



OJJDP FY 2022 Virtual Town Hall With Youth

August 8, 2022 | 11 a.m.–1 p.m. ET

Breakout Room 1 Notes

1. What does justice and liberation mean to you?

- Justice means everyone receives the same. Liberation is not having to worry about harassment.
- Justice to me is the ability to hold people accountable. Liberation is the ability to be free from oppression of any kind.
- Justice is personalized to the individual because it doesn't look the same for a person. Time changes and people change, and so it will always change for someone.
- Justice is fairness in the way that people are treated. Liberation is the act of setting someone free from slavery or etc.

2. What are your thoughts on the juvenile justice system, in your own words?

- I would describe the current juvenile justice system as a struggle on our youth. I feel that a lot of things are said because they sound nice, but not everything is being completed to its excellency.
- Also, the age for youth should be extended because youth who have struggled throughout their childhood continue to struggle well into their 30s. And so, having built-in support systems for them is critical.
- I originally had a biased view based on my experiences. For now, it is being more supportive. But I know it is not like that for everyone. People are doing more in the arts space that they were not doing before, so there are more opportunities for youth to engage; for instance, doing art virtually.
- Some youth talked about transportation, and I know that this is one thing that can be supported for youth. Many youth do not have their own vehicles and it can be tough attending activities that they want to participate in.
- I think the current system focuses on rehabilitation rather than more punishment which is what juveniles need.
- I believe the juvenile justice system is letting down a lot of our youth. I think it can be better. I feel as though it's keeping them in the system rather than supporting and uplifting them out of their current situation. I do like that they are creating more programs to encourage the youth—like previously it was mentioned cooking. I know I see more workshops than I did before. I will say that. But I agree there is a lack accessibility for many of my friends, which I think should be fixed.

3. What things about the juvenile justice system do you think should be changed?

- The common theme was support and accommodations for diverse groups of people. The system needs to be more rehabilitative and more accessible.
- There isn't much respect for individuals who have disabilities. They are not part of the discussion at all, so expanding that discussion and really prioritizing that everyone has a seat at the table is so important.



- There is a lack of accessibility for many people, and that should be fixed. There should be more trainings or mindfulness around individuals who have disabilities. We need to take a more solution-oriented approach when addressing these types of issues.
- I think the system is also letting our youth down. Some changes can include access to effective mental health services or limiting children from being housed in the same facility as adult offenders.

4. What can OJJDP do differently to prevent kids from entering the juvenile justice system?

- The interaction of youth with police officers is one that needs to be prioritized. I really don't think that police can be reformed because anyone can be hired as a cop. They don't have to live in a certain community to work there and, of course, everyone has their own biases. Getting youth to talk about this topic would probably be the best first step because it is a young person's initial interaction with the system.
- Young people need to have their needs met. Young people are pursuing crimes because of necessity, they need food and clothes and even attention. There is a broad spectrum of needs that a child has. If a child's needs are being met, then they do not have a real reason to commit any crimes.
- Most of the time, this takes money and commitment. The community understands what the community needs. A lot of it just comes down to funding.
- Focusing mainly on school and youth having something to strive for. Maybe if youth can go to programs to learn about how the system works and why they don't want to get into the system, and what the potential outcomes can be if they are involved, can be helpful.
- Communication would prevent most youth from entering in the system. I know I was very naive, like hundreds of others, I didn't have anyone there to communicate with me and guide me through rights and wrongs, etc. That is why I volunteer at [redacted] to talk to kids and be there to answer their questions, to talk to them through their problems, be that support system I wish I had. I think that would help more.

5. In what ways can communities get involved in helping kids stay out of the juvenile justice system?

- Money is necessary here. The root of the issue is funding. Money is how services are completed.
- We also need to destigmatize youth of color, particularly brown and Black youth, as being thought of as miniature adults. They are also still children.
- We have seen that youth aren't even treated as adults. They aren't even treated as human beings. We need to have things in place to ensure we have a sense of community for young people.

6. A lot of kids that end up in the juvenile justice system are also involved in other systems, like the education system for issues at school, or the mental health system because of court-appointed therapy, or the child welfare system and they are currently in between foster homes. What ideas do you have for improving communication and collaboration among these agencies to better serve kids?



- Sometimes our education can play a huge role in this, like expelling a student, can really have dire effects. Education can play a better part when it comes to community support. A suggestion would be seeing better reentry programs for youth that include more behavioral support.
- Everyone makes mistakes, but it's the things you do after that determine how that mistake affects you.
- Education. It is hard to get people to look past your mistakes or your past. One thing they can't look past is that shiny diploma or degree that's stamped that you did better for yourself. More programs to help those get their GEDs, classes for trades, etc., is important too.
- Mental health and physical health services would be great. We should also change federal policies, such as allowing Medicaid to provide coverage to people who are incarcerated. We should also support people with mental illness from becoming disconnected from their care while incarcerated.

