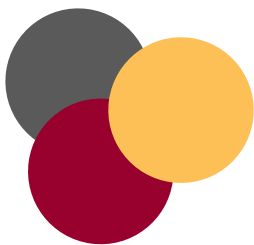


# **(Re)Imagining Justice for Youth**

## **Year One Evaluation Report**

**Submitted to:**  
**John Choi, Ramsey County Attorney**

**April 2023**



**MEDICAL SCHOOL**

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This report is the result of an applied research partnership between the Ramsey County Attorney's Office (RCAO) and the Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center at the University of Minnesota (UMN PRC). The report was written by Kara Beckman, MA, researcher at the UMN PRC. Devan Steward, MPP, RCAO data analyst, made essential contributions, as did UMN staff and students Angeline Gacad, MPH, Doris Espelien, MA, and Rebecca Shlafer, PhD, MPH. At the UMN PRC, researchers are learning about the best practices for providing adolescents with the necessary skills and opportunities to live healthy and meaningful lives. The UMN PRC is also dedicated to learning and implementing ways to reduce disparities that exist among Minnesota's young people. In addition to conducting research, the UMN PRC supports the youth-serving community through partnerships to promote best practices and public support for young people, conduct program evaluations, improve policies and systems, and train professionals whose work directly impacts youth.

RCAO named UMN PRC as its research partner for (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth (RJY) following a competitive bid process and awarded a contract to analyze local data, summarize national research, and provide technical expertise on aligning new legal system responses with adolescent development. To increase the likelihood our partnership would improve practices, policies and impacts, we employed an embedded research methodology in which UMN PRC researchers participated as members and advisors in multiple aspects of the project, including project leadership team meetings. Ms. Beckman was the lead researcher on this project and a member of the project leadership team since 2020. The publication of this report was also supported by the Grant or Cooperative Agreement Number [5U48DP005022; R. Shlafer, PI] funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Prevention Research Center Program. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the Department of Health and Human Services. Details on methods are included in Appendix A.

With community elders who have helped lead the efforts shared in this report, the authors recognize the ideas and practices described here, especially those related to community interconnectedness, restorative justice and the recognition of the full humanity of all people, are based on Indigenous wisdom and resilience. We [acknowledge](#) that the University of Minnesota stands on Miní Sóta Makhóche, the homelands of the Dakhóta Oyáte. We commit to deepening our understanding, shared healing, and becoming good relatives to each other, the land, and all beings.

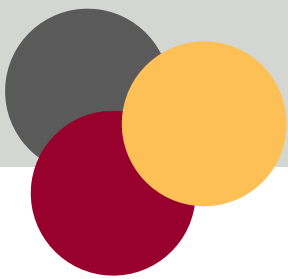


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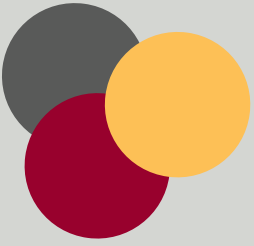
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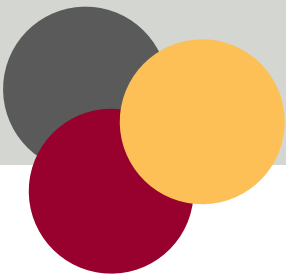
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# Executive Summary



# It is time for real change in our youth justice system.

Achieving the outcomes we want from our youth justice system will require change that addresses the harmful beliefs at the core of traditional models, and replaces them with policies and practices that create true accountability and healing, rather than just punishment.

The Ramsey County Attorney’s Office, together with other community and system leaders, are building a new approach to youth justice. **It’s called (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth (RJY)** and it puts community at the center of the legal response to harmful behavior.

Based on extensive national and local research, RJY aims to respond to harmful youth behavior in ways that **support youth to be caring, emotionally mature, and willing to take responsibility for their behavior**, rather than send them into an ineffective and harmful system.

**The change process has just begun.** In the first year of this new approach, most cases referred from law enforcement were not collaboratively reviewed, very few cases were charged and then referred to community accountability, and only 10% of total laws enforcement referrals were fully resolved in community.

## (Re)imagining Justice for Youth SYSTEM PARADIGM SHIFT

### Traditional

### (Re)Imagined

#### Policies

- Focus on blame, guilt and punishment
- Avoid honesty: anything you say can be used against you
- Increasing penalties for non-compliance



- Focus on needs, harms and obligations
- Take responsibility: make things right and move forward
- Tailored supports until resolution

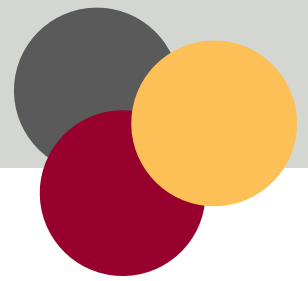
#### Mental Models

- Accountability is punishment
- Bad people hurt people
- Victims want vengeance
- Prevention through fear and control
- Perpetuates racism and implicit biases



- Accountability is making right
- Hurt people hurt people
- Victims want healing
- Prevention through relationships and opportunity
- Addresses racism and implicit biases

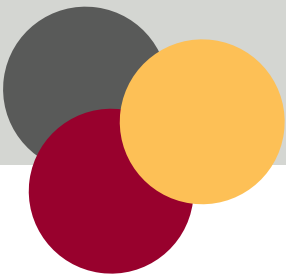
Kania et al., 2018, The Water of Systems Change ([https://www.fsg.org/resource/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change/](https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/)).  
Provided by RCAO/RJY leadership team. Learn more at <https://z.umn.edu/rcyjwd>



## There are promising preliminary results.

- Young people whose cases were successfully resolved in community had about **3 fewer months** of system involvement, compared to cases that included probation.
- **81%** of community accountability cases documented family engagement in accountability processes with the young person
- A larger proportion of the cases **successfully resolved in community** with no charge involved youth who were Black, Indigenous, younger, and not on their first referral to RCAO, compared to diversion data from 2017-2018.
- Qualitative evidence suggests community accountability creates spaces where **youth address their behavior, grow and heal**, and that sufficient time and family engagement are important for meaningful accountability.
- Cases resolved outside of the legal system in RJY's first year may have resulted in estimated **direct cost savings and future societal benefits of over \$400,000.**

*“He was very remorseful and understands that his actions not only affected him but also his family and community. He is new to the area and just finding his way with friends and a new state. He has a plan and just needs more support due to mom working six days a week to help him achieve his goals and stay on the right path.”*



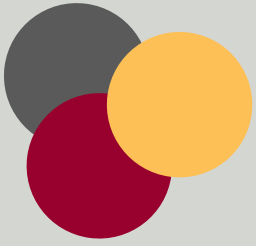
## RJY will take everyone, working together, to implement a vision of a legal system that truly supports accountability and healing.

RJY leaders are committed to transformative change, including:

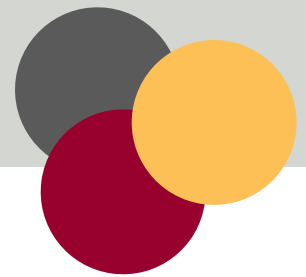
- **Accountability, transparency and continual improvement**, including this first public report on progress and results.
- **Reliance on the partnership** of community elders and practitioners to help us implement our vision with integrity.

Everyone can help. Members of the public can:

- **Expand understanding of:**
  - The true impacts of the traditional legal system and the implicit messages sent when accountability is passive and imposed, rather than active and agreed upon;
  - Developmental science that demonstrates behavior changes when needs are met. The most effective policy approaches for actual prevention of crime are ones that reduce inequality, such as greater investments in schools, health care, housing stability, and livable wages.
- **Advocate for:**
  - Equal scrutiny of traditional and new approaches to youth justice;
  - Local and state policy makers to reduce the harmful collateral consequences of legal system involvement for youth, and to enhance services outside of the legal system to meet the needs of youth and families.
- **Engage in, request, and help improve community accountability:**
  - Get to know your local providers of restorative justice and request their services directly if you need help in responding to an incident of harm or conflict.
  - Become trained in restorative approaches to increase the number of community providers that can offer healing accountability within and outside of formal legal systems and/or to participate as community members in restorative processes.



# **Section 1: Why are we (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth?**



No matter what we look like or where we live, most of us believe that it is essential to teach our youth to be caring, emotionally mature, and willing to take responsibility for their behavior. We also recognize the key roles that families and caring communities play in instilling these values. Yet the foundational practices of our legal system for youth frequently undermine parental roles, limit youth learning, and result in increased crime in our communities.<sup>1</sup> For decades, legal system leaders have primarily focused on securing more resources to continue responding in traditional ways, instead of analyzing legal processes to understand whether they provide meaningful accountability for those who have caused harm, healing for those who have been impacted, or increased safety in our communities. A coalition of leaders convened by Ramsey County Attorney John Choi is determined to help move to a new future where the legal system serves communities better by reimagining how it serves our youth. We believe it is time to fully support our youth, even and especially those who commit crimes in our communities, to get back on track and make things right. By coming together, including families as essential partners, and showing that we trust communities to support their youth and their neighbors, we can also begin to heal. This report is a summary of our approach and an invitation to help make a new future.

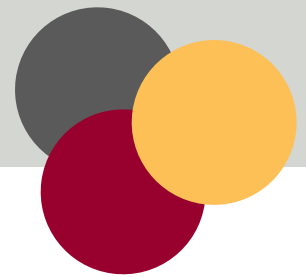
What we are (re)imagining: We believe in our collective ability to build a community in which all young people are taught to take responsibility for their harmful behavior and to identify and address the underlying causes of their actions. In this community, our legal structures support families and other caring adults to provide guidance for young people until they understand the impact of their behavior, have taken reparative actions, developed the emotional maturity needed to make healthier decisions, and received support to address any underlying needs.

What we have: Traditionally, young people who are referred to the legal system navigate a maze of advice, court appearances, mixed messages (e.g., “take responsibility for your behavior” vs “anything you say can and will be used against you”), and imposed decisions about guilt and consequences. During this process, youth may never actually be required to recognize what they did was wrong and the impact it had on other people, leaving victims feeling unheard and unhealed. Additionally, youth charged in the traditional legal system often incur long-lasting collateral consequences on future employment, housing, and education prospects. There are few assessments of the effectiveness of these systems and little to no consequences for providing ineffective services or having a negative impact on public safety.

How we get there: Restructuring our legal systems to address harmful behavior in a way that provides both accountability and prevents future harm will take all of us working together. The word “(re)imagining” intentionally acknowledges a dual reality between distinct lived experiences of justice and accountability. The perspective of community members helping to lead this work from Black and Indigenous communities and other communities of color is that our legal systems have never done justice for their youth, and we must imagine an inclusive justice for the first time. The perspective of people in the legal system is that they have been seeking justice for all youth, and we must reimagine it to get better outcomes. Further, “(re)imagining” in its continuous form signals to all of us that it will take ongoing resolve to remain honest about how the divisions of the past have and continue to harm all of us, and commitment to stay on a path of transparency and learning until this new, more effective legal system is fully developed in our community.



## **Section 2: What is (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth?**



## A vision that is community-oriented, youth-focused and transparent

(Re)imagining Justice for Youth (RJY) is our attempt to be engaged in an approach that puts community – parents, family members, people impacted, and other community leaders – at the center of the legal response. RJY means acknowledging people closest to the harm are best positioned to hold youth accountable to repair harm caused and to support their learning and growth around community expectations for behavior and hopes for children’s futures.

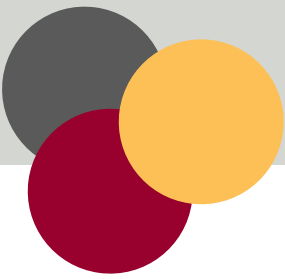
Leaders in Ramsey County, from the County Attorney’s Office (RCAO), Public Defender’s Office, impacted community, law enforcement (LE), other county agencies, and researchers formed a leadership team which met for nearly three years between 2018 and 2021 to create RJY’s vision and initial approach. Together, we created goals to share power and to develop more effective legal system responses to young people, informed by developmental science and focused on healing. This leadership team – which continues to meet bi-weekly to guide the approach – analyzed past data, reviewed alternative approaches, shared wisdom from multiple perspectives about what works with youth, and ultimately designed and launched a new approach to youth justice in July 2021. The leadership team committed to:

- **reduce the racial disparities and collateral consequences** inherent in justice involvement that inhibit young people’s success as they are maturing and transitioning to self-sufficiency as young adults;
- **share power with community** through co-designing RJY, collaboratively reviewing cases to determine how best to respond, and in providing actual responses to community incidents;
- **create a collaborative review team**, consisting of members from our most impacted communities, public defenders, and county attorneys, to review cases together through a restorative, equitable, trauma-informed lens and determine how best to respond;
- **build a continuum of restorative community-based alternatives** to traditional legal system involvement to address the needs of people harmed; and help youth identify and repair harm, gain support, and address their underlying needs to prevent harmful behavior from recurring and help them succeed; and
- **ensure the new changes are transformative and sustained**, such that the core mental models or paradigms that underlie traditional systems<sup>i</sup> are replaced and form the foundation for new practices, resource allocations and policies.

The RJY vision includes a new legal structure and decision-making process, as represented in Figure 1. Dots represent incidents of harm in the community caused by young people. Green dots refer to the traditionally most frequent type of youth-involved incidents which are less severe, yellow dots refer to medium severity incidents, and red dots to most severe. A portion of these incidents are funneled into

<sup>i</sup>A full explanation of how RJY’s vision may differ from traditional legal system processes is beyond the scope of this report. An accessible overview of the traditional legal system for youth in Minnesota is available in Section 2 and Appendix C of the 2018 “[Results First Juvenile Justice Report](#)” from the Office of Management and Budget. It is worth noting some differences in language between the youth and adult legal systems used throughout this report: youth cases are “petitioned” rather than “charged”, and youth receive a “disposition” which may or may not include an “adjudication of delinquency” rather than “sentenced” based on a “conviction.”

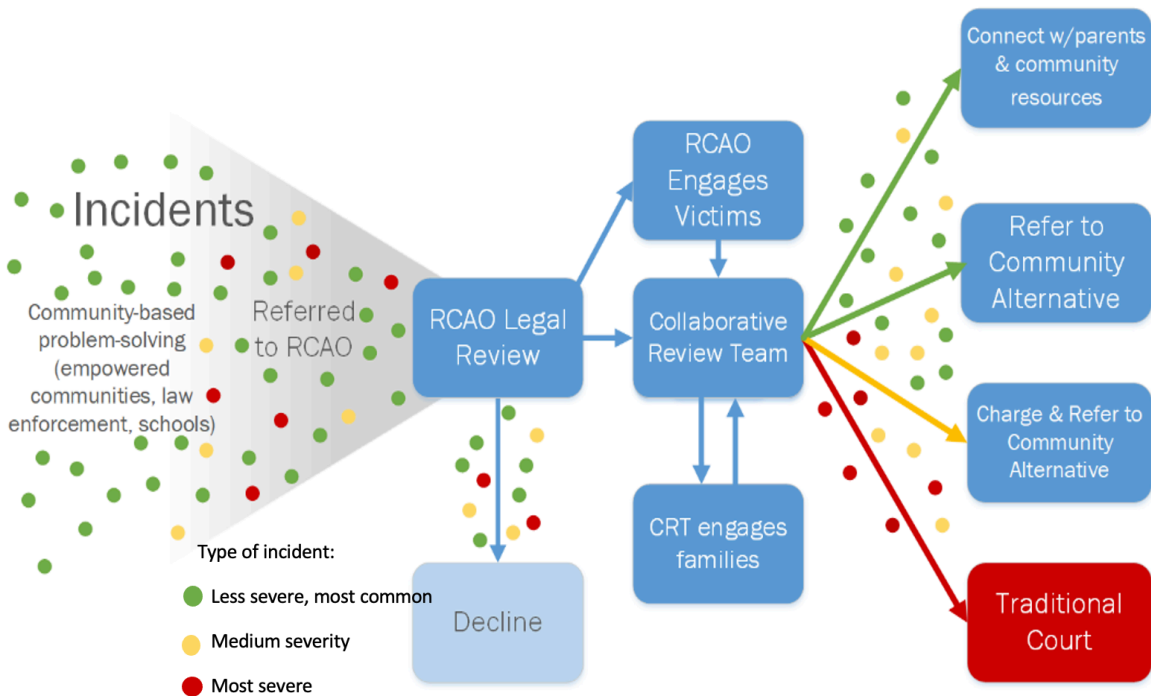




the legal system through law enforcement interaction and referrals. At that point, an assistant county attorney conducts the initial RCAO legal review and either declines the case or moves the case forward. Assistant county attorneys may decline to petition or charge a case for reasons such as prosecution not being in the interests of justice, or the law enforcement investigation does not provide sufficient evidence that a crime was committed or of a specific individual being responsible for the crime. This legal review continues to be an important part of the RJY legal process to prevent a “net-widening” effect in which more young people are caught in the “net” of the legal system to grant them access to services. In the RJY vision, if a case is not declined at this stage, it proceeds to collaborative review, as explained above, in which victims’ and families’ perspectives are sought for further insight. The final column represents four accountability pathways that a case might take after a decision by the collaborative review team. As of the writing of this report (March 2023), this vision is in the beginning stages of implementation, with most cases not yet collaboratively reviewed and the charge & refer to community alternative pathway still being developed.

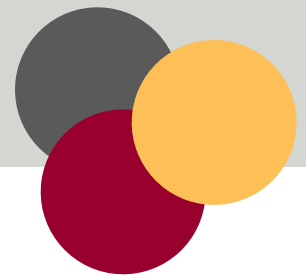
**Figure 1. (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth Vision: Share power with community**

*The majority of youth-involved incidents will be resolved in the community. When cases are referred to RCAO, a collaborative review team will gather family and victim input to help determine the type of accountability best suited for healing.*



The accountability pathways, and related abbreviations used throughout this report, are:

**Decline/Connect with parents & community (Decline):** Refer the incident back to the parent/caregivers. Parents are likely best positioned to address the incident with their child and no system involvement is necessary. The end result of this decision is that the referred case is declined and young people have no conditions or obligations imposed on them by the legal system.



**Refer to community accountability/alternative (CA):** The case is referred directly to one of the community agencies under contract to provide restorative justice and/or case management services. Restorative justice processes provide meaningful accountability and offer people who have been harmed options to engage in the repair of the harm processes. Case management services provide support to youth who have engaged in behavior that may be illegal, but may not have caused direct harm to another person. If the youth is successful within these community alternatives, they will be exited from the legal system without having a petition on their record. If unsuccessful, cases are returned for collaborative review to determine next steps.

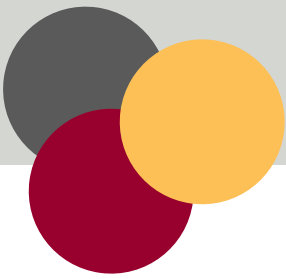
**Petition and refer to community accountability/alternative (Charge + CA):** The case is petitioned to court (i.e., charged) and then referred to one of the community alternatives. The legal parties enter into an agreement for a continuance for dismissal so the case will be dismissed if the youth successfully completes the conditions of accountability as determined in community. If successful, youth are exited from the legal system having had a petition on their record, but without a disposition or adjudication (resulting in fewer long-term educational, housing, and employment impacts).

**Petition to court (Court):** The case is petitioned to court and goes through the traditional process. Youth may end up with a disposition, adjudication, dismissal, or continuance depending on multiple factors. The conditions of accountability are determined by judges and monitored by corrections.

Additional aspects of the RJY vision warrant further explanation to distinguish from traditional processes. The collaborative review process aims to understand an incident through the lenses of “harms, needs, and obligations” which align directly with restorative justice principles.<sup>2</sup> The collaborative review also seeks to intentionally humanize young people, by bringing in the context of youths’ lived experiences and developmental capacities. The process includes humanizing youth in the context of race by naming how systemic racism may have limited their opportunities to thrive and influenced interpretation of their behavior by adults. Collaborative review also includes guidance about how to apply an understanding of adolescent development to the discussion of harms and needs, to avoid pathologizing developmentally typical youth behavior or behavior that might be a symptom of trauma.<sup>3</sup> The collaborative review team made 90% of their decisions by consensus in the first year and frequently with the input of victims, as well as family members or others who may know well the needs of the young person who caused harm.

