



## **FY 2022 OJJDP Administrator Topic-Specific Listening Session: Opening Up Opportunities for System-Involved Youth**

July 14, 2022 | 1–3 p.m. ET

### **Breakout Room Notes**

#### **1. What does it mean to you to open up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?**

- First, there needs to be increased investment in community services. We know the more contact youth have with systems, the worse the outcomes. I know most [youth who have been incarcerated] have experienced trauma, which is made worse by incarceration.
- [State] conducted an analysis of juveniles housed in juvenile facilities; 92 percent were eligible for diversion programs but were still being detained. We need to know what opportunities exist in the community and what those opportunities look like for youth accused of serious crimes. Some youth might need a restorative time-out before they transition back to the community in a meaningful way. Socioeconomic factors are a big factor. In my community, we advocate for universal basic income for everyone that leaves a juvenile justice facility. They need a cushion to help them getting housing, transportation. They need financial support to stabilize the community.
- I totally agree for the need to build a community infrastructure. In addition, opportunities are needed in juvenile facilities. There should be access to education and employment with transition to community-based programs upon reentry. None of us want these kids locked up, but if they are in prison, programming needs to start in the facility. I have been in these systems where young people do not have access to education, workforce development. Programming should be initiated in the facility and transitioned into the community.
- Resources for reentry are needed.
- If we really want to create opportunities for these young people, we need to focus on prevention, working with the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. I think OJJDP could work to strengthen relationships between these agencies. In my work, we see that by the time a young person is touched by the juvenile justice system, they have already had a long history of involvement with other agencies and the underlying issues that ultimately lead to justice involvement have not been addressed. These youth have already been failed by the system. We need to identify and provide interventions, programs, support, and behavioral and mental health services before they end up justice involved.
- OJJDP's investment in community is essential and to be regarded as a partner and driver for system work, organization, and cultural shift with government organizations, responsive to the needs of the community, not in position to tell communities that need. Any training and teaching that can create that link is helpful to foster those relationships.
- Help lead the organizational and cultural shift within government agencies so they can be responsive to the needs of the community. Technical support to foster cross-system collaboration.
- Invest in community infrastructure, create opportunities for growth.
- One of the things that came to mind is recognizing that for many of the young people involved in the juvenile justice system, it's their first time receiving any mental health supports and resources. It is important to recognize on the front end what the failures are prior to their



interaction with the juvenile system. Many of these resources they have never received before. The well-being of young people is the core of this work. Youth need healing and wellness supports as well as more connections to education and employment opportunities.

- Young people need more meaningful employment and career pathways that can be accessed after transitioning from the juvenile justice system. Or they should be receiving educational credits for employment pathways. They should have more access to subsidized employment models that are targets for young people who have been involved in the juvenile justice system, and not just meaningless trainings. Workforce development and education are key.
- The opportunity for a young person to not even have to enter a juvenile justice system. Let us end incarceration altogether. This is a perfect opportunity to shift our mindsets about how and why youth even enter the juvenile justice system. What is it that we need in the community? It is time to begin reimagining the communities. We need to consider why we are not funding organizations that work closely with the youth.
- How do we move low- and medium-risk youth from juvenile justice facilities? For the deeper-end youth, we need to consider removing congregate care completely.
- We need to hear directly from youth and families and center the work on directly impacted young people in this process to end incarceration and offer employment opportunities.
- We need more capacity-building opportunities for staff. This may include more coaching and training for staff who work to guide the workforce. There should be more entry-level positions being offered for directly impacted youth.
- Yes, really appreciate thinking about transformation of the system.
- An opportunity for OJJDP that seems critical in this season is in the spirit of hoping youth never become justice involved. Read the tea leaves and see where associated systems are going. Get in front of the direction we are heading to create new pathways for young people who may be at risk of entering into the juvenile justice system. For example, OJJDP may consider taking a proactive approach with collaborating and using the power of the coordinating council and tools at OJJDP's disposal as well as other colleagues throughout DOJ to be very explicit about the serious harms and behavioral health threat assessments coming out of this administration. The behavioral health assessment piece will be a critical topic to study to inform future opportunities.
- Continue to do expungement work. It is important for a youth's record to go away. The best opportunity for young people is to not carry that legacy with them in their futures.
- The [2018 Final Report of the Federal Commission on School Safety](#) suggests that school hardening, militarization, and the growth of school policing are not tangential things when it comes to slowing the number of youth who enter the juvenile justice system.
- OJJDP has considered expanding [OJJDP Expunging Juvenile Records: Misconceptions, Collateral Consequences, and Emerging Practices Brief](#). OJJDP will share more information as it becomes available.
- Youth need more access to civil legal services. For example, post-disposition council, expungement support, or assistance with sex-offender deregistration. The same concept applies for education advocacy and school advocacy.
- OJJDP may consider partnering with the [Office for Access to Justice](#) and their interagency roundtable to gauge some of the civil legal services available for youth.
- [Debt-free justice campaign](#) has been successful in many states. We might consider how this can be done at a national level. Complex and crucial nature for stopping funding from going to marginalized communities and youth of color. We know the importance of getting rid of fees and fines, so there is an opportunity for these youth.



