



# MICHIGAN CENTER *for* YOUTH JUSTICE



## 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

*"Thank you, as always, for supporting the Michigan Center for Youth Justice's work. We are excited to share our 2021 accomplishments in more detail with you in this virtual annual report."*

[Read Jason Smith's 2021 Letter](#)

## The MCYJ 2021 Annual Report Is \*FINALLY\* Here!

MCYJ is happy to announce that our 2021 annual report is ready for you to enjoy! We invite you to take a peek at this interactive web-based report to learn more about the advocacy, trainings, projects, and events that took place last year. We are proud of what we have accomplished, and ready to continue creating a more fair and just youth justice system in Michigan.

[View Report](#)

The Ballmer Group Awards MCYJ 3-Year Building Grant

Capacity-

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We are thrilled to announce that the Michigan Center for Youth Justice was just awarded a generous 3-year grant from the Ballmer Group, a philanthropic charity founded by former Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer. While the Ballmer Group's funding is nationally focused and reaches hundreds of nonprofits around the U.S., Steve Ballmer is a Detroit native and has a particular interest in supporting not-for-profit organizations in Michigan.

This grant provides MCYJ the flexibility to fund very important capacity-building and organizational growth activities, including additional staff, enhancing our partnerships with other community groups, and more promotional efforts to spread the word about our work throughout Michigan. We are proud and honored to add the Ballmer Group to our roll of foundation supporters.

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## Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice Revamped

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Earlier this month, Governor Gretchen Whitmer [signed an executive order](#) revamping the [Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice \(MCJJ\)](#) to ensure that the state advisory group aligns with the added requirements of the 2018 reauthorization of the federal [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act](#). The governor's order appoints some new members and reappoints some existing members, including MCYJ Executive Director Jason Smith.

The MCJJ provides advice, suggestions, and solutions to the governor on juvenile justice issues and at least every two years must submit to the governor and the state Legislature a report regarding compliance with the state's juvenile justice plan. The report must include policy recommendations and potential actions on how to improve juvenile justice in the state.

Changes in the governor's executive order include a requirement that people under age 28 must make up at least one-fifth of the MCJJ's membership and representatives of victim or witness advocacy groups and a tribal representative or another individual with expertise in tribal law enforcement and juvenile justice in tribal communities also be appointed.

[Read Gov. Whitmer's Press Release](#)

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## Cole Williams Works with Incarcerated Youth to Build Bonds, Form Villages

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He had a son at 16, became a single father at 17, went on to foster-parent seven Black boys, and adopted one of them as well. Colebert (Cole) Williams of Grand Rapids, Michigan, (pictured below) is a fatherhood consultant and he lives out that mission, including through his organization, [The Delta Project](#). He is determined to serve young justice-involved Black and brown males, to help them improve the future for their families.

The Delta Project works inside prisons and with youth who are returning home. The goal is to “break the generational cycle of incarceration by reconnecting youth of color and their families, and to community relationships through mentorship, coaching and storytelling.” The project's partners include the Greater Grand Rapids NAACP and the Heart of West Michigan United Way.

Williams' introduction to the need to intervene in the justice system happened in 2011 when Steve, the now-25-year-old he still considers a foster son, had a mental health crisis. Williams called the police to calm the situation, but instead they took the then-14-year-old to a detention center and Steve ended up being charged with a crime. He went on to be placed in an adult residential facility and his underlying mental health issues were never properly addressed.

Williams says he knew the foster care system well, knew the mental health system well, but when he was thrust into the justice system he realized those three systems weren't working together collaboratively. The core problem, Williams says, is that the youth justice system mirrors the adult criminal justice system. Instead, he says, we should

“mirror systems that reflect the families and the community, and look at what resources that are missing and provide that.”

He says the current system fails to take into account the stages of youth brain development and economic challenges. “With the disparity in the rates of Black and brown children in the system, we have to do a better job of using research to work collaboratively and make change.” That’s why Williams created the Boys to Men-Tors support group to help boys 15-18 in the justice system “navigate their life circumstances and positively envision their future.”

To view the full article, [click here](#).



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## MCYJ Works Toward Restorative Justice in Kalamazoo with Carlton Mayers, II

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As the founder, owner, and head consultant of [Mayers Strategic Solutions, LLC](#), Carlton T. Mayers, II, Esq. (pictured below) consults with communities nationwide to reimagine public safety by using the Community Empowerment-Centered® approach to identify, strategize and implement long-term and positive change in practices, policies and culture through the C.A.T. Method®. Mayers is also a public safety expert and utilizes this background in his work toward restorative justice, diminishing gun violence and police reform.

