

# YiP Youth Lab

The Youth Lab of Young in Prison (YiP) is a select group of youth who use their past experience in youth detention to improve the juvenile justice sector. Through creative and expressive workshops, they engage in meaningful exchange with a range of actors – such as prosecutors, prison staff, lawyers and parole officers.



The YiP Youth Lab is active in Kenya, Malawi and the Netherlands. In 2017, the YiP Youth Lab reviewed plans of the Dutch Custodial Institutions Agency to completely redesign custodial juvenile care. YiP Youth Lab is officially part of the public juvenile prosecutors training curricula since 2018.

- **Professionals** get an opportunity to move close to the memories and ideas of young ex-detainees. They are invited to engage in storytelling, theatre or spoken word sessions to co-create new solutions that improve the lives of vulnerable youth during and after detention.
- **Young ex-detainees** further build life skills such as effective communication, critical thinking or self confidence. After developing these skills with *Young in Prison* in detention, youth move to a next level with continuous support and training after their release. They get paid fees for their advise as trainees and gain work experience to kick-start their lives outside prison.
- **The topics** and depth of a *YiP Youth Lab* are tailored to needs and urgencies in the sector, ranging from pragmatic issues (improving communication skills with youth) to more systemic matters (to re-imagine the way punishing youth helps society). *Yip Youth Lab* programmes are developed in collaboration between professionals, YiP workshop facilitators and youth.

## Serious participation: the world through youth's eyes

Every child and young person has the right to be listened to, and taken seriously.<sup>1</sup> *Young in Prison* collaborates with professionals in forensic youth care to design youth-friendly ways for participation in their treatment and all phases - pre- and post-release - of their trial.

Since 15 years of *Young in Prison* activities, we continue to learn what it takes to truly listen to youth deprived of their liberty. What we learned along the way is the 'art of translating': from the formal and adult world to the direct and lived world of young people - and vice versa. How do from-the-heart-experiences speak to policy recommendations? And how do complex questions about juvenile justice make sense to the day to day lives of youth?

*Young in Prison's* direct and long-term relationships with both worlds made us speak and switch between these languages. We aim to ensure that listening to youth's voices is not a mere tokenism, but a serious and legitimate instrument for change.

<sup>1</sup> As stated in Article 12 of the UN Convention on The Rights of the Child.



# YiP Youth Lab timeline

- **2012 - 2015** - YiP in South Africa starts with the Siyakhana Ambassadors programme; the source of inspiration for future Youth Lab programmes. Siyakhana Ambassadors are post-release participants who are trained in various leadership skills. They facilitate dialogue with a range of actors in institutions, schools and communities. YiP holds dialogue sessions with warders and administrators of Pollsmoor prison.
- **2015** - YiP in the Netherlands launches a short movie in which young ex-detainees reimagine their 'perfect punishment' - the publication gains lots of attention from Dutch media.
- **2016** - The YiP programme in the Netherlands is growing. There is increasing interest from institutions in the juvenile justice sector to engage with youth of YiP programmes. Over the course of 2016, YiP undertakes several ad-hoc assignments that include advising employees of the public prosecutor service and the Amsterdam municipality.
- **2016** - To meet the growing demand of institutions and organisations in the Netherlands, YiP starts to formalize and professionalize the offering. It is called the Youth Lab from now on and 14 youth participate in a first leadership programme.
- **2017** - The public prosecutor in the Netherlands announces that the *YiP Youth Lab* is now a formal and mandatory part of the training for new juvenile prosecutors in the Netherlands. The *YiP Youth Lab* evaluates the plans of the Custodial Institutions Agency to redesign the youth prisons of the future.
- **2017** - YiP in Kenya initiates learning sessions between young ex-detainees and police and judicial power in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya. Creative performances are used as tools to ease the contact between youth and professionals. The YiP program is implemented by YADEN and supported by Oxfam Novib and Hivos as part of the Voice Programme.
- **2018** - *YiP Youth Lab* continues to grow and now also engages with lawyers and judges. There is a training of 50 juvenile lawyers from various European countries to improve on communication skills with young people in conflict with the law. The training is part of a larger Fair Trials project about the new Child Directive as part of EU legislation on children's rights.
- **2018** - *YiP Youth Lab* in the Netherlands launches a programme for youth to start mini social enterprises.