**a. What do you think are best practices for opening up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?**

- Socioeconomic impact, universal income for youth. We need to recognize there is a socioeconomic impact that results from having been incarcerated. To address this, there needs to be universal basic income for youth to support reentry to the community.
- Programs and systems to help kids transition. Education, behavioral health support, being able to have these resources when reentering.
- Create situations of opportunities with young people to start focusing on what is happening with them even before they touch the system. OJJDP to develop stronger partnerships that focus on families and young people before they enter the system (preventative).
- Yes, going upstream and working across systems (education, health and human services, etc.) is so important and changes the trajectory.
- OJJDP's investment in community is essential and that the community be regarded as a partner and driver. Requires an across-the-board shift. Any TTA to foster collaboration between various agencies.

**2. What are some challenges the field is currently facing when trying to open opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?**

- Capacity for programming. I see long waitlists for behavioral and mental health services and prosocial activities for kids referred by systems. The waitlists are too long, and there seems to have been a failure to reinvest cost savings from removing youth from prisons into the community.
- There are also workforce problems that have been a longstanding issue. Staff are not paid enough; employers do not provide the support to deal with the stressors of these jobs like secondary trauma or avoiding burnout.
- To piggyback on the comment about reinvesting in the community, as an example, the average daily population of youth detained in county has decreased significantly, but the average daily cost per youth detained has not decreased, which demonstrates those funds are not being reallocated to community-based services.
- Huge price tag to incarcerate youth.
- I think there is a lack of political will. Decisions are not data driven and are not based on research or even common sense. There is an industry that profits from criminalizing kids. There is more than a lack of resources, there is a lack of political will to invest in alternatives.
- The full-time employees have not gone down even though there are only 20 young people in a secure setting. Reinvestment isn't happening.
- There is a need for a community infrastructure, but it seems like it is often easier, politically expedient, to incarcerate young people.
- In 2019, youth detention was at an all-time low, 2020 forced people into the underground economy and exasperated the mental health issue. People were reactive. There was an increase in violent crime, domestic violence, street violence, and property crimes. Often, if you look at what is categorized as street, it is often crime to survive. Universal basic income can address many of these issues. The money is there for prisons but not to help people in the community and prevent crime. Universal basic income could elevate the economic drivers of crime. Housing is another major issue; rents are getting too expensive. People are priced out of their community.
- In my experiences, judges often have little knowledge of the needs of justice-involved youth,



and just take the fastest option to process the case, which is often incarceration, or they believe punishment will change the behavior. Because judges cycle through, it seems like some just want to bide their time and move onto something more interesting.

