

# Incarcerated Youth Perspectives on Violence: *The Voices from the Inside*

*New Mexico Incarcerated Youth Speak Out about Violence*  
September 2007



Prepared by: Roberta M. Rael

Office of Injury Prevention  
Injury and Behavioral Epidemiology Bureau  
Epidemiology and Response Division  
New Mexico Department of Health  
Funded by Centers For Disease Control and  
Prevention ESCAPE Grant #U17/CCU624342-01

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## *Mission Statements of Collaborating Partners*

The mission of the ***New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH)*** is to promote health and sound health policy, prevent disease and disability, improve health service systems, and ensure that essential public health functions and safety net services are available to New Mexicans.

***New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD)*** believes in the strength and resiliency of families who are our partners and for whom we advocate to enhance their safety and well-being. We respectfully serve and support children and families and supervise youth in a responsive community-based system of care that is client-centered, family-focused and culturally competent.

***Youth Diagnostic and Detention Center (YDDC), New Mexico Girls School*** provides incarceration for committed, adjudicated youth up to the age of 21. Services include education, family visitation, mental health counseling, physical health care, sexual offender therapeutic services and life-skills. Programs offered include: gender specific programming for females, self edification programs, bonding and attachment sessions with incarcerated youth and their children, Native American programming, hospitality, service industry training and family counseling.

***Albuquerque Boy's Reintegration Center (ABRC)*** provides adjudicated male juvenile offenders age 16 to 21 a step down program as they are paroled from a facility. ABRC assists the clients in developing internal controls while providing clients with positive adult role models and involvement in community activities. Pertinent groups prepare the client for reintegration into their home community as well as assisting them in resolving problems that led to their adjudication, including individual rehabilitative programs, mental health individual and group counseling.

***The Juvenile Parole Board (JPB)*** issues conditions of parole for juveniles released from facilities administered by the Juvenile Division of the Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD). While the JPB is administratively attached to CYFD, it has autonomous power to parole and release adjudicated youth committed to the Juvenile Justice Division of CYFD.

In addition to setting conditions of an adjudicated child's parole, the JPB has the authority to reprimand the juvenile or revoke parole if parole conditions are not met. JPB conditions often require juvenile offenders to participate in available rehabilitation services. The Board sets the conditions and coordinates the parole process which is then carried out by the CYFD supervising parole agent.

***Inspired Leadership*** is a New Mexico consulting group that provides group facilitation, youth and adult leadership training, organizational development, positive youth program development, project management, radio production and grant writing.

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Teresa Jacobs, MPH, DOH OIP Violence Against Women Prevention Coordinator

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Emili-Jon Gonzales - Deputy Director

### **Children, Youth & Families Department**

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### **Youth Participants**

Sandia Cottage  
Milagro Cottage  
Manzano Cottage  
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Cynthia Rael-Vigil - Consultant

### **Facilitation Team:**

Roberta M. Rael, BA, Inspired Leadership  
Geraldo Rivera, BA, DOH OIP Prevention Unit Manager/Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator  
Teresa Jacobs, MPH, DOH OIP Violence Against Women Prevention Coordinator  
Kim Zamarin - MPH Consultant  
Nakya Estrada - Inspired Leadership

# Executive Summary

New Mexico has some of the highest rates of youth violence in the country. Suicide and homicide are the second and third leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds in New Mexico. In 2002, New Mexico was among the states with the highest rates of homicide and suicide for all ages. <sup>1</sup>

In 2004, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided a two year grant to the New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) to initiate activities to reduce youth violence in New Mexico. In 2006, Inspired Leadership was contracted to obtain perspectives from incarcerated youth to assure inclusion of youth with an in-depth experience with violence.

Youth participation in violence prevention work is integral: youth perspective has proven to be valuable to policy and program processes. Youth who participate have a sense of inclusion, involvement and empowerment. These are three basic components of developing a sense of personal value and self-esteem. The intent of this special project is to provide a voice from a segment of the community that typically does not have an opportunity to participate in program, policy and institutional change.

This report reflects what incarcerated youth in New Mexico had to say about their own life history related to violence, how incarceration impacted their lives, and what risk and protective factors exist that will prevent or propel them into the adult system of incarceration after they are released from their current commitments. This information was retrieved through the use of focus groups that were designed specifically for this population of incarcerated youth.

## Background:

This special project was initiated from the New Mexico Department of Health, Office of Injury Prevention. A successful collaboration developed between the New Mexico Juvenile Parole Board, Children, Youth and Families, New Mexico Youth Diagnostic Development Center (YDDC) and the New Mexico Boy's Reintegration Center in order to implement this project.

*Youth violence* was defined as aggressive behaviors that may result in injury or death committed by and against youth. Such behaviors are exemplified by child maltreatment, youth suicide, sexual violence, school violence, bullying, community violence, teen dating violence, and domestic violence involving children, youth and young adults (0-24 years of age).

The definition of *youth* utilized in this assessment



*Young people post their responses on the environmental model pictograph.*

includes children through young adults as specified by the CDC and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) which identifies youth as adolescents between the ages of 14 and 25.

Although a large body of research was reviewed prior to implementing the focus groups, the U.S Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's "Predictors of Youth Violence Report" is referenced in this report. The basic findings of this special project are in line with the larger scientific study.

### **Participants:**

There were 20 focus group participants representing approximately 8% of the 259 incarcerated youth in New Mexico. The focus groups consisted of one female group and three male groups, one of which was a group of paroled youth. Although the majority of the participants came from Bernalillo County, seven other New Mexico counties were represented. The majority of the participants were of Hispanic ethnicity. This aligns with the demographic data for incarcerated youth in New Mexico.

### **Methodology:**

A semi-structured focus group process involving interactive activities that included the following was employed:

1. Individual participants created a visual representation of the story of their lives.
2. Participants reflected on how incarceration had impacted their lives.
3. Participants identified risk and protective factors that would prevent or propel them into the adult system.

### **Identification of Risk and Protective Factors:**

Some of the *risk factors* attributed to violent behavior for the participants of this project stem from family history of violence, family history of substance abuse, family history of gang or illegal activities, economic stress, emotional stress, being a victim of violence at an early age, poor health, low academic achievement, access to and a history of carrying weapons, attempted suicide, dealing with prejudice or racism, and early alcohol and/or drug use.

*Protective factors* that the incarcerated youth identified as key determinants to keep them out of the adult penal system included positive and supportive relationships with family and friends, parental involvement or an association with another adult who provides positive mentoring, a sense of connection with school teachers, participation in religious or spiritual activities as well as community involvement.

The development of positive internal assets, such as self-love, self-esteem, positive self-talk and believing in oneself, were identified as essential by both males and females. Other individual protective factors identified as important when faced with the temptations and difficulties associated with returning to past/home environments included personal discipline, mental state and strong interpersonal skills.

The participants identified community protective factors that included the opportunity for vocational and educational placement and accessibility to jobs that pay a living wage in their communities. Value was placed on gaining vocational skills while incarcerated to increase their employability upon release.

The following are the conclusions derived from the 20 incarcerated youth participants:

### Conclusions:

1. The insight that incarcerated youth bring to the violence prevention field is powerful and including their voices and life experiences in reducing violence is important.
2. Incarcerated youth want to make a positive contribution. The participants believed that this project provided an opportunity to make a positive contribution, even while they were incarcerated.
3. Supportive adults in youths' lives are probably the most important protective factor for staying out of the juvenile and adult justice systems.
4. There is an inherent tension for incarcerated youth between wanting to be reunited with family and knowing that their family environments present a major risk factor.
5. Incarceration provided the youth with safety, structure, education and an environment that appeared to be healthier than the environments they came from.
6. Releasing youth to the environments from which they came, without in-depth support in each of the (ecological model) domains does not provide for positive long term outcomes.
7. Incarcerated youth desire a life that is free of violence, crime and stress.
8. Incarcerated youth are children who need and want to be cared for, loved and accepted.

### Recommendations:

1. Place resources in early childhood, parenting, prevention and early intervention programs.
2. Provide parenting classes for all new parents in New Mexico that include basic information on the long term effects of substance and physical abuse.
3. Provide parenting classes for all incarcerated youth: some are already parents; many will be parents in the future and can learn how to re-parent themselves as a means of healing past abuse and breaking the cycle of violence.
4. Provide (vocational) educational opportunities that can be converted to employable skills once released so that the incarcerated youth are employable.
5. Place resources in mentoring programs, including mentoring for youth that are incarcerated.
6. Encourage policy makers, program managers and funding providers to evaluate the long term impact of incarceration vs. rehabilitation to provide a stronger focus on rehabilitation for youth offenders.
7. Develop in-depth reintegration plans for each youth released back into their former environments.
8. Encourage policy makers and program managers to continue to work on solutions to the violence, crime and poverty links in New Mexico.
9. Continue to include incarcerated youth voice in program, policy and institutional change in New Mexico.
10. Include incarcerated youth voice in the Governor's Gang Task Force.
11. Include incarcerated youth voice in the Governor's Youth Violence Task Force.



# Introduction

New Mexico has some of the highest rates of youth violence in the country. Suicide and homicide are the second and third leading cause of death for 15-24 year olds in the State. In 2002, New Mexico was among the states with the highest rates of homicide and suicide for all ages. <sup>1</sup>

In 2004, New Mexico Department of Health (NMDOH) obtained an ESCAPE grant (Enhancing State Capacity to Address Child and Adolescent Health through Violence Prevention, # U17/CCU 624342-01) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to develop a statewide youth violence and prevention and intervention strategy. As part of the CDC grant, NMDOH embarked on a comprehensive assessment of factors contributing to youth violence in the State. The assessment would lead to the development and implementation of strategic plans for prevention and intervention systems.

In 2006, Inspired Leadership was contracted to obtain “youth voice” on risk and protective factors from youth across the state of New Mexico. This effort resulted in the report *Youth Violence in New Mexico*.

As a result of the planning grant, a Violence Free Youth Partnership and Strategic Plan were established in 2005. Within this Strategic Plan, seven strategic intentions were identified:

1. Create intergenerational partnerships that help heal communities.
2. Connect, inspire and equip young people to become leaders.
3. Educate all levels of policy makers on the current realities of youth violence in New Mexico and guide them toward possible solutions.

