

# Implementation and Outcomes of Healthy, Wealthy and Wise

## CalVIP Final Local Evaluation Report

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## Contents

Implementation and Outcomes of Healthy, Wealthy and Wise .....	
Executive Summary .....	v
I. Project Description.....	1
II. Data Collection .....	2
III. Research Design .....	3
A. Process Evaluation .....	3
B. Outcome Evaluation.....	3
C. Outcome Measures.....	4
IV. Results and Conclusions.....	5
A. Process evaluation results.....	5
1. Who did HWW serve? .....	5
2. How did implementation of HWW compare to original plans? .....	7
3. How did participants join HWW? .....	10
4. What was the connection between HWW and life coaching? .....	10
5. How did HWW engage with participants and families?.....	11
6. What were program successes? .....	12
7. What challenges or opportunities exist for HWW? .....	12
B. Outcome evaluation results .....	13
C. Conclusions.....	18
References.....	21

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## Tables

1	Data sources.....	2
2	Sample of HWW participants eligible for outcomes analysis.....	3
3	Sample of HWW and life coaching participants eligible for outcomes analysis .....	4
4	List of outcome measures .....	4
5	Participant risk factors.....	5
6	Contact with law enforcement before receiving HWW or life coaching services from CYO.....	6
7	Participation in HWW and life coaching.....	11

## Figures

1	Participant demographic characteristics .....	6
2	Healthy, Wealthy & Wise program logic model.....	8
3	Cohort participation among all HWW participants, graduates, and non-graduates.....	8
4	Graduation among HWW participants .....	9
5	Hours of participation among all HWW participants, graduates, and non-graduates.....	9
6	Contact with law enforcement 12 months before and after starting services, all HWW participants.....	13
7	Contact with law enforcement 12 months before and after starting services, HWW and life coaching.....	14
8	Contact with law enforcement 12 months before and after starting services, life coaching only participants .....	15
9	Contact with law enforcement 12 months before and after starting services, HWW graduates and non-graduates .....	16
10	Distributions of baseline and endline SEL scores.....	17

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## Executive Summary

Through CalVIP, the City of Oakland aimed to enhance life coaching services offered to individuals at highest risk for engagement in gun violence by piloting a peer-led group cognitive behavioral treatment program known as Healthy, Wealthy & Wise (HWW). The program, delivered by Community & Youth Outreach (CYO), is designed to convene cohorts of approximately 25 young people weekly for 14 weeks. Each session is led by facilitators who are trained credible messengers from the community. The curriculum includes units on decision making, identity, overcoming pain, difficulty and trauma, and life skills/financial literacy. The evaluation sought to assess the implementation of the program and the outcomes of participants. Several key findings emerged:

- **Participants were primarily African American young men from East and West Oakland with a history and/or immediate risk of gun-involved activity.** Between July 31, 2018 and December 31, 2019, 169 individuals participated in HWW. Only 44 percent met four or more risk criteria as required by the life coaching program, and 60 percent had been previously arrested.
- **Two-thirds of HWW participants were not part of the life coaching program as envisioned.** Individuals who participated in both HWW and life coaching had higher rates of prior contact with law enforcement than those who participated in HWW only, suggesting that HWW served a mix of individuals, including those at lower risk of violence. Participants were encouraged to bring friends and family members who might provide them with support and benefit from HWW themselves.
- **Although CYO followed the basic program structure and content, the organization did not use a strict cohort model.** To accommodate individuals with different needs, the program allowed participants to join a cohort late and complete graduation requirements with another cohort. Individuals could also continue participating after graduating. Overall, 41 percent of participants took part in two or more cohorts. Thirty-six percent graduated from the program, including 5 percent who graduated twice.
- **Participants and staff said the program promoted positive changes in mindsets, including new approaches to conflict and other life skills.** They saw HWW and life coaching as complementary and identified the curriculum content, sense of accomplishment from program completion, peer support, and relatable, effective facilitators as key strengths of the program. However, participant retention was an ongoing challenge. In response, CYO modified the timing of when staff distribute incentives to encourage continued participation.
- **The percentage of HWW participants who had contact with law enforcement decreased after starting services.** For example, 16 percent of HWW participants were arrested in the 12 months before starting HWW, compared to 5 percent in the 12 months following—a 69 percent decrease. There was limited evidence of improvements in participants' levels of self-reported resilience.

The results suggest that HWW is a promising intervention for reducing recidivism, but further research is needed. Although CYO did not follow a cohort model, HWW was still able to offer a safe peer support group facilitated by credible messengers who served as role models and delivered relevant content. However, the program did not strictly complement life coaching as envisioned and ultimately served a lower risk population than originally anticipated. Although participant outcomes showed significant reductions in recidivism, individuals who participated in life coaching only also saw similar reductions and were generally a higher risk population. Unfortunately, due to limited sample sizes, the evaluation was unable to determine the causal effect of HWW, alone or as a complement to life coaching.

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## I. Project Description

Oakland residents are involved in the justice system at high rates; for instance, over a third of all of Alameda County’s adult and juvenile probationers live in Oakland (Alameda County Probation, 2020). Through Oakland Unite, the City of Oakland has invested in support services for individuals at highest risk for engagement in gun violence, including a new model of case management called life coaching. Life coaching seeks to help young adults avoid violent situations and contact with the justice system through relationship building and connection to needed resources. Although the life coaching service delivery model incorporates many evidence-based practices, it lacks behavioral health supports. This gap was identified in an evaluation of Oakland Unite life coaching services conducted by Mathematica. The research suggested that building appropriate, culturally competent behavioral health supports for high-risk participants is a critical next step for the City’s gun violence intervention efforts (Gonzalez et al. 2017).

Through a California Violence Intervention and Prevention Grant (CalVIP), the City aimed to enhance the life coaching model by piloting a peer-led group cognitive behavioral treatment (CBT) program. CBT provides individuals with opportunities to recognize situations that trigger negative behavior, reflect on their thoughts, and develop coping mechanisms to work through their emotions. The principles of CBT have been successfully adapted to individuals involved in the criminal justice system, specifically to help them understand and change criminal thinking patterns. A meta-analysis of past research showed that group CBT programs can reduce adult and juvenile recidivism by as much as 26 percent (Lipsey et al. 2007). Recently, an experimental study in Chicago found participation in a CBT program reduced recidivism among school-age youth at high risk of involvement in crime and violence (Heller et al. 2017).

Healthy, Wealthy & Wise (HWW) is a peer-led CBT program developed by Community & Youth Outreach (CYO), an Oakland community-based organization that provides outreach, mentoring, case management, and other support to high-risk youth and young adults and is part of the Oakland Unite life coaching network. HWW is based on Thinking for a Change and Credible Messenger Mentoring, two programs that have been shown to increase motivation and reduce recidivism (Lowenkamp 2009; Lynch 2018). It draws on an evidence-based curriculum from The Change Companies. By augmenting existing life coaching services, HWW is intended to support highest-risk individuals to identify problematic situations, help them improve self-control and problem-solving skills, and heal from trauma.

The HWW curriculum covers four units: 1) decision making, 2) identity, 3) overcoming pain, difficulty and trauma, and 4) life skills/financial literacy. According to program documents from CYO, groups of approximately 25 young people are facilitated by staff who are trained credible messengers and come from the community. Sessions are held for 1.5 to 2 hours per week for 14 weeks. In addition to group work, participants use an interactive “Change Companion” journal to document their journey, reflect on their thinking, and set goals (Proctor et al. 2011). The program provides \$25 stipends per session to encourage attendance, as well as food and transportation support. A graduation ceremony is held for each cohort to celebrate the achievement and participants receive a \$100 graduation stipend.

