
Facility Report



JHA 2022

**Evaluation of IDJJ:
Hitting a Ceiling in
Juvenile Incarceration**

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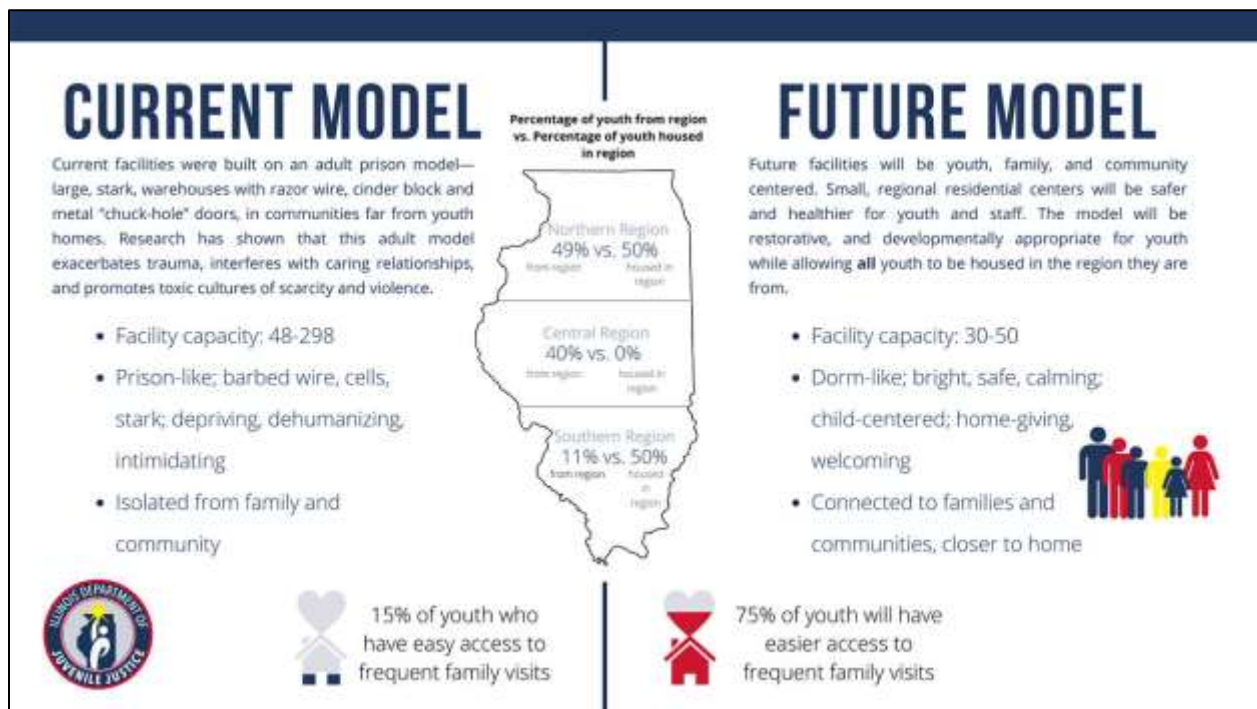
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Executive Summary

In July 2020, the Governor and the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) announced its 21st Century Transformation Model. [IDJJ describes](#) this as a plan to close down large, adult prison-like juvenile facilities and to replace them with smaller, localized, child-centered facilities. The timeline outlined when the plan was released was about four and a half years, with an end date in late 2024. However, nearly three years into the plan, all five of IDJJ's existing youth centers remain open with no planned closures articulated.

JHA believes that IDJJ has reached a point where the impact of further improvements is limited by the adult prison-style model of its system and facilities, which affects youth in ways that are impossible to overcome. The Agency has improved treatment, programming, and care of youth in state custody over the last several years; next steps in transforming our juvenile justice system must include moving away from the Illinois Youth Centers (IYC) currently used to incarcerate youth. Therefore, this report focuses on the most negative enduring issues at IDJJ facilities as well as new problems that have cropped up as IDJJ has implemented measures intended to address other problems.



IDJJ transformation model graphic

Key Takeaways: IDJJ overall

1. Carceral environments are not appropriate for youth. Rather than investing scarce resources to address physical plant needs of older facilities, funds should be allocated for needed community-based treatment, programming, and supports for youth.
2. Even with a much lower population, IDJJ facilities continue to struggle to meet the needs of all youth in state custody residing in IYCs due to the nature of the environment. Increased deferment options and community-based supports are better investments for helping our youth develop into productive members of society.
3. Low staffing levels for security reported throughout 2022 by administrators at IDJJ facilities interfere with scheduled programming and deprive youth of recreation opportunities.
4. A deficit of special education teachers throughout IDJJ lead to youth regularly missing school and a lack of compliance with the teacher-to-student ratio required under the R.J. consent decree.
5. Access to mental health care for incarcerated youth appeared much improved with the lower population, with all facilities except Harrisburg automatically scheduling youth for weekly individual appointments with their therapist regardless of mental health level.
6. Staffing shortages and other negative environmental factors (such as increases in violence between youth) may impede or delay youth's opportunity for positive release decisions.
7. While IDJJ offers innovative programming, it is often limited to only a small portion of the youth who would benefit from receiving it.
8. Youth who are incarcerated near their communities have more access to community resources that will continue to be available to them after release without building a regional reliance on a carceral facility.
9. All five IYCs have unaddressed physical plant needs that create safety issues and impede functioning.
10. While improvements in culture, policy, and practice have been realized at some level in some facilities, there remain immovable barriers to a fully rehabilitative and supportive system for youth who are incarcerated in large youth centers. It is time to close these facilities and fully embrace a more holistic and rehabilitative approach for youth in conflict with the law.

The History of IDJJ

Until 2006, Illinois' youth centers were under the control of the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC). IDJJ was created as part of a push to move away from placing youth in harsh, carceral settings. At that time, there were eight IYCs under IDJJ's purview: [Harrisburg](#), [St. Charles](#), [Warrenville](#), [Chicago](#), [Pere Marquette](#), [Joliet](#), [Kewanee](#), and [Murphysboro](#).

In September 2012, [R.J. v. Mueller](#) (*R.J.*), was filed against IDJJ by the American Civil Liberties Union of Illinois on behalf of incarcerated youth. *R.J.* sought to improve conditions within IDJJ and targeted three major areas: access to education, mental health care, and health and safety, including the use of confinement. At the time of filing, IDJJ had a population of about 1,000 youth. According to the [complaint](#) filed in *R.J.*, youth were isolated in specialized confinement wings for weeks or months at a time, staff instigated fights between youth, and students with Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) fell by the wayside. Pepper spray was used liberally with little regard for bystander youth. If a youth had graduated from high school or earned a GED, there was little if any educational or vocational programming available to them. According to data provided by IDJJ, the recidivism rate—measured by the percentage of youth who returned to IDJJ or IDOC custody within three years of release—was nearly 60% for youth released in 2012.

Between 2012 and 2016, IYCs Joliet, Kewanee, and Murphysboro were closed. They have since been reabsorbed into IDOC to house specialized adult prison programs. Kewanee and Murphysboro are IDOC life skills reentry centers and Joliet is a mental health treatment center.

As IYCs, these three facilities suffered from issues such as understaffing, lack of programming and mental health treatment, liberal use of confinement and other ineffective and detrimental disciplinary methods, and resembling adult prisons in their appearance and function. However, repurposed for adults (with their specialized programming, smaller populations, and relatively newer physical plants) these facilities have become three of IDOC's more rehabilitative prisons. While not without problems, repurposing these facilities into relatively smaller adult specialized facilities represents a step forward for IDOC.

Importantly, in August 2015, the [Office of the Independent Juvenile Ombudsperson](#) (OIJO) was established as a resource for youth in IDJJ and their families and to ensure the rights of youth incarcerated in IYCs were respected. OIJO investigates complaints by youth, provides information to youth and their families, and makes regular public reports. Both youth and IDJJ administrators report that the OIJO is an important partner to them, a trusted office that helps identify issues and respond productively and appropriately to them.

In the 10 years since *R.J.* was filed, advocacy and legislative reforms have helped reduce the number of youth who are sentenced to IDJJ facilities, and IDJJ's population has dropped to an average of 150 youth. Five IYCs remain, and JHA has observed improvements. In [March 2023](#), no IYC reported a population above a third of its maximum capacity. Youth in IDJJ now commonly report to JHA that they are able to meet with mental health staff when they want and that they feel like they are learning in school and are able to get help if they are struggling. IDJJ data from [February 2023](#) also shows that no IYCs had a monthly average length of behavioral hold exceeding two and a half hours during that time. Based on data provided by IDJJ, the recidivism rate had fallen to about 36% for youth released in 2017 and remained stable for youth released in 2018 and 2019. JHA hopes to see this number continue to fall as data becomes available for youth released in subsequent years.

However, understaffing continues to hinder IDJJ's ability to progress. Shortages in educational staff have resulted in youth not attending school for a full day every day and have cost multiple IYCs vocational programming. Harrisburg and Warrenton saw an uptick in violence between youth in 2022. Despite a Fiscal Year 2023 [operating budget](#) of more than \$134,000,000, IDJJ has not addressed some persistent issues and is unable to rectify others.

IDJJ in its current form is inarguably a vast improvement over the IDJJ of a decade ago. Nonetheless, youth currently incarcerated in IYCs continue to report enduring problems, and some IYCs have experienced backsliding. **The need to close large facilities and expedite the transformation process in order to better serve youth and the ultimate goal of reallocating resources to invest in providing youth with supports in their communities remain unfulfilled.**

IDJJ's Progress Under R.J.

R.J. took a three-pronged approach to reforming policies and practices in IDJJ facilities: health and safety, education, and mental health. Under the remedial plan, IDJJ was required to make a variety of reforms with respect to each of these components, which were then assessed by three court-appointed monitors; a second mental health monitor was later appointed, making four monitors total. The remedial plan set out a structure where IDJJ would be assessed separately by facility for each provision except for those which called for department-wide policy changes. If a facility was determined to be in substantial compliance with a provision of the remedial plan for two years in a row, substantial compliance would be considered achieved and assessment under that provision would be terminated at that facility. This allows for oversight of the consent decree to naturally end when IDJJ had established consistent compliance with all provisions at all facilities. This section will summarize the reported progress that IDJJ has made under the *R.J.* consent decree with a focus on the remedial plan provisions that are still active.

Health and Safety

IDJJ facilities were assessed individually on twelve provisions relating to health and safety, such as rewriting policies on confinement and restrictive movement to include limitations on their use, adopting an evidence-informed behavioral management system, and ensuring that staff who came into contact with youth received a variety of trainings on subjects ranging from adolescent development to use of force alternatives to IDJJ's responsibilities under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA). In 2018, the year after the health and safety monitor was appointed and the first year the five youth centers were assessed individually on their compliance with most of the health and safety provisions, Pere Marquette was assessed as being in substantial compliance with eight of the twelve provisions, Warrenville was assessed as being in substantial compliance with six, St. Charles and Harrisburg with four, and Chicago with three.

Five years later, only one facility, St. Charles, has not met the two-year compliance threshold for all twelve health and safety provisions. In 2022, St. Charles was determined to be in substantial compliance with the remedial plan provision requiring facilities to rewrite their confinement and restricted movement policies to limit the use of confinement and to provide certain services—such as mental health, education, and phone use—to youth on confinement. St. Charles was

also determined, for the first year, to be in substantial compliance with the provision regarding staffing levels. In 2021, the monitor noted that St. Charles had been meeting the legally required youth-to-staff ratio for three years, but needed to elevate the quality of staff supervision. However, in 2022, the monitor found that the consistency of staff trainings and of one-on-one coaching with supervisors had improved dramatically. After 2022, this provision was the only one that remained active at St. Charles.

The following charts summarize IDJJ’s status with respect to the health and safety portion of the Remedial Plan as of April 2023, with provisions that IDJJ had met the two-year compliance threshold for prior to the monitor’s 2022 report colored dark green.

| | Chicago | Harrisburg | Pere Marquette | St. Charles | Warrenville |
|---|---------|------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------|
| Confinement & Restricted Movement Policy | | | | Substantial Compliance | |
| Confinement Conditions | | | | | |
| Comprehensive Treatment Model | | | | | |
| Behavior Management System | | | | | |
| Individual Youth Development Plans | | | | | |
| Security Staffing Levels | | | | Substantial Compliance | |
| Youth and Family Specialist Staffing Levels | | | | | |
| Training of Staff with Youth Contact | | | | | |
| Youth Grievance Reporting | | | | | |
| Limits on Mechanical Restraints | | | | | |
| General Programming | | | | | |
| Legal Assistance to Youth | | | | | |

| | Agency-wide |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| Independent Juvenile Ombudsman | |
| Placement Coordinator | |
| Discharge Planning Upon Intake | |
| Prepare Youth for Placement | |
| Placement | |
| Deputy Director of Quality Assurance | Substantial Compliance |

Education

IDJJ facilities were assessed individually under eight provisions relating to education, such as committing to full-time, full-day education; maintaining certain teacher-to-student ratios; and providing in-person as well as online learning. In 2018, Pere Marquette was assessed as being in substantial compliance with seven of the eight provisions, Harrisburg was assessed as being in substantial compliance with six, Warrenville with four, Chicago with two, and St. Charles with one.

Harrisburg and Pere Marquette both met the two-year threshold on all education provisions in 2020. Of the three remaining youth centers at which monitoring was still active, Warrenville and St. Charles were assessed as being in substantial compliance with four of the eight provisions, and Chicago, with six. Though St. Charles was only meeting half of the remedial plan's education provisions in 2022, this represents significant improvement from onset of monitoring in 2017, when it was the only facility determined to not even be in partial compliance with some provisions. Chicago has similarly come a long way.

Chicago, St. Charles, and Warrenville were all determined to be in partial compliance with the provision requiring full-time, full-day instruction. The monitor noted in 2022 that “[w]hile IDJJ has developed a compulsory education policy, a comprehensive school schedule, and has taken strides to ensure that youth attendance is being tracked, school/class cancellations and school refusal had become endemic,” necessitating the creation of a compensatory education plan. The monitor found that the facilities lacked a consistent way to determine who was in school each day, to properly incentivize school attendance, and to ensure that students were still provided with educational opportunities when they were not in school due to staffing issues or school refusals.

All three facilities were also deemed to be in partial compliance on the provision pertaining to the educational curriculum. The monitor determined that while the new Continuing Technical & Education (CTE) Director was making real progress in expanding CTE programming at the three facilities, the state procurement process was hampering IDJJ's ability to purchase GED instructional materials, and a special education teacher vacancy at Warrenville had resulted in Language Live, the intensive literacy program in use by IDJJ, not being available there.

Additionally, Warrenville and St. Charles were also found to be in partial compliance with the provisions on teacher and other education staffing levels. The monitor noted that while both facilities were meeting the student-to-teacher ratios required, both had vacancies for teachers in multiple subjects. At Warrenville, the monitor stated that teacher vacancies were “moving in the right direction,” with two teachers set to start in November 2022 and three further vacancies. At St. Charles, the monitor noted two vacancies, one of which had existed for more than a year. With respect to other education staff, the monitor determined the facilities to be in partial compliance despite several important new hires because of a lack of special education aides.

The following chart summarizes IDJJ’s status with respect to the education portion of the Remedial Plan as of April 2023.

| | Chicago | Harrisburg | Pere Marquette | St Charles | Warrenville |
|---|------------------------|------------|----------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Full Time, Full Day Instruction | Partial Compliance | | | Partial Compliance | Partial Compliance |
| Teacher Staffing Levels | Substantial Compliance | | | Partial Compliance | Partial Compliance |
| Other Education Staffing Levels | Substantial Compliance | | | Partial Compliance | Partial Compliance |
| Substitute Teacher Policy | Substantial Compliance | | | Substantial Compliance | Substantial Compliance |
| Modified School Calendar | Substantial Compliance | | | Substantial Compliance | Substantial Compliance |
| Blended Learning | Substantial Compliance | | | Substantial Compliance | Substantial Compliance |
| Curriculum | Partial Compliance | | | Partial Compliance | Partial Compliance |
| Special Education Policies and Procedures | Substantial Compliance | | | Substantial Compliance | Substantial Compliance |

Mental Health

The mental health monitors have broken down the Remedial Plan’s mental health provisions into various configurations of sections that have changed over time, with some provisions being broken down into sections in some years and taken all together in other years, making a strict comparison between 2017 and 2022 difficult. With respect to mental health, IDJJ was required to make reforms such as providing group therapy to youth in Reception and Classification

(R&C) units, honoring youth requests to speak with a mental health professional outside of a scheduled appointment time, and revising policies concerning the treatment of LGBTQ youth.

In 2017, facilities were assessed based on nine provisions. Harrisburg and Warrenville were found to be in substantial compliance with five of them, while Chicago, Pere Marquette, and St. Charles were in substantial compliance with four.

By 2022, two of the provisions with which all five facilities were assessed as non-compliant in 2017—mental health hospitalizations and medication consent—had been moved to an agencywide assessment. IDJJ had been found in substantial compliance with both provisions for two years in a row as of 2021. There were four sections that were still active for at least one facility. The first was timely and consistent follow-ups after a youth is prescribed a psychiatric medication. While all facilities were assessed as being in substantial compliance in 2021, the monitors noted that there remained some inconsistency in follow-up assessments at Pere Marquette. In 2022, this issue had apparently been resolved, and the monitors stated that “psychiatric and medication follow-up were appropriate.” Pere Marquette was the only facility still being assessed based on this provision, and as of 2022, had been in substantial compliance for two consecutive years.

IDJJ was also assessed as in substantial compliance with the provision requiring that all facilities have a Treatment Unit Administrator (TUA) in 2022. This is the first year since 2018 that all facilities were determined to be in substantial compliance, due to apparent problems with attracting qualified mental health staff at Pere Marquette, which had been non-compliant every year between 2018 and 2022. In 2022 however, the monitors noted that IDJJ had enacted an interim plan to use the TUA at Harrisburg for coverage at Pere Marquette when that position was vacant. According to the monitors’ report, the interim plan was utilized for about nine months and worked well until Pere Marquette’s TUA position was filled.

All facilities except for Pere Marquette have been assessed to be in substantial compliance with the provision requiring the establishment of appropriate mental health staffing levels and qualifications since 2018. In 2022, the monitors noted that Pere Marquette only had one mental health staff member of the three it was allocated, and was providing sufficient coverage by keeping its population very small and made up of youth without a high level of mental health need. The monitors determined Pere Marquette to be in substantial compliance because of

IDJJ's ability to keep the population and need level low and because they found no evidence of insufficient mental health services. However, they also recommended that IDJJ adopt a policy requiring all facilities to have two mental health professionals in place at all times.

In 2022, all of IDJJ's facilities were assessed as being substantially compliant with the section of the remedial plan requiring coordination with mental health staff when planning reentry. IDJJ's facilities were all found to be non-compliant in 2019, the first year that this section was assessed on its own, and partially compliant in 2020. The monitors explained that the partially compliant assessment in 2020 was "largely related to lack of documentation regarding continuity of treatment with community-based providers." The monitors reported that 55% of youth released from IDJJ between March 2021 and July 2022 were referred to Aftercare mental health services and had either completed treatment or were still attending sessions, 10% were enrolled but had not yet had a session, and 21% had refused Aftercare services—numbers the monitors found impressive "given the challenge inherent in engaged this population of youth in mental health treatment."

IDJJ has done nearly everything it was required to do under the *R.J.* consent decree. The provisions it has not met largely come down to staffing deficiencies, a persistent problem that IDJJ has little control over but that nonetheless negatively impacts the opportunities offered to youth. Despite the improvement IDJJ has made in many areas and diligent attempts it has made to improve in others, persistent problems—such as these staff shortages—continue to plague the system, while new problems have emerged despite, and sometimes as a result of, the measures IDJJ has taken. Additionally, while meeting the goals established under *R.J.* will be a major accomplishment for IDJJ, *R.J.*'s standard is constitutional adequacy. JHA believes that a higher standard is necessary to best serve youth in Illinois. IDJJ's Transformation Plan shows that the agency does as well.