4. Establish a network of youth and adults to help educate everyone to lead, learn, heal and make positive healthy choices.
5. Create meaningful activities with youth for youth and by youth that facilitate education and entertainment in a safe environment.
6. Strengthen community and school collaborations to educate students to better their communities.
7. Jumpstart educational outreach through use of technology and research. <sup>2</sup>

In 2006, in accordance with the NMDOH *Violence Free Youth Partnership Strategic Plan*, Inspired Leadership was contracted by NMDOH to obtain youth perspectives from incarcerated youth for the purpose of including youth that have an in-depth experience with violence.

Youth participation in violence prevention work is integral to creating long term changes. Youth that participate have a sense of inclusion, involvement and empowerment. These are three basic components of developing a sense of personal value and self-esteem.

The intent of this special project was to bring the voice of incarcerated youth to the table, and to have these youth feel that they too could participate in informing policy makers and program managers of the current realities of youth violence based on their life experience and perspective. This project provided a means for incarcerated youth to feel productive in creating positive change in New Mexico. Therefore, this project aligned with several of the Violence Free Youth Partnership's seven strategic intentions.

A successful collaboration was established between three New Mexico state agencies that resulted in the implementation of this special project. The key collaborators included the New Mexico Department of Health Office of Injury Prevention, the New Mexico Juvenile Parole Board, Children, Youth and Families' YDDC facility and the New Mexico Boy's Reintegration Center.

Staff from each of the agencies participated in providing guidance for the overall project, reviewing the focus group design, selection of participants and providing some staff support to each of the focus groups. Staff from the YDDC also met with the facilitator team to review and provide professional consult on the initial findings.

**Purpose:**

The intent of this special project was to provide a voice from a segment of the community that typically does not have an opportunity to participate in program, policy and institutional change. This special project was designed to provide a voice from incarcerated youth on their life history related to violence, how incarceration has impacted their lives, and what the risk and protective factors are in their lives that will prevent or propel them into the adult system of incarceration.

This report provides a snapshot of what 20 incarcerated youth in New Mexico had to say about their history, current life conditions and their goals and dreams.

**National Data and Research:**

*Youth violence* is defined as aggressive behaviors that may result in injury or death committed by and against youth. Such behaviors are exemplified by child maltreatment, youth suicide, sexual violence, school violence, bullying, community violence, teen dating violence, and domestic violence involving children, youth and young adults (0-24 years of age).

The definition of *youth* utilized in this assessment includes children through young adults as specified by the CDC. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) identifies “transitional” youth as adolescents between the ages of 14 and 25 who are transitioning into adulthood.

In 2000 the U. S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Study group on Serious and Violent Juvenile Offenders devoted two years to analyze research on risk and protective factors for serious and violent juvenile offenders, including predictors of juvenile violence derived from the findings of long-term studies.

The basic framework from this analysis is referenced in this report as a means of comparing the project findings with a larger scientific body of research.

According to the OJJDP’s article (Hawkins, et al, 2000) "Predictors of Youth Violence," "Identifying and addressing the predictors of youth violence at appropriate points in youth development is important for prevention. If risk factors can be decreased and protective factors enhanced by preventative action, then the likelihood of violence should be reduced."<sup>3</sup>

The OJJDP analysis utilized the ecological model which illustrates the risk and protective factors across these five social and environmental domains: Individual/Personal, Family, Friends/Peers, School and Community.

Following are examples of risk and protective factors identified in the *Juvenile Justice Journal* as a result of analyzing 66 longitudinal studies. (The highlighted bullet points represent the risk factors that the participants of this special project identified in their lives.)

### Predictors of Violent Behavior: (Two Predictors of Youth Violence)

#### Individual Factors:

- Pregnancy and delivery complications
- Low resting heart rate
- Internalizing disorders
- Early initiation of violent behavior
- Involvement in other forms of antisocial behavior
- Beliefs and attitudes favorable to deviant or antisocial behavior

#### Family Factors:

- Parental criminality
- Child maltreatment
- Poor family management practices
- Low levels of parental involvement
- Poor family bonding and family conflict
- Parental attitudes favorable to substance use and violence
- Parent-child separation

#### School Factors:

- Academic Failure
- Low bonding to school
- Truancy and dropping out of school
- Frequent school transitions

#### Peer-related factors:

- Delinquent siblings
- Delinquent peers
- Gang membership

#### Community and Neighborhood Factors:

- Poverty
- Community disorganization
- Availability of drugs and firearms
- Neighborhood adults involved in crime
- Exposure to violence and racial prejudice<sup>3</sup>

### New Mexico's Incarcerated Youth:

According to CYFD's 2006 Annual Report, reviewing data from 2002 to 2006, the demographic information for current incarcerated youth for 2006 was as follows:

- In fiscal year 2006 there were 259 youth that were committed

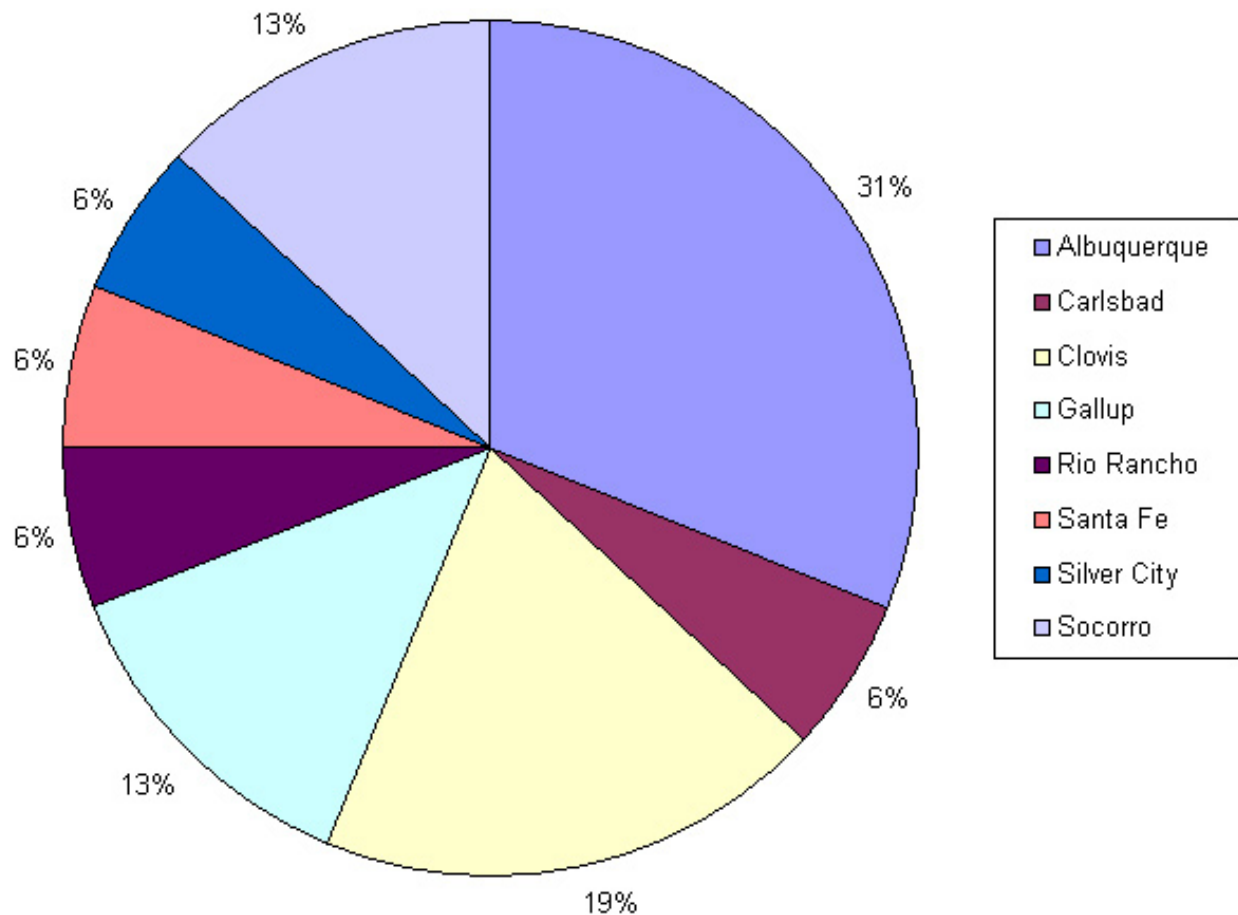
- The median age was 17
- Eighty-five percent of the population was male, 15% were female
- Youth of color make up approximately 85% of the population. The ethnicity breakdown for incarcerated youth was: Hispanic 76.3%, African American 5.4%, Native American 2.7% and White 14.6%<sup>4</sup>

### The Voices from the Inside Participants:

Focus group participants were a sample of 20 incarcerated youth. In order to insure the anonymity of the juveniles who participated in this focus group project, the term "Participants" will be used throughout this report. There were three male focus groups and one female focus group. The majority of the participants came from Bernalillo County but seven other New Mexico counties were represented. The majority of the participants were of Hispanic ethnicity for both the female and male populations. This participant sample is aligned with the demographic data for incarcerated youth in New Mexico.

<i>Ethnicity</i>	
African American	2
White	2
American Indian (Native)	2
Hispanic	13
Not Reported	1
<i>Age</i>	
14	1
15	0
16	3
17	6
18	6
19	3
20	1

## Communities Represented



### Methodology

#### Design and Procedure:

A semi-structured focus group was employed to discover what ideas and thoughts incarcerated young people have about violence, risk, and protective factors. The framework allowed incarcerated youth to share their own life history related to violence, reflect on how incarceration has impacted their lives, and identify what risk and protective factors in their lives will prevent or propel them into the adult system of incarceration. Interactive dynamic activities such as the “River of Life” art exercise were utilized to keep the youth participants engaged and open to the processes involved.

