

*REPORT OF INPUT
GATHERED AT THE
YOUTH LEADERSHIP
TEAM MEETINGS*

I want to create a youth justice system that...

Makes youth feel heard.

Is dynamic.

Understands or understands as best as they can all three sides. The side of the youth, parents/family, and the law.

Actually helps the kids when/before the problem becomes too hard to stop.

Is stable for both adults and youth.

Keeps siblings together.

Gives teens more options when they get in trouble. More ways to help.

Listens.

Can make a change for the future of juvenile justice/foster youth.

Empowers youth.

Properly prosecutes juveniles and helps juveniles instead of pushing them to be criminals.

Shows equality to all youth and treats them with respect and dignity.

Helps all youth become more comfortable and educated about their future.

Understands the youth and what they really need.

Is loving and helps families come together.

Helps and not only punishes.

Will help everyone be positive.

Lets kids be heard! Actually helps the youth.

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2016, the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) launched four “Youth Leadership Teams, ” covering all parts of the state, to involve young people in youth justice decision making and empower the next generation of young leaders. These teams provide an opportunity for young people who have had involvement with the justice system - past or present - to share their perspectives and give input.

Each team is supported by ‘founding partners’ – counties and youth-serving organizations who wanted to help shape the teams and commit to supporting youth in coming to the meetings. In all, 13 founding partners joined in this effort for 2016-17.

Youth participate in one of the four teams, depending on where they live (North East meets in Wausau, North West meets in Eau Claire, South meets in Madison, and Milwaukee meets in Milwaukee). The four teams had their first meetings in November 2016, second meetings in February, and the third round of meetings in April 2017. In all, 56 young people attended one or more of the first three meetings.

Each meeting has three core activities: (1) give input to DCF, (2) develop and strengthen leadership skills, and (3) work on a project of the team’s choosing to help improve the youth justice system.

At the first three meetings, youth shared their input about the current status of the youth justice system and their vision for the future, and helped shape it into this report. The format used to gather input from the youth was the same DCF used to gather input from adult stakeholders during 2016. That input is summarized [here](#).

The input summarized and quoted in this document is the input of the youth themselves, not the opinion of the Department and Children and Families.

We are grateful to the founding partners and other adults who have supported the youth during this founding year, to the community partners who have helped make these meetings productive and meaningful, and above all to the youth for their dedication and courage in sharing these insights for the purpose of helping to create a better youth justice system for all youth.

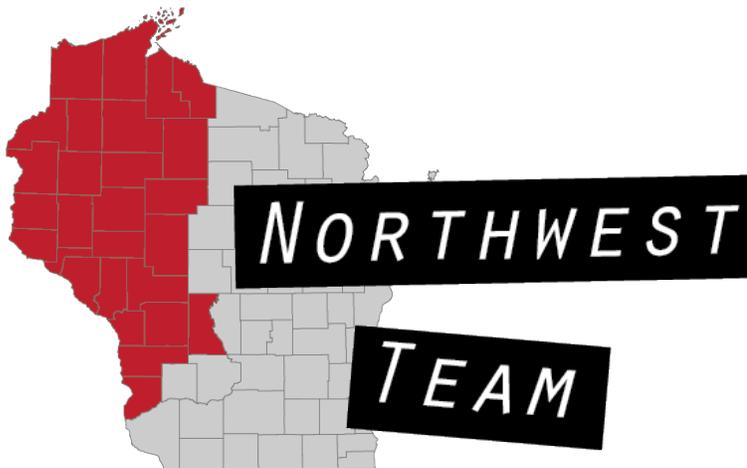
The Teams

The individual team members for each of the four teams completed the sentence "I am..." to describe themselves however they chose. Their answers are below. This gives a sense of the many different young people that are part of the teams, and some insight into their views of themselves.



I AM:

Me.
A unique individual with my own vernacular.
Here.
Hopeful, blessed & inspired.
Too cool for school!! :-)
Polite.
Strong.
Resilient.



I AM:

Strong.
Driven.
Diverse.
Confident.
Strong & independent.
Beautiful.
Appreciative.
A football player.
Going to make a difference.
Sick of people expecting me to be perfect.
A light skinned child working through rough times in my life.
Going to go somewhere in life.

NORTHEAST

TEAM



I AM:

A juvenile from Waupaca county, but that's not all that I am!

A youth leader at the Youth Wellness Center. Proud of the fact that I make better decisions than I was.

STRONG!

Blessed.

Chill.

MILWAUKEE



I AM:

A survivor.

An open-minded and strong spirited individual that will succeed.

A very educated person that is often misunderstood.

Very poetic.

Mindful.

Vision for Prevention & Diversion



“When people seem like they don’t want to get help, sometimes they do want help, they just don’t see hope.”

