



# Commission on Children and Youth 2013-2014 Annual Report

Montgomery County, Maryland

Department of Health and Human Services



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October 1, 2014

The Honorable Isiah Leggett  
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable Craig Rice, President  
Montgomery County Council

The Honorable Philip Kauffman, President  
Montgomery County Board of Education

Uma Ahluwalia, Director  
Montgomery County Department of Health  
and Human Services

Citizens of Montgomery County

Dear Mr. Leggett, Mr. Rice, Mr. Kauffman, Ms. Ahluwalia and Citizens of Montgomery County,

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth (CCY) is pleased to present its 2013-2014 Annual Report.

Throughout the year, the CCY leveraged its advisory authority to support policy and budget decisions that promote the safety and well-being of the County's children and youth and work to ensure all young people have access to successful futures. We presented testimony to the County Executive, County Council, Board of Education, and Department of Health and Human Services advocating for critical youth-serving programs that provide children and teens an opportunity to realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

In addition to these presentations, the CCY forged and maintained several collaborations in 2013-2014 to advance its priorities. We worked closely with the Montgomery County Public Schools Department of Curriculum and Instruction and Metro DC PFLAG to promote changes to the MCPS Health Curriculum that allow for increased access to accurate information about sexual and reproductive health services and increased support for young members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community. We were gratified to see those efforts bear fruit when the Board of Education voted unanimously on June 17, 2014 to approve a Revised Secondary Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework.

# A Letter From the Chair



# A Letter From the Chair

In addition, the CCY established a strong working relationship with the Healthy Montgomery Steering Committee and continues to be actively involved with its Obesity Prevention Partnership and Behavioral Health Task Force. The Commission also built a partnership with the Disproportionate Minority Contact Reduction Committee and will continue to work closely with that group in 2014-2015 as it examines school discipline and suspension policies.

Of particular note is the CCY's work in the community. We find it rewarding to reach out directly to the populations we are legislated to serve. Each year we host a Youth Having a Voice Roundtable to provide an opportunity for County leaders to hear the message of the community's youth, the CCY to gather information that will define its goals and work throughout the year, and organizations to raise the awareness about their programs and the needs of their youth. We also conduct an annual service project to support children in need in conjunction with Montgomery County's Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Additionally, the CCY sponsors the annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards to honor individuals, organizations, and businesses whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth have made a profound impact on the lives of others. Finally, our year would not be complete without sponsoring a cookie stand at the Tree House Child Assessment Center's Tour de Cookie. We hope you read more about these uplifting youth-focused activities in the report.

The CCY is committed to its mission and appreciates your support in our efforts. We look forward to working with you again this year. Please feel free to contact the CCY to inform us about how we may best support your efforts and partner to benefit the County's children and youth.

Sincerely,

Dana Bell, LCSW-C  
Chair



# The Commission on Children and Youth

## Mission

The Commission on Children and Youth promotes the well-being of Montgomery County's children, youth, and families so that all young people may realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

The Commission advances its mission by: (1) identifying the needs of young people and their families, and the groups and agencies that serve them; (2) informing and advising the County Executive, the County Council, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Board of Education (BOE), and the community at large; (3) recommending policies, programs, funding, and legislative priorities; and (4) affirming the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all the County's young people.

## Structure

The scope of issues and priorities the Commission can address is broad and far-reaching. In order to focus its work, the Commission holds an annual strategic planning retreat every June and selects priority issues for the year. Sub-committees are formed around the selected priorities.

In 2013-2014, the Commission elected to prioritize:

- **Annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable** - Put youth opinion into action regarding food available during the school day and the Montgomery County Public Schools' (MCPS) 10<sup>th</sup> grade health curriculum (particularly around access to accurate and complete information about sexual health).
- **Out-of-School Time Success** – Identify the current state of out-of-school (OST) time programming and promote critical factors that lead to the success of OST programming.
- **Social Media Literacy** – Promote and initiate the education of youth on the positive and negative impacts of social media.

