



Closing the Gate

Creating an Anti-Racist Juvenile Justice System in Kalamazoo

MICHIGAN CENTER



for YOUTH JUSTICE

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The Kalamazoo Community Foundation for the generous support that made this project possible. KZCF was established in 1925 and continues to provide essential funding to programs that ensure all of our children have an equitable chance for success in school, that nurture and prepare all of our young people for life beyond school, that support individuals and families from all walks of life, that enhance community prosperity in every corner of Kalamazoo County, and make life better for all. They use anti-racism and equity analyses to advance practices that interrupt racism and identify root causes that drive disparities in our community. They seek and use proactive strategies to dismantle White supremacy and systemic racism within philanthropy, public policy, and our community.

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Methodology

The goal of this project was to learn how youth of color are impacted by the juvenile justice system in Kalamazoo and collaborate with local stakeholders to develop an anti-racist framework that could be applied to reverse racial disparities. Quantitative data was accessed from the Kalamazoo County Circuit Court - Family Division annual reports (2019-2020), the Court's annual DMC (Disproportionate Minority Contact) Data Worksheet (2018-2020), the Kalamazoo County Prosecutor's Office annual reports (2014-2020), the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety annual report (2019), KDPS-prepared arrest reports (October 28, 2021), the Michigan State Police arrest data (2019), and the U.S. Census Bureau. Qualitative data was collected from government officials, service providers, community members, and over 100 youth, ages 10-17 years old, in Kalamazoo via interviews, listening sessions, and surveys. The resultant findings presented here inform an anti-racism framework and recommendations for community leaders and policy makers, and is intended to be used to inform local and state-level juvenile justice policies.

Executive Summary

While the rate of juvenile crime in Kalamazoo County has steadily declined over the past ten years, Black youth are still arrested and prosecuted at substantially higher rates compared to White youth. According to the Michigan State Police, Black youth accounted for 64% of youth arrests in Kalamazoo County in 2019, despite comprising only 14% of the population.

Our mission 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.

Unfortunately, in Kalamazoo, as in so many other jurisdictions, systemic safeguards have not been put in place to stop youth of color from entering and sinking deeper into the system at disproportionate rates.

Inconsistent and unreliable data, locally and statewide, makes it nearly impossible to definitively track how many youth of color are in the juvenile justice system, the offenses with which they are charged or diverted, or their age, race, and gender.

As in other jurisdictions, there is no specific entity responsible for monitoring or providing oversight across the multiple agencies and systems that make up the youth justice continuum. Without strong systems of accountability, though, policies and procedures may unintentionally be biased, leading to inequitable outcomes for youth of color.

Over the course of a year, a diverse group of stakeholders shared their experiences and insights to better understand the context for racial disparities in Kalamazoo's youth justice system and, more importantly, what can be done to eliminate them. In particular, the community emphasized the need for prevention and diversion to reduce arrests among youth of color while keeping communities safe. Increasing diversion would help ensure that the police can target their resources toward the most serious offenses.

The following framework provides a detailed anti-racist action agenda for Kalamazoo, and other interested communities, to use as an implementation guide for reform.

Data Snapshot

Kalamazoo is a mid-size county situated in southwest Michigan and is home to roughly 265,000 people, including 56,890 youths under age 18. The county seat is the city of Kalamazoo, a vibrant and diverse place, home to 76,000 people. Kalamazoo is a place that is rich with culture, the arts, festivals, two universities, two hospital systems, and the Kalamazoo Promise, which offers up to 100% college tuition coverage. It also battles generational poverty, racial tensions, and gun violence, particularly in the Northside and Edison neighborhoods.

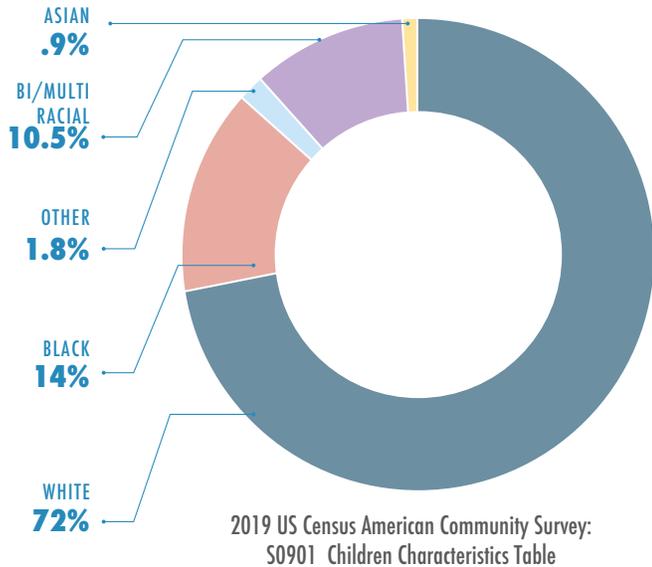
Approximately **13.6% of children (ages 0-17)** across the county **live in poverty**, along with **35.9% of young adults (ages 18-24)**.¹ These numbers **substantially increase** when examining the city of Kalamazoo, in which **one out of every three** residents **lives in poverty**.



