

**Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup
YRCII Youth Roundtable Executive Summary
August 11, 2015**

On August 11, 2015, the Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup held two roundtable discussions with youth at a YRCII facility. The meetings were facilitated by Workgroup member Randy Bowman. Twelve female residents were in attendance during one session and fourteen boys attended a second session.

➤ ***Areas in Need of Improvement:***

- **Give youth a voice in the trajectory of their cases.** Youth felt like they had little or no say, often, in the trajectory of their own cases: in court, with their defense attorneys, and with their supervising officers.
- **Examine whether and how well levels are actually working.** Youth commented that youth who have progressed through the levels in placement are treated the same as youth who have just entered placement, or who frequently violate the rules. There is either insufficient staff or insufficient will among the staff to provide the incentives youth at higher levels have earned. Youth commented that this reality gives them very little motivation to progress and succeed.
- **Improve quality of defense representation.** Youth reported feeling as though their defense attorneys do not spend sufficient time with them before court and that they are pressured into pleading guilty. They reported that prosecutors and judges do not know enough about them and the circumstances that brought them to court to make decisions, and do not listen to what the youth have to say.
- **Ensure responses to violations of supervision are proportionate to the violations.** Youth expressed concerns about how officers respond to alleged violations; they feel penalties are excessive for technical violations.
- **Create more alternatives to out-of-home placement:** Youth expressed a desire for rehabilitative options, such as treatment and house arrest, as alternatives to placement. One young person also expressed concern about lack of support upon release from placement.
- **No contact orders should only be put in place when absolutely necessary:** Youth reported that no-contact orders are often more punitive than protective. In particular, when they relate to family members, because seeing and spending time with family is important. When it relates to their peers, youth often struggle because they generally attend the same schools and sit in the same classrooms. Kids do not always understand the repercussions of violating those orders - particularly when it comes to texting/social media. They just want to see their friends.
- **Youth report early and multiple placements; preference for alternatives to case management placements:** Youth talked about how they entered the system at young ages (many through the Department for Children and Families) and have been through multiple placements. Some expressed a preference for jail over YRCIIs because “you serve your time and get out.” One preferred the Kansas Juvenile Correctional Complex (KJCC) to the YRCII because she felt safer at KJCC and, comparatively, the staff there treated her with respect.
- **Conditions of placement are poor:** All of the boys reported poor conditions (bugs, holes in the wall, bad food) at the facility, and one noted that this is typical of out-of-home placements. Girls were concerned about attitudes of staff members.

➤ **How Pieces of the System Interact:**

- **Youth cycle between foster care, out-of-home placements, and probation:** Youth reported a lack of stability and supports that cause a lot of cycling among different placements. Many youth at the YRCII were first placed out-of-home at young ages by DCF.
- **The system is disorganized.** Multiple youth stated that they feel the system is not organized. Youth shared examples of kids “getting lost in the system,” and of probation officers and placements losing important paperwork, such as documentation of community service hours and educational credits.

➤ **Other:**

- **Intervene early:** Youth talked about how earlier assistance to address family issues such as parental drug abuse and familial abuse may have prevented them from entering the juvenile justice system.
- **Youth in YRCIIs are bored.** There is very little to do apart from playing cards, watching TV, and coloring/crocheting, particularly when school is not in session.

➤ **Notable quotes:**

- **On non-secure residential placement:**
 - “Every morning I have to make a decision. Do I run or do I stay?”
 - “Every out-of-home placement like this one should be shut down.”
- **On victimization leading to juvenile system involvement:**
 - We are all here because of the environment we grew up in. We do cruel things because cruel things were done to us.
- **On lack of reintegration support upon discharge from placement:**
 - I don’t know what to do when I get out. I don’t have any support.