# TAKING ON TRANSFORMATION

Chapter 6

## CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE TO ALIGN WITH VISION AND VALUES

CATALYZE JUSTICE

COLUMBIA | JUSTICE LAB

# SPECIAL THANKS

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# CHANGING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

## CHAPTER OUTLINE



## OBJECTIVE

EXPLORE THIS CHAPTER ONLINE

This chapter explains why advancing organizational culture change is vital to youth justice system transformation and how to effect culture change across a youth justice agency in partnership with youth, families, communities and other youth-serving agencies.

# INTRODUCTION

**Undertaking a large-scale transformation depends on many different factors, including knowing where your jurisdiction currently sits relative to a desired vision; the detail and design of policy changes that move toward that vision; and the beliefs and behaviors of the people who will implement these policies.**

This last point recognizes the significant role that organizational culture can play in advancing whether and how vision statements get translated and implemented in policies and practices that positively impact young people and their families on a daily basis. For this reason, taking steps to ensure that agency values and beliefs are internalized at all levels—from agency director to frontline staff, and among community partners—is integral to achieving the ultimate goals of any transformation.

Organizational culture generally refers to the collective set of values, beliefs and behaviors that operate within an institution or agency. The culture of the youth justice system in particular has been shaped by its origins, reflecting the country's history of racism and paternalism (see more in the chapter on *Centering Racial Justice and Equity*) and how the values and practices associated with these origins have been reinforced over time. Many other factors impact organizational culture, including current policies and practices, institutional

structures, leadership, tenure and experience of staff, channels of formal and informal communication, partnerships, training and metrics.

Given this backdrop and the reform efforts of the last two decades, leaders looking to take on system transformation may find themselves at very different starting points when it comes to organizational culture. For example, in some places the status quo—namely, the behavioral paradigm that relies on custody, control, isolation and punishment in carceral settings—may be firmly entrenched as the primary response for serving youth who come into contact with the system. In such instances, moving away from and undoing this paradigm is a critical first step and will include a vision for closing punitive, harmful facilities.

> **IT WILL BE IMPORTANT FOR LEADERS TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK AND ACCELERATE MOMENTUM FOR THE YOUTH AND FAMILIES THEY SERVE TO DEFINE AND CREATE THEIR OWN VISIONS OF SAFETY AND WELL-BEING.**

Simultaneously, however, it will be important for leaders to lay the groundwork and accelerate momentum for the youth and families they serve to define and create their own visions of safety and well-being. In other places, efforts may already be underway to shift in a new direction and being able to help institutionalize this mindset and push further will be important. The context will also be broader than just the youth justice agency, and the larger political landscape and vision of other child- and family-serving agencies in the jurisdiction will have an impact on organizational culture and transformation work. In all cases the work will be challenging, messy and iterative, but it is critically important, especially if the end goal remains to prepare systems to support and expand the role and authority communities have in serving their own young people.

Regardless of where a jurisdiction is in this journey, leaders play a critical role in setting the tone about how the process of achieving a new vision will unfold. Transparency about the goals of transformation—including the closure of facilities and increasing community responsibility for youth justice—and how they will work

with staff, youth, families and community partners is critical to achieve these goals. Staff who work with young people every day are a valuable resource and are necessary collaborators to bring new visions to reality in practice. Youth, families and communities are essential partners to defining and realizing a new vision for youth justice that will be youth-centered, family-focused and increasingly community-led. As leaders approach the task of shifting organizational culture to align with new values and goals, it is important to be humble, ask questions and be willing and eager to learn from partners inside and outside of the current system. Ample research on organizational culture demonstrates the ways in which culture can propel or hinder institutional goals.[1] A healthy organizational culture—one in which vision, values, strategies and metrics are aligned—builds faith in the intent and ability of the organization to cultivate positive outcomes and propels the organization forward in achieving them.

This chapter offers core strategies and case examples to help youth justice leaders shift and promote healthy organizational cultures that align with their ultimate transformation vision. It focuses on key concepts that leaders can center in conversations within their agencies, including transparency; shared values and common goals; participatory and inclusive processes; and focusing on strengths, assets and collaboration to embed youth well-being and success into all aspects of the work.

The content in this chapter overlaps with that of others, including *Building Public and Political Will for Change*; *Partnering with Youth and Their Families*; *Shifting Roles, Responsibilities and Resources to Communities;* and *Developing a Shared Vision for Transformation* and works hand-in-hand with these chapters. It includes examples that represent a wide range of jurisdictions taking on transformation, from those that are early in the process and urgently looking to end racist, harmful system practices and close down youth prisons, to those that have moved much farther along the spectrum of community-centered approaches. As appropriate, it outlines important considerations and questions that leaders can explore as they work to align their organizational culture with a more youth-, family- and community-centered paradigm.

# OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUE

## HOW THE ORIGINS OF YOUTH JUSTICE IMPACT AGENCY CULTURE TODAY

As has been explored in other chapters (see *Centering Racial Justice and Equity, Partnering with Youth and Their Families*, and *Shifting Roles, Responsibilities and Resources to Communities*), the roots of the criminal and youth justice systems in the United States lie in a history of racism, paternalism and control. The philosophy and foundation of these systems, and decades of practical reinforcement since, have entrenched a punitive cultural paradigm that will be a central challenge to face among youth justice leaders seeking transformation.

Over the past two decades much evidence has demonstrated that the "crime and punishment" culture of our criminal and youth justice systems has resolutely failed to increase safety in communities or to help people involved and incarcerated within these systems change for the better. As such, many alternatives have been developed for youth prisons and other punitive youth justice responses, many in partnership with communities, and transformation is underway in systems across the country. Nonetheless, a youth justice leader today seeking to transform the system into one that will support youth well-being and encourage true partnership with families and communities must face the legacy of this punitive culture, as it remains largely entrenched across youth justice systems despite many earnest and ongoing efforts at reform and successful examples of ongoing transformation.

Effective and meaningful youth justice transformation—change that reaches a young person's day-to-day experience with the system—depends not only on changing policies, but upon changing the attitudes, beliefs, behaviors and culture of the system and the people who run it. It is people throughout the system—from case managers in a community-based program, to a young person's probation officer, to the front-line staff of a secure facility, to the facility director—who create the culture that a young person experiences in the youth

justice system and who will be responsible for implementing policy and practice changes. True system transformation must include youth justice reform which gets to the roots of shifting staff values and beliefs. Culture change is vital among youth justice staff in the process of transformation, even when the ultimate goal of transformation is having very little "system" left and having young people's needs met in communities without intervention. It will take some time to reach that ultimate goal and there will be many interim steps between the current system and this ideal. Over the course of the transformation process it will be critical to engage current staff and administrators in implementation of a new vision and this work will require a new and ever evolving culture.

**CHANGING BELIEFS AND BEHAVIORS IS CHALLENGING FOR ANY PERSON, LET ALONE ENTIRE WORKFORCES THAT HAVE KNOWN CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES TO BE THE SIGNATURE FEATURE OF THEIR AGENCIES FOR OVER A CENTURY.**

Why is culture change so challenging? First, the roots of the current punitive youth justice culture go very deep. Beliefs about the purpose of the system to rehabilitate the troubled or dangerous child, and how to go about that, have been ingrained across youth justice staff and reinforced through training and mentorship for generations. These attitudes are even ingrained to a certain extent among families and communities who have been conditioned by the paternalistic arm of the system to rely upon it and may not yet fully understand the possibility of a community-led system. Changing beliefs and behaviors is challenging for any person, let alone entire workforces that have known correctional facilities to be the signature feature of their agencies for over a century. Many specifically resist change out of fear of losing their jobs and the livelihood that supports their families and the unknown of what comes next. Unemployment is highly unsavory politically, and unions are powerful institutions that protect youth justice staff and will oppose any change that will result in job loss. Many staff have worked with the system for many years and have experienced waves of reform that have come and gone under rotating leadership—with varying degrees of success. Staff who

have experienced temporary or superficial reforms are likely to be skeptical of new leadership seeking to institute change and may resist even the most earnest transformation efforts, disbelieving the sincerity of their intent or their likely effectiveness.

Often, even in the context of youth justice reform, agencies have been fairly insular and have not worked well with their own staff, other related agencies, or youth, family and community partners. In some cases, new visions have been held too closely by youth justice leaders, without successful collaboration with key stakeholders, leading to little permutation of these visions beyond executive leadership or the facility context. In the context of transformation to an increasingly community-led system, broad and sincere partnership—and the development of a culture of shared vision, goals and values among all groups central to transformation, across the system and communities—is absolutely essential.

What is needed to accomplish deep and enduring culture change in a youth justice system? How do you convince staff that change is meaningful, that staff will feel more aligned to the goals that led them to this work and will feel more effective in achieving them? How do you engage staff throughout the organization, as well as youth, families, communities and other agency partners, and gain their buy-in, input and investment into transformation so that culture change ripples throughout these groups to create one, new, unified organism? How do you embed a new culture that is youth-centered, and that aims largely for the system's dissolution and transformation toward a community-led paradigm? These are the questions that this chapter seeks to address in exploring how to effect meaningful culture change as part of youth justice transformation.

