Bureau of Youth Services Newsletter

AUGUST 2026

A Message from the Administrator

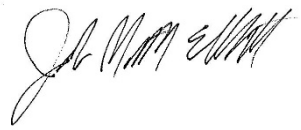
As we near the end of summer (too soon?), it can be all too easy to get swept up in the busyness that comes with the fall season. Before we look ahead, I want to take this as an opportunity to reflect on this summer and the incredible work that's been happening across the Bureau of Youth Services (BYS) and in support of youth across the state.

And this work has continued even as we've gone through some transition. Last month, we said goodbye to Evelyn Coker, who served as BYS Director for over two years. Evelyn was an invaluable member of the Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP) team, and we continue to be grateful for her hard work, dedication, and leadership during her tenure.

Also last month, we held the 14th annual Youth Achievements Ceremony, where we recognized the graduation of youth with experience in out-of-home care. We were thrilled to be able to celebrate these remarkable young people alongside BYS and Department of Children and Families (DCF) staff, DCF Secretary Jeff Pertl , Governor Tony Evers and First Lady Kathy Evers.

Not 24 hours later, DSP Deputy Administrator Shelby McCulley and I headed to DSP's Motivational Interviewing (MI) Summit. We joined 130 participants (from 45 counties! To talk about ongoing and future MI efforts. While there, both Shelby and I spoke to how critical the voices of lived experts – especially youth – were in shaping the conversations of the day and Wisconsin's MI efforts as a whole. That inclusion of youth voice is at the core of BYS's mission and work.

I could go on, but I'll instead encourage you to check out the rest of this newsletter. From awards ceremonies to family teaming and youth justice innovations to a new Independent Living training, there's no shortage of updates. Hope you enjoy, and a sincere thank-you for all you do, each and every day, to support the young people and families across Wisconsin.



Department News

Procurement and Grant Opportunities

If you're interested in contract or grant opportunities related to youth service and youth justice initiatives, it can't hurt to bookmark the following resource pages:

- The Wisconsin Department of Justice (WI DOJ)'s competitive grant opportunities can be found at WI DOJ Grants Opportunities page, or you can contact Kiley Komro for additional information.
- DCF's Anticipated Procurement Opportunities page lists forthcoming procurements, including those for youth services contract opportunities.

2026 Wisconsin Public Child Welfare Conference



The 2026 Public Child Welfare Conference, "Family is the Key Ingredient," will be held October 21–23, 2026, at the Wilderness Resort in Wisconsin Dells, WI, with both in-person and virtual attendance options. Cost is $100 regardless of attendance choice, and attendees who complete the full conference will receive 19 Continuing Education Hours (CEHs). Registration opened on July 31 and closes October 15.

Primary parts of the conference include national and Wisconsin experts delivering keynote presentations on family engagement and prevention-focused practices, as well as workshops on recognizing and addressing bias, building on family strengths, and learning about child welfare best practices and DCF's statewide initiatives. There will also be a networking reception on Thursday, October 22.

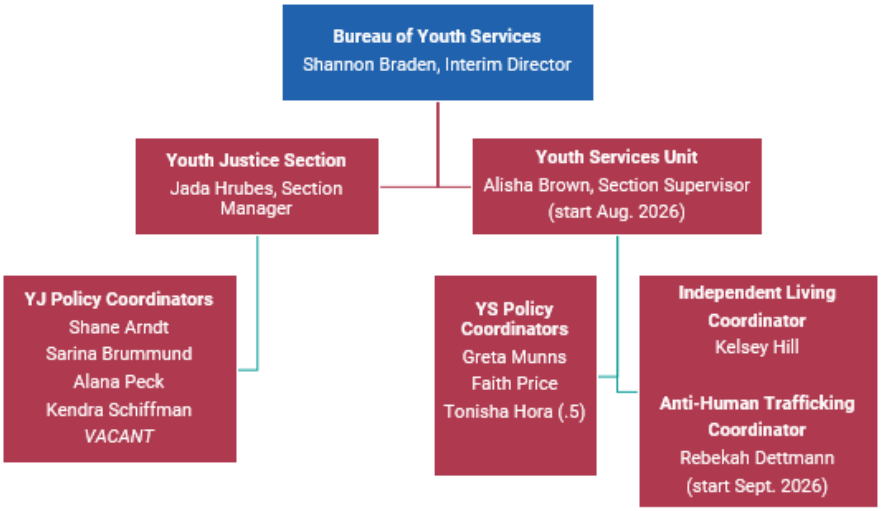
Registration information, brochures, and event materials are available on the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System Conferences page. The conference brochure also includes information about lodging; if you are interested in booking a room, do so before September 20 to receive the discount rate.

