



# On Balance

Dane County Department of Human Services & Dane County Juvenile Court Program Publication

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## Meet Ed Pearson, Dane County Juvenile Court Administrator

The Dane County Board approved my contract as the Juvenile Court



Administrator on July 17, 2025. I had previously served as the Interim Juvenile Court Administrator for 10 months, replacing John Bauman after his retirement.

Before my employment at Dane County, I worked at the state of Missouri as a Psychiatric Aide (1994) for the Missouri Department of Mental Health while in college, and upon graduating from Southeast Missouri State University in 1995, I was employed with the Missouri Division of Youth

Services as a Youth Specialist, Youth Group Leader, and a Facility Manager II for a total of 9 years. During this time, I was certified as an Adventure-Based Counselor and then a Sex Offender Counselor through the University of Louisville's Sex-Offender Counselor Program.

I left Missouri in 2005 to accept a position as Juvenile Detention Superintendent and Shelter Home Supervisor in Rock County, in which I worked for 8 ½ years. During that time, I helped create the ACTIONS program, which is an alternative to corrections placement in Rock County. I left Rock County in 2013 to accept the job as Superintendent of the Dane County Juvenile Detention Center, and I have remained in Dane County since that day. I also currently serve on the Dane County Labor Relations Committee, and I am also a commissioner for the Wisconsin Governor's Juvenile Justice Commission (GJJC) in which I am the chair of the Ethnic & Racial Disparities Committee (ERD).

In my role as Juvenile Court Administrator, I am the department head of the Juvenile Court Program, which consists of the Juvenile Detention Center, Shelter Home, Home Detention Program, and the Juvenile Reception Center. Our department will be expanding to add the ATTA (Assessment Treatment Transition and Aftercare) program, which is an alternative to corrections program. ATTA will be implemented in Fall 2025.

In 2026, the Juvenile Court Program will assume the duties of the Electronic Monitoring Program (EMP). Also, as Juvenile Court Administrator I serve as a juvenile court liaison with State, County Executive, County Board of Supervisors, Dane County Departments and other agencies involved with Juvenile Court functions. I also work on special projects assigned by the Juvenile Judges, while representing the Juvenile Court in the community including providing information to the public, best practices to help the youth, and to enable proper assessment of community needs. Overall, I have 31 years of experience working with youth and I am excited to continue my work as the Juvenile Court Administrator.

## YWCA Partners with DCDHS for Youth Restorative Justice Training

By Tonya Pollard, DCDHS

The Early Intervention Services Unit partnered with YWCA for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Restorative Justice Youth Training. This year, due to high interest from youth, two sessions were offered to ensure everyone who wanted to participate had the opportunity.



We witnessed so many powerful moments and heard inspiring reflections from the youth. One quote, in particular, stood out and perfectly captures the heart of this work:

*“I really connect with the saying ‘hurt people, hurt people.’ When I took this training last year, I was in a bad place and making some poor decisions. But something about the training, and especially the way Sam (YWCA facilitator) took extra time with me, really helped me realize I wasn’t okay. I learned a lot about myself through that experience. Since then, I’ve been doing much better, and I’m really grateful to Sam for that support. Taking this training a second time has really helped everything click even more. I truly get it now.”*

We are incredibly proud of each and every youth who participated and grateful for the opportunity to walk alongside them in their growth.

## 2025 Youth Arts Festival Recap: A Celebration of Youth Creativity, Expression, and Community!

By Jay Young, Briarpatch Youth Services

On Saturday, July 27, Briarpatch Youth Services held our 7th Annual Youth Arts Festival and what a day it was! The weather started off raining and cloudy as we began setting up early that morning. By the time noon rolled around, and the people started to arrive, the sun was shining, the energy was high. You could sense that the talent that was going to be on display was nothing short of incredible.



Hosted in a beautiful green space near our offices, provided by our generous partners, the Alexander Group, the festival brought together young people, families, local youth artists, and community members for an unforgettable celebration of youth expression. From live music and freestyle rap to visual arts, crafts, dance, and hands-on art-centered activities, the event showcased the power of creativity to build confidence, spark connection, and amplify youth voice.

Thanks to the support of our sponsors, Steve Brown Apartments, MG&E, Quartz Health Solutions, Dane Arts, First Business Bank, and Total Water – Madison, our volunteers, youth artists, and youth performers, we were able to offer a free, welcoming, and vibrant space where young people could shine. Candid moments of joy, powerful performances, and community connection reminded us why we do this work and, most importantly, why it matters.