This project assessed anecdotal information using a qualitative analytical approach. A transcriber at each focus group took comprehensive notes on the process and what the participants were articulating during each segment of the 6 hour focus group. A content analysis approach was used to aggregate the data from each focus group. This approach allowed the facilitators to sift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion. This also allowed the facilitators to discover and describe the key focus areas that surfaced from the youth participants. The process allowed inferences to be made, which could then be corroborated by other methods of data collection. The process involved the following:

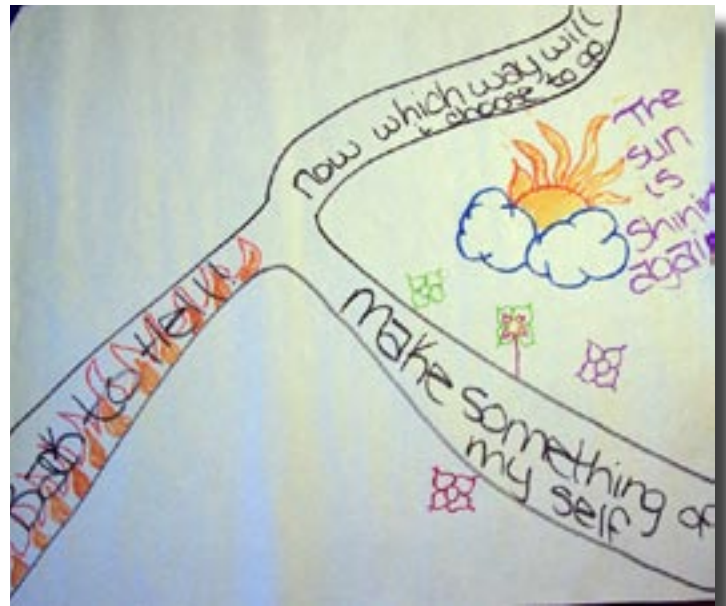
### *River of Life examples*

#### Data Collection Framework

1. Individual participants created a visual representation of the story of their lives.
2. Participants reflected on how incarceration has impacted their lives.
3. Participants identified risk and protective factors that will prevent or propel them into the adult system.

#### **River of Life:**

This exercise provided an interactive method of identifying and reflecting the events that make up a person's life utilizing the river as an analogy. For this project, the river symbolizes the internal and external forces that existed in the participants' lives with a focus on the violence that they have experienced. This exercise involved having the participants share their story verbally with the other participants and the facilitator team. The facilitators encouraged the youth to share as much as they were comfortable with about their history and incorporated consistent probing questions to obtain more in-depth information. Some of the questions asked were: When was the first time that you experienced violence? What type of violence was it? How was love demonstrated to you in your family? What was your family structure? How old were you when you joined the gang (if appropriate)? How old were you when you were adjudicated for the first



time? These questions were asked of all participants.

Each participant explained their River of Life differently and facilitators left the interpretation up to them.

#### **The Impact of Incarceration:**

As a separate process the question, "How has incarceration impacted your life?" yielded valuable information that contributed significantly to the findings of this report. The facilitation approach utilized for this process allowed the youth to speak freely and engage in discussion. The key question

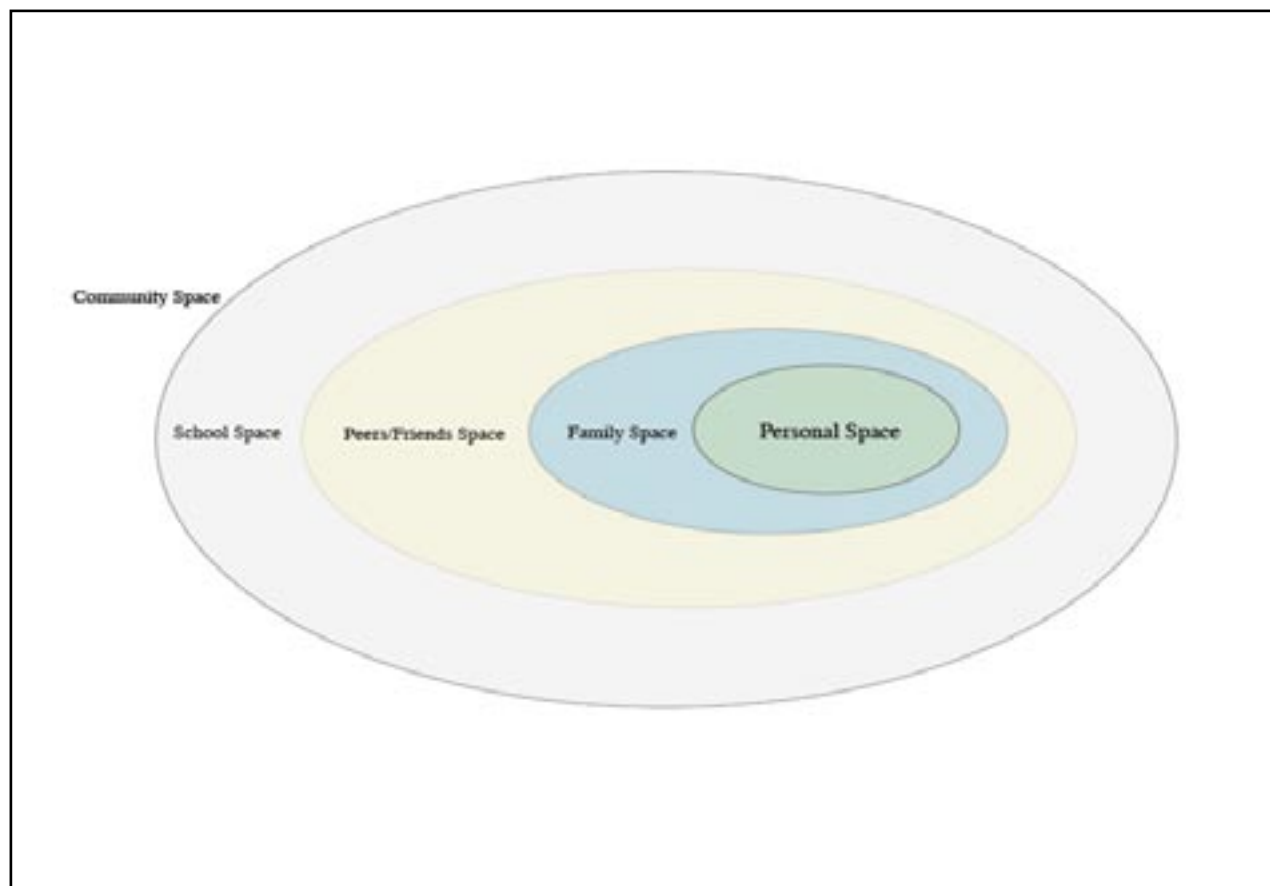
“How has incarceration impacted your life?” was followed up with such questions as, “If you were not here today where would you be?” “What have you learned about yourself?” “How do you know when staff cares about you?”

**Ecological Model for Youth Violence:**

The ecological model was used to illustrate the violence risk and protective factors across five social and environmental domains; individual/personal, family, peers/friends, school, and community/neighborhoods. Utilizing the Ecological Model provided a means of comparing the information that was obtained in

New Mexico with national research. This model also allowed the participants to distinguish the different areas of their lives. There was some flexibility in retrieving this data from the youth, allowing for some overlap and interweave between the five levels. For the purposes of this project, the youth were asked the same questions for each domain; “What will contribute to your ending up in the adult penal system when you are released?” and “What do you need to stay out of the adult system?” Additional questions included, “What do you have going for you?”

*A pictograph of the ecological model used by the young people.*



### Findings: What Did Youth Say?

The findings described are a compilation of the information that was obtained from the three exercises utilized in the six hour focus groups. Quotes from the participants are included throughout this section of the report.

#### River of Life Exercise:

The following three photographs are one of the participant's drawing of his River of Life and his story.



**Participant:** This is where I started here, I was young, used to be calm, grew up by myself. I crossed the line, started hanging with the big boys, started doing all kinds of stuff. I was still going to school but I was fighting and ditching, getting into fights behind the railroad tracks. This is me, that's the cop, the cop car taking me to the detention home. My river started drying up because I got locked up.

**Question:** What do you mean by the river drying up?

**Participant:** Because over here, kind of, I used to do whatever I wanted, growing up, getting out, I used to get into crack. Then my river starts to dry up.

**Question:** How can you put water back in the river?

**Participant:** By doing good, getting honest. Stop doing the things I used to do, just making my life better.

**Question:** How old were you when you first experienced



violence?

**Participant:** I was about two years old. I sort of remember seeing my real dad and my uncles fight. He used to sell coke and one of my uncle overdosed on his stuff. I saw him (Dad) doing it, big old bricks of coke, but he never gave me any of that. At ten I got jumped into the gang, but I'm not in it anymore. I don't want to talk about it.

**Question:** Talk about your family.

**Participant:** I have an older brother and older sister, and a younger sister. I love them a lot; my brother used to take care of me. I never had a dad, my mom was never around; she was out. I don't know what she was doing. My brother was in the back yard getting high, I started going down the street with my friends, and after that I crossed the line. When I got older I got in trouble, I started hanging out with the "big boys." I started fighting with guns. I had my first gun - a 38 special - when I was 12. My older sister found it and gave it to brother and my brother gave it to my mom.

My dad's still in prison, supposedly he is going to get out. I won't talk to him when he gets out. My brother is going to kick the sh\_\_ out of him because he left my mother with my little sister. (Participant's father has been in prison since participant was two years old.)

**Question:** How old were you when you started experimenting with drugs or alcohol?



**Participant:** Young. I started smoking, and I started selling, I started getting my stuff from a homie, a vato. I started selling to everybody. I got my stuff for free, he used to look over me, he used to tell me to go sell, make some money for myself. I did, I started getting worse, started doing drugs. I stopped right when I had my kid, I stopped because I don't want to end up dying or something like that.

**Question:** When you were growing up, how was love shown to you?

**Participant:** No love, just from the streets, that's it. Just my brother a little bit; he raised me, he bought me my clothes, he used to buy me little cars, I still remember that from when I was two years old. He had my back.

**Question:** What could have happened when you were running in the streets by yourself?

**Participant:** I could have died. I got a gun pulled on me three times, they didn't pull the trigger though. I was lucky.

**Question:** How old were you?

**Participant:** 14, 15, and 16. One time they pulled the trigger but they missed. I got lucky on that one.

**Question:** When was the first time you got in trouble with the law, what happened?

**Participant:** This is my first time getting locked up. I got caught once robbing a store, a pharmacy store, when

I was about 12 year old. That's how I first started. They caught me, but my cousin, and homies got away. They took me home to my brother, he got pissed off, he was telling me off and sh\_ \_.

