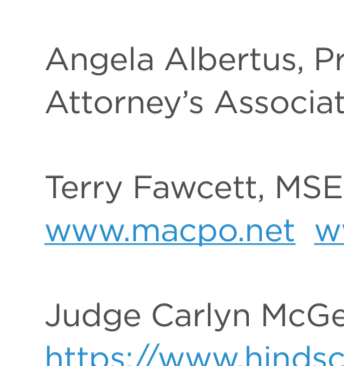


KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CONFERENCE

Building a New Paradigm in Youth Justice

On June 5th, 2023, the Applied Research Center for Civility (ARCC), a joint effort of the National Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC) and the University of California San Diego (UCSD), organized a one-day conference in San Diego, California to discuss the future of community-led juvenile diversion around the country. Support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Conrad Prebys Foundation, and the UCSD Division of Extended Studies helped bring dozens of people from around the country working for youth justice to participate in wide-ranging conversations about how to increase the leadership of communities in diverting young people away from the juvenile legal system.

The conference theme, Community-Led Juvenile Diversion: Building a New Paradigm in Youth Justice, focused attention on the role of communities in shaping juvenile diversion programs and the importance of partnerships between juvenile legal systems and the communities they impact.



Nate Balis, Director of the Juvenile Justice Strategy Group at the Annie E. Casey Foundation gave a keynote address.

Three speaker panels throughout the day gave a diverse group of system and community organization leaders an opportunity to reflect on their experience working in and with community members, youth, and their families to reduce youth interactions with the juvenile legal system.

The first panel featured representatives of the juvenile legal system:

Angela Albertus, Program Director, Juvenile Justice, National District Attorney's Association; <http://ndaa.org> <https://twitter.com/ndaajustice>

Terry Fawcett, MSE, Probation Director, Pine County, MN; www.mn-ca.org www.macpo.net www.appa-net.org

Judge Carlyn McGee Hicks, County Court Judge District 1, Hinds County, MS; <https://www.hindscountyms.com/court-systems/county-court-judges/district-1>

Abdul Malik, CBI Citywide Director, New York City Department of Probation; <https://www.nyc.gov/site/probation/index.page>

Scott MacDonald, Justice Consultant / President Justsolve, former Chief Probation Officer, Santa Cruz County, CA; <https://www.justsolve.net>

The second panel brought together leaders of organizations working with communities and juvenile legal systems:

Julia Arroyo, Co-Executive Director, Young Women's Freedom Center, CA; <https://youngwomenfreedom.org/>

Marquetta Atkins-Woods, Founder and Executive Director, Destination Innovation, Inc., Wichita, KS; <https://www.destinationinnovation.org/> <https://www.progenyks.com/>

Elida Ledesma, Executive Director, Arts for Healing and Justice Network, Long Beach, CA; www.ahjnetwork.org/

Brittany Young, Founder and CEO, B-360, Baltimore, MD; www.b360baltimore.org

Jaquita Monroe, Senior Associate, Annie E. Casey Foundation; <https://www.aecf.org/> <https://www.aecf.org/work/juvenile-justice/jdai>

And the third panel included key figures involved in the San Diego District Attorney's Juvenile Diversion Initiative:

Breea Buskey, MS, Program Manager, Alternative Juvenile Justice, National Conflict Resolution Center; <https://ncrconline.com/mediation-conflict-resolution/community-services-san-diego/restorative-practices/district-attorney-juvenile-diversion-initiative/>

Sunny Chang, Youth Programs Senior Manager, Outdoor Outreach, San Diego, CA; <https://www.outdooroutreach.org/>

Lisa Weinreb Delgadillo, Esq., Chief of the Juvenile Branch of the San Diego District Attorney's Office, Deputy District Attorney; <https://www.sdcdca.org/prosecuting/juvenile/Juvenile-Diversion>

Monica Felix, LCSW, Supervisor of Behavioral Health Programs, Rady Children's Hospital, San Diego, CA; <https://www.rchsd.org/>

Steven P. Dinkin, President, National Conflict Resolution Center; <https://ncrconline.com/>

The panels were followed by a breakout session that gave attendees an opportunity to share ideas about the future of community-led diversion in the United States. In addition, attendees submitted questions and comments online throughout the day. Conference attendees came from a wide range of backgrounds and included community-based organization leaders and staff, government staff, justice system employees (e.g., judges, probation officers, prosecutors), mentors, activists, foundation staff, community or family members, school or university faculty and staff, formerly justice involved people, social services staff, and youth.