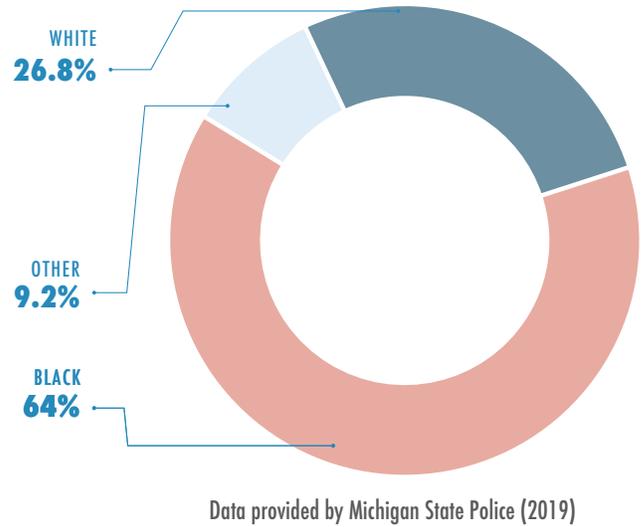
The following visualizations explore the relationships between demographics and rate of arrest for young people in Kalamazoo City and County.

Kalamazoo County Youth Arrest Data²

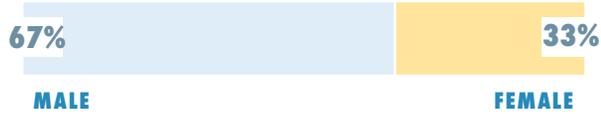
Youth (Under 18) Demographics



Youth (Under 17) Arrests by Race



Youth Arrests by Gender

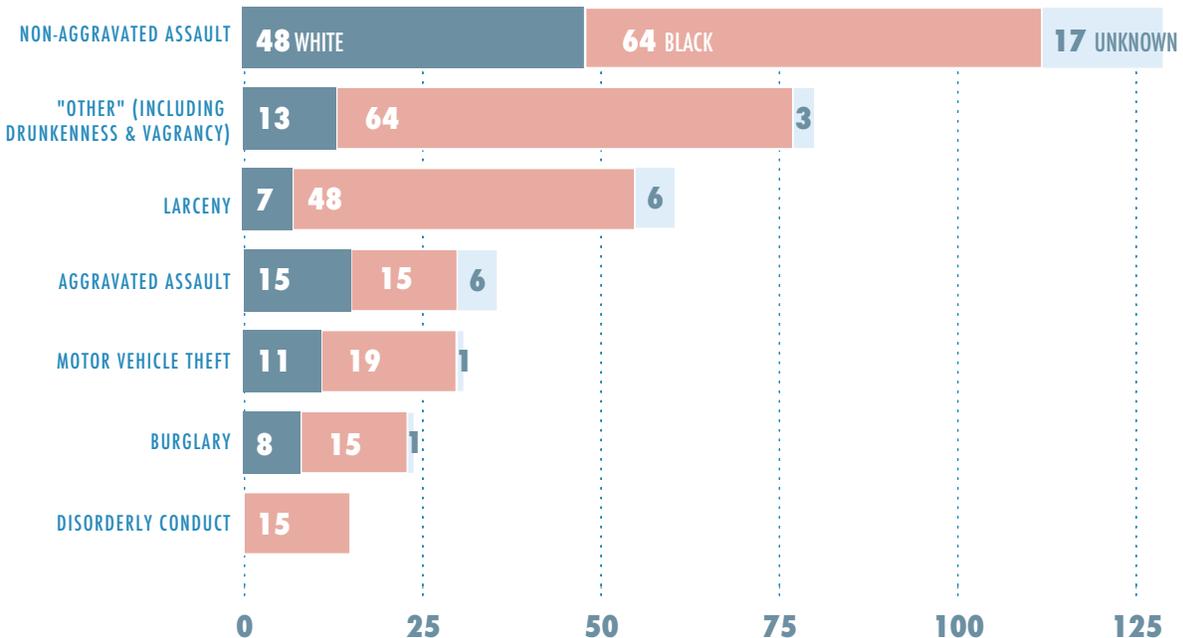


Youth Arrests by Age



Arrest Types by Racial Demographics

Seven most frequent offenses account for 88% of the 428 youth arrests throughout the county



Formal Petitions

630 PETITIONS AUTHORIZED IN 2020 **DOWN 50%** SINCE 2017

Similar to national trends, Kalamazoo has seen a decrease in formal petitions in juvenile court; however, petitions have not necessarily declined at the same rate when accounting for race.

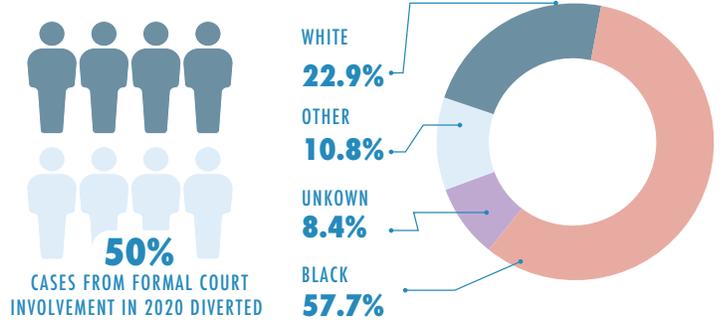


There remains a significant racial disparity in the number of youth who are formally processed in court.

