



Massachusetts
Department of Youth Services

Strategic Plan

Improving Youth Outcomes
& Community Safety

2017-2018

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MARYLOU SUDDERS
Secretary of EOHHS



PETER J. FORBES
DYS Commissioner

March 1, 2017

Message from Commissioner Peter Forbes:

I am pleased to share with you the Department of Youth Services 2017–2018 Strategic Plan. The Plan is the Department’s blueprint for making communities safer by improving the life outcomes for youth in our care and is aligned with Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services priorities and performance measures.

Thank you to the DYS staff and stakeholders for their significant contributions to the development of this strategic plan. Through this process we have affirmed five DYS strategic priorities for 2017 and 2018, which we believe are key building blocks for better youth outcomes and improved public safety. Those five strategic priorities are:

- Youth and Staff Safety across the DYS continuum of youth programs.
- Investing in “What Works”— using promising and evidence-based practices.
- Infusing Positive Youth Development into all aspects of service delivery.
- Improving agency communications throughout our workforce, with our providers, and among our key external partners.
- Working to identify and reduce racial and ethnic disparities in our work.

During the next two years, DYS will continue to invest in its strategic priorities and achieve its goals as organized into five categories: **Realign, Rehabilitate, Reintegrate, Respect, and Report.**

Over the next eighteen months, DYS leadership, staff, strategy teams, and other stakeholders will fully implement the DYS 2017-2018 Strategic Plan.

DYS is proud of its progress in reducing recidivism, embracing best practices, improving youth outcomes in the community, increasing youth educational attainment, and providing effective community transition services to enhance public safety.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter J. Forbes".

Peter J. Forbes

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES VISION

Every young person served by DYS will become a valued, productive, and law-abiding adult who contributes to the safety of their community and leads a fulfilling life.

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES MISSION

As the juvenile justice agency for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the Department of Youth Services promotes positive change in the youth in our care and custody. Our mission is to make communities safer by improving the life outcomes for youth in our care. We achieve our mission through investing in highly qualified staff and a service continuum that engages youth, families, and communities in strategies that support positive youth development.

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES VALUES

- **We are unwavering and determined in the pursuit of the positive development of youth in our care.**
We believe all youth have the capacity for positive change. We are committed to providing positive opportunities, supports and experiences to change the trajectory of their lives.
- **We actively support a safe and healthy environment for our diversified and highly skilled workforce.**
We are committed to ensuring that staff work in a safe and secure environment, and we promote continuous learning by offering training and career development opportunities for all staff.
- **We promote safer communities by providing prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation services.**
We believe that when youth have the prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation services they need, they can become constructive and productive members of their communities who are no longer a risk to themselves and others.
- **We actively engage and support youth, families, and communities as our partners.** We believe families are youth's most important teachers, care givers, and role models. We engage families and communities to provide the environment and support every youth needs to succeed. We collaborate with youth and their families in the development of the youths' individual service plans in a manner is that culturally competent.
- **We promote fairness as a foundational expectation for our interactions with youth and their families.**
We acknowledge the critical role fairness plays in the positive change process and its significance for healthy development. We recognize the challenge of racial and ethnic disparity for DYS-involved youth. Treating youth fairly means avoiding bias and stereotypes and looking at the individual strengths and weaknesses of each youth in the system.
- **We work collaboratively with our public and private partners.**
We believe that collaboration with public and private partners will build the effective continuum of services that youth need to succeed in school, work, and life.
- **We adhere to the highest ethical and professional standards in all our work.**
We conduct our work with the greatest respect for the public's trust and interest. We perform our duties guided by the most current science, evidence and promising practices.
- **We respect and embrace diversity.**
We conduct our work and fulfill our mission in a manner that demonstrates respect for the values, preferences, beliefs, culture, and identity of youth, families, staff and community in all that we do.
- **We embrace resilience and independence as indicators of the positive development of the youth in our care.**
We believe that with the necessary supports and guidance, young people are capable of moving beyond the circumstances that brought them into the justice system and can make valuable contributions to their communities.

DYS 2017-2018 STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITIES

- YOUTH AND STAFF SAFETY
- DOING WHAT WORKS: USE OF BEST AND EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES
- POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
- COMMUNICATION IMPROVEMENTS
- REDUCE RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITY IN OUR WORK

REALIGN

Evaluate Current Use of Resources to Ensure Best Youth & Community Outcomes.

