



YOUTH

ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Community Safety and Well-being
Directorate



MISSION

TO WORK IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH THE COMMUNITY AND
SERVICE PROVIDERS TO
ADDRESS ROOT CAUSES AND
REDUCE YOUTH VICTIMIZATION
AND CRIMINALITY.



PARTNERING FOR YOUTH SAFETY: BALANCING SUPPORT AND ENFORCEMENT

We are committed to being a leading partner in building community safety by supporting young people through a balanced approach of accountability, fairness, and connection to community resources. Working alongside our partners, we help young people and their families access the right supports while ensuring their rights are protected and their needs are understood.

CONTENTS

Strengthening Ottawa's Youth	05
A Word from Our Chief	06
Guiding Pillars	07
Emerging Youth Trends in Ottawa	07
An Inclusive Equity-Centred Approach	08
Strategic CSWB Alignment	09
Community Consultations	10
Community Youth Unit	13
Balancing Consistency with Local Response	13
Encompassing Youth Outreach	14
Diversion Pathways	16
What We Are Striving For	16
How We Will Measure Progress	17



STRENGTHENING OTTAWA'S YOUTH



A Community Safety Approach

The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) Youth Strategy reflects our responsibility to reduce the risk factors that lead to crime and violence, and to safeguard some of our youngest and most vulnerable residents. While our youth come from diverse backgrounds, they share the common challenge of navigating a complex journey from childhood to adulthood.



Through this strategy, OPS members are empowered with the knowledge and tools to support youth, using the Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) framework as a guide.

It prioritizes social development, prevention, and risk intervention, before situations escalate to crisis or criminal involvement. It's grounded in data, shaped by best practices, and strengthened by ongoing partnerships with families, schools, service providers, and youth.



OUR COMMITMENT

WHILE RESIDENTS AGED 12 TO 24 COMPRISE 25% OF OTTAWA'S POPULATION, THEY FACE UNIQUE DEVELOPMENTAL VULNERABILITIES THAT REQUIRE A SPECIALIZED, COMPASSIONATE APPROACH. THIS STRATEGY ACKNOWLEDGES THAT EVERY MEMBER OF THE OPS, FROM FRONTLINE PATROL TO SPECIALIZED UNITS, PLAYS A ROLE IN SUPPORTING YOUTH AS THEY NAVIGATE THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD.

A WORD FROM OUR CHIEF



Young people aged 12 to 24 make up a quarter of Ottawa's population and play a vital role in the city's future. At the same time, they are among the groups most vulnerable to experiencing crime and violence, as well as becoming involved in it.

The Ottawa Police Service Youth Strategy reflects our responsibility to reduce the factors that place young people at risk, while supporting them as they move from childhood to adulthood.

This work is not limited to one unit or program. While our Community Youth Unit works directly in schools and neighbourhoods, every police officer will interact with youth at some point in their career. That means every member has a role to play in making sure those interactions are informed, compassionate, and focused on the best possible outcome.

Through initiatives such as our Youth Trained Officer (YTO) program for patrol officers, and through the ongoing work of our Community Youth Unit, we are strengthening our ability to respond to young people in a way that recognizes their circumstances, supports accountability, and connects them to the right help where needed.

