Richmond Department of Children and Youth Investment Options Brief

The recently completed Community Needs Assessment process provided an overview of current data and findings related to children, youth, and their families in Richmond, and North Richmond, California – specifically as related to the focus of the Richmond Fund for Children and Youth. The Community Needs Assessment identified six priority areas for investment. Community input was gathered through focus groups and interviews with youth and providers, surveys, forums, and the review of multiple reports and secondary data resources. Priorities were identified by synthesizing these data sources and surfacing issues that were raised across multiple groups and subgroups and within the framework of the legislation informing the Richmond Kids First Initiative. The six priorities are as follows, in no particular order of priority:

- Mental health and wellness
- Education support and employment/training support
- Out of school time, afterschool sports, and enrichment programming
- Violence prevention
- Access to basic needs
- Information, guidance, and case management

This memorandum provides further information related to these priorities and begins to detail options regarding programming, approaches, and populations that will benefit from investment. There were also several approaches identified related to programming that could cross several of the six inter-related areas identified above. These approaches include but are not limited to:

- Trauma-informed programing
- Healing
- Caring adults participating in the lives of youth
- Trusting relationships with providers
- Meet children and youth where they are (e.g. school or neighborhood)
- "Push in" supports rather than "opt in" supports for those hard to reach (e.g. reaching out to our most marginalized students)
- Value and recognizing identity while building belonging
- Staff programs with individuals with lived experience or cultural fluency who can effectively engage youth - "Have staff who can not only represent a culture but can be restorative and beneficial to the culture"
- Improve translation and language equity
- Improve access by robustly sharing information out to the community
- Equity in place
- Maintain youth voice in programming

Priority 1: Support Mental Health and Wellness for Richmond Children and Youth

Mental Health and wellness for Richmond and North Richmond children and youth clearly stood out in the Community Needs Assessment. The community has identified stress and trauma as an issue for children and youth in the community. Given the many stressors in the community, there are children at risk of mental health and developmental impact given their exposure to "adverse childhood experiences." At the same time, youth express that they have experienced depression. Programs that support mental health and wellness and that address mental health needs will help Richmond and North Richmond children and youth to thrive. Included in this priority is mental health education which will be targeted toward reducing stigma and increasing understanding of mental health and wellness issues.

The issue of mental health and well-being was a concern across all of the focus groups that were conducted. This is particularly true for Black and Latinx residents who are disproportionately exposed to violence leading to long term impacts on health and well-being. Trauma-informed programming, as well as mental health programs, emerged as a significant need for children, youth, and families along with the need for that programming to consider the rich diversity of residents many of whom have are experiencing the trauma of the constant threat of family deportation, violence in the community, discrimination and more. Also, the need for culturally fluent approaches is central to filling this gap as many of Richmond and North Richmond's children, youth, and families come from non-western cultures where there may be barriers and stigma attached to western approaches to mental health and wellness programming.

Options for supported programming

- Provide a "safe space" and support mental health along with social and emotional well-Being for young children and youth
- Provide supportive relationships, including counseling and support for children and youth
- Strengthen school-based and group programming (e.g. anxiety or anger management)
- Diversify access (e.g. by opening access to short term needs and those not being served)
- Address trauma and support healing skills.
- Mental health education for children, youth, and families; build access and openness to receiving support

Priority populations

- Disconnected youth
- Young people who themselves are homeless, or whose families are homeless or threatened by homelessness
- Young people living in poverty
- Immigrant and undocumented children and youth
- LGBTQ+ children, youth, and families
- Young people with poor physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral health outcomes

Priority 2: Provide Education Support and Employment/Training Support

The need for education support and employment training emerged across surveys, focus groups, forums, and other sources. Richmond and North Richmond children and youth want the chance to excel in school and move successfully to college and career. There was a strong desire for college access programs, tutoring, and wraparound support for those who may be struggling such as transitional age youth (TAY) or new immigrants arriving as unaccompanied minor children. The latter group also needs support with accelerated language learning. In addition, participants identified mentoring, internships, and job skills training as key to their success. Access to resources such as high-speed internet and computer equipment such as tablets has become a priority in the current distance learning environment. Participants often pointed to disparities between nearby, wealthier districts outside of Richmond and North Richmond that are better resourced and have programs, tools, and infrastructure that allow for students to excel.