BLACK YOUTH IN KALAMAZOO COUNTY



Case Diversions

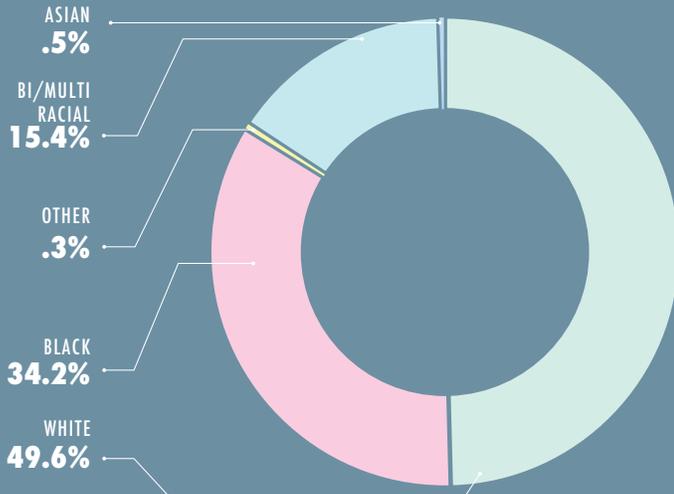


FORMAL PETITIONS OF BLACK YOUTH IN KALAMAZOO COUNTY



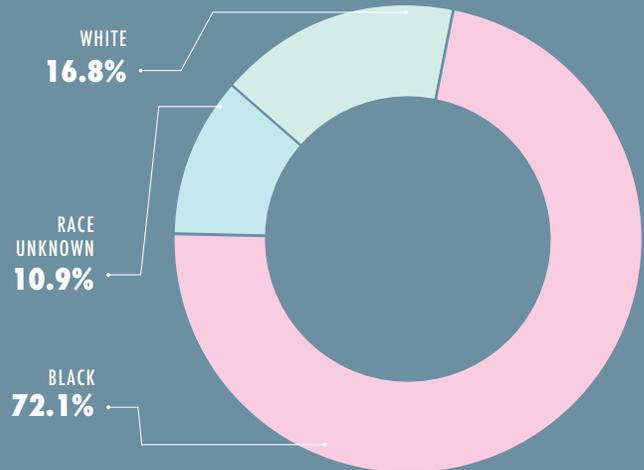
City of Kalamazoo Youth Arrest Data

Youth Demographics



2019 US Census American Community Survey: S0901 Children Characteristics Table

Youth Arrests



Data provided by the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety (2019)

Kalamazoo zip codes with highest rates of Youth Arrests

49001 EDISON

49007 NORTHSIDE

150 SERVICE CALLS RESULTING IN **50** POLICE REPORTS
— AT KALAMAZOO CENTRAL HIGH

149 SERVICE CALLS RESULTING IN **69** POLICE REPORTS
— AT LOY NORRIS HIGH

5 TOTAL ARRESTS AT BOTH HIGH SCHOOLS COMBINED

Data provided by Kalamazoo Public Schools, 2018-2019 School Year.

Rooted in Racism

“As we begin our journey toward becoming an anti-racist organization, we must first acknowledge the role the City of Kalamazoo has played in systemic racism.” - Jim Ritsema, Kalamazoo City Manager ³

There is no question that racism has been embedded throughout Kalamazoo’s history. Centuries of racially-targeted economic disadvantage, housing, and employment discrimination, disparate educational outcomes, and intergenerational justice involvement have resulted in significant community trauma and violence, and are significant risk factors for justice involvement among youth. Engaging



in anti-racism work, therefore, requires an acknowledgment of the trauma caused by racism, and a commitment to undoing oppressive structures that continue to uphold and perpetuate it.

Kalamazoo was selected for this project because of its willingness to acknowledge historical and systemic racism, and its demonstrated commitment to undertake the work needed to undo it. From the Kalamazoo County government declaring racism a public health crisis to the City of Kalamazoo and Kalamazoo Public Schools committing to becoming “anti-racist organizations,” there is momentum and energy around this work.

What is Anti-Racism?

Anti-racism is the practice of opposing racism, in all its forms, which includes proactively examining and changing policies, practices, attitudes, and behaviors that are influenced by racism. A big focus of this work will be examining institutional and structural racism:

- **Institutional racism** occurs within institutions and systems of power. This refers to the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for White people.
- **Structural racism** is a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity.⁴

Community members were asked, **What does anti-racism mean to you?**

“Being intentional about identifying, describing and dismantling racism - within ourselves, others, and systems.”

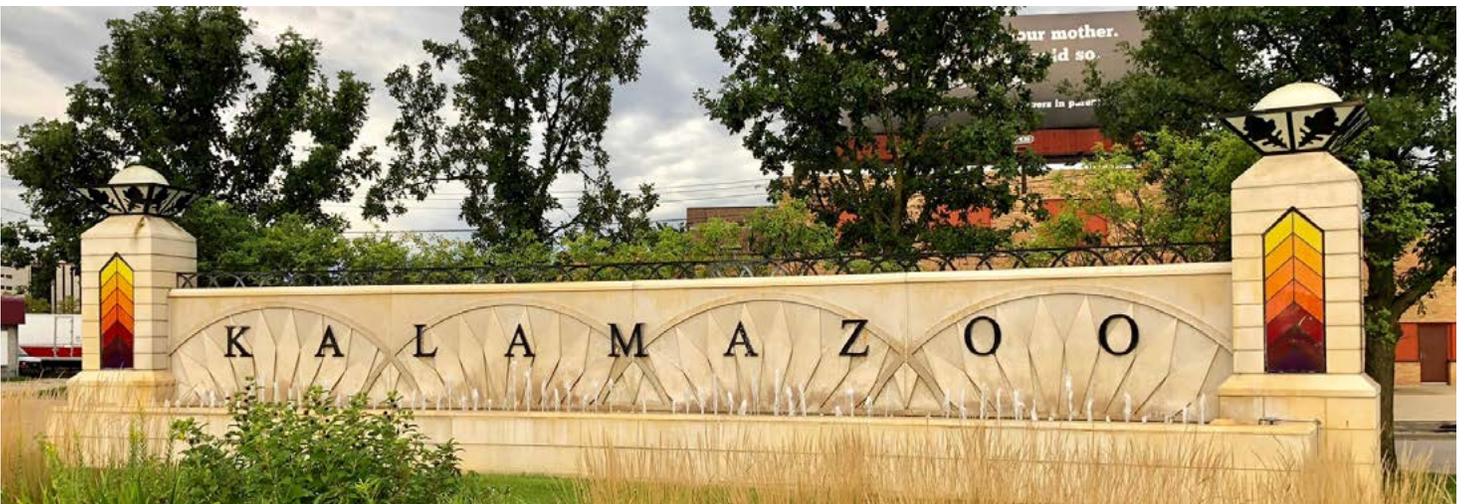
“Identifying systemic oppression of people of color and uprooting it so it no longer destroys us.”

