

Office of Youth and Family Engagement

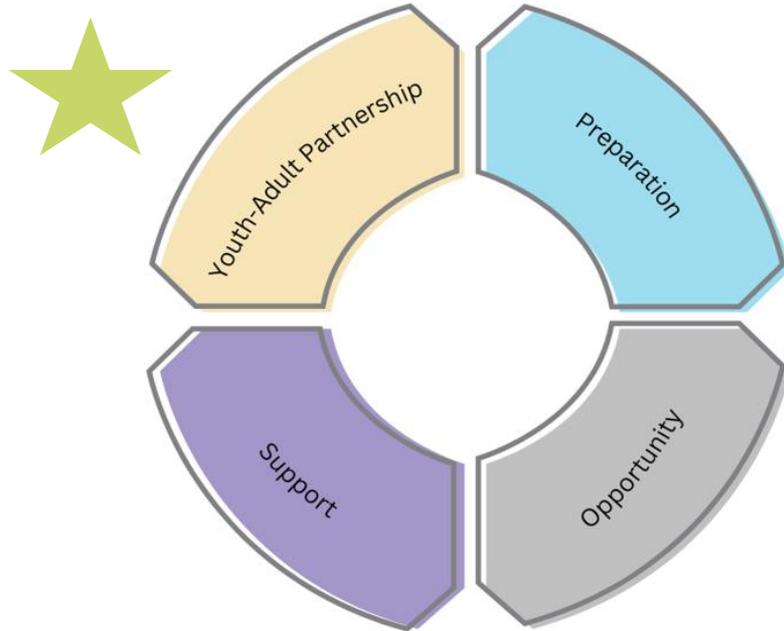
*Embedding Lived Experience
Across Iowa HHS*

March 2026



Who We Are





Adapted from Annie E. Casey Foundation

Lowest ← Engagement Level → Highest

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Broadcast Information outreach newsletter fact sheet annual report	Seek Input or Feedback survey public meeting invite questions focus group	Invite Two-Way Communication workshop volunteer role data collection program design input	Partner Meaningfully planning team co-hosted event advisory council staff + board reflect community	Share Leadership participatory evaluation delegated decision community-based governance

Adapted from the International Association for Public Participation's [Spectrum of Participation](#)

What We Do

Agency
Integration

Youth-Led
Initiatives

Juvenile Court
Services
Partnership
(MOU)

Jim Casey
Initiative

Juvenile
Justice System
Work

Spotlight: SIYAC



State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council Annual Report
January 2026



IOWA State of Iowa Health and Human Services Youth Advisory Council

2026 Legislative Priorities

Mental Health Resource Accessibility

Ensure every school provides clear, easy to find mental health resources on their websites so students can quickly access support when they need it the most.



Student Representation on School Boards

Support Senate File 86 to allow school boards to bring on student representatives. This helps ensure students have a real voice in the decisions that affect them.

Permitted Civic Engagement Absence

Create a policy that gives high school students an excused absence to take part in civic activities. This helps students get real experience with civic involvement.



About the State of Iowa Youth Advisory Council (SIYAC): SIYAC connects Iowa youth ages 14-20 with state leaders to advise and advocate on policies affecting young people and families. Established in 2001, SIYAC was codified in Iowa Code §216A.140(1) in 2020.



hhs.iowa.gov/SIYAC
OR scan the QR Code

Senate File 2319 - Introduced

SENATE FILE 2319
BY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

(SUCCESSOR TO SF 2084)

A BILL FOR

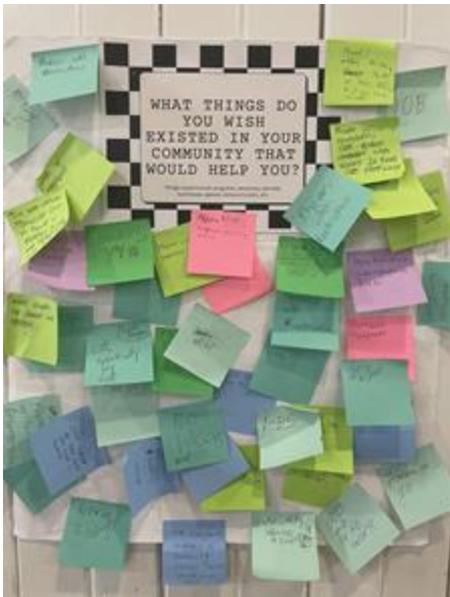
- 1 An Act relating to the inclusion of the your life Iowa program
- 2 on public school internet sites.
- 3 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

BECOME A PART OF SIYAC!

