

Youth Dynamics,  
Inc.  
Residential and  
Community  
Services

Billings, Montana

February 28 and March  
1,

2023

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Site Inspection Conducted by the Mental Disabilities  
Board of Visitors

*Jeremy Hoscheid*

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Jeremy Hoscheid, Executive Director

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Mental Health Facility reviewed:**

Youth Dynamics: Residential and Community Services (Billings)

Dennis Sulser, Ed. D., CEO

### **Authority for review:**

Montana Code Annotated, 53-21-104

### **Purpose of review:**

1. To learn about services provided by Youth Dynamics in Billings.
2. To assess the degree to which the services provided by Youth Dynamics are humane, consistent with professional standards, and incorporate Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors standards for services.
3. To recognize excellent services.
4. To make recommendations to Youth Dynamics for improvement of services.
5. To report to the Governor regarding the status of services provided by Youth Dynamics.

### **Site Review Team:**

#### **Board:**

Tyson Schumacher, Board Member

#### **BOV Staff:**

Jeremy Hoscheid, Executive Director

Vera Haffey, Legal Secretary

Dennis Nyland, MH Ombudsman

### **Review process:**

- Interviews with Youth Dynamics staff and clients
- Review of treatment activities, tour of Youth Dynamics facilities
- Review client treatment plans
- Review policy and procedures, organizational structure

## Overview

Per M.C.A. 53-21-104 the Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors (Board) conducted a site inspection of Youth Dynamics (YDI) on February 28 and March 1, 2023. The Board inspected the YDI Billings treatment programs which included the Billings Community Office location and four therapeutic group homes. In addition, the Board received a tour of the YDI Administration office.

Founded in 1981, Youth Dynamics is the largest non-profit children's behavioral health care organization in Montana, with 32 locations to serve the needs of children and families by providing:

- Individual and family therapy
- Case Management
- Therapeutic Foster Care
- Family Support Assistants
- Parenting Education and Support
- Therapeutic Group Homes
- Substance Use Treatment
- Transitional Living Skills
- Therapy for children with highly sexualized behaviors and/or who have committed sexual offenses

**Organizational Mission Statement:** Youth Dynamics provides family focused behavioral health treatment founded on the principles of an actively caring and trauma sensitive culture in which people can realize their full potential.

## Organizational Planning and Quality Improvement

YDI is a non-profit organization that maintains several licenses through the Department of Public Health and Human Services to provide behavioral health services for youth and their families. YDI provides services in 32 different locations and operates 19 office locations across Montana. In addition to behavioral health services, YDI is also a licensed child-placing agency which licenses foster parents. YDI maintains accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). CARF is a behavioral health industry standard in recognition for its business, personal, governance, and clinical functions.

YDI has a strategic plan that is completed annually in November. YDI has developed a fluid 3–5-year strategic plan that is monitored quarterly by multiple directors within the organization. The 10-member YDI board of directors is also connected to the organization's strategic plan and regularly receives updates. The Board appreciated learning that the organization is continually asking themselves “Why are we doing this?” instead of relying on the adage of “We’ve always done it this way.” YDI has put in place processes for reviewing the organization's key

performance indicators and established benchmarks and timelines that allow them to maintain a quality organizational plan.

YDI also has considered stakeholder and employee feedback while developing the organization's strategic plan. YDI utilized a program called uSPEQ as its client satisfaction survey tool. With the large geographic area YDI serves across Montana, the Board was pleased to hear about the involvement of the managers at the local level in the strategic planning process as there are different needs in different areas of the state.

YDI also utilized frequent employee surveys to monitor how the agency is doing on an employee level via OCS surveys, a strategy used through their CARF accreditation process. YDI Leadership mentioned that they are using the data from the three years of surveys to find a sense of whether employees are being valued. Staff interviewed gave the impression that they understood the organization's mission and vision as well as the organization's strategic plan. Staff also stated they believe YDI Leadership to be proactive in their management approach and made specific references to the organization's open-door policy, organizations weekly newsletter, as well as the quarterly "State of the Agency" update provided by the CEO.

