



Wisconsin Department of Children and Families

Bureau of Youth Services Newsletter

JANUARY 2026

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 being involved in the child welfare or youth justice system. If you have questions or ideas, please contact us!

Leadership

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Youth Justice Team

Youth Justice Policy
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Faith Price
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As we begin 2026, I want to thank county, contracted, tribal, and other partners for your continued collaboration and commitment to supporting youth and families across Wisconsin. In 2025, together we strengthened youth voice, advanced training and quality improvement efforts, and deepened cross-system partnerships. I am excited for you to see several of those accomplishments and get a peek of what's ahead. I wish you a healthy and successful start to the new year, and I look forward to continuing this work together!

Evelyn J. Coker

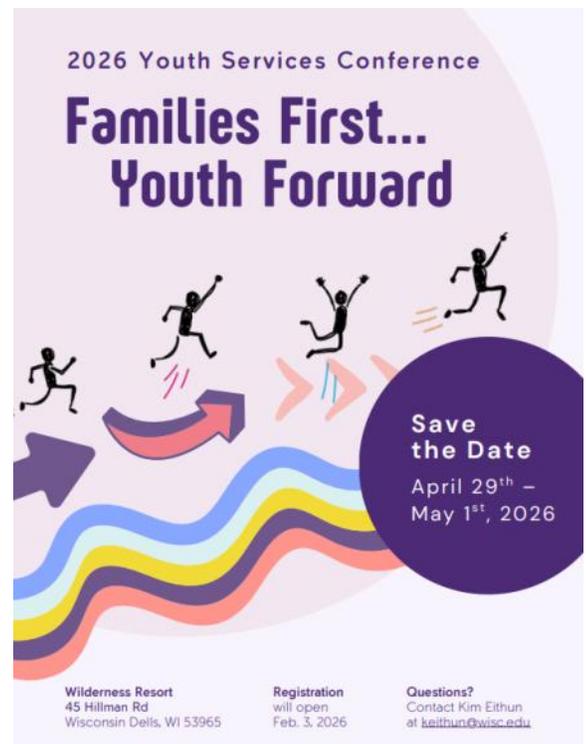
Division News

Save the Date!: Youth Services Conference

DCF invites you to **save the date for the 2026 Youth Services Conference: Families First Youth Forward**. This event will focus on collaboration with youth and families at the local, state and national level.

This year's conference will be held on **April 29 - May 1, 2026**. There will be both in-person and virtual attendance options. The in-person conference will be held at the Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells. The virtual event will be held on Zoom. **Conference registration opens on February 3, 2026**. See the [2026 Youth Services Conference: Families First Youth Forward Flyer](#) for more information.

We look forward to seeing you there!



Division News (cont'd)

New Resource for Child Welfare Education Points of Contact

The **Every Student Succeeds Act** requires that **Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Child Welfare Agencies (CWAs) collaborate to ensure educational stability for students placed in out-of-home care (OHC)**. Points of Contact play an important role – acting as a bridge between CWAs and LEAs to support and advocate for students placed in OHC.

This school year, Wisconsin's Educational Stability workgroup - which includes members from both DCF and DPI - have been updating resources to better support Points of Contact. In November, the **Best Interest Determination (BID) resource was updated to clarify what the BID process is and make the worksheet more user-friendly**. That document is available as a [PDF](#) or [Word](#) document.

Please reach out to [Moe Green](#) or [Alana Peck](#) with any Education Stability related questions!

Youth Justice Updates

Youth Justice Advisory Committee

Newly launched in July, the **Youth Justice Advisory Committee (YJAC) is comprised of county professionals from various YJ practice areas with the purpose of informing BYS's decisions and policies regarding Wisconsin's Youth Justice programs.**

October 2025 meeting agenda topics included:

- John Elliot, DSP Division Administrator, attended to **thank committee members for their involvement**
- Discussion about **foundational training topics** to include in Youth Justice Training Standard
- Discussion and survey to **solicit ideas for YJ trainings** for new Youth Justice professionals
- **Feedback on "Advice for Youth in the Youth Justice System Guidebook,"** a document created by Youth Leadership Team members for youth on supervision

Updates from the following projects:

- [BYS Newsletter](#) (hey! you're reading it right now!): reminder about the Youth Arts and Achievements Corner (see page 10 for the Corner)
- eWiSACWIS: heads up about the upcoming Wisconsin Information and Support Portal (WiSP) release (see page 5 for more information on WiSP)
- YASI Interrater Reliability (IRR) Pilot Project: sharing results of the pilot and preparing for a statewide rollout (see page 3 for more information on the YASI IRR Project)
- YASI Coaching Program Updates: 31 Coaches in 19 counties
- YJ Data: BYS creating more YJ-focused dashboards to improve county accessibility to YJ data;
 - New quick reference guides for Juvenile Secure Detention Registry and Child Welfare Implementation Support Metrics dashboards available [here](#)
- YJ regional TA meetings moved from bi-monthly to quarterly, with 2026 dates released to the workforce
- Sexual Behaviors Assessment Survey results presented

Upcoming meetings in February and April 2026.

If you are interested in serving on this committee in 2026 or want a summary of the most recent committee meeting, please email dcfyj@wisconsin.gov with the subject title YJAC.

Youth Justice Updates (cont'd)

2024 YJ Referrals and Intake Report Coming Soon!

The Youth Justice (YJ) Referrals and Intake Report provides information on youth referred to the YJ system, YJ referral details, and YJ intake decisions logged in eWiSACWIS during one calendar year (CY). **In CY2024, county human service agencies logged 12,450 YJ referrals for 7,907 unique youth in eWiSACWIS.**

This year's report includes insight from **38 Youth Leaders with lived experience in the YJ system**. During the October 2025 Youth Leadership Team (YLT) meeting, DCF staff shared five key findings from the report. YLT members' reactions and responses to these findings can be found throughout the report – look for the speech bubble icons.



Read the **2024 YJ Referrals and Intake Report** [here](#). (Link will refresh with 2024 data when available)

For additional support navigating reports or YJ data, reach out to [Catie Carter](#), YJ Research Analyst, or [Alana Peck](#), YJ Policy Coordinator.

New Youth Justice Training!

Youth Justice Philosophy and Case Process (YJPCP) is a prerequisite course for the Collaborative Case Works (CCW) 2 training provided to new youth justice professionals hired on or after 1/1/26. This one-day YJPCP training is an introductory course for YJ professionals, designed to talk **about the “why” behind their duties** so they have a more holistic understanding of how the Wisconsin YJ system can impact families. Learners are introduced to legislation, standards, disparity statistics, and case flow throughout this foundational course. Learners will also learn more about language commonly used in the YJ system, the importance and benefit of uplifting lived experiences, central tenets related to adolescent brain development, and key evidence-based practices and philosophies consistent with [Putting Families First](#).



For additional information about YJPCP, contact [Mindy Mattson](#) at Wisconsin PDS.

YASI Interrater Reliability Project

The **YASI Interrater Reliability (IRR) project aims to eventually assess IRR across the YJ workforce** by having YJ professionals (YJPs) regularly complete a YASI assessment based on an example case vignette.

- By conducting an IRR assessment across YJ professionals using the same example case vignette, **DCF can measure whether YJPs assess the same information in similar ways based on YASI best practice, training, and guidelines in the YASI administrative guide.**
- BYS will use this method as a **continuous quality improvement strategy to evaluate consistency and accuracy in YASI scoring** across all staff involved in the process.
- The recent pilot tested the process with six volunteer counties; the **results provide a summary of IRR amongst the pilot counties, identify areas for ongoing training and support, and inform DCF's larger statewide plan** for regular IRR testing.

YASI IRR 6-County Pilot. The counties that volunteered to participate in the include **Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Dunn, Fond du Lac, and Sauk Counties**. YJPs, including staff and supervisors, were given two weeks in August to complete a YASI assessment based on the case vignette. They received their results two weeks prior to their county feedback session (held in September or October), which involved sharing the combined 6-county results along with individual county results and reviewing areas where YJPs need review and clarification. (cont'd on the next page)

Youth Justice Updates (cont'd)

YASI Interrater Reliability Project (cont'd)

Overall Results for 6 Pilot Counties Combined. The 65 pilot participants did great overall! **The combined average percent correct on the YASI full assessment was 81% and on the YASI pre-screen was 85%, both of which exceeded the DCF 80% benchmark.** The table below highlights overall results by YASI domain. Participating YJPs are **strong on six out of 10 domains** where overall average % correct (across all items combined) was above the 80% benchmark and weaker on only 4 domains that are below the 80% benchmark on average. The **strongest four domains**, with highest accuracy and consistency overall, **include legal history, school, alcohol/drug use, and employment/free time domains.**

For additional information about YASI IRR, please contact [Kendra Schiffman](#).

