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Ramsey County Engage!
Transforming Juvenile Justice
Community Conversations
Debrief & Findings – January 2025

Today's Meeting Agenda

❖ Circle Settle-in!

❖ Engage! Series Overview

❖ Measurables

❖ Mindstorm Themes

❖ Thematic Summary

❖ Questions/Reflections?

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When you think about what you hope to see for Juvenile Justice in Ramsey County, is there one word that comes to mind?

Circle Settle-in!

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PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH **PROJECT OVERVIEW**

Event Date(s): November 8th (JDC events), November 16th, November 20th, December 5th, December 20th (with Face-to-Face).

Total Participants: n = 168
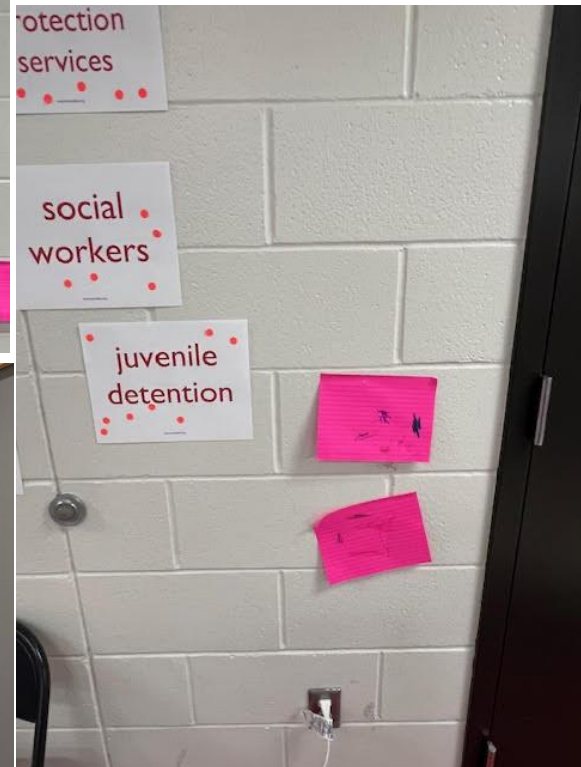
IBPOC: n = 132 (79%)
Youth Under 24: n = 95 (57%)

Demographics: Youth and families who have had contact with Juvenile Justice, social workers, policymakers, educators, guardians, public defenders, law enforcement and legal professionals, probation officers, community organizations and service providers.

Host Locations: Ramsey County Juvenile Detention Center, Neighborhood House, Central High School, Maplewood YMCA, Face-to-Face.

Languages: English

Contact with Juvenile Justice:
What's Your Role or Experience?

Demographics Measurables

Goal | Delivered

At least 51% Indigenous, Black and other people of color (IBPOC) and/or marginalized immigrants (Results: n = 132 of 168 participants).
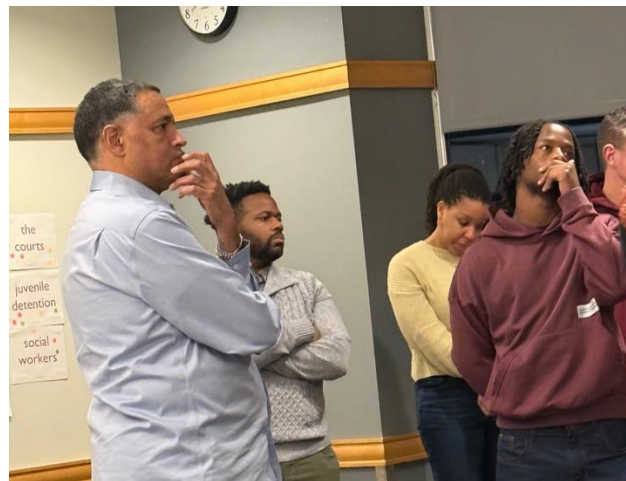
51% | 79%

At least 25% under the age of 24 (Results: n = 95 of 168 participants)

25% | 57%

At least 10% under the age of 20 (For events which reported an under-20 count, results: n = 20 of 168 participants)

10% | 12%

These numbers continually update as events are completed and data reviewed.

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"Everyone has to come together to make change."

– discussion participant

RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: **Prevention and proactive supports**

Theme: Importance of **preventing contact with juvenile justice** in the first place; **reducing use of JDC as a catch-all** for youth in crisis; **mobilizing other supportive resources** for crisis response.

Participants said:

❖ "Enforce preventative measures first – funding and marketing and connecting people with resources they need before they need them. If something is happening at home, or parents need support themselves, or something is happening with their child… There needs to be more preventative measures put in place. The things that can be stopped."

❖ "We need to give kids resources to keep kids out of the system. But once they are in, what do we do?"

❖ "Before people get to the system, [they] need resources/support."

❖ "We don't have enough family support, we need preventative family support, families are tired and need that help."

❖ "[The] length of staying at the JDC, has been longer since COVID… and that's the thing that I would change. The JDC is not for that, especially if they are waiting for placement. Secure placement, that's different… but mental health placement and group homes, the JDC should not be the solution. We see it a lot especially with girls. Especially girls sex trafficked, there aren't any places for them. Going back on the street isn't safe for them either."

❖ "Not a place for mental health concerns, shortage of facilities and MH [mental health] workers."

❖ "ATDs beds – kids who need a bed – shouldn't stay in JDC…it's not cost effective. Mobile RAI should be in existence – prevent kids from getting to [the] JDC."

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"Prevention [is the best] intervention."

— discussion participant

"Do I want [the] young people I work with to have better outcomes in the system? [Of course], but I don't want them in the system [in the first place]. I don't think about changing the system, I want to destroy it.

"The system comes from a history of enslavement and it's in relation to our system and incarceration. The prison system is tied to corporations, [and] we are expected to do the labor that will find another iteration [of that injustice]."

— discussion participant

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"It is a matter of whether there is someone you trust to have eyes on your kids while you're gone. You can't expect a single mom to work 3 jobs and then make sure that their kids aren't where they shouldn't be. Oversight shouldn't be just the state, or the government, it should be in the community. Preventative measures should be in place, so they don't feel like they have to do illegal actions to support themselves."

— discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: Understanding the centrality of basic needs, safety and support

Theme: Centrality of basic needs, safety, and support to whether (and to what extent) one avoids or encounters the juvenile justice system – including food security; safe and adequate housing; adequate caregivers; education and opportunities for growth; mentorship, trusted peers, and access to caring adults; hope for the future.

