What Helps What Harms

YOUTH MOVE NATIONAL
2014

What Helps What Harms (WHWH) is Youth MOVE's National Policy Iniative. Through a youth-driven forum and discussion process, WHWH captures the needs of young people in our chapter network and expresses the voice of youth across the country. Youth spoke up and we listened. The information contained in this report comes directly from Youth MOVE Chapter members and is used to guide Youth MOVE's national partnerships, resources we create, and strategic policy actions moving forward.   Individual Chapter WHWH documents are available on our website at www.youthmovenational.org.

The Youth MOVE National WHWH Policy Initiative is lead by Project Director Jessica Grimm of Bravehearts MOVE New York. Her passion and dedication to youth voice is what brought life to this project and made it happen. We'd also like to thank all of our chapters who lead the charge to ensure youth are heard in their communities and for their partnership in bringing their voices to the national level.

YOUTH MOVE NATIONAL™

WE ARE CHANGE AGENTS "MOTIVATING OTHERS THROUGH VOICES OF EXPERIENCE"

THREE THEMES

WHWH provides concrete recommendations for positive change in youth-serving systems. Young people repeatedly identified approaches that were most helpful to them which appeared in every pillar of WHWH. In order to ensure maximum positive impact of recommendations that are implemented as a result of WHWH, changes must be guided by these three themes:

PEER SUPPORT
CULTURAL COMPENTENCY
YOUTH VOICE

SIX PILLARS

Pillars are areas of work, which include youth-serving systems and places where young adults function. These six pillars were most commonly identified and repeated by young adults, and they most passionately expressed that these areas urgently need to be improved. Each Youth MOVE Chapter identified additional pillars of work that are relevant to their local communities; chapter-specific WHWH documents can be found on the Youth MOVE National Website. The pillars and priorities outlined here are prioritized by most frequently occurring from our collective voice of young people.

EDUCATION
COMMUNITY
MENTAL HEALTH
FOSTER CARE
JUVENILE JUSTICE
EMPLOYMENT

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THEMES

#1 PEER SUPPORT.

Youth are loud and clear that having opportunities to connect and share with their peers is a necessary experience to reach successful recovery. These peer opportunities and relationships are based on shared lived-experience that allow for youth and young adults to remain positive, feel hopeful and supported, and ultimately allow them to achieve their goals. Youth Peer Support is unique and often is self-defined and individualized by the community or service setting. Many Youth MOVE Chapters have adopted a peer support approach in their work, while other chapters identify the need for structured, peer-led programs to offer support throughout the transition period, assist with establishing long lasting, positive relationships, allow youth to feel valued and understood, and ultimately achieve and maintain recovery.

#2 CULTURAL COMPETENCY

Cultural competency is an emerging theme among our chapters. Youth defined competency as 'doing something successfully and efficiently'. It is imperative that we recognize the uniqueness of youth culture and the various sub-cultures that youth identify with and represent. Chapters identified the need for more awareness, education, and support to assist providers in the field on topics including, but not limited to, youth culture, race, and LGBTQ. Youth identified when providers lack the competence in understanding one's culture it can leave a young person feeling misunderstood, stigmatized and judged, resulting in disengagement. Cultural competency is about building relationships which are based on mutual respect, understanding, trust, and non-judgement.

#3 YOUTH VOICE

The recommendations within the document come directly from Youth MOVE Chapter youth members. As is frequently heard from youth, "Nothing about us, without us" applies to all youth-serving systems, programs, and services. Just as What Helps What Harms is a youth-driven policy document, the work that comes from implementing these priorities needs to be done in full partnership with young people. As youth-serving policies, systems, and services are changed based on this information, it is imperative that youth voice is infused in a meaningful way throughout all levels of design, implementation, and delivery. Maintaining a youth-driven approach in the process of change ensures improved outcomes, increased effectiveness, and higher engagement of young people. Youth voice is a practice that we all must value in order provide the best services for our young people.

