CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE

ENDING THE CRIMINALIZATION OF YOUTH: ONE INVESTMENT AT A TIME

JUNE 2020

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	
Introduction	6
Who is the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance?	7
Values	7
The Need for Systemic Change	14
Justice Reimagined	19
#InvestInMeCT	42
Calls to Action	43
Conclusion	47
Appendix	49
Acknowledgements	54

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report develops legislative asks and calls to action for policymakers and community members to reduce the number of youth entering the juvenile justice system. It does that by centering the knowledge and experiences of those most impacted by the justice system into all conversations on juvenile justice policy, practice and reform.

First, this report provides background on the history and work of the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (CTJJA/the Alliance) and state of juvenile justice in Connecticut. Though progress has been made in reducing the size of the juvenile system and improving conditions for system-involved youth, there is still much more work to do in both areas.

Second, this report identifies the need for systemic change to ensure continued progress in removing currently incarcerated youth and preventing their initial introduction into the justice system. In 2017, the Alliance began hosting conversations, referred to as vision sessions, with impacted youth and community members. The information gathered from these sessions was used to identify seven inequities commonly experienced in traditionally underserved communities and communities of color that lead to justice system involvement.

Identified as *The 7 Themes of System Change*, these root causes of justice system involvement are:

- 1. Economic Insecurity
- 2. Housing Insecurity
- 3. Need for More Credible Messengers and Positive Influences
- 4. Lack of Equal Opportunity
- 5. Lack of Trust in the System and Abuse of Authority
- 6. Trauma Caused Within Communities
- 7. Lack of Hope



Third, this report presents the conversations had with impacted youth and community members, where they discussed the problems identified in *the 7 Themes of System Change* and some solutions necessary to address these root causes of justice system involvement. In having these discussions, youth and community members also discussed what happens when the 7 Themes funnels kids into the justice system in the first place by examining additional problems faced by system-involved youth.

By reviewing the information received through Vision Sessions, the Alliance was able to identify 10 calls to action necessary to stop the funnel of kids into the justice system, by investing in the success of youth and communities. These calls to action, which make up the overarching asks in the **#InvestInMeCT** Campaign, are:

1. The state must remove all youth under the age of 18 from prison-like environments within the adult and juvenile justice systems.

2. To better meet the needs of youth identified by system-impacted individuals, and to improve outcomes for system-involved youth, the state must invest money into non-prison-like, rehabilitative programs.

3. State and local leaders must fully invest in a wide variety of individualized activities, programs, and resources to better serve communities.

4. The state must ensure law enforcement, and other individuals in positions of power who display abuses of authority are held accountable for their actions.

5. The state must invest in mental health and other support services to prioritize healing individual and community-level trauma faced by youth and families.

6. State and local leaders must create strategic plans to address and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in our justice systems.

7. State leadership must acknowledge there is racial inequality when it comes to accessing basic resources like employment or housing and to develop a plan to address the inequities that lead to economic and housing insecurity.

8. The state must fully invest in an education system where all youth get the same quality education and opportunities as kids who reside in more affluent communities.

9. State and community leaders must develop and implement a plan to establish trust and heal relationships between state agencies and communities where there has historically been distrust and fear.

10. State systems and community organizations must work to ensure those typically left out of positions of power are encouraged and supported to have a say and to become decision-makers themselves.

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TOGET NEE Together, these 10 calls to action work to reduce the number of system-involved youth through increased investment, of funds, time and care into communities

that have long been left out and left behind. By providing resources and opportunities, Connecticut can prevent youth from entering the justice system in the first place, and by improving conditions and practices for currently detained or incarcerated youth our state can ensure youth are able to successfully re-enter their communities without future system-involvement.

INTRODUCTION

In the last 15 years Connecticut has made significant advancements around juvenile justice. Legislation to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction, limit the pathways into detention, reduce out of home placement and remove youth from court who do things like run away or skip school has ensured fewer youth are engaging with the courts than previously. When proposed, each of these reforms was considered very ambitious and many doubted they could be successfully implemented, but advocates, legislators, and community members fought hard to get them passed and implemented. Taken together, these changes have meant fewer youth entering the courts, being detained or incarcerated, or being transferred to the adult system.

When we started looking more closely at the data though, we could see progress had been made in improving conditions and outcomes for youth across the board, but we also realized that these reforms had helped some kids more than others. The number of youth entering the justice system decreased significantly overall, but we saw the greatest decrease in white kids entering the courts and justice systems - noticeably more than we saw for Black and Hispanic kids. Although we've seen tremendous breakthroughs, these conditions showed the need for more improvement.

This made our next steps clear. We wanted to know why some kids were being helped more than others and we wanted to develop reforms that would support the youth who were still falling through the cracks. Since then we have shifted the way we operate, by working to ensure the voices of those directly impacted by the justice system are incorporated into all discussions around juvenile justice policy, practice, and reform.

This paper pulls together the many conversations we've had with system-impacted youth and community members and their calls to action for creating equitable system-reform. Impacted youth, families, and community members know what they need to thrive. Decisions makers need to listen.

WHO IS THE CONNECTICUT JUVENILE JUSTICE ALLIANCE?

The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance (CTJJA/the Alliance) is a statewide public policy and advocacy organization located in Bridgeport, CT. For more than 15 years, CTJJA has been working to end the criminalization of youth. CTJJA is a youth/adult partnership made up of Justice Staff, Justice Advisors and Steering Committee members, who offer professional guidance and expertise from a range of diverse fields.

Our Justice Staff and Advisors carry out the day-to-day activities involved in our work. The Steering Committee provides ongoing guidance, expertise, and collaboration to achieve our shared mission. We value the strengths, skills, expertise and experiences of everyone regardless of their age or background.

VALUES

As an organization we've created a list of beliefs that we value. We believe...

- In loving and supportive collaboration
- In the leadership of directly impacted communities and their power to influence policy
- In working towards our collective liberation by breaking down systems of oppression that harm our youth
- In creating inclusive environments with shared decision-making
- In trusting ourselves and others to achieve deeper understanding



without making assumptions

- In making sustainable work and not sacrificing long-term goals for short-term wins
- In breaking down biases and focusing on building equity with diverse communities
- In making all the necessary investments for youth and families to thrive

WHO ARE THE JUSTICE ADVISORS?

The Justice Advisors are a group of 18 through 25-year-olds from Connecticut's most impacted cities. Their first and second-hand experience with the justice system brings credibility and authenticity to our work. They are students, employees, sons, daughters, and neighbors in communities throughout our state.

