Washtenaw Equity Partnership Working Group

April 19, 2022 6:00-8:00pm

Attendees:

Alma Smith (co-chair)
Heather Rye
Linda Rexer
James Fink
MaryAnn Sarosi
Angela Tripp
Natalie Holbrook
Ashley Shukait
Dennis Schrantz
Aubrey Patiño
Maisie Lee Gholson
Deb Labelle
Rachelle Wilson
La Keisha Vereen
Lisa Jackson
Chief Marlene Radzik
Su Hansen

Dez Simmons
Judge Tim Connors
Che Carter
Daicia Price
S. Joy Gaines
Peri Stone-Palmquist
Walter Miller
LaWanda Hollister
Jeff Rose
Eli Savit
Elizabeth Swavola (Vera)
Alex Roth (Vera)
Angie Carpio (Vera)
Kaitlin Kall (Vera)
Sandhya Kajeepeta (Vera)
Tara Dhanraj (Vera)

- Co-chair provided update on stipends to the group. Closer to knowing when stipends will be paid, but don't have a date yet.
- Introduction of new Vera member, Angie Carpio.
- Housekeeping for meeting
    - Subcommittee members in attendance, use of virtual hands, comment length.
    - Process for reporting out from each subcommittee. 10 minutes for each subcommittee.
    - Bulk of conversation, overarching questions reserved for second half of the meeting.
- Subcommittee report out
    - Prevention and Front End
        - Co-chair reported out for subcommittee.
        - A lot of areas the group wanted to focus on; the four decided on combine those areas.
        - Priorities
            - Lack of community alternatives to police.
                - The group wants to look at what different options could look like.
            - Need for more culturally responsive social services that address basic needs.
                - Focus on culturally responsive social services. Recognize what gaps there are in order to address basic needs.
            - Impact of system involvement on housing and other needs.

- o Group discussed different ways just becoming system involved impacts access one has to housing, employment, health care, etc. Intersectionality of different needs.
  - High police presence in specific neighborhoods and the harms caused.
    - o If we don't have alternatives, can't address harms caused. Already know where there is a high prevalence of police. Why is there high police prevalence and what are the impacts of this? What would it look like to have different alternatives in those neighborhoods?
  - Question from attendee: what does alternatives to police mean?
    - Response- thinking along the lines of unarmed response. Social services will be addressed under the second priority area.
  - Question from attendee: did this subcommittee discuss pretrial release, supervision, bail and assignment of counsel?
    - Response – no, looking at keeping people out of the system overall.
  - Question from attendee: are there any further comments about how this subcommittee will go about exploring these priority areas.
    - Response – members have started indicating areas they are interested in digging into. The plan is to break into smaller groups focusing on each of these four areas and start working from there. First step might be connecting with information and data that people already have access to.
- o Court Process Subcommittee
  - Co-chair reported out for subcommittee
  - Had a difficult time narrowing down priority areas.
  - Priorities
    - Examine access to and use of restorative justice approaches and other alternatives to punishment.
      - o Group discussed how Washtenaw has diversion and peacemaking court in the County. Peacemaking court has benediction from Michigan Supreme Court; only county in the state that has this, but it is underutilized.
    - Identify data and metrics to track/report on racial inequities in the court.
      - o Want to engage with other groups tracking data (such as prosecutors office project). Want to track race of victims.
    - Examine racial disparities in access to specialty court programs.
      - o One of the judges in subcommittees has looked at who has access to specialty courts and that there were racial gaps in participants.
    - Examine racial disparities in bond/bail decisions.
      - o A lot of agreement among subcommittee determining this priority. How are they working now, and what are criteria for bond decisions and how does that get reported out?