7. What kinds of resources and supports do you wish you had prior to your involvement with the juvenile justice system?

- Housing and employment are the two most important things. Not every youth is going to go to college or a trade school, so we need to value every type of work. It really starts there, and it trickles down.
- I wish that I had more reassurance, like having someone physically sit with us and have a conversation with us for us to realize what we are doing right and what we are doing wrong, and how that would affect me in the long run.
- Mentorship. When you have someone there to talk, listen, and guide you through your new life, it makes all the difference.
- OJJDP can team up with Elliot Housing. OJJDP is already housing young adults, but the housing age should be extended to accommodate them further. Currently, the maximum age is 21 or 22, that a person can stay. A suggestion to address this is that youth can stay longer if they work as mentors in their housing unit.
- Food support for youth would be great. Awarding food gift cards to get groceries would also go a long way to address food insecurity.

8. What advice would you give to juvenile justice staff (probation officers, parole officers, law enforcement, court attorneys, judges, etc.)?

- Honoring youth as youth and not treating them as animals.
- To just keep in mind that they're children who have made mistakes and are trying to grow from it.
- There needs to be more training. People in these professions need to understand the mind of a young person. If these things are taken into consideration, organizations can build better staff.
- I believe that without verifiable life experience, then education really is important. You really need to be able to put yourself in the shoes of a youth.



Breakout Room 2 Notes

1. What are your thoughts on the juvenile justice system, in your own words? What kinds of things should be changed?

- It's a bureaucracy. We often have to scramble to find IDs for students when they're leaving for college or employment. Why isn't there a process or procedure in place to grant the residents/students an ID from the very beginning of the induction process? These youth need IDs when they reenter the community and there shouldn't be any impediments.
- Education is key. There is a huge lack of educational opportunities for system-involved youth. A young person can be in a holding facility for 6 months before being committed, and in both facilities, not have really any educational opportunities. There are also low graduation rates.
- There is a huge lack of programming in the facilities. Seems like youth/residents had to beg for programming opportunities. Also, there was a huge lack of reentry programming for youth who were transitioning back into the community.
- Having relevant, culturally competent programs is important. There needs to be more community-based organizations coming in and providing restorative justice opportunities. The juvenile justice system is like chess. The system is set up to fail us. The system needs to empower youth to be their best selves. If youth are system-involved, let them know that it's temporary. We also need to be asking youth what they need. A lot of youth have deep-rooted trauma. The school-to-prison pipeline is very real. We need more culturally competent programming. Many times, people in powerful positions do not like seeing youth advocate for themselves, so it's very hard to speak up.
- I think of the juvenile justice system as an extension of what's been happening in disadvantaged communities, for example, breaking up communities, boarding schools, etc. The juvenile justice system should be totally redesigned so that it's not breaking up communities. It's also important to ensure grant money is being invested into communities. Further, community-based organizations need more structure for funding.
- Prevention – Ensuring that programming is structured to help Tribal/native youth to navigate the juvenile justice system.
- Life skills. There's so many things we don't learn before entering the juvenile justice system. While being system-involved, it would be helpful to have opportunities or programming for literacy programs, life skills, credit and finance classes, and ongoing supports.
- Reentry support when transitioning out of the juvenile justice system.
- Implementation plan for making sure youth are connected when they're exiting the facilities. Youth need more resources within the community, which should be a place of uplifting and not punitive. Also, there should be a curated place to teach youth since they're still learning.
- Defund juvenile justice systems and reallocate funds to community-based organizations.
- Youth are not being listened too in the juvenile justice facilities. If you're lucky, you may get therapy. If I had access to therapy after transitioning out of the juvenile justice system, it would have been helpful to talk to someone outside of the home.
- Mental health and healing supports.
- Tailored, individual therapy. We need supports to help change us as individuals. We need support groups that make us better people.