The following charts summarize IDJJ's status with respect to the health and safety portion of the Remedial Plan as of April 2023, with provisions that IDJJ met the two-year compliance threshold for prior to the monitors' 2022 report colored dark green. Chicago and Pere Marquette were not

assessed for the provision relating to R&C units because they do not have R&C units, which is indicated in the chart below in gray.

| | Chicago | Harrisburg | Pere Marquette | St. Charles | Warrenville |
|--|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Initial Psychiatric Evaluations | | | | | |
| Medication/Follow Up Assessments | | | Substantial Compliance | | |
| Treatment Unit Administrator Positions | | | Substantial Compliance | | |
| Mental Health Staffing Levels and Qualifications | | | Substantial Compliance | | |
| Mental Health Records Requests | | | | | |
| Individualized Treatment Plan/Implementation | | | | | |
| Coordination of Treatment | | | | | |
| Family Therapy | | | | | |
| Community Reentry | Substantial Compliance | Substantial Compliance | Substantial Compliance | Substantial Compliance | Substantial Compliance |
| Medication Management | | | | | |
| Youth in Reception & Classification Units | N/A | | N/A | | |
| Youth Seeking Immediate Mental Health Care | | | | | |
| Limits on Mental Health Crisis Confinement | | | | | |

| | Agency-wide |
|---|-------------|
| Licensed Physician Medical Director | |
| Board-Certified Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist | |
| Assessment/Facilitation of Hospitalization | |
| Medication Consent | |
| LGBTQ Youth | |

IDJJ’s Transformation Plan

IDJJ’s transformation plan, officially called the 21st Century Transformation Model, was announced by the Pritzker Administration in July 2020. According to IDJJ’s [Transformation webpage](#), the model is based on dorm-like, child-centered facilities with a capacity of 30 to 50

youth, where an estimated 75% of youth will have easier access to frequent family visits than they do in IDJJ's current facilities. The [plan](#) involves converting existing properties in or near the communities where youth come from into residential youth centers, investing in community-based services, and repurposing IDJJ's current adult-style facilities for use by IDOC.

IDJJ divided the project into three stages, which were mapped out through 2024. Phase 1 involved engaging stakeholders, initiating capital projects, and increasing community investments. Transfer of adult-style facilities to IDOC would begin in Phase 2, as would implementing community diversions to decrease the use of secure confinement for youth. In Phase 3, transfer of adult-style facilities would be completed, and all youth still in secure confinement would be housed in IDJJ's new, community-based youth centers.

In IDJJ's [2021 Annual Report](#), the agency reported transformation progress such as piloting the Mobile Intake Unit, which enables IDJJ to process youth while they are still at county detention centers, allowing some youth to be released without ever being transferred to IDJJ and reducing the need for Reception & Classification (R&C) units within IDJJ; increasing community programming; searching for a new site for IYC-Chicago; and designing IYC-Lincoln, which IDJJ touts as the first of many small, community-based youth centers. [2022's Annual Report](#) reported increased mental health and behavioral services for youth, continued expansion of community partnerships, and increased training for staff, but focused less on concrete moves towards transferring youth out of IDJJ's adult-style facilities.

According to information provided by IDJJ in February 2023, IDJJ's new recent expenditures included \$4,000,000 to a residential "step up, set down" program at [Arrowhead](#), intended to deflect IDJJ admissions and shorten length of stays for youth in the Quad Cities region; \$50,000 to a [National Youth Advocate Program](#) intensive outpatient treatment program serving Peoria; contracts with mental health providers in under-served areas; as well as the creation of programs allowing staff who have built relationships with youth while in custody to continue supporting them on release. IDJJ has also reportedly established or expanded partnerships with community-based mentoring and arts programs as well as community colleges to facilitate enrollment in online classes while youth are in custody. Several of these programs continue to be available to youth after release while they are on Aftercare. IDJJ has strengthened the services available to youth in Aftercare in recent years. Because this report is focused on the

lives of youth while they are in IDJJ's facilities, it does not detail changes to Aftercare. This is an area that JHA looks forward to exploring in the coming year.

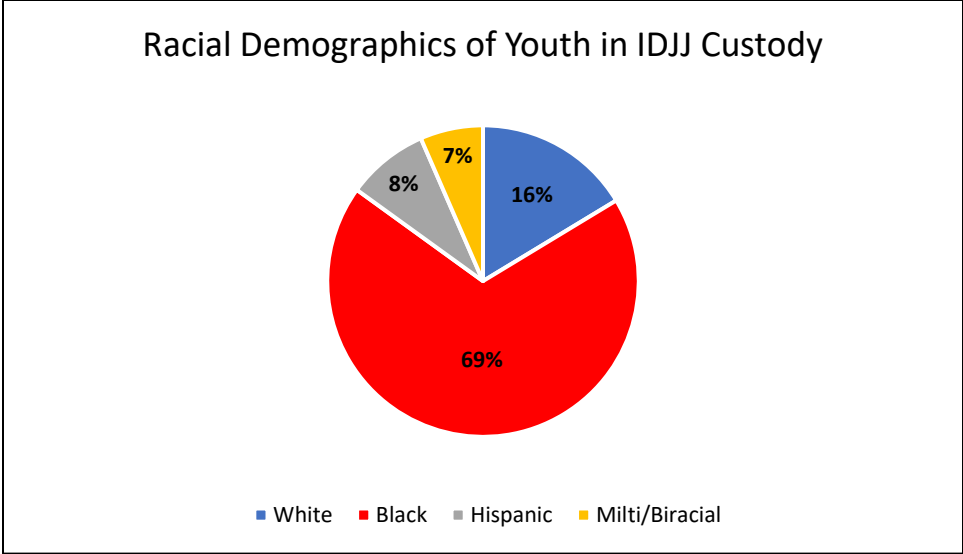
JHA wholeheartedly supports IDJJ's goals of reducing youth incarceration, moving youth out of adult-style facilities, and transitioning its large facilities to use by IDOC. IDJJ has demonstrated its ability to make large-scale improvements in relatively short amount of time, and JHA has faith that the Transformation Plan will allow youth a more welcoming environment and more programming opportunities that will encourage them to focus on their futures. However, we are concerned that more than halfway through the timeframe initially laid out for the transformation, all of IDJJ's large, adult-style facilities continue to house youth, while no small, community-based facilities have been opened. **This report demonstrates that despite the improvements IDJJ has seen over the years and continues to make, there is a limit on how rehabilitative a system based on adult incarceration can be. IDJJ has hit that limit.**

IDJJ's Current Population

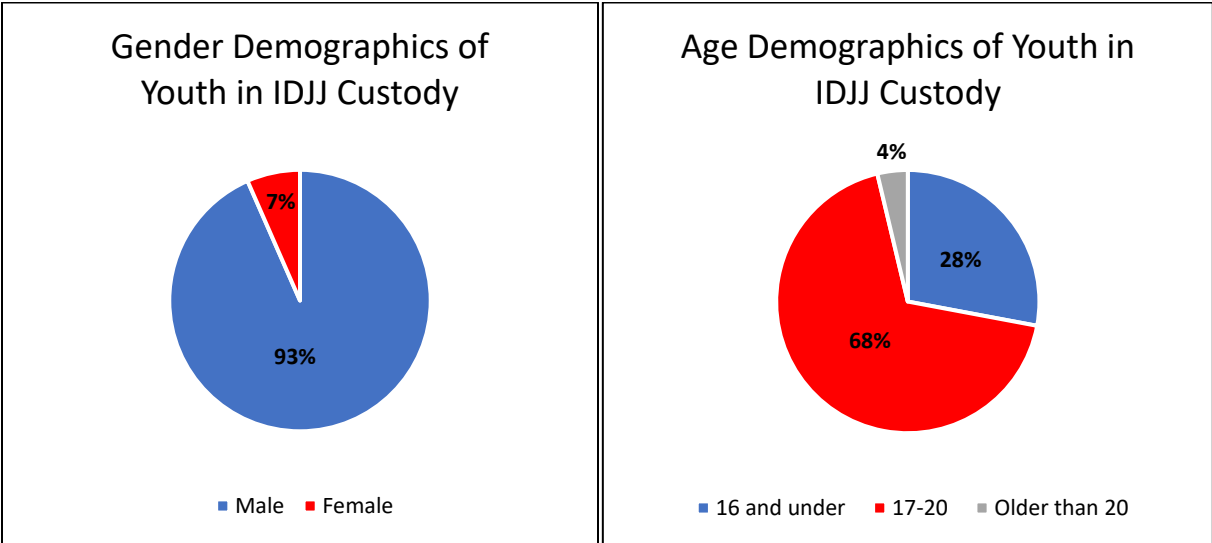
IDJJ's [April 2023 Quarterly Report](#) indicates that as of March 2023, there were 154 youth incarcerated. In May of 2022, IDJJ's average daily population exceeded 150 for the first time since March 2020, and remained at or above it through February 2023 (the last month for which data was available), dipping into the 140s only once, in January 2023. In March 2023, St. Charles had the largest population, 51, and housed 33% of all youth in IDJJ custody. Harrisburg had a population of 48. All other IYCs had populations below 25.

142 of the youth were male and ten were female.¹ 105 were Black, 25 were White, 13 were Hispanic, and nine were Biracial or Multiracial. IDJJ's Quarterly Reports from [October 2021](#) through [April 2023](#) indicate that Black youth made up between 65% and 73% of IDJJ's population during that period of time. [The U.S. Census Bureau](#) estimated in 2021 that 14.7% of Illinois' population is Black.

¹ Although the Quarterly Report showed 154 youth in IDJJ custody, demographic breakdowns reflected only 152 youth.



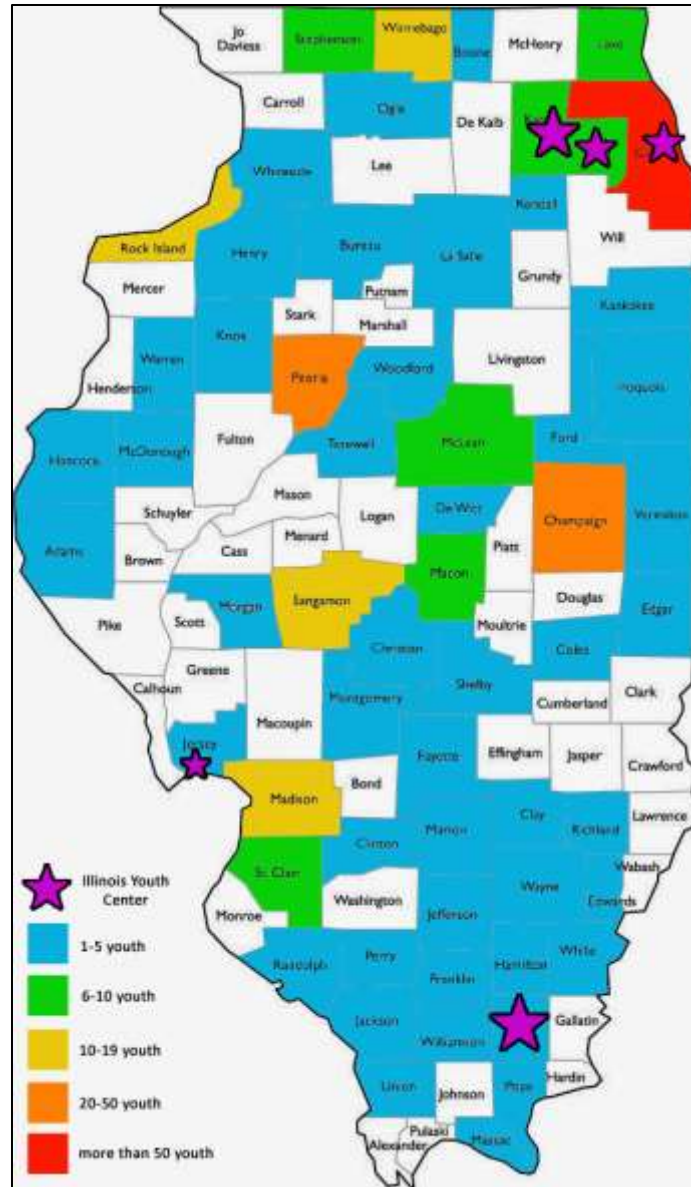
The average age was 17.5. In Illinois, the minimum age at which a youth can be placed in IDJJ custody is 13. Thanks to efforts to reduce both IDJJ’s population in general and the number of younger youth committed to IDJJ custody specifically, the number of youth committed to IYCs at ages 13 and 14 has fallen from 146 during the [2010 fiscal year](#) to 15 during the [2021 fiscal year](#). This is a dramatic improvement, although JHA and others continue to argue that IDJJ is not an appropriate placement for anyone aged 13 or 14. IDJJ’s quarterly and monthly public reporting does not break down the number of youth 16 and under by age.



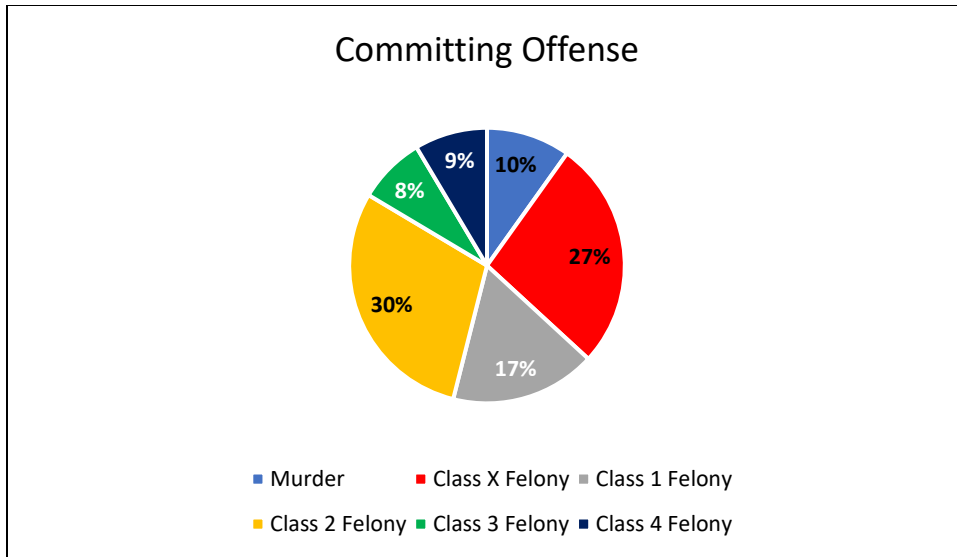
While commitments from Cook County once dominated IDJJ's population—788 youth were committed to IDJJ from Cook County during the [2010 fiscal year](#)—by April 2023 they accounted for only 27, or 18%, of the youth incarcerated in all IYCs. The collar counties accounted for an additional six youth. On the other hand, there were 69 youth from Central Illinois in IDJJ custody (45% of IDJJ's population). 60 total youth were committed to IDJJ from Cook County during the [2021 fiscal year](#), compared to 54 combined from Champaign and Peoria Counties. Similarly, Winnebago County, home to Rockford, once committed more youth to IDJJ by far than any county besides Cook—141 during the 2010 fiscal year. In 2021, both Peoria and Champaign Counties committed more youth to IDJJ, 27 each, than Winnebago, 17.

Notably, three of IDJJ's youth centers are located in the Chicago metropolitan area: St. Charles, Chicago, and Warrenville, the latter being the only IYC housing female youth. One youth center, Pere Marquette, is located about an hour north of St. Louis on the Mississippi River, and one, Harrisburg, is located on the southeastern edge of the state, less than 25 miles from the Kentucky border. Currently, IDJJ has no facilities housing youth in Central Illinois. Harrisburg, IDJJ's southern intake center, processes youth from as far north as Peoria. 61% of IDJJ's capacity is located in Cook and the Collar Counties while only 34% of youth were committed to IDJJ from counties in Northern Illinois in March 2023. 35% of IDJJ's capacity is located in Southern Illinois at Harrisburg, while Southern Illinois admissions accounted for only 15% of IDJJ's youth. Despite 51% of youth in IDJJ custody being committed from counties in Central Illinois, IDJJ had no ability to house youth anywhere in the region.

In March 2023, in addition to the 33 youth from Cook and the collar counties, there were 30 youth from Northern Illinois, 69 youth from Central Illinois, eight youth from Southern Illinois, and 12 youth from Metro-East incarcerated in IDJJ. The following map shows the distribution of counties that committed youth to IDJJ custody during the 2021 fiscal year compared to the locations of the IYCs. The size of each IYC corresponds to the size of its marker on the map.

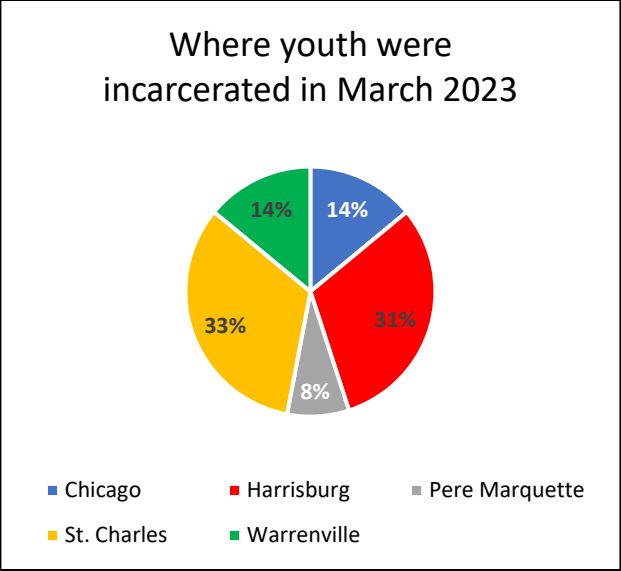
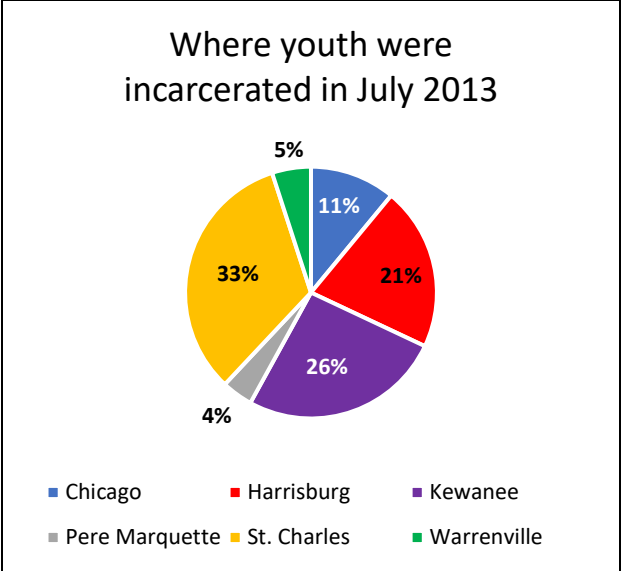


The vast majority of youth incarcerated in IYCs were committed for a Class X, 1, or 2 felony. This is a change and indicator of reform from several years ago, when IDJJ held many youth committed for lower-level offenses. Of the youth incarcerated in IDJJ youth centers in March 2023, 15 were committed for murder, 41 were committed for a Class X felony, 26 were committed for a Class 1 felony, 45 were committed for a Class 2 felony, 12 for a Class 3 felony, and 13 for a Class 4 felony. 74% (113) of youth were committed to IDJJ by juvenile courts while 26% (39) were serving adult sentences.