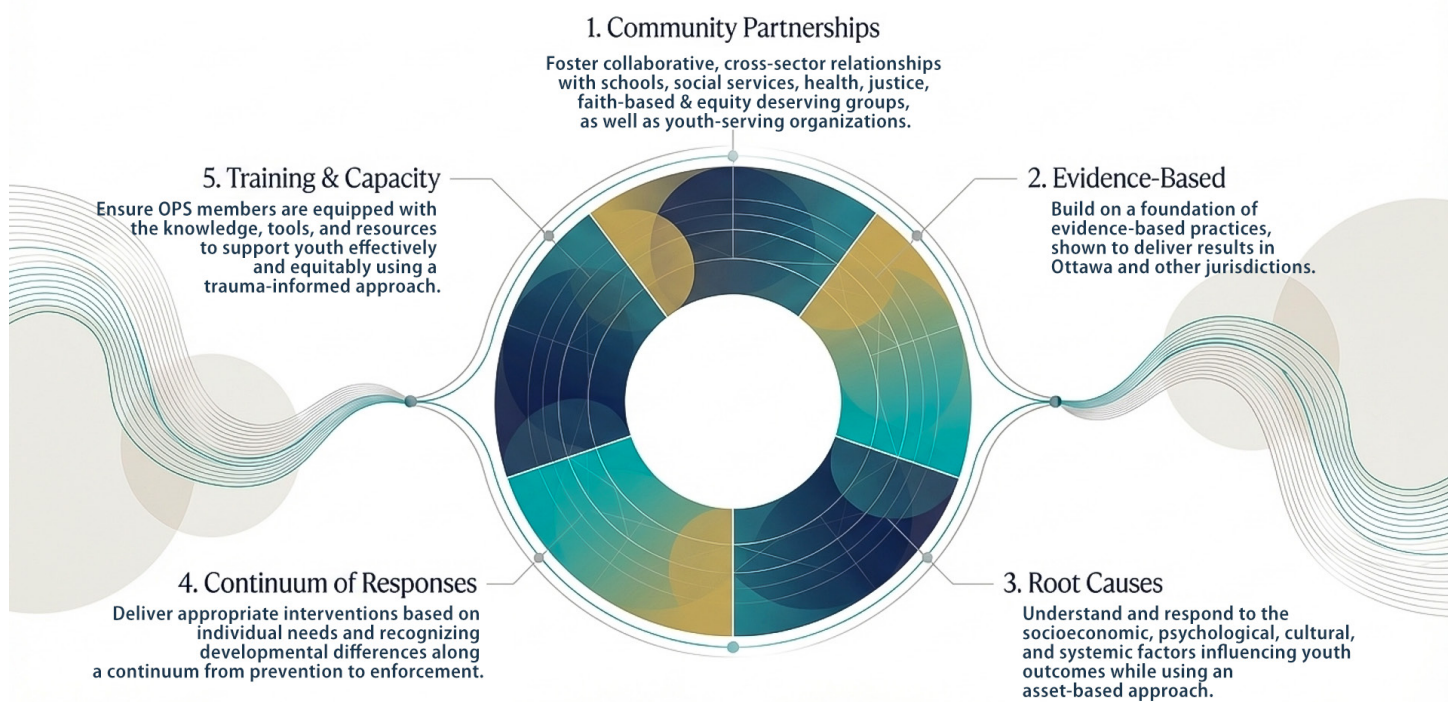
This strategy is grounded in the Community Safety and Well-Being framework. It emphasizes prevention, social development, and early intervention with the goal of addressing issues before they escalate into crisis or criminal involvement. It is also built on strong partnerships with families, schools, youth-serving agencies, and community organizations across Ottawa.

We are also working with community partners to improve how we respond to youth experiencing mental health crises. Initiatives such as the Youth-Centered Mobile Crisis Response Team, delivered with the Youth Services Bureau and local health providers, help ensure young people in crisis receive timely, trauma-informed support in the community.

This strategy reflects the commitment of OPS members who work every day to support youth, as well as the important contributions of our community partners, educators, service providers, families, and young people themselves. It is another step in strengthening how we prevent harm, build trust, and support safer communities.

Eric Stubbs
Chief, Ottawa Police Service

GUIDING PILLARS



EMERGING YOUTH TRENDS IN OTTAWA 2019–2024

While Ottawa's overall crime rates have shown a decrease compared to the national average, they remain higher than the national average in certain categories. In 2024, Ottawa's Crime Severity Index (CSI) was 55.8, reflecting a 3.1% increase from the previous year (Canada Crime Report).

Comparatively, Ottawa fares better than many other Canadian cities in terms of overall crime rates.

However, specific concerns persist regarding youth involvement in crime and victimization. Youth are also facing greater vulnerability to online harms, human trafficking, and peer-influenced group violence such as swarming and assaults.

Many of these young people are also victims of



trauma, social isolation, systemic disadvantages, and family instability. Recognizing that the brain continues to develop until around age 24, it's crucial to address youth behavior within this developmental context.

An analysis of youth-involved incidents from 2019 to 2024 reveals significant increases in several areas:

- **Sexual Offenses:** Incidents related to child Child Sexual Exploitation and Explicit Material increased by 400%. Sexual assault cases involving partners rose by 114%.
- **Violent Crimes:** Robbery incidents involving youth nearly tripled, with business-related

robberies showing the most significant increase. Threats to individuals increased by 35%.

- **Weapon Possession:** Youth-related possession of weapons, including firearms, doubled over the five-year period.
- **Mental Health:** Mental health-related incidents, including apprehensions and voluntary hospital admissions, doubled between 2019 and 2024.
- **Victimization:** Youth victimization in sexual offenses, such as sexual assault and sexual touching, increased between 27% and 425%. Online-related crimes like child luring and extortion saw significant rises, with extortion cases increasing by 350%.

AN INCLUSIVE EQUITY-CENTRED APPROACH

Ottawa is one of Canada's most diverse and rapidly growing urban centres. Nearly 36% of the population identifies as a visible minority, including significant Black, Arab, South Asian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, and Latin American communities, alongside a large Indigenous population of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth.

The Ottawa Police Service Youth Strategy emphasizes culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and equity-focused engagement.