The Commission hosts two major community events each year: the Youth Having a Voice Roundtable, which allows the Commission, public officials, and the larger community to hear the message of Montgomery County youth, and the Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which honors individuals and organizations that provide extraordinary service to the children and youth of our community.

## Meetings

The Commission and its sub-committees meet on the second Wednesday of the month from 6:00 PM – 9:00 PM. Meetings are generally held in the 1st Floor Conference Rooms at 401 Hungerford Drive, Rockville. Meetings are open to the public.



# Membership: CCY Year 2013-2014

The CCY has 27 positions including one representative from the public school system; one representative from the private schools in the County; one representative from the Montgomery County Recreation; and two representatives from HHS. The remaining 22 members are equally divided among individuals with recent experience with agencies providing services to children and youth; youth and young adults; and parents. **The Commission on Children and Youth is the only board, committee or commission within HHS with youth members.**

## Youth Representatives

Noelle Dayal  
Sharika Dhar  
David Edimo  
Madelyn Goldberg

Josiah Holmes  
Zachariyya Khan  
Elizabeth Lakew

## Parent Representatives

David Anderson  
Jane de Winter  
Stuart Grossman  
Lindsay Hoffman

Alisa Smedley  
Vicki Stearn  
Stephanie Williams  
Don Wynne

## Private Agency Representatives

Shari Argue, Lourie Center Early Head Start  
Dana Bell, Phillips School – Laurel  
Carson Henry, YMCA Youth & Family Services  
Nancy Kaplan, Private Nursery School Community  
Alies Muskin, Anxiety and Depression Association of America  
Roberta Rinker, Greentree Adolescent Program, National Center for Children and Families  
Deatrice Williams, Infant & Toddler Connection of Alexandria/Alexandria Parent Infant Education Program

## Public Agency Representatives

A. Thomas Grazio, HHS, Child Welfare Services  
Tamara Niedomanski, MCPS  
Elizabeth Ortega-Lohmeyer, Montgomery County Recreation  
Teresa Schuster, HHS, Public Health Services, School Health Services

## Staff

Mary Gies, Program Manager  
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services



# CCY Activities

## **GUEST SPEAKERS AND PRESENTATIONS:**

- Social Media Literacy Committee met with Sergeant Ken Sanger and Detective John Reinikka of the Montgomery County Police Department, Family Crimes Division, Child Exploitation Unit. Members heard about social media trends among youth, methods for keeping children safe while online, and the potential for schools to educate youth and parents about social media safety. (December 11, 2013)
- Hosted Luis Cardona, Youth Violence Prevention Coordinator, HHS, who presented an update on the County's Positive Youth Development Initiative and discussed how the CCY can contribute to current efforts. (January 8, 2014)
- Youth Having a Voice Committee met with Jeffrey Mehr, Content Specialist, PreK-12 Health Education, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, MCPS, to receive an update and provide input on proposed revisions to the MCPS Health Curriculum. (January 8, 2014)
- Met with Elijah Wheeler, Disproportionate Minority Contact Reduction Coordinator, Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families, Inc. Mr. Wheeler explained the history and origin of DMC and also described current efforts to address the issue in Montgomery County. He also discussed how the CCY can contribute to the work of the DMC Reduction Committee. (February 12, 2014)

## **TESTIMONY AND CORRESPONDENCE:**

- Provided testimony to HHS in support of funding for policies and programs that promote the safety and well-being of children and youth, and work to ensure children and youth have access to successful futures. (October 14, 2013)
- Participated in a worksession with the Health and Human Services Committee of the Montgomery County Council to discuss how the County advisory boards and commissions can further the Council's policy priorities. The Commission stated its policy priorities for the year, which were to support policy and budget decisions that promote the safety and well-being of children and youth, and work to ensure children and youth have access to successful futures. (October 17, 2013)
- Transmitted a letter to the BOE in support of Superintendent Joshua Starr's recommendation to push high school students' start to a later time. (October 28, 2013)



