The total equals all reported participants (excluding those with missing data).
- 2. **Multi-Selection Format** – Participants may be counted in multiple race/ethnicity categories.

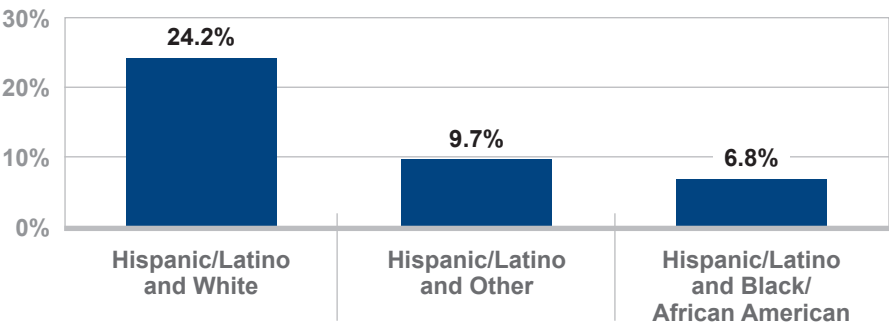
Race and Ethnicity Categories for Eligible Participants counted only once for Race and Ethnicity, FY24



Note: The total number of participants (1,615) does not include 396 young people with missing race or ethnicity. *The category "Other" includes: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and other.

In the multi-select format, high-frequency combinations are reported. The combinations occurring at the highest frequency are the following: Hispanic/Latino and White (24.2 percent), Hispanic/Latino and Other (9.7 percent), and Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American (6.8 percent).

Most Frequently Reported Multi-Select Race and Ethnicity Categories for Eligible Participants, FY24



Note: The total number of participants (1,615) does not include 396 young people with missing race or ethnicity.

Service Participation by Race and Ethnicity Categories, FY24

Race and Ethnicity	% of Total Eligible Participants (N=1,615)	% of Eligible Participants in Services			
	Eligible	Enrolled	Education	Employment	Behavioral Health
Hispanic/Latino	48.0%	64.3%	22.9%	33.5%	43.9%
Black/African American	36.2%	67.3%	22.1%	39.0%	41.6%
White	11.0%	55.4%	20.9%	38.4%	36.2%

Note: This table does not include data on participants who did not report race and ethnicity. Data is not included for the following race and ethnicity categories: American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, or other. These reporting formats follow the guidelines for race and ethnicity reporting recommended by the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board Data Subcommittee.

Non-white participants received all types of services at a higher rate than white youth in all categories except occupational training/employment where white participants had a higher rate than Hispanic/Latino participants. Among non-white participants, Hispanic/Latino youth were less likely to receive occupational training/employment services than Black/African American youth.



After engaging with SSYI while he was incarcerated, a participant was released to his home. He came to SSYI multiple times a week, and he became extremely focused and engaged, especially in cognitive behavioral therapy classes and the Healthy Habits curriculum. He began working at a medical supply store, where he still works. Citing his compliance, employment, and engagement with the SSYI program, among other reasons, a judge reduced his charges. Today, he is working with the SSYI program educator to explore optician certifications at a community college.

– Lynn Roca SSYI Staff Member

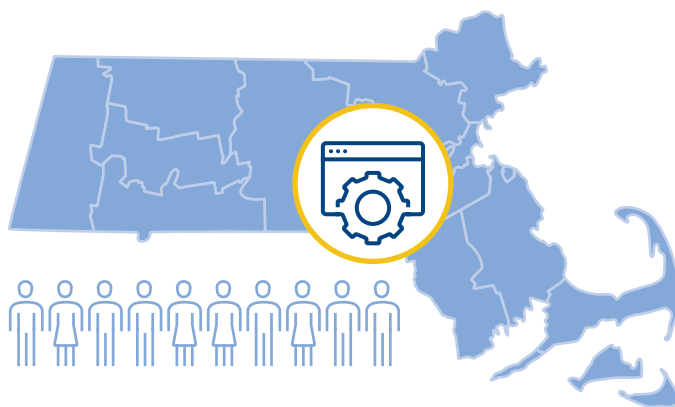
SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program Evaluation

Since 2013, the American Institutes for Research (AIR), in partnership with WestEd, has conducted a statewide evaluation of the SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program, generating knowledge about effective violence prevention and strategies to support the success and well-being of at-risk youth.

The statewide evaluation has provided critical insights into effective violence prevention strategies for at-risk youth, as well as their pathways to success and well-being. Findings from AIR–WestEd evaluations have consistently demonstrated SSYI YV's effectiveness.

Key Findings

- **Reduced Incarceration:** A rigorous matched comparison study found that individuals eligible but not enrolled in SSYI YV were twice as likely to be incarcerated compared to those enrolled.³ The U.S. Department of Justice recognized SSYI YV as a “Promising Program” based on these results.
- **Community-Level Impact:** An analysis of violent crime trends before and after SSYI YV implementation showed a statistically significant reduction in violent victimizations in SSYI YV cities compared to non-SSYI YV cities.⁴
- **Cost-Benefit Analysis:** For every \$1 invested in SSYI YV, cities save \$5.10 in victimization costs due to reduced violent crime.⁵
- **Decreased Recidivism:** An analysis of Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) data found a statistically significant link between decreased recidivism and increased contact with SSYI YV outreach and case management staff—indicating that deeper engagement in SSYI YV services leads to better outcomes.⁶
- **Addressing Female Gang Involvement & Human Trafficking:** Research examined factors influencing female gang involvement and the overlap between human trafficking and gang activity, guiding adaptations to better serve young women.⁷
- **Youth Experience & Well-Being:** Two surveys across 11 SSYI YV sites revealed that participants made significant gains in their well-being and had a positive outlook for the future. Ninety six percent of participants cited “having a safe place to focus on their future” as a key reason for joining SSYI.⁸



SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program Technical Assistance

Professional Development for Staff

SSYI YV invests in staff training and professional development to enhance service delivery and support career growth. Through this professional development, the network aims to continuously improve the quality of services provided to at-risk youth and reduce instances of violence in the communities.

In FY24, professional development was primarily coordinated by Commonwealth Corporation and focused on key topics, including:

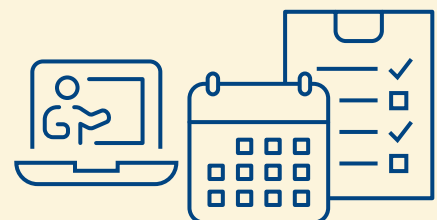
- Motivational Interviewing
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries
- Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS) Training for evidence-based practice expansion
- Case Planning & Quality Assurance Training provided by the National Youth Screening and Assessment Partners



Additionally, ForHealth Consulting facilitated an educational and professional development series for all SSYI YV-funded staff. These included lunch-and-learn sessions on topics relevant to outreach workers, case managers, and program managers. Training topics were selected based on staff and supervisor feedback, ensuring they were tailored to the team's needs and interests—enhancing both engagement and effectiveness.

The following topics were chosen for professional development in FY24:

- De-escalation for Youth Workers: Navigating Conflict with Calm
- Building Self Awareness and Cultivating Self Care
- Motivational Interviewing
 - Overview of Motivational Interviewing and Basic Skills
 - Basic Skills Part 2
 - The 4 Processes of Motivational Interviewing
 - Role of Supervisions in Motivational Interviewing Implementation (*supervisors only*)
- Establishing & Keeping Professional Boundaries: Guidelines for Working with Youth



Operational and Technical Support

Program Management Support

- The operations team (EOHHS, ForHealth Consulting, and Commonwealth Corporation) meets weekly to review policy updates, program successes, and challenges.
- A technical assistance, management, and oversight strategy guides systems development, program improvement, data-driven decision-making, and staff professional development.
- Monthly virtual meetings with the 14 SSYI YV grant leadership teams provide updates, training, and opportunities for cities to share challenges and program insights.

Management Oversight

EOHHS and Commonwealth Corporation work closely with SSYI-funded cities to ensure program fidelity through:

- Regular meetings to review compliance, contracts, budgets, and data.
- Quarterly convenings of the program administrators, representing law enforcement agencies and their lead agency partners, to discuss operations, program design, service delivery, and policy matters.

Onsite and Remote Technical Assistance

Commonwealth Corporation, with support from ForHealth Consulting, conducted regular meetings with each SSYI YV site. These meetings are an opportunity for grantees to obtain support on programmatic challenges and technical assistance on program design and implementation.

Affinity Group Meetings

- Statewide affinity group meetings, hosted by Commonwealth Corporation in collaboration with EOHHS, foster best practice sharing, professional development, and operational improvements.
- These sessions bring together program directors, law enforcement personnel, case managers, outreach workers, educators, employment specialists, and behavioral health specialists from all cities across the state.

Trainings and Meetings:

Program trainings and meetings were held multiple times throughout the fiscal year.

