



Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

JUVENILE JUSTICE WEBINAR SERIES

SESSION 3: YOUTH ADDRESS THE
ROOT CAUSES OF JUVENILE
JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT



April 29, 2021
10:00 am-12:00 pm
Virtual Event

PLEASE REGISTER AT:
[JJS321.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/jjs321)

Introduction

On April 29, 2021, The Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) conducted the third session of the Juvenile Justice Webinar Series. A panel of youth and youth representatives discussed their experiences with the juvenile justice system and offered suggestions for addressing the root causes of system involvement. The session also offered an opportunity for participants to reflect on the recommendations from the previous two sessions and gain insight on the youth experience.

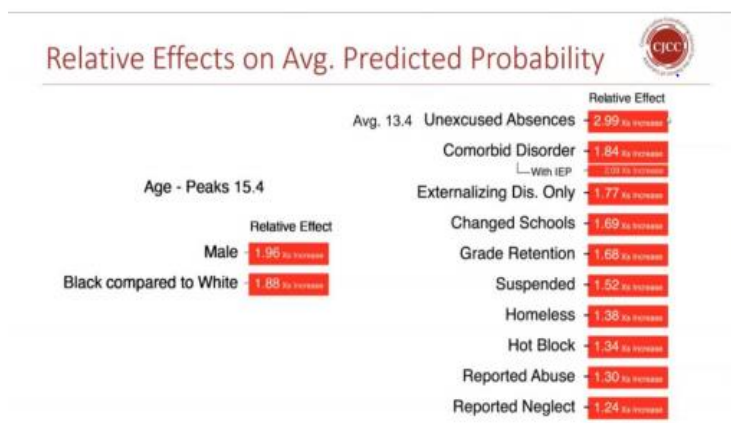
Kristy Love, Deputy Executive Director of the CJCC, began the session with opening remarks explaining the purpose of the session and emphasizing the need to identify specific actions to reduce juvenile justice system involvement. Ms. Love highlighted for the roughly 53 participants that CJCC has been laser focused on how to prevent youth from becoming justice system involved, while being committed to doing the work to see the recommendations come to fruition.

Afterward, she introduced the moderator for the panel, Kyla Woods. Ms. Woods is a Youth Leaders in Action Co-Chair for the District’s Juvenile Justice Advisory Group and a Policy Fellow with the Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Next, Ms. Love introduced Frank Petersen IV, CJCC’s Juvenile Justice Compliance Monitor, who conducted an introductory audience poll which showcased the participants’ interdisciplinary background. About a third of the attendees worked in a variety of preventative wrap-around services, with the rest representing the criminal and juvenile justice, child welfare, community organizing, education, mental/behavioral health, and social services sectors.

Mr. Petersen provided a recap of findings and recommendations from the CJCC study of the [Root Causes of Juvenile Justice System Involvement](#), an overview of the key action items from session two and stated the goals for session three.

Overview of Recommendations from Root Cause Study



The CJCC’s Root Cause Study identified the following factors that increase the chances a young person will become involved in the juvenile justice system: unexcused absences, being held back a grade, being suspended, changing schools mid-year, mental health challenges, abuse and neglect, homelessness and living on a block with a lot of gun violence.

Additional explanatory factors gleaned from focus groups and a series of interviews with youth included: peer influence, future uncertainty, and the lack of exposure to alternatives.

Recommendations from the study included implementing evidence-based programs in the District such as the school-based Becoming a Man (BAM)© program; a community-based cross-age peer mentoring program; creating a year-round youth employment program that includes vocational job training; conducting universal ACEs screening for youth; providing ongoing, community-based case management services to youth and families who have not touched the legal system; and establishing a process where Birth-to-Three providers can connect families to case management systems once they age out. Leaders from youth-serving agencies collaborated to identify additional recommendations for the District. Key action items included: increase awareness of youth services, enhance collaboration among youth serving agencies, increase youth exposure, and expand youth employment opportunities.

The goals of session three were to amplify the youth voice in the community by gaining the perspectives of youth and parent representatives and generating next steps for implementing recommendations.

Youth Panel Discussion

Upon conclusion of the summary of the recommendations from the previous sessions, Ms. Woods then introduced the panelists:

- Nataly Del Valle, Peer Advocate, DYRS
- Tia Bell, Founder, T.R.I.G.G.E.R Project
- Deon, Youth Leader, T.R.I.G.G.E.R Project¹
- Makayla, Youth Leader, T.R.I.G.G.E.R Project
- Alicia Jackson, Parent Representative, Case Manager Mayor's Office on Returning Citizen Affairs



¹ To protect their privacy, only the first names of the youth panelists have been provided.

