

**SUMMARY REPORT OF THE
WATAUGA COUNTY RISK AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE**

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PART I. Risk Assessment Summary

The Risk and Needs Assessment Committee reviewed data from the Juvenile Risk Assessment and the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument administered by Juvenile Court Counselors after juveniles are referred with a complaint alleging that a delinquent act has occurred but prior to adjudication of the juvenile. These assessments are used to predict the likelihood of the juvenile being involved in future delinquent behavior. For some youth, some of the individual item ratings may be heavily dependent upon information reported by the juvenile or the parent(s).

Overall Risk Observations

- Like last year, case numbers were impacted by COVID-19. Referrals to Juvenile Court Counselors were affected beginning in March 2020 and continuing through June 30, 2021, including school referrals/reporting of incidents due to closures and remote learning. The pandemic environment is still ongoing and is an unknown factor as far as impact on data reported, both increases and decreases.
- There were 40 Risk Assessments completed during the 1st 6 months of the fiscal year (July 1 to December 31, 2020) using the NCAR assessment tool, and 37 completed during the 2nd 6 months of the fiscal year (January 1 to June 30, 2021) using the YASI assessment tool. According to the NCAR, 40% of youth assessed were at a Risk Level 4 for recidivating. This is similar to the previous year's 43% and is higher than any other risk level, as well as higher than the State rate of 35%.
- According to the YASI, 57% of Watauga youth fell into the Moderate risk range, which is higher than the State rate of 39% for the State.

Watauga County Risk Factor Observations: FY 2019-2020

- R4 Prior Assaults – 35% of the youth had prior assaults, an increase from the previous year and higher than the state rate of 25%. Assaults with a weapon increased from 6% in the previous year to 10%, although reports from the committee members suggest this was likely the result of one incident with multiple random victims that did not involve a gun.
- R6 Substance Use/Abuse – Substance use and/or abuse has remained above the State average over the last four years with an increasing trend: 35%, 40%, 42%, and 48%. State levels over the same period were between 31%-45%.

- R7 School Behavior Problems – School behavior problems dropped in the moderate to serious category from 81%, 77%, and 64% in the past 3 years down to 45% in the current year. However, there was also a decrease in the state percentage of moderate to serious school behavior problems, from 45% to 40% which could be attributable to remote learning. Due to this, and reports that these numbers are going up now that the schools are back in session, the committee recommends continued attention to this risk factor.
- R8 Relationship with Peers – Youth who lack pro-social peers and sometimes associate with delinquent peers remained high over the four-year period: 65%, 58%, 65%, and 73%, while the State ranged from 39%-42%. Watauga numbers could be higher than other areas due to being a small community and relationships are more likely to be known to court and law enforcement professionals.
- R9 Parental Supervision – Parental supervision indicators showed improvement from the previous year, with 88% “willing and able to supervise”, slightly higher than the state rate of 83%. This improvement could be attributed to schools being closed and more parents being at home.

PART II. Needs Assessment Summary

The Risk and Needs Assessment Committee also reviewed data from the Juvenile Needs Assessment instrument administered by Juvenile Court Counselors prior to disposition in court. The Juvenile Needs Assessment is an instrument used to examine a youth’s needs in the various domains of life: The Individual Domain, The School Domain, The Peer Domain, and the Community Domain. This instrument was designed to detect service intervention needs as an aid in service planning. As with the Juvenile Risk Assessment, some of the individual item ratings may be heavily dependent on information reported by the juvenile or the parent(s).

Overall Needs Observations

- Referrals to Juvenile Court Counselors were greatly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic beginning in March 2020 and continuing through June 30, 2021, including school referrals/reporting of incidents due to closures and remote learning. The pandemic environment is still ongoing and is an unknown factor as far as impact on data reported, both increases and decreases.
- There were 40 Risk Assessments completed during the 1st 6 months of the fiscal year (July 1 to December 31, 2020) using the NCAR assessment tool, and 37 completed during the 2nd 6 months of the fiscal year (January 1 to June 30, 2021) using the YASI assessment tool. According to the NCAR, 40% of youth assessed had Medium Needs. This is similar to the previous year’s 41% and is higher than the State rate at 32%.

Watauga County Elevated Needs Observations: FY 2020-2021

- Y1 Peer Relationships – The percentage of youth reporting Rejection by Positive Peers and Some Association with Delinquent Peers was up from 65% the previous year to 78% in the first 6 months of 2020 and is significantly higher than the State rate of 42%. Youth with positive peer relationships was down from 22% to 13%, which could be attributable to school closures, but still a concern.

