



ENGAGEWINONA

Winona County justice programs

Listening session + survey report

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Presented April 2021

Summary

Winona County asked Engage Winona to facilitate a process in spring 2021 to hear from the community on the county's justice programs and systems, to:

- **Hear community voices:** Give the community an opportunity to be fully heard and share issues, concerns and ideas
- **Identify themes, opportunities, challenges:** Provide Winona County with detailed public insight from the community to guide future planning efforts and program and resource development
- **Create a frame for future work:** Provide Winona County the opportunity to share information with the community on existing justice programs, how the system works, what the county can influence and control (and can't)
- **Identify areas of collaboration:** Explore pathways for Winona County to keep residents engaged going forward, including working on projects of shared interest

Engage Winona held a **virtual listening session March 24 attended by nearly 100 people**. Additionally, **more than 130 unique individuals completed a survey** between mid-March and early April.

Within this engagement, we **recorded nearly 500 comments** relevant to a variety of core issues related to Winona County's justice programs and system.

What's in the report

The following pages go more into detail in each of these sections:

- **Participants:** Who participated, based on limited self-reported demographic information
- **Justice Programs + System:** Participants' understanding of current programs, and direct experiences with the programs or the system
- **Good Questions:** What questions participants had about justice programs; how the system works; what the county has influence over; anything they wanted to give the county an opportunity to respond to



- **Programs + Services:** Providing feedback on existing programs; generating ideas for future programs and services; sharing examples from other communities that could be brought to Winona County
- **Future for Youth:** Providing input on a future facility for youth; sharing ideas for system-based and community-based programs and services to support youth

Appendix of comments

We've included an appendix of comments recorded during the listening session and survey.

We don't always provide this as part of the main report simply because of volume, but felt it was important here: For transparency; as a document we hope folks will engage with as they seek stories of personal experience, answers, opportunities, and potential solutions; and as a testament to the abundance of thoughtful, detailed, personal responses provided.

The appendix is not exhaustive but it is comprehensive. Just a small amount of comments were removed if they fell in one of two categories: Not relevant to Winona County (e.g., questions about school district policies), or non-responses (e.g., a comment on the process).

The intention was not to limit participation, only to focus the data to generate meaningful, focused discussion and action steps.

Next steps

Engage Winona plans to present this report to the Winona County Board of Commissioners and county staff in April 2021 for consideration as they move forward with jail programming and justice system program review and design.

Engage Winona plans to hold two additional events this spring. The first will provide space for the county to respond to the questions posed in the March listening session, share info on the justice system and programs, and engage the community in dialogue about potential next steps. The final event is still to be determined; it will likely involve a smaller group of engaged citizens and county officials planning action steps and ways to stay engaged.

Engage Winona's presence in this space is as an agenda-free, neutral listener and facilitator to support community input and amplify voices. We are also assisting Winona County in imagining pathways to engage in action steps in collaboration with the community.

Beyond this spring, it will fall to Winona County to continue any engagement and work on these issues, though as a deeply local organization we will always be present as we're able, and would be happy to be invited back for future engagement.



Participants

Listening session

In the March 24 listening session held virtually on Zoom, **nearly 100 people participated**. This included those who only attended for a portion of the time. We intentionally did not collect check-in or demographic information from participants due to privacy concerns.

Survey

We opened a survey two weeks before the March 24 listening session and kept it open until April 1. The intention was to hear from those unable to attend the listening session, as well as to capture input folks may not feel comfortable sharing in a public gathering.

The survey was marketed on social media, through Engage Winona and Winona County's email newsletters and communication channels, highlighted in media coverage, and shared by email through word-of-mouth and community networks.

The survey received 131 unique responses. There were checks in place to prevent people from taking the survey multiple times.