“Supporting the development of policies through action or through expressing ideas that try to normalize racial equity and dismantle racist policies and belief systems.”

“Systems change work that is transformative in a way that creates equitable opportunities for Black, Indigenous, People of color (BIPOC) communities.”

Undoing Racism

Anti-racism work is not about pointing fingers or placing blame. We are approaching this project with the belief that all stakeholders involved genuinely want safe communities and positive outcomes for youth of color. As such, we encourage individuals to be open to examining their own internal biases as part of the iterative process of undoing racism. Our willingness to engage in self-reflection and personal accountability establishes a foundation from which we can collectively move toward greater equity and inclusion within our policies and systems.



Kalamazoo Commits to Anti-Racism

In 2019, the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution declaring racism a public health issue.⁵ It stated that “there is clear data to illustrate that racism negatively impacts the lives of Black people in Kalamazoo County,” specifically citing that “Black residents in Kalamazoo County predominantly live in neighborhoods with restricted access to healthy food choices and essential resources, excessive high priced gas stations and liquor stores, and older housing stock leading to a variety of other health issues, including reduced life expectancy, higher rates of infant and maternal mortality, high rates of asthma, higher rates of lead poisoning, and higher vulnerabilities to public health pandemics, including Covid-19.” In it, the Board recommitted its **“full attention to improving the quality of life and health of Black Kalamazoo residents through policy advocacy and the assessment of current and proposed laws and practices.”**

Kalamazoo County hired a consultant to develop recommendations for improving diversity, equity, and inclusion, outlined in the 2019 Kalamazoo County Government Strategic Plan. The Board established an Executive Inclusion Council (EIC), comprising County Board and Administration/Executive leadership, and is in the process of hiring a DEI coordinator.

Likewise, in 2021, the Kalamazoo City Commission held a special session in which they identified priorities around diversity, equity, and inclusion as well as public safety. Their goal was to incorporate an anti-racism lens into “every aspect of what the city is doing.” They published an organizational DEI assessment, outlining a plan to strengthen DEI leadership, strategy, and accountability, develop a comprehensive DEI data collection and quality improvement process, implement an anti-oppression hiring/training curriculum, and ensure an ongoing Equity in All Policies internal review process.⁶

The City also prioritized public safety goals related to continuing use of community policing, gun violence intervention and trauma treatment, and strengthening relations with people of color. Over the past year, the city of Kalamazoo has seen an alarming increase in gun violence. Assaults with firearms have increased 10% compared to the same time last year, and shootings have increased 402% over the past 10 years.⁷ In 2021, the county of Kalamazoo passed a resolution declaring gun violence as a public health issue, stating that “the issue of gun violence in Kalamazoo County is rooted in racial and health inequities and injustices experienced for generations by people of color.”⁸ Both the county and the city have committed \$1 million for community violence intervention from the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds.⁹

Kalamazoo Public Schools (KPS) have also made efforts to address racial equity and increase the use of restorative practices after a 2013 report to the Michigan Department of Education uncovered disparate suspension and expulsion rates among Black students with disabilities.¹⁰ More recently, in 2020, local advocates sought to end the use of School Resource Officers (SROs) in KPS, arguing that their presence led to disproportionate discipline against students of color.¹¹ The KPS School Board ultimately voted to keep SROs in the schools, as well as establish the KPS Equity Taskforce, whose goal is to “eliminate and dismantle racism and other forms of intolerance and discrimination within the district’s practices, policies, goals, curriculum, and culture.”¹²

The Youth Justice System

Pathways and Exit Ramps

The community identified numerous factors that lead young people to become involved with the justice system, including, but not limited to:

Poverty/lack of access to opportunities

Exposure to trauma and adverse childhood experiences

Parents/caregivers need more support; lack of supervision

Lack of access to health/mental healthcare

Lack of cultural competence in schools and social services

Inadequate prevention and diversion services

Bias and disparate contact with law enforcement

When a youth is arrested, they enter the “juvenile justice system,” which is actually a continuum made up of various departments within county and city government. Kalamazoo County oversees the Sheriff’s Office, Prosecutor’s Office, and the Courts, while cities and townships oversee their own police departments. For this report, we have focused on the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety because they respond to the neighborhoods with the highest rates of arrest in the county.

