

Safe and Successful Youth Initiative

Legislative Report



February 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) is a nationally recognized youth violence prevention and intervention initiative that operates in 14 cities with the highest juvenile crime rates across the Commonwealth. SSYI focuses efforts on a small number of young people, ages 17 to 24, that local police have identified as “proven risk” or “impact players.” These youth are determined by police to be substantially involved in gang activity or street violence, weapons violence, or crimes against persons. SSYI workers—many have lived experience in the justice system—reach out and develop relationships with these youth and then offer them a chance to redirect their lives through educational, employment, and behavioral health services. SSYI combines public health and public safety approaches with a goal of eliminating youth violence.

The 14 SSYI programs are overseen by the Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF), an office within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS). Commonwealth Corporation provides program management assistance to EOHHS and technical assistance to the 14 programs. ForHealth Consulting™ at UMass Chan Medical School provides data management, data reporting, and other supportive services. Each SSYI program is composed of a police department, lead agency, and program partners. Lead agencies are community-based organizations or local/quasi-governmental organizations that manage and coordinate all SSYI program activities, services, policies, operations, and reporting. Program partners provide services or opportunities to SSYI youth and may include nonprofit, municipal, county, for-profit organizations, and licensed mental health clinics.

Under the SSYI umbrella, EOHHS also operates the SSYI Human Trafficking Grant Program to meet the needs of youth of all genders, primarily ages 10 to 24, who are survivors, or at risk, for human trafficking.

This fiscal year 2023 report is issued in accordance with the 2024 General Appropriations Act, line item 4000-0005.¹



Fall River Staff at the New England Streetworker Conference

Source: UTEC

¹ An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2024 for the Maintenance of the Departments, Boards, Commissions, Institutions, and Certain Activities of the Commonwealth, for Interest, Sinking Fund and Serial Bond Requirements, and for Certain Permanent Improvements, 2023 Mass. Acts, ch. 126.

SSYI Outputs

This report details program goals and benchmarks for evaluating grant recipients, as well as SSYI program outcomes and findings for state fiscal year 2023 for the 14 SSYI programs and the three SSYI Human Trafficking grantee programs.

The data for the 14 SSYI cities provided in this report are primarily derived from the SSYI case management system, referred to as the SSYI database. The SSYI database supports program operations and reporting across all SSYI roles, including police departments, lead agencies, and program partners. All SSYI sites use this single system for youth identification, outreach, contact with youth, enrollment, case management, education, employment, and behavioral health functions.

During the period covered by this report, SSYI provided innovative and important services to youth whom police departments identified as being most likely to be victims or perpetrators of violent weapons offenses. In summary:

- A total of **2,039 young people were identified by police as eligible for SSYI** in FY23. Outreach workers attempted to contact these youth to solicit their participation in SSYI. Over **1,000 young people were successfully contacted in fiscal year 2023**.
- If youth agreed to enroll in SSYI, a case manager conducted an intake interview to gather information about them and enroll them in the program. Enrolled participants received case management services. A total of **1,073 young people were enrolled and received case management services in fiscal year 2023**.
- Case managers coordinated with local service providers to engage young people in education programs. Educational services primarily focused on maintaining high school or alternative high school enrollment and graduation or assisted with the attainment of HiSET or GED qualifications. A total of **534 young people received education services in fiscal year 2023**.
- SSYI programs also offered occupational training and employment services to young people so they could receive both the soft and hard skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. Young people who

In fiscal year 2023:

2,039 youth were identified by police as eligible for SSYI youth violence prevention and intervention program.

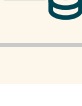
	1,073 youth	were enrolled and received case management services
	534 youth	received education services (high school or alternative high school enrollment/graduation; HiSET or GED)
	610 youth	participated in employment activities (obtaining unsubsidized jobs, skills, job retention, and career planning)
	856 youth	participated in behavioral health services
	89%	of eligible youth were non-white, including Latinx youth
	Non-white vs. white eligible youth	received services in comparable percentages: • Education: 30% vs. 28% • Employment: 33% vs. 35% • Behavioral health: 47% vs. 44%
	204 SSYI-eligible youth	were young women (ages 17 to 24)

enrolled in transitional/subsidized employment received SSYI program support in obtaining and maintaining unsubsidized jobs, including ongoing communication with their case managers and assistance with problem resolution, job retention, and further career planning and skill development. A total of **610 young people participated in employment activities in fiscal year 2023.**

- Many SSYI participants have experienced trauma, and many have mental health issues or substance use disorders. Case managers helped SSYI youth access behavioral health services. A total of **856 young people participated in behavioral health services in fiscal year 2023.**
- Most eligible young people were non-White (89 percent), including Latinx youth. **The percentages of non-White eligible young people participating in services were comparable to white eligible young people.** The comparison between non-White and white eligible youth were as follows: education, 30% vs. 28%; employment, 33% vs. 35%; and behavioral health, 47% vs. 44%.
- The SSYI program was expanded in fiscal year 2019 to include young women (ages 17 to 24.) **There were 204 SSYI-eligible young women in fiscal year 2023.**
- In the **SSYI Human Trafficking Grant Program in FY23, 406 youth received services.** Among these, 218 were enrolled and 188 participated in support groups (53 enrolled and 135 non-enrolled youth). All enrolled youth received survivor mentoring and received behavioral health services. In addition, 101 young people received direct financial assistance. There were 7,044 contacts made by staff to youth and on behalf of youth. Grantees also conducted trainings for other service providers and offered groups and activities to young people. The total attendance for these training sessions was 648.

In fiscal year 2023:

406 youth received services through the **SSYI Human Trafficking Grant Program.**

	218 youth	were enrolled
	188 youth	participated in support groups
	100%	of enrolled youth received mentoring
	100%	of enrolled youth received behavioral health support
	7,044 contacts	made by staff to youth and on behalf of youth
	648 providers	attended training sessions
	101 youth	received direct financial assistance

SSYI Outcomes

In February 2021, SSYI was identified as a “Promising Program” by the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice, and selected for inclusion in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Model Programs Guide.² In September 2021, the Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence noted: “The evidence shows that SSYI’s investment in local, community-based violence reduction strategies is saving the lives and money of Massachusetts residents.”³

² National Institute of Justice Crime Solutions, “Program Profile.”

³ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, *Local Intervention Strategies*.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR), in partnership with WestEd, has been the state evaluator for SSYI since 2013. The AIR–WestEd evaluations and the findings demonstrated the program’s effectiveness:

- A rigorous matched comparison study was conducted to examine the likelihood of incarceration among different groups of individuals identified by police as eligible for SSYI. The study found that those eligible but not enrolled in SSYI were twice as likely to be incarcerated as those who were eligible and enrolled.⁴
- An examination of community-level violent crime trends before and after the establishment of SSYI found a statistically significant reduction in violent victimizations in cities where SSYI was operating as compared with cities that were not implementing SSYI.⁵
- A cost-benefit analysis of reduced victimizations from violent crime in SSYI cities found that for every \$1 invested in SSYI, SSYI cities save \$5.10 in victimization costs.⁶
- An analysis of CORI data on reoffending in combination with youth case management data from SSYI cities found a statistically significant association between decreased recidivism and increased contact with SSYI outreach and case management staff.⁷



⁴ Campie et al., *Predict Incarceration Likelihoods*.

⁵ Campie et al., *2018–19 Final Programmatic Report*.

⁶ Campie et al., *2018–19 Final Programmatic Report*.

⁷ Campie et al., *Influence of Outreach*.

SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL YOUTH INITIATIVE LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Introduction

This legislative report provides information on two programs, the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative (SSYI) and the SSYI Human Trafficking Grant Program.

SSYI is a nationally recognized youth violence prevention and intervention initiative that operates in cities with the highest juvenile crime rates. SSYI focuses efforts on a small number of young people, ages 17 through 24, whom local police have identified as “proven risk” or “impact players.” These young people are determined by police to be substantially involved in gang activity, street violence, weapons violence, and/or crimes against people. SSYI workers, many of whom have experience in the justice system, reach out and develop relationships with these young people and then offer them a chance to redirect their lives through case management, educational, employment, and behavioral health services.

Following the implementation of a pilot project offering services to females, EOHHS established the SSYI Human Trafficking Grant Program as a distinct program under the SSYI umbrella. This program is designed to meet the needs of young people of all genders, primarily ages 10 through 24, who are survivors or at risk of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE).

This 2023 report details SSYI program goals and benchmarks for evaluating grant recipients, as well as SSYI program outcomes and findings for state fiscal year 2023 (FY23) for the 14 SSYI programs and the three SSYI Human Trafficking grantee programs.

The report is issued pursuant to the 2024 General Appropriations Act, line item 4000-0005:⁸

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 highest annual risk of being perpetrators or victims of gun and community violence; provided further, that any new grants awarded from this item in fiscal year 2024 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 may select the same evaluator in fiscal year 2024 as selected in fiscal year 2023 . . .; provided further, that not later than February 15, 2024, 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 2023; provided further, that funds may be set aside for the administration of these programs; provided further, that these funds shall be available to those municipalities with the highest number of annual youth homicides and serious assaults as determined by the executive office . . .

⁸ An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2024 for the Maintenance of the Departments, Boards, Commissions, Institutions, and Certain Activities of the Commonwealth, for Interest, Sinking Fund and Serial Bond Requirements, and for Certain Permanent Improvements, 2023 Mass. Acts, ch. 126.

Report Organization

The first section of this report provides details of the SSYI program that focuses on youth violence prevention and intervention. It describes the program model and components and provides information on program administration and operations, including a listing of the SSYI grantees and subgrantees. It also reports statistics on youth participation in SSYI and program activities, such as education, employment, and behavioral health services. Youth participation and successful outcomes are illustrated through success stories. Finally, the findings of the SSYI evaluation are described.

The second section of the report describes youth violence prevention and intervention collaborations. At the state level, SSYI currently coordinates the statewide Youth Violence Prevention Partners (YVPP). 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.

The third section of the report provides information on the SSYI Human Trafficking Program. The program history, funding, and design are described. Program statistics are reported including staffing levels, operational metrics, service participation frequencies, and participant demographics. Grantee activities, for example, groups, prosocial activities, trainings, meetings, and collaboration with SSYI cities are described. Youth participation and successful outcomes are illustrated through success stories.

The appendices include descriptive statistics for the SSYI cities, including poverty, unemployment, school dropout and crime rates. The SSYI cities' key performance indicators are also reported.



New England Streetworkers Conference

Source: EOHHS

Safe and Successful Youth Initiative

Background

SSYI combines public health and safety approaches for eliminating youth violence. The original SSYI model was driven by research conducted by the Boston Police Department on high-crime neighborhoods. The program model reflects the belief that a disproportionately small number of individuals drives most of the violent crime. By identifying these high-impact players in each community, SSYI aims to directly intervene in their lives in a positive way, thus reducing violent crime. SSYI fills gaps in direct services currently available to proven-risk youth, who require extensive, intentional outreach and engagement and are not typically served by traditional youth-focused organizations.

Local police departments, with input from other law enforcement partners, stakeholders, and service providers, use a rigorous process to identify individuals eligible for SSYI services. Following identification, specialized outreach/street workers contact these high-risk young adults and attempt to engage them in SSYI services.⁹ Outreach can be challenging since these youth have typically been disconnected from school and other resources; some SSYI youth are in a house of correction or state prison at the time of initial contact. Many outreach workers have a similar background to these young adults and can frequently establish positive relationships with them, making them feel comfortable with various aspects of SSYI programming. Enrolling eligible young people into the SSYI program typically requires numerous contact attempts and ongoing support from the outreach workers throughout the program.

Once enrolled in SSYI, youth receive intensive case management. Case managers, working closely with outreach workers, stay in contact with the young adults and assess their needs and progress on an ongoing basis. Case managers also coordinate with other service providers to provide educational, employment, and behavioral health services. Educational services focus on helping participants maintain high school or alternative high school enrollment and reach graduation, or assist them with attaining HiSET or GED qualifications.



⁹ In FY19, EOHHS modified the program eligibility criteria to allow services for young women, in addition to young men.

The SSYI program also offers occupational training and employment services, providing young people with both soft and hard skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. With proven-risk populations, there is a need for intensive soft-skill development to address their professional skills and enhance their employability. Young people then enroll in transitional/subsidized employment and receive support in obtaining and maintaining unsubsidized jobs, including ongoing communication with their case managers, assistance with problem resolution, job retention, and further career planning and skill development.

Another element of the SSYI model is behavioral health services, where young people can access licensed clinicians and other professionals who are experienced working with proven-risk youth and with skills in trauma treatment and other appropriate therapies. Behavioral health services also reflect an awareness of substance use prevention, reduction, and treatment, including screening and services targeting opioid addiction.

SSYI Program Components

The SSYI model, as previously described, is composed of six core components (Table 1).

Table 1. Core Components of the SSYI Program

Program Component	Component Description
Identification	Police identify young people most likely to be victims or perpetrators of violent weapons offenses. These individuals comprise the eligible participants, who are 17 to 24 years old. (For the eligibility criteria, see FY23 Program Activities Across the Six Core Components .)
Outreach	Specialized outreach/street workers contact high-risk eligible young people and attempt to enroll them in the SSYI program.
Enrollment/Case Management	Enrolled SSYI young people receive intensive case management. Case managers work closely with mental health clinicians and outreach workers to assess youth needs and progress. Case managers also coordinate with others to provide education, employment, and behavioral health services to youth.
Education	Educational services are provided to young people, which include high school, alternative high school, and HiSET and GED programs.
Occupational Training & Employment Services	The SSYI program provides occupational training and employment services to youth, including the soft and hard skills necessary to succeed in the workplace.
Behavioral Health Services	SSYI youth have access to licensed clinicians with experience working with proven-risk youth, including trauma treatment and substance abuse prevention, screening, reduction, and treatment.

Cities with SSYI Programs

SSYI programs operate in the following 14 cities: Boston, Brockton, Chelsea, Fall River, Haverhill, Holyoke, Lawrence, Lowell, Lynn, New Bedford, North Adams, Pittsfield, Springfield, and Worcester (see the map in [Appendix A](#)). These cities have high poverty rates, ranging from 10.8 percent in Haverhill to 26.5 percent in Holyoke for the 2017 through 2021 period ([Appendix B](#), Figure B1). Unemployment rates statewide

continued to decrease in 2023; however, most SSI cities have high unemployment rates compared to the overall Massachusetts rate of 2.6 percent ([Appendix B](#), Figure B2). The Commonwealth's 2017–2021 unemployment rate for persons ages 16 through 24 was 12.0 percent; seven SSI cities have higher rates, including five cities—Springfield, Fall River, Holyoke, Brockton, and Lawrence—with rates exceeding 15% ([Appendix B](#), Figure B3). Male high school dropout rates in 2022 ranged from 7.3 percent in Worcester to 24.6 percent in New Bedford ([Appendix B](#), Figure B4). In 2022, the violent crime rates in SSI cities ranged from 400 crimes per 100,000 residents to 1,010 crimes per 100,000 residents ([Appendix B](#), Table B1).