- **Law Enforcement Personnel Meetings**
 - September 19, 2023
 - March 19, 2024
- **Joint Meeting Between SSYI Human Trafficking Programs and Youth Violence Programs**
 - January 17, 2023
- **Managing Professional Boundaries Between Workers and Clients**
 - October 17, 2023
- **Individualized Success Plan Trainings**
 - November 30, 2023
 - December 12-13, 2024
 - January 19, 2024
- **Education Affinity Group**
 - December 19, 2023
- **Employment Affinity Group**
 - November 21, 2023
 - May 21, 2024
- **Case Managers and Outreach Workers Affinity Group**
 - April 16, 2024
- **Clinical and Behavioral Health Affinity Group**
 - January 15, 2024
- **Administrators' Meetings**
 - August 15, 2023
 - February 20, 2023
 - March 21, 2023
- **All Cities Site Check-In Meetings**
(monthly)
- **Technical Assistance Sessions**
(monthly with each city)

State and National Youth Violence Prevention and Intervention Collaborations

SSYI values collaboration at both the state and national level. At the state level, SSYI currently coordinates the statewide Youth Violence Prevention Partners. At the national level, SSYI participates in the Community Violence State Administrator Peer Network, a multi-state collaboration hosted by the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence.

State Collaboration

There are multiple youth violence prevention programs operating across the commonwealth that provide services complementary to SSYI YV.

To better meet the needs of individuals in these programs, SSYI YV coordinates and hosts monthly, voluntary, cross-secretariat youth violence prevention meetings in which managers who operate state-funded youth violence prevention and intervention programs present and discuss their work.

This fosters collaboration and a greater understanding of program challenges and violence prevention techniques used across the commonwealth. In addition, the group shares information about best practices and grant opportunities. Youth Violence Prevention Partners also maintains a program database, which collects information about grant programs, recipients, and locations.

Youth Violence Prevention Partners
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• EOHHS (SSYI YV, SSYI HT, Homeless Youth Services)• Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (Shannon Community Safety Grants)• Commonwealth Corporation (YouthWorks, SSYI YV, and re-entry programs)• Department of Children & Families (Family Resource Centers)• Department of Youth Services• Department of Elementary and Secondary Education• Department of Mental Health (transition-age youth services)• University of Pennsylvania Crime and Justice Policy Lab• Department of Public Health (Gun Violence Prevention Program, LGBTQIA+, and youth development programs)• Massachusetts Probation Service (Emerging Adult Services)• National Youth Screening & Assessment Partners

In FY24, SSYI YV hosted a variety of discussions relevant to Statewide Violence Prevention Partner meeting participants and their interests that year. Topics included:

- The impact of “Raise the Age in Massachusetts”
- Family Resource Centers
- Strong Communities Initiative
- Conducting evaluations (two parts)
- Youth Count
- Probation initiatives and community-based behavioral supports

- Budgets
- Youth Violence Prevention Data Collection Tool (Based on Data from the Massachusetts Office of the Comptroller)
- Office of the Child Advocate programs and reports

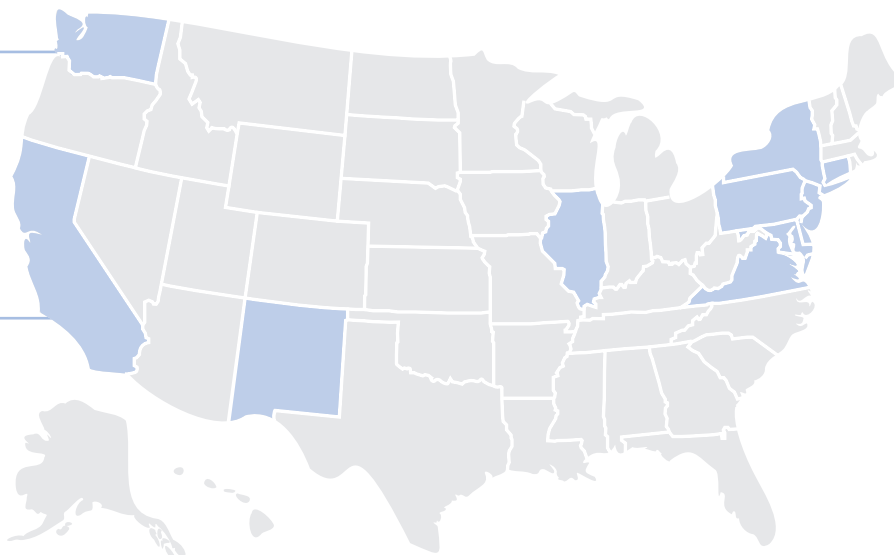
National Collaborations

The Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence provides technical assistance and other support to those working toward preventing gun violence. The center was created by former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords, a survivor of, and now leader in, the movement to end gun violence in America.

In September 2021, the Giffords Law Center noted, “The evidence shows that SSYI’s investment in local, community-based violence reduction strategies is saving the lives and money of Massachusetts residents.”⁹

The Giffords Law Center invited SSYI to participate in a Community Violence State Administrator Peer Network, which meets quarterly, to share information, learning, and best practices.

The other states participating in the network include: New York, New Jersey, Washington, Virginia, Delaware, California, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New Mexico, and Connecticut.



Section 3:

SSYI HUMAN TRAFFICKING INTERVENTION PROGRAM IN REVIEW

SSYI Human Trafficking Intervention Program

The SSYI Human Trafficking Intervention Program (SSYI HT) supports youth who are survivors or at high risk of commercial sexual exploitation. Funding supports survivor mentors with lived experience of commercial sexual exploitation and other staff, who offer guidance, services, and support to participants.

Grantees offer long-term support, including:

✓

Mentoring

✓

Individual service plans

✓

Harm reduction, crisis intervention, and safety planning

✓

Community building and continual engagement



Some grantees also offer therapeutic groups, case management, and in-house clinical services. When services are unavailable internally, grantees provide referrals to external service providers.

In FY24, three organizations received funds through SSYI HT:



Survivor mentoring is a core component of SSYI HT.



Grantee	FY24 Grant
My Life My Choice (a program of the Justice Resource Institute, Inc.)	\$895,412
Safe Exit Initiative	\$347,237
RFK Community Alliance	\$324,736
Total	\$1,567,385

Executive Office of Health and Human Services: SSYI Legislative Report – FY24

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My Life My Choice (MLMC)

MLMC's SSYI Human Trafficking Intervention Program draws from its well-established, evidence-informed survivor mentoring model.

MLMC mentors, supported by clinical staff, form connections with participants, providing a positive relationship at the core of participants' engagement with the program. Mentors draw upon their own lived experience while acknowledging that everyone's experiences are unique. They work to develop trust with participants, many of whom have faced situations that have caused them to distrust adults. By creating a safe space where young people can feel comfortable sharing about their lives and acknowledging that "you are more than your experience," MLMC supports participants in developing a sense of community and unconditional support. Through the mentoring relationship, mentors work with participants to identify their self-defined goals and develop individualized plans to support their success.

RFK Community Alliance

RFK Community Alliance's Legacy Mentoring Program serves young people in Berkshire and Hampden counties, focusing on youth advocacy and system navigation.

Survivor mentors work with participants to ensure their voices are heard and elevated. By developing a shared connection through lived experience and an understanding of what exploited youth are going through, RFK mentors function as effective advocates, working with participants to navigate systems, including education, courts, and child welfare, to provide individualized and flexible wrap-around support services. This program has the flexibility to extend support to youth who may have disengaged from other services or lack family connections. RFK employs motivational interviewing and other evidence-based techniques to build trust and engagement, ensuring participants know they are listened to and valued.

RFK has educated and trained new community partners, in addition to other community stakeholders, in Hampden and Berkshire counties about commercial sexual exploitation and related topics.

Safe Exit Initiative (SEI)

SEI's SSYI Human Trafficking Intervention Program has survivor staff who work closely with young people to form connections and build a sense of community.

SEI fosters community and peer support through both structured and informal activities. For some young people, meeting other survivors and learning about their experiences is a crucial part of understanding and processing what they have been through. The SEI model is built upon accepting young people where they are at and working with them, regardless of their level of engagement in the program. SEI supports youth at all stages of exiting exploitation, including those in missing or absent status or those who have been disconnected from the program for extended periods of time.

Survivor staff engage participants in group discussions, crafts, and leisure activities to encourage self-expression and healing. Mentors help participants develop self-advocacy skills, rebuild relationships, and navigate difficult conversations. Through the continued support and engagement offered, SEI creates a supportive environment that sees each young person as a complete individual, removing stigma and shame. SEI offers a physical drop-in location 12 hours a day, seven days a week, providing a safe space for support, basic needs, case management services, and respite.