The youth justice continuum can best be envisioned as a pathway that has multiple stops along the way, from interaction with the police all the way to potential placement in a secure facility. This pathway includes a number of decision-points in



which diversion - or “exit ramps” - could steer a youth away from justice involvement and toward community-based resources, like schools, family supports, community services, mental health, and substance abuse treatment, and much more.

The goal of an anti-racist model is to maximize the use of these “exit ramps” by removing as many barriers as possible for youth of color to take advantage of these resources. The Police, Prosecutor’s Office, and the Courts have already established some of these exit ramps; however, based on feedback from the community, even more are needed.

Police - Justice involvement typically starts with an interaction with the police. If the police determine that the situation warrants further attention, they will press charges and the case will go to the Prosecutor’s Office.

KDPS has implemented a number of programs designed to interrupt youth crime, including the Bridging Opportunities Initiative, Group Violence Intervention, and the Police Athletic League. In 2022, KDPS, in partnership with Integrated Services of Kalamazoo, was awarded a grant to address racial and ethnic disparities at the point of arrest from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Prosecutor’s Office - The Prosecutor’s Office will determine if sufficient evidence exists to prosecute the case. If so, a petition will be filed with the Family Division of the Kalamazoo Circuit Court.

The Prosecutor’s Office is currently exploring partnerships to establish restorative justice practices prior to a petition being filed with the court.

Defender’s Office - Youth may be appointed an attorney if they cannot afford one. The newly created Kalamazoo Defender Office does not currently represent youth so the Court contracts with private attorneys for juvenile representation.

The Kalamazoo Defender Office uses a holistic approach to legal defense, addressing the broader needs of adult clients with support from client navigators and partnerships with community services.

Court/Probation - Approximately half of cases referred to the Court are handled informally through diversion. The remaining cases proceed to a hearing, referred to as “going formal.” This may result in the youth being found responsible (“adjudicated”) for the offense and may result in a youth being placed on probation or other consequence (“disposition.”)

Kalamazoo Court offers unique treatment courts, including Juvenile Drug Treatment Court and Juvenile Mental Health Treatment and Recovery Court Program.

Truancy cases are always diverted from formal court processing.

Values

The following core values emerged from community conversations as critical to developing an anti-racist framework.

- **Commitment to Equity and Anti-Racism** - Leadership and organizational culture must support anti-racism efforts in order to be successful.
- **Youth & Family Voice** - The voices of those directly impacted must guide the policy discussions.
- **Transparency & Accountability** - Transparency and accountability are fundamental to an equitable, anti-racist justice system.
- **Data-informed Decision-Making** - Data is essential to understanding the prevalence and impact of racial disparity.
- **Prevention & Diversion** - Prevention, diversion, and early intervention are key to driving down racial disparities.



Goals

The following goals were informed by community input to guide concrete actions.

- **Foster a Culture of Anti-Racism** - Anti-racist principles will be integrated into the values, expectations and practices throughout Kalamazoo's youth justice continuum.
- **Planning, Oversight & Accountability** - Governmental systems will be accountable to the community, and non-governmental entities will have access to evaluate activity related to race equity.
- **Data Transparency & Coordination** - Systems that serve justice-involved youth will be transparent with their data and effectively communicate and coordinate with one another in order to reduce racial and ethnic disparities.
- **Culturally Competent, Community-based & Trauma-informed Programs & Services** - Services to meet youths' needs are holistic, trauma-informed, and community-based. This includes implementing strategies and programs designed to reduce racial disparities, build trust with communities of color, and improve community safety.
- **Improved Perceptions & Experiences** - We will see a measurable improvement in the perceptions and experiences among youth of color involved in the community and the justice system.

When asked "How will you know that an anti-racist juvenile justice system exists in Kalamazoo?" the community responded:

"Policies and practices will reflect a clear and ongoing commitment to anti-racism."

"Services will be holistic and trauma-informed, addressing the root causes of racism."

"We will have systems in place to allow non-governmental units to study government activity related to race equity."

"Black and Brown youth will not be disproportionately impacted, and do not feel targeted, by the system."

Foster a Culture of Anti-Racism

In order to permanently reduce racial disparities and drive down arrests among youth of color, anti-racism must become part of the organizational culture. This means that the shared beliefs and values established by leadership should convey a commitment to anti-racism, which is consistently communicated to staff via policies, procedures, and expectations. In short, anti-racism should become the way they do business.

Efforts to do just that have been underway in Kalamazoo for quite some time. In September 2013, the Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety (KDPS) commissioned a study that revealed racial profiling among police officers during traffic stops. They found that Black drivers were more than twice as likely to be stopped as White drivers, as well as more frequently searched, handcuffed and arrested.¹³

KDPS responded to these startling findings by making racial bias training mandatory for officers. Kalamazoo Valley Community College's Police Academy dedicates 50 hours of training (beyond the state's required 25 hours) around implicit bias, de-escalation techniques, cultural diversity, and the history of the relationship between police, Black people, and other communities of color.¹⁴

They also established quotas for public interactions in order to strengthen relationships in the community. In 2019, KDPS established the Office of Community Affairs, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, with a focus on "enhancing community relations in conjunction with the 21st century policing pillars and enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion practices within the department."¹⁵

Despite these proactive steps, the current sentiment from young people still reflects a feeling of fear and distrust in a system that is supposed to keep them safe. Kalamazoo youth who were interviewed by MCYJ expressed feeling targeted and disrespected by the police, rather than protected. Black youth felt stereotyped as "criminal" and "bad." Several youth commented that officers "come off disrespectful," "aggressive," and are "not patient enough to try to get to the root of the problem," often leading to confrontation and, ultimately, arrest. The youth shared a desire to be able to rely on the police to keep them safe, indicating that they felt safer with officers of color who "act like you're a regular person," "humanize you more," and are less likely to "try to hurt you."