A second aspect of the RJY vision includes a broader understanding of accountability. In RJY, we aim for meaningful accountability through responding to incidents of harm in a way that:

- **engages** those most impacted by a youth’s harmful behavior;
- **identifies and repairs harm** – provides youth meaningful opportunities to make right the harm they have caused and promote healing for everyone involved;
- **addresses young people’s underlying needs to reduce the likelihood harm recurs** – engages family members or other supportive adults to understand youth needs and co-determine developmentally-appropriate responses to connect youth and their families with resources and support;
- **supports positive youth development and builds connections to school, community, and caring adults** – helps youth overcome adversity and realize their full potential.



This process is documented through accountability plans developed during restorative community accountability processes. Plans include three types of actions: actions needed to repair harm, to begin addressing underlying needs, and actions needed to reconnect to positive supports. Actions to address underlying needs may include referrals to additional services. Actions for positive supports may include referrals to school services, mentoring, or job skills training. Figure 2 depicts this structured process to achieve meaningful accountability in cases where harm has happened. Additional details about RJY processes are available elsewhere, in both [written](#) and [video-recorded](#) versions.

**Figure 2. Community-based accountability produces meaningful accountability through structured processes**

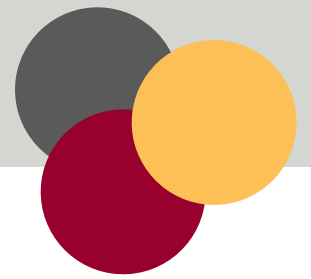
*Restorative processes are intentionally structured to engage young people, people harmed, and community members in creating and completing a plan for healing.*



**A vision that includes (re)imagining justice systems**

By seeking to shape a new approach to justice and accountability, the RJY leadership team recognizes and seeks to reckon with the reality that the traditional systems are designed to achieve exactly the forms of justice and accountability they are currently achieving.

As summarized in the RJY System Paradigm Shift (Figure 3), our approach includes revealing and



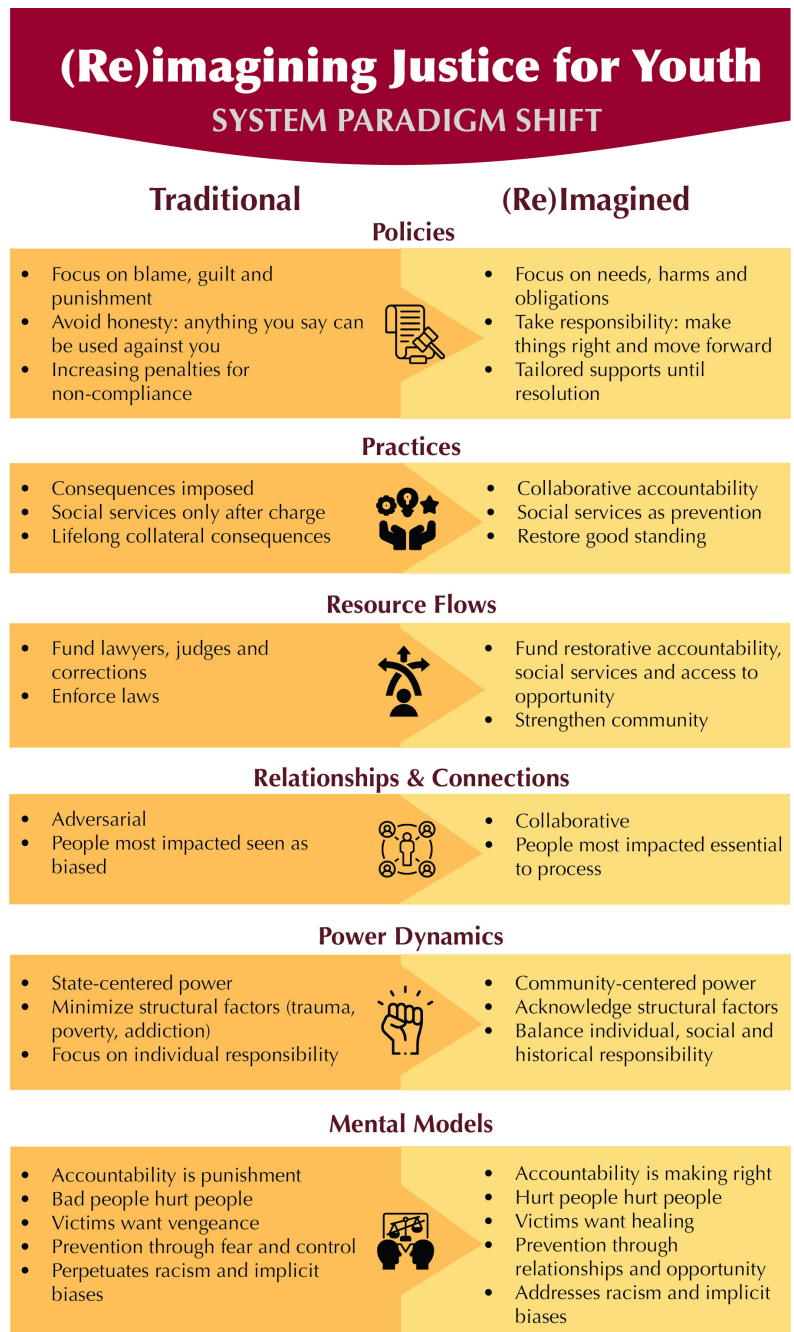
transforming differences in traditional and (re)imagined systems.<sup>4</sup> Among the more explicit differences in how the two systems would function are policies, practices and resource flows. In traditional systems, policies support punitive accountability that deems as essential only imposed consequences (thus including both “soft on crime” and “tough on crime” approaches.) Even apparently restorative actions, such as paying restitution, are punitive when imposed by authority figures not directly connected to the incident. However, in a (re)imagined system, the opportunity to make things right and move forward are essential.

Practices emphasized in traditional legal systems are designed to isolate culpability in individuals, including children as young as age 10 in Minnesota, and avoid questions of societal responsibility for policies and resource decisions that have harmful impacts on children, families, and communities. By contrast, restorative accountability takes seriously the idea that a society that does not invest in equitable opportunity or commit resources to support all youth shares accountability when youth who are disproportionately burdened cause harm.

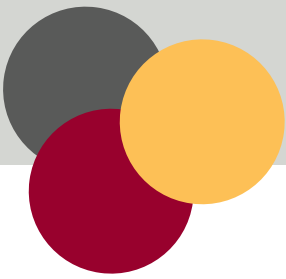
Relationships, connections, power dynamics, and mental models represent the more implicit ways systems function. These more implicit differences include that the traditional legal system concentrates power in the state, and relies on system actors imposing decisions about how to respond to an incident of harm. In a (re)imagined

### Figure 3. (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth requires a system paradigm shift

*Traditional system conditions must be transformed for sustainable change to occur.*



Kania et al., 2018, The Water of Systems Change ([https://www.fsg.org/resource/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change/](https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/)). Provided by RCAO/RJY leadership team. Learn more at <https://z.umn.edu/rcyjwd>



approach relying on restorative accountability, all impacted people are viewed as essential participants for collaboratively deciding what is needed to make right the specific incident, identify and address needs for healing, and identify and address actions needed for future success.

## **A vision grounded in evidence**

The RJY vision and processes are grounded in evidence showing both what has worked and what has not worked for accountability with young people. As demonstrated by the evidence shared below, the status quo within the legal system has not worked nationally or locally. Rather, emerging Western scientific evidence is beginning to align with existing Indigenous knowledge that restorative justice is a more effective approach to accountability and healing.

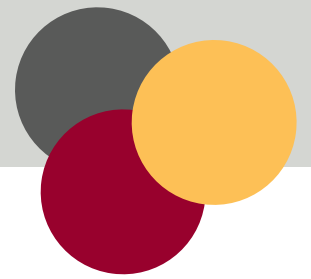
### ***National evidence***

National evidence demonstrates that the traditional youth legal system is not leading to safer or more productive communities. Having any contact with law enforcement during adolescence has been demonstrated to increase likelihood of arrest as a young adult by three times.<sup>5</sup> Deeper legal system involvement during adolescence is associated with worse health and lower education,<sup>6-8</sup> reduced employment opportunities,<sup>5</sup> and sizable costs to society.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, a 2022 report from The Sentencing Project notes that research consistently finds youth who are referred to the legal system do better when they are initially diverted out and have increasingly worse outcomes the deeper their involvement goes into the system.<sup>10</sup> These results stand in stark contrast to the fundamental purpose of the youth legal system: to provide accountability, meet the needs of victims and prevent further harm through rehabilitation. Research related to each of these aspects, summarized briefly below, contributes to an understanding of why the traditional system has failed to achieve its purpose in relationship to young people.

*Accountability.* The legal system in the U.S. has a long history of alternating between accountability processes that look primarily backward to punish culpable conduct and forward to prevent future crime through requiring services or other interventions.<sup>11</sup> Public dialogues frequently differentiate between these alternatives as “soft” or “tough” approaches to crime, but fail to interrogate both in terms of their true effectiveness and ability to provide meaningful accountability.

In the context of relational and restorative approaches to accountability (Figure 4), both “soft” and “tough” approaches of imposing consequences fall within the “TO” quadrant.<sup>12</sup> They fail to center the full humanity of people who are hurt and people who cause harm, and they perpetuate beliefs that people who cause harm should be controlled rather than supported to heal. Alternatively, services outside of an accountability process is in the “FOR” quadrant as it denies people who cause harm agency to take responsibility for their behavior. Either approach is dehumanizing, as indicated by objectifying language such as “criminals,” “delinquents,” “offenders,” or “incorrigible.” Finally, in traditional accountability processes – because the main responses most often include inflicting harmful consequences on people who cause harm (including when harmful consequences are paired with purportedly rehabilitative ones) – determining guilt plays a key role to ensure protections exist against harming or punishing innocent people or people not capable of being responsible for their actions. This results in many incidents of harm ending in the “NOT” quadrant, with both people harmed



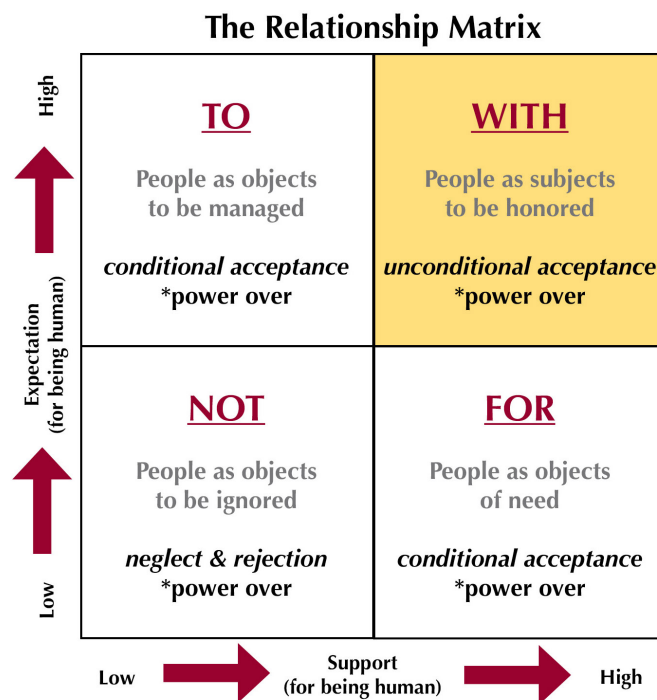


and people who cause harm not experiencing any opportunity to be accountable or heal.

Accountability, however, can be a process of active engagement. Restorative justice is accountability that requires acknowledging one's role in harm and taking reparative actions in line with individual and shared responsibility for behavior. Restorative accountability is achieved "WITH" people, via collaborative processes in which the person who caused harm is involved in hearing the impact of their actions on people harmed, family and community. They acknowledge their role in the harm, and carry out a plan to make things right, including a plan that addresses underlying needs, so as to prevent repeat behavior. The process does not preclude other actions (e.g., in-patient services), but those decisions are made collectively and would likely include agreement that removal from family and community end as soon as all believe the youth can be safely restored to the community.

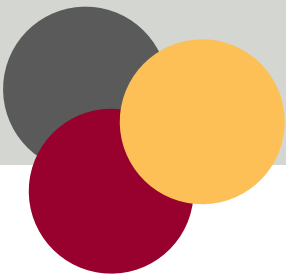
**Figure 4. Restorative practices pair high support and high expectations**

*Restorative practices recognize the humanity of the young person as a person who is expected and is supposed to do right.*



From Restorative Justice in Education by Katherine Evans & Dorothy Vaandering | Good Books, New York

Restorative accountability aligns more closely with youths' developmental needs. Rather than have a third party impose sanctions, the principles of inclusion and participation require that youth and people impacted not only talk about the harm, but also determine the resolution together.<sup>13</sup> Youth learn to take responsibility for their behavior, by being active participants in the accountability process. By listening to family and community members' perspectives in the dialogues, youth increase understanding of how actions impact others, both directly and indirectly. Youth also learn about working through issues in a way that heals rather than disrupts relationships because family and community members are able to express disapproval of the wrongful deed, while expressing care for the youth and support for their growth. The process affirms a youth's emerging self-image, rather than applying pejorative labels.<sup>14</sup> Further, restorative dialogues are able to acknowledge shared responsibility for harmful behavior, such as when young people grow up in "over-policed and under-protected" communities.<sup>15</sup> As a result, restorative accountability engenders empathy and learning in young people, rather than defiance.<sup>16</sup> The overriding societal belief that imposed consequences are an essential part of accountability has defined responses in the youth legal system within the "TO" and "FOR" quadrants, despite the fact that



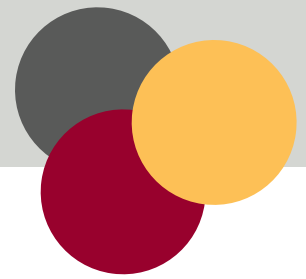
the separate legal system for youth was designed to minimize focus on punitive accountability in favor of rehabilitation. In reality, core differences between the adult and youth legal systems may be largely confined to language rather than approaches, much less in a system truly focused on the unique characteristics and needs of children and youth.<sup>17</sup> For example, in theory, children are not regarded as fully culpable for their harmful behavior (as indicated by the use of the language of “disposition” rather than “sentencing”). In practice, however, the need to determine culpability for a specific instance of harmful behavior, rather than develop a contextualized understanding of an incident, can minimize the impact of childhood trauma, environmental causes, and developmental trajectories. When context is taken into account, cases may end with little or no accountability given an overall paucity of age-appropriate treatment options, especially for younger youth. Some older youth may then have a history of multiple incidents due to ineffective responses while they were younger, and may be treated more harshly or moved into the adult system.<sup>11</sup> Further, imposed consequences (whether punitive or rehabilitative) engender defiance and disconnection, rather than remorse.<sup>18</sup> There is also extensive evidence that youth of color are subject to harsher responses in the punitive justice system.<sup>19-20</sup>

To summarize, while many “less punitive” measures include elements of more meaningful and healing accountability (e.g., restitution, community service, treatment courts), these approaches are not truly restorative unless they align with the principles of restorative justice, such as consensus decision-making by the most impacted people.<sup>13</sup> Apologies, services or restitutions are still punitive when they are imposed by ‘objective’ third parties that did not have a role in the harm. Regardless of the harshness or supportiveness of decisions, these approaches continue to make disposition a passive rather than active process, and undermine an important opportunity for growth that is actively taking responsibility for one’s behavior and making right any harm caused.

*Doing right by victims.* People who have been harmed deserve to be surrounded by a community that recognizes their needs, helps them heal, and works to prevent harm from happening again. Unfortunately, the dialogue about victims is rarely nuanced or evidence-based, inclusive of all people who are victims of criminal or harmful behavior, or honest about the variety of ways to effectively meet the unique needs expressed by the victims themselves.

To have an inclusive dialogue about people harmed, it is important to first acknowledge that people who cause harm and people who have been victims of harmful behavior come from overlapping groups and are often the same individuals. This reality is often obscured. There is a far higher likelihood of victimization when an individual comes from a low-income background, and this likelihood of victimization can turn into hypervigilance to threats, resulting, especially for youth, in quick errors in judgment that then end up in them being referred to the legal system.<sup>21</sup> For some youth, it is only through their harmful behavior that childhood experiences of violence or systemic neglect are revealed.

Further, accountability practices within the legal system are based on assumptions that people who are harmed by crime and those who engage in criminal behavior are fundamentally different types of people, contributing to beliefs that what victims primarily want is revenge or incarceration, rather than repair, healing or expressions of remorse.<sup>22</sup> When people who have been a victim of a harmful act are



actually given an option, incarceration is not their primary solution. In at least one jurisdiction that explored this issue, nearly all (90%) victims chose something other than incarceration.<sup>23</sup> This indicates victims are aware of the tradeoffs between short- and long-term senses of safety within traditional legal system responses, given evident harms in people returning to communities after incarceration.

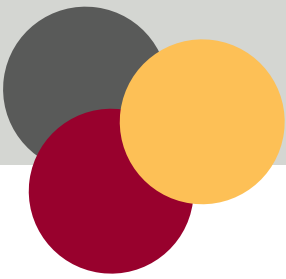
Finally, an inclusive dialogue about victims also requires considering individuals who choose not to report crime to authorities. The most recent data available from the 2021 National Crime Victimization Survey notes that less than half (approximately 46%) of violent victimizations were reported to police in 2021.<sup>24</sup> Survivors' reasons for not reporting crimes to authorities are multifaceted, and "based in part on whether they believe that doing so will meet their needs for safety and justice."<sup>23</sup> To honor their reality, we should have processes that center their healing needs. We might also ensure that the conversation about victims includes actions related to the most effective policy approaches for actual prevention of crime - investments in schools, health care, housing stability, livable wages, etc. that would reduce inequality.<sup>25</sup>

Comparatively, restorative justice processes are victim-oriented, whereby the person harmed—as opposed to a judge—is instrumental in holding the person who caused harm accountable. Evidence shows victims are often more satisfied when their case is resolved through restorative justice as it is more likely to lead to actual healing.<sup>26</sup> Healing emerges from the restorative processes aimed at addressing victims' needs—including specific actions such as repairing or replacing lost or damaged property, or offering a genuine explanation and apology—actions which do not always occur in the traditional system. Participation in restorative justice has been found to alleviate symptoms of post-traumatic stress associated with victimization.<sup>27</sup> Such evidence undermines the assumption of conventional legal systems that the adversarial nature of lawyers in court requires adversarial relations between people who have been harmed and those who caused the harm.<sup>22</sup> Restorative justice, at least in principle, seeks ways for all impacted parties to cooperate in preventing future harm and repairing past harms. Finally, restorative justice processes do not require direct contact between the victim and the person who caused them harm. Some restorative justice practices, such as the community conferencing model, are specifically designed to help young people be accountable for their actions regardless of the desire of victims to be directly involved in accountability processes or in situations where there was no direct victim (e.g., possession charges).

*Rehabilitation.* The approach to rehabilitation in the youth legal system ideally begins with an acknowledgment that, regardless of the seriousness of their behavior, youth almost always age out of such behavior, even without intervention.<sup>28</sup> And yet, the youth legal system ignores this evidence in at least two specific ways.

First, the legal system determines that some youth are untreatable, despite science showing that no level of risk signifies someone is beyond help.<sup>29</sup> This relegates youth to a status of "objects to be managed" (Figure 4). Some young people are still sentenced as adults, leading to longer prison sentences and fewer rehabilitative services tailored to their age and developmental capacity. As a rehabilitative measure, evidence indicates incarceration is far more harmful than effective.<sup>23</sup> While this evidence has led to national efforts which successfully cut admissions to juvenile detention facilities in half over the last 25





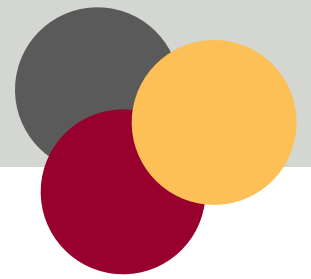
years,<sup>30</sup> resources saved through reducing detentions have not necessarily been reallocated into more effective approaches. In Ramsey County, for example, resources from closing Boys Totem Town were initially proposed to be reallocated to probation<sup>31</sup> – thus funding less punitive responses, but not actual healing services, such as restorative justice, or crime prevention services, such as education and after-school programs that could reduce inequality of opportunity.

