

Washtenaw Equity Partnership (WEP) Prevention & Front End Subcommittee Inaugural Meeting

January 18, 2022 5:00-6:00 pm

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Desirae Simmons (Co-Chair)
Heather Martin (Co-Chair)
Victoria Burton-Harris (Co-Chair)
Alyshia Dyer
Tish Lee
Aubrey Patiño
Judge Patrick Conlin
Mary Garboden
Ashley Shukait
Liz Spring
Delphia Simpson
Gillian Gainsley
Judge Miriam Perry
Vonnie McLoyd
Kevin Karpiak
Daicia Price
Lisa Jackson
Belinda Dulin
Gina VanDuinen
Sheeba Pawar
Rev. Jeffrey Harrold
Alma Wheeler Smith (WEP Co-Chair)
Alex Roth (Vera)
Tara Dhanraj (Vera)
Kaitlin Kall (Vera)

- Co-Chairs welcomed everyone and thanked them for accepting the invitation and joining this subcommittee
- Members introduced themselves and shared their dreams for this work
 - Member: I want to think about what we can do differently in the community or enhance or better utilize what's already there so, instead of having a school-to-prison pipeline, we can create a pipeline that will connect people to the resources that are already existing more easily. My dream is a pathway to connect our young people to the wonderful programs that Washtenaw County already has, see where the gaps are, and maybe redirect resources to use them for young people.

- Member: The dream that I bring today is rooted in conversations being had now with other organizers where we're trying to discern between things we're told and what's happening in practice. I would love to see us reduce the police state and focus on life-affirming services and collective care that keeps all of us safer.
- Member: My dream is to be able to have a community where we can support youth in the community up front, before they're justice-involved, and to have innovative ways for people to access services, because sometimes it's not just about access to services but also innovating about how we provide them. I also think it'd be great if we didn't need a detention center anymore but had a place with services for youth, and I dream of not having anyone suspended or expelled from school.
- Member: What I dream about is decriminalizing being poor; being poor shouldn't be a crime.
- Member: I'm really excited about how community spaces like libraries can harness types of community care.
- Member: I envision a decriminalization of poverty and a decriminalization of behavior and use of color that often is seen in a way that gets harsh discipline and reactions that aggravates a young person that is already trying to define themselves and that just spirals into an offense that may lead to an arrest.
- Member: My hope is to reduce child poverty and ensure that all children who need them have access to high quality mental health services, because mental health problems can lead to many negative outcomes and prevention and intervention can help deal with a lot of those problems in a positive way.
- Member: I dream about collective care as well but looking at it more about how it has an effect on generations and how it can impact health and so many other things throughout multiple generations.
- Member: My dream is that the young people in our community understand that there's a community of people who really do care deeply about them and want to listen to them and want to know how we can support them.
- Member: My hopes for this space are that we can provide clarity and transparency and information so that people could have a better understanding and more say over how safety is performed in their lives and on them and to them in ways that are hopefully less violent and less intrusive and more democratic.
- Member: There are so many great programs, if there was a way to channel people who are entering the system into constructive and healthy and healing ways to avoid the back end of the system (i.e. MDOC and/or the county jail), that would certainly be a dream well realized.
- Member: My dream is to discover and explore the connections between civil legal aid/civil justice issues and criminal justice issues. That goes to a lot of the front-end issues, including housing, education, and income maintenance. My dream is to see racial justice and racial equity in all of those spheres.
- Member: A short-term dream would be transparency in policing. A farther-along dream would be accountability in policing. A bigger dream would be the realistic reduction of policing and an increase in actual public safety. I'd like to shrink the footprint of policing

and increase other services that would be better suited for people who often find themselves coming into the criminal legal system.

