

---

A YEAR IN REVIEW

2022

# YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM IN NEW JERSEY 2022

AN ANNUAL REPORT PREPARED FOR

**THE NEW JERSEY COUNCIL ON  
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT**





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) partnership was established in 2004 between the Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) and the Judiciary, with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. JDAI provides a framework for conducting a thorough, data-driven examination of the detention system, and for using that information to develop strategies for system improvement. Using the JDAI framework in New Jersey has led to an extraordinary, sustained reduction in the number of children held in detention throughout the state.

Recognizing that detention reform is an entryway to broader, overall system reform, JDAI also serves as a

framework for making the entire juvenile justice system smarter, fairer, more efficient, and more effective. The kinds of changes a jurisdiction makes to safely reduce reliance on pre-trial detention can and should influence how other parts of the system operate. New Jersey has successfully embraced JDAI as a platform for pursuing meaningful reform in the broader youth justice system. The New Jersey Council on Juvenile Justice System Improvement (NJ CJJSI), co- led by the JJC and the Judiciary, and at the local level, County Councils on Juvenile Justice System Improvement (County CJJSIs), are charged with using the core strategies of JDAI to examine juvenile justice in (cont'd)

*"...JDAI also serves as a framework for making the entire juvenile justice system smarter, fairer, more efficient, and more effective."*



New Jersey systemically and promoting data-driven strategies that improve outcomes for youth, families, and communities.

Throughout 2022, youth justice stakeholders around the state continued to navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, and to slowly but surely begin to normalize operations that were disrupted during the public health crisis. New Jersey's JDAI community also worked hard to ensure the dramatic drop in youth detention that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic did not evaporate, demonstrating a steadfast unwillingness to accept a return to pre-pandemic levels of detention as part of the "return to normal".

Indeed, over the last year, the NJ CJJSI, County CJJSIs, and their committed partners took action to strengthen supports for youth and families, to acknowledge lessons

learned from the pandemic, and to put in place effective diversion strategies for safely maintaining youth in the community. As a systems-change community looking forward, we must recognize that we have not only a tremendous opportunity, but an obligation to embrace choices that ensure our youth justice system respects families, minimizes confinement, and promotes young people's long-term success – doing so equally for youth of every race and ethnicity.

The information acquired and subsequently outlined in this report was the result of collaboration between the staff of the JJC's JDAI & System Reform Unit and local and state system partners. It is hoped that the JDAI network and system reform partners across the state find the report's contents useful as a tool for guiding ongoing juvenile justice system improvement efforts.

*"...demonstrating a steadfast unwillingness to accept a return to pre-pandemic levels of detention as a part of the "return to normal."*

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 *Working to Achieve Continued Transformation  
of Youth Justice in New Jersey*

03 Race Equity

---

07 Detention Reform

---

11 Mechanisms to Divert Youth from  
the Formal System

---

13 Reinforcing & Promoting the Juvenile  
Justice Commission's Plan for Transforming  
Agency Practice

---

20 Broader System Decision Points

32 *Reform on the Horizon: Continuing to Build on  
Progress and Successful Efforts*

# WORKING TO ACHIEVE CONTINUED TRANSFORMATION OF YOUTH JUSTICE IN NEW JERSEY

## A SOURCE OF MOTIVATION

Since JDAI'S inception in New Jersey 20 years ago, there has been remarkable success in transforming the New Jersey youth justice system – success that has been recognized nationally. Through years of hard work and collaboration with system stakeholders, New Jersey, the first state to implement JDAI statewide, has eliminated the chronic, dangerous overcrowding that plagued county youth detention centers. Data-driven analysis has focused on ensuring that detention is reserved for only those youth who cannot be monitored safely in the community and that their stays in detention are as short as possible.

The results of JDAI in New Jersey have been remarkable – detention populations have

dropped by 74%, with youth of color accounting for almost 90% of the decrease, and with detention for low-level offenses such as violations of probation and missing a court date down by more than 90%. And, from a public safety perspective, youth crime rates have dropped dramatically since the launch of JDAI, by more than 80%. The only thing more remarkable than the dramatic reductions in the number of young people held in detention is the long-term sustainability of these changes. A key to the success of JDAI is without a doubt the extraordinary, lasting partnerships between the JJC, the Judiciary, and countless other stakeholders throughout the state.

*"...detention populations have dropped by 74%, with youth of color accounting for almost 90% of the decrease..."*

This year's report reflects the continued evolution of youth justice reform in our state, spotlighting state and local achievements in 2022 in key areas where the NJ CJJSI and County CJJSIs continue to focus and center their work (cont'd)

in order to further advance meaningful reform. While these victories and strategies are to be shared and celebrated with all partners, they should also motivate us to go deeper and to further expand and grow our efforts to transform youth justice in New Jersey at both the state and local levels.

As partners, we all come to the table because we firmly believe in the need for a separate system of justice for children and because we believe in young people.

This report is prepared to help us advance those beliefs. We encourage all youth justice partners to explore each section of this report, and we hope that in each section, you discover something new, something that will expand your understanding, or something that will inspire you to take action. Please use this report as the resource it is intended to be as we continue this journey together to transform New Jersey's youth justice system.





# RACE EQUITY

Promoting race equity and eliminating racial disparities has been at the forefront of JDAI in New Jersey since its inception, and the NJ CJJSI is committed to leading juvenile justice reform with race equity at the heart of the work. As we move forward, our work must be intentionally centered on eliminating racial and ethnic disparities and ensuring an equitable juvenile justice system.

Both the NJ CJJSI and County CJJSIs are forums for two-way communication between state and county partners, ensuring that around the state and across levels of government, we are all on the

same page regarding our system reform efforts, and can learn from one another, particularly as it relates to advancing racial equity and eliminating racial disparities in the youth justice system. To best achieve the goal of eliminating racial disparities and advancing race equity, the NJ and County CJJSIs must continue to invite people to the table, share resources, and facilitate discussion to advance our collective understanding of the causes of racial disparities in the youth justice system and strategies for change, and use data to identify whether and where disparities exist and to guide the development of effective solutions.

**NEW JERSEY COUNCIL ON  
JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM  
IMPROVEMENT  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON  
REDUCING ETHNIC AND  
RACIAL DISPARITIES (ERD)**

The NJ CJJSI and Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee's joint subcommittee on Reducing Ethnic and Racial Disparities (ERD Subcommittee) charged into 2022 by establishing an ambitious mission statement, which is to "Seize the transformative potential of this moment in history to begin to dismantle structural racism within our youth justice system by acknowledging the existence of systemic racism and the widespread disparate treatment of people of color. Through collaboration with youth, families, communities, and stakeholders, the ERD Subcommittee will identify and propose structural changes and significant policy reforms to advance racial justice and equity within the system."

Recognizing, however, that advancing race equity and inclusion can sometimes seem daunting, and often leaves many wondering how and where to start, the ERD Subcommittee adopted the Annie E. Casey Foundation's [Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide: 7 Steps to Advance and Embed Race Equity and Inclusion Within Your Organization](#) as its framework to help guide the Subcommittee's approach to this important work (REI Action Guide or Guide).

