



ANNUAL REPORT

2024



GET TO KNOW US



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.



MIYOUTHJUSTICE.ORG |



@MI.YOUTHJUSTICE

A Message of Hope from our Executive Director

Dear Friends and Supporters,

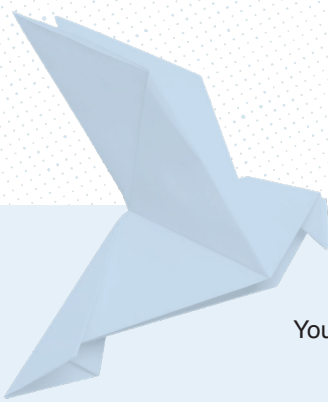
As we reflect on 2024, I am proud to share how the Michigan Center for Youth Justice (MCYJ) helped prepare our state and supported the laying of a strong foundation for some of the most significant youth justice reforms in a generation. Building on the momentum of the Justice for Kids and Communities legislative package, we focused on ensuring that stakeholders across Michigan were informed, equipped, and ready to implement these transformative changes. MCYJ remains steadfast in our mission, and when opportunities arise to advance policies that improve the lives of young people, we will be ready to inform, lead, and advocate.

Thank you for standing with us, for believing in Michigan's young people, and for continuing to invest in a justice system rooted in accountability, healing, and restoration.

Jason Smith

Executive Director





AT MICHIGAN CENTER FOR YOUTH JUSTICE WE BELIEVE IN:

COMMUNITY & CONNECTION

Youth deserve to remain connected to their families and communities, even if they become involved in the justice system. They should be recognized for their strengths and values, not just for their mistakes.

EFFECTIVENESS

We are results-driven and work with integrity. We can be counted on to deliver fair, equitable justice reform for Michigan's children, youth, and young adults.

EQUITY

All youth should be treated in a fair and just manner by the youth justice system, regardless of who they are or where they come from.

INCLUSION

People impacted by a problem should be at the center of our advocacy. We believe in creating a big tent. Nonpartisanship and divergent perspectives generate better solutions.

POSSIBILITY

Every problem has a solution if we work together, think outside the box, and are willing to try new things.

RESTORATION

The youth justice system should be restorative and rehabilitative. Kids who get in trouble are still kids.



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT



Justice for Kids and Communities

This year, we prioritized support for counties implementing the Justice for Kids and Communities legislative package. These reforms, which went into effect on October 1, 2024, focused on improving youth outcomes, expanding local continuums of care, and promoting evidence-based practices. We were thrilled to partner with local communities to explore how to effectively expand access to diversion and upstream services through the Child Care Fund (CCF). Ensuring these reforms reach their full potential will be a lasting, iterative process, and we look forward to continuing these collaborations.



The Child Care Fund Unit provides financial reimbursement to counties and tribes for community-based programming for child welfare and juvenile justice youth, and placement costs for youth involved in juvenile justice cases. The annual budget of approximately \$360 million is shared between the State, 83 counties and participating Native American Indian Tribes.

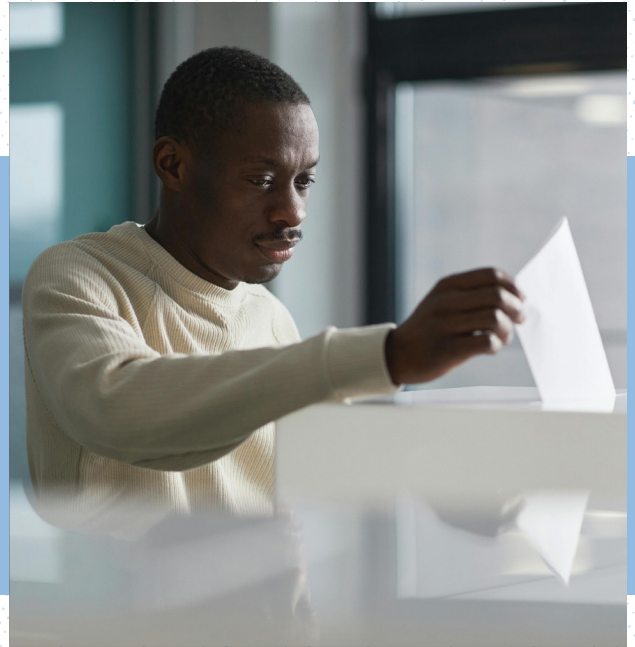
Source: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/doing-business/child-care-fund>