The majority of Mayers’ work is focused on finding ways to bridge the gap through restorative and productive means. This includes having law enforcement work with a community organization that consists of a board of trained volunteers and providing youth the opportunity to learn the impact of what they’ve done through a diversion program — avoiding incarceration. This can also include community members making guidelines of what they want to see from law enforcement. Mayers advocates thinking outside the box, beyond incarceration, to teach young people accountability and provide structure. He admits that this method might not always work for everyone. The young person could make the same mistake again or another mistake, but trying is what matters.

In partnership with the MCYJ, Mayers is helping to achieve the goals of a 2021-2022 project to create an anti-racist juvenile justice system in Kalamazoo. In collaboration with the Campaign for Criminal Justice Transparency, he is working to implement the recommendations of the MCYJ report “Closing the Gate: Creating an Anti-Racist Juvenile Justice System in Kalamazoo.” The mission of this report is to reduce the number of Black and brown youth who enter Kalamazoo’s juvenile justice system by implementing an anti-racist youth justice model that prioritizes prevention and diversion. The report lays out strategies for a long-term commitment to anti-racism led by community members in Kalamazoo, with recommendations toward accountability, transparency, data-driven planning, diversion, and youth voice. MCYJ looks forward to continued work with Mayers in the areas of restorative justice and creating an anti-racist juvenile justice system.



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## Staff Transitions at MCYJ

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Staff members Sarah Taylor, Project Coordinator, and Husain Haidri, Outreach and Engagement Manager, have recently transitioned out of their full-time roles and into part-time contractual positions. While we're sad to see less of these team members, we're extremely grateful to have them stay on in some capacity to continue their work. We're also proud and excited to announce that they're each moving on to pursue graduate degrees — Sarah at the University of Michigan's Master's in Public Policy program and Husain at Michigan State University's College of Law.

As we adjust to a reduced team size, we look forward to welcoming new team members, including a new Director of Policy who will be starting with us in September.

MCYJ is also excited to be hiring for two novel part-time contractual positions, both of which we hope will ultimately turn into full-time employment. As part of our capacity-building efforts, supported largely by the previously announced *True Reformer* grant from the Public Welfare Foundation, these two positions will support our community engagement and fundraising efforts, respectively. **Click on these links to read more about the [Youth & Family Organizer](#) and [Development Manager](#) positions currently available with MCYJ.**



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## MCYJ Reaches New Supporters with Farmers Market Project

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During the month of July, Husain Haidri, our Outreach and Engagement Manager, created and executed a new farmers market initiative. The purpose of the *Farmers Market Project* was to engage new supporters of MCYJ across the state in their first advocacy action while building MCYJ's contact list and changing the narrative about youth justice. The efforts took place over five Saturdays, July 2nd through July 30th, 2022.

The project's primary goal was to engage new supporter contacts, with the hope that each would fill out a postcard to be mailed to their legislators in support of our [Debt-Free Justice campaign](#). Through the course of the project, we were able to collect a total of 55 signed postcards (five over our goal!) which represents 55 new supporters of MCYJ working toward a fair and effective justice system for Michigan's young people.

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## Youth Justice in the News

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- [Priorities That Keep Kids' Best Interests at the Heart of What We Do](#)
- [Infographic from the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Infographic on Community-Based Alternatives to Youth Confinement](#)

- [MDHHS issues RFP for planning and implementing evidence-based services and research-supported services for juvenile justice-involved youth](#)
- [Michigan Supreme Court Restricts "Cruel" Treatment of Youth in Run of Major Decisions](#)

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## Upcoming Events

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Michigan Center for Youth Justice

***Motivational Interviewing Virtual Professional Development Training***

September 21st, 9a.m.-noon EST. Learn more [here!](#)

The National Partnership for Juvenile Services

***National Symposium on Juvenile Services***

September 27th-30th, Galt House Hotel, Louisville, KY 40202. Learn more [here!](#)

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

***CJJ 2022 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Conference***

November 1st-2nd. Learn more [here!](#)

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**Our Vision:** a fair and effective justice system for Michigan's children, youth and young adults.

**Our Mission:** we work to advance equitable youth justice policies and practices that protect young people and help them achieve their full potential.

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Please consider supporting our work by donating today.

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