

## Volunteers of America Restorative Justice Program in Southeastern Kentucky

Over the past five years, the Volunteers of America Restorative Justice Program in southeastern Kentucky has steadily grown into a trusted, community-based alternative for youth involved in the court system. What began with only 13 referrals in its first year expanded to 62 referrals by Year Four, reflecting increased awareness among schools, courts, and community partners that restorative justice offers a meaningful path forward for young people. Even with the natural fluctuations in cases seen in Year Five, the program has now served 182 youth across the region, marking a remarkable trajectory for a rural initiative launched just five years ago.

As the program matured, consistent findings have emerged: youth who fully participate in the restorative justice process are significantly less likely to reoffend. The most recent recidivism analysis, based on Administrative Office of the Courts data, examined 52 young people referred between 2022 and 2023. Among the 49 who completed the restorative process, three-quarters had no new charges in the two years that followed. In contrast, the small group of youth who did not complete restorative justice all acquired new charges—often at a higher rate. These results echo earlier snapshots from 2020–2022, which showed that youth who completed the program accumulated half as many new charges as those who dropped out. Across both datasets, the pattern is unmistakable: completion of restorative justice is associated with a lower likelihood of returning to court.

Restorative justice in southeastern Kentucky is not simply a meeting or a contract; it is a supportive, often transformative experience. Many youth enter the process with disrupted relationships, limited coping skills, and uncertainty about their own support systems. To better understand these dynamics, participants complete a brief “social support” questionnaire before and after their restorative conference. The Year Four results show meaningful improvement. After taking part in restorative justice, more youth reported having an adult professional they could talk to, supportive peers at school, and healthy activities they enjoyed. Post conference surveys indicated increases across several protective factors—including students feeling they had people at school they could trust and a legal hobby or activity that gave them purpose.

These shifts matter. Stronger support networks are linked to better emotional regulation, improved decision-making, and a greater sense of belonging, all of which reduce the risk of future offending. The fact that these improvements persist even after a single structured restorative intervention underscores the power of giving youth a space to be heard, take responsibility, and reconnect with people who care about them.

Together, the referral growth, recidivism outcomes, and strengthened social support indicators tell a clear and hopeful story: restorative justice is working for southeastern Kentucky. It helps young people repair harm, rebuild relationships, access necessary resources, and return to their communities with renewed accountability and support. And it is doing so in a way that is both effective and deeply rooted in the values of healing, responsibility, and community connection.

### ODCP RJ Spending Breakdown

	FY24	FY25
Personnel	\$ 236,709	\$ 144,176
Travel/Training	13,188	6,056
Consulting	5,272	9,553
Project Evaluation	67,314	21,079
Supplies	11,611	1,745
Education/Outreach	92,173	-
Operating Expenses	40,424	31,549
Administration	49,866	19,341
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 516,557</b>	<b>\$ 233,500</b>

### Restorative Justice Funding Sources

Program Name	Funding Source	FY24	FY25	Notes
SEKY Restorative Justice Program	ODCP	\$516,557	\$233,500	
CVI Pivot to Peace	ARPA		220,000	
Restorative Justice in Jefferson County	DJJ	134,174	140,000	Funding began FY22
Community Mediation Center	EAF	9,000		
Pivot to Peace - Gun Violence Initiative	OSHN	100,000		
Title II	DJJ	149,863		Funding began FY23
Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)	OVC	85,024	77,372	
JCPS Project Prevent	Department of Education	176,915	174,720	
Restorative Justice	Private Donation	25,000		Funding began FY22
Restorative Justice Expansion	ARPA	1,300,000		Funding began FY22
Restorative Justice	ARPA/OSHN General Fund		707,720	
JCPS Title I Expansion	Jefferson County Board of Education		165,080	
Alternatives to Detention	DJJ	458,333	3,000,000	\$3m for FY25-26
Victims of Crime Act (VOCA)	ARPA	126,235		Funding began FY23
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,081,101</b>	<b>\$4,718,392</b>	