Below, we describe the major themes and ideas that emerged over the course of the day.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Diversion

Diversion is a partnership between the juvenile legal system, such as prosecutors, and communities that requires trust and shared responsibility for youths' wellbeing.

Partnerships can help communities understand what juvenile legal system representatives (e.g., prosecutors, judges) want to see from young people and the organizations that support them.

Diversion should be culturally relevant. Youth and community voices should be included in planning for diversion programs.

Diversion should be broad and far reaching. Diversion programs can and should include life skills, mentorship, work, and job readiness.

Diversion should focus on families. Families are dealing with a wide range of issues and need access to services.

Accountability is important to diversion, both for youth and for the adults who create the conditions that youth have to navigate, but metrics need to be different than punitive measures. The aim should be pre-arrest diversion, prevention, and, ideally, an end to the need for diversion in any form.

The Juvenile Legal System

Diversion saves the juvenile legal system resources.

Community-led diversion has to be embedded in the culture of juvenile legal systems in order for it to persist through changes in leadership or the political context. Community-led diversion programs cannot be tethered to individuals who believe in them but may eventually leave or be removed from their positions.

Legislation that supports community-led diversion can be more resistant to changing political environments.

The juvenile legal system needs to be structured in a way that allows figures like probation officers to spend more time with youth to do more impactful work, for example by limiting caseloads.

Need to reform juvenile legal systems to end more punitive processes such as mandatory minimum sentences where they exist.

Resources can be shifted away from probation toward the community. Need to prioritize policies for sharing data between organizations and system partners.

Need to collect data on racial disparities in juvenile justice and use legislation to mandate data collection, if necessary.

Youth, Family, and Community

Community partners can help overcome resistance to diversion through engaging with people who are directly impacted. They can help shift the culture in the community to match the work being done with youth.

Allow young people to be young people but also teach them how to advocate and share their voice.

It is important to distinguish between service providers and the community. Communities are powerful and resilient, including young people.

Mentorship and coaching are passed on from generation to generation and need to be cultivated.

Safe houses that are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week can support youth who need a safe place to go outside of regular diversion programming.

Community-Based Organizations

Training and help should be available to community-based organizations to submit applications for funding and other opportunities available through public or private organizations. Community-based organizations need help speaking the language of the juvenile legal system and funding sources.

Community-based organizations should be able to hire young people to work with the community. They have to provide alternatives to criminalized behavior that many young people engage in to survive.

Networking organizations can increase the capacity of organizations to support youth and work with juvenile legal systems. Coordinating organizations can connect youth to services and facilitate funding through sub-awards to community-based organizations working directly with youth.

Getting recognition for a community-based organization from other prominent organizations like a research university or large foundation can help maintain support from system leaders when system leadership changes.

Memoranda of understanding between community-based organizations and juvenile legal systems can ensure ongoing support when system leadership changes.

Getting Buy-In

We need to share more stories of success in juvenile diversion and challenge the equation of justice with punishment. At the same time, youth should not have to share their trauma to get support.

Advocates for community-led diversion need to educate resistant stakeholders about the process as well as critical issues like adolescent brain development.

Building trust between communities and juvenile legal systems is an ongoing process and requires constant engagement with stakeholders and community partners.

Prevention

Supporting diverted youth can have positive multi-generational effects as positive outcomes are passed on to their children as they age into parenthood.

Prevention efforts typically do not have enough resources even though we know how to identify youth at risk of system involvement. Funding and policy changes should focus on prevention.

Ensuring people have resources like housing and healthcare can prevent system involvement.

This excerpt is from the Applied Research Center for Civility impact paper: [Principles and Strategies for Community-Led Diversion in Juvenile Justice](#).