YTJ™ YOUTH TRANSFORMING JUSTICE

WHERE SECOND CHANCES COME FIRST



Impact Report 2026

Where second chances come first

Youth Transforming Justice (YTJ) works to end the school-to-prison pipeline by replacing punitive school discipline and juvenile justice responses with restorative, trauma-informed, and youth-led approaches.

In partnership with San Rafael City Schools, Novato Unified School District, and Marin County Probation.

NOVATO UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

SAN RAFAEL CITY SCHOOLS

Our mission:

Youth Transforming Justice partners with young people, schools, and juvenile probation to replace punitive school discipline and juvenile justice responses with restorative, trauma-informed, and youth-led approaches.

We address harm through accountability and repair, keep young people connected to school and community, and prevent deeper involvement in the justice system.



Marin County

2025

Where second chances come first

With your support, young people stay in school, ***not*** in the justice system.

1. Interrupt the cycle

YTJ intervenes at the point where a suspension, expulsion, or court referral would otherwise happen. Instead of being removed from school or pushed into the system, young people are referred to a restorative, peer-led process.

2. Repair harm and foster accountability

Through restorative justice circles and peer-led processes, young people take responsibility for their actions, understand the impact of their behavior, and actively repair harm to relationships and community.

3. Build confidence, purpose and hope

Trained youth Peer Leaders facilitate restorative processes, guide conversations, and support their peers in completing individualized restorative plans. Young people are not treated as problems to be punished, but as individuals capable of accountability and leadership.

4. Help save your community

Rather than being sent home or cited into the justice system, students remain engaged in school while addressing the issue that led to the incident. This reduces repeat referrals, lowers recidivism, and keeps young people on track academically and socially.

With the support of YTJ, a young person is more likely to:

- *Stay in school and avoid suspension or expulsion*
- *Avoid entry into the juvenile justice system*
- *Take accountability and repair harm through restorative practices*



- *Reduce repeat incidents and negative behavior patterns*
- *Build confidence, resilience, and a sense of purpose*
- *Build lasting connections to peers, mentors, and supportive adults*

Impact:

Year: 2025

Reduction in repeated individual student referrals

93%

Suspensions diverted:
(2024 - 2025)

60

In 2025, YTJ partnered with San Rafael City Schools, Novato Unified School District, and Marin County Probation to intervene at the point where a student would otherwise be suspended, expelled, or cited into the justice system. Through restorative practices and peer-led processes, young people were held accountable, repaired harm, and remained connected to school. This work reduced repeat referrals, lowered recidivism, and kept students on track academically and socially.

7%

Recidivism rate
(rearrest, re-referral, or re-offense)

Grade Level	Number of Students
Elementary	73
Middle School	101
High School	77
College	5
Total	*256*

Gender	Percentage
Boys	58%
Girls	40.6%
Non-Binary	1.4%

Overall Program Completion Rate	87%

Financial Overview

TOTAL REVENUE: **$688,257.50**

Foundations: **$123,000**

Government Grants: **$486,874.84**

Individual Contributions and Events: **$10,568**

FSA Fees: **$51,164.63**

RCU High Yield: **$3,867.39**

Trainings: **$11,975**

Other: **$807.64**

Total Expenditures: **100%**

Total Program Expenses: *77.97% of total expenses*

Total Administrative Expenses: *13.86% of total expenses*

Total Fundraising Expenses: *7% of total expenses*

These financials are unaudited and provided for informational purposes.

Your support keeps young people in school and out of the justice system.

Your investment makes youth leadership possible through Equity Internship stipends.



School Suspension Alternatives

When a student gets in trouble at school or is cited into the justice system, the standard response is punishment. Suspension. A court date. Removal from the classroom and the community where they need to be.

YTJ partners with schools to do something different. Instead of removal, students are referred to a structured, peer-led process on campus. They work with a Peer Team to examine the impact of their actions, repair harm to relationships and community, and complete an individualized restorative plan.

Students stay in school. They stay engaged in their education. And the issues that led to the incident are actually addressed, not deferred. With your support, School Suspension Alternatives keep students connected to school, to their peers, and to the adults who can help them move forward.

Replacing suspension with accountability and repair.



Peer Solutions/ Youth Training Youth

Young people listen to each other in ways adults often cannot. That is not a philosophy. It is what we have watched happen for more than twenty years in Marin County schools.

When a student gets in trouble at school or is cited into the justice system, the standard response is punishment. Suspension. A court date. Removal from the classroom and the community where they need to be.

YTJ does something different. The student sits down with a team of trained youth their own age. Not administrators. Not a judge. Their peers. Together they talk through what happened, who was affected, and what needs to be made right. The student takes responsibility, makes a plan, and follows through.