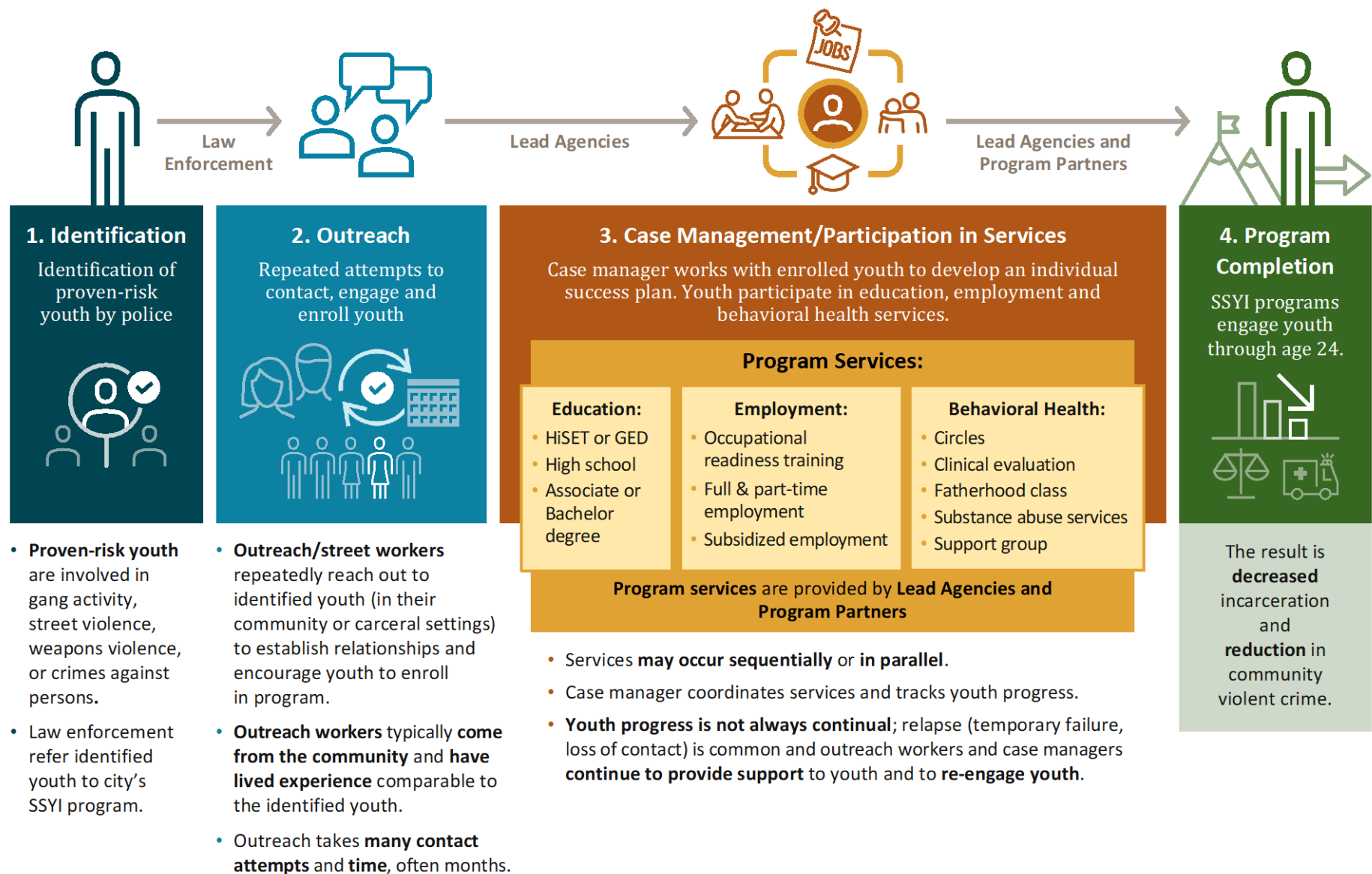
SSI Program Administration and Operations

The Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF) within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) oversees and administers the SSI program and awards grants to cities. Commonwealth Corporation supports the program's administration by providing program management support, technical assistance, and training to the local SSI programs. ForHealth Consulting provides data management, information system training and support, program reporting, and professional development for SSI staff.

Each SSI youth violence prevention and intervention program (see diagram on p. 14) comprises a police department, lead agency, and program partners. Police departments receive grant funding and provide overall leadership and oversight to lead agencies and program partners. Lead agencies are community-based organizations or quasi-governmental organizations that manage and coordinate all SSI program activities, services, policies, operations, and reporting. Program partners provide services or opportunities to SSI youth and may include nonprofit, municipal, county, or for-profit organizations or licensed mental health clinics.



SSYI Youth Violence Prevention and Intervention Program Model



SSYI Youth Violence Intervention and Prevention Grantees

SSYI youth violence prevention and intervention funds are administered by EOHHS and are available to cities that have had the highest annual number of youth homicides and serious assaults. SSYI completed a procurement in 2015 and reopened the procurement in 2018 and 2019 to add one additional city each year. EOHHS currently contracts with 14 SSYI grantees (municipalities/police departments) with grant agreements through June 30, 2025. These grants also fund subgrantees, including 14 lead agencies, behavioral health providers, and local provider agencies (Table 2).

Table 2. FY23 SSYI Grantees and Subgrantees

Grantee (FY23 Funding)	Lead Agency	Behavioral Health Provider	Program Partners that Receive SSYI Funds
City of Boston (\$1,360,206)	Boston Public Health Commission	Boston Medical Center; Bay Cove Human Services	• MissionSAFE • Youth Options Unlimited • InnerCity Weightlifting • More Than Words • Notre Dame Education Center
City of Brockton (\$500,000)	Old Colony YMCA	Old Colony YMCA	• Complete Labor Staffing
City of Chelsea (\$580,009)	Roca	North Suffolk Behavioral Health Care Association	
City of Fall River (\$600,000)	Greater Fall River RE-CREATION	Solid Ground Psychotherapy	• Bristol County Training Consortium (MassHire Fall River Career Center) • Bristol County Sheriff's Office • City of Fall River
City of Haverhill (\$751,245)	UTEC	UTEC	
City of Holyoke (\$674,896)	Roca	River Valley Counseling Center	• MassHire Holyoke Career Center
City of Lawrence (\$753,504)	Lawrence Family Development (doing business as Lawrence Prospera)	Children's Friend and Family Services, a division of Justice Resource Institute, Inc.	
City of Lowell (\$953,909)	UTEC	UTEC	

Grantee (FY23 Funding)	Lead Agency	Behavioral Health Provider	Program Partners that Receive SSYI Funds
City of Lynn (\$575,786)	Roca	Children's Friend and Family Services, a division of Justice Resource Institute, Inc.	• Lynn Youth Street Outreach Advocacy (LYSOA)
City of New Bedford (\$568,258)	NorthStar Learning Center	Child & Family Services, Inc.	• Bristol County Sheriff's Office
City of North Adams (\$428,169)	18 Degrees		
City of Pittsfield (\$513,189)	18 Degrees		
City of Springfield (\$664,443)	Roca	Clinical & Support Options	• Baystate Medical Center • Hampden County Sheriff's Department • MassHire Springfield Career Center
City of Worcester (\$700,000)	Worcester Community Action Council	Open Sky Community Services	• Legendary Legacies • Worcester Youth Center • Worcester Public Schools • Laurie Ross • City of Worcester



SSYI youth violence prevention & intervention grants also fund subgrantees, including:

- 14** lead agencies,
- 9** mental health providers, and
- 20** local provider agencies



Goals and Benchmarks for Grant Recipients

The current grant agreements between EOHHS and SSYI grantees require them to demonstrate effective approaches toward meeting annual performance targets. Grantees set individualized performance targets in FY23 with a goal of meeting or exceeding them. The annual performance targets (Table 3) represent the sum of targets for all cities.

Table 3. Annual Performance Targets by Component

Program Component	Target Description	FY23 Target
Identification	Young people who have been identified for participation in the SSYI program (referred to as eligible young people)	1,941
Outreach/Contact	The number of eligible young people who have been contacted by outreach staff	1,397
Enrollment/ Case Management	Eligible young people who enroll in the program	1,095
Education	Eligible young people who are participating in educational services	577
Occupational Training and Employment Services	Eligible young people who are participating in occupational training and employment services	651
Behavioral Health Services	Eligible young people who are participating in behavioral health services	862

SSYI Success Story — North Adams



“He moved into a new apartment two weeks ago.”

When a North Adams SSYI participant first enrolled two years ago, he was 17, he never had a job, and he was couch-surfing back and forth between family members’ houses. This participant never really had anyone positive in his life other than his grandmother. Unfortunately, he’s from a small town and his last name didn’t have the best reputation, so that didn’t help when he was in trouble with the law. If anything, it made it worse. This past year he joined the YouthWorks program through MassHire, found employment, and started HiSET classes in an adult ed program. I remember the first paycheck he received. He called me upset. He never knew that he would have to pay taxes and told me he didn’t think this job thing was for him. But he remained employed. He also completed a bank credit course about a year ago and has been working on his credit. Last month I was able to take him to the dealership to sign a lease on his new car, and he moved into a new apartment two weeks ago.

— North Adams SSYI Staff

Report Methods

SSYI Database

The SSYI city data provided in this report are primarily from the SSYI case management system referred to as the SSYI database. The database supports SSYI program operations and reporting across all SSYI roles, including police departments, lead agencies, and program partners. All SSYI sites contribute data to this single system for youth identification, outreach, and case management functions.

The ForHealth Consulting Data Management group implemented the SSYI database in 2017 in collaboration with local SSYI programs, EOHHS, and Commonwealth Corporation. The data in this report reflect the sixth full fiscal year of data available in the SSYI database. ForHealth Consulting built the SSYI database on the Microsoft Dynamics Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system. It can be accessed via the internet using a web browser (via Secure Sockets Layer) and includes web pages designed specifically to support the day-to-day operations of the SSYI programs. To ensure data security, ForHealth Consulting implemented the SSYI database within Microsoft's cloud-based Dynamics 365 CRM service. Dynamics 365 meets the compliance standards of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants Service Organization Controls (SOC) 2.¹⁰

The SSYI database improves operations by facilitating consistency in case management and outreach processes and by improving reporting consistency across SSYI program locations. The database includes role-based permissions where staff roles define data access and business functions. Police officers enter the names and eligibility criteria of eligible young people and refer them to program directors. However, these officers do not have access to youth assessment, enrollment/case management, outreach, or service data. Program directors in lead agencies use the SSYI dataset to assign youth to outreach workers and case managers and track youth progress. Outreach workers use the SSYI database to track youth contacts and record case notes. Using the SSYI database, case managers record intake and assessment information, enroll youth, track and maintain individualized success plans, and track and monitor progress in SSYI 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.



Pittsfield SSYI Staff

Source: Pittsfield SSYI Program

¹⁰ More information about this compliance certification is available from Microsoft: <https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/trustcenter/Compliance/SOC?Search=true>.

FY23 Program Activities Across the Six Core Components

Youth Identified for Services

The criteria that police use to determine SSYI eligibility changed slightly in FY20. Among youth eligible in FY23, those identified prior to FY20 (820 young people) met at least two of the following criteria:

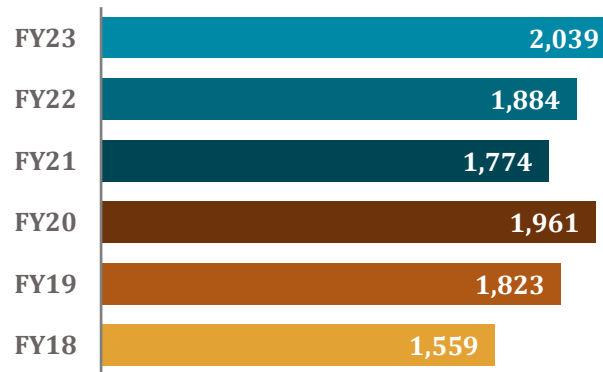
- Repeatedly engages in weapons violence or crimes against persons
- Was a victim of weapons violence or crimes against persons
- Engages in high-volume, drug-related criminal activity
- Is in a leadership role in a gang or significantly involved in gang activity

The FY23 eligible young people identified during or after FY20 (1,219 young people), met at least one of the following criteria:

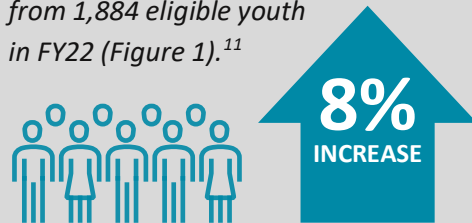
- Repeatedly engages in crimes against persons
- Repeatedly engages in weapons violence
- Is in a leadership role in a gang
- Is substantially involved in gang activity or street violence
- Significantly facilitates gang activity or street violence

Approximately two-third (63 percent) of the eligible young people were eligible for SSYI because they repeatedly engaged in weapons violence or crimes against persons (Figure 2).¹² Nearly half (47 percent) were eligible because they were in a leadership role in a gang, they were substantially involved in gang activities or street violence, or they significantly facilitated gang activity or street violence.

Figure 1: Unduplicated SSYI Eligible Youth



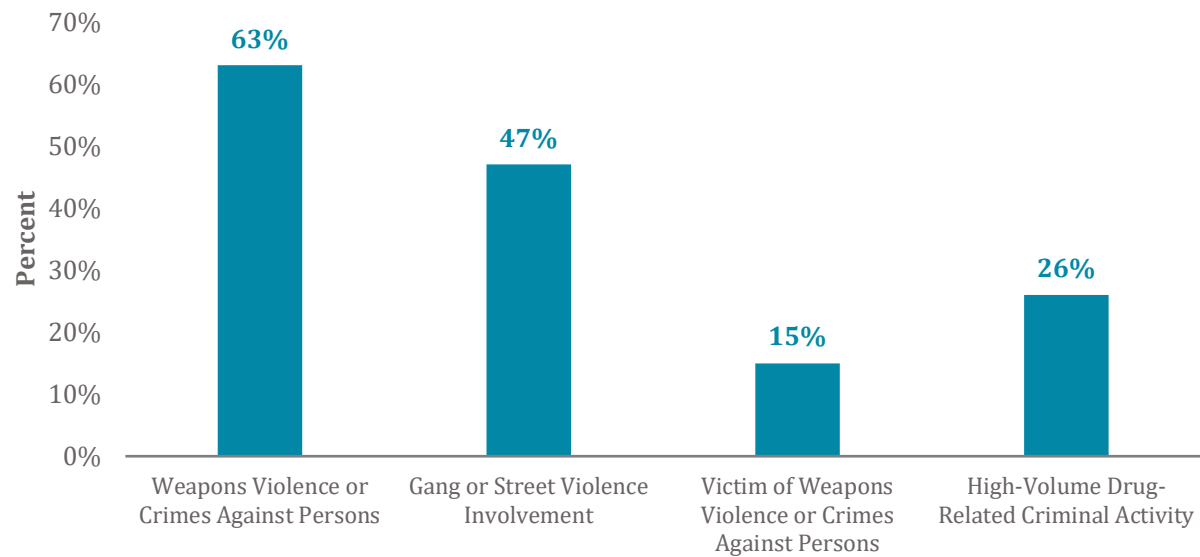
There were **2,039 eligible youth** during FY23—an **increase of 8%** from 1,884 eligible youth in FY22 (Figure 1).¹¹



¹¹ See Appendix Table C1 for the number of unduplicated youth on the SSYI list for each program.

