

Texas Children's Mental Health Forum

Convened by Texans Care for Children and the Texas Health Institute
Tuesday, June 21, 2011

TOPIC:

Youth Voice in the Policy Making Process

DISCUSSION NOTES

Notes are provided to share highlights of Forum meetings with those who are interested in the topics being discussed but are unable to attend. Texans Care for Children and the Texas Health Institute strive to capture an accurate outline of the information and discussion shared during each meeting. However, these notes should not be viewed as an official or complete record of the meeting, and some inaccuracies may be contained. Please contact [Josette Saxton](#) at Texans Care for Children to report any significant errors.

PRESENTATION: [State Efforts to Empower Youth & Why Their Voices are Needed](#)

Presented by Lauren Cohen, Youth Coordinator, ViaHope

Notes from presentation:

Via Hope:

- Via Hope is the statewide Training and Technical Assistance Center for Mental Health, collaborative effort of Mental Health America of Texas (MHAT) and National Alliance on Mental Illness of Texas (NAMI-TX)
- Funded through the Department of State Health Services and the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health
- Has a Youth Program, in addition to its Adult Consumer and Family programs.

Youth Voice:

- Improves policies and programs by designing them to better meet the needs of youth
- Promotes resilience in youth

Via Hope's Youth Program:

- Targets youth aged 14 to 24
- Not limited to youth with mental health diagnoses
- Youth guided – held focus groups in communities across Texas with youth to find out how to build a youth mental health advocacy program
- Based on youth feedback, Via Hope's next activities are:
 - Media Project: collecting written papers, drawings, etc. related to mental health, stigma
 - Mental Health Advocacy Retreat: August 5-7, 2011, at University of Houston. 35-40 youth participants. Theme – "Stand Up – Reach Out".

Potential Next Steps for Youth Program at Via Hope:

- Need social media presence (Twitter, Facebook)
- Strengthen youth voice in other branches of the state

- Support systems that connect with youth to better enable them to focus on youth mental health
- Youth as trained positive peer supports

Ways to Help Via Hope's Youth Program:

- Spread the work about the program
- Connect Lauren Cohen with youth who may be interested in becoming involved, as well as programs or organizations focusing on youth, mental health, or advocacy.
- Lcohen@namitexas.org; (512) 693 – 2000 x 104

PRESENTATION: Regional Efforts to Empower Youth – Alamo Area Youth M.O.V.E.

Presented by [Alamo Area Youth M.O.V.E.](#) Youth Representatives Kia Hardaway, Kendra Hardaway, and Evan Hall

- M.O.V.E. stands for “Motivating Others from Voices of Experience”
- Youth led county wide organization devoted to improving services and systems that support positive growth and development by uniting the voices of individuals who have lived experience in various systems including mental health, juvenile justice, education, and child welfare.
- Official chapter of [Youth M.O.V.E. National](#)
- Youth meets monthly at the Center for Health Care Services in San Antonio
- Advocate for youth to utilize their power and expertise to foster change in their communities and their own lives
- Visited the State Capitol during session to attend Youth in Action Day, meet with legislators; successfully secured the support of Rep. Menendez to file amendment which sought to restore funding to system of care initiatives.
- Kendra Hardaway won a Blue Ribbon in state competition for her photos taken at the state capitol on Youth in Action Day
- Evan Hall has had a written piece published through the Pathways newsletter in Oregon and is currently writing a book about his experiences.
- SAMHSA is providing \$6,000 for Youth Leadership to Alamo Youth MOVE. Two emerging leaders will be attending the System of Care Conference in Chicago and will participate in the Youth MOVE National Board meeting. SAMHSA has also approved funding for the Executive Director of Youth MOVE National to provide a Keynote Presentation and two workshops regarding youth Voice on decision making teams at the Bexar County Consumer and Family Conference, Aug 18 - 20 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Riverwalk, in San Antonio.