PILLAR #1
EDUCATION

WHAT HELPS	WHAT HARMS	WHAT'S NEEDED
Teachers who are aware of mental health signs and offer support.	Large class sizes can be detrimental to the learning experience.	A safe place for youth to go to when they are feeling "overwhelmed".
A positive presence from teachers and administrators who show they care about the youth.	Teachers who do not have the ability to offer individualized attention.	More positive peer and adult role models for youth to learn from.
An educational environment where youth feel supported, valued, successful, and not stigmatized, even if they have social, emotional or behavioral challenges.	Complex curriculum and "*there isn't enough time to ask questions*".	Opportunities and support for youth to learn from mistakes, instead of just suspending them.
Teachers that understand youth culture, strive to form genuine relationships with their students, and offer individualized learning options.	School suspensions being viewed as strictly a punishment measure. Where is the teaching moment and accountability? Nobody is looking out for underlying issues. We need "*solutions not suspensions*".	More opportunities for youth to pursue interests through internships and apprenticeships.
A guidance counselor who actually meets with youth to offer an individualized look at post-school options such as vocational, college, trade, certification etc.	Lack of empathy and sincerity in anti-bullying or anti-violence campaigns. We lose focus on how much damage is done by violence.	Updated books, curriculum, and technology equipment for schools in inner-city communities.
	Common use of hurtful language by peers. Students and even teachers discriminate based on culture or social status.	Social awareness campaigns geared with sudents in mind need to be developed with young people.
	School work and curriculum intensity varies depending on which school.	

PILLAR #2
COMMUNITY

WHAT HELPS	WHAT HARMS	WHAT'S NEEDED
♦ Youth shelters that are available in the community. ♦ Community (youth friendly) resource specialists that are aware of all community resources. ♦ Multiple levels of housing options for youth of all different levels of maturity, independence and readiness. ♦ Hiring young professionals with lived-experience to work as housing staff. Building a positive relationship with the youth. ♦ Police officers that care about their community and the youth's needs. ♦ Accessible means of transportation for youth. Sometimes youth can't even get to support resources if there is no way to get there or youth cannot afford public transportation.	♦ Not having services geared to the "transitional age" population. Youth end up "*falling through the cracks*". ♦ Where you live can be a daily obstacle. Negative peer pressures in the community and easy access to drugs and alcohol. ♦ "*Voucher stigma*" in the community with landlords. Landlords "*think twice*" housing a young person with a housing voucher, questioning their financial stability and responsibility. People are needed to help youth through this process. ♦ The media glorifying violence, jail and drugs. ♦ Youth feeling that they have no safe place to go.	♦ Positive and supportive adults and peers that help youth transition into adulthood. ♦ Develop working relationships with law enforcement, community leaders, and youth to reduce tensions and stigma. ♦ Housing programs that do not give up or discharge a youth for making a mistake, but assist and support the youth learning from their mistakes. ♦ Youth and families learning how to become advocates and work toward a safer community. ♦ Clear consequences for those who commit an act of violence and a ZERO tolerance for bullying. A commitment from the school and the community on this is essential.

PILLAR #3
MENTAL HEALTH

WHAT HELPS	WHAT HARMS	WHAT'S NEEDED
Finding other youth that can RELATE to you (i.e support groups, peer support).	Inconsistency of providers. This leaves youth feeling " abandoned" and forces them to have to re-tell their story. Multiple intakes and overloads of paperwork cause this as well.	Youth need to play a more active role in the development of any treatment plan.
Having a trusting relationship with a peer or school counselor.	Lack of support for youth transitioning from the child system to the adult system. Youth need someone to walk with them through the process and make sure youth get the help they need.	A youth voice and presence for all policies that directly and/ or indirectly impact youth.
Providers that view youth as an active stakeholder in the process.		Youth Peer Support programs and services.
Knowing you have support. Whether it be from a family member, service provider, peer support, or friend, *"Youth need to feel supported"*!	The eligibility/qualifications requirements for youth to obtain the services they NEED, can prevent them from receiving services.	Developing good relationships with doctors, therapists and psychologists.
Safe treatment facilities. Youth should be heard when they say they no longer feel safe.	Lack of information about the side effects and alternatives to medications.	Having open conversation about mental health. Knowing the signs and what you can do to help.
Having knowledgeable clinicians who are trained to deal with youth, offer accurate diagnoses, and different approaches to treatment, including trauma.	STIGMA that surrounds individuals involved in the system.	Therapy dogs/cats that can be made available to clients.

