

REIMAGINING  
YOUTH DIVERSION  
THROUGH  
**HOLISTIC**  
APPROACHES



A 2021 CHIBYDESIGN PROJECT



Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of creative alternatives for responding to conflict -- alternatives to passive or aggressive responses, alternatives to violence.

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*American Journalist*

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# REIMAGINING YOUTH DIVERSION THROUGH HOLISTIC APPROACHES

A report spotlighting the importance of embedding accountability and community-centric practices into justice systems.



# 1

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Chicago is committed to collaborative reforms to youth diversion in Chicago. The City aims to replace the current youth diversion mechanism, the Juvenile Intervention and Support Center (JISC), with a service-oriented alternative model that incorporates opportunities for pre-arrest diversion and deflection and redefines the role of law enforcement. Following the Office of the Inspector General’s (OIG) February 2020 audit, the City has undertaken a comprehensive effort to understand the challenges of the existing systems for diverting youth away from the justice system and what changes are needed to support youth and families better.

In the short term, the City has implemented reforms at the JISC in response to the Consent Decree’s youth-related paragraphs (paragraphs 32-36), recommendations from the OIG audit, and Mayor Lightfoot’s priorities. These reforms aim to make the JISC process more trauma-informed and improve the experience for youth. The City has revamped and expanded JISC partnerships with community providers to connect young people with high-quality diversion opportunities such as mentoring, counseling, and job skills training. Social service providers and legal advocates are now embedded on-site at the JISC to better assist young people and their families through the diversion process.

The City aims to replace JISC with a new model for youth deflection and diversion. Over the past year, Mayor Lightfoot’s administration and City departments have heard the community’s many concerns about the JISC, which has signaled that large-scale changes are necessary but are not accomplishable within the current structure. The Mayor’s Office understands a critical need for a new model for youth diversion in Chicago to appropriately support young people and their families. Community voices, especially young people, directly impacted by the JISC and the justice system are critical parts of that strategy. The vision and principles outlined in this report will be a north star for the City as they work with partners to develop the future of youth diversion in Chicago.



The diagram above illustrates the co-designed framework developed during workshops with community leaders. Participants recommended the City lead with the following visions to develop a new model for youth deflection and diversion:

- Preventative, not reactive
- Restorative
- Youth-led

Each of these three visions are supported by principles to guide the City’s approach to achieving its goals. Some of the principles fall under multiple visions and this shows the interconnectedness between community recommendations.

## PROJECT PARTNERS



### CHIBYDESIGN

ChiByDesign is a social and civic innovation design firm pioneering the use of co-design and social science approaches. We are a black-owned, people-of-color-led organization, where we welcome and nurture new perspectives.

We are bold in our collaborative approach to create anti-racist outcomes. We view social and civic concerns through an anti-racist lens. We seek to understand and redesign the social technologies that create inequities and power-based structures. We are firm believers that empowering the folks closest to the challenge with the tools and mindsets of design can unlock limitless creative and effective solutions. Our work is grounded in co-creating an equitable and sustainable future with you.



### THE CHICAGO COMMUNITY TRUST

The Chicago Community Trust (CCT) envisions a thriving, equitable, and connected Chicago region where people of all races, places, and identities have the opportunity to reach their potential. This partnership between ChiByDesign, the Chicago Community Trust, and the Mayor's Office supports an effort to envision a new justice system that restores communities and provides youth at higher risk of being impacted by violence with the supports they need in times of crisis. Engaging community members in conversations about a new system for youth diversion might look like informed the youth diversion report's findings. The voices and perspectives of those that current justice system practices have impacted are central in creating and implementing necessary change.

## PARTICIPANTS' ORGANIZATIONS

### BUILD

Chicago Vocational Career Academy

Heartland Alliance

Lawndale Christian Legal Center (LCLC)

Metropolitan Family Services

Moms Rising

Nancy B. Jefferson High School

New Life Centers

Precious Blood Ministry Of Reconciliation (PBMR)

Thrive Chicago

## FREQUENTLY USED TERMS

# DIVERSION

Formal or informal interventions, programs, and approaches occurring at any point in a juvenile's involvement with the juvenile justice system that prevent further system involvement while holding juveniles accountable for their actions. Juveniles may be offered support services or resources and be required to complete said services to avoid deeper penetration into the juvenile justice system.

