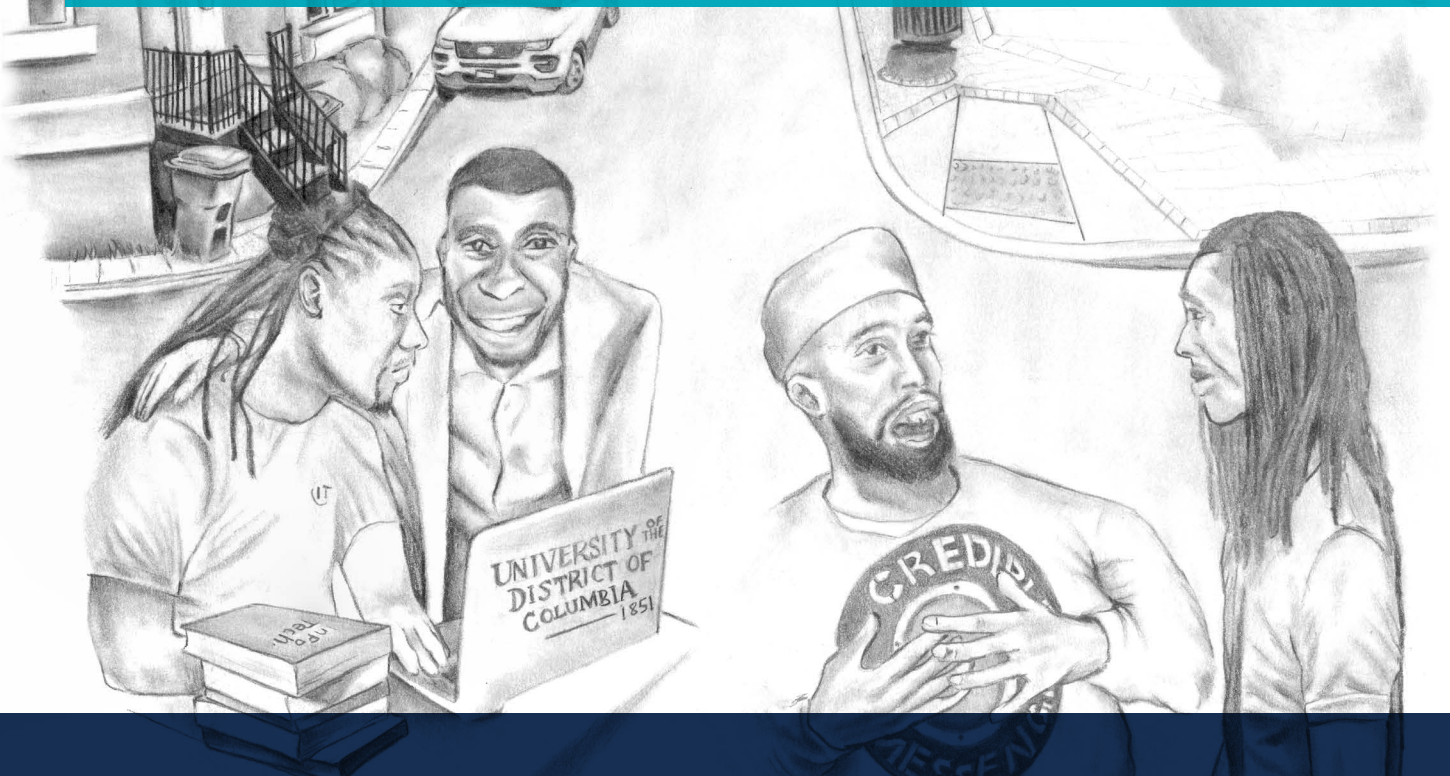




BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE:

A plan to invest in DC's emerging adults

MAY 2024





The cover art represents a vision for investing in emerging adults in DC. Starting in the bottom right corner, the emerging adult is being guided by his Credible Messenger and in the bottom left corner, that same emerging adult is later enrolled in college. These are the foundational components to moving the emerging adult in a new direction. As a result of these efforts, the emerging adult gets hired at a job fair after completing his education and ultimately buys his first home with his family. These images are up in the clouds, as they represent the goals and dreams of the emerging adult being achieved. At the center is the District of Columbia, both the local level of the neighborhood of the artist, as well as the national view of DC.

Cover art and chapter art were prepared by Ovid Gabriel, artist and owner of **Cope With Art, LLC**. Ovid's work draws on his lived experience in this sector as a youth and young adult in DC. Ovid received his high school diploma from Maya Angelou Public Charter School in 2021 and is currently enrolled at Prince George's Community College. He has created numerous works of art as a commissioned muralist within the Washington, DC metropolitan area. He is a certified tattoo artist and has done detailed tattoos for numerous clients. As a partner artist with the Justice Policy Institute and StrategyForward Advisors, Ovid was commissioned to create visual representations of system-impacted personas. Ovid has had multiple gallery showings of his art across the DC region. He has traveled throughout the United States and Caribbean.

“I have benefited from the advice of great youth leaders about how to succeed and overcome challenges and obstacles. All my life experiences have informed my art content and have given me great opportunities to use my talents.”
- Ovid Gabriel



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SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

Our deep thanks to the 20 emerging adults from DC Jail, New Beginnings, the Young Men Emerging unit, Youth Services Center, and formerly impacted community members whose voices are included in this plan. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect their identities.

PROJECT TEAM

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Executive Summary

In 2019, the Council of the District of Columbia commissioned the Justice Policy Institute (JPI) to create a strategic plan to support the 2018 update of the Youth Rehabilitation Act (YRA). This strategic plan was intended to address the need for rehabilitative components for emerging adults, young people ages 18-24, which were notably missing from the 2018 revision to the YRA. **JPI submitted the YRA strategic plan to the District in 2021; however, no action has been taken to date to implement this strategic plan.**

Local criminal legal reforms such as the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (2016), Omnibus Public Safety and Justice Act (2018), and Second Look Amendment Act (2019) in the years surrounding the 2018 update to the YRA were intended to account for the needs of emerging adults as well as the need for public safety. These acts acknowledged developments in neurological science, which show that brain development, particularly with regard to executive function and decision-making, is ongoing through an emerging adult's mid-20s. This science and related research suggest that a comprehensive support system that addresses community and individual needs is the most effective long-term response to system involvement for emerging adults. Rehabilitative support, as shown in model programs from around the nation, results in lower recidivism rates, stronger social structures, and thriving communities over time.

However, in recent years, there has been a backlash blaming reform efforts for existing crime, when in fact, some of the **critical services and systems that were supposed to be implemented to support those reforms, such as the YRA strategic plan, were not implemented.** Public safety and justice reforms must be paired with the requisite services and systems to support system-involved emerging adults in being able to thrive and contribute positively to society. **Responsibility lies with the District to provide these types of strategic support, as recommended by the YRA strategic plan.**

It is not too late to fix this. This action plan is a guide for the District to use now to implement the YRA strategic plan. It is directly informed by the lived experience of DC's system-impacted emerging adults, a national developmental framework for emerging adult justice, research, and feedback from community partners and those working directly with the District's system-impacted emerging adults.

Across six areas, this action plan identifies a key priority and a first step towards meeting the priority. The need across these six areas is significant. While local and national models in each area point to the potential that can be achieved, **it also will require the District to advance policy and system-level change to address the shared goals of reducing crime while caring for all residents of the District.** This plan can serve as a guide to jurisdictions across the country working to improve the outcomes of young adults and invest in building safer communities.



PRIORITIES

- 1. Create an Office of Emerging Adult Services.** Raise the profile of emerging adults and systematically address their needs as key components of violence prevention and community strength strategy.

FIRST STEP: Hire a director of emerging adult services.

- 2. Invest in Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters.** Invest in people who build trust with similar life experiences and deep knowledge of place.

FIRST STEP: Prevent attrition and pay equitably.

- 3. Provide safe and stable housing.** Ease the burden of survival, allowing emerging adults space and time to develop critical life skills.

FIRST STEP: Develop a housing fund to support emerging adults.

- 4. Build education and workforce pathways.** Bridge the gap between current educational attainments and necessary education and job skills, thereby providing additional career options.

FIRST STEP: Provide access to education and award credit for learning.

- 5. Offer robust diversion and restorative justice options.** Prevent incarceration experiences, which further entrench trauma and harmful social situations. Connect emerging adults directly with the impacts of their actions, with the goal of restoring both the perpetrator and harmed parties.

FIRST STEP: Assess existing programs and begin to expand.

- 6. Invest in families, communities, and health.** Promote long-term wellbeing and reduce the odds of recidivism. Invest holistically in community partners to reinforce positive gains.

FIRST STEP: Provide family and health services for emerging adults.

We call on the District to recognize that system-impacted emerging adults can be an asset to the community and supported to achieve their greatest potential. This action plan offers a path forward for the District to pursue this investment in emerging adults to the benefit of families, communities, and the District.

CHAPTER 1

Enact the YRA Strategic Plan to Support Public Safety





INTRODUCTION

In 1985, the District of Columbia passed the **Youth Rehabilitation Act (YRA)** to institute sentencing alternatives for youth convicted as adults. The law applied to youth up to age 22 and encompassed most crimes. More recently, District leadership passed the updated **Youth Rehabilitation Act of 2018**, which extended the age to 24 and modified sentencing provisions to enable more young people to become eligible under this law. However, it was noted at the time that the updated legislation was largely missing the “R,” meaning it failed to prioritize rehabilitative practices in support of young people.

THE YRA STRATEGIC PLAN

In May 2019, the Council of the District of Columbia requested that a strategic plan be developed to prioritize rehabilitative components for the YRA. The Justice Policy Institute (JPI) was selected to lead the development of the strategic plan. This plan was created through the convening of the DC Emerging Adult Justice Action Collaborative.

JPI launched the Collaborative, with funding from the Public Welfare Foundation, to bring together key stakeholders and develop a comprehensive strategic plan for the YRA. The Collaborative consisted of 20 District government, policy and advocacy organizations, community providers, and individuals with lived experience in this field (listed below).

District Agencies and Government

Council Member Charles Allen’s Office
Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA)
DC Department of Corrections (DC DOC)
DC Office of the Attorney General (OAG)
DC Office for Students in Care of DC (SCDC)
DC Superior Court
DC Young Men Emerging Unit (YME)
Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services
Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice
Public Defender Service of DC (PDS)

Advocacy, Policy, and Community

Alliance of Concerned Men
Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth
Corrections Information Council (CIC)
DC Justice Lab
Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop
Impacted Community Members
JP Morgan Chase
Justice Policy Institute
National Reentry Network for Returning Citizens
Public Welfare Foundation
School Justice Project
Voices for a Second Chance

JPI and partners conducted interviews, focus groups, and convenings with more than 75 people over one year to inform the development of the YRA strategic plan.

The **DC Youth Rehabilitation Act Strategic Plan (2020-2025)** was formally submitted to the District government in November 2021. Recommendations from this plan were evidence-based and drawn from national and local models. The YRA strategic plan offered a roadmap for District leaders to implement comprehensive initiatives to support system-involved emerging adults.

The plan was spread across three goals:

- **Goal #1:** Increase trauma-informed, healing-centered restorative services.
- **Goal #2:** Build a community-based continuum of care.
- **Goal #3:** Build a criminal legal system-based continuum of care.

A timeline called for:

Years 1-2: Research, convening, and adopting the strategic plan elements across District agencies (2020-2021).

Year 3: Hiring a coordinator to operationalize the plan (2022).

Year 4: Implementation of pilots targeting these goals (2023).

However, since the submission of the strategic plan in 2021, the Mayor's Office has not implemented it (as of the date of this publication in 2024), with the exception of an amendment to the March 2024 Secure DC Amendment Act authorizing the creation of an Office of Emerging Adults.



DISTRICT LEADERSHIP SQUANDERS EXTENSIVE STRATEGIC PLANNING, MISSING OPPORTUNITIES TO MAKE COMMUNITIES SAFER



IT IS PAST TIME TO ENACT THE YRA STRATEGIC PLAN

At the time of YRA's passage, the Council of the District of Columbia had advanced several data-driven, groundbreaking reforms coupled with forward-looking investments to keep communities safe, support young people and returning citizens, and continue the more than decade-long decline in crime from 2003 to 2018. Such investments included:

- The **Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act of 2016 (IRAA)** allowed some individuals who were incarcerated before age 18 to go before a judge for a sentencing review.
- The **Omnibus Public Safety and Justice Amendment Act of 2018** amended the 2016 act to specify that individuals who were convicted of a DC code violation, charged as an adult, convicted before age 18, and had served at least 15 years, could go before a judge for a sentencing review.
- The **Second Look Amendment Act of 2019** went into effect in 2021 to expand IRAA eligibility to individuals who had been incarcerated before the age of 25 and had served at least 15 years of their sentence.



Much has changed since the District mandated the development of a strategic plan for the Youth Rehabilitation Act in 2018: the global pandemic closed in-person schools, businesses, and community support systems, creating hardships for many families. Even before the pandemic, DC Public Schools historically struggled with **worsening disparities in achievement outcomes in Wards 7 and 8**. With only **one grocery store for the two wards**, with limited selection and shopping options, everyday tasks of survival have become increasingly difficult. At the same time, the District holds the record for the **biggest gap in unemployment among African Americans** in the country and the worst health disparities from **infant mortality to life expectancy**. The impacts of these hardships and lack of services may have, in the pandemic's aftermath, contributed to an increase in crimes committed by youth and emerging adults. Concentrated in Wards 7 and 8, **many violent crimes are perpetrated by people who have themselves been victimized within the last twelve months**.

In spite of these destabilizing conditions for residents of the District, the previously successful reform efforts have met backlash. Legislation has been passed to roll back proposed reforms while enacting tougher punishments and harsher sentences. In particular, initiatives and investments to support emerging adults that have shown some success have been called into question or are facing major transitions due to changes in vision, leadership, or funding.

What is missing is a recognition that youth and emerging adults are an asset to the community and that they can be supported to achieve their fullest potential. This view is based on a philosophy known as **Positive Youth Development**, which the **District has formerly embraced**. Additionally, multiple scientific studies support the view that emerging adults, while no longer youths, are **not yet full adults with fully developed decision-making capacities**. Emerging adults are a distinct group and require unique services as they grow into community members who can make positive contributions.

On its own, punishment after a crime is an insufficient strategy for public safety. Incarceration and other methods that rely on control or confinement **lack what emerging adults need most to function as healthy community members**: engaged adults, peer groups who model prosocial behavior, realistic chances for academic achievement, and opportunities to develop their decision-making and critical thinking skills. Investment in violence and crime prevention must constitute the District's highest priorities in establishing community safety. Emerging adults who have become system-impacted also need support and investment during and after their involvement with the criminal legal system.

Implementing the 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan can provide essential investment and support for system-impacted emerging adults. The tenets of the YRA strategic plan remain unchanged, and the need for rehabilitative services among the District's emerging adult population has not declined. In fact, with incidents of certain crimes rising and individual and community instability increasing, this need is now even more urgent.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE YRA STRATEGIC PLAN

Implementation of the YRA strategic plan must be intentional, comprehensive, coordinated, and fully funded to support the District's system-impacted emerging adults. This action plan calls for a focus on goals #1 and #2 of the YRA strategic plan: Increase trauma-informed, healing-centered restorative services and build a community-based continuum of care. Each of the following chapters highlights a specific priority and first step to achieve the objectives of the YRA strategic plan and respond to the current context within the District.