It recognizes that youth from racialized, newcomer, and marginalized backgrounds may face complex relationships with policing institutions. This strategy aims to ensure that every young person—regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, socioeconomic status, or immigration background—feels safe, valued, and heard.

Through this approach, the Service is committed to



YIPI

Youth In Policing Initiative

A summer employment program that provides local youth with paid work experience within OPS and community placements. The program focuses on building life skills, mentorship, and positive relationships with police, while helping participants develop confidence, teamwork, and pathways to future employment.



YAC

Youth Advisory Committee

The Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) brings youth voices to decision-makers, providing input on programs, policies, and issues that affect young people to ensure services are inclusive and effective.



CADET CORPS

A youth development program that builds leadership, discipline, and confidence through mentorship from police officers. Cadets take part in training, community events, and team-based activities, while gaining exposure to policing and developing skills for future careers in public service.

engaging diverse youth voices to guide policy and programming, creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and relationship-building, and supporting resilience and leadership across Ottawa's communities.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

This renewed strategy reflects years of work by our Community Youth Unit (CYU) and other dedicated members, alongside input from community partners, service providers, educators, and young people.

The development of the Ottawa Police Service Youth Strategy was informed by extensive research and broad consultation to ensure it aligns with best practices and community priorities. This process included engagement with Police Services across Canada to understand national approaches to youth intervention, as well as a review of academic literature on effective strategies for working with vulnerable youth.

Locally, initial consultations were held with the Ottawa Youth Justice Services Network and the Ottawa Police Service Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) to ensure the strategy reflects community needs and the priorities of our Community Youth Unit.

Additionally, a survey was conducted with youth-serving agency partners across Ottawa to gather input on their priorities for police involvement and the overall direction of the strategy.

**“...THEY
EMPHASIZED
THE
IMPORTANCE
OF ADDRESSING
THE ROOT
CAUSES
BEHIND THESE
CONCERNS.”**

WORKING WITH DISTRICTS

The development of the Ottawa Police Service Youth Strategy was informed by extensive research and broad consultation to ensure it aligns with best practices and community priorities.

Prior to releasing this public document, we held an additional facilitated community consultation with partners from youth-serving organizations and diverse communities most impacted by this work. Participants shared that some of the most pressing issues facing youth today include social media influences, rising youth violence, mental health challenges, and substance use. They emphasized the importance of addressing the root causes behind these concerns.

Participants also spoke about the varying degrees of trust that youth and families have toward police, often shaped by past trauma and experiences of discrimination. They noted that police typically engage with youth during moments of crisis, and there is a strong interest in more proactive involvement to build positive relationships and humanize officers beyond the badge.

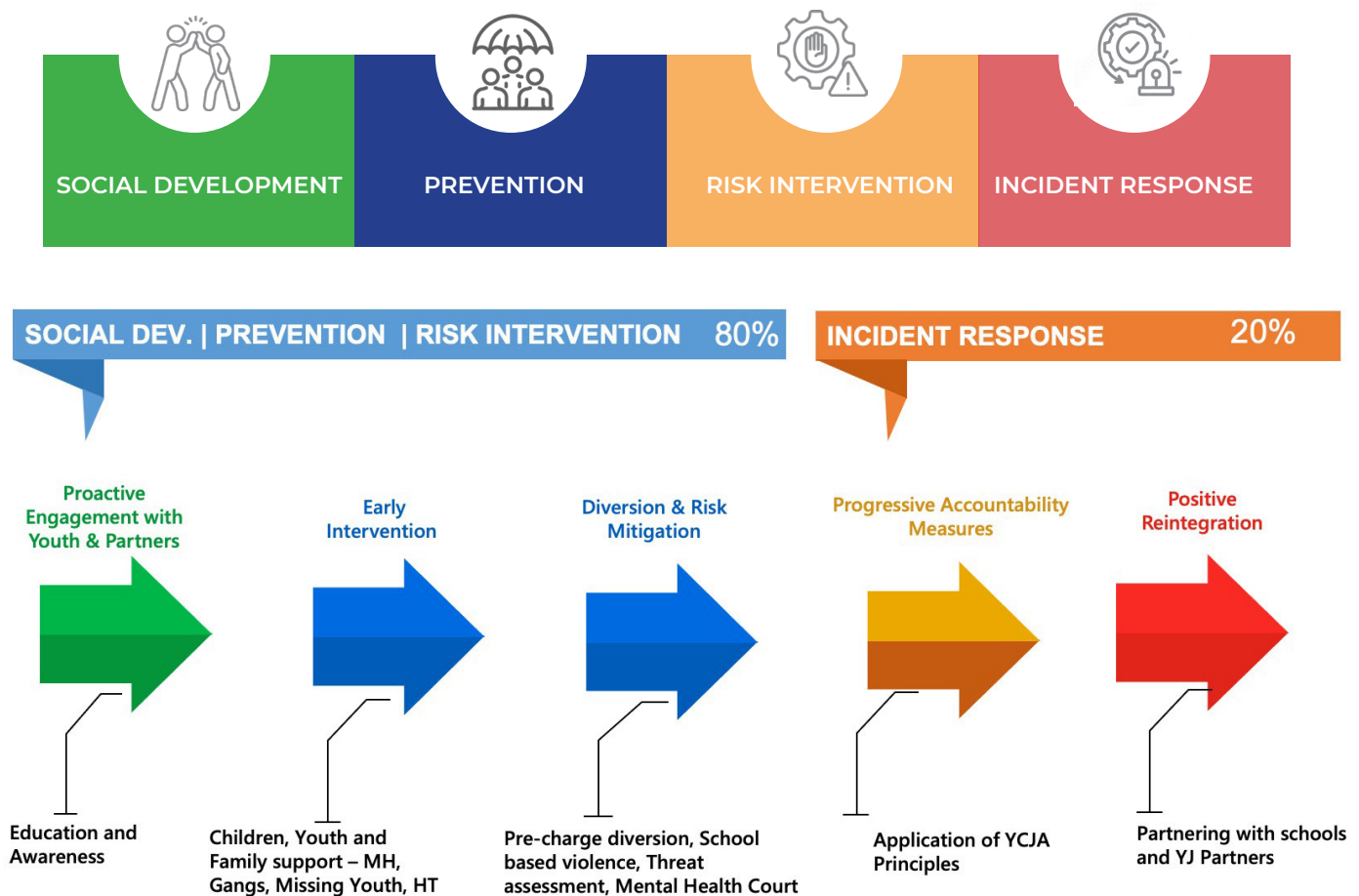
Community organizations called for greater transparency and accessibility regarding youth crime statistics and