SSYI Human Trafficking Intervention Program Services

Key FY24 Data at a Glance



402

young people served
through SSYI HT



356

providers and students
trained by program staff



1,800

combined referrals to
internal services and
external partners



6,866

total contacts



4,326

contacts with enrolled participants



1,048

contacts with unenrolled young people



1,492

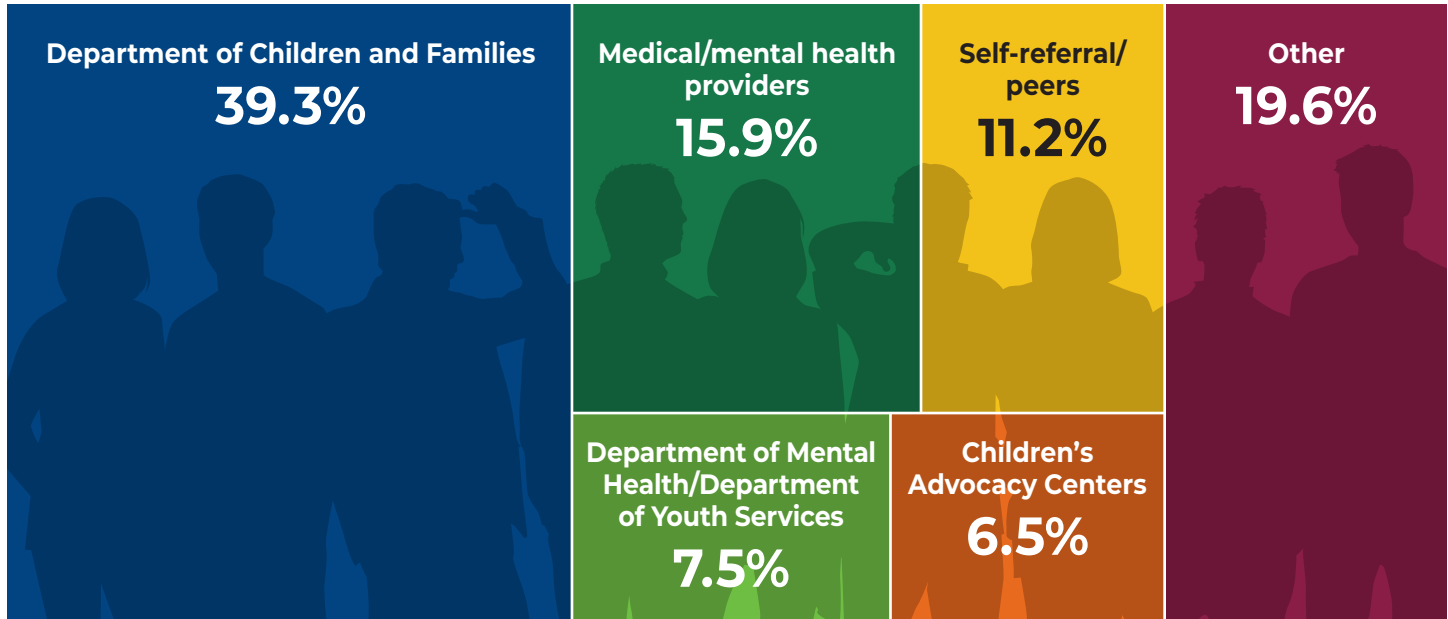
contacts made by grantees to family,
social service agencies, and others
on behalf of enrolled participants

Survivor mentors and case managers use **a variety of outreach methods**—in-person visits, phone calls, and social media—to **build trust and engage youth**.

An additional essential component of the SSYI HT is connecting participants with needed services, offered by the grantee or by external partners and collaborators.



In FY24, referrals to SSYI HT came from the following entities:



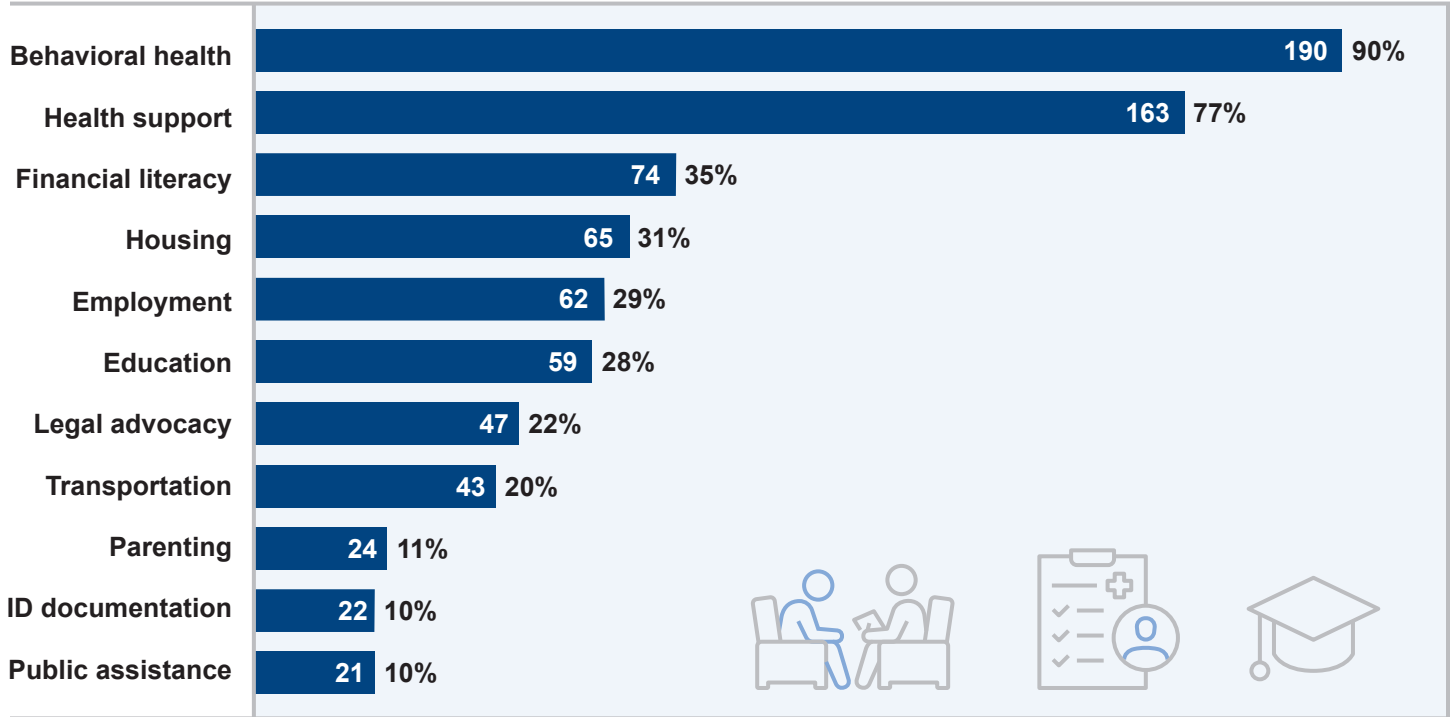
In addition to one-on-one mentoring support, grantees offer a broad array of services, tailored to meet their individual needs. Examples of services include:

- **Health:** Medical self-advocacy, self-care, substance use support, sexual healthcare, MassHealth enrollment, and healthcare navigation
- **Housing:** Assistance with voucher and other housing-related applications, referrals to rental assistance, and placement in transitional independent living
- **Education:** Support in exploring educational opportunities, GED and college application and enrollment support, financial aid application support, and individualized education plan advocacy
- **Employment:** Job application support, resume building, interview preparation, job skills training, work-study programs, and internships
- **Behavioral health:** Access and referrals to clinical support, group therapy, and psychoeducational programs; topics include de-escalation, emotional regulation, mental health management, crisis prevention, setting boundaries, education specific to commercial sexual exploitation prevention and healing, and exit planning from exploitation



Forming relationships and gaining trust with young people is a key piece of the survivor mentoring model upon which SSYI HT is based.

Percentage of Active Participants Who Received Support Services (by Type), FY24



Program Reference Information

The table below provides a detailed summary of services and activities for both those enrolled and those not enrolled.