➢ Role of housing instability, domestic violence, and unsafe environments and other factors out of young peoples' control in destabilizing lives and increasing encounters with law enforcement, courts, juvenile detention and the juvenile justice system broadly;
➢ Youth attempting to escape domestic violence especially vulnerable to falling into crisis and intersecting with the juvenile justice system;
➢ Need to provide resources and support to youth and families, partner with community organizations and programs that are already successfully meeting community needs; more resources for girls and gender non-conforming youth.

Participants said:

❖ "Avoiding the system [requires] stable housing, [kids] need to be [able to just] be a kid in the house – [they] can't be the provider, basic needs taken care of, internet, options, opportunities, role models/peers; [they] need to have the opportunity to dream and realize the dream, need to meet basic needs – address those needs [or kids won't be able to avoid getting into trouble], accessibility to participation [in the community], building community through meeting [people] halfway…"

❖ "Who is doing the work [already]? Support them – invest in them."

❖ "Find ways to invest in what's happening [already that is successful locally or on a small scale]."

❖ "In my experience, I'm in the mud, on the daily, I see youth navigating the criminal justice system, I'm hopeful that we still have these services, there's only a handful. [At] Safe Zone and Face-to-Face, we're doing some amazing work and I'm thankful to be a part of it. We help youth navigate housing, workforce, healthcare, mental health care, help navigate court systems, probation help, music studio, integrated health."

❖ "CPS, community organizations [are] better at keeping families together but are underfunded. How much more support could be given to these organizations to build capacity?"

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More on: **Understanding the centrality of basic needs, safety and support**

Participants said:

❖ "One young man [in the conversation] who had been in foster care his entire life said that his main health-related social need was for a home. A number of other youth talked about experiences in the foster care system, many were originally from other states and ended up abandoned or stranded in Minnesota. Lots of disorder and lack of social resources."

❖ "[As a facilitator, I] heard a lot [from participants] about basic needs, voice and agency, having a space where your voice is heard and then there's follow up. Several people said, 'You come, and you hear us, but then there's no follow through.' Action has to come with the extraction of important insights."

❖ "[I] heard a little bit about how this [organization, Face-to-Face] is a place that was safe but also comfortable for them to come, how important or unique Face-to-Face was that they could come, the resources and support there, how the staff was engaging and being engaged with to create that community and youth friendly space. [Now, I'm] wondering about if some of the insights that came from here were in part because of the way that this team and space create this space for community. How do you expand what Face-to-Face is doing? Partner more? [Transformation and community investment] doesn't always have to be a new thing, [you] can build off or invest in things that already exist and are meeting needs for communities now. [Could there be] an expansion of F2F? Investment and collaboration, etc. Some of the staff working there brought in more people as well, some of them were brought in by [staff member] LaRochelle."

❖ "[A group of] 12 young black men [in the conversation] said one of the things they would do to transform justice and meet their health-related social needs is to reduce gun violence and exposure to fentanyl."

❖ "One young lady was stranded, [originally] from Chicago, after a domestic violence situation. Had to leave the room for a moment after circle share-in, really crying out for a sense of safety, connection and belonging. Adults in the room really connected to their stories and empathized."

❖ "[There was] a lot about fentanyl use and how it shows up on the train, the green line. Snelling is a hub, they smell the 'nasty plastic burning smell' on the train [was unavoidable], people use it on the train, even with kids on the train. The kids were especially aware of and sensitive to this, especially those who were trying to avoid using or encountering it."

❖ "There are not enough resources for girls and gender nonconforming folks."

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"**What could have helped [me] to avoid [the] juvenile justice system? I was on the road – only if I got out of the community I was in [could I have avoided juvenile justice].Trouble followed me – [I] feel like the trouble will catch you and lead you back in.**"

– youth participant

"Sometimes [you can't avoid getting in trouble], the trouble has to get away from you."

— youth participant

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"Fixing the societal system leads to [reduced] interaction with justice system."

– discussion participant

"**[When you're] walking on water, you could drown anytime.**"

"**Give kids another chance.**"

– youth participants

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: Understanding the centrality of basic needs, safety and support

Theme: **Community belonging and a solid "support system"** *is* **a basic need**; importance of trusting and safe intergenerational relationships, **stable home life and whole-family system support**; need more spaces and opportunities for community gathering; family and community-based support programs; older **mentors and positive peer connections protective** (youth with limited community support and resources fall back on harmful coping mechanisms).

Participants said:

- ❖ "[It's hard to avoid getting into trouble if you] don't have positive community."

- ❖ "50/50 – street life is meant for you to fail if you're in too deep."

- ❖ "For kids, [they] need one caring adult/trusting relationship."

- ❖ "Parent advocates to help families [would make a difference]."

- ❖ "Parents need support – practical and educational."

- ❖ "People living without parents – [still need] parenting without them."

- ❖ "Single father programs → daycare opportunities slow process or single-parent programs – applications too long for forms."

- ❖ "Creating belonging and people being invested in their community [is an important resource and preventative intervention]."

- ❖ "Building the safety net [is essential]."

- ❖ "Give every kid a trusted and committed adult (ex. a neighbor assigned at birth)."

- ❖ "A number of young people in the room displayed a lot of leadership qualities, able to describe and articulate their needs and struggles, need support to feel more empowered, mentored and invested in to build them up. But many organizations working on mentorship are struggling to get leaders and professionals of color who can fill these support roles."

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"[I] feel like it's me against the world – I have to stick to myself."

"You are what you be around."

– youth participants

"I'm blessed to be able to work with transformative justice working with youth. I am a criminal justice case manager, so when youth come into contact with the system, instead of charging them we can connect them with services. As a case manager, I don't just work with the youth, I work with the family. There's only so much change that a youth can have if the family isn't also able to be supported. One of the youth I'm working with is 18, and she just got on probation. We've had our ups and downs, but I'm very empathetic with the youth I work with. Because I was a teen mom, I know what it is to be in a situation where you need support. If they aren't taught the skills to make it, they won't have it. This young lady lost her mom and had issues with her boyfriend, but she just signed a lease today. She had one job when I met her, but she also, she did her Keys assessment, a coordinated assessment for homeless youth, so I worked with her to be able to find housing.

