

A woman with glasses and a black t-shirt is shown from the chest up, raising her right fist in a power salute. She has a joyful expression with her mouth open. The background is a city street with tall buildings and other people, all tinted in a deep purple color. The woman's t-shirt has some text on it, including "MERCY" and "mercy: (mer-see) an act of kindness".

**Mikva
Challenge**

2020

**JUVENILE JUSTICE
COUNCIL**

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Kyrie Adams
Kenwood HS

Oluwatobiloba Akingbesote
Gage Park HS

Xavieon Anderson
Morton West HS

Marco Avila
John Hancock College Prep

Miah Bertrand
Thornridge HS

Edgar Casco
George Washington HS

Dariah Clark
YCCS - Chatham

Angela Cuevas
Lane Tech HS

Treashur Duff
North Lawndale College Prep

CJ Gordon
Whitney Young HS

Daymien Guttierrez
Clemente Community Academy

Jalen Hunt
North Lawndale College Prep

Micah Johnson
YCCS - Innovations

Nia Johnson
Providence St. Mel Development

Andrianna Laye
Christ the King Jesuit College Prep

Sarah Lerner
Whitney Young HS

Grace Miller
Walter Payton HS

Tonimesha Neal
North Lawndale College Prep

Julian Nieto
Lane Tech HS

Octavio Perez
Von Steuben HS

Anita Rao
North Shore Country Day School

Heaven Riley
Brooks HS

RaMaje Scales
Homewood Flossmoor HS

Sean Skoog
Whitney Young HS

Ahide Soriano
Roosevelt HS

Asata Young
Kenwood HS

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The Juvenile Justice Council (JJC) is a diverse group of 26 young people ranging from ages 15-18. This summer, we worked to generate ideas on how the COVID-19 pandemic caused inequalities in the justice system and ways to address them. Our recommendations reflect the thoughts of youth who have direct experience with the juvenile justice system in Cook County. The Juvenile Justice Council strives to promote youth voice, advocate on behalf of those who have not been given a chance to speak for themselves, and to promote a just and equitable society by advocating for restorative justice and fair reentry practices.

FRAMING QUESTION

How can the justice system respond to the racial inequalities and structural disparities that were presented by the COVID-19 pandemic?

SUMMER SNAPSHOT

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically changed and will continue to change the world. More specifically, the pandemic has brought to light major disparities that have persisted within the justice system. In light of the disparities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have identified issue areas in the juvenile justice system that have adversely impacted young people during this crisis. Our recommendations will address the county's longstanding commitment to reducing recidivism among juvenile offenders, the technological disparities that have been exacerbated by the pandemic, and barriers to re-entry for young people as they transition from system involvement to the community.

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Recommendation 1:

Addressing Barriers to Reentry: Roadmap to Reentry

Cook County should host a digital forum on a roadmap to re-entry created in partnership with the Juvenile Justice Council and other potential partners. The result of which should be a collaboration on the creation and management of a technological guide to help young people navigate re-entry in the post-COVID-19 digital era.

Cook County should launch a social media campaign to inform Cook County residents of their options, particularly families of those re-entering from the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. The Juvenile Justice Council can create and spread digital media with resources, links to sign up for County Care or other programs, and aid for families to determine eligibility of such programs.

Why It's Important

Youth involved in the juvenile justice system often do not have access to the information and resources needed for successful reentry. Unsuccessful reentry is often directly responsible for an increased likelihood of recidivism. As it stands, the Cook County Sheriff's Office's reentry assistance network is not user-friendly, and does not showcase resources for juveniles.

Social media is the most effective way to get in touch with juvenile offenders, as they are young people, too. Studies have shown that drug-involved probationers who volunteered to receive a text or email reminders about treatment goals participated in more days of treatment and had fewer days of substance use than those who didn't receive electronic reminders.

Steps of Action

Action Step 1: Youth-friendly Digital Guide

The Juvenile Justice Council, in conjunction potential partners in Cook County, should create a youth-friendly and consumable digital guide [including, but not remaining limited to, comprehensive healthcare information upon re-entry, eligibility, and information on signing up for County Care, links to resources, and tutorials (i.e. a video on how one completes a W-4 tax form or applies for a job)] of relevant information and resources for juveniles involved with and/or leaving the Justice System, modeled after the re-entry assistance network put out by the Cook County Sheriff's Office, but with more youth-specific and COVID-19-related information.

Action Step 2: Virtual Forum

The guide should be presented in a virtual forum via Zoom involving members of under-served Chicago neighborhoods including Austin, West Garfield, Roseland, North Lawndale, and Cook County municipalities like Calumet, Thornton, and Bremen, and presented for any other county residents interested. The forum should also be recorded and uploaded as a manual for users of the guide.