# DEFLECTION

Policies, practices, and programs occurring pre-booking/pre-arrest that prevent juvenile arrest and any involvement in the juvenile justice system. Juveniles may be offered supportive services or other resources but are not required to utilize them.

# RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

Restorative justice is a theory of justice that emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behaviour. It is best accomplished through cooperative processes that include all stakeholders. This can lead to transformation of people, relationships and communities. The foundational principles of restorative justice have been summarized as follows:

1. Crime causes harm and justice should focus on repairing that harm.
2. The people most affected by the crime should be able to participate in its resolution.
3. The responsibility of the government is to maintain order and of the community to build peace.

# TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE

At its most basic, transformative justice seeks to respond to violence without creating more violence and/or engaging in harm reduction to lessen the violence. This is an abolitionist framework that understands systems such as prisons, police and I.C.E. as sites where enormous amounts of violence take place and as systems that

were created to be inherently violent in order to maintain social control. Transformative justice works to build alternatives to our current systems which often position themselves as protectors, while simultaneously enacting the very forms of violence they claim to condemn.

# 2

## YOUTH JUSTICE OVERVIEW

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## YOUTH JUSTICE OVERVIEW

Children with extenuating circumstances and unique lived experiences encounter the juvenile justice or adult criminal justice systems more than preventative measures. These are children who



Impacted from poverty



Identify as a person of color or LGBTQIA+



Have disabilities, mental health, and substance abuse challenges



Subjected to neglect, abuse, and other violence



Lived in foster care

Despite the significant decreases over the past decade, the criminalization of young people in America unfortunately still occurs at alarming rates. These are some of the numbers:

**728,890**

Total number of children arrested in 2018.

**76,000**

Number of young people prosecuted, sentenced, or incarcerated as adults annually.

**9X**

Black youth are nine times more likely than white youth to receive an adult prison sentence.

**2.5X**

62 percent of children arrested in the United States were white, yet Black children were two and a half times more likely.

For Illinois specifically,

**31,515**

Total number of young people who were victims of abuse and neglect.

**\$26,783**

Total dollar amount spent per prisoner, compared to \$14,327 spent per public school student.

**22.5%**

22.5 percent of young people were impacted by an adverse childhood experience, whereas 16.7 percent were impacted from two or more.

**21.9%**

Percentage of Black students suspended from school, compared to 2.9% of white students.

## A shift in practice: the impact of youth diversion

Positive changes in policy and techniques such as juvenile diversion programs are the catalysts of this decline. But what exactly are diversion programs? The Annie E. Casey Foundation defines these programs and approaches as measures to “hold youth accountable for their behavior without resorting to legal sanctions, court oversight, or the threat of confinement.” The diversion, regardless of form, must ensure justice system involvement does not infringe upon young people maturing into adulthood. For example, a criminal record can have adverse effects on young people’s future employment and higher education pursuits.

It’s more effective when juvenile courts and probation agencies’ only involvement is to issue warning. Youth are 45 percent less likely to re-offend when assessed as low risk and diverted, comparable to youth facing formal court processing. In 2018, 41 percent of juvenile referrals nationwide were diverted, according to the federal Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention. Of the 59 percent of U.S. delinquency referrals formally processed, only 6 percent were for violent offenses.

In its report, *Transforming Juvenile Probation*, the Casey Foundation calculates that **at least 60 percent of juvenile cases — and likely a more significant percentage — could be safely diverted.** This number would

**The Annie E. Casey Foundation defines these programs and approaches as measures to “hold youth accountable for their behavior without resorting to legal sanctions, court oversight, or the threat of confinement.”**

increase if formal probation were limited to only youth with serious offenses or those otherwise assessed to be a risk to public safety. Some jurisdictions have already met or exceeded that target. Prosecutors dismissed many cases (32%), and community-based or probation-administered juvenile diversion programs handled the rest. Likewise, Washington’s Pierce County has diverted 82% of youth referred to court on delinquency charges spanning 2017 through 2019.