With CalVIP support, CYO planned to accept referrals for HWW from other agencies in the Oakland Unite life coaching network and graduate up to 120 highest-risk participants over the course of two years. This Final Local Evaluation Report provides evidence of the project’s implementation and outcomes.

## II. Data Collection

The evaluation draws on agency visits, review of documents, and administrative data to learn about program implementation and participant outcomes of HWW. Table 1 describes each data source.

**Table 1. Data sources**

Data source	Description
Agency visits with semistructured interviews	During visits conducted in January 2019 and January 2020, the evaluation team conducted semistructured interviews with agency staff members, including managers and frontline staff. Each site visit included interviews with participants and observation of a HWW group session.
Review of documents and materials	The team reviewed materials provided by Oakland Unite staff as well as materials collected directly during the site visits, such as scope of work, quarterly narratives, and blank journals.
Administrative data	The team collected individual-level data on arrests, convictions, and dispositions from the Alameda County Probation Department <sup>1</sup> ; data on arrest and victimization incidents from the Oakland Police Department; and service and participant data from Oakland Unite's Cityspan database through December 31, 2019. CYO also provided a listing of HWW cohorts and program graduates through December 12, 2019.
Brief Resilience Scale	The team collected individual-level data on the Brief Resilience Scale. Starting in October 2018, program staff were to administer the scale to participants at HWW or life coaching program intake and every three months thereafter. Staff recorded this information in the Cityspan database.

Outcome data related to contact with law enforcement from the Alameda County Probation Department and Oakland Police Department were only available for the subset of participants whose personally identifiable information (i.e. name and date of birth) were entered into Oakland Unite's Cityspan database and who consented to share this information with evaluators. Personally identifiable information was needed to link records across multiple administrative data sources. In addition to the participant demographic and service data in Oakland Unite's Cityspan database, CYO provided a listing of each cohort and those who graduated from the program.

HWW and life coaching program staff administered the Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al. 2008), which assessed one component of social and emotional learning (SEL). Social and emotional learning describes the development of a broad set of skills such as self-awareness, decision-making, and self-control, which are linked to a range of positive outcomes in education, employment, and interpersonal relationships. As resilience could be affected by HWW and life coaching, program staff were to collect periodic data on this measure at the start of program participation and once quarterly thereafter. However, data were collected inconsistently, with many individuals having no SEL records, only one record, or a first record that did not coincide with when they started participating in program services.

A total of 169 individuals participated in HWW during the period reflected in this report. Administrative data from law enforcement agencies were not matched to service data for individuals whose information was not recorded in Cityspan (11 percent) or who did not consent to share their personally identifiable

<sup>1</sup>The Juvenile Division data files included an arrest date and arrested offenses, sustained offenses, disposition, and facility information. These files included juveniles arrested throughout Alameda County, including the City of Oakland. The Adult Division file included only information on sustained offenses for individuals who were on formal probation.



information for the evaluation (40 percent). About 49 percent of participants were administered the Brief Resilience Scale at least once, and only 28 percent had both a valid baseline and endline measure<sup>2</sup>.

### III. Research Design

The evaluation consisted of a process and outcome evaluation examining participant outcomes related to contact with law enforcement and SEL.

#### A. Process Evaluation

The goal of the process study was to describe HWW participants, implementation of the program, fidelity to the program design, and successes and challenges. The analysis for the process study included reviewing program materials and documents, summarizing notes from the site visits, developing descriptive statistics from the demographic and service data, and analyzing information across the data sources to identify implementation themes. We report descriptive statistics on participant characteristics and service receipt for all individuals with valid data and include the sample sizes in all tables.

#### B. Outcome Evaluation

The outcomes evaluation consisted of a pre-post analysis 12 months before and after program enrollment. To be included in the outcomes analysis, participants had to meet the following eligibility criteria: 1) attend at least one HWW group according to program data, 2) consent to share personally identifiable information for the evaluation, and 3) start HWW by December 31, 2018, such that outcomes could be observed over a 12-month follow-up period (outcome data were collected through December 31, 2019). After applying these criteria, there were only 37 participants remaining (Table 2).<sup>3</sup>

**Table 2. Sample of HWW participants eligible for outcomes analysis**

Sample	N	Percent of total
All potential HWW participants	169	100
Who attended at least one HWW group	143	85
And consented to share data for outcome evaluation	78	46
And started HWW by 12/31/18 (i.e. had a 12-month follow-up period)	37	22

Source: Cityspan.

These 37 individuals received different mixes of services—either HWW in combination with life coaching, as originally intended, or HWW only—and some did not graduate from HWW (Table 3). Thus, we conducted the pre-post analysis for all eligible HWW participants as well as for the following subgroups: 1) individuals who participated in HWW only, 2) those who also received life coaching

<sup>2</sup> SEL records dated three months prior to one week after start of services were considered valid baselines, and records dated at least 60 days after baseline were considered valid endlines.

<sup>3</sup> As described in the grant’s Local Evaluation Plan, the evaluation originally sought to include an impact analysis using a matched comparison group research design. The goal was to measure the impact of participating in HWW on outcomes 12 months after program enrollment, using propensity score matching (PSM) to generate comparison groups of individuals who were similar to program participants but did not participate. However, once the minimum eligibility criteria required for inclusion in an impact analysis were applied, sample sizes were too small to conduct PSM, which requires reliably estimating the probability of participating in HWW using logistic regression.

services during this period, 3) those who graduated from HWW during this period, and 4) those who participated in HWW but did not graduate. Finally, we examined pre-post outcomes for individuals who only received life coaching from CYO during the same period.

**Table 3. Sample of HWW and life coaching participants eligible for outcomes analysis**

Sample	N	Percent of total
All HWW participants eligible for outcomes analysis	37	100
• Participants in HWW only	12	32
• Participants in HWW and life coaching	25	68
• HWW graduates	18	49
• HWW non-graduates	19	51
CYO life coaching only participants eligible for outcomes analysis	147	100

Source: Cityspan and program data provided by CYO.

This pre-post outcomes analysis is descriptive—that is, the results cannot be interpreted as being caused solely by participation in HWW. Due to small sample sizes, we were unable to conduct a more rigorous impact study, and readers should exercise care in interpreting differences between groups. Nevertheless, the analysis offers insight into how key outcomes changed for participants over a twelve-month period and how those changes compared for individuals who received different bundles of services from CYO.

### C. Outcome Measures

The outcomes evaluation used data on arrests, convictions, probation, and violent victimization from law enforcement records. We used the Uniform Crime Reporting statute categories and statute codes to determine each arrest or victimization incident’s type. For arrest or victimization incidents with multiple offenses, we used the most serious offense to determine the severity. In addition, we examined SEL as measured by the Brief Resilience Scale and recorded in Cityspan. Each outcome was measured at baseline and endline as described in Table 4, so that we could compare changes over time. Sample sizes are noted in all outcome figures.

**Table 4. List of outcome measures**

Outcome	Definition
Arrested for any offense	Whether the individual was arrested by the Oakland Police Department at least once in the 12 months before or after starting services.
Arrested for a gun offense	Whether the individual was arrested in Alameda County at least once in the 12 months before or after starting services for an incident involving a gun.
Arrested for a violent offense	Whether the individual was arrested in Alameda County at least once in the 12 months before or after starting services for an incident involving homicide, rape, robbery, or assault.
Sentenced to probation	Whether the individual was sentenced to formal probation supervision in Alameda County in the 12 months before or after starting services.
Convicted of any offense	Whether the individual had any conviction in Alameda County in the 12 months before or after starting services.
Victim of a violent incident	Whether the individual reported to the Oakland Police Department being a victim of an incident involving homicide, rape, robbery, assault, offenses against the family and children, prostitution, or sex offenses in the 12 months before or after starting services.

