

MWHI Public Safety Subcommittee
Strategic Plan Recommendations

Subcommittee: Public Safety
Date: September 19, 2016

Proposed strategies:

1. Prioritize runaway and homeless youth as our major focus.
 - a. Work to identify gaps in services and resources needed to fill the gaps.
 - b. Move forward with a grants conceptual group to expand homeless and runaway services in Marion/Polk counties.
2. Endorse phase one of the Marion County District Attorney's Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion plan as presented at the Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative Task Force and Marion County Public Safety Coordinating Council meetings.

Runaway and Homeless Youth:

A report from the Oregon Department of Education indicates that the number of homeless youth in Marion and Polk Counties during the 2014-2015 school year was 1,758. We know these numbers are low as HUD doesn't recognize youth as homeless if they are doubled up and couch surfing. In addition youth are not engaged in school and camping are often missed in the Point In Time Count conducted each January. While the 1,758 youth have access to schools and associated supports, there are many disengaged youth that rely on day services for basic needs and have nowhere to go at night.

Community Action Agency operates [HOME Youth & Resource Center](#), a day shelter for runaway and homeless youth ages 12 – 17, 18 if still in school. Services at HOME connect youth and their families to resources that meet their immediate needs during daytime hours seven days a week. [HOST](#), operated by Northwest Human Services, runs a drop-in center, overnight emergency shelter and a transitional living program for homeless and runaway youth/young adults ages 18 through 24. The absence of an overnight shelter for youth under 18 years of age leaves a gap in services, leading to a multitude of problems for homeless youth and the community.

As a result of their homelessness, unaccompanied youth face devastating harms and barriers in life, all of which hinder their ability to re-assimilate into society, depress their motivation, and inhibit their becoming independent, successful, and contributing members of their families and communities. The consequences of homelessness bring despair to youth in the form of mental health problems, substance use, victimization and criminal activity, survival sexual practices, and barriers to education and employment. These problems further burden society with the cost of finding ways to take care of these youth. If these youths are not helped, they will likely become an addition to the population of chronic homeless adults. [Consequences of Youth Homelessness](#)

The Public Safety subcommittee feels we need to invest in a comprehensive system of care for runaway and homeless youth in Marion and Polk counties to protect youth from falling victim to crime and victimization and stop the flow of youth entering adulthood homeless.

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion:

Deputy District Attorney, Paige Clarkson, gave a presentation on [Substance Abuse and Criminal Charges-the role of the District Attorney](#) at the June 6 Mid-Willamette Homeless Initiative Task Force meeting, outlining criminal charges related to possession of a controlled substance (PCS) which is often seen in tandem with other crimes, and sometimes related to a mental health crisis or with homelessness. PCS

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crimes are currently felonies. Individuals with addictive behaviors that lead to criminal charges face barriers to employment, securing housing, getting a driver's license, and need additional assistance. Marion County District Attorney's office filed 862 felony PCS charges in 2015. An additional 555 PCS charges were not filed. Accountability, public safety, livability for the community, proper stewardship over public prosecutorial resources, and rehabilitation are concerns of the District Attorney's office.

This District Attorney's office is changing how they charge PCS in Marion County. The DA's office will exercise the discretion to shift charging practices to misdemeanor-level charges for first time PCS offenders. In this process, offenders will be offered diversionary probation with dismissal of charges for successful completion of court ordered treatment and other intervention level sanctions. This shifting of charging practices and intentional intervention support will maximize the courts resources while providing a holistic approach to rebuilding quality of life for first time offenders. The goal is to connect individuals with services, change behaviors, and reducing recidivism through best practices interventions.

Finally, the DA's office would like to work with local law enforcement to expand and fully implement Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD). LEAD is a pre-booking harm reduction diversion program that allows officers to redirect low-level offenders engaged in drugs or prostitution activity to community-based services instead of jail and prosecution. LEAD participants begin working immediately with case managers to access services to reduce harm to themselves, as well as the harm that the individual is causing the surrounding community. This public safety program has the potential to reduce recidivism rates for low-level offenders and preserve expensive criminal justice system resources for more serious or violent offenders. [King County, WA LEAD](#)

Research basis for proposed strategies:

Mid-Willamette Valley Community Action Agency, Why the Run: A Look at Marion County's Runaway and Homeless Youth http://www.mwvcaa.org/HYRC/documents/Why_They_Run.pdf

Oregon's Runaway and Homeless Youth: An Overview and Strategic Framework, Oregon Department of Human Services Homeless Youth Advisory Committee, August 2016.

http://www.co.marion.or.us/BOC/MWHI/PublishingImages/Pages/Task-Force-Subcommittees/Oregons%20Runaway%20and%20HomelessYouth%20-%20An%20Overview%20and%20Strategic%20Framework%20-%20FINAL_1.pdf

Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion, King County, WA.

<http://leadkingcounty.org/>

Oregon Department of Education, Homeless Education Program, 2014-2015 Homeless Student Data

<http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=113>

Hidden in Plain Sight: Homeless Students in America's Public Schools

<http://www.gradnation.org/sites/default/files/HiddeninPlainSightFullReportFINAL.pdf>

National Network for Youth, Consequences of Youth Homelessness.

https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/IssueBrief_Youth_Homelessness.pdf