



WALK ABOUT YAKIMA

Two Years of Community Intervention and Impact



Community Peace Center

Prepared by Sam Decker, WAY Program Coordinator
For the Washington State Department of Commerce
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Community Peace Center
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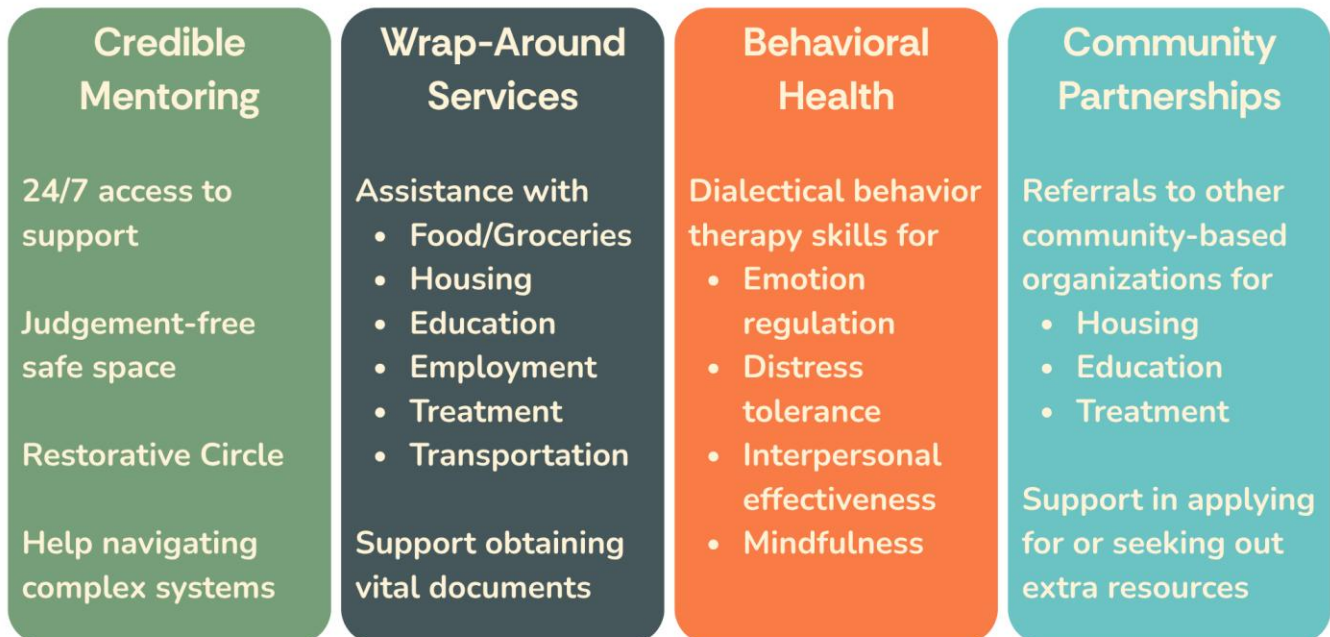
“Nobody has ever really looked out for me like this.”

-WAY Mentee, 2025

The Model

Walk About Yakima (WAY) was born in 2020, the brainchild of a few Yakima community members who were daring (and perhaps crazy) enough to believe that love, not punishment, was the key to solving community violence. Housed within the Community Peace Center of Central Washington, formerly known as the Dispute Resolution Center of Yakima and Kittitas Counties, WAY has grown into a one-of-a-kind community violence intervention (CVI) program dedicated to serving gang-involved youth and young adults at the highest risk of killing or being killed by firearm violence.

WAY targets individuals primarily between the ages of 12 and 24 who have been identified as high risk by law enforcement partners. These individuals are given the opportunity to opt-in to the WAY program, which is entirely voluntary. Those who choose to participate are assigned a compatible mentor. All WAY mentors have lived experience in the challenges and obstacles that most affect our participants, including gang involvement, substance use disorders, incarceration, and trauma. Mentors design a custom curriculum for each mentee centered around four program pillars:



Participation in the WAY program typically lasts one year and is divided into three distinct phases:

Phase One focuses on relationship building. The mentor provides immediate stabilizing assistance for food, housing, and clothing. If necessary, a cell phone is purchased to facilitate daily check-ins between mentor and mentee. Trust is a priority. Phase one lasts about three months.

Phase Two focuses on skill building. The mentor introduces dialectical behavior therapy, starting with simple, easy-to-use skills and working up to more complex skills. Mentees are required to pursue/maintain either education or employment and meet all probation or court obligations. Phase two lasts about six months.

Phase Three focuses on independence building. Mentors gradually step back over several months, requiring fewer check-ins and encouraging mentees to become self-sufficient. Mentees are expected to have no new contacts with law enforcement in this phase. Phase three lasts about three months.

Mentees who successfully complete all three phases are graduated from the program. Mentees who do not engage with their mentors or participate in program activities may be separated from the program, and those who enter long-term incarceration or substance use treatment are placed on a “custody pause.” Many separated or paused mentees choose to re-engage with the WAY program in the future. Most mentees, whether they graduated or separated early, choose to maintain contact with their mentor even after their participation in the program has ended.