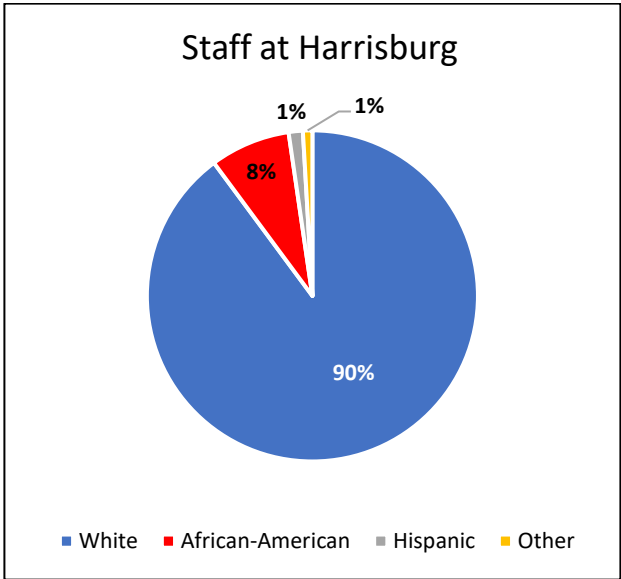
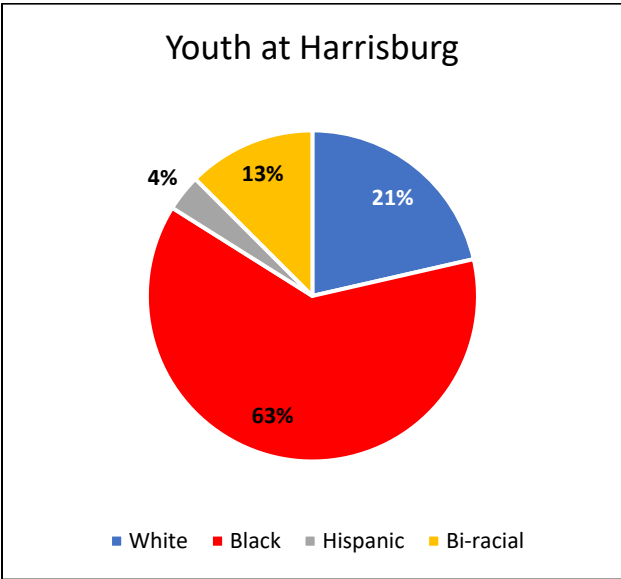
The proportion of youth committed to IDJJ for minor offenses has fallen in the past twelve years. During the 2010 fiscal year, 921 youth (43% of those committed to IDJJ custody) were there for a Class 3 felony or less serious offense. 173 youth were being held for a misdemeanor. In comparison, during the 2021 fiscal year, 71 youth (22% of youth committed to IDJJ) were committed for a Class 3 or Class 4 felony. Youth have not been committed to IDJJ for misdemeanors since 2016.

In [July 2013](#), the earliest month for which data exists on IDJJ’s website, the three largest IYCs were St. Charles, Kewanee, and Harrisburg. 80% of the more than 800 youth incarcerated in IDJJ were housed in one of these three facilities. In March 2023, Harrisburg and St. Charles each accounted for about a third of youth in IDJJ custody, while 36% of youth were housed at one of IDJJ’s three smaller facilities. Despite all IYCs housing a larger percentage of youth than they did in 2013, their total population has decreased more than fivefold, from 873 to 154.

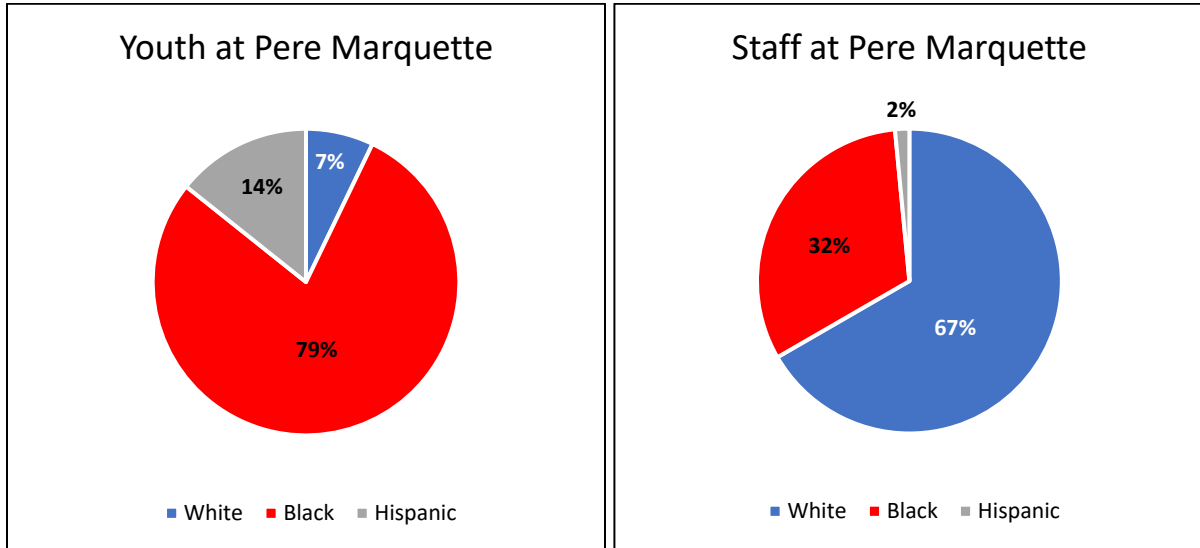


Racial Disparities Between Youth and Staff

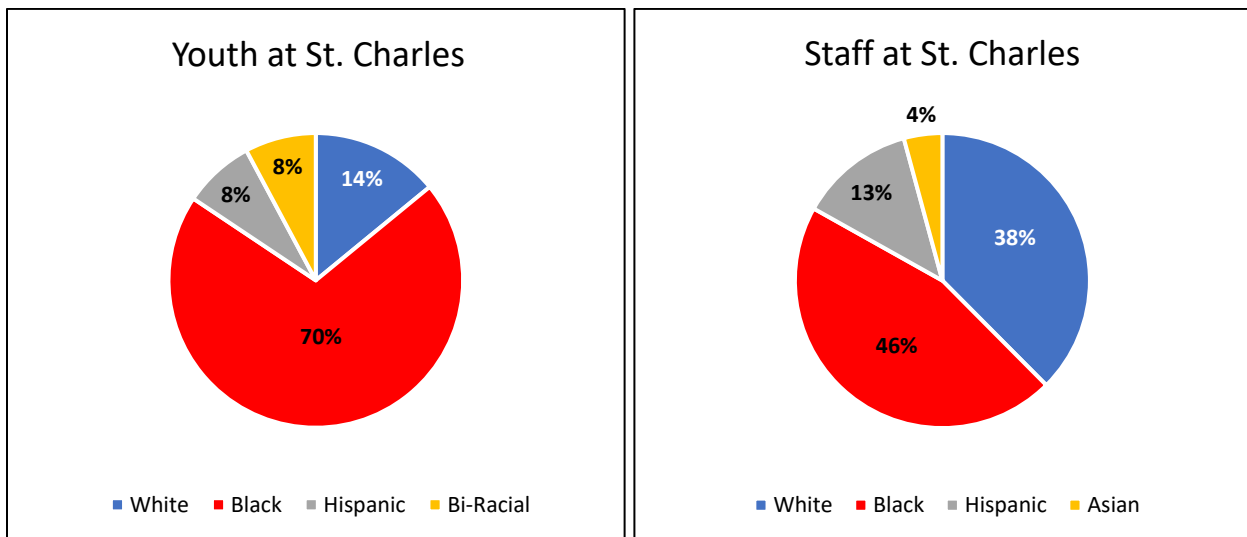
At the time of JHA’s 2022 Harrisburg visit, documents provided to JHA by IDJJ indicated that 63% of youth at Harrisburg were Black, 21% were White, 4% were Hispanic, and 13% were biracial. In comparison, 90% of staff at Harrisburg were White. The population of Saline County, where Harrisburg is located, is similarly 92% White. Harrisburg has the largest racial disparity between youth and staff in IDJJ.



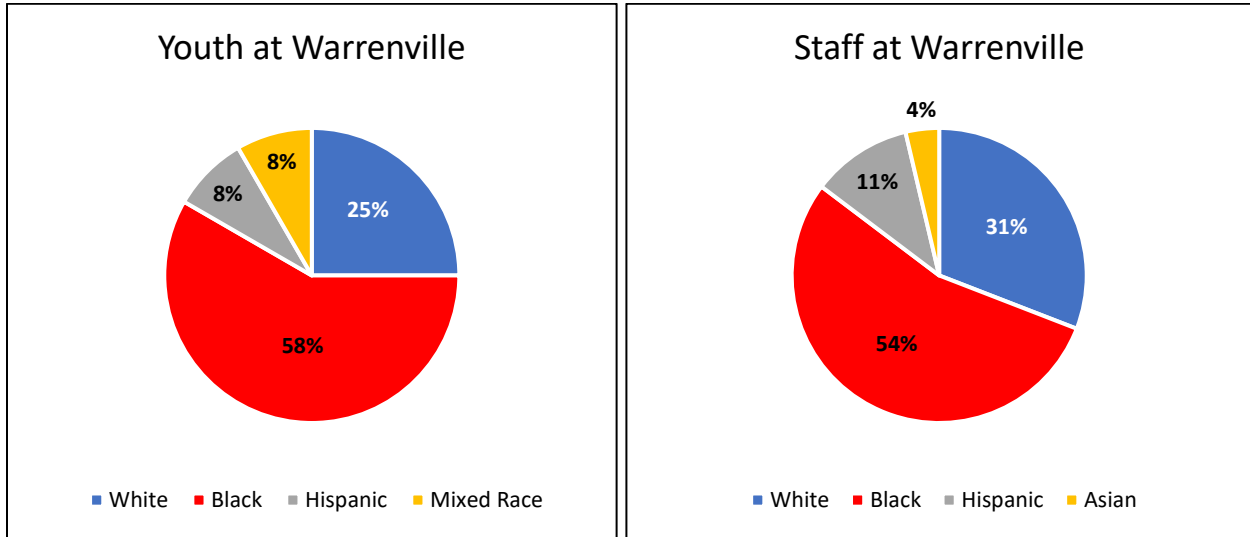
According to data provided by IDJJ in April 2022, prior to the Pere Marquette visit, 67% of staff at Pere Marquette were White, 32% were Black, and 2% were Hispanic. In comparison, 79% of youth were Black.



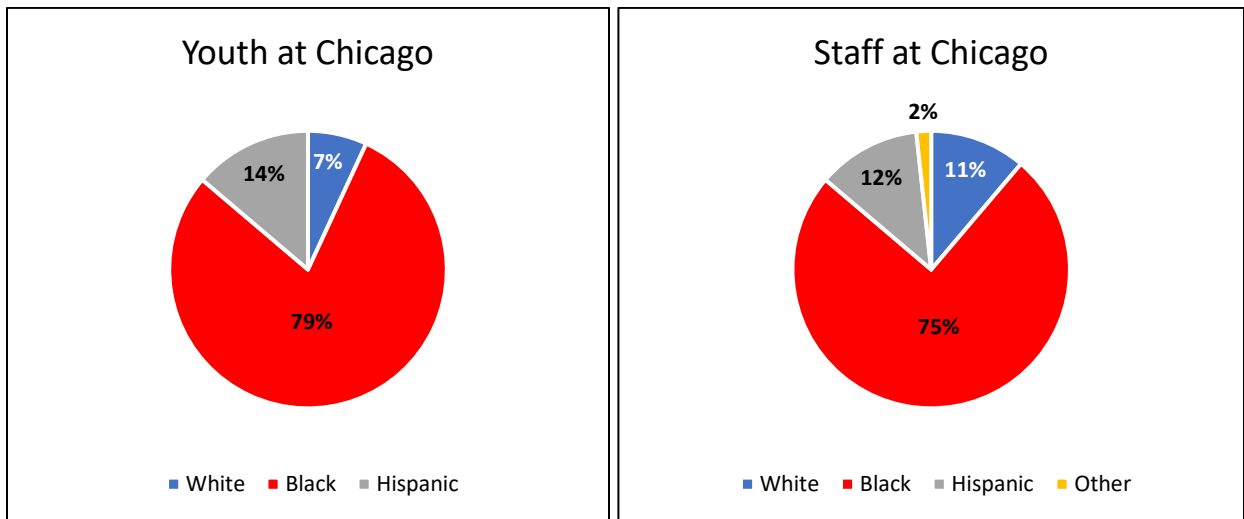
Data provided by IDJJ in advance of the March 2022 visit to St. Charles indicated that 38% of staff there were White, 46% were Black, 13% were Hispanic, and 4% were Asian. In comparison, 70% youth were Black.



Data provided by IDJJ in October 2021 indicated that 31% of staff at Warrenville were White, 51% were Black, 11% were Hispanic, and 4% were Asian. In comparison, 58% of youth were Black.



Data provided by IDJJ in November 2021 indicated that 11% of staff at Chicago were White, 75% were Black, 12% were Hispanic, and 2% identified as another race or ethnicity. In comparison, 79% of youth were Black.



IYC-Chicago

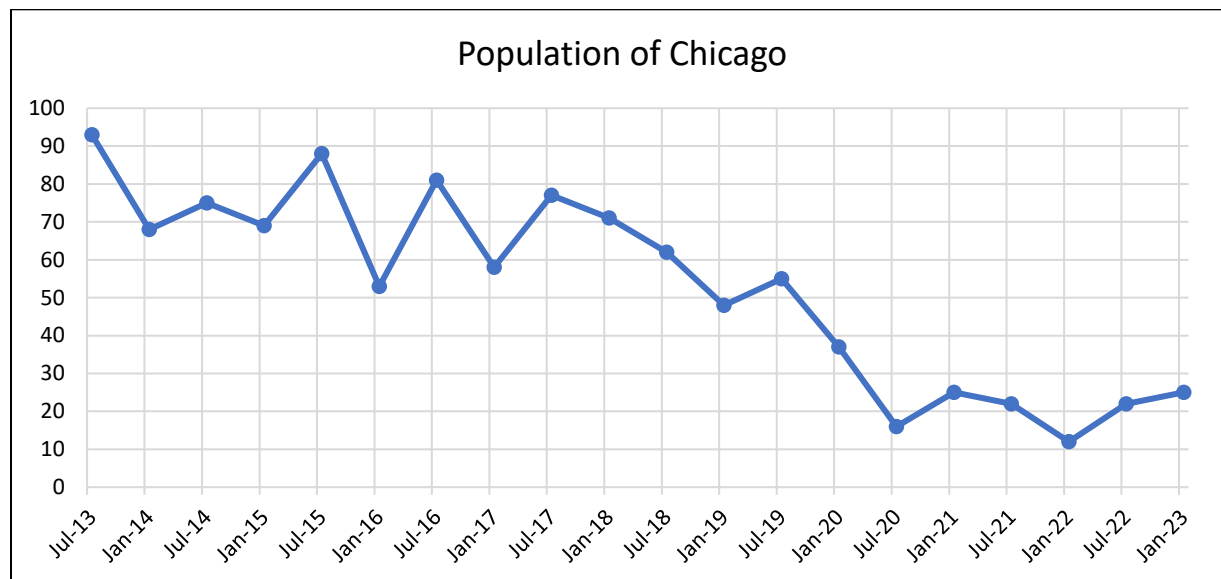
IYC-Chicago is located in the City of Chicago about three miles west of the loop, between East Garfield Park and West Loop neighborhoods. As of March 2023, it had a population of 22 youth and was at 17% of its maximum double-bunking capacity of 130 and 30% of its single-bunking capacity of 73. For fiscal year 2023, Chicago's operating budget was \$13,191,800, averaging nearly \$490,000 per youth.

Key Takeaways

1. IYC Chicago's plumbing affects water temperature on the units in a way that necessitates bringing some youth to shower on other units. This causes the youth on those other units to spend more time confined to their cells while the other youth are using showers.
2. Issues with the appropriateness of Chicago's physical plant, which cannot be fixed because the building is leased, have deprived youth of programming opportunities.
3. Because this facility was retrofitted as a youth center, it is less durable than required and is not set up to allow for outdoor recreation.
4. Youth at Chicago benefited from the individualized attention they received at school and had the option to attend college online after graduating high school.
5. Chicago's co-occurring disorders program appeared to be a step forward for substance use treatment within IDJJ but was only available to youth from Cook County.
6. Chicago's proximity to field trip opportunities and volunteer organizations in the city of Chicago benefited youth.
7. Facility staff had shown initiative in creating programming opportunities for youth. However, even brief temporary absences of key staff members affected youth's access to these opportunities.

Population

In the first half of the 2010s, about 10% of youth incarcerated in IDJJ facilities were housed at Chicago. The population fluctuated between roughly 65 and 90. Since the closure of Kewanee in 2016, Chicago has housed about 20% of youth in IDJJ custody, although its population has decreased along with IDJJ's population. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Chicago's population has hovered around 20 youth.



JHA's most recent [monitoring report](#) for Chicago was released in 2018. At the time, Chicago had a population of 67, or 52% of its maximum capacity. The major issues JHA noted at the time included youth only attending school for half the day because of a teacher shortage; a lengthy waitlist for substance use programming, which meant some youth were being kept past their projected release date to complete the program; a plumbing issue resulting in the shower water on one unit being very cold; and a physical plant that only allowed for limited outdoor activity and contained no greenspace.

JHA's most recent visits to Chicago were in November 2021 and July 2022. At the time of JHA's 2022 monitoring visit, Chicago's population was 26, less than 40% of the facility's 2018 population. Administrators reported that a population in the mid-twenties was ideal. Chicago reportedly had two social worker vacancies and a shortage of nurses. While JHA is aware that staffing is a nationwide issue, staffing levels nonetheless impact the quality of life and the

opportunities offered to youth living in IYCs, and these impacts will be discussed in this report. The smaller population had eased some of the problems previously encountered at the facility. However, many issues remained.

Physical Plant



Chicago is a warehouse that has been converted to a youth center by IDJJ. Administrators at IDJJ have been open about their desire to move IYC-Chicago to a different location because of the current physical plant's significant shortcomings. Because IDJJ leases this building, the Agency does not have control over some aspects of the physical plant. The facility has a longstanding issue with water being hot in some housing wings and cold in others. Administrators have told JHA for years that this is a plumbing issue only the building's landlord can fix. JHA reported on cold shower water in C Wing in in our [2018 monitoring report](#).

During the 2022 visit, an administrator reported that they were planning to start taking youth on C Wing (the wing with the coldest water) to shower on another unit, but this was logistically difficult because some youth on C Wing could not mix with some youth on other units. An administrator explained that youth from C Wing needed to be brought to shower one at a time while youth living on the unit with the shower were in their cells. This solution may not have

been possible with the larger population Chicago had in 2018, and JHA was pleased to hear that administrators had a solution in the works for this longstanding issue. However, it is still less than ideal and speaks to the limitations of using this particular facility that IDJJ does not have full access to control or renovate.

JHA heard from youth that they did not have enough time outside. This was a concern that JHA visitors heard repeatedly from youth at the facility during both our 2021 and 2022 monitoring visits. While other IYCs have green space and housing units in separate buildings that necessitate going outside daily to walk to dietary and programs, the majority of Chicago's space is in one building with the only area for outside recreation being a sally port with a basketball hoop. JHA has been documenting this issue at least since our monitoring report on Chicago [in 2010](#). During the 2021 visit, which took place in November, several youth told JHA visitors that they had not been outside since September. [Illinois law](#) dictates that for youth confined in county juvenile detention facilities, "vigorous physical activity, both indoor and out, shall be part of the daily schedule." It also states that outdoor recreation space in county juvenile detention centers "must provide at least 200 square feet of recreation space per youth with a minimum size of 3,000 square feet." **Similar standards should be adopted for IYCs in recognition of youth's need for exercise and fresh air.**

During the 2022 monitoring visit, which was in July, most youth told visitors that they had been outside or had the opportunity to go outside within the past week. While a smaller population might mean that each youth gets more time in the sally port, ultimately the lack of outdoor space is a problem inherent with Chicago's physical plant that will continue to be a problem as long as any youth are incarcerated there.