police interactions, suggesting that this information be added to the Ottawa Police dashboard.

This comprehensive approach ensures that the Youth Strategy is evidence-based, community-informed, and responsive to the needs of Ottawa's youth. It is not a new direction—it is the latest evolution of a long-standing commitment to building a safer, healthier future for Ottawa's young people.

STRATEGIC CSWB ALIGNMENT

Community Youth Unit Officers within the Ottawa Police Service play a critical role across the four levels of the CSWB Framework. Their work is grounded in relationship-building, and collaborative problem-solving with youth, families, schools, and community partners.





SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT - Upstream

Goal: Improve youth outcomes by addressing systemic and environmental conditions.

- **School Engagement:** Serve as accessible, consistent liaisons between police and local schools (e.g., presentations, proactive presence, support to school staff).
- **Community Engagement:** Participate in community events, youth activities, recreation programs, and cultural gatherings to build trust and break down barriers.
- **Youth Voice Advocacy:** Elevate youth voices in OPS policy development by engaging directly with youth through our OPS Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), youth programs (Youth in Policing Initiative (YPI), Ottawa Police Cadets Corps (OPCC), Soccer Mentoring, and Cutz 4 Kidz) and other youth leadership groups.
- **Partnership Building:** Collaborate with local youth serving organizations, settlement agencies, faith-based & equity deserving groups to support community programming (e.g., mentoring, life skills workshops).

PREVENTION - Targeted Intervention for Vulnerable Youth

Goal: Reduce the likelihood that vulnerable youth will experience harm or become involved in criminal activity.

- **Identification of Early Risk Factors:** Identify the unique needs of youth under age 12 and connect them with resources; recognize signs of family conflict, school disengagement, substance use, child welfare involvement or association with high-risk peers.
- **Referrals to Support Services:** Connect youth and families with mental health workers, social workers, housing supports, and community-based programming related to vulnerability associated with missing youth, human trafficking, street level violence.
- **Relationship-Based Policing:** Build ongoing, trust-based relationships with youth before crises occur, allowing for proactive and non-punitive engagement.
- **Support in Transitional Periods:** Work with schools and agencies during critical transition times (e.g., re-entry after suspension, change of residence, entering high school).

RISK INTERVENTION - Timely, Coordinated Response to Elevated Risk

Goal: Address specific risks that, if left unaddressed, may lead to harm or criminal justice involvement.

