

Memorandum

To: DMC Work Group
From: Jaime Michel
Date: 11/17/2009
Re: Synthesis of Data from DMC focus groups with parents/adults and youth

A total of 9 Focus groups were conducted with both adults/parents and youth. There were a total of 122 participants in these groups. (need Ytec stats). Seven of the focus groups were conducted with youth and included a total of 98 participants (44 males and 54 females). The age range of young people in the youth focus groups was from 12 years old to 21 years old. The remaining two focus groups were conducted with parents/adults and included a total of 24 participants. Of the total number of participants in all focus groups approximately 92 participants designated their home zip code as 94124—the Bayview Hunter’s Point area, which was the targeted population.

1. Please describe what’s positive about about community?

There were a wide range of responses given for this question. Several groups said “the people”, specifying friends and relatives and a sense of a close knit community. Two groups recognized the young people in the community and their willingness to stay in school. Two groups also mentioned Black-owned businesses. Other varied responses from different groups were various community based programs, gyms, churches, pools and the San Francisco 49er’s.

2. What programs or organizations are you aware of in your community that are particularly helpful to young people who have gotten into trouble with the law? What makes them good? What do they do? How do they help youth?

A wide range of programs were mentioned. However, only about half of the groups expounded on “what makes programs good.” A prominent theme in their responses were preference for programs that provide job opportunities or job training. Another major theme was a preference for programs that helped meet youth’s educational needs such as tutoring, GED programs and helping a youth’s reentry into school. Programs were also recognized for providing both youth and

parents with general overall support. A response that stood out from one group was "Programs give you hope."

3. What makes you (or your child) want to go to a program in your community?

The two primary themes that emerged from focus group responses were that youth were attracted to programs that had caring and understanding staff, and programs that were able to provide a safe environment for youth. Also, group participants reported that programs that provided homework help and job opportunities also motivated them to attend various programs.

4. Why did you stop attending programs in your community?

A majority of the focus groups reported that they stopped attending programs because of their feelings about the staff. Some groups reported that staff were apathetic, or unwelcoming and rude. Others groups reported that programs just did not provide enough stimulating services or experiences and were subsequently called "boring".

5. Why do programs fail? Why do you feel programs do not provide good services?

As in question number four, a majority of the focus groups identified staffing issues as a significant variable in the failure of programs. Several groups expressed concern that staff "did not care", were "unfair", were "scared of youth" and failed to meet the needs of the youth. One group also expressed concern that staff was unable to keep the youth safe in the programs as staff were unable to detect which youth were in conflict with one another. In addition, concern was expressed in the development and coordination of programs, in that programs were poorly organized and the interest of the youth were not kept in mind, as youth input was not encouraged. Another prominent theme was an awareness by focus group participants that programs lacked stable and consistent funding sources.

6. What areas in your community would you feel particularly comfortable and safe if you attended a program located there?

There was a wide range of answers for this question and it was difficult to discern a "pattern" in responses. However, this is a pattern in itself, in that participant's response seemed to be guided by their own experiences and perceptions which appeared to be in part a function of what areas what areas were familiar to them. For some it appeared that the safest places were blocks or areas in which they lived or had family and friends who lived there. Some participants reported feeling safest on their own block, or at specific programs. Others named various neighborhoods like Oakdale, Sunnydale or Westpoint.

7. What areas in your community would you feel particularly uncomfortable or unsafe if you attended a program located there?

Again, a variety of streets and neighborhoods were reported as feeling unsafe, such as Oakdale, Sunnydale, Westpoint, Double Rock, Harbor Road and the Fillmore. However, some of these neighborhoods other participants had answered in the previous question that they did feel safe in these areas. Consequently, it was difficult to extract specific information on areas where participants felt unsafe, since a participants' own experience and background appeared to determine what area he or she considered unsafe.

8. Are there certain times of day during which you think it would be most important for programs to operate?

The majority of focus groups reported that afterschool hours would be the most important times for programs to operate. These hours could start from 3:00 p.m. or 4:00 p.m. Some groups stated programs should go til about 7:00 or 8:00 pm, while other groups said programs should go as late as 10:00 p.m. Five of the groups included that weekend hours were also important hours for programs to operate.

9. What would help young people in your community avoid getting involved with criminal activity?

Almost every focus group, both adult and youth, responded that more job opportunities for youth would help youth avoid involvement in criminal activity. Other employment related responses were more training for the trades, raising the minimum wage and lowering the age at which children could work.

Youth focus groups also recommended more afterschool programs which could include activities and field trips where youth would be taken outside of their immediate community, such as camping trips.

The responses of adults covered a broad range from commenting on the need for more parental involvement in the lives of children to the need of the school system, juvenile justice and family court systems to provide better support and system coordination for youth.