Step one in the REI Action Guide is to "establish an understanding of

race equity and inclusion principles." As stated in the [REI Action Guide](#), "Often, race-focused conversations derail because people are using the same terms in different ways. One of the challenges of communicating effectively about race is to move people from the narrow and individualized definition of racism to a more comprehensive and systemic awareness. To illuminate racism we need to 'name it, frame it, and explain it.'" The [Guide](#) explains that common language creates a narrative that makes it easier to communicate the commitment to eliminating racial and ethnic disparities and a platform for coordinating our collective work toward equitable outcomes.

Embracing this philosophy, in 2022 the ERD Subcommittee developed a Race Equity and Inclusion Dictionary to provide a better understanding of key terms relevant to the work of eliminating ethnic and racial disparities within the New Jersey youth justice system. Key terms were identified and defined, and examples were provided to help illustrate how these concepts show up in our work and lives. On the surface, providing definitions for key terms may not seem like a critical part of this work. However, there is no way for us to speak the unspeakable, have difficult conversations, and challenge ourselves, our colleagues, and our superiors to do better if we are not speaking the same language.



**AMENDED JJC RULES  
PROMOTE RACIAL JUSTICE  
AND ADDRESS HISTORIC  
INEQUITIES**

In September 2022, the JJC issued a Notice of Proposed Readoption with Amendments to the rules at N.J.A.C. 13:90 governing the County Youth Services Commissions and the Partnership/Family Court Program to allow for the provision of “upfront” funding to the counties for startup costs. In turn, each county will have the ability to provide upfront funding to community-based service providers when awarding grants. The JJC’s action recognizes that in the past, small businesses and local non-profit organizations, particularly grassroots organizations in communities of color, did not have access to the resources or funding needed to provide services first and wait for reimbursement later.

**PARTNERING TO  
IMPLEMENT A YOUTH-  
FOCUSED LAW  
ENFORCEMENT TRAINING  
CURRICULUM**

National research findings show trainings available at the police academy level are limited in terms of juvenile justice-specific training, even though police are often first responders to deeply challenging situations involving youth. Many officers do not receive formal training on adolescent brain

development, best practices for interacting with teenagers, and how to effectively navigate cultural differences. To bridge this gap the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Committee, in partnership with the JJC and NJ CJJSI, sought to fund an entity that would work with a New Jersey leadership team to develop a youth-specific training curriculum for law enforcement. Strategies for Youth© (SFY), whose mission is to improve police and youth interactions, advance the cause of training for public safety officers in the science of youth development and mental health, and support communities partnering to promote strong police/youth relationships, was selected to lead the development of the curriculum. The resulting curriculum includes lectures, interactive discussions, and exercises on topics such as recognizing the characteristics of youth that inform their responses to law enforcement; adolescent development and youth culture in order to better assist in interpreting youth behavior and responses; communication strategies for de-escalating crisis situations and improving decision making skills; and the ways in which implicit bias can have significant influence on the outcomes of interactions between police and youth. (cont'd)

*Collaboration is key to the development of a youth-specific training curriculum for NJ law enforcement.*

The curriculum was introduced to the JJC’s State Youth Advisory Board to obtain feedback from young people, and at an early adopters training to obtain feedback from law enforcement professionals from Ocean, Middlesex, Hudson, and Union counties. In 2022, four-day “train the trainer” events were held in both Ocean and Middlesex counties, under the leadership of the Prosecutor’s Office in each county, reaching approximately 60 law enforcement professionals. Those selected to become trainers will continue to receive support and technical assistance as they further hone their skills and mastery of the training curriculum, as a strategy to support Ocean and Middlesex counties as they work to roll-out the training county-wide. New Jersey will work to onboard up to five additional counties as part of the initiative in 2023.

A final component of this initiative is the implementation of “Juvenile Justice Jeopardy,” workshops designed to help kids stay safe and out of the juvenile justice system by learning about how to navigate interactions with peers and the police. The workshops invite youth, using a game format, to participate in engaging and meaningful discussions about their views of and experiences with the juvenile justice system, and offer a structured framework for correcting misconceptions. As of the end of 2022, four Juvenile Justice Jeopardy pilot games, where newly trained game leaders practice hosting the game for youth under observation and coaching as part of technical assistance, and seven Juvenile Justice Jeopardy workshops were held, reaching approximately 55 youth in Ocean, Middlesex, and Hudson counties.





# DETENTION REFORM

The NJ CJJSI is deeply committed to the ongoing implementation of the JDAI 8 core strategies to eliminate the unnecessary and inappropriate detention of youth, particularly youth of color, in New Jersey. As noted earlier, the results of JDAI have been remarkable. A key to the success of JDAI is without a doubt the extraordinary, lasting partnerships between the JJC, the Judiciary, and countless other stakeholders throughout the state. New Jersey stakeholders have taken many constructive steps and employed many effective strategies that together paved the way for impressive across-the-board results and a durable statewide

consensus likely to sustain detention reform into the future. The NJ CJJSI and County CJJSIs will continue to focus on practices surrounding the use of detention through the routine review of state and local detention data, with the goal of ensuring that successes achieved to date are sustained and that additional opportunities for improvement are acted upon.

**ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE  
OF THE COURTS DIRECTIVE  
ON ELIGIBILITY FOR  
REPRESENTATION BY THE  
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC  
DEFENDER**

Effective May 1, 2022, N.J.S.A. 2A:158A-26 provides that any person under the age of 18 who is arrested or charged with an indictable offense or act of delinquency shall be automatically eligible, at no expense to that person, for representation by the Office of the Public Defender. The Application for Assignment of Counsel (“5A”) will no longer be used, since the juvenile, under the statute, is automatically eligible for representation. In addition to protecting youths’ rights by ensuring they have automatic representation by counsel, it also streamlines case processing by eliminating time spent assessing eligibility.

**NAVIGATING THE COURT  
PROCESS WITH THE  
SUPPORT OF A FAMILY  
NAVIGATOR**

**MONMOUTH COUNTY**

Monmouth County’s Family Navigator, contracted through the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County, has implemented a new practice of

talking with parents/guardians of youth in detention regarding select areas to obtain their feedback, including visitation, communication with their child, education, needed services, and any concerns they may have about their child’s stay in detention. Feedback from parents/guardians of youth in detention is guiding the development of family engagement initiatives that address the needs and concerns identified. To date, the Family Navigator and Monmouth County detention alternatives staff also partnered to address the critical needs of families of youth on detention alternatives living in temporary housing, including providing resources and purchasing food at a local grocery store.

*"Feedback from parents/guardians of youth in detention is guiding the development of family engagement initiatives."*

**OCEAN COUNTY**

The Ocean County Youth Services Commission (YSC), in partnership with the court’s Family Division, created a YSC-funded Family Navigator position. The Family Navigator is housed in the Family Division and provides support to parents/guardians newly involved with the courts at the first and second hearings, helping them to navigate the juvenile court process.