"After one year on the program, she'll get a section 8 voucher where she can move anywhere in the state. And she was just elated. I work to encourage these youth to know that they can do it and expose them to things that can really help open up new opportunities. Candle making classes, and theatrical performances, and pottery classes. You never know when you're planting the seeds what's going to grow. I see her taking accountability and making that growth. She got heated today because her mom took her birth certificate and she couldn't get it, so she was worried she wouldn't be able to get into this housing, so I talked her through it, help[ed] her process. A lot of kids don't have someone there to talk through these things with [them]. But by the end of the day, she walked out of there with her lease in hand, and I was able to remind her, look, I told you you could do it! I told you you were capable. I'm not the only case worker on my team; we're doing this together."

– discussion participant

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"A caring guardian is a resource many of these youth did not have; [there is an] assumption that some of what we think of as basic resources and foundational needs [is obvious when it isn't]."

— discussion facilitator

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

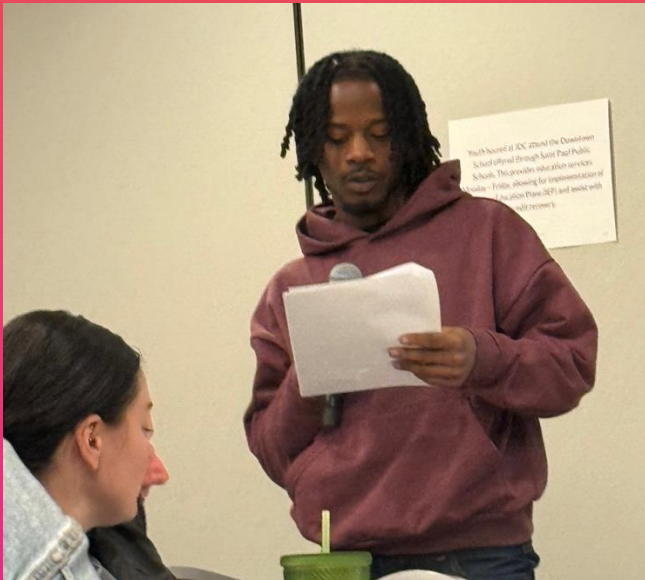**Priority: Understanding the centrality of basic needs, safety and support**

Theme: Need for more **mental health support, crisis prevention resources**; empathy, understanding of the special vulnerability of young people in crisis.

Participants said:

❖ "[We need] funding for mental [health treatment and] therapy."

❖ "[The Juvenile Justice System is] not a place for mental health concerns, [but there is a] shortage of facilities and MH [mental health] workers."

❖ "[A] common experience with ADHD is really early conditioning to avoid authority and situations where you can be criticized because you are constantly being criticized for not fitting into established social structures and expectations. [You can be] viewed as annoying or difficult, getting into trouble because of inability to conform to neurotypical expectations and environments. Makes it difficult to get access to resources, because something that is complicated and unfamiliar could go wrong and so comes to feel like you shouldn't even try because the risk is too high. Inability to access medication for ADHD, self-medicating with things like marijuana which can help people feel better but makes concentration and irritability issues worse for those who have ADHD."

❖ "[I] heard people talk about self-medication with weed, but not a whole lot of access to doctors, medication, stability and treatment."

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"Everyone should have access to mental health and basic necessity support."

– discussion participant

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"The system has failed us. It's colonized, it sends us back into another form of slavery. I've been in the justice system, I was one of those kids that got in trouble, but if you are a traumatized ten-year-old, you don't know what to do, you don't know how to handle that crisis.

"My daughter for example is autistic, and she had a crisis, she was overwhelmed and felt unsafe, so what she did is, she took out a knife and threatened her grandma. She felt unsafe and, in that crisis, — do you know what they did? They charged her with second degree [assault]. She was 16 and got two offenses. She didn't have any help, any resources. My daughter is low-functioning, her lawyer says she can't stand trial because of her impairments. And they're trying to slam my daughter with these charges.

"But these children don't know no better. I'm still in court trying to fight this, and she's 17 now. Our children don't have support when they deal with crises. And the gangs come in and go after the young ones who don't have that support. So, I'm all about reconstructing and decolonizing — because I'm going through it. I see it daily, because no one is coming into the home and helping what is broken in the home. No one is doing trauma-responsive alternatives. My daughter didn't know any better. She still doesn't understand."

— discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: Corrections and detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns

Theme: Desire (among currently institutionalized youth) for **productive development and labor, education and capacity-building toward a stable, healthy life** experience outside of juvenile detention.

Participants said:

- ❖ "[I want] help to get [an] education. [You're] not encouraged [to] but have to be self-motivated. [It's] hard to have motivation in [a juvenile detention center]…it'd be good to have more encouragement." – youth participant

- ❖ "[For] going to college – [all the] support is outside – not here." – youth participant

- ❖ "I have a good support system on the outside [of the detention center, and that helps]." – youth participant

- ❖ "[We need more] resources in [detention centers for] educational support." – youth participant

- ❖ "[I'm just] trying to survive – I know what I'm in here [at a correctional facility] for. I can't complain about that." – youth participant

- ❖ "No one knows what be going on." – youth participant

- ❖ "[Juvenile justice is] not treating the problem – just treating the symptom." – youth participant

- ❖ "[When I talk about this issue,] I try to say solutions, [like if] they had an option to go to a training program or the Air Force/Navy. I'd like to see that offered to anyone, let them know that there are more options out there."

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"[I] feel like [we're] just sitting in here doing our time [in detention]."

– youth participant

"[I] would like to learn – so [we] have something to do that can use when get out [of the correctional facility]."

– youth participant

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"If you're in [a correctional facility] for a long time – [you] need opportunities to earn more."

– youth participant

RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: Corrections and detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns

Theme: Ensuring youth staying in juvenile detention centers have **adequate food, beds, clothing, hygiene supplies, and time for video and in-person visits** with family, loved ones and caregivers.

Participants of the youth conversations said:

- ❖ "[What would we] change [at the correctional facility]?
    - [The] food – [the] best food is tacos, [but] breakfast [is] not good. Small portion[s], cold, not a lot of flavor – needs to taste better. [A] P&J sandwich [is] not dinner – portions [need] to be full.
    - Clothes – need to be cleaned better.
    - Better shoes.
    - Better clothes.
    - Better beds
    - [Don't need to] decorate the rooms – want white walls – don't want to decorate – not going to be here that long."

- ❖ "[The correctional facility] need[s] more staff. Some work a lot. Especially in the pod[s]."

- ❖ "[The] staff [here] is good – a lot of staff care – will have a conversation – more privileges."

- ❖ "Video visits should be longer."

- ❖ "Everything else is alright – [it] ain't supposed to be perfect."

