



2023 Impact Report

FACILITATING REFORM AND LASTING CHANGE





Rachel Sottile
President & CEO

Letter from Our President & CEO

Thank you for your interest in the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ). The work we do would not be possible without assistance from people like you. This report provides a look back at our accomplishments over the past year. As you read about CCYJ's impact in 2023, and how we are positioned to be even more effective in 2024, I hope you will appreciate how vital your contribution has been, and that you will renew your support to the important work we do on behalf of Washington's most vulnerable children.

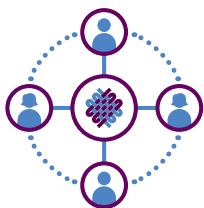
Center for Children & Youth Justice

Four years ago, at the end of 2019, most of the world had yet to hear about an emerging global health threat. The nation's first confirmed case of the novel virus, here in Washington State, came the following January—and was officially named “COVID-19” in February 2020. Three years of tumult and tragedy later, the pandemic now appears to be mostly behind us. But for many vulnerable children in our state, the destabilizing legacy of the disease—which infected millions across our state and claimed more than 15,000 lives here—persists. In the wake of this crisis, the work of the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ) as a **collaborator and convener, a capacity-builder, and an advocacy partner of youth-serving organizations and systems across the state** is more urgent than ever. We are rising to the challenge.



CCYJ's mandate is to improve outcomes for Washington State children and youth ages 0 to 25 who are, or are at risk of being, involved in either the foster care system or systems of youth justice. As the experiences of these children are subject to many of the same challenges and traumas, our efforts within these fields frequently overlap. In both systems, youth who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and youth who identify as LGBTQ+ are disproportionately represented—much as they were disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Our work, accordingly, is always designed to be inclusive and ever-framed with an equity lens.

CCYJ is not, itself, a direct service agency; our staff do not work with the children who need care. Instead, we achieve sustainable improvements in the health, safety, and well-being of young people in Washington state indirectly, by applying **three distinct modalities** across the entire ecosystem of care:



Facilitating multi-system coordination and collaboration



Providing training and ongoing technical assistance



Advocating for data-driven and youth-centered solutions

We are, in short, a trusted partner for any individual, group, or agency committed to positive system change. And we get results.

This report highlights CCYJ's most significant accomplishments of 2023.

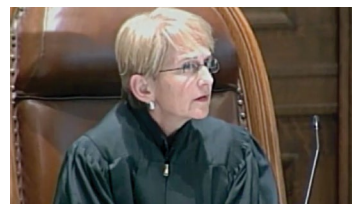


Justice Bobbe J. Bridge (Ret.) was awarded the 2023 Norm Maleng Advocate for Youth Award.



"Our kids deserve a fighting chance to become strong, self-sufficient, and thriving members of the community."

"All children, even those who have made mistakes, should be able to experience accountability in realistic ways, benefit from rehabilitative treatments, and return to their communities with hope for their futures."



Tribute to Our Founding President & CEO

Justice Bobbe J. Bridge (Ret.)

In 2008, the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ) created the Norm Maleng Advocate for Youth Award in honor of CCYJ's co-founder, former King County Prosecutor Norm Maleng. This award is given each year to recognize an individual who has demonstrated exemplary leadership and commitment to youth and families who become involved in Washington's juvenile legal and child welfare systems.



This year, we were thrilled to honor our founding President & CEO, Justice Bobbe J. Bridge (Ret.).

Justice Bridge had already left a mark on Washington's juvenile legal and child welfare systems when she launched CCYJ in 2006. Following a successful private law practice, she served on the Washington State Supreme Court and, prior to that, the King County Superior Court, including as Chief Juvenile Court Judge.

As her second term on the supreme court was winding down, Justice Bridge was looking for new ways to contribute when she learned of a five-year grant that the MacArthur Foundation was offering to agencies interested in examining ways to improve juvenile justice. She quickly assembled a team, formed the Center for Children & Youth Justice, and got the award.

At the time, Justice Bridge recognized that while many people in Washington were doing important work in juvenile justice and child welfare, few had time or capacity to study the data these agencies were producing. "Neither system was working

to advance the majority of kids into successful adulthood," she later said. "They weren't focusing on what really works."

CCYJ filled that gap. Instead of focusing on the trees, it would study the forest.