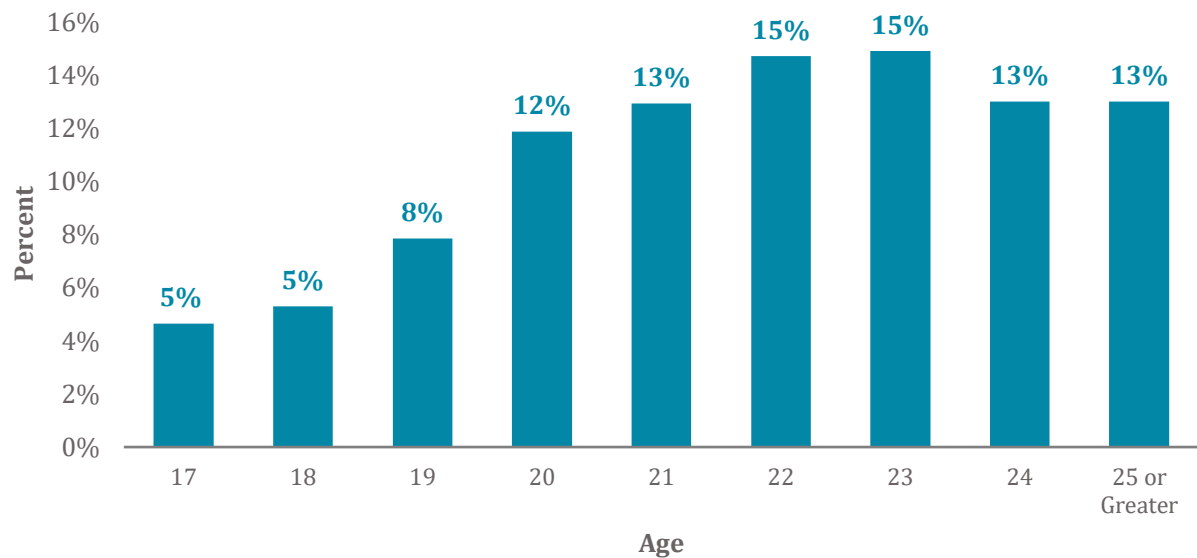
¹² The percentages in Figure 2 total to more than 100% because youth may be eligible for multiple reasons.

Figure 2: Eligible Youth (%) by Eligibility Criteria



The age distribution of eligible youth is shown in Figure 3.¹³

Figure 3: Age Distribution (%) of Eligible Youth



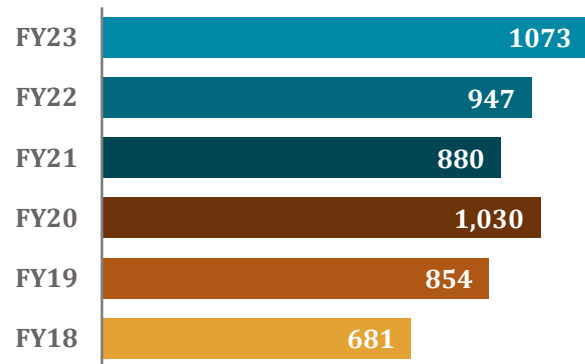
¹³ Youth ages 25 and above were served on an exception basis, with prior EOHHS approval.

Outreach and Case Management

Outreach workers contact eligible young people to solicit program enrollment. Once young people agree to enroll in SSYI, case managers have recurring contact with them to gather intake and assessment information, develop individualized success plans, and coordinate and track SSYI services. Contact occurs in person, by phone, or through social media or text messaging. For this reporting period, most contact occurred either in person (42 percent) or by text (33 percent).

A case manager conducts an intake interview to gather information for each enrolled young person who then receives case management services.

Figure 4: Number of Youth Receiving Case Management



There were **1,073 young people** receiving case management services during FY23 (Figure 4)¹⁴ — a **13% increase** between FY22 and FY23.



Table 4. Successful Contacts of Eligible Youth by Contact Type

Contact Type	Number of Contacts (%)
	FY23
In Person	13,770 (42)
Phone (Conversation)	7,220 (22)
Phone (Voicemail)	34 (0.1)
Social Media	586 (2)
Text Message	10,713 (33)
Email	325 (1)
No Contact Type	12 (0.04)
Total	32,660 (100)

¹⁴ See Appendix Table C3 for the number of unduplicated youth enrolled by city.

Educational, Occupational Training and Employment, and Behavioral Health Services

Educational Services

Case managers coordinate with local service providers to engage youth in educational programs. Educational services primarily focus on maintaining high school or alternative high school enrollment and on reaching graduation, or they assist with the attainment of HiSET or GED qualifications.

There were 534 young people participating in educational activities in FY23 (Figure 5).¹⁵ In FY23, SSYI youth participated in 752 educational activities (Table 5). Approximately 62% of these activities were HiSET or GED programs.

Figure 5: Number of Youth Participating in Educational Services

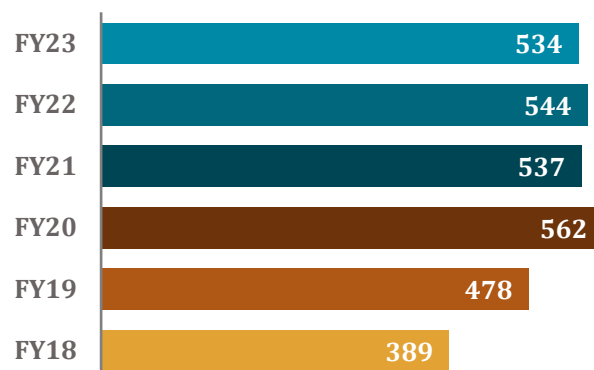


Table 5. Youth Educational Activities

Education Type	Number of Activities (%)
	FY23
HiSET or GED	469 (62)
High School	89 (12)
Associate or Bachelor Degree	40 (5)
Other*	154 (21)
Total	752 (100)

*“Other” includes peer education, SSYI grantee educational programming, and life skills.



¹⁵ See Appendix Table C4 for the number of unduplicated young people participating in education activities by city.

Occupational Training and Employment

The SSYI program also offers occupational training and employment services, which provides young people with both the soft and hard skills necessary to succeed in the workplace. This includes soft-skill development to enhance employability. Young people who enroll in transitional/subsidized employment receive SSYI program support to obtain and maintain unsubsidized jobs, as well as ongoing communication with their case managers and assistance with problem resolution, job retention, career planning, and skill development.

There were 610 young people participating in employment activities during FY23 (Figure 6).¹⁶

Young people participated in 1,016 employment activities in FY23 (Table 6). The activities were divided among unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, and occupational/job readiness training. Unsubsidized employment (full-time and part-time) accounted for approximately 44 percent of employment activities, occupational readiness training accounted for 29 percent, and subsidized employment accounted for 24 percent.

Figure 6: Number of Youth Employed or Participating in Occupational Training

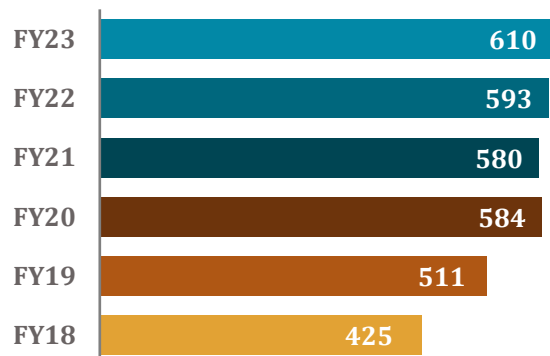


Table 6. Youth Employment Activities

	Number of Activities (%)
Employment Type	FY23
Occupational Readiness Training	293 (29)
Full-Time (Unsubsidized)	246 (24)
Part-Time (Unsubsidized)	201 (20)
Subsidized	241 (24)
Other*	35 (3)
Total	1,016 (100)

* "Other" includes identifying and collaborating with employers, coaching and assistance with job applications, preparing for job interviews, and ongoing communication with youth and their employers, as appropriate.

Lynn Transitional Employment Program

This year we [Lynn SSYI Program] added a new element to our Transitional Employment Program (TEP). We noticed most of our young people do not have their driver's license, and many jobs require it or offer high pay to those with licenses. The costs of the permit test, a driving class, the road test, and the physical license are high. So, in response to this need, we built "obtaining your license" into TEP. If young people make it to a certain number of consecutive days of work, we start the permit process. We then establish new goals for the next step in the license process. This allows the young people to simultaneously work, set goals, and acquire a valuable credential all at the same time.

— Lynn, SSYI Staff

¹⁶ See Appendix Table C5 for the number of unduplicated youth participating in employment activities by city.

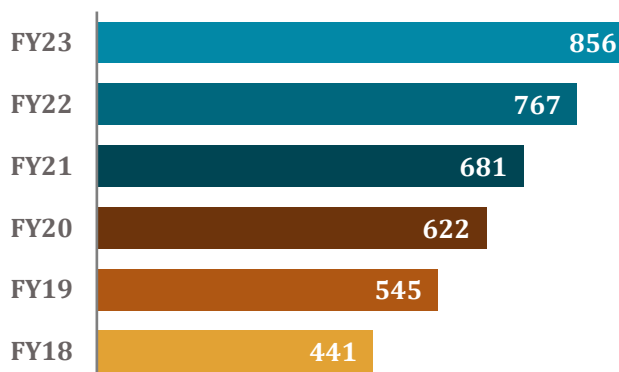
Behavioral Health Services

Many SSYI young people have experienced trauma, and some have behavioral health issues, including substance use disorders. Case managers help youth access behavioral health services, which are provided by SSYI-funded or external clinicians.

There were **856 young people** participating in behavioral health services in FY23 (Figure 7)¹⁷ — an **increase of 12%** compared to FY22.

12%
INCREASE

Figure 7: Number of Youth Participating in Behavioral Health Services



SSYI youth participated in 1,402 behavioral health services in FY23 (Table 7). Providers conducted 378 clinical evaluations. One hundred eighty-nine SSYI youth participated in trauma-informed services. In FY23, ForHealth, in partnership with EOHHS and Commonwealth Corporation, revamped the SSYI database's behavioral health service categories, which went into effect in FY24.

Table 7. Behavioral Health Services, FY23

Service Type	Number of Services (%)
	FY23
Anger Management Class	38 (3)
Circles	113 (8)
Clinical Evaluation	378 (27)
Fatherhood Class	16 (1)
Substance Abuse Services	21 (1)
Support Group	38 (3)
Trauma-Informed Services	189 (13)
Other*	579 (41)
Total	1,402 (100)

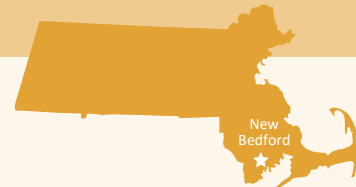
* "Other" includes individual counseling, peace-building skill groups, social problem-solving groups, and so forth.

Roca Circles

We [Roca] use the indigenous practice of Circles as a form of engagement and restorative justice. We hold Circles with our young people when there is a conflict, when we are acknowledging a transition in their life, when we are grieving, or if we're celebrating.

— Roca SSYI Staff

¹⁷ See Appendix Table C6 for the number of unduplicated youth participating in behavioral health services by city.



“SSYI staff and I would trust him with our lives.”

As much as we [New Bedford SSYI Staff] would like to take credit for young adults who are currently on the path to success, it is important to note that all these participants had the internal motivation to change, and it is because of this that they have been receptive to SSYI guidance and intervention.

Three years ago, as a transitional coach, I visited the home of an identified gang member I had never met. This youth was highly skeptical of me, avoiding eye contact, and looking all around in case I was a law enforcement officer setting him up for arrest. In this five-minute conversation speaking with the youth about SSYI services, two vehicles filled with young adults drove by us slowly. The young adult I was speaking with gave them a signal to keep driving and not do anything about my presence. I can only speculate what may have occurred if the participant had decided to use the power he developed from years in a leadership role in a gang and had his friends speak with me.

Fast forward to today, due to the efforts of the entire SSYI team and especially the individual’s transitional coach [who provides SSYI outreach and case management], the youth is on the pathway to success. He is in the SSYI building two days a week for GED class and is expected to graduate in 2024. He is also engaged in weekly behavioral health sessions and is expecting his first child in December. Most importantly, he now sees himself as an individual and not just as a gang member. He has not reoffended in years and is moving away from the lifestyle more every day. Three years ago, this participant could have caused me great harm; today, he looks me right in the eye, shakes everyone’s hand, and is extremely appreciative. SSYI staff and I would trust him with our lives. We will do everything in our power to ensure the continued success of this young man. After he ages out of the program, if he chooses to pursue a career as a case worker, he has the potential to be one of the best in the profession.

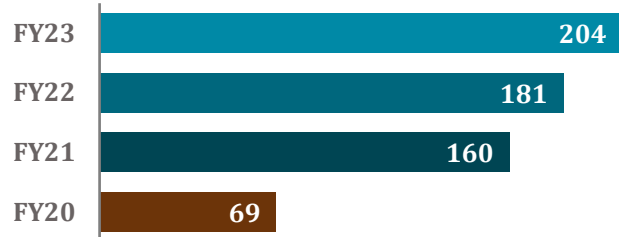
— New Bedford SSYI Staff

Program Participation Among Young Women

After FY19, when the SSYI program was expanded to allow participation of young women (ages 17 to 24), law enforcement has identified increasingly more women for the program. There were 204 SSYI-eligible women in FY23 (Figure 8), a 13 percent increase compared to FY22 and approximately a 300% increase since FY20, the first full year young women were eligible.