- OJJDP could provide or facilitate training for community-based organizations to better understand how juvenile courts function, and training for judges to understand what resources are available in the community and how they can be serving these youth. They seem clueless to how much power they wield. There are some who care but have no idea how to address the underlying issues and feel that prison is the only option. As systems and community, we need to give them permission to access alternatives.
- The courts often treat youth like adults and expect them to have the same level of understanding. Often they are punished for childlike behaviors. This is especially true for young people of color and gender-expansive youth. There has been some progress, but so much more needs to be done.
- We keep looking at young people as if they are adults. A lot of kids are being criminalized for acting like children.
- We often hear youth are being incarcerated because there is nowhere else for them to go, and we need to do better.
- Judges and prosecutors are not required to receive training about child development or what type of programming works. I believe prosecutors have more power than judges because judges tend to follow the prosecutor's recommendation. In [state], juvenile defense attorneys are required to complete 12 hours of training, some of that focusing on development, trauma, bias, and gender identity. Prosecutors should at least have the same requirement.
- Judges listen to prosecutors because most of them were prosecutors. Prosecutors adultify young people of color. White youth are not treated like adults by the system.
- There is a racialized element to adultification.
- I do support the idea of training, but perhaps I am jaded because there was a case study done with prosecutors; they reviewed cases of youth transferred to the adult system and after going through the facts of cases and humanizing the people involved, they said they would have acted differently in those cases, but the following year, there was an increase in youth transferred to adult court.
- I do not know if judges rotating is an issue in other jurisdictions. We have had some great judges, but they get rotated out of the juvenile court. We had one that would introduce himself to families before court and when he learned kids were not given an opportunity to eat before coming to court, he made sure meals were provided. He had a monthly brown bag lunch series with training for prosecutors and defense attorneys, but this has not resulted in significant changes, which is why I believe there is no political will to change. We love to talk about evidence-based programs, but there is no evidence based on policing and prisons.
- I have heard there are some prosecutors refusing to charge juveniles as adults. More information about those jurisdictions and the outcomes would be helpful. Beyond training, we need to challenge ourselves in situations where we think it is OK to put a kid in prison. How do we address status offenses, probation violations? What are the alternatives? Are there different levels of restorative justice?
- Prosecutors have a huge amount of power; how can we challenge them or get them to do something different?
- To add to that, we see a lot of kids with firearms. In many of these situations, the only crime is possession of the firearm. Normally, the prosecutor might be willing to seek an alternative, but because the impacts of gun violence on the community, they feel they must be more punitive.



- OJJDP could help address gun violence impacting kids, and kids have lots of reason for having a gun. We need to understand and address the root causes.
- Status offenses are still criminalized, nonviolent misdemeanor crimes. When these happen in school, white kids go to the principal's office, Black and Brown kids go to prison. There needs to be a universal policy that no youth eligible for diversion is ever detained, they are always treated in the community.
- The community connections program has shown that soft contacts in the community with community-based programs significantly reduce recidivism. Higher contact for higher-risk youth might be needed. Employment, education, and healing circles in the community that go beyond trauma-informed care and evidence-based programs led by grassroots organizations in the community should be the focus.
- There is a flawed logic for what we chose to invest. We say we want credible messengers, but bar people with felony convictions or gang associations from program employment. We need these people to be peer navigators and mentors. It makes a difference when the mentor is someone with whom you identify.
- Why are there prosecutors in the juvenile court? Why not focus on the youth and family? Even when we demonstrate support in the community, they still want to detain the youth.
- Referrals are challenging because the attorneys and judges have no idea what services are available in the community. Families are afraid to speak with the social worker. They feel there is a mission to break the family apart.
- Informing all court stakeholders of programs that can be offered to juveniles.
- There needs to be a list of services and address capacity issues to reduce waitlists, but social workers do not even know what services are available, they do not know the community.
- I would like to bring up a few things about foster care. There is a foster care to juvenile justice pipeline. OJJDP could work with the child welfare system to coordinate efforts, expand the spectrum of how we view child welfare and the impact it has on families. Separate true safety issues from situations in which a struggling family needs support and services, so that we remove fewer children who can stay with their family is a starting point.
- When kids do need to be removed, their community needs to be the primary resource for placement, staying in the neighborhood, or with relatives, reduce trauma, focusing more communities, stabilization of substitute placement, lots of referrals from kids' response to the trauma they experienced. Kids have reasonable, adaptive reactions. The more that we can put supports around substitute care, crisis stabilization, wraparound, respond in productive ways other than criminal ways.
- Foster care providers might be less likely to call the police when a child acts up if they have the proper support to address the behavior.
- We see girls and gender-expansive youth behavioral and mental health issues being referred to law enforcement because they are being served by a community-based organization that does not understand their needs or can't address them. If these youth act out aggressively, the police are called. These youth do not belong in prison because they have behavioral or mental health issues.
- We need to identify programs and services that are effective in addressing young folks with mental health needs. Parents cannot find providers that work with young people. There needs to be more investment in programs that work, expanding those programs to make them available to everyone.
- We need to look at the parameters around the referrals. Why are the police being called? When I was young, a fight would get you sent to the principal's office. Now the police are called.
- Criminalizing families, they feel like the system is always looking for them to mess up, if we