- ❖ "[If I could] change one thing about the system, [what would I change]?
    - Everything.
    - More options for better hygiene supplies, better mattress.
    - Home passes.
    - Not staying so long.
    - Should be temporary – but for longer stays it should be more comfortable."

- ❖ "[This correctional facility is] one of the better ones. [There are] a lot of supports."

- ❖ "Resource[s should be] provided to kids that they need regardless of case status."

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: Corrections and detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns

Theme: Need to be **treated with dignity and respect** by detention center staff; law enforcement should avoid treating youth and families aggressively, show up respectfully and minimize the use of force against families and young people in crisis; would benefit from **mental health crisis response and conflict de-escalation training.**

Participants of the youth conversations said:

❖ [Was there] anyone [who] helped [ease] the experience [of staying at a correctional facility]? Staff – their energy, respect [really helped]."

❖ "Some staff – have bad shit [going on] at home – [and end up] taking [it] out on us."

❖ "What could have made experience easier or harder?
  • Police and judges [are] making it harder.
  • [My] case involved police – very [much] acting disrespectful to [my] family."
  • Using power against them [makes it harder]."

Other participants said:

❖ "Make the decision you'd want made for your kid not just a name on a piece of paper – use a different [approach, one based in] empathy."

❖ "Kids like lots of whipped cream on their hot chocolate, [they do kid things] – seeing kids as kids, even those in justice system, [is really important]."

❖ "[There should be] trauma-informed training for the juvenile justice system. Empathy training. Looking at people and what type of empathetic training can they have. Judges, lawyers, parole officers."

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: Corrections and detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns

Theme: Youth (and families/guardians) **need support for managing the stress of court appearances**; need better understanding of **young people's special vulnerability to the sometimes-unpredictable decision-making of adults** in the system (esp. as decisions often impact youth with the fewest resources for support), particular concern about power of law enforcement, judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals, detention center staff over youth.

➢ Perception that sentencing is sometimes disconnected from severity of behavior or seriousness of criminal activities, amount of discretion available to judges and other decisionmakers creates **perception of injustice and arbitrary treatment**;
➢ Concern about the motivations **and quality of court-provided public defenders** ("'public pretenders' [are] there to put you in jail"); need to bring judges and probation officers in as compassionate and understanding partners in change.

Participants said:

❖ "[The] way things are run – [the] sentence [is] not connected to [the] crime."

❖ "Judges [make things harder], planning shit, [they can] change your life with one 'little smack.'" – youth participant

❖ "[The people who make decisions about my life] don't even know me – [they're] judging people off [the] challenges [they face]." – youth participant

❖ "[Judges] only listen to the state – [the] prosecutor." – youth participant

❖ "Judges don't listen to [your] story." – youth participant

❖ "[The] probation system is broken, probation officers [are] not committed."

❖ "Yes [I have had contact with the juvenile justice system], they dropped my case because it was bullshit."

❖ "[When it comes to] court processes – why does it need to be scary?" – youth participant

❖ "[The idea of being] scared straight – doesn't work."

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"[Something that makes my situation] harder [is] attorneys, judges. [It feels like they're] not on your side – not acting in your interest. [The] 'public pretender' [public defenders are] there to put you in jail – [they] don't care about what's in your best interest."

– youth participant

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"[It feels like the people who are supposed to be helping me are] actively working against [my case]. [They] hide stuff – [I] didn't get [important] papers, [it's a hindrance when they are] not informing [you] about what's happening."

– youth participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

More on: Corrections and detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns

More on system power and the perception of arbitrary decision-making/unequal treatment; the need for more advocacy and navigation support, participants said:

- ❖ "Judges have a lot of power." – youth participant

- ❖ "[I have] two kids in school: One [is] lighter [skinned] – gets away with things. [But my] darker-skinned [child is] labeled [a] problem child, even though [they are] engaged, [get] good grades, respectful. [There is] disparate treatment [because of colorism]."

- ❖ "[They should] judge [you] off individual behavior – not collective punishment." – youth participant

- ❖ "For the youth, their soul gets snatched behind bars for things they didn't do. The lack of adequate representation, public defenders that fail our youth. It's underfunded and money tends to dictate how adequate their representation is."

- ❖ "[I have] noticed through all of these conversations that the teenage participants have so much more accountability than expected, almost too willing to take responsibility for the difficulties in their lives and less likely to pinpoint the systemic systems and issues that bear down upon them."

- ❖ "I want to become a quality attorney for people that can't afford them. For youth that are justice involved, [it's important to consider] how drugs and alcohol and addiction affect our youth as well."

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"[There should be more] court support to help families navigate the court."

– discussion participant

"**Navigating social and health related resources that do exist [can be] especially difficult for young people, including issues like not necessarily having access to [their] own documentation (like birth certificates) or understanding how to deal with structural barriers. [There is an] overwhelming lack of resources, knowledge.**"

– discussion facilitator

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: Corrections and detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns

Theme: Institutionalized youth and their families need **clear, consistent communication about their cases**, their futures, and any changes in their circumstances.

➢ Need for better communication practices for informing youth about options, steps, and opportunities to improve their circumstances, and about available supportive resources for youth, parents and families, the broader community;

➢ More support for navigating systems and available resources; uncertainty plays a role in mental health, stress and anxiety.

Participants said:

❖ "[There's a] lack of awareness around what rules are, [and what] resources are available."

❖ "Parents don't know what to ask for, because they don't know the resources exist. Like they don't know that they can ask for help in a certain area. For example, they don't know they can get help with rent assistance. People that work in the system, they are so engrained in it… so they're like how do you not know about this resource?"

❖ "Parents [need to] understand the role and resources of the justice system."

❖ "What makes you feel safe? When I know what's going to happen. I have some control." – youth participant

❖ "[We need more] court support to help families navigate the court."

❖ "[In our conversation I heard] a lot about the inability to access things that might be available because of a lack of knowledge about them, or the expectation that kids have the ability to do a lot of this work to find out what is out there and go through all the hoops for qualification, paperwork, navigating systems."

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"[I] need more information [about] what's happening [with my case] and what will happen – [I] don't know how to start."

"[I'd like to] know what's coming – what may come. [I] should know more [about my own case]."

"Not knowing sets [us] up to dig a deeper hole – [there's so much] anxiety about what's coming."

– youth participants

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"We are all operating in silos, and people are operating in their own situations. If you don't need resources, you're not worried about them... If you're doing well, you don't know what the services are for those who need them. For example, the homeless population doesn't know about resources for the justice system and vice versa. Even though they should.