Accepting applications now until May 31, 2026

Fill out a SIYAC application form here! [📄](#)

Spotlight: Talking Wall



41

Locations

618

Youth

4,055

Post-It Notes

What do young people in your community need more of to feel safe and supported?

"Having a good support system you can trust"

"Open access to transportation and better/more transportation"

"Nicer police (understanding of the situation) who have control of emotions"

"Support from police more often"

"Providing money, free food, and rides or have mentors and security cameras and have police not jump straight to violence"

"More people focusing on the good rather than focusing on the bad"

"Counselors/therapists so youth don't feel so helpless and lost."

"Scary to go to JCOs with these emotions how am I supposed to tell you how I'm feeling if you can use it against me?"

"Credible Messenger Programs"

"More people to talk to that were in the same situations or similar"

"More lights in dark areas and fix broken street lights"

"More help with education. No one enforces you to go to school. Understand there are different types of learning"

"Money"

"Good paying jobs"

"Help better the quality of houses"

"Healthcare vending machine + Plan B, Narcan, etc. and instructions on how to use stuff safe."

"More Narcan and how to use it"

"More skate parks and more parks around the state of Iowa and more bikes for kids"

What have you been needing and quietly hoping someone would notice?

"Love"

"A hug"

"Respect and love"

"Seeing my family"

"Being able to meet my bio-family"

"I want my Mom's rights back so she can see me and my sister"

"My changes"

"To ask me how I really feel in private"

"That I'm hurting, the scars I have and that I don't feel safe"

"Sleep"

"Notebooks"

"I need people to see the deeper side to the story"

"Help...I have troubles reading and spelling"

"Help with expressing my emotions correctly"

"For there to be easier or better ways to visit my Mom and more time with her."

"Birthday parties/dresses. My birthday is in 2 days"

"That I need love and someone that can care for me. Someone that can be there and hear me out and listen. Someone that can love me for me."

"I need to talk to my friends and to my girlfriend about my mental health"

"Us kids have bad depression. We need to be noticed because teens are losing their life."

"That I just want to be a part of something"

"I'm not mentally ok"

"That I need a lot more attention than I get"

"I've been needing the judge to realize I am trying to get better for myself"

"That we can all change with the right support"

Talking Wall Impact

- ▶ Hygiene products
- ▶ Youth Report to the Court
- ▶ Credible Messengers pilot
- ▶ Remote Hearings
- ▶ Shackling in the courtroom
- ▶ Increased clothing allowance
- ▶ Juvenile Detention Rules rewrite
- ▶ State Training School: visits, phones, grievances, body scanner
- ▶ Local changes: art therapy, hair care

Spotlight: Youth Justice Council



Each year, the Youth Justice Council creates their Action Plan by reviewing thousands of sticky notes collected directly from youth currently in foster care and the juvenile justice system. These notes reflect honest experiences and real ideas shared through interactive listening sessions across the state. As council members, we sort through these sticky notes, identify themes, and combine what we learn with our own lived expertise to decide what priorities to focus on for the year. This process ensures that our Action Plan is grounded in the voices of youth most impacted by the system and driven by youth leaders committed to making change. These are our 2025 Priorities:

- 1. REAL SUPPORT FOR YOUTH**
Support should be something youth can feel, not just something people talk about. Youth need real connection, people who listen, and help that matches what we actually need.
- 2. CARE THAT CARES**
Mental health shouldn't be one-size-fits-all. Youth want options, consistency, and to have a say in who helps us and how.
- 3. KEEP US OUT OF THE SYSTEM**
Don't wait until youth are deep in the system to care. Support youth early with mentors, job opportunities and programs in our communities that actually show up for us.
- 4. DIGNITY IN THE DETAILS**
Youth in the system deserve their own underwear, nutritious food, and a place to sleep that is safe and comfortable. Taking care of our basic needs shows that we matter.
- 5. YOUTH POWER IN LAW AND POLICY**
Youth and young adults with lived juvenile justice experience, including the Youth Justice Council, should be at the table when decisions are made about the juvenile justice system. Real change means listening and acting on feedback from youth who have lived it.

