Hello everyone! It’s hard to believe that summer is winding down and another school is beginning. This issue of the BYS newsletter is extra-special, as it includes highlights from the Foster Youth Graduation Event held in July – in person for the first time since 2019! This event truly showcases the amazing resilience and accomplishments of the young people we work with, as well as highlighting the importance of the work that all of you do every day. Thank you for all you do and enjoy these final days of summer!

Youth Justice Updates

2022-23 YJ Innovation Grants

BYS is excited to share that it has awarded Youth Justice Innovation Grants to 16 counties! The YJ Innovation Grants are an opportunity for counties to implement new, creative, evidence-informed practices or programs with short-term start-up funding from DCF. Eight counties will begin initial grants in October 2022. Eight counties were awarded additional funds to continue projects they started in October 2021. This year’s areas of focus are Matching Services to Needs, School Justice Partnership, and Racial and Ethnic Disparities Reduction. Grant recipients are as follows:

Matching Services to Needs – proposed projects will implement or enhance an evidence-informed practice and/or program to increase access to “right” services for youth.

- Ashland (Continuation)
- Crawford (Continuation)
- Dane (Continuation)
- Green
- Jackson (Continuation)
- Jefferson
- Marathon
- Oconto
- Oneida
- Pierce (Continuation)
- Washburn
- Washington (Continuation)
Youth Justice Updates continued...

2022-23 YJ Innovation Grants

School-Justice Partnership – proposed projects will improve collaboration between human services, schools, and other community stakeholders to reduce school referrals to the youth justice system.
  - Outagamie (Continuation)
  - Walworth
  - Waushara

Racial and Ethnic Disparities Reduction – proposed projects will explore and develop a collaborative strategy aimed at reducing racial and other disparities in youth justice outcomes.
  - Eau Claire (Continuation)

Congratulations to this year’s grant recipients and a huge thank you to the members of this year’s scoring team!

We will publish a summary of this year’s projects this fall. In the meantime, you can peruse a summary of last year’s recipients here.

Youth Services Updates

ARPA Funds for Runaway and Homeless Youth Partners

Seven state-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs are selected through a regional competitive procurement process and receive funding from DCF to serve youth ages 12-21. In November 2021, Governor Evers announced that $2 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding would be directed to DCF-funded programs supporting those experiencing housing insecurity. State RHY programs welcomed the news of additional dollars allowing for innovation and expansion of service provision, and all seven contracted RHY agencies submitted proposals for additional project-based funding aimed at mitigating the impact of COVID-19.

This short-term provision of significant ARPA funds makes it clear what is possible when state-funded RHY programs receive additional dollars. Some of the ways partners have used or plan to use the funds include an additional Masters-prepared therapist hired in Milwaukee, a drop-in center planned in Superior, additional staff hired to meet service demands in Brown County, and two transitional housing units and case management needs supported in Stevens Point. ARPA funds continue to be available to current state-funded RHY partners through December 31, 2024.

For more information about these exciting projects, or state-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth programs more generally, please visit https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ys/rhy.
Graduation Celebration

BYS hosted its 10th annual Foster Youth Graduation Celebration on July 19, 2022 at the Governor’s Executive Residence to honor a special group of Wisconsin students. First Lady Kathy Evers and Department of Public Instruction State Superintendent Dr. Jill Underly joined DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson to recognize and celebrate former foster youth who recently graduated from high school, completed milestones in post-secondary education, or who attained other educational achievements.

“I am extremely proud of these graduates and honored to be part of this important milestone in their lives,” said First Lady Kathy Evers. “Obtaining a degree takes a lot of hard work and dedication, especially for foster youth who often face additional challenges. These exceptional individuals deserve to be applauded for their resiliency and all that they have accomplished.”

Nationally, 57% of foster youth graduate from high school and less than 10% graduate from college. Most suffer not only the loss of their biological family but might have also faced multiple foster home moves, changes in caseworkers, and being uprooted from friends and schools — often more than once.

The 28 graduates who were able to attend the celebration represented foster youth throughout Wisconsin who successfully graduated in the 2021-2022 academic year.

“These young individuals have overcome so much adversity, yet they had the strength and determination to succeed in achieving their educational goals,” said DCF Secretary Emilie Amundson. “They are truly inspirational and deserve to be celebrated. I have no doubt that they will continue to do great things in this next chapter.”

Dr. Jill Underly, State Superintendent, also spoke and inspired graduates, as did former Wisconsin foster youth Tina Czappa, who spoke to the graduates about her brave journey towards academic and career success.
Youth Voice Updates continued...

Graduation Celebration continued...

Special Awards

Every year DCF recognizes youth who have been Champions of Change in their efforts to improve youth-serving systems. DCF also recognizes supportive adults who help the graduates on their path to success.

Champions of Change

This year’s first recipient of the Champions of Change Award was Yesenia.

Yesenia is a Menominee tribal member, recent Green Bay West High School graduate, and soon-to-be UW-Stevens Point student. Yesenia acts as the peer mentor for the Menominee Independent Living program, using her own experience to help guide others in and transitioning from out-of-home care.