As we continue to reflect on the day, we're filled with gratitude and hope. Thank you to everyone who showed up, supported, and helped make the festival a success. Together, we're building a future where every young person is seen, heard, and supported.



Until next year!

#YouthArtsFestival #BriarpatchYouth



## MMSD Holds Dane County Attendance Summit Ahead of the 2025-2026 School Year

By Amanda Wiza, DCDHS

The Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) hosted the Dane County Attendance Summit on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 2025, at Lafollette High School. The summit brought together staff from MMSD and 10 surrounding school districts, including Verona, Monona Grove, and Sun Prairie, along with partners from Dane County Human Services and other community organizations.

MMSD Superintendent Dr. Joe Gothard opened the event with remarks encouraging school staff and partners to continue modeling belonging, fostering connections, and collaborating to address chronic absenteeism. Nationwide, chronic absenteeism among students has doubled since the pandemic and has been slow to return to pre-pandemic rates.



Keynote speaker Lorri Hobson, from Attendance Works, a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving attendance to support student success, delivered a powerful presentation on how schools across the country are improving attendance by building a sense of belonging in schools and meeting the needs of families.



Following the keynote, attendees participated in multiple breakout sessions offering information, training, and opportunities for collaboration. Topics included family engagement strategies, mentorship, and wraparound services. Professionals from American Institute for Research (AIR) discussed how social-emotional learning and family engagement strategies can promote attendance. DCDHS GRIT workers shared how their mentorship, group activities, and early intervention strategies foster belonging in schools. Staff from CEOs of Tomorrow highlighted the benefits their

career-readiness programs have on keeping students engaged in learning.



Representatives from Building Bridges presented their wraparound approach to helping students stabilize mental health and address crises through cross-agency collaboration. Mentoring Positives leaders discussed ways to advocate for and support children's educational needs by engaging with caregivers. Staff from DCDHS Youth Justice, CPS, and Access hosted a panel on county-level collaboration to address chronic absenteeism and introduced a new pilot program, the Truancy Review Board. Staff from Lake View Elementary shared communication models and

outreach strategies to strengthen relationships with families. Anthony Cooper Sr., from Focused

Interruption, presented on his organization's work in mediation, life skills, and relationship building to reduce violence in the community, which impacts attendance.

Overall, the summit was a valuable opportunity for participants to gain new skills and connect with other local professionals who share a common goal: reducing absenteeism.

## **YJP Takes Youth "To the Skies"**

*By Ty Mahone, DCDHS*

Youth Justice and Prevention program leaders offered youth an opportunity to take youth "to the skies" with a partnership with the Willa Brown Aviation Academy (WBAA), a local group focused on introducing the world of aviation to youth at middle and high school level. The WBAA strives to help increase diversity in the aviation industry by focusing on kids from communities not typically aware of aviation opportunities.

The first event of this partnership between YJP and WBAA included an initial exposure to the aviation industry on August 21 at the Middleton Airport. Youth were engaged in this activity and many expressed interest in continuing to learn more. On October 16<sup>th</sup>, YJP Program Leaders will be taking interested youth to WBAA's next "Wings to Fly" program, a one-day flying event that offers a hand-on flying experience for youth.

YJP is grateful for this partnership and looks forward to introducing more youth to aviation and other career opportunities!

## **ATTA Program Update**

*By Albert Watson, Juvenile Court Program*

Currently ATTA (Assessment Treatment Transition and Aftercare) is ready to get the program started as we have the space, programming schedule, and mental health development, and we are creating a cultivating environment where our youth can grow and transform mentally, socially, and emotionally in order to redirect their current paths. We are finding beneficial programming to start mentor programs as well as looking into an educational alternative that will be conducive with the ATTA youth. The educational alternative even has the possibility of being the main educational means after leaving ATTA.

ATTA staff are continuing to train and gain more knowledge around ideas on how to grow ATTA and be better at working through the needs of all incoming youth we will be working with. ATTA still has to put together the referral process and how that process will work coming from the courtroom, judges, attorneys, DA, and DCDHS. We believe that once we have gotten our curvy roads made straight, we will be ready to put this program into practice and foster great changes in young men's lives. Each part of the ATTA program is very intentional in terms of the thought of the future and aftercare of each resident.

