

CY2023 Annual Report



iowacollaboration
for**youth**development

State of Iowa
February 1, 2024

State of Iowa
Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development Council
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Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development Council Members
February 2024

San Wong, Health and Human Services
Chad Jensen, Director of Juvenile Court Service
Debbie Nistler, Iowa 4-H Program Leader
Jay Pennington, Bureau Chief, Department of Education
Lulu Roarick, Chair, State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC)
Ashley Sinnwell, WIOA Program Coordinator, Iowa Workforce Development
Steffani Simbric, Administrator, Child Advocacy Board
Susie Sher, Director, Office of Drug Control Policy

Acknowledgments

The ICYD Council thanks all of the staff who contributed to producing this report. A special acknowledgment is extended to Lulu Roarick, who represents the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC) and provides unique perspectives and important contributions by sharing their thoughts, ideas, expertise, and youth voice.

A special thank you to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for the public/private partnership and support to continue the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative in Iowa. The financial support and guidance provided will be invaluable as ICYD embraces authentic youth engagement, Youth Participatory Action Research, and the Youth Opportunity Pathway, to provide information for policy development with authentic youth engagement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – ICYD COUNCIL CY 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

The Iowa Collaboration for Youth Development (ICYD) Council members are leaders of eight state entities with the vision that **“All Iowa youth will be safe, healthy, successful, and prepared for adulthood.”** The ICYD Council oversees the activities of a growing number of youth-led initiatives and has sought input from these youth in the development of more effective policies, practices, programs, and this Annual Report. In 2009, legislation passed formalizing the ICYD Council in Iowa Code §216A.140.

The ICYD Council has prioritized creating the Youth *Opportunity Pathway* through positive youth development, leadership skill building, and authentic youth engagement throughout state government entities.

Specific recommendations to support the ICYD Council are to:

- Support the ICYD Council in adopting the recommendations from *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* report from The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (pages 22-24). Link to the publication: <https://hhs.iowa.gov/media/68/download?inline=>.
- Support the ICYD Council in developing new strategies to incorporate authentic youth engagement (AYE), positive youth development principles, and the Youth Opportunity Pathway into state-level policy and practice, which include training staff, engaging youth on state boards and commissions, and other creative ways to improve outcomes for youth.
- Provide resources to support state-level youth opportunities and youth-led initiatives (e.g. State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, Achieving Maximum Potential, Iowa Youth Congress, Youth Justice Council), which include participating in Youth Shadow Week, participating in meetings with youth, reviewing their priority areas, and provide guidance to assist them in achieving the goals.
- Identifying new and better ways to provide services and supports to Iowa’s youth and families by encouraging multi-agency approaches in the development of innovative strategies and to incorporate federal initiatives that will eliminate the educational achievement gap for underrepresented students, and racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system.
- Provide resources to continue and expand evidence-based practices and programs as they are developed and identified.
- Provide resources for the continued review and study of services for youth, through the collection and analysis of data that determines the effectiveness of the services.
- Support the continued use of data and research in the development of strategies and actions.
- Continue to develop ways to share information among agencies to address issues affecting youth who receive services and supports from multiple agencies.
- Support the continued use of state agency staff time to implement activities that meet the goals of the ICYD Council.

I. OVERVIEW OF THE ICYD COUNCIL

In 2009, legislation passed placing the ICYD Council and SIYAC in Iowa Code §216A.140. Prior to becoming “codified councils”, both ICYD and SIYAC operated as non-statutory entities. The ICYD began in 1999 as an informal network of state agencies from 10 departments serving as a forum to foster improvement and coordination of state and local youth policy and programs.

The ICYD Council’s vision is: **“All Iowa youth will be safe, healthy, successful, and prepared for adulthood.”**

The ICYD Council has prioritized creating the *Youth Opportunity Pathway* through positive youth development, leadership skill building, and authentic youth engagement throughout state government entities. The ICYD Council finalized a three-year action plan to **improve the status of Iowa youth through shared accountability and systemic collaboration, coordination, and authentic youth engagement**. Each agency on the ICYD Council has a role in achieving this goal.

ICYD has historically participated in a variety of state and national youth initiatives and has been recognized nationally (e.g. National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association, federal Interagency Working Group for Youth Programs, Forum for Youth Investment, and Children’s Cabinet Network) for its work in coordinating youth development efforts. The ICYD Council provides a venue to enhance information and data sharing, develop strategies across state agencies, and present prioritized recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly that will improve the lives and futures of Iowa youth.

The Department of Health and Human Services is the lead agency and oversees activities for the ICYD Council.

ICYD Council’s Purpose

The ICYD Council strives to improve the lives and futures of Iowa’s youth by:

- Adopting and applying positive youth development principles and practices at the state and local levels;
- Increasing the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of opportunities and services and other supports for youth;
- Improving and coordinating youth policy and programs across state agencies.