- **More positive things to do outside of school**

- Currently sports/clubs cost too much - “most of the things that are offered cost money and most kids don’t have a lot of money to spend.”
- “Your temporary social worker encourages you to participate in extracurricular activities however they are for the wrong reasons. In my personal experience I was told to do so because it’d look good to the judge so I could be off paper within 90 days (what a joke!).”
- YMCA can be good.
- Different types of youth groups in the community can help.
- “I believe recreational groups set in a neutral unbiased location, where other adolescents are there that have experienced the same things, would provide a unique experience for the individuals overseeing to observe what we’re capable of while provide us with the chance to live a full and meaningful life in our teen years.”

- **Mentoring**

- Mentoring outside of school can really help - doing activities outside of school, including community service.

- **Ask what is behind a youth’s behavior**

- Give youth ways to get the positive attention they seek - be more positive and sensitive to behaviors and situations.
- Make an environment so kids want to change.
- People have to want to change, but you can be there for them, and that can help.

- **Youth should be able to be more involved with planning/choices of treatment or placement**

- “I’d like to see a place in the court room where the child has a written report on the potential placement or beforehand at a staffing and is able to contribute to the checklists of ‘must haves’ before following through with the first home that has a bed.”

- **More training to prevent bringing in law enforcement to resolve regular conflicts**

- Currently out of home placements call the police a lot because they don’t know how to deal with kids’ behaviors.

- **More activities that relate to youth to participate in, that are in a safe environment and free**

- Education needs to be more physical and not sitting in a chair all day. Need more hands-on learning to find your passion and learn about many options for hobbies.
- Life skills need to be taught through hands-on experience.
- **Support youth in finding ways to be active without being engaged in negative activities.** “My negative friends were active; I wanted to be active, so I ended up getting into trouble.”

- **More "therapists" or counselors or just people to talk to, to understand and listen, who can help**

- “It’s hard to meet an adult and immediately reveal all your information to them. Sometimes we feel the need to hide stuff from therapists. The consequences of sharing things can become excessive. We want to be honest, but it’s hard to be.”
- Don’t lecture or engage kids when they are frustrated.

- **Use classes/tickets/Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPAs) instead of supervision**

- **Educate kids about the law and consequences**

- Especially with drugs, kids need to know what can happen.

- **Teach kids accountability**

- “A lot of parents blame the kid’s friends, but you are your own person. You need to understand you made the choice.”
- Should be given responsibility after it’s earned.
- “If you are given unconditional love and a good work ethic, you can overcome anything.”

- **Pay attention to what’s going on at home**

- Educate kids on the importance of talking about what's going on at home.
- Sometimes kids are running away because there are problems at home – abuse made them run – otherwise they wouldn’t run.

- **Work with parents and relatives**

- Helping a family will help a teenager too.
- It helps to foster relationships with relatives.
- Entire family needs to be supportive. Need help and relationships with positive people.
- Siblings are powerful - they can be a motivator, or a bad influence.
- “My social worker does a really good job of keeping in contact with my dad. My social worker will fill my dad in on what we talked about after we meet.”
- Kids need parents around – need an authority figure. Need to be raised with love.

- **Ask youth for information and share information with them**

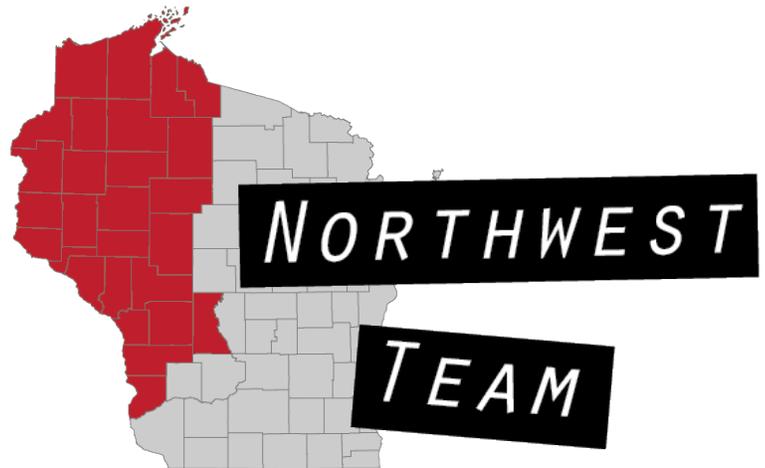
- Ask kids why they are truant.
- Youth want to be actually heard and have something done about it.
- Kids need more information about why things are how they are.
- Law enforcement needs to listen to youth. They need to gather information before making decisions. Law enforcement only believes the adults and children get punished without anyone knowing the reason why they did what they did.
- Youth need a voice because they are undermined.

