From 2008 to 2010, State University of New York at Buffalo, School of Social Work conducted an evaluation of the Hillside Children’s Center - Community Service Livingston County Youth Court (LCYC) program. Analyses focused on the recidivism (readmission) rates of children ages 12-17 who participated in their program. A particular strength of this evaluation is the use of a mixed method design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data elements. Additionally, the ability to integrate research and clinical practice with client outcomes provides an added strength to this evaluation, ultimately building the knowledge base in an effort to more appropriately meet the needs of the children and adolescents that Hillside Children’s Center serves.

Based on the initial goals and the interest in having enough allotted time to track follow-up recidivism rates, prospective data was not collected for this evaluation. Beginning in the year 2006, participants entered the LCYC and continued receiving services until 2008. Following discharge, the year of 2009 serves as the follow-up period for this evaluation. With a vast amount of rich data, pretest information utilized for this evaluation was collected by Hillside Children’s Center which included program participant information. Additionally, information was collected from Livingston County Probation (Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument [YASI] Recidivism information) and Livingston County Department of Social Services (LC-DSS) (Placement information). The qualitative data collection component of this evaluation consisted of either a face-to-face or a telephone interview, and included multiple sources: LCYC participants and their parents, LCYC volunteers and their parents, LC Probation, and Hillside Children’s Center staff.

Due to constraints based on the relatively low rates of recidivism and placement, the available size of the sample was quite small, which perhaps reduces the power to detect significant differences between the groups, essentially elevating the risk for Type I errors. As a result, information on marginal trends (p<.25) is also presented. Because of limited power and the increased chance of causality related to a random occurrence, evaluators considered nearly all other potential elements or variables that may help improve existing Hillside Children’s Center programs, with the understanding that these factors will need to be evaluated further. This information could perhaps point to areas of future investigation, in addition to potentially saving time, effort, and monetary costs associated with future data collection.

The current evaluation utilized data from 120 participants, of which 55 were LCYC participants and 65 were Community Service Only (CSO) participants. To increase the accuracy of comparisons and results, the two groups were matched on age and gender. Although evaluators were unable to locate a true control group of juvenile offenders who did not experience LCYC or community services in Livingston County, which is the reason for use of the CSO as the comparison, information was found for comparison groups from various other states that were included in an evaluation of teen courts from 2002. While not ideal, the addition of these comparison groups in this evaluation does provide some useful information concerning recidivism among youth. Lastly, evaluators also considered cost-effectiveness of the LCYC program using recidivism and placement rates as the results or outcomes of interest. For purposes of this executive summary, the Livingston County Youth Court group will be referred to as LCYC, and the Community Services Program Only group will be referred to as CSO.