ICYD Council's Membership

Legislative changes in 2023 has modified the ICYD Council's membership. Effective July 1, 2023, Iowa Code §216A.140, states:

"The youth development council membership shall be determined by the council itself and shall include the directors or chief administrators, or their designees, from the following state agencies and programs:

- a. Child advocacy board.
- b. Department of education.
- c. Department of health and human services.
- d. Department of workforce development.
- e. Office of drug control policy.
- f. Iowa cooperative extension service in agriculture and home economics."¹

In addition, the ICYD Council has approved two additional members from:

- State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council
- Judicial Branch – Juvenile Court Services

The director or chief administrator (or their designee) of these state entities represent their respective entities on the ICYD Council. In addition, many of the agencies have additional staff that actively participate in meetings and complete tasks as directed by the ICYD Council. Below are the agencies and members of the ICYD Council:

ICYD Council Members – February 2024

Department of Health and Human Services San Wong, Director, Human Rights	ISU Extension and Outreach, 4-H Youth Development Debbie Nistler, Iowa 4-H Program Leader
Child Advocacy Board Steffani Simbric, Administrator	Iowa Workforce Development Ashley Sinnwell, WIOA Program Coordinator
Office of Drug Control Policy Susie Sher, Director	Department of Education Jay Pennington, Bureau Chief – Bureau of Information and Analysis Services
State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC) Lulu Roarick, Chair	Judicial Branch Chad Jensen, Director of Juvenile Court Services, State Court Administration

¹ Iowa Code 2024, Section 216A.140

II. THREE-YEAR ACTION PLAN – YOUTH OPPORTUNITY PATHWAY

Based on the graduation and dropout data, the ICYD Council recognizes that minority youth, migrant youth, youth in poverty, and youth with disabilities need additional and specific supports and services.

ICYD strives to engage these youth and provide opportunities to remove barriers so these students are able to graduate from high school and have life-long opportunities.

The ICYD Council has prioritized creating the *Youth Opportunity Pathway* through positive youth development, leadership skill building, and authentic youth engagement throughout state government entities.

The ICYD Council's three-year action plan is to:

Improve the status of Iowa youth through shared accountability and systemic collaboration, coordination, and authentic youth engagement.

The Council developed overarching values that will SHAPE our work together:

- **Shared Accountability:** To achieve maximum results, we will engage leaders across boundaries of various state agencies and sectors towards shared results and will share accountability for the progress toward that result through aligned actions and sharing of resources.
- **Healing-Centered:** Trauma is a collective experience that must be met with holistic supports. For solutions to be effective, actions must address root causes, address harm, and restore well-being by shifting from a culture of harm, discipline, punishment, and confinement to restoration, hope and healing. We must advance the conditions to make systems healing-centered (including addressing mental models, moving from transaction to transformational relationships and connections, power dynamics, resource flows, practices and policies).
- **Authentic Youth Engagement:** The perspectives and expertise of young people are critical in understanding the issues governments are called upon to address, and essential in creating solutions that work.
- **Progress:** ICYD state agencies will continue to intentionally collaborate and show progress on the issues of equity, authentic engagement, healing-centered engagement and shared accountability.
- **Equity:** Historical inequities cannot be corrected by ignoring them. For statewide solutions to be effective, marginalized voices must be included, data must be disaggregated (by race, geography, gender and other relevant variables) and policies and programs must be responsive to the particular needs and strengths of each community and group of youth in Iowa.

BLUEPRINT TO ACHIEVE AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth engagement is a powerful way for community-based organizations and government agencies to involve the young people they serve to improve the system. The young people provide opportunities to make challenging actions to create positive social change. Youth engagement offers the expertise and partnership of young people, helping adults fully understand what it is like to grow up in a rapidly changing world while navigating the various systems and policies impacting the lives of youth each day. Youth provide a valuable and unique perspective to address issues due to the “way they think” (brain development) and they are closer to the problems and know about the issues – their lived expertise.