Among these women, 121 (nearly 60%) completed the SSYI intake process and agreed to enroll in SSYI (Table 8). Fifty-seven women participated in educational services, 74 in employment services, and 94 in behavioral health services.

Figure 8: Number of Eligible Women



There has been **approximately a 300% increase** in the number of SSYI-eligible young women since FY20, the first full year young women were eligible.

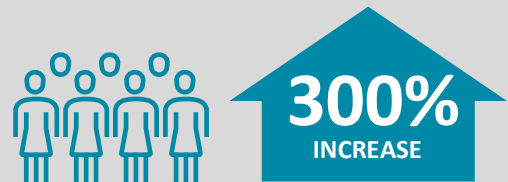


Table 8. Program Participation Among Young Women

Program Component	Number of Young Women in FY23
Eligible Young Women	204
Enrolled in Case Management	121
Educational Services	57
Employment Services	74
Behavioral Health Services	94

Race and Ethnicity

SSYI youth self-report their race and ethnicity as part of the intake process. Data were collected in a two-question format with separate questions for race and ethnicity; young people may report multiple races and ethnicities.

The race and ethnicity data are presented here in two formats: an ordered and a combination format (Table 9).¹⁸ In the ordered format, youth are included in a race or ethnicity category in a specified order. Once a young person is counted in a category, that person is not counted in subsequent categories in the order. Thus, the categories are mutually exclusive, and the sum of the counts for each category equals the total number of youth (except for the youth with missing race and ethnicity data). The order is as follows: Hispanic/Latinx, Black or African American, American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, and Other. With this order, the Hispanic/Latinx category includes 50 percent of youth and the Black or African American and White categories include 35 percent and 11 percent, respectively.

¹⁸ These reporting formats follow the guidelines for race and ethnicity reporting recommended by the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board Data Subcommittee.

In the combination format, high-frequency combinations are reported. The combinations occurring at the highest frequency are the following: Hispanic/Latinx and White (27 percent), Hispanic/Latinx and Other (9 percent), and Hispanic/Latinx and Black or African American (7 percent).

Table 9. Race and Ethnicity Categories

	Number of Youth (%)
Race and Ethnicity Category	Eligible Youth, FY23
Total Youth*	1,748 (100)
Hispanic/Latinx	876 (50)
Black or African American	604 (35)
Asian	26 (1)
White	191 (11)
Other	51 (3)
Most Frequent Reported Combinations	
Hispanic/Latinx and White	478 (27)
Hispanic/Latinx and Other	152 (9)
Hispanic/Latinx and Black or African American	116 (7)

* The total does not include 291 young people with missing race or ethnicity.

Tables 10 and 11 provide service participation statistics by race and ethnicity categories as a preliminary indication of racial equity. Table 10 compares service participation rates among eligible youth in three race and ethnicity categories: Hispanic/Latinx, Black or African American, and White. The percentage of eligible youth who were enrolled is lower among youth who are White (55 percent) compared to both those who are Hispanic/Latinx (59 percent) and Black or African American (61 percent). The percentage of eligible youth who were enrolled was higher among youth who are non-White (60 percent) compared to White (55 percent) (Table 11). The percentage of youth participating in services who were non-White was comparable to those who were White: education, 30 percent versus 28 percent; employment, 33 percent versus 35 percent; and behavioral health, 47 percent versus 44 percent (Table 11).

*In FY23,
the **percentage of
non-White youth**
participating in services was
comparable to
those who were **White**.*



Table 10. Service Participation by Race and Ethnicity Categories

	% of Total Eligible Youth (N = 1,748)	% of Eligible Youth in Services			
Race and Ethnicity Category		Enrolled	Education	Employment	Behavioral Health
Hispanic/Latinx	50%	59%	29%	30%	51%
Black or African American	35%	61%	29%	38%	44%
White	11%	55%	28%	35%	44%

Note: This table does not include data on youth 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.

Table 11. Service Participation by Non-White and White Race and Ethnicity Categories

	% of Total Eligible Youth (N = 1,748)	% of Eligible Youth in Services			
Race and Ethnicity Category		Enrolled	Education	Employment	Behavioral Health
Non-White	89%	60%	30%	33%	47%
White	11%	55%	28%	35%	44%

Note: This table does not include data on youth who did not report race and ethnicity.

SSYI Evaluation

Since 2013, the statewide evaluation of SSYI has generated knowledge about what it takes to prevent violence among individuals most at risk for violence and to support pathways to success and wellbeing. While many urban areas outside of the Commonwealth have experienced sharp increases in violence in the post-pandemic era, cities implementing SSYI-funded programs and supports have largely been spared from these otherwise historic increases in gun violence.

Key FY13–21 evaluation activities and findings:

- A rigorously matched comparison study examined the likelihood of incarceration among different groups of individuals identified by police as eligible for SSYI and found that those eligible but not enrolled in SSYI were twice as likely to be incarcerated as those who were eligible and enrolled.¹⁹ The U.S. Department of Justice used the study’s results to recognize SSYI as a “promising practice.”²⁰

¹⁹ Campie et al., *Predict Incarceration Likelihoods*.

²⁰ National Institute of Justice Crime Solutions, “Program Profile.”

- An examination of community-level violent crime trends before and after the establishment of SSYI to determine the impact of SSYI over time found a statistically significant reduction in violent victimizations in cities where SSYI was operating as compared with cities that were not implementing SSYI.²¹
- A cost-benefit analysis of reduced victimizations from violent crime in SSYI cities found that for every \$1 invested in SSYI, cities save \$5.10 in victimization costs.²²
- A review of research focused on factors that influence female gang involvement, as well as the overlap of human trafficking and gang involvement among females to identify factors that might be important for adapting the SSYI model to serve females.²³
- An analysis of CORI data on reoffending in combination with youth case management data from SSYI cities found a statistically significant association between decreased recidivism and increased contact with outreach and case management staff that was connected to deeper youth engagement in SSYI services.²⁴

Evaluation Activities for FY22–23

EOHHS has continued its investment in evaluating SSYI and in FY23 supported the following evaluation activities, which began in FY22:

- **SSYI Youth Relationship and Recidivism Study:** The youth relationship study involved a detailed examination of how SSYI outreach and case management staff develop strong and trusting relationships with youth and the resulting impact on youth outcomes. The study involved surveys of SSYI youth, which were completed and reported on in FY23.
- **SSYI Occupational Development Survey:** The occupational development survey collected information from SSYI staff and partners on the professional development, opportunities, and supports that are needed to work effectively with youth to achieve outcomes. The survey also explores the factors that impact staff retention and turnover, and potential pathways and barriers for career advancement in the field of community violence prevention and intervention. The American Institutes of Research wrote a report of survey findings at the end of FY23.
- **SSYI Program Monitoring Tool:** In FY23, the evaluation team worked with ForHealth Consulting, EOHHS, and Commonwealth Corporation to develop a program monitoring process to ensure that the implementation of SSYI across sites is consistent, according to grant requirements, and aligned with best practices. The monitoring tool and process will be centered on a continuous quality improvement model that includes technical assistance and that supports an ongoing knowledge shared across cities to ensure youth are receiving the SSYI model as intended. To support monitoring, ForHealth Consulting implemented SSYI database changes and created reports.

²¹ Campie et al., *2018–19 Final Programmatic Report*.

²² Campie et al., *2018–19 Final Programmatic Report*.

²³ Sutherland et al., *Push and Pull Factors*.

²⁴ Campie et al., *Influence of Outreach*.



“Change did not come easy.”

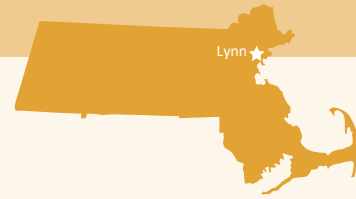
A young man from Fall River SSYI has endured a plethora of obstacles—some caused by his own wrong doings and poor decisions, while others have been placed upon him with little to no control of his own. He came to us roughly seven years ago with a list of charges, was gang involved, and had a history with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). He did not have much parental and/or family support, lacked education, and was unemployed. This young man, on paper, presented as a troubled youth and a convicted felon; however, in person, he always demonstrated the utmost respect to everyone he encountered in the program.

Early on, the young man participated in our HiSET program and our in-house employment program, but unfortunately, he soon was resisting the services and his attendance declined. Through hard work, dedication, commitment, consistency, accountability, and some tough love, he began to change and his desire for self-betterment began to shine bright. The almost impossible obstacles to overcome slowly became achievable goals. This young man, who early on, barely spoke two words to our staff, would rarely make eye contact, would never ask for help, slowly became comfortable with program staff who were truly in his corner.

Change did not come easy and was built over several years. The positive relationships that were built provided this young man with the trust and tools necessary for success. This did not come without hard work and sacrifice. This young man is the sole provider of a young son and on most days, he bikes to work. He cut off the people who weren't in his best interest and navigates through his personal issues and daily struggles. He demonstrates the true meaning of resiliency.

He is now one class away from completing his HiSET, works onsite daily as a lead worker for our employment program, attends community events to speak about his past and his current successes. He displays the utmost respect and gratitude to those he meets daily. This young man's story is a testament to what the SSYI program, positive people, and an involved community can do for those who need guidance, support, and a second chance.

— Fall River SSYI Staff



“He is an active, hands-on father who cares for his child.”

A young adult was referred to Roca from the Department of Transitional Assistance, because his pregnant girlfriend was receiving services. When we met, he talked about his open cases and street involvement. He had so many open cases that he had lost track of all of the cities where he had to appear, and after many phone calls, we were able to figure out that he had six open cases in five different cities with charges that ranged from felony larceny to drug offenses to assault and battery. He was unemployed, couch surfing, and extremely nervous about becoming a new parent, but he did express a desire to make changes, especially since he had a daughter on the way.

His Youth Worker quickly built rapport with him and started bringing him to the Roca building multiple times a week. He started his SSYI participation with Cognitive Behavioral Theory classes and meeting with the behavioral health clinician. Soon after, he signed up for our Transitional Employment Program (TEP). Once he was working consistently, his girlfriend’s parents let him move into their home, which made him so much more stable.

He began our fatherhood classes and started meeting with our educator to research trade schools. Of course, there were bumps in the road. He was terminated from TEP and struggled with emotional regulation, but we were always able to reengage him. He has been with Roca for twelve months now, and all of his cases were closed either with a dismissal or continuance without finding. He moved from our work program to a job in retail and is also enrolled in a trade school. His daughter was born, and he is an active, hands-on father who cares for his child when his girlfriend works on the weekends. We are very proud of his hard work over the last year.

— Lynn SSYI Staff



Brockton SSYI Staff Holiday Deliveries for SSYI Participants

Source: Brockton SSYI Program

Operational and Technical Support: Trainings and Meetings

Program Management Support

EOHHS, with support from Commonwealth Corporation, monitors the operation of the SSYI programs throughout the year. Commonwealth Corporation conducted multiple virtual and in-person meetings during the fiscal year. Meeting weekly, the operations team—made up of EOHHS, ForHealth Consulting, and Commonwealth Corporation staff—checks in on policy and programmatic successes and challenges and has crafted a technical assistance, management, and oversight strategy. This strategy focuses on systems development, program improvement, data-driven decision-making, and professional development for program staff. Monthly virtual meetings were also conducted with the 14 SSYI grant leadership teams to provide general EOHHS and procedural updates and trainings as well as an opportunity for cities to share challenges and programmatic updates.

Management Oversight: EOHHS and Commonwealth Corporation staff work collaboratively with SSYI sites to ensure the program model is being implemented with fidelity. There were regular meetings to discuss compliance, contracts, budgets, and data. Quarterly convenings of the program administrators, representing law enforcement agencies and their lead agency partners, focus on operations, program design, and delivery, as well as on policy issues.

Onsite and Remote Technical Assistance: Commonwealth Corporation staff have years of direct service experience working in programs that serve the SSYI population. The staff conduct regular meetings with each SSYI site. These meetings are an opportunity for site program staff to obtain support on programmatic challenges and technical assistance on program design and/or implementation.

*In FY23, **approximately 210 virtual technical assistance visits and calls** were conducted with the 14 sites. Technical assistance **focused on evidence-based practice, remote delivery, and tools** to engage the service population.*



Professional Development: To strengthen service delivery, the SSYI network provides professional development to staff. The focus of the FY23 offerings was on crisis response, supporting LGBTQIA+ youth, and the importance of boundaries in helping professions. Other professional development activities supported the continued expansion of evidence-based practice using the Ohio Risk Assessment System (ORAS). The National Youth Screening and Assessment Partners (NYSAP) provided training on case planning and quality assurance. Additionally, ForHealth Consulting provided all SSYI-funded staff with an educational and professional development series of trainings.

Program Development Support: Staff members from program sites convened remotely to work on program development. To ensure program consistency in implementing the ORAS, 10 of the 14 sites convened multiple times to ensure that a consistent set of policies and protocols would be used across the programs. The NYSAP training supported the buildout and quality assurance fidelity monitoring of individualized success plans. Commonwealth Corporation staff also met with some communities up to 10 times during the year to provide enhanced support in developing a transitional employment model and infrastructure.

Affinity Group Meetings: Commonwealth Corporation, in collaboration with EOHHS, hosted statewide affinity group meetings throughout the year to share best practices, provide updates, offer professional development, and strengthen operations. These meetings allowed SSYI program directors, law enforcement personnel, case managers, outreach workers, educators, employment specialists, and behavioral health specialists to meet with their peers from across the state, share best practices, and participate in professional development.

Table 12: FY23 SSYI Convenings

Law Enforcement Personnel Meeting: • Aug. 16, 2022 SSYI Human Trafficking and SSYI City Joint Meeting: • Jan. 17, 2023 Program Development Support: Quality Assurance Individualized Success Plan Training Working Group • July 21, 2022 • Jan. 19, 2023 • Mar. 8, 2023 • June 1, 2023 Individualized Success Plan All-Staff Training (2 days): • Dec. 8–9, 2022 Ohio Risk Assessment System Training (2 days): • Apr. 12–13, 2023 • May 17–18, 2023 Education Affinity Group: • Nov. 15, 2022	Employment Affinity Group: • Oct. 18, 2022 • Apr. 18, 2022 Case Managers and Outreach Affinity Group: • May 16, 2023 Clinical/Behavioral Health Affinity Group: • Feb. 21, 2023 Administrators’ Meetings: • Sept. 20, 2022 • Dec. 13, 2022 • Mar. 21, 2023 • June 20, 2023 Network-wide Site Check-in Meetings: • Monthly Technical Assistance Sessions: • Monthly with each SSYI city
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SSYI Foundational Leadership Skills Trainings

To respond to suggestions made by SSYI direct service staff, ForHealth Consulting staff provided eight hour-long interactive “Lunch and Learn” sessions. They designed topics to be relevant to the individuals’ work as outreach workers, case managers, and program managers. The session topics are listed in Table 13. A total of 177 people attended the “Lunch and Learn” sessions.