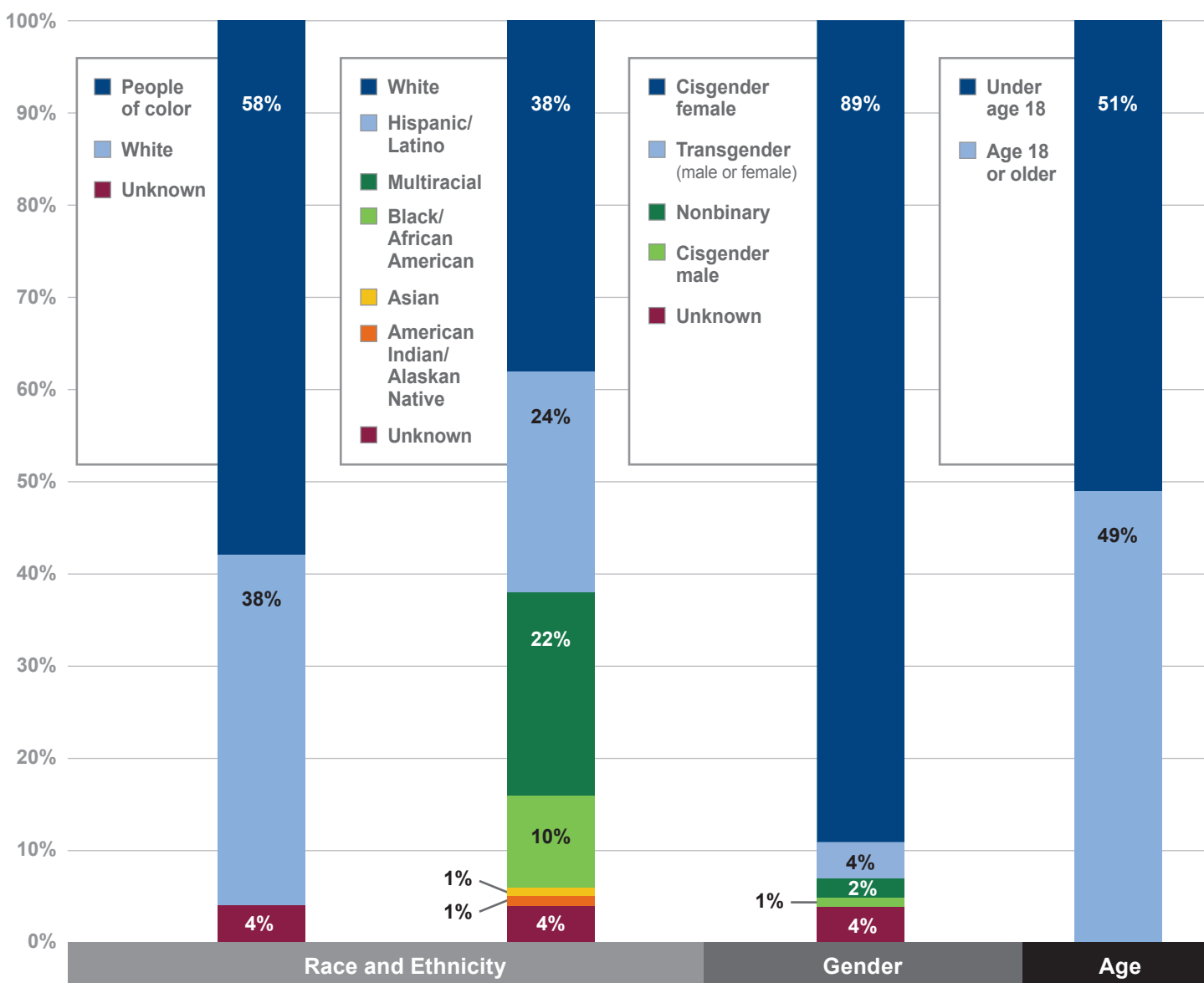
Activity / Service	Count
Young people who received services through SSYI HT (total) (including enrolled participants, group participants who were not enrolled, and young people who received outreach who were not enrolled in FY24)	402
Enrolled participants	249
Young people who received outreach who were not enrolled	123
All young people who participated in support groups	77
Enrolled participants who were in support groups	47
Non-enrolled young people who were in support groups	30
Newly enrolled participants	56
Referrals to external services	1,087
Participants receiving external referrals	78
Referrals to other units and services within the grantee agency	713
Participants receiving internal referrals	52

Program Participant Demographics

FY24 participants' race and ethnicity, gender, and age characteristics are shown in the figure below.

Fifty-eight percent of participants were people of color. Thirty eight percent identified as white, 24 percent as Hispanic/Latino, 22 percent as multiracial, 10 percent as Black/African American, 1 percent as Asian, and 1 percent as American Indian/Alaskan Native; the race of the remaining 4 percent was unknown. Most participants were cisgender female (89 percent), 4 percent were transgender, 2 percent were nonbinary, and 1 percent were cisgender male. Most participants (51 percent) were under age 18.

Race and Ethnicity, Gender, and Age Categories for Participants, FY24



Human Trafficking Trainings and Collaborative Meetings

In FY24, SSYI Human Trafficking Intervention Program grantees continued efforts to conduct trainings and collaborate with other providers.

Grantees reported conducting 10 trainings for 356 participants. Audiences included University of Massachusetts students, high school students, and SSYI YV program staff. Training topics included commercial sexual exploitation and advanced clinical interventions.

In addition to hosting trainings, grantees also participated in a variety of meetings with other agencies and service providers to raise awareness about their programs, educate communities on survivor support, and provide guidance on best practices for assisting survivors of commercial sexual exploitation.



“A participant referred to the program by the Department of Children and Families shared that she felt more in control of her life and her goals than she ever had, utilized mentor support regularly, and advocated more for herself to safely get all her needs met. She is very proud of the gains she has made in her recovery and continues to grow and explore healthy relationships.”

– Safe Exit Initiative Staff Member

APPENDICES

A. SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program Statistics by City

Program statistics for SSYI cities, including counts of both male and female participants are shared below.

Eligible Individuals by City, FY24

Site	Number of Participants
Boston	235
Brockton	98
Chelsea	128
Fall River	94
Haverhill	119
Holyoke	120
Lawrence	128
Lowell	196
Lynn	164
New Bedford	181
North Adams	56
Pittsfield	91
Springfield	283
Worcester	118
Total	2,011

Contacts by City, FY24

Site	Number of Events
Boston	3,964
Brockton	559
Chelsea	5,409
Fall River	556
Haverhill	531
Holyoke	3,814
Lawrence	940
Lowell	841
Lynn	5,050
New Bedford	2,654
North Adams	1,335
Pittsfield	797
Springfield	5,286
Worcester	898
Total	32,634

Enrolled in Case Management by City, FY24

Site	Number of Participants
Boston	159
Brockton	47
Chelsea	103
Fall River	34
Haverhill	40
Holyoke	94
Lawrence	59
Lowell	58
Lynn	104
New Bedford	62
North Adams	34
Pittsfield	39
Springfield	187
Worcester	50
Total	1,070

Education Services by City, FY24

Site	Number of Participants
Boston	74
Brockton	24
Chelsea	39
Fall River	10
Haverhill	10
Holyoke	13
Lawrence	45
Lowell	11
Lynn	29
New Bedford	35
North Adams	23
Pittsfield	8
Springfield	54
Worcester	7
Total	382

Occupational Training and Employment Services by City, FY24

Site	Number of Participants
Boston	110
Brockton	32
Chelsea	54
Fall River	22
Haverhill	14
Holyoke	26
Lawrence	59
Lowell	15
Lynn	37
New Bedford	56
North Adams	39
Pittsfield	36
Springfield	73
Worcester	32
Total	605

Behavioral Health Services by City, FY24

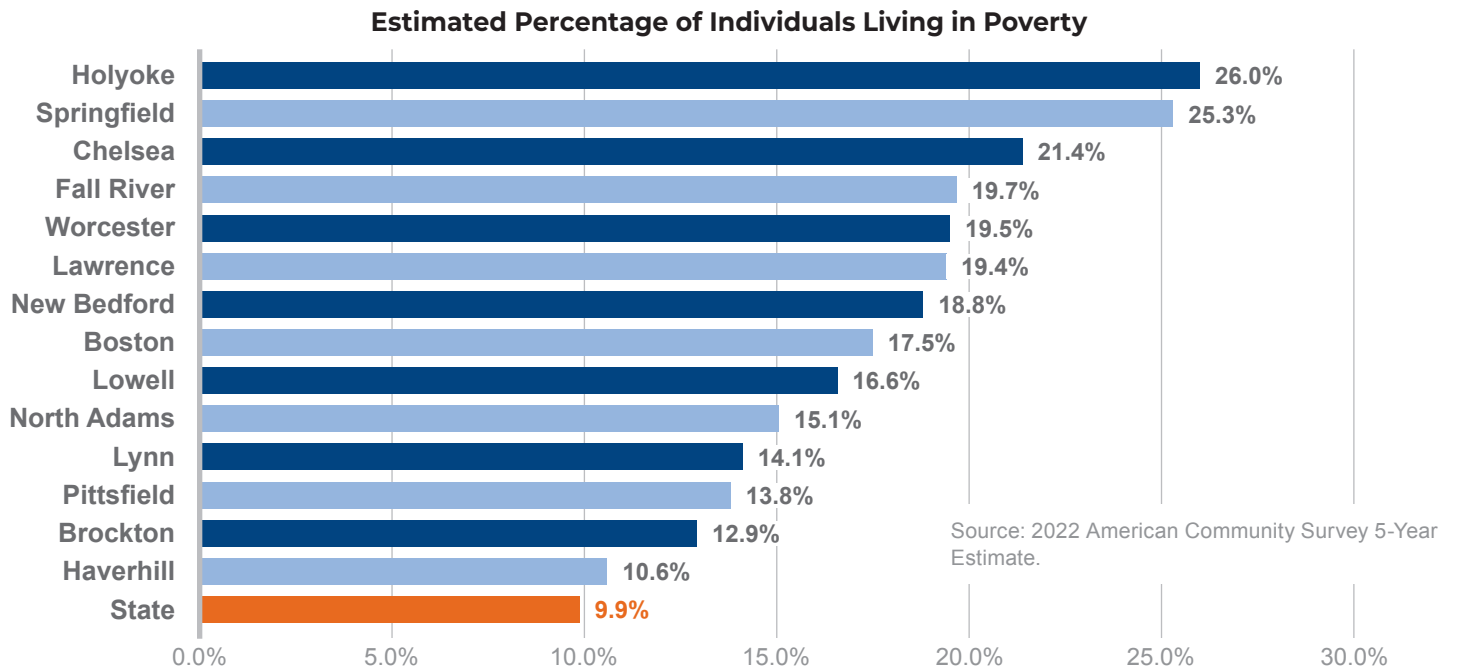
Site	Number of Participants
Boston	121
Brockton	30
Chelsea	72
Fall River	23
Haverhill	27
Holyoke	66
Lawrence	56
Lowell	38
Lynn	70
New Bedford	48
North Adams	20
Pittsfield	20
Springfield	104
Worcester	7
Total	702