In October 2017, The Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance launched its first group of Justice Advisors as we shifted to a youth/adult partnership. We know that people who have been directly impacted by the juvenile justice system need to be a part of all ongoing conversations across the state about our youth and families, especially regarding decisions that will impact them. This isn't how things have usually worked, so we committed to changing that norm.



CTJJA Justice Advisors, Founding Members, 2018. [Left to right: Shamare Holmes, Aquil Crooks, Yancy Singleton, Shaneese Pettway, and Iliana Pujols]

Our Justice Advisors are dedicated to disrupting and dismantling the pathways that funnel children and youth into courts and prisons. Their primary goal is to make sure the voices of those who are directly impacted are meaningfully and authentically a part of all discussions around juvenile justice policy, practice, and reform.

WHAT DOES THE ALLIANCE DO TO ACHIEVE ITS MISSION?

The Alliance works to *end the criminalization of youth* by using organizing, advocacy, and policy tools to protect the rights, futures, and well-being of potentially, currently, and formerly incarcerated youth.

We work to constantly gather information on the experiences of impacted youth, families, and community members to strengthen our understanding, strategize solutions and mobilize towards the changes we need. The success of our mission depends on the involvement of all members of our Alliance, along with their many skills, strengths, and continued dedication to the work.



THE STATE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE IN CONNECTICUT

Over the last 15 years, Connecticut has done a lot of work to improve and shrink its juvenile justice system. Important progress has been made and fewer youth are getting involved in the courts than before. Of course, there are still conditions that need to get better. A current issue we struggle with is identifying how best to respond when youth are charged with or commit more serious offenses.

In 2018, Connecticut officially closed their last large youth prison, the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS). During this process, advocates like us said that instead of CJTS, the state should create intensive, individualized services in the community along with smaller, "home-like" secure facilities to house the young people that would have usually been at CJTS. The state's replacement plan did call for small staff and hardware secure facilities.



The state's short-term solution was to convert one unit in each of the juvenile detention centers, in Bridgeport and Hartford, to hold kids long-term instead of short term. R.E.G.I.O.N.S. secure in detention opened in July 2018, as a long-term care program aimed at providing education and needs-based therapeutic interventions for youth in confined settings. These converted units were originally intended to be temporary, until an agreement could be made on who would be in charge of the small facilities. The state has struggled to develop contracts for small facilities, so those R.E.G.I.O.N.S. secure units in detention have become a long-term solution. Many are unhappy about this situation, including advocates, legislators, and state operators of the juvenile justice system. Still, there have been some barriers to solutions which the state has not been able to overcome. And, so far, the state has not created more community-based intensive programs as alternatives to residential placement.



CTJJA at the Youth First Initiative's Youth Leaders Network Convening in Newark, NJ, 2019.

Connecticut is also a state that still incarcerates kids under 18, with adult court charges, in adult prison both pre- and post-trial. Boys are held at Manson Youth Institution (MYI) and girls are held at York Correctional Institution (York). Members of the state's Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee (JJPOC) have recommended for three years that all kids under 18 be kept in juvenile facilities until they are 18 - even if their cases are in the adult system, but that hasn't happened.

Conditions at MYI are a problem, as the Office of the Child Advocate, an independent state oversight agency, outlined in their January 2019 report which examined conditions of confinement for detained and incarcerated youth. Following this report, the Federal Department of Justice opened an investigation into conditions at MYI for 15-17-year-olds in the fall of 2019. Even though the state was required to have a plan for how to remove youth from the adult system by January 2020, no plan was created.

During the year before CJTS closed, the Alliance was having a larger conversation about ways to involve youth voice in the conversations and decisions that take place around juvenile justice policy and practices.

The Alliance wanted to have youth, family, and community voice in the conversations about where young people who commit serious crimes go, but we found that there were not many spaces that community members could go and share their thoughts and opinions on this specific issue.

More specifically, we wanted to make sure that decision makers were creating, investing in, and implementing spaces and ideas based on the needs, asks, personal experiences and expertise of our community members.



CTJJA at the Youth First Initiative's Youth Leaders Network Convening in Boston, MA, 2018.

In order to create a space where those most impacted by the justice system could discuss problems, solutions, needs and wants, our Justice Advisors began hosting community conversations with previously and currently incarcerated or detained youth and impacted community members. We called these conversations vision sessions.



THE NEED FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE VISION SESSIONS

Vision sessions are group conversations held with 2-20 people for about 1.5-2 hours. Participants have included previously and currently incarcerated or detained youth, family members and impacted community members. To expand on our knowledge and experience, our Justice Advisors hosted sessions in facilities, programs, and community spaces to learn more about the needs, demands, and recommendations of our community members, and directly impacted individuals.

Since 2017, the Alliance has used vision sessions to funnel information from community members directly to policymakers and other stakeholders. This is one technique used to bridge the communication gap between communities and decision makers, such as supervisors of probation and facilities where youth are incarcerated. Vision sessions allow us to bring more than just our own opinions to the conversations we participate in. A big role that the Alliance plays includes building and maintaining relationships with impacted youth and families, nonprofit organizations, state agencies, and additional stakeholders. Building and maintaining relationships allows us to serve as a two-way communication pathway.

Through vision sessions, the Justice Advisors have had the opportunity to lead conversations with about 150 youth and community members across the state. These topics have included, but were not limited to, resources they know are needed in their



communities, ways that the juvenile justice system has or has not failed them, ways to repurpose the CJTS facility, areas for growth in their communities, issues that are important to them, factors that have led them or others into the system, ways they think young people should be treated and housed to ensure restorative outcomes for both themselves and the victims based on their personal experiences or the experiences of others close to them, and even shared knowledge about the current juvenile justice system.

THE 7 THEMES OF SYSTEM CHANGE

After hosting our first round of vision sessions, we were able identify 7 root causes that led young people into the system based on those discussions. We refer to these root causes of youth criminalization as The 7 Themes of System Change. They are:

1. Economic Insecurity

There are many barriers to economic security. Including but not limited to:

- Implicit and Explicit Bias Related to Race, Ethnicity, Gender, LGBTQ Identity, etc
- Location and Transportation Issues
- Education Attainment Level
- Criminal Background
- Employment Options
- Childcare Needs
- Age

2. Housing Insecurity

Economic insecurity and housing insecurity are often intertwined. If people can't get good jobs, they can't afford a good place to live, and most good jobs are not in neighborhoods where people can afford to live. This situation puts families in distress and stuck in situations where they're forced to make

difficult decisions about their housing.

