



2026 Youth Justice Innovation Grants

Project Summaries

The Youth Justice (YJ) Innovation Grants are an opportunity for county human service agencies to implement new, creative, evidence-informed practices or programs with short-term start-up funding from DCF. All projects must serve the overall purpose of improving community-based delinquency-related services. Initial grantees meet the requirements of one of the following topic areas: Reducing Youth Justice Referrals, Pre-Court Diversion, Post-Dispositional Services, or Micro Grant for Lived Experience.

In 2025, 25 grants were awarded: 6 initial grants to start or enhance a program or practice, 1 initial micro grant for lived experience and 18 continuation grants, 5 of which are also micro grant recipients, to continue implementation of a program or practice started in 2023, 2024 or 2025.

Types of Grants

Reducing Youth Justice Referrals (RYJR)

This project area is focused on collaborating with community partners to reduce the number of youth unnecessarily referred to the YJ system. Any services provided would be before the point of a YJ referral and delivered outside of the YJ system, although YJ staff should be involved in the collaborative efforts underpinning the project.

Pre-Court Diversion (PCD)

This project area is focused on collaborating with community partners to offer services/programming to divert referred youth away from formal court involvement. These are services that will be provided to youth after a youth is referred to YJ, but before they are formally petitioned to court.

Post-Dispositional Services (PDS)

This project area is focused on improving community-based services delivery for youth on supervision. Projects should implement programming that can be added to a county's Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) service matrix for medium and high-risk youth. Proposed services are rooted in positive youth development and should not include an electronic monitoring component.

Micro Grant – Lived Experience (LE)

This project area is focused on implementing or strengthening lived experience voice by amplifying youth perspectives, reflecting on engagement practices, creating opportunities for youth feedback, and increasing awareness of opportunities to share lived experiences. Counties can use funds to recruit or facilitate youth attending DCF's Youth Leadership Team (YLT) or an equivalent county-led youth lived experience group.

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This icon identifies Continuation Grantees that accepted a Micro Grant for Lived Experience.

2026 Grantees

Reducing YJ Referrals	Pre-Court Diversion	Post-Dispositional Services	Micro Grant Lived Experience
<p>Initial Grantees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Waukesha – Ann Villeneuve Waupaca – Lauren Young <p>Continuation Grantees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Barron – Megan Hahn Chippewa – Kyra Secraw Clark – Shauna O’Keefe La Crosse – Bridget Todd-Robbins Sawyer – Sarah Inczauskis 	<p>Initial Grantees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iron – Krystal Ferrell <p>Continuation Grantees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kewaunee – Chad LaLuzerne Kenosha – Pamela Condos Monroe – Wendy Davey Taylor – Kala Thompson 	<p>Initial Grantees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eau Claire – Hannah Keller Lincoln – Mickala Ferge Portage – Jode Peterson <p>Continuation Grantees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Douglas – Alida Whited Dunn – Carrie Anderson Forest – Melissa Ison Juneau – Kelly Firlus Ozaukee – Kim Falkner Racine – Tiffany McWhorter Sheboygan – Jessica Bitter Winnebago – Kari Kraft Wood – Katie Miloch 	<p>Initial Grantees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jefferson – Jessi Godek

Reducing Youth Justice Referrals – Initial Grantees

Waukesha

Objective: To expand Waukesha’s existing [Teen Court Program](#) to include Disorderly Conduct referrals, which accounts for 44% of their delinquency referrals. Teen Court is a program for first-time offenders in-lieu of appearing in municipal court and/or paying a fine.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-16 that are first time offenders and receive a Disorderly Conduct Referral.

Waupaca

Objective: To establish a Youth Diversion Specialist to provide trauma-informed assessments, interventions, and service referrals to youth with behavioral challenges and/or who have

engaged in delinquent behavior and have not yet been referred to the YJ system. This professional would maintain a smaller caseload (6-8 youth) to allow for more intensive case management.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17, identified by law enforcement, school liaison officer, and behavioral school staff as displaying behavioral challenges, engaging in delinquent behavior, and/or exhibiting other behavioral needs.

Reducing Youth Justice Referrals – Continuation Grantees

Barron

Objective: Implement a tiered system of intervention by providing support and opportunity to low-risk youth. Any youth can participate in the mental health school clubs. Youth will be identified for pre-truancy or pre-delinquency conferences through their schools due to disruptive behavior or lack of school attendance.

Target Population: Primary population is youth ages 10-17.

Chippewa

Objective: To reduce YJ school-based incident referrals by using a universal approach to triage cases with youth who made a threat (verbal, written, physical).

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 will be referred to the program who made a verbal, written, or physical threat.

Clark

Objective: Offer pre-delinquency conferences to youth and their family to match their needs with community services to reduce unnecessary referrals to YJ, mental health suspensions, and school expulsions.

Target Population: Youth ages 13-17 alleged to have committed a misdemeanor offense on school grounds (disorderly conduct, possession, property damage, battery), which would typically result in a formal YJ system referral.

La Crosse

Objective: Reduce the number of YJ referrals and civil ordinance citations by diverting youth engaged in four focus act behaviors in the City of La Crosse.

Target Population: Primary population is youth ages 12-18.

Sawyer

Objective: Divert truancy referred youth from formal system involvement into community-supported alternatives.

Target Population: Primary population is youth ages 10-16.