Table 13: Leadership Skills Trainings, Modules, and Topics

“Lunch and Learn” Session Topics
• Crisis Co-Response • De-Escalation Techniques • Supporting LGBTQIA+ Youth Populations • Overview of Gangs and Signs to Be Made Aware of • Motivational Interviewing • De-escalation and Safety Planning • Trauma 102 Follow-Up • Boston Area Rape Crisis Center

Data Management and Reporting Services

ForHealth Consulting provides SSYI data management and data reporting services to EOHHS and SSYI sites. To support SSYI program staff, ForHealth Consulting hosts meetings that provide training for newly hired staff, reviews of operational reports, and assessments of data integrity with program directors. Additionally, ForHealth Consulting provided technical assistance, responding to more than 1,000 phone and email questions in FY23. ForHealth Consulting provided the technical assistance training, videoconference trainings, and data integrity assessments listed in Table 14.

Table 14: SSYI Videoconference (Zoom) Trainings and Data Integrity Assessments

• July 5, 2022 – Fall River • July 7, 2022 – Worcester • July 12, 2022 – Pittsfield • July 13, 2022 – North Adams • July 18, 2022 – North Adams • July 20, 2022 – Boston • July 20, 2022 – North Adams • July 21, 2022 – Springfield • July 28, 2022 – Springfield • Aug 3, 2022 – Worcester • Aug 4, 2022 – Boston • Aug 8, 2022 – New Bedford • Aug 8, 2022 – Boston • Aug 9, 2022 – Worcester • Aug 12, 2022 – Fall River • Aug 15, 2022 – New Bedford • Aug 16, 2022 – Lawrence • Aug 16, 2022 – Springfield • Aug 24, 2022 – North Adams • Aug 24, 2022 – Pittsfield • Aug 25, 2022 – Lowell • Aug 25, 2022 – Lawrence • Aug 26, 2022 – Haverhill/Lowell • Aug 30, 2022 – Springfield • Aug 31, 2022 – North Adams • Sept 1, 2022 – Haverhill/Lowell	• Sept 1, 2022 – Lawrence • Sept 2, 2022 – Pittsfield • Sept 7, 2022 – North Adams • Sept 8, 2022 – Springfield • Sept 8, 2022 – Haverhill/Lowell • Sept 9, 2022 – New Bedford • Sept 13, 2022 – Springfield • Sept 13, 2022 – Pittsfield • Sept 14, 2022 – Lawrence • Sept 14, 2022 – Pittsfield • Sept 19, 2022 – North Adams • Sept 20, 2022 – Springfield • Sept 21, 2022 – Lawrence • Sept 21, 2022 – New Bedford • Sept 22, 2022 – Haverhill/Lowell • Sept 22, 2022 – Fall River • Sept 22, 2022 – Pittsfield • Sept 22, 2022 – Lawrence • Sept 23, 2022 – Springfield • Sept 23, 2022 – Lawrence • Sept 27, 2022 – North Adams • Sept 27, 2022 – Fall River • Sept 27, 2022 – Pittsfield • Sept 28, 2022 – Lawrence • Sept 29, 2022 – Worcester • Sept 30, 2022 – North Adams	• Sept 30, 2022 – Pittsfield • Sept 30, 2022 – Brockton • Oct 3, 2022 - Lawrence • Oct 4, 2022 – New Bedford • Oct 6, 2022 - Boston • Oct 6, 2022 - Worcester • Oct 7, 2022 – New Bedford • Oct 7, 2022 - Lawrence • Oct 11, 2022 - Brockton • Oct 14, 2022 – Fall River • Oct 14, 2022 – Brockton • Oct 20, 2022 – Lawrence • Oct 20, 2022 – New Bedford • Oct 31, 2022 – Haverhill/Lowell • Nov 3, 2022 – North Adams • Nov 7, 2022 – North Adams/Pittsfield • Nov 7, 2022 – New Bedford • Nov 16, 2022 – North Adams/Pittsfield • Nov 16, 2022 – Worcester • Dec 1, 2022 – Springfield • Dec 7, 2022 – Pittsfield • Dec 8, 2022 – Lawrence • Dec 12, 2022 – Worcester • Jun. 30, 2022 – Springfield
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Youth Violence Prevention and Intervention Collaborations

State and National Collaborations

SSYI values collaboration at both the state and national level. At the state level, SSYI currently coordinates the statewide Youth Violence Prevention Partners (YVPP). 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.

Youth Violence Prevention Partners (YVPP)

YVPP membership includes a cross-secretariat group of managers who operate state-funded youth violence prevention and intervention programs. Members include representatives from EOHHS (SSYI, SSYI Human Trafficking, and Homeless Youth Services programs), Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (Shannon Community Safety grants) Commonwealth Corporation (YouthWorks, SSYI, and re-entry programs), Department of Children and Families (Family Resource Centers), Department of Youth Services programs, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education programs, Probation programs, Department of Mental Health (transition-age youth services), University of Pennsylvania Crime and Justice Policy Lab, and Department of Public Health (Gun Violence Prevention, LGBTQIA+, and youth development programs). YVPP's goal is to increase collaboration and communication across state-funded youth violence prevention programs and to support reductions in youth violence through better outcomes for children, youth, and families.

In FY23, YVPP hosted a variety of discussions, including topics on the Positive Youth Development Framework, the Children's Trust Safe Kids Thrive program, the Community Health Equity Initiative Survey (formerly the Covid Community Impact Survey), human trafficking initiatives, and other topics.

YVPP also continued to share information on best practices, grant opportunities, and updates to the YVPP program database, which collects data on grant programs, recipients, and location by fiscal year.

Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence

In 2017, SSYI and the Shannon Community Safety Initiative were featured by the Giffords Law Center in a report entitled "Investing in Intervention: The Critical Role of State-Level Support in Breaking the Cycle of Urban Gun Violence." According to Giffords, "... the majority of [SSYI and Shannon] funds are being used to address the underlying causes of gun violence—such as poverty, lack of education, and inadequate mental health resources. . . . This investment in the public health approach to violence reduction pays large dividends in terms of the number of lives and taxpayer dollars saved. . . ." ²⁵

In a subsequent October 2018 press release, Giffords highlighted SSYI as "... one of the most innovative and effective state-level violence reduction programs operating anywhere in the nation. . . . SSYI has been one of the driving factors behind Massachusetts' impressive reductions in gun violence in recent years. . . ." ²⁶

In June 2021, SSYI was invited by Giffords to participate in a Community Violence State Administrator Peer Network, which meets on a quarterly basis, to share information, learning, and best practices. The other states participating in the network include New York, New Jersey, Washington, Virginia, Delaware, California, Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, Illinois, New Mexico, and Connecticut.

²⁵ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, *Investing in Intervention*.

²⁶ Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, "Giffords Applauds Governor Baker."

SSYI Human Trafficking Grant Program

Background and Overview

Following the implementation of a pilot project offering services to females, EOHHS established the SSYI Human Trafficking Grant Program as a distinct program under the SSYI umbrella. This program is designed to meet the needs of young people of all genders, primarily ages 10 through 24, who are survivors or at risk of commercial sexual exploitation (CSE).²⁷ The SSYI Human Trafficking program was significantly influenced by the My Life My Choice survivor mentoring model, as well as the service models developed by Safe Exit Initiative (formerly Living in Freedom Together) and Eva Center.

As defined in the budget line item 4000-0005, SSYI is a violence prevention and intervention program administered by EOHHS and “... the grants shall be targeted at reducing youth violence among young persons at highest risk of being perpetrators or victims of gun and community violence. . . .”²⁸ EOHHS CYF acknowledges human trafficking as a severe form of community violence, which often overlaps with gun and gang violence.

In December 2019, EOHHS issued a grant application for vendors to operate a human trafficking grant program. EOHHS received three responses, and in April 2020, signed contracts with these three vendors. In FY22 and in FY23, EOHHS expanded the program with additional funding. Table 15 shows the total FY23 allocations.



Source: My Life My Choice

Table 12. SSYI Human Trafficking Grantees

Grantee*	FY23 Funding
My Life My Choice, a Program of the Justice Resource Institute	\$559,638
Safe Exit Initiative**	\$808,692
RFK Community Alliance	\$216,688

* EOHHS also contracted with a fourth grantee in FY23 who was unable to establish an SSYI Human Trafficking program; EOHHS did not extend this contract.

** Living in Freedom Together (LIFT) is now doing business as Safe Exit Initiative; the former is the vendor’s legal name.

²⁷ The “SSYI Human Trafficking Grant Program” section of this report uses the term “commercial sexual exploitation” or the abbreviation “CSE.” This term encompasses human trafficking and also includes exploitation of young people age 18 and over whose trauma may not meet the legal definition of human trafficking. CSE is legally categorized as human trafficking for young people under age 18. The term “commercial exploitation of children” or “CSEC” also applies to the youth grantees serve who are under 18. Since grantees serve young people both under and over 18, for consistency and simplicity, this report uses the term “CSE.” In addition, the report uses the term “youth” to apply both to the minors and to the young adults that grantees serve.

²⁸ An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2024 for the Maintenance of the Departments, Boards, Commissions, Institutions, and Certain Activities of the Commonwealth, for Interest, Sinking Fund and Serial Bond Requirements, and for Certain Permanent Improvements, 2023 Mass. Acts, ch. 126.

The funds support survivor mentors, including those in the EOHHS-designated priority locations of Worcester County and Hampden County, as well as in eastern Massachusetts and other areas of the state. A survivor mentor is a trained-and-supervised individual who has lived experience related to exploitation and provides interpersonal support to youth survivors and youth at risk of exploitation.

In addition to survivor mentors, the SSYI Human Trafficking funding also supports other staff, such as clinicians, who work with survivors. Mentors and other staff provide an array of services and supports, including individual service plans/treatment plans, outreach, case management, harm reduction, crisis intervention, safety planning, and continual engagement with young people. To address immediate needs, the program provides support and direct financial assistance to youth for food, housing, transportation, education, and other costs. Referrals are made to external service providers. Staff also provide community building and prosocial activities and therapeutic groups.

Grantees also use SSYI Human Trafficking funding to provide training and technical assistance to increase the capacity of service providers and caregivers to effectively meet youth's needs.



My Life My Choice Office Mural
Source: My Life My Choice

My Life My Choice Survivor Mentoring Overview

Core to the success of survivor mentoring is the mentees' ability to bond with their survivor mentor and build trust while finding safety and stability outside of their exploitive relationships. Survivor mentors are crucial anchors that enable mentees to gain stability and create a healthy life.

Trauma and abandonment are central to the narratives of young people, and exploited youth recount a profound sense of being alone and without resources. Exploited youth have an especially difficult time trusting adults. This sense of isolation and mistrust are key challenges in connecting sexually exploited youth to services.

The difference between an adult mentor and an adult survivor mentor is that the bridge between a survivor and a young victim is much shorter; survivor mentors can decrease mentees' sense of isolation and build trust much faster. As a result of this connection, a survivor mentor can help the mentee access additional services and support. A mentor's key role is also to instill a sense of hope that can come only from someone who can authentically say, "I was where you are, and now my life is better and free from exploitation."

FY23 Program Demographics and Activities

In FY23, 406 young people were served, including 218 who were enrolled whom the program is working with, or trying to connect with, and 188 non-enrolled young people who participated in support groups. Of the 218 enrolled participants, 198 had an active status, 53 participated in support groups, and 81 were newly enrolled in FY23.

There were 4,812 contacts between program staff and enrolled youth. In addition to direct contact with young people, staff contacted family members, social service agencies, and others on behalf of the participants; these 2,232 contacts represented a substantial part of the staff's efforts to support and advocate for young people.

Staff made 367 referrals to services external to the grantee agencies for 169 young people. In addition, staff made 378 referrals to other units within the grantee agencies for 57 participants.

In FY23, the SSI Human Trafficking Grant Program supported 7.4 survivor mentor staff FTEs and 4.5 other related FTEs, such as program directors.

Ninety-two youth were referred to the program. Most of the referrals were from the Department of Children and Families (DCF) (42 percent). The remaining referrals were from mental health providers (18 percent), parents/guardians (6 percent), peer survivors or self-referrals (5 percent), multidisciplinary teams in child advocacy centers (4 percent), and the Department of Mental Health (DMH) or the Department of Youth Services (DYS) (3 percent) (see Figure 9).

Participants' race, gender, and age characteristics are shown in Figure 9. Fifty-six percent of participants were people of color.²⁹ Forty percent identified as White, 24 percent as Latinx, 18 percent as multiracial, 12 percent as Black, 1% as Asian, and less than a percent as Native Hawaiian; the race of 3 percent was not reported. Most participants were cisgender female (86 percent); less than 5 percent were transgender, less than 4 percent were nonbinary, and less than 2 percent were cisgender male. Most participants (58 percent) were under age 18 (see Figure 10).

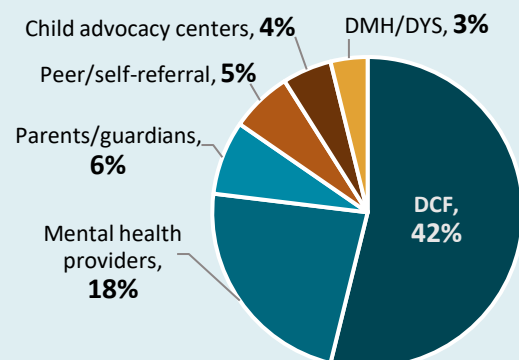
²⁹ People of color includes Latinx.

In FY23:

406 youth received services through the SSI Human Trafficking Grant Program.

	218 youth	Enrolled and working with or being contacted by the program
	198 youth	Enrolled youth with an active status; 81 were newly enrolled
	188 youth	Support group participants, including 53 enrolled and 135 non-enrolled youth
	4,812 contacts	Between program staff and enrolled youth
	2,232 contacts	By staff to family members, social service agencies, and others on behalf of youth
	367 referrals	To services external to the grantee agency for 169 youth
	378 referrals	To other units within the grantee agency for 57 youth

Figure 9: Participant Referral Sources



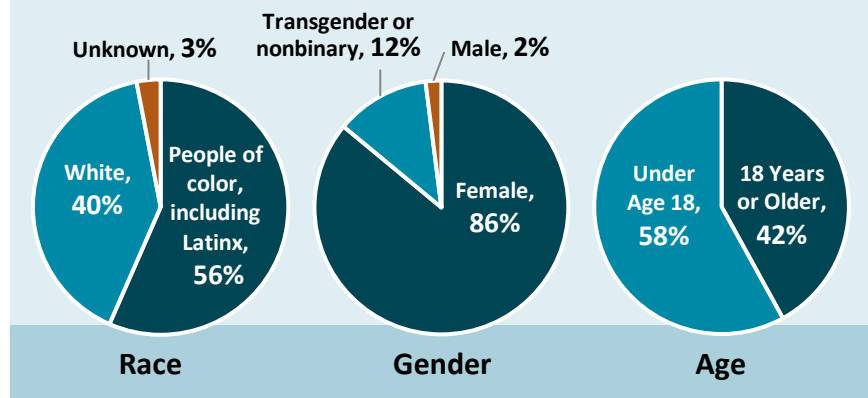
Program participants received a broad range of support services (Figure 11); all received behavioral health services. In addition to receiving support from their survivor mentors, staff clinicians, contracted external clinicians, and referred behavioral health providers offered behavioral health services to youth, including individual support, group support, and/or psychoeducation. Grantees supported youth through de-escalation and emotional regulation, mental health management, safety planning and crisis prevention, coping skills, education on CSE (prevention and healing), exit planning for CSE, domestic violence, setting boundaries, and advocating for themselves in relationships.