About 80-85% voluntarily answered at least one demographic question to give us a broad sense of folks' backgrounds and experiences:

- **Community:** 68% City of Winona, 32% Winona County - representation included St. Charles, Lewiston, Stockton, Dakota, Rollingstone, and rural townships
- **Age:** Widely and evenly distributed from 13 to 80s
- **Race/ethnicity:** 80-85% White, 5-8% Black, 2-4% Hispanic or Latino, 1-2% Native American, 1-2% multiple races
- **Family:** About 35-40% have children at home; others reported grown children
- **Name:** About 50% did not provide a name - this was left optional due to folks' concerns about privacy

Youth response

We had youth respond to the survey, but no youth participation in the listening session. Several participants who work directly with youth said they were hesitant to participate for a number of reasons. Extensive youth engagement was outside the scope of this project; we wanted to flag this as a critical step for the County moving forward.



Justice programs + system

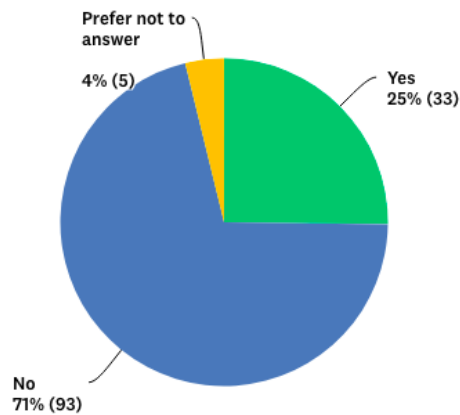
Overview

Only in the survey, we asked participants what their experience and general knowledge was of Winona County's justice programs and justice system. We also invited participants to share stories of direct experiences with programs or the system.

Analysis

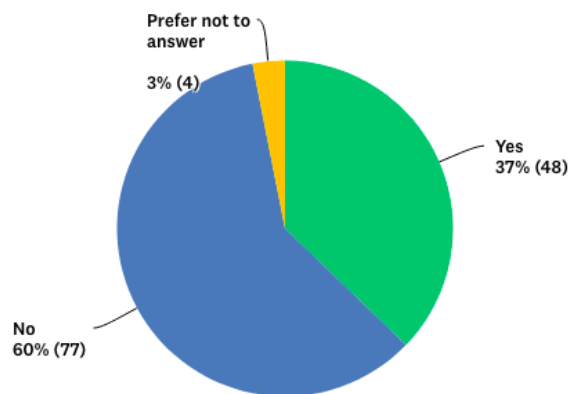
Have you or a family member had direct experience with Winona County's justice programs?

Answered: 131 Skipped: 0



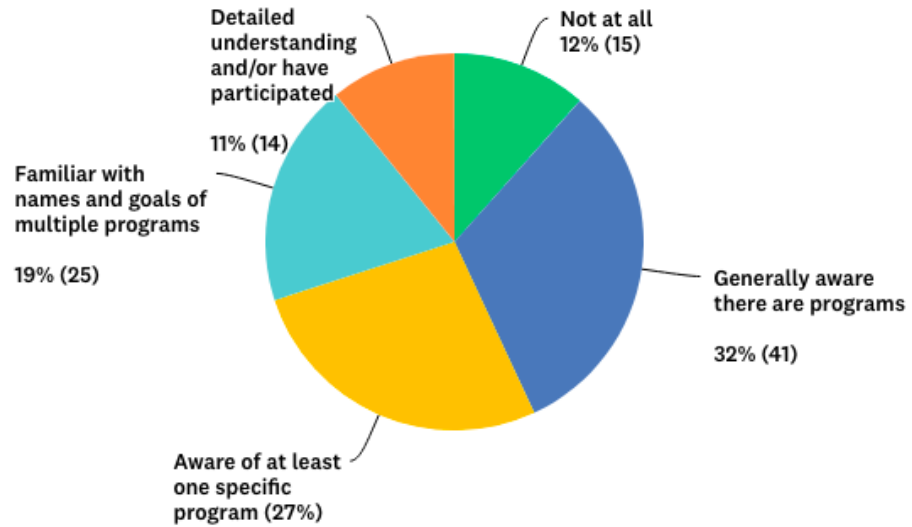
Have you or a family member had direct experience with Winona County's justice system - including court or jail?