Pre Court Diversion – Initial Grantees

Iron

Objective: To expand Iron County’s evidence-based service array to improve school attendance and family strengths for youth referred for truancy. Staff will be trained to utilize the Washington Assessment of the Risks and Needs of Students (WARNS), Check and Connect, Triple P, Strengthening Families Program, Motivation Interviewing (MI), Aggression Replacement Training (ART), and Carey Guides & BITS.

Target Population: Primary population serves youth ages 10-17 that have been referred for truancy concerns.

Pre Court Diversion – Continuation Grantees

Kenosha

Objective: Provide services to support regular school attendance and youth at-risk of having their Deferred Prosecution Agreement (DPA) revoked.

Target Population: Youth who are 10 years and older identified as “truant” in Kenosha.

Kewaunee

Objective: To expand pre-court diversion services to youth diverted from formal court proceedings including mentoring, restorative justice, and family connection services.

Target Population: Youth ages 13-17 who could be placed on a DPA. Youth who have had multiple referrals over the past 12 months will have the highest priority. Youth who also have an identified need through the YASI pre-screen in the "Family" and/or "Skills" domains will also have high priority.

Monroe

Objective: To reduce truancy petitions and formal dispositions through a multi-system collaboration and serve youth through informal services.

Target Population: Middle and high school youth ages 10-17 and their families.

Taylor

Objective: Refer youth to a five-week course with weekly meetings covering life skills and information about the consequences of their risky behaviors in efforts to avoid court involvement.

Target Population: Youth ages 13–17 that enter into a DPA. The qualifying criteria for the group would be that they agree to the classes, have a DPA, and original incident is appropriate to address within the youth diversion group.

Post-Dispositional Services – Initial Grantees

Eau Claire

Objective: To provide training to YJ professionals in Trauma-Based Relational Intervention and ART (Aggression Replacement Training). Funds will also be utilized to purchase the Tools on Devices software through the Carey Guides, and strategic use of incentives and transportation to empower youth rehabilitation, reduce recidivism, and foster safer communities.

Target population: The training will benefit youth ages 10-17 on dispositional orders. The evidence-based practice can additionally be utilized with youth that are engaged in deflection and diversion services.

Lincoln

Objective: To expand the service array for an Intensive Supervision Program (without electronic monitoring) to better match medium and high-risk youth's services need. The program will utilize Carey Guide and BITS, Forward Thinking Guides, and ART.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 on a dispositional order or consent decree that score medium or high-risk on YASI.

Portage

Objective: To train two child welfare professionals in Triple P Level 4 standard training and teen extension. The trained workers will utilize the training to engage with families to help parents learn strategies that promote social competence and self-regulation in youth.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 that have been adjudicated delinquent and have medium or high-risk needs in the (YASI) family domain.

Post-Dispositional Services – Continuation Grantees

Douglas

Objective: Expand access to community-based alcohol and other drug abuse (AODA) services to youth and their families.

Target Population: Douglas County youth ages 10-17 and are identified as medium or high-risk on a YASI pre-screen.

Dunn

Objective: Provide services to youth and families with complex needs to promote positive community engagement, improve mental health, and increase family functioning.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 years old who scored medium or high-risk on the YASI, who are on a DPA, consent decree, or formal supervision.

Forest

Objective: Connect youth with New Horizons for mentoring or to Forest County Family Services for skills programming, intensive supervision, and any other needed supports.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 years old who scored medium or high-risk on the YASI.

Juneau

Objective: To provide Thinking 4 a Change curriculum to medium or high-risk youth to decrease need for crisis intervention, meet basic needs for all community youth and increase community support.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 years old who are placed on a DPA, consent decree, or dispositional order.

Ozaukee

Objective: Expand service array by providing intensive in-home program for youth under supervision as well as their families targeting familial relationships using Functional Family Therapy.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 years old who scored medium or high-risk on the YASI.

Racine

Objective: Expand service matrix for youth to a family mentorship program and then transition youth to working with a clinician focusing on specific skill development.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 years old who scored medium or high-risk on the YASI.

Sheboygan

Objective: Reduce recidivism by offering evidence-based programming at a reporting center to system involved youth who live in the City of Sheboygan.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 who scored medium or high-risk and have protective factors of low or medium on the YASI and are on delinquency orders.

Winnebago

Objective: Expand county service array to include mentoring and skill building services highlighting service providers with lived experience to reduce recidivism.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 years old who scored medium or high-risk on the YASI.

Wood

Objective: To expand flexible and easily accessible mental health services to increase protective factors while decreasing the number of youths with medium or high-risk in the skills domain, number of youth placed in out of home care and re-referrals.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 years old who scored medium or high-risk on the YASI in the skills domain.

Micro Grant – Lived Experience

Jefferson

Objective: To grow a solid and robust Youth Advisory Board (YAB) in Jefferson County for youth with lived experience in the justice system. Jefferson County YJ staff facilitate and coordinate a space for youth to come together each month and share thoughts and experiences that will lead to better practices and policies that support youth and their families. Staff help provide transportation for youth to and from YAB meetings and offer incentives for attendance and participation. They will also offer gas cards to parents who are able to transport their child to and from meetings. Funds also will be used to purchase podcast equipment and marketing materials for their YAB to start a podcast about their experience in the YJ system.

Target Population: Youth ages 10-17 that have or were involved in the YJ System.