All of Chicago's housing units showed signs of disrepair. Namely, they all had areas of damaged drywall that was patched with plywood. Administrators explained that because Chicago is located in a converted warehouse that was not designed for the purpose it is being used for, the facility is less durable than it needs to be. Youth are able to punch or kick holes in the wall with relative ease. At the time of the 2021 visit, most holes were patched with unpainted plywood. By the 2022 visit, many of the plywood patches had been painted. On one housing unit, a mural of a dragon was in progress, covering up a large plywood patch. Administrators explained that they hoped covering the patched-up walls with art would deter youth from breaking through them again. An administrator told JHA visitors during the 2022 visit about an

incident during which a youth kicked a hole all the way through a wall between an upstairs hallway and the gym, climbed through the hole, and dropped down onto the gym floor one story below. Reportedly the youth was not seriously injured, but JHA notes that this shows that the deficits of Chicago's physical plant are not only uncomfortable and unpleasant for youth, but can in some situations pose real danger.

The quality of Chicago's physical plant is a known issue for IDJJ. It was acknowledged on both visits, and beginning the search for a new site was identified in the [2021 Annual Report](#) as something the Department had undertaken that year. While JHA is pleased that IDJJ had started the process, at the time of this report's publication in spring 2023, no new site had been publicly announced. **JHA encourages IDJJ to make the location of this new site a priority.**

Education

According to administrators, youth were in school all day every day except for Wednesdays, when school was scheduled for a half-day. An administrator stated that school cancellations were rare and only occurred if a security issue pulled away staff needed to escort youth to the school. [IDJJ's public reporting](#) reflects that no full school days were cancelled at Chicago between November 2021 and August 2022. During the July 2022 visit, one youth reported to JHA that he did his work on a computer with assistance from the teachers, and that he could get help when he asked for it. Another youth spoke very highly of his math teachers. However, a third youth told a JHA visitor that he could not access one-on-one tutoring even though he needed it and did not feel like he was learning. Administrators reported to JHA visitors that Chicago has not seen any fighting or property destruction at school in several years.

In February 2023, Chicago had a special education student-to-teacher ratio of eight. The *R.J.* consent decree requires a ratio of six special education students to a teacher. IDJJ's public reporting indicates that this had been the case since January 2022, except for in December 2022, when the ratio briefly dropped to six.

JHA was informed by administrators during the 2022 visit that school attendance had been above 90% in the weeks before, and it was reportedly 100% on the day of the visit.

Administrators were also proud to report that four youth had graduated from high school in the preceding two months. IDJJ's monthly reporting showed that 11 youth had earned their high

school diplomas at Chicago in 2022. In general, youth seemed to be benefiting from the individualized attention which the smaller population allowed.

During JHA's prior November 2021 visit, visitors spoke with a staff member in the school who reported that the procurement process was seriously hindering the facility's ability to get new supplies for students. Reportedly, textbooks were out of date and they had been waiting three years for new ones. The staff member also reported that the school had to rely on donations for supplemental classroom materials and that they had resorted to purchasing posters for the classroom with their own money. Additionally, the staff member reported that the computers in the classrooms were old and so slow that they were difficult for students to use, and that new ones had been donated but had been sitting in the basement for years waiting to have the necessary programming installed. IDJJ administrators reported in February 2023 that new computer had been installed in Chicago's school, and at the schools at all four other IYCs.

During JHA's July 2022 visit, we were shown Chicago's resource room, which is reportedly used during the school day by youth with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and for afterschool programming. JHA was shown the computers that youth used for [Language! Live](#), a literacy program for youth in middle and high school who struggle with reading, and paintings of toucans and drawings of sneaker designs done by youth as part of an after-school art program.

Chicago offers a program through the City Colleges of Chicago where youth who have graduated from high school can attend virtual college classes. The classes are intensive six-credit, four-week programs, and youth take one class at a time. At the time of the 2022 visit, one youth at Chicago was enrolled in the program. Administrators explained that the program had started with four youth, but that one had withdrawn and two had been released. JHA visitors saw the remaining student, who was working on an essay for a writing class with a [Literacy Volunteers of Illinois](#) tutor. This youth was working at a table set up in an old confinement unit that administrators reported had been repurposed into a study space for graduates. IDJJ administrators reported that laptops had been purchased for use by youth enrolled in online college courses in 2021.

Chicago, along with three other IYCs also offered a class with Northwestern University through a partnership with its [Prison Education Program](#). The program began with a non-credit-bearing course on the history of the criminal legal system during the Winter 2020-21 semester. During

JHA's 2021 visit, a credit-bearing creative writing class was being offered. During the 2022 visit, the class was on public speaking. Youth involved in this program at the time of the 2022 visit reportedly attended class once a week at either IYC-Warrenville or on Northwestern's campus. However, JHA did not speak with youth involved in the program during either visit to Chicago.

IDJJ administrators reported in 2023 that they had partnered with Northwestern to offer a mentoring program where graduates at Chicago, St. Charles, and Warrenville would meet weekly with Northwestern students to work on college readiness. Additionally, administrators reported that Northwestern would continue to offer one credit-bearing class per year to high school graduates at the three northern facilities, with the next set to start in June 2023, and they hoped to expand the program in the future.

Chicago houses a barbering program through [Larry's Barber College](#). JHA visitors were shown the classroom, which was equipped with barber chairs and hair-washing sinks during the 2021 visit. [Reportedly](#), students in the program work towards completing the required 1,500 hours of instruction and clinicals and can sit for the state licensure exam. Youth who are in the barbering program provide barber services to other youth in the facility and have been transported to other IYCs to give haircuts when those IYCs did not have their own barbers. IDJJ administrators reported the agency was exploring partnerships with [Curt's Café](#) to offer a job training internship and with [Greater West Town Community Development Project](#) to offer a Shipping & Receiving certification program.

Mental Health

The co-occurring disorders program, established at Chicago in 2021 in partnership with [Youth Outreach Services](#), is the successor to Chicago's former substance use treatment program, which is still in place at other IYCs. The program is designed for youth with both mental health and substance use disorders who are returning to Cook County after release. Mental health staff explained during JHA's 2022 visit that this program allowed youth to work with the same therapist for both substance use disorders and other mental health issues, where previously youth had worked with two different mental health staff if they received treatment for both issues. This reportedly allowed for a more holistic treatment approach as well as better continuity of care. Mental health staff told JHA visitors that youth in this program have group sessions once or twice a day and individual sessions once a week. Youth reportedly work with a

therapist at Chicago and with a community-based provider whom the youth will continue to work with after release.

According to [IDJJ's 2021 annual report](#), of the 52 youth who participated in the co-occurring disorders program during its first year, 70% continued treatment after release compared to 30% of youth who completed “traditional treatment approaches.” The high rate of continued treatment for youth released from Chicago demonstrates the benefit of housing youth in or near the communities they will return to, where they can access resources that will continue to be available to them after release.

At the time of JHA's 2022 visit, there were seven youth in the program. During our visit to the program housing wing, JHA visitors observed youth sharing timelines of the important events in their lives. A youth told a JHA visitor that he thought the program was helping because the regular group sessions allowed them to “get things off [their] chests” instead of letting negative feelings fester. The program also included a journaling component where youth wrote back and forth with their therapist. Mental health staff reported that this had been a big success and was a well-liked part of the program.

While substance use treatment programs in IDJJ's facilities were once dominated by youth who had a history of marijuana use, staff on Chicago's co-occurring disorders unit told JHA visitors that they were seeing less marijuana use than they had in the past. Reportedly, most of the youth in the program had used pills, such as Xanax or Percocet, and synthetics. Staff also reported that many of the youth in the program had engaged in pill-mixing. Data from [July 2022](#), the month of the visit, indicates that 68% of the 41 youth engaged in substance use programming within IDJJ reported that they primarily used marijuana, 10% reported that they primarily used alcohol, and 20% reported that they primarily used other drugs.

Outside the co-occurring disorders program, administrators reported that all youth met one-on-one with a mental health professional (MHP) once a week. This stands in stark contrast to JHA's 2018 visit, when only about 20% of youth were meeting with a MHP weekly and 15% did not have regular appointments at all. The previous practice was in accordance with IDJJ's mental health level system, which assigns youth a “level” based on their need: youth at Level 1 have minimal need and are entitled to 90 minutes of mental health services per month, and youth at Level 2 have moderate need and are entitled to weekly mental health services.

However, by 2022, Chicago’s small population had allowed it to ensure that each youth received weekly individualized care regardless of level.

The mental health monitors appointed in the *R.J.* case noted in their October 2022 report that lack of space for individual and group sessions was an ongoing issue but that there were plans for a capital development project that would address this issue. While JHA supports IDJJ’s prioritization of mental health space, we are concerned about spending considerable resources on physical plant improvements that will not wholly address the issues at the leased Chicago facility while IDJJ is actively looking to transform use of facilities based on current population needs.

Recreational Programming

Chicago benefits from its location in the city through both proximity to volunteer groups and access to field trip opportunities. Administrators told JHA visitors during the 2022 visit that recent field trips included seeing a play at Steppenwolf Theater, taking an electric boat down the Chicago River, and doing teamwork exercises at Lincoln Marsh. According to administrators, there was a field trip to a White Sox game scheduled for the weekend after our visit. One youth, who told a JHA visitor that he had been at Chicago for two weeks, spoke positively about the Steppenwolf field trip and was impressed that he had gotten to go on a field trip so soon after arriving.

Youth must be on A Grade or Honors, the top two levels of IDJJ’s four-level behavioral modification system, and be vaccinated for COVID-19 to be eligible for field trips. Not every eligible youth attends every field trip because some youth who do not get along cannot go on trips together. According to administrators, some field trips are also part of specific programs—for example, there was a trip to Mod Pizza to work the pizza ovens for youth in the culinary arts program. These trips were only opened to youth who were not enrolled in the relevant program if there were leftover spots. Administrators reported that youth were able to have clothing from home to wear on field trips and on “special occasions.” However, some had youth reportedly informed OIJO that they were required to wear their uniforms while on field trips.

Several youth on one housing unit expressed concerns about not being able to go on field trips, but JHA was not able to confirm what level the youth were on or whether they were vaccinated.

A youth on a different wing told a JHA visitor that he felt it was unfair to require youth to attain A Level to go on field trips and that they should be open to anyone who was not considered an escape risk.

Chicago also offers several programs in the facility run by a mixture of volunteers and staff, such as [art therapy](#), a teen pregnancy prevention program, a civic education program, a twice-a-week [dog training program](#), a music workshop, a [mentorship program](#) run by previously incarcerated youth, [Shakespeare Behind Bars](#), and chess and backgammon clubs. One of the therapists had started a gardening and environmental club where youth could raise plants in their cells. Staff reported that during summer 2021, youth had planted and taken care of a small outdoor vegetable garden, but they had not had the garden in 2022 because the staff member who ran the program was on vacation during part of the summer and would therefore not be able to maintain it. JHA was impressed with the program but notes how the temporary absence of one staff member impacted youth's ability to participate. Additionally, while JHA was pleased to hear that youth were able to raise their own plants, a potted plant in a cell is not an adequate substitute for time spent outdoors.

Administrators reported that Chicago also held special events, such as Juneteenth and Fourth of July barbeques in the sally port—which, as mentioned above, is a walled-in paved area with a basketball hoop in it that functions as Chicago's only outdoor space—and monthly “Cultural Mondays” where the facility ordered in food and hosted entertainment representative of other countries. These events were generally hosted by a staff member who was from or had recently visited the subject country. According to an administrator, they had featured countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Jamaica, Japan, and Italy.

Reportedly, the only regularly offered religious activity Chicago had at the time of the 2022 visit was a Christian Bible study. Administrators indicated that they were working on making connections to provide regular programming for youth of other religions, and told JHA visitors that a group of youth had fasted for Ramadan in the facility and they had been able to bring in an Imam to hold a service for Eid al-Fitr. JHA notes that a facility located in the City of Chicago being unable to provide a regular religious service for its Muslim youth demonstrates an inadequacy in religious programming even in the IYC likely best located to provide services.

Administrators at Chicago told JHA that they had looked into starting a dog training program with a live-in dog, like the program that existed at Warrenville from 2017 to 2021. However, they found that Chicago's lack of outdoor space was prohibitive. The dog program was a very positive experience for youth who participated at Warrenville, and JHA was sorry to hear that Chicago's physical plant had prevented youth there from having a similar opportunity.

Like many other IYCs, Chicago had a Teen Center—a room with video games and arcade games—that youth can use once they attain a certain behavioral level. Chicago's Teen Center was equipped with an air hockey table, a basketball arcade game, a flatscreen TV, video games, board games, a radio, and a popcorn machine. Unsurprisingly due to Chicago's limited amount of space, the teen center was smaller than those at St. Charles and Harrisburg. It was also located in an adjacent building to which youth must be escorted through the facility's parking lot. An administrator reported that because youth had to be walked through the parking lot, moving them to the Teen Center required extra security staff, and because of that, the Teen Center was rarely used.

Even with a population of 25, Chicago was not well enough staffed to allow youth to take advantage of all the opportunities and incentives designed to be available at this facility. This speaks to more than just a staffing issue. It speaks to a physical plant that is uniquely unsuited for the purpose IDJJ needs it to full.

IYC-Harrisburg

IYC-Harrisburg is located in Harrisburg, Illinois, about 25 miles west of the Kentucky border. It is the southern reception center for male youth in IDJJ and does intake for youth from as far north as Peoria. As of March 2023, it had a population of 48, which is 15% of its maximum capacity of 319 and 17% of its single-bunking capacity of 276. In fiscal year 2023, Harrisburg's [operating budget](#) is \$21,440,700, averaging to nearly \$400,000 per youth.

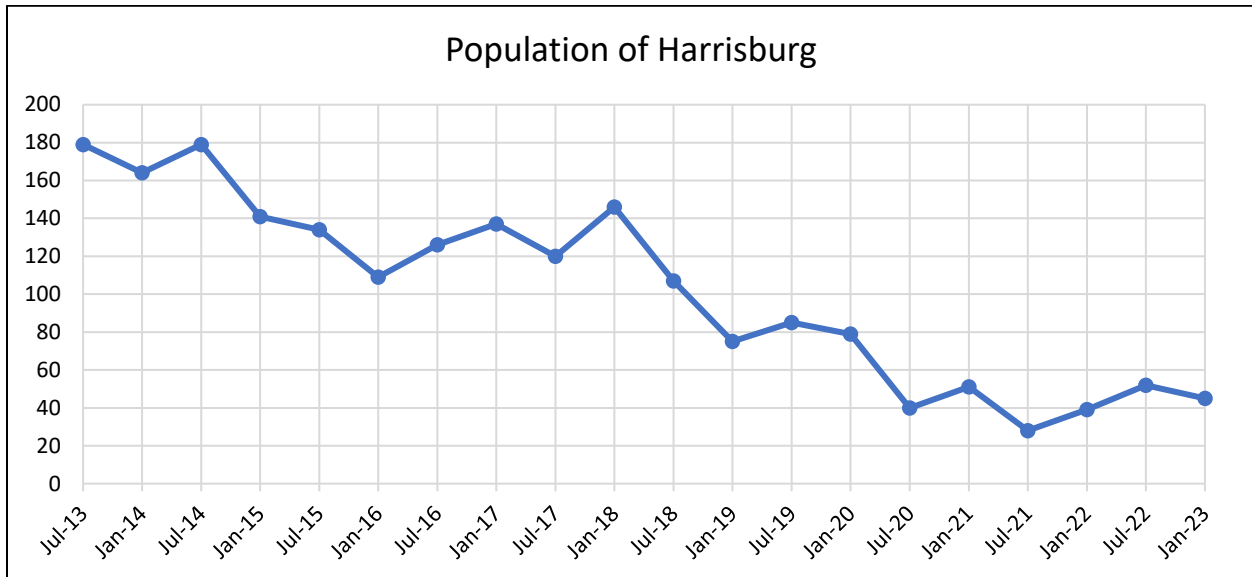
Key Takeaways: IYC-Harrisburg

1. Even with a population less than half the size it was in 2018, Harrisburg continues to struggle with violence at higher rates than other IYCs.
2. Most of the youth incarcerated at Harrisburg are far from their homes in central Illinois, in a community that is not invested in their rehabilitation.
3. Youth reported abuse from staff, including intentional provocation and violence at Harrisburg.
4. Youth at Harrisburg consistently report that staff is racist towards Black youth.
5. Despite a slew of expensive, recent maintenance projects, Harrisburg's physical plant had many unaddressed needs.
6. Students at Harrisburg reported needing more help than they were getting and wanting to spend less time on online instruction. Harrisburg is not meeting the special education student-to-teacher ratio outlined in the R.J. consent decree.
7. Youth reported that students were removed from school for the day for small offenses, like talking out of turn or being disrespectful, further hindering youth's education.
8. While IDJJ's movement towards allowing youth to complete required treatment in the community is a positive, reliance on Harrisburg to provide juvenile sex offender (JSO) for all male youth and substance use treatment for downstate youth, which is counterintuitive to IDJJ's transformation plan to move away from large, prison-like youth centers.
9. Harrisburg's Honors program was popular among youth, but the inconsistency in Honors offerings agencywide incentivized youth to spend more time at a facility that was otherwise not a good fit for them.

Population

In the first half of the 2010s, Harrisburg housed 20% to 25% of the youth in IDJJ custody at any one time—between roughly 140 and 180 youth. Since IYC-Kewanee's closure, about a third of

youth incarcerated in IDJJ have been housed at Harrisburg. However, like other IYCs, its population has fallen significantly since 2018. Since March 2020, Harrisburg's population has generally hovered between 30 and 55 youth.



JHA's last visit to Harrisburg prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was in [2018](#). At the time, Harrisburg had a population of 136, 48% of its maximum capacity. The major issues JHA noted at the time included staff filing new criminal charges against youth for behavioral issues that should have been handled in-house as IDJJ disciplinary issues, leading to lengthy sentences in adult prisons for some youth; reports of physically abusive treatment by staff; over-prescription of antipsychotics to youth with mental health issues for which they had no proven efficacy; and the difficulty in switching a youth to a new therapist if they did not work well with the one assigned to their housing unit.

JHA's most recent visits to Harrisburg were in [July 2021](#) and August 2022. Administrators reported that the population on the day of the 2022 visit was 54, or 40% of the facility's 2018 population. Administrators reported at the time of the 2022 visit that most youth at the facility were between the ages of 15 and 18. According to documents provided by IDJJ at that time, 22% had been convicted of adult felonies.

Data published by IDJJ reflects that there was a spike in youth fights at Harrisburg, from an average of five per month [in 2021](#) to an average of 17 per month [in 2022](#). Similarly, the number

of youth-on-youth assaults spiked from an average of three per month in 2021 to an average of 12 per month in 2022. In May and June 2022, Harrisburg reported both more fights and more youth-on-youth assaults than it had reported in a single month since before March 2020, despite having had populations of a similar size at other points in 2020 and 2021. The health and safety monitor appointed in the *R.J.* case noted that while youth violence had increased relative to the size of the population at four of IDJJ's five IYCs in 2022, this was particularly pronounced at Harrisburg, where the rate of fights and assaults between youth increased 150% from 2021 to 2022.

At the time of the 2022 visit, Harrisburg was struggling with fights between youth. A staff member told JHA visitors that fights were common in school, housing units, and outdoor areas, and that there had recently been a ten-person brawl outside between buildings that staff had struggled to break up. The staff member speculated that fights were common because youth were bored and spent all their time with the same people. Staff and youth agreed that a lot of fights were over the phones.