This content represents the opinions of youth in the State of Iowa Youth Justice Council and does not represent the opinions of the State of Iowa Department of Health and Human Services.



Accepting Submissions

Submit by April 2, 2026



Call for Workshops

6th Annual Family and Youth Engagement Summit
September 1, 2026 | FFA Enrichment Center | Ankeny, IA



bit.ly/2026SummitWorkshops



IOWA
Health and
Human Services

Accepting Submissions

Submit by April 2, 2026



Call for Exhibitors

6th Annual Family and Youth Engagement Summit
September 1, 2026 | FFA Enrichment Center | Ankeny, IA



IOWA
Health and
Human Services

bit.ly/2026SummitExhibitors

Spotlight: Credible Messengers



Spotlight: Youth Shadow Week



2026 Youth Shadow Week

Youth Shadow Week pairs HIS youth council members with state government professionals for a day of job shadowing- deepening youth understanding of decision-making, building social capital, strengthening engagement in public service and providing professionals with fresh perspectives.

Total youth participants	19
Total system leaders	20
Number of agencies represented	10



Youth Impact Highlights¹

★★★★★ 4.77 Average Rating



100%

Better understand how system-level decisions are made



85%

Can now see themselves working in state government



100%

Built connections they plan to use in the future



92%

More likely to engage with state leaders



Logistics

- 100% felt prepared
- 100% felt comfortable asking questions
- 85% felt supported during Youth Shadow Week
- 85% felt their state leader was prepared

"It was really cool to see people who essentially have my dream job and know that my dream job is actually accessible with my limitations because of my autism."

"There are so many ways you can work within government. You don't have to be a legislator to make changes!"

"I have a way better understanding of public health as a career and how many different sectors are apart of it. I now am planning on adding a public health major."

State Government Professional Impact Highlights²

★★★★★ 4.90 Average Rating



90%

Better understand youth impact on government decisions



80%

More likely to engage youth in their work



Logistics

- 100% said youth demonstrated respect
- 100% said youth were prepared
- 100% are interested in participating again

"I firmly believe that better engagement with youth is an important part of my job. This experience confirmed those beliefs for me."

"There is significant value in our youth's perspective to inform our work. This provides an amazing opportunity to spark interest in our youth to help solution problems."

Ideas for Improvement²

Provide youth with sample questions	Explore having it after funnel week
Schedule a dedicated day for legislative shadows with on-site support	Create a legislative cheat sheet on each committee's purpose and discussion topics
During the prep call, emphasize importance of orientation basics, breaks and not leaving youth unattended	Consider extending it to a full week
Offer youth the option to shadow with a peer for comfort	Make the prep call mandatory

Spotlight: Youth Engagement in Behavioral Health

Youth-Led Suicide Prevention

- ▶ Goal: Develop a youth suicide prevention plan by youth for youth and youth serving organizations
- ▶ Status: Conducting Talking Walls with youth and young adults throughout the state

Children, Youth and Family Learning Collaborative

- ▶ Goal 1: Raise awareness by providing training and education, focusing on special populations
- ▶ Goal 2: Determine better ways to collect feedback from those with lived experience to be able to include in decision-making
- ▶ Goal 3: Develop a plan for youth-based peer support
- ▶ Actions Underway
 - Youth-designed 988 Campaign
 - Incorporating stories in on-demand suicide prevention trainings
 - Ongoing meetings with the CYF team to shape youth peer support development

Questions

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Health and
Human Services