Each long-term priority and first step will require financial commitment. However, inaction on the strategic plan has its own attendant costs. Punishing emerging adults through incarceration is expensive; it is a policy choice that fails to acknowledge the broader individual and community contexts that contribute to crime and therefore addresses no long-term solutions. In contrast, investment in rehabilitative services directly supports community safety and can pay dividends for generations.



CHAPTER 2

Create an Office of Emerging Adult Services



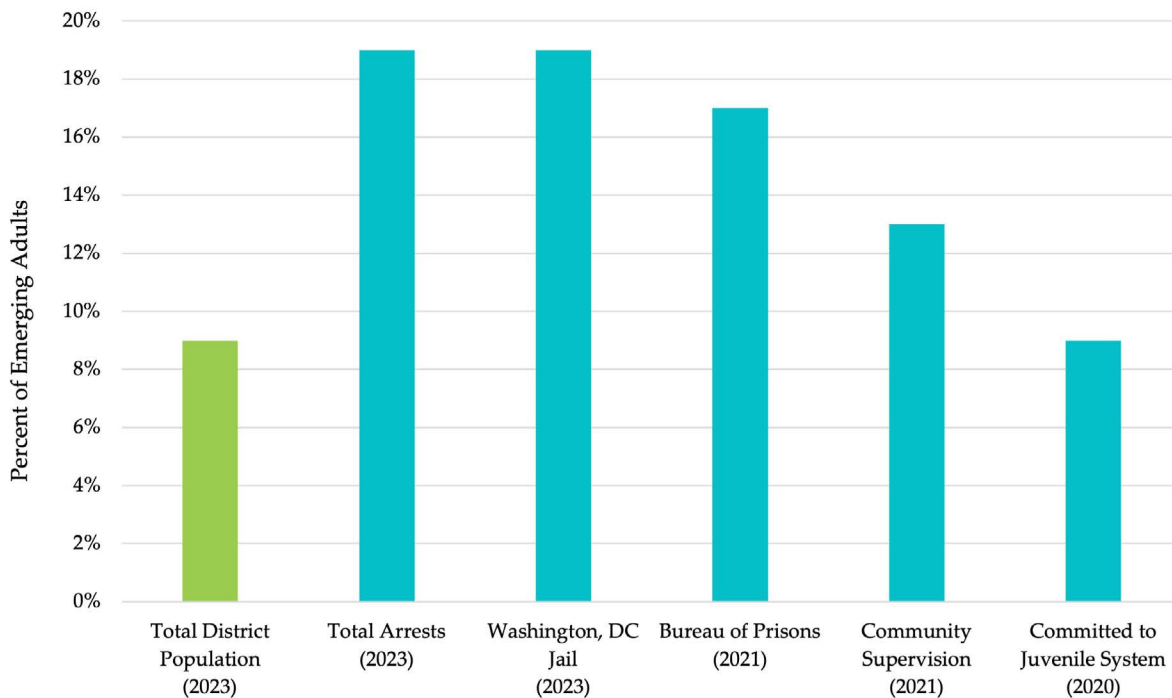
Establishing the infrastructure to support system-impacted emerging adults is the first step. The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for the Mayor’s Office and District agencies to lead in this work (see Appendix A).

SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

While emerging adults in DC make up just **9%** of the District’s population, they are vastly overrepresented in the criminal legal system. In 2023, emerging adults accounted for **19%** of all arrests in DC and 19% of all incarcerated residents in the DC Department of Corrections (DOC). Since the District has no prison, due to the **Lorton Reformatory closure in 2001** after decades of **substandard conditions and medical care**, District residents who are convicted of a Washington DC Criminal Code felony are sent to the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP), where they **experience challenging conditions and limited rehabilitative opportunities**. In 2023, 17% of admissions of District residents into the FBOP were emerging adults.

As of 2021, **13%** of DC’s community supervision population in the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency (CSOSA) were aged 18-25 (about 1,241 individuals). Individuals 18 and older often move through the adult criminal legal system, but if they had a prior commitment as a youth, they may be placed under the care of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS). In 2020, **9%** of commitments at DYRS were individuals between the ages of 18 and 21.

EMERGING ADULTS ARE DISPROPORTIONATELY REPRESENTED IN THE DISTRICT’S CRIMINAL AND JUVENILE LEGAL SYSTEMS



Source: Justice Policy Institute, chart based on aggregated data from 2020-2023. Data were pulled from DC Health Matters, District of Columbia Justice Statistical Analysis Tool, DC DOC (data is no longer accessible), CSOSA, and DYRS.



LIVED EXPERIENCE: DC'S SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

JPI, StrategyForward, and partners interviewed 20 system-impacted emerging adults in 2023 across local carceral facilities and the community about their experience and who they are. Here is some of what they shared:

WHAT'S YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THE LEGAL SYSTEM?

I was first arrested at the age of 15 years old and then became Title 16 [charged as an adult while still a youth] at age 16. - Tariq

I was first admitted to Youth Services Center (YSC) at age 11 and then New Beginnings at 15. At 16, I became Title 16 [charged as an adult while still a youth] and ended up at DC Jail after turning 18. - Amir

I was first arrested at 12. I was committed to DYRS at 16 until I was 19. I spent a lot of time at YSC and New Beginnings and multiple other out-of-state facilities. My first adult case was at the age of 18. I have been at the DC Jail since 2018 and my trial date is 2024. - Bryce

This is my first time being incarcerated, at 21. - Trevon

I'm 23 and have been incarcerated for four years now. I was on the juvenile block in 2018. - Jamal

I was first arrested at 12 and committed at 15 and sent to New Beginnings. I was committed for two years from 15-17 and then picked up another charge and was committed until 18. - Kofi

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH?

I am caring, social, resilient, and creative. - Malik

Communicating with others. Lending a helping hand and using my life as an example for others, but I understand that I'm a work in progress. - Kofi

I am appreciative. I like to learn. I like to write poetry. - Omari

My voice, being able to articulate myself, not being afraid to step up to the plate to advocate for what we need. - Tyree

Being dedicated to what I'm passionate about and listening/understanding those who want to help. - Tariq

I'm loyal to my family and what I want to be in life. - Lamar

Being open-minded and understanding my opinions and others. I enjoy helping others and sharing information. - Amir

My ability to learn new things, take advice, and fix my mistakes. - Deion



DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK FOR EMERGING ADULTS

In 2021, the District was selected as one of three sites nationally to test a developmental framework from Columbia University’s Emerging Adult Justice Project to provide developmentally appropriate services for system-impacted emerging adults. This framework, which served as the foundation for this action plan, can inform the direction and approach of the Office of Emerging Adult Services. Understanding who emerging adults are, their needs, and what motivates them, is the first level of the framework.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY EMERGING ADULT JUSTICE DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK

LEVEL 1 (Individual): Transforming Our Understanding of Emerging Adult Needs

In order to achieve well-being, emerging adults need to feel safety and belonging and have a sense of their own identity, competency, and ability to contribute to their families and communities.

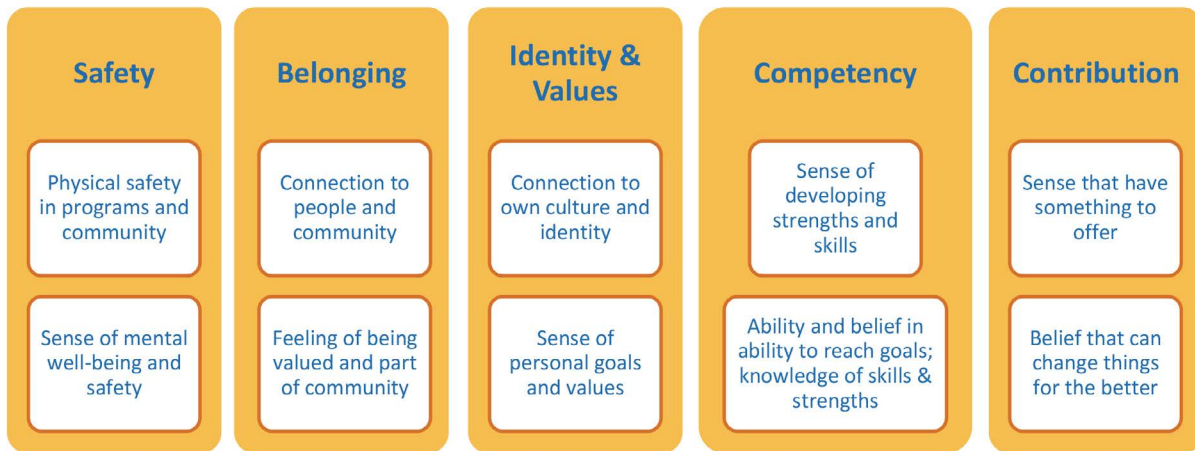
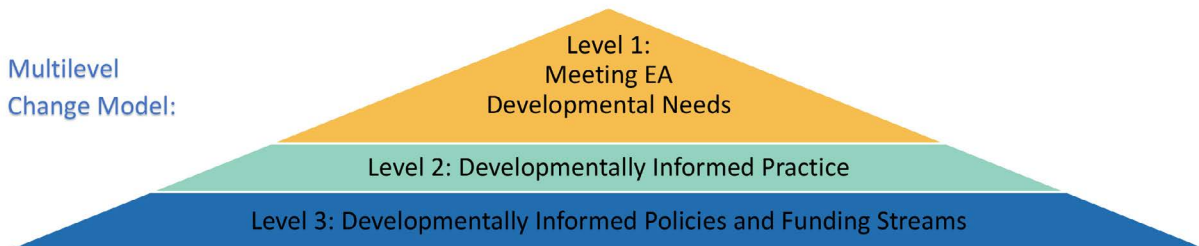


Chart: Aspects of Individual Well-Being Emerging Adults Need to Thrive

Source: Columbia University Justice Lab, Promoting Healthy Development for Emerging Adults in the Justice System: A Framework for Practice and System Transformation (2022).

LEVELS 2 AND 3 TRANSLATE THE WORK OF LEVEL 1 INTO PRACTICE, POLICY, AND FUNDING

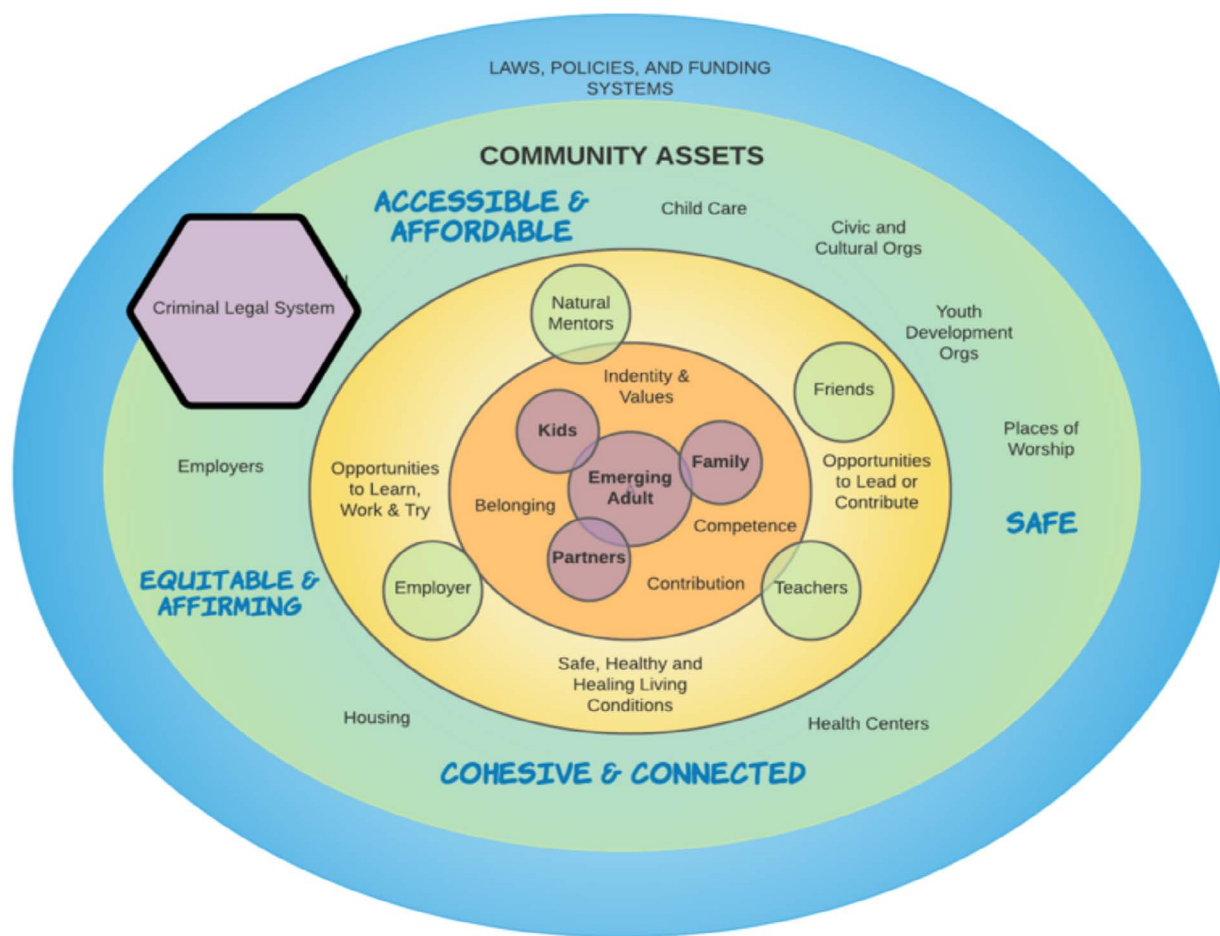


Source: Columbia University Justice Lab, Promoting Healthy Development for Emerging Adults in the Justice System: A Framework for Practice and System Transformation (2022).



Finally, a bird's eye view of the full framework shows how all stakeholders work together. Collaboration across groups can foster safe environments, accessible and affordable services, equitable and affirming learning and work opportunities, and cohesive and connected housing and health support, as shown in the graphic below. The priorities and first steps of this action plan seek to encompass this developmental framework by considering the roles of communities, organizations, agencies, and other stakeholders. To learn more, see [Promoting Healthy Development for Emerging Adults in the Justice System: A Framework for Practice and System Transformation](#).

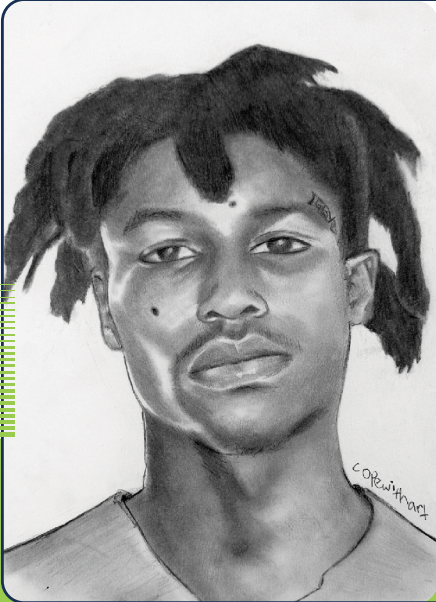
A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE EMERGING ADULT JUSTICE DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORK



Source: Columbia University Justice Lab, [Promoting Healthy Development for Emerging Adults in the Justice System: A Framework for Practice and System Transformation](#) (2022).