October 2025 is the current projection to receive referrals for residents into ATTA. This will be an exciting time for the care and direction of juvenile offenders in Dane County. ATTA should provide each of these residents with the services and resources gained to help build them into future successes into our Dane County community.

## YJP Banquet and Awards Ceremony

By Paige Michels, DCDHS



A packed house at the Warner Park Recreation Center celebrated youth, caregivers, and Youth Justice professionals for their achievements at the Youth Justice and Prevention Banquet and Awards Ceremony on Thursday, June 26.

Attendees enjoyed a motivational speech from keynote speaker Louis Nzegwu, as well as opening remarks from interim DCDHS director Astra Iheukwumere, county executive Melissa Agard, and Juvenile Court Judge Everett Mitchell.

It was amazing to see so many community members together to celebrate YJP youth and professionals. Thank you to all who attended and congratulations to our award winners!

### *Youth Certificates*

Big Heart: Ivan Gonzales, Jared Anderson, McKenzie Goecks

Consistency Counts: Jeremy Mack, Tyrese Lomas, Isiah Haynes, Terrio Henderson, Judah Kruse-Seekings, Eduardo Olivos Manjarrez, Demarcus Poe, Jayden Knight, Patrick Barner, Jr., Janiyah Bell, Brian Gurney, Eternity Vaughn



Improved GPA: Ashante Calvin, Christian Nielson, Ja'Mya Lust, Daequan Lewis

Improved School Attendance: Louie Ayala, Daequan Lewis, Maurice Bryant, Tabby Wightman, Serenity Little, Kendric Edmond, Aliana Fenton

### *Youth Awards*

Coach Clauer "None in the Gap" Award: Jared Anderson

All-Star Award: Daequan Lewis

Leadership Award: Jaden Hicks

No Cap Award: Janiyah Bell

Positive Attitude Award: Terrio Henderson

Glow Up Award: Ashante Calvin

Judge's Choice Awards: Neveah Stanford, Alejandro D. Jackson, Alayana Kettavong



**Adult Awards**

Coach Clauer “None in the Gap” Award: Albert Watson

Stephen Blue Award: Ben Gonring

Beth Gentilli Award: Ty Mahone

Gene Weidemann Award: Hong Pham

Outstanding Parent Award: Contessa Huffman

James Rumpf Community Service Award: Lexi Leuzinger



Joe Thomas Positive Image Award: Alexandra Fayen

**LaFollette & East Enrollment GRIT Youth Stay Engaged and Inspired All Summer Long**

*By Tonya Pollard, DCDHS*

This summer, GRIT youth from East and La Follette High School enrollment areas have been actively involved in a wide range of opportunities focused on leadership, career development, and restorative justice. They’ve participated in trainings, volunteered in the community, and stayed connected through hands-on learning experiences.

Through strong partnerships with organizations like YWCA, Briarpatch, Second Harvest, and various local businesses, we were able to offer many first-time experiences to our youth. They built upon their skills, gained more confidence, and made more community connections along the way.



Our youth showed dedication, curiosity, and resilience throughout the summer. They worked hard, supported each other, and built meaningful new friendships. We're incredibly proud of all they've accomplished! Program Leaders Lizbeth and Tonya are excited to carry this positive momentum into the new school year!



### **DCDHS Program Leaders Host Annual Summer Boys Group for Youth**

*By Joe Muellenberg and Amanda Wiza, DCDHS*

During the 2025 Boys Group summer session, ten boys attended weekly groups at Dane County Human Services - Youth Justice and Prevention. Throughout the sessions, the youth engaged in conversations to better understand their emotions, choices, and goals for their own lives. Program Leader Rick Naylor reported a priority was to help the young men build self-esteem in the hopes they will choose to not put themselves in harm's way in the future. The main focus was to get the boys outdoors and connecting with role models in the community. The group went fishing several times. They reported appreciating the chance to relax outside and learn a new skill.



The group visited Mr. Rudd's barbershop where the barbers not only gave them clean cuts and line-ups, but also had a deep conversation about making positive life choices based on their own lived

experiences with gang activity and involvement in the criminal justice system.



The boys also got to test their physical stamina and learn boxing skills at BossHog Training Center. They learned how conflict resolution and boxing align, as they both require working hard towards life goals. Group runs through the end of August and next on the docket are trips to the Willa Aviation Academy and a Brewer's game in Milwaukee.

