



OJJDP FY 2022 Regional Listening Session: Midwest Region

August 17, 2022 | 2–4 p.m. ET

Breakout Room #1: Treating Children as Children

1. What does it mean to you to treat children as children?

a. What do you think are best practices for treating children as children?

- Meeting children where they are at and that includes ensuring that services are age appropriate and that they consider youth development. Then incorporating those concepts into the programming and therapy. While youth are experiencing being held accountable, there are still ways to make them feel welcome, wanted, loved, and cared about and not just a number.
- Making sure we are using developmentally appropriate interventions. Take a step back from that and see children for their humanity. And see the adultification of Black and brown kids. Also, avoid using the term “juvenile.” Treating kids as kids means seeing them as children and fundamentally respecting the human rights of children. We need to engage children in the same way we want to see our own kids treated. That means moving to decarceration.
- They are sort of approached like they should have no agency. Instead, think of them as experts in their own lives and really value their experience. Not treating them like, “You’re just a child and you don’t know.”

2. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to treat children as children?

- In [location], juveniles are being held in a spotlight for an increase in crimes like car jackings. So, there’s a push lately to give more severe punishments for those types of offenses. While there is a debate whether crime has increased, they are saying youth are participating in more egregious crimes and that is why they are holding them longer.
- That public narrative about youth crime being on the rise is easily disprovable by data. This myth about returning to the ’90s super-predator is really problematic. And we are facing a consequential election, and candidates feel like they have to be tough on crime even though we know all the things that happened in the ’90s were harmful. I’m also concerned about complacency at the SAG [(State Advisory Group)] level. They seem more interested in funding instead of transformative policy and practices. A lot of system folks have been on SAGs for a really long time. For them, they are sort of desensitized to the language issue of “juvenile” versus “youth.” It feels tokenized when they include impacted folks. They don’t actually give them the knowledge and information to provide their voice and perspective. It’s difficult to break down these established barriers and make progress against the status quo.
- It’s important to cycle in SAG members who are passionate and do care about changing systems. Sometimes they are afraid to rock the boat and be bold. Leadership (state and local) matters and we need more collaboration. DHS could be an agency to bring other agencies together to break some of this thinking and share best practices and say, “While we’ve been doing this for 20 years, here is a new approach we’ve been taking.” Make sure we appoint the right people, and our leadership is involved and collaborative. Funding is really important. How can we be



creative if we lose some of our funding over issues that the state is facing over jail removal and sight and sound? I wish states could invest more in juvenile justice and not rely on the fed.

- Money should be fundamentally tied to what is OK for kids. We have to meet these things—it's like a check box; if we can meet these things, we can get the money. The way the SAGs are set up, when the SAG gets its money and thinks about addressing racial disparities, it's all about investing in community resources. That makes it seem like it's the youth in the community that are the problem. What about addressing the systems?
- Everyone says, "We all have to get along," but is anybody going to say out loud that all of the kids in the detention centers are Black and that that is a problem? When you say that, people say, "Make sure you're not calling anyone racist." I'm not talking about them; I'm talking about their policies and practices.
- It's great to have the funding to do the programming, but we need to invest in systems improvement. That's where we really see change happening. It's hard to follow the change in local youth engagement work.

3. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) establishes four core requirements: (1) the deinstitutionalization of status offenders; (2) separation of youth from adults in secure facilities; (3) removal of youth from adult jails and lockups; and (4) reducing racial and ethnic disparities.

- a. What goals do you recommend OJJDP set for the jail removal requirement (which states must follow if they want to participate in the Title II Formula Grants Program)? (For example, zero youth in adult jails.)**
- We are struggling with jail removal. We know it is impacting other states and the de minimis is an issue. We would love to say, "No youth in jails," but we have to give support to states to make that happen. The police will say, "We are understaffed and don't have enough room in our jails to co-locate in our facilities, so to truly separate them would be difficult." If you are going to change the de minimis, we need to get resources to states to make these infrastructure changes or system changes.
 - I think it should be zero youth in adult jails. This is an incentive for states to move to decarceration and find community-based alternatives. If we put it in infrastructure, then we are just putting more money into caging children. I would like to see OJJDP move to a place where it is zero and rethink what it means if you are out of compliance with that and what does it look like to put supports in place for states to move toward decarceration. Maybe redirect funding with some technical assistance to your state that is focused on decarceration and how to actually do this effectively. The de minimis number has left us in a place where there is complacency and kids are just a number. Put state noncompliance and funding on probationary status to work toward decarceration.
 - What can feds do to educate these other system partners on the impact of their decision making and creating more structures to keep the youth inside? And how can we incentivize those states that are making progress?
 - How do we hold folks accountable? They might never see any of the dollars, so what do they care? We need accountability that actually impacts change. How do we get there versus the current structure?



b. Can we undertake any work with partners like the National Sheriffs' Association, the American Jail Association, or others to help reach the specified goals?

