The Bureau of Youth Services is a unit within Wisconsin’s DCF that is dedicated to being more responsive to the needs of older youth in and at risk of the child welfare and youth justice system. If you have questions or ideas, please contact us!

Leadership

Shelby McCulley
Director

Ragen Shapiro
Section Manager

Staff

Asia Jackson
Anti-Human Trafficking Coordinator

Carlton Frost
Youth Justice Policy Coordinator

Devon Lee
Youth Justice Policy Coordinator

Elizabeth Valitchka
Youth Justice Policy Coordinator

Faith Price
Youth Services Policy Coordinator

Greta Munns
Youth Services Policy Coordinator

Kelsey Hill
Independent Living Coordinator

Meet Ragen: New BYS Section Manager

Ragen Shapiro joined the DSP Management team as the new Section Manager for the Bureau of Youth Services. Previously, Ragen has served as a Youth Justice Policy Coordinator in the Bureau since March 2016. Ragen has an extensive background in Youth Justice, having worked for 12 years as an Assistant District Attorney in Dane County before becoming a PPA-Advanced in the Division of Juvenile Corrections at the Department of Corrections.

During her three years in BYS, Ragen has worked to implement the objectives of the BYS Framework and Youth Justice Strategic Plan. She has most recently served as the Project Manager for the statewide roll-out of the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) which will assist county human services staff with identifying individual youth’s risk level for re-offense and better tailoring youth justice case plans to address the youth’s needs and strengths.

Ragen is a native Madisonian and when she is not at work, she can be found cheering on the sidelines at her son’s high school soccer games, building Legos with her daughter or traveling around the state in pursuit of the best supper club old fashioned in Wisconsin. (Your suggestions and recommendations are welcomed!)
BYS Gratitude Activity and Tree

The BYS team gathered before Thanksgiving for a day-long meeting to discuss bureau work, share a meal, and have fun. Because it was our team Thanksgiving, one of the things we focused on was gratitude. “Gratitude” is derived from Latin, meaning “thankful or pleasing,” and generally means being grateful for what one has rather than focusing on what we wish we had.

First things first: we were grateful to be able to share a meal together, and we learned that we have some amazing chefs on our team who made our working lunch a success. For our main dishes, we had turkey (thanks, Ragen!) and peanut stew (thanks, Shelby!). We learned that the Instant Pot really does make the quickest, most amazing mashed potatoes (thanks, Greta!). No Thanksgiving lunch would be complete without cranberry sauce (thanks, Kelsey!) and a veggie tray that includes olives (thanks, Elizabeth!). Our appetizers were rounded out with some bread and pub cheese (thanks, Devon!). We learned that in the fall, you can get cranberry ginger ale (thanks, Asia!).

And, of course, we had to have dessert. We had pumpkin bread that was so irresistible it had to be tasted before the meal (thanks, Faith!). We also had staff who, even though they were unable to stay for the meal, dropped off chocolate cake (thanks, Carlton!) baked by a generous spouse (thanks, Christal!).

The food was delicious, but we also wanted to talk specifically about gratitude and what it meant to our BYS team. As part of our discussion, we created a BYS “gratitude tree,” with each staff member writing on paper leaves the things for which we are grateful at work. Our tree (pictured) is full of gratitude for meaningful work, supportive colleagues, and fun. Our activity was an easy way to remind us of what we have while thinking and talking about how our team operates.

Working in the child welfare and youth justice systems, it can be easy to become overwhelmed, focus on long-term goals, or celebrate successes that occur and the collaborative efforts that make them happen. This gratitude exercise was a good reminder for BYS staff to reflect on the things at work for which we are grateful. We encourage you all to take a moment to do so as well!
Hijack the YAC

Throughout September and October 2019, BYS staff members Greta Munns and Kelsey Hill visited all seven local Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) to meet with and provide strategic sharing training to members. This is a crucial training for young people with lived experience because it teaches them how to share their stories and personal experiences safely and powerfully. It is one of the main tools youth need to be strong advocates for themselves, their communities, and other youth in the child welfare system.

For the first part of each meeting, local council members participated in the training provided by DCF staff and a youth co-facilitator. Training materials were based on feedback from experienced state-level YAC members and resources developed by FosterClub that are free to download here: http://store.fosterclub.com/youth-leadership-toolkit/.

YAC Winter Meeting

DSP and BYS leadership attended the 2019 Youth Advisory Council (YAC) winter meeting to get direct input from YAC members on DSP’s strategic planning and Family First Act changes (more info on the Family First Act can be found at https://www.familyfirstact.org). This included a brief overview of legislative changes and DSP priorities, as well as a facilitated input gathering activity that allowed YAC members to provide their feedback on what supports, resources, and enhancements would increase the likelihood that children/youth can safely stay with their families rather than be removed from their home. Additionally, members were able to weigh in on what would make placement experiences more positive if a child/youth must be removed from their home by reflecting on their previous experiences and needs as they relate to foster homes, residential care centers (RCC), and group homes.