3. Need For More Credible Messengers and Positive Influences

Young people want to be able to connect with people who can relate to their circumstances, who have experiences similar to theirs, and are emotionally invested in them. They want actual relationships with people that look like them who can show them that people from their cities can *"make it."*

4. Lack of Equal Opportunity

People of color, especially students of color, are well aware of the fact that there is significantly more investment in schools in predominantly white communities than in schools that are located in the cities. They understand and experience daily the reality that their peers one or two towns over are offered all kinds of opportunities that they will never have.

5. Lack of Trust in the System and Abuse of Authority

Our vision sessions made it clear that, especially in certain cities in CT like Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury, and Hartford, the community and law enforcement do not trust each other. This lack of trust makes it hard for both sides to have safe, fair interactions when they are engaging on the streets or in other places. This also makes some spaces feel uncomfortable or unsafe for youth or law enforcement because of assumptions based on previous encounters and perspectives.

Young people we talked to in vision sessions said that they have experienced biased treatment from some members of law enforcement, and people in power in other state agencies, programs, facilities, or schools. They don't see people in power receiving any consequences for that biased behavior.

6. Trauma Caused Within Communities

Things like housing insecurity and economic insecurity cause stress and trauma over time. In addition, violence, unfair treatment, raids, brutal assaults, shootings, street dealing, and abuses of authority exhibited by people in power lead to trauma spreading throughout communities: experiences that some would consider traumatic, others start to consider regular, or "normal." The pain, fear, and anger people feel makes it hard for them to concentrate, focus, or sometimes care about anything. It cannot be overlooked; the ways trauma impacts a person's mental health and overall well-being.

7. Lack of Hope

People expressed not having any hope when it comes to believing that things "will get better" or that "they can be successful," especially when all odds are "against them" geographically, economically, racially and historically. When people don't have hope, it makes it hard for them to be optimistic or imagine themselves being successful.

These themes reveal a stark reality most common in traditionally underserved communities and communities of color. These communities do not get the same opportunities to thrive as wealthier, predominantly white communities.

Though racial and ethnic injustice was not an explicit stand-alone theme in vision sessions, laws and practices in place for generations created and continue to maintain segregated communities and opportunities that created the 7 themes. The harm of those laws and practices must be undone in order to really fix the root causes of justice system involvement.



CTJJA participating in the Midwest Academy Organizing for Social Change training in Chicago, IL 2019.



JUSTICE REIMAGINED FROM THE 7 THEMES TO #INVESTINMECT

We realized that addressing *the 7 Themes* requires investment – of money, but also of time and care, into communities that have long been left out and left behind. We developed the **#InvestInMeCT** campaign to tackle the root causes of justice system involvement by working to identify solutions that directly address the 7 Themes.

We believe finding, funding, and implementing solutions to the commonly experienced inequities outlines in the 7 Themes would dramatically reduce the number of system-involved youth. In addition to making sure youth never enter the justice system to begin with, we also wanted to identify solutions to improve conditions for system-involved youth to ensure they can successfully re-enter their communities and leave the justice system entirely.

In order to know what recommendations to make to change the lack of investment in certain communities, we hosted more vision sessions to learn how youth and communities wanted investments to be made in them.

To achieve this goal, we created a new format for our vision sessions that was more focused on identifying specific solutions. Acknowledging there are young people charged with more serious offenses, we wanted to know how people who participated in these sessions thought this population of youth should be handled. We wanted to get youth and community answers to

questions like these: "Where should youth who commit more serious offenses go? What kind of spaces do they need to be in? What plan ensures the most success for our young people?"



Each vision session group got the chance to discuss what services, resources, and environment they thought would best help address these issues. To help facilitate this conversation the Justice Advisors created a hypothetical scenario that involved a young man named Demarco with a realistic and relatable story.

During these sessions, the Justice Advisors split the participants into two separate groups and presented the Demarco scenario with a set of questions to each group. One group would identify what would happen to Demarco in the current system that exists in Connecticut based on the information that group was they were provided, while the other group got the opportunity to create a reimagined youth justice system and were able to decide exactly how it would handle Demarco's situation. These conversations were authentic and engaging with most groups asking for us to return, or even stay after to eat!

PART 1: EXAMINING THE 7 THEMES OF SYSTEM CHANGE DISCUSSING ECONOMIC AND HOUSING INSECURITY

We said earlier that though our goal in vision sessions was to talk to those most impacted by the justice system, particularly youth. It soon became clear that there would be a conversation around housing and being able to pay bills during every vision session. We had plenty of participants tell us they were incarcerated



for simply trying to meet a basic need, like stealing food to eat or breaking into a car to sleep in for the night. Teenagers talked a lot about being responsible for keeping a roof over their family's head. "It's just me around to take care of my mom, so whatever I gotta do to keep her safe, that's what I'm gonna do." Many of the families we talked to only had one working adult. In instances where fewer resources are coming in, family members may need to work multiple jobs to survive. Many people can only find jobs that pay minimum wage, but with transportation and childcare needs, that job might only cover the rent, not any other bills or costs. We heard that those situations put a lot of responsibility on the older siblings, sometimes 12-14 years old, that want to buy shoes for school or go to the movies but can't ask their parents for money because they know they're already struggling.

We know poverty knows no race, and yet people of color are disproportionately impacted by income inequality and housing insecurity. In February, 2020, the company Zippia analyzed data from the American Community Survey and the Sentencing Project and found that Connecticut is the 4th worst state in the country for Black people when it comes to income inequality, homeownership rates, education gap, and incarceration rates. Annie E Casey's 2019 KidsCount Databook, showed that between 2011 and 2017, Connecticut's Black and Latinx children were twice as likely (40%) as Connecticut's white children (20%) to live in households facing employment insecurity.



Organizations like the Partnership for Strong Communities, the Open Communities Alliance, and Connecticut Voices for Children have been doing research and advocacy around these issues for years. The data showing conscious and unconscious racism as major reasons for our state's disparities is clear. Action needs to be taken to create a state where all people have opportunities to work a job that pays a fair wage and safe, secure housing.

Young people had some ideas about how to make this happen. They'd like to see access to more employment opportunities. They mentioned programs like Youth @ Work, which provide workplace exposure and mentoring to in-school youth ages 14-21, which is successful but can only hire a certain number of people. Many times, they talked about wanting to be able to learn and earn money while doing it. Lots of times, training programs not only cost money, but would require someone to quit their job to attend. **People can't afford that**.