2. What can OJJDP do differently to prevent kids from entering the juvenile justice system?



- More community-based supports.
 - More supports in schools such as experienced guidance counselors and mentoring programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters. They provide helpful guidance for kids, which is free. The youth have mentors that listen to them.
 - More programming for young parents in juvenile systems with kids under the age of 18. This is a strategy to divert youth from entering the system at all.
- a. Instead of sending kids to detention facilities, what other ideas do you have for kids who get into trouble with the law?**
- Family-alternative sentencing programs. For example, if a parent or primary caregiver comes into contact with the juvenile justice system, they can opt to be a part of a program instead of going to prison. This includes attending classes focused on understanding self-worth, cognitive behavior supports, ACEs, and information on available services such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), housing resources, and more. Such a program would be comprehensive and meet the basic needs, but also rewire the way participants think. Then, if a participant completes the program, they don't go to prison and the charges will be dropped. The focus is really to support needs on the front end.
 - Community-based organizations that allow you to bloom and have self-determination. Education plays a huge role. In [location], there's a working group working with the [state] juvenile justice system working with community-based organizations. Leaning on community-based organizations that are led by directly impacted youth is helpful for youth who have been directly impacted. When you see other people who have been impacted or system-involved, it's easier to relate.
 - The juvenile justice system is a dead end, in real life and in the system.
 - If I had access to resources such as a life coach, therapy, and other programming before incarceration, it probably would have changed my life. Being incarcerated first was very unnecessary and negatively impacted me. We should be offering community programming resources and supports first before a youth enters into the juvenile justice system.
- b. In what ways can communities get involved in helping kids stay out of the juvenile justice system?**
- Positive relationship-building in the community. Also, we need to see role models who have done something good, so we can see that in the community.
 - There are some good programs, but nobody knows about them. There needs to be more promotions about the programming, resources, and services available to kids.
 - Community-support even after transitioning out of the juvenile justice system.
 - Compensate youth for their educational and job training programs.
 - When exiting the system, there should be an exit plan with bullet points for youth to follow. Staff should identify supports, housing, and resources for youth to utilize after they transition out of the juvenile justice system. Sometimes, youth are left with nothing.
 - I have seen several youth transitioning out and then return to the juvenile justice facilities in less than a week. This is not OK.



3. What kinds of opportunities would be helpful for kids when they go back to their communities after being involved in the juvenile justice system?

- Recreational opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.
- Programs in the community such as therapy or counseling focused on life skills. The issue is the programming costs, but not everyone has the money.
- Connecting young people with staff so they can continue to build strong relationships after they leave programs. Sometimes, they aren't allowed to meet or talk with the staff. Programming staff have access to useful connections such as job opportunities. Right now, there's a law in [state] that states that the youth cannot come into contact with programming staff for at least five years after completing the program.
- Mental health resources and supports.
- Love and open arms. Tapping into cultural competency so that youth can embrace their culture and understand what works for them as well as knowing about their history.

a. What opportunities would be helpful for kids who are currently involved in the juvenile justice system?

- Having educational resources. One of the best resources is a Tribal youth board, which can lead youth to joining a national youth board. One of the main things it does is connect youth to other opportunities. Youth can create a new mindset and awareness for what is happening outside of their community.
- Being compensated for my time was helpful. Experts get paid a large amount of money for their experience; paying youth what they're worth is just as important.
- It is important for trauma-informed staff to be working with directly impacted youth. Taking time for youth to decompress and reflect is also important.
- We need more programs to support youth who exit the juvenile justice system. There is no one waiting for us after we leave the juvenile justice system. A program to connect you to job opportunities would be helpful. For example, there is a construction program that pays participants for their skills. The program serves youth ages 18–27 where they have the opportunity to get construction certifications through the program and learn new skills through a 12-week program, if they complete it successfully, they have the opportunity to be hired upon completion. Youth also have the opportunity to complete additional trainings. Wraparound services are also available such as assistance with phone bills, gas cards, and more.

4. A lot of kids that end up in the juvenile justice system are also involved in other systems, like the education system for issues at school, or the mental health system because of court-appointed therapy, or the child welfare system and they are currently in between foster homes. What ideas do you have for improving communication and collaboration among these agencies to better serve kids?

- You'll see the signs early in other systems if a youth needs support. Being more attentive when they first enter a system is key.
- Utilize a multidisciplinary team that implements cross-system collaboration. For example, the team reaches out to the school if they need a transcript. As for mental health resources, the program can reach out if they need additional care. Community-partners would also be included in the communications if the team needs to reach out.



5. If you were to offer training to juvenile justice staff (probation officers, parole officers, law enforcement, court attorneys, judges, etc.) during your system involvement, what would the focus of your training be?

- We're humans. Once you get into the system, you become a case number. We want people in these leadership positions to know that we come with trauma and baggage. Just humanizing us and recognizing that we're also going to become adults someday would mean everything. We need more assistance than what we're currently receiving, so don't be so quick to judge us and cut us off.
- People can change. I've seen so many cases where people have completely changed their life around.
- I feel like most people in these positions are doing it for the money. We need to have some folks in these positions who can truly relate to the youth.