PILLAR #4
FOSTER CARE

WHAT HELPS	WHAT HARMS	WHAT'S NEEDED
Freedoms and opportunities for youth in care that are given to youth NOT in care ("*Normalcy*").	Foster parents that treat youth as if they are not part of the family. "*The youth already feel out of place and this further adds to the trauma.*"	Mandatory rule for youth to live in a transitional apartment before aging out of foster care. Then the youth will be able to learn how to live independent successfully. Youth need practice with these skills BEFORE they are discharged alone.
Mentoring for youth. Youth benefit from some by their side that hears their VOICE.	The trust issues that kids develop from bouncing around from home to home. Leaving a youth feeling the cycles of attachment and abandonment. Abuse that can happen within foster homes.	Classes for foster parents learning how to better integrate foster youth with their own families to decrease feelings of isolation.
Foster parents that understand the importance of the role that they play in a young person's life. A youth that feels genuinely cared for by their foster parent is more likely to do well in the home. Foster parents that make a commitment to stick with a child throughout the transition period into adulthood. "*You don't age out of a family or a relationship*"!	Lack of training for staff to increase cultural competence, motivation and youth engagement.	More parent involvement and support while youth are in care. Mentors for youth by young professionals with shared lived-experience.
Extending age eligibility for foster care. This allows youth who may have prematurely exited care to be able to reenter care to seek additional supports and services.	Youth not having any knowledge about their history in care i.e Medication, placements, reasoning for removal.	A stronger review process for people who wish to become foster parents. Youth involvement/voice with training of foster parents.
	Being separated from biological parents. Case workers offer minimal explanations and don't validate a young person's pain and trauma.	More youth involvement in their own transition planning.

PILLAR #5
JUVENILE JUSTICE

WHAT HELPS	WHAT HARMS	WHAT'S NEEDED
Clear explanation of the court process and the rights that youth have during their time in the system. Youth would like to work jointly with providers over their situation.	Punishments that isolate the youth from natural supports. Youth in these situations greatly desire someone they can trust and reach out to, such as a youth advocate or mentor.	Trainings specific for police officers on how to interact with youth and mental illness. Policies that acknowledge and protect LGBTQ youth and are trauma-informed.
Mental health services that are accessible to youth during their time in detention.	Youth going through the court system with no understanding of what is going on with their case and their rights.	More assistance for youth transitioning from jail back into the community.
"*Chill*" probation officers. Youth and probation officers can have a mutual respect for one another while PO's try to empower the youth, not belittle them.	Terminology that the youth cannot understand leaves youth feeling overwhelmed, silenced and intimidated.	The ability to pick your own program for community service versus being assigned to one.
A system and community that values Restorative Practices.	Negative relationships between youth and police officers. Police officers that use excessive force with youth and stereotype them.	Youth working alongside local family court judges to create youth-friendly materials that are easy to understand, and make court proceedings more youth engagement friendly and culturally competent.
Having someone by your side in court that can explain every step of each process. Having someone you can trust.	Staff that humiliate youth and talk down to them. Youth feel that they do not have a voice.	
	The STIGMA that surrounds youth in the juvenile justice system. Providers and administrators assume the youth is "*bad*" without learning their story or hearing their VOICE.	

PILLAR #6
EMPLOYMENT

WHAT HELPS	WHAT HARMS	WHAT'S NEEDED
A business who encourages giving young adults job opportunities, including young adults who may have made mistakes in their past.	Jobs want youth to have experience in order to be hired but, employers do not give youth the opportunity to hired so they can obtain the experience.	Access to some form of child care while youth search or interview for a job.
Having someone aid you in finding employment (i.e Mentor). Having a support you can go to during your time employed. Positive relationships with youth and employers.	Not enough financial assistance or affordability for certification programs. Vocational certification that is too expensive for youth to utilize. There is also a lack of these resources in the community.	More job opportunities for youth with lived-experience, to work in and with community agencies.
Opportunities for youth to learn "*real life*" vocational skill before they leave high school.	Not having child care to look for a job, let alone keeping one. Often youth cannot get childcare assistance unless you are already employed and can show a month's worth of pay stubs.	Better access to certification programs. An increase of programs that lead directly to a permanent employment placement.
Businesses that allow youth the ability to take time off for mental health needs in the same way others take time off for medical needs.	Lack of "real" job readiness for youth during time in foster care.	Businesses that are willing to hire youth, especially youth with a criminal history. "*Some people just need a second chance*".
	Youth feeling judged based on their lack of experience, culture, age, sex etc.	Supports and/or services in the community to help youth obtain gainful employment.

The following Youth MOVE Chapters completed local WHWH projects and the voices of the youth in these communities directly drive the information throughout this document.

Bravehearts MOVE New York
Kentucky Youth MOVE
Onondaga Youth MOVE (NY)
Orange County Change Agents (NY)
Rise Up! Youth MOVE (NY)
SITY On the MOVE
Y.E.S. Youth MOVE (FL)
Youth MOVE Kairos (OR)
Youth MOVE Maine
Youth MOVE New Jersey - Hudson YP
Youth MOVE North Carolina
Youth MOVE Saginaw (MI)
Youth MOVE Seminole (FL)
Youth MOVE West Virginia

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