

# Youth Justice (YJ) Vision and Strategic Plan

## Introduction

Across Wisconsin there is an interest in ensuring that youth are served in the appropriate system, and that the youth justice system does not function as the default for youth who cannot otherwise access needed services. There is also agreement – and a body of supporting national research – that existing policies and practices that bring youth into the youth justice system unnecessarily, treat them as higher risk than they are, or keep them in longer than needed, are straining the system’s limited resources and harming youth.

The vision for the Wisconsin youth justice system is that it ***focuses on prevention and diversion, and provides accountability and services to youth and families in the system that prepares them to thrive.*** Across the state, there are already many dedicated people and promising programs moving us forward toward this vision. Our collective challenge is to work together across systems - state, county and tribal agencies, courts, law enforcement, schools, service providers, and many others - to bring to fruition the vision we share.

Our strategic plan highlights the role we plan to play at DCF in the coming year to move this forward.



## Focus on Prevention and Diversion

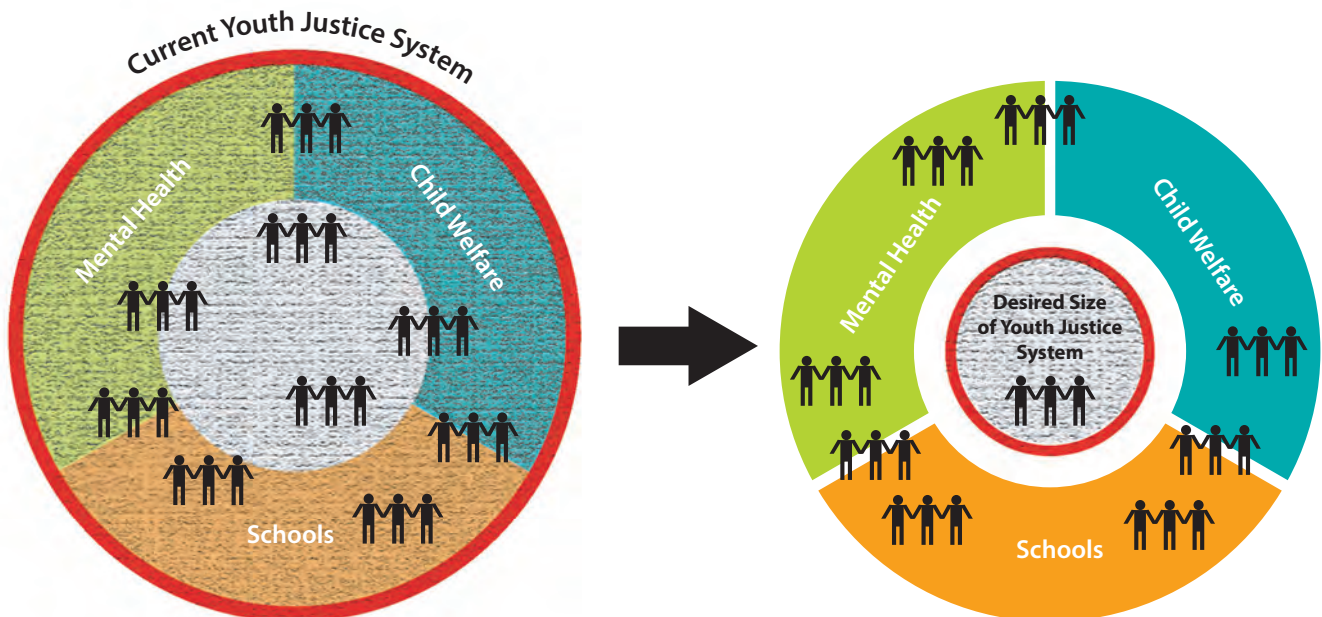
There is consensus that there must be more focus on preventing and diverting youth from entering the youth justice system. As a state, if we can proactively screen and treat youth for substance abuse, trauma, and unmet mental, emotional, and behavioral needs, we can keep many young people from unnecessarily entering the system. Further, through improved practice and collaboration within and across the child welfare and youth justice systems, we can ensure children do not unnecessarily crossover from the child welfare to the youth justice system.

## Provide Accountability and Services to Youth and Families that Prepare Them to Thrive

There is also a desire to ensure that youth who do enter the system are held accountable in a way that allows them to repair any harm they have caused, and learn from their mistakes. Even youth who make serious mistakes deserve true second chances, while the community deserves safety and accountability, not mindless punishment.

All those who come into contact with youth and families in the system want to be able to tailor services to risk, needs, and strengths, provide evidence-based or evidence-informed practices and programs, and provide trauma-informed care. They want to connect youth to the supports and skills they need to find a good job or pursue higher education. Furthermore, they do not want to involve young people in the system for longer than necessary based on terms of supervision that punish common teenage behaviors such as breaking curfew and missing school.

Finally, for those youth placed out of home, there is a desire for a sufficient range of options for all populations of youth. For that subset of youth who are placed in detention, there is agreement that in order to succeed, those youth need quality education and services.



The youth justice system encompasses youth with a variety of primary needs other than delinquent behavior.

Youth are served in the appropriate system, and are not brought into the youth justice system in order to address other primary needs.



# DCF Youth Justice (YJ) Vision

## Vision:

All youth have the tools to thrive in adulthood.

## Strategic Priorities are to create a system that:

- Serves each youth, individually, within the context of his or her family and culture.
- Responds timely with services designed to positively impact youth and family needs.
- Empowers youth, families, and workers to achieve the best outcomes.
- Builds strong partnerships across systems.
- Is accountable to those it serves.