- **Mentoring**

- Sometimes you need a mentor as a substitute for the family.

- **Need safe places to go when things are hard or unsafe at home**

- Need a center to house teens. It could be dorm like, have transitional housing.



“It’s not even that you have to give us what we want - just let us be heard.”



- **Mentors can help**

- "Because normally the way majority of youth works – if you get bored, you start thinking about or you do bad things. If you have a mentor you can go do good things."

- "Having someone there to talk to is beneficial. So you're not just talking to yourself. Older mentors can be helpful – they know more – younger kids they can't do as much. Adults, they have power. But I guess it depends on the situation. Both could be beneficial. Younger people you're more able to easily identify with. Some things you wouldn't share with each type – having both could be good."

- **Consider family relationships**

- "I would always have to go see my social worker. We would both sit in there together and then break out separately. That way you get more honest discussion. Some kids they don't like to say things in front of their parents. Parents might take what you say the wrong way, then they end up blowing up at you later."

- "I like to see things from both perspectives. It might also be a good idea if you have a bad relationship with a parent, but you have a good relationship with another adult – they can help mend the relationship. You don't have to stay as silent as you would if there is someone to help moderate the situation."

- With truancy cases, ask: What kind of home life is making someone not go to school?

- Need to have parents own up to their role.

- Involve parents and don't take parent responsibility away.

- **Educate youth about what can happen if they break the law**

- "If you have an earlier introduction to youth justice and these are the things that would possibly get you in trouble, you could try not to do them. And you'll know what will happen before you do it. You're not clueless."

- **Schools should not get kids' court orders, and if they do, they should be careful how they use the information**

- Issue is how schools go about using the information that they have – comes down to how comfortable the young person is with the school having the information and how the school uses it. It can be good to have people come check up on the kid so that if something big comes up they can address it.

- School shouldn't bring it up all the time to the kid, just treat them like a normal kid.

- "Every single time I do one thing wrong, the assistant principal comes up to me and says, you know, if you do something wrong you're on probation... it brings negative attention to you even if you do one tiny thing."

- "I don't want to be labeled – I'm ok with getting special ed, but I don't like being labeled as EBD."

- "I would be ok with them using that information to show me how to be a positive role model to stop other people from making the same mistakes (for how to learn from mistakes), not to indirectly blackmail me for anything that goes wrong in the future."

- **Support kids that don't have support at home**

- They need a support system. Don't just tell them they have to live somewhere they hate.

- **More DPAs (Deferred Prosecution Agreements)**

- **Adolescents should be allowed to be in school**

- Being expelled or suspended keeps them out of school, makes them feel isolated

- There should be alternatives to suspending or expelling kids because of truancy. Should work more on getting kids the services they need.

- Need more flexible programming and more choices.

- All youth deserve to get an education. Schools should do more to make youth want to be in school.

- **Make being with a counselor more comfortable**

- School counselors are not always receptive to all kinds of students. Schools don't have school counselors. They are school schedulers. Small rural districts can't afford to have counselors. The kids who are challenging get pushed out of the district.



- **Provide access to programs and awareness of existence**

- Financial help to be involved in programs.
- Ability to participate in programs regardless of academic performance.
- Focus on helping youth do something productive and positive in the community.
- If the program is helping keep the youth out of trouble, they should be able to participate.
- If you participate you don't have time to get into trouble.
- If someone is failing, there might be a reason - explore this.

- **Provide structured activities**

- Need help in school and before school even more than after school.
- Need support during the hours after school between 4-7pm.
- Alternatives to fighting - other physical outlets (for example, boxing).
- Youth need jobs; need work opportunities.

- **Have teachers who care about academic performance**

- Schools see certain kids as if they're going to fail anyway.
- "The system is set up for us to fail. Schools in black neighborhoods dumb down curriculum. It feels like teachers don't like you. I had to hold myself to a higher standard."

- **Do more as a community to support kids to stay at home and in community**

- When you are placed far way from your community, you are an outsider, and they look at you like a troubled child - they associate you with any trouble that comes up.
- A lot of times social workers are quick to decide you need to go out of home. You end up bouncing around a lot just for one little mistake.

- **Allow kids to make mistakes**

- Shouldn't punish kids who are acting because of impulse - throwing kids in detention or corrections will just make them madder
- Sometimes it just takes time - you need time to think.
- It's important for young people to understand the consequences of certain actions (for example, that you can get in trouble just for being in the car).

- **Restorative justice**

- This is a very powerful approach. The book "Touching Spirit Bear" shows how it can work.
- Think about different ways of helping people to change. Less punitive.