- a. New Regulations
- b. Policy Review
- c. Strategic Investment of Resources
- d. Training Focus

REHABILITATE

Improve and Expand Programs to Meet the Needs of DYS Youth.

- a. Education
- b. Jobs Training
- c. Vocational Rehabilitation
- d. Dialectical Behavior Therapy
- e. Empowering Your Future

REINTEGRATE

Improve Programs to Ensure Successful Youth Return to Community.

- a. Community Placements
- b. Youth Engaged in Services (YES) Program
- c. Recidivism Reduction Strategies

RESPECT

Create a Safe & Respectful Environment for Youth & Staff.

- a. Positive Youth Development
- b. Safety for Youth and Staff
- c. Fairness

REPORT

Be Data-Driven and Set Objective Criteria to Evaluate Progress and Create Communication Channels with Staff and Stakeholders.

- a. Doing What Works
- b. Best Practices
- c. Communications Improvements
- d. Measuring Outcomes

REALIGN

Realign agency resources with more effective services across the continuum in order to achieve optimal youth and community safety outcomes by:

- ❖ Reviewing and improving current assessment tools
- ❖ Increasing fidelity and expanding JDAI to reduce the number of low-risk youth in secure detention
- ❖ Enhancing agency communication procedures, protocols, and policies
- ❖ Investing in resources to implement effective, proven strategies
- ❖ Implementing supervisor and leadership skills development for DYS staff
- ❖ Ensuring that our training resources support critical operational needs
- ❖ Enhancing and expanding technology for improved communication
- ❖ Assessing equity throughout our youth service continuum

REHABILITATE

Employ effective rehabilitative strategies for youth by:

- ❖ Enhancing staff training for broader implementation of Positive Youth Development (PYD)
- ❖ Implementing PYD program components using best practices
- ❖ Implementing a PYD coaching strategy
- ❖ Engaging families in DBT and other skill-development opportunities with youth
- ❖ Increasing youth educational attainment, life skills, and job skills
- ❖ Assisting youth to increase insight and improve personal decision-making
- ❖ Expanding youth civic engagement as a PYD program component
- ❖ Measuring progress on critical youth skill attainment indicators
- ❖ Treating youth fairly by avoiding bias and stereotypes and looking at the individual strengths and weaknesses of each youth in the system

REINTEGRATE

Successfully reintegrate youth into the community through enhancing current release planning and community supervision practices by:

- ❖ Increasing the Average Length of Stay for DYS youth who reside safely in the community
- ❖ Ensuring that DYS revocation practices are fair and are guided by youth risk and community safety
- ❖ Continuing to measure and prioritize outcomes related to recidivism, educational and vocational attainment and to evaluate the effectiveness of the DYS Youth Engaged in Services (YES) program

RESPECT

Create a respectful, fair and safe environment for youth and staff throughout the DYS continuum of service by:

- ❖ Increasing youth voice and youth input into service planning
- ❖ Ensuring that DYS practices are fair for all youth and prioritize feedback from youth in this regard
- ❖ Enhancing and expanding meaningful partnerships with families to address the best interests of youth in our care
- ❖ Training all staff in trauma-informed care
- ❖ Implementing mediation training and other restorative practices

REPORT

Improve the quality and utilization of data and management reports to track and monitor youth and community safety outcomes staff, by:

- ❖ Developing an enhanced communications strategy
- ❖ Ensuring that a high level of cross-disciplinary effort is included in all work plans
- ❖ Improving effective communication among Central Office, regions, providers, programs, and all staff
- ❖ Enhancing the monitoring of revocation and education outcomes
- ❖ Expanding JJEMS & JASPER reporting capacity and staff training
- ❖ Improving demographic data collection for all youth served through the continuum in alignment with national best practices
- ❖ Further strengthening the ability to improve data integrity across all aspects of DYS operations

REALIGN resources based on risk, need and interests of young people and public safety.

Evaluate Current Use of Resources to Ensure Best Youth & Community Outcomes

GOAL 1: Ensure optimal youth outcomes through effective services and strategies that reflect best and promising practices.

Initiative 1: Review and improve current assessment tools.

DYS uses several risk assessment tools to develop treatment plans for youth. In partnership with the University of Massachusetts Medical School, DYS has completed a one-year validation study of our use of the YLS/CMI as a risk assessment instrument. Based on the study's findings, DYS has implemented staff training so all workers conducting assessments will be prepared to correctly implement the updated YLS/CMI (2). The initial statewide staff regional trainings were completed in July, 2016 and each region has developed the internal capacity to continue the necessary training and review. These trainings will also be included in a Community Training Series in June 2017.