A high percentage of program participants also received health support services (77 percent). These included education and support with medical self-advocacy, self-care, substance use, sexual health, accessing new MassHealth cards, application assistance, and doctor/healthcare provider selection.

Housing is a major issue, particularly among youth who are transitioning out of DCF care. Twenty-three percent of program participants received housing support. They received assistance with applications for emergency housing vouchers and connection to resources for rental assistance and placement; participants also received support with transitional independent living program placements. Housing young people has posed challenges, including a complex housing application process and waiting lists.

Twenty-four percent of young people received education supports. Grantees helped young people explore, apply for, and enroll in school, including GED programs and post-secondary education. Grantees provided support with graduation planning, college applications, financial aid applications, and securing tutors. They also supported young people by attending Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings and other education-related meetings. Safety and exit planning in the school environment were also critical for some youth to access education. Young people with learning disabilities also received support with school strategies, educational and emotional support from school staff, and plans that allowed them to engage in education.

Figure 10: Demographic Characteristics of Participants



Safe Exit Initiative Group Outreach

Through in-community psychoeducational groups, Safe Exit Initiative made over 300 points of contact with 165 young people not enrolled in mentoring services. In these groups, we discussed realities of commercial sexual exploitation, vulnerabilities and intersections with other social issues, the exiting process, grounding skills, and safely meeting needs. These groups proved to have a critical impact. Discussions helped clear up misconceptions about CSE, and many participants shared they knew someone who was involved (friend, family, or someone they had met while homeless/missing). As groups progressed, most participants demonstrated a strong understanding of the traumatic impacts of systems of prostitution, identity-based violence (i.e., gender-based violence, race-based violence), and how to support survivors. Multiple survivors also shared that this was the first time they felt supported in self-identifying and processing this. Many young people expressed interest in connecting further for onsite groups and mentoring. Maintaining these groups has been challenging due to staffing shortages at programs. However, these conversations are critical to challenging stigma, reducing isolation, and shifting cultural norms.

Twenty-one percent of young people received employment services and supports. Grantees supported young people with job applications, resume building, and preparation for and transportation to interviews. Jobs programming included job skills training, work study programs, and internships.

Young people also received support with financial literacy (25 percent), transportation (21 percent), legal issues (16 percent), public assistance (8 percent), parenting (9 percent), and identification documentation (7 percent).

My Life My Choice's Clinical Services

A significant part of supporting our mentees to create a brighter future is addressing the trauma of the past and present through our clinical services. Many of the young people we serve have had negative experiences in therapy in the past, because therapists did not understand their trauma, but they are willing to receive therapy with a My Life My Choice staff member. We measure the success of our programming first and foremost based on feedback from our youth:

"Therapy helps with processing trauma and learning self-love and self-confidence and creating a support system."

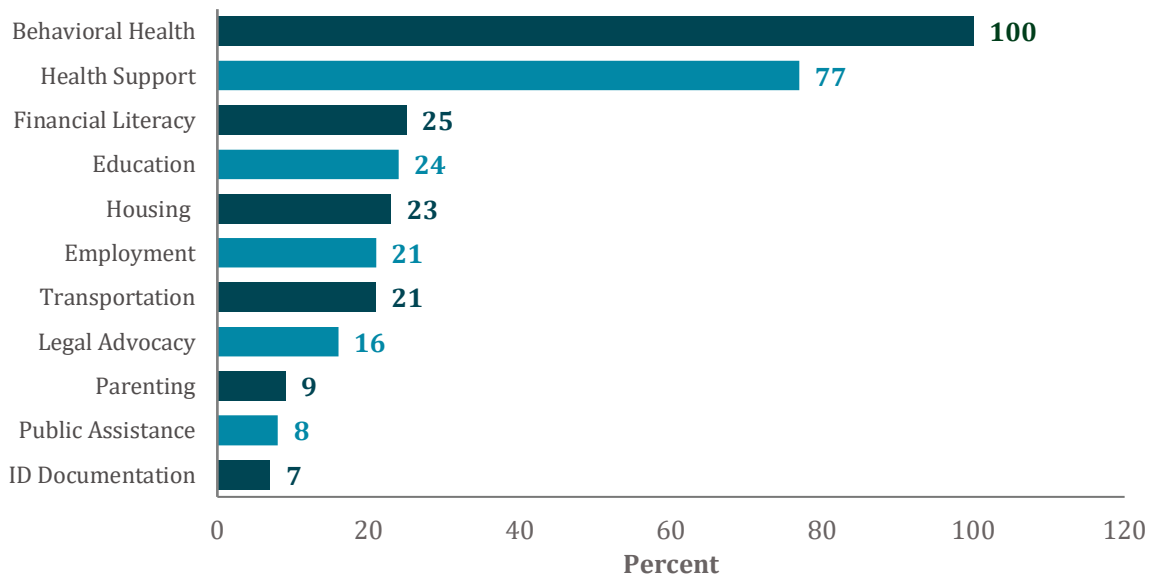
"Being able to be transparent with someone helps with being able to identify emotions and become more aware of yourself."

"Therapy here is super accessible because it's free!"

Therapy "allows you to release things you can't release with other people in your life. It helps you figure out coping skills."

— My Life My Choice Staff

Figure 11: Percent of Youth Who Received Support Services By Type



Safe Exit Initiative's HARBOR, Drop-in Center and Shelter Space

Our drop-in center and shelter space, HARBOR, was a critical resource in the success of our transitional-age youth (TAY) mentees. In FY23, Safe Exit Initiative provided overnight shelter for 14 young adults ages 18 to 26 and drop-in/phone support to several other youth through this space. Those who stayed at HARBOR received support from several survivor staff members in addition to the designated survivor mentor. Through this space, we supported these young adults in accessing treatment and transitional independent living programs; our team also supported TAY survivors with safety planning and legal support in clearing warrants and filing restraining orders against their previous exploiters. Sometimes, we had to ask youth to take a break from the physical space due to a breach of our program agreements, and we made it clear they still had access to basic needs and emotional support through our outreach and survivor mentoring services. Often, these youth still reached out for support, demonstrating the level of trust they felt even when held accountable by and expressing frustration with our team. This space also served as an important step in safety planning for several local young adults and youth who were frequently missing from care.

— Safe Exit Initiative Staff

Community Building and Healing through Groups and Prosocial Activities for Youth

In FY23, SSYI Human Trafficking grantees held multiple youth groups that specifically addressed issues of exploitation, such as myths, recruitment tactics, drivers of prostitution, online tactics of exploitation, and child sexual abuse as gender-based violence.

Other groups discussed exploitation and related issues, such as self-advocacy, coping skills, resiliency, and substance use disorders. Groups covered the overlap between substance use disorder and exploitation, recovery pathways, and coping skills; the language related to systems of prostitution and the exploitation stigma; and building trust in peers and providers after exploitation.

Grantees also held groups that used art and creativity to further recovery goals and build community and self-esteem, including the following:

- Summer Art Drop-In, which included, for example, making buttons and jars with discussions about how art can be a tool for self-expression, advocacy, and self-sustainable income
- Exploration of a screen printer, 3D printer, and t-shirt press to develop marketable skills
- Creating vision board collages; making sugar scrubs, while reflecting on self-care and family challenges
- Making “Holiday Survival Kit” books with coping skills for surviving holidays with trauma
- Journaling as a tool for healing, self-advocacy, and social justice
- Filling plastic eggs and balloons with paint and smashing them on canvases in an exercise in anger and grounding



Source: Safe Exit Initiative Staff

“This project was completed entirely by our youth and survivor team, from the initial design conversations to composition, stenciling, and fully bringing our youth’s ideas to light. Our survivors and youth are resilient, capable, and bright—and I think our wall truly captures that. The youth were very thoughtful in their design, capturing elements that represented resilience and healing in our own time and way. We are the light.”

— Safe Exit Initiative Staff

Grantees' FY23 activities for young people built community, furthered healing, and fostered a sense of joy, as youth exited exploitation, pursued recovery, and worked on various aspects of their lives. Activities included a field trip to view murals around Worcester and a mural painting project, trauma-informed Zumba classes, community dinners, and holiday celebrations. Examples of other outings were bowling, arcade games, laser tag, a Worcester Railers hockey game, and dinner.

Human Trafficking Trainings and Meetings

SSYI Human Trafficking grantees conducted trainings and collaborated with other providers. The total attendance for these training sessions was 648 in FY23. The trainings included staff from state agencies in Massachusetts, such as the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Mental Health; University of Massachusetts students, the Boston Police Department, the Plymouth District Attorney's Office, and staff from community-based organizations. Training topics included CSE, supporting transition-age youth, trauma-informed care, barriers and considerations for medical care, healthy boundaries, clinical training on CSE, online exploitation, and grooming.

Building community is a key component both in reducing vulnerability for youth at risk and in the exiting and healing processes for survivors.

– Safe Exit Initiative Staff

Grantees also participated in meetings with other agencies and service providers. Outreach meetings informed providers of grantees' work. Partnerships evolved from meetings with different stakeholders to better support CSE survivors, including those in school, with substance use disorder, and LGBTQIA+ youth. In addition, collaborations included multidisciplinary teams and other meetings to support specific youth, such as those in foster care and young people who were missing from care, transitioning to adulthood, and struggling with school.

Collaboration with SSYI Cities on Human Trafficking

In FY23, EOHHS continued its efforts to work with SSYI Human Trafficking grantees to ensure SSYI cities are trained in CSE. In January 2023, My Life My Choice conducted a half-day CSE training for 90 SSYI program staff, including program directors, law enforcement, clinical staff, outreach workers, and case managers. My Life My Choice also offered slots in its CSE trainings to SSYI staff to further strengthen their knowledge of CSE and their ability to support young people.



Safe Exit Initiative's outings and celebrations (from left to right): Department of Mental Health's Success Fest, Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women's Girls Empowerment Leadership Initiative (GELI) Conference, and a Safe Exit Initiative "welcome to the world" celebration.

Source: Safe Exit Initiative Staff

SSYI Human Trafficking Success Stories

The following stories show how the SSYI Human Trafficking program affected five survivors.³⁰

“Sally”

“Working hard as a parent to break trauma patterns, Sally wants to be a Survivor Mentor.”



Sally was first referred to Safe Exit Initiative in 2020 by a police officer. She was referred again the following summer by a mental health provider and began working with one of our mentors. When she first connected with us, she was homeless and shared that she had severe agoraphobia due to her trauma and time in “the life.” She struggled with navigating transportation and maintaining good nutrition and other activities of daily living.

Over two years later, Sally is still connected with Safe Exit Initiative. During this time, we supported her in finding and moving into a transitional independent living program and moving back home when she became pregnant. She regularly reaches out for support, and earlier this year she began engaging in programming. Over time, she has both exhibited and reported an increase in self-confidence and self-sustainability. She still calls for support when she hits a wall to share and celebrate good news—sometimes about a phone call she finally made by herself and a resolution for navigating a crisis. During this past year, Sally has made gains in parenting, which allows her to focus on her next steps, goals, and program attendance. She also began volunteering, which made her feel good about gaining independence and getting out of her shell.

Sally’s journey has been a success on many levels. The impact of word of mouth and repeated referrals brought Sally to Safe Exit Initiative. We have provided consistent support to help her meet both small and large goals, despite the barriers she has faced. Survivor mentoring is a critical service and an important source of support for youth like Sally—we see many small daily wins with a lot of the youth we serve. Working hard as a parent to break trauma patterns, Sally wants to be a Survivor Mentor when she is fully stabilized. It has been encouraging to see her progress and the impact of her hard work on the next generation of her family.

— Safe Exit Initiative Staff Member



Examples of Participant Artwork. Source: Safe Exit Initiative Staff

³⁰ Names and identifying details have been changed to protect survivors’ confidentiality and safety.

“Sloane”

“She did the work and made amazing progress.”

Sloane was one of my first youth who I began to work with as a survivor mentor in the RFK Legacy Mentoring program. I identified with her silent need for help and her resistance to trusting anyone. Being a survivor mentor and now program coordinator has given me a second chance to write my story by giving youth the encouragement, training, and services that I didn't have. I meet with youth regularly and connect them with services like therapy, food benefits, and housing support. We create safety plans and discuss healthy relationships, and all the while I help them work toward realistic goals that they are excited about reaching. Sloane and I met frequently for many months to ensure that she trusted me and found her path. She graduated from the RFK Legacy Mentoring program because she did the work and made amazing progress.



Sloane is now a member of RFK's Youth Advisory Board, taking on a leadership role. Sloane also managed to complete an accelerated credit recovery program and is on target to graduate from high school in 2024 and pursue college. I take pride that Sloane's bravery is helping take care of the next generation. I am also proud to share that another lead survivor mentor in the Legacy Mentoring program worked with a legal team and mentee to prosecute some of Sloane's perpetrators. She was able to help pass a federal law using pieces of Sloane's story that allows survivor mentors to speak in court on behalf of the young women—and sometimes men—that they serve. That's HUGE because while part of the work is helping young people like Sloane find their voice, asking them to testify against their offenders repeatedly is re-traumatizing and inhumane.

— RFK Community Alliance Staff Member

“Regina”

“This summer, Regina's leadership skills and confidence flourished.”

Regina has been a part of My Life My Choice and has received survivor mentoring services since 2022. Last fall, they participated for the first time in Leadership Corps, a group dedicated to helping mentees develop job readiness skills, build community, and cultivate their leadership skills. Regina has since joined every session of Leadership Corps and has taken a particular interest in using their voice to advance survivor-centered policies in the fight to end exploitation.



