



Commission on Children and Youth 2014-2015 Annual Report

**Montgomery County, Maryland
Department of Health and Human
Services**



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A Letter From the Chair



October 19, 2015

The Honorable Isiah Leggett
Montgomery County Executive

The Honorable George Leventhal, President
Montgomery County Council

The Honorable Patricia O'Neill, 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. Leventhal, Ms. O'Neill, Ms. Ahluwalia and Citizens of Montgomery County,

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth (CCY) is pleased to present its 2014-2015 Annual Report.

The Commission subcommittees for 2014-2015 worked on three topics that were generated by Commission members at a retreat in 2014 and from the Youth Having a Voice Roundtable in 2013. Access to mental health services for children and youth, life skills training for youth, and the new MCPS school discipline and suspension policies were researched, examined, and discussed throughout the 2014-2015 Commission year.

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 worked to ensure that 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 youth an opportunity to realize their full potential and become contributing, productive adults.

In addition, the CCY continued to serve on the Healthy Montgomery Steering Committee and continues to be actively involved with its Obesity Prevention Partnership. The Commission also worked closely with the Disproportionate Minority Contact Reduction Committee in 2014-2015 in examining discipline and suspension policies.

A Letter From the Chair



CCY has also continued important work in the community this year. Each year we host a Youth Having a Voice Roundtable to provide an opportunity for County leaders to hear from the community's youth and for the CCY to gather information from youth that defines the Commission work for the year. This year, the youth focused on the topic of cultural competence and school discipline. Additionally, the CCY sponsored the annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards to honor individuals, organizations, businesses and youth honoree whose dedication, vision and service to children and youth have made an impact on the lives of others. Finally, one of our favorite collaborations was sponsoring a cookie stand at the Tree House Child Assessment Center's annual Tour de Cookie event.

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

Dana Bell, LCSW-C
Chair



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 2014-2015, the Commission elected to prioritize:

- **Access to Mental Health Services:** Allow youth better 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.

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.



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

Malik Couch
David Edimo
Josiah Holmes
Zachariyya Kahn

Sareana Kimia
Bobbi Sherman
Jayvon Sneed

Parent Representatives

Stuart Grossman
Lindsay Hoffman
Dr. Angela Mickalide
Nora Morales
Dr. Terri Phillips
Alisa Smedley
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
Dr. Helen Munoz-Baras, Mgmt. Sciences for Development, Inc.
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
Adraine Clutter, Silver Spring Dept. of Recreation
Jennifer Harris, Montgomery County Public Defender
Tamara Nedomanski, Montgomery County Public Schools

Staff

Barbara J. Andrews, Administrator, Early Childhood Services
Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services



CCY Activities

GUEST SPEAKERS AND PRESENTATIONS

- School Discipline and Suspension Policies Committee: Elijah Wheeler, DMC Reduction Coordinator, Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families discussed the new MCPS school discipline policy, cultural competence and disproportionate suspensions of students of color. (October 8, 2014)
- Full Commission: Luis Cardona, Positive Youth Development Initiative, Department of Health and Human Services spoke on work with youth in Montgomery County and on the County's My Brother's Keeper work. (February 11, 2015)
- Life Skills Training Committee: Visitors from Wheaton High School Project Management Class, MCPS to discuss Life Skills Curriculum in development at Wheaton HS. (February 11, 2015)
- School Discipline and Suspension Policies Committee: Luis Cardona, representing Cultura Cura. (February 11, 2015)
- Youth members of the Commission report on Hot Topics at every Commission meetings often raising issues adult Commissioners are not familiar with or aware of.
- Commission members who serve as liaisons report on the Behavioral Health Workgroup and on the Obesity Prevention Partnership at each meeting.



CCY Activities

Continued

TESTIMONY AND CORRESPONDENCE

- Attended and presented priorities and updates at Quarterly Meetings with the Director of Health and Human Services (2014-2015)
- Collaborated on a joint DHHS Commissions and Boards Statement on Mental Health, providing information on youth access to mental health services (Winter 2015)
- Participated in the County Executive's annual meeting with Boards, Committees and Commissions (Spring, 2015)
- Provided testimony to the County Executive at the forum for the FY16 Operating Budget in support of funding and services in the County related to access to mental health services for children and youth (Spring, 2015)



Tour de Cookie stand



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable

The Commission hosted its annual Youth Having a Voice Roundtable on December 10, 2014 at the National center for Children and Families in Bethesda. Approximately 10 teens from various high schools throughout the County joined us for a dynamic discussion. This year the conversation focused on two key topics associated with MCPS and CCY priorities: school discipline/cultural competency and life skills training.

