

**Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup
YRCII and TLP Youth Roundtables Executive Summary
August 26, 2015**

On August 26, 2015, the Kansas Juvenile Justice Workgroup held roundtable discussions with eight youth in two Youth Residential Centers (one male YRCII and one female YRCII) and two youth in a Transitional Living Program (TLP). The meetings were facilitated by Workgroup member Randy Bowman, Director of Community Based Services for the Kansas Department of Corrections (KDOC).

➤ ***Strengths of the Juvenile Justice System:***

- **Staff can create a positive and family-like environment:** Youth at the girls YRCII reported feeling supported through positive relationships with staff and receiving positive reinforcement. In the TLP, youth reported clear goals, set timetables, and a sense of consistency and accountability from staff.
- **TLP support youth to achieve their independence:** Youth in the TLP indicated that they understand the steps they need to take in order to become successfully independent. Youth discussed their enrollment in college courses and their employment, which they felt a sense of ownership of since they went through the steps of achieving these goals (with the assistance of staff).

➤ ***Areas in Need of Improvement:***

- **Programming isn't always available, is not individualized or tailored, and can be repetitive:** Youth in the boys YRCII indicated that no programming is available. Youth in the girls YRCII reported that they have completed the same program multiple times due to being in placement for multiple years. One youth that is a mother reported that she had indicated to staff that she would find parenting classes helpful, but has not received any parenting classes and instead has taken another class four different times.
- **Youth do not know how long they will be in placement for:** None of the youth in either YRCII could identify when they would be released from placement. Several youth said they were told they would be in for 90 days by the judge or their attorney, but had been in for longer than that. Youth reported that the unpredictability of how long they would be in a particular program was problematic and affects their ability to work. Youth indicated that it seems to be entirely up to probation as to when they get out and that is not communicated to the youth and does not necessarily correspond with the level systems in the YRCIIs.
- **Youth are in out-of-home placements for lengthy periods of time for minor behaviors:** Some youth noted they have been in placements for years as a result of an initial charge of "verbal assaults," and many youth reported that they were in placement for a first or second misdemeanor offense.
- **Staff turnover disrupts the relationships that are established:** Youth in the girls YRCII noted that staff transitions are difficult for youth, as rules often change and the whole environment can feel different.
- **Probation officers do not communicate with youth as much as youth would like:** Youth identified difficulty getting a hold of their probation officers when trying to contact them and not receiving consistent check-ins from their probation officers.
- **Legal representation is inadequate:** Youth reported that they had only brief conversations with their attorneys prior to disposition. Multiple youth reported having

different attorneys for different court dates. Youth indicated that they felt pressured to plead guilty by their attorneys and felt that their attorneys were taking the side of the court and not representing their side.

- **Placements don't use consistent rules:** Placements vary regarding the approach to "levels" and rules, and there are inconsistencies both within a particular placement and from placement to placement. Youth reported sometimes reaching a stated goal or going a certain amount of time without violations but not still not advancing to the next level or out of placement. Youth also mentioned an inconsistency in what constitutes a violation; specifically, in some YRCII youth stated that turning off the TV could be considered a write-up for "tampering with security," while in other YRCII that type of violation would be require the much more serious behavior of messing with security cameras.

➤ **Other:**

- **Youth want clarity on expectations and consequences, respect from staff, structure and stability:** Youth discussed the importance for them to feel respected by staff in order to return that respect and to feel that staff care about them. Youth indicated that clear rules and consequences create structure and stability and are much preferred to arbitrary responses.

➤ **Notable quotes:**

- **On the difficulty of leaving the JJ system:**
 - "Once the system gets a hold of you, it doesn't let go."
 - "Seems like the only options are stay in the system until you age out or graduate, or run."
- **On the unfairness of the system:**
 - "Seems like the only kids who are sent to placement are the ones whose parents don't have money."
- **On feeling disempowered in the process:**
 - "Want to be told more info about what's going on in our lives, to have more input, instead of just being told or not told."
- **On punitive nature of placements:**
 - "Need to get gate and fences down. We're not supposed to be in a jail, but it feels like we are."
 - "Strip searches are extreme."
- **On lack of programming and activities in placements and what they do instead:**
 - "Absolutely nothing."
 - "Watch TV and movies."
 - "Not much to do."
 - "Mess with staff."