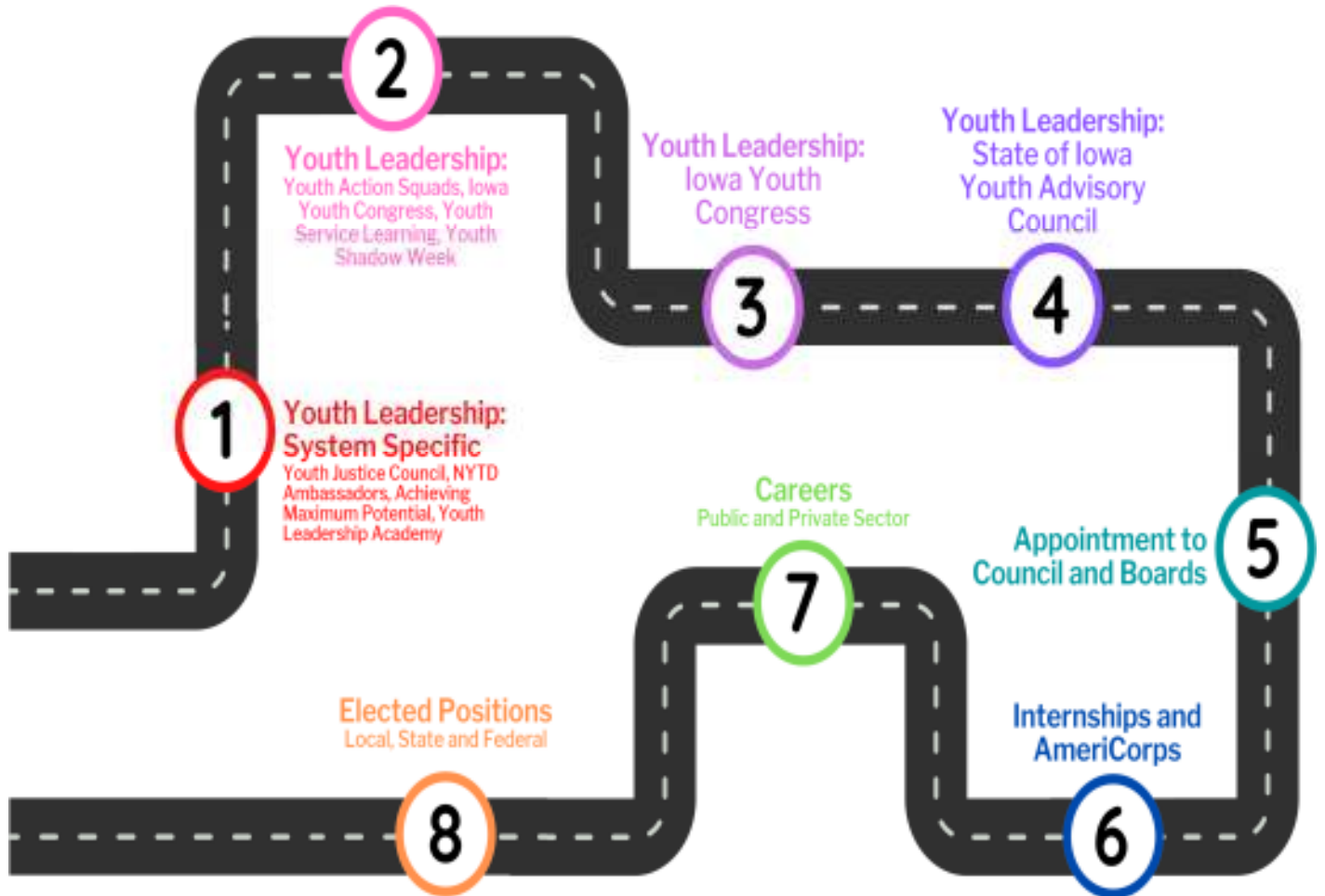
The approach has started with the development of an interactive youth leadership and civic engagement curriculum and set of strategies, which has added structured training, coaching, and education for youth to utilize these new skills to successfully advocate on local, state, and national issues. The process provides topical training on positive youth development (PYD) and brain development, advocacy, leadership, and youth participatory action research (YPAR). In addition, expert panels provide specific information on the issues. Another unique aspect of this approach is that youth are the facilitators/trainers of the curriculum and are leading the process.

The goal is to fully develop a Youth Opportunity Pathway that will:

- Intentionally recruit diverse youth to participate on the Youth Opportunity Pathway
- Provide advocacy and leadership skills to youth
- Establish opportunities for youth to become leaders and decision-makers
- Provide training and technical assistance for state agency staff on authentic youth engagement (AYE) and PYD strategies

As the skills are built and opportunities expand, youth will be prepared to follow a path of additional opportunities of public service and to a career of their choosing – A Youth Opportunity Pathway.

YOUTH OPPORTUNITY PATHWAY



Completing the Youth Opportunity Pathway

The ICYD Council will lead the PYD and AYE implementation and coordinate the trainings of youth and state agency staff, and will be the clearinghouse for information and resources.

The following strategies are being implemented:

- Training and technical assistance for Juvenile Court Services on PYD, AYE, and family engagement that will lead to authentic youth voice in policy making and decisions, and result in improved outcomes for youth.
- Identify additional opportunities for youth and ensure youth have access to be engaged with government agencies. ICYD Council will create / enhance clearinghouse of opportunities and provide guidance on connecting youth with appropriate opportunities.
- Involve youth in continuous quality improvement process to improve services.

- Intentionally recruit diverse youth to participate, including youth with lived experience. Lived experience is “representation and understanding of an individual’s human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one’s perception of knowledge, based on one’s own life”.²
- Identify and highlight current youth engagement activities in state agencies.
- Local service agencies and community entities will be encouraged to implement PYD and AYE approaches.