Kalamazoo teens specifically stated that there “needs to be a culture change.” They envision a system in which police “engage more in a positive way, show love, greet [them] kindly, play basketball, [and] build trust.” They want to be treated fairly, given the benefit of the doubt, and have interactions based on respectful communication. Essentially, they want to be treated like community members, not suspects.

Goal 1: Anti-racist values will be integrated into the expectations and practices throughout Kalamazoo’s youth justice continuum.

Objective 1: Appoint a coordinator or leadership team dedicated to integrating diversity, equity and inclusion within and across the youth justice continuum.

Objective 2: Adopt and implement anti-racist position statements that clearly articulate a commitment to upholding the values of diversity, equity and inclusion. (See page 27 for sample statement.)

Objective 3: Provide and evaluate trainings and other professional development opportunities for police, prosecutors, and court staff focused on de-escalation, cultural competence, adolescent development, non-violent communication, and trauma treatment.



Planning, Oversight & Accountability

There currently is no single entity responsible for monitoring or oversight of Kalamazoo's juvenile justice system. While the Kalamazoo County Commission is responsible for approving the court's budget, their role is not to provide oversight of the Prosecutor's Office, Juvenile Court, or Juvenile Home. The Court and Prosecutor's Office provide public annual reports, but the information included is at their discretion and it is not systematically reviewed by any specific oversight entity.

At the Police level, there exists the Citizens Public Safety Review and Appeal Board (CPSRAB), which hears community complaints that are appealed after they have been investigated by KDPS's internal Office of Professional Standards. This group also serves in an advisory role to improve public safety services and policies, and build community trust. This entity is not specific to juvenile justice.

Community members felt that a lack of oversight and monitoring is a barrier to holding the system accountable. It was the sentiment that publicly elected officials and public services, in general, should be accountable to the community. Structures should be established or strengthened that allow for community members, particularly youth and families directly impacted by the juvenile justice system, to become more involved in a process for monitoring outcomes and ensuring accountability.

Goal 2: Governmental systems will be accountable to the community, and non-governmental entities will have access to evaluate activity related to race equity.

Objective 1: Develop an independent community accountability board, that is staffed, to develop and systematically work through this action plan focused on race equity in juvenile justice. This group could be a subcommittee of an existing community group.

Objective 2: Develop benchmarks and timelines to review the interactions of youth at each "touchpoint" and evaluate for trends related to racial disparity.

Data Transparency & Coordination

One of the greatest barriers acknowledged by systems stakeholders is the lack of consistent, reliable data to help track services within and across systems. In order to improve services, it is imperative that agencies along the youth justice continuum effectively and consistently collect, monitor, and publicly report data related to the youth served, and that the community has reasonable access to this information for monitoring and reform purposes.

In 2019, local officials reconvened the Kalamazoo Criminal Justice Council (KCJC), a county initiative to improve intergovernmental cooperation. The KCJC - which had previously been defunded in 2006 - specifically sought to reduce the number of young adults in county jail. Members included representatives from the city of Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo County District Court and Circuit Court, Michigan Works!, Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, the Sheriff's Office, Kalamazoo Department of Public Safety, and community members. The county created a memorandum of understanding with the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research to evaluate court trends but it is unclear if this project was completed. While the intention of collaboration exists among stakeholders, meetings were put on hold, and the KCJC reportedly disbanded, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Even if this group reconvenes, it is not entirely focused on the youth justice system.

In 2021, a coalition of local advocates established the Campaign for Criminal Justice Transparency, pushing for a countywide, publicly accessible database to show the race and neighborhoods of those arrested, as well as making the current Citizens Public Safety Review and Appeals Board an independent entity. As a result, the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution requiring a transparent and accessible database related to criminal justice information. It is not specified whether juvenile justice data will be included as part of this database.

Goal 3: Systems that serve justice-involved youth will be transparent with their data and effectively communicate and coordinate with one another.

Objective 1: Require youth justice agencies (police, prosecutor's office, court, juvenile home) to align definitions and report on the same data indicators. These data indicators should be selected with input from community members.

Objective 2: Implement policies and legislation that strengthens data collection, locally and statewide, in order to improve data-driven decision-making.

Objective 3: Develop data dashboards with real-time information from all youth justice agencies, including an annual in-person presentation before the community board.

Objective 4: Evaluate specific and measurable indicators for a reduction in justice involvement among youth of color.

GOAL 4

Anti-Racist Diversion Policies

One of the most impactful ways to tackle institutional racism is to systematically evaluate which policies and procedures have a disproportionate impact on youth of color. When examining diversion policies specifically, jurisdictions can create more equitable pathways that steer youth away from formal court involvement, ideally occurring as early as possible.

Kalamazoo Court has demonstrated a strong commitment to diversion, handling 50% of cases informally. Contrary to public perception, Kalamazoo diverts a greater percentage of youth of color than White youth. However, data was not provided on the types of offenses that are diverted, nor the completion rate.

The terms of a diversion agreement are established by the local court, in accordance with the Michigan Juvenile Diversion Act, and typically require admission of responsibility for the charges, participation from the parent/guardian, payment of restitution, and completion of community service. These requirements may pose a hardship for families whose parents cannot attend meetings or who have a limited income to pay restitution. In Kalamazoo, this disproportionately impacts families of color. According to the law, if the diversion agreement is revoked, a petition may be authorized with the court and the case proceeds to a formal adjudicative hearing.