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YAC Winter Meeting continued...

When leadership asked the YAC members what supports they would have needed to safely remain in their home after a CPS report and determination was made for removal, their responses included:

“Addiction counseling for parents”
“Housing programs/assistance for families”
“Have a worker visit more frequently to check-in”
“Parenting support like a super nanny to teach parents skills in their own home”

When asked what workers should consider after removing a child/youth from the home, YAC members mentioned:

“Not forcing reunification if it’s not realistic or in the best interest of the youth”
“If a child has to be [in an RCC] before going home; make sure family has the resources they need to visit (gas cards, meals, transportation, etc.)”
“Moving children/youth in middle or high school disrupts sports or other extra-curricular activities that might be a youth’s outlet or security net”
“Be purposeful and make sure the needs of the youth can be met [in the placement setting]”

Stakeholder input into DSP and BYS’s strategic priorities is important, especially directly from individuals with experience being in the child welfare system. All YAC members have unique and valuable perspectives and did a fantastic job of providing genuine, innovative, and candid feedback that Division and Bureau staff can consider as they continue their work on implementing the Family First Act and other changes in Wisconsin. They will continue to be an amazing resource as things progress. Well done, YAC!

In November 2019, DCF brought together about 30 staff from all seven Transition Resource Agencies (TRAs) for a full-day meeting dedicated to increased networking, information-sharing, and collaboration. Each region sent at least one person and many of them sent four or more. At different points throughout the day, another 4-6 people attended remotely via phone and screen sharing technology.

This convening meeting was the direct result of regional program staff asking for more opportunities to meet with each other, and DCF staff recognizing the immense value of having TRA programs share their processes, challenges, strengths, and best practices directly with their peers rather than only through DCF. The day was co-developed by the DCF IL Coordinator and three TRA staff from three different regions; they all collaborated on agenda and content development via planning phone calls and shared documents.

The meeting complemented other opportunities DCF provides for regional agencies to connect; it was a successful learning exchange, with staff from each regional TRA providing an overview of their independent living program by describing their agency and staff structure, strengths, challenges, any in-house programs and funding sources, key partners, forms, and more. Each region received guiding questions and topics ahead of time to frame their presentation, which they were permitted to make in whatever format made the most sense for them. Other attendees had the opportunity to ask questions and make comments in response to each presentation.

In the afternoon, attendees broke into small groups, with representation across roles and regions. This activity allowed attendees a chance to get to know each other and work together and to also collaboratively brainstorm how to best serve the needs of hypothetical youth and to identify areas of overlap, innovative practice, and areas of difference across regions. Each group then presented to the whole group. Though each attendee only worked on one scenario in a group, they received all scenarios ahead of time and were therefore able to provide additional thoughts or suggestions during the large group discussion.

Initial feedback from attendees was very positive – they made (or strengthened) good connections, gained a more comprehensive view of the statewide independent living service model, and learned about other regions’ innovative ideas and best practices. DCF will continue to work with its regional partners on future collaborative opportunities.
FosterClub All-Star Internship

Wisconsin DCF is once again sponsoring two All-Star internship slots for summer 2020. This means that two Wisconsin youth will be able to participate in this opportunity at no cost to them.

- **What:** "The FosterClub All-Star Internship was founded on the belief that youth who have successfully transitioned into young adulthood can have the largest impact on their peers. All-Stars are recognized as leaders on a national scale, and through their stories continue to affect policy and practice, significantly improving the lives of youth still in care. Interns receive leadership training, help improve outcomes for youth transitioning out of care, educate peers and industry professionals, and change public perceptions about foster youth across the nation at conferences and events all summer long."

More information available at: [https://www.fosterclub.com/all-star-program-outline](https://www.fosterclub.com/all-star-program-outline) or via youngleaders@fosterclub.com.

- **Where:** Seaside, Oregon
- **When:** Two sessions: 1) May into June & 2) July into August
- **Requirements:** This is a commitment that youth must be prepared to make from beginning to end.

  **To qualify:**
  - Have firsthand experience in the child welfare system
  - Be between the ages of 18 and 24
  - Be responsible and require minimal supervision
  - Be able to travel and be photographed

  **To apply:**
  - Applications available January 1, 2020
  - Submit complete online application no later than deadline (TBD)
  - Include references if possible
  - Participate in phone interview(s), if required (not all applicants will make it to this point)

  **To participate:**
  - Abide by program rules and fulfill expectations, as determined by FosterClub and DCF

  **What youth receive**
  - Weekly honorarium ($150/week)
  - End of internship bonus honorarium ($1500)
  - Cell phone stipends
  - Free housing during internship training
  - Travel to and from the internship
  - Travel to and from nationwide events
  - Cultural & recreational experiences
  - Leadership training
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 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.

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*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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