Second, the legal system essentially operates on the belief that any youth who encounters the system requires rehabilitation (i.e., is an “object of need,” Figure 4). However, emerging evidence demonstrates that alternatives to system responses with no conditions on success are among the most effective approaches to long-term community safety and wellness.<sup>32</sup> Research also shows youth engage in most of the behavior that is deemed illegal at similar rates across geography and race,<sup>33</sup> indicating much of this behavior is developmentally typical. Indeed, developmental science shows that risk-taking in adolescence is normal. However, higher rates of the most harmful behavior by youth in communities marred by legacies of societal disinvestment (e.g., redlining, inequitable education funding) indicates such behavior is a reflection of the impact of these societal decisions on children’s developmental trajectories.<sup>33</sup> Yet, one of the most perverse incentives in our legal systems is that young people – many of whom may have had long periods of system involvement but never got what they needed – only qualify for rehabilitative services if they commit an act serious enough to get them into the deep end of the legal system.

Restorative justice offers another process: engaging the youth and their family, people harmed, and skilled community facilitators in a comprehensive dialogue about what may be needed, including potential underlying issues or whether the young person simply made a developmentally typical mistake. Grounded in evidence that people do the right thing when their needs are met, restorative justice treats all people involved in a harmful incident as subjects able to play essential roles in accountability processes. Increasingly, evidence demonstrates these restorative processes reduce future reoffending among young people more than traditional processes, whether restorative justice occurs in schools,<sup>34</sup> after police referrals,<sup>35-36</sup> in community-based settings with multiple referral sources,<sup>37</sup> or as an alternative to prosecution<sup>38</sup> or probation.<sup>39</sup>

### **Evidence from RCAO data**

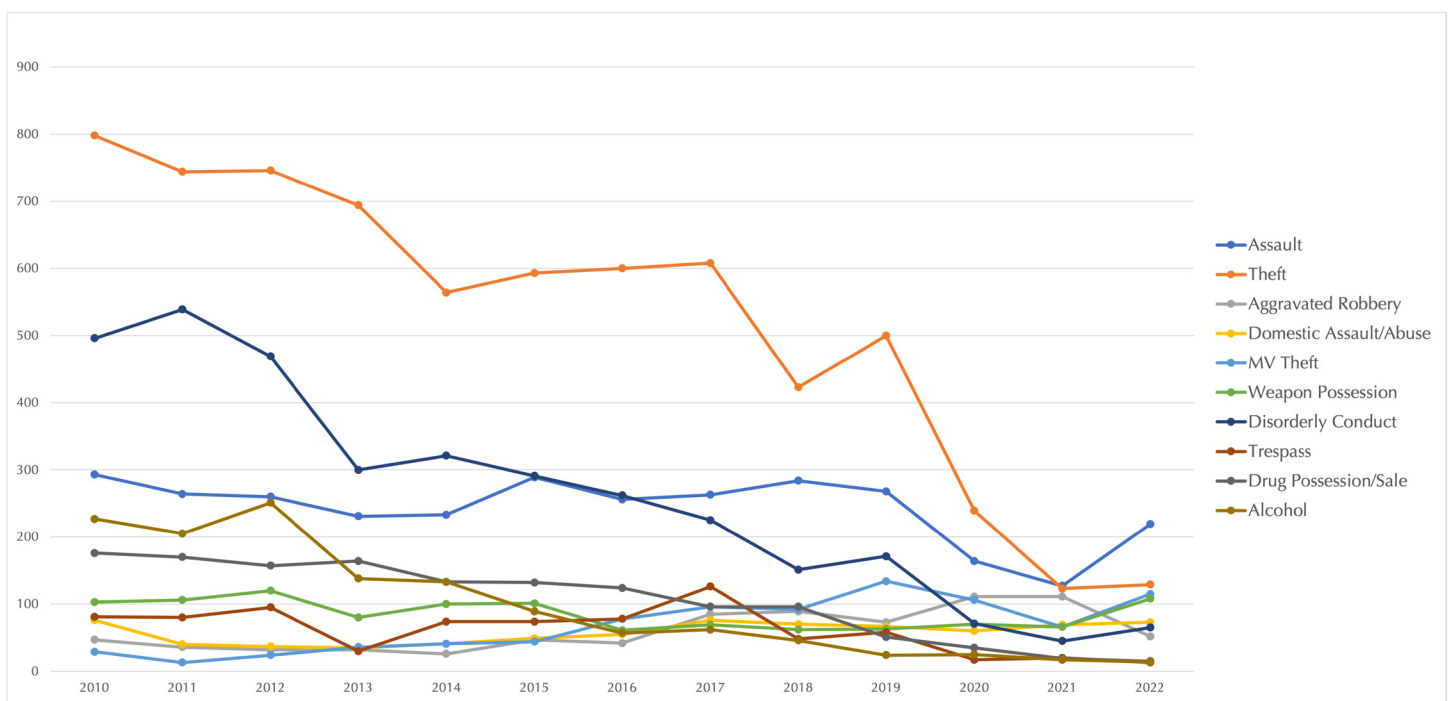
While forming the RJY vision and approach, we analyzed RCAO data on youth referred by law enforcement from 2010-2019 and linked that to adult court records kept at the state level. To develop comparable two-year time points to which we could eventually compare initial RJY results, we assessed some data separately for calendar years 2012-2013 and 2017-2018. The 2017-2018 period is what we consider the baseline comparison from a point in time when some reforms were underway, including lower referral and charge rates for less severe incidents, but not nearly to the extent of the RJY vision. The 2012-2013 period serves as an additional and earlier point of historical comparison. Additional findings and figures are available [online](#).



Our research revealed first that this has been a period of greatly reduced law enforcement referrals (Figure 5). While a few types of more serious crime have increased during the pandemic (e.g., aggravated robbery), overall the past decade has seen drastic reductions in criminal behavior by youth in Ramsey County.

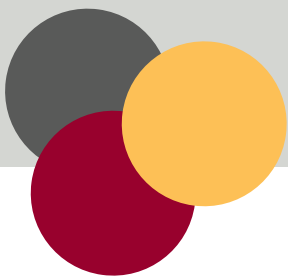
**Figure 5. Far fewer youth incidents referred to RCAO annually since 2010**

*While referrals from law enforcement decreased over the course of the data reviewed, some incidents of higher severity increased (e.g., aggravated robbery).*



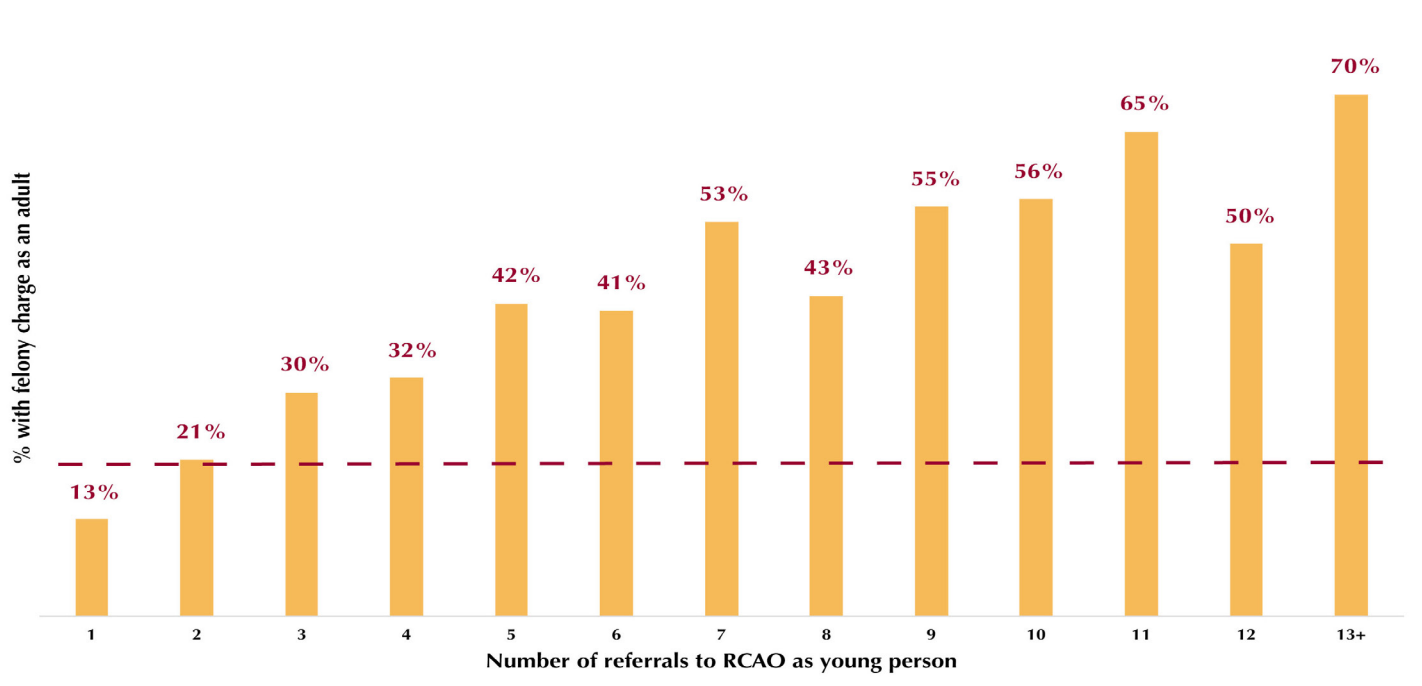
Research further revealed that decisions and approaches within RCAO during this period resulted in high rates of re-referral and profound collateral consequences that continue well into adulthood, too often led to further justice involvement in adulthood, and exacerbated racial disparities with respect to which youth were referred to the justice system. These findings are summarized below.

**Traditional legal system responses were not meeting the needs of young people or community.** The more often a young person was referred to the legal system, the less effective the responses were, as they became more likely to have future system contact, both as youth and as adults. As adults, 1 in 5 people (21%) referred to RCAO as a youth between 2010-2019 ended up with a felony charge as an adult (Figure 6, dotted line); however, only 13% of youth with one referral did, compared to 30% of youth with 3 referrals and 70% of youth with 13+ referrals (Figure 6, columns). Further, results indicated that traditional legal system responses to serious behaviors were least effective, as young people who ever had any gross misdemeanor or felony charge ended up with felony charges as adults at higher rates than people with only misdemeanor or petty misdemeanor charges in their youth.



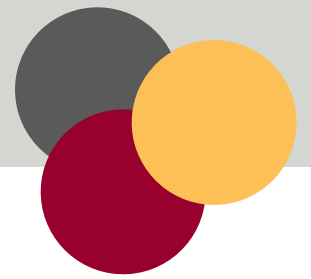
### Figure 6. Rate of adult felonies increase with each RCAO referral

While overall only 21% of young people who had RCAO contact as a youth had a felony charge as an adult, the percentage rose considerably with each additional number of referrals.



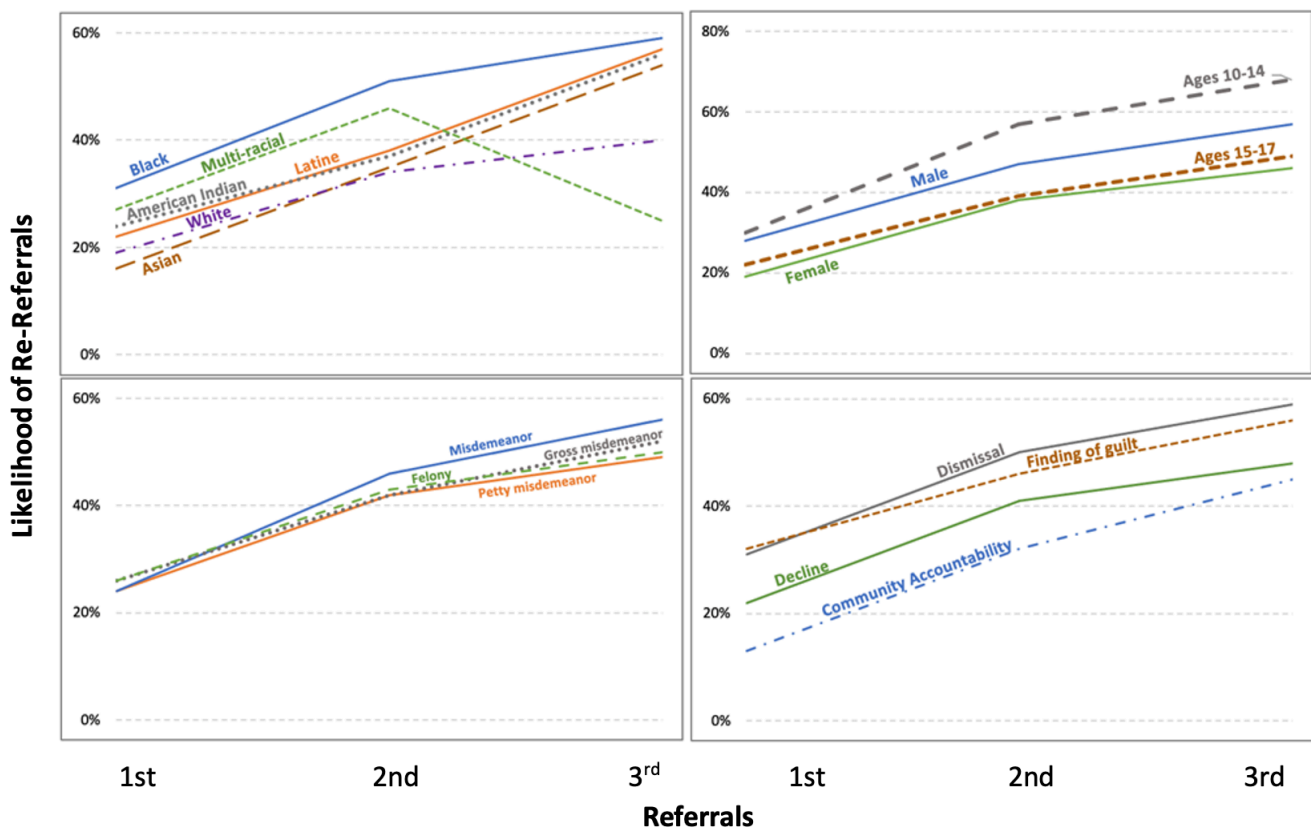
Similar trends existed within a shorter follow-up period. While 65% of young people were referred to RCAO only one time before their 18th birthday, the remaining 35% were referred more than one time. Of those who were referred a second time, a much greater proportion, 57%, were also referred a third time. We found this to be true despite higher rates of charging youth with any previous charge, whose cases were charged roughly 75% of the time in 2017-2018, compared to youth on their first referral, whose cases were charged 50% of the time.

Indeed, in looking specifically at 2017-2018 re-referral data, no matter how we disaggregated the numbers, the pattern persisted of an increasing re-referral rate from first to second to third referral (Figure 7). This persistent pattern indicates that youth on their second and third referral to the legal system especially need improved responses. Beyond the overall pattern, the disaggregated data shown in Figure 7 also reveals consistently higher rates of re-referral for some populations as they move through their first three referrals. Compared to other groups, populations with higher re-referral rates included youth who were identified as Black, American Indian, Latine, Asian, male, and ages 10-14 at referral. On the other hand, data show similar re-referral rates regardless of severity of the referred incident, which align with national research findings that recommend not differentiating approaches to



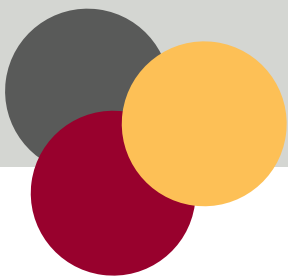
**Figure 7. Re-referral rates increase across demographics and responses after first, second and third referrals.**

Data from 2017-2018 show that each contact a youth has with RCAO increases their chances of having additional contacts, a trend that appears consistent no matter how the data are parsed (with the singular exception of multi-racial youth on their third referral). For example, a male youth at his first RCAO referral has a 28% chance of future re-referral. When on a second referral, a male youth now has a 47% likelihood of re-referral. On a third referral, odds are 57% that a male will be referred a fourth time.



accountability based on severity, but rather seeking to understand the unique needs and histories of individual youth.<sup>28</sup> Finally, data show that the use of community accountability (referred to as diversion at the time and typically reserved for first-time, low-severity incidents) resulted in lower re-referral rates. Cases resulting in a decline, which were an increasing proportion of cases compared to earlier in the decade, resulted in the second lowest rate of re-referrals. Together, these data demonstrate: 1) the importance of finding more effective responses after a second and third referral, 2) the need to improve effectiveness with Black, American Indian, Latine, Asian, male, and youth ages 10-14, 3) why a decision to decline a case is one of the accountability pathways, and 4) why RJY aims to ensure community accountability is available and effective for youth regardless of incident severity.

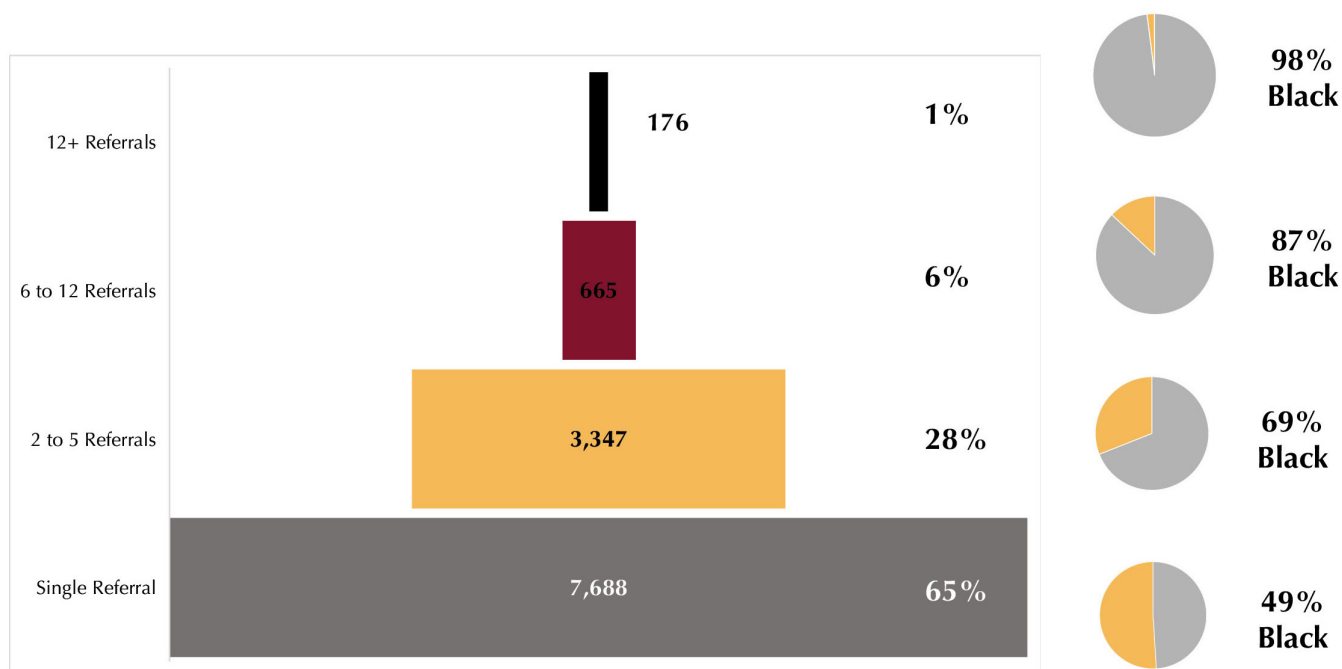
**Traditional legal system responses are not reducing racial disparities.** In Ramsey County, between 2010-2019, Black youth made up less than 20% of the youth population but nearly 70% of youth referrals to RCAO. When separated out by referral number, this extreme disparity increases as the



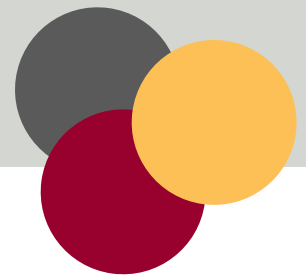
number of RCAO contacts increase, such that Black youth are 98% of youth who have 12+ referrals (Figure 8).

