

YOUTH CULTURAL BROKERAGE

PILOT PROGRAM

Mid-term Evaluation Report
January 2026

01. INTRODUCTION

This report presents a summary of interim findings from CCIS' Youth Cultural Brokerage Program (YCBP) - a partnership with Calgary's Youth Probation Office, funded by the Ministry of Public Safety and Emergency Services, Government of Alberta. The program was designed to ensure that immigrant youth and their families receive culturally-responsive support when involved with Youth Probation Officers within the Correctional Services Division. This report covers the first 6-month (May 2025 - December 2025) period of the one year pilot project.

METHODS

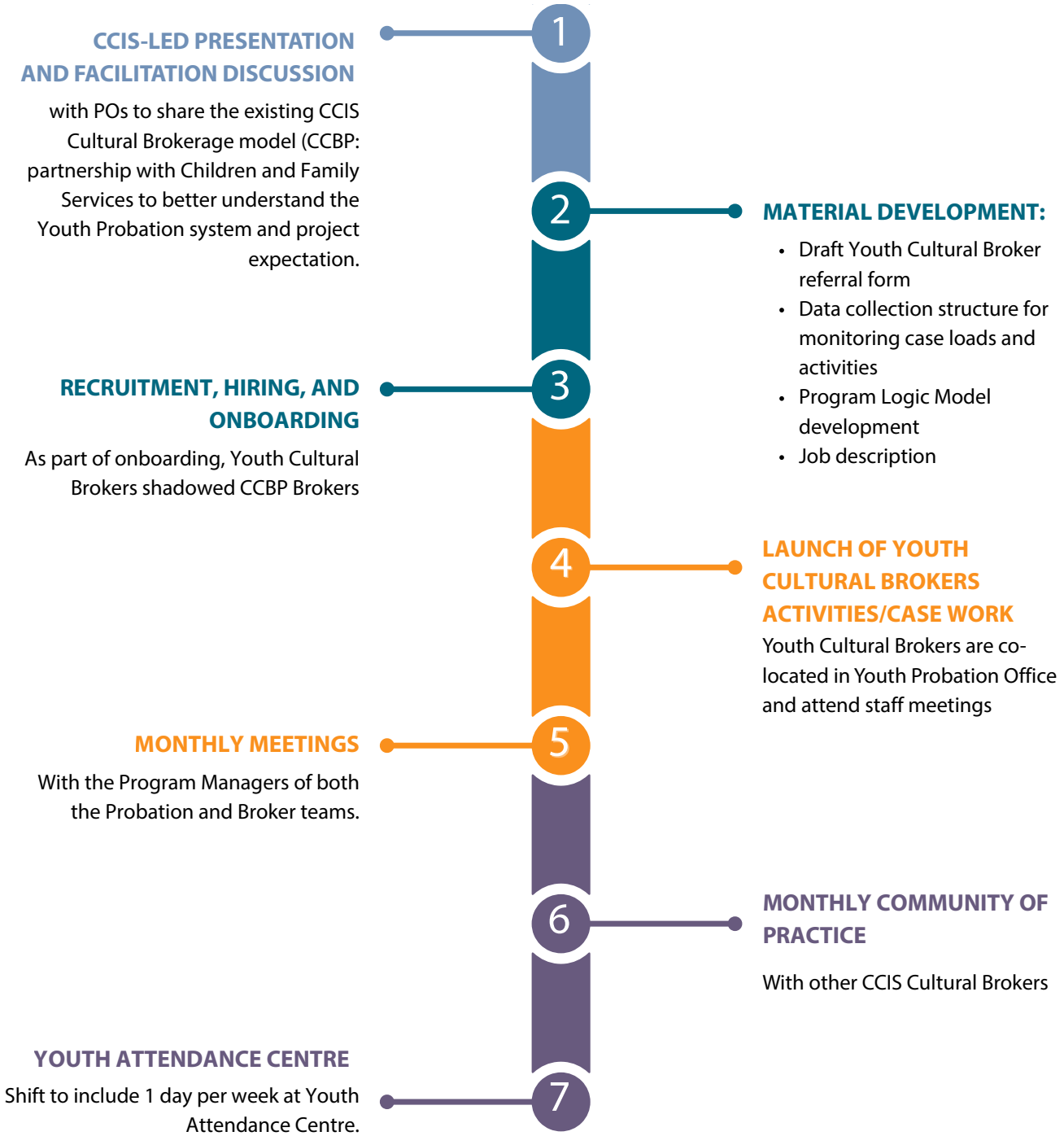
The third-party evaluation focused on capturing an update on the project implementation, including any key milestones or adjustments, as well as emergent strengths, outcomes, and opportunities for the project. Evaluation activities included:

- **Group Discussions** (N=2) with Youth Cultural Brokers (2) and Program Manager
- **Individual Interviews** with Probation Officers (N=6) and Management (N=3)
- **Case Notes Review** (13 case summaries provided)
- **Review of Client Demographics** and **Activity Tracking Data**

The evaluation also included Program Logic Model development and check-in sessions with the Youth Cultural Brokers and Manager.

02. IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY

To-date, the implementation of the Youth Cultural Brokerage Program has progressed as expected. Based on discussion with management at both CCIS and the Youth Probation Office, as well as Probation Officers (POs) and the Youth Brokers, most assumptions for the program - including the pace of uptake, workloads, and the scope of Broker activities - remain in-tact. Key activities of the project to-date include:



03. KEY OUTPUTS

At the launch of the program, there was immediate engagement of Youth Cultural Brokers as Probation Officers had pre-identified open cases where YCB support would be valuable. Brokers reported another uptick in new referrals in early January 2026 as new clients enter the youth probation system and as evidence of the program's positive momentum.

36 YOUTH PROBATION CASES SUPPORTED BY BROKERS

As of December 31, 2025, Youth Cultural Brokers had supported 36 youth probation cases, **all but one of which remained active.** To date, all cases are attached to the Calgary office.

Youth Cultural Brokers consulted to Probation Officers on 94 instances; meaning **cultural insight was provided** regarding a case **prior to or without a referral being made**. Additional, YCB had numerous consultations to the staff of the Youth Attendance Centre.

94 YOUTH CULTURAL BROKER CONSULTATIONS TO PROBATION OFFICERS

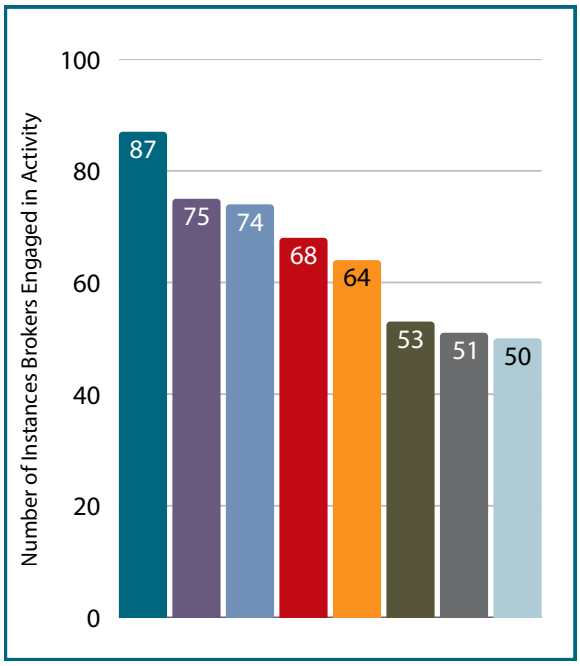
Whole-Family Approach

Youth Cultural Brokers take a whole-family approach to their role so their contacts also included parents and siblings of the youth.



03. KEY OUTPUTS CONT'D

Main Activities of Youth Cultural Brokers



Youth Cultural Brokers have **played a critical role** in:

- Supporting pre-sentencing reports (15 instances)
- Providing families assistance in navigating the court/legal system (2)
- Attending court sentencing sessions (3)

Youth Cultural Brokers made **43 external partner agency collaborations** or **referrals**:

- Main referrals include employment resources, mental health support, and settlement services
- Insights and recommendations are made to PO to ensure cultural alignment of the referrals and resources they provide (124 instances)

03. KEY OUTPUTS CONT'D

Demographics

Youth and their families represented **8 different countries of origin** (as well as Canada):

- Eritrea
- Ethiopia
- South Sudan
- Somalia
- Syria
- Saudia Arabia
- Iraq
- Afghanistan

Youth and their families represented **8 different home languages** (excluding English):

- Tigrinya
- Kunama
- Dinka
- Amharic
- Arabic
- Somali
- Farsi
- Dari

A majority of youth were Permanent Residents (**56.5%)**, followed by Canadian Citizens (**30.4%**), and some with no/lapsed status. Many arrived in Canada as refugees.