Statewide Juvenile Justice Poll

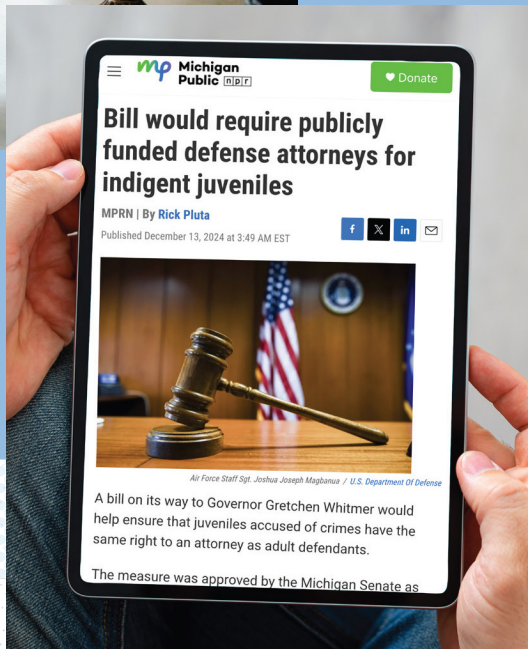
Following the exciting passage of the Justice for Kids and Communities legislative package, we partnered with Marketing Resource Group (MRG) to launch a statewide survey focused on Michigan's juvenile justice system. This registered voter poll provided foundational insights on community based care, juvenile defense, and data transparency. The findings supported several legislative priorities and identified key knowledge gaps across the state, directly informing our advocacy.

mrq



Indigent Juvenile Defense Standards

One of our top legislative priorities was the passage of juvenile defense reform—a cornerstone of the Justice for Kids and Communities legislative package. This legislation ensures that Michigan's youth have consistent access to quality indigent defense services. We are grateful for the leadership of many partners, including the State Bar of Michigan and the ACLU of Michigan. Thanks to our supporters, we sent 3,264 letters directly to state legislators. While the bill had bipartisan support, it did not pass during the lame-duck session. Advancing this reform will remain a top priority.



EVENTS & EDUCATION



Advocacy in Action Gala

May 17, 2024 | Venue 4M, Ann Arbor, MI

MCYJ hosted its bi-annual fundraising gala, Advocacy in Action. The event was a huge success, raising over \$20,000 to support MCYJ's work for an equitable justice system for Michigan young people and their families. The event featured a strolling dinner, music performed by Ypsilanti Youth Orchestra Jazz Ensemble, live and silent auctions, and youth justice award presentations. Candice Jones of the Public Welfare Foundation gave the keynote speech. Awardees included State Senator Sylvia Santana (Youth Justice Reformer Award), Terri Gilbert (Lifetime Achievement Award), and Cayden Brown (Youth Justice Advocate Award). MCYJ would like to thank the sponsors, supporters, and attendees who made the event such a success.

Youth Justice
Reform Award

Sylvia Santana
STATE SENATOR



Lifetime
Achievement
Award

Terri Gilbert



Youth Justice
Advocate
Award

Cayden Brown



\$20,000
in donations
raised





Cards & Community

December, 2024

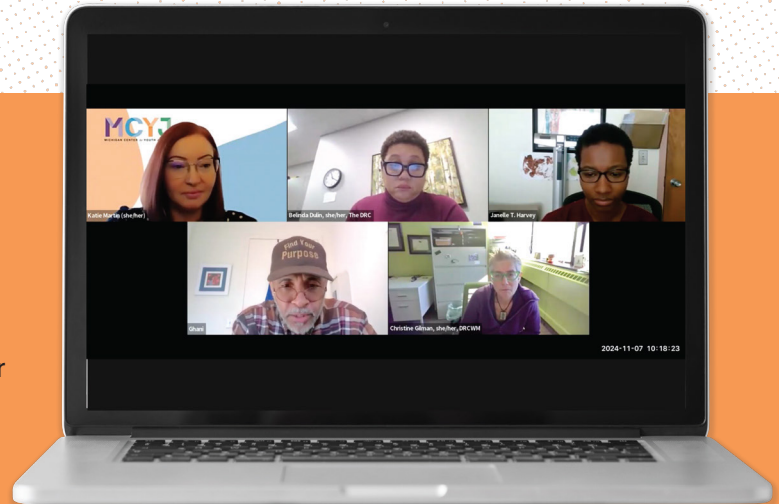
MCYJ hosted its annual Cards and Community event, where staff and community members came together to write positive and uplifting holiday cards to youth in residential facilities during the holiday season. Staff and volunteers were able to write nearly 500 holiday cards for young people in facilities throughout the state of Michigan. Thank you to everyone who helped us bring holiday cheer to kids. It truly means so much to young people.

