2026 CJJ YOUTH JUSTICE IN CONFERENCE RECAP



PREPARED BY:

Coalition for Juvenile Justice

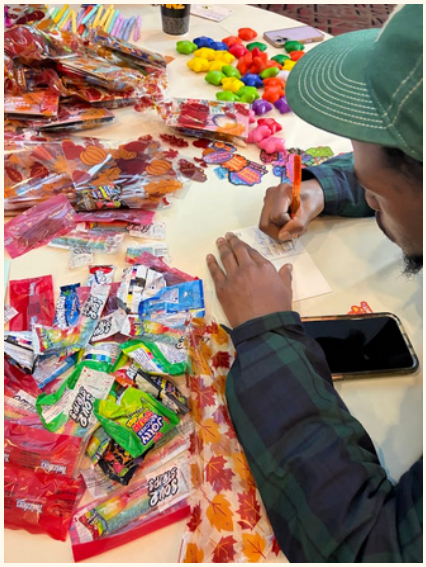
The Coalition for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) brought together youth advocates, practitioners, policymakers, State Advisory Group members, community leaders, and young people from across the country for the 2026 Youth Justice in Action Conference, held October 13–15 at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown.

Hosted during Youth Justice Action Month (YJAM), the conference centered on the theme “Together Toward Opportunity: Youth Centered. Community Driven.” Throughout three days of learning, collaboration, and connection, participants explored innovative approaches to advancing youth justice, reducing racial and ethnic disparities, strengthening community partnerships, and ensuring that young people and families have meaningful opportunities to shape the systems that impact their lives.

DAY 1: BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY







The conference began on Tuesday, October 13, with a **Networking Mixer and Community YJAM Activity** hosted by **Adelphoi**, providing attendees with an opportunity to connect with colleagues, advocates, and partners from across the country. As part of the activity, attendees came together to assemble care packages for young people in facilities, including handwritten notes and words of encouragement to remind them that they are seen, valued, and supported.

This meaningful activity reflected the spirit of **Youth Justice Action Month (YJAM)** and reinforced the importance of compassion, community connection, and collective responsibility in supporting young people impacted by the justice system. The gathering set the tone for a conference grounded in collaboration, shared experiences, and collective action.

NETWORKING RECEPTION

Learning, Leadership, and Connection



















DAY 2: OPENING THE CONVERSATION: LEADERSHIP, REFLECTION, AND SYSTEM CHANGE



KEYNOTE: “BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND”

BRUCE EDWARDS, JUVENILE FAMILY MAGISTRATE FOR THE CIRCUIT COURT FOR PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY

Wednesday's programming began with welcoming remarks from CJJ National Vice Chair **Janelle Ridley**, followed by a land acknowledgment delivered by **Miguel Sague Jr. of the Council of Three Rivers American Indian Center of Pittsburgh**.

Opening keynote speaker **Bruce Edwards**, Juvenile Family Magistrate for the Circuit Court for Prince George's County, presented “Begin with the End in Mind,” establishing a foundation for conversations about intentional leadership, youth-centered decision-making, and the outcomes we seek for young people.

The opening plenary brought together **Pennsylvania State Advisory Group** and system leaders, including **Kim Berkeley Clark**, **Teresa Willcox**, **Robert Tomassini**, **Russell Carlino**, and **Hunter Hurst**. The discussion provided an opportunity to examine youth justice leadership, state-level practices, and the importance of collaboration in advancing meaningful reform.




2026
Youth Justice in Action
Conference
TOGETHER TOWARD
Opportunity
Coalition for Juvenile Justice
October 13 -15, 2026
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania







AWARDS LUNCHEON

Celebrating Leadership and Looking Forward

Ahe CJJ Luncheon and Award Ceremony provided an opportunity to celebrate individuals whose leadership and dedication continue to advance youth justice.

CJJ proudly recognized **Tara Kelly**, Kentucky's R/ED Coordinator, as the recipient of the **2026 Andrew Smith Award**. The award recognized Tara's leadership, commitment, and contributions to advancing racial and ethnic equity and improving outcomes for young people.

The luncheon also featured R/ED Spotlights and Youth Star Performer Spotlights, recognizing the important contributions of individuals working to create positive change. The Youth Star Performer Spotlight were presented by Emerging Leaders Committee members Chanelle Grosbard, Isaiah Polk, and Pray'Eon Jackson.






Shawn Malia Kanaiaupuni
R/ED Coordinator, Hawaii
PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION
Coalition for Juvenile Justice


Jolene Brooks
R/ED Coordinator, Idaho
Marissa Evans
Planning and Compliance Program Manager, Idaho


Emerging Leaders
Scholarship Recipients
CERTIFICATE OF SCHOLARSHIP
Daisy Gunderson
Coalition for Juvenile Just


Youth Star Performers
DC Youth Leaders in Action
California Youth Advisory Board
Coalition for Juvenile Justice


Scholarship Recipients
Daisy Gunderson
Coalition for Juvenile Justice


TOGETHER TOWARD Opportunity
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A SEAT AT OUR TABLE: CENTERING YOUTH VOICE

One of the conference's featured plenaries, “A **Seat at Our Table: Conversation with Café Momentum**,” highlighted the importance of creating supportive environments where young people can build skills, develop confidence, and access meaningful opportunities.