Youth Opportunity Pathway project’s goals:

- *Connect* the voices and expertise of youth directly affected *to* decisions that impact their well-being and dignity
- *Connect* initiatives driven by the community and those most impacted by challenges *to* existing assets and resources
- *Connect* data and research *to* meaningful action
- *Connect* system-focused policies and practices *to* collaborative and equitable approaches implemented with cultural humility
- *Connect* strategies *to* knowledge that children live in families and families live in communities
- *Connect* decision makers *to* greater understanding of root causes and solutions.

Youth engagement is most successful when it is authentic and supported by youth-adult partnerships. The question is, what makes the engagement “authentic”?

Authentic youth engagement is achieved when young people:

- Are respected for their ideas and opinions and are free to state them;
- Are working in an environment that facilitates their engagement, and they are involved in a meaningful way as teachers as well as students;
- Are equal partnership in all aspects of their own individual planning and decision-making;
- Are equal partners in making decisions and determining the direction of programs and activities, including the creation of the agency’s policy, the program or service itself, the training curriculum, and delivery of the program or services;
- Expect to, and receive, consistent opportunities to set goals, devise strategies, and act;
- Participate in challenging experiences, with the necessary support to help them succeed; and
- Thrive when adults listen to them, respect them, and engage them in meaningful programs and activities.³

² Skelton-Wilson, Syreeta, Ph.D. et.al. (2021). *Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience, Improving Federal Research, Policy, and Practice*. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation.

<https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1bb6cd68f81e1bb74e3bf30e1085a354/lived-experience-brief.pdf>

³ <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/Youth%20Voice.pdf>

It takes time for adults and youth to fully embrace and create a culture and environment that will foster authentic youth engagement. This time of norming allows adults and youth to feel comfortable with one another, to agree on areas of importance, and to come to decisions that are agreed on by both partners. While the idea is simple and the process laborious, the benefits of ensuring authentic youth voice and participation are invaluable for all.

The ICYD Council is embarking on new strategies to incorporate authentic youth engagement (AYE) into state-level policy and practice. The new approach started in 2021, with the development of the initial Youth Action Squads (YAS) that focused on racial justice and COVID-19 effects. The groups of 25 youth (14-24 years of age) receive structured training, coaching, and education that includes Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is providing them with the skills and opportunities to successfully create and implement an action plan and advocate on local, state, and national issues.

In order for these opportunities to be available and successful, state agency decision makers must receive training and technical assistance on positive youth development (PYD) and AYE.

Long-term goals:

- State agencies have a commitment for authentic youth engagement that includes partnering with youth to create and deliver improved services and resources.
- Youth are active members on state boards, commissions, and councils.
- Youth are participating in authentic state agency decision making.

What it will take to make it happen:

- ICYD to lead the PYD and AYE implementation and coordinate the trainings of youth and state agency staff, and be the clearinghouse for information and resources.
- State agencies commit to the need for authentic youth voice in policy making and decisions on services.
- Identify additional opportunities for youth
- Ensure youth have access to become engaged with government agencies.
- Involve youth in continuous quality improvement (CQI) process to improve services.
- Intentionally recruit diverse youth to participate in trainings.
- Identify and highlight current youth engagement activities in state agencies.
- Local service agencies and community entities are encouraged to implement PYD and AYE approaches.

The ICYD Council is leading the coordination effort of the multiple agencies and organizations that support state-level youth-fueled councils and initiatives. The goal is to effectively remove barriers for historically underrepresented youth by empowering them to realize their leadership capabilities and by challenging adults to recognize and engage youth. The effort will equip youth with the tools to communicate their vision, inspire collaboration, and make significant contributions that result in positive change.

Once the foundation of PYD and AYE are incorporated in state agencies, specific topics will be selected to prioritize, study, and develop strategies to improve. Identified priorities are:

- Mental health access;
- School culture and climate – ensure schools are safe;
- Educational, vocational, and personal development opportunities to enhance the successful transition to adulthood.

Currently, the ICYD Council and the Department of Health and Human Services oversees the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC), the Iowa Youth Congress (IYC) and the Youth Action Squads (YAS). For some youth this experience is the first step of a very long journey on the Youth Opportunity Pathway.

STATE OF IOWA YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (SIYAC) – PURPOSE AND PRIORITIES

The purpose of SIYAC, as stated in Iowa Code §216A.140(8), is to “foster communication among a group of engaged youth and the Governor, the General Assembly, and state and local policymakers regarding programs, policies, and practices affecting youth and families; and to advocate for youth on important issues affecting youth.” SIYAC’s mission statement is: “to raise awareness of issues that affect young Iowans by providing civic opportunity and to inspire youth to create a better future for Iowa.”

Originally established in 2001, SIYAC was formalized in Iowa Code in 2009 as an avenue for youth to inform state leaders and local communities on issues important to young people. SIYAC consists of 21 youth aged 14 to 20 who reside in Iowa. Members serve two-year staggered terms that begin in July. SIYAC meets biweekly over Conference Call and quarterly in-person.