**Question:** Is your brother into gangs?

**Participant:** My brother is a south side, he's always been south side. But he dosen't bang.

**Question:** Who do you have in your life right now?

**Participant:** My son. I'm not going to make the same mistakes my dad made. (I didn't even put him in the river of life.)

**Question:** How old is your child?

**Participant:** A year and nine months.

**Question:** How long is your commitment?

**Participant:** I have two years left. I have been locked up a year and a half.

### General Findings:

Some of the *risk factors* that are attributed to violent behavior for the participants of this project stemmed from family history of violence, family history of substance abuse, family history of gang/illegal activities, economic stress, emotional stress, being a victim of violence at an early age, low academic achievement, access to and a history of carrying weapons, attempted suicide, dealing with prejudice or racism and early alcohol/drug use.

The majority of the focus group participants had a life-long history of violence. Some were exposed to domestic violence at a very young age, and others experienced violence as children, committed by their parents and/or family members. Gang violence was also a principal factor resulting in the youth becoming perpetrators of violence.

Many of the participants' parents used, or were addicted to drugs and/or alcohol. Drug use among parents included crack, meth and heroin. Drug use was prominent with nearly all of the youth. Many had used meth, crack,



cocaine, and “any other drug available” by 14 years of age. Many started experimenting with drugs as early as seven years of age. Drugs were a dominant risk factor in all five of the domains.

In one of the male participant groups, five out of six had fathers that spent time in prison, or were still in prison. Most of the youth had parents or family members that were in gangs. Most of the youth participants had mothers that were teens when they had their first child, some as young as 13 and 14. Many of these youth had experienced some form of parent separation at an early age.

For the youth that are gang members, the trend was that they were exposed to gangs by family members or because of the neighborhoods where they grew up. Most were “jumped in” or initiated around the ages of 10 or 12. Once in the gangs, they began to commit crimes and engage in drug dealing and violent acts that included guns. Many of the incarcerated youth have been arrested or detained many times, some even up to 30 times. For the vast majority of them, this was their first commitment to YDDC.

Many of the youth experienced death early in their lives. For example, a number of the participants witnessed a death due to violence that they committed or that someone else perpetrated. Poverty and economic challenges were prevalent. Gang life and the fast money that drug dealing provided were major risk factors. Some youth spoke of experiencing hunger and not having food at home, which they stated lead them to stealing in order to eat. Many of the youth shared that they felt that they had been discriminated against in school or in the community due to race or ethnicity.

### **Risk Factors:**

The following graphs illustrate only the written responses for the Ecological Model exercise. The facilitator team had the participants provide further explanation for the written responses and that information is reflected in the notes that were taken during the focus groups and in the “findings” listed above.

Drugs, gangs and “bad friends” were the most significant risk factors listed in the *Community Domain*. These were also considered the key risk factors that the youth will contend with once they are released into their communities. Getting free from a past lifestyle that has been dominated by drugs and gangs is vital for these youth to stay out of the adult system and live a violence-free life. There was a general distinction between gangs and friends that most of the youth referred to, in that not all friends were gang-members. However, both gangs and “bad friends” created the same consequences for the participants.

In the Community Domain, an interesting risk factor was identified by the participants. In each of the groups there was discussion of returning to a small community or neighborhood where the participants had a “past.” That past would come back to haunt them in the form of having enemies and the police would try to make trouble for them once they returned to their communities. In general, the youth felt that the police would be harassing them once they returned to their communities, based on their past history with the legal system. Beyond that, they indicated that old enemies would be waiting for them to settle old scores or start trouble for them while they are on parole or on probation.

Also the participants felt that their personal and family reputation in the community would be another risk factor that they would have to deal with. For some of them there is a sense of having negative expectations within the community placed on them due to family reputation and their own past difficulties.

Some of the females listed “sex” as a risk factor and explained that sexual activity is frequently a trigger or proxy for other risky behavior. The following are quotes that the females gave for listing sex as a risk factor.

At least one of the female participants made reference to being out on the streets, doing drugs and inferred exchanging sex for drugs or money. There was also discussion of past sexual abuse and being raped by the female participants.

*“If I had sex and got an STD, I would get depressed and would want to do drugs.”*

*“It can make you feel worthless....is that all they want me for?”*

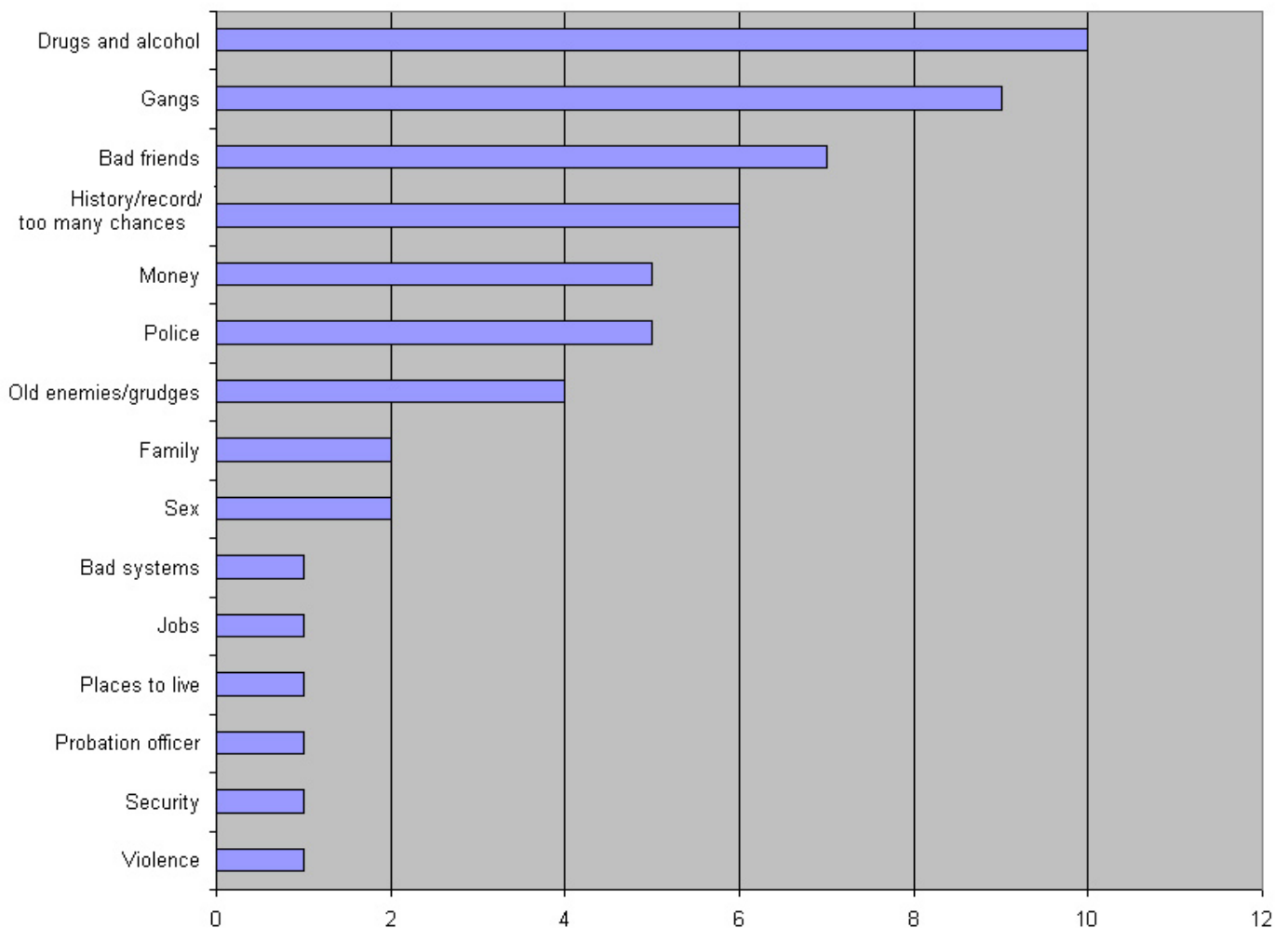
*“A lot of young girls get with older guys and are used for sex. That leads to skipping school, doing drugs...and then once you have sex you think you are in love. Then he breaks your heart. Then you are on to the next.”*

*“And then everyone calls you a ‘ho’ and then you turn to drugs.”*

they returned to their communities, based on their past history with the legal system. Beyond that, they indicated that old enemies would be waiting for them to settle old scores or start trouble for them while they are on parole or on probation.

Also the participants felt that their personal and family reputation in the community would be another risk factor that they would have to deal with. For some of them, there is a sense of having negative expectations within the community placed on them due to family reputation and

### Community Domain Risk Factors Frequency



For the **Peer Domain**, the following were listed as Risk Factors:

- Gangs
- Peer Pressure
- Drugs/Parties
- Violence
- Friends

This data correlates with the OJJDP analysis. Siblings were not high on this list of risk factors but were listed in the Family Domain.

In the **School Domain**, the top five risk factors included in order:

- Parties/Drugs
- Gangs
- Negative Friends
- Teachers that do not care or are “dirty”
- Boyfriends/Girls/Messing with girls

Drugs and Gangs were significant in most of the ecological model domains. Being discriminated against, due to race or ethnicity, was also discussed in this domain. There was passionate discussion about the negative impact that teachers had on the participants’ lives. Teachers that do not care or teachers that targeted the youth as trouble makers were considered risk factors for staying in school.

Again, in this domain, there was a distinction between gangs and negative friends. Boyfriends/Girls and Messing with girls was a separate category as the girls seemed to indicate that in general, Boyfriends could be more of a risk than a protective factor.

The males listed getting involved with the “wrong” kind of girl as a risk factor. There was a general sense that a “good” girlfriend, who kept the male on the right path, was a protective factor but getting involved with girls that are into gangs, partying, drugs and who want to “use” the males would be risk factors.

Many of the participants indicated that they had been suspended or expelled from school more than once. Some participants had been “kicked out” as early as elementary school.

