

## Listening Session Summary: Focus on Youth Enrichment, Youth Engagement, Youth Mentoring, and Positive Youth Development

Location: San Francisco, CA

Date: May 4, 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 enrichment, youth engagement, youth mentoring, and positive youth development?

- **Schools** should be engaging, safe, relevant, flexible, and connected to youth's lives.
- Schools need to receive more adequate resources to meet the needs of the whole child.
- **Families** should be strengthened to reduce the need for youth services.
- Youth need a **safe home** with an **involved family** and/or other adult mentors, even after age 18.
- **Cross-agency collaboration** should be improved.
- Youth need better **continuity of services** across the transition to adulthood.
- Youth need better support to **develop employment skills**.
- **Youth need to have their voices heard** and to be involved in their own service planning.

#### What are the needs of youth (up to the age of 24) related to youth enrichment, youth engagement, youth mentoring, and positive youth development?

- Youth need **continuity of services**.
- Youth need support to meet their **educational needs**.
- Youth need guidance in establishing their **goals**.
- Adults should have **high expectations** for youth.
- Youth need relationships with **supportive adults**.
- Youth need to maintain strong **connections to family**.
- Families at all income levels need guidance and support to meet the needs of older youth.
- Youth need a **positive cultural identity and self-identity**, supported through relationships with older adults from their cultural group.
- Youth need to **develop skills** to be successful in the workplace.
- Youth should have opportunities to **volunteer** and to take on **leadership roles**.

**What are effective programs and strategies regarding youth enrichment, youth engagement, youth mentoring, and positive youth development? Are there program or policy gaps?**

- **A youth development model** (such as provided by the Search Institute) can be very effective, particularly when adults are trained in youth development, when programming is integrated into schools, and when youth are taught to make good decisions.
- Youth benefit from programming focused on helping them **establish and maintain positive relationships**.
- Many successful programs have a focus on **empowering youth and connecting them with others** (e.g., California Youth Connections for foster youth).
- Successful programming engages formerly disconnected youth in supporting or mentoring others (including in schools).
- Successful programming for homeless and runaway youth, such as the Youth Service Bureau, requires the involvement of youth beyond their role as clients.
- Youth benefit from **enrichment activities** (e.g., the arts), but these activities could be even more valuable if they were of high quality. Enrichment activities should sometimes be designed for purely recreational purposes. Not every activity for a young person has to be labeled “therapeutic” to be beneficial.
- **Resources and training around existing programs** is needed more than the creation of new policies and programs.

**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 in foster care
- Youth who do not live with loving parents or caregivers
- Homeless and runaway youth
- Gay and lesbian youth
- Pregnant and parenting youth
- Juvenile justice-involved youth
- Rural youth
- Native American youth
- African-American youth
- Immigrant youth
- Youth with learning disabilities
- Youth who are HIV positive

***Best ways to serve these populations***

- **Improve outcomes for foster children** by finding them permanent families, stabilizing their foster care placement (and helping care providers to address issues rather than just changing placements), keeping foster youth in their home community and school district, and by funding long-term efforts at supporting youth in foster care or who have been in foster care.
- **Strengthen families and meet the needs of adult caregivers** to improve outcomes for youth who do not live with loving parents or other caregivers who are able to meet their needs.
- Be aware that youth at moderate risk benefit the most from **mentoring**.

- Provide gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth as well as pregnant and parenting youth with programming designed to help them **establish and maintain healthy romantic relationships**.
- Provide gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth with **suicide prevention programming**.
- For youth in the juvenile justice system, focus more on engaging them and enriching their lives and **focus less on punitive measures**.
- Provide the **community-level collaboration** essential to serving rural youth.
- **Increase cultural competence** among staff serving Native American and/or African American youth.
- **Increase collaboration with tribal serving agencies** to meet the needs of Native American youth.

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

- Youth benefit from programs that introduce **consistent, caring adults** into their lives, and that provide **support for adult caregivers** and mentors (e.g., Building Strong Families initiative).
- Foster youth receive more efficient mental health services when **volunteer licensed therapists** work with them (rather than waiting for Medicaid-funded providers).
- Youth benefit when they are asked to **share their voices and provide leadership** (e.g., California Youth Connection).
- Youth benefit from **activities that take place outdoors**, such as summer camps, outdoor education initiatives, and parks programs. Parks programs are often designed for younger children and exclude older youth.
- **Multi-service centers** can more efficiently and effectively address a young person's needs than single-service programs.

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

#### *Barriers to collaboration*

- Schools currently have a **heavy focus on academics** to the exclusion of other areas of learning and support, and can be unwilling to collaborate with outside agencies.
- A **focus on programs** rather than individual young people.
- The current structure of funding sources and accountability systems allow for **too little flexibility** (although this issue has been improving under the current administration).

#### *How barriers can be removed*

- There should be a **focus on the individual** young person rather than a focus on programs.
- The court system can effectively drive collaboration to meet the needs of a young person, and that collaboration can be very effective if it is initiated by the young person.
- **Peer review** can help ensure accountability for grantees with fewer burdens on programs.
- **Community ownership and sharing of administrative and qualitative data** can increase collaboration.

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

- Existing collaborations could work better if they were given more clout and adopted a **shared, long-range view of their purpose and desired goals**.
- When collaborations develop a shared focus on a few key goals, they can **use data more effectively** and more easily incorporate youth into the collaborative effort (some state advisory group models have been successful).
- Agencies need a **comprehensive focus on prevention** from birth through adulthood.

- There is a need for better **information sharing across agencies** serving the same individual. Issues of confidentiality could be addressed by engaging program beneficiaries in providing consent for information sharing.

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

- Provide better **life skills education** (such as managing personal finances) in schools.
- Engage the **broader community** with young people to promote positive change from the community up, rather than through top-down programming.
- **Provide mentors** for youth from all kinds of backgrounds.
- Provide supports and guidance for **adults and youth acting as mentors** to help sustain mentoring relationships and meet the needs of their mentees.

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

- **Build on existing successful approaches**, rather than require the implementation of new approaches to address issues.
- Abandon the current approach to funding, which is cumbersome, takes up too much staff time, contributes to silos in service delivery, and has requirements that focus on quantity to the detriment of quality.
- Improve data systems and increase availability of data to **provide information about the impact and effectiveness of prevention and intervention efforts**.
- Structure funding to **focus on the whole child or family**.
- Integrate a **youth development framework** (such as Developmental Assets) into programming.

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 IX (San Francisco, CA)

### ***Participating organizations\*:***

- San Francisco Unified School District
- Mendocino County Youth Project
- American Camp Association
- John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities
- Casey Family Programs
- Family Violence Prevention Fund
- Office of Economic and Workforce Development
- City of Oakland, Office of Parks and Recreation
- The Dibble Institute
- American Samoa Government

- Fresno County EOC
- Community Network for Youth Development
- Sacramento Regional Conservation Corps
- A Safe Place
- Marin Advocates for Children
- San Francisco Housing Authority
- UCSF, Department for Social and Behavioral Sciences
- National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
- Bill Wilson Center, Fastenau & Associates
- HHS-ACF
- City & County of San Francisco
- Toussaint Youth Villages
- Friends for Youth, Inc.
- TAYSF, Transition Age Youth
- Alameda County Government
- Department of Labor
- California CASA

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