DYS has also begun a process to test and validate the Detention Placement Instrument (DPI) used to determine level of security within the detention continuum of care. In conjunction with University of Massachusetts Medical School, DYS anticipates reforms to this tool, and to our data-collection practices at the point of the detention placement decision. DYS will also roll out new training to staff to support implementation. The Department is evaluating current substance abuse assessment tools and will implement any recommendations for improvement.

Initiative 2: Increase fidelity and expand JDAI to reduce low risk-youth in secure detention.

Massachusetts JDAI is established in six counties with expansion to the remaining counties under active consideration. The evaluation of community-based options and potential expansion of the model to other locations is in process. Our objective is to ensure that youth have access to the right services based on their risk profile, regardless of their geography, and to assure that youth spend the least time possible in detention. Grant-funded staff will support our local counties to assure fidelity to the national model.

Initiative 3: Improve communication procedures, protocols and policies.

DYS is actively engaged in a regulatory review and amendment process, as many of our regulations have not been updated since their promulgation in the mid- to late 1980s. This process is ongoing and it is expected that many of the proposed changes will be finalized for distribution in 2017. This will necessarily dictate the creation or revision of policies to support regulation. Additionally, DYS has many other policies that will be reviewed and updated. DYS has an existing Policy Committee that will lead this review with input from stakeholders.

Initiative 4: Improve current programs through investing resources in effective and proven programs and strategies.

The Department has a Best Practices Group that has been meeting regularly for several years. While Evidence-Based Practices provide models that have been evaluated comprehensively, we also need to step back and consider using "What Works?" This concept involves evaluating our existing programs and practices with objective criteria and making decisions to either continue doing things because they generate positive outcomes, or to eliminate them because they are ineffective. All of our services will be assessed to ensure that we are getting the return on our investments in terms of achieving the desired

outcomes. The Department is currently participating in the Youth-in-Custody Practice Model (YICPM) Technical Assistance and Training Program, an eighteen-month comprehensive evaluation process of “what works” in serving youth in custody. The YICPM process was designed by the Center for Juvenile Justice Research at Georgetown University and the Council of Juvenile Correctional Administrators to assist juvenile justice agencies to align core, research-based principles with everyday practice, and achieve more positive outcomes for youth, families and communities.

Initiative 5: Implement supervisor and leadership skill development for DYS staff.

The current DYS workforce is one of the agency’s greatest assets. Some of our staff members are long-term employees, while others are less experienced. Staff training, development and mentoring are important investments in the retention and advancement of our work force and contribute to the stability of our programs. DYS has implemented an onboarding process, a retention-review process and a professional alignment process to support our workforce. Existing resources are available through the Center for Staff Development, and other offerings may need to be developed that are specific to our workforce.

Initiative 6: Enhance availability of technology to improve agency communications and efficiency/effectiveness.

DYS is one of the early adopters within the EOHHS cluster of agencies seeking to improve staff and agency communications. In March of 2016, DYS went “live” with DYS Pulse--a web-based intranet platform providing DYS State and Provider employees with access to agency communications through recent news, discussion groups, polls, document and content sharing, access to the agency’s first online staff directory, statewide events, opportunities to comment, rate and vote on ideas, and additional features promoting collaboration and communications across the Department.

Specific sets of staff that meet regularly— e.g. Safety Committee, Executive Staff, Communications Team, Policy Committee, etc. — will be supported and their work will be enhanced by the DYS Pulse. This new staff resource will improve agency communications and maintain appropriate levels of security and confidentiality.

Initiative 7: Assess equity through our youth service continuum.

A youth’s ability to engage with the department is contingent upon their belief that the system is “fair.” Going forward, the Department will collect and assess data based upon race, ethnicity and gender at key decision points in the service continuum to monitor and respond to any inequity or bias in our service delivery.

REHABILITATE Improve and expand programs to meet the needs of DYS youth.

GOAL 2: Improve the current DYS program continuum to ensure the most effective services are available to promote the success of youth in the care of the Department.

Initiative 1: Enhance staff training regarding the implementation of Positive Youth Development (PYD) by embracing promising practices and improving communications regarding PYD.

The framework of Positive Youth Development has helped us engage young people as partners in their treatment. It has been incorporated into DYS Basic Training and helps to orient new employees to our approach.

