

2016 - 2017

Hennepin County Community Voices on Juvenile Justice Alternatives



*Original works of art by Olivia Levins Holden, Community member and member of VRJ research team



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction & Methodology	5
Demographics	6
Community Trust	9
Current Environment	10
Policing & Racial Profiling	10
School to Prison Pipeline	10
Discipline	12
Lack of Resources & Support	12
Home & Family	13
Experiences with Hennepin County Juvenile Justice System	14
Reasons for Entering Juvenile Justice System	15
Court Process	17
Placement	17
Probation & Reentry	20
Community Recommendations	22
Conclusion & Our Final Recommendations	30
Appendix A, B, C & D	32



Introduction & Methodology

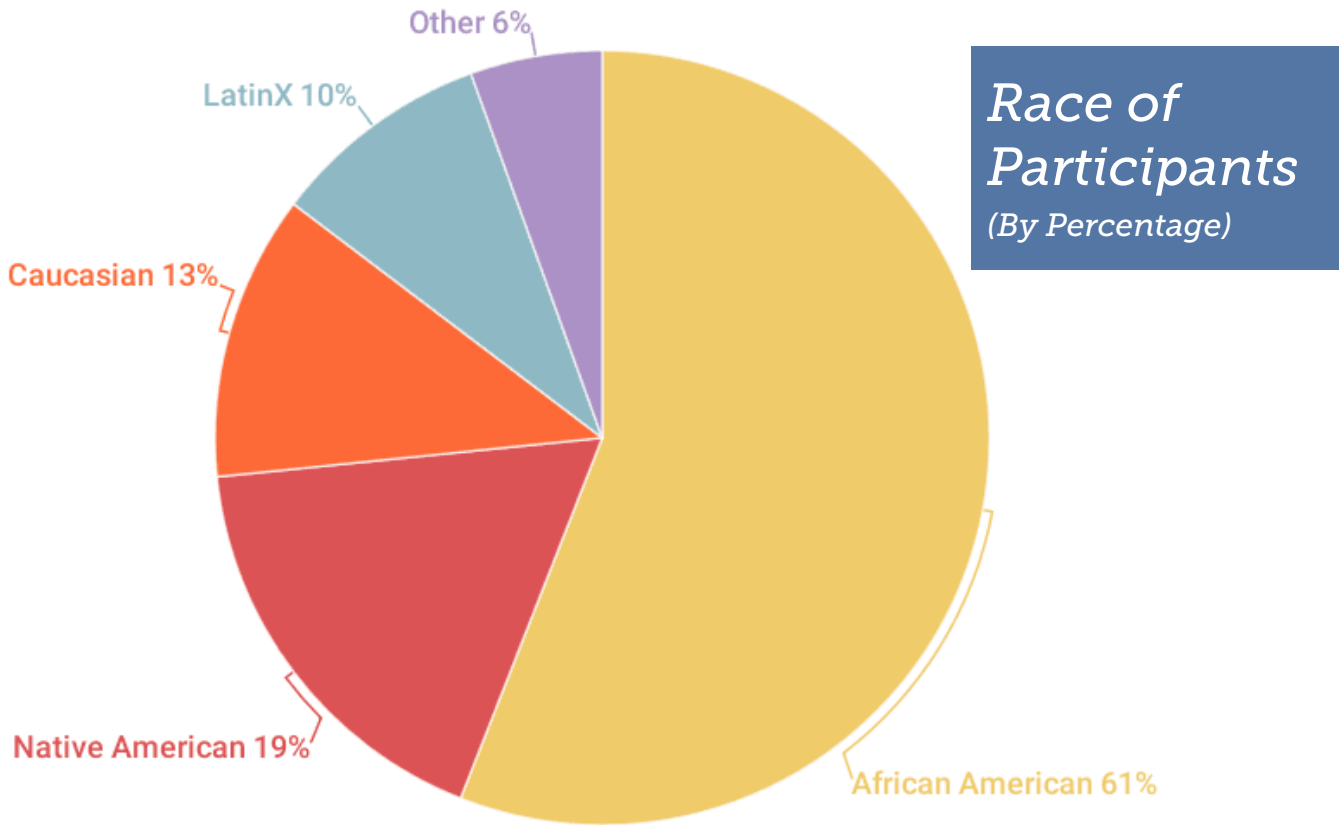
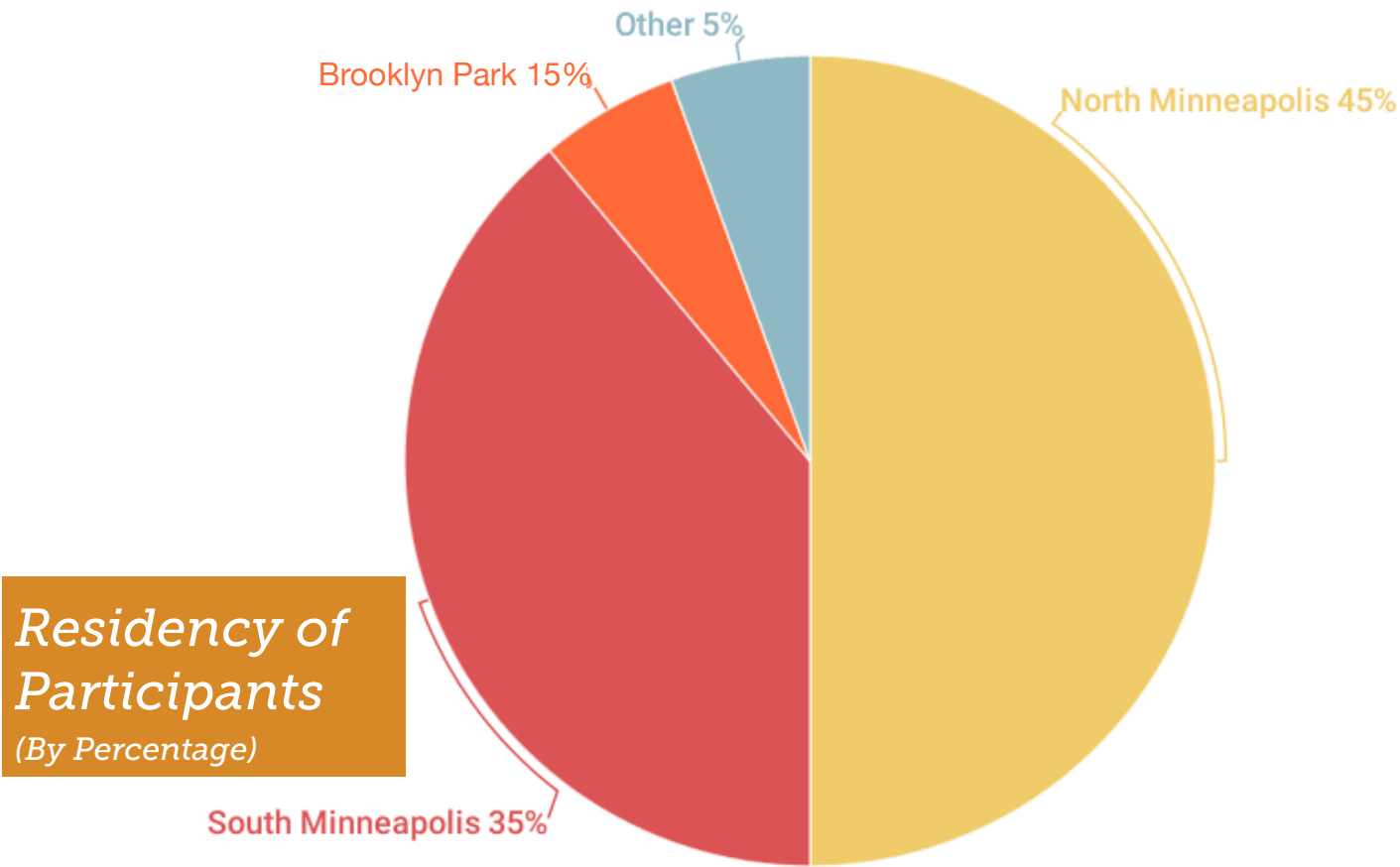
Starting in September of 2016 Voices for Racial Justice (VRJ) began an eight month qualitative research project. Our goals were to gather the experiences of youth, family, and community members of color who are most impacted by the juvenile justice system to generate community informed recommendations related to decreasing detention rates, disparities, disproportionality, as well as to build connectedness amongst youth and their families to advocate for systems change. Our approach to research was strongly influenced by the necessity to first center the trust and well-being of youth and family members who have been impacted by the juvenile justice system. All participants received introductions of who we are as an organization, our intentions, as well as why the real stories of youth and their families are important to us. Overall, we wanted to allow youth the space to be themselves. We believe the narratives, voices and leadership of youth and families are central to any real change.

VRJ is committed to research that is community driven to best inform and challenge systems to advance racial equity. Given our principles of authentic community engagement, we utilize Research Justice, a research framework that identifies and centers the stakes, interests, and leadership of communities most impacted by

inequity in designing process oriented research that is accessible and nurtures community transformation. We worked as a team of five core researchers, including our lead facilitator who was directly impacted by the juvenile justice system as a youth. Our research team was made up of diverse researchers from the communities our research was based in. All our researchers have strong roots in the community, are artists, educators, writers, and grassroots community builders.

Under a Research Justice frame, we do not distinguish or separate ourselves from community as simply researchers, but we are also community members who are held accountable by other community members. Therefore it was necessary to show up to community meetings and conversations outside of our research project. One research team member attended Hennepin County Juvenile Justice Steering Committee Meetings, and also attended meetings where the concerns of community members were expressed regarding proposals for a joint youth facility between Hennepin County and Ramsey County. Research members also attended community meetings regarding juvenile justice alternatives hosted by local partners and/or by community members.

Given that for some youth and family members, this



project was the first time participants spoke publicly about their experiences, we worked to practice being trauma informed. We learned that a focus group structure is not always the most comfortable for youth who do not trust researchers, or do not have pre-established relationships with us. Therefore we utilized interactive facilitation including interactive brainstorming activities, and games as facilitation tools to have difficult conversations. Furthermore, applying cultural strategy to research acknowledges the experiential knowledge and creative skills within our community that is part of building community knowledge.

Cultural Strategy integrates arts and culture to provide a more intricate frame for community building where we can view our work as part of a larger process; it is important when working in communities experiencing intimate traumas from systems that research is humanizing. By offering an entry point for youth and families to contribute their art we build stronger narratives and solutions where youth and families are able to bring their whole selves to the research. A cultural strategy approach helped us prioritize all of the communities' contributions generated through art and centered the voices of youth and families, whether they chose to contribute to the conversation by writing poetry, lyrics, or telling oral histories. As part of our research process and trust building process, one of the things we did was host writing workshops where youth could tell their stories through writing. The writing they developed are integrated into the report, along with some featured poetry written by local youth.

