Listening Session Summary: Focus on Physical and Mental Health and Wellness

Location: Kansas City, MO
Date: October 14, 2010

Approach

The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP) hosted a series of listening sessions across the country to gather input from stakeholders to inform the development of an overarching strategic plan for federal youth policy. In order to go in depth on specific issues, each listening session had a special focus topic, such as juvenile justice, housing, positive youth development, and others. Sessions lasted approximately four hours and were led by an experienced facilitator.

Participants

See Appendix A for participant information.

Questions and Responses

Summaries of participants' responses follow each of the questions below.

What is the single most important thing we could do to make a difference in the lives of youth, related to physical and mental health and wellness?

- Service providers need to **listen to youth** and support them to make their own choices.
- Youth need **caring adults** in their lives.
- Youth need to feel **safe**.
- Service providers need to go where youth are and **create a climate of trust and caring.**
- Service providers need to **focus on prevention**, starting when children are young.
- Youth need **collaborative care** that involves service providers from multiple domains.
- Youth need more **access to information** regarding options and resources for care.
- Youth need significantly increased availability of **school-based health care.**
- Youth need easier access to **mental health services.**
- Youth need to be empowered with **skills for critical thinking, setting goals, making good decisions, and developing healthy relationships.**
- Parents need **support and empowerment** to better meet the needs of their children.
- Providers need to shift from a deficit-based approach with youth to a **strengths-based approach.**
- Service providers must be **educated regarding laws** that give unaccompanied minors a right to care without parental consent—unaccompanied minors are often needlessly denied services.
- Youth need **improved availability of transportation** to be able to access services.
- The current **health care/health insurance system** creates significant barriers to care for many.
- A better system is needed to **track children's healthcare** (e.g., immunizations received).

What are the needs of youth (up to the age of 24) related to physical and mental health and wellness?

- Youth need **obesity prevention** through better nutrition and exercise from an early age.
- Youth need to be **empowered and educated to ask questions** regarding their care.
- Youth need to be better educated regarding **how to negotiate the health care system.**
- Youth need better early **substance abuse prevention.**

What are effective programs and strategies regarding physical and mental health and wellness? Are there program or policy gaps?

Effective programs and strategies
- **Wraparound services** are effective, especially if the young person is involved in identifying their own needs and their support team.
- Youth need **flexible approaches** to engaging them in services (e.g., peer outreach, teen clinics, etc.).
- Youth need ongoing, long-term connections with **supportive adults.**
- Youth benefit from **peer support** regarding their specific needs and issues.
- Youth need adults within the school system who are **committed to their long-term success.**
- **After school programs** provide enrichment to youth and help youth avoid risk behaviors.
- The Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports (PIBS) program helps young people develop **internal assets** (e.g., honesty, respect, a sense of responsibility).
- Comprehensive preventive rehabilitation models provide youth with **mental health supports.**
- Collaborations and coalitions can provide service providers with **improved access to information** and opportunities for funding.
- Families benefit when service providers come together promptly to **coordinate their services.**
- Youth can be a force for change when they make their voices heard and **engage in advocacy.**
- A recent growth in **funding for prevention** services will be cost-effective in the long term.

Program or policy gaps
- Funding needs to be restored for school-based health and mental health services.
- More after school programming is needed, including programming for older youth that includes workforce development.

Do specific populations of youth have disproportionately poor outcomes related to the topics we have addressed? What are some ways to best serve these populations?

Populations with disproportionately poor outcomes
- Youth of color.
- Youth living in poverty.
- Youth in foster care.
- Youth with mental health needs.

Ways to best serve these populations
- Use **wraparound models** to address multiple needs.
- Help youth in foster care understand and manage their situations.
- Conduct **better evaluations** of how well services are meeting the needs of youth.
- **Eliminate the stigma** associated with seeking some types of services (e.g., mental health).
- Use **creative approaches** to engaging youth in treatment programs.
- Help service providers better understand the unique needs of youth and **individualize their approach** to building relationships.
- Look beyond cultural competence training for staff—**address deeper issues** that create barriers to effective service provision.

What programs really make a difference in the lives of youth? How do you know this?

- Prevention approaches are critical to improving youth outcomes.

- For-profit and/or private organizations can sometimes meet needs more cost effectively than government programs.

What are the barriers to collaborating on youth outcomes, and how can these barriers be removed?

Barriers to collaboration
- Service providers use **different language** and have identified **different desired outcomes.**
- Current funding structures encourage **competition rather than collaboration.**
- **Misalignment of time frames** across agencies means that funding might not become available for services in the order that those services are actually needed.

How these barriers could be removed
- Service providers that are trying to meet the needs of a shared group of youth should figure out how to **work together to create a sustainable service system.**
- **Umbrella organizations** can help ensure stability of funding to meet the needs of a population.
- Funders could ask providers to **decide together how to solve a problem** in their community.
- **Leadership** is needed for collaboration to happen.
- Grant applicants can be required to collaborate.

What types of initiatives could promote collaboration and improve outcomes for youth?

- Improve the work of **coalitions** to provide more comprehensive services and reduce silos.
- Use **peer outreach** to engage youth in services and to share information.
- Reach out to youth in a **broad variety of settings.**
- Provide **universal health care** coverage.
- Improve the Medicaid system so that service providers are reimbursed fairly and so that youth are better able to **access and maintain services.**
- Improve access to services for youth and families in **rural areas.**
- **Empower youth as consumers** of services. For example, involve them in hiring decisions, and ask them to provide feedback regarding the quality of care they receive.
- Support individuals from a community to gain professional health care skills so they can then serve that community.
- Train health care providers in a **positive youth development framework.**
- Develop and **share a better evidence base** regarding what works in youth service provision.
- **Focus on youth needs** rather than agency structures. For example, the child welfare and juvenile justice systems often serve the same individual.
- Take a **bottom-up approach** and ask communities what they need and then provide funding, rather than the government deciding what to fund.

What are your ideas for federal policy to improve the coordination, effectiveness, and efficiency of programs affecting youth?

- Require **youth involvement** in drafting legislation that affects them.
- Take a **flexible approach** to improving access to services for youth.
- Increase **self-advocacy** among consumers of services.
- Use **strengths-based approaches** to thinking about youth.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS from Region VII (Kansas City, MO)

Participating organizations*:
- Synergy Services, Inc.
- Kansas Children's Service League
- Kansas Enrichment Network
- Administration for Children and Families
- TLC for Children and Families, Inc.
- Children's Mercy Hospital
- Pure & Simple Health Education, Inc.
- Circle of H. O. P. E.
- American Humane Association
- Connections to Success

*Note: Participant information is only provided for participants who registered for the session and may not represent all organizations that were present.