## Understanding Chicago’s current model

The Juvenile Intervention and Support Center operates in 10 of the city’s 22 police districts. A recent audit by the city’s inspector general concludes it is impossible to determine whether its effort to divert Chicago’s youth out of the criminal system with the Juvenile Intervention and Support Center works or is a failure. A lack of collaboration between the Chicago Police Department and the Department of Family and Support Services and poor record-keeping, including improper destruction of records, make the task impossible.

Based on the city and inspector general’s research, there is a unique opportunity to create the architecture for a new model of juvenile justice. This new model must include the voices of those most affected—youth, families, and community leaders to imagine new pathways for youth deflection and diversion beyond station adjustments. The future of juvenile justice is restorative, youth-led, and preventive, not just reactive. You can learn more about the visions and principles in the findings section of this report.

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## Goals, deliverables & methodology

**GOALS.** For this project's context, ChiByDesign utilized a co-design approach and a human-centered methodology. This approach brings together community partners' expertise and creativity (organizations, artists, and youth) to design a community-based and best practices-informed vision and goals for future state deflection and diversion. These were our objectives:



To discover and understand how participants define safety, justice, and well-being.



To outline supports and infrastructure needed for keeping a community physically, mentally, and emotionally safe.



To identify and share systemic conflict resolution best practices.

Presenting these goals through a new justice-centered space designed by participants was practical in defining the principles and vision of JISC and the City of Chicago for the future of youth diversion in Chicago.

**DELIVERABLES.** ChiByDesign was ultimately engaged to:



Create a co-designed framework concept that includes vision, goals, values, and principles for the new youth diversion model that can continue to evolve as the needs will.



Develop recommendations for expanding youth diversion pathways beyond post-arrest diversion and replacing the current JISC structures.

**METHODOLOGY.** We achieved this project's goals by engaging our workshop participants to co-create the framework through a two-step process (pages 22-25). Incorporating these critical stakeholders into the design process informed the direction of the project. It specified the needs of community members for a community grounded in safety, justice, and well-being.



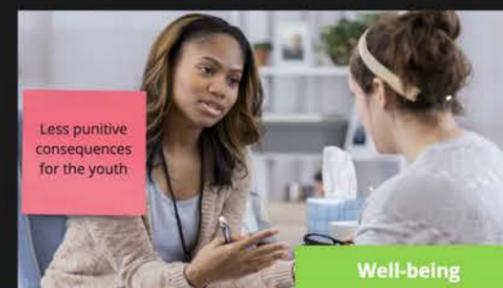
## FUTURE FRAMING.

First, we virtually convened a Design Committee of nine - four organizational leaders and parents and five youth leaders - to articulate the values and principles of community safety through co-designing a vision for a future community.

## A FUTURE COMMUNITY CENTERED ON SAFETY, WELL-BEING, AND JUSTICE.

Our community centers its efforts to develop youth into tomorrow's leaders. We empower them to contribute to decision-making and influence the future. Here, all residents have equitable access to digital and physical resources. Furthermore, we hold systems and each other accountable. Our schools, parks, and other facilities are safe havens that encourage residents to share their experiences and foster healthy relationships.

### OUR WAKANDA



# PROTOTYPING SESSION.

In the second co-design session, two organizational leaders and five youth leaders tested these values and principles' desirability and feasibility by prototyping a new justice-centered space for our community today.

## DESIGNING A NEW JUSTICE-CENTERED SPACE

### COMMUNITY

There's a 14 yr old in your community considering carjacking. They're being convinced by friends that it'll be fun to speed around town in a stolen car. Additionally, they can make \$1500 when they resell the car. How does your justice-centered space help this 14 yr old navigate this situation? Use the prompts to consider the **activities, objects, interactions, and people (roles)** needed in your space.