The Need

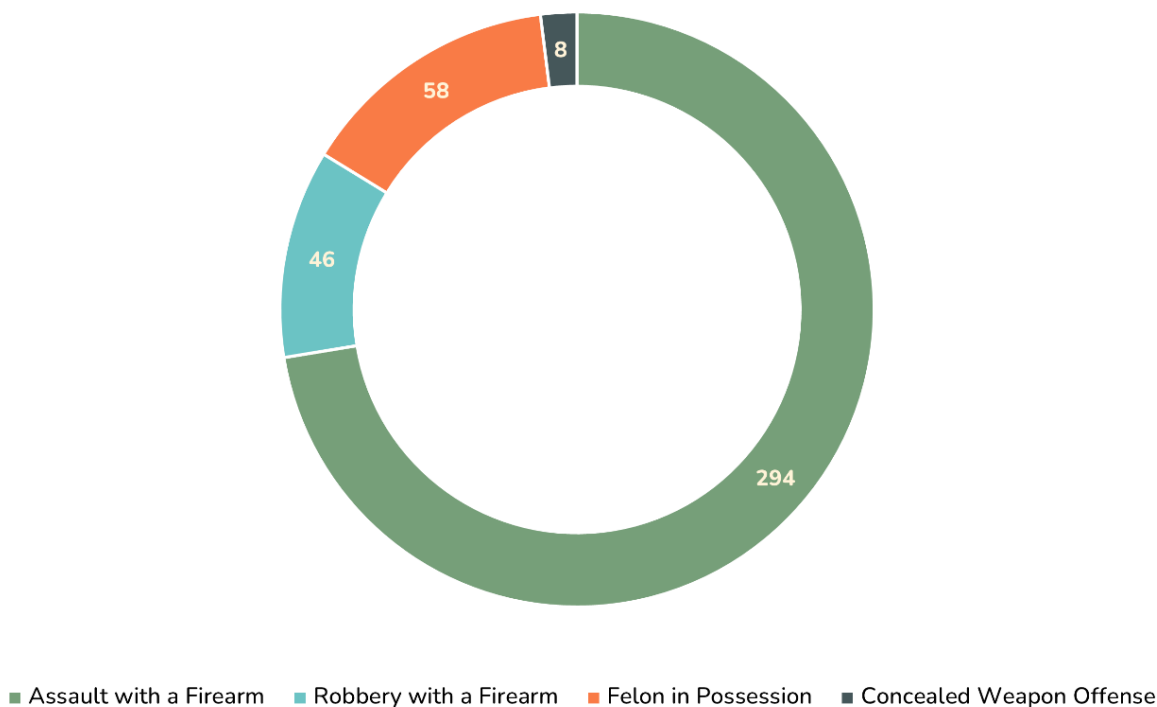
Nestled in the heart of orchard country, Yakima is a charming small city that suffers from a big-city gang problem. Yakima has the perfect storm of factors that contribute to the prevalence of gang activity, but at the root of them all lies poverty. 16.1% of Yakima’s residents live beneath the poverty line, which is significantly more than the Washington state average of 10.3% (US Census Bureau, 2024). According to WAY Program Manager Alfredo Orozco, who grew up in Yakima gang life, poverty makes kids feel that their options are limited. “Growing up poor in Yakima, you basically have two options—becoming a rapper, which is gang related, or selling drugs.” This sentiment is echoed by WAY mentees, 85% of whom, when surveyed shortly after joining the program, indicated that they sometimes or often found themselves forced to pick between two bad choices, with no other way out. Francisco Chiprez, a WAY Mentor, added that young men in particular are lured in by flashy, luxurious displays of guns, clothing, jewelry, cars, and women by the “older homies,” authority figures reaping the financial and cultural rewards of gang life.

Compounding the poverty issue is the startling fact that Yakima serves as a hub for gun and drug distribution. “Drugs are coming in from Mexico and Canada,” said Alfredo, “landing in Yakima, and then

being distributed to Montana, Idaho, California. Guns too.” This network of contraband is operated by cartels and enforced by the brutal prison gangs Nuestra Familia and Mexican Mafia, which act as regulatory forces for the Norteño and Sureño street gangs, respectively. The strong presence of cartels and prison gangs in Yakima make street gangs more common, more active, and more dangerous.

A final factor contributing to the severity of Yakima’s problem is the fact that many families experience domestic violence and generational gang involvement, major cultural aspects of Latino gangs. Youth are growing up with fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and older brothers in gangs. They experience associated violence and trauma from a young age, and in many cases are expected to take up the mantle as they grow.

The result: a violent crime rate 4.5 times higher than the national average, according to a 2021 statement by former Yakima Chief of Police Matt Murray. During the contract period of July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2025, data provided to WAY by Yakima Police Department showed a total of 406 firearm related crimes, with “assault with a firearm” constituting nearly three quarters of offenses:



By identifying and intervening with youth at the highest risk of gun violence, WAY functions similar to a focused deterrence program. Working with the individuals who drive a significant proportion of violence, will, over time, decrease the overall rate of gun violence for all of Yakima.

*“[Mentee] has made such great progress; he's doing so much better...
I am extremely proud of him.”*

-Mentee's Aunt, 2025

The Contract

Contract S24-34464-006 was initiated with the following goals and activities:

- Hire personnel to implement program, and provide training in CBT, DBT, MST, FIT, trauma-informed care, de-escalation, nonviolent communication, and other skills.
- Build and maintain work group for program and meet regularly.
- Identify youth at high risk for firearm violence and provide notification meetings. Enroll youth who choose to opt-in to the program.
- Build mentoring relationships with participants and provide them with wrap-around services and behavioral health interventions.
- Work with TA consultant and evaluators for program performance and outcome measures.
- Attend quarterly check-in meetings with Commerce and provide quarterly reports of outcome and performance measures.

A total of \$1.47 million was granted, giving the WAY program a budget of \$735,000 for each of the two years.

WAY's mission heading into this contract was to bring hope to all people in the Yakima community by establishing a program of trust, hope, and belonging through modeling and practicing radical love.

The People

At the onset of the contract on July 1, 2023, the WAY team consisted of a program manager, systems manager, program coordinator, assistant program manager, and two mentors. Two remaining mentor positions were filled over the course of the first contract year.

Due to the nature of our work, WAY requires an intense screening process for all prospective mentors. All mentor candidates undergo a preliminary interview with the program manager to determine if their background is suitable for working with at-risk youth. WAY mentors are required to have lived experience, which allows them “to identify with what [a] young person was going through and connect with them on a

deeper level,” (Jones, in review). Upon passing the initial interview, candidates then interview with at least two other members of leadership, including the Executive Director. A background check is also conducted before onboarding begins.

All WAY staff members receive initial and ongoing training in the following areas:

- Behavioral health interventions, with a heavy focus on dialectical behavior therapy (DBT). Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) training is also provided, although to a lesser extent. Initially, training in multisystemic therapy (MST) and family integrated therapy (FIT) training was provided, but these were found to be ineffective for the population being served and were mostly discontinued (for a more thorough discussion, refer to “The Interventions – Challenges & Lessons Learned” section on page 18).
- Professional mediation training, provided by the Community Peace Center. Mediation skills, which include active listening, reframing, de-escalation, and nonviolent communication, are valuable tools when working with at-risk populations.
- Trauma-informed care, which allows mentors to consider a mentee’s past and current trauma in order to provide appropriate interventions.