A fascinating conversation happened when some young people said we should lower the age at which young people can work, so that 13-, 14-, or 15-year-olds could earn money legally. Other young people talked about how that would just make the long-term problems worse. When youth get jobs, they don't have time for sports or music or after-school activities. Wealthier, predominantly white youth get to do all of those without worrying about supporting their family. So, they said, instead of lowering the age when youth can work, basically giving in to and accepting racial disparities, we need policies that would help the family of the young people so that they no longer had to worry about helping to pay the bills.



Connecticut has been known as a state with wide racial disparities around housing and income for a long time and there are other barriers that make these inequalities worse. We have people working to secure jobs that pay a livable wage but they are unable to do so because of additional obstacles such as not having a license so they can't drive, or a criminal background. We have people searching for assistance, who can't get support due to not meeting the requirements or having too "high" of an income to qualify, which most often isn't even enough money to pay the bills. These are all barriers that can be removed if the state were to invest in the success of our community members and reentry community.

We need strong leaders to acknowledge these facts and partner with communities of color to develop budgets and policies specifically created to reverse decades of inequity. We must hold agencies as well as local and state-wide elected leaders accountable for making budgets and policies that intentionally work to reverse racial disparities. That means being involved in our communities, asking elected officials about their ideas around these issues and voting based on their answers.

DISCUSSING THE NEED FOR MORE CREDIBLE MESSENGERS AND POSITIVE INFLUENCES

One of the most rewarding takeaways from the vision sessions was the joy that the participants got out of seeing people who share similar experiences as theirs in the position of Justice Advisors. Young people and families thrive off of seeing people like them succeed and become successful. It is unfortunate that people of color do not represent a lot of the leadership across the state. We often see people of color serving on-the-ground jobs, like the correctional officers, but how about the big bosses? It seems so much harder for a person of color to become a leader than it is for their white peers.

In fact, in February 2020 the Connecticut Secretary of State, Denise W. Merrill released a report highlighting that even though a Connecticut law was passed in 1993 requiring state boards and commissions to report on their gender and racial/ethnic make-up, almost half of them don't follow that law and the ones that do still report that Black and Hispanic people are significantly underrepresented as part of their membership.



CTJJA participating in the Midwest Academy Organizing for Social Change training in Chicago, IL 2019.

We need to break the cycle of hierarchies that have led to almost all-white, male leadership that has been in place for generations. Our young people are our future, all of them deserve the chances and opportunities to be great.

DISCUSSING THE LACK OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

The conversation about education is one that youth feel really strongly about and discuss in every vision session. In sessions, we hear young people say they're being taught in classes with people 3 grades younger than them, or that their schools ran out of paper before the end of the school year. Before one vision session, staff told us that our plan to have the 15-17-year-old boys in the program answer questions by writing their thoughts on sticky notes and attaching them to easel paper taped to the walls wouldn't work because most of the boys couldn't read or write well enough to fully participate.

These stories are unacceptable.

It's unfortunate that we allow a reality where children in predominantly Black and Brown communities aren't being provided the same quality education as children in predominantly white communities. It is one of the most persistently damaging and inequitable things we, as a state, could do. All young people deserve equal education and success opportunities, and our children are aware that this is not what they're getting.



Aside from the unequal distribution of educational resources, youth talked about not feeling valued or wanted by their schools - "*The structure is horrible, and they push kids out like nothing.*"

Another young person, 18-years-old, who didn't know how to read, told us that nobody had invested the time into actually teaching them.

They told us that educators themselves are not always promoting the success of our children of color. Young people mentioned teachers telling them more than once, *"You'll never be anything."* What do you think happens when someone is repeatedly told they'll never be anything? Eventually, they are going to believe it and fall into the trap of thinking they can never be successful.



This is a problem recognized by national and Connecticut leaders. The National Center for Education Statistics says, *"Having a teacher of the same race/ethnicity can have positive impacts on a student's attitudes, motivation, and achievement and minority teachers may have more positive expectations for minority students' achievement than non-minority teachers."*

In Connecticut, Governor Ned Lamont reported in 2019 that **40% of our students are people of color but not even 9% of teachers are people of color.** Legislators in our state recognize that we have a problem, and in 2019 they passed a bill to increase the number of teachers of color, but no money was included to implement the recommendation.

Understanding that a person spends a large chunk of their life in school, we need to make sure that the people surrounding our kids in schools are protecting them and are invested in them. We must provide our youth with a proper education and give them the tools they need to open the doors to success. This is what students in more affluent communities receive. Youth of color and those from less affluent families have a right to just as much.

DISCUSSING THE LACK OF EQUAL OPPORTUNTY: OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN COMMUNITIES

During vision sessions, participants discussed how the state funds programs and how money and resources are allocated throughout communities. Even with limited knowledge of how Connecticut's budget works, young people and families are aware of the closure of different facilities and programs, and they recognize when a good program is closed without another program put in place to replace it.

In almost every vision session that was held, at least one person mentioned having attended a program in the past that they loved that no longer exists. It is unfortunate when young people and families build a relationship with staff and become comfortable in a space where they feel supported and that resource is removed. Small community providers often struggle to receive and maintain funding due to the credibility they might not have with the state. This means the state is often overlooking programs that can serve the communities they're in.

Young people mentioned realizing that there are much fewer programs now for youth in the system compared to when they were younger, or when their slightly older siblings were in school. They also mentioned no longer knowing where to go for help because they're used to programs closing, are tired of inconsistency, and are often unaware of the programs and resources that may still exist around them. People are aware that their communities are not being invested in at the same rate that money, programs, and resources are being removed. When state or local leaders choose to remove a program or facility the state must reinvest every dollar back into those communities in a way that is meaningful and helpful.



One sentiment we heard a lot was, "To my knowledge if you wanna get good help you have to get into a lot of trouble."

Why do people need to get in trouble to get the services they need? There are often programs or services that are amazing, and needed, but you have to be on probation or DCF involved to attend. What is the point



of sharing the resource once a person has already come in contact with the system? We want to be able to address things before they happen, therefore the idea of someone having to be in crisis to receive a service is unacceptable.

Aside from the need to reinvest dollars and close youth prisons to create more intentional restorative spaces for people who are directly impacted by the system, the need for a wide variety of activities, resources, and programs for all youth and families is critical. Young people and families want to have access to programs that are free and accessible to everyone.