# CCY Activities

## Continued...

- Presented testimony to the BOE on the Superintendent's Recommended Operating Budget for FY15. The Commission spoke in support of budget elements that prepare all students for successful futures, increase social and emotional support for students in schools, and increases access to quality OST opportunities. (January 16, 2014)
- Provided written comments to the Healthy Montgomery Steering Committee on the draft Behavioral Health Action Plan and Obesity Action Plan. (January 31, 2014)
- Participated in the County Executive's annual meeting with Boards, Committees, and Commissions. (March 11, 2014)
- Responded to a request for feedback from the Montgomery County Department of Transportation on methods to increase sales of the Youth Cruiser SmarTrip Card and Ride-On ridership. (March 14, 2014)
- Wrote a letter to Superintendent Joshua Starr, requesting a meeting and recommending that information, dialogue, and education about the appropriate use of social media be incorporated throughout the MCPS curriculum and across many other areas of a student's life. (March 31, 2014)



- Presented testimony to the County Council in support of the County Executive's recommended FY15 operating budget related to children, youth, and families. (April 10, 2014)
- Wrote a letter to Philip Kauffman, President, BOE, reasserting previous recommendations for increased access to accurate information about sexual and reproductive health services and increased support for young members of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community. (May 22, 2014)
- Published *Critical Time, Critical Needs: 2013-2014 Survey of Out-of-School Time Providers*, a 'snapshot' of the needs of out-of-school time youth program providers in Montgomery County. (August 1, 2014)



# Commission Activities

Continued...

## COMMUNITY EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES:

- Toured MCPS Food and Nutrition Services to gain a better understanding of food available during the school day. (October 29, 2013)



- Implemented an “Are You A 10?” Stress Scale Poster Contest to help raise awareness about social and emotional wellness among Montgomery County middle school students. The winning poster was replicated and displayed in the health rooms at all 38 MCPS middle schools. The grand prize winner was awarded an iPad Mini courtesy of United Therapeutics Corporation and Avitecture, Inc. The five students awarded honorable mentions received \$25 Barnes & Noble gift cards. (Fall 2013)



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- Compiled an extensive spreadsheet of OST programs throughout Montgomery County and then re-launched a survey to youth-serving professionals, both administrative and direct service, for the purpose of assessing and identifying the most common, important, and supportable needs of youth serving organizations throughout the County. Partnered with Quench to offer lunch for 20 to one winning survey respondent and 19 colleagues. (Fall 2013)

- Hosted the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual *Youth Having a Voice Roundtable*, which allowed high school youth representing various programs throughout Montgomery County to frankly discuss food available during the school day and the MCPS 10<sup>th</sup> grade health curriculum, particularly issues related to access to accurate and complete information about sexual health. Please see **page 9** for a summary of this event. (December 4, 2013)



# Commission Activities

## Continued...

- Organized a duffel bag and toiletry drive at each of the high schools represented by its youth members and then hosted two tables at Montgomery County's MLK, Jr. Day of Service where volunteers assembled toiletry kits and stuffed duffel bags with items for children being placed out-of-home. (January 20, 2014)



- Participated in the Tree House Child Assessment Center's Tour de Cookie by hosting a Candyland-themed cookie stand and riding in the event. (May 3, 2014)



- Hosted the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards, which recognized individuals, organizations, and businesses whose dedication, vision, and service to children and youth have made a difference in the lives of others. Please see **page 13** for additional information on this uplifting event. (May 12, 2014)
- Participated in the inaugural meeting of the Healthy Montgomery Obesity Prevention Partnership. (May 29, 2014)
- Appointed liaisons to the Disproportionate Minority Contact Reduction Committee. (June 2014)



## Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

The Commission hosted its annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable on December 4, 2013, at the National Center for Children and Families in Bethesda. Approximately 15 teens representing Crittenton Services of Greater Washington, Greentree Adolescent Program, YMCA Youth & Family Services and various high schools throughout the County, joined us for a dynamic discussion. This year, the conversation focused on two key topics associated with MCPS: food offered during the school day and the 10<sup>th</sup> grade health curriculum.