restructure the system, we might gain the trust of families and young people and respond in a different way, not criminal

- Punish instead of helping to heal.
- We can reduce referrals by using existing programs that have been developed to address the needs of youth in the child welfare system. In [state], the Boys & Girls Club created their own program that is culturally competent and covered by Medicaid. There needs to be innovation and investment in community-based programs, cross-sector collaboration, and education across sectors of available programs.
- More services that include the family, behavioral support in the community, earlier connection to services for families before juvenile justice contact. Once children are system involved, they get pathologized and over-medicated. Services need to be community-based and mental health needs to be destigmatized.
- We punish instead of healing.
- Capacity for programming is a massive challenge—behavioral health with a long waitlist. Failure to reinvest savings from the reduction in saving on kids not being detained or confined. Workforce issues: staff aren't being paid their worth, we are losing good people.
- Same issue in my community. The spend and FTEs have not gone down even though there are only 20 young people in a secure setting. Reinvestment isn't happening.
- Community infrastructure investment is needed. It is easier (politically expedient) to incarcerate young people.
- Increase in property crimes.
- The courts/judges, many of the judges are making a fast approach to move cases along. Some judges are not clear about the juvenile justice issues. OJJDP should do more partnership with youth court judges.
- We as systems need to create opportunities for judges to have "other options" to incarceration
- We keep looking at young people as if they are adults. A lot of kids are being criminalized for acting like children.
- Having the courts, judges, prosecutors, and programs rely on research.
- Not having a standard to determine when a kid should or should not be detained or confined.
- Gun epidemic amongst youth is a challenge.
- Foster care to juvenile justice pipeline, OJJDP should work hand in hand with Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to coordinate effort to examine how we view child welfare (how can we remove fewer children).
- If a child must be removed, they should be placed in familiar environments (area, culturally sensitive, etc.).
- Resources are needed for temporary care providers.
- Law enforcement culture in a foster care setting. If they are lacking resources, they may be more prone to call law enforcement agencies.
- Sometime child welfare issues are passed on to the criminal justice system due to capacity and lack of (quality) providers.
- Parameters around referrals: need to begin reflecting on what should constitute a referral.
- Reducing the referrals, need to be family centered.
- The systems will have to work across the silos and invest their own dollars into programs that are already in place.
- Partnering with paralegal officials.
- [The Vera Institute of Justice](#) has [a program that focuses on ending incarceration of girls](#). This might be a useful resource for others.