**Figure 8. Racial disparities increase as contacts increase**

*Between 2010-2019, Black youth made up 49% of youth referred once, but 98% of youth referred 12 or more times.*



The RJY leadership team explicitly interprets these results as evidence that traditional accountability practices do not result in the outcomes we are seeking. Addressing this racial inequity early and intentionally through improved accountability responses is essential, and there is urgency to provide opportunities for accountability that are less harmful and more meaningful, timely, and effective. Indeed, we now have more than two decades of research showing that the most powerful ways to improve youth health and behavior is not by escalating consequences, but by ensuring their physical, emotional, social and developmental needs are met.<sup>40-41</sup> Even when unmet needs are identified and addressed in the traditional legal system, the lack of incorporating developmental science into understanding how these processes feel like consequences to young people is likely a contributing factor to their ongoing patterns of harmful behavior. We recognize many of us are socialized to believe that people who are referred multiple times to legal system are “bad people” making rational decisions to harm others, thereby blaming children who struggle rather than systems that perpetuate inequality.<sup>42</sup> We reject these belief systems and instead are addressing our shared responsibility for these unacceptable outcomes of the traditional system.



## **A vision that is accountable to our community**

A final element of RJY is public accountability. The RJY leadership team acknowledges the shortcomings of traditional legal system responses in addressing the underlying needs that contribute to legal system involvement and commits to working together to attain full system transformation to a more effective, restorative and developmentally tailored approach. To bring transparency and accountability towards achieving our vision, the RJY leadership team will regularly share not only who is coming into our system, but also whether our responses are changing and whether they are making a difference in our community. Specifically, we will report at least annually on:

- **Indicators that RJY's vision is being implemented and responses are changing, including:**
  - **Accountability:** Rates of access to, participation in, and quality of services in new and traditional accountability pathways;
  - **Trust:** Evidence of trust between community members, RJY's leadership team, members of the collaborative review team, RCAO, and providers.
- **Indicators that changes are having positive impact, including:**
  - **Lightest system touch possible:** More timely accountability with fewer collateral consequences;
  - **Healing:** Young people referred to RCAO will experience more healing and growth, and better connection to families, community, and school; people harmed will experience more healing;
  - **Impact on recidivism:** Young people will be less likely than those referred prior to RJY to be re-referred to RCAO for second and third incidents;
  - **Smarter investments of public resources:** Budgets will begin to shift as fewer resources are needed to address youth behavior through supervision and conditions, and more resources are used to address underlying needs, ensure meaningful accountability practices, make right any harm caused, and restore opportunities for youth to fulfill their potential.

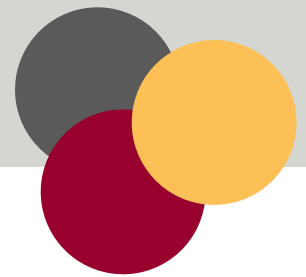
Based on RCAO data reviewed above, we will disaggregate indicators whenever possible for populations for whom the system most needed to develop improved approaches. This includes youth who are: on their second and third referral to the justice system, Black, Indigenous, Latine, Asian, male, and ages 10-14 at referral. This report is one aspect of our commitment to transparency, and aims to share what we learned, why we developed our approach, and preliminary data<sup>ii</sup>.

<sup>ii</sup> Data for this report were retrieved from relevant databases in September 2022. Data exclude transfer of venue cases.



# **Section 3: First Year RJY Implementation**





To assess the extent to which the RJY vision was implemented in the first year, we first review access to RJY processes and responses. Next, we report on participation, success rates and response quality in the different accountability pathways. Finally, we share data on two other aspects of the RJY vision that were important to the leadership team: trust and doing right by victims. When relevant, we highlight data from specific populations identified in the baseline analysis as most in need of new approaches, and we share comparable data points from prior data analyses to provide context of what has changed and how much.

### **Access to new accountability pathways**

The vision of RJY (Figure 1 above) shows all cases being collaboratively reviewed after legal review. In reality, shortly after RJY was launched, RCAO leaders narrowed eligibility for collaborative review following concerns over the idea of a collaborative review and due to logistical constraints that were creating delays in the process. To address concerns, delays, and fine-tune the new process, RCAO excluded from collaborative review those cases in which youth are being detained and/or are alleged to have committed more serious violence, including:

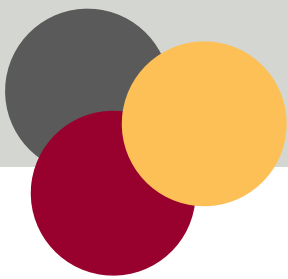
- Any case resulting in death;
- Any case involving a firearm;
- First or Second-Degree Assault;
- First or Second-Degree Aggravated Robbery;
- Criminal Sexual Conduct; and
- Any other case that appears to the reviewing attorney to be an immediate public safety risk, with approval of the division director.

While in theory, cases of young people can be referred to community accountability regardless of whether their case is reviewed traditionally or collaboratively, in practice, guidance and explicit permission for RCAO assistant county attorneys for doing so was not in place during the first year of RJY implementation.

### **Results**

According to RCAO system data, law enforcement referred 1,004 cases of young people to RCAO during RJY's first year. Of these 1,004 cases, 993 (98.9%) had been through a legal sufficiency review, and 308 (31%) cases were declined during legal review. After legal review, 330 (30% of total cases referred, 44% of cases not initially declined) were sent for collaborative review, and 385 (39% of total, 56% of those not declined) were reviewed traditionally (Table 1). Demographic disaggregation of each group indicates that 62% of young people referred by law enforcement were identified as Black (despite being approximately 19% of the youth population of Ramsey County), compared to 57% of those whose cases were reviewed collaboratively and 66% of those whose cases were reviewed traditionally. Cases of males made up 74% of law enforcement referrals, 62% of cases reviewed collaboratively and 83% of cases reviewed traditionally. Youth ages 10-14 made up 35% of total referrals, 41% of cases reviewed collaboratively and 34% of cases reviewed traditionally. Cases of youth referred for the first time were 46% of total referrals, but 61% of cases reviewed collaboratively and only 29% of cases reviewed traditionally (Table 1).



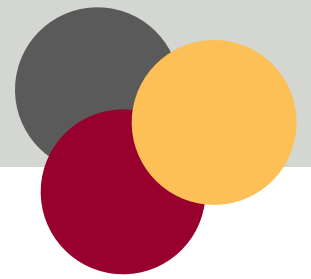


**Table 1. Initial Review Process**

	<b>Referred from law enforcement N=1,004</b>	<b>Declined N=308 (31%)</b>	<b>Collaborative review N=300 (30%)</b>	<b>Traditional review N=385 (39%)</b>
<b>Race or Ethnicity</b>				
American Indian	3%	4%	4%	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%	3%	3%	6%
Black	62%	61%	57%	66%
Latine	4%	6%	5%	3%
White	10%	11%	11%	7%
Multiracial	1%	1%	1%	0%
Other/Unknown	16%	15%	19%	15%
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	74%	74%	62%	83%
Female	25%	26%	37%	16%
Non-binary/Unknown	1%	1%	1%	1%
<b>Age</b>				
10-14	35%	32%	41%	34%
15-17	65%	68%	59%	66%
<b>Number of times referred to RCAO</b>				
1st	46%	52%	61%	29%
2nd	16%	15%	14%	18%
3rd	8%	6%	7%	11%
4th or more	30%	27%	18%	42%

\* final 3 columns exclude 11 cases pending initial legal review

In terms of decisions made within collaborative and traditional review, the median time to the review decision was 14 days for all cases, which varied by whether the case was initially declined (18 days), went to collaborative review (8 days) or to traditional review (10 days, Table 2). Review decisions resulted in 73% of collaboratively reviewed cases being referred directly to community accountability. For cases reviewed traditionally, 94% were charged and referred to traditional court processes (Table 2). While these differences are striking, the narrowing of eligibility for collaborative review resulted in distinct types of cases in each review process. By the end of the accountability process (i.e., final disposition), the number of declined cases increased to 40% of the total, including 24% of cases initially



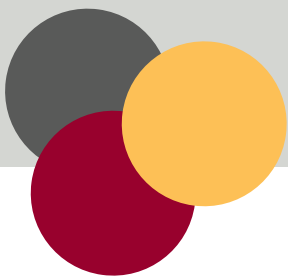
reviewed collaboratively. Data also indicated that over half of cases reviewed collaboratively avoided a charge on the youth’s legal record (24% through eventual decline and 34% by having a successful CA process). When combining totals for petitioned/guilty and post-petition dismissal, data show that 35% of all cases were petitioned, with 27% ending in a guilty finding and 8% ending in a post-petition dismissal. For cases reviewed traditionally, 65% ended in a guilty finding (Table 2).

**55%** of collaboratively reviewed cases avoided a charge on youth’s legal record

Table 2. Initial Review Decisions & Final Dispositions				
	Referred from law enforcement N=1,004	Declined N=308 (31%)	Collaborative review N=300 (30%)	Traditional review N=385 (39%)
<b>Time to Review Decision</b>				
Median Days	14	18	8	10
<b>Initial Review Decision</b>				
Declined/Declined to parent	37%	100%	15%	4%
CA	22%		73%	0%
Charge + CA	2%		5%	2%
Traditional Court	38%		6%	94%
<b>End Result / Final Disposition</b>				
Declined	40%	100%	24%	5%
Successful CA	10%		34%	0%
Charged/guilty	27%		8%	65%
Post Charge Dismissal	8%		7%	15%
Pending/Other	14%		25%	19%

\* final 3 columns exclude 11 cases pending initial legal review

**Centering key populations.** New accountability pathways were designed by and with community leaders to better meet the needs of youth least served by traditional approaches. In this first year, with the exception of the youngest youth who were slightly more likely to have their cases reviewed collaboratively, a smaller proportion of key populations (especially Black youth, males, and youth with multiple legal system referrals) had their case reviewed collaboratively, as compared to their proportion of the referrals received from law enforcement.



**Baseline data comparisons.** Comparable data relevant to this section are largely not available given collaborative review did not exist prior to RJY. One comparable data point from 2017-2018 is that 4,408 cases were referred by law enforcement during that period. This represents roughly double the rate of referrals that occurred in the first year of RJY, when 1,004 referrals were made in a one-year period. In the same 2017-2018 time period, 23% of referrals from law enforcement ended in the case being declined, either initially or later in the process. During the first year of RJY, that rate was 40%, with 31% of the total being declined at the legal review stage. These changes in overall referral rates, as they related to policing practices and to decline rates, will be a factor in trying to assess contributing factors to change going forward.

## Meaningful accountability

We turn next to understanding whether envisioned aspects of meaningful accountability are happening within the different accountability pathways. We assessed indicators of participation, success, engagement, and quality.

## Results

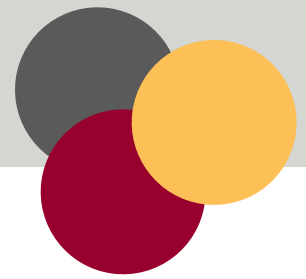
Results related to participation and success in the various accountability pathways are discussed first based on RCAO data.

**Participation.** After the initial legal review, 685 cases were collaboratively or traditionally reviewed. The decisions made during that review process resulted in 63 (9%) additional declined cases, 218 (32%) cases referred to CA, 22 (3%) cases charged and referred to CA and 382 (56%) charged/petitioned to traditional court (Table 3).

Disaggregated results related to race and ethnicity indicate that cases involving American Indian youth accounted for 3% of all reviewed cases, 2% of declined cases, 4% of cases referred to CA, 5% of cases charged and referred to CA and 2% of cases charged in traditional court. Cases involving Black youth

Table 3. Accountability Pathways for Reviewed Cases					
	Total reviewed N=685	Declined N=63 (9%)	CA N=218 (32%)	Charge+CA N=22 (3%)	Traditional court N=382 (56%)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>					
American Indian	3%	2%	4%	5%	2%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5%	2%	4%	9%	6%
Black	62%	51%	59%	64%	66%
Latine	4%	0%	6%	5%	3%
White	9%	22%	9%	0%	7%
Multiracial	0%	0%	1%	14%	0%
Other/Unknown	17%	24%	17%	5%	16%
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	74%	67%	59%	73%	84%
Female	25%	32%	41%	27%	15%
Non-binary/Unknown	1%	2%	<1%		1%
<b>Age</b>					
10-14	37%	33%	44%	23%	34%
15-17	63%	67%	56%	77%	66%
<b>Referral #</b>					
1st	43%	73%	61%	55%	27%
2nd	16%	6%	14%	5%	20%
3rd	9%	10%	6%	14%	11%
4th or more	31%	11%	18%	27%	42%

\*Accountability pathway totals exclude 11 cases pending initial review and 308 cases declined during initial legal review.



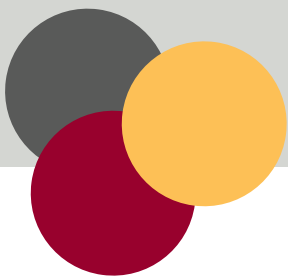
represented 62% of law enforcement referrals, 51% of declined cases, 59% of cases sent to CA, 64% of cases charged and sent to CA, and 66% of cases charged in traditional court. Cases involving white youth made up a higher proportion of cases declined during reviews (22%) compared to their proportion of law enforcement referrals (10%), CA referral (9%) or traditional court referrals (7%). Males were a larger proportion of cases charged in traditional court (84%), and a smaller proportion of cases declined (67%) or referred to CA (59%), as compared to their proportion of law enforcement referrals (74%). By age, the youngest youth were a larger proportion of cases referred to CA (44%), compared to their proportion of law enforcement referrals (35%). By referral number, cases of youth on their first referral were a far larger proportion of youth whose cases were declined (73%), a larger proportion of cases referred to CA (61%), and a smaller proportion of cases charged in traditional court (27%), compared to their proportion of law enforcement referrals (46%). On the other hand, cases of youth on their 4th or higher were 31% of law enforcement referrals, but 11% of declined cases, 18% of cases referred to CA, and 42% of those charged in traditional court.

**Success/Resolution.** In looking first at the 218 cases referred directly to CA, 51% were closed successfully after their initial referral while 49% were closed as unresolved (Table 4). However, the final rate of successful resolution in CA was 66%. This increase is due to 12 cases that were successfully referred to another provider by the collaborative review team after originally having been unresolved in their initial referral. **Success in CA and Charge + CA is defined as having developed and completed an accountability plan that repaired any harm caused and initiated actions to address other needs that might help prevent similar behavior in the future.**

Unresolved cases were a combination of situations in which providers had no contact with the youth (28%), made contact but were unable to fully engage youth in the accountability process (17%), or had youth or families refuse engagement (3%). Thus, data indicate the largest barrier to success in CA was whether providers were able to make initial contact with youth and their families. This pattern emerged early and resulted in multiple iterations of process changes, ultimately resulting in a new RCAO hire in May 2022 to better coordinate referrals with providers. Year 2 data will indicate whether this higher level of coordination between RCAO and providers results in improved initial rates of success.

End results on CA cases indicate that 16% ended with a decline, likely the results of a collaborative review team decision of how justice was best served after an unresolved initial result. Fewer than 10% of CA cases have so far ended in a finding of guilt. However, with over 60 cases still pending, many final dispositions remain undetermined. The charge + CA pathway includes only 22 total cases, with 45% closed successfully after their initial referral and 58% ending with a post-charge dismissal.

Traditional court cases are presumed resolved, as traditional court ends in some type of resolution of all cases. However, neither RCAO staff nor partners in Ramsey County Community Corrections could give a rate of “success” or a more nuanced definition of “resolved” they track within traditional court cases. Traditionally, once a young person’s case is petitioned, the case moves into the purview of courts, and a judge may impose a disposition with conditions including probation, out-of-home placement, or other measure. These records are not held within RCAO, and were thus unavailable for analysis by our team. Ramsey County Community Corrections Juvenile Probation unit did share the following description of



**Table 4. Initial and End Results for Accountability Pathways**

	<b>Total reviewed N=685</b>	<b>Declined N=63 (9%)</b>	<b>CA N=218 (32%)</b>	<b>Charge+CA N=22 (3%)</b>	<b>Traditional court N=382 (56%)</b>
<b>Initial Track Outcome<sup>^</sup></b>					
Resolved/Successful		100%	51%	45%	100%
Unresolved			49%	55%	
<b>End Result / Final Disposition<sup>^^</sup></b>					
Declined	14%	100%	16%	0%	2%
Successful CA	15%		66%	NA	NA
Charged/guilty	40%		9%	42%	80%
Post charge dismissal	11%		9%	58%	18%
Pending/other	21%				

\*Accountability pathway totals exclude 11 cases pending initial review and 308 cases declined during initial legal review.

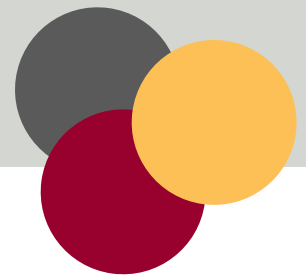
<sup>^</sup>Percent calculations exclude 41 cases pending initial CA outcome, 11 cases pending post-charge CA outcome, and 64 cases pending traditional court outcome.

<sup>^^</sup>Percent calculations exclude an additional 21 cases pending final disposition after initially being unresolved in CA, and 2 additional cases pending traditional court outcome.

their services: “Juvenile Probation uses a racial equity lens and positive juvenile justice framework to protect public safety and reduce the delinquency behaviors of youth on probation. Probation officers provide youth with skills and supports to maintain healthy and positive relationships with family and friends, succeed at school, and find and retain employment. Juvenile Probation works to limit the use of confinement and out-of-home placement by partnering with community-based organizations to offer therapeutic and cultural and gender specific programming that addresses that young person’s needs and allows him/her to safely remain in the community. Family engagement is critical to this work, so probation officers often collaborate with families in developing a case plan for the youth to successfully complete probation. Success for an individual case may be defined as staying in community and out of confinement, participation in community programming and lack of any probation violations.”

Nonetheless, since no definition of success is used across cases (either in Ramsey County or the field of juvenile probation broadly), there are not comparable data. Thus, the only meaningful data we are able to report is the final disposition. For cases resolved in traditional court, 80% ended with a finding of guilt and a disposition, which most often includes probation with Ramsey County Community Corrections.