In discussions with the YDI Clinical Leadership team and the Quality Improvement Manager it was stated that data that is collected through the QI/QA process is regularly analyzed and used to improve the various processes in the organization. The Board was able to review data provided by YDI. Discussions were had regarding the type of data being collected and how the organization utilized that to inform the overall treatment practice across the organization. Through discussions and document reviews it was identified that the leadership team and QI Manager had access to reports in their EHR (Aura/Sigmund) that can help them narrow down certain areas to find information. YDI generates an annual report with a wealth of demographic data and has a yearly process for reviewing QI data. The yearly process includes items such as Length of Stay, Critical Incidents, Diagnoses, and other items. YDI indicated they'd like to explore increasing this frequency to quarterly. YDI also indicated that the new Medical Director has asked for more frequent reporting on critical incidents.

### **Rights, Responsibilities, and Safety**

YDI provides individual rights and responsibilities information to clients and family members both verbally and in writing. Depending on the services being provided the individual rights and responsibilities can be found in the YDI Admission Handbook, Youth & Family Handbook, and also within the Youth and Family Partnership Agreement. These are provided during the intake/entrance process. YDI also stated they were working on developing a Caregiver Handbook for Therapeutic Group Homes, which would also include this information.

When talking with the staff regarding advocacy services available to individuals, most staff had a general understanding of the different advocacy programs in the local area and other advocacy services/groups statewide. When asked what they knew about the Mental Disabilities Board of Visitors, the Mental Health Ombudsman (MHO), or Disability Rights Montana (DRM), it was mixed if the staff knew the purpose or duties of these offices. After talking further with the staff, they had a much greater understanding of the purpose/duties of the Board, the MHO, and DRM.

The staff interviewed had a good understanding of the client grievance policies/procedures and as part of the process, individual clients and families are given the information when they enter into the services of this facility. The Board did note an area of concern related to the grievance policy language. According to policy it is a requirement that a grievance must be given within 30 days of the occurrence of the issue purportedly happening. The Board would like to note that YDI appeared to be able to address most client concerns quickly and without the need for additional steps/measures such as the filing of a client grievance form. While this may often be the case, the Board feels that YDI could benefit from potential policy language changes to allow individual receiving services to file a grievance at any time during their treatment stay. The Board also feels that YDI can benefit from uniformity of documents used in client grievance process across treatment services. Examples: At one group home location a folder was taped to the wall with a form titled petitions. While that works well for asking staff for an adjustment to bedtime, or other house rules, it is not necessarily a private way to write and submit a proper grievance. At another group home location there were no petition forms readily available, and it took staff a fair amount of time to provide the Board with a copy of one. The Board also noted one location utilizing a document titled Resolving My Conflict. The Board believes that there should be one common document titled Client Grievance Form. It is worth noting that none of the youth interviewed by the Board had any grievance concerns, praised the quality of the treatment provided. The program appears to be providing high-quality services across both the residential and community programs.

In addition to the Individual Client Rights and Responsibilities, the individual client and parent/guardian are also provided with the Abuse and Neglect policies. It is reported that this information is also explained verbally during the intake process. The Board did not notice any signs of abuse or neglect during the site inspection and none of the youth interviewed gave any indication that any such behavior was occurring. The youth interviewed stated that they felt safe at the group homes.

The staff interviewed were aware of the policies and procedures regarding abuse or neglect of individuals and how to handle such situations. The staff understood what constituted abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Staff understood mandatory reporting guidelines and were able to explain the organization's procedural steps and to contact the CPS hotline (Centralized Intake). In interviews with staff none of them were able to share a time when they had ever had to make a report of this nature. Neither staff nor clients interviewed could report any issue with retaliation of any kind for reporting abuse, neglect, or exploitation. The Board was able to have a discussion with YDI leadership and clarify the reporting requirements under 53-21-107 to the Board. The Board learned about the organization's investigation process. Incident reports are required to be completed within 72 hours, but the majority are completed within 24 hours. The Board would recommend that all incidents are reported within 24 hours.

After a critical incident at the facility, there are debriefings for the clients and for the staff members. The Board was pleased to learn about the debriefing process and its inclusion of staff members. Debriefing is an important process, especially in an organization seeking to continually improve. Staff also stated that YDI would also provide additional therapeutic support for staff who need it.

YDI staff are trained annually in the MANDT System. The MANDT system is designed to help organizations develop a culture to provide emotional, psychological, and physical safety for everyone involved. This treatment approach has not only benefited the organization from the aspect of minimizing potential for client and staff injuries, but this approach promotes the therapeutic relationship that the clients have with their staff.