PERSONAS: UNDERSTANDING DC'S SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

In 2023, JPI and partners released a series of **emerging adult personas** to promote a more holistic understanding of the District's young people. Each persona represented one segment of the emerging adult population and highlighted their experience, strengths, and aspirations. Personas were based on aggregate interview data from 20 emerging adults, developed collectively across a broad range of stakeholders, and validated by those with lived experience. These personas can serve as a resource for District leaders to anchor decision-making, policy creation, and service design in a fuller understanding of emerging adults.



Brandon

19 yrs old, Black/African American

GOALS
Finish high school, go to college or trade school. Start a business someday. For now, get out of jail and go home to see daughter.

PRIORITIES
Family and providing for two-year-old daughter. Safety for self and family.

STRENGTHS & SKILLS
Connecting with others. Resourceful, ambitious, charismatic, and resilient.

EDUCATION & CAREER
Completed 10th grade; working on a high school diploma.

FAMILY
Raised by grandparents. Father was killed. Mother struggles with drug addiction.

LIVING SITUATION
Incarcerated at DC jail (pre-trial).

LOOKING CLOSER

Being a father: "Having a kid when you're still a kid makes you think you're grown all of a sudden when you actually haven't had a chance to grow up yet."

Family experience growing up: "A lot of us come from broken homes and no male role models. There is so much trauma. It makes you think the abnormal is normal."

Source: Justice Policy Institute, <https://justicepolicy.org/personas> (2023).

PRIORITY: CREATE AN OFFICE OF EMERGING ADULT SERVICES

The District should create an Office of Emerging Adult Services (OEAS) to lead the implementation of the YRA strategic plan, coordinate efforts across other agencies, and operate from this developmental framework.

An OEAS would provide a home base for funding, leadership, vision, innovation, expertise, and advocacy. It could function with a minimum of two professional (not administrative) staff sharing the work of coordination across agencies and advocacy and research. An OEAS would bring visibility to this key population in the District and would champion efforts on their behalf, both within the District, and in coordination with the FBOP. An OEAS would also establish metrics, collect data, and report annually on the state of this work and be expected to stay current on best practices and trends in the field.



FIRST STEP: HIRE A DIRECTOR OF EMERGING ADULT SERVICES

Create the inaugural position of the Director of Emerging Adult Services. This director can begin laying the groundwork for OEAS and implementing the YRA strategic plan, as originally required by the YRA Act of 2018 and similar to the new role designated in the Secure DC Omnibus Amendment Act of 2024. This director could be housed within the City Administrator's Office for one to three years while initializing research and making the case to secure more funding and support to grow the work, launch the OEAS, and pursue implementation of the YRA strategic plan. The District needs to create a new budget line item for this role, develop a position description, and select the right person who can lay the foundation of an operational OEAS.

The director would:

- 1. Have prior lived-experience** as a system-involved emerging adult, ideally, and expertise in positively supporting this population, advocating for policies and practices, and guiding systems for related services.
- 2. Forge collaborative relationships** and liaise directly with the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services, the Deputy Mayor for Public Safety and Justice, the DC Office of the Attorney General, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency, Metropolitan Police Department, the Mayor's Office of Returning Citizen Affairs, and others.
- 3. Conduct a landscape analysis** of all the offices and services that touch emerging adults and their families.
- 4. Identify and lead efforts** to initiate implementation of the YRA strategic plan.
- 5. Raise the visibility** of promising initiatives and efforts.
- 6. Begin to identify key metrics** to track related to emerging adult services, challenges, and needs.
- 7. Champion and advocate** on behalf of this population to District agencies and partners.

CHAPTER 3

Invest in Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters



TRAUMA IN SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

System-impacted emerging adults experience trauma at much higher rates than their non-system-involved peers. A 2020 report examined system-impacted District youth from 2016-2018 and found that these youths are more likely to be housing-insecure, experience family instability and abuse, lack positive experiences with education and learning, and have physical and mental health challenges. Specifically, the report compared system-impacted youth to their non-impacted peers and found the following:

Housing and Family Instability:

- **10.7%** have **experienced homelessness** compared to 4.6% of their non-involved peers.
- **49.1%** have **reported neglect** compared to 18.9% of their non-involved peers.

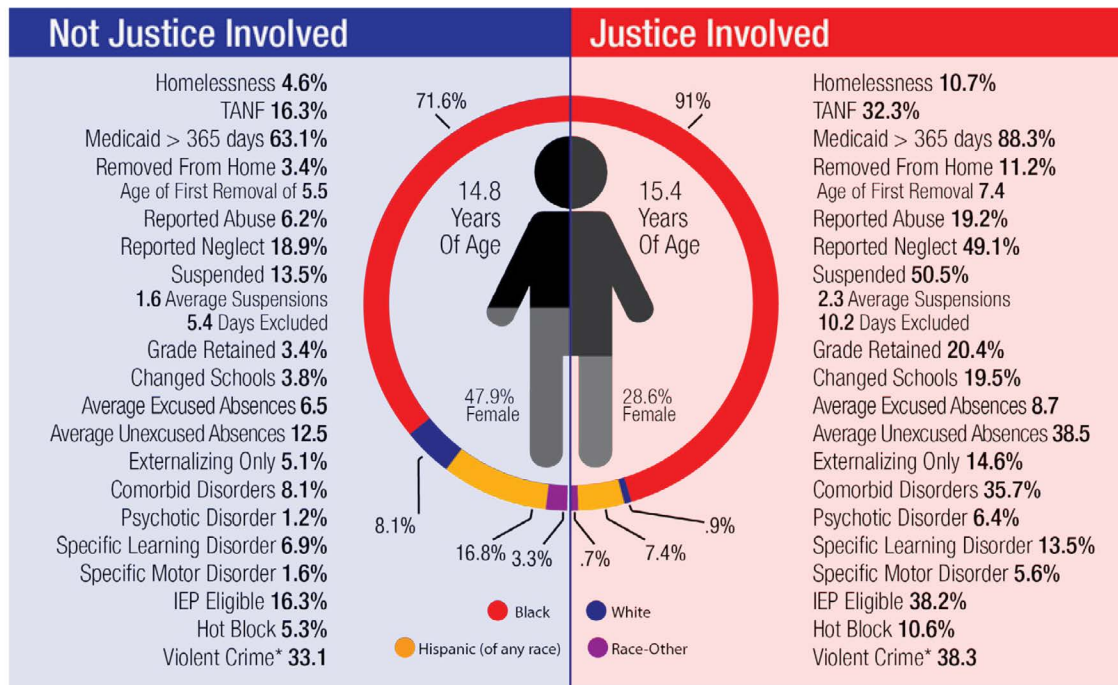
Education and Learning Challenges:

- **50%** were **suspended from school** compared to 13.5% of their non-involved peers.
- **38.2%** were eligible for an **Individual Education Plan (IEP)** compared to 16.3% of their non-involved peers.

Physical and Mental Health Challenges:

- **6.4%** had a **psychotic disorder** compared to 1.2% of their non-involved peers.

SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS EXPERIENCE SIGNIFICANTLY HIGHER TRAUMA THAN NON-SYSTEM-INVOLVED PEERS



Source: Kathryn Sill, Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, A Study of the Root Causes of Juvenile Justice System Involvement (2020).



One of the most important ways to provide trauma-informed and healing-centered restorative services to the District's system-impacted emerging adults is through Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters. **Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters work closely and directly with system-impacted youth and emerging adults to support them and promote public safety.** Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters often come from the same background of having been system-impacted. They understand the experiences and challenges of system-impacted youths and emerging adults and are able to guide them in a different direction. They are knowledgeable about public safety issues in each neighborhood and have the trust of families and individuals, which allows them to intervene to provide care, support, and guidance at a critical juncture for youths and emerging adults.

CREDIBLE MESSENGER MODELS

In 2016, DC launched a **Credible Messenger initiative** to support system-involved youths and emerging adults under the oversight of the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services (DYRS). Credible Messengers serve as mentors and are an essential point of contact for these young people. They work with families and local communities, connecting their mentees to available services and acting as a constant resource for young people.

DYRS lists the **guiding principles of Credible Messengers** as:

- Promoting family and community engagement;
- Engaging Parent Peer Coaches, who are Credible Messengers in their own right as they help other families navigate the criminal legal system based on their own involvement and family experiences;
- Connecting young people to services available in their communities;
- Promoting healthy family and community engagement;
- Enhancing the agency's role in city-wide violence prevention efforts;
- Improving services to youth in the community;
- Connecting youths to resources and relationships to ensure their success; and
- Creating job opportunities for DC residents that build on the strengths of natural community leaders (Credible Messengers).

In short, the Credible Messenger program seeks to address multiple factors of instability that so many justice-involved youths experience. The concept came out of a broader effort in New York, the **Credible Messenger Justice Center**. Participants in that program described positive outcomes including **promotion of individual and community healing, empowerment, and effecting change in policy and public safety.**

I would say that certain people who are locked up, when they come home, they need a big brother who has been where they were. A lot of people don't like asking for help, but when someone is giving them help, they will listen. A mentor to show them the steps to changing their life, taking them to job interviews, practicing with them the proper way to go to a job interview and just being there for them the whole step of the way. That would help me - that one person to believe in me. - Jamal



VIOLENCE INTERRUPTER MODELS

Violence Interrupters work in neighborhoods that experience the highest incidence of violence. They build relationships, promote restorative justice techniques, de-escalate and mediate conflicts, mentor those most at risk of committing violence, and promote peace and public safety. Similar to Credible Messengers, Violence Interrupters are often returning citizens or others who know these neighborhoods from direct experience.

Violence intervention in the District dates back to the 1990s and early 2000s through community groups like **Cease Fire: Don't Smoke The Brothers & Sisters** and the Peaceaholics. These organizations taught new ways of responding to stressors that could lead to violence and were led by those with lived experience and deep understanding of the neighborhoods they served. **Cease Fire** continues this work.

In 2018, two new violence intervention efforts were started by the District's government. The DC Office for the Attorney General (OAG) created **Cure the Streets**, which brought Violence Interrupters to neighborhoods in need. By 2022, Cure the Streets had ten sites across Wards 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Their **data dashboard** demonstrates strong engagement of Violence Interrupters in priority neighborhoods and regular mediation interventions to support peaceful resolution of conflict. Also in 2018, the Office of Neighborhood Safety and Engagement started a **violence intervention initiative**, which expanded to 22 neighborhoods in the District and contracted with community-based organizations to coordinate efforts.

Nationally, **Cure Violence** is a groundbreaking **public health approach** that treats community violence like a communicable disease – preventable with the right interventions. In partnership with 25 cities, Cure Violence promotes Violence Interrupters as community peacemakers. Through relationship-building, they identify situations that could lead to violence, like unresolved disputes or potential retaliation, and provide support services and interventions to help move neighborhoods away from violence. This strategy has been **rigorously evaluated** in multiple settings and found to be effective at reducing gun violence, saving lives, and changing the culture of communities.



PRIORITY: INVEST IN CREDIBLE MESSENGERS AND VIOLENCE INTERRUPTERS

While the Credible Messenger and Violence Interrupter programs are making progress, more is needed. Current budget cuts threaten these programs' long-term viability and success. **Stalled action on the Neighborhood Engagement Achieve Results (NEAR) Act** of 2016 has meant that some Violence Interruption programs are either on hold or unevenly implemented. **Nor has the Mayor's Office created the Office of Violence Prevention and Health Equity** the NEAR Act called for. In order for the District to ensure the sustainability and impact of Violence Interrupter programs, it must create pathways for upskilling, education, and promotion and invest in the care of these providers, especially since most employees in these roles are citizens with prior legal involvement. These steps should include:

- 1. Professionalize Credible Messenger and Violence Interrupter roles.** Clarify job descriptions and be cautious about the continual expansion of duties and expectations without adequate resources or compensation. Carefully select, train, and support Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters so that they are held to high standards and prepared to excel in their roles. Regularly offer professional development through programs such as the DC Peace Academy to increase Credible Messengers' and Violence Interrupters' skills and understanding and help them be more effective.
- 2. Include medical and retirement benefits.** These roles often do not have medical benefits or retirement offerings. In order to signal investment in providers who work to prevent violence, funding to the organizations holding the contracts should include funds for benefits and retirement, and the District should require contract holders to provide these benefits affordably. A review should occur of comparable roles across DC that are considered high-risk and how these roles remain competitive in attracting and retaining employees.
- 3. Provide mental health and trauma-informed support.** Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters deal with the impacts of violence and trauma on a daily basis, which is not easy. The District should provide services, such as counseling to promote strong mental health.
- 4. Provide pathways to promotion and education.** Provide leadership training and skill development in related fields that can increase opportunities for promotion and upward mobility. In the absence of such pathways, the District will experience continual attrition of these important roles due to burnout and limited opportunities for career progression. Offer funding for Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters to gain formal postsecondary education in the form of certificates and degrees. Collaborate with colleges and universities in the District and region to support the development and sustainability of career and education pathways.
- 5. Evaluate impact.** Without impact or outcomes data, the case can not be made for the benefit and utility of these programs. The District must develop performance metrics to assess programs and study their effectiveness.



