

CommunitySpeak:**Raising the Voices of Youth, Families and Great Service Provision in Southeast Michigan**

Wednesday, August 23, 2017

Judson Center, Royal Oak, MI

Children's Center, Detroit, MI

Michigan's Children and our host partners, the Judson Center in Royal Oak and the Children's Center in Detroit, hosted a day of dialogue with federal, state, and local public officials; other advocacy partners; and parents, youth, and child and family service providers at our first ever CommunitySpeak event. Attendees discussed successes and challenges within the foster care, mental health, education, and other service systems intended to benefit children, youth and families in Michigan.

Parents, service providers, and young adults spoke about the impact of programs and policies on their lives, and made recommendations for changes that would relieve burdens on the lives of families. Each speaker had their own unique story, reflecting the following recommendations:

- 1. Expansion of mental health care services and funding:** Speakers lamented the instability of rates for services and the lack of overall resources for mental health care services. Parents also called to eliminate the barriers that restrict access to mental health care for children and youth in the foster care system.
- 2. Raise the wages of caseworkers and foster parents:** Several people asked for more regular training and information for foster parents both before and after any youth enter their care, specifically around trauma-informed parenting practices. Parents of youth with disabilities noted that frequent staff turnover caused undue burdens for them.
- 3. Better pay for mental health and social work professionals:** Parent speakers recalled how their child's service professionals quit their jobs because wages in other industries were much higher. Service providers testified that fast food companies provided more competition for labor than other service organizations.
- 4. Further integration of schools with social services:** Parents recounted stories of how their children benefited from having clinical physicians and social workers who were deeply embedded in their school and who could work with educators to wrap support around the whole child. Parents also requested that "wraparound" support staff be included in IEP meetings for students.

In order to improve youth outcomes, we need to invest in services that work for children, youth and their families. As federal budget cuts loom and as our state begins another fiscal year with opportunities to invest, we need to pay attention to the experiences shared at this CommunitySpeak and create other opportunities to hear directly from those most directly impacted by those investments or lack thereof. Youth, caregivers and service providers can provide recommendations for systemic improvements that have the best chance of working. Policymakers, advocates and others in attendance will use what we learned to build better policy and practice.

Youth were joined by the following listeners:

Elected Officials and Staff:

Staff, U.S. Representative Brenda Lawrence
Staff, U.S. Representative Sander Levin
State Senator Hoon-Yung Hopgood
State Representative Stephanie Chang
State Representative Sherry Gay-Dagnogo
State Representative Tim Greimel
State Representative Klint Kesto
State Representative Hank Vaupel

State and Local Government Representatives:

Children's Trust Fund
Detroit Wayne Mental Health Authority
Foster Care Review Board
Michigan Department of Education
Michigan Department of Education
Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)
Wayne County DHHS

Other Advocacy Partners:

Ethel and James Flinn Foundation
Fostering Forward Michigan
Macomb Community Action
United Way of Southeastern Michigan

This CommunitySpeak has been made possible by the voices of the youth, families and those directly working to help them supported through the following partners:



Developing Strong Children
and Successful Families

The Children's Center was founded in 1929 by former Detroit Mayor and United States Senator James Couzens as one of the first child guidance centers in the United States, The Children's Center has

grown to be the Michigan child and family agency offering the largest number of specialized therapy programs for at-risk children and youth. Located in Detroit it serves nearly 7,500 children and families annually through child welfare, behavioral health, social and emotional services and supports. The Children's Center has a strong team of licensed psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists and case managers that work to treat the whole child through an integrated care model. Using a collaborative approach The Children's Center works with the whole family to strengthen their natural support systems to see them thrive during and after treatment.

The Judson Center is a non-profit human service agency that provides compassionate, comprehensive services to children and families throughout southeast Michigan in Genesee,



Judson Center
Helping those in need succeed

Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties. Since opening in 1924, they now provide services to more than 4,000 children, adults and families each year. Their work changes fates and restores childhoods for children who have been abused and neglected, and others who are challenged by developmental disabilities, severe emotional impairments and autism spectrum disorder. Judson Center has remained responsive to these and other community needs by providing a range of innovative and quality services and serving as a resource for healing and a leader in human services.

Michigan's Children is the only statewide independent voice working to ensure that public policies are made in the best interest of children from cradle to career and their families. Our emphasis is on influencing public policies that close equity gaps and ensure that the children and youth who face the most challenges have the supports they need to succeed in school and life. By working to reform public policy, we improve the odds for all children, and support the work of those who provide services that help individual children overcome the odds. We have been creating opportunities for young people, parents and other community members to share their stories, concerns and suggestions directly with policymakers since 1996, and continue to find new ways to provide young people, families and the supporting professionals around them the tools that they need to advocate on their own behalf.

CommunitySpeak, building on Michigan's Children's signature KidSpeak® and FamilySpeak forums, combines the benefits of hearing directly from youth and families who have experienced challenges with a glimpse at exceptional programs that work to serve them well. This event will provide a rare opportunity for youth and families to speak directly with federal, state, county and city government representatives, as well as community and business leaders about barriers that they face and their suggestions for change. Connecting the experiences of youth and families directly with policymakers has proven to be an effective advocacy strategy. Adding in the experiences of service providers helps provide context to individual experiences and defines additional recommendations. Their voices have changed the trajectory of policy conversation and have resulted in building champions for constituent-driven solutions in the Legislature, several Departments and other local policymaking bodies.

For more information about this KidSpeak or other opportunities to hear directly from young people or their families, please contact Michele Corey, Vice President for Programs, at 517-648-5498 or michele@michiganschildren.org.