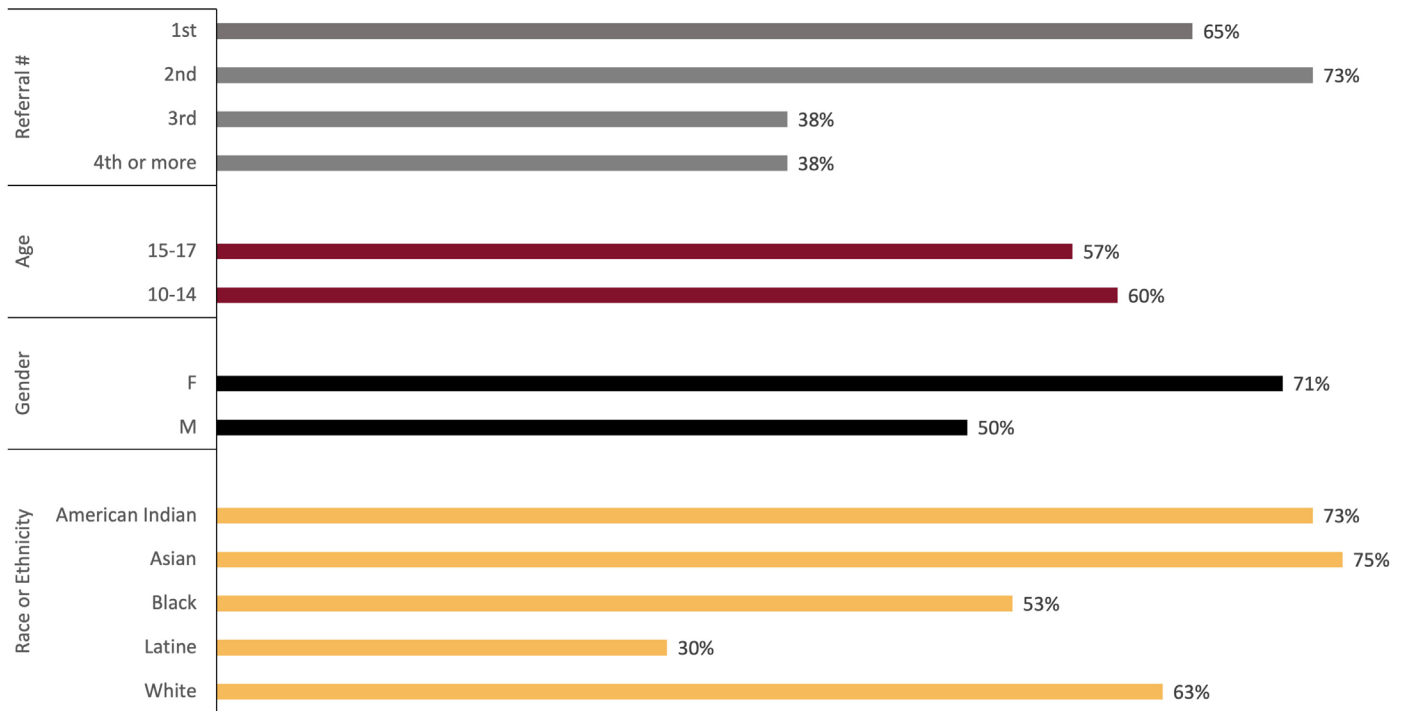
Within key populations, data demonstrate youth from across demographics are successful within CA, with some potentially important differences emerging in the first year. Figure 9 shows CA success rates within demographic groupings for 177 youth who had completed at least their initial CA referral, including 21 youth with final disposition still pending. Results indicate, for example, that 65% of youth on their first referral to RCAO who were referred to CA were successful in CA. Results indicate providers achieved relatively higher success rates for youth on their first or second referral, youth identified as female, and youth identified as American Indian, Asian or White.



**CA Engagement & Quality.** To enhance understanding of what is distinct about different types of accountability, we asked providers to complete reports on each case. These reports highlight who is engaged in CA, what level of services are provided, and what accountability plans entail. Evaluators also reviewed reports for indicators of quality services, including the extent to which decisions are collaborative rather than imposed, tailored to individual situations, and aligned to key principles of youth development and restorative justice.

**Figure 9. Young people across demographic groups are successful in CA**

*Some additional tailoring may be needed to increase rates of successful outcomes.*

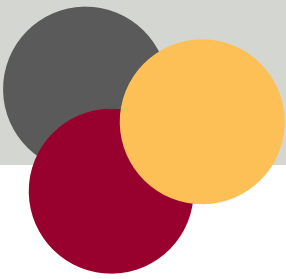


We received reports for 92 cases with completed CA referrals. Reports included information on 52 youth who engaged in some level of services while the remaining were for youth with either no or limited contact. For the 52 reports which described engagement of young people in CA, services included a total of:

- 74 restorative circles or conferences among 40 youth;
- 22 case management sessions among 9 youth;
- 78 group or individual sessions to work on personal skills, address needs or achieve goals;
- 30 referrals to external services such as mentoring, job skills training or individual/family therapy to continue work on accountability plans outside the purview of justice systems.

In additions to services provided, 39 reports provided details of agreed-upon accountability plans. Plans

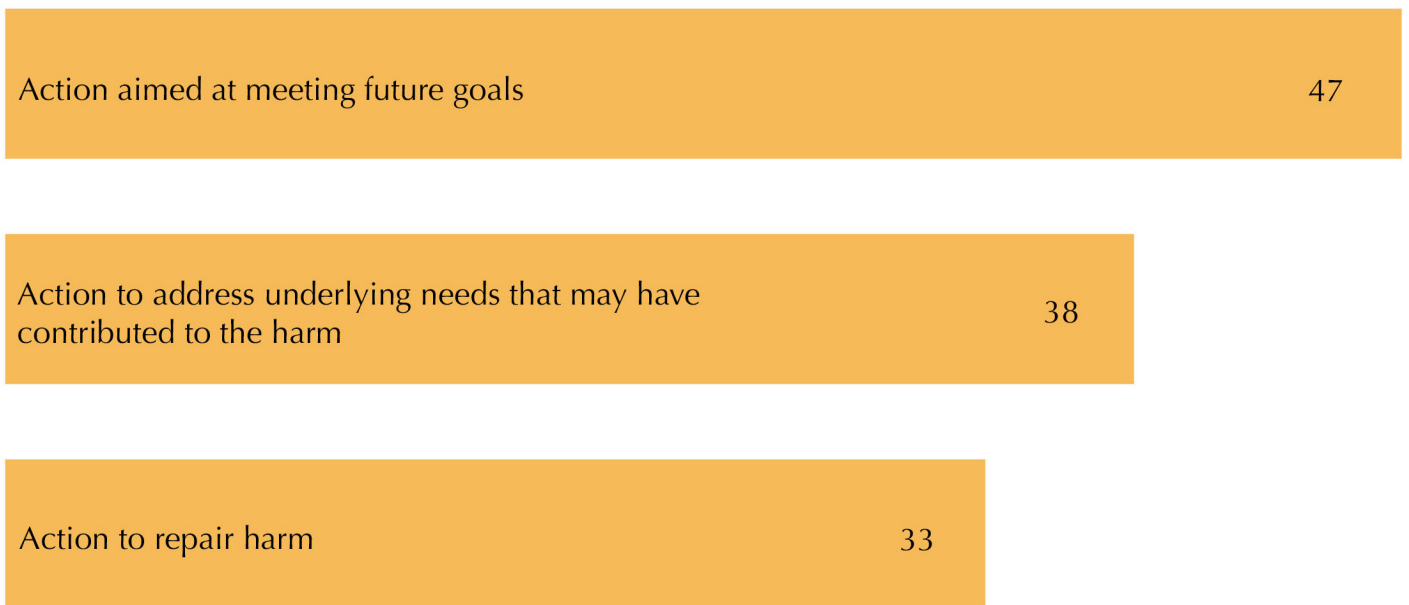




documented whether impacted parties discussed each element of restorative accountability and detailed the actions youth agreed to take to repair harm (e.g., apologies, restitution), address underlying needs (e.g., begin therapy, make different friends) and/or meet future goals (e.g., meet with guidance counselor, get job training.) Data indicate that actions across each element of accountability were common. As shown in Figure 10, the 39 plans included 33 actions to repair harm, 38 actions to address underlying needs that may have contributed to the harm, and 47 actions aimed at meeting future goals. Reports also described who, beyond the young person, participated in the community accountability processes. Of the 52 cases in which youth participated at some level in CA, 81% had a family member present to help determine the accountability plan. These supportive adults played key roles, such as sharing the impact of the young person’s behavior on family members. As the people who know the young person best, their perspectives on whether there were underlying needs that were contributing to the harmful behavior were essential in creating a plan to prevent harm in the future. Family

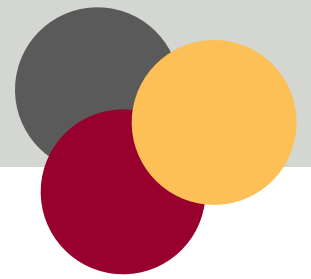
**Figure 10. Meaningful accountability included 118 youth actions in 39 plans**

*For accountability to be deemed successful, youth must complete actions to repair harm, and initiate actions to address underlying needs and meet future goals.*



members were also able to ensure accountability plans were realistic, such as being able to confirm the young person would be able to access recommended resources.

Beyond family, other community members were also involved (school staff, case managers, coaches, etc.) in 54% of CA cases, and in 19% of cases a person harmed had direct involvement. Unfortunately, we were unable to track involvement of a person harmed as a portion of the cases in which there was a specific person harmed, but we are collecting those data for future reports.



To assess quality within these services, we looked for documentation of the extent to which providers were integrating knowledge from the fields of healthy youth development, case management, and restorative justice into their approaches. An early qualitative analysis of provider reports, included as Appendix B, demonstrated that key elements essential to young people's development - relationships, cultural identity and emotional literacy - were present in accountability process. An additional important finding from this analysis was the extent to which the emotion of fear was present in youth and family reflections, and how fear is a pervasive feeling throughout this process. Families and youth discussed how fear impacted them and their decisions (e.g., decisions parents made to not allow young people freedom and resulting rebellion; fear young people had during interactions with law enforcement). While such overarching issues were not necessarily resolved, it was evident that the space provided by community accountability providers to discuss these feelings was meaningful to families and youth as they navigate their social realities.



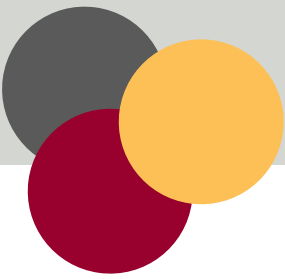
Taken together, the breadth of plan elements provide strong evidence that plans are tailored to individual youth and their circumstances. In addition, high levels of engagement by family and community members indicate that collective decision-making processes occur which consider multiple perspectives. Data indicate a need for more involvement and better tracking of victim involvement.

We also intended to collect survey data from participants in CA. These surveys were designed to assess participant perceptions of healing-centered practices, including feeling prepared, safe, heard, and respected and committed to completing the accountability plan. However, other logistical issues took precedence (e.g., addressing low contact rates, ensuring quality of case closing reports), and we quickly realized we would be unable to collect meaningful data. We plan to revisit these surveys and other potential methods for assessing quality across all accountability pathways, given the vision to instill principles from restorative justice and healthy youth development for any response within the legal system.

### **Centering key populations**

Current eligibility criteria and decision-making processes are not decreasing disparities for Black youth, male youth and youth with a higher number of law enforcement referrals, but rather appear to be slightly increasing them in terms of who gets the opportunity to participate in less punitive accountability and avoid collateral consequences. For example, cases involving Black youth are 62% of law enforcement referrals, 59% of those sent to CA, and 66% of those sent to traditional court. Data are slightly more promising for Indigenous youth and other youth of color, with smaller differences in rates of CA compared to their proportion of law enforcement referrals. The proportion of cases among the youngest youth (ages 10-14) getting access to CA (44%) is higher than their proportion in terms of law enforcement referrals (35%). Similarly, youth on their first referral from law enforcement who are already the least likely to be re-referred are getting access to CA at far higher proportions (61%) than their share of law enforcement referrals (46%).



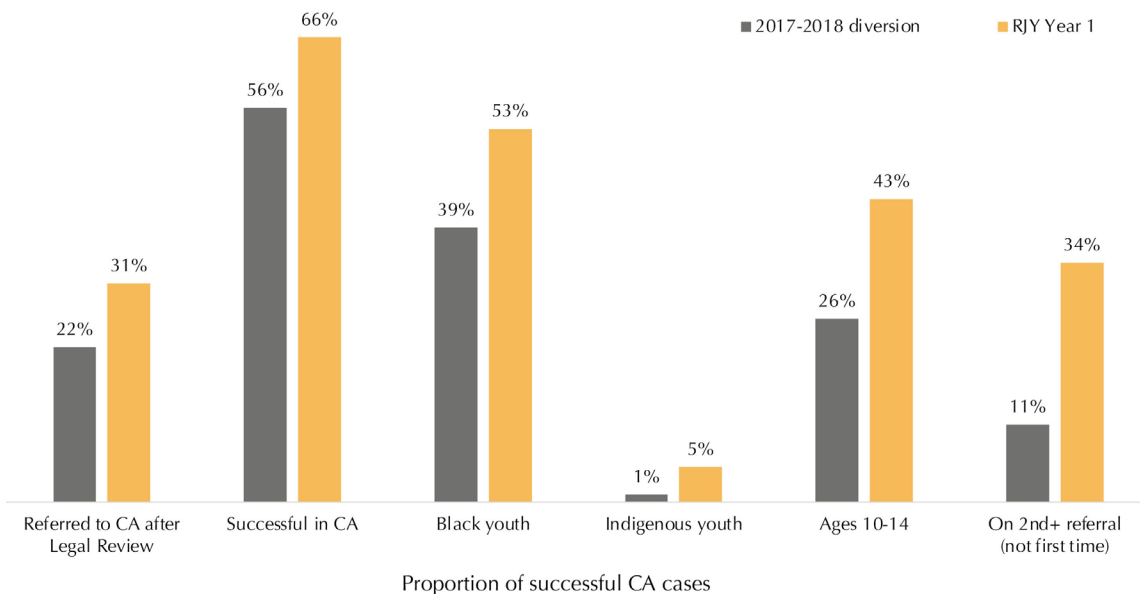


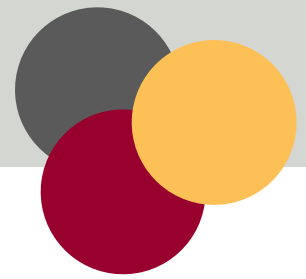
On the other hand, when they do get access to CA, success rates are high for many of these groups. American Indian and Asian youth had success rates of over 70%, while 53% of cases involving Black youth experienced success in CA. On the other hand, only 30% of CA cases involving Latine youth were successful. CA success rates were similar for both younger (60%) and older (57%) youth. Finally, there were high rates of success for youth on second referrals (73%) but far lower success rates for youth on 3rd or 4th or more referrals (38%, respectively).

**Baseline Data Comparisons.** Similar to most jurisdictions, RCAO has traditionally included diversion from prosecution as an option for young people, especially for first-time and low-level incidents. While there are differences between RCAO’s prior diversion programming and RJY’s CA pathway, the end result is similar in that a case is resolved in community without a charge. Therefore, diversion data from 2017-2018 offers the most comparable data to cases referred directly to CA during RJY’s first year. In comparing rates of referral to CA to prior rates of diversion, the proportion of cases initially sent to community for resolution outside of the system increased from 22% in 2017-18 to 31% during RJY Year 1 (Figure 11). The overall percentages of those cases that were successfully resolved was also higher (56% vs 66%). Data also indicate youth poorly served by the traditional system are becoming a larger proportion of youth whose cases are successfully resolved in community. Specifically, in comparing the composition of those successful cases, cases of Black youth were 39% of successfully resolved diversion cases in 2017-18, but 53% of successfully resolved CA cases in RJY’s first year. Similarly, as a proportion of successful cases resolved in community, cases involving Indigenous youth rose from <1% to 5%,

**Figure 11. Youth from populations poorly served by traditional system were larger proportion of successful CA during RJY’s first year**

*For example, cases of Black youth were 39% of successful diversion cases in 2017-2018, but 53% of successful CA cases during RJY’s first year.*





cases involving youth ages 10-14 rose from 26% to 43%, and cases involving youth not on their first referral rose from 11% to 34% (Figure 11).

## Doing right by victims

As noted in the research review, nearly all people impacted by harmful behavior want two things: 1) to experience healing and 2) for the behavior to stop so the person who caused harm does not repeat the behavior.<sup>23</sup> Data on engagement of people harmed for CA processes were collected via the closing reports submitted by providers. Quantitative data included items on a prepared form as to whether a victim was involved in the accountability process or not. Forms were adapted towards the end of RJY's first year to clarify whether any lack of involvement was because there was no direct victim, the victim did not want to be involved, or the victim could not be contacted, but these more nuanced data were not available for this report. To get a better picture of victim involvement, the evaluation team triangulated the quantitative data on victim involvement with qualitative data from provider reports to calculate percentages of cases that had any documented involvement of victims. We also conducted a thematic analysis of qualitative data.

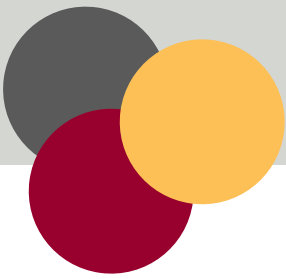
During RJY's first year, outreach and engagement to people harmed was expanded. At the beginning, community providers did the initial outreach if a case was assigned to CA. However, to attain their perspectives earlier in the process, RCAO decided to contract with restorative practitioners to reach out to victims prior to collaborative review. As the approach continues to evolve, we will continue to evaluate how and whether RJY is doing better on behalf of people harmed. However, comparisons will be limited as neither historical nor current data are available for traditional court cases, as victim involvement and satisfaction for cases involving youth has not been systematically tracked by the traditional system.

## Results

The data we have indicate that 19% of CA cases had documented contact with a victim. This rate is likely an undercount, as it only includes cases that had a full report from CA and not situations in which other people, such as members of the collaborative review team, may have had contact with people harmed.

Analysis of qualitative data revealed multiple themes about involvement of people harmed in CA. Themes are shared below with examples.

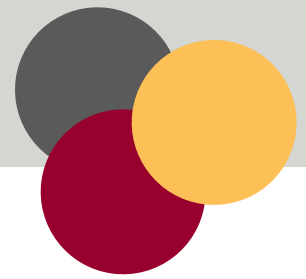
**Theme 1: Many people are impacted by harmful incidents, both directly and indirectly.** Closing reports frequently detailed how restorative accountability included perspectives of multiple people impacted by harmful behavior, and how young people were often moved by recognizing the impact on people who were their family, friends, and neighbors. Providers stated they observed, for example, that young people who had committed a theft expressed more empathy after hearing about higher prices in their neighborhood, the fear of store employees who might also be neighbors, and disappointment expressed by family members, as opposed to what they had previously only considered a small revenue loss for a large corporation. For example, one report included this reflection, "*Youth showed remorse about what she did and recognized that she had alternatives to choose from other than stealing. She was very*



*articulate and understood the impact it had on not only herself but her mother and siblings.”* Similarly, another report summarized, *“This young person is extremely remorseful. She readily admitted what she did and that it was wrong. She was readily able to articulate who was harmed and/or impacted by this behavior. She had not considered other young women might be scrutinized when they come into the store. She said she was grateful for the process because she has not had an opportunity to ‘talk about it openly.’ She has already made the necessary restitution and apologized to her family.”* An additional reflection indicated a young person was *“very remorseful and understands that his actions not only affected him but also his family and community. He is new to the area and just finding his way with friends and a new state. He has a plan and just needs more support due to mom working six days a week to help him achieve his goals and stay on the right path.”*

**Theme 2: Collective decision-making is possible to prevent future harm and repair harm.** Reports demonstrated that people harmed and the youth involved did not need to be in adversarial relationships. In instances where people harmed were family members or other people known to the youth, these victims expressed wanting help for the young person rather than harmful punishments. In one case, a resolution was described as *“he was committing to writing a letter that we would use to reach out to neighbors as identified by the parents.”* Additionally, many of the people impacted realized if they had initiated conversations to understand problematic behavior earlier or had adequate staffing, the legal system might never have needed to be involved. For example, one case involved a setting in which youth were not supposed to be unsupervised but when a staff person left to use a restroom, a fight broke out. In trying to intervene, the situation instead escalated and one young man was charged with assault. The people impacted later reconvened and came to agreement about shared responsibility for what had happened and a pathway forward.