It works. Since 2004, YTJ has worked with more than 2,000 young people in Marin County. Our recidivism rate has held at 7%. The young people who go through the process do not come back. And some of the youth who once sat on the other side of that table now run it. Our North Marin Site Coordinator was a YTJ participant as a teenager. He completed college and came back to serve the community he grew up in.



Since its inception in 2004, the YTJ model has diverted 1,300 teens from the traditional juvenile justice system.

Peer-led programs succeed.

Substance Safety Skills Harm Reduction Training

When a young person gets caught with drugs or alcohol, the standard response is punishment. A citation. A court date. A lecture about making better choices. None of that addresses what is actually happening in their life, and none of it prepares them for the next time they are in a dangerous situation.

Substance Safety Skills Harm Reduction Training takes a different approach. The program runs across four sessions: a Saturday family session and three weekday evening teen sessions. All sessions are confidential and non-judgmental by agreement.

The Saturday session brings youth and their parents or caregivers together for an honest, intergenerational conversation about Marin's substance landscape. Not a lecture. Not a shame session. The session opens by asking parents about their own risk-taking years, then asks youth the same questions about their peers. Two guest speakers are in the room: a parent who has lost a child to the drug epidemic, and a young person in recovery. Youth make a pledge to their parent to protect their friends' lives. The three teen-only evening sessions go further. Young people learn the neuroscience of adolescent risk-taking, their legal rights, and how to examine their own relationship with substances. Safety scenarios are a core part of every session: how to take car keys from someone who should not be driving, what to do if someone overdoses, how to access emergency help and receive immunity from prosecution, and how to protect peers from substance-driven harm.

The program is grounded in harm reduction, restorative justice, and adolescent brain science. It is delivered by YTJ's bilingual coordinators and designed for the reality that young people will make choices about substances and need the skills to survive those choices and protect the people around them.

96% of referred youth complete all four sessions.



Oliver's Story:

In 2025, Oliver's growth was clear as he moved from being a young person supported by YTJ to someone actively leading and giving back to his community. Over the course of the year, he was recognized with both the Center for Volunteer and Nonprofit Leadership Youth of the Year Award and the Marin Community Clinic Youth of the Year Award. These honors reflected not only his service hours, but the character, responsibility, and initiative he demonstrated as he stepped into leadership roles.

Oliver also helped found a new youth-led initiative, Heart-Safe Marin, alongside fellow Novato High School students. The project aims to address emergency readiness gaps by placing AEDs and medical kits in community spaces across Marin County, particularly in underserved areas. Oliver reached out to YTJ not for funding, but to invite partnership and endorsement, writing that his experience with YTJ "has shaped how I think and view community safety and prevention" and that he wanted to continue that work by creating opportunities to protect others.

The shift in 2025 was about ownership. Oliver was no longer simply participating in programs. He was applying what he had learned about accountability, prevention, and community responsibility to design solutions of his own and mobilize others around them. He began identifying needs, communicating with community organizations, and helping lead an effort to raise significant support for a cause he believed in.



Oliver reflected on what the experience meant to him: "YTJ gave me a place to grow into someone I respect."

His story shows what YTJ hopes for every young person we serve: the confidence to lead, the skills to act, and the belief that they can create safer, stronger communities themselves.



Fentanyl & Overdose Prevention

Youth Transforming Justice addresses the growing threat of fentanyl through novel, practical, life-saving approaches. At a time when a single mistake can have irreversible consequences, access to accurate information and peer support has never been more critical. Through near-peer education and prevention trainings at schools including Marin Catholic, Branson, and Marin Community School, YTJ equips young people with the knowledge and tools they need to make smarter decisions in real-world situations. These sessions are designed to resonate; grounded in honesty, relevance, and trust, so students are more likely to listen, engage, and retain the critical life-saving lessons they learn.

In these trainings, youth gain a very clear understanding of fentanyl and overdose risks, learn to recognize the signs of an overdose, and know how to respond in an emergency. Just as importantly, they build the confidence to look out for one another, fostering a culture of accountability, responsibility, and shared commitment among peers.

With your support, YTJ's harm reduction work is helping prevent tragedies before they happen. By providing young people with accurate information and practical, life-saving skills, we empower them to protect themselves and others, turning knowledge into action and awareness into impact.

Wellness Groups

Not every young person who needs support has gotten into trouble yet. Many are just carrying more than they should have to carry at their age, and they don't have a place to process it.

School Wellness Groups reach those students before a difficult moment becomes a crisis. Groups of eight students meet weekly across a 27-week program on campus. The small group size is intentional. Eight students means every person in the room is known, heard, and accountable to the others. It is not a classroom. It is a community.