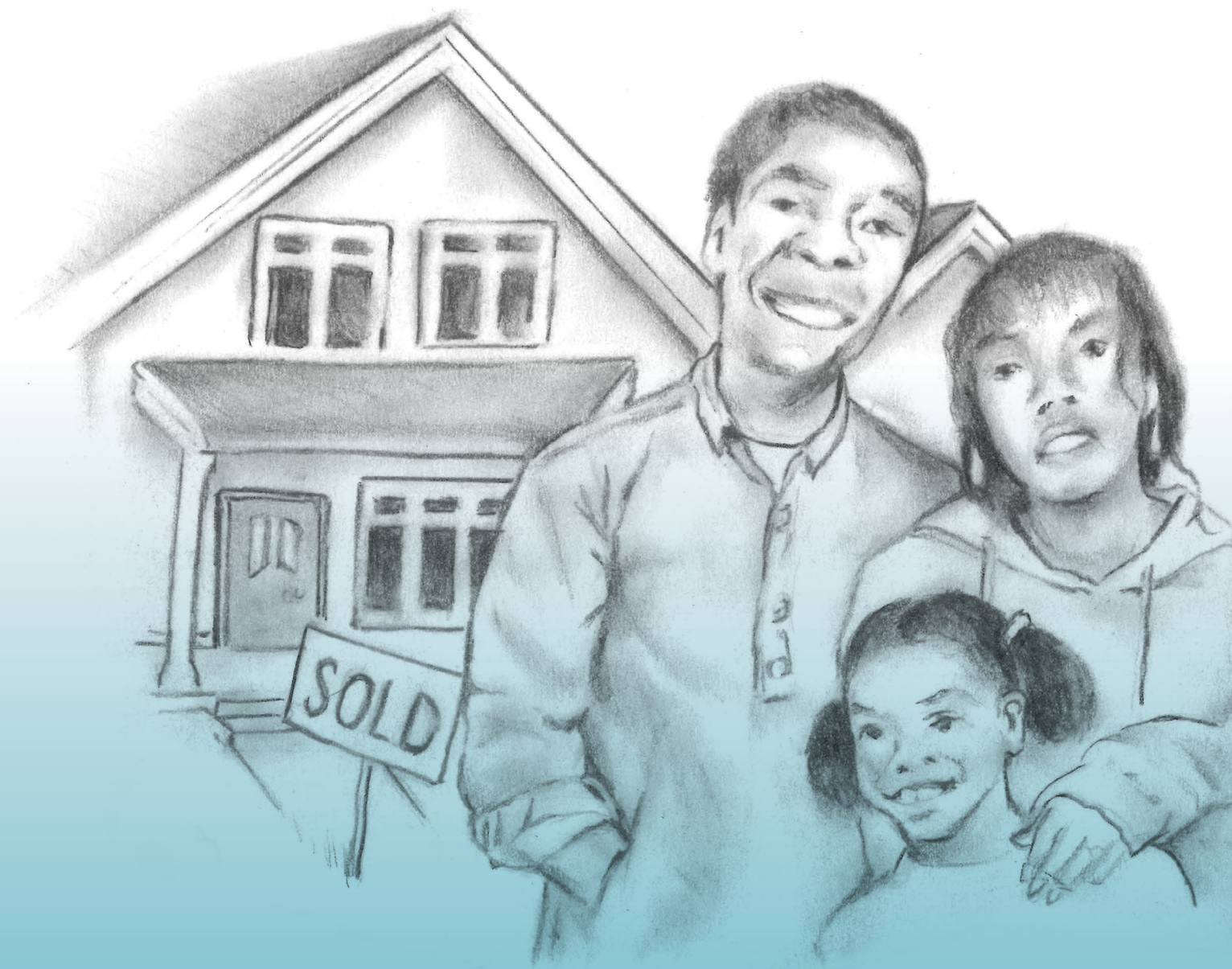
FIRST STEP: PREVENT ATTRITION AND PAY EQUITABLY

In the short term, the District must act to prevent attrition of these critical providers. Too much is being asked of them, and not enough is given. Provide support in the following ways and help lay the foundation for longer-term investment and sustainability:

- 1. Fund generously and sustainably.** DC needs to ensure sustainable funding for these programs, particularly when federal resources end in 2024, and increase funding when needed to further address community safety. Sustainable funding should also spur the District to move beyond providing one-year contracts to community organizations that lead Credible Messenger and Violence Interrupter initiatives. This should be changed to multi-year agreements in order to provide job security.
- 2. Pay equitably.** Starting pay for a Credible Messenger or Violence Interrupter is about \$40,000 a year or about \$19/hour, which is not considered a **family-sustaining wage in the District**. The work is extremely high-risk, as these providers are in regular contact with neighborhoods that have a high incidence of violence, specifically gun-related violence. The salary should include hazard pay. However, wages are set by the community organization holding the contract, so there is no standard minimum required for paying a family-sustaining wage.

CHAPTER 4

Provide Safe and Stable Housing





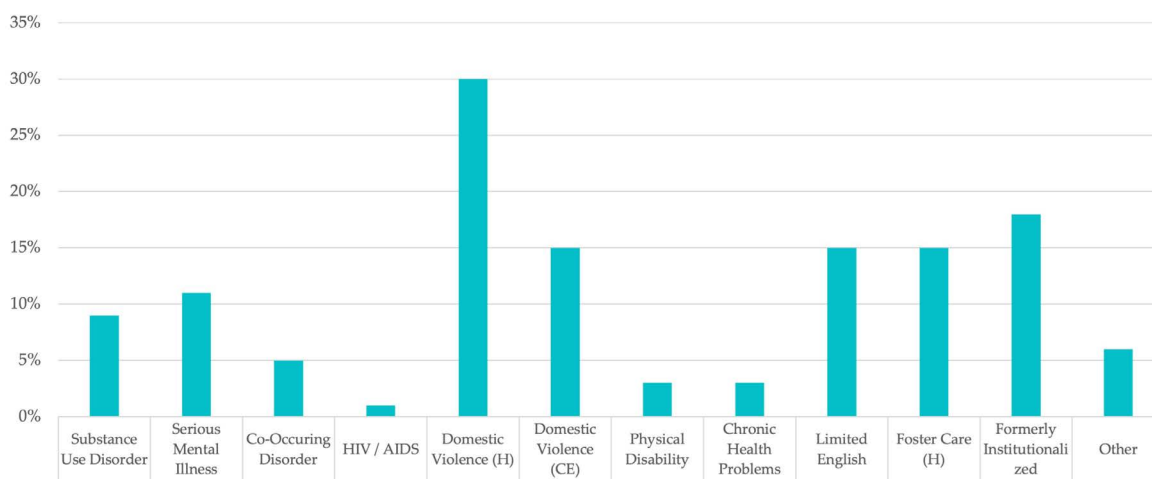
Housing is essential to promoting safety and stability for emerging adults. The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan identified the necessary components to support housing programming and opportunities for emerging adults (see Appendix A).

HOUSING INSTABILITY

Too many system-impacted emerging adults lack a stable and safe living environment. Safe and stable housing allows emerging adults to focus on employment, education or training, and moving towards their goals. However, in 2023, there were **362 emerging adults who experienced homelessness** and 119 emerging adults who experienced homelessness as part of their family unit, for a total of 481 emerging adults (this report did not specify between system-impacted or not) in the broader metropolitan DC region. **This represents a 40% increase since 2019. Single unhoused emerging adults represent 10% of all unhoused single adults in the region.**

These unhoused emerging adults in the region are more likely to have certain negative life experiences and vulnerabilities. The chart below shows that the second-most-common life experience of unhoused emerging adults is having been institutionalized, meaning leaving a juvenile detention center or other carceral facility. Percentages in the chart are of the full research population.

UNHOUSED EMERGING ADULTS IN THE DISTRICT METRO REGION LINKED WITH HEALTH CHALLENGES, SUBSTANCE USE, & VICTIMIZATION

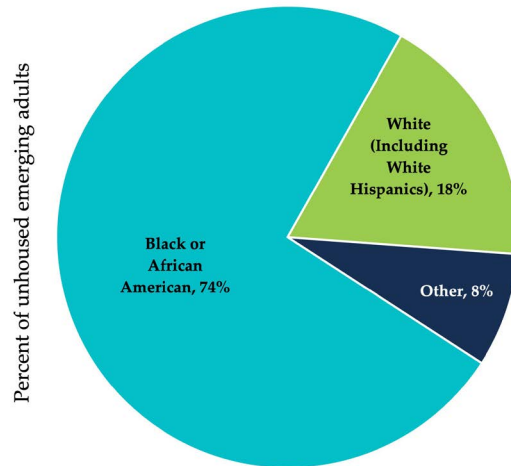


Source: Council of Governments, Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the Annual Point in Time Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness (2023).

Note: These categories are not mutually exclusive; It is possible for an emerging adult to be counted in more than one category. "CE" found under Domestic Violence indicates a "Current Episode"; "H" found under Domestic Violence and Foster Care indicates "History".

Additionally, 74% of unhoused emerging adults in the DC region in 2023 were Black or African American and 18% were white, which includes Hispanic individuals.

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN THE DISTRICT METRO REGION HARMS EMERGING ADULTS OF COLOR



Source: Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, *Homelessness in Metropolitan Washington: Results and Analysis from the Annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of Persons Experiencing Homelessness (2023)*.

These data point to a bigger issue, namely the lack of affordable housing in the District. Recent studies highlight a **shortage of more than 30,000 housing units** to meet the needs of the District's more than 54,000 extremely low-income renters. While oriented in the right direction, the District's 2019-2025 goal of **establishing 12,000 affordable housing units** meets less than half of the need for affordable units. Rents in the DC area **rose between 4% and 6% in 2022 and then another 1.6% to 2% in 2023**. Currently, an **annual salary of \$73,520 is required for a two-bedroom apartment** at fair market value. This salary is linked to employment opportunities that are not yet available to most system-impacted emerging adults.

The District needs housing programming specifically designed to engage system-impacted emerging adults. Programming should emphasize preparing for self-sufficiency through phased programs for independent living (i.e. starting off in a group environment with skills building to create stability for independence); skills-building programming for independent living (i.e. cooking, cleaning, budgeting, banking); mixed-use living spaces that create community environments for living and working, and connecting family with resources to increase family housing stability. Programming should also prepare participants for eventual home ownership (i.e. rent-to-own opportunities).

HOUSING MODELS

System-impacted emerging adults require safe, stable housing, particularly upon re-entry into the community, to support them in achieving their goals and preventing recidivism. Young people need support through onsite mentors and a structured yet familial environment. Finally, wraparound services are necessary to support readiness and advancement.

The **Young Men Emerging (YME)** unit in the Central Treatment Facility in the DC Department of Corrections, can serve as one such housing model out in the community. At the YME, incarcerated emerging adults are paired with a mentor who is an older resident at the jail who can guide them. The YME unit was created in 2018 by two founding mentors and followed a structured, cohort-based



approach that incorporates daily programming, such as morning circle and educational offerings. The mentors created a welcoming and empowering environment through an open layout and gathering space, a sense of belonging, and by prioritizing people-first language. They set expectations and held mentees accountable to follow the structure while also supporting them.

We need more programs like YME everywhere. The correctional system can mess people's heads up where they become more troubled than when they went in. We need more therapeutic environments where people are behind you and supporting you so that you don't keep coming back. When you give young people the right environment, the space and time to cultivate them and motivate them, they thrive. - Trevon

While the goal of the YME unit is to prepare emerging adults for a positive transition back into the community, it is not enough to ensure success in the community. Mentees who have exited the program and returned to the community with a new plan and a different way of being have found, over time, that the challenges and pressures in DC related to housing, safety, and stability actively work against their plans.

I'm nervous about the unknown, not knowing if I am going to fail. I want to be able to stay calm and stay on the right path and not put my foot back in the streets and take fast money; there's a lot of temptation. - Amir

Appropriate housing is an essential component of a successful reentry. Emerging adults who leave incarceration and return to the same neighborhood where they come from are more likely to feel unsafe and experience pressure to return to their prior peer groups and activities that led to interaction with the criminal legal system.

Another successful residential model in the District comes from the **Maya Angelou Public Charter Schools**. For the past 20 years, Maya Schools has provided housing during the week for young people ages 14-20. They currently rent five single-family houses in different neighborhoods across the District – three for young men and two for young women – with up to eight young people in each home. A trained counselor serves as the house parent to run the house and create a safe, welcoming, and familial environment. Programming such as family meals, field trips, and workshops provide tools for life readiness. Young people sign a cooperation agreement that identifies their needs and goals while clarifying expectations and rules. Maya Schools has seen great success with this structured and supportive housing model; students who participate demonstrate more resiliency, set new goals for their future, learn to hold themselves accountable and support others, and are more likely to go to college and work (according to information shared in a 2023 personal interview).

Other emerging adult housing models from around the country can inform this work. Examples include **Project Rebound's** John Irwin House in Orange County, California, which was started in 2018 as a transformative housing community for formerly incarcerated university students. It includes supporting services such as mentorship, life skills, and tutoring. **Ujamaa Place** in St. Paul, Minnesota, provides holistic transformation opportunities for young Black men experiencing inequity at the intersection of race and poverty and helps them achieve connection, stability, and personal success. (See additional models in Appendix B: Chapter 4 Housing Programs.)



LIVED EXPERIENCE: DC'S SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

JPI, StrategyForward, and partners interviewed 20 system-impacted emerging adults in 2023 across local carceral facilities and the community about their experience and who they are. Here is some of what they shared:

WHAT IS YOUR CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION?

I stay with different people - my child's mother, sister, and cousin. - Amir

I'm living in a halfway house but am hoping to go home to live with my mom. - Omari

I've grown up in the trenches my whole life. I grew up with my mother and no father so I've kind of always had to provide for myself and my mom. - Idris

I bounce between girls' houses. - Kofi

I live with my mother, sister, and my niece. I grew up in the hood but lately my neighborhood has been getting gentrified. I have a pretty good living situation and stable home. - Dario

I currently live with my mother and brother and have made strides to get my own permanent housing. - Deion

I come from a good family. It was a well put together household - mother and stepfather. It will benefit me to try and get my own place since I'm of age now. - Trevon

When I'm released, I hope to live with my mother. She is trying to move now. She doesn't want me to be in the same environment and fall into the same habits and obstacles I was facing before. - Jamal

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL SAFE?

Moving out of my community where there is a lot of chaos. Having a fresh start. - Lamar

No one can feel safe anywhere. You have to be on point always. - Zane

Belonging in the community. - Trevon

Being away from DC makes me feel safe. - Darius

At the Masjid, I feel safe. - Omari

Being able to travel with my job and see different areas of the DMV, and being around people that help me stay out of trouble and who understand me all makes me feel safe. - Tariq

When I'm not in the streets. Being at home with my family or when I'm out of town. - Idris

I want to go somewhere and be comfortable that I'm not going to run into people. - Tyree

Being away at college makes me feel safe. - Deion

Right now, nothing makes me feel safe in DC. - Amir





PRIORITY: PROVIDE SAFE AND STABLE HOUSING

The District needs a similar model for our emerging adults in the community. In this safe and supported place, emerging adults can live, learn, and prepare for future independent living in a supported environment. **An emerging adult housing model** at the most basic level would be a small group of emerging adults, perhaps five to ten, living together in a safe and supportive environment, with active guidance and leadership from mentors, access to education and workforce training, and wraparound support to address mental/physical/social health, trauma, and other life skills and needs. For the District to provide emerging adult housing options for those in the community and newly returning to the community, start by considering the following factors:

- 1. Housing type:** Consider multiple housing options to meet the different needs of emerging adults. This could include:
 - **Familial style living for a small group:** Rent homes in safe neighborhoods across DC that can serve as a home setting for a small number (4-6) of emerging adults, similar to the Maya Schools residential program.
 - **Affordable units in apartments:** Set aside space in new apartment buildings for a mentor and 4-6 emerging adults.
 - **Family housing:** Provide family housing options for emerging adults who are young parents seeking to live with their children and significant other or who have responsibility for family members. Family units would be separate from other housing units in DC locations.
- 2. Leadership:** Have each home managed by a coordinator and supported by a trained mentor who was system-impacted and who lives with and guides the emerging adults, similar to the YME model. An on-site mentor is essential to the program's success.
- 3. Structured, familial environment:** Set clear expectations for the behavior and participation of residents, which includes pursuing education and/or workforce training. Have residents sign a cooperation agreement. Balance the structure with support and engagement, such as creating a welcoming space, holding morning meetings and family meals, and facilitating group interaction.
- 4. Programming and services:** Bring in programming and services or have the home paired with the closest recreation or community center to connect the home setting to programming and services. Provide learning onsite with both life and work skills. Incorporate fun activities.
- 5. Screening:** Screen prospective residents for fit with the program and other residents to ensure a safe and positive environment. Develop an application and interview process. Get references from Credible Messengers and others.
- 6. Incentives:** Incentivize participation and progress by providing stipends for residents that can be applied toward current living needs and future independent housing.
- 7. Transition:** Use this emerging adult housing to facilitate and enable a smooth transition to independent, successful living that is stable, safe, and sustainable. Use funding, programming, and support to focus on this.