RESOURCE EQUITY	
<b>EDUCATION</b>	<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>
How are people educated about the resources available to them now and in the future?	
CONNECTION & COMMONALITY	
<b>SUPPORT</b>	<b>TRUST</b>
Where can people be around others like them? What supports create connections and promote peace?	
RESTORATION	
<b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b>	<b>REHABILITATION</b>
How are people encouraged to hold others and systems accountable?	
CONNECTED PATHWAYS	
<b>WELL-BEING</b>	<b>FUTURE PATH</b>
How do we respond to trauma and grief? How is emotional support provided at all ages?	



# 4

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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## FINDINGS

These workshops sought to bring organizations, youth, and community advocates together to define the best practices for prevention and intervention in youth diversion. Through the thought-provoking conversations and ideation, we uncovered that this is a multilayered topic. To effectively address youth diversion, there is a need to address the systemic inequities like structural racism, inequitable distribution of resources to communities, inadequate career opportunities, etc., that create a barrier for youth to succeed. The common threads that emerge from these workshops are **accountability** and **community-centric**. This new model must embed accountability in all aspects, and the community must be at the forefront of all efforts. Participants recommend that the City of Chicago implement youth justice-oriented projects with the following visions, principles, and best practices:

### VISION

- 
**PREVENTIVE, NOT JUST REACTIVE.**  
 Intervention occurs before a specific action (or before the community is in a particular state).
- 
**RESTORATIVE.**  
 Serving justice involves repairing harm instead of relying on fear and punishment.
- 
**YOUTH-LED.**  
 Youth are empowered to influence the future of the community.

\* Visions are overarching aspirations of the organization as to what it hopes to achieve or to become.

\*\* Principles are 'rules' or 'laws' that govern what you do. These explain how to approach achieving your goals.

\*\*\* Best practices are actionable ideas that fulfill the guiding principles.



VISION

PRINCIPLE

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATION

INSIGHT

SUPPORTING QUOTES

HOW TO READ

# VISIONS & PRINCIPLES

We capture the importance of the visions with principles and community recommendations supported by dynamic insights and powerful quotes on the following pages. After the principles, there are some best practices and actionable ideas to fulfill them. Here is a simple diagram to explain how to process this information.

## RESTORATIVE



**Help vs. hurt.** Demonstrate commitment to Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice.

**Emphasize accountability over punishment.**

**Provide opportunities to process trauma.**

*Without accountability, punishment does not solve root issues nor create long-term solutions.*

*Acknowledging and addressing loss and trauma is fundamental to providing support for healing.*

“We’re punitive when it comes to the youth.”

“A system that says I’m going to help you and not just punish you.”

“Shouldn’t be penalized for the rest of your life but should be held accountable.”

“Lost my friend through gun violence. The support was minimal. Saw the shift that anger increased, students joined gangs... had there been supports, they might have not ended up. I wish there were more moments where schools could have played a better role at providing support. It created more hurt rather than acknowledging that we lost someone.”

“Those brought in are not regarded as people. Thus trauma is inflicted.”



**Connected pathways.** Understanding the youth’s unique needs of today as well as guiding them to create a productive future.

**Advancing the emotional and overall well-being of the community is equally as important to community safety.**

**Establish connections to support youth in shaping and building a positive future.**

*Unresolved trauma and fear lead to disturbances in a community’s safety and unhealthy responses to feeling unsafe.*

*There is a disconnect between youth and the people/things that lead them on a better path.*

“Take time to know “the little person”—try to understand them and their experience.”

“Provide support so that the growth doesn’t stop there.”

“Emotional check-in classrooms with anonymous platforms (needed in some cases).”

“Provide youth with a ‘way out.’”

“We default to “defense mechanisms”...How we respond to the lack of safety—carrying weapons is a response to trauma and fear.”

Options for the youth and really look at how we develop our justice system. Sometimes they make one mistake and there whole life is impacted at the age of 16.



