

PROJECT RISE

LEADER PROFILE: KELLY PETHKE

“We’re doing what’s best for children and families we serve. We’re making this community a safer place.” - Kelly Pethke

Kelly Pethke is the deputy administrator of Milwaukee County Division of Youth and Family Services. In this role, she led a review of the youth probation system and facilitated a community advisory council to engage families, providing insight into policies and procedures to reduce youth recidivism. She also introduced data sharing among like-minded organizations through monthly reports to encourage collaboration. She is responsible for grant and contract activities, budgeting, quality assurance, program development, implementation and monitoring of strategic goals and initiatives to advance youth justice reform efforts.

Previously, Pethke served as an administrative coordinator and grant coordinator with DYFS. In these roles, she gained support for community-based programming that provided alternatives to correctional placements, and reduced the number of youth in detention. These programs connected more youth with resources closer to their families and natural supports that contribute to youth success. In addition, Pethke’s team implemented validated risk and assessment tools and began to focus on treatment and rehabilitation to address the trauma many youth experienced.

Pethke’s current goals include introducing additional diversion programs for low-risk youth and developing a local Residential Treatment Center to address the needs of moderate and high risk youth, including trauma-informed mental health care, monitoring, treatment, advocacy and support.