- **Youth-Centered Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT-Youth):** In partnership with the Youth Services Bureau (YSB), OPS delivers a specialized mobile response for youth experiencing mental health or safety-related crises. The team pairs a Crisis Intervention-trained officer with a specialized child and youth worker to provide trauma-informed, community-based support and connect youth and families to appropriate services.
- **Collaborative Case Management:** Participate in multi-disciplinary response tables (e.g. Safety and Freedom from Exploitation Together for our Youth (SAFETY) for youth at elevated risk of Human Trafficking & Safety Talk About Youth (STAY) for missing youth) to develop coordinated action plans.
- **Crisis Intervention:** Engage youth in high-risk situations (e.g., conflict at home or school, involvement in violence or drug use) with a focus on de-escalation and harm reduction (Violent Threat Risk Assessment (VTRA), Critical Incident Review Committee (CIRC), Assessment of Risk to Others (ARTO)).
- **Diversion Pathways:** Promote and facilitate alternatives to criminal charges, such as extra-judicial measures or restorative justice referrals (diversion referrals, Youth Mental Health Court). In Ottawa, Diversion referrals are forwarded to an organization contracted by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) who completes an assessment of the youth and ensures the right approach is implemented that best serves the needs of the youth.
- **Safety Planning:** Work with schools and families to ensure safety planning for youth at risk of violence, exploitation, or struggling with mental health/substance use challenges.

INCIDENT RESPONSE - Post Incident Support

Goal: Provide immediate, reactive responses to incidents involving youth where public safety is threatened.

- **Crisis Support with Youth Lens:** Respond to incidents involving youth with a trauma-informed, age-appropriate approach.
- **Post-Incident Follow-Up:** Ensure follow-up with youth and families after emergency events to re-engage in longer-term support.
- **Victim Support Coordination:** Collaborate with victim services, school supports, and child protection to address impacts of violence or trauma.
- **Street Level Violence & Human Trafficking:** In collaboration with specialized units and community partners, help youth exit situations involving street level violence and human trafficking.
- **Progressive Accountability Measures:** Provide youth a fair, step-by-step consequences that match behaviour, promote responsibility, and support growth.
- **Positive Reintegration:** In partnership with school boards, youth justice and youth serving community organizations provide support to youth reintegrating into community following a serious incident.

“.....every member has a role to play in making sure those interactions [with youth] are informed, compassionate, and focused on the best possible outcome.”