FIRST STEP: DEVELOP A HOUSING FUND TO SUPPORT EMERGING ADULTS

Housing for emerging adults must be prioritized. In the short term, a housing fund would focus on emerging adults in need of placement upon release from incarceration and to prevent or address homelessness. In the longer term, a housing fund would support emerging adults as they prepare to transition away from needing public support.

- 1. Set aside a budget line item for housing emerging adults.** Set aside a portion of existing housing resources in the District for emerging adults. More re-entry housing options are needed for emerging adults. Begin to work towards the longer-term supportive housing options addressed in the priority above.
- 2. Utilize existing short-term housing options.** Provide initial housing vouchers as a stop-gap, but recognize that short-term vouchers are insufficient on their own. Emerging adults need longer-term housing options and pathways to independent living.
- 3. Make safe housing and neighborhoods a priority.** Recognize that safety and stability go hand in hand. Help young people who would like to move out of high-risk neighborhoods by providing options in safer neighborhoods, new apartments and housing developments, and potentially beyond DC within the greater DMV region.

CHAPTER 5

Build Education and Workforce Pathways



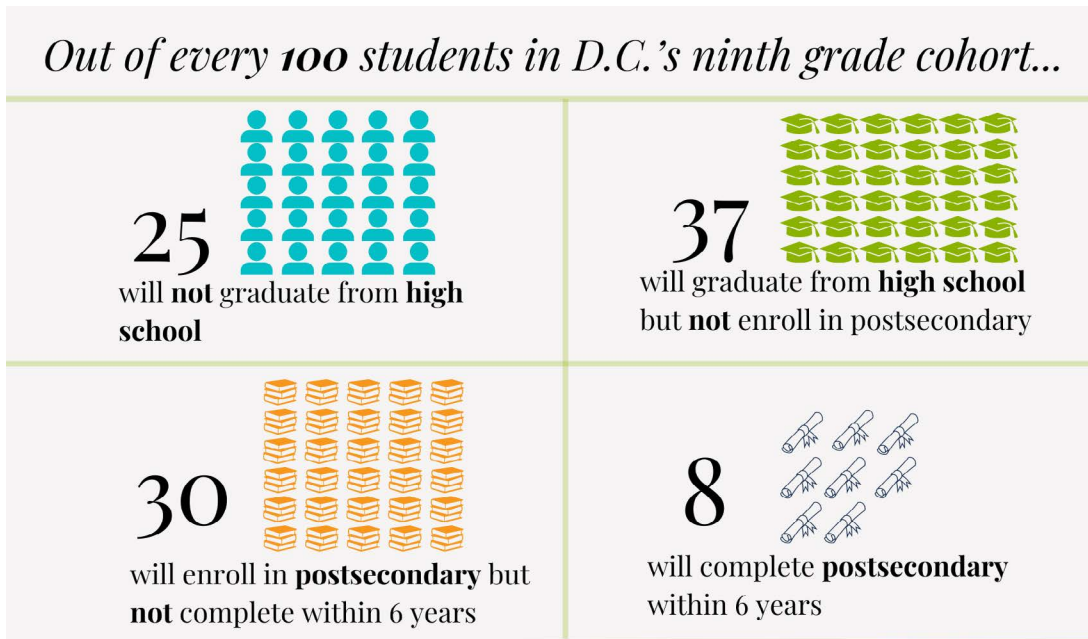
Education and workforce training provide many benefits to system-impacted emerging adults. The 2020-2025 YRA Strategic Plan called for investing in education and workforce training pathways (see Appendix A).

EDUCATION AND TRAINING LEVELS

Education and workforce training can help break cycles of poverty and crime by providing increased resources and opportunities. Attaining higher levels of education is linked to **civic engagement**, stronger community ties, and a **robust economy**. Research found that every additional \$1,000 per pupil investment in local schools correlated with a **2.4% decrease in property crime**. Education investments are also linked with lower rates of chronic engagement with the criminal legal system. Individuals with less than a high school diploma had the highest recidivism rates (60.4%), **followed by high school graduates (50.7%) and those with some college (39.3%)**. **College graduates had the lowest recidivism rates (19.1%)**.

In the District, only 8% of 9th graders from 2022 were projected to complete a postsecondary degree, and 25% will not graduate from high school. Education and workforce training are critical avenues to employment and stability for all District residents, particularly for system-impacted emerging adults.

FAILING TO EDUCATE, TRAIN EMERGING ADULTS IN THE DISTRICT HAS LONG-TERM CONSEQUENCES FOR LIFETIME EARNING, EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

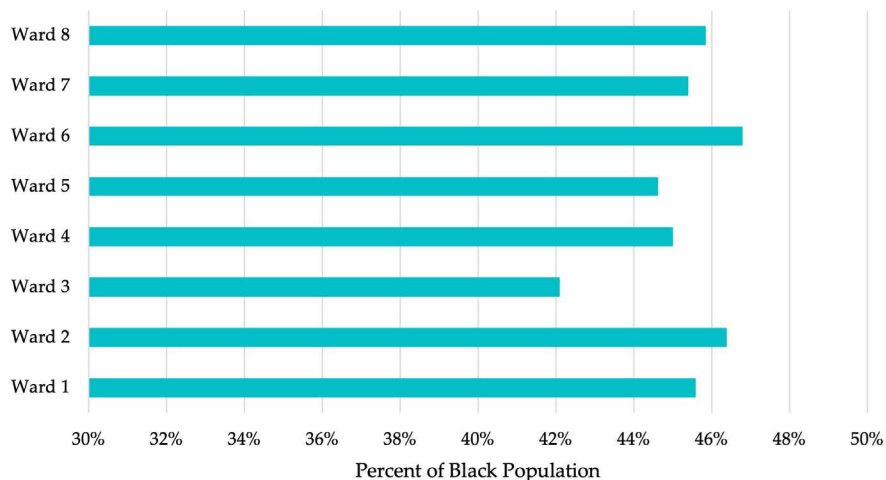


Source: DC Office of Education through Employment Pathways, Launching DC's Education through Employment Data System (2022).

In 2023, this amounts to more than **20,000 men over the age of 25 in the District who have less than a high school diploma**. The population of men, age 25 and older, who have less than a high school credential is highest in Wards 7 and 8 at **nearly 18% in Ward 7 and 16% in Ward 8**.

For Black males in DC age 25 and older, these numbers jump to about 45% across all wards.

NEARLY HALF OF ADULT BLACK MALES IN THE DISTRICT LACK A HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE



Source: DC Health Matters, Black/African American Population: Male (2023).

For system-impacted emerging adults, these numbers are much higher. Interruptions in education may begin with an interaction with the criminal legal system even before adulthood. **Adolescents who experience youth incarceration are much less likely to re-enroll in high school.** In fact, institutionalization (including incarceration) was the **strongest correlating factor with U.S. high school drop-out rates.** Chronic absenteeism is also directly linked with crime: **for every 10% increase in chronic absenteeism in a district, violent crime increased by 4%.** System-impacted emerging adults also have a higher rate of special education needs. **More than 90% of system-involved young people in DC have special education needs.**

In addition to education, emerging adults need job training and job placement. Out of nearly 10,000 clients serviced by the Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency in 2018 (people who had had experience with the criminal legal system), 72% were considered “employable,” and of these, 42% were employed, 43% were unemployed, and 15% had an unknown employment status.

EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE MODELS

The District has made progress in recent years by providing a foundation for educating and training its system-impacted youth and emerging adults. **Maya Angelou Schools** operates academies for youth and emerging adults at New Beginnings, the Youth Services Center (YSC), and the DC Jail. These schools provide accelerated learning to help students progress toward and/or complete their high school diploma or GED. Local universities partner with DYRS and the DOC to provide postsecondary education. Students at YSC and New Beginnings can take online courses from the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). Some residents at the DC Jail can take in-person classes from local and other universities on-site at the jail. Other programs like the **Petey Greene Program** provide tutoring, writing courses, and developmental education preparation at the DC Jail. The Lead Up, Lead Out program at the DC Jail offers additional learning opportunities. Workforce training is also available to the District’s incarcerated youth and emerging adults, with various programs being offered. Commercial Drivers License training has been available at the DC Jail and YSC. (See additional models in Appendix B: Chapter 5 Education Programs and Workforce Training Programs.)



While existing offerings provide a foundation, more is needed. Each of these offerings can be impacted by a lack of support from agency leadership or staff, internal vision changes that can disrupt the stability and continuity of the program, and a lack of funding prioritization that can hinder a program's ability to be fully staffed and supported with the necessary tools. Other basic issues, such as lack of access to students or insufficient space or implements for learning, can also get in the way.

We need more programs where they are pushing education like at YME. You have to want better things for yourself. - Trevon

We need more educational and training programs and more permanent jobs instead of just summer jobs. - Idris

We need programs in the community that will make people prepared for life - how to get a job, start a business, and be productive in life. It starts young. If you don't have that information, you won't be as productive. - Lamar

LIVED EXPERIENCE: DC'S SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

WHAT LEVEL OF EDUCATION HAVE YOU COMPLETED?

I received my GED inside of jail and am thinking of getting other work training. - Amir

I completed most of high school while incarcerated. I am on track to graduate high school. - Micah

As a kid, I was on the honor roll until I reached middle school. Once I moved to a foster home, things went downhill. Since I was always in a new home, I was also always in a new school, which messed up my grades and made me not want to be in school anymore. Schools didn't have my transcripts, so I started missing days and not really caring because I felt like I was being held back. Now I am attending Maya Angelou Academy at the Youth Services Center. I am kind of back on track, but I think I may try to get my GED instead because I don't want to be behind. - Idris

I got my high school diploma at New Beginnings. I am going to go to UDC for business. - Zane

I stopped going to high school in 9th grade; started my GED and passed three sections. I tried to get my GED at the jail but was kicked out, so I started going to the high school at the jail and I am still working on my diploma. - Bryce

I completed high school in Maryland and went to trade school at Prince George's Community College and got certified in HVAC, electrician, plumbing, weathering, and carpentry. I was there for 14 weeks. - Trevon

WHAT ARE YOUR EDUCATION AND CAREER GOALS?

I want to get a diploma and am thinking of going to college; I want to be a chef and am interested in culinary school. - Trevon

Once I get out, I'll look into HVAC. Everyone needs air and heat. I also see myself owning a non-profit program. I like helping people. - Trevon

I was very excited and proud to graduate high school. I want to enroll in college now. - Micah

Hopefully I am able to get a job and obtain my GED and just be able to provide for myself and my family. - Idris

I want to get my bachelor's degree. I want to start a clothing business. - Lamar

I want to go into plumbing when I finish high school. - Kofi

I want to be a therapist or mentor; I want to talk to the youth and tell them where I came from and share my experiences. - Keon

I want to own my own business someday. I don't want to work for anybody. - Zane

I've written up a non-profit business plan to mentor youth and get them outside of the neighborhood. My goal is to curb the incarceration rate of young Black men and try to change the trajectory of their lives. - Tyree

I want to graduate with my high school diploma. I do not want to go to college but I don't mind going to trade school or getting a certificate in business. - Dario



PRIORITY: BUILD EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

The District needs to ensure all system-impacted emerging adults can enter and complete pathways to earning a postsecondary credential or training in a high-demand field at a family-sustaining wage. This starts with prioritizing funded education and training while emerging adults and youth are in carceral facilities and continuing those pathways with a seamless transition once they return to the community.

- 1. Give education and training programs the full support of DOC and DYRS.** District leadership must prioritize learning in all DOC and DYRS secure facilities. That means DOC and DYRS leadership need to work closely with education and training providers to ensure young people can access timely learning resources. Leadership needs to create open lines of communication and coordination to address issues and barriers with education and training providers and provide a cohesive experience so that learners can advance.
- 2. Make education and training programs mandatory at the DC Jail and secure facilities.** Currently, only emerging adults at the DC Jail with an individual education plan (IEP) receive mandatory education to pursue their GED. Those who do not have an IEP or have already completed high school or their GED are not required to participate in education and training programs. Make education and training programs mandatory in the DOC and DYRS secure facilities and incentivize participation to increase greater engagement and better outcomes. This will enable emerging adults to optimize their time in the facility and gain new skills and competencies that will help them progress toward a credential and/or employment.
- 3. Commit to only high-quality offerings that are connected to future work and/or learning.** All education and training programs in the DC Jail should be focused on helping emerging adults build skills and credentials toward further education and/or high-demand jobs that pay a family-sustaining wage. To ensure all offerings are high-quality and connected to a pathway, take the following steps:
 - **Make all courses count.** All postsecondary education and training programs at the jail and other secure facilities should count towards either college credit, a workforce credential that leads to a job that is in high need of workers, or a documented skill that can be shared and considered an asset when seeking employment.
 - **Prioritize stackable content.** Focus on certificates, micro-credentials, and other forms of education and training that can stack towards a postsecondary degree or workforce credential.
 - **Incorporate job-readiness skills.** To support emerging adults in the workforce, prepare them with basic job readiness skills that will facilitate their success in entry-level positions. These are known as **soft skills or durable skills** and can include elements such as resilience, oral communication, collaboration, creative problem solving, intercultural fluency, and more.
 - **Identify priority pathways.** Determine which jobs in the region are in high demand that would be a good fit for emerging adults. Survey emerging adults to identify top programs of interest. Design pathways towards these jobs with partners.



- **Partner with postsecondary institutions and employers on post-release pathways.** Ensure all education and training programs at the DC Jail are created and offered in conjunction with at least one college or employer partner who can continue training or hire individuals who complete the program. District agencies should partner with the **Second Chance Hiring Alliance** and colleges already in the DC Jail. All education and training partners should be required to facilitate or participate in the transition from incarceration to learning or work or bring in new partners who can facilitate that transition in a coordinated and seamless manner.
 - **Incorporate paid internships, apprenticeships, and work-based learning.** Help guide emerging adults into post-release opportunities to learn and work at the same time. Do this in close collaboration with employer and educational partners.
- 4. Design accelerated GED to degree or credential pathways.** For many system-impacted learners, the timeline to complete their GED and move to additional education or training is simply too long. A GED can take up to a year or more to complete before the learner is able to begin postsecondary education or training. If the goal is readiness for work and the ability to earn a stable income, this timeline must be condensed. The District should prioritize accelerated offerings in its secure facilities and community to combine GED completion with a college degree or workforce credential. This model is being used in many places around the country.
 - 5. Make competency-based online programs more accessible.** Provide access to high-quality online postsecondary programs, especially for emerging adults in the community who may not be able to travel to in-person classes due to transportation issues or personal safety concerns. Prioritize accelerated competency-based options and non-profit institutions known for serving adult learners well. Provide scholarships for emerging adults to access postsecondary options.



FIRST STEP: PROVIDE ACCESS AND AWARD CREDIT FOR LEARNING

In the immediate term, the District needs to help emerging adults access existing educational and training options and receive educational credit for their learning.