Issues discussed by youth:

- Schools system is the biggest challenge (negative teacher interactions, lack of flexibility)
- Need to better educate teachers about mental health
- Need for school programs that are flexible to better meet the unique needs of students with mental health diagnosis (such as allowing students to listen to music if doing so helps them to focus)
- Importance of peer support, family
- All the “hoops” families face in trying to coordinating the care, meeting the needs of child with mental health concerns

- Providing parents with the tools to advocate for their children within the different systems, knowing the child’s rights
- Psychiatrists are better equipped to prescribe medication than are primary care doctors
- Importance of finding a “good fit” with a mental health provider
- Other challenges include peer pressure, money, temptations

Recommendations from youth on how organizations, programs can make it easier for youth to provide recommendations or feedback:

- Provide school newspaper column where students can provide feedback, ideas
- Have providers give youth resources/information on how to provide input
- Exit surveys

PRESENTATION: Findings & Policy Recommendations from [Voices of Experience: Improving Mental Health Supports for Homeless and Transitioning Youth](#)

Presented by Christine Gendron, Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS) and Tannika Lassiter, Youth Research Team Member

Texas Network of Youth Services (TNOYS)

- Association of community-based agencies that serve youth in at-risk situations and their families
- Training & technical assistance, youth development programming, and advocacy

“[Improving Mental Health Supports for Homeless and Transitioning Youth](#)” Project

- Funded by a grant from the Hogg Foundation
- Purpose: to find out about the challenges youth face and get their ideas for addressing those challenges
 - Youth who have been homeless or aged out of foster care
 - Transitioning to adulthood
 - Emphasis on mental health
- Hired a Youth Research Team to interview youth
- Facilitated additional focus groups
- Policy Recommendations developed by youth

Project Summary:

- Youth work hard to overcome disadvantages they face
- Mental health issues are their biggest challenges, even in the face of significant unemployment, housing insecurity
- The way youth cope with challenges is a major strength
- Homeless youth face more obstacles and have access to less support
- Mixed experiences with mental health services
- Strong interest in peer support

Among the Project’s Findings:

- 77% of youth consider themselves to be adults
- 84% of youth have caring adult in their life

- Sense of optimism among many youth, with more than 75% reporting to be working on some aspect of self-improvement
- Youth who aged out of foster care were more likely to know how to navigate public benefits system
- Half of interviewed youth have been diagnosed with a mental health condition
- 50% of youth with diagnosis agree with diagnoses
- 18% of youth take a psychiatric medication
- 53% of youth talk to a mental health professional
- 40% of interviewed youth provided a negative definition of “mental health”
- 74% consider themselves to be mentally healthy
- Of those with a mental health diagnoses, 76% reported being comfortable with it being known, 32% report they have been treated differently because of it
- Victimization rates are high (67%)

Policy Recommendations from the Youth Research Team:

Recommendations for Mental Health Services

- Better educate youth and parents about mental health to fight the stigma associated with seeking services and increase awareness of the resources that are available.
- Better education mental health professionals about youth.
- Allow youth to have access to different types of therapy.
- Teach youth about setting boundaries so they can better protect themselves in their relationships with family members, friends, dating relationships, and more.

Recommendations for Improving Supports for Homeless and Transitioning Youth:

- Recognizing youths’ strengths:
 - All mental health professionals who serve homeless and transitioning youth should be trained in trauma-informed care.
 - Policymakers and service providers should promote the development of peer support networks for youth.
 - Policymakers and service providers should offer support for youths’ interest in spirituality.
- Working in partnership with youth
 - Youth should be offered more opportunities for meaningful participation in public policy decisions.
 - Service providers should create leadership roles for youth clients.
- Preparing youth for the future
 - Youth should receive mental health awareness education.
 - Youth should receive more education in financial literacy and money management skills.

TNOYS is launching a new research project utilizing hired Youth Researchers to look at the experiences of youth with mental health issues who have been involved with the juvenile justice system. Those interested in learning more about this project are encouraged to contact Ryan Hazlett at rhazlett@tnoys.org.