## HUDSON COUNTY CREATES COMMUNITY DETENTION LIAISON

Hudson County created a Community Detention Liaison position to serve as a liaison between the multiple out-of-county detention centers where Hudson County youth are held, Hudson County stakeholders, and the community. This position is designed as a point of contact to streamline and enhance communication between parties, provide a consistent support to Hudson County youth at the detention centers, provide immediate follow-up and support when issues arise, assist in planning pro-social activities, and support youth and families upon reentry into the community. Additionally, the Liaison is an advocate for the needs of Hudson County youth throughout their time in detention.

## BURLINGTON COUNTY REVIEWS FAILURE TO APPEAR BENCH WARRANT DATA

In an effort to reduce the number of young people detained on a bench warrant for failing to appear at court, the court's Family Division staff analyzed all outstanding juvenile bench warrants, contacted parties, and reissued court dates for appropriate youth with minor

offenses, resolving 23 outstanding warrants without relying on detention.

23

Number of warrants resolved without relying on detention

## JDAI TRAINING HELD FOR PUBLIC DEFENDERS IN BURLINGTON COUNTY

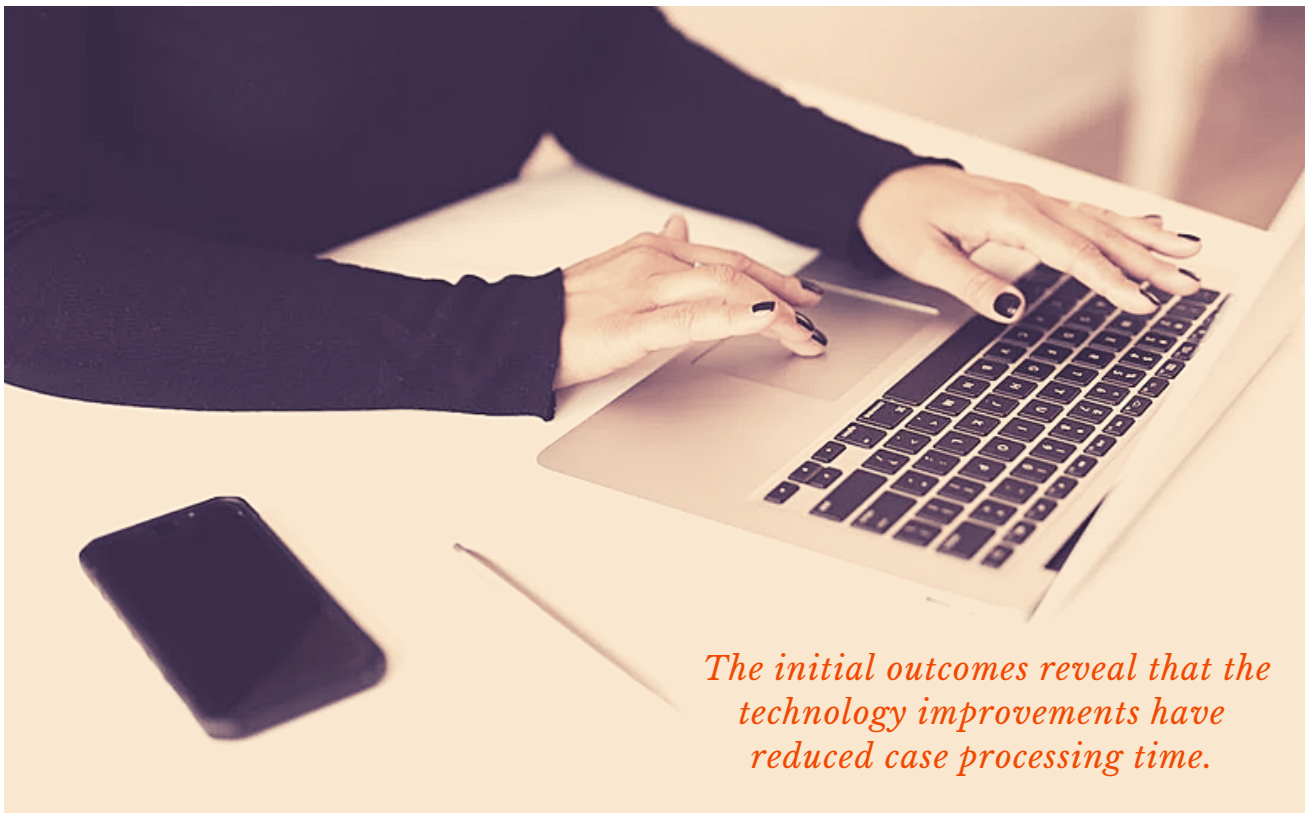
A JDAI-101 training along with community provider training by the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Care Management Organization (CMO), and the Family Support Organization (FSO) was provided to all new attorneys in the Burlington County Office of the Public Defender. The goal of the training was to enhance public defenders' knowledge of the juvenile court, the principles and core strategies of JDAI, and available community resources to better support the representation of court-involved youth.



**CUMBERLAND COUNTY  
PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE  
GRANT SUPPORTS CASE  
PROCESSING REFORM**

Through the Innovation Prosecutor's Solution Grant, the Cumberland County Prosecutor's Office (CCPO) has improved its information technology to more effectively and efficiently manage and track juvenile caseloads and case processing. Specifically, the CCPO purchased an InfoShare application that helps transition the office from a paper to an electronic file system, expedites the eDiscovery process, and makes law enforcement documents available immediately upon

upload. The CCPO also trained staff on effectively implementing the new technology and assigned an in-house researcher to evaluate the effects of the new technology on case processing times. Just prior to implementing the InfoShare application, it took an average of 202 days from arrest to reach disposition. The initial outcomes reveal that the technology improvements have reduced that case processing time by 84 days, to 118 days. Other program successes include successfully executing a data sharing memorandum with the courts, revising case management policies and procedures, and implementing sustainable data practices that the CCPO can continue in the coming years.



*The initial outcomes reveal that the technology improvements have reduced case processing time.*



## MECHANISMS TO DIVERT YOUTH FROM THE FORMAL SYSTEM

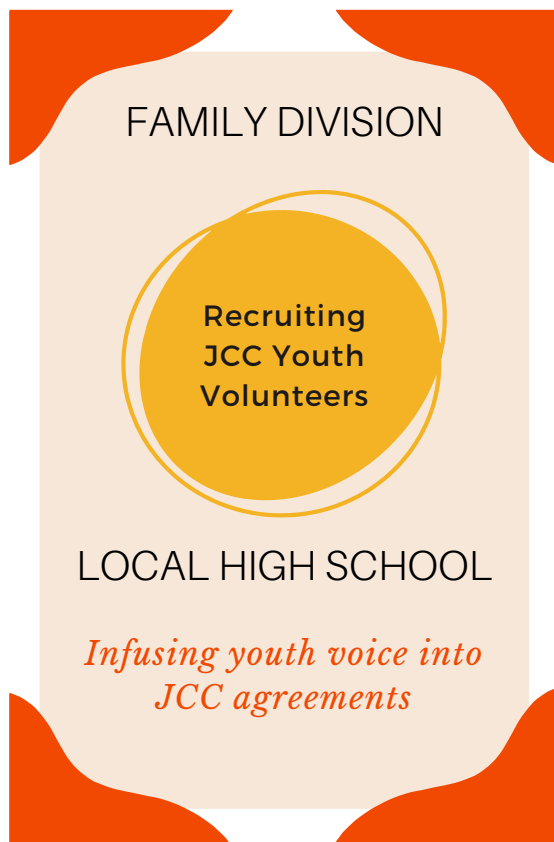
A central part of youth justice reform is promoting and reinforcing diversion practices that hold youth accountable for their behavior without resorting to legal sanctions or formal court involvement or oversight, and limit the likelihood of unnecessary detention. Innovative alternatives to formal court processing, including those that serve as stationhouse adjustments and those that serve as resources available through court Intake Services Conferences and Juvenile Conference Committees, shield young people from the

harms of formal juvenile justice system-involvement while encouraging responsibility and growth.