Questions for the Roundtable were developed in the youth committee of the CCY and included:

Cultural Competence/School Discipline:

1. How do you believe you are treated by your peers based on how you identify yourself? By adults?
2. When it comes to discipline and school suspension, do you perceive any issues with certain groups of students within your school being treated differently than other groups?
3. How can our schools and/or other organizations ensure cross cultural understanding and accountability for youth?

Life Skills Training:

1. When you get out of high school and need to function in life, what types of skills will be important?
2. Which life skills do you think are the most important for you to learn?
3. Which of these skills have you already learned, and from whom and where?
4. Of the skills you still need to learn, who do you think should teach you, and where do you think you should learn them?
5. How can your school provide you the skills you need in order to be prepared for a successful future? How can your school improve in this regard?



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable *Continued*

Responses from the youth were informative and reflective and have the power to provide the adults in the room and at MCPS and other schools and programs for youth insights into youth experiences in Montgomery County. An overview of the discussion follows:

School Discipline and Cultural Competence

Overall, students feel that cultural competence among the school staff, administration, and peers is important, and yet it is not always demonstrated with consistency by any of these groups.

- Culturally diverse friend groups are important.
- After school activities and participation in cultural organizations can help display one's culture in a positive light.
- Communication with peers from different cultures can ease tension between cultural groups.
- Everyone should demonstrate respect and strive for understanding when interacting with other cultural groups.
- Some youth feel that they present themselves differently based on the peer/cultural group they are interacting with.
- The youth feel it is important to speak up when they feel disrespected by a peer with regard to culture.
- The home environment impacts how peers from different cultures interact at school and in the community.
- Some youth feel that they are judged based on their cultural orientation by peers and school staff, and that others expect them to behave a certain way because of their cultural background.
- Youth feel that teachers often favor students whose cultural backgrounds are similar to their own.
- Youth feel there is not always mutual respect among students, peers, and school staff/administration.
- Youth feel that the punishment they receive for even minor infractions is often unfairly linked to their culture and/or race.
- Youth feel that the school authorities cannot relate to them. They suggest that schools host roundtables like this one so that students can communicate their point of view without feeling “outnumbered.”
- Youth would like to see cross-cultural events occur within the school so that peers can learn about one another’s cultures.



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable *Continued*

The youth feel that there is progress to be made at school in relation to cultural competence. They value diverse peer groups and being active in cultural organizations both within and outside of school. However, some youth feel it is difficult to know how to interact with other cultural groups at school. Also, they say, it is hard to be part of too many different groups since your behavior changes when you spend time with a different set of people. They feel that school discipline is impacted by one's cultural background, and that some school staff and administration show favoritism toward one cultural group over others. One participant noted that teachers have held it against him for pointing out their prejudices. Another added that "if you do what you can to show ignorant people what you really are, and they keep treating you badly, then it is their fault, not yours." Yet another participant suggested that "you spread positive images of your culture by doing positive things."

Life Skills Training

The youth feel that the following skills are necessary to learn in order to achieve success and satisfaction in later life:

- organization/time management
- independence/self sufficiency
- cooking
- cleaning
- laundry/hygiene
- taxes/money management
- drivers education
- basic car and home maintenance and repairs
- CPR
- etiquette in the workplace and elsewhere
- working and living in a diverse environment
- balancing "street skills" and "book skills"
- learning and practicing realistic ways to get out of bad situations in a variety of contexts
- successfully completing the college and financial aid application process

The youth feel they could best learn these skills from a role model. However, not all youth have role models outside of the school system. Also, as one participant pointed out, "some are called 'life skills' because you have to learn them in life." Another youth added that "sometimes you have to learn the hard way, by making mistakes."



Youth Having a Voice Roundtable *Continued*

Some youth liked the idea of learning these life skills in school, if the class was experiential and scenario-based. As one youth pointed out, “if someone just tells it to you, you don’t learn it as well. You need to do it.” The youth do not believe Life Skills should be a graded class. They acknowledge that some students will not attend regardless of the possible benefits. Incentives could help with attendance of the class (i.e. food, field trips, etc.)