6. Youth of color are overrepresented throughout the nation's juvenile justice systems. What is your vision of a racially fair and equitable juvenile justice system?

- The zero-tolerance policy needs to go. That is the main cause of the school-to-prison pipeline. It is the number one reason why youth are overrepresented.
- Leadership officials can be extremely racist. It's hard for the kids to get out of the system because officials are racist again youth of color.
- Listening to the youth/residents is also critical. The kids are screaming out for help, but the adults ignore them. What's the point of being in a rehabilitation facility if nobody is listening?
- Tribal consultations for youth can be a helpful resource to discuss the trauma youth are experiencing. By offering these kinds of opportunities to youth in collaboration with thought leaders and others in the community, they'll have a safe space to have these types of conversations.

7. What types of community-based resources were available for you when you were transitioning out of the juvenile justice system? (For example, mentorship, employment and educational resources, housing resources, prevention programs.)

- Host public events for youth with people who care and staff who are already working with these kids. The event would be a good opportunity to meet new people and mentors and build relationships.
- School-based educational resources

8. What can OJJDP do to support kids who are transitioning out of the juvenile justice system?

- Keep in contact with us, not just every once in a while. Staying in contact is important.
- Better communication from service providers.
- Being consistent and transparent with communication and offering internships.
- Offering intel on how the juvenile justice system works.
- Empowering and educating youth on how the system works. Self-determination can be practiced when you're fully informed on how the system works.



- An office of young people at OJJDP, where young people can do the work and they get paid for it.
- Also, maybe OJJDP can consider changing their name. “Juvenile justice” has a negative connotation to it.

9. Do you have any additional ideas or recommendations for OJJDP to consider?

- Receiving adult probation as a juvenile, already puts me in the system. This needs to change.
- I hope this meeting isn't performative. I hope that someone is actually listening and will put some of these things into action.

Breakout Room 3 Notes

1. What are your thoughts on the juvenile justice system, in your own words?

- It has no room for restorative growth. Everybody is angry from the things that are happening. We need to uplift youth in our community.
- More compassion for youth is needed.
- Expungement of juvenile records needs to be automatic once the young person is released from supervision.
- Yes. I thought my record was sealed after I turned 18, but it wasn't, and I didn't get a job because of it. I got my expungement for free because I went through a reentry program.
- There should be more mental health services. If kids are in the juvenile justice system, not only are they in an environment where it is very toxic for their mental health, they are away from their home, they are away from their family—or their friends who they consider their family—and they are in a space where they feel alone, and I feel like there should be more mental health services for them.
- Mental health is key for people of color and males because they are thought to be strong. So mental health is a key component that is often overlooked.
- I agree with bringing a good source of mental health care to our youth. But we also have to be very cautious about what that mental health looks like. Being young and in the mental health system, youth can be doped up on meds. They're not getting help. They're just shut down. We need to rethink about how we are giving these young people services. Because putting kids on medicine does not fix the problem. It actually makes the problem worse, because now, when they are older, a lot of those kids are addicts. Obviously these medicines are not the cause of the addiction, but it's kind of like the gateway.

2. What can OJJDP do differently to prevent kids from entering the juvenile justice system?

- Youth mentors are needed.
- We need more nonprofits to uplift the youth in our community. For example, an art program can help youth who have been systematically impacted use their voices through different forms of expression. We need more of those types of programs out there. We also need to consider youth who aren't as aggressive about seeking. We need to think about how we can make more programs like that for the youth who don't speak up; the youth who shut people out.



- Yes. At-risk youth may be more artistic than vocal. Having a nonprofit that focuses on art and uses art as a form of advocacy would be good.

3. What kinds of opportunities would be helpful for kids when they go back to their communities after being involved in the juvenile justice system?

- Different opportunities. Some jurisdictions are inviting the private sector to the conversation to provide more opportunities for at-risk youth to get work.
- More nonprofits that uplift youth and are hopefully stipend paid.
- Nonprofits helping youth out by getting them jobs, providing counseling to youth, and providing them the resources to get into schools.
- Nobody is going to want to do something unless they are getting paid for it. What they were impacted by is valuable. Their experience has value, and I believe stipends are a good thing.
- Make sure at-risk youth get paid for their experience.
- Youth need more career-focused opportunities. Advocacy work. Nonprofits that focus on advocacy and make sure these youth get paid. They need mentor opportunities to teach these youth advocacy opportunities.
- A lot of youth do what they do to support their families. Some youth sell drugs because they don't have other means to make money. Making sure they have a mentor to show them other ways is important.
- I agree on how being involved in a nonprofit as a participant can move one forward in their advocacy career, and they can provide an example to the newcomers. We have to keep the room for restorative growth.
- There is a barrier to engagement because of housing or food insecurity—minimum wage is not going to cut it. For youth to pursue their careers—to feed safe and capable to manage their independence, they need more than minimum wage jobs. Minimum wage won't give them the support they need. There are barriers beyond having a career—there's the basic needs piece and providing wraparound services.
- We want to get to the career and engagement, but if someone is couch surfing, it's hard to do it.
- Youth need access to their documents: Driver license, birth certificates, school records. They need to know how to access those and even how to test for their learners permit. You need a big brother or big sister to help you navigate that.
- Teaching our youth how to obtain these documents. You are teaching us all these things that are supposed to get us ready for college, but not how to get an ID. And get my social security. It's a catch 22: I need an ID to get an ID. We need more outreach to be more independent. These kids are minors but a lot of them are on their own.