In the **Family Domain**, the top five risk factors listed were the following in order:

- Drugs/Drug use amongst family
- Gangs/family gang members
- Lack of support/love
- Death of family member(s)
- Violence and abuse in the family

This data coincides with the OJJDP analysis that includes parental criminality, child mistreatment, poor family management practices, low levels of parental involvement, and parental attitudes toward substance abuse and violence. Perhaps some of the most poignant statements that supported this data came from the responses to the question, **“How was love shown to you in your family?”**

*“It wasn’t. With material things, but I didn’t get much love when I was younger. It wasn’t like emotional. I’ve been away so long. I’ve been locked up so long, this is all that I really know. I could love a stranger more than I could love my own family. I could love my girl more than I could love my own family. That love I could feel, that’s real. The love from my family is a whole different thing.”*

*“I knew I was loved. My dad was there, but he was always at work. I don’t remember seeing him too much, except for the nights [sic] and stuff like that. I never really met my real mom. My step-mom was the angry type. She wasn’t the one I would go to for affection.”*

*“My sister used to punch me in the chest. My brother used to slam me around. My dad used to spoil me, buy me candy and stuff.”*

*“First love shown to me: ‘I need school clothes, can you help me out?’ Here’s an ounce of dope, showed me drugs, told to go sell them.”*

*“My mom just worked all the time so she would have money. She only shows me it when I’m in jail.”*

*“My family has never been the type to get in your way, try to tell you what to do. All of us were raised to make our own choices, have each other’s back. Whatever you do, always be there to support you no matter what you do, whether it was gangbanging or whatever.”*

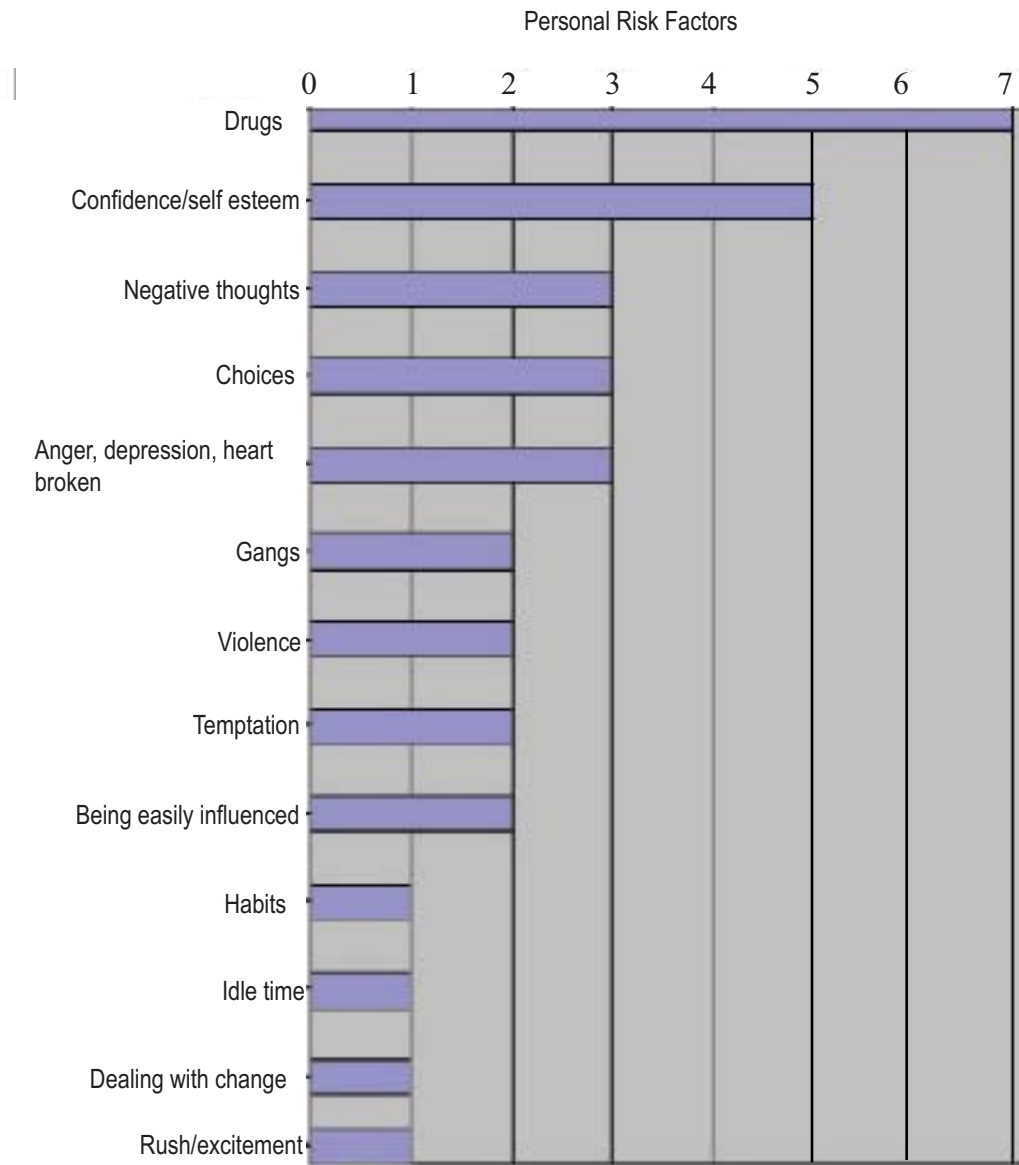
*“With my mom, she raised me and my older brother. She never showed it, and she let us do whatever. Now she shows it, says she loves us, hugs us. She’s strict on my little brother. He hates me because he can’t do things I used to do (stay out late). I could walk down the street drunk, when he (my brother) walks down the street she comes to get him. She’s strict with him, trying to raise him right.”*

*“My dad is not a dad, he’s a homie. I blaze with him. I get drunk with him every time I visit. I stay at his house for three months and I’ll see him maybe a week. He likes to smoke rock. He’s out drinking, and I barely see him.”*

In the Individual/Personal Domain, the temptation to use drugs was identified as the primary risk factor that the youth will have to contend with once they are released from incarceration. The second risk factor was “lack of self-confidence” and other internal assets that are needed to successfully deal with risk filled environments. Coping with emotions, such as being angry, depressed, “broken hearted”, were other individual risk factors. Dealing with negative thoughts and having to decide which choice

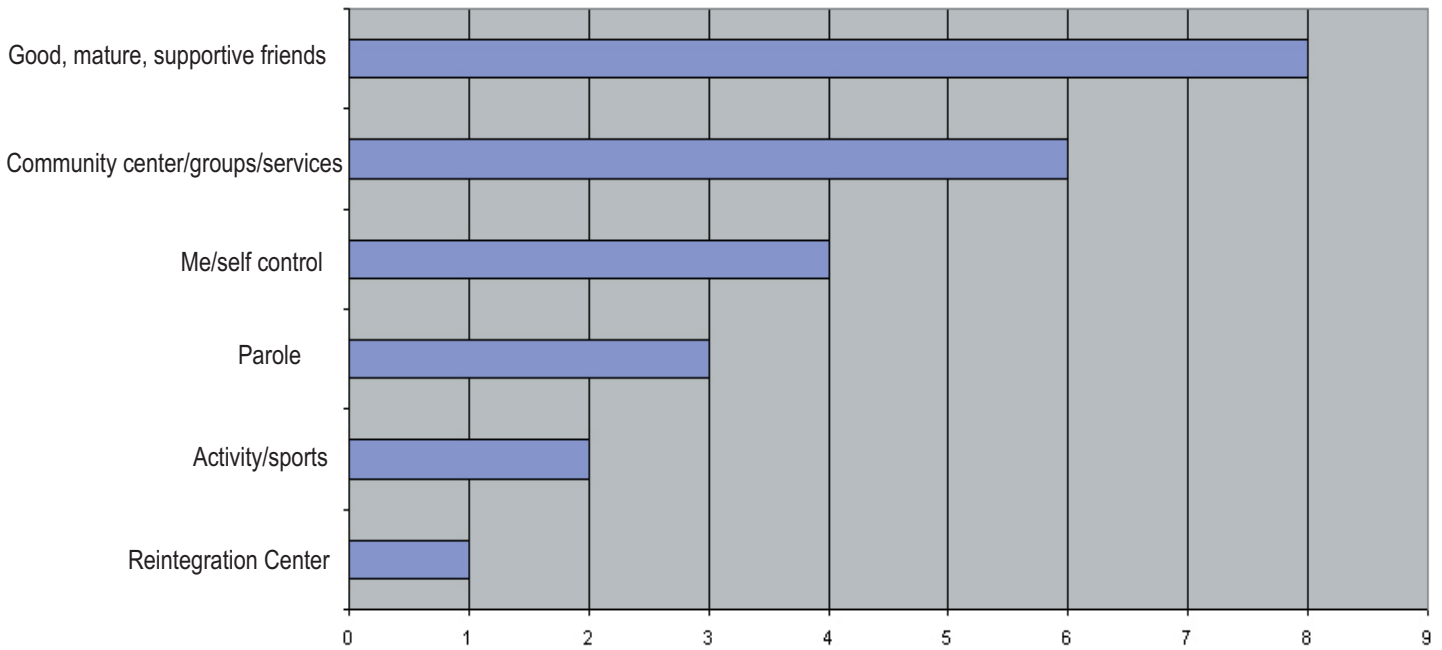
to make were other primary risk factors that the youth identified.

Gangs, violence, temptation and being easily influenced were several other risk factors listed. Old habits, having idle time and getting an adrenaline rush from doing something that is illegal were other risk-factors that were mentioned.



*“I just need motivation. Not even my daughter is enough motivation. I don't really have enough motivation in my life. I feel like a lot of my life is hopeless, a lot of people have less than what I have. I have a lot more than other people have. That doesn't really make a lot of sense these days... I have to make a choice if I'm going to do it now or just keep doing what I'm doing. Right now I want to do better, but I keep doing things I shouldn't be doing.”*

Community Protective Factors



**Protective Factors:**

In general, there was more national research available that focused on violence risk factors than on protective factors for juveniles. However, the participants were able to identify the following protective factors.

*Protective factors* that the incarcerated youth identified as key determinants to keep them out of the adult penal system included: positive and supportive relationships with family and friends, parental involvement, or an association with another adult who provides positive mentoring, a sense of connection with school teachers, participation in religious/spiritual activities, and as community involvement.

The development of positive internal assets, such as self-love, self-esteem, positive self-talk and believing in oneself, were identified as essential by both males and females. Other individual protective factors identified as important when faced with the temptations and difficulties associated with returning to past/home environments included: personal discipline, mental state and strong interpersonal skills.