VRJ consulted with communities impacted by the juvenile justice system to develop written findings and recommendations for JDAI Hennepin. These written recommendations to JDAI Hennepin are for the purpose of providing systemic interventions to decrease the number of youth of color in the criminal justice system and eliminate the reliance on incarcerating youth as a means promoting community safety. VRJ developed findings and recommendations in consultation with communities by hosting four listening sessions or focus groups in Hennepin County. We relied on relationships VRJ has with local community organizations and partners in order to host listening sessions that were comfortable and accessible to community members. Therefore, we chose to host listening sessions in partnership with local organizations that are trusted and respected by different groups of people of color. In an effort to honor the safety of our participants,

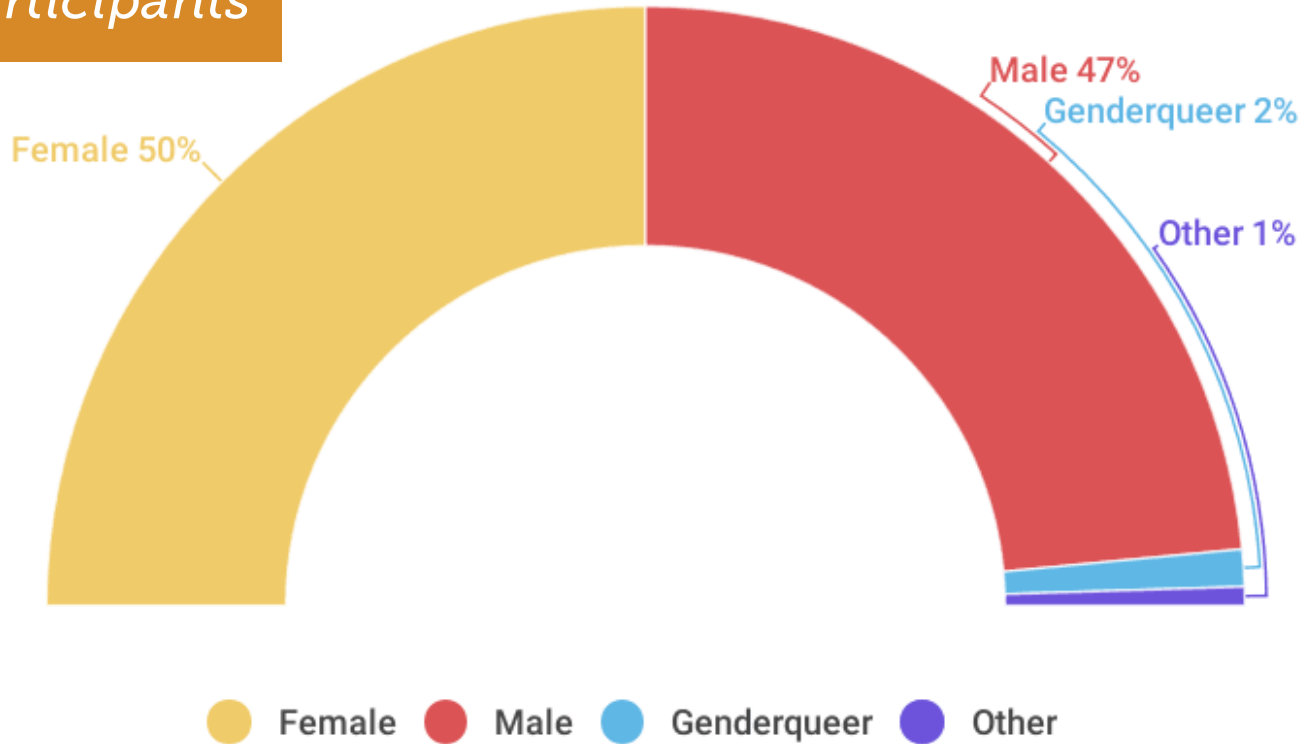
we will not list the organizations by name. We want to ensure the protection of safe spaces for community members. Furthermore all names used in this report regarding participants are pseudonyms. We also left out any identifying information.

Our process was a reflection of the commitment we have to our partners in ensuring we maintain reciprocal levels of trust. In each session we had at least one person with whom youth and family members had relationships with and trusted. We had one intergenerational listening session with a Latino-led community organization in South Minneapolis that serves predominately Latino community, one youth centered listening session with a Native American-led community organization in South Minneapolis that serves predominantly Native American community, one youth-centered listening session with a Black led organization in North Minneapolis that serves predominately African American community, and one intergenerational conversation between youth and their family members in North Minneapolis. We also hosted writing workshops in partnership with a Black-led writing organization in South Minneapolis, and conducted a handful of interviews with community members impacted by the juvenile justice system as well as youth who were from or currently live in Brooklyn Park. Some of those interviewed are currently adults who reflected on their experiences as criminal justice-involved youth.

We spoke to youth on probation, who have been in out-of-home placement, youth reflecting various demographics of the community including race, ethnicity, socio-economics, gender, age, sexual orientation and immigration status. We spoke to youth who have different offense histories, who have been arrested, detained pending adjudication, and tried as adults. Many of the youth we engaged have been invested in and connected to their communities and are all interested in continuing to support the process of community based conversations to address issues between the county and the community.

A total of 70 community members participated in listening sessions; 30 more community members participated in writing workshops but chose not to participate in listening sessions. Of those we spoke to, 77% reported that they themselves, or someone in their family, have been directly impacted by the juvenile justice system. 61% of participants were African American, 19% Native American, 13%

Gender of Participants



Caucasian, 10% Latinx, and 6% responded Other (some participants identified as more than one race.)

Participants came from different parts of Hennepin County, with 15% currently residing in Brooklyn Park, 45% in North Minneapolis, 35% in South Minneapolis, and 5% elsewhere in the Hennepin County metro area. Of those we spoke with, 6% were between the ages of 11-14, 60% were between the ages of 15-19, 41% were between the ages of 20-30, and 26% were between the ages of 32-61. 50% of participants identify as female, 47% identify as male, 2% as genderqueer and 1% as other. Unfortunately we did not have strong representation of Asian youth and family members in this study, and recognize this as a missed opportunity and something that must also be addressed. Overall the communities we spoke to were a reflection of strong community organizations and partners that were interested in supporting this research by hosting and recruiting youth in their communities.

The structure and format of each listening session was designed to meet the needs of youth and families in that particular place and community. Some youth felt more comfortable participating in listening sessions where family members were present, some felt more comfortable where their friends and peers were present. One listening session

was predominantly in Spanish and our research team members translated when necessary. We had writing workshop options, for youth who wanted to contribute their ideas and opinions without having to participate in a listening session or interview. Although the format and structure was different across listening sessions, the questions remained the same.

Many youth and family members expressed feeling positive and sometimes hopeful after our conversations. Youth, family, and community members told us these conversations were a great start. For some youth having a safe space to process their experiences with other youth with similar experiences was also the first time they received affirmation from family and friends. Some youth found sharing their experiences with family members present restorative. Having space to share lifted the issues from being simply a personal issue to a systemic one, where everyone is concerned for the well-being of youth of color in their communities. For other youth the conversation was very difficult, requiring us to schedule follow up sessions that centered writing activities, arts, and conversations on healing. Our major challenges to getting this project started was navigating the trust gap between the community and Hennepin County juvenile justice system.

Community Trust

Overall, the majority of community members who participated in our project expressed deep distrust for the Hennepin County juvenile justice system. Youth and families expressed not being at the decision making table when policies, practices, and proposals are being made and decided upon. They did not feel there was any type of accountable evaluation system where youth and family members could evaluate practices, people, and policies. They also did not feel they had a lot of control over options that catered to the specific needs of youth in their communities. During the process of this research project, Hennepin County was involved in hosting community conversations about a proposal for a new multi-million dollar joint juvenile facility between Hennepin County and Ramsey County. This proposal caused deep concern, outrage, tension and protests led by youth who've been impacted by the juvenile justice system. Our research team initially struggled to gain participation in this research given the already large trust gap between community and the county. The joint facility proposal created an additional barrier when community members questioned and scrutinized this research and its connection to Hennepin County juvenile justice center.

Community members also expressed distrust and scrutiny towards the Annie E. Casey Foundation, because of the lack of knowledge regarding the

role the foundation plays in the work of the county. Some community members believed the foundation played a role in supporting the proposal for the joint facility. It was also not clear whose interests were being served by JDAI Hennepin, and the Deep End Initiative and its reform efforts. Part of our own trust building required us to share information on the Deep End Initiative, explain the work of Hennepin Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative when necessary in order for community to have as much information as possible to make informed decisions about participating in this research. We strongly recommend JDAI Hennepin have community sessions regarding their work, intentions and principles that are transparent and accessible to community members. We also strongly recommend Annie E. Casey Foundation makes clear their funding intentions, goals, and commitment to Juvenile Justice Alternatives to the communities that should be positively impacted due to the foundation's funding. Without this information, community members cannot make informed decisions on trusting any entity or institution that has a partnership with Hennepin County juvenile detention system, or understand the work of the county and its reform efforts. Nor can community members hold the initiative, foundation and county accountable to any intended goals.

Current Environment

Policing and Racial Profiling

In all of our conversations, racism and racial profiling were a key to defining the current environmental, social climate and landscape. Many people we spoke to shared experiences of being profiled, discriminated against and harassed by police, employers, and school officials due to their race and class. Participants expressed feeling a lack of safety in their communities, workplaces, and even their homes as a result of discrimination. "I don't feel safe, because lots of places you go.... Even without police, people of color know we have [internalized] white supremacy. You experience racism, rejection, and injustice at work and wherever". At the same time some youth only felt safe with people who came from their neighborhoods, given the discrimination they experience by White communities outside of their neighborhoods.

Participants shared how the overall culture and expectations of youth of color in their communities are shaped by White supremacy. Some of our Black participants talked about the violence that racism and racial profiling creates. One person shared: "they expect Black men to become baby daddies, be locked up, be gang banging, do something crazy, and they expect Black women to... be pregnant, oh, pregnant at an early age...they just don't expect the right things for us." Because of experiences like these, participants felt safer in their own neighborhoods among people who shared their own walks of life. One of the groups in our listening sessions said they felt safer in their own neighborhood despite hyper-policing, than they did venturing out of their neighborhoods where there are fewer people of color.

The majority of participants expressed feeling unsafe around police, and cited numerous instances of racial profiling and harassment. They shared that police maintained heavy presence and a hyper-policing of their communities. Numerous youth spoke on their experiences of frequent traffic stops, harsh fines and mistreatment at the hands of law enforcement. Some also shared the fear and emotional impact these encounters have instilled in

them, "I got stopped once for going through a yellow light. So, he stops me, he pulls me over, I was frantic because I had never gone through that before, right? He takes me out of my car and put me into his car, and I was crying like crazy...He took me out of my car, put me in the back of the police car. First time I had ever in my life been in a police car. And I was just so scared." Interviewees and listening session participants described police behavior as aggressive, stating they tend to escalate situations unnecessarily and treat their communities as if they are inherently suspicious.

For participants from immigrant communities, whose lack of citizenship poses a threat to their safety and security, there is the additional threat of deportation and harassment from Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE). "Every morning I'm looking out the window because having been an inmate in jail- and now with migration- I have to be watching....I'm facing the system twice," Emanuel said. Many expressed not feeling safe in most places, even at home, because police and ICE can break into someone's home and separate a family. This climate of fear has increased in recent months, and is affecting adults, youth, as well as young children. One participant shared a story of taking care of her little cousin when her little cousin asked her, 'did you know that the police can ask for your papers now? I'm worried for mom and dad.' She then returned to watching TV again. "You don't want that mentality in those little kids," she noted. "They shouldn't have to worry about that right now".