To further build on their passion, Regina went on to participate in our Summer Employment Program as a Policy Intern with our Policy Department. As part of our summer programming, youth can gain valuable work experience by completing an internship and attending various job readiness workshops throughout the summer that include resume building and financial planning, among other topics. This summer, Regina's leadership skills and confidence flourished as they led a policy workshop for other mentees. Regina has since written a policy memo and led a voter registration drive for other mentees. When Regina first began receiving services from My Life My Choice, they were unsure what their plans would be after graduation. Now with the support of many at My Life My Choice, they have applied to several universities with the aim of receiving a degree in public policy.

— My Life My Choice Staff Member

“Rae”

“I’m good!” instead of “I’m so mad.”

When an RFK survivor mentor began working with Rae, the very first thing she voiced was anger. She was mad at everyone, including herself. Rae was frustrated and did not know how to express her anger properly. During the summer, she was on probation for an aggressive act. Rae was placed on probation and was ordered to do community service, write letters of apology, re-enroll in school, and stay out of trouble. She did just that. By the time school started she had completed all her requirements without issue. She didn't want to be angry anymore. She wanted to be happy. Thanks to the RFK Legacy program, Rae was able to join a boxing gym. They were kind to her, didn't ask her questions, and treated her as if she had been there for years. Rae received boxing gloves and a mouth guard on her very first day and gifts from other members of the gym. But they didn't make it awkward for Rae; they gave the gifts to the Survivor Mentor to provide to her. Rae was able to work out her aggression, sadness, shame, and embarrassment on the bags instead of on the streets. She continues to stay out of trouble and is currently just a “regular kid” as she puts it. She has learned where to focus her anger and has finally started to believe that none of the abuse she endured was her fault. Recently, Rae was able to successfully graduate from the Legacy Program thanks to her hard work and her adherence to the treatment plan. Now when you ask Rae how she is, she says, “I’m good!” instead of “I’m so mad.”

— RFK Community Alliance Staff Member



“Felicia”

“My Life My Choice has never given up on me.”

Felicia has been a part of My Life My Choice and has received survivor mentoring services since 2019 as well as intensive case management and therapy services from our Survivor Empowerment Team. We have been privileged to be able to walk alongside them through the ups and downs of transitioning to adulthood. Since their 18th birthday last summer, they have been unstably housed and received minimal support from family; however, with support from their survivor mentor, therapist, and case manager, they secured their first apartment this August. From general budgeting to securing funds to cover up-front costs, our team was able to offer wraparound services to support this mentee as they pursued stable housing.

Unfortunately, due to circumstances out of their control, they are currently looking for a second apartment and had to take legal action against their landlord. Felicia’s survivor mentor and our economic empowerment and housing coordinator advocated for them every step of the way as they navigated the small claims court to reclaim their deposit. While Felicia is currently living at home again, they continue to work closely with their team to secure another apartment. Throughout all of this, Felicia has learned the importance of leaning on others in time of need and the power of My Life My Choice’s support. Below are some words from Felicia’s recent speech at our Food for the Soul Dinner reflecting on their experience in My Life My Choice’s services:

“Having someone in your corner that genuinely cares and wants better for you is the best thing anyone could ask for . . . over the years My Life My Choice has never given up on me, has always supported me at my best, and has never judged me at my worst.”

— My Life My Choice Staff Member



Thoughts from Grantees on Survivor Mentoring

Safe Exit Initiative, My Life My Choice, and RFK Community Alliance staff conveyed the following thoughts and expressions:

Survivor Mentoring — Safe Exit Initiative

“We firmly believe in supporting survivors and youth in affirming their identities, finding joy, and building a life outside of trauma.”



Survivor mentors are those with lived experience serving as role models, who provide mentorship and emotional support for others with similar lived experiences. Survivor mentors are survivors of the sex trade and violence of prostitution. As survivor mentors, we understand the vulnerabilities that can contribute to an individual being targeted and exploited, the physiological and psychological impact of exploitation, and what exiting the sex trade entails. Mentoring from lived experience is so important as we can relate on a level that others cannot, and we show up with unconditional support and zero judgement.

Survivor mentors provide mentorship and emotional support—someone to check in with and who will empathize with what other survivors are facing. Along with this, we do a significant amount of safety and exit planning with survivors and the other youth that we serve (those at risk of CSE). We also support youth in connecting with resources and provide case management to assist with individually driven goals. Additionally, we firmly believe in supporting survivors and youth in affirming their identities, finding joy, and building a life outside of trauma.

During one-on-one meetings, we meet with youth in a variety of settings: within residential programs, at treatment facilities, out in community, and at our drop-in center. We play cards, get coffee, go for walks, learn new skills, play basketball—activities that support youth in discovering their interests and working toward their goals and building skills. At our drop-in center, we have been intentional about creating an inviting space and investing in opportunities that youth may not otherwise have access to.

We support youth in navigating relationships—as critical as our role is, the survivor mentor support is just one piece of the puzzle. A lot of the work I do with youth (whether they are a survivor or at risk of CSE) includes providing mentoring and coaching on how to have difficult conversations with their other supports, rebuild relationships, and self-advocate to safely meet their needs. We encourage survivors and youth to step into their power and celebrate their independence, and we are here to directly advocate when they are not being heard. Survivors are often excluded from community due to stigma, isolation by exploiters, and marginalization due to their identities and other vulnerabilities, such as homelessness and substance use disorder. Building community is such a critical piece of the work that we do—connecting them to other peers, strengthening their allied supports, and building out their network of safe spaces.

— Safe Exit Initiative Staff

“The mentor guides the activities, but the mentee is the driving force behind what they need in their recovery process.”

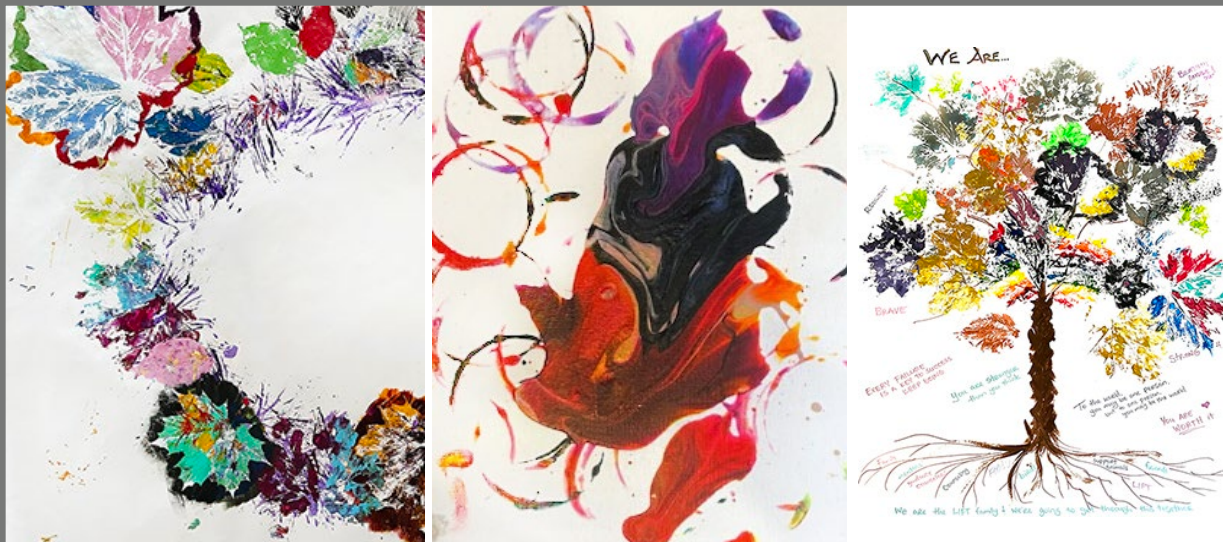


The survivor-led model is important, impactful, and effective in a way that I hadn't seen in my years as a clinician. When employing the traditional clinical model, you keep the focus on the client and rarely share personal insights to connect. The first time I experienced a mentor share their story with a mentee was so powerful. This child had experienced gang-based exploitation, as had the mentor. That child needed to feel seen and supported through an immediate connection from sharing an experience.

Each mentee is different. A mentor may take a mentee to get something to eat and talk about their day to build rapport and create a brave space for them to share when they are ready. Some mentees need or want to do more structured activities like journaling, creating self-care activities, or developing and practicing coping skills. The mentor guides the activities, but the mentee is the driving force behind what they need in their recovery process.

Generally, mentees are seen weekly for the first year of services. The mentor is constantly assessing for needs and may use a holistic approach with a case manager, therapist, group, or other community provider. This also makes way for growth and community within My Life My Choice.

— My Life My Choice Staff



Examples of Participant Artwork

Source: Safe Exit Initiative Staff



“With training and personal experiences, the mentors offer each youth a deep and meaningful relationship.”

Legacy Mentoring with RFK Community Alliance serves Hampden County children and youth at risk of, or already affected by, commercial sexual exploitation. Mentors develop and support meaningful relationships; provide mentoring services to youth identified as CSE survivors or at imminent risk for CSE; and actively engage youth identified as CSE survivors to help them become empowered and courageous survivors with the ability to change their own lives. The Legacy team members are skilled mentors who have been trained in the My Life My Choice model, which is an evidence-informed prevention curriculum that provides concrete and well-researched methods for preventing exploitation in vulnerable youth. The mentors have each experienced exploitation because of vulnerability from complex childhoods with traumatic experiences. With training and personal experiences, the mentors offer each youth a deep and meaningful relationship.

The Legacy team is working on providing each youth member with the tools and confidence to reduce vulnerability, to become more financially independent, and most of all, to be safe and able to make healthy choices in the future. In the words of one member of the team: “I work at Legacy because these kiddos need an outlet from a person who understands the reasoning behind their impulses and why they struggle with activities of daily living. Not only am I mentoring them, but they are constantly teaching me to be a better person, and they have softened my heart. CSE is an ongoing issue, and many children are victims. I am the voice for the children who have not yet learned to advocate for themselves, and in doing so, I am here to make sure their needs are met. Through my current life, I demonstrate how your past will never define your future, while keeping them safe in the community.”

— RFK Community Alliance Staff

Evidence-Informed Human Trafficking Programming

The SSYI Human Trafficking grantees have been trained by one of the grantees, My Life My Choice. My Life My Choice’s survivor mentoring program had a formal evaluation conducted by researchers from Northeastern University and Boston University School of Public Health through National Institute of Justice funding. Evaluation results provide evidence for this model’s effectiveness:³¹

- Youth were three times less likely to report having been commercially sexually exploited in the past six months after having been involved with My Life My Choice for six months.
- Youth were five times less likely to report having been commercially sexually exploited in the past six months after being with My Life My Choice for one year.
- Coping skills increased from baseline to six months and at the one-year mark.
- Social support increased at six months and at the one-year mark.
- Self-reported drug use decreased from baseline to six months and at the one-year mark.

³¹ Rothman et al., “Longitudinal evaluation.”

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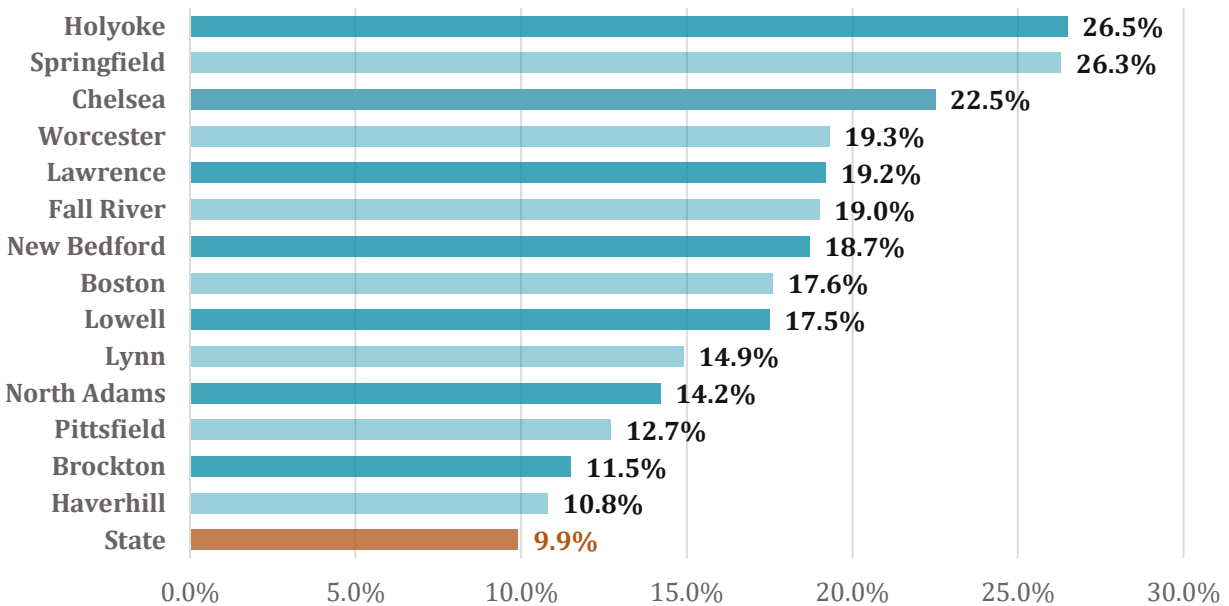
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APPENDIX A: CITIES WITH SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL YOUTH INITIATIVE PROGRAMS



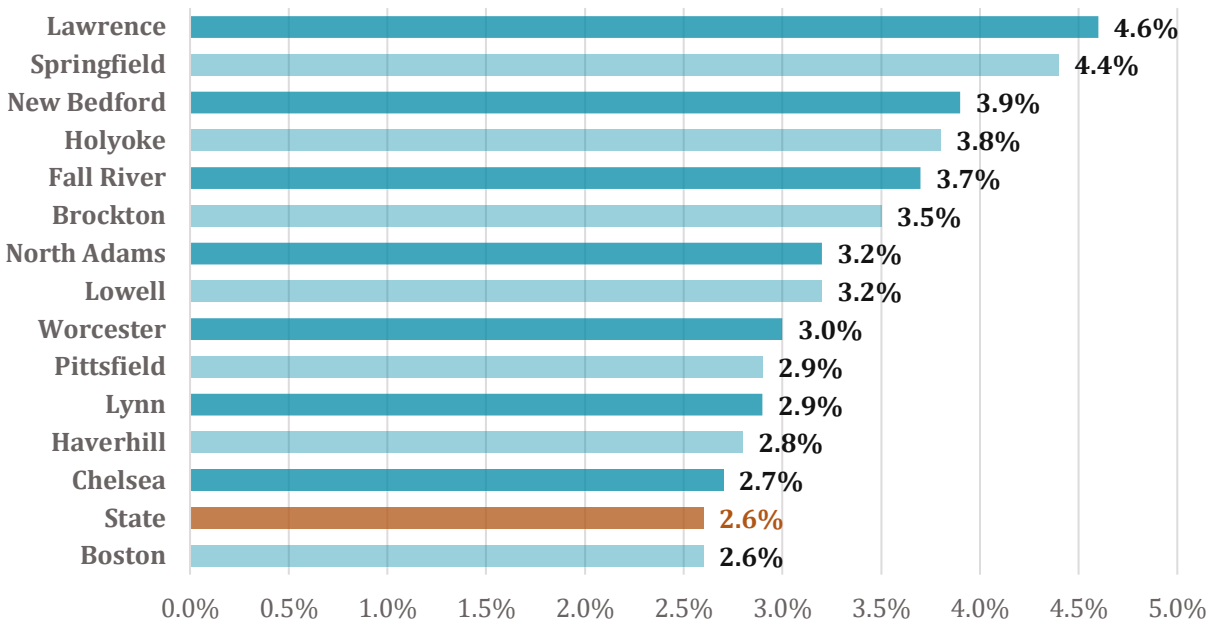
APPENDIX B: CHARACTERISTICS OF SSYI CITIES