Facilitated by **Café Momentum Pittsburgh** Executive Director **Cheyenne Tyler** and Café Momentum National Program Manager **Amanda Timpson**, the conversation featured youth ambassadors **Terrance Parham**, **Neveah Hollis**, and **Neiko Wilson**.

By centering the voices and experiences of young people, the plenary reflected the conference's larger message: youth should not only be included in conversations about their futures but should be recognized as essential partners in shaping solutions.







DAY 3: CLOSING

Closing with Courage and Commitment

The conference concluded with a closing plenary titled **"If Only You Were Brave,"** presented by Dr. Christian H. Bijoux, Executive Director of the Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health at the Connecticut General Assembly. Emerging Leaders Committee Member, **Pray'Eon Jackson** had a full circle moment in introducing Dr. Bijoux.

The closing program also featured Youth Justice Action Month highlights, connecting the conversations and strategies shared throughout the conference to the broader movement for youth justice.

Closing remarks from Emerging Leaders Committee Chair **Isaiah Polk** and CJJ Executive Director **Melissa Milchman** reinforced the importance of continued engagement, collaboration, and action beyond the conference.

Moving Forward Together

The 2026 Youth Justice in Action Conference underscored the power of bringing together young people, families, practitioners, advocates, and policymakers around a shared vision for change. From youth-led workshops and discussions on racial and ethnic equity to innovative community-based approaches and cross-system partnerships, the conference provided space to exchange ideas, build relationships, and identify opportunities for continued progress.

CJJ extends its appreciation to the presenters, youth leaders, sponsors, exhibitors, planning committee members, partners, and attendees who contributed to the conference.
As Youth Justice Action Month continues, we carry forward the message that guided our time together in Pittsburgh: meaningful change happens when young people are centered, communities are empowered, and partnerships are built around opportunity.
Together, we are building a future where youth thrive.


Closing Plenary
If Only We Were Brave
Dr. Christian H. Bijoux
Executive Director
Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health


Closing Remarks
Isaiah Polk
Chair of the CJJ Emerging Leaders Committee
Melissa Milchman
CJJ Executive Director




Washington, D.C.



THANK YOU TO OUR AMAZING SPONSORS AND EXHIBITORS

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice extends its sincere gratitude to the sponsors and exhibitors who helped make the 2026 Annual Conference a success. Throughout the week, our Exhibitor Hall served as a vibrant gathering space where attendees could connect with organizations, explore innovative resources, and learn about programs and services supporting youth, families, and communities nationwide.

Our sponsors and exhibitors played an important role in enriching the conference experience by sharing expertise, fostering meaningful conversations, and showcasing initiatives that advance youth development, education, advocacy, prevention, and system transformation. Their presence created valuable opportunities for networking, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing among conference participants.

We are especially grateful for the time, energy, and commitment exhibitors dedicated to engaging with attendees throughout the conference. From answering questions and demonstrating resources to building new partnerships and strengthening existing relationships, their contributions helped create an interactive and informative experience for all participants.

The success of the 2026 Annual Conference would not have been possible without the generous support of our sponsors and the active participation of our exhibitors. Thank you for your partnership, dedication, and shared commitment to building brighter futures for youth and families across the nation.

We look forward to continuing this important work together.



A PEAK INSIDE THE EXHIBITOR HALL











PRESENTERS AND ATTENDEES IN ACTION











PRESENTERS AND ATTENDEES IN ACTION











PRESENTERS AND ATTENDEES IN ACTION











Coalition for Juvenile Justice

YOUTH JUSTICE IN ACTION CONFERENCE

FEEDBACK OVERVIEW



REAL PEOPLE. MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS.
LASTING IMPACT.

BY THE NUMBERS

200+
ATTENDEES
from across the country

20+
SPEAKERS
sharing expertise, lived experience, and innovative ideas

COUNTLESS
CONNECTIONS
to strengthen our collective impact

WHAT ATTENDEES ARE SAYING

> Inspiring, informative, and energizing. I left with new ideas, new connections, and a renewed commitment to this work."

> The conference created a space for real conversations and meaningful solutions."

> One of the most valuable and impactful conferences I've attended. The diversity of perspectives made it truly special."

TOP TAKEAWAYS

- INNOVATIVE IDEAS
- STRONGER NETWORKS
- PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS
- RENEWED COMMITMENT

Together, Toward Opportunity

YOUTH CENTERED. COMMUNITY DRIVEN.