We first tackled the subject of school food and sought students' opinions on quality and appeal. The Commission is aware of the magnitude of the process of feeding MCPS students. Several Commission members had the opportunity to tour the Division of Food and Nutrition Services last fall and were impressed by its scale and efficiency. But, with increasing publicity on the quality of foods offered by schools nationally, coupled with the increasing numbers of students relying on school food for their daily nutrition, we thought it important to hear directly from the consumers.

Consistent themes emerged from the engaging discussions on these topics. Overall, students are disappointed by the quality and appeal of the food offered during their school day. An overwhelming theme was that the food did not seem fresh or "real", although the youth did acknowledge their craving for "junk" food, as well. Specific student comments included:

- I am lactose intolerant, so on days when breakfast is a cream cheese-stuffed bagel and milk. I'm left with few options. I can find more options at lunch.
- I'm an athlete and the portions are too small to satisfy me.
- There aren't enough vegetarian options.
- My breakfast sandwiches are often wet.
- I'd like a heavier breakfast with more fresh fruit.

Another concern that surfaced is meal-skipping. Many high school students are busy with clubs and other activities during their lunch periods and seek alternatives to cafeteria offerings. Other students have no lunch period because they opted to schedule a class instead. In some cases, students forego lunch altogether given the long cafeteria lines. Therefore, the **Commission recommends having healthy, reasonably-priced food options available to students throughout the day, via vending machines or kiosks, so that youth are not forced to go hungry or eat more junk food.** The new federal regulation that precludes vending machines that do not offer healthy options from being turned on until 30 minutes after school ends makes it more important than ever that vending machines with healthy options be available for students who remain after school for sports and other extra-curricular activities.



## Youth Having a Voice Roundtable Continued...

Additionally, the Commission was struck by the inconsistency of offerings throughout the school system. Overall, it appears that a few MCPS facilities offer a salad bar but others do not. Some offer other unique options, like a burrito/taco bar. There appears to be no consistency and many schools have none of these extra offerings. **The Commission recommends an increase in parity of food offerings among schools. We recommend that MCPS develop a plan to ensure that each school facility expand its healthy options, including through fresh salad bars, and make these offerings available to students who receive free and reduced meals.**

Council President Craig Rice and Council Vice President George Leventhal, in a recent letter to Superintendent Starr, raised many valuable points that would improve the health and nutrition of students. We look forward to working with all parties, particularly the County Council, to develop the funding mechanisms to implement these recommendations.

Following the dialogue on food, the roundtable discussion shifted to perceptions of the 10<sup>th</sup> grade health curriculum. The Roundtable participants had an overwhelmingly positive attitude toward health-related concepts and the overall importance of a solid foundation in them. Because the curriculum includes sensitive topics, such as sex, sexually transmitted diseases, the use of contraception, and mental health the Commission was grateful that the youth participants were so willing to share their opinions on the subject.

Of greatest note, the youth felt invested in their health and, if anything, wanted more engagement on these real-world topics in the school curriculum. Specifically, youth comments included:

- Condoms aren't taken seriously enough. People feel like they're in love and will be together forever so protection isn't necessary.
- I wish we could learn more about love and emotions and how they fit with the physical acts.
- I want to know more about addiction and how to handle it. There is a big issue with depression. Mentally we are not good. We might not look it but we go home and are just sad.
- I was so inexperienced in tenth grade that many of the topics confused me. Things have made more sense as I've gotten older.





## Youth Having a Voice Roundtable Continued...

Participants also expressed an interest in a more holistic version of “health,” to include other life skills. The participating youth asked for more practical classes, such as driving, cooking, and budgeting, which they recognize as being critical to future success. As one participant said, “school acts like English and math are your life; but they aren’t.”