Any Service by City, FY24

Site	Number of Participants
Boston	160
Brockton	62
Chelsea	111
Fall River	41
Haverhill	66
Holyoke	98
Lawrence	93
Lowell	82
Lynn	119
New Bedford	119
North Adams	49
Pittsfield	68
Springfield	212
Worcester	95
Total	1,375

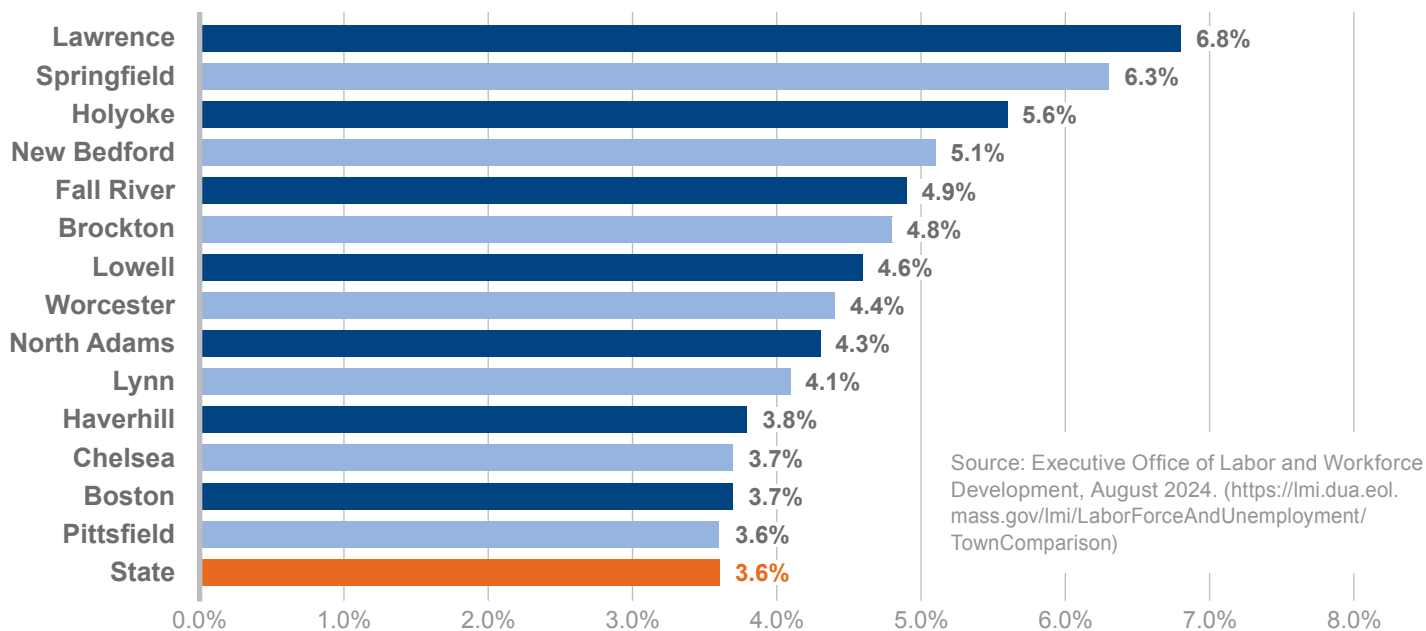
B. Characteristics of Cities Implementing the SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program