"If the community broadly doesn't know about a resource, then chances are nobody knows or not a lot of people know about it. There are great resources and programs, but who knows about them and what is their reputation? Are youth and families actually excited about using them? How do we change that and make programs attractive?"

— discussion participant

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"**Everyone should know about the resources [that exist], not just the people who need them now, because they may later, or someone they know may need it later.**"

– discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: **Corrections and detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns**

Theme: **Youth internalize messaging that they are inherently bad people, problems to be solved, or a "menace to society,"** desire **not to be defined by encounters with juvenile justice**; need to **combat stigma** of experience with juvenile justice, separate harmful or unproductive behavior from inherent worth and life potential; sense of **intense vulnerability to environmental influences** like violence, housing and food instability, paired with adult-scale and/or long-term consequences – produces sense of desperation, inability to make mistakes.

Participants said:

❖ "[Kids take on an] oversize [sense of personal] responsibility — both systemic and familial expectations and responsibility influences some to lean almost too heavily into accepting responsibility for everything that goes wrong in a kid's life, [so we] need to take into account the broader context for these issues."

❖ "[We] need to remove the stigma of 'criminal' and the bias that comes to mind."

❖ "[There are] barriers to what can be expunged, and people treat arrest/MH [mental health] incidents [as reasons] to stop people from getting jobs."

❖ "EJJ – can hang over you." – youth participant

❖ "[If you get a] PO violation – you get an adult sentence." – youth participant

❖ "Community is a lot of what ends up changing the outcome, you can't expect people to go 6 months in Red Wing and then put them back into their community and not expect them to the same thing, especially if it's their livelihood or that's how they make money. Some of the change shouldn't be with Juvenile Justice but more with the economy. We have shamed the idea of welfare and put certain ideals and judgments on welfare, without realizing the damage done."

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: Corrections and detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns
More on internalization of stigma, long-term consequences and treating youth as adults:

Participants said:

- ❖ [We need to change] how they look at kids. [If you're] 16 – charging as [an] adult [means] going to prison.

- ❖ "[It feels like you] cannot mess up." – youth participant

- ❖ "Give kids another chance." – youth participant

- ❖ "[When it comes to the system, I was] pushed into it – [by] older kids, [my] neighborhood." – youth participant

- ❖ Small group discussion dialogue:

  - As a person of color — adult or juvenile — you're always looked at in a certain way, just going around your day. We're a target.
  - Or you just grow up in a neighborhood where you can mess up and it doesn't get noticed, because they're just not as policed.
  - I will co-sign that.
  - I would say that if you have the right complexion, you have the resources available to you. You are looked at like you could do anything.
  - You can run for president.
  - If you fit the narrative, you make everyone comfortable, you look like the people in power, it's easier to navigate the system because "you look just like my baby."
  - To build off what you said, my brother is light skinned. My mama is light skinned. And for us growing up, people would judge me before they'd judge him, look at me before they look at him. People have preconceived notions.
  - Or if you speak well and can advocate for yourself, they say, oh you're so articulate.
  - A kind of fetishization.
  - Yeah, or just because you're young, people think you can be taken advantage of.
  - To build off what she said, you mentioned being able to articulate yourself, but even within the black community people will say you "talk white" or if you watch anime, or you sag your pants — of course there is slang, and code-switching.

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"[I've] been in [a correctional facility] 4 times – I'm a bad kid. I know what I did, and it is what it is."

– youth participant

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"[The] prosecutor call[ed] me a 'menace to society.'"

– youth participant

"If I'm outside [the correctional facility], [I] can't get alcohol [because I'm] not an adult, [but] inside, I'm an adult."

– youth participant

"**Do your time, don't let your time do you.**"

"**Where you came from doesn't define you.**"

— youth participants

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: **A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)**

Theme: **Law enforcement should reflect communities it serves** (officers who live in the areas they police and reflect local community diversity); perception of uneven policing (wealthier, whiter neighborhoods less policed, leading to different police-community relations); need for **more positive interactions and collaboration between police and community.**

Participants said:

- ❖ "[I think we need more] bonding between people, specifically between police and community."

- ❖ "Not seeing police [makes me feel safer in my neighborhood]."

- ❖ "[We need police to be] people who look like us."

- ❖ "Seeing and having connection with people we know [makes us safer]."

- ❖ "[What makes me feel safe is] the ability to move around without the possibility of being harmed."

- ❖ "[Safety means a certain] familiarity of an area."

- ❖ "Understanding how to build community and relationships [is essential]."

- ❖ "[Law enforcement should be] a partner in meeting the needs [of community members]."

- ❖ "[We need] policing partners."

- ❖ "[There should be] trauma-informed training for the juvenile justice system. Empathy training. Looking at people and what type of empathetic training can they have. Judges, lawyers, parole officers."

- ❖ "[I would change] everything that's possible to change."

- ❖ "[If I could change one thing, it would be law enforcement's] interactions with people of color."

- ❖ "[I would feel safer with] less policing."

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"What would change [my] mind about the police? Transparency. Building trust in our community, understanding the people that they are policing."

– discussion participant

"Correctional officers have little interactions with Black people who aren't incarcerated."

– discussion participant

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"**Law enforcement could be a better partner –
[an] actual [force] for [positive] change.**"

– discussion participant

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"Why don't police [and community] work together?"

– discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)

Theme: Developing a **restorative rather than punitive system** ("rehabilitation first") **which takes the context of young people's lives into account**, willingness to pilot and study social support mechanisms such as universal basic income; need for youth to **have a supportive care team and community of support** – including committed, well-trained and compassionate parole officers – **more (and better) whole-person supports for transition** from detention and/or after encounters with law enforcement and juvenile justice broadly; partnership and shared support expectations among law enforcement, juvenile justice professionals, and parents, guardians, family**; more resources for parents and families** (especially toward stabilizing basic needs like food, housing, childcare, and educational resources); terror an ineffective rehabilitation method for supporting youth in developing healthy, safe and productive lives.

Participants said:

❖ "Restorative justice is so important."

❖ "[We need to rethink] the care team around youth."

❖ "People who are punishing [youth] should be focused on opportunities."

❖ "[We need to] understand what they hope for, [their] dreams."

❖ "Kids will say whatever they think you want to hear. [We] need to understand [their] home life.

❖ "Understand [the] whole person."

❖ "[The juvenile justice system is] holding people in [corrections facilities] locked up who need help."