Given that so many youth are diverted, it raises the question as to whether some of the cases ought to be elevated to the level of court intervention at all. Currently, few options exist for diversion at the police and prosecutorial levels. This is likely due to funding availability. Typically, diversion services are billable to the Child Care Fund, a 50% cost-share partnership between the county and the state that is only accessible to the court (not the Prosecutor's Office nor the police). If Kalamazoo stakeholders wanted to develop pre-petition diversion services, they could not likely be funded by the Child Care Fund. A pre-petition diversion model would certainly make an impact in driving down racial disparities, but it would need to rely heavily on community partnerships and be creative in the way it funds services.

Goal 4: Diversion policies and practices will reflect a clear and on-going commitment to anti-racism.

Objective 1: Fully fund a continuum of diversion services, including the development of pre-petition diversion options that can be accessed by community workers, schools, police, and prosecutors that do not require court involvement.

Objective 2: Maximize the use of diversion by implementing alternatives to financial restitution, such as community services in lieu of payment.

Objective 3: Conduct Race Equity Impact Analyses on new policies to determine if policies have an inequitable impact on youth of color.

GOAL 5

Culturally Competent, Community-Based & Trauma-Informed Services

Recognizing that racism, poverty, and violence are traumatic and ongoing public health crises, stakeholders urged the expansion of anti-racist, trauma-informed services to address the mental and emotional health needs of youth and interrupt pathways in the justice system.

Several of the youth and community members recognized that behaviors that lead to the police being called often stem from something deeper. The youth want to see more involvement with their families and the adults want to see the roots of the trauma addressed, not just the behaviors. Some of the youth suggested that we “put more money into social services” and “have social workers go on calls with them [the police].” The recognition that trauma can manifest as problematic, or even illegal, behaviors is an important step toward developing interventions that focus on collaboration and healing as a means to public safety.

Collaboration is central to Kalamazoo’s juvenile justice system. The police, Prosecutor’s Office, and the juvenile court have numerous community partnerships that enhance their services and create a safety net for families.

KDPS's Bridging Opportunities program serves 25 youth annually by offering summer employment, educational support, mentorship, and community activities. They also offer the Police Athletic League to build relationships and provide mentorship to youth. KDPS is also exploring a new partnership with Integrated Services of Kalamazoo to strengthen access to mental health services. Likewise, the Prosecutor's Office is exploring a new partnership focused on restorative justice.

The Court has already established formal partnerships with Integrated Services of Kalamazoo, ISAAC, Northside Ministerial Alliance, Urban Alliance, Michigan Works!, YWCA, KYDNet, Boys and Girls Club of Kalamazoo, Recovery Institute of Southwest Michigan, Pretty Lake Camp, Habitat for Humanity, Speak It Forward, KRESA, and more. There are also many organizations and informal networks that support families that are not formally contracted with the juvenile justice system. All of these organizations do incredible work to weave a social safety net for families. A more coordinated approach to diversion would allow these agencies to maximize their services for families who are often disconnected.

Goal 5: Implement strategies and programs designed to reduce racial disparities, build trust with communities of color, and improve community safety. Services to meet youths' needs should be holistic, trauma-informed, and community-based.

Objective 1: Expand the use of diversion, restorative justice, youth assistance, and wrap-around models, especially at the police and prosecutorial levels.

Objective 2: Expand the use of trauma-informed services, including trauma screening for justice-involved youth, trauma training for youth service providers, and culturally relevant trauma-informed programs throughout the community.

Improved Perceptions & Experiences

The true test of an anti-racist system is whether the community perceives it to be anti-racist. Position statements, policy changes, and trainings are important in terms of establishing expectations for anti-racist practice, but they are not entirely sufficient if the community does not see or benefit from those changes. Systemic changes must be evaluated to ensure effectiveness, and part of that evaluation must include ongoing feedback from youth, their families, and the community at large.

As with any change initiative, those most directly impacted by the problem must also be involved in guiding the solution. Youth, in particular, are eager to join this effort and suggested that youth leadership opportunities be created to facilitate their participation. Their unique perspectives and lived experiences can bring new ideas and greater understanding to the decision-making table and demonstrate that a truly anti-racist system is one that is community-led.

Goal 6: Achieve measurable improvements in the perceptions and experiences among youth of color in the community and within the justice system.

Objective 1: Develop feedback processes to regularly hear from justice-involved youth and their families about their experiences.

Objective 2: Develop a process to incorporate youth feedback to inform training, procedures, and policy decisions.

Objective 3: Promote leadership opportunities for justice-involved youth, including multiple seats on the community accountability board for directly-impacted youth and families.

Recommendations

The year-long planning process that informed this report is intended to jumpstart a long-term plan committed to anti-racism led by community members in Kalamazoo. The goals and strategies outlined in this document serve as a roadmap for the coalition to follow, with particular attention to:

- **Accountability** - Establish a permanent independent community accountability board to advocate for youth justice improvements. This board, or subcommittee of an existing board, should have the authority and responsibility to investigate and evaluate the system.
- **Transparency** - Require public reporting on youth justice statistics across agencies. Information should be consistently defined across systems and accessible to the community.
- **Data-Driven Planning** - Develop measurable indicators for a reduction in justice involvement among youth of color. Data should be used to inform a plan that identifies ways to effectively reduce arrest, prosecution, and adjudication.
- **Diversion** - Expand and evaluate the use of community-based diversion. This includes establishing police- and prosecutorial-level diversion programs as well as community restorative boards to repair community harm.
- **Youth Voice** - Regularly seek feedback and leadership from justice-impacted youth. The lived experiences of youth and their families should guide training, procedures, and policy decisions.