Individuals Living in Poverty

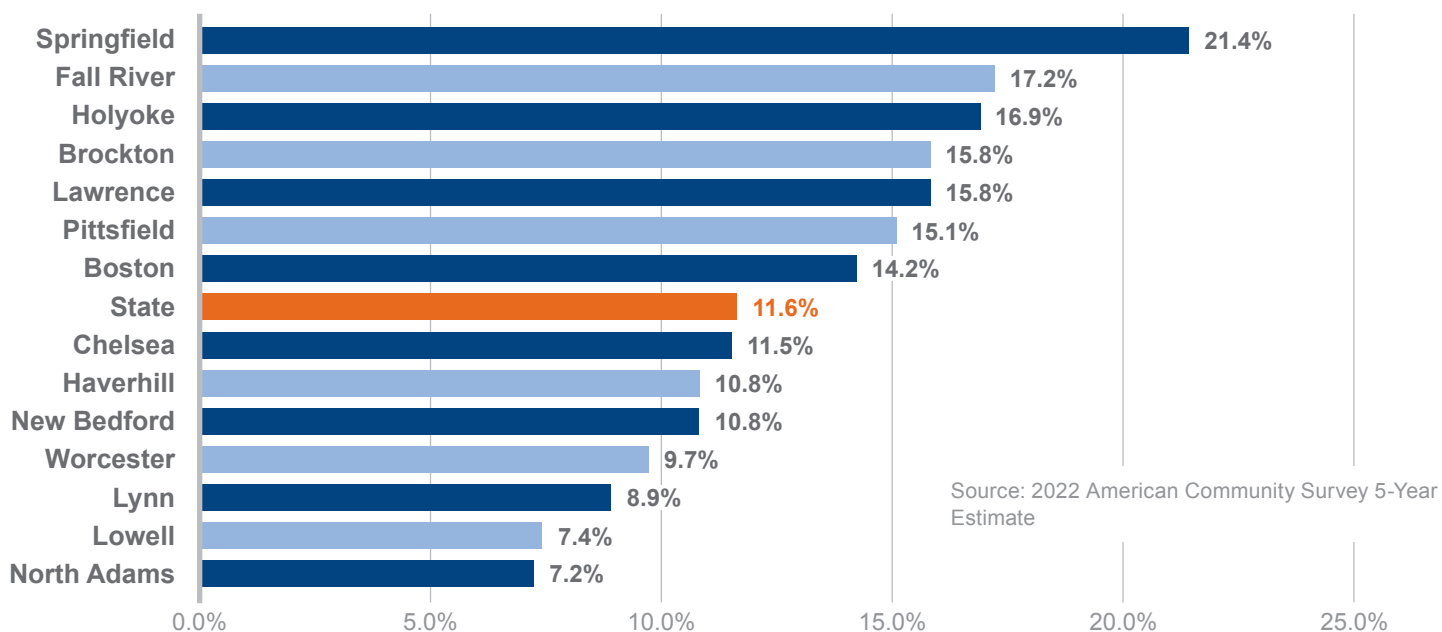


Unemployment

Unemployment Rates, All Ages

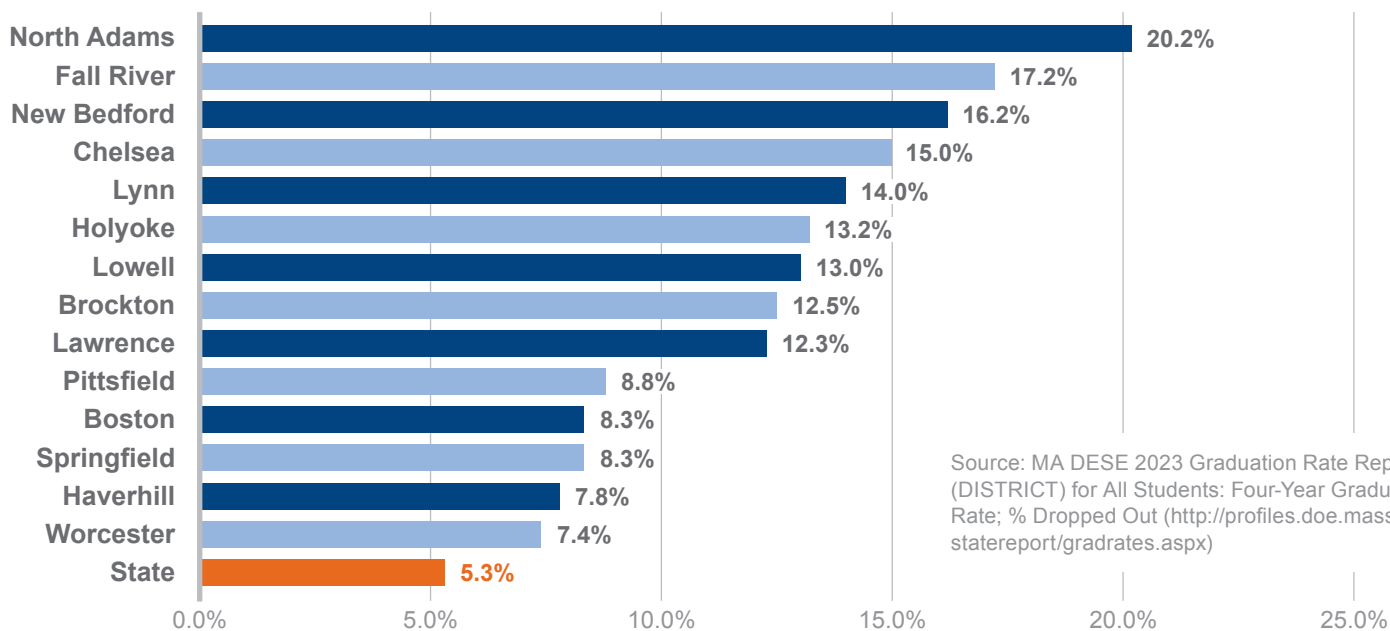


Estimated Unemployment Rate, Ages 16-24

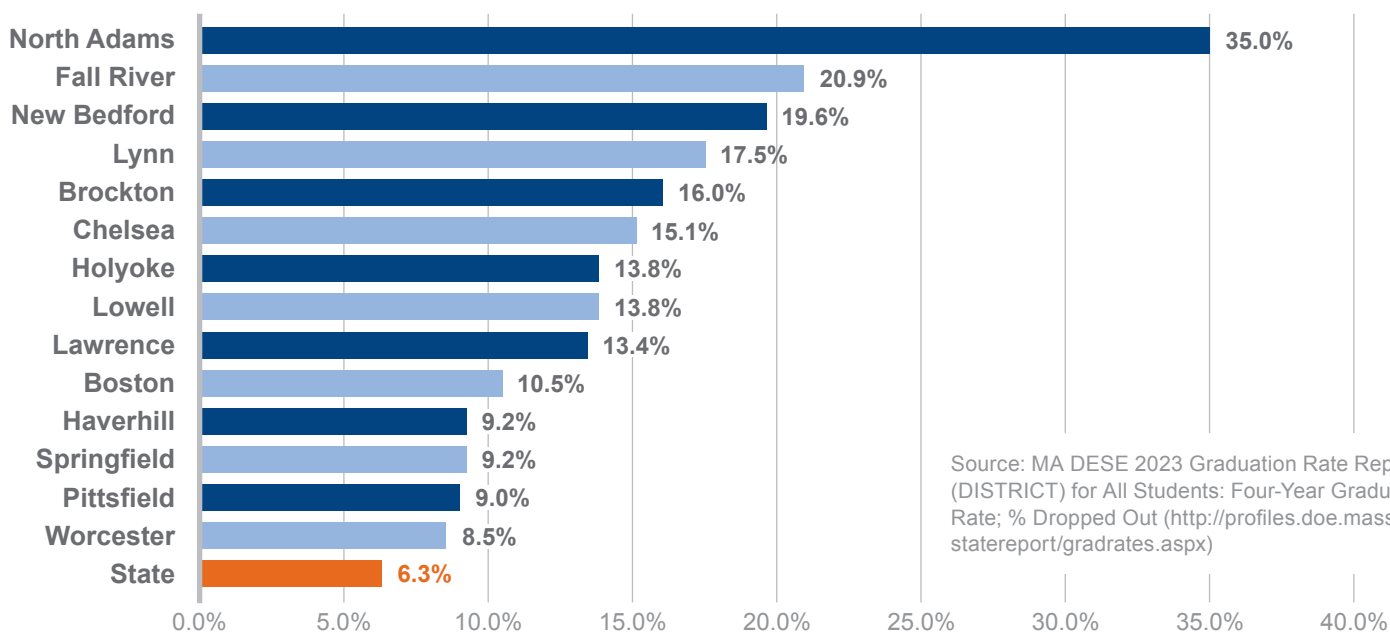


Dropout Rates

Dropout Rate, All Genders



Dropout Rate, Males



Crime

2010 to 2023 Violent Crime Rate by City (per 100,000)

City	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	% of Change (2010-2023)
Boston	904	845	835	782	726	707	707	669	622	607	683	630	643	617	-32%
Brockton	1,161	1,229	1,143	1,231	1,052	991	1,081	955	905	821	765	694	742	665	-43%
Chelsea	1,774	1,743	1,852	1,223	1,112	1,080	923	778	676	667	652	795	826	955	-46%
Fall River	1,224	1,218	1,063	1,059	1,167	1,141	1,093	989	1,014	868	877	983	1,059	910	-26%
Haverhill	575	591	675	670	698	542	593	618	559	524	465	585	585	509	-12%
Holyoke	1,196	1,007	949	1,042	967	948	1,070	1,083	966	859	978	1,005	989	991	-17%
Lawrence	826	994	1,011	997	1,094	879	741	723	619	674	417	427	534	477	-42%
Lowell	1,128	742	539	572	546	435	342	289	324	363	303	321	400	N/A	N/A
Lynn	847	885	821	889	777	777	772	715	595	492	432	466	692	460	-46%
New Bedford	1,223	1,143	1,073	1,093	1,258	N/A	866	666	634	664	618	644	663	504	-59%
North Adams	942	N/A	705	984	557	1,079	N/A	1,490	777	563	802	1,110	1,057	1,097	17%
Pittsfield	628	598	426	252	444	654	790	881	842	710	838	699	817	648	3%
Springfield	1,367	1,027	1,039	1,092	1,091	1,073	1,032	874	989	905	981	954	905	884	-35%
Worcester	973	988	959	955	965	887	890	727	683	630	567	586	607	N/A	N/A

Notes: Crime rates for 2009 through 2019 are from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation publication, Crime in the United States reports (<https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/need-an-fbi-service-or-more-information/ucr/publications>)

For 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023 violent crime rates were calculated by dividing violent crime incidents by city population. Violent crime incidents are from the U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation Crime Data Explorer (<https://crime-data-explorer.app.cloud.gov/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend>). The city populations were from the U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts. (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045221>).

C. Data Management and Reporting Services

ForHealth Consulting provides data management and data reporting services to EOHHS and SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program sites.

ForHealth Consulting hosts meetings that provide training for newly hired SSYI YV staff, reviews of operational reports, and assessments of data integrity with program directors, in addition to technical assistance and video conference trainings, plus data integrity assessments. Additionally, ForHealth Consulting provided technical assistance, responding to more than 800 phone and email questions in FY24.



D. Report Methods

SSYI YV Database

The SSYI YV database serves as the primary source of site data presented in this report.

The database supports SSYI YV operations and reports across all SSYI roles, including police departments, lead agencies, and program partners. All SSYI YV sites contribute data to this single system for youth identification, outreach, and case management functions. ForHealth Consulting implemented the database in 2017 in collaboration with EOHHS and Commonwealth Corporation. The data in this report reflects the seventh full fiscal year of data available in the database.

In FY24, ForHealth Consulting implemented database enhancements and created reports to make it easier to access and understand data. The database can be accessed online (via Secure Sockets Layer) and includes web pages designed specifically to support the day-to-day operations of the SSYI YV sites. To ensure data security, ForHealth Consulting implemented the database within Microsoft's cloud-based Dynamics 365 Customer Relationship Management service. Dynamics 365 meets the compliance standards of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants System and Organization Controls (SOC) 2.

The SSYI YV database improves operations by facilitating consistency in case management and outreach processes and by improving reporting consistency across SSYI YV sites. The database includes role-based permissions where staff roles define data access and business functions.