Harrisburg's location is also a drawback. While Harrisburg is located near the southern tip of Illinois, the vast majority of youth at Harrisburg are not from Southern Illinois. According to data provided to JHA by IDJJ in August 2022, only seven of the 56 youth incarcerated there at the time, or 13% of the population, were from counties south of East St. Louis. A total of 19 youth, or 34% of the population, were from counties south of Springfield. In comparison, 12 youth, which represents nearly a quarter of Harrisburg's population, were from Peoria and Champaign Counties alone. Peoria and Champaign are both more than 200 miles north of Harrisburg and are closer to all four of IDJJ's other facilities. While this problem is particularly pronounced for Central Illinois youth incarcerated at Harrisburg, it is inherent to any system where youth from all over the state are incarcerated in a small number of large, prison-like facilities with an even smaller number of intake centers. Such a system necessitates sending some youth far away from their communities.

Additionally, IDJJ administrators reported that the community in which Harrisburg is located is not supportive of IDJJ's increased focus on rehabilitation over punishment

and detailed two instances in which facility and agency administrators had been threatened with legal action for merely taking youth on outings.

While JHA was pleased to see that IDJJ was sending fewer youth from Cook County to Harrisburg—in August 2022, there were reportedly no youth from Cook County incarcerated there—a problem remains with IDJJ sending Black youth from urban areas in the northern half of the state to a facility located far from home in an overwhelmingly White community that does not support their rehabilitation, with an overwhelmingly White staff that is reportedly racist towards them.

Additionally, Harrisburg is the only IYC that offers Juvenile Sex Offender (JSO) treatment for male youth, so all male youth who are required to complete that program must be incarcerated at Harrisburg for the necessary period of time, regardless of where they are from, where their support system is located, or the home community they will return to.

Staff

While JHA heard few complaints about staff during our 2021 visit to Harrisburg, a group of Black youth who spoke with JHA visitors during the 2022 visit reported feeling like staff tried to “*finesse*” them out of out-of-cell time by locking them in their rooms during shift change. IDJJ administrators confirmed that this was not agency policy and reported that the matter had been addressed on multiple occasions, including through corrective action with staff. Youth stated that staff lied, used their authority against them, cursed at them, and ticketed them when they reacted. Another Black youth who said that he had carried out a staff assault similarly reported feeling like he had been provoked. JHA visitors also heard from a White youth who was then incarcerated at a different IYC that he had been physically beaten by a group of security staff at Harrisburg staff in retaliation for assaulting a correctional officer in 2020, which had been reported to OIJO and investigated. A youth who spoke with JHA at Harrisburg in 2022 said of staff, “*You get your ass beat down here.*”

Harrisburg is the only IYC that used handcuffs more times per month on average in 2022 than in 2019 despite a dramatic 40% drop in population. [In 2019](#), handcuffs were used an average of six times per month on a population averaging 83 youth. [In 2022](#), handcuffs were used an

average of 12 times a month on a population averaging 52 youth, meaning that an individual youth at Harrisburg was more likely to be handcuffed in 2022 than in 2019.

OIJO detailed in its [2021 Annual Report](#) youth concerns about Harrisburg staff using racist language towards Black youth, sometimes with the intention of provoking them, and disparities in the way Performance-based Standards (PbS) points and disciplinary tickets were issued to White youth versus Black youth. Youth also reported to OIJO that Black youth were given less desirable room assignments and did not receive the support that White youth received when they reported that they were being bullied by other youth. The *R.J.* mental health monitors likewise noted in their October 2022 report that youth who were currently and had formerly been incarcerated at Harrisburg consistently reported experiencing racist comments and name-calling from security staff. According to the report, administrators stated that youth who expressed concerns about discriminatory treatment would be transferred if they wanted to be. JHA also continued to hear persistent reports from youth at other IYCs who have transferred from Harrisburg that staff there are racist towards Black youth.

As noted above, according to data provided by IDJJ in February 2023, **Harrisburg has the least diverse staff and the largest disparity between the proportion of Black staff and the proportion of Black youth of the five IYCs. That this issue continues to plague IDJJ demonstrates the need to reduce reliance on large adult-style prisons. IDJJ should instead rely upon outpatient supports or—when indicated by substantial need—small, rehabilitative, treatment-focused residential placements like those proposed by IDJJ in its Transformation Plan.** Any scheme in which youth are sent to one of a few large IYCs located throughout the state will necessarily require some youth to be sent to far-from-home facilities that are a poor fit for them.

Physical Plant



Harrisburg contains a total of twelve housing units. At its August 2022 population of 55, according to [publicly available data](#), that means the facility could be maintaining one housing unit for every 4.6 youth. At the time of the 2021 visit, three housing units were empty and two housed a single youth.

In 2021, Harrisburg had a list of maintenance needs that had not been resolved. An administrator told visitors that they had recently upgraded the generators and installed a chiller system. Two buildings had been reroofed, and administrators reported that one of the housing units had previously been unusable due to leaks. The roof of the gym reportedly still needed repairs. JHA noticed missing ceiling tiles in the gym that had been removed due to water damage from leaks.

The boiler system in one building had been replaced, but administrators told JHA visitors that the other three buildings still had the original boilers from when the facility opened in 1983. According to an administrator, the cooling system was old and in need of replacement, and Harrisburg was also direly in need of computerized temperature control. JHA visitors noticed many cracked or broken windows on housing units and a broken window in the dietary building.

A two-year painter vacancy had left the facility with chipped and peeling paint and graffiti throughout the housing units. IDJJ administrators reported that a new painter was onboarded at Harrisburg in December 2022.

In some instances, the observed graffiti was offensive, and while JHA understands the difficulty of upkeep on all issues, the physical plant issues present provided a negative impression of the areas, appearance of neglect or lack of care about living conditions for youth, and undermined other positive measures. Given the amount of unoccupied space at Harrisburg, it is difficult to understand why conditions in occupied units and rooms could not be improved. Some of these issues were still present during the 2022 visit. JHA visitors also heard reports of a drainage issue in the dietary unit resulting from a collapsed water line. Administrators explained that lack of capital development funding had hindered their ability to make needed repairs. Illinois appropriated about \$1.6 million for Harrisburg capital development projects in [fiscal year 2023](#).

While some serious maintenance issues had been addressed, many others remained unaddressed. **Ultimately, as long as any youth are incarcerated at Harrisburg, the entire physical plant will need to be maintained in order to keep the facility safe and functional. This is an inefficient and expensive undertaking for IDJJ for a facility that has not reached 20% capacity in over two years and has been the focus of many serious issues around problematic treatment that youth experience in state custody.**

Education

Harrisburg reportedly employed seven teachers, including four special education teachers. According to publicly available documents published by IDJJ in [August 2022](#), there were 41 students enrolled in school. The special education student-to-teacher ratio was seven, higher than the six required by the *RJ* consent decree. This is the largest number of students Harrisburg has held at once since March 2020. Staff in the school told JHA visitors in 2021 that the classroom computers, on which students did the majority of their school work, were 2012 models and that students often complained about the computers' slowness. The facility had begun streaming high school graduation ceremonies to allow families to attend, and graduating youth had elected a speaker to read an original poem, excerpted on page 19 of JHA's [2021 monitoring report](#).

Youth told JHA visitors during the 2022 visit that they needed more help in school than they were getting. They also stated that they wanted to have a different teacher for every class and to have “*paper and pencil days,*” both things that would make school feel more like it is in the community. Youth reported that they or classmates had been removed from school for the day for talking and being disrespectful, and one youth mentioned that he had been pulled out of school almost every day for a month. When a youth is removed from school, they are reportedly taken back to the unit and given packet work. Removing youth from school for talking out of turn seems like an overreaction that hinders youth’s access to education.

At the time of our 2021 visit, the facility had requested computers which would be placed in the library, fulfillment of this request is discussed below. The library had reportedly undergone a recent expansion, and staff there said that while they were not part of an interlibrary loan system, they were able to borrow books from nearby libraries if a youth requested a book they did not have. The library hosted a poetry club, a culture club, and a life skills club. Library staff also did a monthly author spotlight and had recently hosted a virtual author event where youth were able to meet with and ask question of the spotlighted author. Library staff spoke of actively soliciting donations and said that they were working on expanding their religious offerings and their LGBT section. Youth reported during the 2022 visit that the library was good but they wanted more urban fiction books.

Harrisburg offered a high school vocational program that included modules on carpentry, masonry, electric, and plumbing. It additionally offered, through Lake Land College, a culinary arts program, a custodial arts program, and a horticulture program to youth with a high school diploma or GED. During the 2021 visit, JHA visitors were able to speak with youth in the horticulture program, who were engaged and seemed to get along well with program staff.

Substance Use Treatment

One of the housing units at Harrisburg is dedicated to substance use treatment. At the time of JHA’s 2022 visit, there were nine youth on the wing. Substance use staff reported that marijuana is still the most common substance reportedly used by youth in community prior to their participation in the program but that they have been seeing an increase in reported usage of meth and fentanyl. According to program staff, although Harrisburg did not have many youth

who were incarcerated for a drug crime, nearly 90% of their youth had a history of substance use.

Youth in the program reported finding it helpful, seemed engaged in programming, and had a rapport with the staff member leading the group JHA observed. Two youth on the substance use treatment unit were completing the program a second time after being released and rearrested. Both youth reported that they had continued to use marijuana after their initial release, but they had not continued using harder drugs.

The substance use treatment program, provided through vendor WestCare, is mandatory for some youth, but administrators reported that youth can finish it in the community if they reach their release date before program completion. This is an improvement from the past, when many youth were held past their projected release dates in order to complete the program. Youth from fifteen counties in the southern part of the state are able to continue meeting with the staff they worked with at Harrisburg to continue substance use treatment after release. Reportedly, at the time of the 2022 visit, Harrisburg substance use staff were working with thirteen youth in the community, including one who was released from Pere Marquette. Administrators explained that the small number of substance use treatment programs and months-long waitlists presented a major barrier to youth from Southern Illinois, and offering continued support from Harrisburg staff had dramatically increased the proportion of youth who continued treatment after release.

Juvenile Sex Offender Treatment

As mentioned above, Harrisburg houses IDJJ's JSO treatment program. At the time of JHA's 2022 visit, there were nine youth in the program, most of whom were housed on one unit. Reportedly, whether youth in JSO treatment are on their own unit or mixed in with other youth depends on how many there are at the facility at any given time. Administrators stated that having a dedicated unit allows opportunities for peer mentoring but that some youth elected not to live on the unit because of the stigma attached. Reportedly, being in JSO treatment does not affect youth eligibility for other programming, and youth in treatment participate in all other programming with youth who are not in the JSO treatment program. Administrators described this as a way to "compartmentalize" JSO treatment and mitigate stigma. Youth in JSO treatment reportedly have treatment plans with their therapists, and treatment primarily consists of

individualized work. Unfortunately, the JSO unit was on quarantine for COVID-19 when JHA visited in 2022, so we were unable to speak with those youth.

Administrators stated that, like the substance use program, they have been focusing on transitioning youth in JSO treatment back into the community. According to administrators, the proportion of youth in JSO treatment who went to a residential treatment program after release was as high as 80%. Youth, seeing the residential program as redundant, sometimes stopped attending in violation of the terms of their release and were then reincarcerated within IDJJ and forced to start over in the JSO program. Reportedly, through the use of telehealth, 50% of youth in JSO treatment are able to avoid a residential placement, and administrators expected the number of youth being released into residential treatment to continue shrinking as the program expanded. Whether or not a youth went to a residential placement or participated in telehealth after release reportedly depended on their level of pathology as well as the availability of community placements.

JHA was pleased to hear that Harrisburg has been focused on improving the transitions of youth who require substance use programming or JSO treatment after release, especially considering the lack of community resources available to youth returning to communities southern Illinois. However, we are also concerned about the availability of these resources being tied to a youth's incarceration, as well as the longevity of resources that rely on Harrisburg given that IDJJ's transformation plan depends on transferring its large, prison-like facilities—including Harrisburg—back to IDOC.

Recreational Programming

Like Chicago, Harrisburg has a Teen Center. When JHA visited in 2021, it was equipped with a pool table, a ping pong table, a PS4, and a second television. A second pool table and a foosball table were pushed off to the side, apparently out of use. During the 2021 visit, Leisure Time Activity (LTA) staff told JHA visitors that their popcorn machine was broken and they were waiting for a new one to be delivered. They were also waiting on delivery of a basketball arcade game. A Level youth were entitled to one hour a week in the Teen Center and Honors youth were entitled to two, but according to staff, this was a minimum and youth were usually given more time than that.

The Honors program at Harrisburg was popular among both youth who spoke to JHA at Harrisburg and youth who spoke to JHA at other facilities who had transferred from Harrisburg. Honors youth lived in their own housing unit. The dayroom had upholstered furniture rather than molded plastic, a refrigerator, a microwave, and a PS4. Youth on the Honors unit had TVs and MP3 players, which they were able to keep in their cells. They had the option to order food from Walmart—which was paid for with money from their trust funds and kept in the fridge on the unit—and had access to an air fryer. The unit was connected to the Teen Center by a door, and staff reported that Honors youth were usually given access to it during the youth’s lunch hour. JHA visitors spoke with youth at other IYCs in 2022 who reported missing the Honors program at Harrisburg, but a youth at Harrisburg told JHA visitors in 2022 that being on Honors Level did not grant enough privileges to be worth the time and effort required to attain it.

In 2021, LTA staff reported that prior to the pandemic, they hosted large-scale events in the Teen Center, but because of COVID restrictions, they were only allowed to have 10 youth in the room at a time. During the 2022 visit, several youth reported not having enough to do. Youth who had previously been incarcerated at St. Charles and Pere Marquette reported that both facilities offered more programming opportunities than Harrisburg. One youth stated that there was *“nothing to do but sleep,”* and another said that the only thing to do was play basketball.

Harrisburg has a large amount of outdoor space, including two basketball courts and a baseball diamond. Administrators reported in 2021 that youth had a recreational period every evening after dinner and alternated between basketball, baseball, and time in the gym. The gym itself was not air conditioned but had multiple industrial fans running. The ceiling had large holes in it, but according to an administrator, the exterior roof was intact.

According to LTA staff in 2021, Harrisburg has not had a chaplain in years, and they had been told they were not going to be getting one. Importantly, chaplains usually serve as volunteer coordinators in Illinois prisons, and LTA staff said they had been doubling as volunteer coordinators. The only religious programming at Harrisburg in 2021 was reported to be a Christian Bible study. While JHA understands that administrators at Harrisburg may be limited in the religious programming they are able to offer based upon what is available geographically near the facility, this demonstrates another problem with youth from urban areas being incarcerated in considerably less diverse communities in other parts of the state.

IYC-Pere Marquette

IYC-Pere Marquette is located in Grafton, Illinois, right along the Mississippi River north of St. Louis. As of March 2023, Pere Marquette had a population of 12 youth, or 30% of its maximum capacity of 40 and 50% of its single-bunking capacity of 24. In fiscal year 2023, Pere Marquette's [operating budget](#) is \$7,722,500, averaging to nearly \$644,000 per youth.

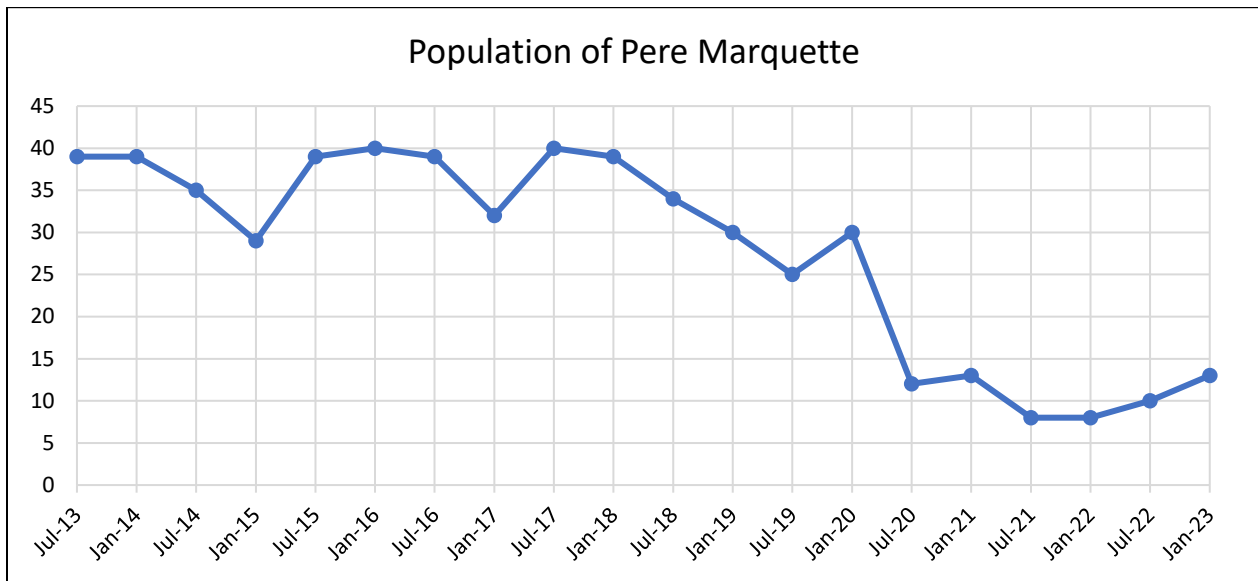
Key Takeaways

1. As with other IYCs, youth seemed to be benefiting from increased individualized attention from staff. The small population enabled one-on-one supervision so youth could cool down in constructive ways after a physical altercation, rather than being confined.
2. Youth convicted of felonies, rather than adjudicated delinquent, have reported to OIJO that staff at Pere Marquette treated them unfairly.
3. Pere Marquette's location forces many youth to choose between a minimum-security environment and remaining close to their support systems and the resources near their communities.
4. Despite its small size and its inability to house youth with more substantial needs, Pere Marquette requires multiple expensive renovations to make it more suitable for youth.
5. Pere Marquette's size limits staff's options for separating youth who do not get along, resulting in increased levels of violence.
6. Absence of critical staff reduced the number of youth able to be housed at Pere Marquette, limiting access to IDJJ's only minimum-security environment.
7. Pere Marquette does not have many on-site options for recreation, leading to boredom among youth and contributing to fighting when youth are unable to go off-grounds.

Population

Pere Marquette housed about 5% of youth in IDJJ custody between 2013 and 2016, with a population in the thirties. Since IYC-Kewanee's closure in 2016, about 10% of youth incarcerated in IDJJ have been housed there. Pere Marquette is IDJJ's only minimum-security

facility and has consistently been one of the two smallest youth centers. Since March 2020, Pere Marquette’s population has been around ten.



JHA’s last report on Pere Marquette was in [2018](#), at which time the facility had a population of 33, or 83% of its maximum capacity of 40. The report did not note any major issues but discussed how Pere Marquette’s status as a small, minimum-security facility benefited the youth there by allowing mental health staff to regularly interact with youth outside of scheduled appointments and groups and how it allowed youth access to robust programming and field trip opportunities. However, despite the benefits of its small size, Pere Marquette is still a less than ideal environment for youth.

JHA has visited Pere Marquette once since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, in April 2022. On the day of the visit, the population was 14, or 35% capacity. Administrators noted that this was the largest population they had had since the beginning of the pandemic.

Reportedly, for the first time in 2021, Pere Marquette had started housing youth convicted of adult felonies. According to OIJO, this change has resulted in some pushback from staff, who see this population of youth as more difficult to manage. Youth with adult felonies who are incarcerated at Pere Marquette reported to OIJO that staff are overzealous in issuing tickets for insolence and insubordination towards them because they do not want them there.

Furthermore, Pere Marquette’s location puts it more than 120 miles away from the counties where 82% of youth (or 262 of the 318 youth) committed to IDJJ during the 2021 fiscal year come from. At the time of the 2022 visit, only five of the 14 youth incarcerated at Pere Marquette had been committed by counties within 120 miles of the facility. Of the five counties that committed the most youth to IDJJ custody during the 2021 fiscal year—Cook, Peoria, Champaign, Winnebago, and Rock Island, which together accounted for 38% of youth committed that year—none are within 150 miles of Pere Marquette, and three are more than 200 miles away. This means that a majority of youth in IDJJ custody must sacrifice proximity to their families and support systems if they want to be housed in IDJJ’s only minimum-security facility. This underscores the need for implementation of the Transformation Plan, which calls for investing in resources to meet youths’ needs in their home communities and assisting their families and loved ones in supporting their youth.