**Theme 3: Referred youth have also, at times, been victims of harmful or criminal behavior resulting in consensus that imposed consequences seem futile when behavior is a result of disabilities, addiction, or past trauma.** There were several reports that described cases that might be categorized as particularly complex. These included situations in which young people might have a combination of having been in unstable foster care situations, a learning disability, chemical dependency or a behavioral disorder. A common theme across reports in these cases was the failure of society to address these needs before a young person came into contact with the legal system, and the need to have a wider array of effective, local and available preventive services. For example, one report stated, *“Youth is already receiving services. Four members of her team participated in her Circle. A follow up Circle is in order to check on her progress and to let her know the community cares. We agree that youth does not need jail but she does need help in learning and developing coping skills so that she does not harm others.”* In at least two other cases, a retail store observed young employees stealing for many months before reporting them to legal authorities rather than intervening immediately to disrupt and understand the behavior. When given an opportunity to discuss one of these situations, a report noted, *“Mother is a strong advocate for this young person. She [has a disability] and got the job at [retailer] on her own. The staff and management should have treated this young person with more respect by making it clear to her the workplace rules and boundaries. She cried during the session because of the shame she felt and the way she was treated.”* Finally, there were also cases in which those involved in the process came to consensus that law enforcement responded in a way that unnecessarily escalated situations.



One example was from a report stating that a gathering in a park turned into ***“a night of chaos with the police. The harsh treatment received from interaction with the police will certainly keep fear in her as she gets older. Mom was extremely concerned when youth called screaming and crying. The one officer who tried to be calm with the youth was interrupted by his partner.”*** In this case, accountability included community adults acknowledging and expressing regret about the law enforcement response.

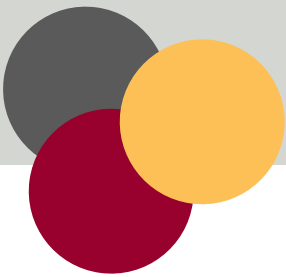
### **Centering key populations**

The thematic analysis of provider reports as related to victims illuminates possible factors related to why the traditional system has been especially ineffective for specific populations. First, the focus on consequences rather than understanding how behavior impacts people in their community may be especially ineffective for young people, and in particular early adolescents, who are still developing the cognitive skills to see abstract linkages between behavior, consequences, and impact. Second, the idea that most harmful behavior is one individual hurting another individual, and these two individuals must then be treated as adversaries, was rarely an accurate picture of what was described in CA reports. Instead, the complexity of situations affirmed that society’s use of the words “victims” and “delinquents” is racialized and problematic, and likely contributes to implicit bias that leads to especially harsh treatment of Black youth, Indigenous youth, other youth of color, and youth with multiple referrals to the legal system. Finally, the extent to which reports described cases in which Black youth, in particular, were monitored and then referred to the legal system points to the biases in our society about when to address and solve problems proactively and in community versus when to engage the legal system, and point to the importance of broadening the conversation about people harmed.

### **Increasing trust**

The leadership team also wanted to pay special attention to the role of trust in making RJY work, especially given the stated goal of shared power. Having been through many attempted change processes before and in recognition of the sensitive and unprecedented nature of this endeavor, we recognized trust would matter within and between members of the collaborative review team, providers, the public, legal system actors, impacted community members. Trust, and similar feelings of confidence and reliability, would influence decision-making within teams, the ability to work through challenges and commitment to the change process. While trust is a difficult concept to measure, the original evaluation plan included several observable indicators of trust.

Figure 12 represents the ecosystem of groups within which history of mistrust is acknowledged and observable signs of trust could be tracked. For example, within the smallest, core group (the collaborative review team), community leaders did not necessarily trust that community perspectives during collaborative review would be honored so they proposed specifically tracking the rate of consensus decisions. Also within the collaborative review team, community leaders of RJY expressed some skepticism about whether the collaborative review process truly aligned with restorative practices, given that conversations about needs and harms happened without direct involvement of youth, families and people harmed. Thus, we tracked whether assessments made about needs and harms during collaborative review aligned with community providers’ understandings of needs and harms after working with young people referred to CA.

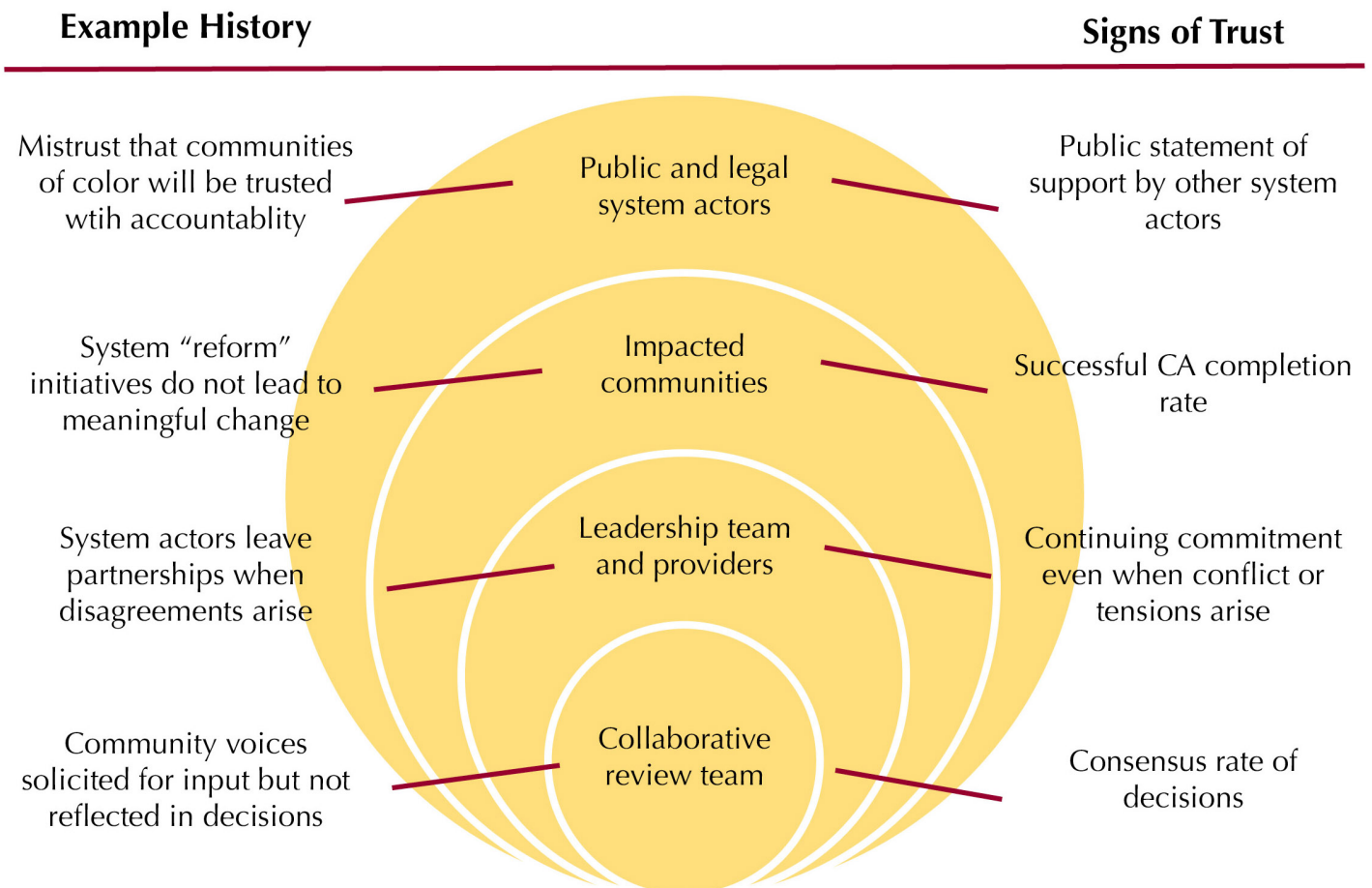


RJY leaders also shared experiences of having been involved in many similar initiatives over time that eroded when partners were not willing or able to work through challenges and therefore wanted to document conflict and the ability to work through it. Thus, research partners were invited to meetings of the leadership team, provider meetings, as well as the collaborative review team to participate, take notes, and observe.

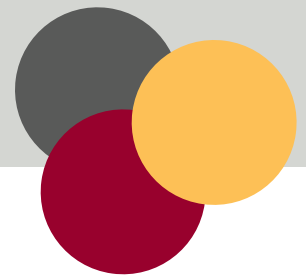
In addition, because of long-standing mistrust between legal systems and impacted communities, and because of widespread beliefs in punitive accountability, RJY leaders expected that participation in restorative processes might initially be low. If CA proved to be more meaningful and successful over time, word would likely spread resulting in higher participation rates and potentially even direct requests.

**Figure 12. Histories of harm and mistrust among and between different groups led to desire to document signs of trust and healing.**

*Several indicators of trust were observed in RJY's first year.*







The long-standing mistrust between legal systems and impacted communities is a partial reflection of common narratives from other legal system stakeholders and less impacted communities about the effectiveness of and need for punitive accountability, especially towards people racialized as Black. RJY leaders expected false assumptions and pushback might be present early in the process of RJY rollout. They also believed that trust could be built through ongoing engagement, relationship building and addressing misunderstandings or disagreements. Thus, they proposed tracking this type of engagement and any public statements of support by other legal system stakeholders regarding RJY.

## **Results**

### Indicators of trust within collaborative review team

- 90% of cases reviewed decided by consensus;
- In 75% of cases, the initial categorization of needs and harms during collaborative review was the same as provider characterizations at closing.

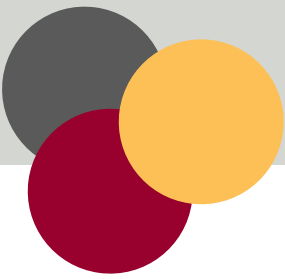
### Indicators of trust within leadership, provider and collaborative review teams

- Challenges and frustrations about processes and events at multiple meetings were discussed and resulted in commitment to continuous improvement and implementation;
- Restorative practitioners especially aided in naming and navigating conflict, such that unspoken tension was not left to simmer or erode trust.

The review of meeting notes demonstrated each group regularly discussed what was going well and what needed improvement. For example, over the course of the first year, in bi-weekly meetings, the leadership team held conversations on such topics as baseline data and indicators, process or logistical issues arising with the changes, standardized closing case procedures and data collection, and efficiency improvement. Members of the collaborative review team, in bi-monthly meetings, reflected on their ability to make accurate decisions with available information, how to incorporate an understanding of adolescent development into decisions about accountability, the need for more community voices, and success rates by CA provider. Provider meetings occurred every six weeks and included topics such as frequency, method and content of reporting, success rates and definitions, and tailored agency training on evaluation procedures when requested. These ongoing meetings create a culture of collective responsibility and collaboration, while providing support and accountability for achieving the vision of RJY.

The review of meeting notes also illuminated issues that remain unresolved. One issue included what to do when youth needs are high. For example, many chemical dependency programs do not have services for youth with low intellectual functioning. In general, the more complex the case, there appears to be lower likelihood of having appropriate community resources and higher likelihood of failing the young person through punitive responses which fail to address their underlying needs. Another unresolved issue is what to do when there is consensus that the young person referred appears to be the primary person harmed. This occurs when those reviewing or attempting to resolve a case agree that there appears to be bias present, and adults in the situation – whether law enforcement or school staff – appear to be the ones who initially escalated a situation. In these cases, there was consensus that petitioning a young person rarely makes sense, but not that declining a case is a better option, given the





healing that might be needed for a young person to feel reconnected to their community. These unresolved issues can threaten trust if actions are not initiated towards resolution.

#### Indicators of trust within impacted communities

- 51% success rate of initial CA referral, with majority of unsuccessful cases due to no contact;
- First anecdotes occurred of families requesting specific providers to work with their children to resolve incidents after having had prior experiences with that same provider.

#### Indicators of trust within public/other legal system stakeholders

- RCAO leadership made more than a dozen presentations to explain the RJY approach and address initial pushback from legal system and public stakeholders;
- Ramsey County Commissioners expressed strong support for RJY during a public [presentation](#) by RJY leadership in June 2022. To our knowledge, no other legal system stakeholders in Ramsey County have made public comments supporting RJY.

### **Summary and recommendations**

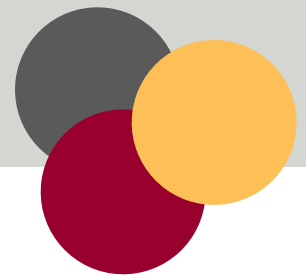
The data reviewed in this section include the following key points and resulting recommendations about the extent of RJY implementation.

#### **Access to new accountability pathways**

- In the first year of RJY, of cases not initially declined during legal review, 44% were sent for collaborative review, and 56% were reviewed traditionally.
- Collaborative review was the primary pathway through which young people accessed CA.
- As compared to their proportion of all law enforcement referrals, youth ages 10-14, Indigenous youth, Asian/Pacific Islander youth and Latine youth had higher or similar levels of access to collaborative review while Black youth and youth on their second or higher referral had lower levels of access to collaborative review.
- **Recommendation:** continue to increase access to collaborative review and CA. In particular, consider:
  - Developing strategies to increase access to CA for Black youth and youth on their second or higher referral;
  - Further develop guidance for referral to post-charge CA for both review processes;
  - Work to address barriers that limit access to collaborative review, such as for cases where youth are temporarily in custody.

#### **Meaningful accountability**

- In the first year of RJY, of total cases reviewed traditionally or collaboratively, 9% were declined, 32% were referred to CA, 3% were charged and then referred to CA, and 56% were charged in traditional court.
- Of cases which completed their CA referral process, 66% were deemed successful and avoided further system involvement, with 51% successful in their initial referral and the remaining successful in a referral to a second CA provider.
- Young people with all types of backgrounds and experiences succeeded in CA, including those from populations for whom traditional approaches were especially ineffective. Specifically, the



proportion of youth who succeeded in CA who were Black, Indigenous, younger, and not on their first referral to RCAO increased compared to baseline diversion data.

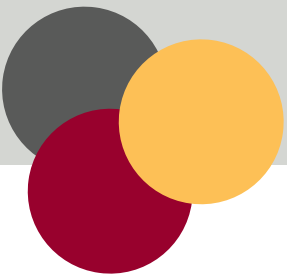
- **Recommendation:** focus of improving rates of success in CA. In particular;
  - Work to reduce the rates of unresolved CA cases due to no contact: ensure there is communication with families during the review process and that the referral process from RCAO to community providers is clear and garners trust;
  - Encourage providers to share outreach and engagement strategies with each other to work towards higher rates of participation, success and engagement;
  - Continue to improve data tracking and report completion rates to better understand whether all providers are using similar accountability practices;
  - Consider creating a system of “graduated supports” aligned to CA, to engage with youth and families until harm is repaired and underlying needs are addressed, but without relying on the implicit threat of harm or punishments based on non-compliance.

### Doing right by victims

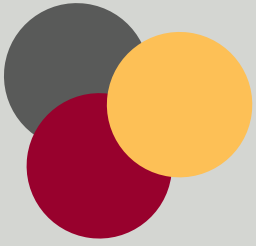
- Available data indicate involvement of a person harmed in 19% of CA cases.
- Multiple strategies for outreach and engagement of people harmed were employed in the first year of RJY. Data tracking has been difficult, both in traditional processes and within RJY.
- Youth who caused harm frequently were also people who had been negatively impacted or even directly harmed by other individuals or systems.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Continue learning about how to best engage people harmed or whether different approaches are needed in different situations.
  - Improve data collection related to engagement and satisfaction of people harmed for all accountability pathways.
  - Confront the racialized and narrow language of the legal system by using new language: “people impacted,” “people harmed,” and “people who caused harm.”
  - Develop strategies to address complex cases that recognize shared and historical responsibility for harmful behavior by young people, especially for young people who have been inadequately served through prior contact with child protection, foster care, education and/or legal systems. Consider especially:
    - ◇ Finding partners who effectively address individuals with highly complex needs, so that punishment is not the default solution for complex or unresolved cases;
    - ◇ Developing pathways for accountability when system-employed adults harm youth, whether school staff, law enforcement, or other adults.

### Trust

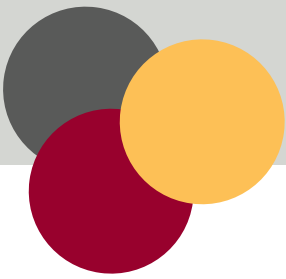
- The level of commitment within teams leading the RJY work is strong and has withstood several challenges. The collaborative review team, in particular, is making decisions at a high level of consensus. The success rates of CA processes (both the 51% initial success rate and the 66% overall success rate) will serve as a baseline measure that should improve over time if processes prove trustworthy in the eyes of community.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Continue to ensure all RJY stakeholders strengthen relationships with and between other



members, identify and address conflict, and build trust for implementing the change process and achieving the overall vision.



# **Section 4: Preliminary RJY Impact**



In this section, we turn to the longer-term goals of RJY to positively influence the lives of youth and the overall well-being of the Ramsey County community. We report available data from RJY’s first year, while strongly emphasizing these data are preliminary and should not yet be taken as a final assessment of whether RJY is more effective than the traditional model.

### Resolutions in community that prevent collateral consequences

One goal of RJY is to increase the rate with which harm caused by young people is resolved in community, without the ongoing collateral consequences of legal system involvement. Figure 13 shows rates for broad categories of RCAO decisions on legal system referrals during three distinct time periods. Results

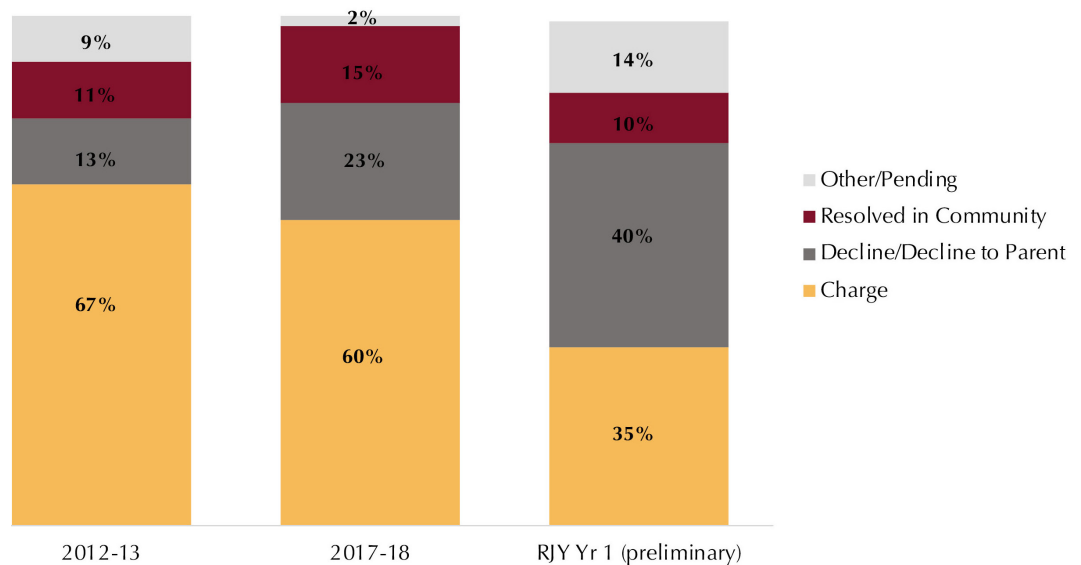
indicate trends that had begun prior to 2020 are continuing during RJY. Specifically, youth cases that are charged fell from 67% in

2012-13 to 60% in 2017-18 to 35% in the first year of RJY. At the same time, decline rates increased from 13% to 23% to 40%. On the other hand, cases that are fully resolved in community have not yet increased as a proportion of total law enforcement referrals. Resolution of pending cases will likely lead to a slight increase in the final percentages

of each category. These trends do not tell us the relative influence of different potential causes, including what changes are due to differences in referral rates, responses within RCAO, differences in policing practices, or a combination of multiple new approaches, such as decisions to avoid criminalizing lower-level behavior.