SIYAC conducts research across the state to identify issues impacting their peers. Information collected from the statewide SIYAC survey is used to identify the key areas SIYAC will focus for the year. Members’ garnered over 200 responses from youth across the state of Iowa. A few key data points:

- The top issue area that survey participants identified most was education (71.4%). Restrictions on books provided in libraries and the instruction of diversity, education and inclusion were the specific areas that youth identified that impacted them the most.
- The majority of the youth do not feel connected to their local or state or federal government.
- Survey participants receive the most information from social media (80.7%), friends (70.3%) and online news sources (60.9%).
- The top 5 issues that survey participants requested SIYAC to take up are: 1) mental health/ healthcare 2) gun control 3) diversity, equity and inclusion 4) environment and 5) transportation.

As a result of the data collected, SIYAC formed committees. Members of each Committee determine how to best address each issue using three main strategies: advocacy, service and public awareness. The committees and descriptions of the topics are:

Civic Engagement Committee:

- Collaborating with Iowa Youth Congress on advancing opportunities for youth voter registration in schools, which includes advocating for enforcement and clarification of Iowa Code section 48A.23
- Supporting schools to host voter registration drives for students

Community Involvement Committee:

- Partnering with Volunteer Iowa to expand youth service learning opportunities and educating youth about the importance of service learning
- Collecting uneaten and compostable items in schools
- Collecting data on public transportation
- Advocating for a plastic bag tax

Health Committee:

- Proposing a position statement to amend Iowa Code 279.9 to include rehabilitation as an option for substance abuse response in schools, in addition to the already stated options of expulsion and suspension. This change would assist students in recovering from addiction
- Creating a guidebook for healthcare for youth
- Hosting a workshop about youth substance use at the Iowa Students for Tobacco Education and Prevention (iSTEP) annual Summit

Mental Health Committee:

- Proposing a position statement to modify Iowa Code 281-14.4 to implement Behavioral Health (BHR) Coordinators in every Iowa middle and high school who will provide schools access to accurate mental health resources to support students and families. These duties can be assigned to an existing staff member.

Education Committee:

- Advocating for student representatives on school boards. In 2023, HF658 was introduced, which authorizes boards of directors of school districts to appoint student liaisons to the school board.
- Developing a guide to help schools implement student representation on school boards, which includes connecting with school districts that have implemented this approach.
- Explore workforce development opportunities for youth, including gathering and analyzing youth workforce data

SIYAC members participate in ICYD Council meetings. The ICYD Council oversees the activities of SIYAC and seeks input from these youth leaders in the development of more effective state-wide policies, practices, and programs. SIYAC members also serve on various other committees and councils, including Volunteer Iowa's Service Learning Committee.

2023-2024 SIYAC Members (Alphabetized by last name):

Name	Office Held	City	County
Lin Aung	Service Chair	Ottumwa	Wapello
Curtis Badio	Civic Engagement Committee Chair	Waukee	Dallas
Jack Baumann	IDEA Chair	Cedar Falls	Black Hawk
Rhett Ellerbroek	Health Committee Chair	Waverly	Bremer
Hadley Harvey	Public Relations Chair	Des Moines	Polk
Owen Hubbard	Legislative Affairs Chair	Bettendorf	Scott
Achinteya Jayaram	Vice Chair	Pleasant Valley	Scott
Zachary Klopping	Mental Health Committee Chair	Vinton	Benton
David Lee	Member	Ames	Story
Drake Luong	Member	West Des Moines	Polk
Seighin McElderry	Community Involvement Committee Chair	Ottumwa	Wapello
Ewuraesi Panford	Member	Dike	Black Hawk
Lulu Roarick	Chair	Iowa City	Johnson
Filiz Sonmez	Member	Waukee	Dallas
Nevaeh Stover	Secretary	Muscatine	Muscatine
Leela Strand	Member	North Liberty	Johnson
Anika Yadav	Education Chair	Waukee	Dallas

YOUTH JUSTICE COUNCIL (YJC) – PURPOSE AND PRIORITIES

The Youth Justice Council (YJC) was established in December 2021 and is a subcommittee of Iowa's Juvenile Justice Advisory Council, composed of youth and young adults ages 16-28 who have either direct or proximate experience to Iowa's juvenile justice system. Members of YJC serve one-year terms and must live in Iowa.

In the Fall of 2022, YJC conducted research through the Talking Wall project to identify the current needs of youth in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Nearly 500 youth participated across the state. The Youth Justice Council themed the information collected at their annual Retreat at the beginning of January. They identified five priority areas for Calendar Year 2023:

1. Prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system.
2. Draft recommendations for standards for youth's support teams.
3. Provide education to youth.
4. Finalize Bill of Rights for youth in the juvenile justice system.
5. Enhance the quality of life for youth in juvenile justice.