- **Mentors**

- Mentors need guidance about how to give positive structure. "Don't just pick me up and take me to McDonald's - show me how to get out of my situation, show me a bigger world."
- Need mentors who can identify and relate to youth.
- Good mentoring connects youth to resources.

- **Crisis stabilization should give you skills**

- It only responds to the immediate crisis. "Give me coping skills for when you're not there."

- **More engagement with youth**

- The question should be: "What conditions set you up for success?"
- Engage youth in programs to prevent crime.
- More young leaders to lead.

- **Support and empower parents**

- Need seminars for bio parents (a lot of parents don't know how to provide structure).
- Support families with their basic needs.
- Family can be the best prevention.

"In this world there are a lot of stories untold by black people who are afraid to speak."

"Give me coping skills for when you're not there."

Vision for Court & Supervision



"When you have a good worker who listens to you, who you can confide in, who you connect with, who sees you as a normal person, it makes being on supervision a lot more positive."

- **Give youth a say and be more open minded**

- A lot of adults think they know best and don't really take kids opinions into account. They are trying to make decisions in kids' best interests, but they don't understand the kids' experiences.

- **Change the culture and treat every case individually - on a case by case basis**

- **Improve the court process**

- Better scheduling; current court process is way too long, lots of delays
- Give judges more information than just what is in the court report
- Help youth understand court - currently youth have little information on court and how it works
- Give explanations for decisions made in court
- Let youth be heard in court. Currently they just ask you for yes or no answers, and just the lawyers, social worker, and judge talk, and that's it.
- "It can be really frustrating to hear your words twisted around in court if the social worker misrepresents something you said - it's also hard to hear everyone talk about you as if you're not even there."
- Use better language in court. "The language used in court makes you sound really bad - even if you know you did something wrong, it is hard to hear 'danger to society' and terms like that."
- Great judges actually listen and try to hear your opinion - they take everything into consideration from every point of view and then make a decision
- Having a public defender who explains everything ahead of time so that you know what is going on in court is very helpful (and it's very hard when you don't talk to or even meet your attorney before going into court - they just make you sign stuff and ask you if you understand it, but not if you agree with it).

- **Match kids with counselors**

- It's also very hard to change counselors all the time. Try to let kids keep their same counselors once they have one they connect with.

- **Involve families/caretakers and friends**

- Involve friends - "Friends are a good thing for younger people to be involved with so they feel they cannot be so stressed out."

- **Emancipation should be an option**

- "It's obviously a huge responsibility but sometimes the kids that are the most capable academically, financially, etc are those that are in the system."

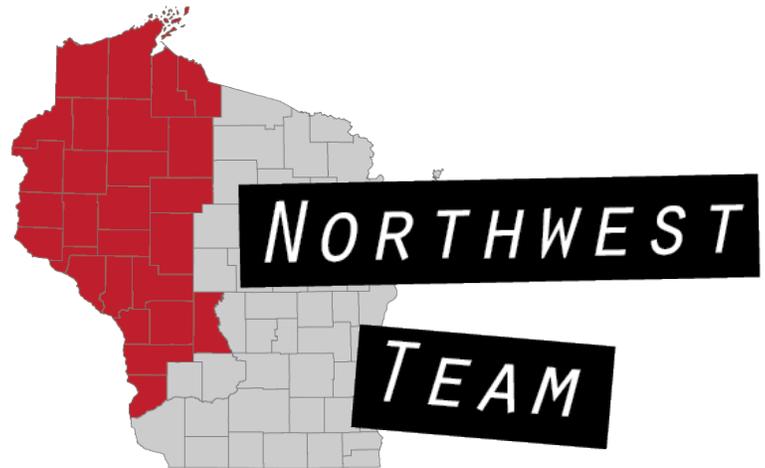
- **Have reasonable rules of supervision**

- For example, an early curfew sets you up for failure - it's great to be outside and this makes you stay in
- Focus on the situation without adding extra rules/work/tasks that don't relate to why you're in the system
- Supervision should only be extended for significant reasons. Currently, you can get extended for little things.
- It's motivating to have an option of getting off supervision earlier - a year is a long time.

- **Youth should be able to try out a different worker if you don't connect with your first worker**

- If you have a worker you butt heads with, you're going to keep getting in trouble.

"72 hour holds don't work - they just make you more angry and you're going to hate the world and change as a person."