MARKERS FOR SELF-ASSESSMENT

## INDICATORS OF CULTURE CHANGE IN YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEMS

As discussed above, shifting the culture of youth justice systems is no small task. The historical legacy of racism, paternalism and control inherent to youth justice philosophy has become entrenched; for nearly two centuries that legacy has been part of system policies, facility designs, and the lack of community-based alternatives, as well as affecting partnership with communities, and staff training, values and beliefs. Implementing meaningful change that leads to transformative shifts in what youth experience requires leaders to be intentional and transparent, and they must communicate new visions and expectations clearly, starting with the philosophies, values and beliefs that underpin the agency's new vision and helping staff at all levels and youth, family, community and agency partners to understand how this will be translated into day-to-day practice.

Youth justice leaders just getting started with transformation or those already engaged partway through the process can look to a number of indicators to understand current system culture and its relative alignment to, or opposition with, youth justice transformation as described in this Guide. These indicators offer concrete ideas to assess how old ideas operate in a system's culture and where action can be taken to shift in a different direction. Indicators can measure how far a system has progressed and where attention is still needed.

System leaders can use these indicators to understand progress with culture change and where to focus new and ongoing efforts to permeate culture change across a youth justice institution and agency. Importantly, organizational culture is something that is constantly evolving and requires intentional focus and work to stay on top of; culture change is never "done" and leaders should establish processes that allow for consistent monitoring and ways to support the continued evolution of culture in line with the vision for transformation. Leaders should consistently communicate

successful progress, regardless of how small it might seem, that has been accomplished and to acknowledge the staff, as well as outside stakeholders, who contributed to that progress.

### Indicators that progress has been made in shifting the culture of a youth justice agency to one that is aligned with transformation:

- Leaders have an understanding of political context and the vision and work of other agencies within their jurisdiction, in order to advance transformation efforts that will be sustainable.
- Leaders are and have been transparent with staff and external partners about the vision for and direction of transformation. Leadership is explicit about the short- and long-term goals of transformation, including acknowledging and repairing harms such as racial injustice and inequity, closing facilities and moving toward a community-led paradigm.
- Leadership has worked with, or is currently working with, staff to identify shared goals and values for the youth justice system that align with the core values and principles of youth justice transformation described in this Guide. Leadership is working with staff at all levels of the agency and has hired a skilled facilitator to guide these discussions.
- Leaders and staff have examined, or are examining, existing youth justice practice according to shared values and goals. Leaders and staff are working together to develop and update policies and practices for a new youth justice system. Leaders have centered racial justice and equity in this work, emphasizing the racial impacts of past practice and awareness in developing new, equitable policies and practices.
- Staff at all levels of the agency are participating in developing and updating policies and practices and report feeling included in the transformation process. Staff have received support and training so that some may become champions for change.

- Leaders have emphasized partnering with youth, families, communities and other youth justice agencies in youth justice transformation. Leadership has created an ongoing planning and implementation body that includes these partners and has hired youth, family and community partners and other experts to train staff for this work.
- Leaders have invested in training and ongoing coaching for staff to prepare them for system transformation, including training in the history of the system, its racist origins, its harms and the need for transformation; training in the latest scientific research on adolescent development; and core skills required for new youth justice practice.
- Staff language and behavior is shifting in the youth justice system, with a focus on person-centered language and demeanor in interactions with youth and families.
- Leadership has worked with Human Resources on a recruiting and hiring strategy for transformation, to bring in new hires who will embrace new values and drive transformation.
- Leaders have worked with staff and partners to develop new metrics for the youth justice system that center youth well-being and success. New metrics are operational and leaders are working with staff and partners to monitor performance according to these metrics.
- Staff throughout the agency are advocates of reform to their colleagues and to new potential hires. Staff do not actively oppose transformation on the job, off the job, in protests or in alignment with unions.
- Youth, family and community partners are advocates of youth justice transformation and vocal partners in change at the table with youth justice leadership, staff and other agency partners.

**Indicators that further attention to culture change is needed, which can point the way to areas for reform:**

- Youth justice leaders have not been transparent with staff about the vision for and direction of transformation. Leaders have been vague or veiled about the goals and changes ahead.
- Leaders have not invited staff into reform conversations and have not engaged with staff about shared goals and values for the youth justice system; if leaders have met with staff, they have invited only staff at certain levels of the agency to participate, rather than a diverse and representative group from across the agency. Leaders have not invested in facilitators for this process.
- Leaders have not, and are not, working with staff to develop new policies and practices to align with transformation.
- Leaders have not emphasized the role of youth, families and communities in the transformation process, have not trained staff to work with them or have not invited them to the table for planning and implementation conversations.
- Leaders have not engaged other youth-serving agencies as partners in transformation.
- Leaders have not invested in training for staff to prepare them for the work of transformation, or system leaders have invested in one-time, superficial or isolated training for staff but not meaningful training and ongoing coaching.
- Staff language and behavior is not shifting in the youth justice system. Staff continue to use distancing and pejorative terms to refer to young people involved with the system and behave according to a punitive and correctional paradigm.
- Leadership has not revised recruiting and hiring processes to hire new staff who are well-suited and skilled for transformation.

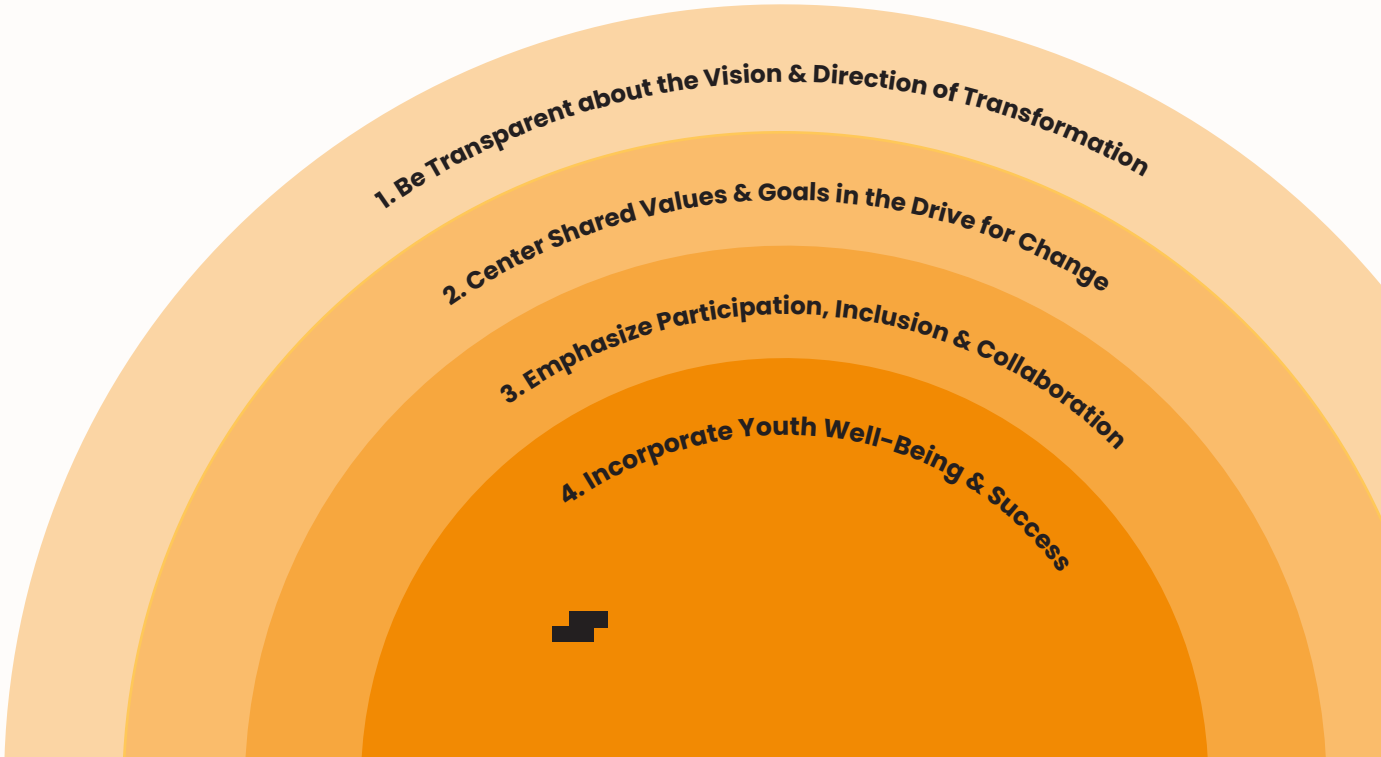
- Leaders have not developed new metrics for the system focused on youth well-being and success and have not worked with staff and partners to create new metrics. Metrics continue to reflect old youth justice values of punishment and control, focused on recidivism and similar measures.
- Staff are actively opposed to youth justice transformation on the job, off the job, in protests and/or in alignment with unions.
- Youth, their families, communities and other youth-serving agencies are not engaged as partners in the work of transformation and report remaining external to the process.