- OJJDP and elected officials can collaborate on reaching out to state associations of sheriffs, public defenders, etc., to work more collaboratively to bring it back to the states. Maybe listening sessions with these folks who don't get OJJDP funding, but they definitely have information and opinions they could share. Also pay attention to different types of communities—rural communities, urban communities, suburban communities. Isn't there an association of governors? We should work with them too. They listen more when it comes from the federal level.
- And we need to include Tribal communities as well. This idea of better collaboration is ideal. I think shifting the model of what happens when you are not meeting that goal—and also shifting the goal—and providing states with meaningful technical assistance—both the knowhow and the political savvy to move us through challenging spaces is all needed. From my perspective, I would like OJJDP to simultaneously work on the jail removal but also the conditions of confinement for kids at the same time because they are so connected. The spaces that we have created for children are not appropriate for children. Children are not being treated as children in those spaces. Kids are held in “the wrap” (a restraint device that holds your whole body) for 2 hours at a time or are in solitary and strapped to a chair—things that are just really awful.

c. What challenges, if any, do you anticipate facing as a result of the pandemic when enforcing the jail removal requirement to remove juveniles from adult jails and lockups?

- Staffing is something that is a huge issue. And not just the jail removal, but the way kids are treated in correctional facilities—it's like, “We don't have the staffing, so we have to do it this way.”
- Staffing. Resources. One thing around removal is pickup and transportation. There's a staff shortage for transporting youth to detention centers or even to facilities to get them out of adult facilities. And parent engagement is an issue. Give them enough time to pick up the youth and don't let that cause further violations. And invest in something that allows them not to be in that adult environment while they are waiting to get picked up.
- If only we could just move toward decarceration and shift funding to community spaces. Ensure kids are held in community spaces and not carceral spaces, whether it's for a short or long period of time. We allow states to keep children in spaces that we would never allow community members to keep them in because there are staffing issues, and that should never be an acceptable response. Your staffing issues don't override this child's fundamental human rights, and we need to invest in other options. I guess your facility should be shut down if you can't appropriately care for children.

4. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for treating children as children should be?

- The youth justice system is not a good place for children. Keep children out of this system. Ground our systems instead in child development and brain development, health, and family systems, and models of care instead of models of corrections and law enforcement. The goal should be decarceration. Treating children as children means they don't belong in cages. They don't belong in locked cells.



- I agree decarceration should be the focus and more community-based alternatives. Diversion coupled with decarceration should be a huge focus. How do we transition youth in the system right now into more community-based programming? If we could be matched in funding for this type of program, we could take this type of program even a step further.
- Think about as many off ramps as possible for kids. We have a model for what this looks like: It's what we do with white wealthy kids. It is developmentally appropriate for children to make mistakes. How do we respond to that and invest in children so they can safely make mistakes and give their families the resources to respond to those mistakes? We are in the midst of a mental health crisis and what that looks like for white wealthy kids is waiting lists for private-pay mental health services that their parents can afford to pay. What that looks like for Black and brown kids is juvenile detention centers where they are held in solitary confinement because of their behaviors. Invest in kids being able to be in school and incentivize states to significantly reduce the number of youth coming into their youth justice systems. When we bring them into the youth justice system, the recidivism rates jump because it's so harmful, so why are we doing that?

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.)

- a. What policies, guidance, or communication would be helpful for OJJDP to develop to support the priority of treating children as children?**
 - Shift the model of the enforcement of the JJDPA to focus on helping states get to decarceration. Policy shifts on that front. Funnel funds directly to support investing in community alternatives and the power of children and families and communities who are experts in their own lives. One barrier is that applying for funding is really hard. How would your average community organization figure it out? There are these bureaucratic barriers to getting money into the community directly.
 - We got some funds to address violence—to do prevention and outreach—and people weren't applying. They didn't know how to get through the process to apply. We went out to recruit applicants. We went to formerly incarcerated individuals who are starting community-based organizations, and they were like, "What is this DUNS number?" So, the feds could continue to offer this training, but maybe to different groups of people to reach these community organizations. That may need intentional outreach and more structured and thoughtful resources on how to navigate the federal funding process and how to maintain your grants once you get the money.
 - In terms of trainings, try to engage in a train-coach-mentor model. So, make it more intentional training. Provide opportunities for states to put teams together to work on decarceration. Have them attend the training, whether virtual or in person, get followup support, and the opportunity to collaborate with each other.