The Commission is heartened that MCPS is already addressing many of these concerns by revamping their curriculum. We have had the opportunity to meet with the curriculum team, and appreciate their attendance at the roundtable. The Commission is proud to have been able to help inform the development of the new health curriculum.

As you can see consistent themes emerged from the Roundtable, the dialogue was lively, and the students learned from one another. We hope that policymakers consider our findings and lessons learned and use them to shape policies and practices that will support the youth in our community.



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable participants and observers donated non-perishable food items to Nourish Now’s *Your Can Counts* program.



## Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth held its 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony on Monday, May 12, 2014 at the Adventure Theatre MTC in historic Glen Echo Park. The event was co-sponsored by Adventure Theatre MTC, Corporate Volunteer Council of Montgomery County, and the Gazette

The Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony is designed to recognize individuals, organizations, and businesses whose dedication, vision, and service to children and youth have made a difference in the lives of others. There are six award categories: Business, Volunteer, Service Provider, Organization, Youth, and Child Advocate. In selecting the award recipients, the Awards Committee considered the quality of service, length of time for which services were provided, number of children and youth benefiting from the service, and impact to diverse communities.

This year's award winners were:

- Bethesda-based Hispanic Business Foundation of Maryland received the Business Award for its work engaging disadvantaged high school students ages 16-21 in educational and mentored job experiences through its Partnership Youth Initiative and Add Us In project.
- Bethesda resident Shirley Brandman received the Child Advocate Award for her long-term commitment to Montgomery County children and youth through her tenure on the BOE, membership on the CCY, service to children as Vice-President for Educational Issues at the Montgomery County Council of PTAs, and work as an advocate for children with special needs. Throughout her career, Shirley has been dedicated to equity and opportunity for all children.
- Silver Spring-based Asian American LEAD received the Organization Award for addressing the social, cultural, and academic needs of low-income and underserved Asian American youth through its Maryland Middle School Program, Maryland High School Program, and Mentoring Program.
- Silver Spring-based Gandhi Brigade was honored in the Organization category for providing young people with opportunities to use media arts as a developmental pathway for personal and community growth.





## Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards

- Heather L. Gordon was honored in the Service Provider category for her unyielding efforts to meet the social, emotional, and educational needs of dually diagnosed youth as a case manager for Silver Spring-based Youth in Transition.
- Bethesda-based Judy Phillips was honored with the Volunteer Award for her dedication and commitment to abused and neglected children.
- Potomac resident Bobbi Sherman received the Youth Award and a \$250 Scholarship from the Corporate Volunteer Council of Montgomery County for her selfless and extensive service to abused and neglected children, youth with disabilities, and critically ill children.

The award is named in memory of Nancy Dworkin, past Chairperson of the Commission, who died in 1987. Nancy was the director of the Center for Unique Learners, a Rockville school for children with learning disabilities. Her upbeat teaching philosophy focused on "teaching to strength" and encouraging all students to develop skills and reach their own potential. This philosophy echoes our purposes in establishing this Awards Program - encouraging us all to reach our own potential for service to others.





## 2014-2015 Priorities

### Access to Mental Health Services

Allow youth greater access to resources to improve their mental health.

### Life Skills Training for Youth

Ensure that life skills training is accessible to the youth of Montgomery County.

### School Discipline and Suspension Policies

Utilize diverse stakeholders related to school disciplinary/suspension policies to create a proactive approach to culturally competent policies.



**Isiah Leggett, County Executive**  
**Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director**  
**JoAnn Barnes, Acting Chief**  
**Mary Gies, Program Manager**  
**Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services**  
**Children, Youth and Families Services**  
**Commission on Children and Youth**  
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Language translation and alternative formats of this report are available upon request.  
For additional information on the Commission, please call or write at the address and telephone numbers listed above.

***Montgomery County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in employment or in the admission or access to its programs or services.***