- Examine racial disparities in sentencing decisions (including Cobb's agreements).
  - Cobb's agreements are presented to the court from agreements with prosecutors and defense. Issue of sentencing was a large part of the CREW report.
- Tentative sixth area: examine racial disparities in plea agreements.
- Post-Sentencing & Reentry Subcommittee
  - Co-chair reported out
  - Priority areas
    - Determine racial disparities in sentence recommendations provided to the court through the pre-sentence investigation report process
    - Determine racial disparities in parole and community supervision.
    - Examine prosecutorial and sentencing diversion, and jail programming – especially for jail reentry- to determine the degree of racial disparity that may exist for client eligibility, selection and termination
    - Examine previous and existing MDOC state prisoner reentry models and ID strengths and weaknesses of the models re: funding, community control, program design, enrollment, and termination, and determine if racial disparities exist in current client selection, enrollment, and termination
    - Assess the conditions in jail and prison that affect release and reentry and result in racial disparity
  - Sentencing project's reducing racial disparities – using this as a tool for the work. The report goes into narrative reasons for disparities and lays out important questions to ask at each point in the system. Suggests creating racial disparity index for each point in the system.
  - Attendee wants to know how subcommittees can collaborate and work together because there is overlap between priority area three and a priority in the court process subcommittee.
    - Vera staff member stated that the discussion during the second half of this meeting is for this purpose to identify overlap and gaps.
- Youth Justice & Schools Subcommittee
  - Co-chair reported out
  - Priority areas
    - What are the drivers of youth ending up in/back in detention?
    - What policies and practices cause racial disparities with the youth entering the system?
    - What systemic barriers and supports do black youth involved in the criminal legal system identify?
      - Want to look at education.
    - In what ways does the way the child welfare system function for older youth contribute to delinquency in our community?
      - Need to do more wordsmithing with this priority area.

- Attendee who is a member of the subcommittee – would like to add, thinking about how different school districts work. This list is reflective of work trying to not focus on children's behavior and thinking about this from a more systemic standpoint.
- Attendee wants to know about number 3 – will the group do focus group with youth to get insight?
  - Response- want to be very clear that the group is not just guessing what youth in the community need. Want youth voice.
  - Attendee: The statewide juvenile justice taskforce is conducting focus groups with youth right now and there are audio recordings of barriers youth have accessed. Could be helpful for this subcommittee.
- Attendee wants to know if alternative schools for children who have been expelled or can't participate in public schooling will be included.
  - Response- this was a huge part of the conversation in terms of policies and practices that cause disparities of youth entering the system and systemic barriers. Considering look at expulsions, suspension, and reentry from detention and child welfare. Talked about alternative schools.

- Behavioral Health
  - Vera staff reported out
  - Priority areas
    - Services disproportionately not reaching BIPOC residents of Washtenaw.
      - Some specific topics within this area include increasing understanding of available services, who provides them and who accesses them; complexity of the system creating barriers; lack of culturally responsive programs and practices.
    - Staffing challenges of service providers: lack of representation, low retention and pay.
    - Lack of harm reduction approach/programs. Committee felt this area has not had enough attention from the County.
  - Attendee wants to know if there was discussion about mental health specialty courts, whether to look at if this would be a value in Washtenaw and look at recommending that as an alternative.
    - Response – Don't think that this came up specifically.
    - Attendee wonders if this could be included in lack of harm reduction approach/programs.
      - Response- might not think of mental health court as harm reduction approach.
  - Attendee wants to know if services are for front end, back end or both for the system, and if there was any discussion of inventorying services to see what they are and where they reach people but also coordination overlap.
    - Response – absolutely looking at existing services.
  - Attendee stated diversionary courts are frowned upon and not equitable.

- ▪ Attendee wants to note that a mental health court is in Washtenaw County, but that is part of the structure of the courts.
- ▪ Attendee stated they are currently on parole, and went into the system as a juvenile and has gone through the process reentering the community. Offender success program is not a good program. System is designed for adults. Wanted to introduce themself.
  - o Data
    - ▪ Co-chair reporting out
    - ▪ Priority areas
      - • Improving data collection
      - • Improving data integration
      - • Improving data analysis
      - • Improving data transparency
    - ▪ Looking at how adult and juvenile systems can collect data as a system, integrate data, what analysis can be done and what data can be made available to public.
    - ▪ The subcommittee has broken into two groups. One group is looking at existing data landscape in the county, what systems do they use, do they share data. Second component is of those systems, what would each system entity want to answer if they can't because they don't collect data or can't access data. Has sent out a survey to all entities that hold CJ data in the county. The other subgroup is the model subgroup. This group will look at models around the country who do this well; interviewing two counties around the country (one in Oregon, one in Pennsylvania). Hope is to find out how their model works.