# ACTION STEPS

**The following steps provide specific guidance toward changing organizational culture to align with vision and values.**

Reflecting deeply on how an organization's current culture supports or hinders the eventual vision for transformation can be humbling and incredibly difficult, particularly when youth are being harmed or hurt. Nationwide, jurisdictions have engaged in work to achieve different goals, from closing harmful youth prisons to reallocating funding toward community-based efforts. The action steps, case examples and cited resources in this section synthesize the learnings of systems as they guided shifts in organizational culture to align with their goals.

These examples showcase places with varying goals and in different stages of transformation, including those that are just getting started and those that may be farther along. In all cases the information shared is intended to offer ideas on how to begin and deepen this type of work. While much of the content in this chapter is skewed more toward early-stage work, leaders may find that these steps still apply to later stages of transformation and could offer a place to deepen ongoing culture change work.



ACTION STEP 1

## Be Transparent about the Vision for and Direction of Transformation

The first step for leaders seeking to advance culture change in a youth justice organization is to be transparent about the vision for transformation and the direction in which the agency is heading. Although there may be some resistance to change, approaching staff from the beginning of the process with transparency about the changes that are planned is critical to gaining their trust in the process, honest feedback about their doubts and their buy-in and partnership in working together toward transformation. As part of what they present to staff, leaders should be transparent about big-picture goals for the system that are aligned with the vision for transformation, for example addressing harms, closing facilities and shifting services toward a community-led paradigm.

**Be transparent and provide clarity to staff around the goals of reform and transformation.** For jurisdictions just starting this process, addressing past and present harm is the first of several important steps that will be required. In these cases, leaders should be explicit about why these initial steps are integral to the bigger picture goals of transformation —that is, ultimately closing punitive, youth correctional facilities and investing in more equitable, youth-centered, community-led and family-focused approaches to youth justice. Providing consistent and clear communication around these goals can build trust between leadership and staff and a healthy organizational culture that propels goals forward.

Transparency is particularly important to help staff anticipate the changes to come and navigate the impact these changes are likely to have on their career path. In the case of facility closures this necessarily means the number of correctional jobs will also decrease. While this marks a step on the road towards

system transformation—one founded in common values and empirical research—it will likely spur anger and anxiety. Leaders, therefore, will need to take care to address this anxiety and other concerns among staff about potential career transitions. In public presentations and conversations being transparent about the ultimate goals of reform, the steps to get there and the proposed timeline of each phase of system transformation will be helpful. Even if many of these variables may lie outside of leaders' direct control—such as legislation that affects the sentencing of young people and funding for different approaches to youth justice, discussed further in *Building Public and Political Will for Change*—communicating clearly and consistently with staff around these developments and providing them with resources along the way is critical.

Leaders can share with staff that the process will directly involve staff at all levels of the organization and will include garnering their insight and participation in designing and implementing reforms. Leaders should invest in training that prepares them to support young people under a new youth justice culture and grow their own skill set as staff inside the agency, or for careers outside of it. For instance, as discussed further in action steps below, youth justice leaders might implement professional development opportunities for staff to broaden their skill sets and earn college credits or certifications in other fields. Leaders can also highlight other jurisdictions that have undertaken similar work in specific areas and what the results have been. The work of Pierce County, Washington is one example of an agency getting insight and participation in culture change directly from staff and is highlighted in the chapter on *Partnering with Youth and Their Families*, as well as in videos and other resources on the Taking on Transformation website. While there will almost undoubtedly be some resistance from staff and from unions regardless of these efforts, youth justice leaders should consider it their role and responsibility to keep their staff informed and engaged.

Throughout this chapter, we emphasize garnering buy-in for system and culture change by engaging staff at each phase of the reform process. This is essential not only to inform and cultivate support for policy and practice changes, but also to build champions and allies throughout

the agency and in the next generation of leaders. Frontline staff who participate in culture and systems change early on are in a position to help to cultivate support amongst their colleagues and to keep these lessons and conversations front of mind as they rise into positions of power and have the potential to further systems change. Engaging staff in this way is also central to sustaining culture change in the more immediate future. While it is common for youth justice leaders and executive staff to change positions every few years-potentially disrupting reform implementation-building allies throughout the agency can help to ensure that progress continues through leadership changes. Garnering the support of staff members is also critical in negotiations with unions, who often pose a formidable political force opposed to reform in many jurisdictions. Champions amongst staff members can use their membership within the union to influence its organizational priorities.

ACTION STEP 2

## Center Shared Values and Goals in the Drive for Change

Youth justice leaders can set the tone for the changes to come and begin to guide a process of culture change with staff by emphasizing the values and goals they are collectively pursuing in the transformation process. This involves reminding staff where they, the agency, and its youth, family and community partners are trying to go in this moment—whether that is addressing immediate harms, working toward facility closures or pursuing longer-term goals of developing more community-led services. Underlying all of this, leaders should emphasize the unifying goal that guides their work in the youth justice system and that everyone shares—wanting to see youth and families thrive and flourish at home, with the system playing a key role in helping to actualize this vision and set kids up for success. Acknowledging that staff within youth justice agencies were often motivated to the profession by this central goal and come to work every day with this aim in mind can help to anchor system transformation efforts, unify staff attention and focus and increase morale and buy-in for reform.

Leaders can then share with staff the data, narrative stories and case examples showing how the current system's approach does not meet these goals, to build buy-in for transformation. Alongside this information, leaders can generate hope and motivation for change by highlighting how other jurisdictions with similar challenges have engaged in transformative efforts that have created better results for youth, families and communities while addressing harms, closing facilities and relying more on communities to lead change, provide services and support youth and families. This sets the stage for the imperative, collaborative work of transformation between leaders, staff and partners, at whatever stage the jurisdiction is in the process of change.

The following steps can help system leaders and staff to develop common ground around shared values and goals for the youth justice system, and anchor system transformation and culture change efforts in this shared foundation:

- **Engage staff in discussions about shared goals and values for the youth justice system.** Often, assumptions are made that staff beliefs, values and goals are aligned with a more correctional approach. However, talking with staff across youth justice systems often reveals that the same values driving system transformation also led them to the work in the first place. Bringing leadership and staff together with a skilled, independent facilitator to dig into shared goals and values can be a good starting point for these discussions.

  It is those on the front lines of the agency who most frequently interact with youth, who are tasked with implementing reforms and can have outsized impacts on culture. This includes frontline correctional and probation officers and supervisors; support staff; medical staff, social workers and behavioral health teams; kitchen and janitorial staff of facilities; and volunteers. Therefore, engaging with staff in all roles and at all levels throughout youth justice agencies around shared values and goals, their insight on day-to-day challenges and their suggestions about how to implement reforms helps to build collaborative approaches to change and a new culture that embraces transformation.

TIPS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

FACILITATION GUIDE

# DISCUSSIONS WITH STAFF ABOUT SHARED GOALS AND VALUES

Skilled, experienced facilitators can organize and run conversations between staff and leadership engaged in youth justice transformation, hold space for dialogue around potential conflicts and help the group arrive at a list of shared values and goals that resonate with staff and leadership and can be used to guide transformation and the culture change process. Useful questions a facilitator might ask to begin and guide conversations include:

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

Why did you choose this line of work? What were you hoping to achieve?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What values and principles guide your work? What is the experience you hope every young person has who comes through this system?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What are the outcomes that you hope young people who you meet in the system will have?

Reviewing a list of shared values and goals common to youth justice system transformation can be helpful to assess how much alignment exists between staff and leadership. Lists of shared values from other jurisdictions that have engaged successfully in system transformation

efforts can be helpful to draw upon as an example for both staff and leadership. Examples of values can also be found in our chapter on *Developing a Shared Vision for Transformation*. Below are some potential shared values and goals to work through in conversations.

**Shared values may include:**

Respect, dignity, equity, justice, safety, well-being and partnership.

**Shared goals for youth, families and communities may include:**

Safety for everyone—at home, in the community and in youth justice programs and facilities; youth well-being, thriving and engagement in the community; stable school attendance and/or employment; family reunification and stability; reduction of crime and delinquency.

**Shared goals for the system may include:**

Addressing and eliminating immediate harms and inequities; closing facilities; increasing reliance on community-led services.