Answered: 129 Skipped: 2



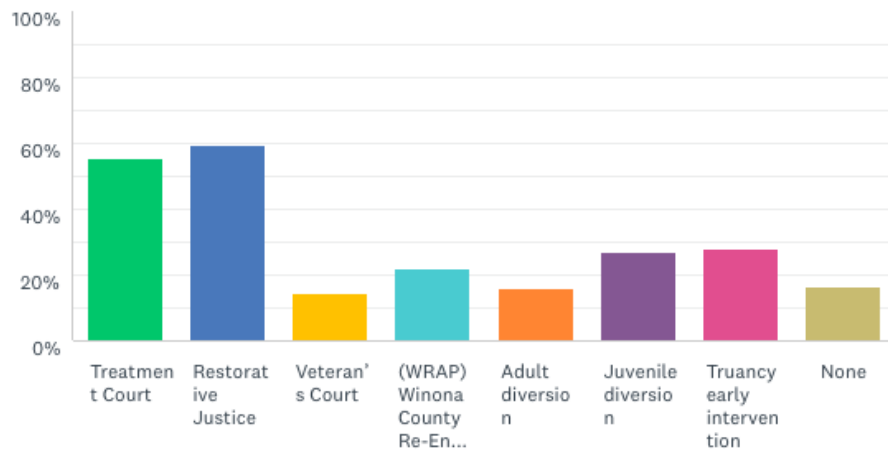
How familiar are you with Winona County's justice programs?

Answered: 130 Skipped: 1



Which Winona County justice programs are you familiar with?

Answered: 126 Skipped: 5



Selected experiences

Note: These are just a small, representative selection of comments - please visit this section in the appendix to see the full responses.

- My child was accused and ultimately charged with a crime. He had to appear in court and was issued a continuance for dismissal ... However, the whole experience has had devastating effects on his mental health, his ability to trust adults and other youth, and his motivation to do well in school. A former straight A student is now failing over half of his classes. He suffers from depression and anxiety. He avoids crowds and groups and has become fearful of being accused of other wrongdoings ...
- A friend of mine was involved with restorative justice many years ago and it turned his life around.
- My sister was in the system when she was arrested for hitting my mom. She went into foster care as a result and spent months trying to get back home and out of the system. In high school, I was threatened with truancy numerous times. I've also had multiple experiences with police through mental health welfare check, none of which have been a positive experience.
- One brother had truancy issues due to depression. Home was toxic. He was removed for the duration of his youth up to 18. Other brother committed crimes but always was given chance after chance and not rehabilitated in any meaningful way, just slaps on wrist. I am of color. My brother is white. I firmly believe his race had everything to do with his seemingly preferential treatment.
- Son was in and out of court for using, etc. After several attempts, on his own and at Teen Challenge, he finally went to New Beginnings and is now 5 years clean!!!
- Access to appropriate and timely, non-coercive mental health treatment is a major issue.
- We need to look at doing away with truancy. It is a slippery slope. We are still in it. And we will probably be fine. But I worry and it has made our child even more anxious than they already are ... I see where this could go horribly wrong for very many kids with or without mental health issues.



Good Questions

Overview

We engaged participants in a process we referred to as Good Questions in the listening session and survey, wanting to learn more about what they wanted to know.

The intention is to have the county provide responses to many of these questions, which will be shared publicly and be used for dialogue at the next engagement event. It presents an opportunity to educate the public on the complex web of programs and the system itself, in order to better understand how they can influence positive change.

Analysis

Participants had rich, varied and diverse questions about justice programs and the system. Many were focused on developing a better understanding of programs - what programs are available, how they are run, what levels of government run which over what programs, why some programs continue while others end.

Many other questions were focused on process, both understanding the steps involved in different situations and wanting to better understand decision-making: When decisions are made, why they're made, and who makes them.

Questions generally fell into four categories: Policies, programs, finances, and facilities. Selected questions are sorted that way below.