~Eric Stubbs, Chief OPS



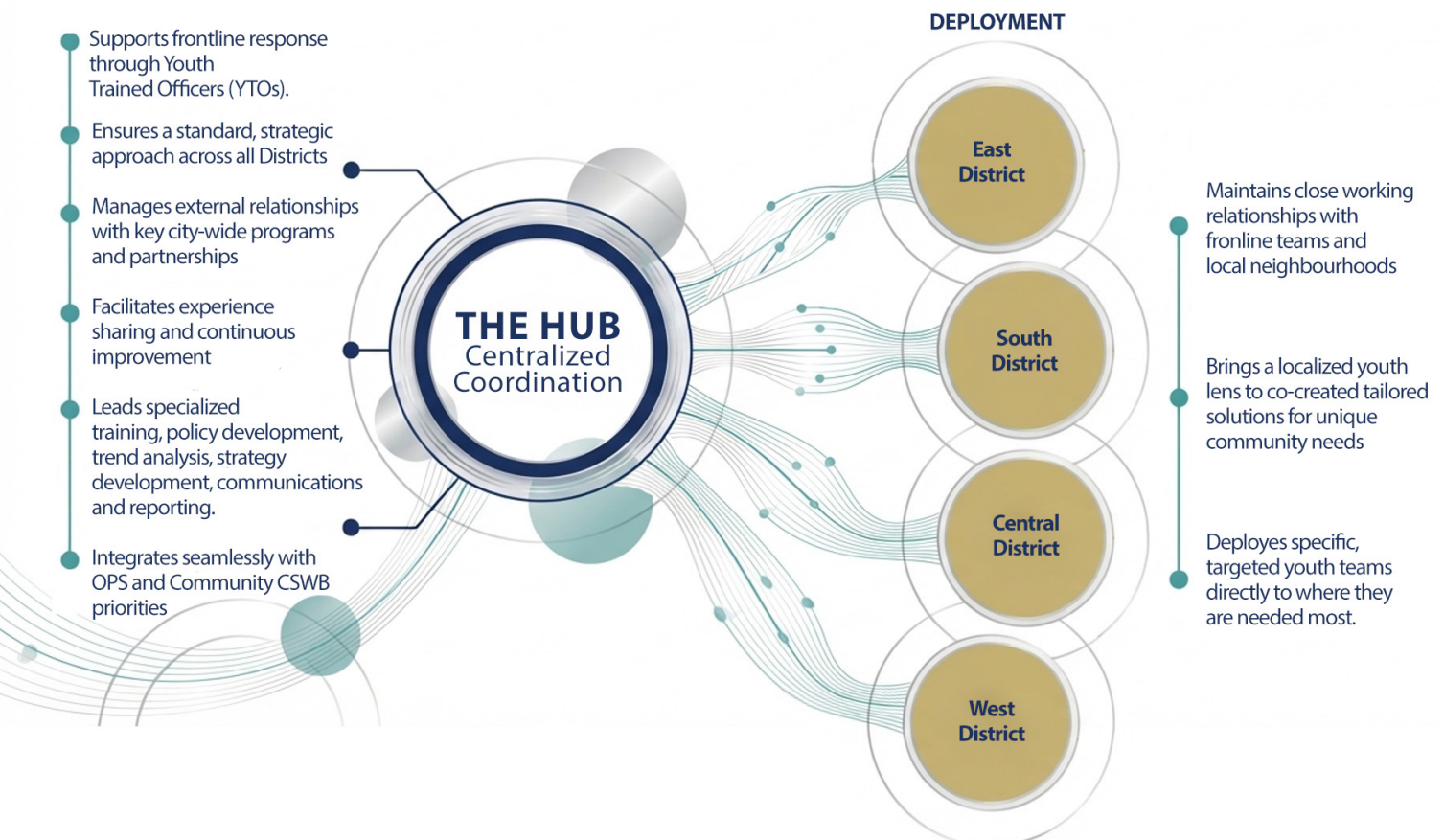
COMMUNITY YOUTH UNIT

A Balanced Service Delivery Model

OPS employs a balanced service model for our Community Youth Unit (CYU) to ensure both District-level collaborative engagement with District teams and local communities, and organization-wide consistency through a centralized structure. CYU officers work within Districts to maintain close working relationships with frontline teams, schools, and community groups to address local issues. All CYU officers report to a central command that provides strategic direction, capacity building, oversight, and coordination.



BALANCING CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL RESPONSE



CENTRALIZED COORDINATION AND MANAGEMENT

Centralized structure monitors all youth-related engagements and services, and ensures:

- 1. Maintaining a standard approach across all Districts.** Common policies, procedures, and engagement frameworks ensure youth are supported consistently, regardless of where they live.
- 2. Supporting frontline response through Youth Trained Officers (YTOs).** YTOs within patrol teams provide youth-focused expertise, helping ensure interactions are informed by legislation, developmental considerations, and diversion opportunities.
- 3. Facilitating experience-sharing and continuous improvement.** Officers can regularly exchange knowledge, discuss emerging challenges, and identify successful practices.
- 4. Strengthening partnerships with external stakeholders.** A unified command allows for more strategic engagement with school boards, social services, community organizations, and diversion program partners.
- 5. Enhancing capacity building and professional development.** The centralized team coordinates specialized training, mentoring, and resource development for youth officers, including equipping members with enhanced knowledge of youth legislation, adolescent development, and diversion opportunities.
- 6. Improving communications, data analysis, and program monitoring.** Trend analysis, performance measurement, and communication strategies are centralized to ensure accountability and responsiveness.
- 7. Aligning youth intervention with the OPS Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) objectives.** The model enables the Community Youth Unit to integrate seamlessly with broader OPS priorities for prevention, risk intervention, and collaborative problem-solving.

ENCOMPASSING YOUTH OUTREACH

THREE YOUTH FOCUSED ROLES COVERING THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY ECOSYSTEM

OPS Team	Primary Mandate	Demographic focus	CSWB Alignment
CSET (Community School Engagement Teams)	Schools	General student body and school staff	Education, early intervention, principal support, and proactive relationship building.
CYET (Community Youth Engagement Team)	Neighbourhoods	Vulnerable, Missing, or at-risk youth	Complex interventions, human trafficking prevention, streetlevel violence, and bridging gaps from CSET
YTO (Youth Trained Officers)	Frontline Patrol	Youth in active incidents	Bringing youth-focused legislative expertise, adolescent developmental knowledge, and diversion opportunities to standard patrol responses.

DISTRICT LEVEL ENGAGEMENT

Two youth teams are responsible for District level engagement with youth and partners.

- **Community School Engagement Team (CSET)**
Designated to school-based engagement and support.
- **Community Youth Engagement Team (CYET)**
Focused on working with the city's most vulnerable and at-risk youth, while ensuring accountability for youth involved in higher levels of crime.

Teams support OPS's strategy of localized, relationship-based policing by:

1. Strengthening alignment with OPS's commitment to work closely with smaller local communities, ensuring policing efforts are responsive to unique neighbourhood needs while enhancing meaningful youth engagement.
2. Bringing a youth lens to Districts, helping shape strategies that reflect the realities and priorities of local communities.
3. Deepening partnerships with community organizations and youth-serving agencies to support coordinated responses and stronger outcomes for youth.
4. Applying a strong understanding of local issues to co-create tailored solutions, build trust, and promote education and awareness among youth, parents, and the broader community.

provides schools with direct access to Community School Engagement Team (CSET) officers, whose specialized training in youth-related issues positions them as trusted partners in the school environment. Their role centers on supporting Principals and Vice-Principals with guidance while strengthening connections with students and staff through educational presentations, relationship-building, and early intervention. These efforts help create safer learning environments and provide support to youth who may be vulnerable to victimization.