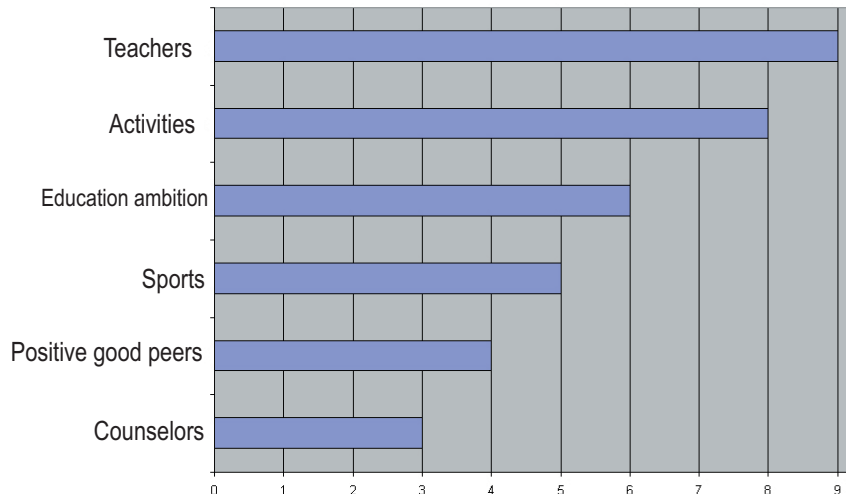
The participants identified community protective factors that included the opportunity for vocational and educational placement and accessibility to jobs that pay a living wage in their communities. Value was placed on gaining vocational skills while incarcerated so that they can increase their employability upon release. The participants tended to merge factors from each of the ecological domains into the Community Domain. This is the area where the facilitator team observed the most overlap in protective factors. For that reason, what would theoretically be considered individual/personal

protective factors were illustrated in this domain.

The youth identified a variety of protective factors in the community domain that are important to note. They include family; good, supportive, positive friends, community groups or services; getting involved in the community with volunteer work, or some positive activities. The youth seemed to take a lot of personal responsibility for their failure or success in staying out of the adult system throughout the exercise. They included themselves in the protective factors that they identified. School and educational opportunities were also important protective factors.

The identified Protective Factors in the School Domain were as follows: Teachers were identified as a key protective factor. In school and after school activities were considered very important protective factors for the participants.

School Protective Factors



Quotes based on the School Domain.

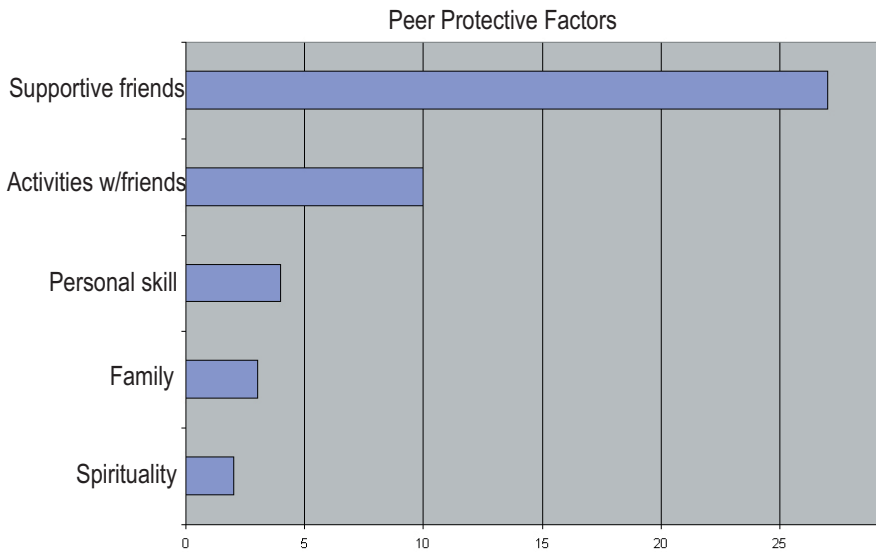
*“Teachers who are real—who really care about you.”*

*“When they are ready to sit down and help you, would listen and talk to you, helped you to understand things.”*

*“Teachers who asked about where you were when you weren’t there.”*

*“Want to be the first to graduate in my family.”*

The graph below illustrates the identified protective factors for the Peer Domain. Here is what youth had to say with regards to the Peer Domain:



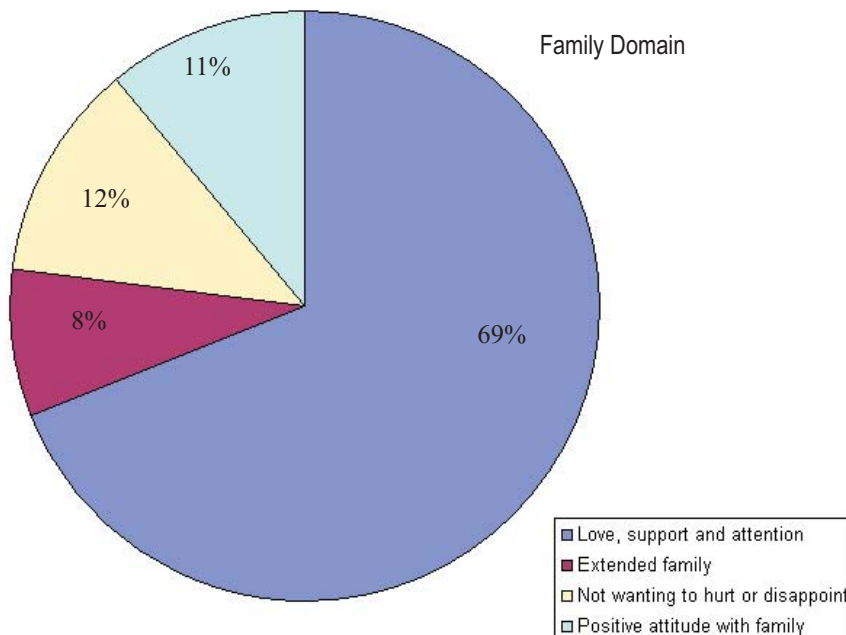
*“Friends who affirm you”. They don’t want to put you down, they give you affirmations”*

*“The friends who are doing good for themselves and want to see you do good and help you stay out of trouble by assisting you.”*

*“When I was in my stuff and I was selling drugs, these friends they kind of in a way set me up. They had someone call me. They cornered me and sat me down and cried to me, literally cried to me telling me that I needed to open my eyes and look at what I was doing. Of course I didn’t listen, but that kind of like showed me what they’re about, got me to keep those friends.”*

Family Domain:

The pie chart below represents the youth responses for protective factors for the Family Domain.



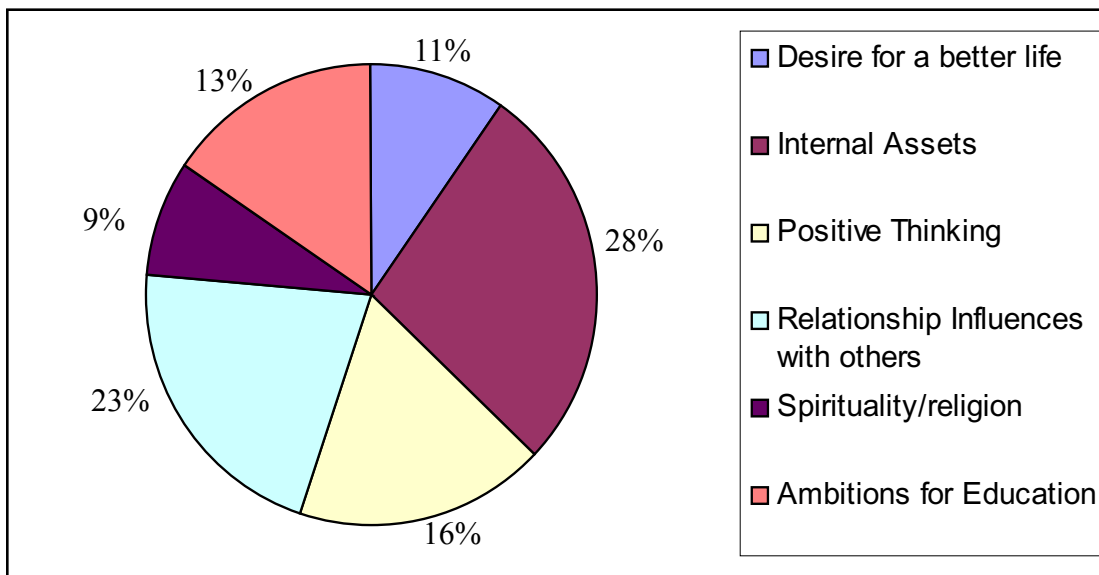
Having love, support and attention from family was a paramount protective factor in this domain. The participants were clear that if they could have positive interactions and activities to engage in with their families, they would fair better once they were released from incarceration. There was a deep sense that they had disappointed their family members by getting into trouble and being incarcerated. The participants did not want to continue to disappoint the family that had demonstrated support and love for them while they were incarcerated. This provided a sense of motivation to do what they needed to do well once they were released. This is where the facilitation team observed a tension between the participants wanting to go home and be with family and the fact that the family environment was plagued with risk factors. For some of the participants the family patterns and behavior has not changed.

*“My dad, he used to sing us to sleep. My mom would tuck us in and when we were sick we couldn’t do nothing. We would get everything we wanted. ... I guess we were spoiled. They would give hugs and kisses endlessly. Still now hugs, and kisses from my mother and my father both. They tell me every day that they love me.”*

There were some youth that did not have family visit them or have any contact with them while they were incarcerated. There were expressions of being hurt and angry that even while incarcerated they did not receive family support. The previous quote was the exception to what the youth expressed when talking about their families.

#### *Individual/Personal Protective Factors:*

*The pie chart below represents the youth responses for individual/personal protective factors.*



The participants expressed a high level of personal responsibility for their failure or success once they would be released from incarceration. The need to develop internal assets, such as self-love, self-esteem and having motivation to do better, were critical protective factors that were identified by the youth.

The participants acknowledged that the influence their relationships have on them was significant both in a positive and negative perspective. The desire for education was identified as an essential protective factor. Several of the participants stated that they had a desire to go to college and obtain a masters degree or a PhD. Many of the youth came from homes where education was not valued, or where there was not very much academic success, so the desire to be educated proved to be important.

