

Richmond Department of Children and Youth

Emerging Priorities from the Community Needs Assessment

Youth and Family Voices: surveys, focus groups, forums and secondary data

October 28, 2020

The Richmond Department of Children and Youth's Community Needs Assessment (CNA) is drawing to a close. This work has included interviews, focus groups, forums, secondary data review, and a synthesis of multiple existing reports and resources in the community. It has been challenging to adapt the process to a virtual environment and, like much in the current conditions of social distancing and virtual interaction, it is not perfect. Nevertheless, there is significant convergence within the data that was collected and reviewed among the youth and community voices that participated and guided the process.

The following are the top priorities that are emerging from the CNA. The work of synthesizing all information is ongoing so these may be refined in the coming weeks. However there is strong convergence around the following topics.

#1 Mental Health and Wellness

The issue of mental health and well-being was a concern across all of the focus groups that were conducted. Given high levels of violence and need across Richmond we would expect many children and youth in Richmond to score high on the Adverse Childhood Experience Assessment (ACES) signaling high levels of trauma. This is particularly true for Black and Latinx residents who are disproportionately exposed to violence leading to long term impacts on health and well-being. The need for trauma informed programming as well as mental health programs emerged as a significant need for children, youth, and families along with the need for that programming to consider the rich diversity of residents many of whom have are experiencing the trauma of the constant threat of family deportation, violence in the community, discrimination and more. Coinciding with these stressors on youth, there is a concern that some youth are turning to alcohol and drug abuse. Also, the need for culturally fluent approaches is central to this gap as many of Richmond's children, youth, and families come from non-western cultures where there may be barriers and stigma attached to western approaches to mental health and wellness programming.

#2 Education Support and Employment Training/Support

The need for education support and employment training emerged across surveys, focus groups, forums and other resources. Richmond children and youth want the chance to excel in school and move successfully to college and career. There was a strong desire for college access programs, tutoring, wraparound support for those who may be struggling such as transitional age youth or new immigrants arriving as unaccompanied minor children. The latter group also needs accelerated language learning. In addition, participants identified mentoring, internships, and job skills training as key to their success. In addition, access to resources such as high-speed internet and computer equipment such as tablets has become a priority in the current distance learning environment. Participants often pointed to disparities between nearby, wealthier districts outside of Richmond that are better resourced and have programs, tools, and infrastructure that allows for students to excel.

#3 Out of School Time, Afterschool Sports, and Enrichment Programming

Low cost or no cost out-of-school and after-school sports and enrichment programming scored high as both desired and needed for youth to thrive across groups. Sports were a popular suggestion as were outdoor activities such as gardening and hiking. The arts were very often mixed in with responses to sports but also were often singled out as highly desirable (music, dance, visual arts were all mentioned). Culturally relevant arts and other programming were important that these activities helped them to build awareness, strengthen self-esteem, and create a sense of belonging. Some groups stated there were few or no respectful and safe spaces to be with others like them. For example, Asian focus group participants felt that they were

marginalized in many programs where their cultural differences were not recognized. This group discussed the solution of a “club” or space where multiple Asian cultures could be celebrated, practiced, and shared.

#4 Information, Guidance, Case Management

For children, youth and families, there were a number of voices that reported on how difficult it is to navigate the Richmond environment of youth services and most all community engagement activities identified the need for support that would assist community members in understanding what resources were out there and whether they qualified to access them. Many of those surveyed said they did not access services because they did not know about them. Young people expressed the need for help, including coaching or case management, in navigating the turn toward independence or the journey to college success. Case management or at the very least guidance from a caring adult is needed so that children, youth and their families can understand and access the services available. Parents and guardians need more support with understanding what was offered and how to best use these programs and services for their children. This information needs to be in multiple languages with extra effort to reach marginalized children, youth, and their families.

#5 Violence Prevention

Violence in the community came up as a barrier to participation and even as a significant barrier to everyday activity for all priority populations. This came out most strongly in the focus groups with African American youth saying they couldn't go to many places in Richmond out of fear and couldn't comfortably be out with groups of friends often because someone felt they were not safe in a particular neighborhood. Others spoke of witnessing violence and being afraid to be in particular locations. Bullying is also a concern for a number of populations. Some participants also reported the fear of gender-based violence as a barrier to movement and participation in the community.

#6 Basic Needs

Many of the focus group participants reported that they had difficulty or needed support with meeting basic needs (housing, food, medicine, utilities, and transportation) for their families: for homeless participants housing and wraparound support was identified; for TAY the need for assistance in supporting their own household after they turned 18 was mentioned (see #3), for immigrant children the need for financial support for families who were often barred from working full time was mentioned; for justice-involved youth they needed access to support that they said was often contingent on having been in Juvenile Hall, and; for some parents and youth who wanted to access particular programs, transportation was identified as a barrier.

The Lens of COVID 19 and the Richmond Community

With COVID 19 and the resulting economic disruption influencing the lives of California residents for coming months and possibly years, the issues of the digital divide, mental health, education, basic needs, and many of the above priorities have been exacerbated and solutions may need to take on new forms and meaning. This situation and its impacts are likely to persist for some time and systemic changes are likely to result. The Richmond community is deeply engaged in both action and ongoing conversation related to this. Ongoing collaboration, community engagement, and partnership will be essential as we move to the Strategic Investment Planning and Implementation phase.