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Youth in IDJJ custody earn vocational certifications

From solar installation to culinary arts, youth build skills in high demand careers with the help of community partners

CHICAGO, IL- The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) today announced that youth in custody earned certifications in various career fields, including solar installation, personal training, shipping and receiving, construction, and culinary arts. Classes offered by community partners on topics such as public speaking, podcast production, music production, audio engineering, and constitutional law also contributed to skill building and knowledge for high school graduates working to make the most of their time while incarcerated.

"IDJJ continues to expand opportunities for youth in our custody to attain skills and certifications that create career pathways and increase employability," said IDJJ Acting Director Rob Vickery. "When a young person reenters the community and gains meaningful employment, they are much more likely to be successful long-term."

- **Solar Installation Training Program-** Two young adults at the Illinois Youth Center (IYC) Harrisburg were the first two graduates from a new program developed between IDJJ and [D&D Electric](#). Youth who complete the program will have the opportunity for full-time employment with D&D Electric upon release from secure custody.
- **Personal Training-** Over the past 18 months, 15 youth at IDJJ's [PEACE Center](#) in St. Charles have earned certifications as personal trainers. Staff from **Northern Illinois University's Department of Kinesiology** work with youth through their [Project Flex](#) program and in conjunction with the [International Sports Sciences Association](#) (ISSA). The program also helps youth prepare for interviews and find jobs in the field upon release.
- **Shipping & Receiving-** Nine youth at the Illinois Youth Center (IYC) Chicago have earned certifications through a partnership with [Greater West Town Project](#) over the past 18 months. Participants earn certifications from the National Safety Council's forklift operator training that also include a 10-hour Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA 10) certification.
- **Pre-Apprenticeship Program-** [Quad County Urban League YouthBuild](#) offers certifications in OSHA 10, the National Center for Construction Education & Research (NCCER) Core, and CPR/First Aid to youth at IDJJ's [PEACE Center](#) in St. Charles. At the end of the 10 weeks, graduating trainees are equipped with the certifications necessary to enter a Department of Labor certified apprenticeship in one of the building trades. 12 youth have recently completed

the NCCER portion of the program, and 13 have completed the OSHA 10 and CPR/First Aid certifications.

- **Construction-** Youth at the IDJJ PEACE Center in St. Charles can earn certifications in multiple construction classes. In the past year, 15 youth earned certificates in introduction to construction, seven earned basic carpentry certificates, three youth earned residential wiring certificates, and four youth earned blueprint reading certificates.
- **Culinary Arts-** Youth at IYC Chicago, IYC Warrenville, and PEACE Center in St. Charles are working with [EDDR Corporation](#) to earn food safety certifications. The first two cohorts are expected to complete their programs this month. Additionally, [Curt's Café](#) in Evanston offers hands-on training in both back-of-house and front-of-house operations for interns from IYC Chicago. At IYC Harrisburg, Lake Land Community College offers certificate programs in Culinary Arts.

“At D&D Electric, we are honored to be part of a program that gives young men the opportunity to turn their potential into possibility,” said **Justin Roberts, D&D Electric program manager**. “Through training in solar design, installation, and leadership skills, we’re proud to help them take their first steps toward meaningful careers in the clean energy industry. Their determination and growth inspire us every day, and we are privileged to support them in building brighter futures.”

In addition to vocational programs, partnerships with community organizations are helping youth learn valuable skills to contribute to their future success.

- **Constitutional Law class-** [University of Chicago Law School](#) offers a non-credit Constitutional Law class for youth at IYC Chicago. Professor Emily Buss, with the help of her law students, has offered the course twice over the past two years to a total of approximately 25 youth.
- **Public speaking and podcast production-** Classes are offered at the PEACE Center by [New Life Centers](#).
- **Music production & audio engineering-** [Young Music Giants](#) teaches youth music production, audio engineering, vocal recording, performance, publishing, marketing, content creation, and distribution in the context of a violence prevention program to youth at the PEACE Center.
- **Literary arts-** Youth at IYC Warrenville and IYC Chicago work on developing their creative potential through writing, music, and art with the help of [Stomping Grounds Literary Arts Initiative](#).
- **Dog training-** [Safe Humane Chicago](#) works with youth at IYC Chicago to teach them to bond with, socialize and train shelter dogs to help them become more adoptable.

The population of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice has decreased over 90 percent since the 1990s, with an average daily population of approximately 170 youth in 2024. Educational, vocational, and skill building opportunities for youth are a vital part of IDJJ’s strategy for youth rehabilitation and success upon reentering the community.

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The Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) was created by statute in 2006 with the mandate of safely housing and rehabilitating youth committed to its custody. The mission of IDJJ is to promote community safety and positive youth outcomes by building youth skills and strengthening families. IDJJ secure facilities are located in Chicago, Grafton, Harrisburg, Lincoln, St. Charles, and Warrenville.

CPR certification at the PEACE Center (St. Charles, IL)



Personal trainer certification at the PEACE Center
(St. Charles, IL)





University of Chicago Law School professor Emily Buss teaches youth from IYC Chicago about constitutional law.



Youth at IYC Harrisburg participating in the solar installation program with D&D Electric





Youth from IYC Chicago learning forklift operation at Greater West Town Project

