



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

November 2, 2023

**CONTACT:**

Dominique Newman

[dominique.newman@illinois.gov](mailto:dominique.newman@illinois.gov)

Matt Boston

[mboston@gwtp.edu](mailto:mboston@gwtp.edu)

**Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice celebrates first youth vocational certifications with Greater West Town Project**

**CHICAGO** – Young adults who are in the custody of the [Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice](#) (IDJJ) are investing in their futures by taking advantage of vocational training and certification opportunities offered by [Greater West Town Project](#) (GWTP). In mid-October, three members of the inaugural cohort of IDJJ youth completed the National Safety Council's forklift operator training, earning three-year certifications that also include a ten-hour Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) certification. The program graduates also completed a career exploration course, basic computer training, and a digital literacy course during their 12-week program.

"In Illinois, we're not just reimagining justice for young people-- we're acting on this vision. Through the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice's collaboration with the Greater West Town Project, youth will have the access to programs and certifications that will better position them for success post-release," said **Lt. Governor Juliana Stratton**. "By helping young people realize their potential, they can better foster their dreams."

Approximately 25 IDJJ staff members and a dozen representatives from GWTP, along with several family members of youth graduates, gathered at Greater West Town Academy on October 23 to celebrate the cohort's achievements and present certificates and words of encouragement. When asked about his experience in the program, a cohort graduate stated, "It's important to have change in your life and this program gave me a chance for change." Another graduate added, "It was a great learning experience. It was an eye opener because I did it while I was incarcerated."

Greater West Town Project will continue their work with the program graduates by assisting with post-release job placement options that utilize the new certifications. **Keisha Davis-Johnson, GWTP Executive Director** noted, "We are thrilled to be partnered with IDJJ to provide job training in growing industries to young people from underserved and underinvested communities. We hope to continue this tremendously beneficial partnership with IDJJ to grow our collective impact on the communities that need it most."

As part of the new partnership with IDJJ, Greater West Town Project will be offering subsequent opportunities to upcoming cohorts in their [shipping and receiving program](#). The program prepares trainees with a broad base of skills needed to be highly qualified for entry-level employment in positions such as a shipping & receiving clerk, forklift operator, warehouse associate, material handler, traffic agent, stocker, order picker, or dock worker. The next cohort begins in January of 2024.

IDJJ **Director Heidi Mueller** stated, "It is exciting to work with a community partner like Greater West Town who is so aligned with [IDJJ's mission](#) and values. Greater West Town understands that building skills and providing real opportunities for our youth makes our communities stronger and safer. We are

**Healthy kids, strong families, safe communities**

so grateful for our partnership with Greater West Town and are already seeing the impact of this critical investment in our young people and the communities to which they are returning.”

As part of IDJJ’s [21<sup>st</sup> Century Transformation Plan](#), IDJJ offers extensive and ever-expanding [Career & Technical Education opportunities](#) for youth who are in secure custody and for those who are being monitored in the community on [Aftercare](#). Youth in the custody of IDJJ who participate in the GWTP shipping and receiving certification program have already earned a high school diploma or GED and complete an application and interview process before beginning the program. **Noah Boudreau, Director of Career & Technical Education** noted, "GWTP is an amazing partner that will also provide IDJJ students with the opportunity to gain employment through their close relationships with local businesses. This will allow our students to use what they have learned and to give back to the community in such an important way."

###

**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.