- **Believe youth can change**
 - Don't hold past things over your head forever.
 - Let us make more decisions about our own lives.
- **Social workers need to listen and not assume - and be honest**
 - Don't sugar coat stuff (like "we're going to try and get you out") - be up front and honest about what you do and don't know and what will happen.
- **Everyone needs training about how to deal with adolescents**
- **If kids are doing better, need to help them – rewards, not just sanctions**
 - It helps to be complimented on the good stuff you're doing, instead of just focusing on the bad things.
- **Don't use detention for the wrong reasons**
 - Don't use detention for truancy. Kids should not be put in jail unless they do a crime - not for status offenses.
 - Instead of using detention for running, sit down and come up with a plan.
 - Use other resources – family and friends – to avoid using detention.
- **Kids need to be heard in court and to understand court**
 - In court, youth should be able to speak more, instead of the judge just deciding based on what adults say.
 - Modify the language used in court so kids understand what is going on – don't use acronyms.
 - Outcomes should be fair – sometimes there are different dispositions for the same offenses.
 - Attorneys need to talk about situation not results.
- **Lower the price on tickets, or help with other ways to pay off tickets**
- **Listen to kids and really talk to them**
 - "It just made me feel good when someone finally listened to me."
 - Workers should ask kids what they need and want, not just decide what they think is best for you.
 - Help kids explore their options.
 - Communicate with them about what is going on in their case.
 - Give youth a chance to explain - from their own place, in their own words.
 - Find the reason why a kid is acting a certain way.
 - Don't lock kids up - talk to them.
- **Recognize that relationships matter - be able to change social workers if it's not a good fit.**
 - Be able to change workers to get a good fit.
 - Workers need to be patient.
- **GAL needs to stay with the case the whole time**

Vision for Court & Supervision

NORTHEAST

TEAM



“The justice system doesn’t have to be a bad process or a bad experience. We need a system that is more loving and less punitive. Ask questions: are you ok? Why are you mad at the world? Why are you doing this?”

- **Listen to youth, let youth have a say**

- “I feel like our voices are not heard. It’s just what parents think, or what the court system thinks, it’s not really about you.”
- Let youth request to review the case, just like the other parties can.

- **Don't treat everyone the same**

- For example, let people listen to music. For some people that helps them focus and it’s how they need help.
- Need to assess young people to understand what they need.
- Just like schools have IEPs for special needs students – need assessments in more situations to figure out what kids need – they are lacking in these areas, but they are good at this – more balanced.
- “Showing you where you’ve gotten so far on your anti and pro social skill wasn’t exactly it for me. For me it’s more hands on – we built a bench – that’s what I enjoyed. I didn’t really enjoy the packets as much.”

- **Everyone needs better information - judges and lawyers**

- “The charge is the tip of the iceberg. If there are other underlying factors they should look at those.”
- The courts can make a better decision if they have a better assessment of you overall because they go with the information they have on hand. If they have better knowledge from the youth’s perspective about the motives behind the offense – that will get them better information about how kids should be helped.
- Good judges listen and ask the youth their names.
- Attorneys should be required to meet with kids beforehand.
- Prosecutors need to listen to the kids. Don’t judge them based on what they know of you from your name, or your past.
- Focus on the environment in the home to understand what is going on with the youth.

- **Give youth a choice about where they meet their case workers**

- Some kids may not want to be seen at school with their worker; might rather be at a library, café, in the community. But others might prefer to meet at school. Just ask them!

- **Focus more on help instead of punishment**

- “If you don’t get help when you’re young then you won’t expect it when you’re older.”
- “Giving someone a punishment without asking why doesn’t help. It takes literally two seconds to ask someone the word ‘why?’ Understanding why something happened will help more than punishing.”
- If you do everything right on supervision, nothing much happens. But if you do poorly even 10% of the time you get penalized, and there is no attention on the 90% of the time you were doing things right. It’s very discouraging.
- “I missed one day of school and then I got sanctioned. I wish there could be a meeting with someone where the kid and parent sit down before going into court to talk about what is really going on. Before jumping to conclusions, learn more about my situation.”
- Use more incentives on supervision.



"I love level headed adults that give kids their time."

- **Be able to advocate for yourself**
 - Youth are not educated enough. I asked questions. Youth don't educate themselves enough and they look dumb.
 - The court process should be explained. When you educate kids they know how to advocate.
- **Figure out what works for each individual for supervision**
 - Clear expectations are key. Make sure youth understand what supervision means.
 - It should involve community service, activities, and focus on strengths.
 - Conditions of supervision shouldn't stop you from doing positive things, like playing sports, or having jobs. Sometimes the conditions are so strict you lose your job because of them.
 - Social workers should put themselves in youth's shoes; try to understand.
- **Public defenders (PDs) need to listen to the young person's side of the story and actually believe him/her**
 - **need to know you have someone on your side**
 - PDs need to listen before making assumptions.
 - Have to get background information on each youth - PD is not very informed.
 - PD is the one who has the power and is talking to the judge.
 - The court process should be explained - attorneys don't always do that.
- **Should have a graduated response - don't send kids away at the first bad thing**
 - Judges shouldn't be so quick to send people to detention or corrections.
 - Sentences should make sense - should get more time for more serious crimes.
- **Believe in youth - Believe what they are saying**
 - If people took the time to treat each youth like they are special, it would diminish a lot of problems. If adults were actually invested and acted like they cared.
- **In court, treat youth with respect - not as a criminal**
 - Judges are quick to see you as a menace to society.
 - "My judge treats me with respect and I love my judge whether he gives me critical feedback or good feedback."
 - You should have input into your case. Judges should ask you what you think and where do you think you should go.
 - Talk about the things youth are doing well. It's really hard when you've been doing your best but the social worker just tells the judge you're not ready to be off supervision.