Selected questions

Note: This is a curated list of questions for the county to respond to first. Please visit this section in the appendix - in both the listening session and survey areas - to see the full set.

Policies

- Would it be better to create a Youth and Family Services Coordinating Council, instead of focusing on criminal justice? Can there be both?
- Is the County willing to adopt a Zero Incarceration Policy?
- Is the County willing to end youth solitary confinement or disciplinary room time?



- The early pandemic months showed a clear change in policies. If it shows we don't need to detain as many, for as long. Can we think differently going forward?
- What is the level of research conducted by those making County policy decisions?
- How do we get a commitment from our elected officials to work toward finding funding for those community support programs, as opposed to detention facilities?

Programs

- **Prevention/diversion**
 - What prevention or diversion programs are there and what is their impact? Which ones are managed by the county, DOC, or other authorities?
 - Can you provide data related to demographics - especially racial breakdowns - of youth and adults who enter the county's programs?
 - What are recidivism rates after using diversion programs? And the inverse?
 - Has the County looked into expanding state or federally funded youth mental health services, food security, housing, etc?
 - Is there a way of getting support and needed help without having a record?
 - (When someone is in the system), it sounds like there is an assessment process but no guarantee of available services?
- **Youth**
 - What are the statistics on youth in the system over the last few years? Can it be broken down by offense/charges?
 - What happened to Restorative Justice for youth? Is there an opportunity to expand it to youth and adults?
 - What does the County do for youth to care for them for long periods of time?
 - What % of kids are sent to detention centers from Winona County for probation violations?
 - There are many youth with truancy tickets this year. How does that relate into how many youth are funneled into the system?
 - Under which auspice would youth group homes be managed? How could they be managed - by the community or a nonprofit?
 - What is the County's relationship with the school districts?



- How are you addressing the significant increase in out-of-home placement of children? What programs exist to prevent circumstances that lead to out-of-home placement?

Finances

- What is the financial breakdown when inmates are sent out of the county?
- Are numbers tied to finances - meaning there's no motivation for keeping incarceration rates low? Does the jail or the juvenile center have a profit motive?
- If we have millions of dollars for a JDC then couldn't we instead use that for the various community supports?
- How do we get more money for (community-based programs?)
- How can community members, nonprofits or others help with finding support for programs outside of the system? Where do we start?

Facilities

- Has there been discussion and/or a vote to not have a youth detention facility? Is there a plan? Does the County know what steps to take to support youth without a detention center?
- Would the County provide data showing demand for a juvenile system?
- How does the county/city relationship around a jail facility work?
- What is the difference between a secure and non-secure facility?
- Why were some county jails able to shut down and we weren't?
- Can you clarify the difference between detention and "treatment?"
- How often do situations arise where juveniles need to be housed in a facility?



Programs and Services

Overview

We invited participants in the survey and listening session to share input on existing programs and services, including which programs have made the most positive impacts; to identify general gaps; and to provide visions and ideas for programs that if expanded or created could lead to the largest change. We also invited folks to provide examples of programs and services from other communities.

Analysis

Much of the input focused on future-oriented ideas and possibilities, as well as on preventative care, resources and support - providing as many programs and services in the community and at the county before people enter the system - or just after entering the system. The vision for those programs and services was through closely connected, collaborative relationships among existing providers, nonprofits, community members and other stakeholders - with the county providing oversight, support, and financial resources as key support for the community-based programs.

Participants also noted that preventative programs require individuals to make the choice to use them - and that some individuals may not make that choice until they're in the system and facing incarceration or other punishments.

Comments and input on potential programming for the county jail were not widely discussed, but several participants expressed interest in being part of any future engagement on jail programs.

Comments and input on youth were a prominent part of these discussions as well; in most cases in this report, those comments are located in the Future For Youth section.