We had a participant who said they simply want to be able to go roller skating without having to drive all the way to Waterbury from Bridgeport. Families and youth aren't only looking for places to go to do fun things, but they want to be able to access resources locally where they can get fresh food and produce. Youth, families, and communities need mentoring services by people who can relate to their circumstances and help guide them on the right path, sports other than basketball that you don't have to pay hundreds of dollars to join, programs open past 8pm on the weekend where young people can hang with their friends instead of having to hang in the streets, and more.

Our young people and families are asking for safe, communities full of resources that offer productive things to do. This is how things are in wealthier communities. It's up to local and state leaders to listen to their communities and invest in creating these kinds of environments.

DISCUSSING LACK OF TRUST IN SYSTEMS THAT DISPLAY ABUSES OF AUTHORITY

Young people mentioned the fear of knowing that police officers are in complete control and can react off of impulse at any instant - "*Most of them I come across yelling in your face and show you they're the man in charge.*"

When police officers respond, physically or verbally, to situations out of fear, which can come from cultural misunderstandings or biases, or simply a person's experience from the past, those responses can be dangerous. We've seen these situations grow into serious ones, like the 3 civilians killed by law enforcement within the first month of 2020 in CT. Since law enforcement has the power in



most situations and officers get the benefit of the doubt, community members rarely get justice when harm is caused by law enforcement, and this includes institutional law enforcement.

We can avoid negative interactions between police and community members in a few ways. Law enforcement officers must receive ongoing training around how to react in situations where they are under pressure or experiencing traumatic events. Part of their evaluation must address this area of their work. Communities could also stop relying on police when they aren't actually the correct people to respond.

Police are often called to address school discipline issues, or people experiencing mental health crises or homelessness. That isn't their job and we shouldn't ask them to play the role of a social worker. Instead, local and state leaders need to invest their dollars in the most appropriate support people.

We can also work to repair and build relationships. It's very easy to put the blame on community members when there's a chaotic situation involving law enforcement, but we need to realize that the officers that are here to protect and serve our communities also have to do their own healing before they can protect and serve anyone. All law enforcement officers need to be properly trained to engage with people who have experienced trauma, but they also need the space, tools, and support to process their own trauma.

Many traumatic experiences can lead to mental health illnesses, such as PTSD, which is severe and needs to be addressed for public safety and personal health reasons. Along with the trauma-specific support, we need to make sure we are providing a wide variety of other mental health services for law enforcement officers as well.



CTJJA Justice Advisor Tatiyana, showing off her brand Reinvent: the recreation of ones self for the better without time being a factor. "In life we go through situations that may stray us away from what we may see as the bigger picture but it is our jobs to continue to strive, work and love ourselves enough to make progress to becoming better people." - Tatiyana Whitley

DISCUSSING TRAUMA CAUSED WITHIN COMMUNITIES AND LACK OF HOPE: ADDRESSING TRAUMA



Our young people are carrying a lot of pain. One young man described his days as, "Looking over your shoulder all the time, looking at every car that passes, taking cautions."

At the end of one vision session a participant said, "Make sure people know the sexual things that happen to people while they're going through these housing issues really impacts their lives."





Another told us, "*I lost my mind once my father died.*" One talked about the people who had died and were buried with no tombstones because there wasn't any money to pay for them.

Trauma spreads like wildfire. It's experienced in schools, homes, communities, and pretty much anywhere. Communities experience trauma together. Community-level trauma means you don't have to have personally experienced violence to feel the emotional and psychological impacts of violence in your community. The level of awareness young people of color in Connecticut have around the state of their schools and educational options compared to their white peers is an example of a community-level trauma.

We've mentioned the importance of providing trauma-informed and other mental health focused services, but where can people actually go to get these services? When we have the discussion about spaces where people are able to process trauma and heal or get mental health services, they only mention knowing about these kinds of spaces in institutions or programs, but never in the community. The only kind of community trauma processing tool that was mentioned during vision sessions was the conversations people are able to have with their mentors or other peers. We need to create a space that consists of staff that specializes in urban and community trauma and allows youth and families to properly process these things without having to wait until they are in trouble.

Some people aren't aware that some of their emotions or behaviors might be caused by their experiences of trauma or a mental health issue and may need help identifying and addressing it. They might never consider attending a group for "grief counseling," but might go talk with a group of guys about how they felt when a loved one was shot.

One way to do this could be a shift from trauma-informed care to healing centered care. Healing centered care is strengths-based and, according to Dr. Shawn Ginwright, an Associate Professor of Africana Studies at San Francisco State University and author. He views those exposed to trauma as agents in the creation of their own well-being rather than victims of traumatic events. We need to invest in services that are helping communities process these traumas and actually promote and encourage their participation in their own and co²mmunity healing - addressing the root causes of their trauma.





² https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-fromtrauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c

BUILDING HOPE AND TRUST THROUGH REPAIRING RELATIONSHIPS

During vision sessions youth often talked about the ways they had lost trust



and faith in the people and systems around them, and that they felt those people and systems had lost faith and trust in them.

One participant said, "Let's look out for each other, hating needs to stop."

Others wanted the older adults in their community to be a better example: "Communities would be better if there was more self-pride in the community;" "People in the community should be setting an example for others."





Huge trust barriers also exist between communities and the systems in power – the Department of Children and Families (DCF), law enforcement, the courts. To the youth, things seem more like "us" and "them," instead of everyone working together to solve or prevent problems.

For example, some youth told us they wouldn't be comfortable entering a room where a police officer was present. A few young men of color said they don't drive in the city for fear of being pulled over and things escalating. When they see police hanging by the park, they walk the other way or cross the street. Also, when community members hear "DCF" they automatically think their kids are getting taken away. There is no sense that DCF might have programs or services that could help their family, only fear and suspicion. That fear and suspicion also goes the other way, if people see a group of kids of color running down the beach, they think they're up to no good. People feel like DCF workers look at families referred to them as "a hot mess" and failures. Articles in the media always refer to "juveniles," not children or youth,

and they always focus on negatives instead of the good things. A young person in one vision session, when we asked what they would say to legislators or others in power, answered, "*Stop making stereotypes about me*." Youth talked about wanting to see the "human" in people, and for people to see the "human" in them.



In fact, a lot of community members aren't aware of the amazing leadership from some state agencies and programs that are actually invested in the success of communities. A lot of agencies and traditional leaders aren't aware of the community members that have book bag giveaways, pull together resource fairs, or host neighborhood cookouts. It's unfortunate to see how divided everyone is. To achieve the long-term goal of true community, we need to work together to create the spaces and opportunities that we want and need.