County CJSIs are encouraged to evaluate the current inventory of diversion options available to law enforcement and the courts and to work to fill any gaps. In 2022, several jurisdictions took steps to implement or enhance new approaches to diversion or to otherwise ensure diversion becomes a focus of ongoing reform efforts.

## MONMOUTH COUNTY RECRUITS YOUTH FOR JUVENILE CONFERENCE COMMITTEES

The court's Family Division partnered with a local high school to recruit Juvenile Conference Committee (JCC) youth volunteers as part of a school project for a one-year term. The court is providing an enhanced training for all new JCC volunteers (including youth) based on restorative principles, court ethics, and standards. The purpose is to have youth voice infused into the final JCC agreements made with youth who come before the JCC as a diversion.



## SALEM COUNTY EXPANDS PROGRAM TO INCLUDE A STATIONHOUSE ADJUSTMENT (SHA) OPTION

The Salem County Building Relationships, Inspiring Dreams, and Growing Employment program (BRIDGE) to date has served youth on probation to reduce violations of probation by addressing some of the barriers youth face when obtaining jobs and higher education opportunities. Additionally, the program offers supportive services to youth (e.g., tutoring, counseling, mentoring, apprenticeships). The Salem County CJJSI reviewed SHA data and identified gaps in supports and resources available to law enforcement to use as part of an SHA. In light of the success of the BRIDGE program, and through funding from the Salem County Prosecutor's Office, BRIDGE was expanded to serve as a Stationhouse Adjustment. By using the BRIDGE program as an SHA, youth will simultaneously avoid formal system processing and be provided with opportunity for growth and development.

*"The BRIDGE program serves youth on probation to reduce violations of probation by addressing some of the barriers youth face when obtaining jobs and higher education opportunities."*





## REINFORCING & PROMOTING THE JJC'S PLAN FOR TRANSFORMING AGENCY PRACTICE

In 2017, the JJC began down the road of creating a comprehensive Reform Plan for Transforming Agency Practice. The significant and successful history of youth justice reform in New Jersey achieved through JDAI provided the JJC with a blueprint for what internal reform would encompass. With assistance from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which included a robust team of technical assistance providers to work alongside JJC professionals, the JJC embarked on a journey to do better - and to be better. The process began with a comprehensive assessment of operations and programming that included surveys of and meetings with youth and staff, site-visits to other jurisdictions and programs,

and JJC staff retreats that pulled out ideas and lessons learned, and then formulated them into the three goals and 15 Reform Plan activities that currently comprise the plan.

The JJC is working to ensure that these goals are met within a fundamental framework rooted in safety, purpose, fairness, and connection in furtherance of the agency's vision for a transformed youth justice system that fosters opportunities for growth and development among justice-impacted young people. In 2022, the JJC continued to make substantial progress toward achieving reform plan objectives.

**REFORM ACTIVITY 1.2:  
DEVELOP A CONSORTIUM  
OF COMMUNITY-BASED  
PROVIDERS TO BRING A  
WIDE ARRAY OF  
PROSOCIAL ACTIVITIES  
AND GROWTH  
OPPORTUNITIES TO YOUTH  
IN FACILITIES**

As further described in previous reports, the JJC's Community-Based Consortium Program is designed so that youth in residential community homes and secure care facilities can take advantage of a wide array of prosocial activities and opportunities that are offered by program providers, focusing on engaging providers from the home communities of youth. Providers engage youth in a variety of activities that support personal growth and development. A closer look at select activities offered through the consortium to JJC youth in 2022 follows.

**A CLOSER LOOK AT THE  
CONSORTIUM: OPENING THE  
DOOR TO HEALING THROUGH  
MUSIC - NEW STEP COUNSELING**

One activity that has proven to be extremely popular, with several JJC programs requesting it for a second session, is the "Mental-Hop" symposium delivered by New Step Counseling, LLC. This program brings mental health and wellness education to young

people through the lens of Hip-Hop culture as it encourages engagement, enlightenment, education, and empowerment in an emotionally safe and supportive space. The activities promote active listening, respect for others, and personal growth and empowerment, as well as healing and positive development. At the sessions, youth participants focus on their own experiences with anxiety, depression, trauma, healing, finding and developing purpose, optimism, and mindfulness. (cont'd)

**Youth Work  
Supervisor**

*"Mental-Hop is an experience more than just a class. As we participated in Mental-Hop, I saw our residents become more upbeat and supportive of one another. It is a great tool to bridge the invisible gap that sometimes exists between our residents and staff. After every class, the residents and myself felt enlightened and empowered. We could see there was a bright light in the darkness."*

The young people participating have truly stepped up, connecting with each other through meaningful discussions. Participants are encouraged to affirm something positive about themselves at the beginning of each session and are guided to use these qualities to help them navigate through storms or challenging times in their lives. Each session closes with a “spotlight” allowing participants to identify a “take-away” from the specific session. So far, sessions have been conducted at eight JJC locations, and it is anticipated that more facilities will be involved in the coming year.

#### A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CONSORTIUM: KISMET OF KINGS, INC.

Both JJC residents and staff have lots of praise for the Kismet of Kings community-based consortium program that uses music, trivia, and relevant works of nonfiction to communicate the importance of selfless service to others, to understand the benefits of “paying it forward,” and to empower young people to use their past mistakes to make positive decisions moving forward. The program utilizes guided meditation and analysis as instructors lead discussions regarding pieces of music by relevant and influential artists to help participants overcome personal challenges and struggles. Workshops culminate with the creation of safety/coping plans

and personal pieces of artistic expression including raps, songs, vision boards, and written materials. Kismet of Kings strives to address social emotional learning deficiencies while building positive character traits and integrity among the participants. The program also utilizes the principles of restorative justice, touching young lives in a way that is positive and impactful. The Kismet of Kings program has been utilized at four JJC locations to date, and at each site the interaction between the instructors and the youth participants has allowed strong relationships to develop that often continue after the youth have completed the structured class component.