Restorative Justice Month

Virtual Panel Discussion: *Redefining Accountability* | November, 2024

For Restorative Justice Month, MCYJ hosted a virtual panel discussion titled *Redefining Accountability*. The panel discussion included two expert practitioners from West and Southeast Michigan Dispute Resolution Centers, the Transformative Healing & Restorative Justice Manager for the Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth, and a young mother who participated in a restorative justice process in Philadelphia to repair harm.

The panel discussed alternative ways to define accountability for youth, how the RJ practice can be effective, and what community members can do to support restorative justice in their area. A recording of the panel can be found [here](#).



Belinda Dulin
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION
CENTER (DRC)



Janelle T. Harvey
PARTICIPANT,
HEALING FUTURES PHILADELPHIA

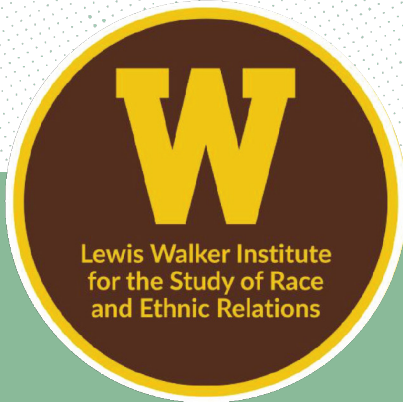


Kempis "Ghani" Songster
CO-FOUNDER,
THE REDEMPTION PROJECT



Christine Gilman
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
THE DISPUTE RESOLUTION CENTER OF
WEST MICHIGAN (DRCWM)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Capitol Day with Western Michigan Youth Fellows

We were happy to support a cohort of young leaders participating in the Western Michigan Lewis Walker Institute Youth Juvenile Justice Fellowship Program and meeting with their state legislators. The cohort came together to identify their priorities, which included safe storage laws, re-entry services for youth, and workforce development programs.



Voices of Justice Youth Fellowship

The Voices of Justice Youth Fellowship is a powerful way we center youth voices in our work. Launched in 2024, the nine-month program supports justice-involved young people ages 16 to 22 as they grow their leadership skills and turn their experiences into advocacy. Fellows meet monthly to learn about community organizing, storytelling, and policy change, while building connections with mentors and each other. All of their hard work culminated in presenting community advocacy projects to Michigan State legislators during Capitol Day. These young leaders are helping shape a more just future for Michigan, and we're honored to support their journey.





'The Table' Podcast

MCYJ's podcast, The Table: Conversations on Youth Justice, returned for a third season in 2024. Featuring new hosts, Macayla Jones and Katie Martin, the podcast explored topics ranging from the power of restorative and school justice to breaking down recently passed juvenile justice legislation. Additionally, Macayla and Katie were excited to welcome a variety of special guests episode to episode, including the perspective of justice-impacted young people. You can listen to Season 3 wherever you listen to podcasts or on our website.

Hosts



Macayla Jones COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR, MICHIGAN CENTER FOR YOUTH JUSTICE