- Y2 School Behavior – School behavior problems were down from the previous year with the exception of “Minor School Behavior Problems” which was up from 20% to 28%, and higher than the State rate of 12%.
- Y4 Substance Abuse – Youth with “No Known Substance Abuse” was down from 55% to 48% in 2020. Youth with “Some Abuse Assessment” was up from 18% to 29%, and “Some Abuse Treatment” at 25% is higher than the State’s 16%.
- Y6 Abuse/Neglect History – Abuse victims “With Support” was higher than the State at 23% compared to 19%. Abuse victims “With No Support” was up from 12% the previous year to 18% and was substantially higher than the State at 3%.
- Y8 Mental Health Needs – Youth with “Mental Health Needs Addressed” improved from 41% to 53% and was higher than the State’s 38%. There was also a decrease in “Mental Health Assessment” from 45% to 28%. However, the committee believes there is a present increase in demand and unmet needs may have gone unreported and need to be addressed.
- F1 Conflict in the Home – Domestic Discord at 28% for Watauga is higher than the State at 19%.
- F4 Family Substance Abuse – Family Substance Abuse at 30% is significantly higher than the State percentage of 11%.
- F5 Family Criminality – The percentage of families with a criminal history is 55% compared to the State at 38%.

PART III. YASI Assessment Summary

The Risk and Needs Planning Committee reviewed data from the Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI) for January 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021. The YASI is an innovative juvenile risk assessment tool that measures risk, need, and protective factors in at-risk and juvenile justice-involved youth. It is administered by Juvenile Court Counselors after juveniles are referred with a complaint alleging that a delinquent act has occurred and prior to adjudication. 37 youth were assessed during the 6-month period.

General Observations

- Most Watauga youth, 57%, were assessed at Moderate Risk, which was higher than the State at 39%; 14% were assessed at High Risk, which was lower than the State rate of 17%.
- Family Substance Abuse and Mental Health Problems were higher than the State rate at 31% and 28% respectively.
- Watauga youth were enrolled in school full time at a rate of 97% which was higher than the State rate of 87%; school attendance, grades and positive school behavior were also positive when compared to the State.
- Sexual Aggression was higher than the State at 19% compared to 7%, as were Alcohol/Drug use, 49% compared to 36% for the State, Sexual Abuse, 14% compared to 8% for the State, and Physical Abuse, 24% compared to 9% for the State.
- Youth reporting being a Victim of Bullying was also elevated at 19% as compared to 8% for the State.

PART IV. Resource Assessment Summary

See attached Continuum of Services

PART V. Summary of Gaps and Barriers in the Continuum of Services

School-based therapy (SBT) through FOCUS is available but needs to be expanded.

Community Day Programming: An elementary day treatment program is available. There is a middle school day treatment program located at Cove Creek. No high school day treatment is available.

Transportation in the County is still a need for accessing resources. Many students would like to join pro-social activities but live far out in the county and have no way to access.

Undocumented youth and families lack access to State-funded mental health or substance abuse treatment, and good alternatives are limited.

Language is seen as a barrier to using resources. Additional Hispanic and language resources are needed, including support groups for Hispanic parents and children. There has been improvement in this area, but there is still a gap.

Enhanced mental health services are not available to youth who lack either Medicaid or Health Choice coverage or are undocumented. Adjudicated delinquent youth do have access to Functional Family Therapy (FFT) through AMI Kids.

A resource to help divorced or separated parents with co-parenting is a need. Improved access to in-home services may help. Some options available through the mediation program (MRJC), but there is no funding for family mediation.

Vaping is prevalent at the high school and seen as a problem. No services currently exist to help counter this.

PART VI. Proposed Priority Services for Funding

The Committee compared the services needed to address the elevated Juvenile Risk Factors and Juvenile Needs with the services currently available in the community. Services which are currently available in the community and sufficiently meet the needs of court-involved youth (or those youth at risk for court involvement) are not considered a priority for JCPC funding.

The JCPC proposes that the following services be approved as funding priorities for FY 2022 - 2023:

- Parent Education & Skill Building
- Interpersonal Skill Building and an Interpersonal Skills

- Experiential Skills
- Mediation
- Teen Court/Restorative Justice (Sentencing Circles)
- Community Service/Restitution
- Vocational Skills
- Substance Abuse Treatment
- Temporary Shelter Care
- Tutoring and Academic Enhancement