Strong Overall on Correctly Scoring Full Assessment (81% avg. on YASI Full Assessment; large majority w/in 1 standard dev. of avg.)			
Domain	Strong	Moderate	Weak
Legal History (14 items total)	96% avg.		
Alcohol/Drug use (3 items total)	95% avg.		
School (13 items total)	91% avg.		
Employment/Free Time (8 items total)	91% avg.		
Community/Peers (8 items total)	86% avg.		
Attitudes (8 items total)	81% avg.		
Aggression/Violence (5 items total)		72% avg.	
Mental Health (6 items total)			68% avg.
Adaptive Skills (7 items total)			67% avg.
Family (16 items total)			63% avg.

Note: YASI IRR Pilot Results Report coming in 2026 Q1.

Youth Services Updates

FosterClub AllStar Internship Opportunity!

In 2026, DCF will once again sponsor two young people to participate in FosterClub's summer All Star Internship program. This means the internship comes at **no cost to the young person**. FosterClub's All Star internship includes youth from across the country who have lived experience in the foster care system. As a group, they **receive leadership training, find and build community, and have the opportunity to participate in national conferences and events.**

The internship lasts from **June 29-August 7, 2026**; five of the six weeks are virtual and one is in-person in the state of Oregon.

To learn more, visit <https://www.fosterclub.com/allstar-internship> or scan the QR code to the right. Please share this opportunity with young people in your network who may be interested. **The application opens on January 1, 2026, and closes on February 16, 2026.**

For more information, contact youthservices@fosterclub.com.



Scan to learn more!

Youth Services Updates (cont'd)

Wisconsin Information and Support Portal (WiSP)

DCF staff spent the past year developing the Wisconsin Information and Support Portal (WiSP) in partnership with county child welfare professionals (CWPs), contracted independent living service providers, and young adults with lived experience.

WiSP is an **unprecedented initiative that provides young adults with child welfare experience access to information stored within the state's eWiSACWIS database** via a portal application while also enabling CWPs to use advanced eWiSACWIS features **to share information to portal users and review information the youth provides back**. WiSP currently includes the following:



Ability for youth to update their contact and demographic information so that it is current, which will help with service outreach and communications.



Message center through which youth can directly communicate with members of their support team.



Resource inventory with many relevant resources for youth.



Independent Living Transition to Discharge (ILTD) planning, which is one of the most interactive features of the portal. This allows youth to provide input about, make corrections to, and reflect on different parts of the plan.



Relevant reminders to remind the youth of specific actions to complete in the portal or important deadlines to keep in mind.



General external notifications to youth to alert them when there is activity in their portal account.

Starting in October 2025, DCF rolled WiSP out to select child welfare agencies, Transition Resource Agencies, and clients, and will continue to pilot the tool with users until statewide rollout in early 2026. Over the long-term, DCF will enhance WiSP to include additional features and eventually broaden access to parents and families. More information to come as this project continues.

For additional information about WiSP, contact DCFILCoordinator@wisconsin.gov.

2026 Brighter Futures Initiative Grantees

BYS is pleased to announce the 2026 [Brighter Futures Initiative](#) Grant recipients!

- **Balance of State Grantees as a result of the most recent RFP:** Ashland, Portage, County, and Wood Counties, and Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
- **Milwaukee Grantees as a result of the most recent RFP:** Community Advocates, Employ Milwaukee, and Running Rebels
- **Renewal Grantees:** Adams, Kenosha, and Washington Counties, and Diverse & Resilient, and La Causa

BFI supports evidence-based, positive youth development, and prevention strategies focusing on the legislative outcomes set forth in [Section 48.545, Wisconsin Statutes](#):

- Prevent and reduce the incidence of youth violence and other delinquent behavior;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of youth alcohol and other drug use and abuse;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect;
- Prevent and reduce the incidence of non-marital pregnancy and increase the use of abstinence to prevent non-marital pregnancy; and
- Increase adolescent self-sufficiency by encouraging high school graduation, vocational preparedness, improved social and other interpersonal skills and responsible decision-making.

Youth Services Updates (cont'd)

Expanded Independent Living Program Eligibility!