4. A lot of kids that end up in the juvenile justice system are also involved in other systems, like the education system for issues at school, or the mental health system because of court-appointed therapy, or the child welfare system and they are currently in between foster homes. What ideas do you have for improving communication and collaboration among these agencies to better serve kids?

- More nonprofits need to be involved. Would be good if someone had oversight over mental health and probation officers—these two agencies—and make sure they share documents.



- When you mix probation with mental health with court appointed therapy, it's not real therapy. Then I'm only doing it because if I don't, I'll get locked up. The only way for therapy to work is if you are engaging with it yourself.
- If a youth needs therapy, it shouldn't be court appointed, because they won't be engaged in it and won't be sharing their trauma.
- When there are a lot of agencies involved, it's like you get stuck in a knot instead of there being some flexibility. It gets stressful. There has to be some clause for youth needs and the stress factor—to think about the quality-of-life piece. When we all come together sometimes, the out-of-the-box thinking becomes sort of a tangle.

5. If you were to offer training to juvenile justice staff (probation officers, parole officers, law enforcement, court attorneys, judges, etc.) during your system involvement, what would the focus of your training be?

- We have the wrong people in the wrong positions in the juvenile justice system. There should be more compassion training. Some people are just collecting a check and don't really care about the youth.
- The safety of our youth. Making them feel safe and heard instead of attacked.
- There needs to be more restorative justice training. There needs to be an understanding that the issue isn't in the youth but in the community that they are being impacted by. It's not the kids' fault. Look at all the things they were born into. There needs to be training on just that: Restorative justice.
- I agree. Also, staff get compassion fatigue. There are disconnects within the system so young people gets starts and stops of services. There needs to be more positive community building across the system. I also think that staff need support in learning how to be vulnerable. Arts-based training for staff may be helpful. It would help them be improvisational and it reduces that power struggle. They need support in that too. And staff and young people need to do that together.
- Learning when you lose motivation to be consistent and finding that motivation again through being consistent.

6. Youth of color are overrepresented throughout the nation's juvenile justice systems. What is your vision of a racially fair and equitable juvenile justice system?

- a. What laws and policies do you recommend OJJDP consider to create a fair and equitable juvenile justice system?**
- Youth of color are more likely to receive a harsher sentence than their majority counterparts. The same act should get the same sentence. An urban kid and a suburban kid should get the same sentence for stealing a car to go joy riding. It's more punitive for youth of color.
 - A lot of the reasons why youth get in trouble is that they don't know how to speak to themselves. There are ways to advocate for yourself without putting yourself in trouble. Quiet isn't always better. They need to learn how to advocate for themselves in a more positive way, not cursing out the cops. The cops will get mad, and they have more authority over you.
 - That sounds amazing, racial equity would greatly impact the justice system.
 - Automatic expungement.



7. What types of community-based resources were available for you when you were transitioning out of the juvenile justice system? (For example, mentorship, employment and educational resources, housing resources, prevention programs.)

- It's hard to have resources when you don't know or hear from the right people. To help put out resources, we need to see more people like us giving out those resources. It is really hard to accept help from people you've been oppressed by. I know a lot of people mean well. I want to see people who look like people I grew up with providing these resources. See someone who looks like you that has achieved these things instead of someone who hasn't lived your lifestyle.

8. What can OJJDP do to support kids who are transitioning out of the juvenile justice system?

- We should be creating success plans based on youth interest.
- More open space or area for growth to open up rather than from an educational standpoint. Education keeps it systematic. So, it should be more from a supportive standpoint rather than, "I'm teaching you something and you have to learn it." Making it less mandatory and make it more of an open discussion.
- Please extend voluntary services to 25. Young people need more time to utilize supportive services. It's a developmental process. Milestones take time and young people need support with Maslow's [Hierarchy of Needs] to launch into adulthood.