A majority of youth identified as Christian or Muslim.

Trends: What We're Seeing

Trends among families that YCB are working with, gathered through the evaluation and case study collection:

- Households Facing Housing Instability
- Low-Income Households
- Cultural Dissonance Between Parents and Youth
- History of pre-migration trauma and/or family reunification
- Unmet Settlement Needs
- Lack of System Familiartity (even if not newly arrived)

04. EMERGENT OUTCOMES

To-date, the Youth Cultural Broker model is considered effective in supporting positive engagement, experiences, and outcomes for youth and their families. Both teams report evident benefits of Broker involvement:

INCREASED YOUTH AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Overall, POs have observed that YCBs are effective in encouraging youth and families to engage more fully in the probation process. **Parental engagement is an emerging benefit of the Program** - as many were not connected due to language barriers, system distrust, cultural misunderstanding, employment commitments, or the youth's active exclusion of them in the process.

> *The initial gap was the mother's fear of child protection authorities, rooted in trauma and cultural misunderstanding. My brokerage bridged this gap decisively by explaining the PO's role, building trust, and allowing the family's traumatic narrative and strengths to be heard. (PO)*

MORE HOLISTIC VIEW OF YOUTH AND FAMILY CONTEXT

Youth Cultural Brokers are positioned to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers, they are able to elicit a more complete and **nuanced picture of the clients' lives,** providing POs with additional information that enhances their cases. Many emphasized the importance of this to completing **pre-sentencing reports** specifically.

> *With a Broker present, it allowed me to understand the family's situation in a way that I had never known before. (PO)*

04. EMERGENT OUTCOMES CONT'D

MORE CULTURALLY-APPROPRIATE REFERRALS & COMMUNITY SERVICE OPTIONS

Youth Cultural Brokers' knowledge of community resources has allowed POs access to a broader suite of options for referrals and community service hours, with a focus on **culturally-aligned resources**.

> *Most families don't want to adhere to the condition of counselling. Brokers are able to explain to the family why the understanding of counselling is different in Canada than other places [and address their concerns of community stigma]. (CCIS Manager)*

INCREASED CULTURAL AWARENESS AND KNOWLEDGE OF PROBATION OFFICERS

Probation Officers report learning new information and increasing their awareness of migration experiences and cultural norms, helping them understand the impacts of **migration, immigration status**, and **culture/faith**.

> *I am already learning so much about immigration, refugees, and the other things a specific family is facing...things I simply didn't know and wouldn't have been able to find out as the brokers can establish trust more quickly. (PO)*

05. KEY STRENGTHS

Both the CCIS and Youth Probation teams report several emergent strengths of the program model that promote positive working relationships and facilitate program outcomes:

- **Early and ongoing orientation of POs to the Youth Cultural Broker model and goals**: The program commenced with a presentation of the purpose, goals, and expectations of the YCB Program to the team of POs. This included information about CCIS' existing Broker models, with a focus on key learnings and successes, and discussion with Probation Officers regarding their workflow and the types of challenges they were facing when working with youth from immigrant families. This information was then used to further refine the program scope and logic model, referral form and data tracking systems, and Broker onboarding activities. As the program progresses, leadership continues to **regularly communicate the program goals and purpose,** including how and when to engage a Broker, to the team of POs. This approach has supported early engagement of Brokers with new and existing cases.

- **Co-location of Brokers with POs:** Co-location of Youth Probation Brokers with Probation Officers in a single, centralized office has been foundational to their integration as team members. Benefits have included ease of access and communication - including general consultation and case updates - **informal relationship building,** participating in team meetings, and facilitating introductions to youth/families who are in the office.