- 1. Support credit recovery.** Ensure credit transfer beyond DC. Many system-impacted learners have had their high school education disrupted during incarceration. While the District currently provides education at all its secure facilities for youth and emerging adults with an IEP, credits for these courses do not always transfer. System-impacted learners may be in and out of secure facilities for shorter periods than a traditional school term. Even though the current education provider, Maya Angelou Schools, provides accelerated learning to help learners catch up and move forward, DC Public Schools does not accept partial credits. So if a student received 1/4 or 1/2 credit towards their high school diploma, it likely will not count in DCPS and other places. Prior legislation was drafted to change this policy but it never passed. All incarcerated learners need to know that the learning they do and the progress they make will count.
- 2. Expand paid employment year-round.** Many system-impacted youth and emerging adults have participated or will participate in the District's Summer Youth Employment Program. However, once summer is over, they are out of work. Develop opportunities for youth and emerging adults to gain more year-round employment that focuses on building their skills and professional networks through paid internships, work-based learning, and other funded learn-and-earn programs.
- 3. Give all system-impacted learners access to Pell Grants.** Incarcerated learners can now access federal financial aid through Pell Grants. Secure facilities and educational partners need to take steps to help incarcerated learners complete a simplified FAFSA form and receive Pell funding for college courses.
- 4. Provide wraparound support.** Ensure that emerging adults, both in facilities and those in the community, are provided with a strong network of wraparound support services, such as mentors, tutors, college and career counseling, and other resources, to ensure their retention and success in education, training, and the workforce and to help them avoid any obstacles that may prevent their success.

CHAPTER 6

Offer Robust Diversion and Restorative Justice Options





Diversion and restorative justice are important tools to help emerging adults achieve their goals and avoid the pitfalls and challenges that concern them. The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for diversion and restorative justice programming to prevent incarceration and promote healing (see Appendix A).

Diversion consists of programs that serve as an alternative to incarceration, sentencing, and even potentially arrest for individuals who have come into contact with the criminal legal system.

Restorative justice is the practice of bringing together those who have caused harm or conflict and those who have been affected by harm or conflict into a facilitated discussion to address the issue and a plan to restore the relationship and/or promote healing.

DIVERSION MODELS

Diversion is an essential means of keeping emerging adults out of the harmful and traumatizing impacts of incarceration while also focusing on providing support, addressing unmet needs, and helping emerging adults get on new pathways. Many individuals can safely remain in the community while adhering to the requirements of a diversion program, thereby keeping community connections, employment, and education moving forward. Successful completion of a diversion program can lead to a **lower rate of reoffending** compared to individuals who go through traditional criminal justice processing.

The District currently offers **several diversion options**, including deferred prosecution and deferred sentencing. These options allow individuals to avoid penalties for a prescribed amount of time while completing some pro-social activities, such as community service. Offering a variety of alternatives while decriminalizing crimes of survival and low-level offenses creates a path away from repeated interactions with the criminal legal system.

Diversion programs for emerging adults around the country vary according to the locale and population of young people being served, yet share common characteristics. Many programs have education or training offerings, counseling, and case management to ensure progress and compliance. Some programs may address the basic needs of housing and food insecurity and offer mentoring and other support. Programs range in length from a few months to more than two years. Some programs are run through emerging adult courts or specialty courts, while others are through the prosecutor's office or community programs.

One model is the **Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board (NOAB)** out of Oakland, California. NOAB consists of a close partnership among community organizations in collaboration with police and local agencies. Diversion occurs at the point of arrest, so there is no incarceration. Community members serve as life coaches to participants over six to nine months and work closely with families. Initial discussions of bringing this model to the District occurred in 2022.

A **Diversion and Workforce Blueprint**, developed by Georgetown University's McCourt School Policy Innovation Lab, pairs diversion with workforce training. In this conceptual model, participants would receive training in the environmental sector, specifically related to forests and fire safety, through a partnership with an employer. The model calls for providing wraparound support to participants, ensuring that the training provides a credential and puts participants on a pathway to additional learning and careers. (See additional models in Appendix B: Chapter 6 Diversion Programs.)



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE MODELS

Too often, violence in neighborhoods may be seen as the only option to address disputes and issues between individuals and groups. However, that is not the case. Restorative justice is a key alternative that many cities, states, and programs use to engage both the responsible party and the harmed party, address the dispute, promote reconciliation, and support victims of crime. In the District, restorative justice practices are currently infused into **violence intervention initiatives** and **Credible Messenger** efforts and are practiced by the **DC Office of the Attorney General**, various community groups, and some schools. **However, more is needed to prioritize restorative justice as an alternative to the traditional criminal legal system approach of punishment.**

Across the country, restorative justice has met with success. **Common Justice**, a program in New York City, has demonstrated how impactful restorative justice can be, even in instances of serious, violent crimes. They have been using a restorative justice process since 2012, and as of 2023, **100% of their restorative justice circles have resulted in agreements** between responsible and harmed parties and only **7% of responsible parties were removed from the program** for committing a new offense. This track record of success offers lessons for District leadership. The District's system-impacted emerging adults and those at risk of becoming system-impacted need support to increase dialogue across differences and models to spur reconciliation and relationship. (See additional models in Appendix B: Chapter 6 Restorative Justice Programs.)

LIVED EXPERIENCE: DC'S SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

JPI, StrategyForward, and partners interviewed 20 system-impacted emerging adults in 2023 across local carceral facilities and the community about their experience and who they are. Here is some of what they shared:

WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES AND GOALS FOR THE NEXT FEW YEARS?

To finish high school, get a job and make money, learn to drive, and get my own car.
- Malik

To still be alive and not locked up, getting a job where I can actually make clean money and take care of my family. Also, being a homeowner or being able to afford my own place. - Idris

To finish school and stay out of trouble. I also want to grow a bigger network and stay in contact with those who mean well and mean business, people who can help me grow. Another thing is staying employed and financially stable. Lastly, making sure that my family is taken care of. - Tariq

I want to leave the DMV; I just want to go and get away from everybody. I hope to stay out of the justice system. I hope that I don't have to witness anything like this again and that others around me don't have to witness this. My friends are dying left and right, which is hurting me. I don't believe that anyone should have to go through this. - Keon

I want to own a house, get a car, and get married. - Trevon

I want to do things differently from my past. I want to show my kids what the struggle is like, while always being there to protect and support them. I want to raise them differently than how I came up.
- Kofi

To be stable and become an entrepreneur. I'm not sure what I want to do with it yet but I do want to be my own boss. Hopefully I can start my own legal business and just make money for myself. - Dario

I hope to graduate high school and hopefully college, and stay connected with my daughter and be a good father. - Micah

I would love money payments so I don't have to stress about working and my daughter and I can go to school and live. - Zane

Hopefully I will get out. I would want to stay out of the system, but I know that's easier to say when locked up and that it will be harder once I am back in the community and seeing people getting money and things like that. - Bryce

I won't be free until I'm financially free. I want to experience the world and have fun with the people that I love. - Tyree

Surrounding myself with people who have the same mindset as me and who want something different and better to change their lives. That's what will motivate me to keep going. Talking to youth, giving them an insight into the streets, how it is way more than the streets and bigger than DC. Trying to change their minds and put them on the right path. In the future, I see myself owning my own business, living in a house, and being financially good. - Jamal



WHAT ARE YOU MOST NERVOUS ABOUT OR WHAT IS MOST CHALLENGING RELATED TO YOUR HOPES AND GOALS?

Staying alive and being able to provide for my mother. I hope that I can make it to that point. At times, I've put myself in some messed-up situations. - Dario

Personally, I'm scared to fail. You want to be the best at what you do. You have to have a strong mind and not let failure be a setback. - Lamar

I hope that I don't get killed out in the streets with all the things that's going out here. I hope that I am able to live long enough to fulfill my dreams and do the things that I actually want to do. - Idris

The patience that it requires and knowing that it won't happen then and there. Another thing is, staying away from people who want to bring me down or don't want to see me succeed. - Tariq

My past haunts me. It feels like a burden to me because I don't want to unintentionally step the wrong way. - Kofi

Trying to change my character for the better. I feel like I have created bad situations, so I want to be more humble and make better decisions. - Bryce

Greatest challenge is peer pressure - staying away from everything and everyone I know. - Zane

The greatest challenge is finding employment with a record. - Omari

The only thing stopping me mentally or putting worry in my mind is getting back into society. That's my only hurdle right now. Once I get back in, it is a straight shot. I'm going forward. - Trevon

Their goals are jobs, family, school, home ownership, getting their lives on track, and even giving back to the community to help other young people get their lives on track. This aligns to the **developmental framework** from Columbia University's Emerging Adult Justice Project, which identifies emerging adult needs of safety, belonging, identity and values, competency, and contribution. **The main concerns of the emerging adults who were interviewed were staying alive and staying true to the change that they wanted in their lives.** They knew it wouldn't be easy, but they each wanted to try.



PRIORITY: OFFER ROBUST DIVERSION AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE OPTIONS

The District needs to significantly invest in and build diversion options that can redirect emerging adults away from arrest, sentencing, and incarceration and into a guided, structured transition that will provide new opportunities, training, and support, and help them get on a different track.

- 1. Provide structured diversion models that prioritize education, training, mentoring, counseling, and basic needs.** Diversion programs for emerging adults must take a holistic approach to addressing histories of trauma and basic needs through counseling and connection to resources and services for housing and food. Such programs should also focus heavily on helping emerging adults get onto new life pathways by quickly upskilling in high-demand areas that will connect them to jobs in the region. An approach that can be successful for emerging adults is to have diversion be minimally invasive while providing connections to outside services, such as through the **Neighborhood Opportunity and Accountability Board** model. Programs can be offered through community-based organizations and partners or through District agencies.

Programs should include multiple options for education and training to both connect emerging adults to the highest needs in the labor market and also align to their areas of interest and skills, similar to the Georgetown University Policy Innovation Lab's **Diversion and Workforce Blueprint**. Diversion models could connect to some of the programming referenced in the education and workforce section and/or focus on building out accelerated GED completion programs with postsecondary partners that also incorporate workforce training and/or college credential programs.

- 2. Pilot a restorative justice model that can be scaled across the District.** Work with community groups, District agencies, and others to create and launch a pilot for what can become a Districtwide model of restorative justice. Create a plan to quickly bring models to scale.
- 3. Incorporate Credible Messengers or Violence Interrupters in diversion and restorative justice efforts.** Infuse support from Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters as a part of any diversion or restorative program for emerging adults to allow for continuity of tailored mentoring support among each young person's interaction with the criminal legal system.
- 4. Invest in community-centered organizations and programs that promote conflict resolution.** Address diversion before it even gets to the justice level. Build community capacity to address conflict.



FIRST STEP: ASSESS EXISTING PROGRAMS AND BEGIN TO EXPAND

- 1. Review existing youth and adult diversion programs in the District for possible expansion to emerging adults.** The District currently has several diversion programs aimed at certain segments of youth and adults, such as the Alternatives to the Court Experience and family court for youths and pre-arrest diversion courts. Consider whether any of these models are ideal for expansion to serve emerging adults. Identify gaps and any modifications that may be needed to provide targeted offerings relevant to this population.
- 2. Prioritize community-led programs.** Expand the pool of funds to community-based organizations and neighborhood groups that are addressing violence and other community issues. Incentivize these groups to create or contribute to diversion programs and related support. Contact the organizations, community groups, and neighbors who are taking steps to strengthen their neighborhood through the **District's Building Blocks grant program**, offered through the Office of Gun Violence Prevention. Identify leading models from within these efforts, bring visibility to them, share outcomes, and help grow this work.
- 3. Facilitate collaboration among key agencies, organizations, and community partners.** Any new or expanded effort will require close collaboration among multiple District agencies, such as the Office of the Attorney General, the Mayor's Office, the Metropolitan Police Department, the Department of Human Services, the Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services, and Court Social Services Division, as well as the United States Attorney's Office (USAO) and other federal government agencies, which does not fall under District jurisdiction. Because the District government does not have full control over diversion programs, building relationships and trust and facilitating collaboration and coordination with USAO will be critical. A necessary early step will be to determine which agency or entity will take the lead on the expansion, additions, and facilitating collaboration.

CHAPTER 7

Invest in Families, Communities, and Health





When facing issues of violence, crime, and public safety, lawmakers and District leaders too often look away from the communities and the District’s role in those communities. Instead, they may focus on the individuals without reference to their context and life experiences. That must change. **DC’s communities with historical disinvestment and systemic inequity have been underfunded and overlooked for far too long.** The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for investing in families, communities, and health (see Appendix A).

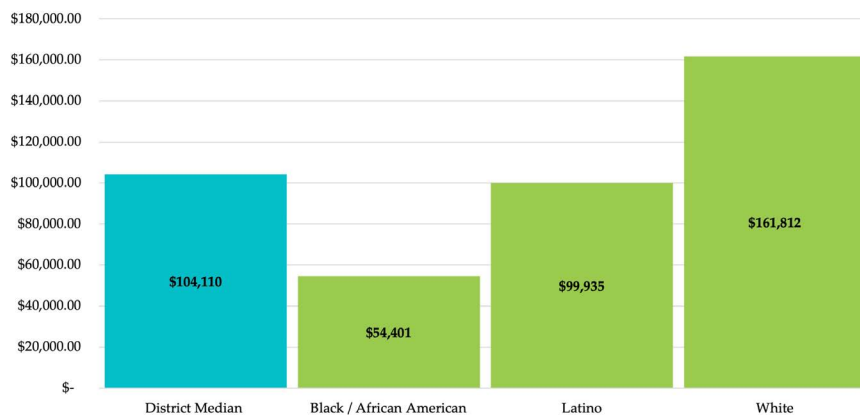
FAMILY, COMMUNITY, AND HEALTH NEEDS

Investing in communities is violence prevention and a public good. Addressing public safety issues must include focusing on public health and recognizing the true impact that poverty has on communities. One study found that “juvenile incarceration results in large decreases in the likelihood of high school completion and large increases in the likelihood of adult incarceration,” meaning that strengthening communities must focus on prevention and investment as a way to increase levels of education and decrease levels of crime and incarceration. Family, community, and health support must be present to provide the full spectrum of services to ensure that emerging adults are able to thrive.

POVERTY

In 2023 in the District, there were 13,000 families who were living below the poverty line. Poverty correlates strongly with race, in the District and around the nation. As of 2023, the median household income for Black households in the District was \$54,000, compared to white households, which had a median household income of \$161,000.

WHITE HOUSEHOLDS EARN THREE TIMES MORE THAN BLACK HOUSEHOLDS IN THE DISTRICT



Source: DC Health Matters, Median household income by race (2023).

Poverty is concentrated in neighborhoods that have experienced historical disinvestment. Housing may be subpar or insufficient, with too many people in small spaces. Communities may lack basic food, health, and other service amenities. According to the most recent data available, **32% of DC’s residents experience food insecurity.** Jobs and training may be scarce or inaccessible, as the District has the highest Black-white unemployment gap in the country. Schools, after-school programming, recreation centers, summer camps, and other resources for youth and emerging adults often fall significantly short of their counterparts in higher-income neighborhoods.