School to Prison Pipeline

The majority of people we spoke with shared that their feelings of safety in their schools were strongly impacted by the harsh discipline they both received and witnessed. This resulted in feeling invisible and/or discriminated against in the classroom. Many felt that their school's treatment of students is informed by racism, racial bias, and a lack of support resources for students of color and low-income students. Youth reported their schools have police officers on site and security checkpoints at the entrances. There is more of an emphasis on controlling behavior than

They don't really care. You

feel like you're just

another number...

they make sure that you don't
clearly understand all of your

options. So it's not

clear. They don't explain it.

supporting student's growth and healing. The kinds of treatment directed at young people of color in the schools create unsafe learning environments, have lasting impacts and perpetuate toxic narratives about who has a right to "succeed," and who ends up in the juvenile and adult justice systems.

Of the people we spoke with, the majority did not feel safe at school. Many students shared that they experienced a different level of treatment in school than White students. A Latino youth worker talked about witnessing kids of color internalize that different treatment they are experiencing in school when they're labeled as "trouble kids." Youth highlighted the over-reliance on discipline takes away the development of creative support resources for students who get into trouble. They also noted that there's a discrepancy between resources made available at affluent schools with higher populations of White students, than schools in low-income predominantly people of color neighborhoods. One student said, "...In our schools, in our communities, they focus more on the behaviors as opposed to in their schools. In Edina and Eden Prairie, they would attempt to get to what is ... what's wrong with Timothy? Timothy's having a bad day. Hey Timothy, why don't you go down to the guidance counselor? He's going to go to the guidance counselor, they're going to really chop it up and they're going to try to figure something out. Tyrone, he's going to go to the vice principal's office, potentially detention and a whole bunch of other areas and these are a fast track to the juvenile justice system.... It's just because of the way that they interface with the two groups of youngsters. They have a different freaking mentality with the two groups."

Discipline in schools replicates the violence youth experience entering the juvenile justice system. Rather than allocating resources to support students overcoming obstacles from their environments, schools often turn to discipline as a quick solution to youth they've identified as "trouble makers." Participants shared experiences of extreme discipline measures. For example a student that got into a fight was suspended for 45 days and transferred to a completely different school. Another student said that they got house arrest after getting in a fight at school. Other youth shared their experience of being caught skipping school by a school resource officer and having their feet burned with the cigarettes they were smoking. Some also talked about being sent home for being late to class. Youth shared that the extreme disciplinary measures

they received while at school caused them to avoid going to school. Some found a correlation between their anxiety and their school environment. One student shared her story of getting interrogated for returning to school with school materials that school officials did not believe she had permission to take out of the school. While making a sphere for a class project, she was given wood and materials to carve what she couldn't finish at school. Even though she brought the materials back the next day, she was taken to a room to be interrogated by four staff members. In the middle of the interrogation she got severe anxiety and started crying. Rather than letting her go, staff members blocked her from leaving. Across the board, those who participated in our listening sessions shared that they experienced harsher disciplinary action in comparison to their White classmates. They reflected that discipline impacted their options for success impacting their emotional well-being.

Lack of Resource & Support

An environment without the necessary resources to support young people to reach their potential funnels low-income youth of color into the juvenile justice system. One participant noted that the lack of resources and support is one of the main reasons so many youth end up in juvenile detention. He said that rather than providing students professional help, they send them to jail. If more students had access to counseling and rehabilitation to support their mental health it might reduce incarceration rates of youth. One Native youth from South Minneapolis Brenda stated, "Because there is so much trauma and depression and stress, we sometimes take roads we shouldn't take. Because we weren't offered help." Others shared that youth frequently are crying out for help, but are not being listened to, especially when youth are struggling to articulate something that isn't right. There needs to be resources to address underlying causes rather than just punishing students when what they need is support. Brenda continued, "It's very important to make sure not to ostracize kids in school and outside, just build a community and try not to tear people apart." Most participants had very few real mentors in school they could call upon when they needed support.

Some youth also shared their experience with the health system was also closely linked to the violence of law enforcement and the juvenile justice system. An 18 year old Native youth shared her experience of being beat up by the law enforcement and then

Discrimination gets in the way
 The government has limited us
 It's not for us [Black youth]
 No more chains. To be free
 Not in America Alive There is none
 Equal for who? Equal for who?
 No capitalism There is no justice Freedom, not locked up.
 White Privilege Freedom Standing Rock
 Freedom, not locked up.
 Resistance Just getting out. Just getting out.
 To do what you want to do without listening to somebody else.
 It's for White people
 Ain't no equality here. Ain't nothing to think of.
 To not be incarcerated
 Freedom/Justice/Equality
 To do what you want to do without listening to somebody else.

placed in an ambulance when the police realized that she was underage at the time. The hospital became an extension of the violence she experienced in the hands of the police. When she arrived at the hospital she was treated in physically and emotionally abusive ways by doctors and hospital staff.

Home & Family

We know that poverty in our communities is the result of systemic violence. Many of the participants we spoke to that ended up in corrections cited poverty as a root cause in having unstable home environments. Young people were left to their own devices to make money to help their families and support themselves financially. One man shared his frustration: "It don't take much to get older and get tired of seeing your family struggle," he said. "Everybody wants better for their loved ones and it gets to a point where you realize that McDonald's and all of this isn't going to be able to provide and pay bills so you just end up becoming a product of your environment." Some shared stories of the difficulties faced at home, causing youth to avoid going home, which in some cases resulted in homelessness. Because homeless youth are often criminalized, this became an easy entry point for them to get pulled into the system.

Some youth have parents or family members who are currently or who have previously been incarcerated, which had negative consequences for their family. One teenager shared that she felt she was the only person that could understand

her, and she only had herself as a support system stating, "All them little mini sessions that I had in my head. I was my own therapist. I had to tell my own self this isn't right, and this got to change. You're probably this way because your mom was absent.. she tried to come back." The level of violence caused by systems of incarceration impacting a family intergenerationally has drastic psychological and emotional impacts on youth.

One high school student shared that it's important not to minimize the trauma of experiencing this violence at home. Some parents and family members of youth are struggling to survive themselves due to their own needs that aren't met. Unmet needs of parents and families makes it seem as if families don't truly care for their youth. However, parents must have their needs addressed in order for them to meet the needs of their children. If parents are struggling with incarceration, with their mental health, or drug use, or can not provide for their children's needs because of income, families must also feel supported, safe, have their needs addressed in order for them to support their child in the ways needed.

Experience with the Hennepin County Juvenile Justice System

Overall Thoughts on the Juvenile Justice System
 The overwhelming majority of participants in our study reported that based on their direct experiences, the juvenile justice system is rooted in the practice

of punishment than rehabilitation. Participants expressed how as a whole the juvenile justice system is flawed and is failing their communities because of the many ways it creates and replicates more harm. They did not feel it was making their communities safer but instead making their communities unsafe. Youth felt their overall experiences from the moment of their arrest court process, placement, and probation they were set up to fail.

Some of the reasons participants found the juvenile justice system to be harmful where the lack of culturally sensitive county workers, aggressive and racially charged local policing, county investigators and prosecutors creating deep tensions between friends, neighbors and community members related to fear mongering, and plea bargains that turn people against each other, the emotional impact of separation from family members during placement, and the unequal treatment of youth of color. Youth expressed that for many of them, avoiding the juvenile justice system is not possible because of the neighborhoods they live in, the schools they go to, and the culture of law enforcement in their communities. Those same youth also expressed how difficult it is to get out of the juvenile justice corrections system.

Entering the Juvenile Justice System

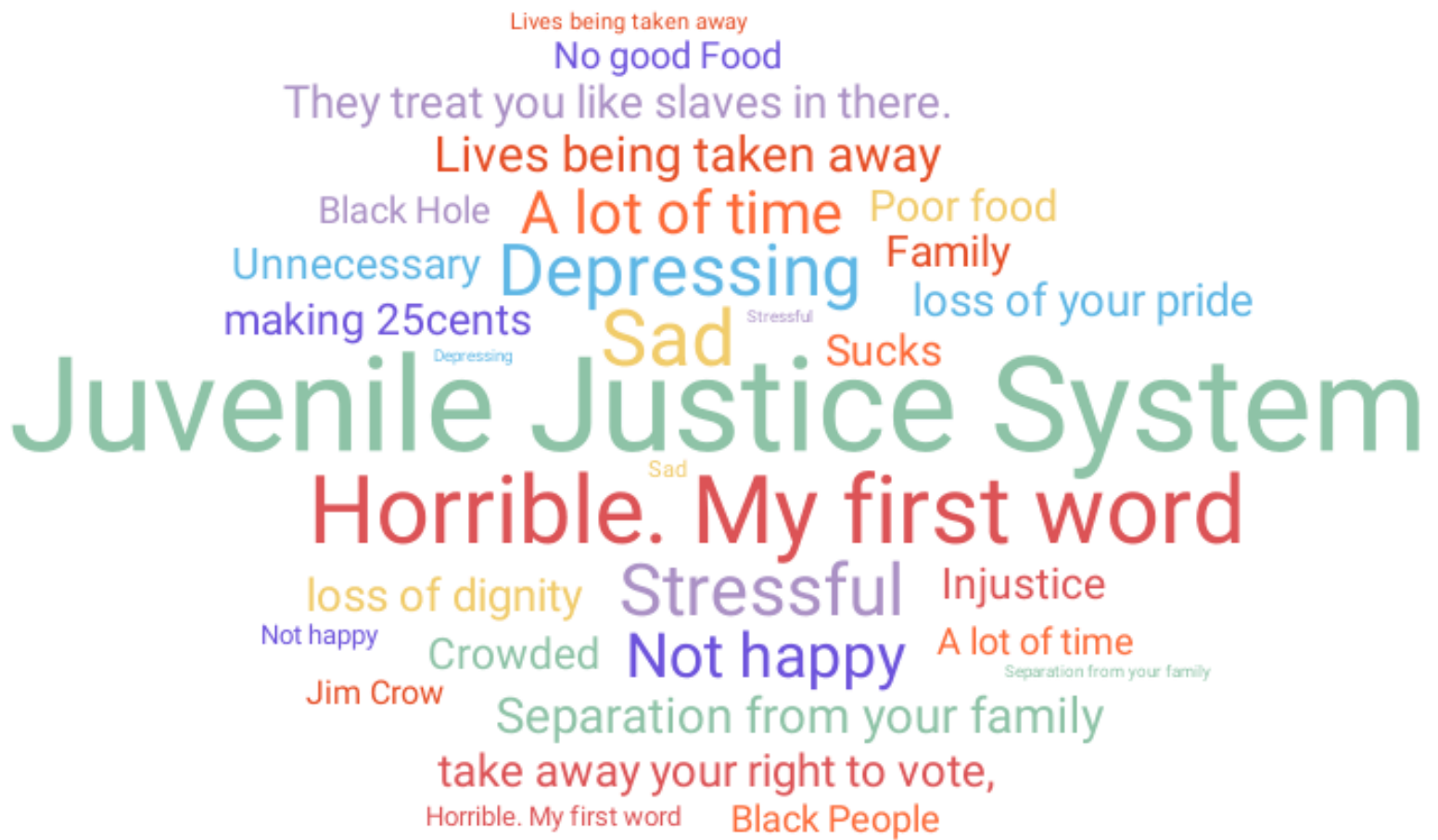
Many youth in our study were held in detention for nonviolent charges, including drug offenses, technical violations of probation, public order offenses, status offenses, and low level property offenses. There were very few violent crimes including assault and aggravated robbery. Many youth believed they were arrested unnecessarily, or were convicted for a crime they did not commit, and expressed feeling scared, confused, and overwhelmed during their arrest and booking. When discussing point of entry into the Juvenile Justice system youth also discussed harassment and profiling by law enforcements as reasons for their arrests and issued court orders.