**Resource equity.** Availability of resources and equitable access to economic opportunities.

**Invest in community needs and divest away from things that do not meet those needs to improve community safety and wellbeing.**

**Foster transparency in decision-making.**

*Existing inequitable systems are a significant cause of community safety issues.*

*Lack of data transparency by the local government with the community members breaks the community’s trust in the government leaders’ decision-making and their interest in public safety.*

“There is a visible divide between certain areas and the services provided in those areas. “Night and day.” Lack of care in what the youth and the people in the communities need. What are you putting in the community? Who is being accountable? It affects adults. How can it not affect the children? It’s important to feel safe. You expect it to look different... but you present it in a negative form.”

“It means not shutting down conversations about the police budget or any city budget line item when we think about how a city leverages and allocates resources for its residents.”

“People feel safe when they can exist without criminalization and systemic oppression. This includes conversations about police presence and the punitive nature of our juvenile justice and criminal justice systems.”



**Family-oriented.** Activating families as an integral part of the process.

**Engage families to shape support.**

*Families are an underutilized asset for positive youth development.*

“[This space] should be connected with families too to shape support rather than traditional youth places which are disconnected about activating families.”

“Parent support services and groups in the space too. Full-service wrap-around interventions for youth and families.”

“Collective community systems that include educational institutions, youth centers, youth programs, and parents... I still think police should be at the table. We have to create a system or village to help co-raise our children, and that system has to include youth-voice.”



**Early intervention.** Making investments into youth early on to ensure success.

**Assist with self-identity and personal development.**

*Helping youth understand who they are and want to be, sets them on the right path.*

“From an educational perspective, engage students in developing critical thinking skills.”

“Help them discover who they are.”

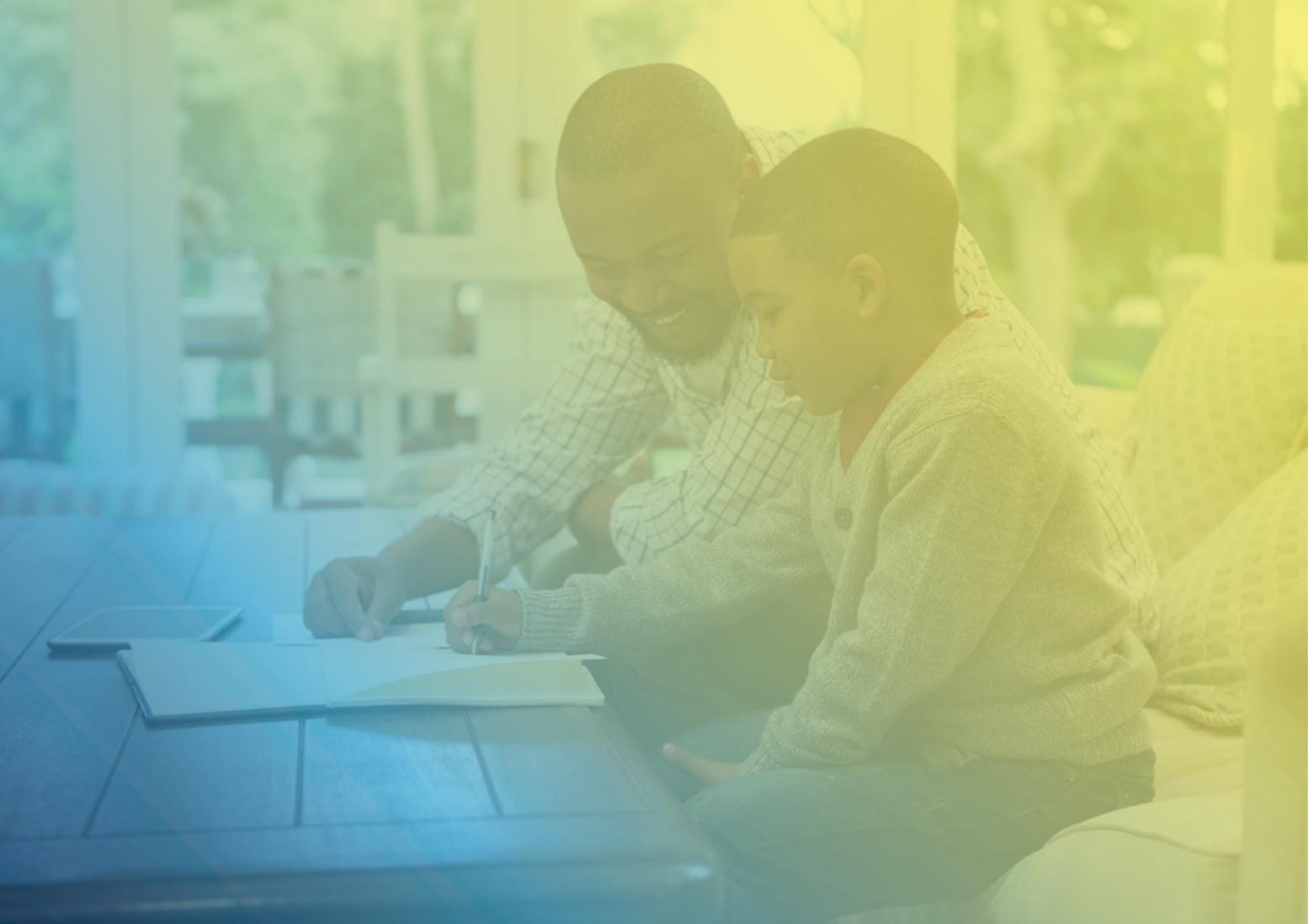
**Engage youth through career and social opportunities.**