- Subsidized/transitional employment for impacted youth including a brief here: <https://www.clasp.org/publications/report/brief/subsidized-jobs-youth-and-adults-impacted-criminal-legal-system/>.
- Here is an incredible example of community-led work (being done in collaboration with Oakland officials) that is narrowing the pipeline: <https://blackorganizingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Black-Sanctuary-Recommitment-Pledge-Final.pdf>.
- The need for healing, which we know is the key to prevention and the key to successful reentry. In talking with young people and families, the most consistent thing we hear is a need for healing practices for kids and the need to repair relationships such as access to culturally sensitive counseling, restorative justice, wellness practices, peer mentors, etc.
- I'd also recommend to you the incredible work of [SOUL Sisters Leadership Collective](#). They work in and across Miami and NYC, including holding contracts with several justice system agencies.
- Codesigning solutions for directly impacted youth and youth who are already system involved.
- The [Young Women Freedom Center](#)'s model to engage formerly system-involved young women and LGBTQ gender-expansive youth into serving youth and getting them to be involved in policy change.
- Advocate for peer mentors, particularly someone with lived experience in child welfare or youth justice to become parts of the legal teams for young people.
- [Healing Generations out of the National Compadres Network](#), who bring intergenerational healing modalities, racial and ethnic diversity to incorporate healing into our work.
- Public/private partnership example from Louisville offering fellowships in the public sector to young Black men with misdemeanor convictions: <https://louisvilleky.gov/government/office-safe-healthy-neighborhoods/thrive-fellowship>
- Also worth knowing about is this incredible effort by GSA Network: <https://gsanetwork.org/updates/devising-freedom-national-strategy-launch/>. Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network) today announced the launch of Devising Freedom, a national strategy that will create a vision for transgender, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary youth to blossom despite the persistent attacks on their bodies and their identities. This national strategy will intentionally work to combat the harmful effects of anti-trans legislation and executive orders that have emerged in at least 22 states across the country, and continue to target young people in their schools, their homes, and their communities.
- Some additional organizations that have some great practices opening opportunities for youth: [Anti-Recidivism Coalition](#), [Youth Arts and Self-Empowerment Project](#), and the [Youth Sentencing and Reentry Project](#).
- I would love to see OJJDP support and fund more authentic youth partnerships and leadership in the jurisdictions that have power sharing to address reform. We often see so much lip service. They put a few youths on our state advisory group. These efforts are well meaning but do a disservice to youth who can actually help tear down the system and replace it with something better.
- We need to create real economic opportunities for families and young people.
- Program: The Youth Power Zone. The plan is to provide housing, family support, and healing spaces. It addresses barriers so that changemakers can be elevated. Once these youths are engaged, they do not reoffend. There is something powerful when these kids see themselves as leaders in their community.
- We want this kid to be resilient. I want them to be resistant.
- Moving more passed trauma informed.
- Education of prosecutors or removing the prosecutors from the courtroom system.