YJC focused on the following activities during calendar year 2023:

- Provided recommendations to the Juvenile Justice Task Force of the Iowa Supreme Court, several of which were adopted as official recommendations of the Iowa Supreme Court.
- Co-created a Youth Court Report to empower youth to be heard in the courtroom that is currently being piloted in two jurisdictions in Iowa.
- Co-created a new HHS tool, Discovering Connections, to empower youth and the adults who support them to better learn and apply information about youth identity, culture and aspirations into permanency decision making.
- Provided recommendations to the State Training School (STS) on eliminating the cost of phone calls and allowing video calls between youth and their families. On November 1, 2023, the STS implemented these recommendations.
- In collaboration with the Storm Lake Community School District and Storm Lake Police Department, organized and implemented a community youth event that included a resource fair, a volleyball tournament, and a Talking Wall with ideas from students on ways to improve their community and prevent youth violence.
- Shared information with Iowa's Congressional Delegation in Washington DC to advocate for the needs of older youth in juvenile justice and foster care.
- Guest lecturer in classes at Drake Law School.
- Participated in Youth Shadow Week, shadowing state government officials to better understand the day to day work of state leaders.
- Attended multiple conferences and events, including:
 - Coalition for Juvenile Justice Conference (Washington DC)
 - Coalition for Juvenile Justice Youth Summit (Tacoma, Washington)

- OJJDP’s Youth Justice Action Month Panel (Washington DC)
- Annie E. Casey Probation Reform Training (Baltimore)
- Future Fest (Cedar Rapids)
- Drake’s Policing in Black Communities Event (Des Moines)
- Juvenile Court Officer Association’s Day on the Hill (Des Moines)
- 2023 State of the Judiciary (Des Moines)
- Participated in the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council’s Retreat, advising on their new 3-year plan
- Created and presented multiple trainings to professionals throughout the year
- Served on several local, statewide and national committees, including
 - Local judicial district teams to expand family and youth engagement
 - Statewide team to expand family and youth engagement
 - Title IV- E Reinvestment Advisory Council
 - Family and Youth Engagement Summit Planning Team
 - Coalition for Juvenile Justice’s Emerging Leaders Committee
 - Jim Casey Site Lead Onboarding Team
- Presented at the annual Family and Youth Engagement Summit
- Worked with Debt Free Justice on fines and fees of youth in juvenile justice system
- Co-facilitated the Talking Wall at multiple detention centers, shelters, group homes and at pre-charge diversion class.
- Practiced legislative advocacy
- Supported the new Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative work

2023 YJC Members (alphabetized by last name)

Name	Office Held	City	County
Arminta Damken-Navarro	Member	Des Moines	Polk
Jack Gatkuoth	Member	Des Moines	Polk
Melvin Gaye	Member	Urbandale	Dallas
Zoie Points	Vice Chair	Iowa City	Johnson
Adriana Wodrazka Espinoza	Chair	Sioux City	Woodbury
Kuol Wor	Member	Eldora	Hardin

Specific YJC Member Accomplishments:

- YJC was awarded the Governor’s Volunteer Award.
- Arminta Damken-Navarro was awarded the 2023 Spirit of Youth Award from Iowa Juvenile Court Services

- Audi Wodrazka Espinoza was appointed to the national Emerging Leaders Committee with the Coalition for Juvenile Justice, the first person from Iowa to ever be appointed
- Zoie Points, Kuol Wor and Jack Gatkuoth graduated from high school
- Zoie was selected to represent Iowa at the 2023 Youth Leadership Institute through the Annie E Casey Foundation
- Melvin completed an internship at the Iowa Department of Human Rights
- Audi became a mom. She and her husband welcomed Leylani in February
- Armi earned her Administrative Support Professional Certificate

IOWA YOUTH CONGRESS – PURPOSE AND PRIORITIES

The purpose of Iowa Youth Congress (IYC) is to enhance opportunity and broader representation of all Iowans in the government process. IYC also provides students the knowledge, abilities, support and relationships to advocate and enact change for issues affecting youth.

Through the IYC experience, students attain a variety of skills including:

- public speaking
- problem-solving
- political debate in multicultural leadership settings
- advocacy
- developing a deeper understanding and application of democratic decision making, government, and public engagement

IYC was established in 2006 by legacy Department of Human Rights. The IYC program was created to provide youth of all backgrounds the opportunity to gain hands-on education in the subject areas of state government, democracy, advocacy, and civic engagement. Iowa Youth Congress consists of up to 100 high-school-aged youth who reside in Iowa. Members begin their term in August and meet regularly to identify issues affecting youth, discuss community needs, form partnerships to meet those needs, draft positions on youth issues, and communicate those positions with legislators. IYC presents information and recommendations on youth issues in the form of position statements to the Iowa General Assembly during the legislative session. Additionally, some IYC members also participate in ICYD Council meetings.

During the Mock Congress in November 2023, IYC approved six position statements / policy proposals, to advocate during the 2024 Legislative Session:

Youth Voter Registration Committee:

- Clarify and enforce Iowa Code §48A.23 to expand and improve the turnout of Iowa youth voter registration by more clearly defining an “opportunity to register to vote to each student who is at least seventeen years of age.” This should be defined as identifying two days within the school year in which students who are at least 17 years old will be allowed to register to vote in their school during school hours.