Visions

- Preventative care, resources and support
- Including families in decision-making on programs and services
- Wraparound support for families, youth and adults
- Focusing on compassionate rehabilitation instead of punitive measures
- Recognizing and addressing that systems are made by humans and include flaws, discrimination, inequities
- Imaginative, creative, community-based solutions



- Emphasize prevention - mental health, chemical dependency, poverty, housing, etc. - that might keep people out of the criminal justice system
- The county repositioning itself as a backbone support system for community-based programs, funneling resources and guidance
- Trauma informed community driven program that includes the whole family in healing, education, reducing barriers, and assisting in getting mental health help
- Wraparound prevention, education and mentoring services - supported by the county, provided by the community
- Bring back Family Based Services to assist adults who struggle with parenting
- A mentoring program connected to job placement
- DWI Court (Comment: Many folks with DWIs do not qualify for Treatment Court)

Selected comments

Note: These are just a small, representative selection of comments - please visit this section in the appendix to see the full responses.

- I remember a program where offenders were put on a project to plant gardens on the levee. I thought that was a good program because they were involved in a project that later they could point to and say "I helped create that." I think it gives them a better understanding of what it means to work for something and make things like vandalism less likely. Maybe a community food garden they could work in? Take some produce for themselves (only fair) and the rest could go to the food shelves. A sense of accomplishment can go a long way
- I would put more energy and resources into Winona's restorative justice program and expanding community care projects and social services
- What we need is a state of the art mental health facility! Many of our current inmates are dealing with a mental health issue that is going untreated which means they will likely reoffend and end up back in jail ... This mental health facility could be modeled after a proposal in the state of Washington. This facility has a "locked unit" as offenders detox and then a less secure facility as inmates begin to continue their treatment and reintegration back into the community. This facility would also have a juvenile unit that would be separate from the adult.
- Opportunities to make a change before crossing the line into jail. Whatever we can do to keep our citizens in our community rather than shipping them to a different county would be preferred.
- Early intervention in mental health and substance abuse, particularly mental health
- Assistance for re-entry when leaving jail. Housing, insurance, driver's license, job search, peer support, family reunited, etc



- Zumbro Valley Scattered Sites supported housing - uses Housing Support funding to both pay for housing (in the community, not congregate living) and to pay for case managers to assist the resident in being successful in that setting
- I think this is a tricky question b/c I believe unless someone wants to change or you've hit a nerve (i.e. removal of kids) that matters to them, people won't change. It would be nice to see a program where 1st or 2nd time offenders are given one more chance & could have their plate wiped clean.
- Make attempts to stop problems prior to involvement with the justice system--fair wages, childcare, and access to mental health services. This could stop some issues before they even start.
- Crime is a symptom of mental health issues, it's the fireworks going off over the Titanic as a last ditch effort before they sink. Ppl love their family but sometimes those same ppl are who make them regress. More group homes. Plenty. Where pseudo family life can take place and give these kids hope, remind them they have worth as human beings. Group homes--all over. Well staffed. Well trained--in emotional intelligence and de-escalation.
- This is a huge question that needs a huge answer. Lift up all voices. Provide safe spaces where voices are respected & valued. Nurture all learners to develop their own empowerment. Be certain basic needs are met. Inclusiveness. Build a stronger sense of community. And sooo much more!



Future For Youth

Overview

We engaged participants directly in the issue of a juvenile facility, invited conversation on what youth most need that they're not getting, and facilitated discussion around the possibility of the county and community meeting the needs of youth without a facility.

Analysis

The large majority of participants' energy, in both the listening session and survey, focused on youth issues. While conflict may appear high and some larger visions (on multiple sides) were criticized as unachievable without broader shifts in community and society, comments and participation revealed lots of space for collaboration and continued work.

There was a strong and overwhelming desire from almost all participants to see more proactive, community-based services, with an emphasis on trauma-informed practice and care - not just from the county, but from schools, nonprofits, and other community structures. These were in the areas of mental health, family-based support, coaching and mentorship, job placement and skills training, home-based or group-home-based placement and care, and similar programs and services.