If you have questions about this conference opportunity, contact Kim Eithun.

BYS Leadership and Staffing Updates

The BYS team continues to evolve, with several changes in recent months. While we said farewell to Director Evelyn Coker and Youth Justice Policy Coordinator Jenna Dunlap in July, we recently welcomed **Interim Director Shannon Braden** and **Youth Services Supervisor Alisha Brown.** We will also add two Policy Coordinators to the team in the coming months – an Anti-Human Trafficking Coordinator in the Youth Services section and a Youth Justice Coordinator in the Youth Justice section.

We are grateful for the contributions of those who transitioned to new opportunities and are excited to welcome new colleagues to the team. Through these transitions, our commitment to collaboration with county, tribal, and other partners remains strong as we continue our shared work to support youth and families.



Back to School Reminders for Education Points of Contact

Students placed in out-of-home care (OHC) often experience educational disruptions that can impact their academic experiences and outcomes. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that local education agencies and child welfare agencies collaborate to implement policies and practices that minimize those disruptions and preserve students' opportunities for improved well-being and success in school.

DCF and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) will co-host a webinar on September 15, 2026 at 12 p.m. to provide a refresher to school district and county human service Points of Contact on the basic educational stability provisions for youth in OHC included in the ESSA. More information will be sent out via DCF Area Administration soon!

Child welfare professionals: Remember to do your part to keep child and youth educational information accurate in eWiSACWIS by updating their education level information when and as needed (such as at the end of the academic year). You do this in their Person Management page.

Youth Justice Updates

New YASI Booster Training

This training fulfills the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) annual booster requirement for all youth justice professionals and supervisors who have oversight of or make decisions in YJ cases. As a reminder, those professionals must complete annual booster trainings in accordance with the options available through DCF and the Wisconsin Child Welfare Professional Development System (PDS).



About this training: Follow a youth named Wes to practice YASI assessments, youth interviews, feedback wheels, and build strong case plans.

Training format – two parts:

1. Online Modules: Assigned 5 weeks before your scheduled huddle. Must be completed at least 3 days prior to your scheduled community huddle date.
2. Community Huddle: 90-minute live virtual session for discussion and skill-building.

Earn credit: Receive 9.5 continuing education hours after completing both parts.

Who should attend: YASI-trained child welfare professionals and supervisors working with families in youth justice.

Check out this new YASI booster training in PDS Online.

Youth Justice Family Teaming and Juveniles in Need of Protection Family Case Plan

The Quality Case Planning (QCP) project exists to clarify and standardize child welfare case planning in Wisconsin so that youth and families are involved in the development and completion of the Family Case Plan. The QCP project's most recent update focused on Juveniles in Need of Protection or Services (JIPS) case planning. Youth justice (YJ) professionals, who are best positioned to strengthen families and communities when there are clear goals and shared understanding of the case plan, can use the Family Case Plan for JIPS cases in eWiSACWIS**.** YJ Standards were updated in June 2026 to include family teaming and reflect practices that promote family engagement and enhance collaboration for CPS and YJ professionals. The recent edits made to YJ Standards include:

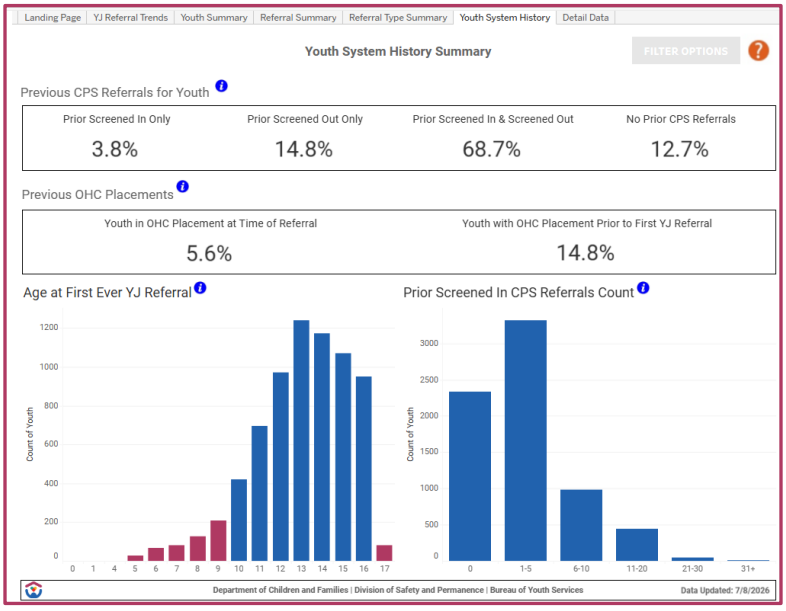
- Defined use of Family Teaming process as a style of engagement for all YJ cases (delinquency and JIPS) in collaboration with the family and identified natural supports.
- Clarified number of goals to be developed at a time for YJ JIPS in-home Family Case Plan.
- Created steps to develop the YJ JIPS in-home Family Case Plan in collaboration with the family and identified natural supports.

Resources related to this effort include:

- Family Teaming | Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
- Family Case Plan Workbook | Wisconsin Department of Children and Families
- Family Case Plan Writing Guide, DCF-P-5931
- Family Case Plan Supervisor Guide, DCF-P-5953

New YJ Dashboard Available in eWReports!

In June 2026, DCF released a new dashboard that includes information about YJ referrals! The dashboard, available via eWReports and modeled after the annual YJ Referral and Intake Report, is designed to provide Wisconsin YJ professionals with referral information that is refreshed daily. Child welfare professionals and supervisors with YJ responsibilities can request access to this dashboard from their county security delegate.



Statewide Implementation of YASI Interrater Reliability

Implementation of the YASI Interrater Reliability (IRR) process will begin in 2027; this will regularly evaluate YASI IRR among the YJ workforce in Wisconsin by having them complete a YASI assessment based on an example case vignette. With this approach, DCF can measure whether YJ professionals assess the same youth information in the same way. This is an important next step to ensure best practice since fully implementing YASI statewide in 2022.

By conducting regular YASI IRR assessment, DCF will:

- Provide regular opportunities for youth justice professionals to practice YASI assessment skills with immediate feedback.
- Provide specific feedback about strengths as well as areas needing more training and coaching support.
- Ensure greater consistency in assessment of youth needs, strengths, and risks for reoffending though improving YASI assessment practice.
- Build up our infrastructure to continuously strengthen youth justice professionals' ongoing case planning with youth and families.

As shared in a prior issue, DCF completed a six-county YASI IRR pilot in late 2025 and has used the pilot participants' data, input, and experience during the process to inform DCF's plan for statewide implementation. **DCF's Southeast region will start the IRR process in Q1 2027.**

BYS will share more details in a future newsletter(s) and at Area Administration and YJ regional meetings (schedule below).