One of the new agency's earliest accomplishments was Supporting Early Connections, a team-based intervention for very young children entering foster care that included education and representation for parents. Justice Bridge's ability to bring parents, guardians, and state child welfare agents to the table to effect change was central to the program's success.

That strategy would become a model for CCYJ today.

Thanks to Justice Bridge's example, the Center for Children & Youth Justice has evolved into a trusted partner to community organizations, service providers, and agencies state-wide; people with lived expertise are central to shaping our policy change agenda; and we are recognized—not only across Washington, but also around the nation—for our contribution to anti-racist action and effective systems change.

Overview

The Center for Children & Youth Justice operates nearly a dozen programs that together address a wide array of issues critical to the wellbeing of children in our state. All of our programs focus on achieving better outcomes for children and families by facilitating collaboration among system stakeholders and others, providing training and technical assistance (TTA), and advocating for solutions that are data-driven and youth-centered. The past eleven months, following the disruption brought on by COVID-19, have been a period of consolidation and growth for CCYJ. This has positioned us to have an unprecedented level of impact in the coming months and years.

Our programs include our Early Childhood Courts, which focus on improving outcomes for families with babies and toddlers in dependency systems, and Girls Court, the state's first gender-responsive court program, in Kitsap County; the Becca Task Force, a statewide collaboration to keep kids in school; eQuality, which is creating safer and more affirming systems of care for LGBTQ+ youth; and Project Respect, a program working to build and sustain a coordinated, statewide victim/ survivor-centered response to commercial sexual exploitation of children.

Policy Initiatives and Accomplishments

Advancing CCYJ's mission through legislative and other policy changes

LINC: Leadership, Intervention & Change

Building a collaborative approach to meet the needs of young people who are youth criminal legal system and/or gang/group involved

Becca Task Force

Creating a space for statewide collaboration to keep kids in school

Early Childhood Courts

Improving outcomes for families with babies and toddlers in dependency systems by expanding the Early Childhood Court approach in Washington state

Project Respect

Building and sustaining a statewide, coordinated, and victim/survivor-centered response to the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Washington State

eQuality

Creating safer and more affirming systems of care for LGBTQ+ youth

HCLS: Holistic Children's Legal Services

Ensuring all children, youth, and young adults in Washington have access to an attorney who is culturally competent and can advocate for their needs holistically

J-WAY: Justice for Washington Youth Coalition

Strategically advancing juvenile justice-related legislation and other policy items

Girls Court

Designed, developed, and implemented Washington's first gender-responsive court program with Kitsap County Juvenile Court



Convening and Collaboration

People and agencies providing direct services to vulnerable children in our state do heroic work. To be effective, they must focus upon the details of their responsibilities. What does this child in dependency need to be safe? What specific resources will help this young person in juvenile court make better choices going forward? Supplying answers to questions like these takes **commitment and laser-like attention**. Such intense work can, however, also be a barrier to stepping back to assess the bigger picture and considering what can be done to make the system itself work better.

This is where CCYJ fits in. A key part of our work is to foster opportunities for shared reflection and action, which we do by facilitating convenings of, and collaboration among, system stakeholders, including practitioners, affected individuals and communities, and government leaders. Fulfilling this role is not simple: We must earn others' trust, we have to be reliable, and we must use the time people share with us productively.



In 2023, CCYJ staff and programs led or participated in 23 statewide commissions, task forces, and coalitions, and the national JuST Response Council.

Several CCYJ programs host their own annual conferences that bring practitioners together from across the state to share needs and learnings and strengthen the connections that are needed to collaborate to improve the systems where they work.



More than 165 people collaborating to address youth group and gang violence and design solutions that work in King County attended the second annual Leadership, Intervention, & Change (LINC) Conference in September. This represents a 157 percent growth in registration over the previous year.



In October, the statewide Becca Task Force, for which CCYJ assumed functional responsibility in 2002, held its 20th annual conference. A record 232 people registered for the conference to share and learn about better ways systems can keep kids engaged in education.

"So inspirational," reported one participant following the conference. "I have a renewed faith in humanity. I am fired up to make meaningful change in my community!"

Project Respect

Project Respect, which developed the Washington State Model Protocol for Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) in 2011 and in 2020 **helped pass legislation ending the practice of arresting, charging, and convicting child victims of sex trafficking, hosted a Task Force Leads Meeting in September.** Seventeen representatives from nine of the state's 12 regional CSEC Task Forces attended the event, which focused on engaging survivors in trauma-informed and culturally appropriate ways.