CTJJA creating and participating in the Demarco scenario/activity with Hernan Carvente from the Youth First Initiative, 2019.



How do we do that? People often say, "It's not what you know, it's who you know." That's unfortunate, but it highlights the importance of building and maintaining relationships. In vision sessions, youth mentioned people at school, or even police on the beat, who they value and have relationships with. Some young people have had great experiences with those who work with them, but not everyone gets to experience that luxury.

We need to invest in repairing and healing the relationships both within communities and between communities and systems. This can be simple things like having community and police mixers or having community block parties. It also requires communities to have honest, hard conversations about where lack of trust and respect comes from, how people are impacted, and what could be done to build trust. We don't need to continue this "us" and "them". We need to see, respect, and invest in each other's humanity.



CTJJA meeting with DCF Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes and the Chief of External Affairs, Ken Mysogland, 2019.


PART 2: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE 7 THEMES FUNNELS KIDS INTO THE SYSTEM? DISCUSSING YOUTH IN PRISON-LIKE FACILITIES

Connecticut currently incarcerates youth, 15-17 years old, charged as adults within the Department of Corrections at Manson Youth Institution in Cheshire and York Correctional Institution in Niantic. Recognizing that the Department of Corrections is not designed to serve and rehabilitate young people, this needs to change. It is against best practice and does not improve public safety.

Every session we hosted, people mentioned that a person's brain isn't fully developed until 25 years-old and that we can't expect children to make decisions with the same maturity that adults do. Our young people and families are not receiving the tools, guidance, or support that they need while incarcerated. We need to make sure we are removing them from prison-like institutions and putting them in a space that is fully dedicated to and specializes in supporting a person's adolescent development and success.

The state closed the Connecticut Juvenile Training School (CJTS), its large youth prison for those with juvenile charges, because incarcerating youth in large institutions doesn't work. Youth with charges serious enough to be locked up, but not transferred to the adult system are now held in R.E.G.I.O.N.S. secure units located inside detention in Hartford and Bridgeport.



We are concerned about youth being incarcerated in secure detention units. The juvenile detention centers that house the R.E.G.I.O.N.S. secure units were built, designed, and staffed as large, prison-like institutions to house youth pre-trial for very short-term stays, but are currently used to hold youth for much longer periods.

When having the discussion about how to handle youth with serious charges during the vision sessions, young people suggested smaller facilities where there is a wide variety of tailored services offered based on the young person's need. These smaller spaces would house 6-12 young people and visually look more like a home where they are able to come in and out of their room and interact positively with others. These programs would do an initial evaluation per young person and design a plan with that individual that would put them on a track to be released once the plan is completed. Participants suggested that the facilities should be designed to promote rehabilitation, with mood appropriate wall colors and culturally reflective decorations. They also said these facilities should include staff that can relate to youth experiences, are dedicated, caring, knowledgeable, and committed to helping these young people thrive. In almost every vision session, a system was recommended that would allow each young person to gain privileges, like off-campus visits and extra family time, which would help teach them self-accountability and respect, and remove privileges when a young person truly fails to respect rules or others.

Participants mentioned the need for individualized mental health and trauma services for all young people who come through these facilities; not just the basic services but rather, services that are provided by people who they can truly relate to and trust to help them succeed. Every session a youth mentioned not having a relationship with their therapists or counselors because it's either obvious that they're simply doing their job or the young people feel as if they are not invested in their true success. When a crime is committed, the plan must always be to try to prevent it from happening again, and jail is no place to tackle the root causes that are leading people into the system in the first place.

Groups acknowledged needing to address the harm that was caused when the initial offense happened, and suggested creating some sort of victim-offender repair program or restorative space where they're both able to discuss the issue and repair their relationship, even if that means simply agreeing to never speak again. One person gave an example of Hang Time in Bridgeport, which hosts weekly gatherings to mediate serious street problems between folks by having facilitated restorative discussions in a room full of community members.

Young people recognize that there's always someone on the other end that is being harmed by crimes that are committed and seem fully committed to wanting to repair these harmful situations. Simply serving jail time when there isn't any sort of closure or restoration process, other than the revenge of housing someone in a facility, is only going to damage that person more.



DISCUSSING RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES IN OUR JUSTICE SYSTEMS

As we toured the state to host vision sessions, we made sure to go to spaces where most people had been directly impacted by the system. Unsurprisingly, we rarely ran into groups that consisted of anything other than Black and Brown bodies.



During every vision session we hosted, we had a conversation about race and how they think race plays a factor in their situations. "As much as we think racism is dying, it's really not, it's growing."

Multiple people mentioned being profiled by law enforcement, or situations like initially getting in trouble simply because they were in a car full of people of color playing loud music. Young people of color talked about getting arrested with a white friend, *"I got locked up, homeboy got probation."*



In December 2019, the Judicial Branch presented data at the monthly Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee meeting about the racial and ethnic make-up of the juvenile justice system. This data overall showed that arrests have decreased over the years, but it more specifically highlighted the fact that arrests are decreasing the most for white kids. **Reforms to decrease the size of the juvenile justice system aren't helping kids of color as much as they are helping white kids**.

We can try to ignore the fact that we have these racial disparities in our system, but it is a concrete issue and it needs to be addressed. Every incarceration begins with initial contact, which is why it is so important to make sure everyone involved in our system (professionals, advocates, and community members) are working together to minimize the racial disparity in the state from the moment that young people come in contact with law enforcement through every decision made by a probation officer, judge, or case manager.

We need to come up with a concrete plan to decrease this disparity instead of saying "we'll work on it." Racial disparities have existed for generations.

We will never achieve equity if we do not hold all aspects of the justice system accountable for decision-making, policies, and practices that lead to worse outcomes for people of color.



#INVESTINMECT

After thoroughly reviewing the information we received through vision sessions, our Justice Advisors and Justice Staff were able to identify 10 calls to action that reflect the needs of the people that participated in our discussions.

Some calls to action seek to address the needs of system-involved youth, to ensure when youth exit the juvenile or adult systems, they are able to do so successfully and without re-entering the justice systems in the future. Other calls to action work to prevent justice system involvement entirely for all youth and community members. Ultimately, all calls to action work to keep kids out of the system by addressing the root causes of youth criminalization identified in *the 7 Themes*.

By addressing these root causes, the **#InvestInMeCT** campaign aims to build opportunity-rich communities where all youth and families can access the resources they need to succeed. That's why we're urging decision-makers to support in the futures of our state's youth by investing in success instead of arrests.



