



TRANSFORMATION AT OYA

Partnership with Legislature Supports Culture Shift

Overview

The Oregon Legislature has been an important partner in Oregon Youth Authority's efforts to change its approach, going from an agency with secure facilities that provided some treatment and education to one that provides education and skill development in centers that are secure. Through a series of budget notes, legislators have supported the agency's progress on:

- Positive Human Development (PHD) and the agency's *10-Year Plan for Facilities*
- The Youth Reformation System (YRS)
- Reduced use of isolation in secure custody



New Bridge High School, at OYA's Rogue Valley Youth Correctional Facility, opened in 2018 as part of the agency's 10-Year Plan for Facilities, and in accord with the principles of Positive Human Development.

Positive Human Development and the *10-Year Plan for Facilities*

OYA focuses on the developmental needs of youth in its care, helping them learn and practice new skills, such as regulating emotions, managing conflict, and making good decisions. By applying a similar supportive method to staff, we arrived at an approach we call Positive Human Development (PHD).

The Budget Note

Positive physical environments support PHD and youth rehabilitation. Recognizing the connection, legislators directed OYA in a note in the 2013-15 budget to develop a 10-year strategic plan to address its facilities' significant deferred maintenance needs and long-term capacity requirements.

What OYA Has Done

OYA completed its *10-Year Plan for Facilities* in August 2014. A central strategy was to design and create environments that support positive youth development and outcomes while addressing deferred maintenance needs. Over the next two biennia, legislators directed about \$100 million in bonds toward OYA's plan.

Since then, the agency has made significant progress on deferred maintenance. It also completed two milestone projects: six new living units at MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility (YCF), and New Bridge High School at Rogue Valley YCF. Both received notice in *Correctional News* as models of developmentally-appropriate spaces for incarcerated youth.

The Youth Reformation System

In early 2013, OYA launched the Youth Reformation System (YRS) to improve youth outcomes. YRS uses research and data to inform the professional judgment of OYA staff and county partners when they are choosing placements for youth.

The Budget Note

In the 2013-15 budget, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means directed OYA to create a business plan for YRS that did not compromise the safety and security of youth, staff, or the community.

What OYA Has Done

OYA submitted a plan to the legislature in January 2014. With legislative support, we realigned internal resources, re-purposed eight positions to staff our implementation team, and added three positions to our research unit. Since then, we developed and implemented several tools for OYA and

county staff to use when determining appropriate youth placements:

- **Forecast:** This tool uses data on youth risks and needs to forecast service types that will be needed and estimate future bed needs.
- **Predicted success rates:** These estimate the probability that a youth will not recidivate within three years of release if placed on county probation; in an OYA community placement; or in an OYA facility.
- **Escalation to OYA:** These scores estimate the likelihood that a youth will escalate from county probation to an OYA placement.
- **Youth Placement Scores:** These help juvenile parole and probation officers match youth with programs that have a history of being effective with similar youth.
- **Risk of Revocation:** This tool estimates the increased probability of recidivism, should a youth be revoked back into close custody following parole.

NOTE: We are committed to ensuring that YRS tools do not exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities, and we test their accuracy across race and gender. An external analysis found our risk estimate tools predict outcomes equally well across all populations.

Reducing Use of Isolation for Youth in Close Custody

Research shows that long-term isolation has negative impacts on youths' physical and mental health. Its use is not in alignment with the developmental model, which focuses on skill-building for youth. OYA has been working to reduce the use of isolation of youth in its physical custody since 2014.

The Budget Note

In 2015, the legislature directed OYA in a budget note to redefine how and when youth could be placed in isolation and to develop effective reintegration processes for youth post-isolation.

What OYA Has Done

OYA reported on its progress to the legislature in December 2015. The agency gathered information on what factors

contributed to the use of isolation from work groups that included employees and external partners. In July 2018, OYA rolled out a new policy allowing use of isolation only when a youth is violent or is threatening imminent violence. To help reintegrate youth returning from isolation and provide an option for youth who are disruptive but not violent, legislators allowed OYA to self-fund six skill development coordinators to work with youth on emotional regulation, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. The overall result has been a steady reduction in the number of isolation incidents and length of isolation for youth in close custody. Meanwhile, in spite of fears to the contrary, measures of staff safety have remained steady or improved, and worker's comp claims from youth-related injuries have reached an historic low.