Almost all participants provided comments on a juvenile facility. The feedback reflected a large range of opinions. Many fell somewhere in the middle, saying they understood the need for a secure facility, wanted it to be used as little as possible, and seen as a transition toward a future where other programs and support ultimately replaced the need for it. Some said they fully supported building a new juvenile facility and saw the old jail as a good location. Many others said they wholly opposed any juvenile facility and called on the county to work toward zero youth incarceration.

Participants also shared in several examples of success stories from other communities, states, and organizations. They are listed below in the examples

Note: *The visions, examples and comments below - as well as the larger collection in the appendix - should not be seen as final commentary or comprehensive input. Rather, it should be viewed as a starting point for future engagement, visioning, and collaborative work with community and county stakeholders.*



Visions

- Expand, support restorative justice: Hold youths accountable for their actions in a non-punitive way that focuses on community oriented consequences rather than the threat of detention
- End truancy
- Positive youth development programming; classroom and behavior management programs; multi-component classroom-based programs; social competence promotion curriculums; conflict resolution and violence prevention curriculums; bullying prevention programs; afterschool recreation programs; mentoring programs
- No facility for youth - zero youth incarceration - focus on community programs, homes, and other alternatives
- Residential secure facility to house youth offenders who need help - a safe, supervised location where children can be placed and then provided services
- Work collaboratively with schools on supporting existing programs and service or offering new ones to meet youth where they're at
- Holistic programs that target mind, body, and spirit for juveniles at risk
- Support existing mentorship programs (like Miller, BBBS, others) to help them expand while supporting new programs
- Non-coercive affordable treatment
- Safe spaces and opportunities for growth and development
- Expand social services to serve struggling youth who may be houseless, struggling with substances, or involved in abusive relationships
- Expand and diversify education programs and afterschool programs to give young people a better chance of uplifting themselves and their communities
- Crisis response teams to de-escalate situations
- Long-term thinking: Learning skills, coping mechanisms, ability to work within system, strengthening family systems
- Ensure juveniles stay as close to their community as possible in a non-secure facility

Shared examples

Note: We haven't vetted this list - we're sharing what participants shared. This list is an opportunity to explore these programs, find others, determine which may be viable, or which may already be happening in some forms.

- **King County, Washington (includes Seattle):** Many innovative approaches and programs, including a Youth Action Plan to guide and inform the County's annual investments in services and programs serving infants through young adults
- **Rochester (MN) ALC:** Range of community-based programs and support systems



- **Our Whole Lives (OWL):** Informed, responsible, and values-based decisions about sexual health and behavior.
- **Treatment Foster Care Oregon:** Keeping kids in homes, rather than institution
- **Olmsted County:** Overall approach to juvenile justice - closed Juvenile Detention Center, has a mobile mental health response team, police community liaison, mental health stabilization
- **Blue Earth County (MN)**
- **South Dakota:** Lowest youth incarceration rate in nation. Community-based rehabilitation services, rather than incarceration
- **Youth Art Center in Decorah, Iowa**
- **New York City:** created community based centers, rather than juvenile detention centers—focused on return to home, not incarceration
- **Compassionate Schools (Washington state):** Model based on restorative practices - was voted on in 2018 but has never been implemented.
- **Woodbury (MN) restorative justice program**
- **VonWald Youth Shelter - Rochester**

Selected comments

Note: These are just a small, representative selection of comments - please visit the multiple youth-focused sections in the appendix to see the full responses.

- I would do away with truancy for a start. I don't see it as a tool to help kids stay in school. But I do see it as a tool to keep them in the system which leads to adults in the system.
- I would rather see my kid housed locally and get the help they need then be shipped across the state or country - the courts have lessened incarceration dramatically but sometimes kids can be a serious threat to themselves and others and we need these places for safety.
- Stop locking up kids. Period. Stop putting kids - any kids - in cages. We need more group homes, more foster care facilities, and less excuses to lock up children.
- Placement in Winona County is the best option, as this will allow the child to maintain natural supports and maintain education with minimal disruption. A setting such as a home would be preferred so children do not feel they are criminals
- I think it's a very good idea to use the old jail for this purpose.
- Ideally you'd have programs and supports to prevent juveniles from messing up. Then if they do mess up, you'd have ways for it not to be considered a "crime."
- Juvenile jail space I feel needs to happen. Just like inmates in cells, juveniles should have one big cell room also. Programs should be anything that would help them to



improve what they did so they don't go back to it once they are released from the juvenile cell. Then probation, community service.