For example one young Black girl in North Minneapolis had a court order for getting off her train without a transfer when she was 16. She had thrown her transfer away and told the law enforcement officer who stopped her that she would purchase a new one, but she was still issued a court order. After appearing in court, the judge dismissed her case because it was the first time the judge had seen her in court. Other youth however were not so

fortunate to make it to their court appearance. Some had bench warrants for failing to appear in court, due to not knowing when they had court, having transportation challenges, or difficulties getting off of work.

One African American youth from North Minneapolis named Jamal, was the passenger in his friend's vehicle when his friend was stopped by the police. Although he was not the one driving he was asked for his information and was arrested on the spot. It was his first time learning he had a bench warrant for failure to appear in court for a fight that had happened at school. Although the fight happened before Jamal was 18, by the time of his booking he had just turned 18 and was facing trial as an adult leaving him to fight to clear his record in a two year court case. Jamal said, "the things kids are getting arrested for pre-Columbine, like fighting, a simple offense, fighting in school is now misdemeanor, felony charges can be placed by the school, not by the parents or the person who was offended...but it's [charges and sentencing] not fair and equal across races."

For other youth, they expressed reasons for their arrests caused by being at the wrong place at the wrong time or being around the wrong people. "Nowadays, they don't catch you doing a crime if you hang around with somebody that's a known gang member, they [the police] will just write you down there too" said a 14 year old Black youth from North Minneapolis. Others who have broken rules in the past struggle with proving their innocence in the future. Jason, 15 year old Black youth from North Minneapolis said, "So, I was on house arrest. Before I was on house arrest I would skip class. Ever since I've been on house arrest I've been in class. One time I was going to the bathroom, there was kids in there smoking tobacco...so I walked out and take off running. There is smoke coming from the bathroom. They [school officers] come search me. I can't smoke on house arrest. They don't believe me so I go home that exact day. I get home, I eat a bowl of cereal like I always do. I'm just sitting at the table, next thing you know, I see the house arrest people pull up. I see a police car behind it. I go to the back room, there's two police cars. I know they're taking me back to juvenile corrections. They take me back to corrections, I wait for court, I go to court and then I look at the paper and I got all these violations from school." Many youth expressed receiving harsher penalties due to racism and unequal treatment of youth of color and Native youth in the court system.



Youth discussed how before even receiving a conviction of any wrong doing they were still treated as if they were guilty throughout the process of their arrest and booking. After they were stopped by police due to a fight, two brothers reflected on their experiences stating, "It was a grimy process. They arrested us, me and my little brother, they're not even explaining anything, we don't know anything. We're kids. I'm 14 and you're fingerprinting me and I don't have a parent present, I don't know what is going on." Jamal also reflected on his booking process, "They sit you in holding cell for hours, and see if there's an available bed, and it's cold down there, then being searched. Your first hours is like a loss of privilege, even though you ain't did nothing to lose your privilege, you're basically in in a room, and you in your mod until you go to court, whenever the court date is". After arrest, some youth were detained in a detention center or other residential facility to await a hearing in juvenile or adult court, depending on how they were charged.

Court Process

The court process for youth and family members

brought additional challenges. For undocumented youth and families the court process raised it's own set of challenges. Many youth and their families expressed not having access to information and resources necessary to navigate court successfully. In fact youth and family members felt coerced to accept the options presented to them rather than feeling that county workers were actually looking out for their best interests.

About her experience in court Monique, a Black youth from North Minneapolis, said, "They don't really care. You feel like you're just another number... they make sure that you don't clearly understand all of your options. So it's not clear. They don't explain it. They overwhelm you with it." Many youth expressed feeling like a statistic, as if that they were fitting a predetermined stereotype or mold based on how they were treated in court and by county staff. They did not feel seen as individuals with their own stories and challenges, but were treated as if they were guilty before being convicted. Participants felt White youth however were treated differently in court. Thompson who is now an adult reflected on his experiences as a youth saying, "I've never seen one single White youth come through with a life or

long sentence. Never. Not one in all of the years that I've been incarcerated. Never." Thompson continued, "When it came to sentencing, I didn't really know what was going on when they were kinda trying to talk to me, like I'm just guilty, and I have to prove my innocence. They was trying to say, 'Oh, well, this is the crime you've committed, this is how much time you're looking at, and this is what we're going to do about you, and things like that.' Basically, just putting that assumption on me, like, 'Okay, I did it,' Even if I didn't, they just try to make you feel like a bad person so that giving you the time wouldn't be so harsh on them, and then they can sleep at night."

Thompson and Monique along with many others felt county workers worked in collaboration against their best interests. Thompson said, "It's very rare to get support. I feel like in order for you to actually have a fair case, you got to spend some money. Public defender, judges, police, all of them work together. If you ain't got no private attorney, then you pretty much screwed". Similarly another Black young adult reflecting on his experiences as a youth, Jason said, "My public defender, he really don't care. He barely even knew my name. I only seen him when it was time for court. My probation officer had it in for me." Jason shared how his probation officer and public defender were working with his prosecutor more than he felt they were negotiating for his best interest. Jason added, "That stuff's [court process] is all messed up honestly because like the judge is gonna agree with them anyway, your public defender, all that. They talk before you even meet your public defender. Nine times out of 10, they already know what they finna do to you". Like Monique and Thompson, Jason also felt overwhelmed, "They trying to get me to sign plea deals and I'm 15 years old. Here it is, they're offering me take 10 years, take 12 years, take 25 years with no conversation with my parents at all. I could have signed away, I didn't but I could have signed away as a youngster two decades of my life... I couldn't even smoke a cigarette but I could have signed a plea deal!"

Some of the youth took matters into their own hands to advocate appeals against their sentence, or took their trial to court. Others regretfully took plea bargains. A few were able to get support after they worked to advocate for themselves. While detained, and awaiting his hearing Jason would attempt reading law books. He said, "They are using Latin, who speaks Latin?...None of it made sense it's all about knowing the law and they know that kids don't

know the law. It comes down to language. There's a language barrier. There's a lot of jargon. Even when you're in court and your listening, the mics are down so low it's hard to hear and I'm hard of hearing anyway. And then the cop that's there in the courtroom whenever I was there would come and stand right in front of me so you couldn't even see the judge or see what's going on."

Thompson had various charges. Like Jason, he started to do his own research. Thompson had made specific recommendations to the county investigator to check the DNA on his ring that was confiscated during his arrest and also recommended he check the cameras. He raised the fact he had no bruises on his hand, to prove he didn't do it [assault charge], however the investigator disregarded any of his recommendations. Thompson felt his public defenders tried to pressure him into taking a plea. He had to prove to his public defender he was serious about taking the charges to court if necessary. "I was fighting for my record so she [public defender] finally got me a state of adjudication on one of the charges, and then got another one of the charges dropped... then we took other charges to trial...the deals they gave was two years, felony assault, two years in prison, probation after. Then they lowered it to one year, three years probation, then they tried to lower it from a felony to a misdemeanor, but I still took it to trial and I beat it".

When discussing advocating for himself Jason said, "the story just pick right back up with the appellate attorney. We was just at war trying to figure this thing out. The issues I wanted to raise she ain't want to raise. She basically told me you on your own. I started studying and put a brief together. She liked it so much she went on ahead and adopted it. The issues I raised got the sentenced reversed during my appeal process."

Unfortunately other youth did not fight to take their case to trial or appeal their sentence. Jamal was detained for six months before receiving his sentence. He would leave for court about once a month. When youth are already separated from their families and communities, the prospect of being separated even longer takes a heavy toll. Jamal said, "They try to trick you. They tried to get me to plead guilty for something that I didn't do. I was young so I pled guilty...I didn't even do the crime, I'm looking at it like this is less time. I want to get out. I want to be around my family. I pleaded." Some youth felt at the time they had won by pleading. Another young

Placement

Broken families
Unjust Business
Fear
Mistreatment
Business Fear
Overcrowded
Unjust
Too many people
People of color

said "...I felt like I had won, because that's what they wanted me to feel like. Now you ask me that same question today...I would take it to trial".

Youth felt their parents were equally as coerced into the options being presented to them by the prosecution. When speaking to his mother Jamal's said she asked him, "What you do? I want you to come home. If this is what you tell me is going to get my kid home I think this is best for you...I'm listening to my mom, she don't know nothing about no justice system." Decision making amongst youth and family regarding their options happened haphazardly without either feeling they had a complete picture of the process, their rights and how to advocate and negotiate the best options for their child.

Some youth expressed their family members were afraid to appear in court due to the possibility representatives from Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE) would be present in the courtroom. One Latino youth from south Minneapolis, Emmanuel stated, "Sometimes the courts allow ICE officials to come, so family members can't be there. That's a big thing, that sometimes our families can't go, or you yourself are afraid to go because you don't know what might happen." Emmanuel reflected how community members have witnessed the harsh treatment of

undocumented community members by ICE in the courtrooms, leaving the courtroom a very unsafe place for undocumented families.

Parents and youth also expressed the court process made their communities less safe, by creating more tension between friends, neighbors and community members. Participants expressed the court process turns people against whoever they are in the case with. This creates tense dynamics when youth return to communities that are steeped in animosity because of youth who feel betrayed by other youth. Emmanuel said, "they're [prosecutors] trying to make them kill each other off...starting wars... when you're out [of placement] your having to fight people."

Placement:

While in out-of-home placement, youth are separated from their families and community, can not go to school or work, and are forced out of their normal day-to-day life. There were more negative experiences than positive experiences youth had in placement overall. While reflecting on their experiences the severity and level of risk (minimum to maximum-risk) of their placement impacted the experience the youth had. For example youth who had some positive experiences were speaking about

their group home experience, however youth in higher-risk facilities did not report the same level of positive experiences. The higher the risk level of the placement site the more negative the experience, as well as the more violent and traumatic for the youth.

Most young people were negatively impacted by being separated from their families. The separation from family, friends and community reinforced the feelings of isolation youth experienced while in placement. Youth had different levels of engagement with family while in placement, those who had less time than others reported feeling angry and that their sentence time went by slower when unable to communicate with family members. For undocumented family members visitation was even more difficult given some family members do not have an ID and needed one for visitation applications. Carlos said, "If you don't have ID, that person is still your family and you still should have the right to visit them. Being detained, and especially being young and not having the support of your parents- how would that not affect you? That's traumatic."

Youth ranked the cultural competency at their placement very low. One youth reported being the only youth of color in a facility up North, "I was the only brown skinned child there and I was charged with a serious offense and they really didn't know what to do with me and so they isolated me for the most part from the other children almost like solitary confinement type of existence up until the point where they certified me and sent me to the adult facility." He expressed feeling misunderstood, and feared not simply for what he was charged for but because his race caused others to feel threatened by him.

