

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE WATAUGA COUNTY RISK AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- I. **Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) Summary**
- II. **Summary of Community Resources**
- III. **Summary of Gaps and Barriers in the Community Continuum of Services**
- IV. **Proposed Priority Services for Funding**

PART I. Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (Full YASI)

The Risk and Needs Assessment Committee reviewed aggregate data gleaned from the Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument administered by Juvenile Court Counselors in Watauga County during the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The full assessment consists of over 100 separate items useful for both predictive risk and case management. Data reported from this review will consist of county-level risk factors that may be prioritized by the JCPC for RFP development, as well as for highlighting prevalent issues among court-involved juveniles that individual programs and community-based service organizations will want to consider when working with court-involved juveniles in the county.

At intake to Juvenile Justice services, all youth receive the YASI Pre-Screen (33 questions), which is also embedded in each full assessment (100 questions). The YASI questions are framed in either a historic context (Legal History, for example) or, in some cases, “current” or “prior three months” timeframes for other, more dynamic, questions. Some of the individual item ratings are dependent on information reported by the youth and/or their guardian(s). Some questions are subject to additional information by the DJJ Court Counselors conducting the intake.

The aggregate outputs from full YASI assessments are just one of the data sources used by the Committee and are the focus of summaries that follow in this report.

****Note**** Many of the deviations from the state numbers were suggested to be due to the small population and smaller number of juveniles served giving Court Counselors the ability to gain more insight into each juvenile by working closely with collateral contacts rather than relying solely on self-reporting by the juvenile and family.

Overall Observations

- There were 59 Risk Assessments completed during the fiscal year (July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024) using the full YASI assessment tool. Last year there were 70 risk assessments completed for the year. According to the YASI, **46% of Watauga youth fell into the Moderate risk range, which is only slightly higher than the State rate of 41%.**
- The overall level of strengths as measured by the YASI showed that youth and families in Watauga County have fewer strengths than the State average. **(71% of youth served had High moderate, High, or Very High strengths compared to 80% for the State).**

Specific Domain Observations

- In Watauga, only 5% of juveniles assessed had previous weapon offenses, compared to 17% for the State.
- While 20% of juveniles in the state had prior detention admission, the rate for Watauga was only 7%.
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- 26% of Juveniles in Watauga have family members who use alcohol/substances compared to only 13% for the state. Similarly, 31% of juveniles in Watauga have family members who have mental health issues compared to 13% for the state.
- **45% of juveniles in Watauga have family members with prior criminal history compared to only 26% for the state.**
- The data shows that compared to the state Watauga schools are twice as likely to file juvenile reports than the state average (43% to 24%). This is likely due to the fact that Watauga law enforcement agencies are either not regularly coming into contact with juveniles or are not filing reports on juveniles so almost all referrals in Watauga come from schools and SROs.
- A staggering number of juveniles in Watauga report having no interest in school activities (54%) compared to the state average (31%).
- The influence that negative peer associations have on Watauga juveniles is significantly higher than the state. (31% to 16%)
- In Watauga fewer juveniles are reporting use of alcohol/drugs under the age of 12 (7%) compared to the state average of 11%.
- 10% more juveniles report having mental health problems than the state average. (49% to 39%).
- **The number of juveniles with history of sexual or physical abuse is much higher in Watauga than the state. (Physical abuse 17% Watauga, 9% state, Sexual abuse 17% Watauga and 6% state).**
- **Similarly, the Watauga percentage of sexually vulnerable juveniles was higher (22%) than the state (6%)**

PART II. Summary of Community Resources

See attached Continuum of Services

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

School-based therapy (SBT) is now offered by High Country Community Health for elementary, middle, and high school students.

Watauga County Schools has also implemented a mental health services program embedded within the school system in part to replace the Assessment Support Counseling Center.

Community Day Programming: FOCUS closed both the middle school day treatment program and the elementary day treatment program. This remains a need in the community.

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. Further, language is seen as a barrier to using resources to the Hispanic population. Additional Spanish 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. AMI Kids has expanded their Functional Family Therapy to also serve Youth who are on a diversion contract. Previously they only served adjudicated youth.

A resource to help divorced or separated parents with co-parenting is a need. Improved access to in-home services may help. Some options are 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. Watauga County Schools has a prevention counselor to address this need, though this resource could be expanded, as well.

Daymark has a 5-session substance abuse treatment program that Watauga High School uses frequently but there remains an extreme need for a higher level of substance use treatment for juveniles.

PART IV. 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 2025 - 2026:

- Parent/Caregiver Education, Skill Building, and Support
- Interpersonal Skill Building and an Interpersonal Skills
- Experiential Skills
- Mediation
- Teen Court/Restorative Justice (Sentencing Circles)
- Community Service/Restitution
- Vocational Skills
- Substance Use Prevention
- Tutoring and Academic Enhancement
- Mentoring