CALLS TO ACTION

The state must remove all youth under the age of 18 from prisonlike environments within the adult and juvenile justice systems.

No youth under the age of 18 should be held in a prison-like environment. This includes removing youth from MYI, York, and R.E.G.I.O.N.S. secure detention.

2

To better meet the needs of youth identified by system-impacted individuals, and to improve outcomes for system-involved youth, the state must invest money into non-prison-like, rehabilitative programs.

To replace our current prison-like systems, our state must fully invest in small, therapeutic, restorative programs. Programs must consist of staff that can relate to youth experiences, and is dedicated, caring, knowledgeable, and invested in the success of the populations they serve. These spaces should include individualized services that promote the success of system-involved youth and properly prepare them to reintegrate into the community.

This includes spending a portion of the money saved when residential facilities, close, such as CJTS, on alternative community programs and facilities and making sure that when one program is ended, something else exists or is funded to meet that same need.

3

State and local leaders must fully invest in a wide variety of individualized activities, programs, and resources to better serve communities.

Examples of resources include, but are not limited to, after-school programs, low to no-cost sports leagues, roller rinks and other athletic facilities, art programming, etc. Community programs and services should be staffed with individuals that can relate to the families, are dedicated, caring, knowledgeable, and invested in the success of the population that they serve.

The state must ensure law enforcement, and other individuals in positions of power who display abuses of authority are held accountable for their actions.

In order to develop and repair trust in the system, we must hold law enforcement personal accountable the same way we would regular community members. Additionally, we recommend all law enforcement be provided with the proper tools and resources to process on-the-job trauma and mental illnesses and be required to attend continuous anti-bias and racial profiling trainings.

The state must invest in mental health and other support services to prioritize healing individual and community-level trauma faced by youth and families.

These services must be available to people where they live, in their own language, respectful of their culture and even if they don't have health insurance.

6

State and local leaders must create strategic plans to address and eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in our justice systems. In that, we recommend all people with jobs connected to the justice systems undergo continuous bias and racial profiling training and evaluations throughout the year and throughout their career.

7

State leadership must acknowledge there is racial inequality when it comes to accessing basic resources like employment or housing and to develop a plan to address the inequities that lead to economic and housing insecurity.

We need to fully invest in eliminating barriers and inequities and hold our systems accountable for achieving that goal. Barriers to opportunities include, but are not limited to, needing court, probation, or other program referrals to access resources, age barriers, disqualification due to criminal background, and more.

B The you wh

The state must fully invest in an education system where all youth get the same quality education and opportunities as kids who reside in more affluent communities.

This includes having teachers who can relate to their students' experiences, are dedicated, caring, knowledgeable, and invested in their students' success. System-involved youth must receive high-quality, individualized education from people who truly care about their outcomes. We need to be uplifting and promoting the success of ALL young people.

9

State and community leaders must develop and implement a plan to establish trust and heal relationships between state agencies and communities where there has historically been distrust and fear.

In that, we recommend that we all work together to intentionally heal the broken trust within communities and between communities and systems like DCF, the courts, law enforcement, and elected officials. We ask for leadership from all parts of our communities, to work together instead of against each other for the greater purpose and the common good.

10

State systems and community organizations must work to ensure those typically left out of positions of power are encouraged and supported to have a say and to become decision-makers themselves.

We need to make sure we are investing in the futures of our families and promoting their excellence by giving people of color equal opportunities and filling leadership roles with passionate diverse teams. This is especially true for those impacted by the justice system.



CONCLUSION

"The children are our future" is a line many of us have heard. Unfortunately, we know not all of our children are provided with the same resources, nor experience the same sense of safety and support growing up. And it's a cycle that gets repeated through generations. Whether we have a child who's growing up provided with everything needed for a healthy well being, or a child who has nothing, we have to care about one just as much as we do the other. As a child you are dependent on those around you to guide you to success. For a plant to grow you must give it water, sunlight, air and time. For a child to grow to their best self they need love, support, resources and guidance.

No one reform will be able to fully address the many inequities present in our current system, but our state must move with urgency to invest in the futures of minority youth and disadvantaged communities by beginning to address those injustices. Our systems must shift in how we prioritize the well-being of our young people, how we address normal adolescent misbehavior, and how we tackle the root causes of youth criminalization. The 10 calls to action outlined in this report, developed in conjunction with system-impacted youth, families, and communities, are the necessary next steps to tackling the inequities in our current system.

The state of Connecticut must continue to work towards decreasing the number of youth in the justice systems as well as improving the conditions for those currently in them, but our goal is not simply for youth to avoid the justice system. Our goal is for all youth to be given access to the resources and support they need to thrive. Just because a plant wilts doesn't mean it's dead, it just needs a little more care. That's why it's important to highlight that we can not do this without investing time, care and love into all the work we do and decisions we make as a state, not only the ones related to juvenile justice.

We are excited to work in closer collaboration with our organizational colleagues who focus their efforts on the issues highlighted throughout our calls to action. None of these can be addressed alone. Inequities and racial disparities cross issue lines and so must our advocacy and organizing. At CTJJA, we put great value on our youth and communities and believe if we work together within those communities we can achieve the common goal of wanting our youth to be in a position where they can succeed. We understand this will not be easy, but just because something will be difficult doesn't mean it cannot or should not be attempted.

We can achieve our goals if we all take the proper measures to invest our time, money, care, and love into bettering our young peoples' pathways to achievement. That's why we're urging decision-makers to support the futures of our state's youth by investing in success instead of arrests.

Do you believe all Connecticut youth deserve an equal opportunity to live safe, healthy, and fulfilling lives? **If so, join us.**



APPENDIX METHODOLOGY - IDENTIFYING THE 7 THEMES

The 7 Themes were identified following the analysis of guided discussions (Vision Sessions) conducted by the Justice Advisors with system-involved youth throughout 2018. Notes provided by the moderators of each discussion were reviewed in detail and participants' statements were sorted according to the personal experience/sentiments that informed their comments (i.e. personal goals, family/community priorities, neglect/mistrust, etc.). This content was then evaluated for relative importance using factors included, but not limited to: context; repetition and consensus; intensity of comments; time spent on topics; specificity of responses. At the end of this process, we were able to identify as "Key Themes" those narratives that either came up in most or all of the discussions and/or could reasonably be viewed as representative of youth experiences across the juvenile justice system.