- I worked with families with children and teens for 20 years. Some of those children and teens were involved with the criminal justice system. My observations were that those children/teens were struggling with significant mental health conditions and/or family issues that contributed to their involvement in the criminal justice system. It often seemed that the CJ system did not know what to do with them and instead of getting the intensive help they needed, the children/teens were punished.
- ... Continuing to refer to young people as "juveniles" dehumanizes these children. If the county wants to be honest about what they are doing, they should use terms like child to explain what they are building - it is a child jail or a child prison. The word juvenile is only associated with crime and the idea of criminals.
- I'd also like to see programming in town for children who have suffered sexual abuse and have become perpetrators as a result. I've had firsthand experience with youth in this situation and it's heartbreaking to see them jailed for perpetrating on another child when we had red flags all along that it was likely to happen.
- I would prefer to see the money go toward a youth mental health facility. We are lacking affordable intensive programming for our children with mental illness.
- I worked with at-risk youth, ages 11-18, for 20 years at an alternative learning center. My experience taught me that developing trusted relationships was a key part of helping those young people learn to become the citizens I would want in my community. Main House fulfilled that role here in Winona County.
- The sad reality is there will be times when a juvenile needs to be held for their own or the safety of others. The environment for them must be clean, safe, and affirming versus punitive.
- I appreciate the thorough memo outlining the process. I understand the need for a juvenile detention facility. As an educator I have struggled with "what else" can be done for a student who is out of control. How can we reach this student to help him/her be more successful at home, in school and in the community?
- The best options are those that do not include detention. I am strongly against juvenile detention centers and believe that preventative programming, including adequate mental health initiatives would be more effective and humane. I support the use of restorative justice and alternative learning centers.
- I was brought up to respect the authorities. And I believe there is a fair share of today's problems that start at home.
- The current programs in place appear to be in the best interest of the youth and the community, however the lack of an out-of-home option within the community staffed by trained caring professionals would interfere with the ability of youth to develop those trust relationships that enhance rehabilitation. Another Main House type situation would be an excellent addition.



- Stronger family bonds. More activities for teens to young adults.
- Problems normally start in the homes. Many homes have one parent and some basically have none. Schools chase God out of everything. So what do you expect? Kids that have little or no guidance ... Children need direction and need to be taught to be creative and exposed to trades schools and other forms of being valuable and needed. We need to see our children to be successful in life. Handouts aren't the answer.
- Want to see the county doing this work and research into alternative programs. Frustrated that the county is asking the community to do it.
- We need to do a better job connecting as a community, address mental health issues, and address drug use. A lot of the youth encountering the juvenile justice system have horrible home lives and we need to provide options for the youth outside of the home to see positive role models if the parent(s) are unable to do so
- We need far more preventative measures. I have worked in the educational system, and there are few if any. Parents beg for help for their children, and many can't find affordable interventions. It starts in school where students are treated like criminals for tardies/truancies, for minor misbehaviors, where police with guns and uniforms roam the lunch rooms/halls. It happens where children are bullied and see no end. It occurs when children have unmet needs and are punished for not being able to articulate them. We do not look for the function of the behavior; instead, adults respond punitively.
- Services are most valuable in the early stages--youth need help early. We miss out when we think about stuff at the late stage of detention.
- Ask Winona County to make a commitment to 0 youth incarceration. This is not a large ask. This is something that's happening nationwide in communities of all sizes. Evidence based research shows putting children in the carceral system does not address the issues.
- You cannot talk about children without talking about their caregivers. Asking a child to be healthier than the adults in their life. We need to talk about family support services.