TRAUMA

Young people in communities with many unmet needs may experience trauma and instability as they move through childhood and into emerging adulthood. Higher numbers of **adverse experiences correlate with increased interactions with the criminal legal system**. Adverse experiences may include the loss of a parent or close family member, serious illness, abuse, neglect, and having an incarcerated family member. Not only do these deficits emerge as difficult episodes, they can be **transferred from one generation to the next**. Such trauma also impacts emerging adults in other ways. For example, trauma responses associated with past experiences may interfere with a young person's ability to deal with common stressors in the workplace, resulting in strained relationships or emotional reactions. Interactions with the criminal legal system may build on or constitute new trauma that negatively affects employability. Trauma is also associated with **fewer educational attainments, higher incidences of poverty, and poorer mental health**. Urban trauma, specifically, has been described as a **chronic recurrent disease** that manifests itself in both mental and physical symptoms. As a result, these young peoples' needs for increased mental, social, and physical health support are greater and must be addressed alongside the priority areas of housing, education and training, and diversion.

TRANSPORTATION

Transportation to services, amenities, education, and employment may feel limited, unfeasible, and unsafe. Between **22% and 47% of households in the District do not have a vehicle**. Many rely on public transportation; however, emerging adults may be hesitant to use public transportation due to safety concerns and the sense of being too visible and vulnerable in those settings. If resources are not available in their communities, they may not go beyond their communities to access them.

We don't like leaving our neighborhood for anything. If we don't have a grocery store in our neighborhood, we don't go. – Tariq

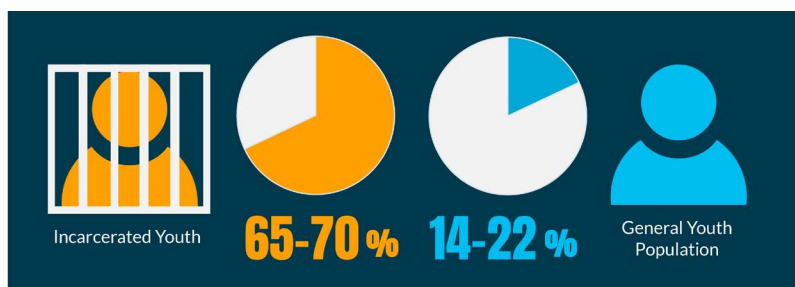
HEALTH

Health is an issue among system-impacted emerging adults. Individuals who are incarcerated have **higher instances of high blood pressure, asthma, cancer, arthritis, and infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis C, and HIV** than the general population. Residents and advocates in DC have advocated directly about the need for **better medical care** for residents at the DC jail.

Several key indicators of youth mental health are worsening. A **2022 report** found that 36% of emerging adults (ages 18-25) reported anxiety, compared with 18% of younger teenagers. Additionally, 29% of the emerging adults surveyed reported depression, while 14% of younger teens reported depression. **For youth with system involvement, the likelihood of a mental health disorder can be three times more than their non-incarcerated peers.**



PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH WITH MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS



Source: National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, Youth Data & Intervention Initiative Report (2022).

A qualitative study of mental health needs in Wards 7 and 8 found **multiple barriers to accessing mental health treatment**, including stigma, lack of patient-centered care, poverty, and lack of social support. The Department of Youth Rehabilitative Services indicated that **more than 90% of the young people in their care had a mental health diagnosis**.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN PUBLIC SAFETY MODELS

Community public safety investment recognizes that strong communities are safe, healthy, and vibrant. Strong communities are **created among a variety of partners**. It is the antidote to a top-down, punitive approach. Programs must give community partners the opportunity to develop strategies that address unique needs and assets in a manner that most effectively serves that community. Community partners who reflect the populations they serve can be catalysts, creating momentum for change. People directly impacted by the criminal legal system must be central to public safety resource conversations. These relationships – across agencies, communities, and people most impacted by the criminal legal system – are the key to success.

Community-driven public safety investment is defined as “directing public resources to local community-driven public safety strategies that extend beyond traditional law enforcement and corrections players.” This budgeting strategy calls for divesting from ineffective policies and practices while investing in interventions identified by community members. A key component of community-driven public safety is that residents and local stakeholders are empowered to come together, identify concerns, and highlight their needs. It is a partnership between government and the governed, but one that is equal, two-way, and brings all impacted individuals to the table to share their perspectives. Most importantly, this strategy works, making communities safer and empowering residents to get involved in local issues. This reordering of priorities can have a profound impact on relationships, as people overcome skepticism and mistrust to work together on common goals. This is, in short, the very definition of community.

Some examples include **Measure Y/Z** in Oakland, California, which redirected some tax revenue and parking fees to violence prevention programs. The **Credible Messenger Initiative** here in the District invested \$3 million in savings from reduced out-of-home placement of youth into a mentoring program. The **No Cop Academy** in Chicago is a campaign to take the \$95 million budgeted for a new police training academy and invest it in housing, schools, and job training. Colorado provides the **Work and Gain Education and Employment Skills**, which invested \$1 million from the parole budget to award to community-based organizations providing reentry support for people returning home from prison.

LIVED EXPERIENCE: DC'S SYSTEM-IMPACTED EMERGING ADULTS

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE RIGHT NOW?

My family is what's most important to me right now. - Dario

My life, my health, and my family are the things that are most important to me right now. These keep me going, and without them, I wouldn't be as persistent as I am. - Deion

Getting my life in order, being more active with my daughter, getting a plan in action, and deciding what I want to do career-wise. - Amir

The most important thing to me is family. - Darius

My daughter. I recently got to meet her for the first time, and she's beautiful. - Micah

My dad, mom, and my family. I never really saw how getting locked up affected them. Recently, I talked to my dad, and he started crying. - Keon

My success is most important to me in my life right now. Rehabilitation. I've been away from the community for a while, so I have to adjust to it and do the right thing. - Lamar

I really need money to support myself. Friends are really important and so is family, even though we don't always get along. - Malik

Stop getting locked up and go do something positive. - Idris

WHO IS MOST SUPPORTIVE OF YOU?

I say my family because since I've been incarcerated, they have been my only support system. None of my friends whom I was hanging with on the streets, none of them have been giving me any type of support. - Jamal

My mother is my biggest support system. - Tariq

My mother. I give all the props to her. Without her, I wouldn't be able to have the mindset, the courage, the strength, the confidence. She taught me a lot and put me in the schools I've been in to see what makes me different as opposed to what I'm around 24/7. - Trevon

My dad and girlfriend are there for me. - Keon

I have a big family, and they all support me. I'm the youngest. - Darius

My mom first, then the YME community as a whole. They really support me. Everyone is pushing me to do better. Good is not good enough. They are pushing me to do even more. - Tyree

My mother. She has my back no matter what, no matter the mistakes I make. She knows I'm not a bad person. Everyone needs that in their life. - Lamar



PRIORITY: INVEST IN FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND HEALTH

- 1. Work with community partners.** Collaborating with community partners is essential and will enable the District to go much further in strengthening communities. This begins with connecting with and listening to communities to understand their needs. Develop formalized communication pathways and partnerships between community groups, city and county leaders, state government, and business groups. Work with community partners to identify investment priorities, then make fiscal investments to support their work.
- 2. Commit to sustainable funding.** Identify and establish sustainable funding sources to ensure support for both immediate and long-term investment. Sustainable funding is essential to better enable community partners to plan, grow, and intentionally respond to current and future needs in a consistent and contiguous manner.
- 3. Invest in violence prevention.** While investing in system-impacted emerging adults is essential, investing in young people, communities, and those at greatest risk of being exposed to violence is a key form of strengthening communities. Supporting children and youth through robust services, after-school programs, extracurricular activities, highly accessible recreation centers, mentors, and tutors can go a long way. Credible messengers and violence interrupters have repeatedly noted the need for a recreation center in each individual neighborhood that is open regularly and for long hours, with programming that is relevant and appeals to children and youths.
- 4. Measure impact.** Set metrics for expectations of what good looks like from District agencies and community partnerships. Measure impact and produce annual or regular reports that can be used to inform budget decisions and prompt changes and improvements.

FIRST STEP: PROVIDE FAMILY AND HEALTH SERVICES FOR EMERGING ADULTS

- 1. Assess existing services for emerging adults.** Examine, improve, and hold accountable existing services for emerging adults. Evaluate the existing health needs of emerging adults and assess the extent to which available services are meeting those needs and, in areas where they may be falling short, whether it is due to lack of capacity, insufficient resources, lack of access, suffering for ineffectiveness, or other factors.
- 2. Account for family needs in all existing emerging adult services.** Take a multi-generational approach to services that allow families to receive similar services. Invest in family units so they can provide strong support for emerging adults. Recognize that emerging adults may have an expanded definition of family beyond their nuclear family to incorporate their children and significant others.
- 3. Prioritize health services.** Address the impact of lived trauma with mental and physical health services. These services should address substance abuse, mental health, and physical health.



Appendix A: Principles from the 2020-2025 YRA Strategic Plan

DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for three key objectives (p. 26).

Objective 1: The District's Mayor's Office must engage in a process to develop Districtwide guiding principles that are trauma-informed, healing-centered, restorative, and address racial disparities.

Objective 2: District Agencies must adopt the guiding principles within six months.

Objective 3: The Mayor's Office must provide guidance and support to District agencies – beyond the youth and criminal legal system actors for all executive functions – and partners to develop initiatives, programs, and responses to ensure compliance with the YRA.

HOUSING

The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for **comprehensive affordable housing services** (pp. 30-31).

Objective: Build housing programming and opportunities for emerging adults.

Core principles:

- Individualized programming
- Re-entry plans
- Housing support prior to system involvement
- Short-term and long-term housing
- Financial resources
- Services/policies to prevent crimes of survival from leading to arrest
- Diversion of young people from the criminal legal system by providing services that address homelessness
- Housing not restricted by prior system involvement
- Services to support a transition to independent living



EDUCATION

The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for **building education programming and opportunities** (pp. 39-40).

Core Principles:

- **Multiple pathways:** Provide options to pursue a high school diploma, GED, workforce certification, and/or various postsecondary programs.
- **Accommodations:** Create accommodations for special education learners in choosing their pathway(s).
- **Address dehumanizing impact of incarceration:** Adapt education programming to specifically counter the dehumanizing effects of incarceration.
- **Needs assessment:** Perform individualized assessments and develop an individualized approach to meet educational needs.
- **Ongoing support:** Involve guidance, counseling, and special education attorneys at all stages of the educational process. Ensure quick access to transcripts. Ensure credits transfer.
- **Diverse opportunities:** Offer various educational programs (coding, art, music, etc) and allow students to experience different postsecondary and workforce pathways.
- **Include higher education:** Provide information and support for college applications and financial aid applications. Create mentorships with college students and local employers to guide emerging adults.
- **Wraparound supports:** Take a holistic approach to support housing, health, and other needs that impact an emerging adult's ability to pursue education.
- **Flexibility:** Ensure programs don't create new barriers for learners.

WORKFORCE PROGRAMS

The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for **building workforce development programming and opportunities** (pp. 42-43).

Core Principles

- **Programming during incarceration:** Offer workforce programs as soon as possible upon incarceration.
- **Programming upon re-entry:** Extend programming through to re-entry.
- **Credential programs prioritized:** Offer programs based on length of credentials and length of sentence.
- **Individualized support:** Provide case management and resources from other advocates and stakeholders, including District agencies.
- **Industry-aligned:** Training should lead to jobs in the community.
- **Ongoing support:** Focus on employment retention support once individuals obtain jobs.
- **Quality and outcomes:** Be clear on goals. Measure progress.



DIVERSION

The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for **building diversion programming and opportunities** (pp. 22-23).

Core Principles:

- Formalized cooperative agreements between the diversion program and key stakeholders ensure program consistency and continuity.
- Broad, equitable, and objective eligibility criteria are applied consistently at multiple points of case processing.
- Exclusionary criteria and costs for program participants must be limited.
- Uniform needs assessments should be used to determine the most appropriate and least restrictive levels of supervision and identify service needs.
- Intervention plans must be tailored to the individual participant's needs and developed with the participant's input.
- Programming must be strength-based and use incentives instead of graduated sanctions in response to participant behavior.
- Programs avoid or greatly limit contact with the criminal legal system by relying on clinical staff to run programs.
- Programming should be rooted in the community and led by the community.
- Staff must receive robust and routine training to ensure trauma-informed care, knowledge of rules, regulations, and best practices.
- Programs must be independently monitored and evaluated.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for **building restorative justice programming and opportunities** (pp. 26-27).

Core Principles:

- Trained facilitators individually prepare participants to engage in the process.
- Those involved in the issue, their families, and their support systems participate in a facilitated discussion about the issue.
- Participants develop a plan with the help of the facilitator to address the issue and provide support to ensure the plan is enacted.
- Restorative justice options are available. Schools, police, and others know about these options.
- Facilitators focus on relationship-building and an asset-based approach toward each person.
- Confidentiality is essential for all involved.
- All involved parties have buy-in. Facilitators should come from or know the communities well that they are serving.
- Community mediation supports returning citizens in restoring relationships with family and other close relationships.



FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for **building family support programming and opportunities** (pp. 45-46),

Core Principles:

- High-need communities prioritized
- Community-led, government-invested initiatives
- Holistic support for intergenerational trauma
- Empowerment and provider selection prioritized
- Bilingual staff added

HEALTH

The 2020-2025 YRA strategic plan called for **building physical/mental/social health programming and opportunities** (pp. 32-36).

Core Principles:

- Individualized approach
- Self-reliance focused
- Inviting, engaging programming
- Family support
- Based on lived experience



Appendix B: References and Models by Chapter

CHAPTER 1: ENACT THE YRA STRATEGIC PLAN TO SUPPORT PUBLIC SAFETY

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CHAPTER 4: PROVIDE SAFE AND STABLE HOUSING

HOUSING PROGRAMS IN THE DISTRICT

Friendship Place/Youth Connect

Friendship Place is a comprehensive housing and homelessness model that provides short- and long-term housing as well as services to help individuals overcome mental health or substance abuse issues. This program also provides long-term sustainability by focusing resources on employment readiness and placement. Another aspect of the model is Youth Connect, a drop-in center focused on emerging adults. Youth Connect helps impacted individuals access vital documents (e.g., Social Security and ID cards) that build independent living opportunities.

Supporting and Mentoring Youth Advocates and Leaders (SMYAL)

SMYAL is the largest LGBTQ youth housing provider in the DMV region. Across SMYAL's Youth Housing Program, residents receive LGBTQ-affirming support and individually-tailored services as they move through a three-tiered progress system toward sustainable independence. Each program provides safe and stable shelter, food, case management services, mental health counseling, crisis intervention, and community support for residents. Residents meet weekly with case managers to work collaboratively on their individualized service plans. Residents can attend life skills courses and community engagement opportunities, including nutrition and cooking classes, financial literacy, healthy relationships and communication, and resume workshops. Entry into SMYAL's Transitional Housing, Extended Transitional Housing, and Rapid Re-Housing Programs are part of the District of Columbia Coordinated Entry System.

Youth HOPE, Department of Human Services for the District of Columbia

The Youth HOPE (Housing Options and Prevention Education) program is part of DC's Youth Homeless Services out of the Department of Human Services. The program provides preventative services, including family counseling, medication, or mental health treatment. These services are designed to ameliorate some of the long-term impacts of homelessness. Additionally, HOPE provides short-term intervention and case management to transition a youth to a more permanent housing solution as quickly as possible.