**REFORM ACTIVITY 1.4:  
DEVELOP A PROGRAM TO  
HIRE RELEASED JJC YOUTH  
AS PART-TIME JJC YOUTH  
WORKER TRAINEES**

**PRESS RELEASE, MARCH 2022:  
AG PLATKIN, JJC ANNOUNCE  
SUCCESS OF THE JJC PROGRAM  
PROVIDING FORMER RESIDENTS  
WITH MEANINGFUL EMPLOYMENT  
EXPERIENCE IN YOUTH JUSTICE  
ARENA**

The Youth Worker Apprentice Program hires youth released from JJC custody as part-time youth worker trainees at JJC residential community homes. This program was made possible through an annual budget allocation of \$250,000. Youth Worker Apprentices can be placed at any of the JJC's 10 residential community homes located throughout the state. Apprentices receive an hourly wage of approximately \$18.75 for up to 20 hours a week, with schedules tailored to meet the individual apprentice's needs. Apprentices can be employed for up to 18 months, allowing them to obtain critical training, develop job skills, and enhance their eligibility to apply for full-time employment, including with the JJC. The JJC also hired a program coordinator and enlisted volunteer mentors to support the trainees. Current JJC residents also benefit from the "credible messenger" approach which has emerged in youth

justice as a best practice, whereby justice-impacted people provide peer-to-peer support to those currently system-involved.

As of the close of 2022, six young people had been hired as apprentices, and three apprentices had transitioned into full-time employment as youth workers at a JJC residential community home. The Youth Worker Apprentice Program has been well received by participants and staff members who state that the apprentices not only act as mentors to current JJC residents but also inspire them to reach for opportunities and personal long-term goals. The JJC expects the number of Youth Worker Apprentices to grow as current JJC residents interact with apprentices.

**Former  
Apprentice-  
turned-full time  
JJC Youth  
Worker**

*"The JJC's Youth Worker Apprentice Program has allowed me, and will allow many others, to inspire young people involved with the justice system who may think that they don't have a shot at life anymore."*

**REFORM ACTIVITY 1.5:  
INFUSING AGENCY VALUES  
INTO OUR WORK - NEW JJC  
MISSION, VISION, AND  
CORE VALUES STATEMENT**

As part of its Reform Plan, the JJC is working to ensure its agency's values are embraced by staff and reflected in the work we do to improve outcomes for young people each day. This effort involves creating pathways for ensuring JJC values are routinely communicated to and among staff, especially during the onboarding process. Interactive exercises with a broad cross-section of JJC staff helped us to identify the core values that we believe in as an agency. We expect these core values to be reflected in what our staff believe about the young people in our care and to guide how staff interact with our youth and with each other. In 2022, the JJC overhauled its mission statement to ensure it reflects the full complement of core values that serve as the foundation for our work. The new mission, vision, and core values statement, which can be found here (<https://www.njoag.gov/about/divisions-and-offices/juvenile-justice-commission-home/mission-vision-core-values/>), clearly articulates the inspired approach JJC takes to improving outcomes for youth, families, and communities. The statement focuses on equity; working to prevent youth from

entering the youth justice system; partnering with youth, families, and communities; empowering and providing opportunities to young people; and ensuring that JJC staff are guided by the core values of integrity, commitment, leadership, diversity, inclusion, and compassion. The statement was rolled out to all staff and worksites, discussed in team meetings, and incorporated into all training curricula for new staff, to make sure that these values are expressed and expectations are set upon hiring and throughout each individual's employment with the JJC.



**REFORM ACTIVITY 1.6:  
ATTEND TO JJC STAFF  
WELL-BEING AND  
STRENGTHEN STAFF  
SUPPORTS**

Staff are best positioned to help youth grow and thrive when they themselves feel supported and a sense of wellness. As one strategy for attending to staff (cont'd)

well-being, in 2022 the JJC launched its Crisis Intervention Stress Management (CISM) initiative. At the core of this initiative is the CISM Team, a group of volunteer staff who respond to critical incidents that occur in the workplace, offering peer-to-peer support. After an application and interview process, JJC staff selected for the CISM Team attended a two-day training that focused on evidenced-based practices including psychological first aid, resiliency, stress management, and peer support. The CISM Team helps fellow employees effectively manage critically stressful situations in the workplace by helping ensure they have the tools and resources needed to maintain their physical and emotional health.

**REFORM ACTIVITY 2.3:  
ENHANCE YOUTH VOICE -  
CREATING THE STATE  
YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD**

As one part of its effort to empower young people to be agents of change and to have their voices heard, in 2022 the JJC launched a State Youth Advisory Board (Board) comprised of twelve youth, including an elected President, Vice President, and Secretary who serve as the Board's cabinet.

The Board is designed to foster trusting relationships between

youth and JJC staff and provides a space for young people to tackle topics which impact residents throughout the JJC, while learning leadership skills including how to effectively identify issues, develop solutions, and recommend and implement change; plan and run committee meetings; and communicate outcomes to their peers. A Local Resident Council was also established at each JJC residential and secure facility to weigh in on issues specific to that location, and to recommend issues that are broader and should be brought to the State Youth Advisory Board for consideration and problem-solving. To ensure the Board's success, the JJC has created a multi-level support system to foster its growth and sustainability, including a team of volunteer staff mentors; an Executive Planning Group (cont'd)

*"The Local Resident Councils and State Youth Advisory Board elevate youth voices by convening residents and staff in open and healthy discussions which guide and support each resident's ability to thrive. These groups inform decision-making and grow opportunities within the JJC that support the overall wellbeing of residents. The goal is to improve the quality of life of all residents during their time with the JJC and as they prepare to return home."*

comprised of Executive staff, the mentors, and the Board's elected cabinet; and Unit Coordinators at each program/facility who help facilitate the work of the Local Resident Councils.

Significant activities of the Board thus far include improvements to the personal care products and footwear selection available to JJC youth; collaborating with the JJC Nutritionist to improve the menus and food options available to residents, including participating in a taste testing of new menu items; planning prosocial activities such as Open-Mic night and intramural tournaments; reviewing and weighing in on the JJC's resident handbook and the contents of the Resident Reentry Portfolio; and sponsoring a legal services presentation by the Office of the Public Defender.

**JUVENILE JUSTICE  
COMMISSION EXPANDS  
MONITORING EFFORTS  
WITH NEW YOUTH JUSTICE  
FACILITY MONITORING  
UNIT**

Since the JJC's inception, through the Juvenile Detention Monitoring Unit, the agency has been responsible for regulating county juvenile detention facilities in New Jersey, ensuring that standards that protect the rights of youth and promote youth safety and well-being are met. As part of the JJC's reform efforts to continually

evaluate all aspects of the agency's operations to improve outcomes for youth, in 2022, the JJC expanded the scope of the Juvenile Detention Monitoring Unit to provide monitoring and support to the JJC's own secure care facilities and residential community homes, and to assume all responsibilities related to the JJC's compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). The change in scope will ensure consistency in the JJC's approach to quality assurance across both county and state youth justice facilities. With its additional responsibilities, the Unit has been renamed the Youth Justice Facility Monitoring Unit. The JJC's newly expanded Unit will build on its existing specialization and expertise in the areas of programmatic monitoring, suicide prevention, reviewing compliance with policies and regulations, and developing corrective action plans in response to major incidents or identified issues, and will continue to carry out its work through the lens of creating a positive and safe environment for youth.