Youth justice leaders may want to work with facilitators to consider what strategies and forums might be best suited to launch and continue dialogues with staff throughout the agency. Conversations might begin amongst the executive team and supervisors, ensuring that leadership is prepared to both implement and model behavior with their teams in a way that contributes to a healthy, asset-based culture, discussed further below. Leaders might then organize a series of conversations with staff in a variety of forums, ranging from town halls where all staff are convened and are able to ask questions openly, to working group meetings where staff collaborate with smaller numbers of peers representing various positions, to opportunities for more informal conversations such as office hours for staff to share questions or concerns with leadership in a more confidential arena. ■

**Examine existing policies and practices in terms of shared goals and values.** Dialogue around shared goals and values can inform tangible benchmarks against which to measure current system practice and progress with reform. Looking critically at existing practice and results alongside shared goals and values for the system that have been defined by leadership and staff (and together with youth, family and community partners as described below) can help staff more clearly see why change is needed and how transformation could better achieve these goals and values.

RESOURCE

**Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI)**

## INDEPENDENT FACILITATORS TO GUIDE THE CULTURE CHANGE PROCESS

The Missouri Model began as a transformation process of the state juvenile justice system, but quickly became a national model that has been visited and replicated by leaders looking to improve youth justice around the country. Former director of the Missouri Department of Youth Services, Mark Steward, founded the Missouri Youth Services Institute (MYSI) to assist other states and jurisdictions with successfully adapting and implemented the same transformative changes to youth justice that had worked in Missouri.

Both the original reform work in Missouri as well as the advising work of MYSI begin with getting the right staff on board and training them. In a report on the Missouri Model by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, they note that "during their first two years, new youth specialists are required to complete 236 hours of training, much of it dedicated to the underlying DYS values and beliefs." [2] MYSI brings this focus on staff into its training for other systems looking to change, with learning modules for staff at all levels of an agency on:

- **System Foundation Building**
- **Understanding A Rehabilitative Program Model**
- **Using A Group Process in Juvenile Justice Programs**
- **Understanding Youth Behavior**
- **Creating an Environment for Change**
- **From Theory to Application: On the Job Coaching & Skill Building** [3]

TIPS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

FACILITATION GUIDE

# EXAMINING CURRENT POLICY AND PRACTICE IN LIGHT OF SHARED GOALS AND VALUES

As a second step of the facilitation process between leadership and staff, using specific questions around whether and how agency values are reflected in current policy and practice can help leadership and staff to outline tangible steps towards system and culture change. Some useful probing questions include:

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

Do all young people have equitable access to resources within youth justice programs and institutions, and community-based supports? Are there differences in practice based on race, ethnicity, sex, gender, age, sexual orientation, etc.? How can we ensure equitable treatment of, and opportunities for, young people?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

Are services youth-centered? Do individual program plans, reports and evaluations emphasize the strengths and assets of young people and their communities, as opposed to deficits or challenges? Do young people participate centrally in planning for their own supports and opportunities?
Are we investing in young peoples' education, personal development, social capacity and overall well-being so that they can thrive when they return to their communities? Alternatively, are we focused on historical measures that may be readily available but may no longer measure what is most important (i.e., recidivism only)?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

Is family defined more broadly than parents? Are grandparents, foster parents, guardians, stepfamily members and mentors able to visit and support young people? Are there flexible visitation opportunities and supportive services for family members to see their loved ones?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What are the conditions of programs and facilities? Do they promote youth dignity, well-being and thriving? Are probation officers and programs focused on positive supports or on supervision and control only? What is the level of safety in facilities for youth and staff? Are aftercare supports focused on positive development and success in the community, or upon control and violation?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

Are partnerships in place with community organizations to support youth diversion, youth in custody and youth upon return home? Are communities driving and leading the services and opportunities available for youth, or are most services run primarily by the system?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What are the outcomes of current practice for youth recidivism and safety in the community? What are the outcomes for youth success in the community (in terms of well-being, family reunification, school attendance, employment, community engagement, etc.)?

As an example of how values can shape reforms, consider safety—a value held universally across youth justice systems. As a leader, it is important to understand what safety looks like for those engaged in the day-to-day work of serving youth in youth justice programs and in the community, and whether such practices and their results reflect the desired goal. In traditional correctional systems, safety might be measured by looking for the absence of problematic youth behavior and the trends in the incidence of such behavior (for example, *is the number of violent incidents in which youth are involved in facilities, programs, and the community decreasing or increasing over time?*).

While strategies that immediately reduce such incidents might be considered effective ways to enhance safety, these practices may fall short in promoting safety in the broader sense or longer term. For instance, a practice that places young people in isolation in a facility after a conflict might prevent bodily harm in the moment but rarely enhances a young person's emotional safety, well-being, resilience or long-term physical safety in the facility. In fact, there is evidence that these practices and others that focus on heightened physical security using force, restraint and isolation can create a more tense and violent environment that increases stress and creates a cycle of conflict and punishment.[4] Similarly, in the community, probation or parole policy and practice may rely overly on violations that result in re-incarceration, when youth safety and success may better be enhanced by increased support in the community. Opening dialogue around a more expansive understanding of safety—one that is intertwined with youth well-being, resilience and long-term success—can shed light into areas for policy and practice reform and culture change that better promote shared goals and values. ■

**Develop and update policies and practices.** Once leadership and staff have looked at the goals and values that drive transformation, and have reviewed them alongside current policy and practice, it is time to work together to develop and update those policies and practices to align with the shared goals and values of transformation. Although some of this work will be done by policymakers, much of the work to translate policy into day-to-day protocols and practices will be the work of youth justice leadership and staff, together with youth, family and community partners. Meaningfully engaging staff in this work increases their buy-in for transformation, as they invest their own knowledge and ideas into the design and implementation of reforms and in the process develop ownership over the changes being made. This co-creation process is culture change in action. Staff harness their expertise and strengths to help shape the transformation, which ultimately contributes to establishing an agency culture that is *procedurally just*. Research[5] shows that when staff feel like the organizations in which they work are fair and aligned with their goals and that they have input in shaping their organizations, they are more likely to help advance those goals. This is particularly true for frontline staff who interact directly with young people, families and other external community partners.

Leaders and staff can use the values and goals they have identified for two purposes: to promote new and updated policies that align with these values; and to identify and end harmful, punitive practices that do not align with values or goals. Both significant harms and subtler, insidious challenges must be identified and addressed so that they do not persist or return and disrupt progress towards system transformation. While some harmful practices will be recognized and ceased immediately, others may take more time and effort to shift the habits and beliefs that underlie them. Ongoing training, coaching and support of staff, together with the influence of youth, family and community partners, will help to institutionalize new changes into youth justice culture, as described further in steps below.

One way to engage staff consistently over time in the development and implementation of youth justice reforms is to build an ongoing

staff review team with membership from staff at every level of the agency. The review team will work with youth justice leadership and youth, family, community and external agency partners (described further below) to review and understand new youth justice policies, offer questions and input into practical implications of reforms, develop new protocols, procedures and tools needed for implementation and to review the impact of reforms on an ongoing basis over the course of implementation.

The staff review team might also collaborate with external experts and facilitators, such as a national research center or local university, or a professional coach with experience in guiding youth justice agencies and jurisdictions in culture change. These external partners can help to provide a more objective perspective from outside the agency and a source of broader knowledge and expertise. External partners can share nuanced insights and lessons from other jurisdictions that have implemented reforms, many of which are highlighted throughout this Desk Guide. More detail on establishing a staff review team is included in the Staff Review Teams Deep Dive on the Taking on Transformation website.

Throughout specific areas of policy and practice review and reform, youth justice leaders should ensure that racial justice and equity are at the center of the work. This includes acknowledging and reckoning with the racist roots of the criminal and youth justice systems and the structural inequities that they have created and exacerbated, disproportionately harming young people of color. Rather than making a leader vulnerable, focusing on this dialogue is an opportunity to demonstrate value-based leadership. Centering equity and drawing upon youth, family and community input (see below) can inform ways to advance equity at every stage of reform—from revising policies and practices in facilities in order to promote well-being to investing in communities disproportionately affected by structural inequities and mass incarceration in order to create and lead alternatives to youth detention and incarceration.