Learning how to have positive thinking and “mind control” was considered an important protective factor for the youth. There was an expression that negative thinking could lead to negative behavior or actions.

Engaging in spiritual or religious activities was also considered an important protective factor. Also a strong desire to have a “good life” free of violence, gangs, and legal trouble was expressed.

*“I don’t want to be like Dad (he’s in prison for rest of life).”*

*“Desire to be there for my daughter, show my daughter that this is not the right way to do it. Positive thinking.”*

*“Coping skills: how to deal with certain situations and how to deal with triggers, like how to get myself away from the violence, or like drugs.”*

*“Like when I start thinking negative, to manage that, and how to control myself so I don’t go back into that negativity”.*

*“Counseling. I learned a lot, I really like that therapist. She was nice.”*

*“My self control of knowing that I don’t want to go to prison.”*

*“My passion of knowing I can be successful. The more schooling, the more money I can make.”*

*“Just a better life: I’m tired of going to jail all the time (now I’ve been locked up 14 times)...I’m just tired of getting in trouble; I keep thinking why I can’t stay out for a period of time, why I keep getting locked up”.*

*“All I need is a job and I can stay out of trouble because I’m easily tempted. I don’t have power to say no.”*

### **Impact of Incarceration:**

Overall the youth that participated felt that they were better off incarcerated than out in the environments that they came from. In one group five out of five males felt that if they were not incarcerated they would probably not be alive. Many youth answered the question, “What would you be doing if you were not here today?” with the response, “Getting high.”

Incarceration provides safety, structure, education and companionship. In general, the staff of YDDC expressed that some of the youth need to be incarcerated because the environments they come from are so embedded in violence that the youth have a better chance of surviving if they are incarcerated.

For the second question on **“How has incarceration impacted your life?”** the following are some of the responses:

*“Learned how to read. I came in with a second grade reading level and now I can read college level.”*

*“I am safer in here than if I was in the outs.”*

*“Could be doing stupid stuff, robbing stores.”*

*“If not here, maybe would not be alive.”*

*“Have GED, school credit.”*

*“Staying away from negative life.”*

*“Away from family and loved ones.”*

*“Set up for failure.”*

*“Still gangs in here – if they disrespect can cause a fight.”*

*“Not a lot of time out of your room because of group therapy; hardly any free time.”*

*“It put me closer to God.”*

*“Made me grow up fast. I didn’t get to do all the things that teenagers get to do. The reality that I screwed up my own childhood.”*



*"There is food on the table, a roof over your head."*

*"I lost time with my family. Something could happen to my mom today or my dad...they could be taken away from me."*

*"The longer you're locked up, the more freedom becomes valued. Like me; I've been locked up for three years - freedom, that's not something you throw away in 12 days. It's just not worth it. The more and longer you get locked up the more you see that. ... That's what I feel."*

*"To me this place does not prepare you for the outs at all. They have all of these programs. You are going to send someone back to what they came from and then expect them to be different. It doesn't work."*

Following are the conclusions and recommendations derived from the 20 incarcerated youth participants:

### **Conclusions:**

1. The insight that incarcerated youth bring to the violence prevention field is powerful and including their voices and life experiences in reducing violence is important.
2. Incarcerated youth want to make a positive contribution. The participants believed that this project provided an opportunity to make a positive contribution, even while they were incarcerated.
3. Supportive adults in youths' lives are probably the most important protective factor to staying out of the juvenile and adult justice systems.
4. There is an inherent tension for incarcerated youth between wanting to be reunited with family and knowing that their family environments present a major risk factor.
5. Incarceration provided the youth with safety, structure, education and an environment that appeared to be healthier than the environments they came from.

6. Releasing youth to the environments from which they came, without in-depth support in each of the (ecological model) domains does not provide for positive long term outcomes.

7. Incarcerated youth desire a life that is free of violence, crime and stress.

8. Incarcerated youth are children who need and want to be cared for, loved and accepted.

### **Recommendations:**

1. Place resources in early childhood, parenting, prevention and early intervention programs.
2. Provide parenting classes for all new parents in New Mexico that include basic information on the long term effects of substance and physical abuse.
3. Provide parenting classes for all incarcerated youth: some are already parents; many will be parents in the future and can learn how to re-parent themselves as a means of healing past abuse and breaking the cycle of violence.
4. Provide (vocational) educational opportunities that can be converted to employable skills once released so that the incarcerated youth are employable.
5. Place resources in mentoring programs, including mentoring for youth that are incarcerated.
6. Encourage policymakers, program managers and funding providers, to evaluate the long term impact of incarceration vs. rehabilitation to provide a stronger focus on rehabilitation for youth offenders.
7. Develop in-depth reintegration plans for each youth released back into their former environments.
8. Encourage policymakers and program managers to continue to work on solutions to the violence, crime and

poverty links in New Mexico.

9. Continue to include incarcerated youth voice in program, policy and institutional change in New Mexico.

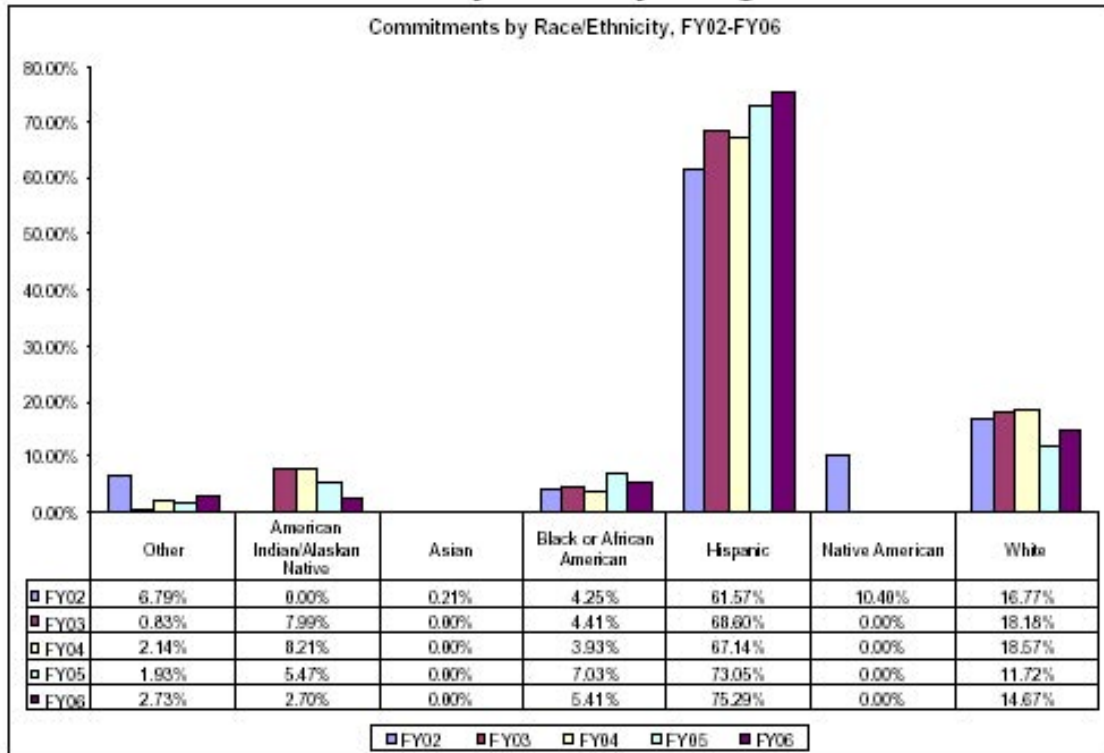
10. Include incarcerated youth on the Governor's Gang Task Force.