## BROADER SYSTEM DECISION POINTS

JDAI's effective detention reform framework and structure provide New Jersey and each of its JDAI sites a foundation for their broader efforts in juvenile justice reform. The CJJSI's vision has always been for our detention reform thinking and outcomes to lead to broader system reform efforts at all points in the youth justice system, from diversion, to detention, to adjudication and disposition, to waiver practice, probation practice, and out of home placement reforms.

The NJ CJJSI and County CJJSIs must continue to consider all these decision-making and programming points and determine whether new opportunities for collaborating

around improvement exist. In particular, community and family ties are critical to a young person's rehabilitation, growth, and development, and should therefore be fostered and supported through reform efforts. Areas of focus should include, but are not limited to, family and community engagement, forging partnerships with youth to elevate their voices and incorporate their perspectives, collaboration among education and justice system stakeholders, and otherwise finding innovative strategies for continuing to cultivate a truly separate system of justice for young people grounded in youth-centric, and strength-based approaches.



**GOVERNOR'S TASK FOR  
THE CONTINUED  
TRANSFORMATION OF  
YOUTH JUSTICE IN NEW  
JERSEY RELEASES FINAL  
REPORT**

Executive Order No. 42 was signed by New Jersey Governor Philip D. Murphy in 2018, establishing the Task Force for the Continued Transformation of Youth Justice in New Jersey (Task Force). The Task Force, consisting of two dozen stakeholders involved in all facets of youth justice, was charged with providing recommendations to the legislative and executive branches on strategies for continuing the reform of the state's youth justice system. The Task Force conducted extensive research and engaged in intensive, collaborative deliberation over all aspects of the youth justice system, reviewing data on the current system, and identifying best practices.

In May 2022, the Task Force announced its release of the Youth Justice Task Force Report. The report reflects the work and engagement efforts of the Task Force and is outlined in four major parts, each incorporating the critical work of one of the Task Force's Subcommittees: Residential and Secure Facilities, Sentencing and Parole, Stationhouse Adjustment, and Youth Services Commissions and Investment in Community-Based Programs. Recommendations

found in the report work to further meet the goals of JDAI and support the ongoing modernizing of our state's juvenile justice system.

*In May 2022, the Task Force announced its release of the Youth Justice Task Force Report.*



**ASSESSING  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
IMPROVEMENT THROUGH  
THE DEVELOPMENT AND  
USE OF A SYSTEM  
ASSESSMENT TO  
EVALUATE MULTIPLE  
DECISION POINTS IN THE  
YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM**

New Jersey began its youth justice reform work focused squarely on safely reducing the use of secure detention. However, the NJ CJJSI's vision has always been to lead broader system reform efforts at all points in the youth (cont'd)

youth justice system, from diversion, to detention, to adjudication and disposition, to waiver practice, to probation practice, to out of home placement reforms. To advance this vision, in 2022 the NJ CJJSI endorsed the creation of a Juvenile Justice System Assessment that relies on quantitative and qualitative data to help County CJJSIs develop work plans that include multiple system decision points, with a focus on identifying and addressing racial and ethnic disparities, and whenever possible, creating equity. The System Assessment includes the following areas: Collaboration, Leadership, and Partnership; Arrest; Court Diversion; Detention Alternatives; Case Processing; Disposition & Placement; Probation; School/Justice Partnership; and Re-Entry & Aftercare. The results of the System Assessment will be used by each County CJJSI to identify opportunities for change, and the NJ CJJSI will review the results to determine whether any cross-cutting issues impacting multiple JDAI sites or implicating state policies exist that require state-level action.

**UPDATE: RESTORATIVE AND TRANSFORMATIVE JUSTICE FOR YOUTHS AND COMMUNITIES PILOT PROGRAM**

The Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths

and Communities Pilot Program, P.L. 2021, c.196 (RTJ Pilot Program) created a two-year pilot program to develop an innovative restorative and transformative continuum of care municipalities of Camden, Newark, Paterson, and Trenton. With \$8.4 million in funding, the RTJ Pilot Program is centered around restorative justice “hubs” to be established in each of the four communities, and is intended to help prevent young people from entering the youth justice system and to support young people being released from a JJC facility.

In 2022, significant steps were taken to pave the way for this new approach to juvenile justice in New Jersey. The JJC adopted regulations to implement the RTJ Pilot Program, developed and issued a Notice of Availability of Funding and grant application process, held a bidders’ conference, and has since reviewed and approved applications from all four participating counties and issued award notices. The JJC also contracted with Rutgers University to conduct an evaluation of the RTJ Pilot Program’s implementation and outcomes. The JJC also contracted with the New York Peace Institute to provide intensive training in restorative and transformative justice practices to JJC staff involved with program implementation and oversight, and Camden County selected the Restorative Center in Camden to conduct training locally. (cont'd)

Additionally, in 2022 the JJC began onboarding staff to support the administration of the program. Finally, Camden and Passaic counties both held public meetings regarding the RTJ pilot program and issued their Requests for Proposals. Essex and Mercer counties will follow suit in early 2023, and the first RTJ hubs are expected to become operational in the summer of 2023.

**UPDATE: THE RUTGERS UNIVERSITY PROGRAM IN JUVENILE JUSTICE & YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

Through a partnership between the JJC, NJ CJJSI, JJDP Committee, and Rutgers University, the Program in Juvenile Justice and Youth Development (JJYD) was established to recruit, train, and retain a workforce that is prepared to address the demands of juvenile justice and work with young people impacted by the justice system. The JJYD Certificate Program offers professional education opportunities drawing from the fields of psychology, social work, criminal justice, law, and education. In 2022, Rutgers offered courses in Foundations in Juvenile Justice, Engaging Youth & Families, Cultural Competence, Foundations of Youth Development, Trauma-Informed Care, Adolescent Substance Use, Suicide Prevention & the Juvenile

Justice Continuum of Care, the School to Prison Pipeline, Youth Justice Reform: Individual & Systemic Problems and Solutions, and Addressing Youth Gangs. In 2022, there were 166 individuals who enrolled in one or more Certificate Program professional development courses.



**NJ CJJSI ESTABLISHES A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE TO ELEVATE COMMUNITY VOICE IN JDAI-DRIVEN YOUTH JUSTICE REFORM EFFORTS**

In 2022, the NJ CJJSI established a Community Partnership Subcommittee charged with elevating community voice in our ongoing JDAI-driven youth justice reform efforts at the state and county level. The Community Partnership is comprised of local and state youth justice professionals and (cont'd)

community partners who share a common ideal that system reform efforts must create a permanent space for community stakeholders to be meaningfully involved in all places where decisions are made. The Community Partnership will create a framework around community engagement that includes developing a step-by-step guide or “toolkit” to support County CJSJs as they work to develop relationships with local community stakeholders, define community partnerships to fit the needs of the local jurisdiction, and understand the services and supports available for the youth within their communities.