Mentors in particular receive additional training in:

- Suicide prevention
- First aid/CPR/Naloxone
- Credible mentoring

New mentors must shadow an experienced mentor for a period of up to several weeks before taking on their own mentees, and they typically begin with lower-risk cases (for example, a young teen who has not yet officially joined a gang) before moving up to more complex, higher-risk cases (such as an older teen who is already deeply entrenched in gang life).

Accomplishments & Milestones

Training: During the contract period, two new training modules for mentors were developed internally. Zero Tolerance, which is paired with WAY’s Zero Tolerance Policy, draws vital boundary lines between appropriate and inappropriate behavior in a mentoring relationship. Zero Tolerance training is particularly important for mentors who have little to no experience working in a professional environment and/or with youth and may lack knowledge of professional boundaries.

Breaking Barriers centers on personal bias, the difference between implicit and explicit bias, and strategies for addressing and overcoming bias. This module includes an LGBTQ+ supplement that teaches basic definitions and discusses additional strategies for working with LGBTQ+ youth. The Breaking Barriers module was found to be extremely valuable for staff members with lived experience, due to the heavy presence of bias and discrimination in gang culture. Mentors were guided through the uncomfortable process of taking a hard look at their personal biases and how those biases could

subconsciously affect their relationships with mentees.

Restorative Circle: Circle is an ancient practice used by many indigenous cultures to facilitate communication, address harm, and promote healing. WAY frequently uses Circle with mentees but takes it a step further by conducting staff Circles as well. Each Circle had a specific theme, from fun team bonding to perseverance, but the majority focused on processing various traumas. Staff were permitted to speak openly about their pain, fears, shame, and regret without judgement and in an environment of love and support. Staff reported a significant sense of healing from this process, which contributed to each mentor's powerful arc of redemption from harmer to helper.

“I was carrying a lot of trauma when I got hired. And being in this place, with these people... I experienced more healing within six weeks of working here than in the seven years before.”

-WAY Staff Member, 2023

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Hiring Difficulties: WAY strongly believes that lived experience is a necessity when mentoring at-risk individuals. This presents a challenge, however, when hiring new mentors. In a smaller community such as Yakima, it is very difficult to find suitable candidates who have lived experience, have turned themselves around, have enough time clean from substances, aren't at significant risk of relapse, and who desire to mentor youth.

At the beginning of the contract period in 2023, WAY experienced about five months of understaffing due to the challenges of finding qualified candidates. Although the understaffing was eventually corrected, it resulted in a significant underspend of personnel funds that had to be reallocated to other categories. See “The Funds” on page 19 for more details.

Professional Expectations: An important lesson learned for WAY during this contract is that staff members coming from a background of lived experience may lack a clear understanding of professional behaviors, expectations, and boundaries.

After experiencing conflicts with professionalism that resulted in the termination of two staff members, leadership recognized the need for intensive, detailed training in this area, which led to the development of the Zero Tolerance and Breaking Barriers trainings discussed above.

“I really want something different in life. I could not have accomplished all I have accomplished so far if it wasn't because of your support.”

-WAY Mentee, 2025

The Partners

From its inception, WAY has maintained a strong working relationship with Yakima Police Department's Gang Unit. This relationship continued during the contract period, allowing WAY and Gang Unit to share vital information about gang activity, mentee progress, and potential referrals to the program. WAY and Gang Unit hold a formal partner meeting once per month, for a total of 24 meetings throughout the contract. Other community partner organizations are welcome to join this meeting to share and receive information.

WAY also works closely with Yakima County Juvenile Justice. During the contract period, any WAY mentees on probation were assigned to one of two subcontracted juvenile probation counselors. These counselors attended weekly caseload review meetings with WAY to discuss progress and concerns for each mentee.

Mentors frequently provided transportation to probation appointments for mentees. Mentors also supported their mentees by attending court with them and often were permitted by the judge to advocate for their mentees. Juvenile probation frequently refers potential mentees to the program.

In addition to these two primary partners, WAY's umbrella organization, the Community Peace Center of Central Washington, serves as a partner for training, executive leadership, and fiscal management. WAY also partnered with various other government agencies, community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations, allowing the program to provide a broad continuum of care for mentees. The table on the following page details WAY's partnerships in Yakima and beyond:

Organization Name	Organization Type	Relationship
Community Peace Center	CBO	Umbrella organization, training
Yakima Police Department	Government agency	Information sharing, referrals
Yakima Juvenile Justice	Government agency	Information sharing, referrals, advocacy
Yakima County Prosecutor	Government agency	Information sharing, advocacy
Yakima County Pre-Trial	Government agency	Information sharing, advocacy
Yakima School District	Government agency	Information sharing, referrals, advocacy
ESD 105	Government agency	Information sharing, advocacy
OIC of Washington	CBO	Service provision
People for People	CBO	Service provision
SAFE Yakima Valley	CBO	Service provision
YWCA	CBO	Community Safety Council
Yakima Foursquare Church	FBO	Service provision, meeting space
Heights Church	FBO	Service provision, meeting space
Yakima Celebrate Recovery	FBO	Service provision
UW FIPRP	Research program	Program/social impact evaluation
Community Passageways	CBO	Information sharing
Urban Family	CBO	Information sharing, service provision
Brad Beach DBT Institute	Private consultant	Training, consultation, capacity building

CBO = Community-based organization FBO = Faith-based organization

Accomplishments & Milestones

New Partnerships: WAY established new partnerships with several organizations during the contract period, including UW's Firearm Injury and Policy Research Program for program and social impact evaluation, Yakima YWCA for the Community Safety Council, Urban Family for service provision to relocated mentees, and Brad Beach DBT Institute for training and consultation.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Differing Approaches: WAY encountered conflict with two community partners regarding differences in opinion on the program's approach to working with at-risk youth. One partner disagreed with WAY's insistence on being a voluntary program, believing that mentors should enforce contact with mentees or "chase down" those who neglect to engage. WAY operates on the principle that change cannot be forced upon somebody who is not ready for it. Mentors know that those who are ready for change will engage, and those who aren't may need some time away from the program until they are truly ready. This difference in opinion proved irreconcilable and the partnership unfortunately dissolved.