11. Include incarcerated youth on the Youth Violence Task Force.

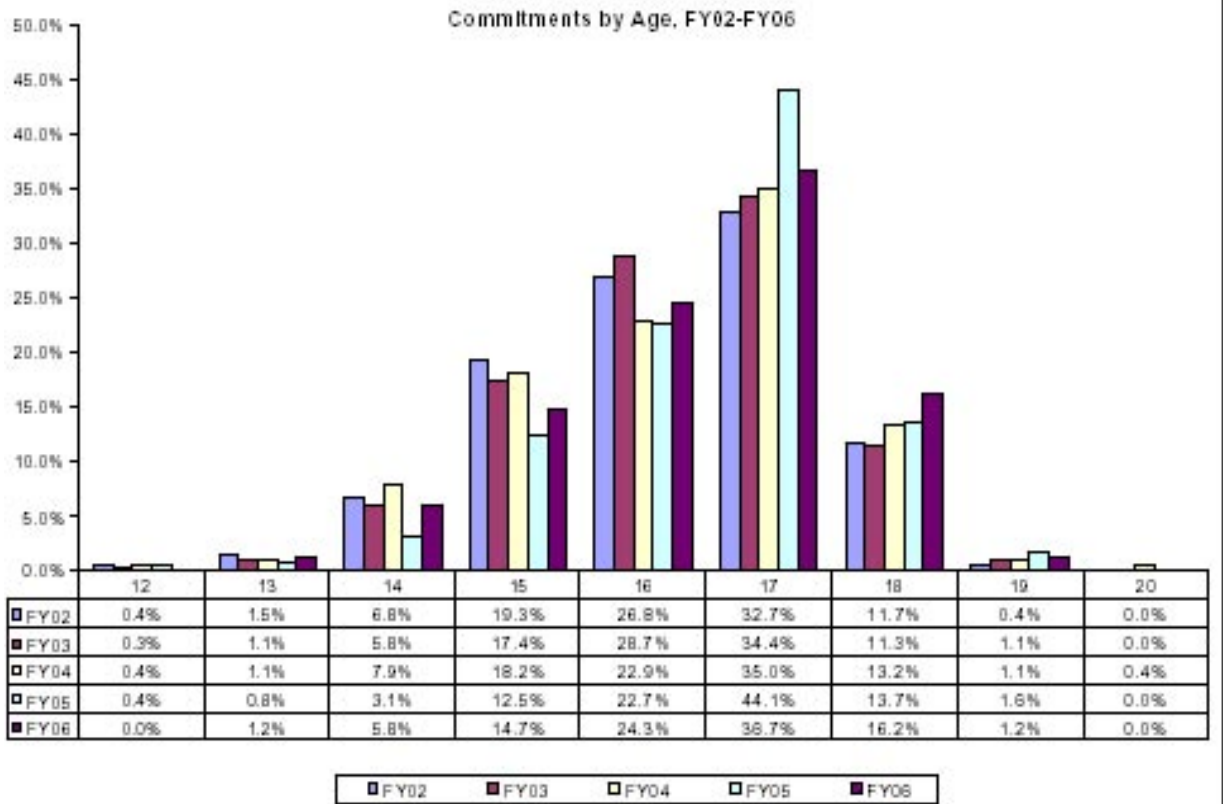
# Appendix



### FY02-FY06 Commitments by Ethnicity/Gang Affiliation



Source: FY02 – FY06 Commitments Updated



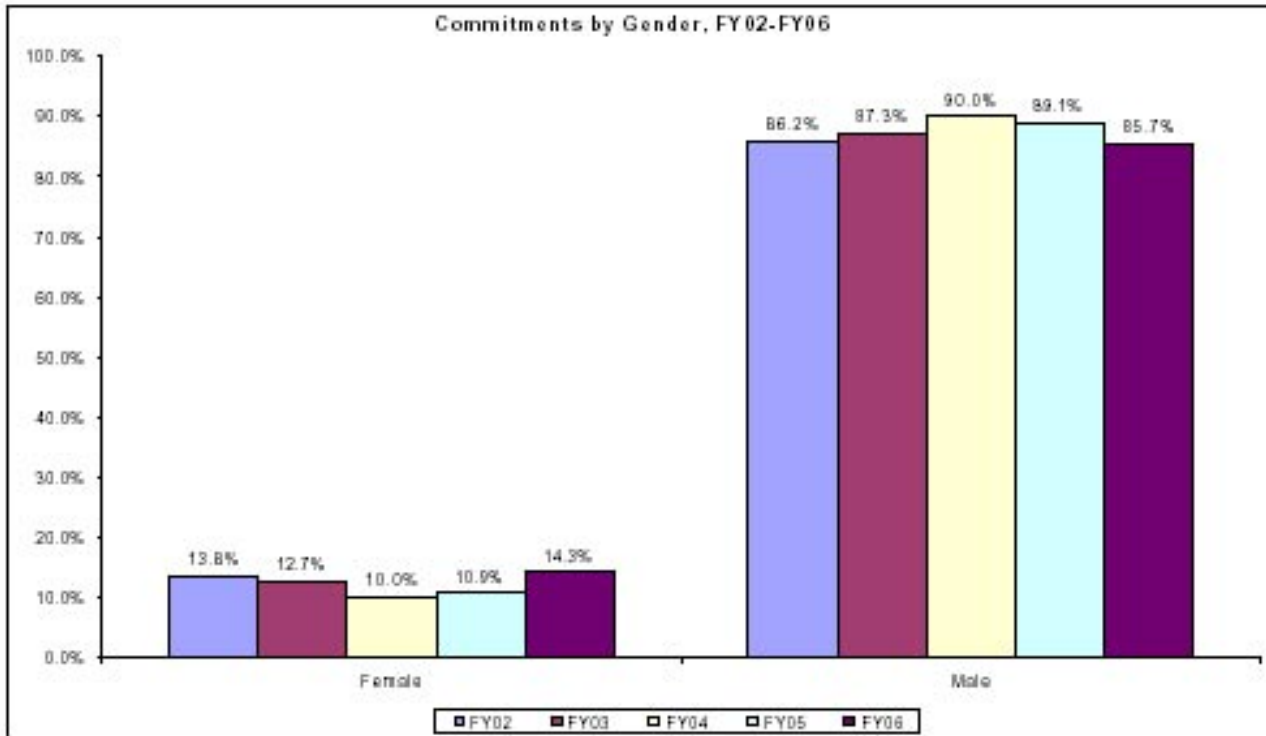

**JUVENILE JUSTICE SERVICES**
**Commitment Trends by Region/District/County**

Region	District	County	FY02	FY03	FY04	FY05	FY06	% Change (FY04/FY05)	% Change (FY05/FY06)	
1	11	McKinley	8	10	1	1	2	0.0%	100.0%	
		San Juan	70	36	34	25	20	-26.5%	-20.0%	
	13	Cibola	2	7	1	5	2	400.0%	-60.0%	
		Sandoval	10	14	10	17	20	70.0%	17.6%	
	2	1	Valencia	17	5	3	6	6	100.0%	0.0%
			Los Alamos	1	2	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
4		Rio Arriba	6	5	5	0	1	-100.0%	0.0%	
		Santa Fe	7	8	16	8	12	-50.0%	50.0%	
8		Guadalupe	3	0	1	0	1	-100.0%	0.0%	
		Mora	0	0	1	0	0	-100.0%	0.0%	
	San Miguel	21	13	7	2	4	-71.4%	100.0%		
3	8	Colfax	12	8	3	11	7	266.7%	-36.4	
		Taos	5	0	6	0	2	-100.0%	0.0%	
	2	Union	1	0	0	0	2	0.0%	0.0%	
		Bernalillo	162	126	74	73	78	-1.4%	6.9%	
	9	Lea	11	15	18	21	19	16.7%	-9.5%	
		Curry	16	10	11	11	12	0.0%	9.1%	
4	10	Roosevelt	4	6	4	3	5	-25.0%	66.7%	
		DeBaca	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	
	14	Harding	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	
		Quay	4	4	0	1	0	0.0%	-100.0%	
	3	Chaves	13	8	3	10	14	233.3%	40.0%	
		Eddy	12	19	18	9	12	-50.0%	33.3%	
5	6	Dona Ana	23	24	29	23	11	-20.7%	-52.2%	
		Grant	8	6	2	1	4	-50.0%	300.0%	
	7	Hidalgo	2	3	1	0	3	-100.0%	0.0%	
		Luna	16	6	6	7	4	16.7%	-42.9%	
	12	Catron	0	0	0	0	1	0.0%	0.0%	
		Sierra	10	3	0	0	1	0.0%	0.0%	
		Socorro	1	0	2	5	4	150.0%	-20.0%	
		Torrance	4	5	7	7	3	0.0%	-57.1%	
	12	Lincoln	5	7	6	3	3	-50.0%	0.0%	
		Otero	17	13	11	7	6	-36.4%	-14.3%	
Totals			471	363	280	256	259	-8.6%	1.2%	

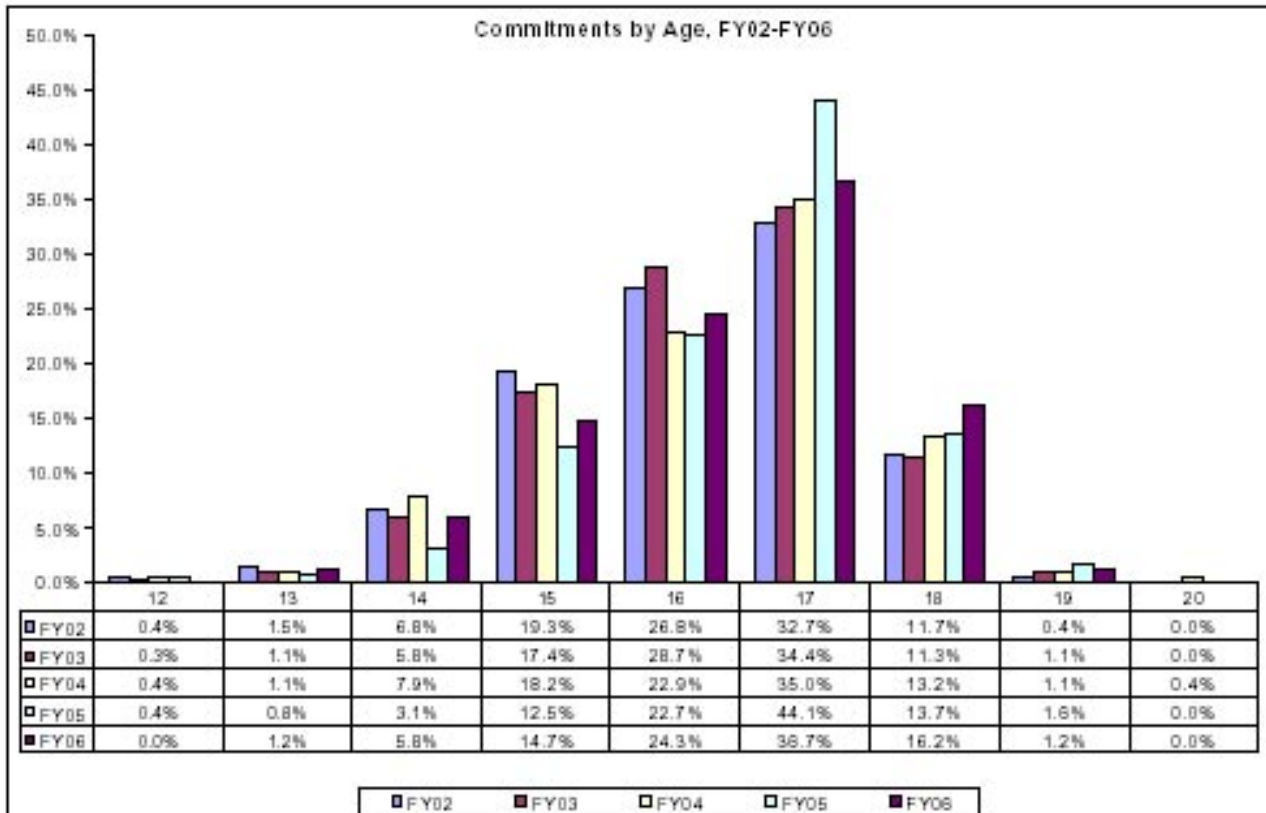
CYFD Juvenile Justice Services – Commitments by County (Source: FY02 - FY06 Commitments Updated)



### FY02-FY06 Commitments by Gender and Age



Source: FY02 – FY06 Commitments Updated



Source: FY02 – FY06 Commitments Updated

1. New Mexico Department of Health. *Youth Violence in New Mexico*. 2005.
2. New Mexico Department of Health. *Violence Free Youth Partnership Strategic Plan*. 2005.
3. Hawkins, J. David, et al. "Predictors of Youth Violence." *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. April 2000.
4. New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department. *New Mexico Juvenile Justice Services Fiscal Year 2006 Annual Report*. 2007.