Physical Plant



An administrator told JHA that the facility was in the process of being routed for cellular reception. HVAC was being installed in dietary and in the school, and windows were being repaired. They reportedly submitted a project to have the restrooms on the housing units

renovated, but had been told that it would be a year or more before any work was done. Additionally, an administrator described a plan to add a \$4 million multipurpose building, which would add a gym to the facility—Pere Marquette is alone within IDJJ in not having one—and additional office space. JHA appreciates that youth at Pere Marquette would benefit from having a gym but questions whether these resources would be better spent on a facility that can accommodate youth with more substantial needs. Pere Marquette also has a [history](#) of disruptions and youth transfers caused by [flooding](#) along the Mississippi River.

Youth at Pere Marquette have the ability – uniquely within IDJJ – to walk around the unfenced grounds without an escort. An administrator explained that when a youth moves from one part of the facility to another, a staff member at the youth’s starting location will radio a staff member at the youth’s destination to let them know the youth is coming. The youth is then permitted to walk there unaccompanied. Pere Marquette is also the only IYC not surrounded by a chain link fence with razor wire, allowing for an unobstructed view of the Mississippi River across the street. This gives it a less carceral atmosphere. A youth who had transferred from Harrisburg told JHA visitors that Pere Marquette had “*a different vibe*” and was “*more chill*” because everyone wanted to have a good time and go home.

With only two living units, Pere Marquette is the smallest of IDJJ’s facilities. However, an administrator reported that the small size caused its own challenges. Options for keeping youth from the two housing units separate were limited, as were options for separating youth who did not get along. A youth who has fought with other youth on each of the two units may have to choose between going back to living with people they do not like and who do not like them or transferring to another facility and losing the freedoms of a minimum-security environment and opportunities such as participating in the Youth Build program, which highlights the fact that even small facilities are not the best way to help youth or provide them with rehabilitative and productive programming. Staff acknowledged that this lack of flexibility was another contributing factor to fights. During our visit, this issue was causing concern for at least one youth who had been moved from one unit to the other after fighting with another youth on his old unit earlier in the day. He told JHA visitors that he was worried about getting jumped on his new unit because he had previously been in physical altercations with youth on that unit. Fights among youth can weigh in favor of them being denied earlier release to Aftercare—which is similar to parole—resulting in longer terms of incarceration.

While JHA believes that incarcerated youth fare better in lower-security environments where they receive more individualized attention, the fact that Pere Marquette has problems that are caused by its small size shows that there is no good way to incarcerate youth. A youth who is hundreds of miles from their support system and worried about their safety on their living unit may have a more difficult time focusing on the rehabilitative opportunities being offered to them. Ultimately, incarceration is not appropriate or most productive response to youth who have been in conflict with the law.

Education

Educational staff reported that the school was well resourced. Classes were reportedly operating with only one or two students at a time because of the low population, allowing teachers a lot of time to work one-on-one with students. IDJJ's [publicly available reporting](#) indicates that from July 2021 to February 2023, the latest date for which data was available, Pere Marquette had between two and nine students enrolled in school at a time. A teacher reported that some computers were not working but that because the population was so low those computers were not needed. Like at other IYCs, staff told JHA visitors that the computers in the school ran slowly, but they did not report any other technological issues. IDJJ administrators reported in February 2023 that the computers at Pere Marquette's school had been replaced and that the facility had been set up for wireless internet.

In addition to the general education classroom, JHA also toured the "annex," a classroom in a building removed from the rest of the school that staff said was used for special education and as needed for general education to prevent youth on separate housing units from mixing. The room was equipped with nine working computers, and staff reported that broken computers were promptly repaired. The classroom also had a TV on which the teacher was able to mirror her computer screen. A staff member in the annex explained that they had access to resources that the rest of the school did not because they taught special education.

For youth who are no longer in high school and do not have a diploma, Pere Marquette had a partnership with [Youth Build Illinois](#) through Lewis and Clark Community College. This year-long program teaches youth how to build and remodel homes. Participating youth attend programming offsite at Lewis and Clark Community College three days a week while studying to take the GED test the other two days. At the time of our visit, two youth at Pere Marquette were

participating in the program, which had reportedly resumed in September 2021 after being on hiatus at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. An administrator told JHA visitors that when youth from Northern Illinois transferred to Pere Marquette, it was usually to participate in Youth Build.

JHA was pleased to hear that Pere Marquette offered a well-liked program for graduates, who are generally underserved in terms of programming in IDJJ despite youth aged 17 and older making up [65% of its population](#). However, JHA is also worried that Pere Marquette's status as the only facility to offer such a program incentivized youth from Northern Illinois to transfer far from their support systems. Additionally, it is not ideal that in order for youth convicted of adult felonies—a large population of high school graduates in IDJJ custody—to participate, they must stay in a facility where they have reported being targeted for discipline by staff.

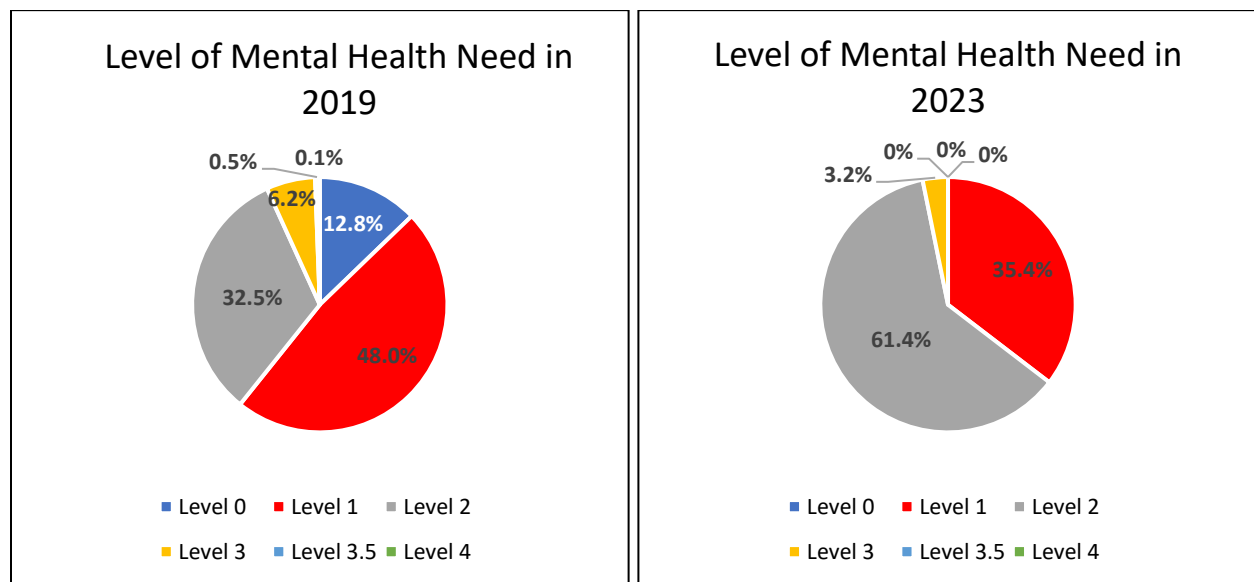
Additionally, because this is the only IYC for both Youth Build participants and minimum-security youth, youth belonging to either of these populations must be incarcerated at Pere Marquette if they wish to continued reaping the benefits of Youth Build or their minimum-security status. This can result in ongoing conflict or violence between youth who do not get along but whom staff or administrators are understandably reluctant to transfer because the youth may both be benefiting from opportunities they can only receive at Pere Marquette.

Mental Health

Mental health staff reported that at the time of the 2022 visit, Pere Marquette's population had more acute mental health needs than in the past. Reportedly, more than half of youth were on psychotropic medication and had “extensive” histories of mental health issues. A staff member told JHA visitors that in 2015, Pere Marquette had housed a mix of youth at Mental Health Levels 0 and 1, indicating no or minimal mental health need. In contrast, at the time of our 2022 visit, there were reportedly no Level 0 youth at the facility. The population was mostly youth at Level 1, indicating minimal need, with a small number of youth assessed to be at Level 2, indicating moderate need.

This appears to reflect a trend throughout IDJJ of youth having more acute mental health needs. In [January 2019](#), the earliest date for which data is available, 50% of the 282 youth in IDJJ custody had a Mental Health Level of 0 or 1. By [February 2023](#), 35% of IDJJ's

population of 155 had a Mental Health Level of 1, and no youth were assessed with a Mental Health Level of 0. However, 64% of youth had a Mental Health Level of 2 demonstrating more youth diagnosed with a higher level of mental health need. However, IDJJ’s publicly reported data reflected that, in February 2023, there were no youth in IYCs who had a Mental Health Level of 3.5 or 4, compared to 2.3% of the population in January 2019, perhaps indicating increased success in finding alternative placement options for youth with a high level of mental health need.



Staffing was an issue within Pere Marquette’s mental health department. JHA visitors were told that the facility had previously had one psychologist and one social worker but no mental health administrator. The mental health administrator position had recently been filled via a promotion, but that had left the facility without a social worker. One of the MHPs had also recently returned from family leave. We were told that IDJJ had adapted to the staff member’s absence by transferring fewer higher-level mental health need youth to Pere Marquette. JHA understands the need to avoid overwhelming the facility’s remaining MHP and appreciates IDJJ’s efforts in that regard, but notes that this was another factor limiting access to IDJJ’s only small, minimum-security facility to youth who could have benefited from such an environment, and is part of a trend within IDJJ of one critical staff absence preventing youth from taking advantage of opportunities IDJJ is supposed to offer them. The *R.J.* mental health monitors noted that Pere Marquette had maintained a permissible ratio of youth to mental health staff through limiting the population, likewise indicating the concern that low mental health staffing continues to impede

youth access to the facility. As mentioned in the *R.J.* section above, the monitors recommended having a minimum of two mental health providers at facilities.

Reportedly at the time of the April 2022 JHA visit, all but four youth at the facility had been assessed as needing substance use treatment. An administrator reported that all youth at Pere Marquette participate in some substance use treatment programming, for example journaling or community meetings, and most youth were in the formal YOS substance use program, which was not the dual diagnosis model offered at Chicago. IDJJ's [August 2022 monthly report](#) indicates that 9 of the 12 youth at the facility participated in the formal substance use program, more than at any facility other than Harrisburg.

Recreational Programing

Pere Marquette was equipped with an outdoor basketball court and a weight room. The weight room was in a dugout-like building and shared a space with the laundry room. It was not air conditioned, and staff reported that the area could get quite warm. The weight room had a variety of exercise equipment, some of which had reportedly been brought from IYC-Murphysboro when it closed. Some of the equipment was noticeably worn with a lot of exposed stuffing on the benches. An administrator reported that the weight room was not in frequent use at the time of the visit, but that youth were able to use it more often when the facility was better staffed. JHA was sorry to hear that even at IDJJ's smallest facility, a shortage of security staff was coming between youth and the ability to participate in recreational activities. The weight room was in use when JHA toured it, however. One youth who told a JHA visitor he had been in fight earlier that day was there with a member of staff to work off steam. JHA witnessed the other participant in the fight sitting on the stairs outside one of the housing units with a staff member. We were pleased to see that youth were being given opportunities to cool down and work off steam after physical altercations in a way that did not involve confining them to their cells. IDJJ data from [IDJJ's Monthly Reports](#) show that Pere Marquette averaged only one behavioral hold per month in 2022 compared to an average of nine per month at Chicago and averages between 41 and 56 per month at Harrisburg, St. Charles, and Warrenville. This data reflects that behavioral holds at Pere Marquette were also generally shorter in duration than at other IYCs. This is a clear benefit of Pere Marquette's small population.

JHA visitors saw youth playing video games on the living units and were also told about a range of outdoor activity youth participated in on-grounds, including walks, basketball games, feeding the birds, and taking care of the grounds. Administrators said that youth were occasionally allowed to walk or run around the perimeter of the grounds, but that it took a lot of staff to supervise. JHA visitors saw a youth stick his head out of a classroom door to ask two passing staff members if he could go on a walk with them. Some youth expressed to JHA during our visit that they were bored a lot of the time.

An administrator also told JHA visitors that youth had opportunities to go on field trips to [Principia College](#), a local Christian Science college, to use the gym and pool; to museums; to get ice cream; and to the [Dream Center of Alton](#) to play video games. Reportedly, they used to take youth to Price Dam, but they no longer do because the public is not allowed to climb to the top anymore. The ability to regularly go off-grounds has historically been a major perk offered to youth at Pere Marquette, but like field trips at other IYCs, this had been disrupted due to the pandemic. An administrator told JHA that the lack of off-grounds trips was a top concern for youth.

Because Pere Marquette is such a small facility and lacks a gym, it relies on being able to take youth off-grounds for additional recreational activities. According to OIJO, when field trips are not available, youth at Pere Marquette quickly become bored because of the limited onsite recreational programming, which has been exacerbated by a long-term Leisure Time Activity Specialist (LTA) vacancy. Boredom resulting from large amounts of unstructured time can lead to youth fighting. IDJJ reported in February 2023 that they were in the process of hiring two LTAs for Pere Marquette.

[Data published by IDJJ](#) reflects that when field trips and volunteer programs were halted in March 2020 as a result of the COVID pandemic, Pere Marquette's rate of fights increased despite its drop in population and despite a decrease in fighting at all other IYCs except Harrisburg. As programming opportunities began to reopen in spring 2021, Pere Marquette's rate of fights returned to its pre-COVID levels, although its population and the rate of fights at other IYCs did not.

In practice, Pere Marquette averaged one youth-on-youth assault and two fights per month in 2021, and one of each per month in 2022. While this represents an improvement over [2019](#),

when Pere Marquette had a larger population and averaged two youth-on-youth assaults and three fights per month, the rate of fights per 100 youth remains similar. JHA acknowledges that Pere Marquette has a small enough population for one or two youth who habitually get into fights to have a significant impact on the facility's violence statistics.

IYC-St. Charles

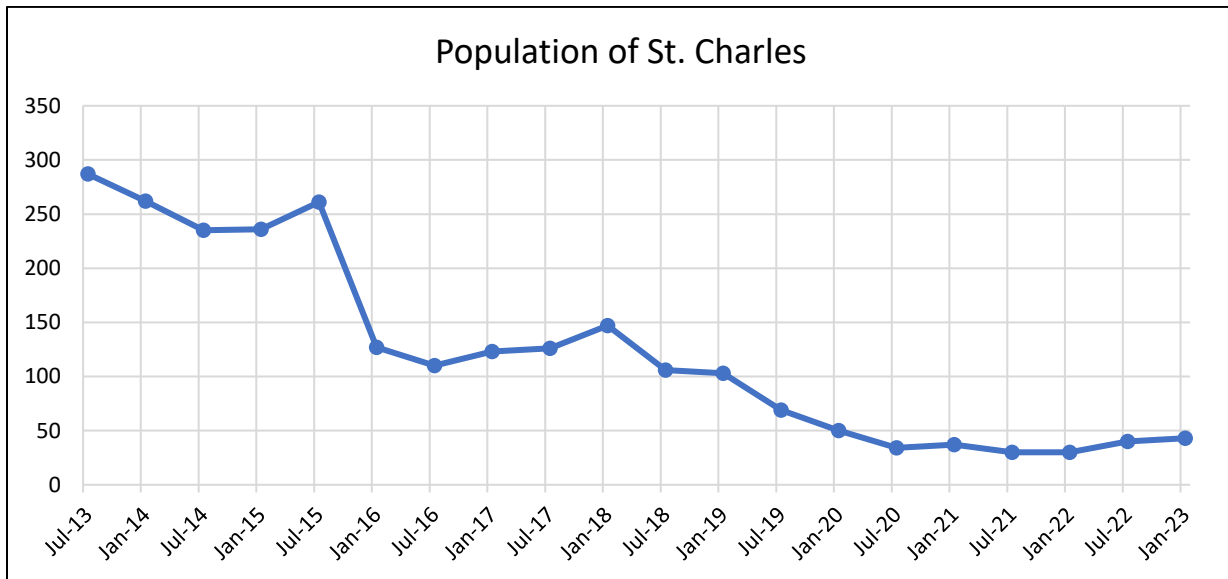
IYC-St. Charles is located in St. Charles, Illinois, about 40 miles west of Chicago. It is IDJJ's northern reception facility and does intake for male youth ages 15 and older from north of Peoria. As of August 2022, it had a population of 51, or 15% of its maximum capacity of 348 and 21% of its single-bunking capacity of 240. In 2022, St. Charles' operating budget is \$24,631,300, averaging to nearly \$573,000 per youth.

Key Takeaways

1. Despite a staff-to-youth ratio of 12 to 1, youth reported missing out on opportunities because of a lack of security staff.
2. St. Charles' sprawling physical plant exacerbates already existing staffing issue, poses additional hazards to youth safety, and may increase response times when an incident occurs.
3. Like other youth centers, St. Charles has substantial unaddressed maintenance needs that foster the appearance and impression of neglect and also put youth safety at risk.
4. St. Charles had several critical staffing vacancies in the education department, including the vocational programs, depriving youth of educational opportunities and resulting in regular school cancellations.
5. IDJJ appeared to be addressing the desire that was expressed by youth during the visits for more higher education opportunities as well as drivers' education.
6. St. Charles has innovative programming opportunities that are only available to a small number of youth.

Population

Between 2013 and 2016, St. Charles housed about a third of the youth incarcerated in IDJJ facilities, about 235 to 270 youth. Since 2016, the proportion of IDJJ’s population for which St. Charles accounts has fluctuated between a quarter and a third. Since March 2020, its population has been in the 30s. Of all IDJJ’s currently open IYCs, St. Charles has seen the largest reduction in its population. In August 2022, its population is 15% of what it was in [July 2013](#).



JHA’s [most recent](#) monitoring report for St. Charles was released in 2019. At the time of that monitoring visit, St. Charles had a population of 101, 29% of its maximum capacity. The main issues JHA noted at the time included a high number of staff vacancies, high mental health profession (MHP) caseloads leading to a lack of psychological intervention for youth who needed it, and the high levels of anti-psychotics prescribed. JHA also noted substantial improvements to both the amount of time youth spent out of their cells and the amount of time they spent in school as compared to findings from JHA’s [2018 monitoring visit](#).

JHA’s most recent visits to St. Charles were in July 2021 and March 2022. At the time of the 2022 visit, St. Charles had a population of 21 youth, 21% of the facility’s 2019 population. Similar to Chicago and Harrisburg, St. Charles’ lower population had mitigated many of the facility’s historical problems, but substantial issues in its functioning were still present.

Staff

At the time of JHA's 2021 visit, St. Charles reportedly employed about 250 staff, **a staff to youth ratio of 12 to one**. However, an administrator reported to JHA visitors that St. Charles continued to struggle with a lack of security staff. We were informed in July 2021 that St. Charles had three security specialists in the academy, but that the class had started with six. Administrators acknowledged that staff retention was a problem, and one administrator speculated that because of changes made to the retirement scheme, staff saw employment with IDJJ as a stepping stone to a position with a police department or IDOC rather than as a career goal unto itself. Administrators identified better security staffing as a top need for the facility. Unfortunately, St. Charles' sprawling physical plant (discussed in a later section) exacerbates issues caused by short staffing.

Administrators also reported during JHA's 2021 visit that the small population had improved relations between youth and staff, which have historically been tense at St. Charles, although they noted that the culture change among staff towards a more rehabilitative mindset was still ongoing. JHA did not hear concerns about staff from youth during either the 2021 or 2022 visits, but notes that youth are sometimes reluctant to voice negative opinions about staff in the facility where they are currently incarcerated.