In addition to these major convenings, several CCYJ projects, including Holistic Children's Legal Services (HCLS), the Safe Babies Court Team, and J-Way, led working groups and coalitions.

Working alone, our impact is limited to our own capacity. Convening practitioners in the same space—to share knowledge, experience, and agency—is the fertilizer that can lead to dynamic, transformational change.

Training and Technical Assistance (TTA)

Wherever they work within Washington’s child-serving agencies, and whatever they do, the people charged with supporting our state’s most vulnerable children want to be more effective—individually, at the organizational level, or both. CCYJ technical assistance (a targeted process offering organization-level support to address a development need or problem) and CCYJ training help service providers realize this aspiration.



In 2023, we provided technical assistance to at least **450 individuals from at least 30 organizations** across the state. Our program events, trainings, and lunch-and-learn series reached **more than 550 people from nearly 90 organizations**.



CCYJ also conducts research and publishes reports that are also designed to inform the field and lead to better outcomes. In April, for example, in partnership with the Washington Center for Court Research (WSCCR), CCYJ released an evaluation of the Kitsap County Girls Court Program that identifies key strengths of the program as well as areas of needed improvement.

One of CCYJ’s more active TTA programs in 2023 was led by our program eQuality, which seeks to create safer and more affirming systems of care for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) youth. In recent years, eQuality staff have developed and begun administering a questionnaire **designed to help youth-serving professionals engage effectively with youth regarding their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE)**—as research shows that youth who talk about their SOGIE with youth-serving professionals have better outcomes. Over the course of 2023, eQuality staff have led a statewide effort to disseminate and implement SOGIE training across all of our state’s youth service systems, especially those focusing on homelessness, child welfare, and youth justice.





Advocating for Reform

Earlier this year, in May, Washington became the 6th state in the nation to stop placing fines & fees on young people involved in the juvenile legal system. **This historic decision was the outcome of a years-long effort led by CCYJ and a coalition of more than 20 partners**, including Stand for Children Washington—the state chapter of a nationwide education and child advocacy group, and the state’s Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF).

"My dad is serving life in prison, my brother got killed by a cop, and I'm thinking 'where is my life going?'" The time I was at Greenhill [my court ordered financial obligation] was accruing interest—I didn't know they could do that. It went from \$26,000 to \$39,000, and now it's sitting somewhere in the \$50,000s. I'm lucky I can pay them \$100 bucks a month, and ya know maybe by the time I am 200 it will be paid off. Today I have a beautiful daughter. I'm trying to do the next right thing. We are going to keep this progress rolling, going with the juvenile justice system. The work's just really getting started. I don't how long it took to put the system in place that they have right now that's not working, but if it's ten miles in it's ten miles out."

— JACOB CARMICKLE



Under the old law, dating back to the 1970s, families of children in the juvenile legal system were compelled to pay a percentage of their gross income to help cover the cost of their child’s incarceration. Whatever the motives for the law, in practice people found that the program, called “ParentPay”, added in detrimental ways to their already significant financial burdens. Many families facing financial hardship forego basic needs, such as rent and food, to pay the fees. Failing to do so often resulted in deeper penalties and/or fees. For many, the result was a vicious cycle that kept families impoverished and entrenched in the juvenile legal system.

Beginning in 2021, CCYJ, Stand for Children Washington, and our partners began educating lawmakers about ParentPay’s inequitable impacts on families and youth of color and calling for repeal of the law.



As a result of this work, in early 2022 state leaders enacted new legislation bringing ParentPay to an end and eliminating nearly \$41 million in outstanding debts related to the program.

The passage of House Bill 2050 in 2022 was a huge victory—not only for justice, but also for economic opportunity. Being freed from unfair and counter-productive financial obligations set many young people and their families on a new path toward self sufficiency.

This year, CCYJ, Stand for Children Washington, and our coalition of partners extended our advocacy success by leading the successful effort to pass House Bill 1169. This bill eliminated the statutes that authorized courts to impose fines & fees in juvenile cases and made uncollectible any juvenile debt that is unrelated to restitution.

Our success in helping end fines & fees and ParentPay is but one example of how CCYJ advocacy is leading system-level change. Another recent example is Justice for Washington’s Youth (J-Way), the new advocacy coalition we spearheaded last year, bringing together people who work across the state’s youth criminal legal system. Unlike in other child-serving systems—child welfare and youth homelessness, for example—juvenile legal system stakeholders lacked strong, sophisticated systems for educating decision makers, tracking legislative bills, mobilizing community, and holding systems accountable.