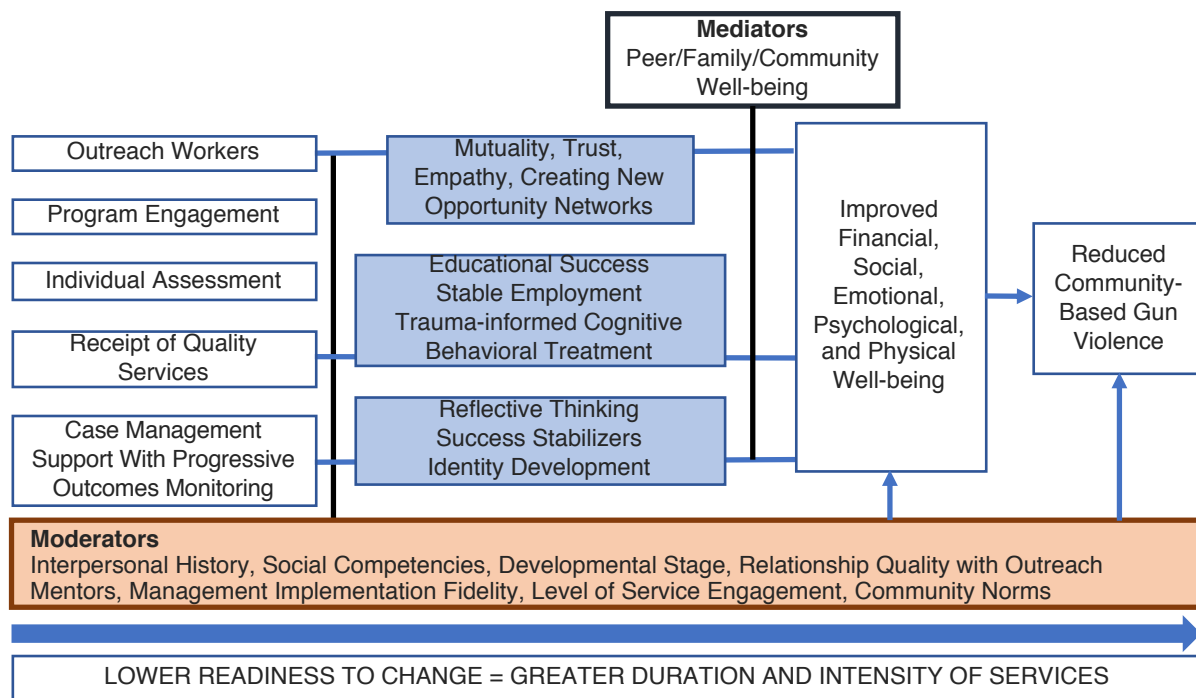


For example, police officers enter the names and eligibility criteria of eligible participants and refer them to program directors. However, these officers don't have access to assessment, enrollment/case management, outreach, or service data. Program directors in lead agencies use the SSYI YV dataset to assign participants to outreach workers and case managers and track their progress. Outreach workers use the SSYI YV database to track contacts and record case notes. Using the database, case managers record intake and assessment information, enroll participants, track and maintain Individualized Success Plans, and track and monitor progress in SSYI YV educational, employment, and behavioral health activities.

Data by fiscal year in this year's report has been revised to reflect a more accurate accounting of service delivery, resulting from ongoing quality control efforts.

E. SSYI Youth Violence Theory of Change

The following diagram is from the AIR-WestEd document *Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) Evaluation: 2018–19 Final Programmatic Report*. It illustrates the theory of change used in the SSYI YV program model.



F. SSYI Human Trafficking Intervention Program Success Stories

RFK Community Alliance



“The program held a graduation for her, and she was so proud of herself—it was the first thing she had ever finished. She is, for the first time in her life, excited about her future.”

When the program’s mentor first met the participant, she was a scared, very quiet girl—all curled up in a ball on a chair in the corner. She did not want to speak with anyone or participate in any services. Knowing her extensive trafficking background, and with permission from RFK, the mentor just kept going back to visit her. Eventually, she agreed to go outside with the mentor for a walk and began to slowly open up and agreed to hang out again. After many weeks, they went to a local horse farm and she was able to ride. She blossomed. She is funny and kind and loves to laugh; she is not a scared little girl anymore. She found her voice and opened up about her past.

RFK allowed the mentor to connect the participant with an after-school service that let her be around kids and adults who looked like her. She completed her treatment plan and surpassed her goals. The program held a graduation for her, and she was so proud of herself—it was the first thing she had ever finished.

She is about to reach another big milestone—she is going to be adopted. She plays sports and, every once in a while, leaves notes in the program office with happy words and the knowledge that what happened to her does not define her. She is, for the first time in her life, excited about her future. Without the RFK Legacy Mentoring Program’s allowing the staff member to mentor her in the way she needed to be mentored, she may not have reached this point. Her mentor said it was an honor to supply the tools she needed to grow, and to watch her do so.

– RFK Staff Member



My Life My Choice



“After one year of working with My Life My Choice, she began to open up and investigate the underlying motivations for why she wanted to go missing from care.”

When the participant, who was in residential care, first began working with her survivor mentor, she reported that she did not care about anything, would frequently go missing from care, and did not want to be a part of My Life My Choice’s program. After one year of working with My Life My Choice, she began to open up and investigate the underlying motivations for why she wanted to go missing from care (which she no longer does). She has also begun to reflect on, and wants to learn more about, why she makes decisions that hurt her and result in her being placed in programs. Because of the progress she’s made within herself, she’s experienced external gains—she now has passes to leave the care facility to spend quality time with her mentor.

– My Life My Choice Staff Member



Safe Exit Initiative



“She shared that she felt more in control of her life and her goals than she ever had, utilized mentor support regularly, and advocated more for herself to safely get all her needs met.”

A participant was first referred to Safe Exit Initiative while she was living at a program where Safe Exit Initiative ran groups. She often attended groups with the hood on her sweatshirt up, eyes and nose barely visible, not engaging at all. During sessions, she expressed that she didn't understand others' concerns and felt stigmatized because of the language staff was using. The Safe Exit Initiative staff members clarified their services and shared their own experiences. The participant agreed to get support, though she was still not engaging much; she was frequently missing from her program, hanging out at the park, and engaging in substance use.

Upon moving programs, she periodically went missing again, often wandering around an area known for exploitation and drug use. She frequently got into physical altercations at the program and went to the Department of Youth Services for a short time. Upon returning to her program, the young woman began engaging more, particularly eager to participate in creative activities. Once she seemed to move out of survival mode, she shared her realization that she is a survivor. She began opening up about her family and growing up in foster care, and together with program staff, processed the exploitation she had been through.

Taking a leadership role in groups, she helped drive conversations with peers about misinformation and the traumatic impact of the sex trade. She stopped skipping class and held down a job for the first time. She shared that she felt more in control of her life and her goals than she ever had, utilized mentor support regularly, and advocated more for herself to safely get all her needs met.

The young woman would like providers to really understand that exploitation is not a choice and has talked about how difficult it was to “do well” when it felt like everyone was focusing on what she was doing “wrong” and blaming her situation on her. She recognizes the progress she has made, stating she feels she is a lot more respectful of others' boundaries and emotions and that she feels she has greatly improved her distress tolerance and emotional regulation skills. She is very proud of the gains she has made in her recovery and continues to grow and explore healthy relationships.

– Safe Exit Initiative Staff Member



G. SSYI Youth Violence Intervention Program Success Stories

Brockton



“I want to give myself a chance at life ... I am ready.”

One participant utilized the program’s support to obtain a full-time warehouse job. His full-time work has been pivotal in changing his life and shifting his reliance away from the streets. He consistently engaged with behavioral health services, attributing his success to this support. His full-time work has been key to changing his reliance on the streets. “Without you guys and the support for my mental health, I would have kept being out there,” he told SSYI outreach.

Another participant initially struggled to find direction until he started meeting regularly with Safe Corners staff. Through goal setting and consistent support, he re-enrolled in school, received his driving permit, and got his first job. He is now focusing on setting larger goals for himself to continue the momentum of his positive changes.

A third participant—who had significant gang involvement and was a victim of gun violence earlier this year—sought Safe Corners’ assistance to make changes in his life. He returned to school, graduated with his high school diploma, and disassociated from his negative peer influences. Establishing safety was essential for him to transcend the past he felt was impossible to leave behind. He now prioritizes time with his family and is preparing for employment and career training this fall. “I want to give myself a chance at life ... I am ready,” he told Safe Corners staff, illustrating the program’s profound impact on his safety and future outlook.

This school year, Safe Corners looks forward to seeing what comes next for these participants and building on the partnerships and firm foundations established in the previous year.

– Brockton SSYI Staff Member



Holyoke



“He’s taken on the responsibility of being a young father.”