Outcome	Definition
SEL	The SEL score of the individual at baseline versus endline. Records dated three months prior to one week after start of services were considered valid baselines, and records dated at least 60 days after baseline were considered valid endlines. In instances where an individual had more than one valid baseline or endline, we selected the baseline closest to their service start date and their last endline score.

## IV. Results and Conclusions

In this section, we present detailed findings of the process and outcome evaluation and conclude by interpreting the results in light of the project’s overarching goal of reducing recidivism.

### A. Process evaluation results

#### 1. Who did HWW serve?

To qualify for life coaching services, and thus for HWW, participants were to possess at least four of the following six risk factors:

- 1) Be on probation or parole for a violent incident
- 2) Live in or hang out in a designated target area
- 3) Have a history and/or be in immediate risk of engaging in gun-involved activity
- 4) Have been shot or seriously injured due to turf or group-related violence
- 5) Have a close friend, peer or family member shot or killed due to turf or group-related violence in the last 3 years
- 6) Interact regularly with known groups involved in violence

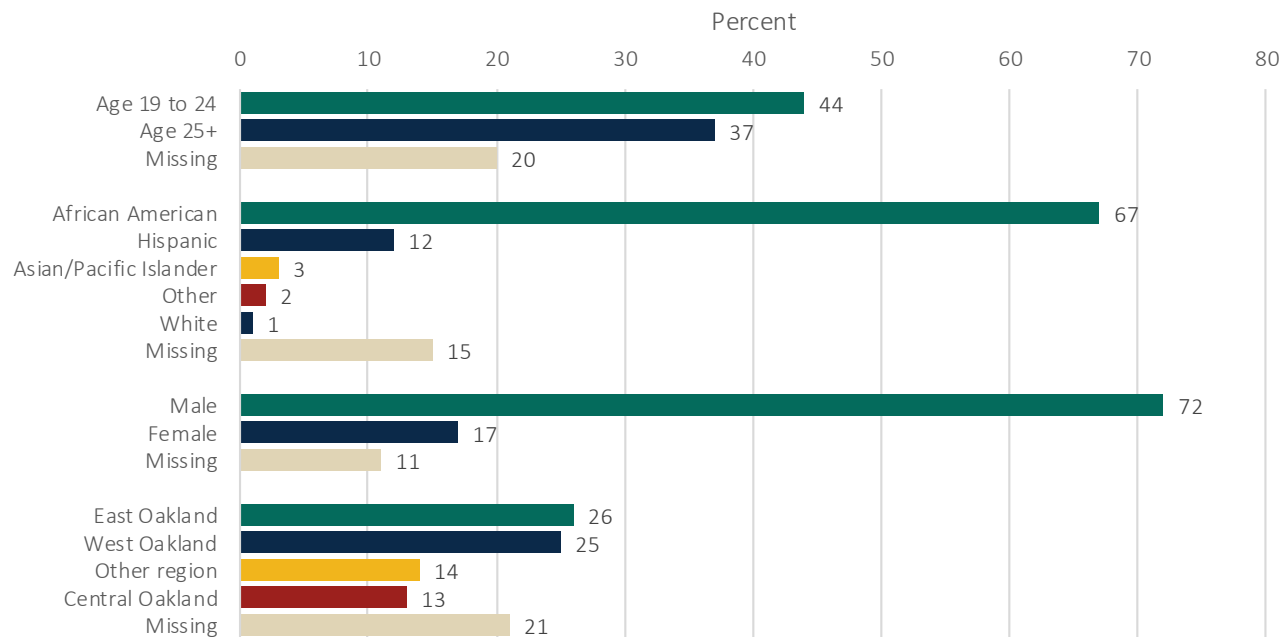
Risk factors were not collected consistently for all participants, but overall, 44 percent had at least four of these risk factors recorded in Cityspan (Table 5). The most common risk factor was having a history and/or being in immediate risk of engaging in gun-involved activity. Based on data collected at intake, individuals who participated in HWW were primarily adult African American males residing in East or West Oakland, which are the two regions of Oakland with the greatest incidence of violence (Figure 1).

**Table 5. Participant risk factors**

Risk factor	Number of HWW participants with recorded data	Percent of these participants meeting risk factor
History and/or immediate risk of gun-involved activity	132	100
Close friend, peer, or family member shot or killed due to turf or group violence	134	97
On probation or parole for violent incident	83	82
Lives or hangs out in target area	151	78
Shot or seriously injured due to turf or group violence	131	39
Interacts regularly with known groups involved in violence	151	11
Meets 4 or more risk factors	169	44

Source: Cityspan.

**Figure 1. Participant demographic characteristics**



Source: Cityspan.

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

According to law enforcement records, 60 percent of HWW participants who consented to share their personally identifiable information were arrested before receiving services and 51 percent had been on probation supervision (Table 6). Forty-seven percent had been charged with a gun offense, and about one third had been charged with a violent offense or been a victim of violence.

Although HWW was intended to complement life coaching, about two-thirds of the 169 participants did not take part in life coaching<sup>4</sup>. Compared to this group, the prevalence of prior contact with law enforcement was much higher among those who participated in both life coaching and HWW. For example, 83 percent of individuals who participated in both HWW and life coaching had been previously arrested, compared to 20 percent of those who participated in HWW only. This might mean that HWW served a mix of individuals, including those at lower risk, or it could be that the program served individuals touched by violence before they became involved in the justice system. Participants who only received life coaching from CYO during this period also had high rates of prior contact with law enforcement (for example, 83 percent had been arrested before starting life coaching). Program staff reported that the main reason for life coaching participants not engaging in HWW was schedule conflicts.

**Table 6. Contact with law enforcement before receiving HWW or life coaching services from CYO**

	Percent of all HWW participants N = 83	Percent of HWW only participants N = 30	Percent of HWW + life coaching participants N = 53	Percent of life coaching only participants N = 156
Arrested	60	20	83	83

<sup>4</sup> Table 6, which is limited to 83 individuals who consented to share their personally identifiable information for evaluation, shows a different percentage of participants taking part in HWW only (36 percent). This reflects the fact that individuals who also participated in life coaching were more likely to appear in Cityspan and provide consent.

	Percent of all HWW participants N = 83	Percent of HWW only participants N = 30	Percent of HWW + life coaching participants N = 53	Percent of life coaching only participants N = 156
On probation supervision	51	20	68	65
Arrested for a gun offense	47	20	62	60
Arrested for a violent offense	33	10	45	39
Victim of violence	34	10	47	50

Source: Cityspan, Oakland Police Department, Alameda County Probation Department.

Note: This table includes participants who consented to share their personally identifiable information only.

## 2. How did implementation of HWW compare to original plans?

The core components of HWW hewed to the original program logic model illustrated in Figure 2. Staff described a cohort model lasting 14 weeks. This schedule allowed the groups to focus on four curriculum subjects for three weeks each, while permitting groups the flexibility to discuss those subjects without being rushed through the content. However, HWW also made adjustments to respond to the needs of participants and the realities of those participants completing a relatively lengthy curriculum. For one, “cohort” denotes the period used to cover the curriculum, as opposed to the group of participants who take part for that period of time. The participants in a group may start up to 4 or 6 weeks after the 14-week period has begun, for example. This allows individuals to begin participating as early as possible, rather than waiting two or three months until the next cohort begins. Due to concerns for participant safety, HWW began running concurrent groups during the 2019-2020 funding period. This allowed the program to separate participants who may affiliate with rival gangs, for instance, while enrolling them as early as possible into HWW.

During the 2019 visit, staff described a graduation requirement based on completion of 10 sessions and the companion journal, which encourages participants to reflect on their past and consider how to change their thinking to promote more responsible attitudes and choices in the future. The 10-session graduation requirement differs from the original planned graduation requirement, in which a participant would graduate if they completed 28 hours of programming, equivalent to attending all 14 sessions.