- **Youth Cultural Broker flexibility and availability**: Though each Youth Probation Broker fulfills a part-time role, they coordinate their schedules to ensure one Broker is in-office whenever possible. Furthermore, Probation Officers report that Brokers have been very flexible in making themselves available for client meetings, including in-community (such as at a school). Brokers are also able to make themselves available to connect with a client/family outside of core working hours, ultimately allowing greater **capacity to accommodate** and engage families.

> *"The Broker accommodated the client's schedule even when I couldn't go into the community to meet mom."*
>
> *-PO*

05. KEY STRENGTHS CONT'D

- **Youth Cultural Broker alignment to cultural and linguistic identities:** Brokers were selected based on their **lived experience**, **language skills**, and **cultural familiarity** with main population groups involved with probation. This has facilitated their engagement with families and their capacity to respond to cases where cultural and linguistic barriers were most evident, or where a gender-based approach is helpful.

  "Brokers themselves are newcomers - their lived experience allows them a closeness and cooperation with the family."
  -CCIS Manager

- **CCIS organizational and staff capacity:** Part of the success of the project to-date has been CCIS' capacity to implement the program effectively and quickly. Leveraging over a decade of experience operating a Broker model with Children and Family Services, CCIS was positioned to leverage their experience to recruit and hire well-qualified staff who are supported by a seasoned manager and team of Cultural Brokers. Several POs referenced the quality, capacity, and personality of the Brokers as a key strength of the work. They are friendly, eager and curious to learn, and communicative.

  Furthermore, existing CCBP Cultural Brokers offer a **community of practice** for the Youth Cultural Brokers. This team supported onboarding and continues to act as a critical repository of cultural knowledge and resource familiarity. They also support de-briefing, understanding role boundaries, and case management strategies. This has facilitated Youth Cultural Brokers to quickly onboard to their scope of work and gain confidence in their practice.

- **Youth Probation readiness:** The program has also benefited from and been able to quickly implement due to the readiness of the Youth Probation team to work with Youth Cultural Brokers, as illustrated by a strong initial engagement of Brokers into existing cases, relative ease of integration in the work, and humility to learn. There is also strong buy-in from leadership to ensure the success of the program. YCBs reported that POs have been **welcoming**, **receptive to their support**, **and demonstrate genuine interest to increase their knowledge** of culture and immigration.

  "POs are so welcoming and eager to learn about the youth's culture and upbringing."
  -Broker

05. KEY STRENGTHS CONT'D

- **Open and regular communication:** The project implementation, including shared learning and course-correction, are supported by **effective** and **ongoing communication between program management** and **frontline staff**, Youth Cultural Broker attendance at Probation staff meetings, as well as monthly meetings between the Youth Cultural Brokers and the Program Managers of each team. It was evident through the evaluation that management from both teams are keen to receive **real-time feedback** in the interest of strengthening the work. POs report that YCBs are very communicative, providing timely updates on their activities and engagement with families, while both parties reach out to the other to ask questions and increase their knowledge. Youth Cultural Brokers report that POs have been open in sharing case notes and other documents to make sure they have full context for their work.

> *"Brokers have been very collaborative; they are open to asking questions, and being part of the team activities. That effort is always evident."*
>
> *-PO*

> *"They are communicating back with telling me what meetings they have."*
>
> *-PO*

06. OPPORTUNITIES

Overall, there is strong support for the program to continue as it addresses a critical need for staff and families involved with Probation. POs and YCBs are keen to continue learning about the work as momentum builds and new cases are taken on. As the program progresses, the following opportunities can be considered to streamline implementation and enhance outcomes:

- **Continue to develop Youth Cultural Broker's knowledge of the probation system through experiential learning:** All parties acknowledged that there is a lot to learn for YCBs, both in terms of understanding the justice system and in exploring the full scope of their role. Though Brokers have illustrated a strong command of the system and boundaries in a short time, they are keen to continue learning about the probation system with more depth through ongoing experiential learning and by reviewing additional resources, as available.