Please note: The content analysis described above was modeled after commonly-held best practices of evaluating focus group data, although the Vision Sessions themselves had not originally been conceived as such. While the questions posed by moderators were largely consistent across all discussions, there were variations between groups because the moderators had intentionally aimed to give the youth participants' a fair amount of control over how the conversation progressed. Additionally, there were no exact transcripts or videotaped recordings to evaluate for the purposes of this research.

DEMARCO SCENARIO

Description of hyothetical scenario utilized during vision sessions.

CASE FILE #8199370

Name: Demarco Bell DOB: March 18, 2003 [16 years old] Race: Afro-Latino Address: New Haven, CT Charges: Possession of marijuana, auto-theft, burglary, engaging in a pursue, reckless driving, speeding within a school zone, endangerment to a child Location of crime committed: Hamden, CT Status: Unsentenced

Report Description: At about 7:10 pm, Saturday, November 2, 2019, witnesses reported Bell and a friend approaching a corner store near Hamden High School in a silver Nissan Altima, which was reported stolen in Greenwich, CT the previous day. Bell went into the store and came out, where he noticed officers approaching the parking lot and immediately sped off. Police decided to pursue Bell in a high-speed chase where he eventually ran out of gas and was apprehended by officers. Bell reported to officers that he was trying to get away because his friend had a warrant and didn't want to go to jail.

Previous charges: Breach of peace at the household gathering (May 2017), assault 3rddegree during sibling dispute (October 2018), possession of marijuana while driving with no tail light (January 2019)

Additional Information Reported:

- Lives in a dangerous neighborhood
- In the foster care system since 2015
- Foster family lives in a 4 bedroom house with 5 foster kids (ages 2, 13, 15, 15, 16) and 2 biological children (ages 1 and 7)
- Foster father is abusive
- 6 biological siblings (Demarco is the oldest): 2 which live in his foster home (the 2 15-year-olds)
- Biological father incarcerated in Big Cheshire since 2013(the adult side)
- Mother incarcerated at York Correction Institute due to substance abuse issues since 2015
- Straight A student
- D.B is at school every day early and stays for the after school program sometimes
- Depended on by all his friends (the leader of the pack)

Our Current System Structure | Guided Questions

Please answer the questions below in the suggested order and record your responses on the flip chart paper as specific as possible, but doesn't have to be full sentences ~ note that your responses will lead to the overall group question: What would happen to Demarco in the current system in CT, and what are some of those pros and cons?

Questions:

- 1. Given the Demarco scenario, what are some issues that might have led him to commit the crime that he committed? Identify issues in his personal and not-personal life
- 2. How do you think some of Demarco's root issues can be addressed? What is the solution to his personal and not-personal problems?
- 3. What are some resources and/or kinds of programs that Demarco might need?
- 4. Since Demarco is charged as an adult he will be placed at Manson Youth Institute to serve his sentence, and once he is 18 he will be transferred to the adult unit ("Big Cheshire"). How do you think being placed in this high-risk secure facility will affect Demarco?
- 5. What kind of services do you think Demarco will receive at MYI?
- 6. How will these services benefit Demarco?
- 7. What do you think will happen when Demarco is released?
- 8. What part(s) of this process will heal the harm that was done to the victim?
- 9. How can the harm Demarco's choices caused to any victim's be healed/addressed?
- 10. How can this process/system make Demarco more connected to the community?



Creating Our Own System | Guided Questions

Please answer the questions below in the suggested order and record your responses on the flip chart paper as specific as possible, but doesn't have to be full sentences ~ note that your responses will lead to the overall group question: If we could create our own system for Demarco, what would it be/ look like and consists of?

Questions:

- 1. Given the Demarco scenario, what are some issues that might have led him to commit the crime that he committed? Identify issues in his personal and not-personal life
- 2. How do you think some of Demarco's root issues can be addressed? What is the solution to his personal and not-personal problems?
- 3. What are some resources and/or kinds of programs that Demarco might need?
- 4. Stop! Forget everything about the way the current system is set up! Put on your dreaming cap, and answer the following questions:
- 5. Knowing what you know after you identified some of Demarco's root issues, what would you recommend for Demarco?
- 6. Does he need to be in a secure setting?
- 7. What does the setting that you put Demarco in look like? Be very specific from the decor to the people in it
- 8. What about this setting/decision helps address Demarco's root issues? List any specific peoples/places/or things that will help solve these issues
- 9. Based on your personal experience, or the experience of others, what will make this process for Demarco successful?
- 10. What will be the long-term goal for Demarco?
- 11. How can the harm Demarco's choices caused to any victim's be healed/addressed?
- 12. How can this process/system make Demarco more connected to the community?

GLOSSARY

Affluent - Wealthy; Prosperous; Rich

Criminalize - To treat as a criminal

Criminalization - The act of making a previously legal activity illegal

Directly Impacted - Something that has directly affected someone or something

Dismantle - To take apart

Disrupt - To break up or disturb something's course; Stop something from happening

Equitable (Equitably) - Something that is fair to all parties

Explicit Bias - Tendency to mentally lean in a certain direction intentionally **Implicit Bias** - Tendency to mentally lean in a certain direction unintentionally

Inequality - A difference in size, amount, quality, social position or another factor

Liberation - Being set free or obtaining equal rights

Oppression - Treating people unfairly, especially with overuse of government power; Can also mean a feeling of being weighed down, as with worries or problems; physical or mental distress

Reform - To correct someone or something or cause someone or something to be better

Reinvestment - To reinvest in something; Put whatever sort of investment (whether time, money, care, love, etc.) into something

Restorative Justice - Any of several forms of justice that attempts to repair the harm done to the victim and to the larger community (this can include apology letters, mediation, community service, or other forms of restitution) **Stakeholders** - A person who has an interest in or investment in something and who is impacted by and cares about how it turns out (this can be a lawmaker, teacher, coach, lawyer, organization, and more)

Youth/Adult Partnership - The title of a conscious relationship which establishes and maintains equity between young people and adults

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CTJJA's Steering Committee members provide ongoing guidance, expertise, and collaboration as we work to end the criminalization of youth. We thank them for their support and insights.

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Founding Members:

Eric Crespo, Aquil Crooks, Shamare Holmes, Shaneese Pettway, Iliana Pujols, Yancy Singleton

Current Justice Advisors:

Tenille Bonilla, Simone Davis, Shannone Hawkins, Theodore Jordan, Tiana Krause, Marco Pujols, Michael Smith, Tatiyana Whitley, Jordyn Wilson

Alum:

Quinton Ballew, Kymberly Escarsaga, Stephen Gary, Quanesha Gibbs, Romelo Goss