



SUMMARY
IMPACT REPORT
YOPE EXPERTS

June 2025

ABOUT YOPE

Young Perspectives (YOPE) works with great energy, positivity and creativity for young people during and after detention, and the professionals who they come across. Our passion for change is at the heart of our services, and we have worked under the motto 'Creativity Sets You Free!' ever since we began. Facilitators deliver arts and sports-based workshops in juvenile detention (JJIs) and closed youth care facilities; volunteer mentors provide one-to-one social support for young people deprived of liberty; and young people with lived experience (Experts) train and advise professionals within the youth criminal justice system. The impact of this latter service was researched for the first time in 2024 and 2025 in our first impact study. In this summary, you can read about the service's activities, the research methods and the key findings.

YOPE EXPERTS - THE TRAINING & ADVISING PROGRAM

At YOPE, we believe that the key to change lies in the experiences of those directly involved. Since 2017, YOPE has collaborated with young people who experienced detention (YOPE Experts) to create a more youth-friendly justice system, drawing on the strength of their lived expertise. Drawing on their life stories, the Experts provide training and advice to juvenile court judges, public prosecutors, probation officers, staff at the Child Protection Board, and other professionals across the entire youth justice system.

Our impact report clearly shows the change this service has set in motion and how it contributes to YOPE's vision: a world in which young people, upon release from a secure institution, can build a meaningful life free from crime.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

More than half of young people who have been in a youth detention centre (JJI) come into contact with the law again within two years of their release. Over the¹ past eight years, through our active engagement with the Experts, we have gained a clear understanding of the challenges these young people face along the way. YOPE's work has a direct positive impact on three of these problems, and our impact research has demonstrated a change in the following areas:

1. a lack of genuine contact between young people and professionals;
2. the 'disruptive experience' of detention: young people experience trauma and a sense of alienation from society due to their imprisonment;
3. the 'gap after release': young people are released with motivation but lack the resources and relationships to build a stable, pro-social life.

PROGRAM'S APPROACH

Each year, YOPE selects around ten young people for a progra lasting approximately two years; they receive intensive support, are paid for their contribution as Experts by experience, and remain involved for a long time as alumni. Activities can be divided into:

- Training sessions (storytelling, role-playing, 'walk in my shoes') in which professionals engage directly with young people;
- Consultancy assignments for policymakers, academics and other professionals;
- Creative contributions (podcasts, presentations, media) that raise public awareness of young people's lived experiences.

At YOPE, Experts receive support in their personal and professional development. Young people set their own learning goals, which are discussed during individual sessions and on-the-job coaching sessions.

YOPE takes a trans-institutional approach: our services and relationships extend both 'inside' and 'outside' secure institutions. 84% of our Experts were already familiar with YOPE through our arts and sports workshops and/or mentoring programs in the youth detention facilities.

During the activities, creative methods (social design, philosophical dialogue) are used, and we emphasise safe, non-judgemental spaces where genuine exchange is possible.