Vision for Out of Home Placements



"Youth should be taken on a case by case individual basis. we are not animals or objects or a math problem where 5+5 is always 10. We all deserve our own experience and support. For some people family involvement was neglected where it shouldn't have been while for others they were grateful for it because it's a situation that can't be changed."

- **Consider youth's opinions and ideas**

- Get our input on where to be - sometimes we know of safe places like friends, extended family, etc.
- Believe what kids say.

- **Make out of home placements for the right reasons**

- Don't use them as a threat.
- Before putting youth into an out-of-home placement consider and analyze their individual situation.

- **Better training for staff**

- Staff who will actually talk to you can really help you. "It's very hard when it feels like staff are just trying to control us - just because you have the power to do something doesn't mean you should do it."
- Training needs to be related to the job itself - just because you have a degree doesn't mean you are qualified to work with teenagers.

- **Keep family connections**

- Family unity is important. Allow visitation with family and siblings. Don't make us wait a month or more to see our family and siblings.
- No fees for contacting family.

- **More options for out of home placements**

- Need more placements available close to home.
- Need more treatment foster care homes.
- Need more choices for services in out of home care.

- **Have fair rules in out of home placements**

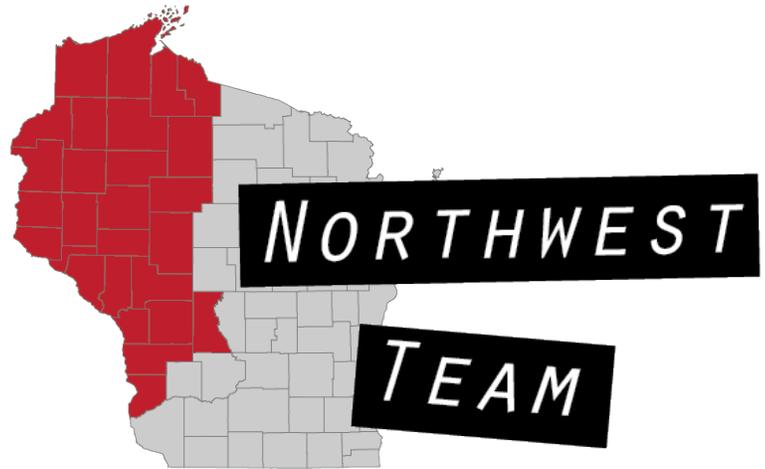
- Give youth the chance to prove themselves and make change in real life situations (in the community) and show responsibility.
- Need flexible policies that are more thoughtful and allow for unique situations.
- Have reasonable rules about contact with friends. Hard to be limited to who is on your call list.
- Give you chances to be in the community sooner.

- **Take time preparing for transition home.**

- Make sure that youth are ready to go back into the community on a case by case basis without overgeneralization or assumption.
- Let youth know how long they will be placed out of home. "They make it seem like it's supposed to be ok with you that you don't know if you'll be there for six months or a year. That's a big difference."

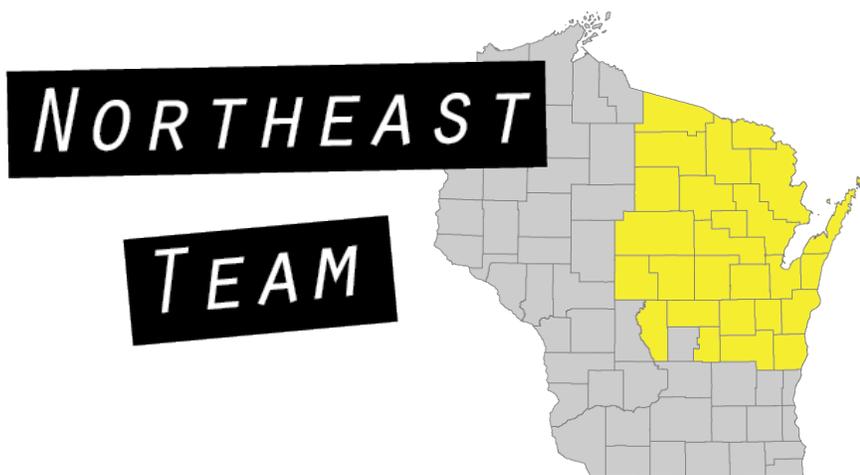
Vision for Out of Home Placements

"Let kids know the dates of when they will get out of placement - we never know and it kills us."