Looking Forward ►►►



The systems change that Washington realized when CCYJ helped to end the use of fees & fines in the juvenile legal system is profound. Yet, our work on this issue is not over. Debt that is no longer collectable can still be reported to credit bureaus and appear in background checks, and in some cases it has led to unlawful harassment by private debt collectors. Even when this does not ensnare the young person in the system, this debt can keep them from being able to meet essential needs, like housing, education, and employment.

We will continue working with our coalition partners to erase the lingering financial obligations placed on young people in the system and to develop the rehabilitative practices that empower youth rather than anchor them to burdens that are carried into adulthood.

Our fees & fines work is but one example of how reform is an ongoing, iterative process—sometimes steady and slow, sometimes, especially when the

infrastructure is in place, rapid and astounding. Recent developments in CCYJ’s Leadership, Intervention, & Change (LINC) program are an example of that latter phenomenon. A decade ago, CCYJ launched LINC to help reduce group and gang violence in King County. Now, after years of steady foundation-building and growth, that program is poised to emerge in 2024 as a dynamic, cohesive, and collaborative strategy to end the crisis of gun violence.

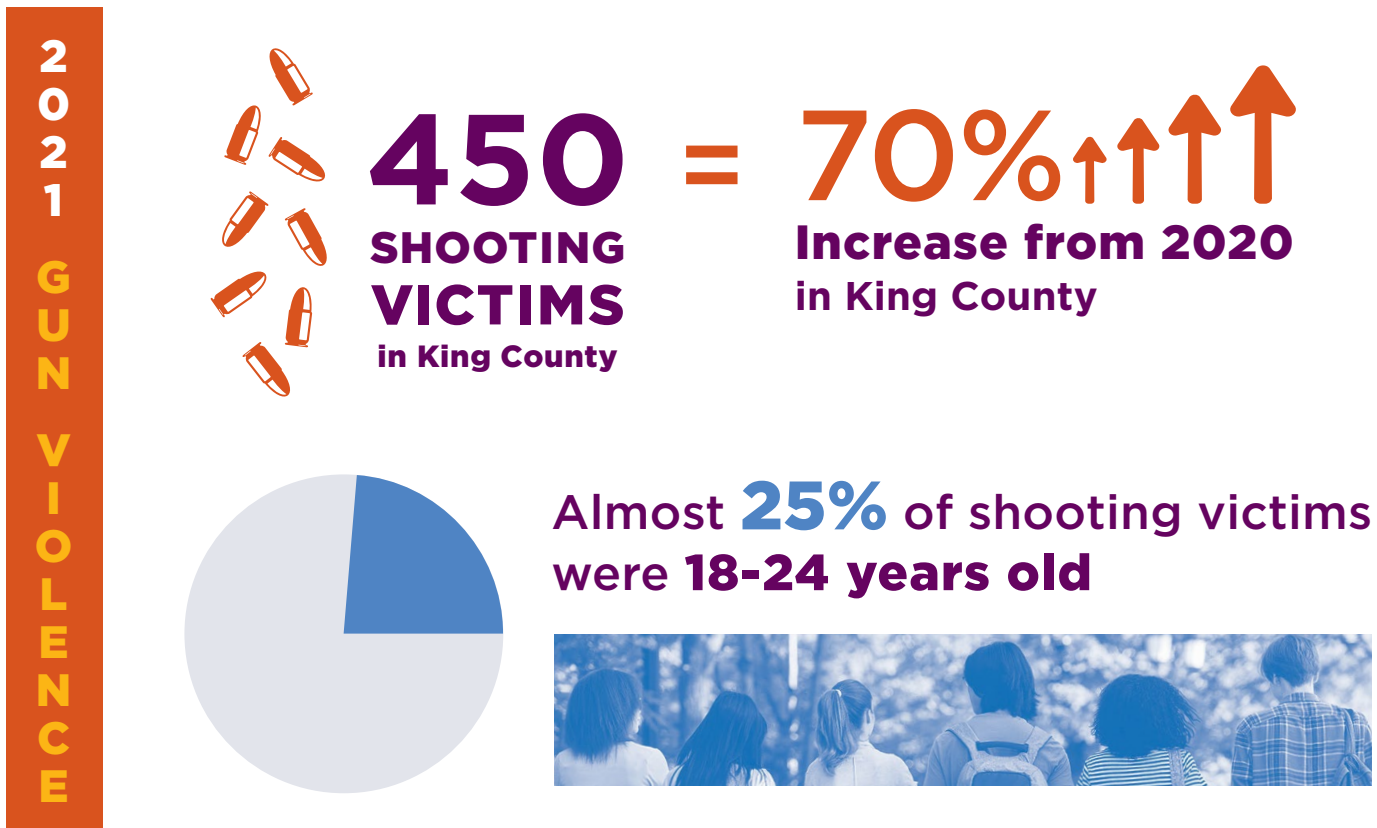
Mobilizing to End Gun Violence

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Washington, like much of the nation, experienced a devastating increase in gun violence. In 2021, there were 460 shooting victims in King County alone—a 70 percent increase over the previous year. This amounted to a 54 percent increase in fatal shootings and a 75 percent increase in non-fatal shootings compared to the four year average, from 2017 to 2020. Nearly a quarter of the victims were between the ages of 18 and 24. The County Executive responded, in 2022, by declaring gun violence a public health emergency.

As noted earlier, CCYJ had already been building an infrastructure that could contend with this scourge. In 2011, we had launched a coordinated effort to prevent and reduce gang- and group-related violence among teenagers and emerging adults. The Leadership, Intervention, & Change program was the first large, multi-jurisdictional effort in the nation to implement a regional adaption of the Comprehensive Gang Model, a protocol developed

by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) a division of the US Department of Justice (DOJ).

Late this year, DOJ tapped CCYJ to lead the next stage of this effort: Building, strengthening, and coordinating a state-wide Community-Based Violence Intervention (CVI) ecosystem that could effectively reduce the gun violence spike.



In 2024, CCYJ’s LINC staff will begin leveraging their network and expertise to implement comprehensive, evidence-based violence intervention and prevention strategies that can lead to reduced gun violence in King County. Drawing upon protocols developed and applied in other areas of CCYJ’s work, LINC staff will operate at three levels: “micro”, “mezzo”, and “macro”.