The ongoing work of creating an anti-racist youth justice system requires the continued commitment and intentional action of local stakeholders, elected officials, and community members - especially youth! - to insist on transparency, accountability, and community-led reform.

Anti-Racist Position Statement - Template

Anti-racism is the practice of opposing racism, in all its forms, which includes proactively examining and changing policies, practices, attitudes, and behaviors that are influenced by institutional and structural racism. As organizations and institutions dedicated to the safety and welfare of Kalamazoo residents, we commit to embedding anti-racist policies and practices in the following ways:¹⁶

- Acknowledge and speak out against all forms of racism, discrimination, and bias in our environments, institutions, communities, and society;
- Educate ourselves and our employees about the history of racism in our community and in our profession, and barriers faced by people of color;
- Provide anti-racist and unconscious bias training and engage in interracial dialogues that will dispel the misrepresentations that dehumanize our Black community members and other marginalized groups;
- Recruit, support, and retain employees with diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, especially those that reflect the community;
- Examine our policies and procedures to identify inequitable impact on populations of color, and make changes as needed;
- Establish metrics, benchmarks, and indicators to track and reduce racial disparities at various decision points in the justice system;
- Advocate for evidenced-based interventions that are culturally relevant and appropriate;
- Partner with local communities, public health agencies, and municipal governments to dismantle structural racism;
- Facilitate opportunities for those directly impacted by the justice system to regularly provide feedback and inform decision-making related to justice policies and procedures; and
- Hold ourselves publicly accountable for taking specific and measurable actions to eliminate the inequities in our community.

Endnotes

1. Michigan League for Public Policy (2019). KidsCount: Kalamazoo County Profile: 2019 Trends in Child Well-Being: <https://mlpp.org/kcdbprofiles2019/Kalamazoo.pdf>
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4. Racial Equity Tools, cf. Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. <https://www.racialequitytools.org/resources/fundamentals/core-concepts/structural-racism>
5. Kalamazoo County declares racism a public health crisis (June 17, 2020). MLive: <https://wwmt.com/news/local/kalamazoo-county-declares-racism-a-public-health-crisis>
6. The City of Kalamazoo Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Organizational Assessment (October 2021). Accessed: <https://www.kalamazoocity.org/docman/equity/7925-the-city-of-kalamazoo-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-assessment/file>
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8. Ibid.
9. Kalamazoo spends \$1M to fight gun violence, declared a public health crisis by city official (September 21, 2020), MLive: <https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2021/09/kalamazoo-spends-1-m-to-fight-gun-violence-declared-a-public-health-crisis-by-city-officials.html>

10. Letter to Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice from Michigan Department of Education informing the district of being selected for a focused monitoring desk audit related to State Performance Plan Indicator 4B (Suspension/Expulsion by Race/Ethnicity) in the 2012-2013 school year.
11. Removing police officers from Kalamazoo schools brought up to board (June 19, 2020). WKZO: <https://wkzo.com/2020/06/19/removing-police-officers-from-kalamazoo-schools-brought-up-to-board/>
12. Kalamazoo Public Schools announces new 16-member equity task force (April 23, 2021). MLive: <https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2021/04/kalamazoo-public-schools-announces-new-16-member-equity-task-force.html>
13. Kalamazoo Public Safety officers target black drivers in traffic stops, racial profiling study concludes (January 20, 2019), MLive: https://www.mlive.com/news/kalamazoo/2013/09/kalamazoo_public_safety_office_19.html; A police force confronts its racial bias (February 23, 2015). Al Jazeera America: <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/articles/2015/2/23/kalamazoo-police.html>
14. TRHT Kalamazoo pushes to expand anti-racism training in Michigan police academies (n.d.), Kalamazoo Community Foundation: <https://www.kalfound.org/About/WhatsNew/ViewArticle/tabid/190/ArticleId/347/TRHT-Kalamazoo-pushes-to-expand-anti-racism-training-in-Michigan-police-academies.aspx>
15. Kalamazoo Public Safety Annual Report 2020.
16. Informed and adapted from Western States Organizational Assessment Rubric, the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, and the Anti-Racist Position Statement of the Association of American Medical Colleges.

Additional Anti-Racism Resources

National Juvenile Justice Network: Resources for Anti-Racist Organizations

Western States Organizational Assessment Rubric

Western States Racial Justice Assessment Tool

Western States: Dismantling Racism

Racial Equity Tools - Organizational Assessment Tools and Resources

Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change. 2004. "Structural Racism and Community Building." Keith Lawrence, Stacey Sutton, Anne Kubisch, Gretchen Susi and Karen Fulbright-Anderson, authors. Washington, D.C.: The Aspen Institute.

Opportunity Agenda: Ten Lessons for Talking about Race, Racism and Racial Justice

Government Alliance on Race and Equity. Curren R., Nelson, J., Marsh, D.S., Noor, S., Liu, N. "Racial Equity Action Plans, A How-to Manual.": Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley, 2016

Concentric Circles: Unpacking Privilege and Power. Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates

Transforming Organizational Culture Assessment Tool (TOCA).

Maggie Potapchuk, MP Associates



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