❖ "More rehabilitation. Not just punishment. Punishment – makes it worse."

❖ "[Kids] need mentors [assigned] like they assign POs [parole officers]."

❖ "Work with some parents who want to see [kids] punished [to] understand their perspective and provide [the] support needed for [the] family."

❖ "Long-term cases don't have [what they need to] bounce back from jail (not enough support for after [serving] time)."

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"[Juvenile justice should be] more about healing than punishment."

— discussion participant

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"[People] need a community of support – government should facilitate community connection, incentivize access to support: food, childcare, small stipend – quality parenting class matters, role play [is pedagogically] important."

– discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)

More on restorative justice, home life context and whole-person responses:

Participants said:

- ❖ "Take context into account. [There's] a lot leading and before kids get into [the juvenile justice] system. Do that by looking at kids' behavior from early days."

- ❖ "Fixing the societal system leads to [reduced] interaction with justice system."

- ❖ "Support parents and teachers."

- ❖ "Acknowledge difference and that [that] can impact experience[s with juvenile justice]."

- ❖ "Encourage parents to understand their perspective and experience."

- ❖ "The public defender's office does a great job with the empathy. I much prefer talking to the public defenders because they talk to the youth and know what's going on. For ex[ample], this kid has a problem with their foster parent, and it's been a repetitive problem… that lets us know there is a different solution to explore here. One of the attorneys, started as a public defender and she has a good understanding of what people have gone through. If it's a felony charge, knocking it down to a misdemeanor. Sometimes we can see 8-9 charges and only go with 2 because they know it's the right thing to do."

- ❖ "How can you build trust? Don't [just] expect trust – [you] have to build it. Being present – continuous [to provide stability]. Partner to get through the challenge."

- ❖ "[For] judges – building trust [looks like] using life [context] of [a kid's] case [to make decisions] – focus on the kid what is forward [in their future], [be] present – reenforce the relationships that can provide the support. See the kid as a kid. [And by] Looping back to the previous encounters."

- ❖ "[Success would look like when] every case does restorative justice."

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"**The US should be a testing ground for different systems that could work, like rehabilitative programming or universal basic income… like give a check every month or so to an anonymous demographic and see what kind of change it can make. We shouldn't shy away from that (trying new things)."**

– discussion participant

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"Improve [the] juvenile justice system – rehabilitation first."

– discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: **A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)**

Theme: Professionals within social services, service provision, and juvenile justice feel **stymied by restrictions** on what they can do to help support the individual needs of youth in their caseloads; perception that care and commitment to **positive change needs to be relational and human**, extending **beyond rigid professional roles**; that system rules and procedures are **structured in such a way as to make transformation difficult, slow or impossible** and that those employed within the justice system have incentives to prevent or inhibit change.

Participants said:

- ❖ "Autonomy from [one's] employer [is sometimes necessary] to do what's needed for kids."

- ❖ "When youth are thriving, it makes me feel good. The opposite [is also true. I feel terrible]: when feeling restrictions on supporting youth."

- ❖ "People who work in corrections [have] got to be creative."

- ❖ "Personal connections is [*sic*] more important that job descriptions."

- ❖ "Metro transit police / St. Paul Police jurisdiction [issues come to mind]. Why wouldn't they help anyway even though it's not their jurisdiction?"

- ❖ "Parole officers can make the choice to have a positive impact instead of just following procedure."

- ❖ "Court administration – can slow changes."

- ❖ "Judges need to be bought in [to the idea of transformation and positive change]."

- ❖ "Everyone in system has a poison pill to make things difficult."

- ❖ "[Do I think transformation of juvenile justice can be transformed?] Absolutely not!"

- ❖ "Once you're in, you're theirs."

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"[The] system moves slowly intentionally to make it hard to change."

– discussion participant

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"I don't believe the system is broken but is doing what it was designed to do. I do believe people can transform and change the system. I gave up part of my career to drive and to help my brother who was involved in the criminal justice system in Chicago. I had to put a lot of work into transforming the way he thought, bringing him to churches, community centers. I worked with youth build. I believe in what people were saying, but it takes enormous work to do that transformation."

— discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)

More on systemic rigidity, structural barriers to change, need for partnership and collaboration.

Participants said:

- ❖ "Why is it so hard to translate the vision [for transformation] into practice?"

- ❖ "[It's] difficult to do the cross-functional work."

- ❖ "[The] county makes it difficult to do contracts."

- ❖ "If there are more people who are willing to take on these jobs and make change, [it will be more possible]."

- ❖ "[You have to] have the right people in place to make these changes."

- ❖ "It's a system, needs to be dismantled and rebuilt."

- ❖ "The wheels of justice are slow, but we're uniquely positioned. A lot of states are thinking about what we have the capacity to do, what we have capability to do."

- ❖ "The funding and resources are available [to make the changes we need], [but] the people in power are not wanting to fund this. It would be silly to assume billionaires aren't targeted to the function of this country, I think in terms of these systems I want to push back on having to go through foundations and organizations, and it's where the system needs to be dismantled. We shouldn't have to beg the same people that grew rich on the existing system."

- ❖ "We shouldn't have to go through the powers that be [to make change]."

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"People in power are stopping the transformation."

– discussion participant

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"A lot of times the transformation we need to see involves hands on work with youth involved in the system and takes funding and additional resources. I think it's possible, but what does it look like if it's not severely underfunded and have the staff to actually run it?"

– discussion participant

"Transformation happens in small stages."

– discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)

Theme: System **accountability, not "the blame game"** – need for transparency and accountability to the community for outcomes, treatment of youth and families; importance of strong leadership dedicated to positive change in partnership with community members and those most impacted; regular reviews of existing programming and interventions to ensure efficacy and efficiency.

Participants said:

❖ "Superiors needing to take more accountability for lack of concern and connection to individuals."

❖ "[I want to see the] system holding itself accountable."

❖ "Supervisors and [the] superintendent could change things at [the youth corrections facilities]."

❖ "It would be good to see some upper leadership from Juvenile Justice and Ramsey County [at these conversations], but we know that other things are going on today (funeral). Leadership needs to be here to know what the recommendations are."

❖ "We are spending a lot of money keeping youth in placement… and certain youth spend a lot of time in placement, and then when they come home, they are back again. The services are there but [leaders] aren't supporting the youth the way they should."

❖ "What we currently DO spend our money [on]… it hasn't changed things. It's how we have done things for centuries."