- Informing all court stakeholders of programs that can be offered to juveniles.
- Creation of a list of all programs and a way to gauge the waiting list.
- OJJDP support and more funding of authentic youth partnerships and leadership in areas where they have the power to make changes.
- Provide economic opportunities for families.
- [CURYJ](#) is an amazing, amazing group.
- Narrative work—youth-led social action work.
- Many millions have gone to "studies" of disparities that lead to no action or attempts to explain away racism.
- Access to data, transparency of data, and accurate data collection. Specifically, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) and racial and ethnicity data. Systems are not transparent and are hesitant to share it with the community. There is a myth that we are downsizing and shifting the services that are needed. Folks have been able to prove there are other alternatives in the community. The data is critical in knowing how to transform systems.
- Supportive resources and services for youth and families such as housing, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, and training programs. There are far too many unpaid jobs, and we need to recognize that young people are living multidimensional lives and need assistance to live. OJJDP might also consider the various types of healing supports young people need before they can get a job and successfully reenter the community.
- The U.S. Department of Transportation is currently working on a grant for buses and bus facilities programs to improve the safety and reliability of America's bus systems. 0.5% of a request may be for workforce development training. You can find more information on the [Federal Transit Administration](#) web page.
- Obtaining data on Native American Youth is a challenge. The Native American Tribes do not categorize the data. It is important to know which kids are sitting in their facilities.
- Mental health services. It is important to be mindful of what young people are saying regarding the mental health services they need. Need buy-in from young people and their thinking to make this work.
- Family member engagement.
- [Resource Sheet: CJSF Brownbag Session 1: The Path to End Corporal Punishment](#)—sharing this because when we talk about data, challenges, and the school-to-prison pipeline, the shameful fact that 19 states in this country still have corporal punishment on the books and a number of those states are actively using corporal punishment is an issue we must all take on.
- Some state governments struggle with deep-rooted white supremacy within their state government. Also, some disciplines such as corporal punishment are alive and well. There is a disconnect playing in the political realm. If OJJDP intervenes and uses their voice on these issues, it will make a huge difference.
- Statutory barriers with access to council for youth in post-disposition and lack of legal services.
- Sometimes, children live in many places where there is a lack of access, universally. We must provide resources to show alternatives to incarceration are the better solution.
- A lot of funds are being routed to systems players who do the work. Some leaders have even admitted we have come to a dead end, and if there was going to be any change, it would need to be in the community or with directly impacted youth and families. To combat this issue, most of the investments pouring into systems folks need to be shifted into communities. Funding must be centered on families and youth. If we want to improve our innovative efforts, we need to reroute funds into communities.
- In addition to the school hardening concerns within the legislation, there are also concerns





around implications to youth records and mental health records, which could counter so much of the work for expungement and concealing as well as encouraging getting mental health services.

### **3. Please share your ideas for reducing referrals and the flow of youth from the mental health system to juvenile justice.**

- Research has shown that the reduction of SROs in schools decreases the school-to-prison pipeline. In addition, the research shows they are finding alternatives rather than sending kids to detention. However, there has been a bit of backlash because in some states, the number of youth arrests increased. Nonetheless, we need to consider the shift away from SROs and detention centers.
- Opportunity to align the de-incarceration work with the work to reduce the use of congregate care and incarceration for youth in the juvenile justice system and put together a holistic approach that focuses on healing and wellness.
- How do we effectively use cross-systems collaboration to provide resources and opportunities outside of the system?
- Cross-system collaboration. We are about to see the bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which includes a call for more funding for police in school, threat assessments, and school hardening. OJJDP has an opportunity to align itself in ways that are appropriate with the statutory language and have those conversations with community leaders and government to raise these issues in the community.

### **4. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for opening up opportunities for system-involved youth should be?**

- Centering the work on directly impacted youth and formally incarcerated youth. This should be at the center of our conversations. Also, offering the resources for youth to be able to work post-disposition.
- Centering on well-being and healing and ensuring youth have the resources they need to thrive.
- Consider the different kinds of investments organizations need on the front end.
- Reminded me of the [Underground Scholars](#) programs at the UC [University of California] systems; they have other names too.
- Consider crossover by young adults over 18 in extended foster care

### **5. What can OJJDP do to advance this key priority through the kinds of strategies and activities it undertakes? (For example, communications, webinars and training, publications, policy guidelines, and pilot programs.)**

- Research recolonizes communities of color. Research should include more narrative work, community lead, social action research, street scholars, involve focus groups, impacts of policing, and collect national insights from young people—not top-down from ivory towers but from the community.
- Research that is youth led, that centers the voice of system involved, photo novellas, art, videos.
- State plans need to require plans for youth economic mobility (jobs and education) for system-involved young people. State advisory groups need to engage system-involved youth to redesign the service delivery system.



- Yes, don't let states spend more money "assessing" racial disparities. We know they're there.
- Many millions have gone to "studies" of disparities that lead to no action or attempts to explain away racism.
- Too often, higher education institutions are not in the community. When you talk to folks in the community who are impacted, there are no solutions. The direction needs to change. Need to tackle people's perceptions.
- Could OJJDP stop categorizing Latinos as white? It is misaligned with other data systems at the Administration for Children and Families, Education Department, Department of Agriculture, etc.