DCF recently expanded IL eligibility criteria specific to continued eligibility beyond time in out-of-home care (OHC). Traditionally, youth qualified for IL up to age 23 if they discharged from court-ordered OHC in one of the following ways:

- ⇒ at age 18 or older,
- ⇒ to adoption on or after their 16th birthday, or
- ⇒ to s. 48.977 guardianship or a guardianship under substantially similar tribal law on or after their 16th birthday.

With this recent eligibility expansion, youth will also qualify for IL if they discharge from court-ordered OHC to s. 48.9795 guardianship or a guardianship under substantially similar tribal law on or after their 16th birthday.

Contracted [Transition Resource Agencies \(TRAs\)](#) are located throughout the state to provide IL services to qualifying youth following their exit from care if they are interested in the voluntary supports. TRAs assist in the areas of employment, education, housing, health, connections, transportation, and more, through a combination of direct services, fund provision, and referrals to other agencies.

Read [DCF Numbered Memo 2025-26](#) for more information about the eligibility change. The [revised IL eligibility guide](#) is available now; DCF is in the process of updating all other documents that reference the old eligibility criteria.

Remember!

There are other independent living documents to support your work – many recently created or updated. For example, the [ILTD Desk Guide](#) and [ILTD Writing Guide](#), the [Guide for Youth in Out-of-Home Care Placements in Wisconsin](#), and more! The Guide for Youth in Out-of-Home Care in Wisconsin is available for free [here](#) (*provided in bundles of 10*).

Youth Services Updates (cont'd)

Anti-Human Trafficking Resources and Training

January is Human Trafficking Prevention month and with that comes a host of resources and to learn, stay informed, and spread knowledge. One great resource is the **U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Human Trafficking Prevention Month Toolkit**. Check it out and share with others!

Looking further ahead, **one of DCF's AHT grantees will co-host Quiet Crisis: A Multidisciplinary Team Response to Human Trafficking, a two-day professional conference** designed for those working directly with, investigating, prosecuting, and supporting victims and survivors of human trafficking. The conference will cover a wide array of topics, including:

- The Role of Technology in Exploitation
- Neurobiology of Trauma
- Case Studies
- Trafficking in Rural Areas
- Child Trafficking
- Advocates Supporting Survivors
- Investigative & Prosecutorial Considerations
- Jail Outreach Programs

The conference will take place **May 14-15, 2026 at the Abbey Resort in Fontana, Wisconsin**. You can register [here](#) and book a room block [here](#).

Reach out to dawn@jtme.org with any questions about the conference. For more information about DCF's AHT initiatives, contact dcfaht@wisconsin.gov.

Partner Highlight!

Workforce Resource, Inc. (WRI) currently contracts with DCF to administer multiple programs and services. Specific to the Bureau of Youth Services, they are the regional independent living provider in both [Youth Services Regions 6 and 7](#), and also the [Anti-Human Trafficking program partner in Region 6](#). WRI recently applied for and received a significant grant that provides additional supports to youth in crisis via a "warm line." This resource is especially impactful given how remote of an area WRI serves, how spread-out clients are from the professionals who work with them and the resources available, and the fact that crises can emerge anytime and anywhere. [Read more about WRI's new initiative](#) and how it's benefitting youth in need, particularly those formerly in foster care.



Crystal Meier, program and case manager, WRI, and academic partner Tamara Kincaid, PhD, associate professor of social work, UW-River Falls.

Photo from <https://wpp.med.wisc.edu/featured-grantees/supporting-youth-leaving-foster-care>

Youth Voice Updates

Youth Leadership Team

Young adults served by YJ Innovation Grant Micro-Grant Counties participated in a **Youth Leadership Team (YLT) meeting** on December 8, 2025. **An amazing group of 20 young people attended and provided DCF's Quality Case Plan (QCP) team with feedback about protective factors and their relation to case planning.** The QCP team is using the youth feedback to **improve engagement** between child welfare professionals and the youth and families they work with.



YLT is open to all youth ages 14-21 with personal experience in the YJ system. This includes youth on delinquency supervision and/or Juveniles in Need of Protection or Services (JIPS). **There will be four YLT meetings in 2026 and plans include some exciting changes, such as potential opportunities for youth voice input and participation;** BYS will share further details soon.