- Member: My dream is that we would only have restorative justice practices in our communities.
- Member: I feel like we're overusing the police for everything instead of creatively solving problems to eliminate the need for the police to get involved, and my dream is to have a county where all the children are treated the same, are treated with grace, and aren't criminalized for their actions.
- Member: My dream is to not have so many people end up in the criminal court, to find different and creative ideas so that young people will never be involved in the criminal system.
- Member: My dream is to help organizations that are struggling, to have everybody doing internal assessment of their own biases against people who use drugs, people who are queer, and looking at accessibility and punitive policies we could change and actually make a huge difference before it ever gets to a point of incarceration.
- Member: Broad dream is decriminalization of poverty, not punishing people for surviving the effects of generational trauma, having mental illness, or fighting back against systemic oppression. More specifically, I'd really like to see us to have a more proactive approach instead of the reactive approach of kids and their families only getting attention when they get into trouble.
- Co-Chair: I've had the opportunity to really get to know the human beings who end up in the system, and for every single one of them it was clear than not only had their families and their situations often failed them, but our society as a whole, and that if resources had been provided and their needs had been met, they never would have come into the criminal legal system. I want to work with people in the community to keep families together and to keep people in the community, where they belong, and that means we have to build out a menu of options to help meet people's needs. My big dream is that we work so that we don't need prosecutors or a criminal legal system and have a society that relies on more holistic and alternative ways, like restorative justice.
- Co-Chair: My dream in this space is broader understandings of prevention and front-end investment. I would love to see deep investment in the arts and our incredibly talented emerging young artists. I would love to see intergenerational spaces and communities that invite collaborative and creative experiences. There are so many different pathways for prevention and our gutting of arts and culture resources over decades has led to a lot of harm and it certainly is one of the deepest pathways for individual and collective healing. I also dream of shaking understandings of "lifetime." So often we say not in our lifetime, but really the patterns and how treat one another in the community live so far beyond our breath, even if outcomes aren't always so clear.
- Co-Chair: I want to live in the near future where we're living in a time where all human beings have inherent value, even when they cause harm and are not yet able to hold themselves accountable; where we end cycles of harm and violence by using care and seeking justice with those who have been harmed; and ultimately, where people have what they need and share what they have, adequate and nutritional food, housing,

quality education, reliable healthcare, meaningful work, and time with family and friends.

- Vera staff presented on the role of Vera in the WEP and the subcommittees and provided updates on data procurement:
 - Background about Vera – national nonprofit founded in 1961 whose mission is driving change in criminal legal and immigration systems to ensure fairness, promote safety, and strengthen communities
 - Vera has been brought on as an independent party to provide technical support, to bring expertise working with other local jurisdictions, and to help facilitate administratively. Vera has no predetermined answers of what recommendations should be implemented in Washtenaw County. The WEP work should be a community-driven and evidence-based process where WEP and subcommittee members have ownership over the work.
 - Alex and Tara are the two Vera staff members who will be supporting the Prevention & Front End Subcommittee.
 - Vera is in the process of executing data sharing agreements with the Washtenaw County Trial Court to obtain adult court data and with the Washtenaw County Sheriff's Office to obtain jail data
 - Other major research activities for this project – helping the Working Group and subcommittees identify specific research questions to prioritize; determining what additional data might be needed to answer those research questions, developing appropriate methodologies and research plans; and executing the research plans.
 - External to the WEP, there are three ongoing research projects with overlapping goals focused on the prosecutor's office, the juvenile justice system, and the Ann Arbor Police Department. The WEP will not duplicate this ongoing work, instead we will coordinate with the leads of those research projects and integrate their findings into our recommendations.
- Co-chairs briefly discuss subcommittee charge (handout shared prior to meeting)
 - Because this meeting had to be shorter than other subcommittees due to Working Group meeting right after, don't have time for a full discussion of the subcommittee charge.
 - Instead, created Google Docs version (link shared with subcommittee members) and ask that people look at that and add comments.
 - Also think about whether there are other expert groups or folks we might want to bring in; whether we want to do focus groups of community members (some funding for this).
- Co-chairs close out with logistical updates
 - Should have stipends of \$1,800 for the year available for eligible subcommittee members. Details still being worked out. Will share more information about that when we have it.
 - When we need to vote on things will do that by majority. Will need majority of members present at meeting in order to vote on things.
 - Discuss regular monthly meeting time – by show of hands, members agree that Tuesdays at 5:00 will work for regular meeting. Will work out and share a schedule

for monthly meetings on Tuesdays at 5:00 that avoids the dates when Working Group meetings are also scheduled.

- Meeting adjourned at 6:00 pm.