Ms. Woods framed the conversation by presenting the panel with discussion questions about their experiences as youth in the District, and what they believe will help prevent justice system involvement.

How Are Youth Perceived in The City?

Ms. Del Valle shared that where the youth live affects how they are perceived. She stated that the media, when reporting crime, also may influence individuals to have a negative view of youth. Deon added that there is a lack of respect for youth based on what neighborhood they are from. Deon also shared that he feels youth are viewed as a threat. Ms. Del Valle shared that the view DYRS has of the youth they serve is different. She added that they recognize youth as someone's child, sibling, protector, friend and sometimes head of household. Makayla shared that youth are not judged as individuals, but as a group. Many adults view youth as unintelligent, misguided, and disrespectful.

Ms. Woods then asked the panel how these perceptions affect youth. Makayla responded by sharing that it is hurtful to be judged based on skin color, age or where you come from. Deon agreed and stated he feels obligated to prove that he is not a threat, and he fears that he may be perceived as threatening if he tries to advocate for himself.

Tia Bell recognized the youth and expressed her gratitude for their participation and their willingness to be vulnerable in sharing their experiences. She also recognized that there have been improvements made to the system, but often we need to hear from youth because their reality may be different. Ms. Bell stated that we do things for youth but fail to seek youth input, and thus we need to hear from young people.

Ms. Woods again turned to the youth to ask how we can best support youth and show that we care. Makayla responded first, stating that there need to be people working in the community who are from the community, particularly police officers. In her experience, people of other races who live or work in their communities do not relate to them. Deon agreed and added he feels they try to rule over them and he does not feel comfortable coming together with police or others who have negative views of him.



Ms. Del Valle shared that she was formerly in foster care and committed to DYRS and relates to Makayla's and Deon's experiences. Currently, in her role as a Peer Advocate, she has felt uncomfortable at times speaking to police, but does so to represent the youth voice and help

police better understand their experiences. Ms. Del Valle mentioned that there need to be more opportunities for youth to share their experiences.

Ms. Woods then asked Ms. Jackson to provide her perspective as a parent. Ms. Jackson agreed that youth are perceived by what Ward they may come from, particularly youth coming from Wards 7 and 8. She shared that her son is 25 and fears that he may be perceived as a threat, even when commuting to work in his security uniform. Living in Ward 8, she must instruct her son to be cautious. Ms. Jackson suggested that we find opportunities to bring a diverse set of community members and youth across Wards together to change their perception of one another. The panelists agreed that coming together would help change the perception of youth in the city. Ms. Bell expounded on what the youth shared by stating that when youth misbehave, it is often due to them feeling inadequate and under-resourced, and their behavior is an expression of their anger and their attempt to regain control. She stated that youth are being judged before their decision-making capacity is fully developed, and that encouraging youth development is critical.

Ms. Woods then posed another question to the panel regarding opportunities to help support youth and keep them engaged. She asked what the government can do, versus what the community can do, and if there are ways they can work together.

Opportunities to Support and Engage Youth

Ms. Bell offered that we should help youth develop and exercise good judgement, and one way we can do that is by being intentional about including young people in the decision-making process. She shared that her mother

was shot when she was 10 years old, and she understands what it is like to experience trauma. Ms. Bell pointed out that it is important to provide youth with outlets and alternatives to behaviors that can lead to justice involvement. Ms. Woods asked Ms. Bell to talk about what we should focus on this summer to prevent a spike in crime. Ms. Bell responded by sharing that her organization, The T.R.I.G.G.E.R Project, and Moms Demand Action



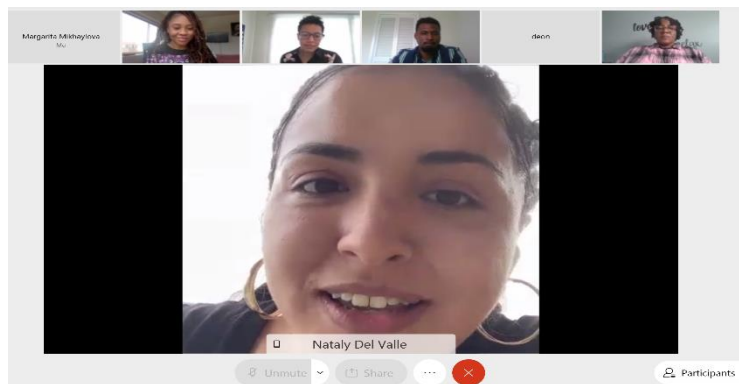
are hosting a city-wide End Gun Violence event June 1,2021, to kick off Gun Violence Awareness month. She stated that in the summer we usually see a rise in gun crime and the event is a collaborative effort made by government agencies, community organizations, and residents to bring an end to gun violence.