Action Step 3: Social Media Display

Alongside the forum presentation, the guide should be advertised and displayed on social media for the maximum effect of mass information. This information can be displayed on the various social media accounts for county officials including the President's official Twitter account and the multiple Instagram and Facebook accounts of county officials.

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Recommendation 2:

Addressing Barriers to Reentry: Access to Education

The Juvenile Justice Department, Chicago Public Schools, and partners in the Alternative School Network such as Nancy B. Jefferson, should build a coalition with the Juvenile Justice Council that assists in the navigation of challenges of e-learning and disparities in educational level upon re-entry. This network would participate in youth-led virtual workshops that promote high engagement, creative innovation, and collaboration.

Why It's Important

As programs that are utilized by re-entering youth become virtual, access to technology has become a top priority for Nancy B. Jefferson and Chicago Public Schools, evident in their efforts to get every student access to internet services. However, even when youth do have access to technology, they may not have the tools necessary to engage with a virtual education. Virtual learning presents new challenges to all students, but its effects can be especially damaging to those already struggling with school, facing the digital divide, learning in underfunded school districts, or facing other educational disparities. High drop out rates post-incarceration make it all the more imperative that schooling and education is highly encouraged and that these students and their educators get all of the support that they need.

Steps of Action

Action Step 1: Coalition Creation

Creating a coalition involving the Juvenile Justice Council, the Alternative Schools Network, and Chicago Public Schools, to assist juveniles re-entering the community could provide adults in the education system with the skills, resources, and information they need to actively support juveniles re-entering education digitally. These include, but are not limited to, re-enrollment procedures, information on school choice, and strategies to navigate remote learning. The Juvenile Justice Council has established a relationship with Daveed Moskowitz, and can use this connection to distribute high-quality resources and lead effective e-learning workshops to students exiting Nancy B. Jefferson and re-entering outside education as well as their adult educational mentors and staff.

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Recommendation 3:

Aftercare and Post Release Services: Virtual Probation Services

Probation officers should connect with youth virtually during the pandemic by moving services to virtual platforms like Zoom. This adjustment addresses the communication difficulties that have arisen due to the social distancing guidelines necessary to prevent transmission of COVID-19.

Why It's Important

Due to COVID-19, probation officers have been unable to meet with youth on probation, preventing them from connecting with the youth to have a successful re-entry. In our interactions with members of the Juvenile Probation Staff, they have voiced concern about the difficulty of adapting to a changing environment, creating further concerns about their ability to adjust to virtual platforms.

Steps of Action

Action Step 1: Mandatory Zoom Workshop

As part of the continuing education requirement outlined in the Illinois Probation and Probation Officers Act, probation officers should attend a mandatory virtual Zoom workshop, hosted by the Juvenile Justice Council, for probation officers to help transition to an effective form of communication to build community between officers and youth on probation.

The workshop would include how to...

- effectively engage with youth online
- form community norms for virtual spaces
- navigate virtual platforms such as Zoom
- help build youth soft skills through activities and energizers
- Provide a safe platform to build relationships with youth

This workshop would be part of the probation officers' continued education requirement, as outlined in the Illinois Probation and Probation Officers Act.

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Recommendation 4:

Aftercare and Post Release Services: Trauma Screening

To align with the County's longstanding goal of reducing recidivism and supporting young people throughout the re-entry process, probation officers should combine the current trauma screening tools in use with the distribution of a comprehensive re-entry guide developed by the Juvenile Justice Council.

Why It's Important

Currently, probation officers provide youth with programs based on the nature of their offense. This approach does not always take into account the trauma, psychological needs, and essentials for financial security of youth. Such needs must be acknowledged as they are indispensable in the reduction of recidivism.

Steps of Action

Action Step 1: Develop a Tool Kit

The Juvenile Justice Council should partner with the Office of Juvenile Probation to develop a tool kit which will include, but is not limited to, the following information:

- **Employment** - Obtaining work permits, employment liaisons, Re-Entry Employment Service Program, Safer Foundation
- **Housing Opportunities** - Halfway homes and sustainable housing options
- **Substance Abuse Assistance** - Treatment Alternative for Safe Communities Inc., counseling, therapy
- **Legal Assistance** - Expungement (expunge.io), informing the youth regarding their rights and terms of their probation, Illinois Institute for Community Law and Affairs
- **Health Resources** - Mental health services, access to healthcare, eligibility for County Care
- **Government Benefits** - How to apply for Social Security Benefits
- **Education** - Re-enrollment process, including the "You Got This" Guide for Youth Transitioning from Juvenile Justice Facilities

This packet can be developed both digitally and in hard copy, and will be distributed via email and reviewed in the first meeting between youth and their probation officer. In order to enforce the distribution of this packet, it will be mandatory for both the probation officer and the youth to sign an agreement stating they have received and reviewed the packet.

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