TIPS FOR SYSTEM LEADERS

FACILITATION GUIDE

# DEVELOPING NEW, TRANSFORMATIVE POLICIES AND PRACTICES WITH STAFF

Once staff and leadership have reviewed current policies and practices alongside shared goals and values, it's time to develop new policies, protocols and practices that reflect and drive the goals of transformation. Some of the work will involve reviewing and understanding policies made by legislators, how they relate to goals and values and how they will be implemented in practice to align with the goals and values of transformation. Some of the work will involve translating policy and vision statements into new youth justice policies, protocols and practices at the agency level. Some useful questions to drive this work with staff include:

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

How do new policies reflect shared goals and values identified? How will they better serve youth involved with the system and their families? How will they better promote safety than current policies and practices? What is the experience of other jurisdictions that have implemented these policies? What effect have jurisdictions seen on recidivism, positive engagement and thriving among youth post-release?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What executive policies, protocols and practices are needed in youth justice programs and among staff to translate these policies into practice at each step of the youth justice system and in partnership with communities?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What new policies, protocols and practices are needed when youth enter the system? How can system admission be more youth-centered? How can new practices lift up youth strengths and give young people and their families a stronger voice in case planning to better serve our values and goals? How can communities be involved?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What policies can guide probation services so that they are more youth-centered and family-focused? How can probation guidelines and expectations be shifted to promote positive youth development and thriving in the community? How can probation partner with communities for a more community-led approach that will better serve youth and families?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What additional programs and practices are needed in the community to support a full continuum of services that can reduce youth entry into prisons?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

As we work to close facilities, how can facilities be more youth- and family-focused in practice? How must policies around youth engagement and safety in facilities shift? How must staff practices around control and the use of force and isolation shift? What can replace these practices to better promote safety and youth and staff well-being? What has been the experience of other jurisdictions in changing the conditions of confinement? What were the effects on youth well-being? Facility safety?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

What policies will support staff in this process at each phase of system change? What support, training, guidelines and resources do staff need to take on new roles?

**SAMPLE QUESTION**

How can communities be more involved in providing a robust alternative to confinement? How can communities be more involved in the process of release from facilities and in supporting youth and family reintegration and thriving after release? What outcomes are associated with closing prisons and transferring authority for many youth programs to the community? How do such programs promote the goals and values we hope to see in youth justice? ■

# RESOURCE

## Bridges Transition Model

One framework to support leaders in implementing transparent, participatory and inclusive strategies for reform and culture change is the Bridges Transition Model.[6] This framework offers an orientation for structuring conversations around organizational change, potential challenges and ways to address them. It outlines three stages of the transition process, and how to approach each.

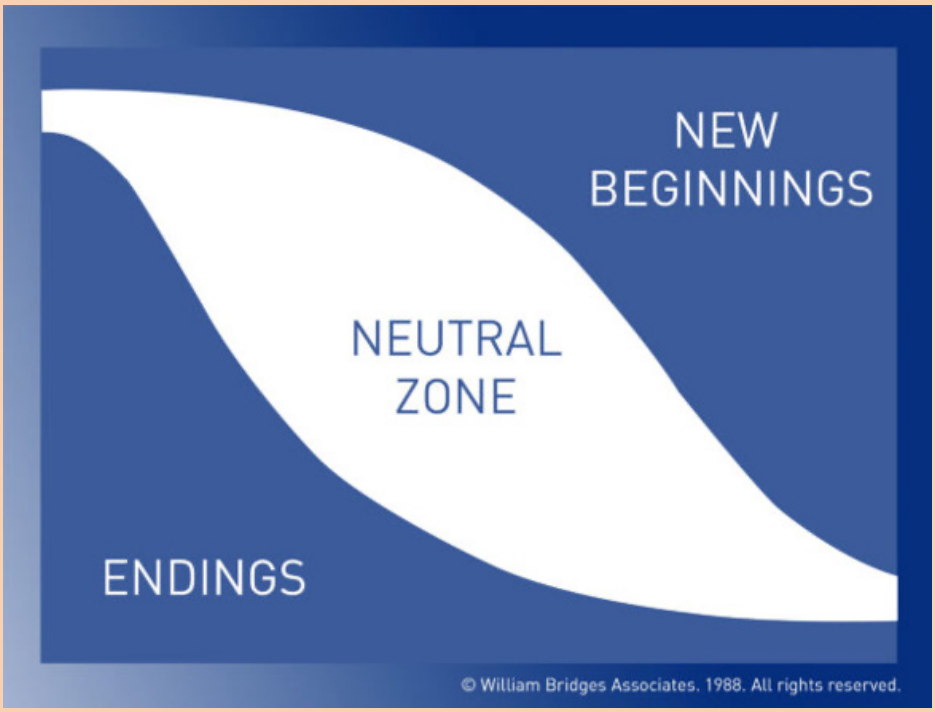



Diagram from William Bridges Associates.

### Endings:

"This first phase of transition begins when people identify what they are losing and learn how to manage these losses."

In early phases of reform, including setting common goals, youth justice leaders can be explicit with their teams about why reform is necessary and convey the research and rationale underlying change, while also acknowledging that these changes nevertheless disrupt some stability in organizational culture and employment.

Continued

# RESOURCE

## Bridges Transition Model

### Neutral Zone:

"This is the time between the old reality and sense of identity and the new one. People are creating new processes and learning what their new roles will be."

- The staff review team can be particularly helpful during this phase, helping to garner insight from staff at all levels around what policies, practices and investments they think would better prepare them in their roles to support the safety, resilience and well-being of young people. Throughout the reform process, and during the neutral zone in particular, leaders can engage in an iterative process where they draft, share and revise reform plans in close partnership with staff.

### New Beginnings:

"Well-managed transitions allow people to establish new roles with an understanding of their purpose, the part they play and how to contribute and participate most effectively."

- Considering how professional development opportunities can invest in staff members' skills to better support young people affected by the justice system and to serve young people in other areas of public service provides a cohesive path to transform staff skills and roles in the justice system. ■

CASE STUDY

# ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI: FULL FRAME INITIATIVE (FFI)

The St. Louis Court engaged staff in the design and implementation of reforms by drawing on the Full Frame Initiative's (FFI) Five Domains of Wellbeing.[7] FFI conceptualizes wellbeing as "the set of universal needs and experiences essential, in balance and combination, to weather challenges and have health and hope." The Five Domains of Wellbeing acknowledge that, "We all are driven to meet our needs and have experiences that provide social connectedness, safety, stability, mastery and meaningful access to relevant resources without unsustainable tradeoffs." The Five Domains of Wellbeing are evidence informed as well as being borne out in practice.

Too often, social systems designed to address one aspect of wellbeing compromise other aspects, ultimately undermining potential steps towards progress. Systems, organizations and communities can create conditions that increase access to wellbeing by focusing on structures as well as policies, practices and culture to make sure they align with and tap into people's universal drive for wellbeing. The Five Domains of Wellbeing framework helps leaders consider a more whole-person approach to their work with young people.

In St. Louis,[8] family court administrators hired FFI staff "to train high-level staff members, while enlisting deputy juvenile officers to develop new assessment forms and procedures in line with the five domains of wellbeing and a wellbeing orientation approach," including focusing on strengths. While there was some hesitation around reform early on, "now staff members say the new approach humanizes families and also saves time," the New York Times reported. Inviting staff to help design policies enables them to take ownership over reforms, an important component given that they are the ones tasked with implementing policies and interacting with young people daily.

CASE STUDY

Additionally, incorporating a strengths-based approach directs attention and resources towards investments in young peoples' assets, rather than focusing on discipline for behavioral challenges.


Graphic adapted from the Full Frame Initiative

The Five Domains can be used as a framework of values to guide youth justice reform in any system. Below is an outline of the five domains and relevant questions they may spark for consideration in a youth justice system:

### Social connectedness:

"The degree to which we have and perceive a sufficient number and diversity of relationships that allow us to give and receive information, emotional support and material aid; create a sense of belonging and value; and foster growth;"

- **Questions that youth justice leaders might explore with their staff:**

  *Are there opportunities for young people to maintain connections with their families and communities? How are young people able to build healthy peer relationships with each other? In what ways, if any, are mentoring opportunities facilitated?*

## Safety:

"The degree to which we can be our authentic selves and not be at heightened risk of physical or emotional harm;"

- **Questions to consider:**
  *In what ways are we ensuring the physical and emotional safety of young people? Are there any strategies we currently employ that might enhance one aspect of safety, while jeopardizing the other? Does the culture provide a sense of safety for youth to express their identities?*

## Stability:

"The degree to which we can expect our situation and status to be fundamentally the same from one day to the next; where there is adequate predictability for us to concentrate on the here-and-now and on the future, growth and change; and where small obstacles don't set off big cascades;"

- **Questions to consider:**
  *Do young people know what to expect tomorrow? How can disruptions to routine be minimized? How can we communicate potential changes to routine in advance and ensure that any changes are geared towards broader goals? How are we supporting our youth to be a part of creating stability?*

## Mastery:

"The degree to which we feel in control of our fate and the decisions we make, and where we experience some correlation between efforts and outcomes;"

- **Questions to consider:**
  *How do we empower young people to set and work towards their own goals? How can we better support them in envisioning their future while they are here and once they return to their communities? What resources are available to make them feel in control of what lies ahead? Do we know their interests and areas they would like to pursue?*

## Meaningful access to relevant resources:

"The degree to which we can meet needs particularly important for our situation in ways that are not extremely difficult, and are not degrading or dangerous."