School Substance Abuse Response

- Amend Iowa Code §279.9 to include rehabilitation as an option for substance abuse response in schools, in addition to the already stated options of expulsion and suspension. This change would assist students in recovering from addiction.

School Counselor Ratio

- Create legislation that would require a 1:250 school counselor to student ratio for all public schools, the recommended ratio by the American Counselors Association.

Permitted Civic Absence

- Create legislation that would require schools to allow high school students one excused absence per school year to attend or participate in a civic or political event. A civic event being defined as voting, poll working, strikes, public commenting, candidate speeches, political forums, civic forums, town halls. etc., which students will be required to prove their attendance.

Gun Magazine Limits

- Create legislation that would create a limit of 15 rounds of ammunition per gun magazine for personal usage. This limitation will decrease mass shooting fatalities as guns will contain fewer bullets while protecting American's 2nd Amendment Right to Bear Arms. At the time of this report, this has been introduced in the Legislature as SF2080.

Mental Health Resource Accessibility

- Require mental health resources and information be provided on school websites. This will ensure students and parents have access to available options when young people struggle with mental health issues. At the time of this report, this has been introduced in the 2024 Legislature as HF2107 and SF2103.

YOUTH SHADOW WEEK – PURPOSE AND IMPACT

Youth Shadow Week (YSW) was created in 2022 to provide youth an opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge and experience of the careers of those who work in state government. Youth participating in HHS programs had the opportunity to shadow a state leader in the judicial, executive or legislative branch for a day. Youth were connected with state leaders by interests and aspirations. Twenty-eight youth and twenty-eight state leaders participated in 2023. Of the youth who participated,

- 100% reported they are more likely to engage with state leaders.
- 89% see themselves working in state government as a result of YSW.
- 100% better understand how decisions are made in government
- 100% built relationships with state leaders they can use in the future, including:
 - A youth became a 2023 Communications Intern at the State Capitol
 - A youth was hired to be a social media manager for a campaign
 - A youth was hired to be a clerk during the legislative session

Of the system professionals who participated:

- 95% better understand the influence youth can have within the state

- 91% are more likely to engage youth within their professional role as a result of YSW
- 100% believed youth gained a greater understanding of state government

The 2024 Youth Shadow Week will be held February 13-19, 2024.

III. NEW COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

In 2023, the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, which is supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has named the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services and the Evelyn K. Davis Center as Iowa’s co-leads in a partnership to ensure that all young people 14-26 years of age and who has experienced foster care have the relationships, resources, and opportunities to ensure well-being and success. Iowa is one of 17 states with an official partnership with the Jim Casey Initiative.

The Jim Casey Initiative will provide resources and technical assistance to advance strategies that aim to break the cycle of poverty for young people and build pathways to long-term stability and financial capability. The initiative seeks to ensure that youth have equitable access to permanent family connections, stable housing, education success, economic security and pregnancy prevention and parenting support when they are exiting foster care. The goal is to provide those who have experienced foster care with a rock-solid foundation that will propel them toward success and well-being.

This partnership will provide opportunities for HHS and ICYD to strengthen Iowa’s efforts to utilize adolescent brain research to employ best practices to authentically engage young people, use data and evaluation of progress to improve outcomes, reduce racial and ethnic disparities in child welfare and juvenile justice, and create better policies that sustain improvements.

Evelyn K. Davis Center will expand the Jim Casey Initiative’s Opportunity Passport financial education and matched savings program. The program provides youth the opportunity to learn effective ways to manage money and provides young people the opportunity to leverage matching funds when they save money toward college, cars, and housing, which helps youth make a successful transition to adulthood.

Juvenile Court Services Authentic Youth Engagement Initiative

In 2024, Iowa’s Juvenile Court Services has initiated building an infrastructure for authentic youth and family engagement. In partnership and with the guidance of HHS, Juvenile Court Services will develop a framework for authentic engagement in Iowa’s juvenile justice system. This will involve:

- Co-creating the infrastructure needed for authentic youth engagement.
- Ongoing training of juvenile court staff on healing-centered and authentic engagement principles.
- Providing the coordination and support of Capacity Coaches, for ongoing staff support and staff accountability.

- Pilot innovative strategies to advance authentic engagement, including Credible Messengers, a national model, to assist youth and families navigate the juvenile justice system.

IV. RESEARCH AND DATA

The ICYD will continue to utilize research and data to identify issues and measure results. Multiple sources of Iowa data and ongoing collection of research by national experts continues to be utilized to provide guidance to relevant topics. All of the ICYD efforts are based on adolescent brain research.

Adolescent Brain Research and Implications for Youth Programs

The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth (2019) report from The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine has found that changes in brain structure and connectivity that happen during adolescence (10-25 years of age) provide young people with unique opportunities for positive, life-shaping development, and for recovery from past adversity. The report has recommendations for multiple systems (education, health care, child welfare, and justice) to capitalize on the opportunities and for addressing inequities.

