

SUMMARY REPORT OF THE WATAUGA COUNTY RISK AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE

- I. **Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) Summary**
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- III. **Summary of Gaps and Barriers in the Community Continuum of Services**
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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 2024 - 2025 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 57 Risk Assessments completed during the fiscal year (July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025) using the full YASI assessment tool. Last year there were 59 risk assessments completed for the year. According to the YASI, **42% of Watauga youth fell into the Moderate risk range, which is comparable to the State rate of 41%.**
- The overall level of strengths as measured by the YASI showed that youth and families in Watauga County have a higher lever of strengths in the high moderate to very high range.

This is a significant increase from last year. (**92% of Watauga's assessments fell into the high/moderate or above range compared to 82% for the state.**)

Specific Domain Observations

- **58%** of Watauga juveniles have had previous referrals compared to 46% of the state.
- Watauga has a lower rate than the state average for referrals for felony offenses. 21% compared to 35%.
- In Watauga, 11% of juveniles assessed had previous weapon offenses, compared to 18% for the State. **Watauga has an increase from 5% last year**
- While 20% of juveniles in the state had prior detention admission, the rate for Watauga was only 7%.
- 49% of Watauga's juvenile crimes were crimes against another person which is higher than the states rate of 41%.
- 25% of Juveniles in Watauga have family members who use alcohol/substances compared to only 12% for the state. Similarly, 32% of juveniles in Watauga have family members who have mental health issues compared to 12% for the state.
- 35% of juveniles in Watauga have family members with prior criminal history compared to only 24% for the state.
- 74% of Watauga juveniles had one or more OSS in the past 2 years, which is significantly higher than the states 61%.
- **32%** of Watauga youths assessed were involved in at least one school activity while the state average was only 14%.
- **53%** of juveniles assessed in Watauga either self reported having mental health issues or were diagnosed with mental health disorders compared to only 38% for the state.
- The number of juveniles with history of sexual or physical abuse is much higher in Watauga than the state. (Physical abuse 16% Watauga, 8% state, Sexual abuse 16% Watauga and 6% state).
- **Similarly, the Watauga percentage of sexually vulnerable juveniles was higher (16%) 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 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.

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. The local vape stores have been reported to the appropriate state and federal agencies and a couple of them have received fines for selling to minors but there has been no follow up or enforcement.

Daymark has a 5-step 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 2026-2027:

- 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