During interviews with staff and clients it was noted that the organization makes every attempt to provide clients with access to staff of their own gender. Current staffing struggles have made providing the same gender staff difficult at times, but the Board was pleased to hear about YDI's effort in making these accommodations. Staffing shortages are a major area of concern across Montana's mental health provider system.

### **Individual, Family Member Participation**

With the organization's family-focused mission statement, the Board was pleased to learn that the involvement of the family members/guardians is highly encouraged regarding the clients' treatment. Family members/guardians are given every opportunity to be involved and be part of the client's treatment, when clinically appropriate. The encouragement of family participation in treatment is true across both residential and community treatment programs. YDI has also worked to include peer support in treatment plans, such as a friend of the client who makes them comfortable during the review process.

While interviewing residents of the group homes they stated they were all aware of and had a good understanding of their treatment goals and felt that they had the opportunity to provide their own input into their individual treatment plans. The residents interviewed also knew what their discharge plans were and spoke to the Board members excitedly about their discharge plans. The Board also took note of a tree that was painted on the dining room wall. The leaves of the tree were the initials of former group home residents who had successfully completed treatment. This served as a positive reminder for the current group home residents.

While interviewing family members in various community-based programs that YDI offers, it was brought up how YDI is very accommodating, understanding, and reactive with their family members in the programs. The family members interviewed felt that there was always an open door for discussions and if there ever was an issue, they felt very comfortable talking with YDI staff to resolve the issue. The family members stated YDI was a great support system for their family, and they feel like they can be very involved in all parts of the treatment process.

### **Cultural Effectiveness**

Given the diversity of individuals residing in Billings and surrounding areas, it was of no surprise to learn about the diversity of clients that YDI serves. YDI has taken a proactive approach in addressing cultural considerations in clients' treatments. YDI recently revised the organization's Cultural Competency Plan to a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan (DEIP) to be more inclusive. YDI will also provide additional training to staff regarding any cultural, ethnic, social, historical, and spiritual issues that could be relevant to individual client's treatment.

The group homes have been very interactive with some of the cultural needs of individual residents. This has included residents and staff participating in smudging practice and hanging dreamcatchers in the client's bedrooms. It was reported that staff have also worked with clients experiencing gender identity and will try to make every accommodation to provide same gender staff. Current staffing struggles have made providing the same gender staff difficult at times.

While interviewing both staff and residents of the group homes they all noted that if wanted, the group home would provide special accommodation to meet their cultural or religious preferences. This includes providing transportation and supervision for the residents to attend their preferred religious services. The Board was pleased to see the openness of staff to being accommodating to clients' preferences and understanding how cultural and religious practices relate to an individual's treatment.

### **Staff Competence, Training, Supervision, and Relationships with Residents**

YDI defines minimum knowledge and competence expectations for staff positions specific to providing client treatment. The organization has a strong orientation program for all new staff. The orientation process is a blended training process, which is a combination of online and peer training. Within the first 24 hours, new hires are introduced to the onboarding process, history of the organization as well as the overview of the organization and go over the "mandatory reporting" statute. Employees then begin classroom training, such as CPR and MANDT.

YDI uses the "Common Sense Parenting" model at their organization but recently began the process of implementing ARC Reflections (Attachment, Regulation, and Competency) as the new parenting model.

It was stated that the initial orientation training of new employees typically takes about 30 days but can be up to 6 months (which is the probationary period) to complete the initial training. The goal to complete the initial training is hopefully in two to four weeks, and on occasion maybe up to 60 days. YDI also stated that it does help that they use "in-house" trainers from the organization which allows them more flexibility to meet the staff training needs.

The organization is working on and very close to using a new program, EdApp, for their training. They have been looking over the applications of this program and feel it will be very helpful for both HR/Training department as well as other staff. There has been a lot of work within the organization, looking to improve the adult learning process(es).

Staff stated they are allowed 24 hours of paid time off for training opportunities per year. This includes, but is not limited to, Homeland Security training, CAN Conferences, and others. The organization will share different training opportunities from organizations such as NAMI and DPHHS with employees. YDI Leadership is very flexible and tells employees if they have an idea for a training opportunity, to bring it up with leadership and they will look into it. The only real criteria being: Does it help you in your role within the organization?