Yesenia was nominated for the Champion of Change award by her Menominee Tribal Independent Living worker, Linea, who describes Yesenia as “a little go-getter”; she is always on top of applying for scholarships and grants, supporting others in the Independent Living program, and spreading awareness about foster care. Yesenia plans to become a school counselor.

This year’s second recipient of the Champions of Change Award was Carmen.

Carmen recently graduated with her bachelor’s degree from the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design (MIAD). She currently works for MIAD documenting the pre-college program through her photography. These photos will be used for the MIAD’s social media content. Carmen has documented many important events, such as senior photos and weddings, and sells her photography on social media. Her future goals involve being an Art Director/Creative Director and continuing with her freelance photography. Hopefully Carmen’s example and what she has accomplished encourages other youth to follow their dreams.

Cindy, Carmen’s Independent Living worker, shared that Carmen “is amazing and has so much more to do for herself and within her community.”

PATHS to Success

This year’s PATHS to Success award goes to Linea, who was nominated by Deziray. She nominated Linea because, “she helped me with many challenges from getting a place to stay to getting some clothes on my back. Never once did she give up on me or ever look down on me. She was very empathetic towards me and my situation. I love her so much.”

Greta Munns, who oversees DCF’s funding for Tribal Independent Living programs shared, “Linea is always innovative, and speaks highly of all the youth she works with; she calls them all her ‘rockstar’ and celebrates their every success. During the height of COVID-19, Linea put together beading kits for Menominee Independent Living participants and has organized a traditional fluting group for youth that offers space for cultural connections, and connections with their peers. I feel so lucky to work with and learn from Linea.”

Congratulations, everyone!
Youth Voice Updates continued...

Youth Advisory Council

On May 14, 2022, the Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council (YAC) convened a meeting in Mount Horeb, Wisconsin. At this meeting – the first held in-person since pre-COVID –YAC welcomed a couple of new members. Amanda Merkwae, DCF Legislative Liaison, joined the group and provided an interactive training on the state’s legislative process.

On July 30, 2022, the YAC had a fun day at Mount Olympus in Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin. Every year, the YAC does one fun event and this year the YAC members voted on a day at a water and theme park. YAC members enjoyed Mt. Olympus’s waterslides, wave pool, lazy river, rollercoasters...even its theme park food! This meeting helped the YAC recruit five new potential YAC members from across the state.

If a youth you know would like to get involved in the YAC at the local and/or state level, please contact your local YAC advisor for more information: https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/youthservices/pdf/yac-advisors.pdf. The next statewide YAC meeting is September 24, 2022.

Youth Leadership Team

The Youth Leadership Team (YLT) will convene again in the 2022-2023 academic year, beginning in October 2022. There will be four meetings throughout the academic year; each will be facilitated as a hybrid meeting (an in-person location with the option for eligible youth and their adult supporter to join virtually). Youth ages 14-21 with personal experience in the youth justice system are eligible to participate. Youth will be compensated for their active participation in these meetings. More information with meeting dates, times, and locations to come.

To learn more about the YAC and/or YLT, visit https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/ys/leadership.
Anti-Human Trafficking Updates

New Anti-Human Trafficking Grantee Announced

In February 2022, BYS released a Request for Proposal (RFP) for Support Services for Sex Trafficking Survivors. As a result of the RFP process, BYS made an award to Human Development Center (HDC), which will provide anti-human trafficking (AHT) support services in Region 7; funding went into effect July 1, 2022. HDC’s AHT program will specifically serve the Douglas County and Iron River area to provide support to young people up to age 21 who have experienced sex trafficking. HDC will provide these young people who with crisis intervention, case management, referral, and outreach services via their drop-in center. HDC is also a Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) grantee. Because of this, the agency has worked closely with BYS staff to support survivors of sex trafficking who have housing instability as well. This has been done, in part, by integrating RHY and AHT funding starting this year.

Request for Information: Caregiver Support

DCF stakeholders and service providers throughout the state have shared via recent information gathering sessions that there are gaps in services and supports for caregivers, including parents, kin, foster parents, or guardians who care for youth who have experienced sex trafficking. To better understand the needs of caregivers, BYS has released a Request for Information (RFI) regarding the types of services and support needed by caregivers who care for youth who have experienced sex trafficking. The information gained from responses to this RFI may be used in the development of a competitive procurement leading to the selection of a contractor(s) to provide caregiver support related to child sex trafficking throughout Wisconsin.

If you are interested in providing a response, please visit the eSupplier website to access the RFI. Please reach out to dcfprocurement@wisconsin.gov with any questions.
The goal of the Bureau of Youth Services is to improve outcomes for youth in the child welfare and youth justice systems and other vulnerable youth. Specifically, the Bureau supports service delivery systems that move youth towards academic success, safe and stable housing, employment, permanent connections with supportive adults, and healthy lifestyle behaviors. Youth aged 12-21 in or at risk of entering the child welfare and a youth justice system present unique and complex challenges. The Bureau brings a more coordinated program and policy focus to youth in the child welfare system and other vulnerable youth.

May every youth in, at risk of, or aged out of the child welfare/youth justice system transition to a successful adulthood.

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