The PYD work group has published a guide to implementing PYD that offers a selection of best practices from across our continuum and will be part of an agency-wide training initiative in 2017. The guide provides realistic examples of PYD in action to help staff move from conceptual framework to practice. DYS has an established coaching model that it has previously used successfully to implement a new concept and related skills, specifically with the DBT clinical skills launch. The implementation strategy is focused on delivering training at the local level using content experts and existing staff identified as “Champions of PYD” who can be part of the training and can be the local experts who encourage and reinforce elements of PYD.

Initiative 2: Increase and measure youth educational attainment, life skills, and job skills with the goal of promoting mastery and independence.

The Department utilizes the Empower Your Future curriculum with young people at all levels of care to help them develop a positive vision for their future. Recent upgrades to JJEMS allow staff to enter data regarding a youth’s pathway for school and work, as well as important life skills. Data collection is underway to measure youth attainment and assure positive outcomes are equally distributed across all youth demographics served by the Department.

Initiative 3: Expand civic engagement as a program component of PYD.

Many of our young people lack the confidence to explore the challenging idea of race and ethnicity in our society and the impact it has had on them personally. They need to be supported in challenging stereotypes and to define and maximize their own potential as an individual. This has not been the focus of our work as a system, yet it impacts outcomes for our youth. This can have implications in our classrooms, our programs, and in the community.

REINTEGRATE youth into community.

Improve Programs to Ensure Successful Youth Return to Community

GOAL 3: Develop best practices for Youth Engaged in Services (YES), revocation, & community programs.

Initiative 1: Increase the average length of stay of DYS youth residing safely in the community.

Disruption in placement is not a successful outcome. The longer a young person is in the community, the more likely he or she is to have established pro-social connections, to be engaged in school or work, and to have a stable living situation. We have begun to track this data point and will make comparisons with outcomes in attainment and recidivism.

Initiative 2: Review and assess revocation-related activities.

In early 2017, the Department will promulgate revised regulations governing the granting and revocation of conditional liberty for youth committed to the agency’s care. There will be training and orientation for both staff and youth regarding related practice changes as a result of the new regulation. DYS is preparing to evaluate the impact of revocation on youth success and public safety. Revocation ties to disruption in placement, and while it is a long-standing practice, we have not previously evaluated its effectiveness. The agency would benefit from a review of revocation activity, as well as an update of related policy in support of new regulation. We need to measure the impact of substance abuse as a factor in revocation activity as well as the effectiveness of our substance abuse treatment strategies.

Initiative 3: Evaluate the effectiveness of YES by reviewing outcomes related to recidivism and educational and vocational attainment.

DYS has been offering voluntary services to all young people aging out of custody for over two years, and more than half have accepted the offer. In April of 2016, legislative changes expanded the age limit for voluntary services to age 22 and created an opportunity for youth to request a restoration of services if they make a preliminary decision to reject voluntary services within a 90-day window.

This allows Youthful Offenders a period of voluntary services after their aging-out at age 21 to receive additional supports during a key transition period. National research, as well as our recidivism data shows that the first six months after discharge from custody is the period that justice-involved youth are most vulnerable for re-offending. The Youth Engaged in Services agreement offers supports to youth during this high-risk time. Young people are interested in assistance with education, jobs, housing, counseling, and a supportive relationship with an adult. DYS has begun a study of a group of youth who accepted voluntary services against a control group who did not, comparing recidivism, educational attainment and other positive indicators.

RESPECT youth, families and staff.

Create a safe and respectful environment for youth and staff

Goal 4: Improve safety for youth and staff throughout the DYS continuum.

Initiative 1: Invest in strategic activities that increase youth and staff safety.

The Safety Committee serves as the nucleus for the work on improving safety. This committee has been in existence for over nine years. Membership includes senior managers, representatives of collective bargaining groups, labor relations, and Industrial Accident managers. The focus has been on reviewing data related to injury, recommending policy and operational improvements, and identifying equipment and facility enhancements. In 2016, DYS convened a Safety Task Force composed of agency leadership, representatives of our direct care work force through AFSCME (Association of Federal, State, County and Municipal Workers), representatives from the Legislature, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and field experts. The Task Force will meet for 12 months and conclude with recommendations to enhance the safety of our staff and the youth we serve. The work of the Safety Committee will be informed by the Safety Task Force.

Initiative 2: Train all staff in trauma-informed care.

The majority of DYS youth has a significant trauma history and it impacts their behavior and their relationships. Left unresolved, it can trigger a cycle of violence that undermines the mission of the agency. All of the members of the youth's treatment team need to understand the impact personal trauma may have on them. Our interventions with youth need to be trauma-responsive to be most effective.