The other partner, which comprised faculty and consultants from University of Washington's Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health, proved inflexible when WAY desired to adapt its treatment model to be more DBT-focused. Mentors found that a mixed approach that prioritized MST/FIT interventions over DBT was less effective and, in some severe cases, impossible to implement. When mentors voiced these concerns and others, including difficulties with complex reporting systems and lack of communication, the Behavioral Health team declined to "meet in the middle," even becoming condescending to mentors seeking guidance. After struggling to obtain basic, contracted training from the Behavioral Health team, WAY and CPC leadership decided that the relationship was becoming more harmful than helpful and chose to dissolve it.

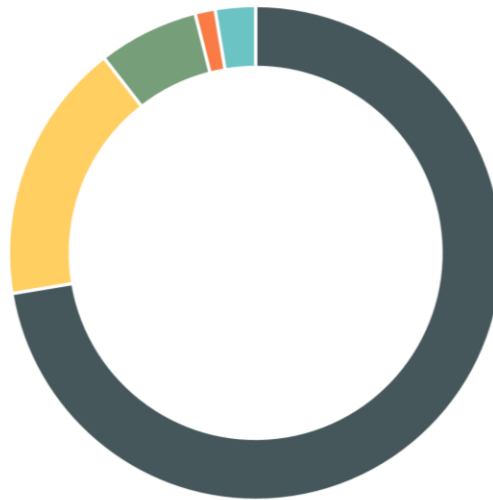
The Mentees

WAY mentors individuals at the highest risk of becoming a perpetrator or a victim of firearm violence. When discussing potential referrals, Alfredo says that "sometimes people say, 'Oh, you don't want this kid, he's a shooter.' But that's exactly the one we want. We want the shooters. We want the trigger pullers." All mentees are involved with gangs in some way, either as an active "jumped-in" member, an affiliate, or a hang-around.

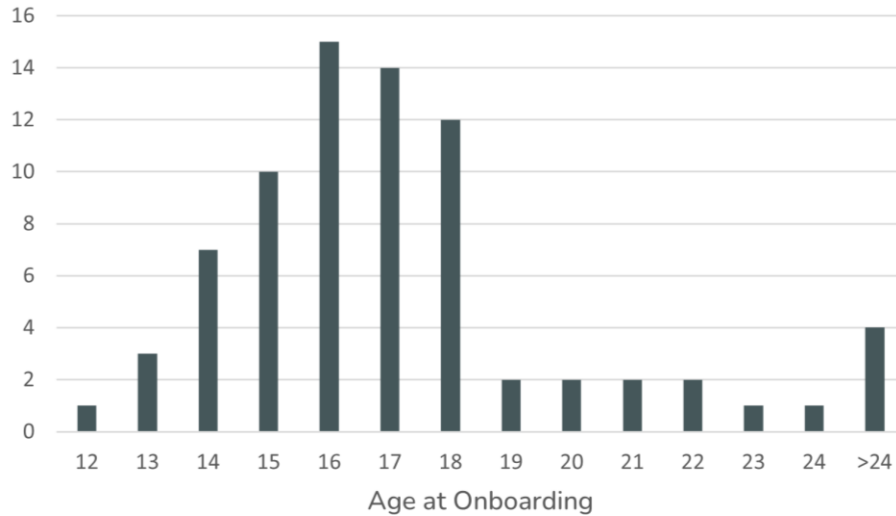
WAY targets individuals aged 12-24, with most mentees falling in the range of 16-18. On very rare occasions, older individuals may be enrolled into the program, but success with older individuals is typically much more difficult to achieve. The majority of mentees are Hispanic/Latino males, as this demographic is disproportionately represented in Yakima gangs. Most mentees are referred from either Yakima Police Department Gang Unit, or Yakima County Juvenile Justice.

Key mentee demographics are summarized in the following charts:

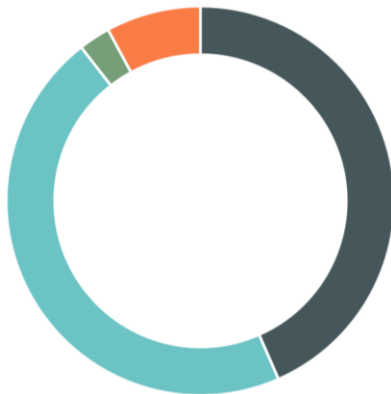
Race & Ethnicity



■ Hispanic/Latino ■ White ■ Native American/Alaska Native ■ Black/African American ■ Two or More



Referral Source



■ YPD Gang Unit ■ Juvenile Court ■ Self-Refer ■ Other

Sex



■ Male ■ Female



WAY served a total of 76 mentees over the contract period. Not including eight mentees who are still actively engaged, 68 mentees have finished their time in the program through graduation, early separation, or a custody pause:

33 Mentees ~49% Graduated

26 Mentees ~38% Separated

9 Mentees ~13% Custody Pause

To reiterate, mentees who have separated or been placed on a custody pause may re-engage with the program in the future, and many choose to do so. All mentees, regardless of their final status, are encouraged to maintain contact with their mentors for as long as they would like.

Accomplishments & Milestones

Success Stories: Please note that names have been changed to protect privacy.

Pedro has been in a gang since he was a kid. He is currently the leader of a notorious street gang in Yakima. He was previously incarcerated for a shooting, causing him to fail to graduate and lose a full-ride scholarship. Now a single father, he was struggling to find work, pay his rent, and take care of his child. After joining the WAY program, his mentor supported him in completing a GED, which he achieved in only two weeks. He is taking CDL classes, which will help him obtain stable employment. WAY paid four months of his rent, allowing him to focus on his classes without the threat of eviction looming over him. Pedro hasn't had any contact with law enforcement since joining the WAY program and has even directed his "little homies" to turn themselves in rather than running from law enforcement. "I want to become a mentor," he said, "because the WAY program has made me feel accepted and understood... I know I can make a difference."

Ivan was never officially jumped into a gang, but life at home was difficult and he was on the brink of making some very bad decisions. His father was an abusive alcoholic, and domestic violence was a constant threat. Ivan carried significant trauma and suffered from mental health issues. One day, he brought a gun to school and ended up on probation. His probation counselor referred him to WAY. Only a month into his participation, there was a serious incident at home that required an emergency relocation. WAY put Ivan in a hotel and eventually helped him find a safer place to live. Once he was in a stable living situation, he began to flourish, enrolling in classes, applying for jobs, and seeking mental health treatment. He attended several field trips with WAY and was always ready for an adventure. He completed probation and ended his time with WAY by finding employment. He still maintains contact with his mentors.