If a participant did not attend at least 10 sessions in one cohort, they could join a subsequent cohort. Thus, participants could complete the required number of sessions across multiple cohorts or within a single cohort. At the time of this report, five HWW cohorts had been offered, reflecting the period from July 31, 2018 through December 31, 2019. Figure 3 shows how HWW participants often took part in multiple cohorts. For example, 27 percent of all participants took part in two cohorts, 10 percent took part in three cohorts, and 4 percent took part in four cohorts (none took part in all five cohorts offered). Graduates were more likely to participate in multiple cohorts than non-graduates during this period.

Figure 2. Healthy, Wealthy & Wise program logic model

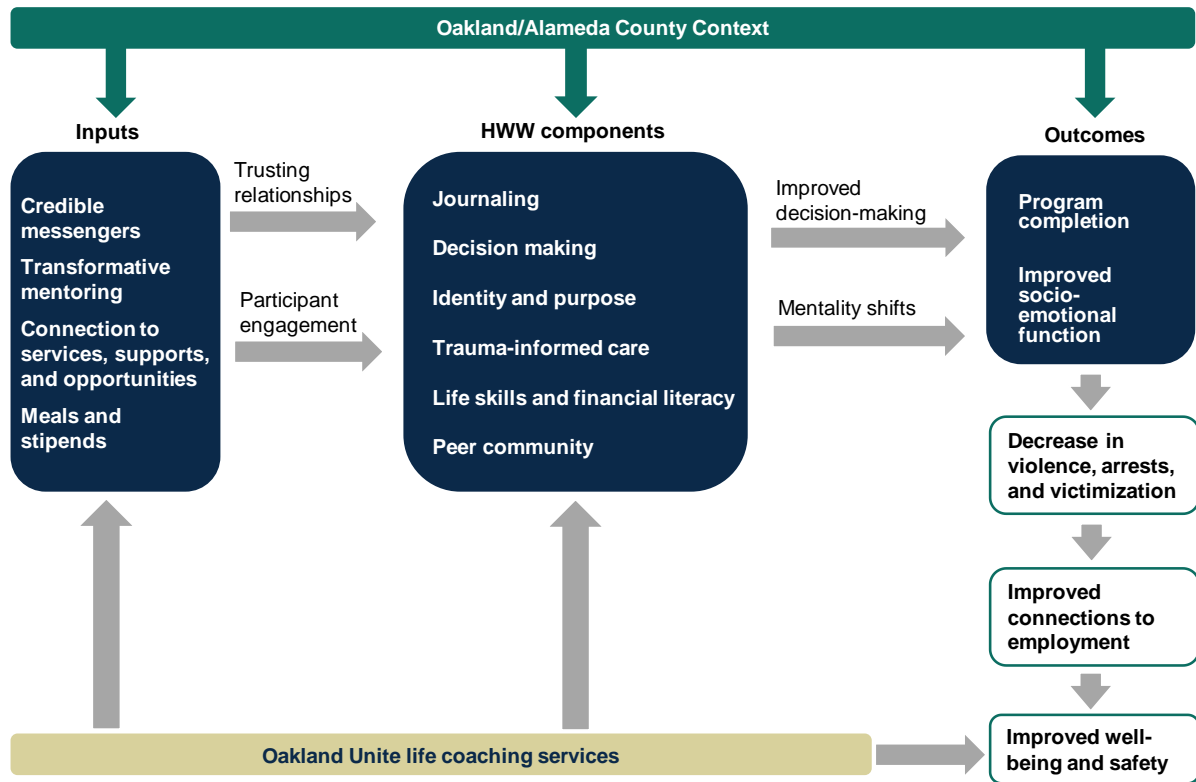
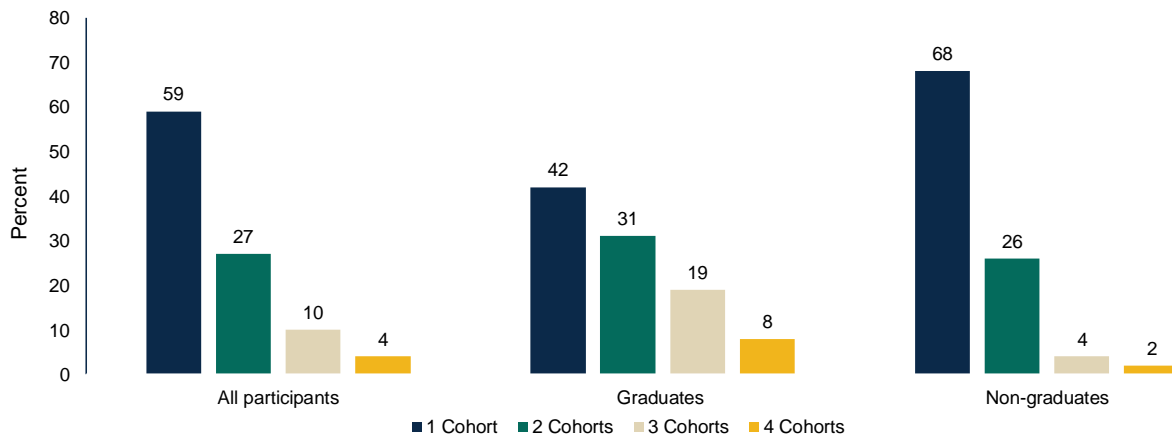


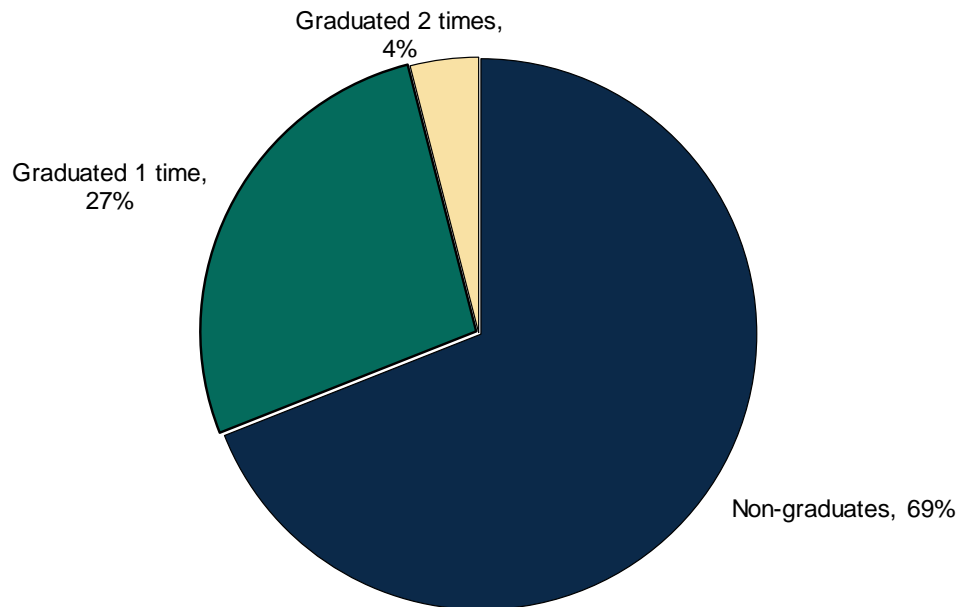
Figure 3. Cohort participation among all HWW participants, graduates, and non-graduates



Source: Program data provided by CYO.

Although graduation was based on completing a minimum number of HWW sessions, participation in HWW did not necessarily end at graduation. At the time of the 2020 visit, staff described how some participants who have completed the curriculum continue to attend meetings, and in some cases complete enough sessions to graduate multiple times. As shown in Figure 4, 36 percent of participants had graduated from the program, including 5 percent who had graduated twice. The graduation rate was higher among participants who also received life coaching than among those who participated in HWW only (45 compared to 24 percent; not shown).