The organization has provided a Leadership Academy (in-house training) for supervisors. This is a good training tool for new and upcoming staff to develop leadership skills as they work up in

the organization. The organization works hard to build those relationships, coming from the very top to the entry-level positions. They use staff surveys to grade the effectiveness of leadership within the organization.

In addition to these training opportunities, YDI also provides regular in-service training to staff which includes suicide awareness and how to respond. While attending a group home staff meeting the Board was able to witness the staff role play different scenarios and behaviors of some of the group home residents. It was nice to this attention to detail as consistency amongst staff and their interactions is an important factor in a client's treatment.

While observing staff and client interactions in the group home the Board was pleased to report that they observed active engagement and positive demeanor shown by the staff toward the residents. The staff was engaged with the residents and there was a clear mutual respect during the witnessed interactions. Clients interviewed at the group home shared with the Board that they thought for the most part staff treated them well and they did not have any concerns to share with the Board.

### **Treatment and Support**

YDI primarily services youth that have been categorized as meeting severely emotionally disturbed (SED) criteria which includes but not limited to the following diagnosis: anxiety, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), depression or reactive attachment disorder (RAD). YDI offers a complete continuum of behavioral health care and treatment.

YDI has strong relationships with primary care doctors within the Billings community and works closely to ensure that a thorough physical/medical examination is completed in a timely manner, often within 30 days of intake.

The individual treatment planning process is started upon intake. As previously stated YDI encourages family members to be part of the treatment plan and the client intake paperwork includes the Family Engagement Questionnaire which looks for any natural support the client may have and that they want to be included in their treatment. The organization strives to have the biological family involved in the treatment plan, when clinically appropriate.

The discharge plan also begins to be formulated upon client intake. This involves asking the client what they would want their discharge to look like. From the very early stages of the individual's treatment YDI makes every attempt to meet the client's needs and wants.

The agency is working to migrate treatment plans to a more individualized model and offered several ways for clients and families to participate in the treatment planning process. YDI also uses the CASII, which is being utilized at a state level for monitoring service intensity and has a strategic goal to include feedback into the treatment plan. While no assessment is perfect, there are opportunities being explored to get the best value out of the system.



YDI schedules all physical or medical appointments needed for an individual client within the first 30 days of treatment. This information is documented in the organizations EHR as well as in the client discharge summary. YDI also ensures that clients receive regularly scheduled dental services as well. YDI maintains close relations with the local provider community in Billings.

Youth Dynamics has taken clear steps to become a trauma informed organization by implementing Attachment, Regulation, Competency (ARC) training to provide trauma informed care to their clients. All staff within the organization have received trauma-informed care training. Staff interviewed discussed that they have trauma-informed care methods in place at all their treatment locations. This includes having the initial and on-going assessments for the clients, and the treatment plans include trauma-specific intentions to specifically address the consequences of trauma. Talking with leadership, they stated they are currently working on a trauma-informed care model for employees, stating they feel it is just as important for them as the clients. The Board was pleased to learn about the importance that YDI has placed on trauma-informed care. It was clear that YDI has taken a sincere plan to consider client needs into their practice.

YDI does not require any individuals to perform labor that involves the operation and maintenance of its facility or any organization with which the facility contracts. YDI partners with Yellowstone Boys and Girls Ranch (YBGR) to assist clients to find and keep competitive employment through a supported employment program. Residents of the group home are required to perform weekly household chores around the group home.

YDI offers medication management services for all clients served by the organization. YDI recently brought on a new medical director for the organization. It is reported that the new medical director believes in the concept that “less is more” when it comes to medication. The new medical director works on whole-body wellness. It is reported that the new medical director is willing to conduct training for staff and wants to be a hands-on part of the organization’s treatment teams. The organization also utilizes local medical providers for any additional medication training that may be needed. This can range from orientation training, quarterly training, and annual training. The processes for medication compliance and non-compliance are written well within the organizational policies/procedures. The organization has detailed policies/procedures for multiple medication type incidents, including but limited to: missed medications, PRN medication use, medication errors, and specialty medication control (diabetes, etc.).