Only 14 years old when he enrolled in the WAY program, Jake was already a member of a gang and was expecting a baby. He was attending online school and was on probation for a vehicle charge. After onboarding with WAY, Jake confided in his mentor that he had once come very close to shooting somebody. Jake's mentor supported him in getting a part-time job and enrolling in in-person classes. He

successfully completed 8th grade shortly before the birth of his son. Becoming a father spurred him to change, and he quietly withdrew from gang activities to focus on his family, covering up a gang tattoo on his hand with a rose. He completed probation and spent most of his time outside of school taking care of his child. Once he turned 15, WAY put him through driver's education. Jake was reluctant to graduate from the WAY program; he had come to love the support of his mentor, who reassured him that they could stay in touch as long as he wanted.

Jessica was in and out of juvie, truant from school, and refused to follow court requirements. Her home life was tough; things were ok when she was at her dad's house, but her mom was a heavy substance user. Jessica hung around gang members and struggled to stay out of trouble. Initially, her mentor struggled to connect with her, and it took a little while for them to build a relationship. There were a lot of ups and downs; Jessica would do well for a while, then get in trouble again. She had pregnancy scares and several positive drug screens at probation. Her mentor was persistent though, and, slowly, things got better. She attended a white water rafting trip with WAY, started having clean drug screens, and made it to school most days. Her bond with her mentor deepened, and communication between them improved. Jessica stayed on the WAY caseload longer than most mentees, and while she continued to have slip-ups, she graduated from the program much better off than she began.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

We Can't Save Everyone: Perhaps the most challenging thing for WAY mentors is the fact that some mentees are not successful. Whether they are already too deeply entrenched in gang life, make a decision that jeopardizes their future, or simply are not ready to change, watching a mentee crash and burn is the hardest part of this work. And while most mentees who do not graduate from the WAY program see some successes, a few do not.

For this reason, prioritizing self-care is vital for mentors. There is an emotional toll to mentoring, and burnout is a serious risk if appropriate self-care and work-life balance is not maintained. WAY leadership is aware of this and encourages mentors to take sick and/or vacation time as frequently as needed to rest and reset.

“It’s hard to let them go, even the ones who graduate.”

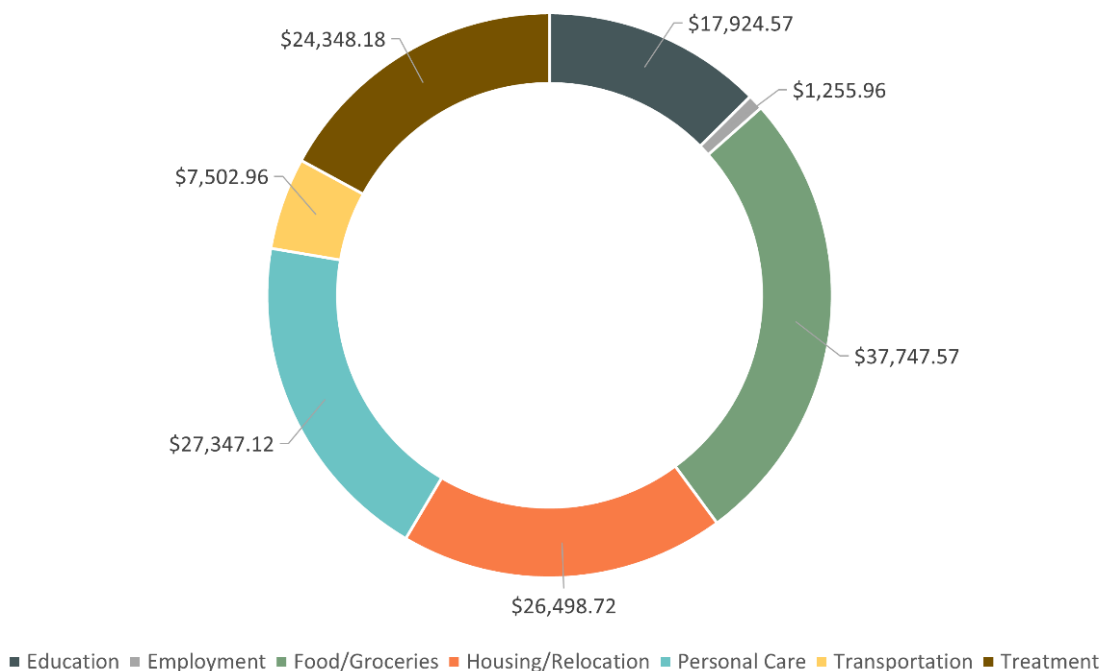
-WAY Mentor, 2025

The Interventions

In addition to credible mentoring, WAY provides wrap-around services to mentees. These services can include transportation to school, probation, or other appointments, support navigating the justice system, and financial assistance.

WAY spent \$142,625.08 of Commerce-granted funds directly on mentees. These funds were divided into seven categories:

- Education – school supplies, school clothes, tuition, driver’s education.
- Employment – interview clothes, work uniforms, work shoes/boots.
- Food/Groceries – snacks and meals for mentees, groceries.
- Housing/Relocation – utilities, rent payments, application fees, emergency hotel stays.
- Personal Care – hygiene items, clothing not related to work or school, baby care items.
- Transportation – gasoline, driver license fees, minor vehicle repairs.
- Treatment – treatment center fees, facility-requested clothes/personal care items.



WAY supported many mentees on probation during the contract period. Data provided from Yakima County Juvenile Justice indicates that mentees had a total of 542 probation appointments and 323 court-required classes or therapy appointments. Mentees, often with the help of their mentors, attended 460 of these probation appointments, for an attendance rate of 85%. They attended 282 of the classes or therapy appointments, for an attendance rate of 87%. Mentors attended court with their mentees a total of 130 times over the two years.

Mentors had a total of 6,708 contacts with their mentees. These contacts are broken down into the table below. Please note that WAY adjusted these classifications throughout the contract period, so, for example, if a category was added recently, the number of contacts in that category may seem low, as they would have previously been classified as “General Mentoring.”