- **Placements should be more age appropriate or family-like when it's for children, should give you more freedom, and should allow normal teenage behavior**
- **Don't use detention unless it's really necessary**
 - Try an ankle bracelet before just using detention.
 - Detention admissions should be proportional to what you did.
- **Detention needs to help you**
 - Do one on one education, or group kids by age and actually teach them.
 - Give kids educational materials they can understand.
 - Detention should be cleaner, safer conditions, more supportive.
 - 72 hour holds don't help - the three days I was in on a 72-hour hold felt longer than the 6 months I had been in before.
- **Placements need to be places where kids get actual treatment**
 - Treatment needs to fit the individual. Everyone is different. Not all addicts or users are the same. Not all kids with mental health issues are the same. Not all kids with family issues or trauma are the same.
- **Listen to kids views' about their placements**
 - Ask youth if they want to go to a group home or foster home.
 - Do better matching with foster homes.
 - When a kid says something is going on in a foster home, social worker needs to listen and not punish the child for it.
- **Recognize the good work that has been done**
 - It's really hard to always start over from square one at a new placement.
- **Group homes need to be more home-like and supportive**
 - It's hard to have quiet time all day.
 - Staff need to have personal experience or understanding of what the youth are going through, need to be accepting and not judgmental.
 - Staff need to know how to resolve conflicts between kids without just calling law enforcement.
 - If you try to run, staff should sit down and talk to you, instead of just seeing you as a screw-up and calling the cops.
 - Staff needs to be professional.
 - You need to be able to voice your opinion – now you can get in trouble for it.
 - Group homes are quick to put you on meds; don't shelter kids, teach them how to deal with life.
 - Good structure is where they teach you how to live on your own and you know the staff actually care.
 - A good group home gives you some independence. For example the staff buy the groceries, but the kids cook.

Vision for Out of Home Placements



"When I went back home, I did the same thing that I did when I first got into trouble. Wherever a kid is doing the best is where they should stay. Because I was doing good I got to go back home and my mom complained about the cost of having to pay for supervision. Once a kid is 'fixed' in the home they are in they are sent back. They should be given a choice."

- **In all out of home placements...**
 - Providers need to show respect toward everyone.
 - Kids should never have to feel unwanted.
 - Try to help kids find permanency.
 - Staff should take the time to personally get to know the youth and his/her background.
- **Give youth choices and options about where to live – flexibility is important**
 - "Don't just plunk youth in a spot in a random part of the state. Ask them where they would prefer to live, even if it's a city or out in the country. I saw in a movie, this brother and sister got adopted out and got to live in a few foster homes for a week and then decide. I think we should have that."
 - Emancipation should be an option. Emancipation process is really hard, especially if you have an adjudication on your record. This should be changed. Plenty of kids get into crime, they get through their DPA, they get a job, but they can't get emancipated.
- **Evaluate placements**
 - Current concern about placements that don't allow a normal teenage life, or are inconsiderate of serious or personal situations.
 - Make sure youth feel safe at placements.
 - Look for placements that have the same interests as kids – something in common.
- **Evaluate family abilities**
 - Help parents – it feels like kids have to change but parents don't.
 - "When we went to counseling it was always my fault. My parent didn't want to change. It's difficult to change someone that doesn't want to change."
 - "If you're in a bad spot at home and you start doing crime and they put you back in the same home that is not helping. Some times having kids not live at home is a good thing. I honestly would have gotten into so much less trouble if I would have been moved out of my home."
- **Make sure kids in out of home placements have a connection to someone they know and trust**
 - "We need more focus on making sure the kid has someone. I'm in a different city at a foster home and my brother is home which is half an hour away. I have a foster brother, but I don't connect with him. My brother is really smart – he can explain things really thoroughly. With other people, I don't understand the way they explain things. When it's someone you know personally, it makes sense to you."
- **Use secure detention as a last resort.**
 - Detention leads to loss of job, school, trust, a lot of things, even sometimes your living arrangement. Makes it very hard to get back on the right track.
- **Have more skill building opportunities, especially in detention centers**
 - "When you're in detention you are bored. There's nothing to do. What if a mentor came in. Someone other than a social worker to do skill building, ask how you're going to do better when you get out."