*Career and social opportunities are essential outlets for the youth that enable them to stay healthy, succeed, and be empowered.*

“Jobs year-round and not just during the summertime for the youth. We need more jobs and after-school activities all the time.”

“A place where they can have more outlets like a dance park, etc.”

“App that connects young people to other things that are happening in the community.”



BEST PRACTICES FOR RESTORATIVE

Involve schools

Create family-targeted services

RESTORATIVE



**Community & connections.** Creating a space where diverse community members can establish commonalities and be vulnerable with each other.

**Create safety by building community strength.**

**Facilitate trust and healing in the community.**

*Community members feel safe when there's a strong sense of community.*

*Collective healing builds trust and helps community members feel supported.*

“Safety is being connected to my community. The community is that block.”

“There must be space for uncomfortable but necessary conversations, mainly if there is a connection between the trauma youth experience to their community and the challenges.”

“Be the facilitator... I get involved... people around me trust me.”



**Accountability.** The collective responsibility community members have to hold each other and the judicial system accountable.

**Promote self-reflection and reconciliation.**

**Create an equitable stake in holding each other accountable.**

*Self-reflection is the beginning of resolution and restoration.*

*Being accountable to each other positively reinforces good behavior.*

“...opportunity to reconcile with somebody who has wronged you and having a safe space to do that.”

“We don’t need systems to hold us accountable...we need to hold each other accountable.”

“Give the victim the opportunity to understand what prompted the act.”

“Everybody is responsible for justice and wellbeing and plays a part.”

“We don’t need systems. We need to do this work internally.”

“What could we do as a whole to kind of minimize what’s going on?”



**Help vs. hurt.** Demonstrate commitment to Restorative Justice and Transformative Justice.

**Emphasize accountability over punishment.**

**Provide opportunities to process trauma.**

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“A system that says I’m going to help you and not just punish you.”

“Those brought in are not regarded as people. Thus trauma is inflicted.”

“Shouldn’t be penalized for the rest of your life but should be held accountable.”