10. What do you think schools could do to help reduce young people getting in trouble?

A majority of focus group participants commented on a need for more safety and security in schools. For some groups this included more police or security gurards, metal detectors and hall and yard monitoring. There was also a significant number of participants, mainly youth, who commented on the quality of teachers,

particularly in regards to teacher to student interactions. Across the board youth reported a desire for more teachers “who care”, “who keep it real”, and “who take the time” and “who share knowledge beyond the book.” Also a significant number of focus groups mentioned a need for more activities in school, such as talent shows, intermural sports, field trips and after school programming. A few focus groups mentioned things as basic as more textbooks, as well as books that are up to date and interesting, along with an updated curriculum. Also two focus groups requested that schools deal with problems with students internally instead of reporting these problems to probation officers or sending kids to other schools (i.e., 1950 Mission, Downtown).

A primary theme in the adult focus groups was a request for teachers to be trained to be more sensitive to the needs of students. In addition, they expressed a concern with the turnover rate of teachers and the need for better salaries for teachers. In addition, both the adult and the youth focus groups expressed an awareness of the need for more parental involvement in the schools.

11. What types of services of programs for young people who get in trouble would you like in your community?

A majority of participants, in both the parent and youth focus groups, stated that job opportunities could be an important service for youth who get into trouble. Two youth groups stated that there was a need for more Boot Camps and Scared Straight programs, and programs where people who have “been there and done that” talk to youth.

In regards to educational services, one of the adult focus groups mentioned more academic services such as tutoring and one of the youth focus groups mentioned more remedial classes that have subjects youth can relate to and are more interesting. One youth group mentioned more monitoring of school attendance, while an adult focus group mentioned a need for more Truant Officers.

Two of the adult focus groups mentioned a need for more supervised community activities. Examples given were work study activities, community based internships and service learning environments. Other services mentioned by adult focus groups were counseling, male mentors, and motivational speakers.

The Youth focus groups had other responses that were scattered across the board such as, anger management groups, parenting classes, better lawyers and representation and more understanding judges.

12. What services do you need to help improve your life?

One of the prevailing themes among the youth focus groups was their expression of a need for academic assistance. Though a few groups mentioned needing academic support like tutoring or assistance with exit exams, an overwhelming majority of youth in all focus groups reported needing more assistance with preparation for college. Their requests were for services such as

college preparatory courses, SAT workshops, assistance with applications and financial aid and scholarship information.

Another prevailing theme among youth participants was a request for more job opportunities to help improve their lives, as well as assistance with career development. In two of the groups counseling services were mentioned, with one group expounding on a theme of personal development through sex education, self-esteem and motivation building classes, and leadership and public speaking training.

Interestingly enough, though not services, two of the youth groups asked for more familial structure and support, such as father figures, two parent families, discipline and more guidance from elders. Also two youth groups mentioned parenting classes. It was unclear as to whether or not parenting classes were for themselves or their parents.

The parent focus groups had somewhat different themes with a strong emphasis on improving social/public resources such as housing assistance, health clinics. There was also a request from one group for more assistance in navigating the social welfare system, especially when someone has exhausted all resources.

In terms of their children, the adult/parent focus group mentioned better transportation for youth, and made a request that educational programs be upgraded and be more career oriented and more after school and school site programming be developed.

13. What other comments or feedback you would like to give?

Not all groups gave closing comments. But of the groups who did a theme that was touched upon once again was the need for programs and schools to have adults who genuinely care and are not afraid of young people. This even extended to a request for judges who get to know youth and the community and are willing to listen to youth and give youth more chances.

Feedback from Facilitator's

Facilitator feedback was gathered from the comments facilitator's reported after completing the focus groups and responses given at a debriefing session of the focus group facilitator's. Once again, there were a variety of comments and observations. A prevailing theme that facilitator's recognized was that youth attachment to staff was particularly significant for youth both in the schools and community based programs. Facilitator's also recognized that focus group participants consistently requested more job opportunities. However, in debriefing facilitator's expressed concern with this theme as perhaps participants may have been too focused on the short-term and not the training and educational goals that can facilitate long-term job success.

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Another prevailing theme that facilitator's recognized was that in certain groups not much was mentioned about the violence in the community or about feeling unsafe. Some facilitator's found it perplexing that focus group participants did not disclose much information around how they feel unsafe. It was uncertain as to whether or not this was due to a fear of reprisal or a desire to maintain a stoic "front".

Also, facilitator's were aware that in many of the groups youth seemed to welcome the opportunity to share their opinions and ideas and some groups even asked the facilitator's to return and do a follow-up session about the results from all the focus groups.