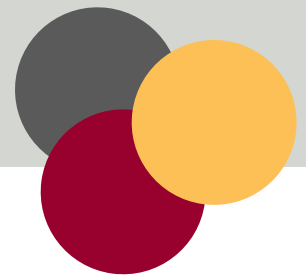
**Figure 13. Far fewer youth-involved cases led to charges in the first year of RJY**

*Cases resolved in community are not yet increasing as an overall rate of legal system referrals.*



### Timeliness

Another goal of RJY is to increase timeliness of responses, and to reduce the length of time between incidents, resolutions, and the end of any legal system involvement. Lengthy processes may reduce relevance of responses and negatively impact youths’ self-identity, increasing the likelihood they may come to think of themselves or begin to assume others only see them as a criminal.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, research shows young people are readily receptive to restorative processes that help them to address and make right the harm.<sup>44</sup>



In Table 2, we noted that the initial review process lasted a median of 14 days per case (18 days for declines, 8 for collaborative review decisions and 10 for traditional review decisions). Table 5 expands this analysis to show median days to resolution within RCAO and to completed accountability for RJY’s first year. Declined and successful CA cases complete accountability at the time of resolution. Declined cases completed accountability in a median of 19 days while cases that were successful in CA took a median of 148 days, or about 5 months.

Per data from Ramsey County Community Corrections, we assume that for cases with a finding of guilt, the most likely resolution is probation. Through the case management and administrative data system in Ramsey County Community Corrections, an analyst identified Ramsey County juvenile probation cases that were closed or discharged during the identified period of July 7, 2021 – June 30, 2022. There were 349 cases closed during this period (with about 220 unique young people who comprise these probation case closures). This includes everything from a very small number of petty cases all the way to felony-level extended jurisdiction juvenile matters. For this set of cases, the median probation length was 201 days (so about 6.5 months).

Final Disposition	Total cases in this category	Median days to RCAO resolution	Median days to completed accountability
Decline	401	19	19
Successful CA	103	148	148
Charged/guilty	274	35	236*
Dismissal or discharge	78	98	Unknown**

\*Estimate based on median days of youth probation cases during same period.

\*\* We are unable to calculate the number of days until youth had no legal system supervision for the 98 cases that ended in dismissal or discharge because there isn't necessarily a typical or 'average' approach.

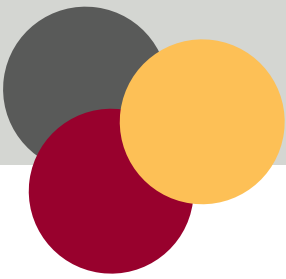
While there is certainly overlap between the 274 cases in RCAO data and the 349 cases closed by probation during the same time period, it is worth emphasizing that these are separate data sets and not specifically the same set of youth. Nonetheless, the data provide a good estimate of the current median probation length in Ramsey County (approximately 6.5 months). When added to the 34.5 days to RCAO resolution, young people whose cases were charged were involved in the legal system for over 7 months. By comparison, young people whose cases were successfully resolved in CA had about 3 fewer months of system involvement.

As case numbers increase, we will also track separately the median days to resolution for young people who have an unresolved CA case and later end up with a court case and probation, as this could increase the amount of time they spend in system involvement.

## Healing

A third goal of RJY is healing for all impacted by harmful youth behavior, including any people harmed and the young person themselves. A principal aim of the traditional model has been rehabilitation,





primarily measured through recidivism rates. The RJY model instead aims instead for tailored healing, measured through whether youth are thriving. The tailored healing approach for young people who cause harm is based, in part, on trusting youth and their families' perspectives on what factors influenced the young person's behavior, while still engaging in meaningful accountability. This allows all involved to prevent unnecessary criminalization.

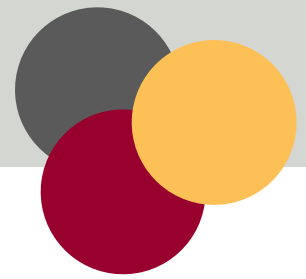
Because healing is a difficult concept to measure quantitatively, our results are based on a qualitative analysis of what accountability entailed that led to healing. We conducted a thematic content analysis of provider reports describing what happened in accountability processes that were meaningful and that helped youth grow and learn in response to the incident that resulted in a legal system referral. We only have data on healing accountability for CA cases, as similar data are not tracked by RCAO for traditional court, either currently or in the past.

## Results

Qualitative analysis of provider reflections noted that meaningful accountability was tailored to the needs and context of people most impacted by the incident. Results from the thematic analysis of these reflections are shared below.

**Theme 1: Meaningful accountability processes created spaces for youth to address their behavior, learn, grow, and heal.** In nearly all cases of successful CA, once youth were engaged, providers were able to successfully resolve the incident. Providers shared how youth engaged in learning, including one youth who *“had already engaged in such deep self-reflection around the incident.”* Another youth *“really did a great job on his agreement follow through and enjoyed engaging with the community members. Once engaged, he really showed us his strengths, goals, and empathy for others. He really took the time to reflect and put himself in the victim's shoes, expressing, ‘I'm sincerely sorry for you not feeling safe or feeling bad that day and I'm sorry that you even had to deal with that.’”* Youth were also supported to understand the underlying needs around the incident and come up with healing plans. As an example, one report stated, *“At the beginning of our meeting, she was quiet and reluctant to share about just how disruptive this incident had been in her family and social life. As we spoke, she opened up and talked in depth about her experiences of racial discrimination at school and elsewhere, and how she was learning how to seek out safer spaces and community. She was quick to reflect that she wished she had taken different actions during the incident and described how she would handle that situation differently now.”*

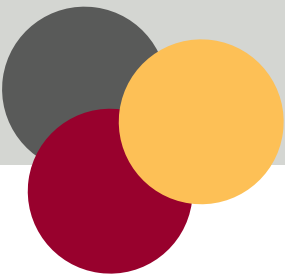
**Theme 2: Meaningful accountability can take time.** Whether due to family or individual circumstances, or to the emotional vulnerability required to take responsibility for one's actions, some youth needed a community of support until they were able to build enough trust to engage in accountability processes. A provider reported that one youth was *“initially reluctant to share about himself or the experience that brought him here. He seemed particularly frustrated by the exercise of writing his reparative agreement and seemed to struggle with articulating how he wanted to move forward in the wake of the incident. However, toward the end of the conference, the group was able to move into a productive conversation about safety and law enforcement. When we returned for our second conference, the youth was far more engaged with the process.”* The provider went on to note that the



young person shared about his experiences, interests, and positive changes he wanted to make in his life and that his mother also reported a positive change in behavior, and increased communication between the two of them. A second example shared by another provider noted that the young person ***“has definitely improved his willingness to talk about himself and engage with the community members.”***

**Theme 3: Family is a key ally during accountability processes.** For many youth, reflecting on and being accountable for the impact of their behavior with family was deeply meaningful and resulted in strengthened familial relationships. This included recognizing the impact of behavior on family, even when they were not the people harmed. For example, one report stated, ***“Youth understands the consequences of his actions and wants to be a better influence to his sister.”*** Family also played a key role in helping youth recognize the emotional needs they might have that were manifesting in harmful behavior. One provider shared how a young person ***“shared his experience with his sister who told him that she was happy that he was participating in the restorative process so that he had other people to talk to besides Mom and family... Mom provided additional perspective and shared the many little good things that she noticed”***, including ***“much less resistance to listen to and engage with mom.”*** Finally, strengthening connections with family were frequently a named action in the forward-looking aspects of accountability plans. One young person ***“wanted the chance to connect with her family more deeply around what had happened, and so we tailored her agreement items to make this happen....When we came together for her closing conference, youth shared that she had several conversations with her mom and sisters, including one shared over the meal she had cooked for them. She said that she had been practicing saying thank you to people in her life, and that she felt much closer to her family since doing so. One particular highlight was when youth shared, ‘it felt so good to say thank you to my mom, because she’s responsible for turning me into the amazing young woman that I am.’ It was clear that setting intentions around creating moments of closeness with family, and finding time to talk about her own racial identity, was deeply meaningful.”***

**Theme 4: Young people begin to experience a sense of healing and community when community providers acknowledge and express shared responsibility for system failures that have deeply impacted youth.** Similar to the idea that CA processes sometimes come to the conclusion that it is youth who are the primary people harmed, once the full context is taken into account, the impact of this acknowledgement can begin a healing process during which a youth and/or their family, begin to see community as a source of support. For example, parents who had been struggling with how to address problematic youth behavior expressed gratitude for experiencing a new approach to accountability. In one situation, a report stated that a parent of a young person on the autism spectrum reported the youth ***“was more present and cooperative with us than he is with others.”*** In another situation, providers reflected that ***“this event gave youth the opportunity to grow in the model of his parents... Youth acknowledged the behavior that he could control and how to be safe in a similar situation [with law enforcement.] Only through engaging with the family and hearing their story do you realize the complexity of the situation and the wealth of love, positive engagement, and connection they foster in their community.”*** Another example comes from a report in which the process ended with a ***“question from all: What is the process when school staff says they will address an issue with another student but instead it is left unresolved and ends in this type of escalation?”***



## Recidivism

Data were analyzed for this report in September of 2022, only 2 months past the end of RJY's first year. Baseline measures of re-referral rates from 2017-2018 were based on a one-year follow-up period. Thus, re-referral results from RJY Year 1 are not yet available and will be shared in a future update to this report. Initial data will be available for analysis in July 2024, following a comparable two-year period of RJY ending June 2023, and one year of follow-up. However, given the lower-than-expected rates of access to and success in CA, it may be even longer before we have results that can be disaggregated by key populations to compare to baseline data analyses.

## Cost savings and wiser investments of public resources

Per the Juvenile Justice Benefit-Cost Analysis conducted by the Minnesota Management and Budget office in 2018, there is extensive potential for cost savings and benefits from RJY.<sup>45</sup> The report concluded declining to prosecute or similar "diversion without services" is a "proven effective" strategy resulting in estimated future societal benefits to Minnesota totaling \$3,400, including an average reduction in costs to taxpayers of \$1,500 per case diverted. Extrapolating from this report, the 63 cases declined during collaborative or traditional review may have led to approximately \$214,200 in current and future societal benefits.

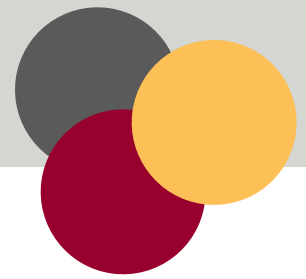
Similarly, "diversion with services," such as RJY's CA, is also a "proven effective" strategy resulting in \$1,830 of estimated future societal benefits to Minnesota, including reduced costs of \$720, per case, taking into account some of the costs to provide those services. Thus, an estimate of the potential societal benefits accrued due to 103 successful CA cases could be in the range of \$188,490. Taken together, the combination of **cases resolved outside of the legal system in RJY's first year may have resulted in direct cost savings and future societal benefits of \$402,690.**

Per the report, "Benefits [from diversion with services] accrue from decreases in crime, in health care expenses, and increases in employment resulting from changes in high school graduation. Because diversion saves money compared to the alternative sentence, probation, we find a negative cost" (p. 34). Cost estimates in the report were based on averages to administer diversion with services (\$830 per case) per a one-year collaboration with ten counties across Minnesota. This estimate of administrative costs may be lower than the RJY model of having a collaborative review team make decisions about accountability pathways. Thus, a full cost analysis, including comparisons to traditional pathways in Ramsey County, is recommended in the future once more of the RJY vision is implemented and costs can be accurately assessed.

## Summary and recommendations

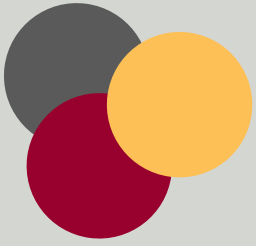
In this section, we reported on the types of impact data we will regularly track and summarized available data to provide an initial understanding of the effectiveness of the RJY approach and as compared to past results. Key points and resulting recommendations include:

- Responses that avoid collateral consequences are increasing as a share of total referrals from law enforcement, when compared to data from prior time periods, but the majority of that increase is

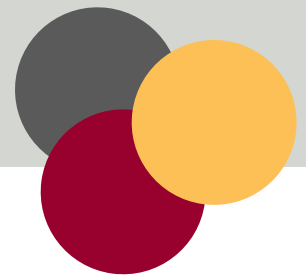


due to declined cases, and not yet an increase in cases being referred to CA.

- Young people whose cases were successfully resolved in CA had about 3 fewer months of system involvement compared to young people whose cases were charged in court.
- Qualitative evidence suggests CA creates spaces where youth address their behavior, grow and heal, and that sufficient time and family engagement are important for healing accountability.
- Data on whether CA reduces rates of re-referrals are not yet available.
- Cases resolved outside of the legal system in RJY's first year may have resulted in direct cost savings and future societal benefits of over \$400,000.
- **Recommendations:**
  - Continue to assess and report rates of resolutions in community, timeliness, healing opportunities and re-referral rates over time, for all accountability pathways.
  - Pay special attention to how timeliness is impacted for cases that are returned unresolved from CA.
  - Continue the commitment towards more fully implementing the RJY vision, as justified by baseline data analysis, cost-benefit research in Minnesota, and national research on accountability, victims and rehabilitation.



# Section 5: Conclusion



The RJY approach hypothesizes that, in the short term, youth will experience the developmentally essential tasks of emotional growth after mistakes, taking responsibility for their actions and learning to make right harm caused to others. Social-emotional skills built during this process include understanding multiple perspectives, increasing empathy, maintaining a positive self-identity, and having a strengthened sense of relationships and community. This opportunity to make things right after engaging in harmful behavior leads youth to a deeper understanding of the links between their own emotions and behaviors, and makes them less likely to harm others in the future. In the longer term, youth will reconnect to their communities in ways that make them more likely to go on to successful lives and less likely to be re-referred to the legal system.

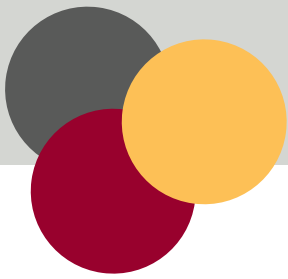
### **Strategic Challenge**

RJY's strategic challenge is enormous: to implement meaningful, restorative accountability with young people who have caused harm while seeking to address and redesign conditions that are intended to uphold a traditional system. As the RJY leadership team has explored, the fundamental beliefs of the traditional legal system are contradictory to the principles of restorative justice and community accountability. The beliefs underlying the traditional system have been carefully cultivated over time to support punitive accountability practices, large investments in legal systems and minimal investments in actual community wellbeing. For an effort like RJY to be sustained, similarly concerted, long-term and intentional efforts to seed a new vision of public safety and wellness will be needed. Further, some of the forces that will seek to hold the status quo in place come from other aspects of legal and societal systems (i.e., education, public health, law enforcement, courts, corrections, social services) that are beyond the initial scope of the RJY vision. Nonetheless, there are key opportunities – primarily in the form of community allies – that can help ensure issues are addressed and the challenge is met (Figure 14).

### **Insights**

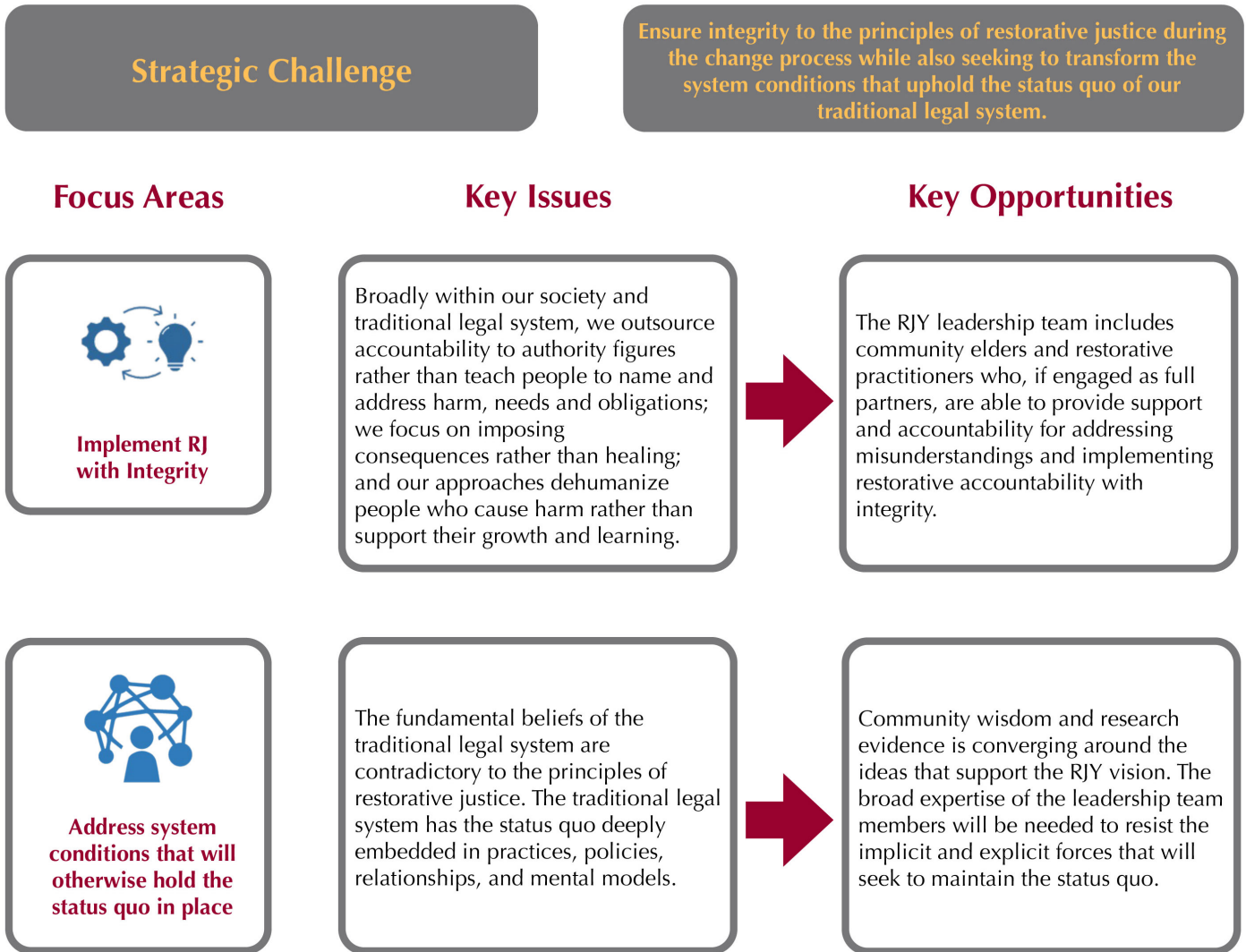
Results shared in this report indicate that RJY leaders have taken intentional steps to implement their vision. First year data show that, of cases not initially declined during legal review, 44% were reviewed collaboratively, and 56% were reviewed traditionally. Decisions made during review processes led to 32% of both traditionally and collaboratively reviewed cases going to CA and 56% being charged in traditional court. Disproportionality for Black youth remained high in terms of their share of law enforcement referrals, and increased in terms of their access to collaborative review and CA. Of CA cases that have been fully resolved, 66% were successful. The proportion of youth who succeeded in CA who were Black, Indigenous, younger, and not on their first referral to RCAO increased compared to baseline data. Within a context of continually decreasing referrals from law enforcement compared to historical trends, data indicate lower rates of youth being charged by RCAO compared to past time periods but not yet an increase in the proportion of cases resolved in community. Data also indicate that, when successful, CA cases resolved about three months faster than youth whose cases resulted in a petition and determination of guilt. Qualitative data show when providers successfully engage young people, accountability processes create meaningful opportunities for young people to address their mistakes, learn, grow, and heal with the support of family and community members.

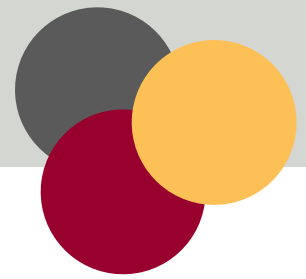




**Figure 14. RJY’s strategic challenge to implement RJ with integrity while seeking to change the system conditions that hold the status quo in place**

*Leadership from community elders and practitioners is key to addressing this strategic challenge.*





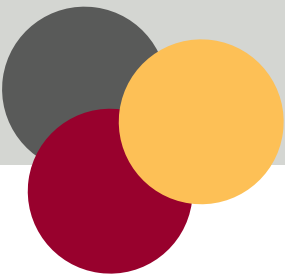
Results also indicate needed areas of improvement, including in success rates of CA processes (especially contact rates), further developing charge + CA referral processes, increasing involvement of people who were harmed, and further increasing equity and reducing disparities in access to CA. If rates of law enforcement referrals of youth to RCAO return to levels seen prior to COVID-19, additional logistical issues will also need to be addressed, including the pace at which the collaborative review team makes decisions and the availability of community-based providers.