Region	Date and time	Link to join
Northeast	Tuesday, October 6: 1-3PM	Join Here
Southeast	Thursday, October 8: 1-3PM	Join Here
North	Tuesday, November 3: 1-3PM	Join Here
South	Wednesday, November 4: 1-3PM	Join Here
West	Thursday, November 5: 1-3PM	Join Here

Youth Justice Advisory Committee

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 YJ programs.

Topics for committee feedback at the July 2026 meeting included:

- Future YJ regional meeting topics.
- YJ referral data.
  - DCF reporting tools for YJ referrals: Dashboard vs. eWReports vs. Annual Report.
  - Using reporting tools to answer questions counties want to know.
  - What are we missing?
  - How can we improve data that we collect in eWiSACWIS?
- **Process for adding new YJAC members.**

The final 2026 YJAC meeting is on **October 1, 2026, from 1-3 p.m**. If you are interested in serving on this committee in 2026 or want a summary of the most recent committee meeting, please email the DCF YJ team with the subject line "YJAC."

Youth Services Updates

Anti-Human Trafficking Updates

Contract Update

New Anti-Human Trafficking (AHT) program contracts started July 1, 2026. There was no change in providers, with all incumbent providers continuing services this state fiscal year. You can learn more about current AHT (and other Youth Services) program partners via the Bureau of Youth Services Grant Programs list and map.

Conversations about Sex Trafficking Learning Series

DCF's contracted AHT partner serving Milwaukee County is continuing its *Conversations about Sex Trafficking* series this fall. The first session took place on August 5, 2026, but three sessions remain: September 2, October 7, and November 4, 2026. You can register here and need only register once to attend one, some, or all of the sessions. Registrants receive a calendar invite once their registration is confirmed; the same Zoom link will be used for all sessions. If you have any questions, contact Rebekah Dettman or Claudine O'Leary.

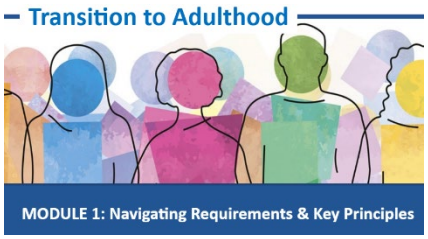
Independent Living Updates

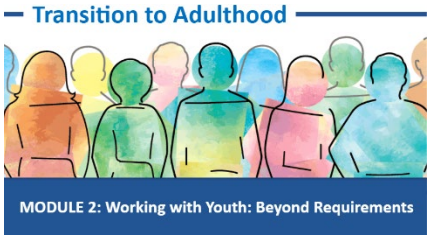
NEW! Transition to Adulthood Training

DCF rolled out a new web-based training focused on Independent Living (IL). Entitled *Supporting Youth Transition to Adulthood*, the two modules take about one hour total to complete and do the following:

- Cover IL requirements and best practices;
- Help professionals understand important timelines, roles, and tools;
- Help professionals build skills to support strengths-based, youth-driven planning.

You can access the training here. Additional information and resources related to IL are available on the DCF Independent Living page.





Youth Voice Updates

Youth Achievements Ceremony

DCF hosted the 14th annual Youth Achievements Ceremony on July 15 at the Executive Residence. Governor Tony Evers and First Lady Kathy Evers joined DCF Secretary-designee Jeff Pertl in recognizing youth with experience in out-of-home care (OHC) who recently graduated from high school or higher. The 28 graduates who were able to attend the celebration represent the larger group of young people with OHC throughout Wisconsin who reached commencement in the 2025-2026 academic year.

"Every graduation is a milestone, but this ceremony represents something profoundly powerful," said Pertl. "It is an opportunity to honor the distinct path each of these young people has walked to get here and to celebrate their incredible self-determination. This milestone is just the beginning of the incredible impact they are going to make on the world."

BYS Policy Coordinator Tonisha Hora was this year's guest speaker and shared her personal and professional connection to today's ceremony with graduates and guests. Hora's lived experience in kinship and foster care shapes her lifelong commitment to supporting young people and improving systems meant to care for them.