**PROBATION DIVISION  
CONTINUES TO TRAIN  
PROBATION STAFF AND  
ENHANCE SERVICES TO  
INCREASE POSITIVE  
OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH ON  
PROBATION**

The Probation Division has been working with New Steps Counseling to implement Mental Hop in every vicinage. Each vicinage can send 7-10 youth to the 8-week, virtual program for the youth to learn about mental health through the use of hip-hop. Youth on probation have been actively engaged and finding benefit in the program, from increasing their knowledge and awareness of mental health to identifying the importance of self-care and wellness. In an effort to engage with youth on probation

and provide experiences they may not have had before.

The Juvenile Manager’s Positive Intervention Committee (PIC) hosted several activities in 2022.

- At a wellness event in the summer of 2022 youth participated in yoga, mindfulness, breathing exercises, meditation, and a low-impact workout. Lunch was provided by Macro-bites, a healthy meal delivery service owned by three men who spent time in prison. Their mission is to give back to the community in a healthy way. The owner spent time speaking with the youth about different ways they can make positive changes as well as how to start a business.
- In November 2022 an acting troupe engaged youth in solving a mystery. The youth enjoyed engaging with probation staff and using their critical thinking skills to solve the mystery.
- In response to an uptick of youth in need of support to develop social skills after being isolated during the pandemic, the Boyd Program offered a virtual social skills program to youth. This virtual program prepared youth for real world experiences, such as college readiness, workforce development, and internship opportunities.

The Probation Division trained all juvenile probation and family division supervisors and probation officers in QPR (Question, Persuade, Respond) suicide prevention training to assist them in identifying suicidal youth and how to respond appropriately.

**JDAI SITES EMBRACE EFFORTS AROUND LOCAL SCHOOL/JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP**

**MONMOUTH COUNTY**

Through its School/Justice Partnership efforts, Monmouth County had previously implemented a marijuana diversion program to reduce formal system involvement for youth charged with marijuana offenses. Due to recent increases in referrals to this diversion program, which is run by the Mental Health Association (MHA) of Monmouth County, the Monmouth County School/Justice Partnership surveyed school Student Assistance Coordinators (SACs) and District Superintendents regarding school-based referrals for marijuana possession and disciplinary responses. The spike in referrals and the survey results led to a determination that further, targeted, school-based prevention efforts were needed as one strategy to reduce instances of marijuana possession and

resulting justice-system referrals. Those prevention efforts included implementing a school-wide education and awareness program in three school districts involving 1200 students.

*School/Justice collaboration leads to implementation of school-wide education and awareness programs in schools.*

**BURLINGTON COUNTY**

Based on data collection and analysis of school referrals to law enforcement filed with the juvenile court in Burlington County, the court's Family Division, the Office of the Prosecutor, and the Executive County Superintendent of Schools approved the formation of a local JDAI School/Justice Partnership Subcommittee, a collaborative body of the Burlington County CJJSI.

**PASSAIC COUNTY**

The Passaic County CJJSI implemented a program in collaboration with Passaic County Technical Institute to increase educational and vocational opportunities for youth on probation in Passaic County. This program gives opportunities to youth who otherwise - based on many factors - would not be eligible to attend Passaic TECH. Youth who attend courses receive a stipend and work closely with instructors.

**ATLANTIC COUNTY CJJSI  
CONTINUES TO EMBRACE  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT  
THROUGH MULTIPLE  
OUTREACH ACTIVITIES**

The mission of the Atlantic County CJJSI's Community Engagement Subcommittee is to provide awareness to the Atlantic County community on youth justice system reform by establishing a trusting, collaborative partnership through community engagement by providing services and hosting events for system-involved youth and the broader community. A number of community outreach events were held in 2022.

In collaboration with the Community Networking Association of New Jersey, monthly virtual events were held to bring together agencies throughout Atlantic County to share information regarding services available to individuals and families within the community. As part of the virtual event, members from the Community Engagement Subcommittee provide information about its JDAI Resource Books, options for youth to participate on the youth advisory council, and opportunities to become a member of the subcommittee.

Connecting the Dots Inc. is an organization committed to the growth of Atlantic County students and the support of their parents. As an advocate for higher education, Connecting the Dots Inc. partnered with "The Scholarship Lady US," Carla Dickerson, to provide SAT/ACT prep courses and tutoring on how to write a winning scholarship essay.

The Community Engagement Subcommittee sponsored 15 youth to attend and participate in the essay writing workshop.

The Community Engagement Subcommittee provided incentives to eleven teens who participated on a local panel to discuss what young people experience in the community and deliberate on strategies to provide young people with the skills and knowledge to make positive change. The teens were provided a gift card, resource book, t-shirt, crisis card, and a backpack. This event was just the first in a series of events meant to engage (youth), prevent (violence), and empower (the community). The audience included the entire freshman class of Atlantic City High School with 60 special guests comprised of community leaders and youth stakeholders.

To address issues of teen violence in Atlantic City, Atlantic County High School partnered with the Atlantic City and the Community Engagement Subcommittee to host "Fatal Flaws in Youth Thinking: An Anti-Violence Teen Summit". The Summit was held in the school's auditorium and featured Hip Hop Podcast Hosts, Gillie and Wallo, to help navigate the conversation.

The Community Engagement Subcommittee sponsored four youth to attend the Pleasantville Summer Camp Program. The camp provides an opportunity for youth to fill their day with activities and to avoid negative decisions and outcomes. Committee members also met with the sponsored youth to discuss the various supports available to them in the community.

ENGAGE • PREVENT • EMPOWER

# 1ST ANNUAL

"FATAL FLAWS IN YOUTH THINKING": A VIOLENCE PREVENTION TEEN SUMMIT

**FREE ENTRY**

**JUNE 1<sup>ST</sup> 12:30 PM**

ACHS  
1400 N Albany Ave.  
Atlantic City, NJ 08401  
(Auditorium)

**Panelist**

- King Gillie, Wallo 267 & Others
- ?

- Building Community
- Resilience in Times of Adversity
- Alternatives to Gun Violence | Community Resources
- Education
- Strong Leadership
- Workforce Development

**STRONGER TOGETHER**

**THIS IS A SAFE SPACE**

\*Light Refreshments will be served

ENGAGE • PREVENT • EMPOWER

The Community Engagement Subcommittee partnered with the Atlantic County Board of Education Ocean Side Success Center Uptown Complex to host a "Back to School Bash". Youth and families were invited out to receive community resource information and to engage in fun activities. Participants were provided with crisis cards, resource books, t-shirts, backpacks, and food. Over 150 families attended the event.

The Community Engagement Subcommittee attended the Ladies in Prayer Services - Hair and Beauty Show where committee members engaged participants and provided 50 resource books and crisis cards to attendees. The Ladies in Prayer Services organization holds outreach events throughout the year supporting positive community activities for youth and families. The goal of the committee's outreach at events such as this one is to provide the community with information regarding activities and services that support youth and families and that prevent youth from entering the juvenile justice system, and to create positive experiences and interactions which help build trusting relationships with community partners.



The Community Engagement Subcommittee partnered with the Atlantic City Youth Football Organization to host a Stop the Violence Pep Rally. Games and food were offered and crisis cards, resource books, t-shirts, and backpacks were handed out to attendees.