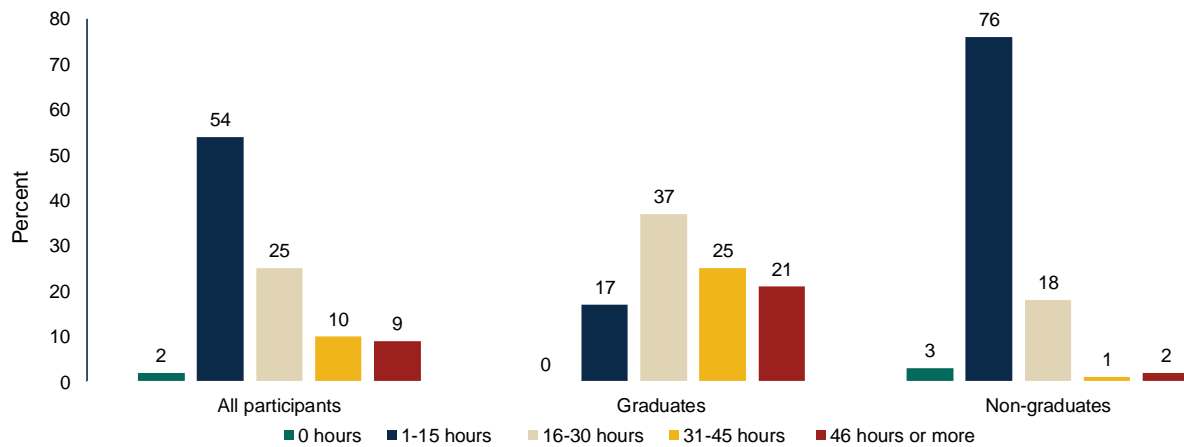
**Figure 4. Graduation among HWW participants**



Source: Program data provided by CYO.

The total hours of participation varied across participants (Figure 5). As expected, graduates typically participated for a greater number of hours than non-graduates. Among non-graduates, 76 percent participated between 1 and 15 hours, compared to 17 percent of graduates. Graduates were required to complete at least 10 sessions, so some may have attended this minimum number (reaching 15 hours total if each session lasted 1.5 hours); it is also possible that the administrative data recorded may have missed some hours of participation. Notably, 46 percent of graduates continued to participate for more than 30 hours, which exceeds the total length of the program. Although graduation requirements were ultimately based on the number of sessions attended (rather than the number of hours), the database that staff used to record participation tracked hours each month rather than sessions attended.

**Figure 5. Hours of participation among all HWW participants, graduates, and non-graduates**



Source: Cityspan and program data provided by CYO.

Consistent with how HWW was envisioned, the program relied on skilled facilitators who were credible messengers and could relate to the experiences and mindset of group participants. Most of the facilitators have been involved with HWW from early on and have had experiences at other agencies with similar CBT programs that preceded HWW. During observations, the facilitator led the group in an engaging and interactive manner, using multiple strategies, such as videos and brainstorming on a whiteboard, to encourage participants to reflect and contribute to the discussion. Facilitators also drew on personal experiences and the experiences of others who have participated in HWW to make concepts culturally relevant and foster discussion among the group.

### **3. How did participants join HWW?**

Young adults came to CYO through word of mouth, Ceasefire<sup>5</sup> referrals, and outreach at Parole and Community Team meetings. Through these pathways, participants learned of CYO and the services the agency offers, including life coaching and HWW. These pathways reflect a transition from the time of the 2019 site visit, when street outreach was one of the Oakland Unite strategies and a major method of identifying high-risk individuals to refer to HWW. Although HWW was meant to receive referrals from all life coaching agencies when the grant program was first envisioned, this has not happened in practice. One possible reason is that inter-agency referrals have historically not been a primary source of new participants for CYO.

### **4. What was the connection between HWW and life coaching?**

HWW was intended to be a complement to the life coaching program. However, in practice not all who participated in HWW also participated in life coaching at the same time. HWW participants could start meeting with a life coach and then join HWW, or they could join HWW first before being matched with a life coach. Frontline staff discussed the benefits of both starting with life coaching before HWW and starting HWW before life coaching. In both types of intra-agency referral, staff pointed out how participants have the autonomy to make a choice for themselves.

One staff person explained that going from life coaching to HWW provides a “warm hand-off,” where the individual is given a choice of whether to participate. In contrast, receiving a referral from a law enforcement agency can feel more obligatory. Alternatively, an individual may join HWW first if the CYO life coaches have a full caseload. This offers the opportunity for facilitators to get acquainted with the participant, build rapport with that person, and determine the life coach best suited to work with them. Then, the individual can be asked about what they think of being matched with a particular life coach before agreeing to the pairing. Another potential benefit of starting HWW first is that the material may help prepare the individual for the process of change that life coaching can then deepen.

Service data show that only 33 percent of participants took part in both HWW and life coaching services (Table 7). Most commonly, these participants started receiving life coaching before starting HWW (46 percent), but it was also common to start HWW before life coaching (37 percent) or to start both programs within the same week (17 percent). Individuals who graduated from HWW were more likely to also participate in life coaching (48 percent) compared to individuals who did not graduate (27 percent). While HWW graduates and non-graduates who also participated in life coaching received a similar number of life coaching hours, on average, non-graduates were more likely to have started HWW *after*

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<sup>5</sup> Ceasefire is a violence reduction strategy that coordinates law enforcement, social services, and the community to communicate directly with individuals at greatest risk of shooting or being shot and offer them outreach and support services.



life coaching (62 percent), whereas graduates were more likely to have started HWW *before* life coaching (60 percent).

**Table 7. Participation in HWW and life coaching**

	All participants N = 169	Graduates N = 52	Non-graduates N = 117
Percent participating in HWW and life coaching	33	48	27
Percent started both within a week of each other	17	12	20
Percent started HWW before life coaching	37	60	17
Percent started HWW after life coaching	46	28	62
Average hours of life coaching received (if participated in both)	36	39	33

Source: Cityspan.

Staff and participants saw HWW and life coaching as complementary services. They described HWW as helping to bring individuals to the place of wanting to live a different kind of life, whereas life coaching then focuses on the specific goals for that life and how to achieve them. As one life coach expressed, during HWW “the light of hope sparks on and they realize they want to do something different but don’t know how to get the support. That’s when they’re linked with a life coach to sit down one-on-one and build from there.”

“Class is [when] they teach you about life. When you with [your life coach] it’s about putting what you learned in class into action. Life coaches—now they calling your bluff on all the stuff you said you were gonna do. They call you. That helps to make somebody successful. You gotta man up and do the stuff you said you wanted to do.”

- HWW participant

### 5. How did HWW engage with participants and families?

Participants and staff interviewed identified the curriculum content, sense of accomplishment from program completion, relatable, effective facilitators, and peer support as key factors contributing to continued participation in HWW. One staff person noted that participants keep returning because “they hear something new they didn’t hear last time.” A participant described how “they talk to you about real-life situations that people in our community are going through,” such as the challenges of trying to get a job when on parole. In HWW, they discuss how to face those challenges and that there are choices beyond “going back to the streets and start selling drugs.” Another participant echoed this sentiment, saying: “we don’t know more than the streets... they teach you there’s another way and [...] there’s other ways to make money.”

Completing the program and graduating can be a source of pride and accomplishment for participants, some of whom may not have finished high school. From a practical perspective, HWW group meetings provide a safe, constructive alternative to being on the streets. Beyond that, staff explained how repetition was beneficial both to the returning participants, by further solidifying what they learned in earlier sessions, as well as to the new participants, who can see the previous graduates as role models. For these returning participants, HWW has introduced a second journal that expands on the contents of the first journal and allows for further reflection.