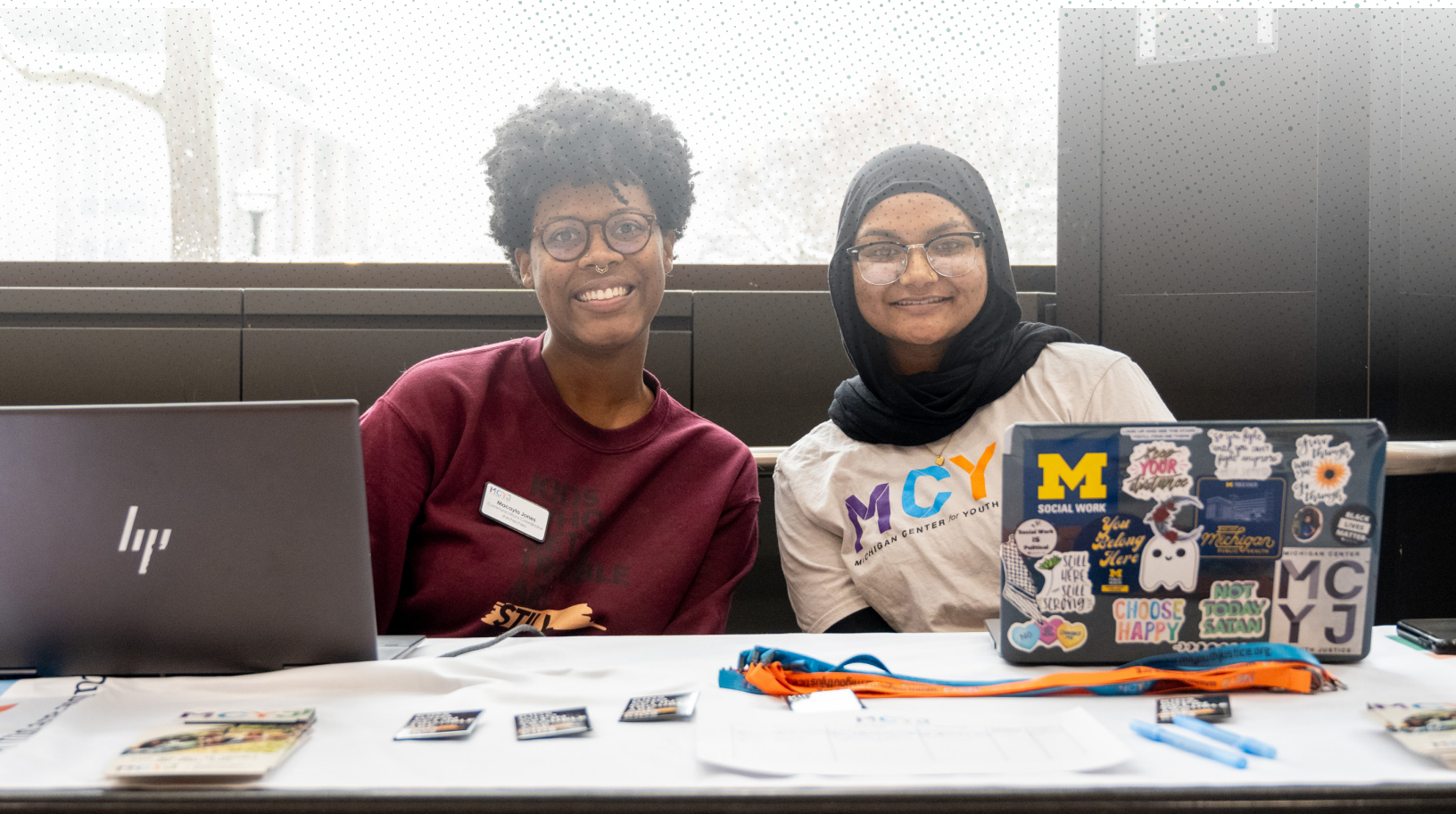


Katie Martin PROJECT & EVENTS COORDINATOR, MICHIGAN CENTER FOR YOUTH JUSTICE



MCYJ in the Community

MCYJ was proud to partner with justice-focused organizations to share our initiatives and advocacy efforts with a wide range of communities across Michigan. One highlight was tabling at the Prison Creative Arts Project's (PCAP) annual juvenile justice event, which brought together stakeholders, advocates, students, and policymakers to discuss meaningful reforms in the juvenile justice system. We also participated in the Race and Power Conference hosted by MOSES, where we had the opportunity to engage with social justice advocates from Michigan and other states, exchanging ideas and building new connections. We look forward to continuing our work in creating connections across the state with fellow advocates, stakeholders, and supporters of juvenile justice reform.



PROJECT COORDINATION & FACILITATION

Fineless Features Survey

On October 1, 2024, Michigan stopped assessing and collecting most juvenile court fines and fees. In response, we launched the Fineless Futures Survey to deepen our understanding of juvenile court debt, dispel misconceptions about the impact of these costs, amplify the voices of those directly affected, and support policy advocates working to reduce the harms associated with justice-involvement costs. We look forward to releasing the report in 2025 and sharing it with colleagues across the country working to eliminate juvenile court fines and fees.