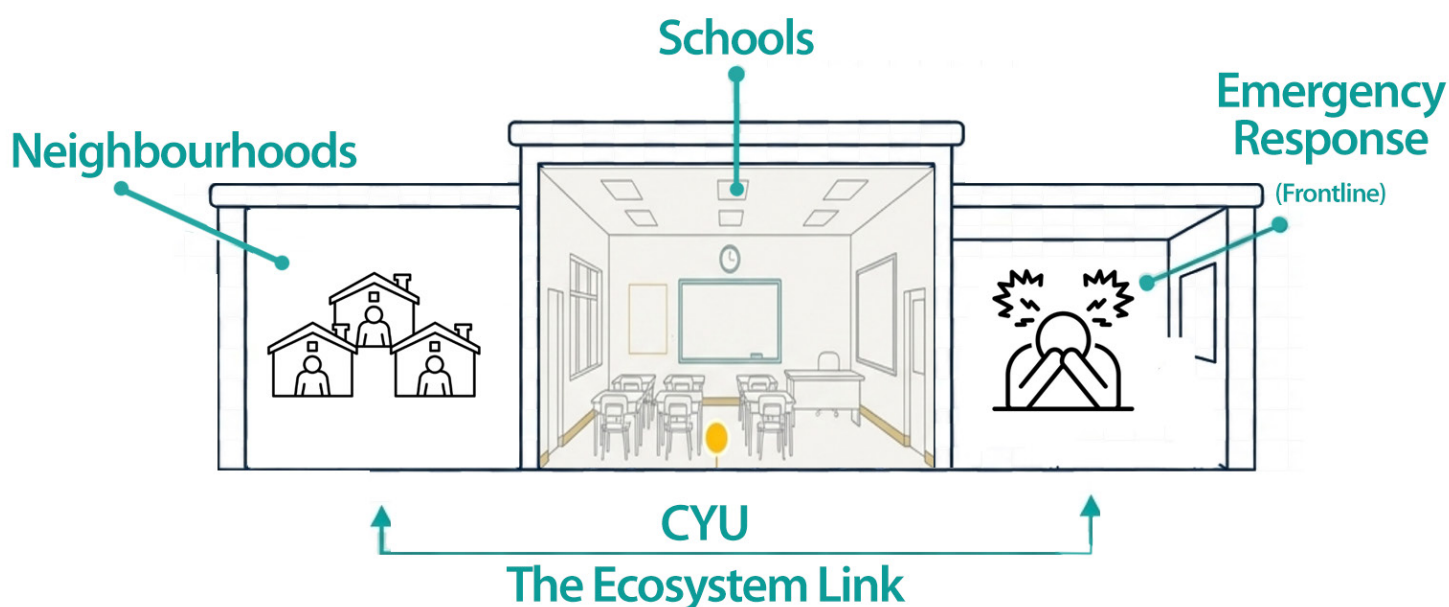
When greater intervention is required, CSET officers are supported by CYET officers, who work directly in neighbourhoods with children, youth, families, and youth-serving partners. Together, officers from CSET and CYET form the Community Youth Unit, serving as critical connectors between OPS and the broader youth-serving ecosystem. Their integrated presence across schools, neighbourhoods, and community spaces enables:

- Early identification of needs
- Strengthened trust with marginalized youth
- Proactive de-escalation of emerging issues
- Sustained relationships across systems

Collectively, these efforts advance the overarching goal of the OPS Youth Strategy: reducing youth victimization and criminality by addressing root causes through partnership, prevention, and timely intervention.

