



Winona County justice programs

Final report: Activities, requests, future actions

Introduction

Engage Winona contracted with Winona County between March and May 2021 to gather public input and ideas on its justice programs, share information about current programs, and explore ways the public can engage collaboratively with the county.

Our presence in this project was to hear and amplify community voices, collect and present input and requests from the community, and identify potential paths for the county and community to work on together.

What we did

- **Held a virtual listening session March 24** attended by **nearly 100 people**.
- **More than 130 unique individuals** completed a survey we created between mid-March and early April.
- Within this engagement, we **recorded nearly 500 comments** relevant to a variety of core issues related to Winona County's justice programs and system.
- **We released a full report** of the themes and focus areas that emerged from the listening session and survey.
- We also **released a comprehensive appendix of all responses** we recorded.
- We **presented the listening session and survey findings** to the Winona County Board of Commissioners on April 13.

- **We held a public Q&A with county officials on April 29**, focused on responses to the questions raised during the March listening session – **more than 50 attended**.
- **We released a report highlighting responses from the event to nearly 20 questions** – ranging from whether the county plans to consider a juvenile facility to how the community can work together on programs outside the system.
- **We hosted the third and final event on May 26** – focused on collaborative action and next best steps forward. **About 40-50 people attended**, working in three small groups: youth programs, adult programs, and Restorative Justice+healing programs.
- We released this final report and next steps in early June.
- We plan to stay connected to this work and are available to serve in ongoing support roles for both community members and the county.

What we produced

- Report on March listening session + survey
- Appendix of full responses - about 500 - from the listening session and survey
- Video of April Q&A event
- Report on April Q&A responses
- Notes from May collaborative action event
- Final report on next steps (this document)

These files are all available on Engage Winona's website at the [Winona County Justice Programs project page](#), and have all been shared with Winona County and the public.

Where we came up short: Youth engagement

We had very few youth engage in this project - just a handful in the survey, and none in the events and conversations.



We did conduct outreach and extended invitations, including to youth of color. It didn't result in participation, but did provide insight: What was reflected back to us from those with experience in the system was a deep distrust of the system, stories of harm caused, and no desire to engage in anything related to justice programs or the justice system. Meanwhile, youth who had no direct experience with the justice system expressed little interest - and not much understanding of why they would want to engage.

The absence of youth in this process calls out for a future project or process focused specifically and maybe exclusively on engaging youth and activating them in providing input and identifying solutions.

Some pathways are addressed in the "Future Actions" section below.

What we heard: Requests + future actions

Below are the most common requests we heard community members ask of Winona County - both of the Winona County board, and of staff and current programs - throughout this engagement:

For the Winona County board

- Provide more funding for community-based programs, prevention, mental health resources, and wrap-around support
- Make a formal commitment to not pursue building a juvenile facility
- Make a commitment to moving toward a future of zero youth incarceration in the county (*original request was to adopt a zero youth incarceration policy, as well as a zero incarceration policy; county officials said it's a state/Legislature issue*)
- Create pathways for youth participation and engagement - on the board, in committees, etc.

For Winona County

- Expand Restorative Justice to serve more youth and reach adults; consider transitioning the program out of the Department of Corrections and the justice system



- Work with schools to end/reimagine the truancy system and process, and/or collaborate additional support on the school side to prevent kids from reaching the system
- Create and promote an easily understandable, accessible list of diversion and prevention programs
- Create a navigator position, a navigator website, or some kind of materials and outreach to help individuals and families better use and understand the county's existing programs and services
- Provide support and technical assistance (particularly around questions of needs for licensing, etc.) to community members exploring the possibility of starting community-based programs, like youth mentoring or support homes
- Provide easy pathways to future engagement on the jail design, construction and programming
- Provide easy pathways to future engagement with existing diversion programs, advisory committees, and other opportunities - one suggestion was a dedicated Get Involved page on the county or CJCC website
- Help county residents understand the underlying issues at play in the system (changing state/federal regulations, shifts in funding, etc.) - regular communication, columns from county commissioners, forums, etc. - to empower them to serve as advocates for policy changes

What we heard: Future workgroups

These are the primary ideas for groups that emerged during the May event. There's no world in which we imagine the county or community volunteers have capacity to launch and support all of these.

One pathway is choosing the one with the most current energy around it and focusing on that first - like Restorative Justice.

Community members expressed a need for the county to initiate groups that involve county programs and policies - announcing its formation, inviting stakeholders, hosting the first gathering.



Engage Winona has the ability to provide some support and connections for establishing workgroups that include community members, and has served in some contexts as a paid group coordinator for larger projects and efforts.

***NOTE:** Winona County recently completed a Sequential Intercept Mapping (SIM) workshop, which identified gaps in adult services - that ongoing process intersects and supports several of the ideas below.*

- **Restorative Justice**

- Collaboratively creating a future for Restorative Justice, including considering a community-based home
- Engage Winona can provide research support

- **Navigator (programs + services access)**

- Identifying, creating materials, outreach, training, etc. to provide easy and accessible understanding of programs and services
- Potential for growing partnership with Winona Community HUB

- **Supporting, networking mentoring programs**

- Better connections, relationships among existing programs
- Potential collaboration with Winona Nonprofit Alliance, other community-based partners

- **Truancy**

- Collaboration with schools
- Include key stakeholders, lived experience voices (students)

- **Policy advocacy**

- Build a network of community voices to speak in support of programs that make a difference
- Identify key policies (especially at state level) to address

- **Crisis stabilization, mental health**

- One of the biggest needs identified in the SIM workshop process
- Need for healthcare, county together at the table