The Community Engagement Subcommittee worked with Licensed Clinical Social Worker Deborah Hamani, of the nonprofit Avanzar, to provide training sessions on Implicit Bias and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion to the Community Engagement Subcommittee. The committee intends to share the knowledge gained through this training and other future trainings with their community partners.





## CAPE MAY AND ATLANTIC VICINAGE PARTNER TO CREATE VIDEO ON JDAI HISTORY

The New Jersey Courts Cape May and Atlantic County Vicinage partnered with the Atlantic County Community Engagement Subcommittee to add a recorded session to the Court's YouTube® channel dedicated to keeping the public informed regarding the Superior Court. The session provided information regarding the history of the site's JDAI Community Engagement Committee and its mission.

## GLOUCESTER COUNTY FOSTERS COMMUNITY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The Gloucester County Community Engagement Subcommittee, with support and funding from the Youth Services Commission, implemented the "Be the Change" speaker series. The purpose of the speaker series is to motivate and rejuvenate youth in grades 6-12 at risk of entering the juvenile justice system to make a positive difference in their own lives, and to help them work to overcome childhood trauma. Four sessions were held in 2022, two at Paulsboro Highschool, one at Clearview High School, and one at Woodbury Middle School, with 15-20 youth attending each session.

Session topics included: Power of Self, Mentally Healthy You, and Overcoming Trauma.

The Reform Alliance, founded by rapper Meek Mills, partnered with the Gloucester County Probation Division and Center for Family Services to acknowledge the success of the Probation Enrichment (PET) Program. The PET Program provides youth on probation with mentoring and coaching to support their ability to successfully complete probation; provides transportation to court ordered probation appointments and evaluations; and rewards positive behavior through healthy/educational activities and enrichment trips for youth and families. The Reform Alliance invited youth and families involved with the PET Program to a night out to attend a Philadelphia Eagles football practice, followed by dinner and courtside seats at the Philadelphia 76ers basketball game with an opportunity to meet Doc Rivers, Jalen Hurts, Meek Mills and members of the Eagles and Sixers Teams.

*Gloucester County's "Be the Change" speaker series motivates and rejuvenates youth in grades 6-12 at risk of entering the juvenile justice system to make a positive difference in their own lives, and help them work to overcome childhood trauma.*

**CUMBERLAND COUNTY  
EXPANDS PROSOCIAL  
OPPORTUNITIES  
AVAILABLE TO YOUTH IN  
THE COMMUNITY AS A  
PREVENTION STRATEGY**

The Cumberland County Prosecutor's Office implemented or expanded several positive programs in specific communities to foster pro-social development as a prevention strategy that supports youth. The Life Skills Club at Vineland, Millville, and Bridgeton Housing Authorities addresses the underlying causes and consequences of juvenile delinquency while educating youth in general life skills. The Club creates a "safe space" for youth to interact with one another and develop mentoring relationships with program staff and other youth. This safe space is created by inviting local police officers, chaplains, youth organizations, faith-based organizations, and other community stakeholders to be part of the program. The Club runs for 10 weeks and covers Financial Literacy, Dangers of Social Media, Police and Youth Engagement, Safe Dating & Healthy Relationships, Leadership, Addiction, Self-Worth, Racism, Mental Health/Asking for Help, Consequences, and Setting Yourself Up for Success. In 2022 there were 1,661 youth attendees.

The Pop-Up Play Streets Program closes designated streets to traffic

so that kids have a safe place to play. The program, which is implemented through a partnership with the Millville, Vineland, and Bridgeton Police Departments, was expanded in 2022 to include additional satellite/pop-up locations in housing complexes and gun and gang activity hot spots. And, a program that offers after-school extracurricular activities in arts, character education, and athletics was implemented at the Bridgeton School District. Students demonstrating tendencies for negative behavior were among the first selected to participate in the engaging activities offered through the program, which included art, yoga, character education, football, soccer, and volleyball. Over the last year, 320 youth benefited from this program.

**CUMBERLAND COUNTY  
EMBRACES YOUTH,  
FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT THROUGH A  
HOST OF INITIATIVES**

The Cumberland County Prosecutor's Office partnered with Inspira Health Network to build a "Future Remix Campaign" to reduce gang-related gun violence and promote community resources for youth. The idea for the campaign originated from stakeholder meetings that occurred shortly after the May 2021 Fairfield Township (cont'd)

mass shooting. The Campaign includes neighborhood billboards, convenience store point of sale ads, posters in English and Spanish, business cards, and social media ads. The ads use QR codes and otherwise drive youth to a landing page hosted by the Prosecutor's Office which displays services and supports for youth, including recreation, sports, enrichment activities, and social services.

The Cumberland County Prosecutor's Office recruited and trained thirty five facilitators for the "Keeping It Real Conversations Initiative", which builds positive relationships and dialogue between law enforcement and youth ages 13-18. Officers and youth participate in panel discussions to identify issues and concerns and role play to put into action learnings from the day.

Officers learn about ways youth may respond to authority, the effects of trauma, and how to improve encounters with youth, as well as adolescent brain development and youth culture. Youth learn how perspectives, environmental influences, and issues of respect impact their behavior toward law enforcement.

The Cumberland County Prosecutor's Office created an online countywide family and youth-friendly calendar advertising family-friendly events and activities happening throughout the county was created to better communicate and announce upcoming events to the community.



# REFORM ON THE HORIZON: CONTINUING TO BUILD ON PROGRESS

## LOOKING AHEAD

As a state JDAI site, New Jersey and its local JDAI sites have focused incredible energy on addressing the dangerous and chronic overcrowding that once characterized our state's youth detention centers, with great success. As JDAI pioneers and leaders we have attended to the front door of detention with determination, and we must bring the same fortitude to our efforts to improve outcomes for youth at all points on the youth justice continuum. Although JDAI has contributed to a precipitous decline in the number of youth detained – and children of color have been the beneficiaries of this overall trend – New Jersey still struggles with racial disparities. Moving forward, our single greatest challenge as JDAI partners is to advance racial and ethnic equity. We must place an intentional focus on race equity at all decision-making and service provision points of the youth justice continuum and create a system that ensures equitable and successful outcomes for all

youth. If this is to change, it will require the single-minded commitment of everyone connected to the youth justice system.

Day in and day out we all work hard to do right by the kids in our state, and our successful efforts demonstrate our shared belief that no child is beyond redemption. Even still, considerable work remains. We know that the problems experienced by youth today are the product of multiple and sometimes complex causes. But, we also know that adolescent development continues into a person's mid-20s and that these years represent a time of significant growth, which presents a critical opportunity for redirection and change. As we continue to partner together, we must embrace this opportunity and offer young people a robust assortment of programs and supports that promote growth and rehabilitation.

Because sites vary so much, each site, depending upon challenges, capacities, and ambition, will ultimately chart a site-specific pathway to the next stages of youth justice reform. However, each site's pathway will continue to be guided by data, and by the core strategies, values, and principles adopted by us all as New Jersey's JDAI stakeholders.