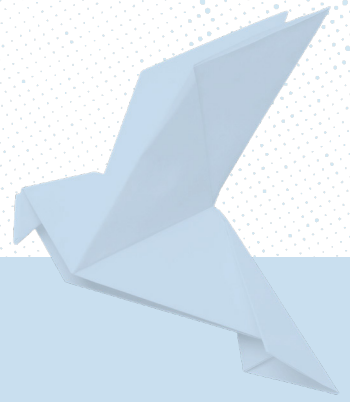
Kalamazoo Project Wrap-Up

In 2024, MCYJ concluded a multi-year initiative in Kalamazoo to advance an anti-racist model for youth justice. In partnership with the Kalamazoo Community Foundation and local stakeholders, MCYJ facilitated listening sessions while supporting the expansion of diversion pathways that prioritize prevention. Our work focused on centering justice-impacted youth and families in decision-making, strengthening early intervention efforts, and aligning local practices with statewide legislative reforms.

As part of our engagement strategy, MCYJ co-hosted a Youth Justice Summit in Kalamazoo, bringing together over 60 cross-system partners to highlight progress, elevate youth voices, and chart the next steps in local reform. The foundation has been laid for a more equitable, restorative, and community-responsive youth justice system—one that can guide future efforts both locally and across the state.



Staff Updates



Heidi's Road to Recovery

During Thanksgiving weekend, MCYJ's Deputy Director, Heidi Franzenhauser, was involved in a serious car accident in Grand Rapids. Since then, Heidi has spent time recovering from her injuries through physical therapy. She returned home to Ypsilanti as an outpatient in the Spring of 2025 and has made remarkable progress.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the exceptional hospital and rehabilitation staff who have provided outstanding care to Heidi during her recovery. We are also deeply thankful for her loving network of friends and family, who have been by her side every step of the way.

As a team, we are incredibly grateful and inspired by Heidi's resilience and progress, and we eagerly look forward to seeing her as she transitions back to work in the Summer of 2025.



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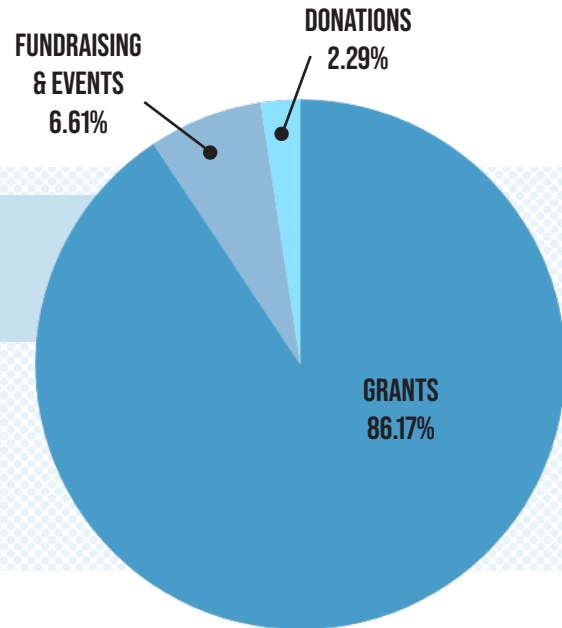
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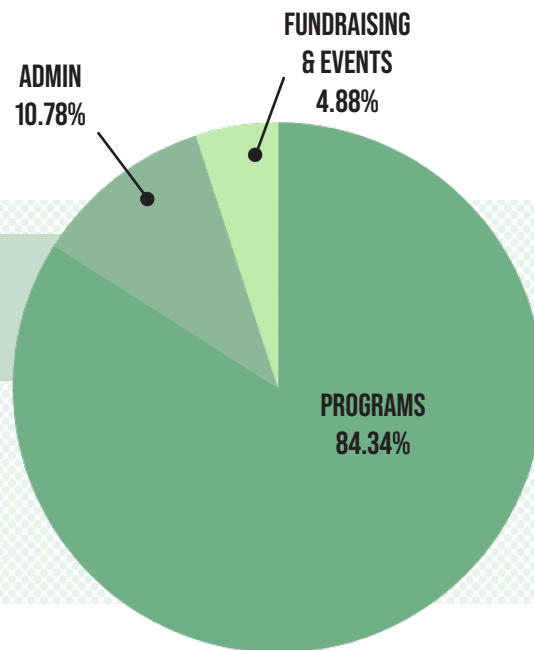


Financials

Revenue: \$981,357



Expenses: \$835,844



Thank You to our Donors

\$1001 - \$5000

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