In addition to her work with DCF, Hora has advocated for child welfare policy reform at the federal level and served as an advisor to Youth Advisory Councils at the state and local level.



Youth Advisory Council

It has been a busy summer for the Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council (YAC)! In May, the YAC recognized Foster Care Awareness Month, by hosting the *Hands Around the Capitol: All Hands on Deck* event in the Wisconsin Capitol rotunda. Organized by young leaders with lived experience in out-of-home care across Wisconsin, Hands Around the Capitol included YAC members, as well as representatives and members from DCF's other lived experience groups – Parent leaders, Kinship Caregivers, and the Youth Leadership Team. At least one person from each group spoke during the event, which also included group tabling, a photobooth, and a speech by DCF Secretary-Designee Jeff Pertl.

The event highlighted the importance of community, featured a youth art exhibition, and highlighted policy priorities the YAC sees as critical to helping youth and families have the tools and resources to thrive. The event culminated in a physical gathering of hands around the rotunda to signify the importance of having an "All Hands on Deck" approach for youth and families. We're so proud to support young leaders.





Also in May, YAC members participated and helped facilitate the Bureau of Youth Services Conference in multiple ways: serving as general session panelists, hosting a youth-lead art exhibition, serving as emcees, and sharing their expertise at multiple World Café tables during the BYS Grantee Meeting that preceded the conference.

Did you know the Wisconsin YAC is one of just a handful of youth-led citizen review panels in the country? As a Wisconsin-based Citizen Review Panel, the group submits an annual report to DCF, in which it makes recommendations to the Department and documents its activities and engagement efforts over the past year. Some recent YAC CRP highlights include:

- In May, YAC members participated on a panel at the Wisconsin CRP annual meeting
- In June, YAC Officers travelled to San Diego, California to participate in the National Citizen Review Panel Conference. While there, they had the opportunity to engage in multiple workshops, network, and hear from national experts regarding child abuse and neglect prevention and intervention. They also got to enjoy some of the unique things San Diego had to offer, like the San Diego Zoo and In-and- Out. We're so proud of the trailblazing work being done by YAC.

Other YAC Happenings:

- In July, two YAC members volunteered to support the Youth Achievements Ceremony
- In August, YAC held its annual team-building meeting in Wisconsin Dells. YAC members swam, connected, and talked about their summer =
- In August, three YAC members attended the National Daniel Memorial Conference in Reston, Virginia
- Throughout the summer, YAC President Angel Shelton completed the FosterClub All-Star internship through FosterClub, a national nonprofit based out of Oregon
- Coming up in October, YAC will have their two-day annual meeting (including officer elections)!

Youth Leadership Team

The Youth Leadership Team (YLT) held its quarterly meeting on July 28, 2026. BYS staff reviewed the 2025 YJ Referrals and Intake Report with the group and asked for their reactions to the information. The next YLT meeting will take place in October.



For more information on the Wisconsin Youth Advisory Council and Youth Leadership Team, visit Youth Leadership Opportunities in Wisconsin.

What We're Reading (and Listening to and Watching!)

BYS staff recommend these learning opportunities and tools. Check them out!

- Research snapshot, Children and Screens: Social Media and Youth Mental Health, Institute of Digital Media and Child Development
- Report, State of the States (searchable by state), State of the Nation
    - Report, analysis of how Wisconsin fares for each of the 31 identified measures
- Two-pager, Vaping and Youth Mental Health, Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health
- Resource list, Youth & Family Voice: Curated Resources, Wisconsin Office of Children's Mental Health

Youth Arts and Achievements Corner

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 to everyone who has submitted art and highlights so far. This month, we are proud to share **two artists' work**!



Art by J.S.



Art by J.S.

ABOUT THE BUREAU OF YOUTH SERVICES

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!
dcfoys@wisconsin.gov

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Sign up for our newsletter here!

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608) 266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.

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