



Winona County justice programs

May collaborative action event

Community members and county staff and elected officials came together May 26 to participate in small-group conversations on identifying future action steps around key issues raised during this process:

- Community-based youth programs, including mentorship
- Community-based and systems-based adult programs
- Restorative Justice and healing programs

Below are notes from each of the conversation rooms. They are not comprehensive - they're focused on capturing key questions, responses, information, and ideas for future action. They are edited for length, clarity and accessibility, while preserving the overall content.

Youth programs

Participants expressed concern about the availability and access to mental health services for youth in the Winona area. These concerns were expressed in the following ways:

- Limited availability of services
- Inadequate funding for service providers thus creating a disincentive to offer services
- Long wait times to get services
- Lack of awareness of the services that do exist
- Complicated access processes that create barriers to getting services

Mental health funding and reimbursement policy are set at the state level.

There are mental health advocacy groups representing rural parts of the county and surrounding counties; Winona County board members are actively involved.

Participants expressed interest in being informed of how they can be involved with policy at the local and state level.

In addition to more mental health services that would reduce the number of youth entering the criminal justice system, Winona needs more primary prevention options for youth.

Lots of support for and discussion about Front Porch Unity. Folks interested in supporting their work can contact Eldridge McClatchey directly at frontporchunity@gmail.com.

Adult programs

Winona County staff/elected official comments:

- **Chris Meyer, Winona County commissioner:** County, community members recently participated in a Sequential Intercept Mapping workshop, looking at gaps and overlaps in the system
 - Need to map the gaps in how participants' experience is engaging with Winona County Health and Human Services.
- **Jeff Mueller, Winona County Sheriff's Office Chief Deputy:** Agreed there should be someplace other than the jail to do more health and human services-related work, and certainly the jail should not be the only place for mental health, but no matter what, some folks in jail are going to be folks with mental health issues and so, in some sense, the jail ends up needing to play the role of health care provider.
 - With limited tax dollars, officials are required to pick this and then not that from existing realities. Imagine all funding is there for all the options, what do we do when there's still violent crime?
- **Chris Meyer:** Solutions will always involve lobbying. But officials are not the only ones who need to do that, so do regular citizens, the county uses lobbying groups, but still needs individuals to write letters or make phone calls.
- **Jeff Mueller:** 20 years ago the county was already needing to make this decision on the jail - the jail has been failing for that long.

Participant comments

- Need better collaboration among county, nonprofits and service organizations in order to avoid siloed approach, for example, on the domestic abuse front - consider a working group on a collaborative model
- Please separate mental health treatment and criminal justice functions by making serious local efforts on mental health more robust, and consider non-incarceration as an option
- Calling for a shift away from incarceration toward structures approved by local elected officials who should work with the state, levy taxes, and fund local problem solving efforts
- Perhaps a crisis intervention approach is what is needed, which could help settle the territory between the role of law enforcement and the mental health officials, requires us to reframe those in crisis away from “offenders”
- In the cases of domestic violence we may not solve the whole story, but might it be better to introduce a lower level of risk?
- Incarceration is not the answer. Separation of law enforcement and mental health concerns, adoption of crisis intervention model, more and better training for officers.
- Success in Winona County Treatment Court and in Human Services Advisory Council - both have strong community input and voices
- Good models for crisis intervention in other places - Memphis, San Jose.
- City of Winona is planning to launch its Alternative Response Team this year - will be alternative first responders for mental health and crisis calls
- Current systems do not do enough on the prevention side
- Winona County Re-entry Assistance Program (WRAP) is one model of something going well in Winona County
- A lot of this comes down to other issues - like affordable housing. How do we persuade landlords to break up the housing gridlock? Can they accept Section 8 offers?
- Affordable housing, job trainings - ways of helping folks from falling through cracks
- Can we shift emphasis to restorative justice and crisis intervention?

Restorative Justice + healing programs

What is the history and current state of the restorative justice program (RJ)?

Karin Sonneman, County Attorney:

- RJ started in Wabasha County in the justice system by someone who then brought it to Winona County 25-30 years ago.
- RJ is defined as efforts to try to repair the harm that has been caused by crime in the community.
- RJ has always been aligned with corrections because it is a theory of criminal justice.
- Winona County tried to expand the program about 10 years ago to adults but there was not enough community support (the county partnered with Winona State at the time).
- County funds the program, along with state funds; the program does not make money - no fees are charged

Angela Boozhoo, participant/facilitator:

- Joyce Packard was my mother; she began the program in Wabasha County, based on Native American principles of healing circles.

Bill Moe, probation officer:

- They started the program through Americorps.
- RJ has always been housed in corrections.
- Joyce tried to get it into DHS because she thought it was a better fit.

Katie Ilies, Restorative Justice staff:

- Provided a brief overview of the programs:
 - Do early intervention – around 300 children
 - Diversion program for truancy – 50+ students
 - Run circles at Riverway Learning Community – around 20 children
 - Run a skills course, which had 10 and 6 each semester
 - Community group conferencing program – 10-12 participants
 - A mentoring program, but that program was paused during the pandemic – usually 8-10 in this program
- On Fridays, RJ meets with WAPS leadership to talk about students. They do try to bridge the gap of information. Some trancies get dropped once students are back in school.

Truancy, truancy diversion notes

- Participant: The reason Restorative Justice is brought up so much now is because there are so many kids in WAPS facing truancy and being funneled to the juvenile justice system.
- Participant asked: What is the motivation for young people to participate in the RJ program?

- Answer – The juvenile delinquency diversion program is voluntary and includes incentives to encourage participation.
- RJ does not track race/ethnicity of program participants
- Participant: Shared story of a student was not given access to the diversion program because of an existing problem. How does this happen?
 - Answer from RJ staff: If a student has a previous charge, and 15 or more unexcused absences, and if have been filed for truancy before, then they are not eligible
- **Karin:** Rules and procedures for truancy diversion come out of (the Winona County Attorney's Office) with consultation with (the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, CJCC). That includes the diversion and restorative justice program.

Would it be possible to house RJ somewhere else other than in DOC or CJCC?

- Participant asked about the RJ program housed in a space that is not the DOC - would like to see it in a community-oriented space
 - Karin Sonneman responded: Where would be a better place to house the program? Because it is pre-truancy program, should it be in the schools? Or where? Could it be in DHS? There are streams of funding that can only be used for certain things, so this would need to be taken into consideration.
- **Karin:** we created some of these programs to respond to the problem at the time, and now perhaps the problem is different. Moving forward, we could put together a group, even outside of CJCC, a collaborative group that should include community members, schools representatives, my office – to explore moving this program to a different place. We would have to include DOC because of funding streams.
- Several participants supported the idea proposed by Karin about continuing the discussion about moving RJ out of DOC and outside of the CJCC. That would be a good next step.