

Listening Session Summary: Focus on Youth Safety

Location: Seattle, WA

Date: October 19, 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 youth safety?

Direct supports for youth

- Do things that **impact all young people's daily lives** (e.g., provide proper nutrition).
- Make a **significant investment** in young people (e.g., education, food).
- Give youth a sense that they have a role in society.
- Respect and **empower youth**.
- Help young people develop **social and emotional learning** skills.
- Provide youth with **life skills education**.
- Help young people learn how to develop healthy relationships.
- Provide youth with **adult mentors** who are accessible but not intrusive.
- **Listen to youth** to understand what they are dealing with and to know what supports to offer.
- Focus on **what the young person is dealing with now**—don't make everything about the future.
- Let young people know what services are available to them and how to access those services.
- Provide **adequate housing** to reduce the risk of violence to young people.
- Provide young people with **safe places** to go, especially in cases of domestic violence.
- Provide youth with **access to education** that will not leave them in debt.

Supports for families and communities

- Provide education to families and parent mentoring/partnering.
- **Help families increase their stability** and meet young people's needs to reduce homelessness.
- Start **preventing** problems much earlier, such as through parent-infant bonding programs.
- **Empower families** by focusing on their strengths and resilience.
- Increase stability in the community to provide a safety net.
- Create a **hub of services** through schools.

Needed policy changes

- Do not just develop policies—implement them.

- Provide young people with adult resources when they face adult problems.
- Address the issue of violence; it is institutionalized and condoned nationally.
- Address the obstacle created when youth under age 18 require parental consent for services that will keep them safe.

What are the needs of youth (up to the age of 24) related to youth safety?

- Adequate **sleep, hygiene, and nutrition**.
- School hours that are a better fit with **young people's natural schedules**.
- Available **non-intrusive adults** who do not have demands or an agenda.
- Safety where youth spend time (e.g., schools, parks, neighborhoods).
- Youth **understanding of their own role** in creating safety.
- **Less violence** and militarized attitudes in the media.
- No access to guns.
- **School-based supports** to help young people cope with dating violence, coercion and control, and gay and lesbian issues.
- **Support for youth victims** of domestic violence, as well as intervention with perpetrators.
- Information for parents about resources to help them meet their youth's needs.
- Support and **education for parents** through peer parent mentors.
- **Differentiated approaches** based on youth characteristics (e.g., boys versus girls).

What are effective programs and strategies regarding youth safety? Are there program or policy gaps?

Effective programs and strategies

- Provide programs that can reach all young people.
- Teach **social and emotional learning** school-wide, with a parent education component.
- Provide families with needed supports at home (e.g., parent coaches).
- **Merge programming and funding streams** to meet youth needs (e.g., independent living and workforce development).
- Provide **youth empowerment programs** that operate across systems (e.g., Youth in Action).
- Have **youth train service providers** in youth perspectives (e.g., juvenile justice, mental health).
- **Send service providers into the field** where young people are rather than asking the young person to come in for an appointment.
- Provide **transitional housing** programs for homeless youth.
- Provide young people in the juvenile justice systems with **alternatives to secure confinement**.
- Provide youth **health education** and wellness.
- Help families access services that can help them meet the needs of their children.
- Implement programs aimed at **addressing youth violence** (e.g., YMCA's Alive and Free, Safe and Drug Free Schools, Safe and Healthy Schools).
- Build **integrated, collaborative systems** to serve youth from the community up (as Washington State is now doing).

Program and policy gaps

- There is a need to **mandate collaboration** between schools and communities.
- **More volunteers** are needed to work with youth.
- The National HIV/AIDS strategy does not address the needs of youth.
- Youth need more **HIV/AIDS education** (e.g., Youth Voices for girls in detention).
- For youth receiving mental health services, focus on **strengthening their family environment**.

- Allow families to ask for services **without fear of punitive measures** by child protective services.
- Provide USDA **food services** to youth up to age 24 who are engaged in educational and workforce development programs, and eliminate policies that prohibit this.
- Give more **flexibility for the collaborative use of funding**.
- Reduce requests for grantees to delay or eliminate youth components of programming.

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?

- Young people who have been sent out of state to abusive, unregulated residential programs for troubled youth often return home “worse than they left.”
- Young people of color experience disproportionate levels of unsafe conditions and violence.
- Foster youth are at higher risk for poor outcomes, both while in care and after exiting care.

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

- Programs that provide a **continuum of care** and have a longitudinal impact.
- Programs that focus on **increasing protective factors** as well as reducing risk factors.
- Programs that focus on **building youth self-efficacy**.
- Programs that use school-community partnerships to identify vulnerable youth, provide them with wraparound services, and provide them with a coach or advocate (e.g., Building Bridges).
- Programs that teach youth advocacy and provide peer support (qualitative research shows the effectiveness of Youth ‘N Action).

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

- **Competition** for the same money to serve the same clients.
- **Lack of focus** on sustainability.
- **Lack of data sharing**.
- **Inflexible funding** criteria.
- **Turf and trust issues** among both local and government agencies.
- **Lack of time and resources** available to carry out collaboration.
- Lack of information among service providers regarding what staff is doing in other sectors (barrier can be removed by providing peer education among service providers).
- **Burdensome reporting requirements** for grantees.

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

- Expand the **number of hours that youth are in school**.
- **Extend school-based services** (e.g., speech and language supports) through the summer.
- **Expand the school-based resources** available to youth and families.
- Introduce **new funding mechanisms** (e.g., Kennedy Service Act).
- **Increase accessibility of promising practices** to agencies at a lower cost.
- **Provide parents with consumer guidance** regarding youth services.
- Mobilize advocacy and rights organizations to push for **regulation of service providers**.
- Continue to **eliminate abusive youth intervention programs** by taking away their permits to use federal land.
- Use **school-community partnerships** to provide a **continuum of services** (e.g., Building Bridges).

- Provide resources to **cover staff time and costs** associated with collaboration.

What can be done for all youth (not just those directly benefiting from programs) in order to use resources effectively?

- **Use technology to communicate with young people** in the modalities that they use most.
- **Build school-community partnerships** focused on youth development.
- Provide young people with **adequate nutrition**.
- Reduce the focus on reporting short-term outcomes.
- **Focus on the young person** instead of the system.
- Ensure that **services are accessible to people in all communities** (including rural communities).

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

- Develop a **strong federal policy** on youth development.
- Recognize that while **resources for intervention** are heavily focused on academics, often there is another underlying problem.
- **Focus funding** based on what an individual young person needs.
- **Streamline funding and the provision of services** to more efficiently serve the whole child.
- **Simplify the application process** for people requiring multiple services.

This work was originally produced by the American Institutes for Research in support of the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs through a contract from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The content does not necessarily reflect the position or policy of HHS, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, or the other departments and agencies represented on the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS from Region X (Seattle, WA)

Participating organizations*:

- ACF Region 10 Family and Youth Services Bureau
- Washington Dads
- Youth Suicide Prevention Program (YSPP) of Washington
- Kings Country Community Organizing Program
- Girl Scouts of Western Washington
- Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
- BABES Network, YWCA
- Society of Counsel Representing Accused Persons
- YouthCare
- Casey Family Programs
- Workforce Board
- King County Mental Health, Chemical Abuse and Dependency Services Division
- Sound Mental Health
- Alive and Free Program. YMCA
- Washington State Department of Health, Maternal-Child Health Program

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