Youth felt that the system as a whole was culturally incompatible with people of color, yet more compatible with "suburban middle class young White youth." One young person said, "I think that the systems they've created are totally compatible with that [white] person's psychosocial makeup." Psychosocial health consists of our social, mental, emotional and spiritual well beings. Feeling, thinking, related and being all operate on a cultural level, where youth of color do not feel they are able to develop psychosocially in a culturally incompetent system in the ways they would be able to in their own communities. At community meetings that were not part of our listening sessions in Native American community, elders were heard saying their grandchildren return from placement reminding

them of children returning from violent and imposed boarding school. At a time when a young person should be developing their own cultural identity, which is restorative given the historical impacts of oppression, young people and elders felt placement was tearing them from their culture, language, and history.

Many youth also experienced abuse in their placements. One youth reported abuse and discrimination at a non-secure out-of-state residential facility he was sent to while discussing how the program director at his placement was verbally abusive, telling him to go kill himself. He was also denied access to phone calls and games for two months. The young man felt accountability was impossible given all the staff members were friends. He said, "they could do anything they want because they know if you get kicked out, you just going to go back to court and get sentenced somewhere else so nobody really cares. Even if you make a complaint, nobody does anything about it." He did not feel safe at his placement, which was an open dorm like structure, at the same time he reported staff were only around during activities. Eventually he was kicked out of his placement, and he reported his abuse to the court and his case was dropped.

Many youth felt their placement experience was dehumanizing, they felt they were treated worse than adults simply because they were young. Other youth reported experiencing other types of abuse in their placement. For example one young person shared a story of how he would wake up to all the windows opened in his placement in the morning, despite all the complaints against the bitter cold, the staff member responsible was not held accountable. Another youth shared how he would have to scrub tile floors with a toothbrush.

Justin said, "There's a lack of the recognition of a young person's humanity.... It's a training issue. They don't see young people as people. They treat them like things that have no rights and no privileges and no nothing. Almost every juvenile that they put me in and then once they put me in the adult facility was kind of the same way. The juveniles just got zero respect. I don't know where the mindset comes from that says dehumanize, devalue, make sure that you don't see or recognize or allow for the individuality of this youngster." Michael added, "They put they hands on people too much. We could have a disagreement but they'll bring it 12 notches up and then they get physical or they'll call a code for no reason. Have you

“There’s a lack of the recognition of a young person’s humanity.... It’s a training issue. They don’t see young people as people. They treat them like things that have no rights and no privileges and no nothing.”

in there beat up, hurting, bones finna break”. Youth felt their placement experience was very “robotic” and “detached” from the actual ways people socialize in community. Youth felt their placement expected them to behave in ways that are unreal. Youth did not feel they were treated, spoken to, or interacted with as real people. Many of them expressed the frustration of having to use the bathroom when told, shower when told, having to get permission to sharpen a pencil. The lack of autonomy and the lack of independence was more prevalent in the experiences of youth in secure facilities.

The youth who had reported any positive experiences were in group homes or because they were able to benefit from having housing. One youth reflected the positive experiences he had with corrections was due to the fact he was able to get housing in a shelter. For youth in group homes, they had the ability to leave to go to the store, but would have to let staff know how long they would be gone and for what purposes. Despite having to report on where they were going and have a time limit imposed, they still felt positive about having that opportunity. Youth in group homes also had more access to family members given they could leave to be with their families overnight and family members could spend time with them as well. Justin said, “Then after business hours you had to fill out a form, and it had to go through the director, which the director was cool. He was Black. He was cool,

and he got to know all the families.... You could do overnight visits, or your family can come do a holiday there. My mom and them came over on Christmas, ate dinner...If you’re going to rehabilitate somebody, put them in something like that you know what I’m saying, instead of locking them up...They didn’t search you at all. They made you feel like you was at home...and every month you’ll come up with plans and goals, and then the closer it is to you graduating, you’ll come up with long-term goals for when you come home”

Outside of group homes, no youth reported seeing mentors and counselors, although some youth had mentors and counselors available at their placements on occasion, none of the youth felt they were accessible or felt comfortable speaking with them. The more secure and restrictive the facility the worse youth reported on their experiences, especially where youth could be placed in hold or segregation, that they expressed was a type of solitary confinement. Youth repeatedly brought up temperature as an issue, that facilities were cold, they needed better blankets, beds, and food. The extremely controlling and isolating nature of high, and max risk residential facilities made some young people dissociate from themselves. “I don’t wish it on nobody,” Marcus said, “for the simple fact they take away everything away, to the point where you don’t even have a name, it basically feels like you’re in modern day slavery. Everywhere you go you’re

getting frisked or patted down at any moment any time of day you can get into a fight, just by walking and looking at somebody wrong.”

For youth who were in residential facilities, many felt besides access to education opportunities there was no sustained effort at rehabilitation. Some felt their education in placement was very minimal, bareboned, and unhelpful. Youth who had felt they improved in their writing and reading credited certain staff members who were supportive. Youth of color spoke positively of staff of color who they could relate to. However for some youth, despite the education in placement, they still struggled to be up to date upon leaving their placement and entering schools outside of their placement. Some felt deterred from pursuing education after leaving placement, because they didn't feel their placement adequately prepared them but left them behind standards of their peers.

Many participants expressed lack of adequate mental health resources. Michael, expressed when he was in placement he had attempted suicide and yet he still did not see a therapist. A lot later before his psychological evaluation he was able to see a therapist, Michael said “it was so phony. It was weird. It was just like he just wanted to rubber stamp something real quick. Get you out of here.” One participant reported losing 60lbs while in placement unintentionally, another reported just trying to sleep a lot as a way of making it through their time. Many felt that drugs were over relied on. “They is so quick to dope you up...oh, something's wrong with this kid. Get him some Seroquels. Why would you put a 13 year old on Seroquel, Remeron or Trazodone, Klonopin. Why would you put a 13 or 14 year old on Depakote? Why would you do that? Do you know what that does to you?” Youth expressed major concern regarding the long term effects of taking these drugs at such a young age. Young people felt drugs should be a last resort. At the same time participants expressed recreation activities were limited and included card games, television, 30 minutes of playing ball. They did not have access to meaningful opportunities that were exciting or restorative to their personal identity, sense of self, and vision for their future.

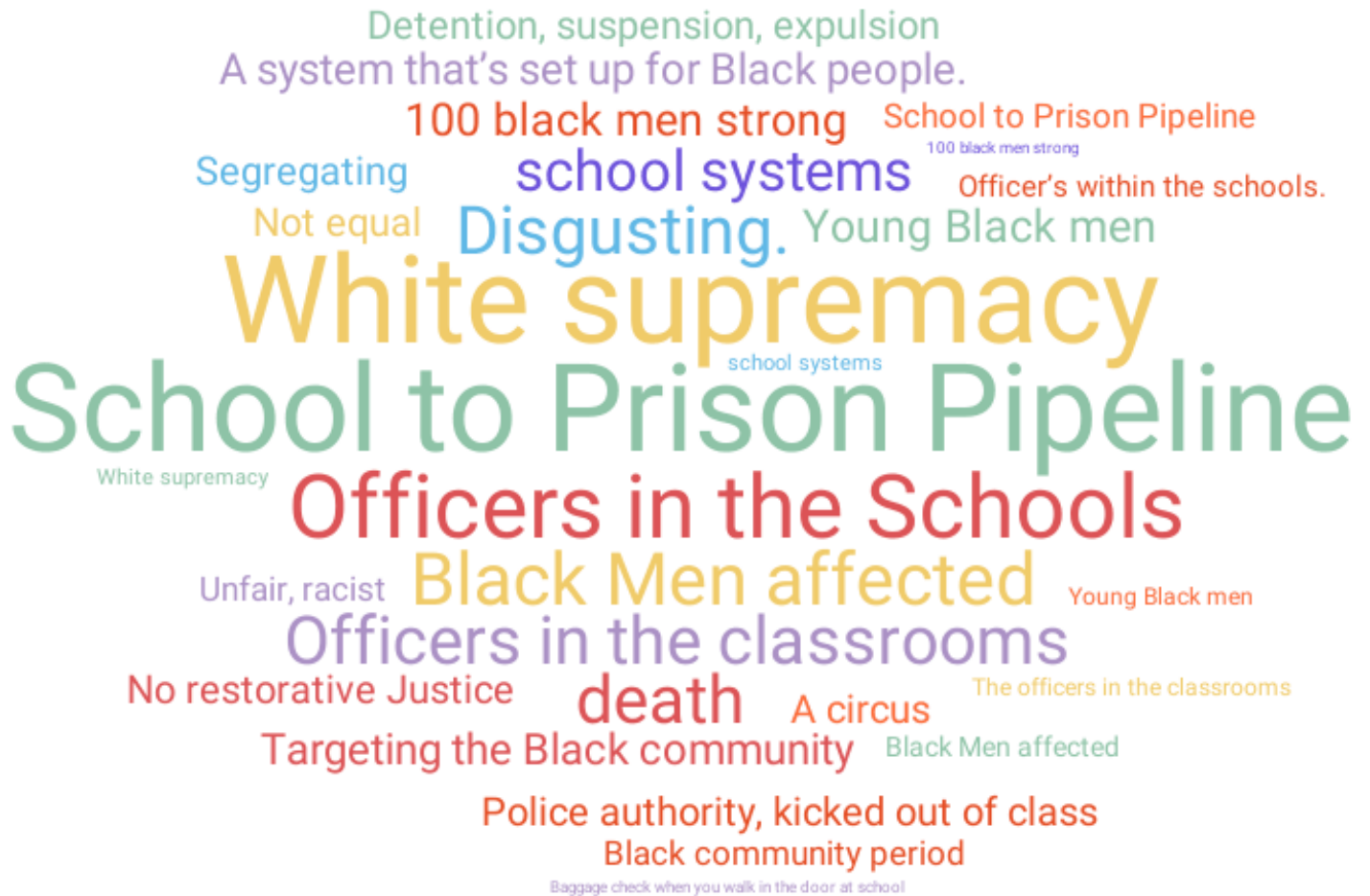
Probation & Reentry

All participants who were on probation expressed their probation officers were not helpful, neither were their probation officers invested in their

success. None of our participants had probations officers that asked or knew what their goals or interests were. Many felt their experience with probation was an extension of their punishment after leaving placement. Some participants would speak to their probation officers about their challenges and violence they were experiencing in their placement and yet their probation officers did nothing with that information.

In fact participants did not trust their probation officers after experiencing their probation officers working against them in court in favor of a sentence in a facility. Youth also did not trust probation officers because they felt they disregarded their safety and were simply trying to catch them messing up. Terrence, Black youth from North Minneapolis said, “Before I got out he [probation officer] was telling me about all this stuff saying ‘I’m going to send police to your house on random nights between 10pm to 1am...then I’m taking you to the precinct and you’re going to meet some of my buddies.’ I’m like no, I’m not going to meet no police. Then my mom had to tell him that she didn’t want cops showing up at her house. He was just trying to be intimidating...he said he was going to give me a violation if I wasn’t there one night. He tried to lock me back up”. Research done by The North Side Research Team led by Black youth from North Minneapolis reveals the level of fear and trauma Black youth in Northside have with the police. Northside youth in this project similarly expressed violent policing in their neighborhoods as a barrier to community safety. For Terrence’s probation officer to lack sensitivity of this dynamic he places Terrence in a situation where he can be increasingly surveilled and harassed by officers who know he is on probation, separating him from other youth and people in his community.