BEST PRACTICES FOR  
PREVENTIVE, NOT JUST REACTIVE

Organize forums to bring people in the community closer together

Create more restorative policies

YOUTH-LED



**Youth appreciation.** Acknowledge and elevate youth as leaders who contribute to their community.

**Provide opportunities to engage with young people, listen and have dialogue.**

**Remove harmful labels that stigmatize youth.**

*Young people's opinions are devalued and often misunderstood.*

*Seeing youth as "problems" demeans the importance of their role in building up a community.*

"Forums like this bring people together; they close the gap between young people and older members of the community."

"There are a lot of anti-youth practices against Black and Brown kids, so even though we say we're asking the youth for solutions, the youth of color are removed from the conversation."

"If you say too much... you are trying to be disrespectful... but you have to listen. The body is full of emotions... if you put it down... it needs an outlet to get it out. Have conversations... that I am not too grown and too smart enough... that we don't have opinions."

"Support creativity, not applying harmful labels to their individuality."



**Non-judgmental.** Creating spaces where young people can openly make mistakes and learn from them.

**Young people need spaces JUST for themselves.**

*Youth feel repressed by society and therefore need spaces to open up, converse without judgment and learn from each other.*

“For teens by teens”...young people talking to people on their level if there’s an issue...that have to do with encounters with the police.”

“Young people learn from each other. Have youth summits where young people can talk openly about their experiences, without fear of judgment.”

“There are so many things that are closed off to us. We can’t even walk in the malls by ourselves. We have to go with a parent.”

**Encourage hard conversations in an open, neutral environment.**

*Youth feel conversations should focus on productive solutions.*

“Have open conversations to discuss consequences .. not always lecturing.”

“Have safe spaces to be vulnerable and have conversations apart from school that might be hard to talk about.”

“You can’t really judge the circumstance of how the child is raised. Kids coming from affluent backgrounds also get in trouble. Asking children... what can we do?”



**Participatory.** Honoring the voices of children/ youth in community decision-making.

**Provide youth with leadership opportunities.**

*Youth are the leaders of tomorrow and need opportunities to build their confidence to continue leading in the future.*

“It means participatory budgeting so youth and families and community can have a say in what they need to thrive.”

“Encourage youth activism.”

“It takes a whole community to put something together.”

“Our youth is the future.”



## BEST PRACTICES FOR YOUTH-LED

Provide training for conflict resolution

Create a check-in process for youth to provide them guidance



# 5

## CONCLUSION

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## FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The workshops spotlighted the importance of approaching this critical issue from a systems lens—understanding the complexities and nuances of engaging youth, their communities, and the policy and legislation that influence this engagement. An area to further explore is the key actors that have instrumental roles in this new justice-centered space. Participants recommended these actors should exhibit the following characteristics:

- **Make individuals feel loved and included**
- **Empathetic**
- **Caring**
- **Compassionate**
- **Non-judgemental**
- **Open to sharing their personal experiences**
- **Good listeners**

These people could be youth counselors, credible messengers, violence interrupters, outreach staff, mutual friends, other court-involved youth, mentors, and elders in the community.

In the prototyping workshop, participants also identified the following characteristics to be included in the new justice-centered space that will create a more holistic youth diversion environment:

- **Green spaces or plants.** Participants emphasized the importance of incorporating natural elements into the space.
- **Quiet spaces.**
  - Reflection spaces.* Providing youth with a dedicated space to process their emotions and reflect on their behavior to enable them to problem-solve effectively.
  - Meditative spaces.* Meditation fosters healthy routines and habits to remain centered and maintain balance.

The current youth diversion space resides within a police station. With the current climate surrounding how police officials engage with communities, especially those of color, it is imperative to consider the physical environment of a justice-centered space.

## CONCLUSION

Without question, this is a multi-layered topic. There are nuances and many different factors that lead to youth involvement with the juvenile justice system, and this must be taken into account when creating pathways for diversion. This design process has made it clear that youth justice efforts must be preventive, restorative, and youth-led. There should be a focus on

empathizing, understanding unique needs and promoting accountability. When considering the development of a new youth diversion model and justice-centered space, the visions and principles shared in this report provide a critical foundation to ensure it is community-centric and promotes justice and wellbeing.





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