> *"With each new case, the POs understanding of the broker role increases and vice versa - Brokers learn more about their own capacity and tasks related to the role."*
>
> *-CCIS Manager*

> *"The more we build capacity about the system, the more it will help us...the more we learn the better we explain it to families."*
>
> *-Broker*

- **Continue to promote the role of Youth Cultural Brokers, with an emphasis on early and consistent case involvement:** It will be important to continue to promote the role of YCBs to new and existing probation staff as well as clients, to ensure they are consulted or referred to in a timely manner. **Key messages include:**

Brokers' **dual role of support** to the family and to the PO, the distinction of their role as an expanded support to what POs alone can provide (e.g., a more holistic view of whole-family needs, flexibility to engage families outside core working hours, and expertise in **bridging culture** to facilitate engagement with system activities and referrals), their **capacity to work across cultures** (not only their own), the importance of cultural interpretation, and the value of early engagement of the Broker.

06. OPPORTUNITIES CONT'D

Based on learnings from CCIS' pre-existing Broker programs, it is recommended that YCBs are at minimum **consulted any time there is a family with even one member who is an immigrant**, or where there is a faith or cultural intersection. This can help POs to determine the need for a referral to fully engage a Broker and/or mitigate hesitancy in making a referral when there is uncertainty. Because their scope of work is different to that of the PO, there may be benefits to their involvement even where a PO is successful in engaging the family.

To support establishing clarity and consistency, the teams may benefit from practice-**informed discussions** exploring how and when to engage YCBs, how to explain their role and purpose to youth/families, and the scope of their activities. This will ensure a common and shared understanding as the teams iterate to find approaches that are effective, to course-correct as needed, and ultimately support a **more structured and consistent approach** to engaging Brokers. Monitoring the demographics of families not connected to a Youth Cultural Broker might also be helpful in monitoring when Brokers are and are not engaged.

Probation leadership also suggested an information poster to share through the screens in the office, which are often viewed by youth and families.

- E**ngagement of regional offices:** To-date the project has focused on uptake in Calgary, however, the YCBs are also available to support regional offices. Regional uptake is a goal for the project teams in the second half of the pilot. A Calgary staff has recently moved to a regional office Supervisor, which is expected to support increased familiarity with the service. As in-person relationship-building has been so valuable in Calgary, YCBs can also pursue opportunities to visit regional offices in person. Ongoing communication to these offices and case examples of how the Brokers are supporting POs and youth can be helpful to illustrate their role and its impact.

- **Implement a full staff meeting cadence:** CCIS management suggested a full-team meeting (2x per year) including staff and leadership from both CCIS and Youth Probation, to further enhance the working relationship, share promising practices, uncover emergent challenges and explore solutions together.

06. OPPORTUNITIES CONT'D

- **Monitor for opportunities to implement institutional changes to enhance cultural responsiveness:** As the program and co-learning continues, some POs were interested in exploring ways to more formally embed not only the Youth Cultural Brokers but critical information and learning emerging through their work into day-to-day practices. This included suggestions for basic training regarding migration journeys, culture, and cross-cultural parenting, reviewing organizational policies and practices that may be limiting outcomes, as well as vetting and formalizing an updated list of community resources. Ongoing monitoring of case demographics and outcomes will be important in assessing any gaps or unmet needs for families or particular population groups.

  Other systemic opportunities not currently in scope for the project include prevention-focused education in communities and increased availability of services that are aligned to the needs of immigrant families.

- **Communicate and scale program learnings:** Though early in the program, POs and leadership emphasized the value to the program in strengthening their work. They are keen to see the program expand to the Edmonton office, regional offices, and to adult probation. It was also suggested that the Youth Cultural Brokers are in a position to support the training or onboarding of new Brokers were the program to expand or scale.

07. CONCLUSION

As discussion, the Youth Cultural Brokerage Program has been effective in responding to an identified gap in serving youth from immigrant families. Youth Cultural Brokers are effective in increasing whole-family engagement, identifying and recommending culturally-appropriate resources, and offering Probation Officers a more complete perspective on the youth's family and community context. These changes are expected to promote more positive experience with and outcomes from probation involvement.

The project implementation has benefitted from leadership buy-in and willingness to learn from both partners, co-location, and CCIS' established Cultural Brokers community of practice. As the first partnership of its kind in Alberta, the Youth Probation Program is quickly demonstrating its potential in enhancing the capacity of the youth probation system to work with newcomer and culturally diverse youth and families.