❖ "There is a fine line when engaging with decision makers. [They] need to hold some of the power - systems people worry about risk. [But the] community needs to be the conduit for knowledge information. Community organizations try to do that – but it's hard. [A] case manager can support the community and county system information sharing."

❖ "People have the power [to make change]. People should have the power – but don't always know that they do. People don't know how to hold system accountable. Right now, [Ramsey County should] understand that people have the power."

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"**[The] system is not accountable so why do we say we need to hold kids [to] accountability?**"

– discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)
More on accountability, leadership:

Participants said:

❖ "[The] average person can't effect change on system – [but we] can make change in self and community."

❖ "[I] wish there was more education about how people in power get power – push power through community."

❖ "Leaders play the blame game."

❖ "[There's a] lack of skills and training of staff. There should be discipline and accountability."

❖ "[We need] system accountability."

❖ "Why is the system the way it is? We have to understand the whole system. [Can there be a] district conviction review?"

❖ "Need to have a truth and reconciliation process."

❖ "[Right now, it feels like the] rights we have can [be] taken away [with impunity]."

❖ "Leaders have staff do community engagement trainings and nothing happens."

❖ "[In our conversation I] heard a lot about basic needs, voice and agency, having a space where your voice is heard and then there's follow up. Several people said, 'You come, and you hear us, but then there's no follow through.' Action has to come with the extraction of important insights."

❖ "Culturally specific supports [are] important opportunities to find and use shared values."

❖ "Culturally appropriate thinking about providing inclusive supports [matter] but [we should be] ensuring supports [that] are best practice for kids [are put in place]."

❖ "Evidence-based supports [would make a difference]."

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"Where are the dollars really going? Who is deciding? [We] want more community conversation about what does or does not get built."

– discussion participant

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"[We need] senators or representatives [who] are open to hearing from people about what they want."

– discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: **A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)**

Theme: Importance of **community involvement, bottom-up change**, organizing and community-based transformation of systems; need for **regular engagement and the sharing of power with community** on decision-making and evaluation of community impact; not always clear to community members who decisionmakers are and how they can be engaged; need clear pathways for community-decisionmaker collaboration and accountability; **leverage existing community resources**; negative community experiences with leadership (ex. County Attorney's Office) detrimental to trust and cooperation with community members, perception that those in power are not always the ones with the best solutions or interventions to address intractable problems.

Participants said:

❖ "Transformation of systems starts with the people – masses of people dismantling systems."

❖ "Who is included in making decision[s]? [It should be] those – most impacted, those [the system] should be serving."

❖ "Community should spread the word – know your rights – proactively know how to interact [with the juvenile justice] system."

❖ "[It should be the] community working together to solve problems."

❖ "[Sometimes it's] hard to figure out who actually has power."

❖ "Power comes from the community for true change."

❖ "Giving people a voice to make [them] feel heard [is an important step]."

❖ "We are here, and change is coming."

❖ "We are here, and we will make change whether you like it or not."

❖ "[I'd like to see] young people mobilizing instead of systems pointing the fingers at each other."

❖ "Something extremely horrible has to happen for people to change."

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"I think change happens at the top, but small-scale change happens at the bottom. The people currently in power have an incentive to keep the system as it is and not change it."

– discussion participant

"[It's] not always the directors/leaders who know how to make the change [that is needed]."

— discussion participant

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"I felt like a lot of changes are made in top management levels, and small changes at the bottom, but it's always a challenge for community members to make changes and for the top level to hear our voices. It's a constant challenge and it goes on."

– discussion participant

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)

More on community involvement, bottom-up change, trust-building:

Participants said:

- ❖ "The government works for us – we outnumber them."

- ❖ "Wanting it isn't enough → [we] need action and steps."

- ❖ "I'm still hopeful [that change is possible] although I know it won't happen in my lifetime. We are the system, the more we do it the same, the [more that people's] needs aren't going to be met. I believe in the possibility of transformation; [but] it's going to take the same amount of energy/resources to transform the system."

- ❖ "A few years I looked at things on a national level and thought about all the terrible things [that were going on]. But you can make a difference with our neighbors, communities."

- ❖ "We shouldn't have to go through the powers that be [to make change]."

"**Include community pre-criminal involvement as a part of the justice system.**"

— discussion participant

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"[I'd like to speak to] power – the power structures and dynamic. Those in power are not wanting to be perceived as weak and not sharing power. There has to be a shift in mentality and where power resides and the ability to influence. Everybody has a role. Those as the 'bottom' could be more empowered to impact change."

– discussion participant

"Every person has to be a changer."

"You don't need a title or organization to make change – [it's about] finding the gifts we each have. We all have a role."

"Everyone has to come together to make change."

– discussion participants

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RC Engage! Juvenile Justice *Community-Sourced Feedback & Priorities*

Priority: A better juvenile justice system together (community-system collaboration)

Theme: Listening to people's stories with empathy, seeking to understand the humanity of those who come into contact with the juvenile justice system, and the broader context influencing those contacts, trauma-informed approach and empathy training for all roles across the broad justice system network; **responding to minors who encounter the juvenile justice system as children, community responsibility for young people** (balance of responsibility upon adults to provide safe, secure and supportive growing environments for youth, not on youth to shoulder the burden of their own circumscribed circumstances, needs and challenges; tension between treatment outside of juvenile justice where youth are treated as minors unable to make decisions about their lives, and within the system, where they are sometimes treated as adults when it comes to punitive administration).

Participants said:

❖ "What should you say to people in power? Kids aren't committing [the] crimes you think. Adults need to take personal responsibility. We care about kids."

❖ "Parental accountability [plays a role]. Parents providing [is essential but requires support]. Family trauma leads to bad decisions for kids."

❖ "[We] need to understand [kids'] home life."

❖ "Understand [the] whole person."

❖ "The person who gives the initial contact [with juvenile justice], where are they and how do they respond to it?"

❖ "[We need to reform] booking procedures (right now kids have to turn themselves in at the adult jail)."

❖ "[For] people who feel removed, there may be a lack of empathy. Building community-wide empathy and understanding [will make a huge difference]."

❖ "[Something that causes] negative [outcomes is] speaking to children without guidance / understanding."

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"**Make the decision you'd want made for your kid, not just a name on a piece of paper – use a different [approach, one based in] empathy.**"

— discussion participants

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"[Kids need] someone to listen to [them], have support, relating, understand that they are human."