IDJJ's public reporting reflects a decrease in use of force by staff and assaults on staff by youth that may speak to a less tense environment. According to IDJJ data, pepper spray was used 47 times at St. Charles in [2019](#) compared to nine times in the first eight months of [2022](#)—although this was a slight increase from 2020 and 2021 and no other IYC used pepper spray more than three times between January and August 2022. Handcuffs had been used an average of eight times per month in 2019 compared to five times per month in 2022, though the drop in population from an average of 79 youth in 2019 to 37 in 2022 may account for this. IDJJ public reporting also reflects that the number of youth-on-staff assaults has fallen from an average of eight per month in 2019 to two per month in 2022.

According to an administrator, the lower population also allowed staff more time and flexibility to plan events on their own, such as a Super Bowl party where youth were able to eat snacks and watch the game.

An administrator told JHA visitors during the 2022 monitoring visit that St. Charles did not have an Honors unit because, due to St. Charles' relatively small population, only a small number of youth would be eligible to live there and the facility was unable to spare the staff. A youth reported to JHA during the same visit that he had transferred from Harrisburg and missed the incentives there, such as the ability to order from Walmart, the video games on the unit, and the ability to have an MP3 player. He said that although his family was located in Northern Illinois and had rarely been able to visit him at Harrisburg, he resisted transferring to one of the northern IYCs because he had been doing well in the Honors program.

Despite employing twelve times more staff than the number of youth incarcerated at St. Charles, youth reported still missing out on opportunities that they enjoyed at other IYCs due to lack of security staff at this facility.

Physical Plant



St. Charles is IDJJ's oldest facility, having first opened in 1904. At the time of JHA's 2021 visit, it was still home to several buildings that were condemned and had not been in use for years. Such buildings posed a safety hazard to both youth and staff. By the 2022 visit, all but one of the old buildings had been demolished, a necessary but undoubtedly expensive undertaking. Nonetheless, St. Charles' sprawling physical plant continues to present issues.

While the lake on the grounds is scenic, the facility has in the past had problems with youth jumping into it—a safety hazard when not all youth at the facility can swim. An administrator reported during the 2022 visit that this had not been an issue in a couple of years. St. Charles also installed razor wire on the housing units to prevent youth from climbing onto the roofs. While JHA understands the need to address this safety concern, the presence of razor wire within the facility border fences adds to the already adult prison-like feel.

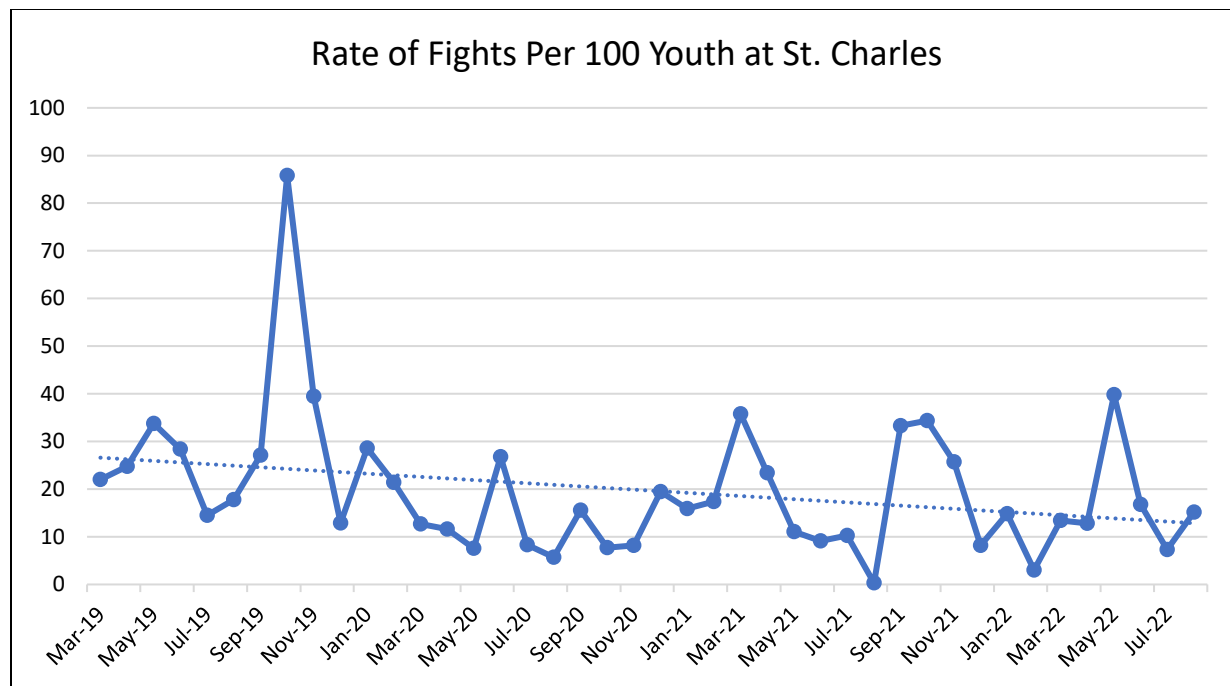
The size of St. Charles' physical plant also makes it difficult for staff to quickly move from one area of the facility to another in the event of an emergency. For example, at IYC-Chicago, if a fight broke out on a housing unit, staff from elsewhere in the facility could access the housing unit by running up or down a staircase or down a hallway. At Warrenville, the housing units and programs building are concentrated in a circle, no farther than a quick sprint from each other. At St. Charles, the buildings are spaced far enough apart that the most efficient way to get from one part of the facility to another is often to drive, creating a longer possible response time. This means that St. Charles would need to station enough staff to respond to any type of emergency in every location where youth are present in order to guarantee a prompt response in the event of an incident—necessitating more than a full detail of security staff.

Slow response times could result in increased use of pepper spray while the few staff initially present at an incident try to control it without other staff assistance. This may explain in part why pepper spray was used at St. Charles three times more than at any other IYC between January and August 2022.

St. Charles is a facility that is already struggling with an understaffed security department, and the security needed for adequate coverage and safety across a large area sets the facility up for failure. However, because of the low population, administrators have been able to close the most remote housing units, mitigating this issue somewhat.

Additionally, staff at St. Charles—like other IYCs—have tried hard to resolve conflicts between youth that could lead to an altercation through the use of mediation. According to an administrator, this effort, which involves pulling in security staff, MHPs, and Youth & Family Specialists (YFSs) who work with the involved youth, has been met with some success.

According to IDJJ’s [publicly available reporting](#), the rate of youth-on-youth assaults per 100 youth at St. Charles had fallen dramatically, from an average of 29 per month² between January and October 2019 to an average of 6.5 per month between November 2021 and August 2022. Nonetheless, St. Charles still sees an average of four fights per month, and in these instances, a quick staff response time can be critical.



St. Charles also struggles with the same routine maintenance needs as many of the other IYCs. On one cottage, a JHA visitor in 2021 noticed that there were missing ceiling tiles creating a hole in the ceiling. Youth on that unit complained that wasps were able to get into the building through the hole, posing a potential safety risk. At the time of the 2022 visit, seven months later, the hole had not been repaired. On a different unit, missing ceiling tiles appeared to have been repaired with plywood. A youth told a JHA visitor that if he could fix one thing about the facility, it would be the cracked floor tiles on the housing units because they were difficult to clean.

² This high average is the result of an outlier in October 2019, when St. Charles recorded an abnormally high rate of 85.8 fights per 100 youth. Without this outlier, St. Charles averaged a rate of 22 fights per 100 youth in the ten months preceding October 2019.

Education

JHA spoke to a teacher at St. Charles about one-on-one tutoring opportunities for youth during the 2021 visit. Reportedly, tutoring was offered via trained volunteers. Youth reportedly sought tutoring voluntarily and were able to dictate which subjects or assignments they received help with, and because youth had chosen to be there, they saw few disciplinary issues. According to staff, most students who sought tutoring were in high school. However, all youth taking the Northwestern writing class received help writing their essays, and occasionally a youth in a vocational program was referred for math tutoring by their vocational instructor. At the time of the 2021 visit, eight youth were reportedly participating in tutoring in addition to the four youth taking the Northwestern class.

At the time of the 2021 visit, St. Charles reportedly had vacancies for a special education teacher, a math teacher, and a librarian. The special education student-to-teacher ratio was 14 to one, more than double the six to one youth-to-staff ratio allowed for under the R.J consent decree. During the 2022 visit, we were likewise told that there were three educational positions posted. While JHA visitors did not hear about school cancellations on either visit and IDJJ's public reporting does not reflect any at St. Charles in 2022, the R.J. education monitor noted in his October 2022 report that youth at St. Charles indicated school was cancelled at least once per week. **JHA is uncertain why this is not reflected in the public data and continues to have concerns regarding educational staffing at this facility and IDJJ's ability to meet youth's educational needs in its current facilities.**

An administrator told JHA visitors that the librarian position had been vacant for a long time, but that it was not a priority position because youth were still able to check out books. JHA is sympathetic to the need to prioritize some vacancies over others, but notes that library staff at some other IYCs have played a central role in expanding the extracurricular educational programming and informal positive opportunities available to youth.

A youth we spoke to in the library during the 2021 visit professed a desire to read more urban fiction but said that such novels often ran afoul of IDJJ's screening process. Administrators seemed to agree that this was an archaic rule, and said that they fought to get individual books approved when they were sent by parents.

Like the other northern IYCs, St. Charles offered high school graduates the ability to participate in the remote Northwestern class, and had reportedly started participating in the Northwestern peer mentorship program by February 2023. A youth who spoke to JHA visitors during the 2022 visit expressed a desire to be able to take “*prerequisites*” at a community college so he would have a head start on a bachelor’s degree when he was released. Several other youth on the same living unit agreed that while there were vocational programs available, there was not enough access to college classes.

IDJJ administrators reported in February 2023, that they had developed a partnership at [Elgin Community College](#) that allowed youth at St. Charles to take online classes, and that the agency had purchased laptops for use by those students. **It is important that youth who want to pursue college degrees be able to do so instead of being routed towards vocational programs as a default.** The youth also said that he wanted to be able to take the written drivers’ test so he would only have to complete the practical test when he was released. According to IDJJ’s [2022 Annual Report](#), driver’s education is set to begin in 2023 for youth at the three northern facilities.

St. Charles offered three vocational programs through Lake Land College: construction, custodial arts, and horticulture. IDJJ’s [2022 Annual Report](#) indicated that there also plans to expand Larry’s Barber College to St. Charles in 2023. According to administrators, the horticulture program had been running on and off because of low engagement. It was not running at the time of either visit, but staff reported during the 2022 visit that it was scheduled to return soon. However, the *R.J.* education monitor noted in his 2022 report that when he visited St. Charles in October 2022, the program was again not running because the teacher had quit. Once again, youth in IDJJ custody had been deprived of an opportunity that St. Charles was designed to offer because of a vacancy in a critical staff position. **IDJJ would be well served to create a substitute teaching program, which would allow the agency to handle staff turnover with fewer school stoppages.**

While St. Charles’ low population has generally benefited the youth there, the closure of vocational programs due to low enrollment offers youth less variety in the type of vocational training they are able to receive. It additionally limits the amount of programming available to high school graduates, who may finish the two available vocational programs and still have time left before their release, during which they struggle to fill their time productively. **This problem**

with maintaining enrollment and instructors is one way a facility’s lower population can cause some issues while mitigating others and demonstrates why continuing to incarcerate youth in large facilities with low populations should not be viewed as a solution.

When JHA visited in 2021, the construction program was housed in a large warehouse-like building on the property with a dedicated area for each of the modules—carpentry, plumbing, masonry, and electrical—and had enough room to build a demo house. Staff reported that youth who complete the six-month program receive certifications in construction and carpentry. However, at the time of the 2022 visit, the building had been temporarily closed because of ongoing construction, and the class was housed in a regular classroom in the school building. The carpentry program reportedly was at its capacity of four youth during both the 2021 and 2022 visits. There were reportedly six graduates at the facility at the time of the 2022 visit.

Staff reported that it was difficult to get youth excited about the custodial program, which also offered a certificate upon completion, but that the youth who enrolled really enjoyed it. Two youth had reportedly been enrolled in the program but both had recently gone home, so it was empty at the time of the 2022 visit. IDJJ’s [October 2022 Quarterly Report](#) indicates that two youth were enrolled in the program by August 2022. Staff also reported that they were looking into converting the program to focus on property management. **JHA notes that it is important that vocational programs reflect areas of employment opportunity and youth interest in order to have positive impact.**

Mental Health

An administrator reported during JHA’s 2022 monitoring visit that most of the youth at St. Charles had been designated as Mental Health Level 2, indicating moderate need. Reportedly, about two thirds of the population was on psychotropic medication and this had been consistent for a few years. According to an administrator, they were making an effort to treat comorbid mental health issues with only one medication when possible. We were also told that both of the psychiatrists working with youth at St. Charles were board-certified child psychiatrists, and they had been phasing out the use of stimulants and anti-psychotics except for when absolutely necessary and that Seroquel, an anti-psychotic that was one of the most frequently prescribed medications at St. Charles in 2019, was no longer being used at the facility

St. Charles reportedly employed six MHPs. JHA visitors were told that all youth had individual meetings with their therapists at least once per week. Youth reported that they could see their therapists outside of their regular appointment if they asked to, and generally felt positively towards their therapists. This was a major improvement over JHA's 2019 visit, when youth voiced the desire to see their therapists more frequently than was occurring at the time. This change was clearly made feasible by St. Charles' significantly reduced population. However, one youth told a JHA visitor during the 2022 visit that he could not relate to his therapist because he did not know anything about her, so he was reluctant to share information about himself or how he was feeling.

The special treatment unit (STU) is the most intensive mental health treatment housing setting at St. Charles. Youth on the STU reportedly saw therapists individually four times per week and participated in a minimum of two group therapy sessions per week. Unlike other housing units at St. Charles, a therapist was reportedly stationed on the unit when youth were present during the day. Staff who work with youth on the unit—including security staff, therapists and YFSs—reportedly participate in weekly meetings to address youth behavior and come up with interventions. We were told that youth in the STU participated in programming with youth from other housing units. At the time of the 2022 visit, there were reportedly five youth on the STU, and administrators told JHA visitors that the population on that unit had been falling. Documents provided by IDJJ in advance of the visit, which reflect four youth on the unit, indicated that they were all 15 or 16 years old.

Recreational Programming

St. Charles has a spacious Teen Center located on the second floor of the programming building, which was not air conditioned. While the building was not intolerably hot during JHA's July 2021 visit, we heard several complaints from youth about the heat in the building. The Teen Center was equipped with multiple pool tables, a ping pong table, a foosball table, an air hockey table, three game consoles, two basketball arcade games, and bumper pool. The equipment seemed better maintained than that which JHA visitors noticed at other IYCs, which hopefully stemmed from diligent upkeep rather than lack of use. Administrators reported that all youth have opportunities to spend time in the Teen Center, but how much time they were able to spend there per week depended on behavioral grade level. A schedule provided to JHA by IDJJ

in March 2022 indicated that the Teen Center was open on Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday afternoons and that youth rotated through the Teen Center by housing unit.

The same building hosted an art workshop, which youth were reportedly able to sign up for on a week-to-week basis, and a writing bridge program, which was not in session at the time of the 2021 visit because the program head was on personal leave. This building was also where the barbering mentorship program was located. The barbering supervisor was reportedly on family leave at the time of the 2021 visit, but the program did not appear to have been disrupted. An administrator told JHA visitors that they were in the process of looking for an instructor who could teach braiding. The program was limited in that the barbering area was not equipped with sinks, so youth were unable to learn hair-washing. Unlike the popular program at IYC-Chicago, St. Charles' barbering program did not lead to certification. A schedule provided to JHA by St. Charles indicated that the art program and the barbering program met once a week at the same time, meaning that youth were unable to participate in both.

St. Charles' music studio was located in a different part of the facility, near the school. JHA visitors were unable to visit the music studio during either visit. Documentation provided to JHA by IDJJ reflected that time in the music studio was scheduled for an hour on Tuesday afternoons, indicating that the studio was only accessible to a small group of youth.

St. Charles has a history of developing innovative and well-loved programs that, due to small class sizes, are only accessible to a small percentage of the youth incarcerated there. While the facility's low population has mitigated this issue somewhat, the majority of youth at St. Charles are still unable to enjoy some of its best offerings.

By the 2022 visit, St. Charles had reportedly resumed field trips post COVID-19 pandemic onset. We were told about field trips to a skate park and a bowling alley. St. Charles had hosted a bike ride on the grounds, which youth from IYC-Chicago were also able to participate in. The facility also offered programming run through volunteer organizations, such as [Project FLEX](#), a fitness and exercise program offered through Northern Illinois University.

IYC-Warrenville

IYC-Warrenville is located in Warrenville, Illinois, about 30 miles west of Chicago. It is IDJJ's only co-ed facility and houses all female youth in IDJJ custody. It also serves as the reception center for male youth under the age of 15 from north of Peoria. As of August 2022, it had a population of 21, or 27% of its maximum capacity of 78 and 30% of its single-bunking capacity of 70. In fiscal year 2023, Warrenville's operating budget is \$12,290,100, averaging out to about \$500,000 per youth.

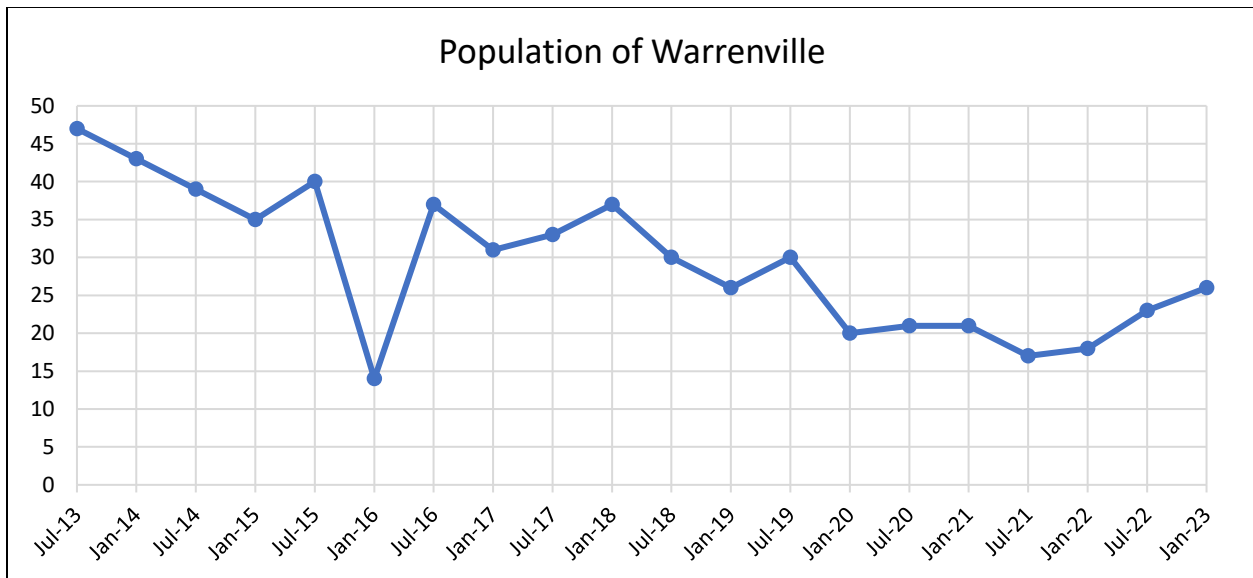
Key Takeaways

1. Staff at Warrenville reported an increase in fighting, which corresponded to an increase in the use of handcuffs on youth and several uses of pepper spray.
2. Warrenville was experiencing a significant shortage of security staff that had resulted in fewer opportunities for youth to spend time outdoors and in the community as well as substantial overtime requirements for staff.
3. Youth at Warrenville were only attending school for half the school day because of educational and security staffing shortages. Youth also reported missing school for multiple days at a time.
4. Warrenville had few programming options for high school graduates and those with GEDs, despite those youth making up nearly half of the facility's population.
5. Mental health staff had apparently succeeded in fostering a culture that encouraged youth who had been disinclined to seek mental health care at other IYCs to begin regularly meeting with therapists at Warrenville.
6. Older youth at Warrenville felt babied by the facility's rules and reported feeling like staff did not know how to deal with them.