6. How can OJJDP support better cross-system collaboration to lead to improved treatment of children as children?

- Put out webinars or materials about best practices for state-level oversight and collaboration related to youth justice. A resource or even an offering of technical assistance for states on how to get there and treat children as children in their youth justice system. Doing that through that



framework of cross-system collaboration is really important. But also, where this is housed is really important. Having youth justice live in corrections and law enforcement is really problematic for so many reasons. I think this lens of development and health and equity being integrated in resources that are being put out is important.

7. What kinds of strategies or activities is your state or region currently doing well?

- a. **Do you have any specific examples of successful approaches, tools and techniques, or pilot programs that others might find useful?**
 - The [[Comprehensive Community-Based Youth Services](#)] system to address diversion, even though it's not called a diversion program, is one example of investing in more community-based approaches. [State] is developing an assessment tool for another type of diversion program. A lot of people use the YASI [(Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument)] for assessment, but [state] is trying to change that. They are piloting a new assessment that is more strength-based. The youth are the experts in their own lives, and they have so much to offer, but sometimes these assessment don't show that. So having a different approach is helpful.
 - Integrating restorative practices at decision points within the youth justice system has shown positive results at the police department level, prosecutors, schools, courts. Those are successful approaches grounded in relationships.
 - Centering youth voices and impacted youth and families. That is the most important part. Youth, families, and communities have all the expertise they need, they just need the resources and to stop being criminalized and targeted by the system.
 - The youth engagement piece: We brought youth in front of juvenile officers association for the first time and got a really great response. Law enforcement officers were talking to the youth and asking, "How can I engage my youth back in my county?" So, we are focusing more on centering youth voices and bringing them to tables that they don't normally get to be at.

Breakout Room #2: Serving Young People at Home, in Their Communities, With Their Families

1. What does it mean to you to serve young people at home, in their communities, with their families?

- To me it means we need to not just focus on the juvenile but the whole family. I think we tend to think, "He did well in the facility and is ready to go home." But in some cases, something is broken at home, which is why he ended up in the facility. We need to make sure that he and his family have support at home to be successful.
- I would echo that statement. At first look for youth accused of sex offenses, out-of-home placement might seem appropriate. However, often these offenses happen in the home and involve an underage victim. In cases where the victim has not been traumatized, community-based treatment that includes the family is the best way to address the issue.
- I think there need to be resources available in the community that help restructure home life. When we think something might be going on at home, we need to dig deeper to discover the issue and provide the appropriate resources to address the issue.
- Resiliency support.



a. What do you think are best practices for serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families?

- Support their given abilities. Listening to what youth say they need.
- The types of programs that are successful in [location] include multisystemic family therapy and several different community-based support services that are not evidence based.
- I have seen detention assessment tools used to support keeping kids at home. And the use of graduated sanctions.

b. Do you have specific examples of implementing community-based alternatives and involving families in the treatment of youth?

- Refer children to community-based organizations. In [state], we refer kids to a lot of religious organizations that have supports for the children and their families. These services are mostly prosocial programs. I think it is really important for children to have prosocial activities so they can build relationships with peers. On my wish list is a mentor program. I would like to hear from others how they have implemented mentoring programs.

c. Can you provide examples of how mentoring programs have been implemented in the region?

- It varies by county. I know you'll see a big menu of services, and some developed by the courts themselves in some counties. There is one that partners with a college and the college students get course credits for mentoring. Other counties use Boys & Girls Clubs or Big Brothers Big Sisters. The rural counties struggle to find programs or mentors. As a result, some have homegrown programs, and some have nothing.
- Here is information about a program that uses college students as mentors.
- In [state], we mostly work with the Boys & Girls Club. There are different clubs around the state, but there are only so many mentors, and it can be a challenge in rural counties not only to find mentors, but in larger rural counties, transportation can be an issue. The mentoring programs can be fragmented.
- Although we do have programs and kids want a mentor, we have difficulty matching kids with a mentor who has a similar worldview. Many of these kids have difficulty building rapport with a mentor. The mentors do not have the capacity to deal with the psychology challenges the kids have. They struggle to connect with the kids. It is not always easy for kids to enroll in these programs. Often, they have to complete an application and there is an interview process. The kids we work with do not have the cognitive ability to compete for a mentor. We need more mentors who truly want to spend time with these kids.
- I wanted to add that the youth affected by the juvenile justice system story is bigger than the box we put them in. We want the youth to see themselves as leaders. When it comes to mentors, kids need to be partnered with people that have had similar experiences who can help coach them and can relate. I think we need more mentors with lived experience.

2. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to serve young people at home, in their communities, with their families?

- Public opinion, prosecutors, law enforcement, the general public at large. I like to tell this story: I have a friend that is a sheriff's deputy, and when I took my current position, he said, "Oh, you



are going to work with baby felons.” The general public thinks the behaviors these kids do need to be corrected through incarceration. It is hard to convince elected judges that these behaviors are best addressed in the community because of the public pressure. It is hard to treat children as children because of public opinion.

- In [state] the courts do not sentence kids to out-of-home placement; they go to treatment programs. I do agree that the courts think they are benefiting the kids by putting them in out-of-home placement, which is not always true. A kid who had been receiving treatment at home four days a week and that included the family might only go to group one or two days a week with no family engagement in a residential facility. We struggle with a lack of data or research to share with judges and stakeholders. Sometimes they do want to keep kids in the community, but they lack a robust menu of services, so they lean towards confinement, so they feel like they are doing something.
- Since COVID, it has become 10 times more difficult to serve kids at home in their communities. We think with the expansion of telehealth there is more access. However, it has put major stress on our treatment providers. There has been an increase in need for services. Communities are identifying kids who have fallen through the cracks and reengaging these kids. As a result, it can take months before a kid can get an appointment with a therapist. Judges do not want to wait that long to connect kids with services, so they incarcerate them because it is faster. I think it would be helpful to have the community-based organizations in the court room to build relationships with the judges. When we recommend a program a judge is unfamiliar with, they can be reluctant to refer the kid.
- In [state], there are offenses for which by statute kids are required to go to prison. In court, we still advocate for community-based services, but the judges are required by statute to sentence the kids to prison. I think we need to work with the legislature to change the statute.

a. What are your comments, questions, or feedback regarding mandatory sentences?

- It is not an issue in [state]. We have a bigger issue with offenses that do not have sentence guidelines like status offenses.
- In [state], it is similar. There is a grid system and whatever box the offense is in, that is the sentence. I agree the legislature needs to change the law. Instead of putting kids in a box, we should look at what happened and why it happened. It needs to be case specific.

3. In what ways do you involve families in the treatment of young people in their homes?

- It varies by county. I know come communities have treatment options that engage the family in parenting programs. For others, it is a struggle. Some wish they had more programs that engaged the family. Some struggle to maintain existing programs. Anything that engages the families would benefit the youth.
- When we are able to find direct services that involve them family, we engage them by using them as collateral contacts. The youth are not always the best historians when it comes to their behaviors. It is helpful to have the family’s additional information about the youth that can help inform the needs of the youth. We get a lot more information when we talk to families.

4. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP’s goal for serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families should be?



- That is a hard question. I would deal with educational issues. I know when kids start off with educational issues, they become frustrated and that impacts everything the kids touch.
- I think it's important for youth to let their voice be heard. I think sometimes kids feel like no one is listening to them. Youth need a way to tell their stories the way they want to tell them. They need a platform and opportunity. I think this would show them that they matter. We need to support youth and tell them they can be whatever they want to be.
- I see a lot of early childhood trauma and poverty, which have a large impact on children. So, I would say eliminate them. I know that is easy to say but hard to do. There has to be things we can do to eliminate them.
- I agree with that comment. Trauma, poverty, and homelessness are some big factors that we see that impact a kid's trajectory. I would change the conditions in the detention centers. There needs to be more mental health services in these facilities. There needs to be staff oversight to make sure they are following protocols and understand how they handle issues.
- I would limit court involvement for low-risk youth and status offenses. I think responses to status offenses should be needs based. Juvenile justice stakeholders feel like they need to use these status offenses as a way to get kids into services. However, these are often things that should be addressed by other agencies working with the youth. Youth that are high-need, low-risk should have those needs addressed outside of the system.
- I would make more resources that provide services to youth available in the community. Using more community-based organizations to serve youth, not prisons.
- I was recently in a meeting with criminal justice stakeholders who were trying to develop strategies to address racial disparities. During the meeting, many brought up issues with the foster care system and other community-based services that are not providing adequate support for youth to prevent further system involvement. There needs to be safe places in the community for youth.
- I see similar issues. In [state], kids run away from foster care and are charged as runaways. Because they have run away, we cannot find community placement for them. I think there needs to be more education about the trauma from being separated from your family. These kids have only run away, they haven't committed a crime.