Some youth did not feel it was clear what would cause them to receive a violation. “You can violate just from not calling your probation officer...That’s all on the sole discretion of your probation officer. They can send you back to jail, give you verbal warnings. It’s solely up to the probation officer,” Oscar told us. Given the level of decision making probation officers have, youth did not feel secure or know what to expect from their probation officers. Another participant said “They [probation officer] even told me they didn’t want to be my probation officer...I feel like the system period is set up for failure...I just did five years in prison, why do I need somebody to monitor my every movement...to have somebody in your business at all times. If you do your time, you



shouldn't have to get out and double your time...he [probation officer] was just looking for every single reason to lock me up. He had it so in for me".

Participants expressed if their probation officers cared they would know their goals, interests, support them find jobs, and that their role wouldn't be one of surveillance or disciplinarian but they would play support roles such as counseling and providing youth resources. Youth felt the role of probation officer was unnecessary given they felt probation was reinforcing the cycle of returning to corrections rather than avoiding corrections.

Given the negative experiences youth had with their probation officers youth expressed also struggling to trust anyone who worked with their probation officers. One youth did not want to confide or trust the YMCA community specialist he was assigned to once he found out his probation officer was speaking to the community specialist. Youth struggle with knowing who they can and can not trust and

who they feel is working together against their interest, their decisions, and voice.

Upon reentry into their communities participants struggled to adjust. Oscar now an adult who entered corrections as a youth said, "You go to jail for 15 years and get out, you don't even know how to use your phone because technology picked up so much". Participants did not feel their time through correction prepared them for life after placement. In fact many participants struggled to find work and housing after leaving. Some participants expressed trying to avoid returning to incarceration was like playing a game of chess given life circumstances and environment could create instances that could place one back at court. Furthermore, given court cases created deep tension between friends, families, and community members some participants reported returning back to their communities that still had animosity from what transpired during court also making their neighborhood and community and unsafe space.



Community Recommendations

Our community recommendations were developed through a process of deep listening. Recommendations are rooted in both short and long term visions for change. First and foremost many participants expressed the juvenile justice system should not exist, especially as it does now. Youth and families found incarcerating youth was not rehabilitatory, but rather rooted in punishment which they experienced as counterproductive and counterintuitive. Youth and family members also challenged the notion that there's one simple solution, but rather different layers of needs and issues that must be addressed to have a lasting impact. This takes time, and requires more than band-aid solutions.

1. Preventative Measures

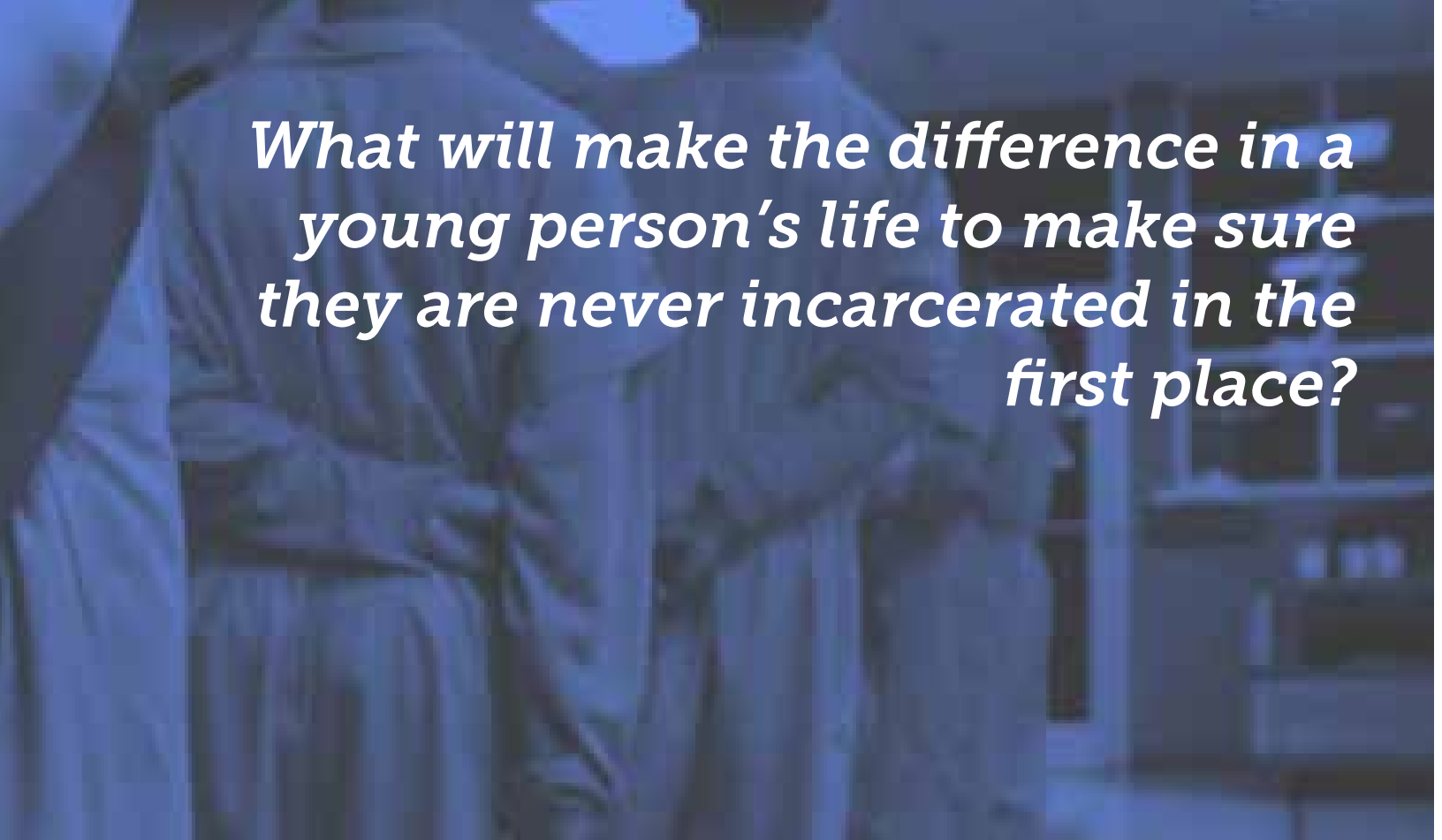
What will make the difference in a young person's life to make sure they are never incarcerated in the first place? It is not enough to talk about what happens once youth exit the system without also building infrastructure that takes preventative measures. Defining root causes is an important first step. As one listening session participant noted, it's important to "stop locking kids up without looking and determining the underlying problem." What happens if we change the frame and focus on

building support systems for youth before they get put through the system? Community members suggested key preventative measures are diversion systems, as well as systems of support in their schools and communities.

2. Youth Guidance, Counseling & Mentoring

"I don't think kids should be suspended for a lot of shit they get suspended for. They should have somebody in the school to talk to these kids and figure out what's going on, because a lot of behavior problems come from homes. A lot of kids act up in school because of what's going on at home. These teachers don't know that, because they don't care to ask. "Oh Timmy's just being bad. Sending him to ISS. Send him to detention." Why don't you figure out what's wrong with little Timmy first?"

Youth talked about the urgent need for consistent guidance and mentorship that truly supports them in reaching their full potential. They spoke to the importance of having positive role models that exemplify excellence and who can provide support for what's going on at home. It matters that youth of color have mentors that look like them, that understand their stories, that understand their struggles, their culture and language. "You can't put



What will make the difference in a young person's life to make sure they are never incarcerated in the first place?

someone from a blue collar neighborhood in the ghetto and expect them to make a difference.”

3. Economic & Educational Opportunities

Youth and communities felt the juvenile justice system tends to punish families who live in poverty, given young people from low economic backgrounds or who are homeless tend to get funneled through the juvenile justice system. The people we spoke to underlined the importance of youth having access to higher education, jobs, programs, and flourishing small businesses. One person noted that their dad would pay youth in the neighborhoods to fill out job applications, as an incentive to get them to apply for jobs. “Because if I’m getting paid to go look for a job, why am I not going to look for a job versus standing on the corner.” Imagine the potential if there were programs that were rooted in the community to support youth in this way on a consistent basis.

4. Addressing the Violence of Law Enforcement

“If all the input [decisions] is coming from one group of people [police] that have never been through nothing, then how can you make a change. You all [law enforcement] never lived in projects, you all

never went hungry, you all never had to see your mama struggle by herself, none of that, so you can't relate through certain things we go through.” Law enforcement has a contentious history with communities of color in this country. Youth and family members consistently expressed not being safe around police and some refuse to call police in emergency situations for fear of being criminalized. Community members expressed that tackling the harm caused by the police force is a long term struggle. Law enforcement must be held accountable for the profiling and harassment of youth of color.

Furthermore, police and law enforcement inherently fail to keep the community safe if their purpose is strictly disciplinary and rooted in policing. Resources need to go into more community activities and programs that are just for the purpose of communities getting to know each other, accessing job opportunities, and developing their neighborhoods rather than just resources going towards the expansion of the police force. Participants felt community safety goes beyond law enforcement.

Community members identified racial profiling as one of the main reasons they feel unsafe around law

STUDENT RESPONSE

Washburn High School

Solutions & Alternatives to youth detention centers

To every dollar I say give me teachers of color
- Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say fund the meals that some kids
rely on for school, make them healthy and good for
you as school should be.
- Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say give our students a chance. An
equal chance to succeed in a world built by success.
To build a society that can rise out of oppression
and focus on our compassion. Build bridges not
walls so we can build a community and opportunity
to those who never had them before.
- Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar we say
hire more teachers of color in our schools
Build a bigger black box performance space
more artists in the community influences education
and classrooms
fund adult education spaces around social justice
and community awareness
Washburn High Theater Student'

To every dollar I say build community. Hire counsel-
ors of color who can actually relate to our students.
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build us a new basketball court
- Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say why is our black box so tiny but
choir room so large why can't I have more teachers
who can relate to my past why is my education on a

path to incarceration
- Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build more black box theaters
To every dollar I say build more classrooms with
more teachers for smaller class sizes
To every dollar we say hire more teachers of color
To every dollar we say buy more technology for
underserved students who can't afford their own to
use
To every dollar we say hire more counselors
Washburn High Theater Student

With every dollar we should be investing in second
chances for our future generation. Building a bridge
between a lost child and his victims. So they can
realize the hurt that they bring and victims can learn
why children lash out in rage. A place for first time
offenders to get help in humane ways where they're
not locked in a cage.
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build a better education system
where it's not based off memorization. To every
dollar we say teach us taxes and the world teach
us things that will help us not the mitochondria is
the powerhouse of a cell. To every dollar I say help
those who are falling build more places for the
homeless.
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build more valuable education
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build education furor students

so they can actually want to participate
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build
more spaces like this
more recent textbooks
more teachers of color
more science equipment
more pre k classrooms to prepare kids for school
more counselors
Washburn High Theater Student

How can you be blind, building streets that are cemeteries for black men.
To every dollar I say build
housing for LGBTQIA
More classes about minorities
More advanced classes that are taught by teacher of color
A black box for washburn high school
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build more safe spaces to go to
and talk to people that can help you because counselors for 1,400 students is not enough. For every dollar I say build more classrooms and more useful classes to actually help you do things once you finish school. For every dollar I say build.
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build safe spaces.
Build more spaces children can be heard.
Reconstruct the school system
All day kindergarten classrooms.
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say we need to hire more teachers of color
Because all these whites that talk about black history I can't
Get another.
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say that every child should see someone
Who looks like them in power.
That every community has access to health care.
That every person addicted to drugs has space to heal
Not space behind bars.
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say bring in new teachers,
A new teacher I can see myself in.
Washburn High Theater Student

To every dollar I say build more school lunches that are healthy but also eatable.
To every dollar we say build ideas for adding classes that will help prepare you for the future things like home.
Washburn High Theater Student

For every dollar we say build
Programs for act/sat prep for everyone
Money to hire more teachers of color
More classrooms
Counselors/Therapists
More interesting classes/curriculums
Funding for the arts/after school activities

“There has to be help for us. They need to start working on our communities to create professional help instead of that militarized help where they throw you in jail...They criminalize you for driving. How is that a crime?”

enforcement. For trust to really be established, they need to see it dismantled from the inside. Cultural and racial justice training and accountability for officers was recommended.