Vision for Out of Home Placements



- **Don't use out of home placement as a first resort**
 - "They will place you hours away from home for the littlest things. Why would you send me an hour away from my home, knowing it's going to be hard on me?"
 - Don't remove kids from their homes for bad reasons, like they don't have enough money. "My environment isn't good but my household is. I don't need to be placed out of home."
 - Judges shouldn't place kids when they aren't comfortable and distanced from family. Place them where they can utilize their strengths.
- **Need good services in placement**
 - A mentor to follow up with you - follow up and follow through are key.
 - Need access to therapy.
 - Need help with education and getting a job.
 - Broaden kids' horizons - show them more of the world beyond their block, more possibility.
- **Want basics of day to day life in placement**
 - Should be able to sleep and eat when you are hungry and tired; not just when they tell you to.
 - Should be able to have a phone
 - More freedom; help youth be structured, but also independent.
 - Should be able to see family when you are at a group home; there shouldn't be a waiting period before they can visit.
- **Everyone should be safe in every placement**
 - Sometimes you are running because you can't deal with problems at your placement - and then you get locked up for that. Detention shouldn't be a placement for AWOL youth.
 - More accountability for placements.
- **Better training for staff - how to engage youth and understand their points of view.**
 - "Before I went to a good placement, I was forced into treatment. But kids are more willing to open up if the staff build a relationship instead of just acting like it's a job. The best staff are those that take and work with kids that no one wants to; they treat them like people and build a relationship."
- **Consistency is key - staff and groups**
- **Don't charge parents so much for out of home placements**
 - "It's so hard to know your single parent is struggling to pay for your placement. And what can you do as a kid? You can't just leave. You have no way to help."

"My family dynamic was overwhelming. I went to a foster mom, and she was great. She said it's ok to be distant from your family. Sometimes you have to distance yourself. Had to stop worrying about family."

Vision for Out of Home Placements



- **More placement options**

- Not too many foster homes want teenagers because they think they're troubled.
- Placement should fit the offense.
- More interventions should be built in.
- Family is not always the best option - it may be an unhealthy choice and youth may need alternative living situations that are healthier.

- **Improve detention**

- But also, detention can't be too nice or it won't be taken seriously by kids.
- Detention should teach more life skills, help with problems.
- Detention should help with school and what you're supposed to learn in school.
- Improve conditions in detention - more time out of room, more time for TV, more comfortable beds, better food.
- More consistency between detention facilities in different counties (some get lots of time out of room, some don't).
- Visitation and contact should be better - allow more phone calls, extend phone calls (beyond 10 min), let people bring food to visits, let anyone visit - you never know who is going to lead you on a better path.
- Need more treatment resources in detention.
- Youth should have to be educated when they are in detention.

- **Let youth voice their opinions**

- This is key. When you're placed far away, they don't tell you that you don't have to go to court, but then you have no say.

"It can be more detrimental to stay with your bio family. It's so hard to get the system to take kids away. Kids need family, but they need the right family. They taught you everything, but they taught you wrong."

I want to create a youth justice system that...

**Gives everyone a fair chance and respect even if they're right or wrong.
Provides help to the youth and helps keep people away from juvenile detention centers.**

Includes different branches according to the different and unique types of situations in order to know how to approach each one.

The youth like. I hate hearing about kids who hate "the system."

Is fair and wants to help juveniles in the system.

Actually helps out the youth and prevents them from making the same and more poor choices.

Is inspiring, motivating.

Helps the youth instead of hindering them.

Gives youth more security and choices.

Hears the voice behind the actions of the individuals themselves or those who jeopardized those individuals so that everyone can have the choice to live out their dreams.

Listens, provides, and cares for the children of today.

Shows sympathy to first timers, hears people out.

Helps everyone, all ages and races, that treats everyone equal and tries their best to help anyone and everyone.

A Goal I'd like to accomplish is:

- Finding content and peace with myself so that I can use my story productively to form a society we all desire, but are too scared to express •
- To go pro with skateboarding • Bettering myself • Go pro with my music •
- Getting a degree in something • To one day publicly share my story and hope to make a difference • To go to college, take care of my baby, and be happy •
- Getting into a performing arts college in New York • Be in college by the Fall of 2017 • Making sure I go to college and graduate • Finish my build • Open a daycare • To maintain a positive mindset even when I feel discouraged while accomplishing my CNA • To make sure everyone gets a fair chance and gets respect even if they're right or wrong • Going to the military • Play in the NFL •
- To make myself happy everyday • Helping others get through hard times •
- Graduating • Make a mixtape • Go to college and work with other youth •
- Freedom from self • To graduate • Graduating high school • Be successful •
- Open my own society and to start sharing my story • Helping youth not feel alone • Changing how the youth justice system treats youth with family issues • To have court staff (judges & public defenders) care about the youth they work with • High school, college, a career I love, making a change •



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