Population

Prior to the closure of IYC-Kewanee in 2016, Warrenville housed about 5% of youth in IDJJ custody, with a population that fluctuated between 35 and 50. At the time, Warrenville housed only female youth. Since 2016, it has become a co-ed facility. Because of this change, its

population has fallen less than those of the other four IYCs. In August 2022, it reported a population 51% of the size of its [July 2013](#) population. Currently, about 15% of youth incarcerated in IDJJ are housed at Warrenville. Since March 2020, its population has been around 20 youth.



JHA's last monitoring report prior to the COVID-19 pandemic was released in [2018](#). At the time of the 2018 monitoring visit, Warrenville had a population of 42, or 60% of the facility's maximum capacity of 70. The major issues JHA noted at that time included over-prescription of sedatives for behavioral issues they were not proven effective to treat; inconsistency or favoritism in the application of the PbS system; and needed physical plant repairs, especially in the mobile units housing the MHP offices.

JHA's most recent visits to Warrenville were in [October 2021](#) and September 2022. At the time of the 2022 visit, Warrenville's population was 24, or 57% of its 2018 population. Administrators reported that the population had been creeping up because of transfers from other IYCs. The average age was 17, which was reported to be higher than it had been prior to the pandemic, though five of the 24 youth at the facility were under the age of 15. On the day of the 2022 visit, there were 6 female youth and 18 male youth incarcerated at Warrenville, which marked a major shift from 2018 when there were 30 female youth and 13 male youth at the facility.

At the time of the 2022 visit, administrators at Warrenville also reported that the facility had seen an increase in fights. According to IDJJ's [publicly reported data](#), the rate of fights per 100 youth increased from 11 per month at Warrenville in 2021 to 18 per month in 2022. This represents a return to Warrenville's pre-COVID rate of fights, which was 19 per month in 2019. Warrenville's rate of youth-on-youth assaults per 100 youth similarly increased from an average of 12 a month in 2021 to an average of 16 a month in 2022. In practice, the number of fights at Warrenville increased from an average of two per month in 2021 to an average of 4 per month in 2022. The number of youth-on-youth assaults increased from an average of two per month in 2021 to an average of three per month in 2022.

IDJJ data also shows spikes in the use of handcuffs at multiple points in 2022 and that pepper spray was used on three occasions between April and August, 2022. Administrators attributed the uptick in fights to the increasing number of younger youth at the facility. They explained that younger youth have less impulse control and are more likely to jump into fights if their friends are involved, resulting in more frequent fights between more than two youth. Administrators also stated that many uses of mechanical restraints were on a single youth who had significant psychological needs and had since left the facility. Others who work in the system but not for IDJJ indicated to JHA that the youth left Warrenville due to his having been transferred to IDOC at age 18. IDJJ is permitted to hold youth until they turn 21. **A youth being transferred to an adult prison three years early because of IDJJ's inability to handle them, even at its most mental health-focused IYC, is a clear demonstration that incarceration is the wrong response for youth with mental illness who come into conflict with the law.** More appropriate than moving this young person into IDOC custody, where mental health treatment will most certainly be lacking would have been to find a residential placement for him that could better address his mental health needs.

According to administrators, the facility was very short on security staff and was also short on educational staff, although two teachers were in the process of being hired. The facility had also recently lost an LTA at the time of the 2022 visit.

Staff

During the 2021 monitoring visit, some youth expressed concerns about staff being unequipped to handle the current population. Prior to the pandemic, Warrenville was a specialized facility

that housed female youth and later began taking younger male youth as well. Both of those populations were small to begin with, and the number of female youth in IDJJ custody has seen a particularly dramatic reduction over the course of the pandemic. This has meant that older male youth have transferred to Warrentville at high rates. At the time of JHA's 2022 visit, 11 of the 24 youth at Warrentville were males age 17 or older.

At the time of JHA's 2022 visit, Warrentville's staffing vacancies had grown numerous enough to impact the functionality of the facility in significant ways. Both field trips and outdoor recreation had been paused after multiple escapes by youth at Warrentville—both from the facility and while on field trips—led administrators to conclude that they did not have enough staff to carry them out safely. According to IDJJ administrators, the youth who escaped were disciplined “consistent with [the] Youth Discipline policy,” and were transferred to other facilities. A history of escape or attempted escape from law enforcement may result in severe restrictions for people during sequent incarceration.

Administrators also stated that school was running at a reduced capacity because of shortages of both education and security staff, meaning that youth were only attending school for half the day.

A security staff member who spoke with JHA during the visit reported being mandated to work as many as forty hours of overtime a week and sometimes being required to work sixteen-hour shifts five days in a row. Reportedly the staff member had not been able to take any vacation time in 2022, as of September. Administrators reported that Warrentville had not been accepting youth transfers from other youth centers during the month of September, but the staff member reported that this had not alleviated the pains caused by the staff shortage because the facility still required just as many staff to keep it running. One housing unit was shut down, and administrators told JHA visitors that they would not be able to reopen it because they could not spare the staff.

During the 2021 visit, an older youth told JHA visitors that staff took advantage of younger youth who did not know how they should be treated. He also felt that he had been retaliated against for standing up for himself and other youth. He reported that staff waited for him to act out and then made an example out of him by writing him tickets for minor rule violations that other youth would not have received tickets for. He also told JHA visitors that the consequences youth

received for rule-breaking were not constructive and often caused further misbehavior by restricting youth from activities that allowed them to burn off steam, such as time in the gym. Other older youth at Warrenville likewise acknowledged feeling that staff there treated them like children and reported that Warrenville had stricter rules than other IYCs—for example, rules around having furniture inside of cells and access to news on current events—which also made them feel patronized. However, some youth reported that staff were more respectful at Warrenville than they had been at other IYCs.

Education

Administrators told JHA visitors during the 2021 visit that the facility employed three teachers and classes consisted of five or six students each. IDJJ's [publicly reported data](#) reflects that there were 14 students enrolled in school at Warrenville as of August 2022, or 58% of the population at that time. This data indicates that Warrenville employed three teachers, and had a student-to-teacher ratio of five to one, nearly twice that of St. Charles, the IYC with the next highest ration. At the time of the 2022 visit, Warrenville was reportedly in the process of hiring two additional teachers.

During the 2022 visit, youth told JHA visitors that they were not attending school regularly, which comported with what administrators shared and what the *R.J.* education monitor noted in his October 2022 report. A youth reported that he only went to school for half-days and that prior to the day of the visit, he had not been to school in a week. He stated that with so much time between classes, it was hard to remember what he had previously learned and expressed frustration that being out of school more days than he was in school was preventing him from graduating. **Graduating from high school can hasten a youth's release from IDJJ custody, so JHA was concerned about the impact that sporadic school was having on the amount of time youth spent at Warrenville.**

Administrators acknowledged that staffing was a barrier to getting youth to school and recalled that two full school days had been cancelled in August 2022 due to lack of staff. JHA hopes the two incoming teachers will help alleviate this problem, but notes that a shortage of security staff was identified as a contributing factor in Warrenville's inability to keep youth in school for a full day.

From March 2021 to at least September 2022, Warrenville did not have any vocational programming for high school graduates or youth who had earned a GED. The facility had hosted a barbering and cosmetology program through [Larry's Barber College](#), the same barbering school that runs IYC-Chicago's popular program. However, administrators reported that they had been without an instructor since February or March 2021. Reportedly, IDJJ's contract with Larry's Barber College prevented the facility from hiring an instructor outside that program. Administrators expressed frustration during the 2021 visit that they were unable to independently staff what had been the facility's only vocational program. JHA notes that once again, a vacancy in one crucial position prevented youth at Warrenville from participating in vocational programming. IDJJ administrators reported in February 2023 that Warrenville was in the process of restarting Larry's Barber College, and that they were also working towards a partnership with [Curt's Café](#) to offer internships to youth at Warrenville.

Warrenville once offered a program with the [College of DuPage](#). However, at the time of the 2021 monitoring visit, that program was on hiatus. Administrators told JHA visitors that prior to the pandemic, youth had been attending class off-grounds at DuPage three days a week. However, the facility had reportedly been unable to accommodate remote classes during the height of the pandemic, and the program had shut down. Administrators reported that high school graduates transferring to Warrenville to participate in the DuPage program had been largely responsible for the change in population, but since the program was no longer offered, there was nothing for those older youth to do. The program had not resumed at the time of the 2022 visit, and administrators were not hopeful that it would.

JHA heard the same concerns about lack of higher education opportunity from youth. Multiple youth who were high school graduates and had transferred to participate in the DuPage program in 2021 expressed feeling like they had been lied to about what the educational offerings at Warrenville actually were. A youth told a JHA visitor during the 2021 visit that the only thing for graduates to do was work in dietary. Another expressed frustration that "red tape" was preventing him from accessing any of the constructive post-high school programs the facility was supposed to offer.

Warrenville did offer the same criminal law, creative writing, and public speaking classes through Northwestern for high school graduates that were offered at three other youth centers. A youth who spoke with JHA during our 2021 visit reported they enjoyed the creative writing

class. When JHA visited in 2022, the Northwestern public speaking class had recently ended. Administrators were unsure whether Northwestern would be offering another class for youth. IDJJ administrators confirmed in February 2023 that Northwestern planned to offer one credit-bearing course per year, with the next course starting in June 2023. Administrators were hopeful that the program would expand over time. High school graduates at Warrenville also reportedly participated in the Northwestern peer mentorship program as of February 2023.

Mental Health

Mental health care has historically been a focus area for Warrenville. While most IYCs began scheduling all youth for weekly therapy appointments as a default³ during the COVID-19 pandemic, Warrenville holds the distinction of being the only facility that offered such access before the pandemic. Mental health staff reported during the 2021 visit that the mental health needs of their population had not really changed since before the pandemic, but that they were seeing more “mental health kids” who had been transferred to Warrenville after having behavioral issues at other IYCs.

When IDJJ’s population was larger prior to the COVID pandemic, Warrenville held specific populations of youth: all female youth and male youth who were young and who had at least a moderate level of mental health need. While Warrenville is small compared to St. Charles and Harrisburg, it still has a maximum capacity of 70 youth. IDJJ’s population is now too small to require such a large facility for these populations. **This has resulted in youth transferring into Warrenville who have different needs than the facility was designed for, that it is at times ill-equipped to meet. JHA supports IDJJ’s desire to provide specialized assistance to those who need it, but treating youth with especially high mental health needs alongside disparate populations including 13- and 14-year-old boys, young men who transferred to attend college classes, and girls at a variety of ages and need-levels is a high expectation to place on a mental health team, no matter how capable and dedicated. Mental health staff identified providing care to youth in all of these groups, which have different treatment needs, as a real challenge.**

³ IDJJ’s policies require youth to be seen individual by a therapist on a weekly basis only at Mental Health Level 2 or higher.

Nonetheless, mental health staff remained committed to providing care for all youth at Warrenville. Staff described a culture within the facility of engaging with mental health and reported that some youth who had rarely sought out contact with MHPs at previous facilities quickly sought out regular contact with MHPs at Warrenville. According to mental health staff, IDJJ policy requires them to meet with a youth who has filed a slip to speak with a therapist within five days, but they tried to see youth by the end of the shift during which help was sought. Reportedly, there was a therapist on call at all hours, and a youth who sought mental health contact overnight could choose between speaking with the on-call MHP over the phone or waiting until their own therapist came in the next morning. Most youth at the facility reported being able to access a MHP whenever they needed or wanted to. However, one youth during the 2022 visit stated that when someone dropped a crisis slip, it could take up to five days for a MHP to see them, which he did not think made sense because mental health crises are acute. It was unclear whether he was speaking about IDJJ's policies generally or about a specific incident where he was experiencing a crisis, filed a slip, and was not seen for days.

Mental health staff reported in 2021 that the most common psychotropics prescribed to youth at Warrenville were Clonidine, which has a sedative effect but has been demonstrated effective to treat ADHD in youth; Prozac, an antidepressant; and Abilify, an anti-psychotic which has been demonstrated effective to treat teenagers and adults with schizophrenia and bipolar disorder and adults with depression. Data provided to JHA in advance of the 2022 visit indicated that 14 youth were taking Clonidine. After Clonidine, the three most prescribed psychotropics were antidepressants Zoloft, Trazodone, and Prozac. All youth reportedly met with a psychiatrist remotely every three or four weeks. Staff told JHA visitors in 2021 that the most common reasons for youth to request to speak with their therapist were wanting to transfer and wanting to be treated more like an adult.

An older youth who spoke with JHA visitors during the 2021 monitoring visit expressed that he used to find meeting with mental health staff very helpful, but that more limitations had been placed on what activities therapists could do with youth. He reported that, for example, he used to see his MHP for help researching his post-release options online, but that mental health staff were now required to print out every webpage they looked at with youth, which made him feel like the administration was babying him and that seeking help was no longer worth it. He also reported that MHPs were no longer allowed to bring music into the facility to listen to with youth,

which JHA heard from an outside source was part of a crackdown on contraband at the facility because of an unrelated issue.

Warrenville has a substance use program provided through Youth Outreach Services. Like the programs at Harrisburg and Pere Marquette, Warrenville's program is not dual diagnosis. Treatment consisted of both groups and individual work. Administrators told visitors that the treatment program had been running at a reduced capacity due to a long-time staffing vacancy, but that the vacancy had been filled. JHA was pleased to hear this, but notes that this is another example of critical staffing shortages affecting the programming opportunities youth were offered.

Recreational Programming

Administrators reported that youth at Warrenville had scheduled recreation time every day and rotated between the gym and the canteen area. JHA visitors toured the gym in 2021, which was equipped with basketball hoops, a volleyball net, and a pull-up bar. Some older youth told JHA that they wished Warrenville had a weight room like other IYCs. Like some of IDJJ's other facilities, Warrenville offers Project FLEX and [Storycatchers Theatre](#), a program where youth write and perform musicals about their experiences.

When JHA visited in 2022, outdoor recreation had been halted for months after an escape during outdoor recreation had led administrators to conclude that the facility was too understaffed to safely have it. One youth stated that he would rather be outside than in the gym, while another recalled that he had found outdoor recreation boring and did not particularly miss it. **Nonetheless, JHA is concerned about lack of staff depriving youth who would like to spend time outside of the opportunity to do so and reiterates that the minimum standards set out for county juvenile detention centers requiring that opportunity for indoor and outdoor recreation be part of youth's daily schedule should be applied to IDJJ.** IDJJ administrators confirmed in February 2023 that outdoor recreation had occurred sporadically at Warrenville from the end of summer through winter of 2022, but expected the facility to return to providing regular outdoor recreation as the weather permitted in 2023.

A youth also stated that because Warrenville only had enough staff to place one security staff member on each housing unit, everyone on the unit had to agree to go to the gym or no one could go. The youth reported that this led to some youth getting less recreation time than they

wanted and caused conflict between youth if some wanted to go to the gym and others did not. This potential for unnecessary conflict between youth based on perceptions of ability to deny each other positive opportunities, and lack of opportunity for youth to engage in exercise to blow off steam may be a contributing factor to the reports of fighting Warrenville JHA heard during the 2022 visit.

At the time of JHA's 2021 visit, Warrenville was home to a dog training program run in partnership with the Naperville Humane Society. As part of the program, a dog would live on one of the cottages while youth trained it in preparation for it to be adopted. The intention was for the dog to be adopted directly out of the IYC without returning to the shelter, and staff reported that the dogs in the program had a high placement rate. Reportedly, several of the dogs that had come through the program had been adopted by staff, and one had been adopted by a youth. When the facility was between dogs, a mental health staff member brought in a therapy dog—a dog that a member of the mental health staff had adopted from the program at Warrenville. At the time of JHA's 2022 visit, the dog program had been halted. Administrators attributed this to safety concerns resulting from the change in the facility's population.

At the time of the 2021 visit, Warrenville had resumed field trips for vaccinated youth. Administrators reported that the facility hosted up to two field trips a week, and that these opportunities were available to youth on Honors, A Level, and B Level. C Level youth were reportedly considered for field trips on a case-by-case basis. Like outdoor recreation, field trips were paused at the time of JHA's September 2022 because administrators had concluded after an escape that they did not have enough staff to safely hold them. A youth told JHA visitors that he had been on a field trip to see a movie five months before, but that field trips had stopped after that. Warrenville had reportedly lost an LTA and had another staff member temporarily assigned to the role. Administrators were hopeful that they would be able to resume field trips in the near future and were reportedly planning one for the end of September.

Physical Plant



At the time of the 2021 visit, an administrator reported that the facility’s external parking lot—the one outside the fence where staff and visitors parked—had been approved for repairs, but that there was no start date. Administrators noted that the internal pavement would hopefully be repaired after work on the parking lot had been completed. The facility had had its air conditioning system replaced, but was still in need of a new water softener in the administrative building.

In 2021, administrators also shared plans to remodel the bathrooms on the living units and add phone and internet connections so counselors could have their offices there. They were hoping to eliminate the mobile trailer units currently housing the mental health offices, which [as JHA noted in 2018](#), were installed in the 1970s and were originally intended as a temporary fix for a shortage of space. When JHA visited in 2022, administrators stated that the remodel had been approved, but there was no start date. The trailers were still in use for individual mental health appointments.

Warrenville is not one of IDJJ’s oldest or largest facilities, but the repairs and maintenance required are notable and likely not without sizeable cost. **As is true of all the IYCs, as long as**

any youth are incarcerated there, no matter the cost, IDJJ must address physical plant needs to ensure youth safety. This raises the sensibility of using scarce resources to run outdated facilities that are unable to provide the most supportive, rehabilitative environments possible for them. Despite Warrenville's lower population, the majority of the youth were high school graduates who were being offered no vocational and very limited educational programming and would likely be better served in other settings.

Conclusion

IDJJ has undoubtedly come a long way in the past decade or so; however, all of its facilities manifest significant problems. Some of these issues, such as violence, short staffing, and lack of programming for high school graduates, are vestiges of the past when IDJJ's population was much larger. Others, such as programming being shut down due to low participation and youth being housed in facilities that are poorly suited to meet their needs, may be exacerbated by the inability to separate youth according to different needs which is actually made more challenging with the current population. **The significance of persistent problems such as violence, mistreatment by staff, short staffing, and inability to provide needed programs (despite the population being about 60% of what it was at the beginning of 2020 and a mere 15% of what it was a decade ago) shows that no matter how low the population is and how dedicated staff and administrators within IDJJ are, a carceral system for youth can never be truly rehabilitative and will inevitably fall short of meeting the needs of youth who come into conflict with the law.**

JHA is hopeful that 2023 will bring needed focus and momentum on the Transformation Plan announced in 2020 and that Illinois will close outdated youth facilities in favor of providing youth with needed supports, programming and treatment in their communities. The low population of youth in state custody and pervasive problems inherent in incarcerating youth in adult-style prisons, which are detailed in this report, make clear that it is time for Illinois to not just improve but truly transform our juvenile justice system.



This report was written by JHA staff. Media inquiries should be directed to JHA's Executive Director Jennifer Vollen-Katz at (331) 264-4081 or jvollen@thejha.org

Incarcerated individuals can send privileged mail to report issues to the John Howard Association, P.O. Box 10042, Chicago, IL 60610-0042. JHA staff read every letter and track this information to monitor what is occurring behind prison walls and to advocate for humane policies and practices. Family and friends can contact JHA via our website www.thejha.org or by leaving us a voicemail at (312) 291-9183.

Since 1901, JHA has provided public oversight of Illinois' juvenile and adult correctional facilities. Every year, JHA staff and trained volunteers inspect prisons, jails, and detention centers throughout the state. Based on these inspections, JHA regularly issues reports that are instrumental in improving prison conditions. JHA humbly thanks everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this report and who graciously shared their experiences and insights with us.