.....  
"We feed off of each other. It's not just a class, it's a support group, it's grown to a family. In prison people talk about having a support group, a positive healthy group of friends, a group of people who help you to be a better version of yourself. This is what HWW does."  
.....

- HWW participant

HWW relies on the strength of the facilitators as credible messengers to deliver the curriculum content, and participants also see them as positive role models. As one participant explained, "I see these men [on staff] who have been affected by gang violence, I see them [...] carry themselves in a way that commands respect. They're doing it in a way without guns." The mix of staff, veteran participants, and new participants fosters an environment where everyone can share and learn from one another.

Current participants may introduce other individuals, such as a partner, family member, or friend to HWW. HWW staff see their support as valuable to the participant's progress, and thus it can be helpful for them to understand and reinforce the kinds of lessons taught during HWW. In some cases, the support person attends only once, and thus is not considered a HWW participant. In other cases, the support person becomes a participant as well, as they seek to address their own experiences with violence. One staff member mentioned that there had been discussion of having a couples' class or a woman-only class, since often men start coming and then bring their partners.

## 6. What were program successes?

Both staff and participants described examples of how mindsets changed after taking part in HWW. One participant described how "they are really trying to emphasize having mental discipline. [Facilitators] stress that the decisions that you make in life will impact your future... [They] really focus on perception, and 'condition your thought process.'" A life coach provided an example of how this mentality shift was demonstrated in the life of a participant who had taken part in several months of HWW:

*"Just recently we had a guy who was just standing outside and somebody shot at him. This guy a couple of cohorts ago would be seeking retaliation and revenge. But the discussion now is, 'I don't even want to live like that no more.' So that sense of retaliation and bloodthirstiness is no longer there. Given [his] experience, this wouldn't have been a question before."*

A longtime HWW participant echoed this sentiment when describing his own thought process:

*"I think first now. If I do something to you now and I go to jail I'm never getting out of jail. Think before you act. Is the consequence worth it? This class really helps you think [and] separate from the situation."*

At the same time, participants pointed out ways that HWW helped them with "life skills" beyond making them consider the decisions that could lead to becoming justice-involved. These practical skills included topics like opening a bank account and building confidence when interviewing for a job.

## 7. What challenges or opportunities exist for HWW?

Staff cited participant retention as a challenge at the time of both site visits. Individuals who attend only one or two times may be guests of participants, or those who are mainly interested in receiving an incentive check. Although incentives and meals help with initial attendance, CYO has modified the timing of when staff distribute incentives to encourage continued participation. For example, staff now distribute incentive checks at the end of the session rather than part-way through the session, to dissuade

individuals from leaving early. Staff have also discussed further modifications, such as distributing a \$75 incentive after participating in three sessions, rather than one \$25 check at each session.

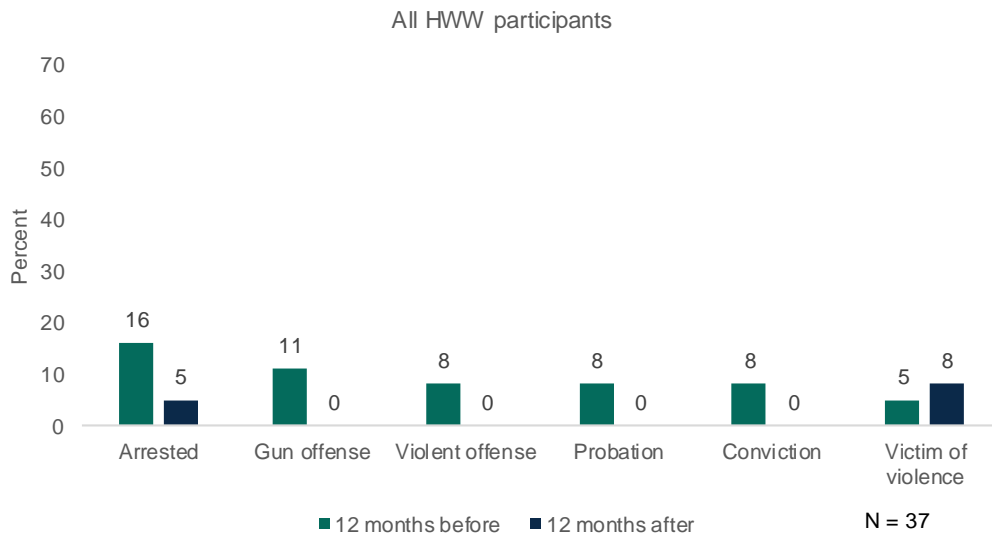
However, CYO is focused more on retaining the smaller set of individuals who have attended at least six sessions, as these are the ones who are on the path to graduation. Among HWW participants who have a life coach, staff said drop-off in participation was often a result of life circumstances. Common reasons that participants stopped attending were because of scheduling conflicts with work and family responsibilities and, to a lesser extent, being reincarcerated or reinjured. The agency does not have similar information about the participants who drop off but were not assigned to a life coach.

### B. Outcome evaluation results

The outcomes evaluation examined the relationship between participating in HWW and being arrested for any offense or a gun or violent offense specifically, being placed on probation, being convicted of a crime, and becoming a victim of a reported violent incident. Figures 6-8 display the percentage of participants that had each of these outcomes in the 12 months before and 12 months after starting services. If there was a positive change, the percentage of participants with each outcome should decline.

Across all HWW participants, there were decreases in the share of participants who were arrested (for any offense as well as for gun or violent offenses), were placed on probation, or were convicted for any offense (Figure 6). For example, the percentage of all HWW participants arrested in the 12 months before starting HWW compared to the 12 months after decreased from 16 to 5 percent. This represents a 69 percent decrease in the probability of being arrested over 12 months. Although arrest rates improved, the rate of violent victimization among participants increased from 5 to 8 percent.

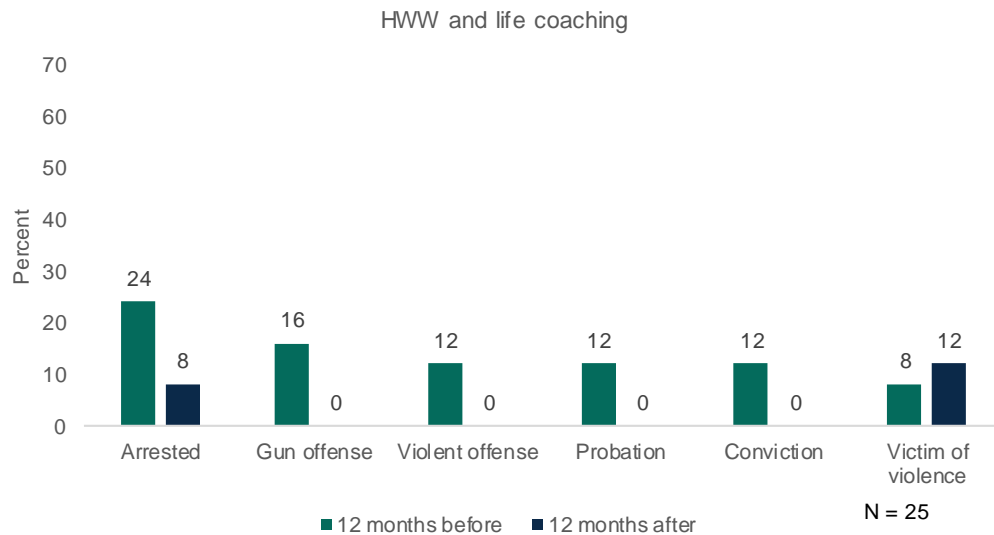
**Figure 6. Contact with law enforcement 12 months before and after starting services, all HWW participants**



Source: Cityspan, Oakland Police Department, Alameda County Probation Department.