- After subcommittee presentations, pause to allow everyone to review all of the priority areas from all subcommittees before beginning discussion
- Are there omissions/gaps in the priority areas we've identified?
  - o Especially when we talk about specialty courts and how often they don't address violence and usually deal with low-level charges…attendee doesn't want to leave out the reality of violence in our communities and how we can address it differently. Should keep that in the forefront, otherwise may miss opportunities to respond to violence in new ways. Don't want our recommendations to exclude violence.
  - o All of the other subcommittees implicate youth and juvenile justice. So in all of the other questions, we should be disaggregating by age.
  - o The focus on practice, guidelines, and policies makes this focused on outcomes. But already know what the outcomes are. Can the group focus on points of intervention instead of just getting information? Can they look at how people are doing their work within these systems in order to disrupt it?
  - o As community members participate, need better ways of communicating to those not familiar with these systems and programs. A lot of the jargon can be alienating for community input.
  - o Question of clarification about what harm reduction means in context of behavioral health
    - ▪ Response- Practical strategies like syringe services, providing condoms. Harm reduction is rooted in historical movements in which grassroots orgs were

        providing services when others were not. It's low barrier, seeing what that person wants to address their needs, and addressing the harms that come with government services.
- o Echoing limitations of exclusion of violent cases and felonies from peacemaking court
- o Judges are in silos and don't know what each other is doing. Then there's the MDOC and no one questions what they're doing with parole and pre-sentencing reports. It is somewhat specific to Michigan as an issue. It is even difficult to figure out where things are located. It's unwelcoming. The system is not set up in a way that is transparent. In each of the subcommittees, I'd like us to think about how we can make this more of a community resource.
- o Other themes to keep in mind for all work: culturally responsive, evidence-based, procedural justice
- o Have to change the mindset of those who are elected: judges, prosecutor, Sheriff's, etc... have to worry about reelection and the quickest way to lose that election is to be touted as soft on crime. Have to end that stigma and let them know the community is more concerned with fairness and protection of everybody's rights.
- o Appreciate comment that a powerful outcome might be resources (maps, charts, lists) for navigating a fairly complicated system.
- o What about decriminalizing mental health issues instead of proposing a mental health court? Are there other places we have as an example of decriminalization of mental health issues?
  - ▪ This could fit into prevention and front-end. Lack of community alternatives to police could expand to lack of community alternatives to criminal legal system broadly. That could include decriminalization.
- o Maybe should have as a premise that we believe that whatever institutional system it is, that the response of the institutions should be commensurate with the degree of harm that is caused not only to individual but to community. Also to examine why the harm happened. That would go beyond just the incident that brought it into the court. How are we responding in the short- and long-term. Example of the harm caused by shackling all juveniles.
  - ▪ Refers back to earlier question about why criminalize mental health and substance use at all.
- o Another important theme is improving material conditions for people.
- Co-chairs asking for feedback from group?
  - o Question posed about how we can work together and not duplicate moving forward
    - ▪ It may be helpful for the co-chairs to get together before the next working group meeting to talk about the overlap and decide if it makes sense for one group to take on a given topic.
    - ▪ Once we have discovered the overlap, how are we going to determine who gets that issue? Let's discuss this when the co-chairs discuss overlap.
  - o We have a lot of the 'what,' but we should think about the 'how'? How are the different subcommittees planning to collect information? Before having a meeting with the other co-chairs, I would want to regroup with my subcommittee to get more information on the 'how'.
- Question about next steps
  - o How much of the work that is laid out in the work plan will be done by the subcommittee members vs. Vera?

- Response- Not really a one-size-fits-all approach because research needs for subcommittees will likely be different. Vera staff will provide research/resources on things like policies, best practices, national examples, data collection and analysis. Vera staff will also provide support for local outreach (e.g. help with designing surveys or questions for focus groups or individual interviews, help scheduling focus groups or interviews), but we will rely more on subcommittee members with local knowledge to tell us who should be involved or to reach out to people they know.