5. Community Policing

“...A father that’s from this community who kids grew up here, and my parents probably know his parents, it would be a whole other respect level. Versus somebody I never seen in my life pull me over, beat me up, put me on the ground, put me in handcuffs. He going to go back home and I ain’t going to probably never see him again.”

Rather than solely relying on police to be in charge of keeping order in community, many of the people we interviewed thought it would be more powerful to have community task forces keep people accountable, and intervene, for the issues in their neighborhoods. Participants recommended the creation of an intermediary group between police and community, such as a Civilian Review Board, that could help build a mechanism for accountability.

6. Decriminalization

Decriminalization is about seeing people as whole people. It’s a commitment towards wanting people to be well. Everyone we spoke to identified this as a crucial step to reforming a system that breaks young people not just when they’re locked up but once they are released and trying to make a life for

themselves. Community members recommended the decriminalization of drug use, petty crimes, poverty and undocumented status. Prison systems should not be invested in incarcerating people for drug use or living with addiction. Youth and families requested more leniency.

A system that cares about how people re-enter society should invest more money into rehabilitation instead of incarcerating people living with addiction, and criminalizing their behavior. There also needs to be a differentiation between petty crimes and more serious crimes. “People are just being put into jail because they’re young or they’re homeless and being put into jail for trespassing,” one student in South Minneapolis said. Undocumented youth shared their added concerns and fears given that police have relationships with Immigration Custom Enforcement (ICE) and fear their documentation status impacting their treatment, and sentencing.

“There has to be help for us. They need to start working on our communities to create professional help instead of that militarized help where they throw you in jail...They criminalize you for driving. How is that a crime? They criminalize you [undocumented community member] for something that any other person can do.”

7. Centering Voices of Youth Navigating the System

For many youth going through the system, it’s a

frustrating process that works to actively silence their voices. Sentencing is largely decided in agreements between prosecutors, public defenders, investigators and judges with little to no say of the youth being charged. One person we interviewed reflected that youth “should actually be able to voice their opinion too. It shouldn’t just be the counselor or your lawyer or your parent. You should be able to voice your own opinion and recommendations.” Rather than being seen as an outside observer to their own case, the voices and recommendations of youth should be considered in the sentencing process. Many people also shared their frustrations of probation as a system that is invested in their failure and ultimately leads to recidivism. There should be investment in programs that support youth trying to navigate the system that are designed by youth themselves. Youth also felt that there needed to be formal and transparent evaluation processes, where youth are able to evaluate county workers, and file complaints.

8. Invest in Youth

“We need to change the system from the bottom up, we have prison cells instead of classrooms, money going to punishment rather than progress... Imagine what we could do, imagine the change we could make, imagine the lives we could create.”

All participants said that one of the pitfalls that led them straight into the system was a lack of support at home, in their communities, or at school. There must be sustained investment in programs that

support youth, healthy and safe spaces for youth, and alternatives to incarceration. Developing more recreation and community centers, programs that help prepare youth for college, and alternative education programs were all included as examples of supportive programs. Many community members highlighted the importance of support groups where youth feel safe to share where they’re at and what they’re struggling with at home and school. Investing in youth also means treating youth with the integrity they deserve and working against ageism. It means shifting how disciplinary action is enacted. It means offering mental health services in accessible ways, and also having tutors and mentors that can relate to youth. We need to ask what it means to criminalize youth when their brains haven’t even fully formed yet.

“I think when you are moving a kid out of placement, they should have a step plan. Once you prove that you can do this, we’re going to get you this part-time job ... we’re going to help you get your license...we’re going to help you start looking for a place.”

Many youth and adults we interviewed shared stories of being released once their sentences had been served and not having the tools they needed to be successful in society. Participants asked for investments in developing programs for reentry into society successfully that offer job and housing security. These programs can serve as resources for incarcerated youth to develop skills they will need to be successful. The approach to reentry has to

“We live in a society that builds bars instead of raising the bar.”

be restorative by restoring the well-being of people so that they may integrate back into society in the best way possible instead of stigmatizing youth and hyper-surveilling youth who are leaving out-of-home placement. On the policy level, legislation is necessary to support people who have served their time in clearing their records so they can have job security.

Rehabilitation needs to be a central part of the strategy for building systems to support re-entry. Given the number of incarcerated people with chemical dependencies, not supporting their recovery is an act of complicity. More investment in halfway houses, homeless shelters, and step programs that support those with substance dependency, housing insecurity, or who have disabilities once they've been released will help ensure they can be successful in the world outside of prison. Furthermore youth felt the over reliance on drugs to treat youth with mental health issues in placement needs to end. Instead, youth were interested in having access to meaningful opportunities, like studying technology, coding, engineering, trade schools, urban farming, or literature, and having access to arts programming. They need access to such programming and opportunities without the added impact of discrimination, abuse, and harassment in their placements. Youth expressed high-risk and maximum-risk level placement was extremely dehumanizing and had worse consequences on youth who were in less severe risk categories. Youth expressed needing options that were not simply defined based on their risk level or likelihood to recidivate. Community members also expressed that counties need to commit to rejecting

any expansion or creation of new youth detention facilities. Communities felt resources for expansion could be used for other purposes that are of high priority in developing alternatives to incarceration for youth.

9.. Dreams For the Future: What it Looks Like for Youth to Win

“If the system actually worked, I think it'll be whole lot more kids graduating...being more successful versus ending up in prison or dead.” Despite the painful experiences of incarceration, community members shared hopeful and rich visions of what a system that works for youth would look like. One person said it would look like MLK Jr's “I have a Dream Speech,” another said it would be a space where young people would feel safe, not terrorized. Many said they would live in a world where youth would not get locked up. Youth and families shared visions where communities of color saw an increase in graduation rates and job security. One person shared their vision of “a system that allows students a voice in a way that gives them comfortability to properly cope and deal with certain things in life they experience.” A system that was committed to the well-being and rehabilitation of young people would be one where they feel safe and that reflects a commitment to their well-being.

“If the system

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Conclusion:

Our Recommendations

Our team learned so much throughout the process of this research. We were humbled by the strength, courage, resilience, care, and love youth and family members had and expressed for each other who were involved in this project. Throughout this process there was a lot of laughing, a lot of food, ice breakers, collective visioning, and affirmation. We learned that despite systems of inequality plaguing our communities, our youth and families are not inherently broken. In fact, the labeling and deficit frameworks placed on youth of color from lower socioeconomic backgrounds is part of the problem. We know our communities care about each other and have the knowledge and creativity to shape the necessary solutions, and that these solutions can allow for our communities to thrive if given the proper investment and opportunities to act on this potential.

Overall we learned youth and families are still not receiving the support they need to thrive and succeed, communities are not safer as a result of locking youth up -- and that the incarceration of youth is a not a solution. We learned youth and families find the incarceration of both youth and family members is a larger issue that must be approached in ways that strengthen community connectedness, rather than creating or reinforcing divisiveness. We learned the current system requires a community-informed accountability process. This work must be trauma-informed.

We know our youth and families need safe spaces to unpack their experiences and needs while navigating pain, trauma, embarrassment, and fear. Therefore

we recommend the investment in community-based organizations, and that partners continue these conversations to promote community connectedness and understanding. We know that if we get the proper resources and training to individuals who come from communities that are disproportionately impacted, and were previously criminal justice-involved youth, these individuals can make the best facilitators and mentors to other youth caught up in the criminal justice system. We need to invest in employment opportunities for those most impacted to lead the creative design of alternatives to incarceration, as well as opportunities for them to serve as mentors and facilitators rooted in restorative justice practices and programs. It is clear that culturally incompetent outsiders to communities can cause more harm rather than aid in restoring safety. We need to know that the county will prioritize the requests and solutions presented by communities impacted before accepting funds to expand or create new residential facilities. Youth and family members expressed that youth placed in higher-risk residential facilities are further traumatized, experiencing an erosion to their sense of identity, autonomy, and individual purpose. Therefore we recommend the prioritization of programs and alternatives that address the negative impact shared.

We make these following final recommendations:

Improve and Increase Access to Information

Make all programs and alternatives to incarceration known and accessible. Community members expressed not having sufficient information on what

already exists, and feeling that the current resources that do exist were to some extent hidden from their knowledge. Furthermore, youth and families did not know the various options available to them to inform their decision making. Youth did not know their rights during booking, and did not know what would cause a probation violation. Youth and families also expressed needing more information regarding the court process and how to file an appeal or how to request alternatives to entering court.

Center Community Evaluation

Those impacted have the ability to tell the county what is and isn't working. Authentic community evaluation of county practices and programs must be done in ways that do not repress or cause harm to those impacted, especially given inherent power dynamics between youth/families and county workers. Furthermore any abuse of youth needs to be investigated and family members must be informed. The effectiveness of community evaluation practices could be informed by participatory evaluation methodologies.

Both JDAI Hennepin and Annie E Casey Foundation Must Present to Community The foundation along with JDAI must practice transparency and host ongoing community conversations with communities of color regarding the information and resources both the foundation and JDAI have at their disposal regarding their initiatives and work. We believe the only way for these initiatives to be effective is for community members to be informed and have relationships with those leading this

work. We strongly believe follow up community conversations regarding the findings in this report must occur. This is important in order to prevent reforms from simply being more advantageous to white youth over youth of color.

Hennepin County Investment in Continuum of Care Models

In the Beyond Bars report by the National Collaboration for Youth, a continuum of care is defined as "an array of meaningful nonresidential community-based programs, supports, resources and services specifically designed to meet the individual needs of young people and their families in their homes. Continua of care cultivate the strengths of youth and families and provide them with what they might need at different stages of intensity in order to keep young people out of the juvenile justice system and confinement." We found a continuum of care model is aligned with the interests of community members expressed in this report. Continuum of care must also center alternatives to arrest, detention, prosecution, placement and violations.

Center the Voice and Knowledge of Communities of Color

Youth and families of color are interested in supporting the design and development of non-residential programs and alternatives through the use of community-based research methods. Including these voices would result in neighborhood-based, place specific, and appropriate programs that expand community capacity and resources.

APPENDIX A: Survey For Youth

A. Experiences with the Juvenile Justice System

Share a story about the process of going through the juvenile justice system for you or a youth family member, or friend.

What was your friends, you and or your family's biggest challenge navigating the juvenile justice system?