Youth Advisory Council

The **statewide Youth Advisory Council (YAC)** met virtually on December 6, 2025 to complete **revisions to the Council's bylaws, which were last updated in 2021.** The group was **engaged, collaborative, and thoughtful** in ensuring the structure of YAC is transparent and supports current and future members' needs and goals, as well as those of the broader out-of-home care advocacy community.

The next **statewide YAC meeting will be held virtually on February 7, 2026 via regional hub sites,** which is intended to **reduce transportation barriers and encourage young adults who have not previously engaged** in YAC to attend and make their voices heard. For this annual "virtual hub" meeting, BYS is able to support the participation of up to eight youth from each of the seven [Youth Services Regions](#), whereas typical statewide YAC attendance is limited to 24 total young adult participants.

Click [here](#) for more information on how to get involved in the YLT or statewide YAC.

Youth Highlight!

Check out [this highlight about Angel Shelton](#), who recently assumed the role of **Vice President of the state's Youth Advisory Council.** Angel is actively involved in her local YAC as well and has big goals for improving the lives of youth currently and formerly in foster care.

BYS State YAC Lead Greta Munns stated, **"Angel's attention to youth well-being and mental health as a YAC member has been and will continue to be an asset to YAC, particularly in her new leadership role.** As a youth-lead, adult-supported council, YAC is powerful because of the leadership and transparency of young adults like Angel and others who persevered; **Angel will be instrumental in helping YAC prioritize wellness as the crux of sustainable change-making.** She and her peers continue to bend the needle of justice for the next generation, but also need and deserve support as they reflect on often really difficult and complex experiences; their sharing and engagement cannot and should not be at their own expense. When asking those with lived experience to share the struggles and shortfalls of systems, partners should do so with intention to find and champion concrete solutions alongside them. **We are fortunate to have young leaders like Angel across our state who we all learn from and consult with."**



Angel Shelton, local YAC member and state YAC VP

Photo from: milwaukeekeenns.org/2025/12/22/where-you-come-from-doesnt-define-where-you-will-go-former-foster-child-becomes-vice-president-of-the-wisconsin-youth-advisory-council

Youth Voice Updates (cont'd)

In remembrance

State YAC member Malea White passed away unexpectedly in October 2025. She was 25. Malea was an active member of both the state YAC and her regional YAC for many years and left an undeniably positive impact with everyone she met and worked with in advocacy spaces. As a member for nearly eight years, she was and will continue to be an anchoring force for YAC. She attended every meeting and was a welcoming, supportive, and feisty force pushing for systems reform. DCF staff put together an official proclamation recognizing her commitment and achievements and presented it to her family. We miss you, Malea.



Malea, pictured center, with other YAC members during a YAC panel presentation at the 2025 Wisconsin CASA Conference in Wausau.



DCF Proclamation in honor of Malea.

What We're Reading

BYS staff recommend these new and interesting research, tools, and learning opportunities. Check them out!

- **Toolkit**, [Youth Voice Playbook](#), Center for Digital Thriving, HopeLab, CharacterLab, & In Tandem.
- **Toolkit**, [National Human Trafficking Prevention Month](#), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2026).
- **Book**, [Thrive: How Science of the Adolescent Brain Helps Us Imagine a Better Future for All Children](#), Lisa M. Lawson (2025); also see accompanying [article](#)
- **Report**, [At the Intersection of Child Welfare and Juvenile Legal System Involvement : Research Strategies for Policy and Practice Change](#), Juvenile Justice Research and Reform Lab and Evident Change (June 2024).
- **Guide**, [Probation and Youth Justice System Review Guidebook](#), RFK National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice (May 2023).

Youth Arts and Achievements Corner

New in 2025, BYs's Youth Arts and Achievements Corner is dedicated to elevating the voices and successes of the youth our team serves. This part of the newsletter is an opportunity for us to highlight young adults' original artwork and/or shout-outs that others share about them. BYs accepts [rolling submissions](#) of the following to include in future newsletters:

- **Youth's original artwork**, can be submitted by youth (ages 14-23) or their adult supporter (with youth awareness and permission)
- **Highlights/shout-outs that celebrate or otherwise recognize a youth** (ages 14-23), submitted by an adult supporter

Thanks for everyone who has submitted art and highlights so far. This month, we are proud to share one artist's work! Here's a fuzzy dragon all the way from Waukesha! Artist anonymous.



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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.***

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.

Sign up for our newsletter [here!](#)