Staff interviewed knew how to properly dispose of any unused portions of medication and were familiar with the process for obtaining medication for clients. It is reported that the organization’s psychiatry partner runs an insurance coverage check ahead of time so an individual being prescribed a medication that is not covered is rare. YDI works to empower individuals with regards to being able to cover the cost of their own medications. YDI also works

very closely with other providers to ensure that the client's medication funding is established prior to any transition.

YDI also provides an on-call service for any issue that arises out of normal business hours. This information is given to clients and parents. All clients have an individualized safety plan as part of their treatment plan.

### **Access and Entry**

YDI has strong relationships with community medical providers and other behavioral health providers in Billings and across the state. YDI noted the numerous strong local Billings partnerships, including YBGR and New Day Ranch in Billings. YDI commented that they are always looking to develop partnerships with the local entities wherever they have YDI locations.

YDI remains in contact with local and state partners on bed availability at their group homes. Unfortunately, YDI has had to reduce their group home capacity from 80 beds down to 64 due to staffing struggles.

YDI begins the clinical assessment and treatment planning process upon intake. The Board learned about the very active role the organization's medical director has taken on since beginning his tenure with YDI. The medical director is involved at all levels of treatment from admission to discharge.

Due to the numerous locations and large geographic area served by YDI, telehealth is used, and the organization has reported a high success rate with telehealth services. While not perfect, telehealth has allowed those in more rural areas of the state access to needed mental health services.

YDI has also developed a focus on marketing and communication from the organization. YDI has grown a significant social media presence which assists the organizations commitment to engaging with the community, acts as a recruitment tool, and serves as a vehicle to assist with the organizations fundraising campaigns. It was reported that across the many different social media and digital platforms they were able to reach over 12 million people, with over 48,000 social media followers, and had over 184,000 visits to the organization's website in 2020-2021. The Board was pleased to learn about the growth as this can be a great strategy to assist with the retention and recruitment of much needed staff.

### **Continuity of Services through Transitions**

Being a children's provider, YDI is very experienced in transitioning clients from children's services into adult programs. From the interviews, it was stated that clients that are going to "age out" from children services to adult services, are given the opportunity to learn life skills to assist them when they go to the adult world. As previously noted, YDI has strong relationships with both the medical and behavioral health communities and utilizes these resources to ensure that proper follow-up appointments and referrals are in place.

Before the client's discharge date, YDI helps the client with living arrangements, transportation needs, and gaining whatever experience they can provide to them before transitioning out into the adult system. Before transitioning out, the discharge team, which includes but not limited to: care and case managers, therapists, treatment team, work together to give the client the best options to be successful when transitioned out. This also includes referrals made to different providers and then a follow-up contact with the client at 30 days, 60 days, and 1 year after.

### **Recommendations**

The Board was pleased with the overall site inspection of YDI Billings programs. YDI is a family focused organization and it is clear that all levels of the organization work hard to carry out their mission statement on a daily basis. While the past few years have been very challenging for mental health providers, YDI remains focused on delivering quality treatment and care not just in Billings, but at all their locations across the state. YDI continues to adapt to the changing environment and is looking to continue to improve the reach and impact of the services they provide. Below are recommendations from the Board to YDI.

- The Board recommends that YDI explore the creation of an “alumni program” which could potentially serve as steppingstone for peer support/mentoring.
  - **YDI response to the Board:** *This is a wonderful idea, and we look forward to exploring what this could look like in the future.*
- The Board recommends that YDI review policy language related to time frame clients can file a grievance and develop a uniform Client Grievance form that can be utilized across services.
  - **YDI response to the Board:** *YDI will work on creating a universal process for youth and families to file grievances when other means of conflict resolution have not been successful, including updating our current language in our procedure.*
- *Continue development of transition assistance plans for when clients are going to discharge. Focused on developing life skills for individuals while living in community.*
  - **YDI response to the Board:** *Life skills labs are currently in the process of being established in all community locations. Furthermore, the transition toolkit will be used for all youth in services who are 14.5 years old or older which will allow clients to identify areas where they may need assistance as they transition into adulthood. This toolkit provides the client with the ability to take the toolkit with them upon discharge from service to continue working on skills that they deem important to their success.*
- Research potential resources to further cultural competencies given different ethnic groups that YDI serves in Billings and across the state.