At the conclusion of Sections 3 and 4, recommendations are offered to address potential issues and strengthen promising progress. The RJY vision, if fully implemented, will represent an important opportunity to test new approaches for meaningful responses to wrongdoing that avoid causing further harm to youth, families, and communities. However, we may be several years away from having a broader understanding of RJY's effects on recidivism rates and monetary benefits to society. While the vision of RJY is transformative, the change process has just begun. Given ample research supporting the theoretical framework for this approach, leadership should remain resolute in guiding the change process until the vision is fully implemented. To provide this leadership, RJY and RCAO leaders must remain grounded in an unwavering belief in the humanity of all people, and ongoing recognition that the status quo is costly, ineffective, harming youth and not serving our community.

## Next steps

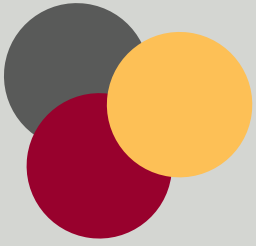
As noted in Figure 12, RJY leaders wanted to pay special attention to the role of trust in making RJY work, and the ecosystem of groups who would be essential partners in this process. Each of these groups can play key roles to continue learning from, improving and expanding the RJY approach.

- Collaborative review and RJY leadership teams can:
  - Carefully review the recommendations from this report and make intentional decisions about how to move forward;
  - Stay connected and engaged to provide the leadership necessary to fully implement and learn the impact of the RJY vision.
- Impacted communities can:
  - Engage in, request, and help improve community accountability;
  - Become trained in restorative approaches to offer such services outside of formal legal systems and/or to participate as community members in restorative processes.
- Members of the public can:
  - Understand and acknowledge the trade offs involved in our traditional legal system and effectively distinguish between efforts aimed at improving legal system responses as opposed to preserving and perpetuating the status quo;
  - Advocate equally for scrutiny of both traditional and (re)imagining approaches;
  - Engage with local practitioners for training to become a community member in restorative accountability processes or to bring such processes to your own communities;
  - Advocate for state policy makers to reduce the harmful collateral consequences of legal system involvement for youth, such that court involvement can be meaningfully improved without triggering ultimately harmful and counterproductive lifelong consequences.
- Other system partners can:
  - Continue learning about and engaging in constructive conversations about needed

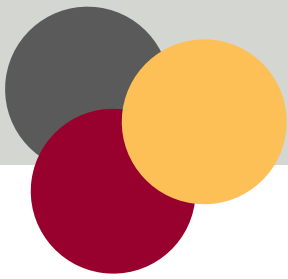


- improvements to youth legal system approaches that are grounded in science;
- Advocate equally for scrutiny of both traditional and (re)imagining approaches, specifically by aiding in identifying other sources of data to have more robust and rigorous comparisons with individuals who receive CA services;
- Enhance access to services outside of the legal system to meet needs of youth, as the best way to prevent harmful behavior is to ensure youth's physical, social, emotional, cognitive and developmental needs met.

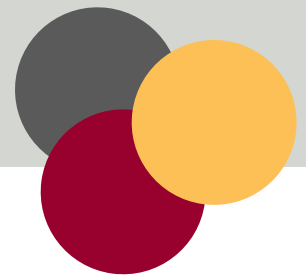
The time has come to have legal system responses that support our youth, even and especially those who commit crimes in our communities. The RJY leadership team members look forward to working with all concerned community members to support our youth to become caring, emotionally mature, and willing to take responsibility for their behavior, just as we seek to take responsibility for the historical, societal, and legal system harms that have for too long prevented true justice in our communities.



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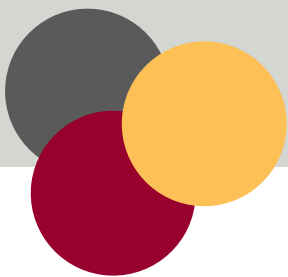
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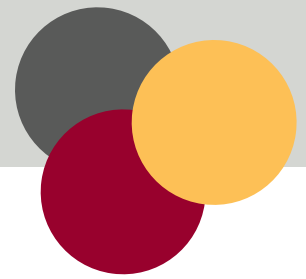




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# Appendices

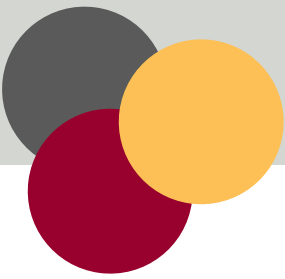


## Appendix A. Methodology

The University of Minnesota Healthy Youth Development • Prevention Research Center (UMN PRC) was awarded the research partner contract for the RJY initiative following a competitive bid process in the fall of 2019. Since that time, UMN PRC researchers have incorporated an embedded research approach to data analysis and technical assistance. Specifically, evaluation plans were developed collaboratively, with multiple perspectives welcomed to determine which evaluation questions to explore, the right mix of rigor and practicality for data analysis, including methods that are feasible for ongoing analysis within RCAO, and approaches most likely to be helpful to the leadership team in making decisions. All data transferred between RCAO and UMN PRC researchers was anonymous, and data sharing was governed by strict confidentiality and non-disclosure agreements and completed using secure file transfers.

For baseline data analysis:

- The RCAO data analyst extracted case data for all delinquency cases for juveniles (i.e., excluding traffic, delinquency and truancy cases) referred to and reviewed by RCAO between 1/10/2010 and 9/30/2019 from RCAO database (PbK) in July 2020, removed anything that would allow researchers to identify individual youth (e.g., name, home address, etc.) and transferred this file to UMN PRC researchers.
- Data included referral date, demographics, and number of counts, and for each count on the case, the severity of the referred charge, whether charged, severity of the charge if charged, charge date, final disposition, disposition date, and randomly generated identifiers. Identifiers allowed us to know whether multiple individuals were charged on a single case and whether individuals appeared multiple times on separate cases.
  - UMN PRC researchers calculated descriptive statistics (means, frequencies) for all cases and counts across decision points (whether to charge, severity of charge, final disposition) overall and disaggregated by race, age, severity of charge, by number of counts on a case, by year, etc. To develop comparable two-year time points to which we could eventually compare initial RJY results, we assessed some data separately for calendar years 2012-2013 and 2017-2018. The 2017-2018 period is what we consider the baseline comparison from a point in time when some reforms were underway, including lower referral and charge rates for less severe incidents, but not nearly to the extent of the RJY vision. The 2012-2013 period serves as an additional and earlier point of historical comparison. We re-calculated all descriptive statistics for these two year periods.
  - UMN PRC researchers also conducted regression analyses to better understand whether differences existed in decisions made by RCAO attorneys, such as whether to charge a case, for different demographic groups. Regression analysis identifies patterns in data where multiple factors may influence the outcome (dependent variable – e.g., whether to charge), and selects the main factor or factors (independent variables – e.g., demographics, whether has a previous charge or referral or not, multi-count case, etc.) responsible for the outcome, with a prediction of the odds of achieving a given outcome in particular circumstances. These statistical tests are frequently used to identify possible causation when randomized control trials are not feasible. Logistic regression assesses the predictive value of each independent variable in comparison to a reference group for that same variable. The results are reported as

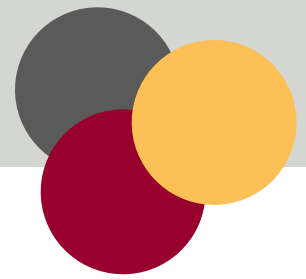


odds ratios: the extent to which that one factor increases the odds for the dependent variable when all other factors are taken into account. While results were not part of this report, they are available in other linked documents that more fully describe results of the baseline data analysis.

- From the full case-based dataset, we used the randomly generated individual identifiers to transpose the data into a dataset organized by individuals, starting with their first referral to RCAO and any subsequent cases. We then calculated similar descriptive statistics, which allowed us to summarize the demographics of individual youth referred to RCAO over time and, importantly, re-referral rates. With this data set, we could explore data by referral number (e.g., whether charge rates differ by number of prior referrals, whether re-referral rates differ by number of prior referrals, etc.)
- Finally, RCAO provided the same data set to the Court Services Division of the Minnesota Judicial Branch, but including the youth name and Ramsey County ID#. A research analyst in that division queried adult court records for matches and, for any matched record, added the total number of convictions in the adult criminal legal system, including offense type and category (e.g., misdemeanor, felony), cases status (e.g., open, dismissed, etc.) and returned the file to the RCAO analyst. The RCAO analyst then conducted a data integrity check, added the random individual identifier to the data set, removed names, calculated date of birth at offense and then deleted actual date of birth (to ensure greater anonymity), removed any other data that could identify individual youth and then transferred the file to UMN PRC researchers. UMN PRC researchers and RCAO determined that the dependent variable of interest was adult felony convictions, so all cases of lesser severity were excluded from analysis. UMN PRC researchers then calculated descriptive statistics for the number of people with RCAO contact as a youth who 1) Were at least age 21 by time of data pull, and were convicted of a felony between the ages of 18 and 21; and 2) Were convicted of a felony at any age and were at least 18 by the date of the data pull.

#### RJY year 1 data analysis:

- Data sources:
  - The RCAO data analyst extracted case data from the RCAO database (PbK) in September 2022.
  - Data collection tools for community-based accountability data were developed with the guidance of UMN PRC researchers in collaboration with leadership team and finalized after consultations with providers. No data were collected directly from participants. Closing reports were completed by providers in PDF fillable forms, including both numeric, categorical and open-ended fields. Reports were sent to RCAO. The RCAO data analyst exported responses into a spreadsheet at the end of year 1. A de-identified copy of this spreadsheet was transferred to the research team for analysis.
- Analysis:
  - The RCAO data analyst conducted all overall case analysis for this report. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means) were calculated by case (i.e., demographics, referrals, initial decisions, accountability pathway, charge and disposition.)
  - The UMN PRC research team analyzed community accountability program data. Qualitative



data were analyzed using thematic content analysis. Descriptive statistics were calculated for categorical and numeric data (e.g., whether victim involved, number of outreach attempts prior to engagement.)

- No inferential statistics were conducted at this stage, given the preliminary nature of cases, lack of outcome data, and low numbers in different accountability pathways.

## **Appendix B. Preliminary Analysis of RJY Qualitative Data**

May 2022

Doris Espelien, PhD student

### **Summary**

#### **Introduction**

In support of the Ramsey County Attorney's Office's (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth initiative, a preliminary analysis was conducted on qualitative data obtained from three open-ended questions on ten case closing reports submitted by community partners. Of these ten cases, two were invalidated due to failure to make contact or because the youth aged out between the time of the offense and their contact with the RJY program.

The case closing report included the following questions:

1. What stood out to you as meaningful for this youth and family? What did you learn about this young person that would be helpful in determining next steps?
2. To what extent did the youth/family access resources recommended to them through your services? If there was not follow-up or access, what do you think were the primary barriers that prevented full engagement and success?
3. What else do you want to document to give a full understanding of what happened and why some things may or may not have worked as intended?

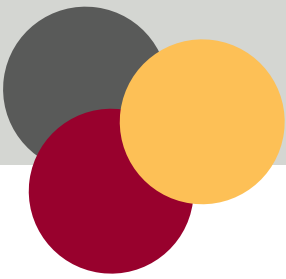
Further questions posed by the primary PRC evaluator, Kara Beckman, in correspondence with the author were:

- In what way is system accountability included in reflections and accountability plans?
- Which systems?
- What is the breadth of ways they are mentioned in the data?

### **Process**

The two conceptual frameworks that drove the examination of this data were healthy youth development and restorative justice. As such, the key ideas were relationships, affect, systems, barriers, and accountability.

De-identified data were analyzed in an Excel spreadsheet. Originally, each set of questions headed its own column. However, the initial review of the data determined that the responses were not often related to the questions, so it was not necessary to keep the answers in three separate columns. For ease of analysis, therefore, all data were compiled into one column. After three readings of the data, and in



accordance with the key ideas informed by the conceptual frameworks, the following tags were established via inductive analysis: culture, relationships, affect, intervention/consequences, and considerations/contributing factors. Examples of each tag were color coded within the text and then annotated in one of five “tag” columns. To identify relationships between and among the tags, a mind map was created using coggle.it (see Mind Map below).

## **Findings**

The themes presented in this section emerged via inductive analysis guided by the concepts central to restorative justice and healthy youth development.

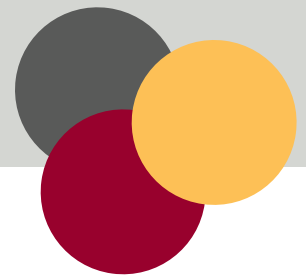
### ***Relationships***

The importance of relationships was conveyed in every case. This includes familial relationships and voluntary relationships (e.g., mentors, friendships). It appears that the mothers were part of every case processing, as many case notes refer to steps the mothers have taken to help their child(ren), mothers’ concerns for their child(ren), and/or the challenges the mothers are facing. In several cases, the youth referenced a closeness with or appreciation for their mother, such as one who was specifically seeking ways to convey her appreciation to her mother “for turning me into the amazing young woman that I am” (case xxxx08). In turn, the mothers referenced a desire for relationships that would improve their own capacities as parents and/or their child(ren)’s outcomes, such as wanting “to build relationships of trust with other parents” at her child’s school (case xxxx62) or connecting with programming or mentors that would help her “guide [the youth] towards building relationships and trust” (case xxxx60). Responses mention relationships with reference to the context of the incident (i.e., who was with the youth at the time of the incident), as a contributing factor to the incident (e.g., these youths assumed the grievances of a previous dispute between the youths’ family members; youth was lonely and seeking attention), or as part of the accountability and/or intervention plans (e.g., making amends to those impacted; expressing gratitude to supporters; identifying healthy relationship opportunities via programming and mentorship; removing unhealthy relationships). The ubiquity of this concept within this small pool of data seems to validate the importance placed on relationships by both those concerned with restorative justice and those concerned with healthy youth development.

### ***Culture***

The two ways in which culture were referenced were as part of the intervention (e.g., the need for culturally specific resources for the youth and/or family) or as a contributing factor (e.g., the youth has experienced discrimination based on their race/culture). A response for case xxxx62 states, “Primary barriers are culturally specific support and resources within the school district...School administration needs to build relationships with parents of color and not just when a situation occurs.” This quote demonstrates the manner by which the intervention and contributing factor usages of culture references can be two sides of the same coin. That is, a lack of culturally specific supports and resources at school and the administration’s failure to develop relationships with parents of color are barriers to the youth’s success, which one can interpret as a youth experiencing passive or active discrimination (depending on the circumstance), which can be seen as a contributing factor to the youth’s adverse event. However, the intervention is both stated and implied within the same response – implement culturally relevant supports and resources; develop relationships with parents of color before adverse situations arise.





### ***Fear***

The mind map shows “affect” to be a strong theme within the responses. Through this diversion program, the youth are processing the event that led them to contact with the police. The processing necessarily involves the emotions experienced leading up to, during, and after the event, including as the youth is encouraged to consider the perspectives of those impacted by their behavior. However, within the “affect” domain, fear stands out as the most common emotion expressed or inferred.

The code definitions below applied to eight cases analyzed in May 2022, and are to be used in conjunction with the codebook.

**Culture (purple):** Any reference to culture being of importance, whether as a descriptor of the youth/family, as part of a need to be met, or as a component of the system in which the youth is involved (e.g., mentions of systemic racism).

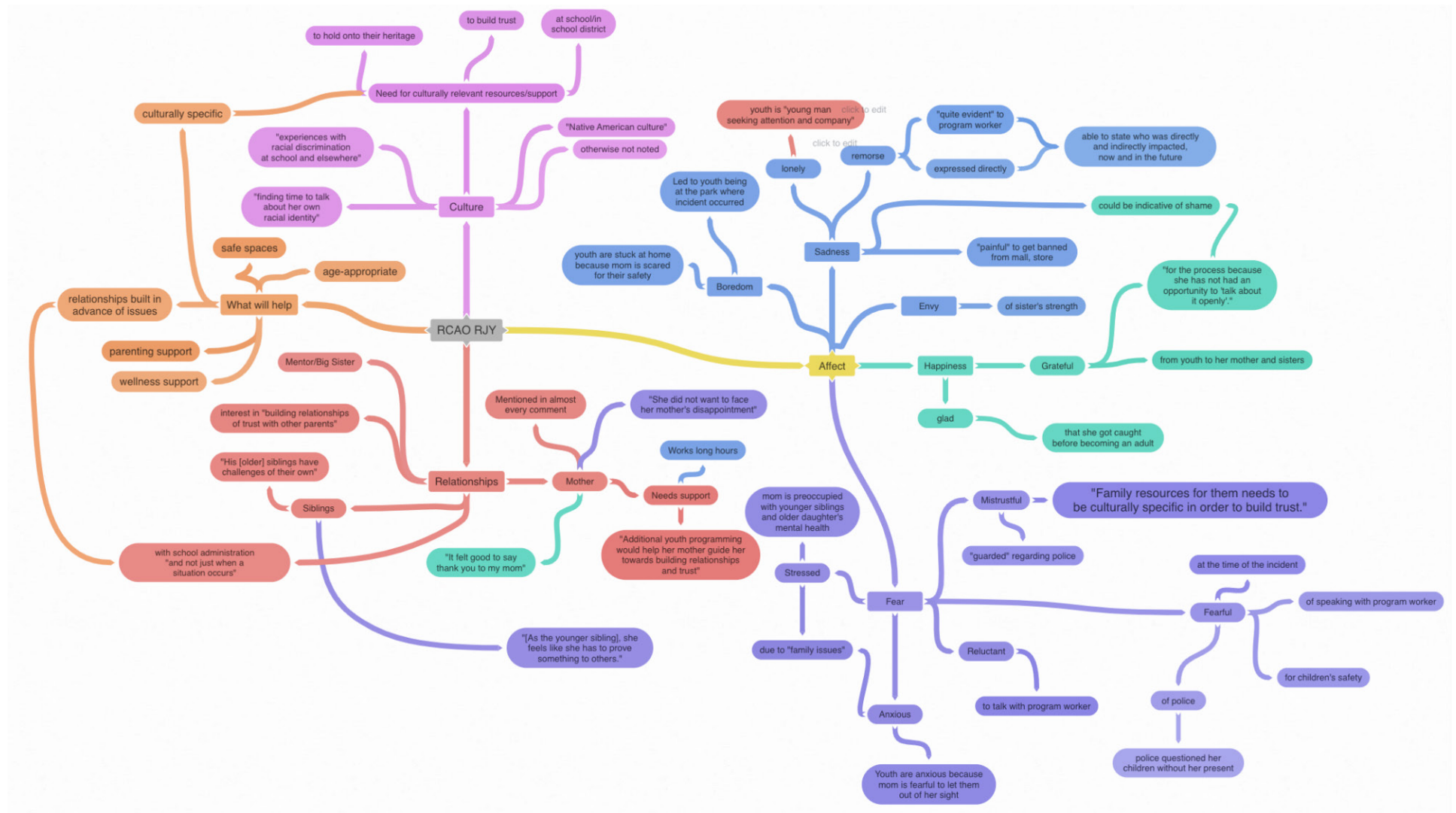
**Relationships (red):** Any reference to extant family relationships (e.g., mother, siblings) or non-familial relationships (e.g., mentors).

**Affect (green):** Any expressions of emotion/affect or about which emotion/affect can be inferred (e.g., bored, mistrustful).

**Intervention/Consequences (blue):** Any references to the consequences of the youth’s actions or to the accountability plans or referrals made by/with program staff.

**Considerations/Contributing Factors (not color coded):** Any references to systems or events that may be useful in understanding the context of the youth’s offense.

# Mind Map



Note: This mind map was created in coggle.it and is limited by the options available in the free version. It is intended to be a helpful visual and not a fully comprehensive mapping.