When a Roca Holyoke participant first came to the program, he was on probation for a domestic violence case. He needed to take anger management classes, find a job and housing, and stay away from a toxic relationship. While transitioning into Roca, his father was murdered and his mother moved away, leaving him alone in Massachusetts. For some time, he avoided his youth worker, who knocked on his door daily and repeatedly called and texted him. The participant answered after a month and went out to eat with the youth worker.

Over time, their relationship improved, and after two months, the youth worker started to implement cognitive behavioral therapy, anger management, and other programming. Today, the participant has completed anger management and has stable housing and a job. He has overcome his struggles with substance abuse and taken on the responsibility of being a young father, completing parenting classes to help ensure the well-being of his child.

– Holyoke Roca SSYI Staff Member



Lowell



“UTEC creates a sense of family and home in a way that gave me a sense of stability.”

One UTEC Lowell-Haverhill participant entered the program at 19 years of age with an open case. Right away, the staff helped him get his Massachusetts ID and driver’s license, supported him in earning his high school equivalency, and accompanied him to court. He was relieved to have access to UTEC’s 2Gen Center for free childcare for one of his daughters. “UTEC creates a sense of family and home in a way that gave me a sense of stability,” he told SSYI staff.

He made use of counseling services that taught him valuable coping skills. “I think this support helped me get back on my feet, so I could learn how to walk on my own in this life,” he said.

UTEC’s Workforce Program gave him the structure and skills that prepared him for full-time employment and taught him how to advocate for himself. “Now I can teach my daughters these valuable life skills and be the best possible role model for them,” he said.

– UTEC Lowell-Haverhill SSYI Staff Member



New Bedford



“His hard work inspired his mother to go back to school after more than 20 years.”

A 19-year-old participant was referred to SSYI a little more than a year ago. He was heavily involved in the legal system. After much mentoring, he started coming to SSYI twice a week for GED classes. With just four hours of weekly instruction, he passed his final GED test in May 2024, just weeks before GED testing stopped statewide for the summer. He’s now considering attending Bristol Community College and is interested in financial literacy. His hard work inspired his mother, one of his biggest supporters, to go back to school and work toward getting her own GED, more than 20 years after she left school. In June, after he received his GED, the participant and his mother went out to lunch to celebrate with his GED instructor and SSYI staff.

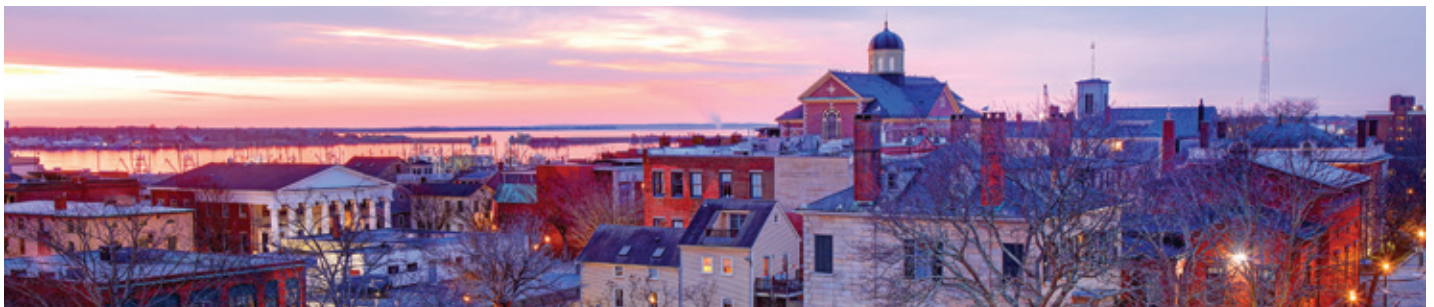
– New Bedford SSYI Staff Member

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“He may not have completed his GED if it weren’t for SSYI’s encouragement and consistency.”

A participant, who has had many different transitional coaches, clinicians, and therapeutic mentors over four years, recently reengaged with SSYI—just a few months away from aging out of the program on his 25th birthday. His primary goal was to obtain his GED. Despite being out of school for several years in a difficult living environment, he had near perfect attendance. He passed three of the four GED tests by early June. In the subject he had previously failed, the final test fell on the last day of the school year. SSYI staff were elated when they got the alert he had passed. He is now on track to enter a welding training program, which would not have been possible had he not graduated. He told SSYI staff he may not have completed his GED anytime soon if it were not for their encouragement and consistency.

– New Bedford SSYI Staff Member



Chelsea



“His first son was born in March, which propelled him to stay committed to changing his life for the better.”

A very reserved participant was referred to the SSYI program from probation for having a weapon in a school zone. He barely spoke to any of the staff or other participants when he first joined the Transitional Employment Program. However, he has been a consistent part of the program for almost a year, building meaningful relationships with many staff members and young people. His first son was born in March, which propelled him to stay committed to changing his life for the better. Two months ago, he completed his probation. Now, with no ongoing court matters, he remains an active member of the SSYI community through the work program and parenting classes.

– Chelsea Roca SSYI Staff Member



Lynn



“He is working with our educator to explore optician certifications at a community college.”

One participant reached out to the SSYI while he was incarcerated, after hearing about the program from another incarcerated young man. His mother contacted the program, and a staff member visited him in jail, and they started working together. The program was able to get him released to his home; he started coming to SSYI multiple times a week, and he became extremely focused and engaged, especially in cognitive behavioral therapy classes and the Healthy Habits curriculum.

He enthusiastically started working as a busser but unfortunately lost that job. The SSYI staff were there to help catch him after this fall, helping him learn how to get back up again safely. After a month of looking for employment, he was hired at a medical supply store, where he still works. Fifteen months after his arraignment, his charges were reduced. The judge cited his compliance, employment, and engagement with the SSYI program as some of the reasons. Today, he is working with the SSYI program educator to explore optician certification at a community college.

– Lynn Roca SSYI Staff Member

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“They (former rival gang members) learned they had more in common than they expected, including prioritizing values like safety and freedom and changing their lives.”

One challenge of interfacing with the highest-risk young people in the community is creating a safe and accessible environment for everyone, including members of rival gangs. Six months ago, the SSYI staff met a young man on house arrest. He started participating in some programs at home and over Zoom. Three months later, he got out of house arrest and expressed interest in the subsidized employment program. After a safety review, we discovered there was a young man currently in the program from a rival gang with a close friend who had been stabbed by the incoming participant.

Staff members began a series of intentional conversations that resulted in both young men agreeing to participate in restorative justice circles. At the end of two circles, both young people agreed to safely share space at the SSYI program. They learned they had more in common than they expected, including prioritizing values like safety and freedom and changing their lives. Thanks to the program’s transformational relationships, mentorship, cognitive behavioral techniques, and more, both participants remain compliant with probation, receive a paycheck every two weeks, and have honored their agreement to avoid conflict while they share space and work on themselves.

– Lynn Roca SSYI Staff Member



Springfield



“He has continually demonstrated unwavering dedication to personal and professional growth.”

A valued member of our community since March 2023, one Springfield SSYI participant stands as a shining example of commitment and perseverance. He has continually demonstrated unwavering dedication to personal and professional growth. He earned a forklift certification, a testament to his commitment to acquiring valuable skills, and he’s actively engaged in pursuing his high school equivalency, demonstrating his determination to create brighter opportunities for himself and his growing family. A devoted father, he is deeply invested in nurturing a loving and supportive environment for his children. He is an inspiration to his peers and the community at large.

– Springfield Roca SSYI Staff Member

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“Her future is filled with faith, hope, and excitement.”

A Springfield SSYI participant dropped out of high school when the challenges of being a new mother and managing her education became too much. She joined the SSYI program in June 2022 and struggled to see the value of engaging at first. But after a few visits, she started connecting with staff and other participants. In the past year, she has received her CPR and First Aid certification and a forklift certification. She also completed the “Tech Goes Home” program and phase two of the Transitional Employment Program with Behavioral Health Network (BHN).

During this time, she had to move into a shelter with her young daughter. When most young people would have given up, she remained determined to change her life. Within two months, she received her driver’s license and completed her high school equivalency.

She is now working full-time as a certified peer specialist with BHN’s The Living Room. She is interested in furthering her education and considering higher education in social work. This young woman is determined to create safety, honesty, love, and accountability for her daughter. She is an exceptional example of resilience, dedication, and ambition, and her future is filled with faith, hope, and excitement.

– Springfield Roca SSYI Staff Member



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I. Endnotes

- 1 This report uses the term "commercial sexual exploitation" to encompass human trafficking and sexual exploitation of young people aged 18 and over whose experiences may not meet the legal definition of human trafficking.
- 2 National Institute of Justice Crime Solutions "Program Profile: Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) (Massachusetts)." <https://crimesolutions.ojp.gov/ratedprograms/safe-and-successful-youth-initiative-ssyi-massachusetts>
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- 9 Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Investing in Local Intervention Strategies in Massachusetts," San Francisco: Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, 2021.

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