Ms. Woods asked Makayla to elaborate on her message in the chat suggesting that youth are interested in going on trips. Makayla shared that she participated in a program that would take

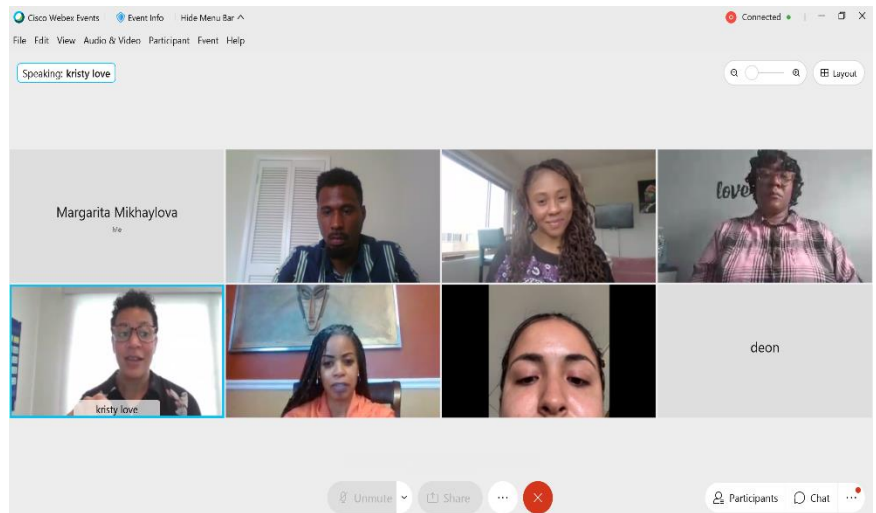
them on various trips throughout the city such as the movies, museums, the zoo, and places in the city they have not been exposed to. Makayla also offered that the recreation centers need to be reopened. Ms. Jackson followed up by stating that recreation centers should open for extended hours and even exploring the possibility of a 24-hour recreation center for youth. She also highlighted that creating exposure activities that are outside of the norm are beneficial for youth. Ms. Woods again turned to Deon to ask him about to share more about how sports keep him engaged and safe during the summer. Deon noted that sports, particularly basketball, allow him to release frustration and is a safe outlet.

Ms. Bell shared that in her experience, basketball protected her and allowed her to create stable adult relationships. Recognizing that trauma is present, and youth are still developing, Ms. Bell stated that it is about more than the sports. Being part of a team creates a safe space, positive peer relationships, access to support systems, and helps establish future connections. Ms. Bell mentioned that it is the presence of love, which gives youth confidence knowing they have a person to call on.

Ms. Woods asked Ms. Del Valle to share ideas for how to connect youth with caring adults. Ms. Del Valle shared that the mentors are essential to the work they do at DYRS. The Credible Messenger program and other community organizations provide mentors for youth. Currently, in her role as Peer Advocate, she is planning exposure trips for DYRS committed youth this summer and she mentioned that relationship-building encourages participation. Oftentimes, programs and services are available only to committed youth; however, they advocate that participation be extended to family members. Ms. Del Valle underlined the need to include the whole family in activities that support youth engagement. This builds community and trust, which can enhance opportunities to connect the youth, or their families to other programming. Ms. Del Valle also agreed that a 24-hour youth center should be something the city should look at bringing to multiple communities. She noted that creating awareness about programs is essential and we must be sure the community knows how to access the resources.



Mannone Butler, Executive Director for the CJCC, asked the panel to share their vision on what would make for a successful 24-hour youth center. Ms. Jackson shared that the center should be staffed by community advocates and youth leaders. Offering a variety of structured programming would help include more youth and keep them engaged. Ms. Jackson shared that a police presence or a security presence would be necessary, and adequate staffing. Ms. Woods referred to earlier comments made by Makayla, that the security guards or officers should be people who are from the community. Ms. Woods brought forward the suggestion for the center to be Metro accessible. Ms. Del Valle shared that the center should also include access to resources such as internet access, showers, meals, and beds. Ms. Butler asked Deon to share his thoughts and he mentioned that stopping the violence and coming together as a community will keep things safe for youth.



Ms. Woods turned to the attendees to engage them in the conversation and asked Mr. Petersen to field questions from the audience. Mr. Petersen then presented an audience question which was related to how to best engage youth in existing opportunities.