Contact Category	Contacts
Community Resources	154
Community Service	13
Custom Notification	40
DBT/CBT Skills Taught	36
Education	275
Contact with Family	286
General Mentoring	5089
Graduation	21
Housing	27
Incarcerated Mentees	213
Interventions	11
Legal Resources/Court/Probation	485
Medical	1
Mental Health	32
Relocation	1
Restorative Circle	9
Treatment	15

Finally, WAY provided DBT and CBT interventions to mentees:

Mentors taught/demonstrated skills 4,304 times

Mentees independently used skills 2,011 times

DBT skills are simple, easy to remember, and can be taught on-the-fly by mentors while out in the community. They are grouped into four categories: emotion regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, distress tolerance, and mindfulness.

The most commonly used DBT skills include:

- Pros and Cons – looking at both sides of an action or situation.
- STOP – stop, take a step back, observe, and proceed mindfully.
- DEARMAN – a process for making difficult requests or asking tough questions.
- Validation – simply making somebody feel seen.
- Wise Mind – combining the logical and emotional sides of the mind to make wise choices.
- ABC PLEASE – a set of steps for improving wellness and handling stress.

Accomplishments & Milestones

Financial Stabilization: By providing over \$140k in financial support to mentees, WAY was able to provide significant relief of money-related stress for mentees and their families. When the brain is stuck in survival mode, it is nearly impossible to learn and grow. Having their basic needs met allowed mentees to get out of survival mode and into learning mode. It also helped prevent mentees from committing criminal acts out of desperation; if you already have food and shelter, you don't need to rob or sell drugs to obtain food and shelter.

Incentives: Although the provision of incentives is a controversial topic, WAY firmly believes that offering concrete, desirable incentives (for example, a flashy pair of shoes or a nice restaurant meal) increases a mentee's motivation to work towards a goal. It is important to remember that most mentees are children, and while adults may be capable of working for goals for nothing more than personal satisfaction or self-improvement, the same can't always be said of children. Kids are more likely to achieve a goal if they know there is a tangible reward waiting for them.

It is also important to remember that cultural relevance plays a huge role in providing items to mentees, especially clothes or shoes. Gang-involved individuals are expected to maintain a certain aesthetic and can face significant—often physical—consequences at the hands of the gang if they fail to meet expectations. It may seem excessive to buy expensive shoes or clothes for a mentee when basic items are more affordable, but, the truth is, they likely will not be able to use the basic items.

For example, WAY provided a basic, inexpensive set of Sketchers to a mentee because his shoes had holes in them. Several weeks later, he was still wearing the holey shoes. When asked about it, he said he couldn't wear the Sketchers, or he would get put in check (beat up) by the gang.

Model Optimization: Over the course of the first year of the contract, mentors realized that DBT/CBT interventions were the most effective behavioral interventions for mentees. The WAY model was adjusted to prioritize DBT interventions over other types. Going forward, WAY hopes to partner with a research program in order to officially evaluate the effectiveness of DBT in gang-involved, high-risk youth and young adults, as there seems to be a lack of research publications related to this specific population.

“[Mentee] likes DBT so much, he started teaching it to his cell block.”

-WAY Mentor, 2025

Challenges & Lessons Learned

MST/FIT Isn’t for Us: The most significant and difficult lesson that WAY learned during the contract period was that MST/FIT is simply not effective for the population served. As discussed in “The Partners – Challenges & Lessons Learned” on page 11, WAY mentors struggled to get appropriate support from the consultation team at UW’s Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health.

One of the concerns most frequently brought up with the consultant was that mentees more often than not lacked the social and family support systems necessary for the success of MST/FIT interventions. For most mentees, the closest thing they have to a supportive family is their gang. To really drive this point home, on multiple occasions mentors have been asked by their mentees to attend sport events, parent-teacher conferences, graduations, doctor appointments, and other major events because their parents or family were unable or unwilling to attend.

This, along with the lack of communication and training from the Behavioral Health team, contributed to WAY’s decision to stop using most MST/FIT interventions and dissolve the relationship with the Behavioral Health team.

The Funds

WAY had a budget of \$735,000 for each of the two years of this contract. In both years, 100% of the funding was utilized. For both years, budget amendments were submitted to correct initial estimates and refine the budget categories.

During the first year, July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024, the period of understaffing meant that there was a large amount of underspend in the personnel category. This underspend was redistributed to other budget categories, particularly mentee services. The following table compares the (amended) budget for each category with actual spending:

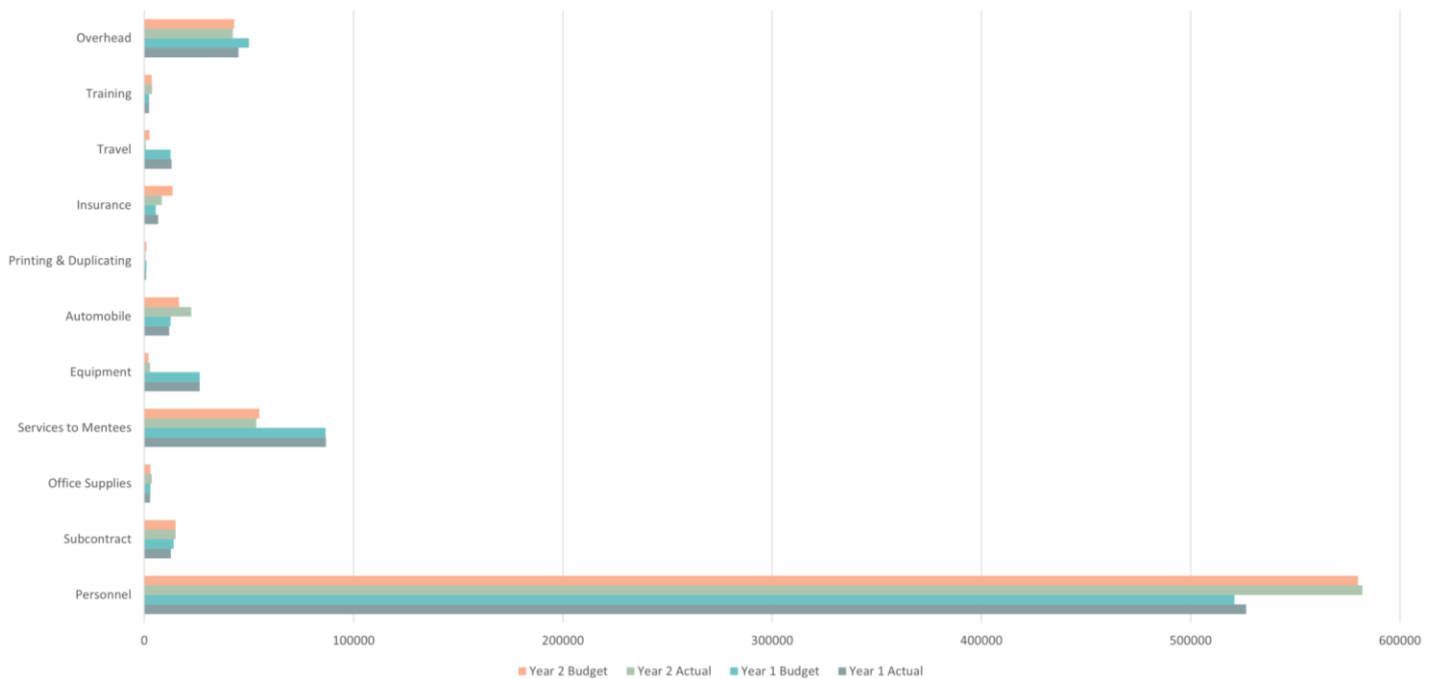
Budget Category	Budget Amount	Actual Spend
Personnel	\$521,000	\$526,490.97
Subcontract	\$14,000	\$12,748.40
Office Supplies	\$3,000	\$2,760.92
Services to Mentees (Operating Supplies)	\$86,685	\$86,771.58
Equipment	\$26,500	\$26,482.72
Automobile	\$12,500	\$11,917.87
Printing & Duplicating	\$1,000	\$829.60
Insurance	\$5,500	\$6,560.41
Travel	\$12,500	\$13,076.81
Training	\$2,315	\$2,314.99
Indirect & Administration	\$50,000	\$45,045.74

The next table compares (amended) budget amounts to actuals for the second contract year, July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025:

Budget Category	Budget Amount	Actual Spend
Personnel	\$580,000	\$582,018.21
Subcontract	\$15,000	\$15,000
Office Supplies	\$3,000	\$3,643.95
Services to Mentees (Operating Supplies)	\$55,000	\$53,548.25
Equipment	\$2,000	\$2,791.24

Budget Category	Budget Amount	Actual Spend
Automobile	\$16,500	\$22,401.68
Printing & Duplicating	\$1,000	\$536.10
Insurance	\$13,500	\$8,356.84
Travel	\$2,500	\$663.71
Training	\$3,500	\$3,712.89
Indirect & Administration	\$43,000	\$42,327.13

The following chart compares budgets to actuals for both fiscal years:



The largest discrepancy between budget and actual amounts occurred during year two for the automobile category. This was due to WAY's company-owned vehicle requiring unexpected repairs.

Accomplishments & Milestones

From a Curse to a Blessing: The huge underspend in the first year's pre-amended personnel budget was initially an intense stressor. WAY leadership struggled to determine how to deal with the leftover amount, until our contract representative suggested moving the money to other categories. One amendment later, WAY had a vastly increased budget for mentee services.

Not only did this allow mentors to provide new clothes and shoes for mentees, but it allowed the team to take mentees on field trips, something WAY wanted to do since its inception but could never afford. Three large trips were executed, one for indoor skydiving, one for a Mariners game, and the third for white water

rafting. These trips were both incredibly fun and eye-opening experiences for the mentees who attended, most of whom had never even been outside of Yakima. Several smaller trips also occurred, including picnics at the lake and fishing trips. All of these field trips promoted relationship-building between mentors and mentees and gave the mentees lifelong memories to hold.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Not Enough Money: Being underfunded is a common complaint among nonprofits; WAY is no exception. In spite of the unexpected abundance of mentee funds in the first year, WAY would be able to do so much more for so many more mentees if additional funds were consistently available.

More funding would allow WAY to hire more mentors, expand our reach into other parts of Yakima County (including the “lower valley,” where intervention is very much needed), provide more training to staff, and, most importantly, increase service provision to mentees. WAY struggled to obtain funds for more intensive DBT training outside the scope of what Commerce initially provided. Funds for training were finally granted by the Yakima Valley Community Foundation—two months from the end of the contract period and far too late to benefit the contract.

Intervention work seems expensive, but when examining the cost of WAY versus the cost of incarceration, the difference is clear: in the state of Washington in 2020, it cost \$87,540 to incarcerate a juvenile for one year (Justice Policy Institute, 2020). The annual taxpayer cost of the WAY program is less than the cost to incarcerate nine juveniles.

Spending money on intervention programs doesn’t get many people excited, but spending money on systems of incarceration sure seems to. Washington spent over \$800 million on its prisons in 2022 alone (Lindsay, 2024). Imagine how many kids we could divert from the justice system before they ever set foot in a prison, for just a fraction of that cost.

Furthermore, studies have shown that well-executed CVI programs can save up to \$41 for every \$1 invested (Corburn & Fukutome-Lopez, 2020). What other investment has a 4100% return?

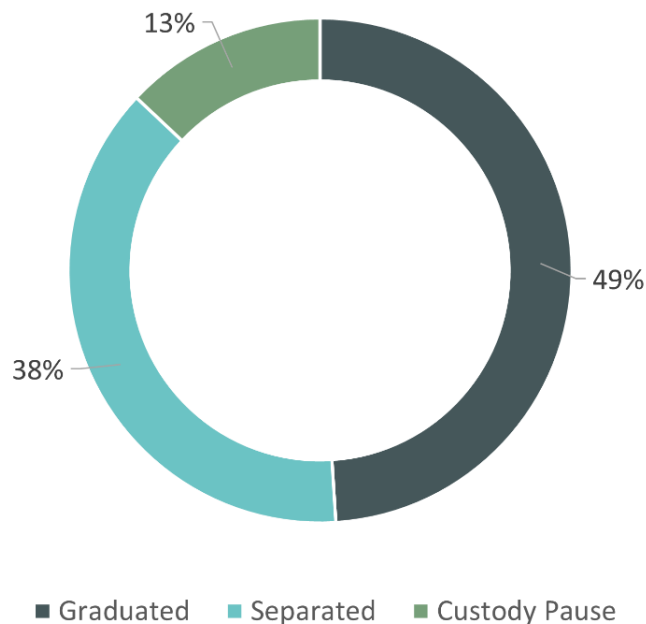
We are constantly reminded by our contract team to be good stewards of the taxpayers’ money. Legislators, budget analysts, number-crunchers, and anyone else who may be reading this, I implore you, put your money where your mouth is. Investing in CVI is good stewardship of taxpayer money.