Figure B1: Estimated Percentage of Individuals Living in Poverty, 2017–2021



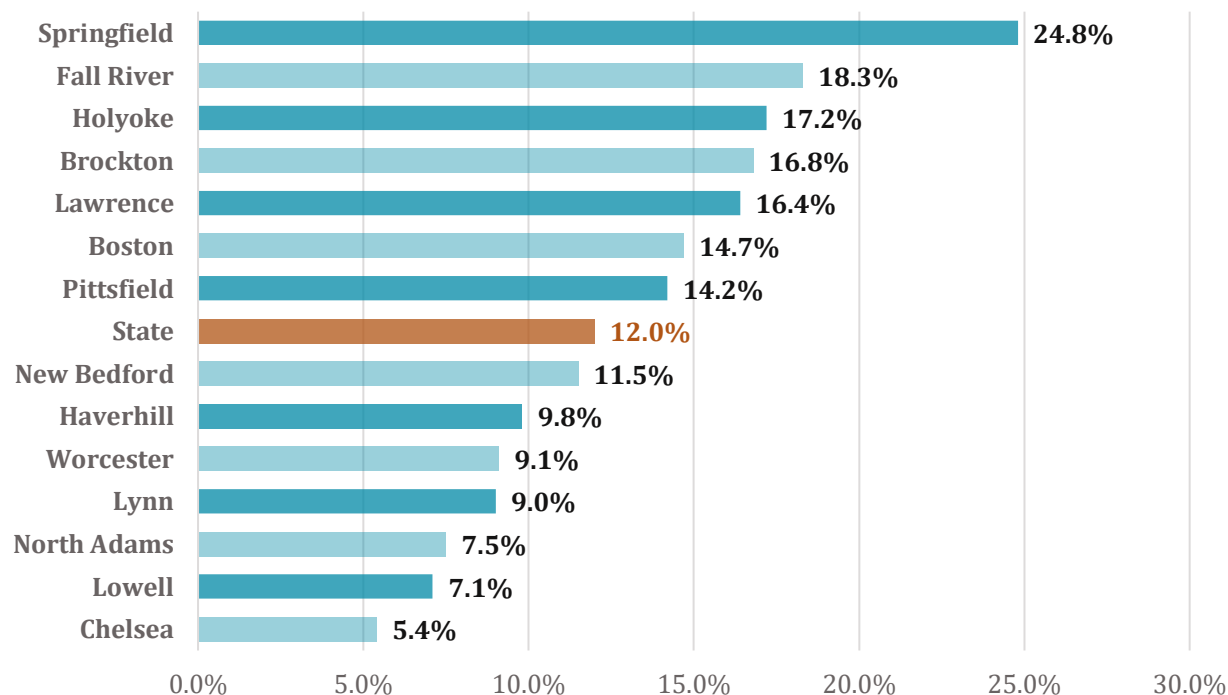
Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate

Figure B2: Unemployment Rates, October 2023



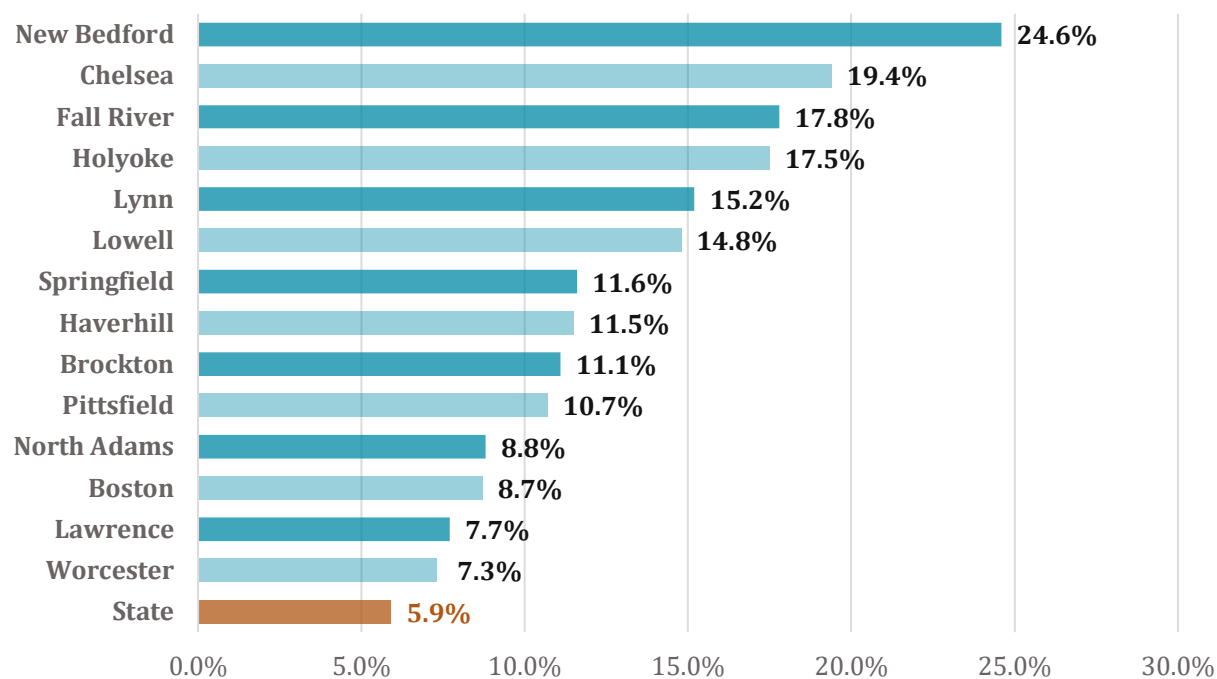
Source: Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development,
<https://lmi.dua.eol.mass.gov/lmi/LaborForceAndUnemployment/TownComparison>

Figure B3: Estimated Unemployment Rate, Ages 16-24, 2017-2021



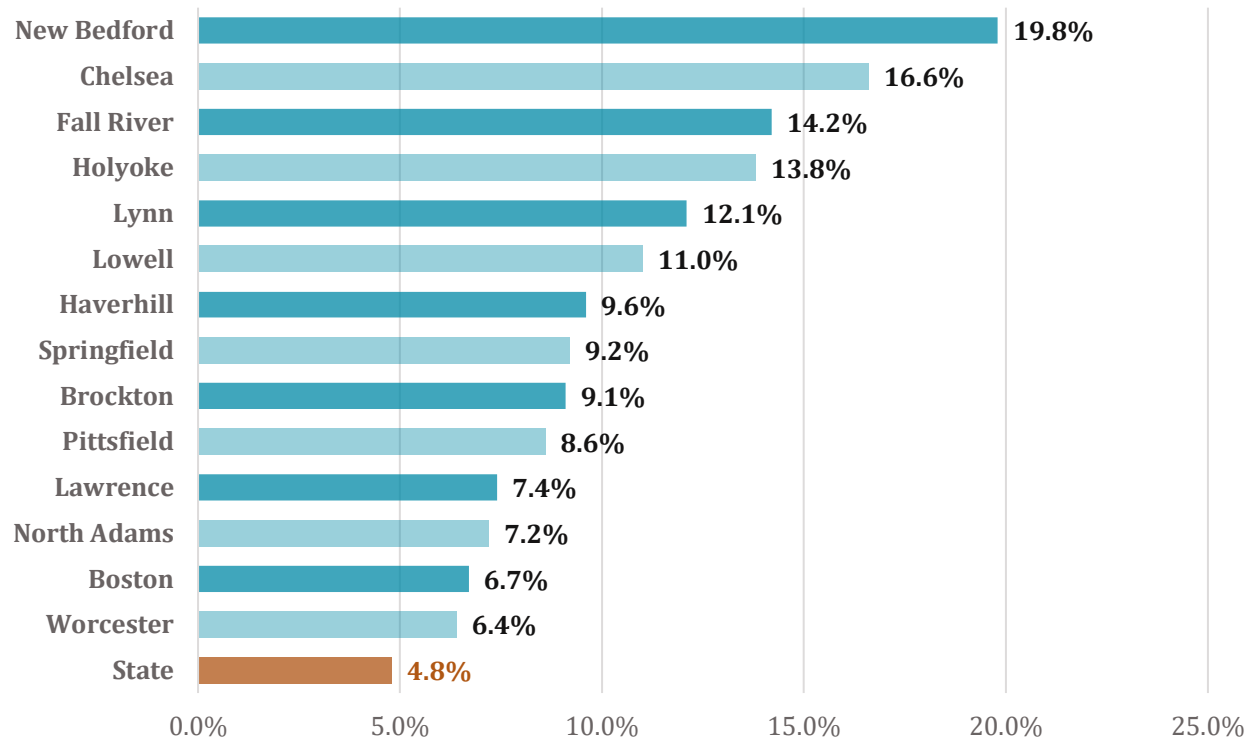
Source: 2017-2021 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimate

Figure B4: Male Drop Out Rate in SSYI Cities, 2022



Source: MA DESE 2022 Graduation Rate Report (DISTRICT) Male: Four-Year Graduation Rate; % Dropped Out (<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/gradrates.aspx>)

Figure B5: Drop Out Rate in SSYI Cities, 2022



Source: MA DESE 2022 Graduation Rate Report (DISTRICT) for All Students: Four-Year Graduation Rate; % Dropped Out (<http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/statereport/gradrates.aspx>)

Table B1: 2010 to 2022 Violent Crime Rate (per 100,000)

Agency	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Boston	904	845	835	782	726	707	707	669	622	607	644	593	608
Brockton	1,161	1,229	1,143	1,231	1,052	991	1,081	955	905	821	712	640	679
Chelsea	1,774	1,743	1,852	1,223	1,112	1,080	923	778	676	667	613	748	782
Fall River	1,224	1,218	1,063	1,059	1,167	1,141	1,093	989	1,014	868	829	909	998
Haverhill	575	591	675	670	698	542	593	618	559	524	449	558	581
Holyoke	1,196	1,007	949	1,042	967	948	1,070	1,083	966	859	946	968	965
Lawrence	826	994	1,011	997	1,094	879	741	723	619	674	402	407	505
Lowell	1,128	742	539	572	546	435	342	289	324	363	301	321	400
Lynn	847	885	821	889	777	777	772	715	595	492	413	440	656
New Bedford	1,223	1,143	1,073	1,093	1,258	N/A	866	666	634	664	550	609	631
North Adams	942	N/A	705	984	557	1,079	N/A	1490	777	563	663	1064	1010
Pittsfield	628	598	426	252	444	654	790	881	842	710	776	633	753
Springfield	1,367	1,027	1,039	1,092	1,091	1,073	1,032	874	989	905	949	934	868
Worcester	973	988	959	955	965	887	890	727	683	630	566	582	606

Notes:

1. 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>)
2. For 2020, 2021, and 2022 violent crime rates were calculated by dividing violent crime incidents by city population. Violent crime incidents for were 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>)

APPENDIX C: KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Table C1: Number of Unduplicated Eligible Youth, FY23

	Number of Unduplicated Youth
City	FY23
Boston	228
Brockton	91
Chelsea	193
Fall River	106
Haverhill	67
Holyoke	163
Lawrence	147
Lowell	163
Lynn	196
New Bedford	156
North Adams	54
Pittsfield	82
Springfield	284
Worcester	109
Total	2,039

Table C2: Number of Contact Events, FY23

	Number of Contact Events
City	FY23
Boston	3,837
Brockton	520
Chelsea	5,190
Fall River	1,053
Haverhill	739
Holyoke	4,226
Lawrence	1,278
Lowell	1,664
Lynn	3,967
New Bedford	1,582
North Adams	1,383
Pittsfield	1,317
Springfield	4,478
Worcester	1,374
Total	32,608

Table C3: Number of Case Management/Enrolled Individuals, FY23

	Number of Case Management/ Enrolled Individuals
City	FY23
Boston	148
Brockton	45
Chelsea	117
Fall River	37
Haverhill	40
Holyoke	116
Lawrence	62
Lowell	66
Lynn	75
New Bedford	48
North Adams	31
Pittsfield	51
Springfield	192
Worcester	45
Total	1,073

Table C4: Number of Individuals Who Received Education Support, FY23

	Individuals Receiving Education Support
City	FY23
Boston	72
Brockton	20
Chelsea	62
Fall River	12
Haverhill	17
Holyoke	55
Lawrence	44
Lowell	32
Lynn	36
New Bedford	41
North Adams	27
Pittsfield	14
Springfield	94
Worcester	8
Total	534

Table C5: Number of Individuals Receiving Occupational Training/Employment Support, FY23

	Individuals Receiving Occupational Training/ Employment Support
City	FY23
Boston	99
Brockton	33
Chelsea	40
Fall River	26
Haverhill	23
Holyoke	26
Lawrence	64
Lowell	42
Lynn	34
New Bedford	41
North Adams	39
Pittsfield	38
Springfield	75
Worcester	30
Total	610

Table C6: Number of Individuals Who Received Behavioral Health Support, FY23

	Individuals Receiving Behavioral Health Support
City	FY23
Boston	84
Brockton	20
Chelsea	110
Fall River	26
Haverhill	31
Holyoke	97
Lawrence	63
Lowell	85
Lynn	75
New Bedford	30
North Adams	23
Pittsfield	27
Springfield	167
Worcester	18
Total	856

Table C7: Number of Individuals Who Received Any SSYI Services, FY23

	Individuals Receiving Any SSYI Services
City	FY23
Boston	151
Brockton	68
Chelsea	133
Fall River	49
Haverhill	45
Holyoke	120
Lawrence	103
Lowell	99
Lynn	96
New Bedford	102
North Adams	45
Pittsfield	68
Springfield	218
Worcester	74
Total	1,371

Safe and Successful Youth Initiative Legislative Report

February 2024

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