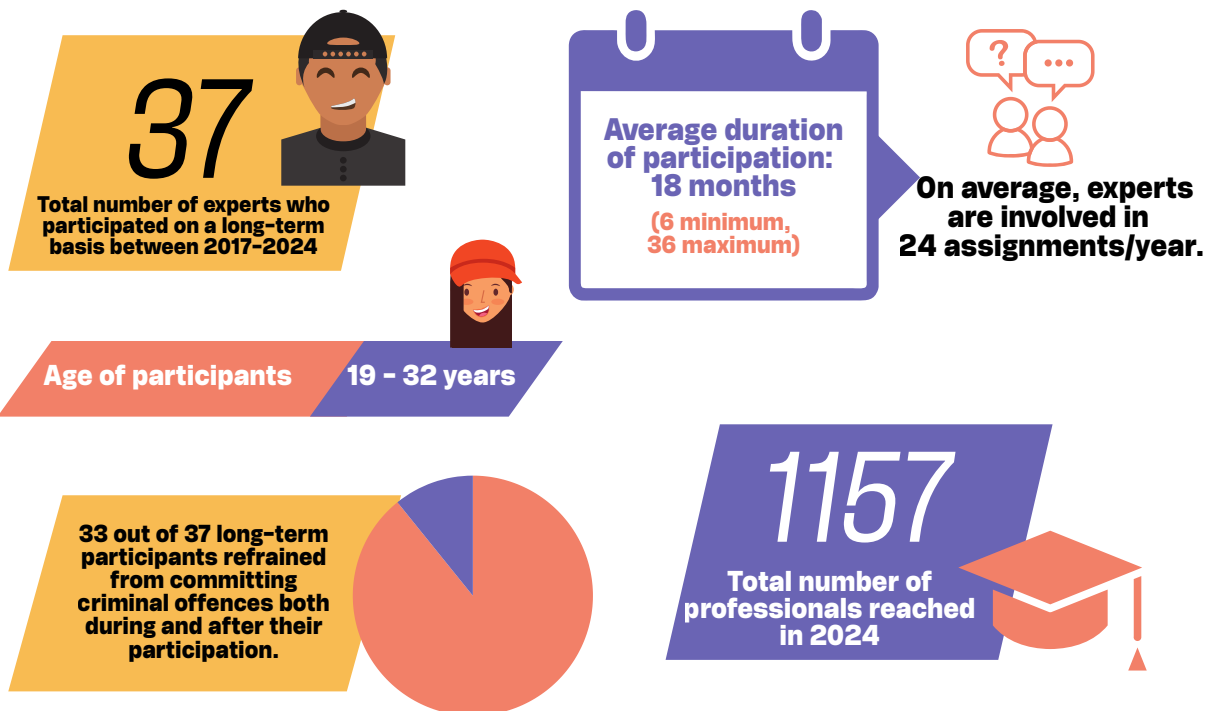
We see young people's journey towards their best path as a winding, sometimes messy process. Reality is stubborn, and every form of impact counts: it is not lost after a relapse or disappointment. We do not fixate on goals – not even on our own Theory of Change – and support young people in their own orientation towards a new vision of the future.

¹ Differences in recidivism trends among young people., WODC 2022-1: <https://repository.wodc.nl/bitstream/handle/20.500.12832/3161/Cahier%202022-01-volledige-tekst.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

RESEARCH METHODS USED IN THE IMPACT REPORT

This initial impact study has a qualitative focus. It comprises semi-structured in-depth interviews with 12 young people (from a wider group of 37 who took part in the program between 2017 and 2024), observation reports, two focus groups and additional surveys of 45 professionals.

KEY FIGURES FROM THE REPORT



1



THE CHANGE NARRATIVE OF THE YOPE EXPERTS

The research shows that participation in the program acts as a ‘hook for change’; a positive opportunity to work towards a new perspective.² Below, we describe how this comes about, first as a ‘result’, then as an ‘effect’, and finally leading to a long-term ‘impact’.

AN AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Meeting professionals (without robes or case files) during the ‘Training and Advising’ activities is an ‘emotionally resonant experience’: it touches and influences both young people and professionals. Experts are given the opportunity to tell a different story about themselves, where the focus is not only on the offence, but also on their past and future. They feel heard and taken seriously by professionals and can make contact in a positive and informal way.

For professionals, meeting YOPE Experts is an emotional experience; they are moved by the young people’s stories. They also hear different, hopeful stories than the ones they are used to hearing in the courtroom. They realise that their work has a major influence on the young people’s journey and future development. 39 of the 45 professionals surveyed learned that it is important to be able to connect with the young people during the criminal proceedings.