- **Questions to consider:**
  *What channels, if any, exist for young people to communicate their needs, concerns or challenges? What resources, if any, exist to respond in supportive ways to young people? Are these resources reliable, confidential and designed in a way that supports young peoples' immediate needs and long-term well-being? How are we working with young people and their families to connect to meaningful and relevant resources in their neighborhoods and community?* ■

ACTION STEP 3

## Emphasize Participation, Inclusion and Collaboration Both Internally and Externally

As important as it will be for leadership to work with staff in the process of transformation, to engender and support an internal culture change process, it will be as critical—in a system shifting toward a youth-centered, family-focused and community-led paradigm—to work integrally with communities, youth and family partners in the process of change. One of the primary values and goals of transformation, as defined in this guide, is youth, family and community partnership. A North Star of transformation is the closure of the facilities and shift of authority to communities, with communities guiding and leading most if not all of youth justice services. To move toward these aims, leadership must begin to build this work into youth justice culture and practice engaging meaningfully with communities, youth and family partners in the transformation process.

As it pertains to culture change, youth justice agencies have largely gotten used to being "islands"—that is, they have traditionally made all decisions about youth justice policy and practice without inviting or engaging external input, either from other system agencies or from youth, their families or community partners. The steps below guide leadership in how to begin to embed partnership, and shared authority with partners, into the new culture. This work, and how to do it well, is explored in greater depth in the chapters on *Partnering with Youth and Their Families; Shifting Roles, Responsibilities and Resources to Communities; and Developing a Shared Vision for Transformation*.

- **Train and support staff to engage with external partners.** Youth justice staff typically have not been trained to work with external partners, including youth, families, communities and other agencies. As partnership will now be a top priority in implementing the vision for transformation—and as the longer-term goal is to relinquish some agency control, increase reliance on communities as leaders, and situate increasing authority for youth justice services and management within communities—staff will need direction, support and skill development in how to build relationships and work with

these partners in planning and implementing changes. Young people, their family members, community leaders and organizations that represent these groups can help with capacity building by training and coaching staff on how effectively to communicate and engage with these partners. Skilled facilitators can guide a graduated set of conversations that begin at a more introductory level, focused on getting to know one another, shared goals and values, and the shared mandate for change, and work gradually toward the more detailed work of planning and implementation.

Along the way, experts and facilitators—including those from the community—can provide capacity building for staff as well as youth, family and community partners in skills that will be required for planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and measuring performance and other aspects of system change. Similarly, system partners can help to train staff about other youth-serving systems, the bridges between them and youth justice and how they can work more effectively together. Practitioners from other jurisdictions that have implemented effective collaborative partnerships between the youth justice system and external partners can also be very useful coaches and guides for this process, offering their first-hand experiences, strategy, training and coaching.

**Engage with youth, families and communities in dialogue and partnership in the transformation process.** These remain the most critical constituents of youth justice services and will be primary partners with communities having increased authority for youth justice as transformation progresses. Once leadership and staff have had the opportunity to explore how shared values and goals drive transformation, and the agency has provided staff with training and context for engaging with partners, leadership can begin to engage staff in meetings with youth, their families and communities to plan for transformation. This engagement can deepen an understanding of shared values among all stakeholders and better connect staff with the impact of current system practices and the import and potential of transformation. This work may involve renewing, together with youth, their families and communities, conversations about shared values and goals

for the youth justice system followed by work together to define new policies and practices that align with these values and goals, and drive transformation. The facilitation questions that leadership and staff explored in the sections above can serve these conversations as well. More suggestions and guidance for how to facilitate these conversations, including how first to repair harms as needed and ensure meaningful partnership with youth, their families and communities, is provided in other chapters in this Guide.

For example, as discussed in *Partnering with Youth and Their Families*, youth justice leaders should invite feedback and suggestions from young people directly impacted by the justice system and their families around necessary structural changes to the system. In some jurisdictions that are further along in the transformation process, for example, leadership invites youth to help guide the thinking and planning process for what will be needed in the community to replace incarceration, and how to structure a continuum of community supports in a way that reflects youth needs and desires, and will ultimately support youth success and thriving. Participatory assessments, which solicit comprehensive feedback from staff, youth, families and community partners, are a more preliminary way to solicit and use feedback from all relevant stakeholders and engage them together in conversations about reform guided by this information. More information on conducting participatory assessments is included in the System Assessments Deep Dive on the Taking on Transformation website.

**Engage with other agencies and make sure they are at the table for transformation.** As discussed above, the youth justice system has traditionally acted as an "island"—fairly closed and insular, making its own decisions and not inviting much input from or collaboration with external entities, including other youth-serving agencies such as child welfare, education and other social services agencies. As the youth justice system transforms, partnership will be a keystone upon which new youth justice structures are built. In this process of recreation and rebuilding it will be critical to build relationships and partnerships with other system agencies, particularly those that serve the same young people who are involved with the youth justice system, to brainstorm about

collaborative responses that will better respond to youth and family needs. Building stronger bridges and formal policies with other youth-serving agencies can allow youth who may be better served by another agency to remain with that agency and avoid involvement with the justice system. Such partnerships may also allow for better service to youth while involved with the youth justice system and upon release and transition home. For example, strong partnerships with the education system can help young people stay enrolled in school while involved with the youth justice system or receive more support with enrollment and success in school upon release.

## REFORMING PRACTICE THROUGH CHANGING CULTURE

Pierce County, Washington has been highlighted numerous times in this Guide, and in other resources about transforming juvenile probation and youth justice work. They have pioneered an Opportunity-Based Probation model with a positive youth justice framework, and not only changed their practice, but started from a place of centering racial justice and equity, collaborating with youth and their families and communities and working with staff at all levels to change the organizational culture. Leadership in Pierce County has noted that staff buy-in is crucial to the success of young people and of the program.

Pierce County has been thoughtful and deliberate about its collaboration with community partners from the very inception of its transformative programming. This process included staff on the front lines being involved in conversations with youth and family about what types of services they wanted and needed, and then finding community-based programs already in existence which met those needs, were aligned with the County's vision and were willing to work with young people.

**READ MORE** about Pierce County's juvenile probation transformation work from the Annie E. Casey Foundation VISIT LINK ↗

**WATCH VIDEO** of leaders and staff in Pierce County talking about transformation work and culture VISIT LINK ↗

ACTION STEP 4

## Embed Youth Well-Being and Success into All Parts of the Work

As leadership, staff and partners work to implement policy and practice changes that align with transformation, the ultimate success of this work—and how it translates to a young person's experience—will depend upon how well it operationalizes a strength-based, youth-centered and increasingly community-led culture day-to-day in practice across all aspects of the work. Leaders must consider the tone of the work and how youth experience of the justice system as it shifts from a culture that has valued and promoted youth punishment and "correction" for the length of its history to a culture that now values youth, families and communities, and is invested in their success and well-being.

There are many aspects of organizational culture that impact how well policy changes manifest in practice. Such elements include staff training and development, hiring and recruiting and metrics. Training and development entails how the agency invests in its staff and their transformation, how staff participate in this process and the language and behavior of staff as well as how they refer to and treat young people, and how this changes over time. Staff hiring and recruiting encompasses whether and how staff are identified and selected who align with the new vision. Transforming metrics will include deciding what we choose to measure, which is ultimately what we prioritize changing and doing. A focus on each of these areas helps to operationalize policy changes into meaningful, transformative practice with youth.

The below steps point leaders to key elements of organizational culture that will be critical to operationalizing the goals of youth justice transformation at every stage of the transformation process—from more immediately ending harms to pushing toward a more community-driven youth justice paradigm.

- **Invest in staff training and development.** A healthy culture that actualizes meaningful system change requires thorough investments in the people that will implement that change daily and advance

core, shared values. It is up to leadership to prepare staff to meet the moment of transformation by first instilling an understanding of the need for, and importance of, transformation (this begins with transparency about the agency's vision, and discussion of shared goals and values with staff and partners) and then investing in the skills, competency and well-being of staff to align with a new approach.

To embed a deeper understanding of—and buy-in into—the mandate for transformation, training should cover the history of the system, the harms it has incurred and the need for reform. This includes the racist origins of criminal and youth justice systems, how the systems have perpetuated inequities and negatively impacted individuals and communities of color, and how these harms must be addressed now in practical reform. Leadership should acknowledge harms and the mandate for change and provide training by leaders from impacted communities, who can share the community context and their experience of the justice system's impact. As part of this training, leadership should provide space for ample dialogue with staff to ensure a solid foundation of understanding and investment in change. Training staff in adolescent development will provide a new or expanded understanding of young people in the system's care, how physical and emotional development works and how new youth justice approaches are effective in promoting youth well-being and success. To empower staff as more skilled agents of change, training should include core strategies of a new youth justice approach such as positive youth development and trauma-informed care. Leadership should offer staff additional optional professional development opportunities and credentials or college credits that deepen and hone their skills to support young peoples' well-being, both inside and beyond the youth justice system.