Makayla and Deon both agreed that posting information on social media platforms, specifically Instagram, is the best way to reach youth. Makayla also mentioned that youth often do not want to participate if the program if the way that it is advertised does not grab their attention. Ms. Woods added that utilizing various influencers youth are familiar with in the music and entertainment industry could help spread the message. Ms. Woods also offered that navigating DC Government websites can be challenging. Ms. Del Valle agreed that program information should be available on Instagram and the messaging should be youth friendly and in language that is relatable to them. She added that DYRS offers free meals, offers programs at convenient times for families, and finds creative ways to incentivize participation. Creating a sense of community helps increase participation. Deon shared that he is more encouraged to participate in activities that promote togetherness.

Ms. Del Valle shared that the Credible Messengers at DYRS can be returning citizens. She stated that it is important to have people who resemble and relate to our youth as mentors. Ms. Jackson responded by providing background information on MORCA and what role they play in assisting returning citizens. She shared that they encourage and assist returning citizens with finding employment where they can give back to the communities they came out of before incarceration. She shared that she is also a returning citizen, and it is beneficial to put individuals who have

experienced the justice system in a position where they can help others currently pursuing a path forward.

Another question was presented in the chat following comments made by Ms. Bell regarding frontal lobe development. If all youth have the same timeline (up to 24 years old) before their frontal lobe is fully developed, then why do only some youth offend? Mr. Petersen responded by referring to the report's findings on various risk factors that increase the likelihood that a youth may become justice system involved.

Ms. Woods asked the panel to share thoughts on what can be done year-round for youth to keep them engaged.

Recommendations for Effective Youth Engagement

Makayla mentioned that in her experience, males her age face the most challenges and there should be a program that keeps them off the streets. Ms. Jackson responded by suggesting the city offer a year-round employment programming for youth. Ms. Woods agreed, and added on a need for creativity in providing opportunities that offer substantial wages for youth.



Ms. Bell shared another experience where she was present during a gun violence incident, and although police responded to the incident, there needs to be more intersection between the community and government agencies to prevent incidents from occurring. Ms. Bell expressed that there needs to be an intense focus on prevention. She highlighted the need to create unique funding sources that fit the needs of the community. She shared that she has challenges securing funding for her programs that address youth gun violence.

Christopher Wade, Outreach Specialist at the United States Attorney's Office, joined the discussion and shared information on his experiences working with youth and what he currently does in his role to provide programming. He first shared sentiments with Deon, that being a Black man and a DC native is challenging and he has faced discrimination, even while serving as a police officer. Mr. Wade agreed with the panel that you must include the youth when creating programming for them. He provided examples where he was able to utilize youth in creating a Know Your Rights curriculum and this encouraged participation. Mr. Wade added that the community needs to be supported when making efforts to work with youth.

Ms. Jackson shared that we need to provide the youth with love and wrap our arms around them. Create familiarity in the community and keeping youth engaged in activities that create a sense

of unity and love. Ms. Woods responded with a suggestion that unique funding be made available for community-based organizations to connect with individuals. She stated that in some cases individuals in the community may be better served by these organizations versus government agencies.

Ms. Love turned back to the youth and asked them to offer additional insight. Makayla shared that youth need to be heard and that often adults do not listen to them. She added that there is a need for more activities that engage youth. Deon agreed with Makayla and shared that he wanted Black people to come together; he added that we need to listen to each other and support community advocates who can connect with people. Ms. Jackson also commented that many events and programs are specified by Ward. Coming together as an entire city builds relationships and can reduce conflicts.

Closing

Executive Director Butler gave closing remarks and thanked the panelists for their insights with respect to the need for more collaboration among agencies, accessibility to existing services, flexibility and creativity in programming, and focus on family stabilization. She shared that CJCC remains committed to identifying and supporting prevention and intervention efforts that can improve outcomes for the youth in the District.

Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

JUVENILE JUSTICE WEBINAR SERIES SESSION THREE:
YOUTH ADDRESS THE ROOT CAUSES OF JUVENILE
JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

KEY ACTION ITEMS

Create opportunities for law enforcement officers to engage in discussions with youth to gain an understanding of youth culture and the history of community- police relations in the District.

Hire police officers who are from the communities they serve.

Establish preventive programs for youth who are not involved in the juvenile justice system but are experiencing risk factors that increase their likelihood of system involvement.

Increase family engagement by extending resources and programming to the families of system-involved youth.

Explore opportunities to open a 24-hour youth center in the District.

Provide opportunities for youth to take trips to various parts of the city they do not often frequent and explore travel outside of the District.

Create a special funding source that allows the city to allocate resources to community-led programs designed to support and engage vulnerable youth.