THE MICRO LEVEL will focus on ensuring that at-risk youth have access to meaningful services provided by community-based organizations currently working in the field. While their staff are highly motivated credible messengers, many local agencies lack sufficient resources for things like providing training, collecting data, or ensuring program fidelity.



LINC’S MEZZO LEVEL of support will focus on helping these service providers develop their own infrastructure and internal capacity. Too often, community violence intervention agencies are under-developed, getting by with insufficiently robust operations, human resources, finance, and technology, among other things.



THE MACRO LEVEL support entails convening the network, facilitating information sharing, and coordinating shared efforts, including advocacy initiatives.

This multi-year plan draws upon all three of CCYJ’s core capacities—convening, training and technical assistance, and advocacy for system-level change. **To meet our goals, we will need to expand our own operations as well. With support from the US Department of Justice, in early 2024 we will begin scaling up our own capacity so we can be effective in supporting our community-based partners and improving operational coordination, both within and across participating organizations.**

CCYJ is honored to have been asked to lead this initiative, and we understand this mandate as an expression of confidence in our theory of change. But more importantly, we recognize this timely gun violence intervention as yet another way we can mobilize to meet the needs, and improve the lives of our state’s most vulnerable young people.





Lasting Change

The work we do at the Center for Children & Youth Justice is solemn. Building effective ecosystems of support; giving voice to, strengthening, and honoring those in the front lines of care—both providers and receivers; and cultivating the connections that facilitate collective change is serious business. However, what matters most to us is not the work, but the outcomes: The impact CCYJ has on the lives of Washington’s most vulnerable children—and on the lives of their families and communities. It is an honor to be able to do this work, and a privilege to do it successfully.

We are grateful for your interest in our work, your partnership, and your support in helping us play such a vital role. It means so much for our state, for our partners and communities, and, most of all, for the children, who like everyone else, deserve to be safe, to be healthy, and to thrive.






All Children and Youth Deserve a Fair Chance

At the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ), we're changing the way young people experience the child welfare and juvenile legal systems—for the better. By listening to young people and working with partners across Washington State, we're helping to redesign our child welfare and juvenile legal systems to meet children and youth's unique needs. Every year we help improve the lives of tens of thousands young people.





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