Investment in staff training and development is particularly essential in the early stages of reform, as staff are learning new skills and ways of working and may by habit rely on old practices that do harm, as new values-aligned policies are implemented. Training and coaching for staff should continue steadily over the course of transformation. One-off trainings are insufficient to build staff skills and morale, or to generate lasting change in practice. Ongoing trainings, on-the-job coaching in real time with young people and families and opportunities for debriefing between staff and trainers

privately and in groups with other staff and youth and families are optimal for supporting staff in learning new approaches and engendering lasting practical change. Senior staff, and even front-line supervisors, who were likely trained under old paradigms and will be important in modeling new behaviors, should also engage in training to support staff in building a culture focused on youth well-being.

## TRANSFORMING STAFF LANGUAGE AND BEHAVIOR TOWARD YOUTH

Culture is well reflected in routine interactions and language used between staff and youth. For example, currently in many jurisdictions it is not uncommon to hear staff refer to young people as "offenders." This language may be so ingrained in agency culture that there is little to no reflection about how these terms shape perspectives of or interactions with young people.

A core part of the culture change process will be to retrain staff in using person-first language that humanizes young people who are involved with the youth justice system, as well as their families and communities, builds a strengths-based perspective of youth and repositions staff as agents of support and change for young people. Using simple, human terms such as "young people with strengths and challenges," for example, immediately provides a more human and complex image than distancing and dehumanizing terms such as "delinquents" or "offenders," and leads staff to consider ways in which they can support young people and invest in their strengths.

Of course, language changes alone do not create change; they go hand in hand with all other practical aspects of transformation described in this chapter and in this Guide. Specific training such as anti-racism training may be useful in addition to open, honest and collaborative conversations between staff, leadership, young people, families and representatives of impacted communities to develop language that is supportive of a new paradigm and youth experience of justice.

**Recruit and hire staff who will drive transformation.** In addition to retraining existing staff, leadership should invest in transforming the recruiting and hiring process to seek out and identify staff who will be compatible with the new vision for youth justice and will be motivated and competent to drive transformation. This work will

involve close work with Human Resources to rewrite job descriptions to include a specific focus on the vision for transformation, as well as experiences and skill sets that will be important to implement new practices. Positions that may previously have prioritized certain qualifications may now prioritize different skills and experiences. For example, a background in positive youth development, experience at another youth serving agency, or lived experience of the youth or criminal justice system.

To support a new agency vision that is increasingly community-led, leadership should consider prioritizing lived experience of the youth justice system in all its written position descriptions and in its recruiting process. Rather than posting positions and actively recruiting within the youth corrections space, for example, leadership may position recruiting efforts more directly within communities and among youth development professionals. Hiring processes should be reviewed to support hiring a team aligned with the new vision—for example, revising questions and scoring scales established for interviews to prioritize experiences, visions and skills that align with transformation. Youth, family and community partners will be important allies in this process, helping to shape and review job descriptions, recruiting and hiring processes to ensure that they are culturally competent and aligned with the goal of achieving a more diverse, representative and community led staff.

As part of this process, and ensuring that racial justice and equity are central, leaders should also examine inequities within staff operations, including a lack of diversity among youth justice leadership. This is a critical component of culture change and is addressed in more detail in the chapter on *Centering Racial Justice and Equity*. Given that past and present racial bias operates not only within the justice system but within organizations and society more broadly, it is important for leaders to ensure that equity is a central principle in how staff, as well as young people, are treated. Creating and implementing parallel processes—that is, building values-focused processes that enhance the well-being of young people as well as staff—can help all members of the agency feel that system and culture change is designed to support them and enhance their collective well-being.

CASE STUDIES

# ENDINGS & NEW BEGINNINGS: NEW YORK & WASHINGTON, D.C.

## New York State

For some jurisdictions, "endings" (as referred to in the Bridges Transition Model highlighted above) might emerge from significant challenges, such as investigations into allegations of abuse. While doubtlessly daunting, investigations can also reveal opportunities for reform and the ways in which leaders respond to these challenges can shape the next steps towards system transformation. This is the trajectory that led New York to reform and ultimately close the vast majority of its youth facilities, investing instead in a national model for community-centered approaches to youth justice.

Following several documented instances of misconduct and abuse inside New York's juvenile facilities and growing external pressure from a number of stakeholders, the state embarked on a process to overhaul its youth justice system. Youth justice leaders partnered with young people, families, communities, advocates and state legislators to address these challenges and transform the system, which led to the closure of dozens of state facilities, the movement of New York City kids into smaller, home-like facilities closer to their homes and neighborhoods and investments in alternatives.

To create safer facilities focused on the resilience and well-being of young people, leaders invited staff to bring in their skills and hobbies outside of the profession to their jobs. Several employees designed initiatives based on their individual interests and areas of expertise—ranging from jewelry making to painting and gardening—expanding programming and mentoring opportunities for young people, while also providing opportunities for staff to contribute to culture change.

As the state prepared to close facilities, building smaller home-like facilities for young people and investing in community-based approaches to youth justice, leaders were transparent with staff that jobs within the facilities would dwindle. While there was resistance to and fear about job loss, leaders also provided opportunities for staff to develop and transition their skills, offering college credits for staff, scholarships for the children of staff, and providing resources and information about transitioning to other government agencies.

## Washington, D.C.

### New Beginnings Youth Development Center

The benefits of using a system orientation framework to develop and implement tangible tools for reform can be seen in the New Beginnings Youth Development Center, a residential facility within Washington, D.C.'s Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS). DYRS utilized a "Positive Youth Justice" framework centered on six core components: education, relationships, health, work, community and creativity. To center and advance these six domains, DYRS devised myriad therapeutic services, including but not limited to vocational training and workforce development, civic and community engagement, restorative justice, art rehabilitation, health and wellness initiatives.

Facilitating art rehabilitation or health and wellness initiatives require different skills than protecting physical security or monitoring behavioral infractions. In order to ensure that staff felt supported in implementing the policies and programs centered on positive youth justice, DYRS invested in staff capacity through training, implementation guidance and opportunities for feedback. Preparing staff with the skills to develop and implement initiatives that support the well-being of young people enables them to engage with youth inside the facility and to contribute to an agency culture geared towards a more equitable, family-focused and community-driven approach to youth justice—one that exists largely outside of correctional facilities. ■

**Design and implement assets-based metrics.** Traditionally, metrics of efficacy in the youth justice system have been based on measuring failures such as recidivism, re-arrest or critical incidents in facilities. While these metrics reveal important information about system shortcomings, they contribute to a culture that is focused on deficits and setbacks and relies on punitive responses that seek to control behavior rather than foster well-being. Positive metrics centered on achieving core goals for youth, on the other hand, can help to motivate positive change, orient everyone toward a common purpose of supporting youth well-being and success and drive reform.

To begin revising metrics to move from a deficit- to a strengths-based approach, youth justice leaders can engage with staff, young people, their families and community representatives around what currently works well in the agency and what they would like to see more of. Some questions to ask might be:

- What initiatives are we proud of? How can these be expanded?
- What are positive changes we see happening among youth? What is helping to bring about these changes?
- What do staff do well that motivates and supports youth? What supports staff in doing their jobs well?
- How can communities be more involved? What is the best support a young person can receive from their community?

These types of questions can point towards the "New Beginnings" that lie ahead, emphasizing the opportunities to collectively build approaches to youth justice that staff, young people, families and communities have a hand in designing. Leaders can work with their teams to devise metrics that reflect the system changes and day-to-day practices needed to better meet shared goals, including improved youth well-being and success in the community. For instance, metrics might include:

- The number and quality of positive interactions between youth and between youth and staff, including youth peer-to-peer mentoring sessions, youth-staff counseling sessions,

and youth-led groups and activities in facilities or in the community, encouraging positive interactions between young people and staff that improve the well-being of both;

- The number and quality of youth-family engagements while at a facility or while in a community program, encouraging staff to support the ongoing connection of young people with their family members and re-stabilization of family supports;
- Youth school attendance, graduation rates and college enrollment, incentivizing investment into resources, time and staff skills to support young people's education journeys and partnerships with the education system;
- Youth participation in programs and mentorship, encouraging investment into supports and opportunities that promote positive youth development; and
- Youth community and civic engagement, supporting youth in building lasting community ties that will support their long-term success.

These examples demonstrate that metrics reflect not only the behavior or progress of young people, but also how staff and agency culture have a role in supporting young people in reaching their goals. Such metrics place responsibility for a young person's success on the ways in which the system shapes opportunities, including through agency policies, practices and culture. Youth justice leaders will have to work with legislative budget staff to ensure these metrics are embedded in external reviews of organizational operations and outcomes. Metrics can also be used as a way to tell stories about the progress of young people, staff and the agency as a whole, reflecting how people are moving forward and where greater investments are needed to support the path ahead.