ENGAGEMENT WITH SCHOOLS

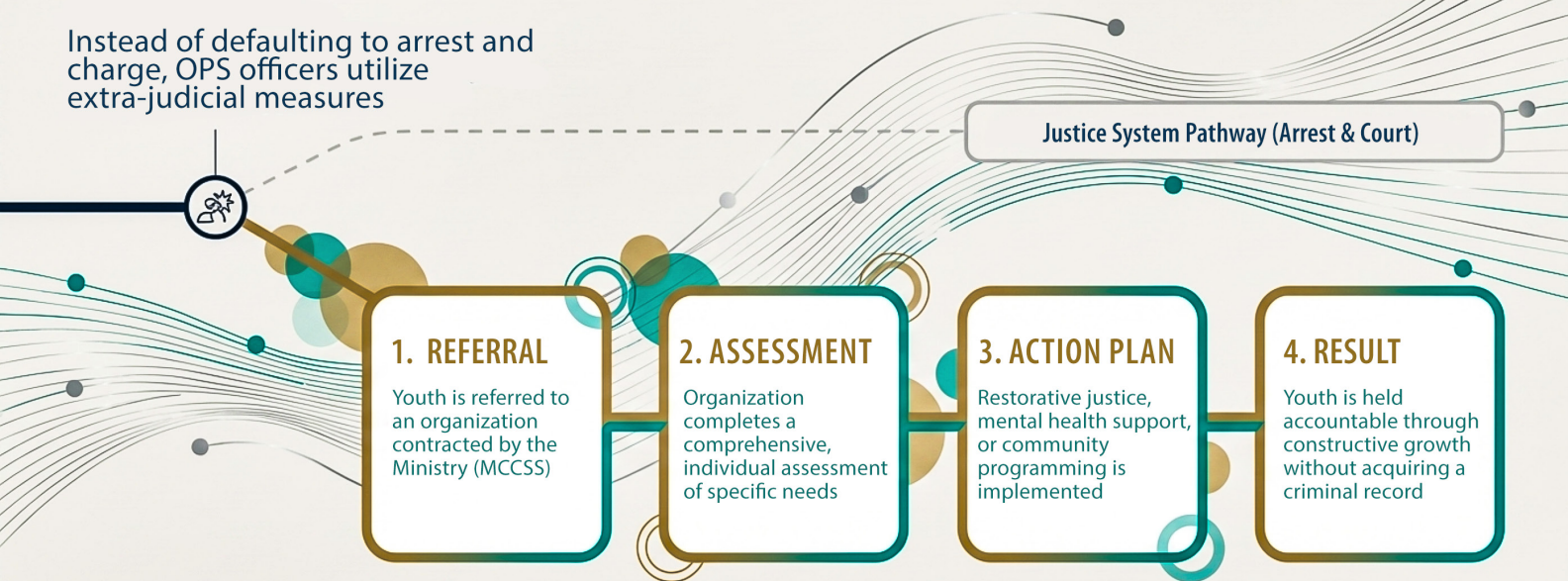
Launched in January 2025, this initiative is a cornerstone of the OPS Youth Strategy, developed in collaboration with Ottawa's four publicly funded school boards. It



DIVERSION PATHWAYS: PRIORITIZING RESPONSIBILITY AND GROWTH OVER CHARGES

THE DECISION POINT:

Instead of defaulting to arrest and charge, OPS officers utilize extra-judicial measures



WHAT WE ARE STRIVING FOR

Short-term Goals (1-2 years)

- Providing the right response at the right time to the right youth
- Strengthening information sharing with partners
- Increasing access to non-police interventions

Long-term goals (3-5+ years)

- Measurable reduction in frequency & severity of youth victimization and offending
- Enhanced community trust & OPS legitimacy among youth & families
- Improved youth well-being & safety

The Accountability Dashboard (KPIs)

- Diversion rates from the justice system
- Reduction in youth victimization and offending
- Feedback loops via youth/community surveys and an annual public transparency report

HOW WE WILL MEASURE PROGRESS

Performance Indicators

- Youth diverted from the justice system
- Strength and reach of partnerships and collaborative initiatives
- Feedback from youth and community (surveys, focus groups)
- Trends in youth victimization and offending
- Reduction in youth-related calls-for-service to frontline patrol officers

Reporting Cycle

- Annual public report on progress and outcomes, ensuring transparency and accountability
- Ongoing updates to OPS leadership and community partners to support continuous learning and shared responsibility



This strategy reflects the Ottawa Police Service's commitment to advancing youth safety and well-being through prevention, collaboration, and evidence-informed action. Guided by the Community Safety and Well-Being framework, it prioritizes early intervention, trust-building with youth and community partners, and culturally responsive, trauma-informed engagement. By addressing the unique needs of vulnerable youth and supporting their potential, the Service affirms its role as both a law enforcement agency and a collaborative partner in creating a safer, more resilient Ottawa where all young people can thrive.

Safeguarding Ottawa's Youth Requires a United Interconnected Front



The Ottawa Police Service **affirms its dual role**: we are a law enforcement agency, but equally, a collaborative community partner.

By addressing the unique needs of vulnerable youth through evidence-informed, trauma-responsive action, we can build a safer, more resilient Ottawa where all young people can thrive.



CONTACT

Supporting youth is a shared responsibility, and meaningful impact happens through connection and collaboration. We encourage youth, families, schools, and community partners to reach out with questions, ideas, or opportunities to work together in strengthening youth safety and well-being across our city.



474 Elgin Street,
Ottawa, ON



Tel: 613-236-1222
Ext: 5355



youth@ottawapolice.ca
www.ottawapolice.ca