Individuals who participated in both HWW and life coaching also had a reduction in arrest rates, from 24 to 8 percent (Figure 7). This represents a 67 percent decrease in the probability of being arrested over 12 months. These participants also became less likely to be sentenced to probation or to be convicted but became more likely to be victims of a violent incident reported to police (from 8 to 12 percent). None of the 12 individuals who participated in HWW but not life coaching had any contact with law enforcement in either the 12 months before or after starting HWW. As noted earlier, this suggests that individuals who participated in HWW only were at lower risk of engaging in violence compared to those who participated in both HWW and life coaching.

**Figure 7. Contact with law enforcement 12 months before and after starting services, HWW and life coaching participants**



Source: Cityspan, Oakland Police Department, Alameda County Probation Department.

Finally, we examined pre and post outcomes for individuals who received only life coaching from CYO (Figure 8). Based on their rates of prior contact with law enforcement, this group had the highest risk of engaging in violence—for example, 43 percent had been arrested for an offense involving a gun in the 12 months prior to starting services, compared to 16 percent of individuals who did both life coaching and HWW (Figure 7). The life coaching only group also saw improved outcomes, including a decrease in the probability of being arrested from 62 to 27 percent. This represents a 56 percent reduction in their 12-month arrest rate. They also saw a decrease in their rate of violent victimization, from 35 to 10 percent.

**Figure 8. Contact with law enforcement 12 months before and after starting services, life coaching only participants**

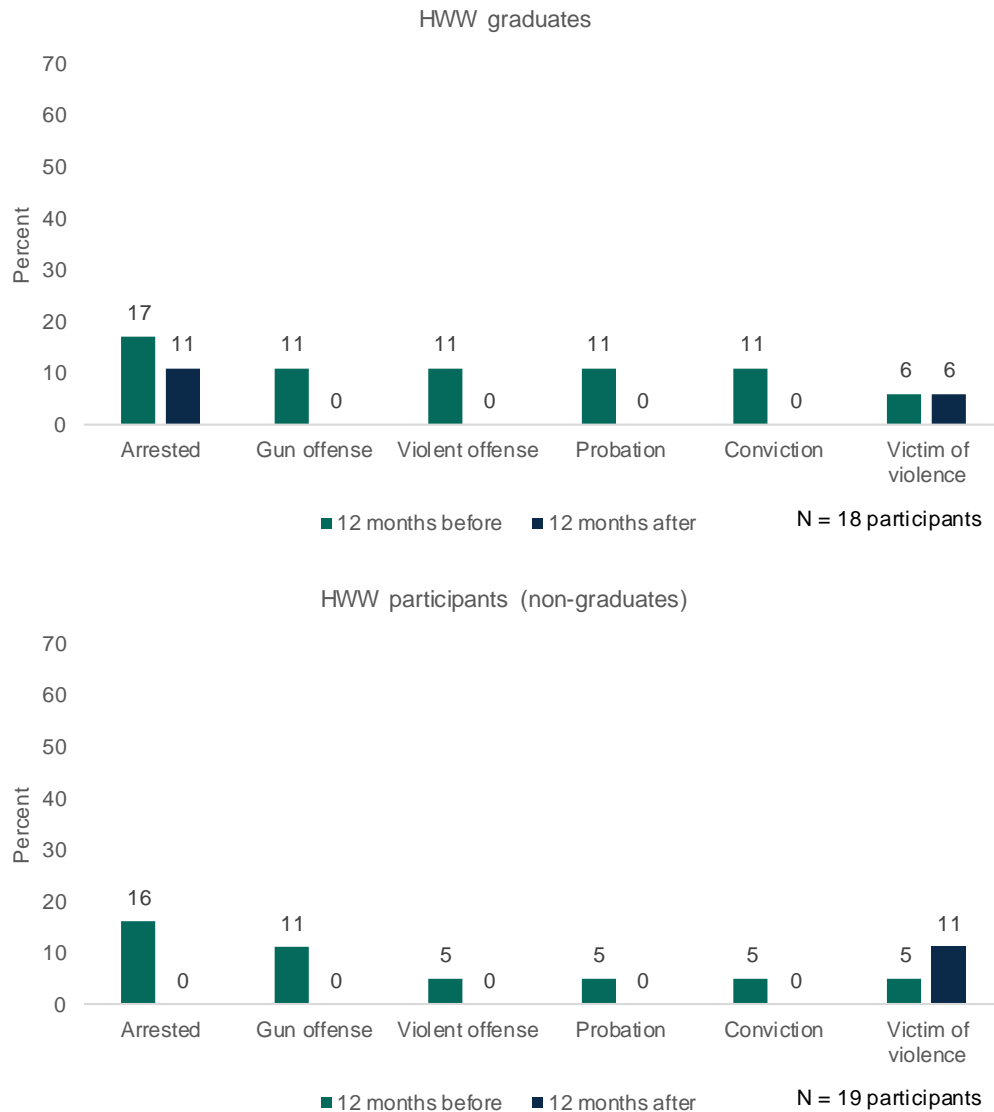


Source: Cityspan, Oakland Police Department, Alameda County Probation Department.

Because each group had a different risk level when they began services, it is challenging to compare their pre-post changes, but generally all groups showed similar improvements. This could reflect the efficacy of the HWW and life coaching models as well as the fact that individuals who chose to engage in these programs may have been eager to make a change in their lives.

The evaluation also examined outcomes for participants who completed the HWW graduation requirements and those who did not (Figure 9). Both groups had lower rates of arrest, overall and for gun and violent offenses, and became less likely to be placed on probation or be convicted. The arrest rate of graduates decreased from 17 to 11 percent (a 35 percent decrease). For non-graduates, the arrest rate decreased from 16 to 0 percent (a 100 percent decrease). Although both groups had similar pre-intervention rates of contact with law enforcement, there could be other differences between them that help explain these patterns aside from whether they completed HWW. In addition, each group had fewer than 20 people, which means that these rates are sensitive to the outcomes of just a few individuals.

**Figure 9. Contact with law enforcement 12 months before and after starting services, HWW graduates and non-graduates**



Source: Cityspan, Oakland Police Department, Alameda County Probation Department.