— discussion participants

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRIORITIES & THEMES (Summary)

Prevention and proactive supports

Key Theme:

- ✓ Importance of preventing contact with juvenile justice in the first place; reducing use of JDC as a catch-all for youth in crisis; mobilizing other supportive resources for crisis response.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRIORITIES & THEMES (Summary)

Community Priority #2:

Understanding the centrality of basic needs, safety, and support

Key Themes:

- ✓ Centrality of basic needs, safety, and support to whether (and to what extent) one avoids or encounters the juvenile justice system – including food security; safe and adequate housing; adequate caregivers; education and opportunities for growth; mentorship, trusted peers, and access to caring adults; hope for the future.

    - ✓ Role of housing instability, domestic violence, and unsafe environments and other factors out of young peoples' control in destabilizing lives and increasing encounters with law enforcement, courts, juvenile detention and the juvenile justice system broadly.

    - ✓ Youth attempting to escape domestic violence especially vulnerable to falling into crisis and intersecting with the juvenile justice system.

    - ✓ Need to provide resources and support to youth and families, partner with community organizations and programs that are already successfully meeting community needs; more resources for girls and gender non-conforming youth.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRIORITIES & THEMES (Summary)

Understanding the centrality of basic needs, safety, and support

Key Themes, continued:

✓ Community belonging and a solid "support system" *is* a basic need; importance of trusting and safe intergenerational relationships, stable home life and whole-family system support; need more spaces and opportunities for community gathering; family and community-based support programs; older mentors and positive peer connections protective (youth with limited community support and resources fall back on harmful coping mechanisms).

✓ Need for more mental health support, crisis prevention resources; empathy, understanding of the special vulnerability of young people in crisis.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRIORITIES & THEMES (Summary)

Addressing corrections facilities, detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns

Key Themes:

- ✓ Desire (among currently institutionalized youth) for productive development and labor, education and capacity-building toward a stable, healthy life experience outside of juvenile detention.

- ✓ Ensuring youth staying in juvenile detention centers have adequate food, beds, clothing, hygiene supplies, and time for video and in-person visits with family, loved ones and caregivers.

- ✓ Need to be treated with dignity and respect by detention center staff; law enforcement should avoid treating youth and families aggressively, show up respectfully and minimize the use of force against families and young people in crisis; would benefit from mental health crisis response and conflict de-escalation training.

- ✓ Institutionalized youth and their families need clear, consistent communication about their cases, their futures, and any changes in their circumstances.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRIORITIES & THEMES (Summary)

Addressing corrections facilities, detention center-specific issues, needs, concerns

Key Themes, continued:

✓ Youth (and families/guardians) need support for managing the stress of court appearances; need better understanding of young people's special vulnerability to the sometimes-unpredictable decision-making of adults in the system (esp. as decisions often impact youth with the fewest resources for support), particular concern about power of law enforcement, judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals, detention center staff over youth.

   ✓ Perception that sentencing is sometimes disconnected from severity of behavior or seriousness of criminal activities, amount of discretion available to judges and other decisionmakers creates perception of injustice and arbitrary treatment.

   ✓ Concern about the motivations and quality of court-provided public defenders ("'public pretenders' [are] there to put you in jail"); need to bring judges and probation officers in as compassionate and understanding partners in change.

✓ Youth internalize messaging that they are inherently bad people, problems to be solved, or a "menace to society," desire not to be defined by encounters with juvenile justice; need to combat stigma of experience with juvenile justice, separate harmful or unproductive behavior from inherent worth and life potential; sense of intense vulnerability to environmental influences like violence, housing and food instability, paired with adult-scale and/or long-term consequences – produces

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PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRIORITIES & THEMES (Summary)

Building a better juvenile justice system together: identifying opportunities for community-system collaboration

Key Themes:

✓ Law enforcement should reflect communities it serves (officers who live in the areas they police and reflect local community diversity); perception of uneven policing (wealthier, whiter neighborhoods less policed, leading to different police-community relations); need for more positive interactions and collaboration between police and community.

✓ Developing a restorative rather than punitive system ("rehabilitation first") which takes the context of young people's lives into account, willingness to pilot and study social support mechanisms such as universal basic income; need for youth to have a supportive care team and community of support – including committed, well-trained and compassionate parole officers – more (and better) whole-person supports for transition from detention and/or after encounters with law enforcement and juvenile justice broadly; partnership and shared support expectations among law enforcement, juvenile justice professionals, and parents, guardians, family; more resources for parents and families (especially toward stabilizing basic needs like food, housing, childcare, and educational resources); terror an ineffective rehabilitation method for supporting youth in developing healthy, safe and productive lives.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRIORITIES & THEMES (Summary)

Building a better juvenile justice system together: identifying opportunities for community-system collaboration

Key Themes, continued:

✓ Professionals within social services, service provision, and juvenile justice feel stymied by restrictions on what they can do to help support the individual needs of youth in their caseloads; perception that care and commitment to positive change needs to be relational and human, extending beyond rigid professional roles; that system rules and procedures are structured in such a way as to make transformation difficult, slow or impossible and that those employed within the justice system have incentives to prevent or inhibit change.

✓ System accountability, not "the blame game" – need for transparency and accountability to the community for outcomes, treatment of youth and families; importance of strong leadership dedicated to positive change in partnership with community members and those most impacted; regular reviews of existing programming and interventions to ensure efficacy and efficiency.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRIORITIES & THEMES (Summary)

Building a better juvenile justice system together: identifying opportunities for community-system collaboration

Key Themes, continued:

✓ Importance of community involvement, bottom-up change, organizing and community-based transformation of systems; need for regular engagement and the sharing of power with community on decision-making and evaluation of community impact; not always clear to community members who decisionmakers are and how they can be engaged; need clear pathways for community-decisionmaker collaboration and accountability; leverage existing community resources; negative community experiences with leadership (ex. County Attorney's Office) detrimental to trust and cooperation with community members, perception that those in power are not always the ones with the best solutions or interventions to address intractable problems.

✓ Listening to people's stories with empathy, seeking to understand the humanity of those who come into contact with the juvenile justice system, and the broader context influencing those contacts, trauma-informed approach and empathy training for all roles across the broad justice system network; responding to minors who encounter the juvenile justice system as children, community responsibility for young people (balance of responsibility upon adults to provide safe, secure and supportive growing environments for youth, not on youth to shoulder the burden of their own circumscribed circumstances, needs and challenges; tension between treatment outside of juvenile justice where youth are treated as minors unable to make decisions about their lives, and within the system, where they are sometimes treated as adults when it comes to punitive

Questions?
Reflections?

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