# A day in the life of the YiP Youth Lab



YiP Youth Lab is no static format, but takes different shapes in different places. Labs can be single events – or a much longer pathway of linked sessions with a range of creative methods. Labs are sometimes assignments from institutions – or can be initiated by Young in Prison or youth themselves. The YiP Youth Lab can focus on transfer of knowledge and exchange, but also campaigns for issues that matter to youth in detention.

Contact between professionals and young detainees often leaves little space for meaningful exchange or reflection. This is despite good intentions and personal desires, but due to systemic design of contact between conviction and release. The YiP Youth Lab allows for a more open and reflective way of communicating to restore that relationship.



## YiP Youth Lab Programme (example)

This is a snapshot example of a 3-hour YiP Youth Lab for future juvenile prosecutors in the Netherlands.

### Participants:

2 young ex-detainees

1 YiP facilitator

1 YiP Actor

10 juvenile prosecutors

### (1) Storytelling and interviewing workshop

*The juvenile prosecutors have an in-depth interviews with the youth. They explain how 'they felt the first time in court, meeting judges and prosecutors', 'the time I felt very uncomfortable with a prosecutor' and 'the time a prosecutor really got to me'. After the interviews, a prosecutor plays back the youth's story in storytelling style in front of all participants.*

### (2) Acting workshop

*Juvenile prosecutors recall and write down a case in which they struggled to make contact with a young person. The YiP actor plays this role and prosecutors practice real-life settings in front of the group. The youth then comments and advises based on their own experiences.*



## About Young in Prison

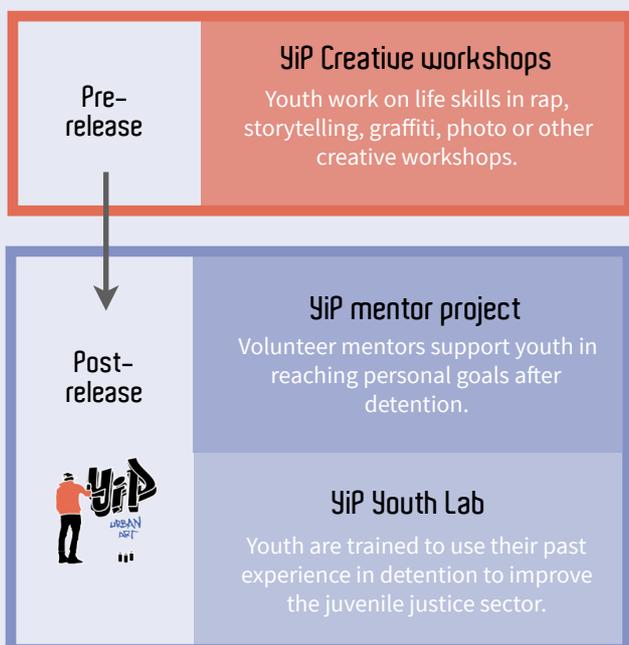
Youngsters live in detention centers around the world. Wrong turns, friends or decisions led them to these places. Young in Prison believes that everyone deserves a second - or third - chance to turnaround their lives and contribute positively to society.

As part of the YiP COPOSO methodology (which stands for Contributing Positively to Society), young people work on personal development through arts and sports workshops. COPOSO focuses on 13 life skills.

YiP was founded in South Africa in 2002 and the YiP International Network followed with activities in countries such as Colombia, Kenya, Malawi, Afghanistan, Morocco and the Netherlands.



**Lamyn, YiP Youth Lab Coordinator:** "Youth can often explain perfectly why a caregiver is helpful to them - or not. Today, institutions genuinely start to listen to convicted youth and ask: 'What is important to you?'"



## 13 YiP Life Skills

Self-esteem, self-confidence & self-development // Empathy  
Effective communication //  
Managing social relationships // Cooperating positively // Creative and critical thinking //  
Coping with emotions // Self-reflection //  
Managing stress and frustration //  
Coping with conflict // Independent action and decision making // Goal setting and planning effectively // Being a positive actor in society

## An invitation

We would love to hear from you and exchange as a community of practice. We hope to learn together how youth in conflict with the law get a fair chance to realize their potential, and how creativity liberates their potential to contribute positively to society.

Please get in touch to exchange, explore new partnerships or a cup of coffee:

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