

Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center (YRTC) Workgroup

Recommendations to the Juvenile Services Committee

The YRTC Workgroup was created by the Juvenile Services Committee in October 2020. The Workgroup established four priorities:

1. Youth Voice
2. Family Engagement
3. Racial and Ethnic Disparities
4. Accreditation

Recommendations for DHHS

Youth voice needs to be centered in the development of policies and practices within the YRTC system.

In 2020, Legislators passed [LB1140](#), requiring DHHS to create a 5-year plan by March 15, 2021. At the time of its original submission, there were no youth or young adult members involved in the creation of the plan. To their credit, DHHS has since engaged one young adult to assist in the ongoing development of the YRTC plan. Although this is progress, best practice is to have multiple young adult perspectives represented. We encourage DHHS to explore ways to expand youth voice in the development of their plan. One way to increase young adult engagement would be to provide compensation for time spent in meetings and preparing for meetings.

Youth placed at a YRTC should also have an avenue to provide input and engage in leadership opportunities. Previously, Project Everlast facilitated groups at the Geneva campus. This program was an effective way for youth to develop connections and leadership skills. The YRTC Workgroup recommends that Project Everlast or other leadership program models be reinstated and developed for youth at each of the YRTC facilities.

Currently, the Kearney and Hastings campuses have a Youth Council where youth are giving input on practices within their facility. According to Performance Based Standards (PBS), the YRTC's conduct an exit interview with youth about their experiences during their time at the facility. YRTC compliance staff review surveys and send feedback to leadership.

YRTC staff and leadership should be trained in a nationally recognized or evidenced based family engagement model.

While efforts are being made to engage families, there is no consistent model utilized in working with families. YRTC staff at every level should be trained in methods of engagement for both youth and families. Models such as Families Thrive should be considered for implementation.

A small group of YRTC staff was able to attend a training in December of 2021. They are currently working on a plan to train additional staff in the future.

[Families Thrive Training \(nspnetwork.org\)](https://nspnetwork.org)

Create a plan to consistently measure and address racial and ethnic disparities.

Although the YRTC's don't have discretion when it comes to which youth who are ordered to its facilities, there remains an ability to examine and address racial and ethnic disparities for youth during their time at the YRTC's. Data must be consistently collected and aggregated by race and ethnicity. The workgroup has identified four areas for action:

1. Add a section focused on racial and ethnic disparity (RED) data/outcomes to the 5-year plan.
2. In collecting data on race and ethnicity, best practice is for youth and/or families to self-report their own demographics. If this is not currently being practiced, the workgroup recommends updating data collection methods be in line with current standards for classifying race/ethnicity.
3. Outcomes for youth at the YRTC's should be measured, aggregated by race/ethnicity, and be shared regularly with stakeholders.
4. Addressing disparities within our juvenile justice system requires authentic engagement within teams of professionals who work with youth. It is recommended that the YRTC teams consider a SWOT (Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats) Analysis centered on racial and ethnic disparities in order to create a culture where staff can build trust and identify any areas of need within their teams. In order to address disparities with youth and families, we must first create an environment among professionals where we are able to talk openly about race issues.

Explore alternative accreditation options for the YRTC's.

There is question about whether the current accreditation through American Correctional Association (ACA) best aligns with the rehabilitation and treatment focus of the YRTC model. DHHS should continue exploring options for alternative licensure and/or accreditation with this workgroup and other stakeholders.

Acknowledgement

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