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.)

- I heard from one youth that he was initially placed on house arrest, but he could not afford to pay the fee. Because he could not pay the fee, he went to jail. His family saved up the money to pay the fee, and he was released to house arrested. But the following month, he was again unable to pay and was sent to back to jail. There need to be free alternatives in the community.
- Support and fund pilot programs that can be replicated and expanded. For example, fund pilot programs that keep status offense out of court.
- I think it would be helpful to have research that shows the diminishing return on investment from putting kids in prison. Research that counters the narrative or old thinking regarding what system involvement looks like.
- I think it would be great to have OJJDP provide more research publications. We do share this information with judges when advocating for alternatives to incarnation.



- Regarding pilot programs, anything that provides supports in schools for status offenses like truancy to be addressed without a juvenile justice referral. Programs that work with law enforcement and the courts to increase diversion or deflect for low-risk youth and status offenses. Support for smaller community-based programs to implement evidence-based programs. Support to incorporate culturally competent programs and programs that address racial disparities. Often, we think the nature of the program will address racial disparities without truly thinking it through. For example, in one location, a program around restitution payments was implemented, but Black folks were less likely to be offered the program because they had not made a payment, or their parents were unable to attend the initial meeting. We see Black kids less likely to be offered diversion. We need to offer programs that consider wage equivalency and have flexible meeting times.

Breakout Room #3: Opening up Opportunities for System-Involved Youth

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

- These youth are underserved and need more attention. We need to help break down barriers to help them succeed and be productive.
- There is a certain amount of bias in our communities. A youth is viewed worse as a juvenile offender than an adult offender would be. System-involved youth are already seen as a criminal. We need to help them and give them opportunities to go down the right path with schooling, employment, and other opportunities. We need people that are willing to help them. We put kids into the juvenile prison system, removing them from their communities and seeing if they turn out okay. Instead, we should work in the community and help them get out of the cycle.
- We need more opportunities for services that are more voluntary than mandated and coercive. This will allow for better engaging with the youth. The services need to be appealing to the youth and help build trusting relationships between youth and service providers. These services should not be transactional. For youth who lack parental role models, are involved in gangs, or have substance use issues, their needs are not being met. Thus, we must provide services to address their needs.

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

- We need to make sure that providers are trained for trauma-informed care.
- We need to make sure that their records do not follow them for the rest of their life. We need to take away the stigmas and biases associated with having a record in the juvenile justice system. We should seal records.
- We should use “youth” instead of “juvenile” to reframe the narrative and help break down barriers and biases. We should change terms from “juvenile” to “youth” because “juvenile” usually implies “delinquent” in many minds.
- There is a lot of room for case managers or social workers be involved with kids charged with serious crimes/offenses. We should assign them to someone or direct them to services to improve their life skills.



- Community involvement, guidance, and partnerships are necessary to help build trust. This also includes having less police or probation officer relations with youth and more social workers or other trusted professionals.

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

- Ensuring standards for public defense to be educated and adhere to the constitution for the juvenile system is difficult because they only deal with the adult system. There is a lot of reform taking place in the juvenile system, including expanding the public defense office for youth. There are not enough resources or educated and qualified people to defend youth. Many youth do not have an advocate at their side while in the system. This leads to further involvement in the system, especially among marginalized populations, specifically Black and brown populations. There is no state oversight for youth defenders.
- There are issues with hiring qualified staff. The funding is not sufficient to retain staff. This hurts the trust of the youth due to the large amount of turnover, and this trust has to be constantly rebuilt. This perpetuates feelings of loss and abandonment. It is difficult to compete with the private sector, for-profit organizations with more competitive salaries.
- A lack of resources is an overarching issue. It is difficult to recruit and retain social workers due to noncompetitive salaries.
- The lack of education for the judiciary is another issue. The understanding that youth behaviors are different from adults is still just “lip service.” We still do not fully recognize the lack of brain development among youth.
- Using language is also difficult within the juvenile system. This is due to the developing nature of language and education regarding the juvenile system, which demonstrates that we do not entirely know how to approach these things yet.
- Another issue is some people not believing the longstanding research or trends around juvenile system involvement. People in power are not willing to acknowledge these trends.
- Another issue is that not many people view themselves as biased, but the research and results definitely prove that many are.