Economic, social, and structural disadvantage along with racism, bias, and discrimination shape life-course trajectories during adolescence, by reducing opportunities and supports that are available for other youth, and increasing risks that other youth do not experience.

Investments in programs and interventions that capitalize on the brain's capacity to change during adolescence can promote shifts in young people's life trajectories, for youth who may have and are facing adverse experiences.⁴

Recommendations for the education system:

- *Rectify disparities in resources for least-advantaged schools and students.*
- *Design purposeful but flexible pathways through education.*
- *Teach practical knowledge and nonacademic skills, such as decision making, adaptability, and psychosocial skills.*
- *Protect the overall health and well-being of each student.*
- *Foster culturally sensitive learning environments.*
- *Help adolescents and families navigate the education sector.*

Recommendations for the health system:

- *Strengthen the financing of health care services for adolescents, including insurance coverage for uninsured and under-insured populations.*
- *Improve access to comprehensive, integrated, coordinated health services for adolescents.*
- *Increase access to behavioral health care and treatment services.*

⁴ Medicine., National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and, Richard J. Bonnie, and Emily P. Backes. *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth*. Washington, District of Columbia: The National Academies Press, 2019.

- *Increase the number of adolescent health care providers and improve their training and distribution.*
- *Improve federal and state data collection on adolescent health and well-being, and conduct adolescent-specific health services research and disseminate the findings.*

Recommendations for the child welfare system:

- *Reduce racial and ethnic disparities in child welfare system involvement.*
- *Promote broad uptake by the states of federal programs that promote resilience and positive outcomes for adolescents involved in the child welfare system.*
- *Provide services to adolescents and their families in the child welfare system that are developmentally informed at the individual, program, and system levels.*
- *Conduct research that reflects the full range of adolescents in the child welfare system.*
- *Foster greater collaboration among the child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and health systems.*
- *Provide developmentally appropriate services for adolescents in the child welfare system.*
- *Foster greater collaboration among the child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and health systems.*
- *Provide developmentally appropriate services for adolescents who engage in noncriminal misconduct without justice system involvement.*

Recommendations for the justice system:

- *Reduce disparities based on race, ethnicity, gender, ability status, and sexual orientation or gender identity and expression among adolescents involved in the justice system.*
- *Ensure that youth maintain supportive relationships while involved in the justice system and receive appropriate guidance and counsel from legal professionals and caregivers.*
- *Implement policies that aim to reduce harm to justice-involved youth in accordance with knowledge from developmental science.*
- *Implement developmentally appropriate and fair policies and practices for adolescents involved in the criminal justice system.*
- *For those youth in the custody of the justice system, ensure that policies and practices are implemented to prioritize the health and educational needs of adolescents and avoid causing harm.”⁵*

The ICYD Council will study systemic policies and practices that disproportionately have negative impact on minority youth, and work together to implement strategies to support the *Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* recommendations.

⁵ Ibid.

V. RECOMMENDED ACTIONS IN 2024

To embed authentic youth engagement into state agencies, the ICYD Council is strengthening activity among the ICYD agencies by developing training materials for staff to be able to recruit and prepare youth for opportunities serving on councils, participating in meetings, and participating in policy making discussions. These are the first steps of the *Youth Opportunity Pathway* strategy.

The ICYD Council seeks support from the Iowa Legislature and Governor's Office to develop innovative ways to authentically engage youth and utilize their expertise and wisdom to craft state policies on youth issues and providing resources needed to achieve this pathway.

Specific recommendations to support the ICYD Council are to:

- Support the ICYD Council in adopting the recommendations from *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* report from The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (pages 22-24). A link to the publication: <https://hhs.iowa.gov/media/68/download?inline=>.
- Support the ICYD Council in developing new strategies to incorporate authentic youth engagement (AYE), positive youth development principles, and the Youth Opportunity Pathway into state-level policy and practice, which include training staff, engaging youth on state boards and commissions, and other creative ways to improve outcomes for youth.
- Provide resources to support state-level youth opportunities and youth-led initiatives (e.g. State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council, Achieving Maximum Potential, Iowa Youth Congress, Youth Justice Council), which include participating in Youth Shadow Week, participating in meetings with youth, reviewing their priority areas, and provide guidance to assist them in achieving the goals.
- Identifying new and better ways to provide services and supports to Iowa's youth and families by encouraging multi-agency approaches in the development of innovative strategies and to incorporate federal initiatives that will eliminate the educational achievement gap for underrepresented students, and racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system.
- Provide resources to continue and expand evidence-based practices and programs as they are developed and identified.
- Provide resources for the continued review and study of services for youth, through the collection and analysis of data that determines the effectiveness of the services.
- Support the continued use of data and research in the development of strategies and actions.
- Continue to develop ways to share information among agencies to address issues affecting youth who receive services and supports from multiple agencies.
- Support the continued use of state agency staff time to implement activities that meet the goals of the ICYD Council.