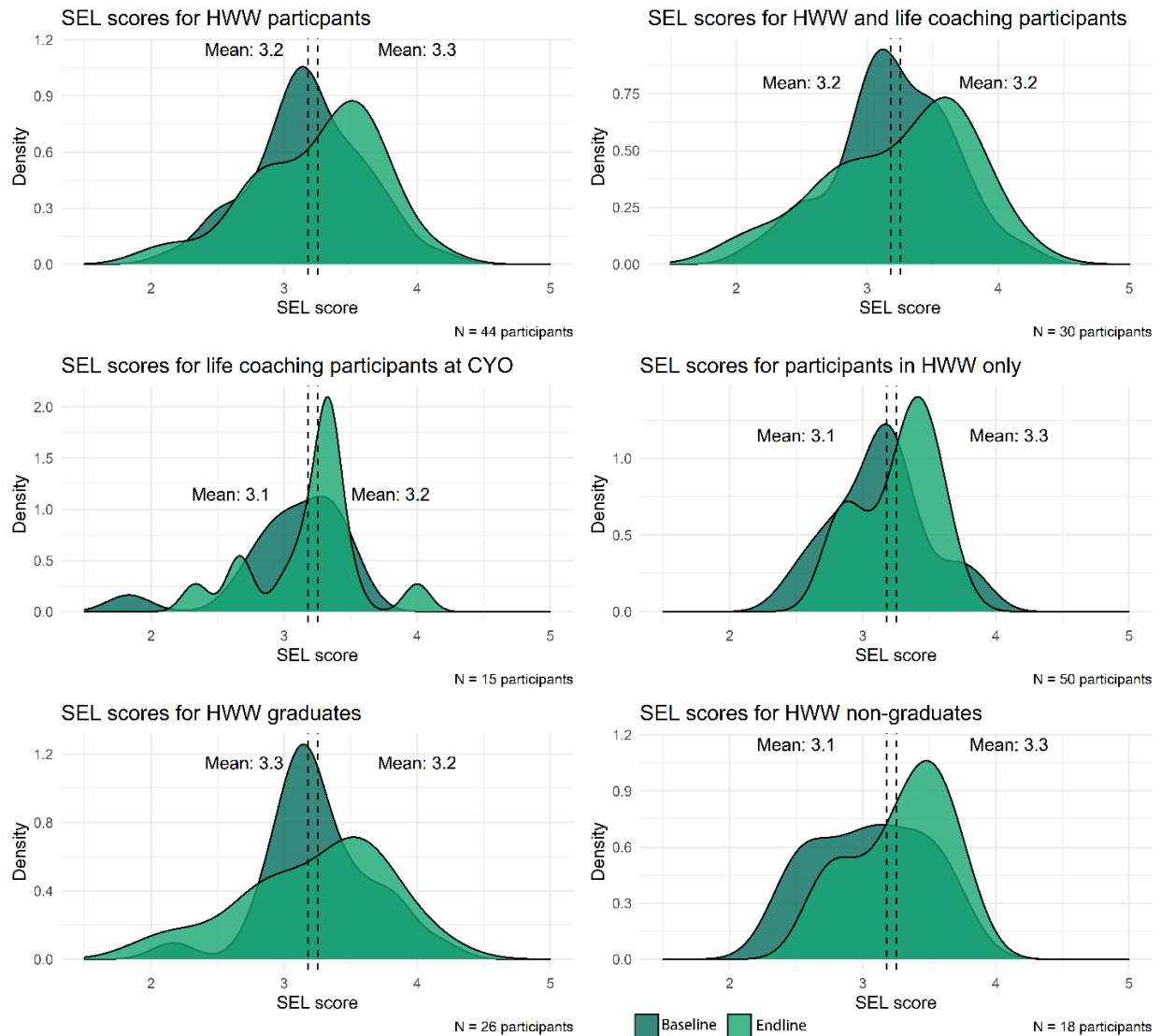
Finally, the evaluation examined the change in SEL scores for these different groups of participants at baseline and endline. Unlike the analysis of law enforcement outcomes, the only inclusion criterion for this analysis was having both a valid baseline and endline SEL score, as defined in the Research Design section.<sup>6</sup> Possible scores range from 1.0 to 5.0; the measure’s authors suggest that scores below 3.0 indicate low resilience and scores above 4.3 indicate high resilience.<sup>7</sup> The average score for HWW

<sup>6</sup> Endline scores had to be measured at least 60 days after baseline. On average, they were measured 189 days apart but the duration between baseline and endline varied across participants.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, B.W., E.M. Epstein, J.A. Ortiz, P.J. Christopher, and E.M. Tooley. “The Foundations of Resilience: What Are the Critical Resources for Bouncing Back from Stress?” In *Resilience in Children, Adolescents, and Adults*:

participants was 3.2 at baseline and 3.3 at endline. These average values were similar across the different groups of participants we examined. While there was little change in average SEL scores between baseline and endline, the peaks of the lighter green density plots<sup>8</sup> in Figure 10 suggest that individuals who participated in HWW, life coaching, or a combination were more likely to have a higher SEL score at endline. However, no HWW participants scored above 4.3 either at baseline or endline.

**Figure 10. Distributions of baseline and endline SEL scores**



Source: Cityspan, Oakland Police Department, Alameda County Probation Department.

<sup>8</sup> Density plots graphically represent the distribution of SEL scores.

### C. Conclusions

The process and outcome evaluations yielded several key findings:

- At the time of this report, five HWW cohorts had been completed, reflecting the period from July 31, 2018 through December 31, 2019. A total of 169 individuals participated in HWW during this period. Of these, 36 percent completed the program's graduation requirements.
- Participants were primarily African American young men from East and West Oakland with a history and/or immediate risk of gun-involved activity, as assessed by program staff at intake. Only 44 percent met four or more risk criteria, a requirement defined by Oakland Unite. Sixty percent had been arrested before starting HWW.
- About two-thirds of HWW participants were not part of the life coaching program as envisioned. Individuals who participated in both HWW and life coaching had higher rates of prior contact with law enforcement than those who participated in HWW only. In general, life coaching participants had higher rates of prior contact with law enforcement than HWW participants, suggesting that HWW served a mix of individuals, including those at lower risk of violence. Participants were encouraged to bring friends and family members who might provide them with support and benefit from HWW themselves.
- Although CYO followed the basic program structure and content outlined in the logic model, the organization made some adaptations. Of note, the program did not follow a strict cohort model. To accommodate individuals with different needs, the program allowed them to join a cohort late and complete graduation requirements with another cohort. Individuals could also continue participating after graduating from the program. To support these individuals, CYO developed a second journal with additional content. Overall, 41 percent of participants took part in two or more cohorts and 5 percent graduated twice from the program.
- Participants and staff expressed that the program promoted changes in mindsets, including new approaches to conflict and other life skills. They saw HWW and life coaching as complementary: HWW helped bring individuals to the place of wanting to live a different kind of life, whereas life coaching focused on specific goals and how to achieve them.
- Participants and staff identified the curriculum content, sense of accomplishment from program completion, peer support, and relatable, effective facilitators as key factors contributing to participant engagement. HWW relies on the strength of the facilitators as credible messengers to deliver relevant curriculum content, and participants also see them as positive role models.
- Staff cited participant retention as a challenge at the time of both site visits. Individuals who attend only one or two times may be guests of participants, or those who are mainly interested in receiving an incentive check or a free meal. CYO modified the timing of when staff distribute incentives to encourage continued participation.
- The share of HWW participants who had contact with law enforcement, including arrests for incidents involving guns or violence, decreased after starting services. For example, 16 percent of HWW participants were arrested in the 12 months before starting HWW, compared to 5 percent in the 12 months following—a 69 percent decrease. However, there was limited evidence of improvements in SEL, as captured by the Brief Resilience Scale.

The results suggest that HWW is a promising intervention for reducing recidivism, but further research is needed. Although CYO did not follow a cohort model, it appears HWW was still able to offer a safe peer-



led support group facilitated by credible messengers who served as role models and delivered culturally relevant content. However, the program did not strictly complement life coaching as envisioned, and instead drew in participants from multiple referral sources. The program appears to have served a lower risk population than originally anticipated and struggled with participant retention. Participant outcomes reflected significant reductions in recidivism (including a 69 percent decrease in the 12-month arrest rate and even larger reductions in arrests involving violence or guns). Individuals who participated in life coaching only also saw similar reductions and were generally a higher risk population.

Unfortunately, due to limited sample sizes, the evaluation was unable to determine the causal effect of HWW. If CYO continues to deliver the program, there may eventually be a large enough sample size of participants to conduct a more rigorous impact study that includes a matched comparison group. Given the original goal for HWW to serve as a complement to life coaching, which lacks a CBT component, future research should identify the impacts on recidivism of HWW only versus HWW in combination with life coaching. These results should be compared to existing research on the efficacy and costs of the life coaching program. The sequence in which individuals engage with HWW and life coaching is another area for future study. There was some evidence to suggest that HWW could help prepare individuals to engage with life coaching, which currently suffers from high rates of initial attrition (Gonzalez et al. 2017). However, additional research is needed to inform whether and how the HWW pilot should be extended.

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