HOUSING PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

California: Center on Juvenile & Criminal Justice - Cameo House

Cameo House provides housing and in-house case management to homeless or nearly homeless justice-involved women, ages 18 and over, to build the necessary skills for independent living. Participants in the program may be pregnant or have a young child. In addition to housing, program participants develop individual plans and practice skills in independent living, relationship-building, parenting, economic self-sufficiency, civic engagement, and educational attainment.



Minnesota: Ujamaa Place

Ujamaa Place directs its variety of support services – housing, education, employment, family reunification, and avoiding future contact with the criminal legal system – to Black men between 18 and 30 years old. Its housing arm includes emergency shelters and independent units as well as opportunities for home ownership. Financial literacy training and education about renting as well as home ownership are designed for long-term positive outcomes. Program goals are facilitated by working with the individual’s needs, but also working within community values.

New York: Lantern Organization - Vicinitas Hall

Vicinitas Hall provides studio apartments for emerging adults aged 18-25. The organization targets vulnerable groups: 60% of the units are reserved for youth with special needs who are leaving or have left the foster care system. The remaining 40% are for low-income emerging adults in need of permanent affordable housing. The building’s live-in superintendent is available 24/7 to respond to emergencies. In addition to housing, Lantern Community Services delivers on-site supportive service programming to all Vicinitas Hall tenants. Program offices offer space for staff to conduct individual and group client meetings, life skills counseling, education and employment development, and referral support. Staff and tenants work together to establish individual goal-centered service plans. The safe and welcoming environment provides stability to youth who have aged out of foster care, many of whom identify as LGBTQ, by helping them to retain housing through case management services organized around social and economic stability, health management, and independent living.

See the full resource list for housing programs on pages 85-89 of the YRA strategic plan.

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CHAPTER 5: BUILD EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE PATHWAYS

EDUCATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE DISTRICT

Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop

The Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop provides a variety of services, including book clubs with members in and outside of prisons. They also work alongside members who are working to reenter society by providing education and training opportunities. Free Minds also maintains a credit-building program, which enables members to gain secure credit lines and participate in financial literacy programming as they develop their own credit history. Participants can seek help with obtaining vital documents, skills development, and case management. The group structure provides peer support as well as facilitator knowledge.

LAYC Career Academy

The Latin American Youth Center (LAYC) Career Academy provides education services and support for emerging adults between 16 and 24. The LAYC Career Academy assists participants as they obtain a GED, earn college credits, or undergo career training in health care and informational technology fields. The Student Support Team conducts in-depth needs assessments for their students to determine their physical, social, and emotional support needs to ensure their academic success. In addition, the Academy provides students with free health insurance, toiletries, transportation services, groceries, housing assistance, and other services as needed.

Maya Angelou Young Adult Learning Center

The Maya Angelou Young Adult Learning Center (YALC) provides GED preparation and workforce development for emerging adults between the ages of 17 and 24. YALC particularly helps justice-involved emerging adults who are transitioning from incarceration. In addition to the programs offered, YALC students and participants have access to onsite counselors, special education teachers, and social workers. Students and participants are offered support with their learning and emotional needs, as well as individualized and group counseling to help them overcome the challenges that affected their education in the past. YALC also provides residential housing for 20 students who have challenging home environments, attendance/academic concerns, need assistance with post-secondary plans, and/or have the desire to improve.

YALC Academic Program: The Academic Program provides a GED preparation program that assists students with few high school credits in getting their GED certification. In addition, it requires students to take their “Foundations Course,” which provides information on employment opportunities and the necessary academic skills to secure and sustain employment.

Workforce Development Programming: This program partners with the Home Builders Institute to expose participants to seven construction trades. Upon completion of the program, participants are certified for the U.S Occupational Safety and Health Administration 10 certification.



EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Massachusetts: ROCA

ROCA provides outreach and services to emerging adults between the ages of 17 and 24. Their target population has been previously arrested, previously incarcerated, gang- or street-involved, use drugs, have dropped out of high school, or were once on juvenile or adult probation. ROCA provides life skills, educational, and employment programming in informal and formal structures. It also offers HiSET/GED classes taught within a flexible curriculum, either in small groups or one-on-one sessions. The classes are tailored to the participant's level and learning abilities. ROCA's Transitional Employment Program provides participants the opportunity to join ROCA's work crews, earn real wages, and learn basic work skills. In addition, ROCA provides workforce readiness curriculum, pre-vocational training, as well as job placement and retention services.

New York: Young Adult Justice Scholars

Young Adult Justice Scholars serves justice-involved emerging adults between the ages of 17 and 24. This voluntary six-month program allows participants to further their educational goals, whether they seek to further or complete a GED, progress with college courses, take job readiness or skills training courses, complete internships, or pursue other employment development. The Justice Scholars program focuses on education, providing educational services, tutoring, case management, career exploration, financial incentives, and follow-up services.

WORKFORCE TRAINING PROGRAMS WITHIN THE DISTRICT

Pathways for Young Adults Program

This program provides aid to DC residents aged 18 to 24 who are not currently working or in school. Participants receive occupational training, workforce readiness training, and paid internship experience. The emerging adults are assigned to an internship with an approved employer within the industries of allied health, administrative services, and basic IT/administrative tech.

Run Hope Work (RHW)

RHW provides training to emerging adults between 20 and 24 who are experiencing homelessness, returning from incarceration, runaways, or are single parents. RHW targets emerging adults with violent offenses, drug cases, and gang injunction cases. The organization provides training and services such as physical fitness training, workforce readiness training, construction skills training, and post-traumatic meditation therapy.

So Others Might Eat (SOME)

SOME is an interfaith and community-based organization that supports residents of the District experiencing homelessness and poverty. SOME provides services such as affordable housing, addiction treatment, counseling, and job training. SOME's Center for Employment Training prepares residents who may lack a diploma or GED for careers such as building maintenance service technicians and medical administrative assistants.



WORKFORCE PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Maryland: Turnaround Tuesday

Turnaround Tuesday prepares returning citizens, as well as unemployed citizens, to return to the workforce. Additionally, the program trains participants to become leaders in their communities and work environments. Every Tuesday, program participants attend training that covers leadership development, job readiness, soft skills, resumé writing, interview skills, background story support, and many other skills needed to successfully return to the workforce.

New York: Young Adult Justice Community Program

This program was developed by the New York City Young Men's Initiative to provide career-related opportunities to justice-involved youth. The program centers around community benefit projects meant to improve the safety, sustainability, and beauty of neighborhoods. Through these projects, participants develop skills in leadership, teamwork, and project management. Justice Community also offers job readiness workshops, job placement support, counseling, and case management. Participants are given a stipend upon completion of training.

Tennessee: Project Return

Founded in 1979, Project Return is an employment-focused agency that helps returning citizens find and retain jobs after incarceration through a series of supportive services. The process begins within prisons and can extend beyond the location of secure employment. Signature services include individualized coaching, job search strategies, mentorship, assistance with living costs, counseling, childcare, direct aid in food, clothing, and more. Transitional employment and housing are available as a temporary service to provide a starting income and living space. Skill development programming allows participants to earn certifications in construction and hospitality services to take advantage of growing local industries. In 2018, 80% of Project Return participants found job placement.

See the full resource list for education and workforce training programs on pages 92-101 of the YRA strategic plan.

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CHAPTER 6: OFFER ROBUST DIVERSION AND RESTORATIVE JUSTICE OPTIONS

DIVERSION PROGRAMS IN THE DISTRICT

Alternative to the Court Experience (ACE) Diversion Program

Founded in 2014, ACE provides both deflection and diversion programming for status and low-level delinquency offenses for youths up to 17 years old. Youths can be diverted at three different points: (1) pre-arrest by MPD (deflection); (2) post-arrest by the Office of the Attorney General (OAG); or (3) pre-petition for status offenses by Court Social Services in collaboration with the OAG. ACE specialists work with the youth's family to develop a six-month diversion plan to address the youth's unique needs, provide tailored programming (e.g., family therapy, mentoring, mental health treatment, school support services, etc.), and present opportunities for the youth to take responsibility for their behavior. Ultimately, ACE works to connect youths and their families with a range of individually tailored support and behavioral health services, monitor successful program participation, and seeks to change the trajectory of the young person's life by keeping them from entering the criminal legal system.

Juvenile Behavioral Diversion Program (JBDP)

Established in 2010, JBDP is a specialty court that provides intensive case management for youths in the juvenile legal system with serious mental health issues. The program is an intensive non-sanctions-based program connecting youths and status offenders to appropriate mental health services in the community. Eligibility is determined based on both clinical and criminal criteria managed by the DC Department of Mental Health and the DC Office of the Attorney General, respectively. JBDP includes three possible tracks: (1) pre-plea, (2) pre-disposition, or (3) post-disposition.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMS IN THE DISTRICT

Office of the Attorney General (OAG) for the District of Columbia Restorative Justice Program (RJP)

Launched in 2016, the RJP works to address the root problems of crime and conflict by providing an alternative to traditional prosecution. RJP takes juvenile and adult cases from the DC OAG and young adult (18-24) misdemeanor cases from the U.S. Attorney's Office. The program operates on a referral basis, where the prosecutor can recommend a case for RJP or a victim may request an alternative to prosecution. Restorative justice conferencing brings those affected by crime together with those who committed the harm for a discussion focused on accountability, empowering victims, and repairing the harm caused by crime.

DIVERSION PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Williamson County, Texas: Second Chance Community Improvement Program

The Second Chance Community Improvement Program serves emerging adults, 18-24, who have committed low-level offenses. Participants can only have committed non-violent offenses and may have been engaged with drug or alcohol charges. Programs run 12-14 months, improving participants' education, employment, housing and financial stability. Additional aims are to reduce recidivism rates, track the tendency for people who commit crimes to re-offend, and promote public safety. Enrollment is offered in lieu of incarceration and often allows participants' criminal records to be wiped clean upon completion.



Kalamazoo, Michigan: Young Adult Diversion Court (YADC)

YADC is a six-to-eight-month program for individuals on probation between the ages of 17 and 20 who have been sentenced for a criminal charge under a diversion statute. Each individual must also, as a requirement of the program, complete a service-learning project in an area that is meaningful to them. Participants beginning their projects simultaneously are encouraged to collaborate and implement a project together. YADC participants speak with local non-profit leaders and learn about their organizations' needs. This connection yields not only community-oriented projects but also valuable communication and employment skills.

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Brooklyn and The Bronx, New York: Common Justice

Common Justice is an alternative to incarceration and a victim service program for serious crimes based on restorative justice practices. The program provides an important opportunity for healing to those harmed by a range of crimes, including assault and robbery, and an opportunity for those who have caused harm to make things as right as possible in place of a lengthy prison term. Common Justice involves victims of any age harmed by younger adults (ages 16 to 26) facing violent felony charges in the Supreme Court in Brooklyn and the Bronx. To enter the program, a defendant's case is rigorously screened and must be approved by the victim of the crime, the District Attorney's Office, and Common Justice. The program does not work with sexual, domestic, intimate partner, or family violence cases.

Common Justice engages qualifying defendants and those they have harmed. If the harmed parties (victims) agree, these cases are diverted into a dialogue process that gives participants the power and opportunity to collectively identify and address impacts, needs, and obligations, in order to heal and put things as right as possible. In the dialogue process, all parties agree on sanctions other than incarceration to hold the responsible party (defendant) accountable in ways meaningful to the person harmed. Staff closely monitors responsible parties' compliance with the resultant agreements and connects the harmed parties with appropriate services. These agreements replace the lengthy prison sentences that responsible parties would otherwise have received. Common Justice works with a broad range of victims of all demographics, but crucial among them are young men of color — notably, a full 70% of the program's harmed parties are men of color.

Chicago: Restorative Justice Community Court

To participate in Cook County's Restorative Justice Community Court (RJCC), the person charged must be age 18-26, charged with a nonviolent felony or misdemeanor, live in the jurisdiction where charged, have a nonviolent criminal history, and accept responsibility for the harm caused. The victim of the crime must also agree to participate. The RJCC utilizes restorative justice conferences and peace circles to resolve disputes. These practices focus on the ways that crime harms relationships in the community, and then bring together the people most impacted by the crime to repair the harm. Under the court's model, defendants take accountability for their actions. They then work out an agreement with the person(s) harmed and the community, focusing on restitution, community service, and letters of apology. Through this program, young people are also connected with a variety of services including mental health.

See the full resource list for diversion programs and restorative justice programs on pages 80-85 of the YRA strategic plan.



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CHAPTER 7: INVEST IN FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND HEALTH

HEALTH PROGRAMS IN THE DISTRICT

La Casa Transitional Rehabilitation Program (TRC)

La Casa TRC is a resource providing transitional housing to English- and Spanish-speaking homeless men in the District. This program strives to help these men achieve self-sufficiency. Each experience is individualized to meet specific goals and needs. The housing has bilingual staff, case managers, employment guidance, courses to prepare for getting a GED, future housing placement assistance, training in life skills, immigration issue resources, and counseling for substance abuse.

Thrive DC

Thrive DC provides a breadth of services, with the goal of fighting homelessness, unemployment, housing instability, and food insecurity in Washington, DC. Services include, but are not limited to, cooking free meals twice daily, supplying weekly emergency groceries, helping individuals find affordable housing, assisting individuals seeking employment, connecting individuals to legal resources, and providing access to computers, showers and machine washers and dryers.

Whitman Walker Health

The Whitman Walker Health Organization offers community-based health care, specializing in LGBTQ+ and HIV care. Whitman Walker Health provides most medical care services, but is unique in its capacity to adequately serve LGBTQ+ folks because it is familiar with the medical issues facing the community, non-judgmental of LGBTQ+ identities, and equipped for gender-affirming medical care and HIV care.

HEALTH PROGRAMS IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

California: Youth ALIVE

Youth ALIVE strives to interrupt cycles of violence and heal victims of violence as well as their communities. The staff are members of the communities they are working with; they go to the clients to meet them in their environments and use START (Screening and Tool for Awareness and Relief of Trauma) to discern symptoms of trauma that are commonly unregistered and neglected.

International: Mental Health First Aid

Mental Health First Aid is an international training program that advocates for the mental and behavioral health of youths and young adults by training teachers to notice signs, symptoms and risk factors of mental illnesses and addictions. Teachers and other connected community members are given the skills and knowledge necessary to refer students and young people to appropriate resources. To date, Mental Health First Aid has trained more than two million instructors in the United States. Attention to the well-being of young people is extremely important given the stressors present in academic environments and the amount of time students spend at school. Training programs are based on the principle that successful prevention of the onset of psychiatric disorders and addictions is most achievable during childhood and adolescence, while brains are still developing.



National: MultiDimensional Family Therapy (MDFT)

MDFT's overarching goals are to advance youths' and young adults' coping, problem-solving and decision-making skills, bolstering their self-reliance while simultaneously strengthening family ties. MDFT is available to individuals between the ages of 9 and 26, but adapts its treatment to respond in age-appropriate manners. Some of these goals are met by addressing environmental factors influencing youths' and young adults' family functions and overall well-being. Individuals need at least one participating parent or guardian to be eligible for the program. By working with both youths and at least one adult, positive outcomes are reinforced from multiple directions. Participants in the program have demonstrated higher rates of drug avoidance, remaining enrolled in schools, and living with families. They showed lower rates of additional arrests as well as decreased reports of child abuse or neglect.

See the full resource list for health programs on pages 89-92 of the YRA strategic plan.

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