What was the court process like, for example prosecution? Public Defenders, Judge, probation officers, prosecution?

If you or youth family member had any experience with jail, house arrest, being in a group home, foster care, treatment facility, diversion program, or secure facility, what was your experience like? Did you get what you needed? What did you need that wasn't provided?

If you, friend, or youth family member were placed on probation, what was that experience like for you? Did your probation officer know your or your peers goals and support with them? _____Y
_____N

Were you, or your friend, or youth family member able to get support from your family or connect with them while you were in placement? _____Y _____N

Was there any experience of discrimination or racism during any part of the process? _____Y
_____N

Did any fees throughout your booking, court process, and time in your placement cause financial challenges? ____Y ____N

Anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B: Listening Session Questions

Listening Session Agenda 2-2.5 hours

Icebreaker & Food

Consent Forms & Demographics Sheets

Word Cloud Activity: When you hear this word throw out your immediate reaction

What do you think of when you hear the word freedom?

Justice?

Equality?

Prison?

Incarceration?

School-to-prison Pipeline

Listening Session Questions

A. 15 minutes Environment

What is safety like in your schools, day to day life, neighborhood?

What was discipline like in your schools?

What is law enforcement like your neighborhood?

Where do you feel safe? What do you think youth need to feel safe?

What makes an adult someone that you can trust and that support you?

Do you see discrimination in your schools, work, day to day life? What does this look like?

B. 20 minutes Community Solutions

What is the Juvenile Justice System? What does it mean to you?

Why do you think young people get pulled into the juvenile justice system?

Do you think the juvenile justice system is set up for youth to succeed? Why or why not?

What do you think the purpose of the juvenile justice system should be?

What do you think the juvenile justice system actually does?

Numbers show that there's more youth of color in the JJS, why do you think there are more youth of color in the JJS than White youth? How can this be changed?

What would it look like if JJS was sensitive to culture & race?

What would it take for youth & your families to to come to the table w/ corrections to change how things work?

What are the How much do you trust Hennepin County Juvenile Corrections? How about your family & community?

ways you would like to see the juvenile justice system using the voices and knowledge of youth to affect change?

What would the system look like if it worked for Youth?

What would happen if youth got into trouble?

Would there still be youth detention facilities?

How would youth be treated and what would the focus and goals be?

What kind of programs would you like to see in the community for youth in general and for youth who are in the justice system?

Imagine what you could do with \$38,000,000 to change the justice system for youth? What first comes to mind?

C. 1 hour Experiences with the Juvenile Justice System

i. 20 minutes ENTRY PROCESS/ CAUSE

Share a story about the process of going through the system for you or a youth family member.

What was you and your family's biggest challenge navigating the juvenile justice system?

What was the court process like for you and your family?
Prosecution? Public defenders? Judge?
Deals/options did they share with you, how long did they work w/ you, did you take their deal or did you take it to trial? Did you feel pressured to take a deal? How did you feel about the deal? Did they start you with the most punitive deal?
Do you feel that you had any input on the deal? What could've been better?
As your case moved through the juvenile justice system, how did the people in the system make you feel? Did you feel heard?
Tell us some logistics about your court experience:
Where was your court hearing held? Was it easy to get there? What time did your court begin?
Did you have fees, did you have any challenges related to costs?
Did you experience discrimination, unfair treatment at any point in the process? __Y __N
If yes, how did you feel or experience it?

iii. 5min PLACEMENT/ POST CHARGES

What kind of placement were you in?
What was your experience with placement?
How was staff? How were correctional officers?
Were you able to file complaints if you needed? Did you know who made decisions and where they accessible?
What were your experiences with staff?
Was there any discrimination?

iv. 5min HEALTH & WELL BEING

How was the overall living environment? Describe the placement
What recreational activities and educational opportunities available? What was missing that you would like to see?
What was safety like?
Were you able to be healthy in your placement?
Where families able to contact each other and have a role in decisions being made while you were in placement?

V. 25 min Leaving/ Re-Entry

What resources were available when leaving your placement?
What supported did you and your family need?
How was experiencing probation? What would you change?
Are there services you need that aren't available or you can't get to?
What if any language, transportation, financial challenges did you experience when impacted by JJC. What would you like to see changed?
What have you learned going through the system?
Where do you want you, your family and or your community to be in the next 5 years?
What stands in your way?
Who can support you to get there?
Did your experience w/ JJC support you with getting there?
Is there anything else you would like us to know?
What brings you hope? What gives you hope? What do you look forward to?

Appendix C: Questions Adapted For Parents

A. Environment

Do you and your family feel safe in:

your day to day life

school

home

work

Do you feel safe around law enforcement in your neighborhood?

Do you find law enforcement in your neighborhood approachable?

Rate you and your family's experience with law enforcement in your neighborhood from one through five, 1 being terrible they are not very helpful, and 5 being excellent

1 2 3 4 5

Have you and your family experienced racism and or discrimination directly in your neighborhood, school, or work?

B. Community Solutions

Do you think the juvenile justice system is set up for youth to succeed?

Do you think the current juvenile justice system works or is successful in rehabilitating youth?

What do you think the purpose of the juvenile justice system should be? (Check all that apply)

___ to punish youth

___ to control youth

___ to offer treatment to youth who have drug, mental health, or behavior related issues

___ to make the community safer

___ to help youth be successful

___ to offer development opportunities for youth to have new skills

___ other: _____

What do you think the juvenile justice system actually does? Check all that apply:

___ punishes youth

___ controls youth

___ offer treatment to youth who have drug or mental health related issues

___ makes the community safer

___ helps youth become successful

___ offers development opportunities for youth to have new skills

___ other: _____

Do you think people in the juvenile justice system know what young people need?

Do you think people working in the juvenile justice system know what families of youth impacted by the system need?

Is there discrimination in the juvenile justice system?

Do you think people who work in the juvenile justice system are sensitive to/respectful of racial and cultural differences?

Are you ever asked what you think about the current Hennepin county juvenile justice system?

Do you think your opinion makes any difference in terms of changing the juvenile justice system?

Do you know who makes decisions about Juvenile Justice policy?

Hennepin and Ramsey County are currently in the process of proposing a new youth facility; do you think we need to build a new youth detention facility?

Do you think that the communities impacted are equal partners at the decision making table regarding Hennepin County Juvenile Corrections?

Rate the level of trust you think the community has with Hennepin County Juvenile Corrections? (1 being very little, to 5 being very high)

1 2 3 4 5

C. Experiences with the Juvenile Justice System

What level of interaction did/do your child or young family member have with the criminal justice system at age 25 and under(Check all that apply):

- _____ Stopped, fined, or arrested by police officer
- _____ Disciplined by school resource officer
- _____ Investigated, and or tried for a court case
- _____ Charged with a felony
- _____ Charged with a misdemeanor
- _____ Placed in a juvenile correctional facility
- _____ Enrolled in out of home placement
- _____ Have worked with a probation officer
- _____ Convicted of a crime?
- _____ Placed in jail
- _____ Other _____

As your child’s case moved through the juvenile justice system, did you understand what was going on?
 Do you feel that you or your child had any input on the court deal that was presented to your child?
 Was your child or family member given the option of a diversion program?
 Did you and your family experience discrimination, unfair treatment at any point in the process?
 Did you feel supported by anyone working for the juvenile courts during the court process?

What kind of placement was your child in?

- _____House arrest
- _____Secure detention facility
- _____Non-secure detention/treatment facility
- _____Group home
- _____Foster care
- _____Alternative/ diversion program
- _____Other _____

Did you able to access and connect with your child while they were in their placement?

Do you know who was running the place, or making decision in their placement site?

Did you feel that adults during placement understood your child or family’s needs?

Were you able to file complaints?

Were you able to get support to your child or your family while they were in their out of home placement?

How would you rate your child’s overall health in their placement?

How would you rate your child’s level of safety in their placement from 1-5 (1 being not safe, 5 being very safe)

1 2 3 4

5

How would you rate your child’s overall health?

1 2 3 4 5

Did your child or family member experience racism or other discrimination present in their placement?

Were you and your child/family able to have control of your money during their time in their placement?

Did any fees throughout your booking, court process, and time in your placement present you with financial challenges?

Was there programming available to your child? (activities set up for building skills, learning, healing, building community)_

Did your child or family have any positive experiences in their placement?

After leaving, were there resources available to support you and your family with re-entry back into society?

Did your child or family have probation?

Do you know how probation officers decide to file a violation of probation, was it explained to you?

Have there been positive changes in your child's life due to probation?

Were there positive changes you hoped probation would help your child achieve, but didn't?

Have your child or family seen or experienced racism or other discrimination from probation programs or other resources provided by the juvenile justice system?

Are you ever asked to evaluate the programs and services you and your family participated in?

Do you feel your child's or family's overall experience with the juvenile justice system negatively impacted your or your child's mental health?

Do you feel your child's or family's overall experience with the juvenile justice system positively impacted you or your child's mental health?

Did language barriers present any challenges to you and your family during your overall experience with the Juvenile Justice system?

Appendix D: Shorter Interview Guide

1. At what age did you enter the juvenile justice system? _____
2. Where did you grow up? How was your neighborhood, schools and work? Did you feel safe? What was discipline like in your school like and or what was law enforcement like in your neighborhood?
3. Why do you think you got pulled into the juvenile corrections? Why do you think young people get pulled into juvenile corrections?
4. What was your experience like, with:
5. Arrest/Law enforcement/ Jail
6. Courts, Prosecution, Public Defenders, Judges
7. Placement/sentencing
8. Do you experience any discrimination or racism? Explain.
9. What was the outcome of your sentence? How did that go?
10. Where was your placement? How was it?
 - Conditions, climate, safety?
 - Educational opportunities?
 - Health/treatment services?
 - Recreational activities?
 - Mentoring?
11. What were your dreams and goals as a young person?
12. Do you feel like your sentence changed your life for the better?
13. Did any part of your experience in juvenile corrections move you towards that goal?
14. What was your experience like with probation? Did your probation officer know your goals and support you towards accessing them?
15. Did your probation officer explain to you what would cause a violation to your probation, did you have any issues with violations?
16. Did any fees, transportation needs, or language needs create barriers for you throughout your experience with juvenile justice system as a whole?
17. How do you think young people need to be treated in order to support their success in their out of home placements?
18. What could change around the way young people are treated by law enforcement and the courts to move young people away from getting locked up.
19. What kind of support do you think young people need who are unable to get out of the juvenile corrections system?
20. Are you aware of any impact on your mental health you had as a young person in juvenile corrections. Were you able to be healthy physically, mentally, emotionally?
21. Was your family or friends able to connect with you and support as a young person in the system?
22. What was your experiences with re-entry? What type of support did you need? Did you get that support?
23. Do you think juvenile corrections is successful at rehabilitating youth? __Y __N
24. Hennepin and Ramsey have discussed replacing their current facilities with a new one. Do you think we need to build a new juvenile detention facility? __Y __N
25. Why or why not? What do you think we need to support youth with rehabilitation and treatment instead?
26. What visions do you have for young people who get into trouble? What do you think a world without prisons for youth could look like?
27. What gives you hope?

Thank you to all of our community members, research team and Voices for Racial Justice staff that helped make this report happen.

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VOICES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

ORGANIZING | ADVOCACY | POLICY