Youth also discussed Drivers Education as an essential life skill that is not available to all students as the cost is prohibitive for many families. They recommend that the schools find a way to offer Drivers Education at low cost.

In CCY Committee work this year (details in Commission Activities section of this report) one committee investigated Life Skills Training in schools and throughout the County. After researching the topic and using information from the Roundtable the committee discovered that youth at Wheaton High School had selected Life Skills training as their project for their Innovative Leadership class. The CCY committee met with the students to hear about their project and collaborated with them in their development of a Life Skills Curriculum for Wheaton High School. The curriculum has been submitted to MCPS for approval. The CCY Life Skills Committee has officially supported and endorsed the curriculum.



Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards

The Montgomery County Commission on Children and Youth held its 29th Annual Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards Ceremony on Monday, June 22, 2015 at the Adventure Theatre MTC in historic Glen Echo Park. The event was cosponsored by Adventure Theatre MTC.

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. The awards are made in four categories: Organization, Service Provider, 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.

The award program was generously sponsored by Adventure Theatre, The Gazette, Taco Bar, Geeks on Call and de Colores Mexican Folk Dance Company. The Corporate Volunteer Council of Montgomery County awarded \$250 to the Youth Award winner. This year's award winners were:

Organization: The Conflict Resolution Center of Montgomery County, Mr. Christopher Page, Executive Director

The nonprofit organization specializes in mediation and youth services. They have worked on a wide variety of approaches to collaborative problem solving in MCPS and other organizations throughout the County. A few of their services include free peer mediation programs in schools, teacher training and holding "Community Conferences" based on the practice of restorative justice. They have worked with thousands of youth throughout the County, providing them with conflict resolution skills for their lifetime.

Service Provider: Mr. Don Milner, Teacher, Montgomery College

Since 2001, Mr. Milner has provided a highly skilled service program for Montgomery College Youth Programs where he developed a study skills course for middle school and high school students, including a special summer study skills course offered in Montgomery College's after school programs. These courses and Mr. Milner's teaching work has touched hundreds of County youth and provided them with important and lifelong skills to help them succeed in school and beyond.





Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards *Continued*

***Youth Award:* Ms. Eunice Muchemi, Senior, Montgomery Blair High School**

Ms. Muchemi has volunteered for the nonprofit Let's Play America, which started as Takoma Plays, for four years. In that time she has volunteered for almost every playground and special event offered by the organization and has been a consistent and stalwart volunteer and youth leader. Ms. Muchemi is from Nairobi, Kenya and came to the U.S. in 2010. Her volunteer work began in 2011 and she has touched the lives of hundreds of youth with strong intercultural communication and youth leadership skills. She has a wonderful sense of others and the youth she served.

***Child Advocate:* Ms. Karla Hoffman, MA, Director, Community and School-Based Services, Family Services, Inc.**

In her role at Family Services, Inc., Ms. Hoffman has supervised multiple programs directly related to health and overall well-being of thousands of youth living in Montgomery County. As an advocate since 1983, Ms. Hoffman has shown a deep personal commitment to youth and mentoring services and a welcoming and listening stance that allows her to be approachable by youth and adults alike. Ms. Hoffman has further demonstrated her commitment as an advocate by serving as the Chair of the Montgomery County Community Action Board, being a committee chair on the Commission on Juvenile Justice and serving on the Welfare Reform Task Force. As an expert on youth development she has created and helped others to create sustainable youth programs throughout the County.





Nancy Dworkin Outstanding Service to Youth Awards *Continued*



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.





2015-2016 Priorities

Our top priority is to support policy and budget decisions that promote the safety and well-being of children and youth, and, furthermore, work to ensure children and youth have access to successful futures.

The Commission is working to affirm the needs, aspirations, and achievements of all of the County's young people through these two priorities.

Priority 1

The Commission is concerned about the rise in the numbers of homeless youth in the County. The Commission intends to look at the causes of this problem and the impact it has on youth and family members.

Priority 2

Review existing local initiatives and reports on My Brother's Keeper and opportunity youth. Analyze, meet with stakeholders, and prioritize recommendations to the County.



Commission on Children and Youth 2014-2015 Annual Report

Isiah Leggett, County Executive
Uma S. Ahluwalia, Director
JoAnn Barnes, Chief

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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.

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