The current partnership with the University of Massachusetts Medical School has provided an orientation regarding trauma in young people. Next steps include training that is role-specific and reviewing program elements to evaluate their effectiveness; for example, assessing how confinement or restraint may trigger a response from a youth with a trauma history.

Initiative 3: Implement mediation training and restorative practices.

Violence both within our programs and in the communities we serve is an increasing concern. Our young people need to develop skills to resolve disputes without using violence. The concept of respect and the

impact of race are powerful triggers for our youth. We need to evaluate and integrate selected practices from the restorative justice community that engage youth in finding other solutions.

Initiative 4: Increase youth voice and youth input in service planning.

Our practices regarding developing and incorporating youth voice need to be consistent across all programs. Each location will evaluate their current methods and make necessary adjustments using best practice recommendations from within the Department and from national experts.

Initiative 5: Enhance and expand family engagement.

DYS has been encouraged by the response from families to our preliminary efforts to connect with them as our partners in their children's success. The results of a parent satisfaction survey conducted within the last 18 months were positive. Focus for the future will include operationalizing parent feedback opportunities, identifying ways to have parental input in policy and practice decisions, and making our programs more accessible to family members.

Initiative 6: Prioritize fairness as a concept across all of our training, practice, and youth interactions with other youth, family members, and adults.

Research has shown that the experience of fairness is a cornerstone to healthy adolescent development. Youth who perceive that they have been treated fairly by systems and by those in positions of authority are much more likely to perceive those systems and authorities as legitimate and adjust their behavior accordingly. Classification decisions, revocations and responses to behavior all must be administered fairly for youth to experience positive youth development and have successful life outcomes.

This requires training staff on implicit bias and the importance of fairness and assessing our processes to ensure transparency and consistency of decision making with equity in results.

Initiative 7: Implement additional services for gang-involved youth considering a positive change:

Youth who are considering a separation from the risks associated with gang life require supports to ensure their safety and ultimate success. Programs such as transitional living programs, independent living programs, foster care, mentoring, employment, tattoo removal and other services need to be available to serve this population. The Department will incorporate youth input as we make decisions on services design and procurement.

REPORT on all venues.

Be Data Driven — Set Objective Criteria to Evaluate Progress and Create Communication Channels with Staff and Stakeholders

Goal 5: Improve data integrity and reporting capacity.

Initiative 1: Develop a communication plan that starts small with realistic strategies.

We have learned that every change or improvement needs to be considered through the lens of who needs to know about it and how will they be informed. The success of an initiative often depends on engaging a complex group of stakeholders and our plans needs to be viewed through multiple lenses. Our strategies for communication may be improved by social media and technology, yet others will continue to require personal contact.

Initiative 2: Ensure a high level of cross-disciplinary effort is part of all work plans.

Given the complex needs of our young people, no single discipline possesses the means to make positive change. For example, in a residential setting, the clinical staff, educators and residential staff need to share a vision and to recognize that their work is interdependent. Anticipating the impact of the connections can contribute to better outcomes for young people.

Initiative 3: Increase effective communications and inclusion among Central Office, regional staff, all staff and programs.

There can be barriers to effective communication between work groups. Some groups may perceive a lack of information, too many/not enough meetings, too much e-mail, insufficient access to technology, not enough access to decision makers, and arbitrary deadlines.

There needs to be an effective communications plan that accurately assesses the audience needs and provides appropriate information and feedback loops with sufficient notice of deadlines. The development of the plan must include participation and input from DYS staff and stakeholders from across the state.

Initiative 4: Expand JJEMS & JASPER reporting capacity and staff training.

The reporting capacity of JJEMS is developing and enhancements to the system are creating opportunities to report out on key data points that have previously been unavailable. Our goal is to provide access to staff at all levels so that access to data is available to measure outcomes and communicate trends.

Initiative 5: Commit to improving data integrity in JJEMS.

A recent report by the Office of the State Auditor identified gaps in the data collected in JJEMS. The data quality capacity of the system is in the process of being strengthened.

Initiative 6: Improve Serious Incident Reporting capacity in JJEMS.

Includes process, categories, reports which will lead to a better discussion on what issues are actually happening in the agency and how we can improve on them. This will also lead to the discussion on how better to report incidents (leading to better communication).

Initiative 7: Improve demographic data collection for youth served.

Accurately collecting demographic data for youth served by the department is critical to assuring equity and fairness in our system. Our data collection must be aligned with national best-practices to assure quality in these critical data fields.