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

- We are not dealing with adults. Helping youth is going to be a frustrating, annoying, and painful experience due to the gravity of their situation. We are quick to file charges against them than offer help or a process that doesn't involve the system. We need more patience.
- There is room for a non-court-based review of behavior and process for setting goals and punishment within reason without the juvenile system involvement. There should be some action before the courts and jails are involved unless a real crime justifies their involvement. There needs to be a buffer.
- It is hard for behavioral health providers to offer resources due to a lack of resources, high caseloads, and a lack of time to meaningfully engage youth. Lower quality of care leads to involvement in the juvenile system. Youth need to fail in order to get help. Instead, we should intervene much earlier. We should work with youth in schools, especially those youth with mental health challenges. The earlier you intervene, the higher the likelihood that they can have a full recovery. We need to offer more resources to youth.



- In [state], family success centers are designed to be primary child abuse prevention models. However, anyone can access the service. They offer a variety of services and events for families to access and help find other resources. These centers are nonjudgmental and provide youth and families with resources to help them succeed and not become involved in the system.
 - Critical response teams are another useful way to stop the flow. These officers are trained to address critical situations and mental health crises. Some are trained specifically for youth. Their training includes de-escalation tactics.
 - Holistic work is critical, especially partnerships with social workers and other professionals.
- a. What ideas do you have to reduce referrals from child welfare systems, including foster care, to juvenile justice?**
- Child welfare and education need to be able to help these youth instead of relying on the juvenile justice system.
- b. What ideas do you have to reduce referrals from the education system to juvenile justice system?**
- We need to stop criminalizing youth behavior. For example, cops in schools criminalize youth behaviors. Educators should not resort to using school officers to punish students. Adding more police, corrections, and punitive and militarized measures in educational spaces is not necessary as these spaces should be places of growth and learning.

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?

- It is difficult for public defenders as they are responding to youth involvement in the system. Prosecutors should have a more active role in helping these youth. In the trajectory of a prosecutor's career, they don't care much about their time working in juvenile courts as they want to move up to felony courts. If I had a magic wand, standards would be set for prosecutors regarding juvenile delinquency prevention and make them get more involved.
- Stopping the increase of caseloads and starting interventions early would be helpful. When the offense occurs and/or the youth is referred to the system, we should intervene. In [location], they have attorneys available to youth at early points in their involvement with the system, serving as an intermediary.
- We should focus on the family unit and support education and physical and behavioral health of youth. We need to help families in poverty without the resources as most of the system-involved youth lack necessary resources.
- When a youth is exhibiting delinquent behavior, the right person should be summoned to their aid. Most of the time, law enforcement is summoned. We should quickly and efficiently have counselors or mentors summoned to meaningfully engage youth and direct them on a different path. Other people can really support the youth better than law enforcement. The current issue with this concept is the belief that making this change is too complicated.
- I really like these ideas about getting an intervention person who isn't a police officer involved before charges are filed. I honestly hadn't even thought of it. You just get so used to the way things are, not the way they could be.



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.)

- Data collection is important to target the work more effectively. We can understand the needs of these populations better. We need to build on those systems of data collection to help enforce standards for service providers. If we continue to collect data, we will realize the issues. This puts responsibility back on the local system to address these issues.
- a. What policies, guidance, or communication would be helpful for OJJDP to develop to support the priority of opening up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?**
 - Any policy that can reduce the loss of learning time would be helpful. Involvement with justice system results in being absent from school and sometimes, suspensions or expulsions. Alternative schools for these youth can create robust and innovative programs to address their needs.
 - Refraining from using “juvenile” or “delinquency” in materials would be helpful. Changing the language at a federal level will help to change the narrative. The current language use portrays youth as “kids” in schools but “delinquents” in the court. Child courts are basically the same as adult courts except they use euphemisms. This way of treating youth perpetuates the narrative that youth are just like adults, so they are treated as such. We need ways to change the culture.
- b. What types of trainings or webinars would it be helpful for OJJDP to develop on the topic of opening up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?**
 - Many people are burned out from attending webinars over the last couple years during the pandemic. People would get the most out of the experiences that are in-person, participatory trainings. Examples may include a guidebook to guide participation in these trainings or a game to play these situations and scenarios out. Actively working through these ideas in a participatory manner, such as roleplay trainings, helps people to understand and retain the information better.

6. How can OJJDP support better cross-system collaboration to lead to improved opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- Expand nationwide reach and communication between systems would be helpful. People need to be able to communicate with other systems in order to understand how to collaborate across different systems.