CASE STUDY

# THE OREGON YOUTH AUTHORITY'S "POSITIVE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT" FRAMEWORK

The Oregon Youth Authority's (OYA) "Positive Human Development"[9] offers one framework for designing aligned and mutually reinforcing values, behaviors and metrics that create a "culture of development." Positive Human Development expands upon the nationally recognized "positive youth development" approach to working with youth—including creating positive environments to help youth develop their natural talents and skills—to apply the same ideas to employees' interactions with each other.

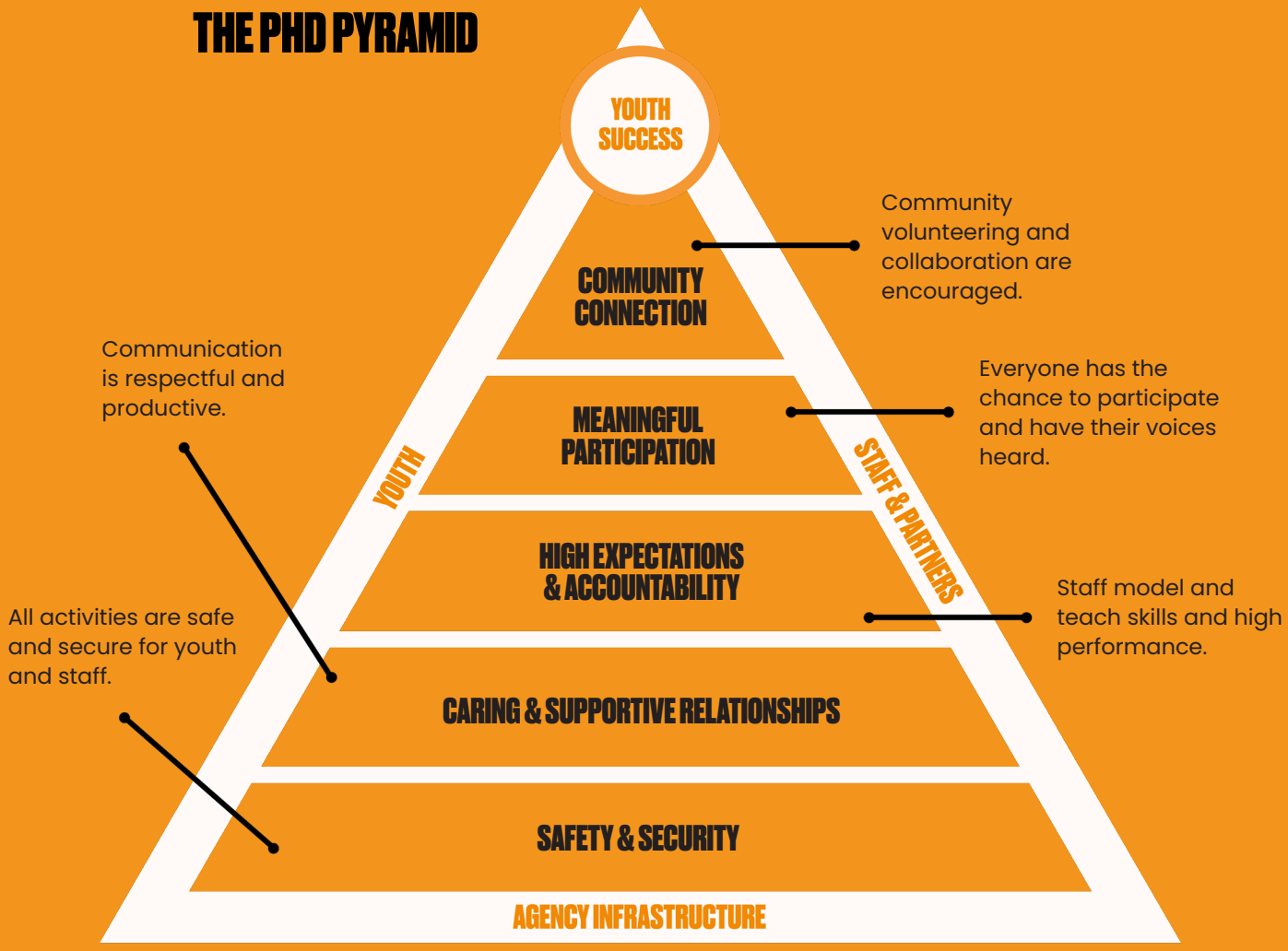
The framework elucidates the role each stakeholder has in contributing to a culture of development, and the essential components for building youth success. OYA leaders and staff work daily to create safe environments where caring and supportive relationships can thrive, where youth and staff are held accountable, where cultural differences are recognized and honored and where everyone participates meaningfully in their community. Staff have learned to look beyond what a youth has done, or what has happened to them, and instead to focus on nurturing youths' individual skills and talents.

OYA's and DYRS's case studies demonstrate how to actualize a system focused on young peoples' safety, resilience and well-being through tangible investments in and metrics founded on the assets of both young people and staff. As agencies develop policies, practices and tools to guide culture change they can rely on system orientation approaches, such as FFI's Five Domains of Wellbeing, which offer a grounding orientation for leaders to engage with staff and young

CASE STUDY

people around their shared visions for a more equitable, youth-centered, family-focused and community-led approach to youth justice. These frameworks provide tangible examples of steps to reach shared visions, how to measure progress and how to build and sustain culture change that propels and supports system change. ■

## THE PHD PYRAMID




**All levels of the pyramid need youth, staff, and partners working together — with a solid agency infrastructure and positive physicial environments supporting them — to achieve youth success.**

Graphic adapted from the Oregon Youth Authority

# NEXT STEPS

**Below is a high-level summary of next steps to take in your jurisdiction to affect the culture change across a youth justice system that is essential to transformation:**

- **Assess current youth justice culture and progress with culture change by reviewing the indicators above.**

- **Be transparent about the vision for and direction of transformation.** Be clear, straightforward and up front with staff about the goals of youth justice transformation. For jurisdictions starting this process, addressing past and present harm is the first of several steps that will be required. In these cases, leaders should be explicit about why these initial steps are integral to the bigger picture goals of transformation —that is, ultimately closing punitive, youth correctional facilities and investing in more equitable, youth-centered, community-led and family-focused approaches to youth justice. Providing consistent and clear communication around these goals can build trust between leadership and staff and a healthy organizational culture that propels goals forward.

- **Center shared values and goals in the drive for change.** Set the tone for the changes to come and begin to guide a process of culture change with staff by emphasizing the values and goals they are collectively pursuing in the transformation process. Emphasize the unifying goal that guides everyone's work in the youth justice system—wanting to see youth and families thrive and flourish at home, with the system's role being to help set them up for success. Employing a skilled facilitator, engage staff in discussions with leadership about

shared goals and values for the youth justice system. Examine existing policies and practices in terms of shared goals and values. Then, work with staff to develop and update policies and practices. Center racial justice and equity in this process.

**Emphasize participation, inclusion and collaboration both internally and externally.** As important as it is to include staff in the transformation process, it is as critical—in a system shifting toward a youth-centered, family-focused and community-led paradigm—to work integrally with communities, youth and family partners. The youth justice system has traditionally acted as an "island" and staff will require support in learning how to work effectively with partners. Train and support staff to engage with partners. Engage youth, family and community partners, organizations representing these groups, and other practitioner experts in building staff capacity. After this foundational work, engage with youth, families and communities in dialogue and partnership toward transformation. Engage staff with other youth-serving agencies and make sure they are at the table for transformation.

**Embed youth well-being and success into all parts of the work.** The ultimate success of transformation will depend upon how well it operationalizes a strength-based, youth-centered and community-led culture day-to-day in practice. Many aspects of organizational culture impact how well policy changes manifest in practice, including staff training and development, staff hiring and recruiting and metrics. Invest in staff training and development. Ensure that racial justice and equity are central components in training and ensure that training includes the history of the system, its racist origins, the harms it has incurred and the need for reform; the science of adolescent development; and core skills and strategies of a new youth justice approach, such as positive youth development and trauma-informed care. Continue training and coaching over the course of transformation. Recruit and hire new staff who will drive transformation. Design and implement assets-based metrics that center core goals for youth, motivate positive change and orient everyone toward a common purpose of supporting youth well-being and success. ■

# CHAPTER RESOURCES

Urban Institute: Changing Organizational Culture VISIT LINK ↗

The Full Frame Initiative: Five Domains of Wellbeing (Video) VISIT LINK ↗

The Bridges Transition Model VISIT LINK ↗

# ENDNOTES

1 For example, see Organizational culture and effectiveness: A study of values, attitudes, and organizational outcomes

2 Read the full report on the Missouri Model from the Annie E. Casey Foundation

3 Information on MYSI staff training from the organizational website

4 See Annie E. Casey Foundation's "No Place for Kids"

5 See more in Urban Institute's "Organizational Justice in Corrections Settings"

6 More on the Bridges Transition Model here

7 See FFI's website for more

8 See the New York Times article on FFI's work in St. Louis here

9 Find out more about Positive Youth Development in Oregon here

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# TAKING ON TRANSFORMATION