“I used to be part of the problem. Now I want to be a solution.”

-Local Gang Leader, 2025

The Results

As previously mentioned, of the 68 mentees who concluded their time with the WAY program during the contract period, about half graduated. A few were placed, and remain, on custody pause, and the remaining 38% separated early from the program, typically in phase one.



While the number of mentees who do not complete the program may seem large, most still experience positive outcomes. “Even for those who do not graduate the program,” said Detective Cali Saldana of YPD’s Gang Unit, “while they are in the program they engage in less violence and contact law enforcement less often.”

YPD provided law enforcement contact data to WAY each month. During the two year period, mentees had a total of 115 quality contacts with law enforcement. Please note that a quality contact does not necessarily mean that a mentee did something wrong. Of those contacts, only 13 were related to a weapon. That point bears repeating: *in two years of work with 76 individuals, there were only 13 incidents of law enforcement contact due to a weapon.*

UW's Firearm Injury and Policy Research Program helped WAY conduct quantitative and qualitative analyses of program outcomes and social impact. Here are some key results from mentee surveys, collected at three points during participation (at onboarding, approximately six months into participation, and at offboarding):

- Enrollment in school increased from just over 50% to more than 75%.
- Inability to meet basic needs decreased during participation to nearly zero.
- Use of maladaptive coping mechanisms (for example, drug/alcohol use, self-criticism, or lashing out) decreased during participation.
- Mentees reported an increased sense of community belonging.
- Self-reported rates of conviction and incarceration dropped, but probation increased.
- Mentees reported an increase in the number of positive role models in their life; by phase 3, 100% of mentees surveyed listed their WAY mentor as a positive role model.
- Every mentee surveyed in phase 2 or 3 reported that they felt that their mentor and other WAY staff cared about them.
- During participation, mentees reported a decrease in witnessing a gun being drawn and feeling the need to take a gun to school. However, they reported an increase in feeling unsafe due to gun violence.

In staff surveys, staff overwhelmingly reported feeling supported and respected by their team members and the broader organization, receiving appropriate training for their role, and getting regular feedback from their supervisors.

Qualitative surveys with mentees revealed several common themes, including:

- Good role models have lived experience and are able to build positive, supportive relationships.
- The ability to meet basic needs and a chance to do better for their family members is a major motivating force.
- Fear of incarceration serves as a deterrent to negative behavior, but some mentees feel that incarceration is inevitable for them due to environmental or systemic factors.
- Violence was frequently attributed to living in specific parts of town or generational factors.
- Violence is sensationalized in the media and media is disconnected from reality.
- Schools enable violence by downplaying, ignoring, or inadequately addressing it.

In staff interviews, the prevailing theme was a desire to give back to the community after taking so much away from it, and to prevent young people from going down the same paths as the mentors went down.

Accomplishments & Milestones

FIPRP: Working with the FIPRP team was incredible. The team was very sensitive to mentors' needs and concerns and worked diligently to address each and every one. They were careful to put the voices of WAY first, even inviting WAY team members to co-present at the 2024 National Research Conference for

the Prevention of Firearm-Related Harms.

Community Impact: WAY had a unique opportunity to interview a local gang leader. In the interview, he discussed how he had been involved in gangs from a young age and initially believed that gangs should serve as guardians of the community. He lamented how that image had been corrupted and twisted over time, vilifying gang members, and described how he was attempting to help his little homies better themselves out of his own pocket.

When asked about how the WAY program impacted the community, he said, “The programs like the one you guys are running right now, I'm hoping a lot more spring up. I hope that there's a way where the world could see this, because if every community can have a program similar to this, we might have a fighting chance to make that positive change. We spent so long sitting dormant, letting negativity and misunderstandings go run wild. Now we gotta play cleanup, and that's exactly what you guys have done. By... doing this program you guys took that first step of playing cleanup, and that's the hardest.”

The interview was eye-opening for WAY staff, and leadership is currently developing other opportunities to interview high-ranking gang members.

Challenges & Lessons Learned

Safety Concerns: WAY chooses to stay out of the community spotlight to protect its mentors. While we would love our program, and its results, to be widely known and available in our community, due to the presence of prison gangs and cartels in Yakima, doing so would put staff members at great risk. WAY leadership desires to develop a strategy for safe, deliberate messaging of the program’s work and outcomes.

Staff Buy-In: Mentors, who come from backgrounds of lived experience and harbor distrust for institutions, at first had difficulty understanding the significance and importance of participating in evaluation with FIPRP. Initial attempts to launch mentee surveys and interviews were met with reluctance and safety concerns.

It took weeks of editing survey questions, tweaking their tone and phrasing to ensure mentees would not be put on guard or feel forced to lie, for mentors to feel comfortable administering the surveys. FIPRP was extremely patient and gracious with the WAY team during this time, offering many suggestions and ideas that were ultimately incorporated into the surveys and interviews.

“These children want to be embraced, they don't want to be feared... you guys with this program that's trying to show them they could be embraced other than just the streets, other than negativity, that there's positive things that will embrace them, schools that will embrace them, programs that will embrace them... doesn't matter the tattoos on their faces or their backgrounds, that there's somebody out there like you, for example, that will embrace them and give them that understanding, that chance and teach them how to shine.”

-Local Gang Leader, 2025

Conclusion

It has been an incredible two years of serving the community with help from the Department of Commerce. There were many ups and downs, tears of joy and sorrow, success, failures, love, pain, and, above all, hope. Always, always hope.

On behalf of the Walk About Yakima program, and the Community Peace Center of Central Washington, I want to extend my sincerest thanks to Commerce for the opportunity to do this vital, lifesaving, community-changing work. We are forever grateful and deeply hopeful that we can continue to do this work together, moving forward until no young person in Washington has to live in fear of gun violence.



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