Sessions are facilitated by YTJ's bilingual restorative justice coordinators in coordination with school counselors. These are members of the communities they serve, delivering the program in English and Spanish to students whose families may not otherwise have access to this kind of support. Sessions focus on emotional regulation, coping skills, resilience, and healthy peer relationships through guided discussion, structured activities, and reflection.

With your support, this work reaches young people at the moment when prevention is still possible.

San Rafael to Novato Expansion (Probation Partnership)

In May 2024, eight students at Sinaloa Middle School in Novato were arrested on felony assault charges after a planned attack on a fellow student. The incident shook the school and the broader community. Parents packed the school that week, some saying their children were afraid to come to school. A teacher with nearly three decades in the district, Liz Nelson, stood up and said, “We’re working so hard, all day long, sitting in circles, seeing what we can do. We need you to help us.”

That moment made clear what was missing.

> *“After the incident at Sinaloa Middle School, it was clear we needed a response that kept students in school while addressing behavior in a meaningful way. Partnering with Youth Transforming Justice allows us to hold students accountable and keep them connected to their education.”*
>
> **— *Tracy Smith,***
> ***Superintendent, Novato Unified School District***

In late 2025, Youth Transforming Justice launched in Novato Unified School District at Novato High School, Sinaloa Middle School, and Hamilton TK-8. This was not a pilot or a new experiment. It was the expansion of a model that had already been working in San Rafael for years.

Marin County Probation funded the expansion after seeing the impact of YTJ’s work in San Rafael. Novato Unified School District leadership supported the partnership and brought YTJ in to work directly with school sites. Together, they made a decision to respond differently, not with more punishment, but with a model that keeps young people in school, holds them accountable, and repairs harm.

> *“We funded the expansion into Novato be cause we’ve seen this model work. It re duces system involvement by addressing issues earlier and more effectively, while keeping young people connected to school and community.”*
>
> **— *Marlon Washington,***
> ***Chief Probation Officer, Marin County***

YTJ has worked with more than 2,000 young people in Marin County since 2004. The same restorative, peer-led approach that has reduced recidivism and kept San Rafael students connected to school is now in place in North Marin, reaching students who previously did not have access to this kind of support.
With your support, this work continues to grow. More schools. More students. More young people in Marin

YTJ™

The Catalysts.

The young people in this report are changing the justice system. You made it possible. Every program, every circle, every second chance begins with the people on this page.

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Antonio Zavala
Program Director

Ben Vincelette
Development and Communications Director

William Orrego
Lead Bilingual Restorative Justice Coordinator

Jessica Chi Sanchez
Bilingual Restorative Justice Coordinator

Melissa Oviedo
Bilingual Restorative Justice Coordinator

Joaquin Lang
Bilingual Restorative Justice Coordinator

Antonio Zavala and Joaquin Lang were both program participants who became Peer Leaders, completed their bachelor's degrees, and came back to serve the communities they grew up in. They are not an exception to the model. They are the model.

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A message from our Founder and Executive Director:

Dear Friends,

2025 was a year of continued growth and stronger alignment with our core partners across Marin County.

In San Rafael, our work with San Rafael City Schools and Marin County Probation continued to provide a consistent alternative to suspension and system involvement. Students were referred to our programs in real time, often at the point where a disciplinary decision or citation would otherwise have been made. That day-to-day integration is what makes this work effective.

That foundation made it possible to expand into North Marin, where we began working with Novato Unified School District. Students in Novato now have access to the same model that has been in place in San Rafael for years.

In 2025, we worked with 256 young people across Marin County and diverted 60 suspensions during the school year. Students led Peer Solutions, sitting across from their peers and working through situations that would otherwise have resulted in removal from school or further system involvement. School Suspension Alternatives kept students engaged rather than sending them home. In our Wellness Groups, young people built the ability to manage stress and ask for help before issues escalated. Through our harm reduction work, high school students led direct conversations with younger students about fentanyl and overdose risk.

This work depends on trust. From school leaders, from probation, and from the broader community. It is built over time by showing up consistently and doing the work the right way.

Over the past twenty years, we have worked with more than 2,000 young people in Marin County. That consistency matters, especially as the need for effective, community-based alternatives continues to grow.

None of this happens without the strength of these partnerships or the support of those who invest in this work.

Thank you for being part of it.

***Don Carney** | Founder and Executive Director*
Youth Transforming Justice



Don Carney
Founder and Executive Director

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734 A Street, Suite 3,
San Rafael, CA 94901
415-730-2234
www.ytjustice.org

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