RESULT

A NEW VISION OF THE FUTURE AND A SHIFT IN WORKING PRACTICES

As a result of their long-term involvement with YOPE, young people say they feel a sense of connection with the people at YOPE, that they learn new skills and take pride in them. Through their interactions with professionals, young people gain a more nuanced and humanised view of them and are able to see their own experiences with the system in a new light. Some of them regard it as a restorative experience. All in all, it has a positive effect on young people’s self-image. This creates space for young people to further explore a new vision of the future and a new self-image that is emerging: who else could I be?

EFFECTS



“Yes, prosecutors were definitely... I really hated them. Because I always felt that they hated me. You’re not really sure what to expect from the people who are there [in the training]. At first, I already had a little prejudice ready, but it was actually the opposite. Everyone was very much like: ‘I’d love to help, but I can’t quite connect.’ [Or] ‘I’d love to help, but I think we’re misunderstanding each other.’ That made me think straight away, oh, hang on a minute. Maybe we’re onto something here.”

Jace³



² Giordano, P.C., Cernkovich, S. A., & Rudolph, J. L. (2002). Gender, Crime, and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation. *American journal of sociology*, 107(4), 990-1064.

³ The young people’s names are pseudonyms they have chosen themselves.

Among professionals, just as with young people, we see positive effects in the areas of connection and development. 31 out of 45 professionals say they are better able to empathise with and understand the experiences and perspectives of young people, whilst 32 out of 45 professionals say that by listening to young people's stories, they have gained new insights that they will apply in their work.



"It's a rare opportunity to get direct feedback from people whose experiences you rarely hear about. Very important!"

Juvenile Court Judge



A PROTECTIVE EXPERIENCE

Young people find that their new skills lead to positive and pro-social experiences. Their confidence that their new outlook on the future actually has a chance of success grows. They give meaning to their past by placing their experiences within that new perspective, enabling them to gradually orient themselves towards a future that better suits who they want to be.

For most, this new path does not look like a sudden turnaround, but rather a natural continuation or rediscovery of who they have always been. YOPE provides a constant, trusted presence that gives them the confidence that they are on the right track and are not alone.

A MOVEMENT FOR YOUTH-FRIENDLY JUSTICE

For this initial impact study, we have not yet been able to properly analyse the impact at a collective and systemic level amongst professionals. 42 out of the 45 professionals surveyed believe that the training contributes to a child- and youth-friendly legal practices. The impact objectives we will explore further in subsequent editions are:

- Establishing child- and youth-friendly contact has become a natural part of professionals' behavioural repertoire
- There is a collective movement among professionals towards systemic change: the impact of the meetings facilitated by YOPE translates into a movement, a momentum among professionals to pay attention to a pedagogical and youth-friendly approach in their work, as a matter of course and on a lasting basis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the professionals and young experts for their cooperation and contribution to the research. Many thanks to: Coosje Peterse, Naomi Manuputty, Susanne Tempel, Rianne de Back, Machteld van Barchjansen, Neda Boin, Iris Boekee, Lamyn Belgaroui, Laura Mudde, Ester van der Geest, Mijntje ten Brummelaar, Carlo Dronkers, Valerie van Schaik and all the professionals who took part in the training sessions and contributed their ideas during the research. Special thanks to the experts who contributed to this research: Glenn, Jace, Mally, Eden, Dwight, Jochem, Justin, Dichter, Amir, Javi, Simo and David. Thanks to your stories and insights, YOPE Experts can continue to develop and facilitate encounters between young people and professionals in the safe space that is YOPE.

Want to read more?

Read the full Impact Report [here](#) (Dutch only).

Want to learn more about YOPE?

- Visit our [website](#) and contact us
- Follow us on [Linkedin](#) & [Instagram](#)
- Share our work with your own network!

Research conducted by: Elizabeth Vrieling

Theory of Change, concept and editing: Lotte van Elp and Elizabeth Vrieling

Strategic support: Ester van der Geest

**YO
PE**

Young Perspectives

Van Hallstraat 54-1
1051 HH Amsterdam

+31(0)20-7371061

info@youngperspectives.org

www.youngperspectives.org