Options for supported programming

- Targeted educational support (e.g. tutoring, language, homework assistance) for populations facing multiple challenges such as unaccompanied minor immigrants and very low-income students
- Career and college exposure at earlier ages (e.g. middle school programs)
- Internships to provide experience, skill building, and exposure for young people
- Outreach and strategies directed to disconnected youth and systems impacted youth who are not engaged in community programming.
- Expand access to West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) career readiness resources to students not in pathways

Priority populations

- Youth of color
- System-involved young people and TAY
- Disconnected youth
- Young people who themselves are homeless, or whose families are homeless or threatened by homelessness
- Socioeconomically disadvantaged children and young people
- Immigrant and undocumented children and youth
- Students with disabilities
- Youth from under-resourced neighborhoods

Priority 3: Support Out of School Time, Afterschool Sports, and Enrichment Programming

This strategy builds on and expands available out of school and afterschool programming. Participation in afterschool and out of school programs is linked to better academic outcomes. For Richmond and North Richmond's priority populations, targeted afterschool programming could improve their chances of completion and success in school as well as their connection to caring adults with whom they feel a connection. Programs must be provided in a safe space with safe access for students.

Low cost or no cost out-of-school and after-school sports and enrichment programming scored high as both desired and needed for youth to thrive across groups. Sports were a popular suggestion as were outdoor activities such as gardening and hiking. The arts were very often mixed in with responses to sports but were also often singled out as highly desirable (music, dance, visual arts were all mentioned). This is in addition to culturally relevant arts and other programming to help them to build awareness, strengthen self-esteem, and create a sense of belonging. Some groups stated there were few or no respectful and safe spaces to be with others like them. Existing after school resources should be leveraged so that funding from the Richmond Fund for Children and Youth (Fund) bring in those not participating and engage students who have barriers to participation.

Options for supported programming

- Programming specific needs of children and youth at their age and stage
- Support youth voice to support diverse programming for students in later grades to develop their strengths and interests
- Free or very low-cost programming
- Funding to also engage parents to understand barriers to participation
- Enrichment programming (e.g. music & arts, science & technology, sports & recreation)
- Culturally relevant and fluent programming
- Academic support such as tutoring, homework support, etc.
- Outdoor programming
- Accessible programming for students with disabilities
- Youth development and leadership opportunities for positive youth engagement

Priority populations

This could include all of the priority populations and programs should be targeted toward including these hard to reach/underserved groups.

- Young people living in poverty
- Immigrant and undocumented children and youth
- Young people with poor physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral health outcomes
- Children with disabilities
- Students experiencing homelessness
- Students who are not engaged in out of school extracurricular activities
- Students at schools with high levels of free and reduced lunch
- Students in very high need locations

Priority 4: Expand Violence Prevention Efforts

Violence in the community came up as a barrier to participation and even as a significant barrier to everyday activity for priority populations. Violence manifests itself in many forms including gun violence, domestic violence, and more. In the focus groups, youth stated they couldn't go to many places in Richmond out of fear and that they were frequently uncomfortable to go out with groups of friends when one of them did not feel safe in a particular neighborhood. Others participating in the needs assessment spoke of witnessing violence or dangerous spots in their neighborhood. Bullying is also a concern for children. In addition, some participants also reported the fear of gender-based violence as a barrier to movement and participation in the community.

Options for supported programming

- Programs supporting healthy development for children
- Mentorship and other programs for youth that feature a caring adult
- Programs that support connection to after school activities and reduce exposure to community risks
- Programs outside of school
- Peer-to-peer groups
- Whole family/parent support
- Anti-bullying programs
- Programs focusing on African American and Latino/Latinx youth
- Youth skills programs: non-violent coping and communication skills
- Street outreach and community norm changes
- Support for families experiencing domestic violence

Priority populations

- African American youth
- Latino/Latinx youth
- System-involved young people
- Young people who have been pushed out of school
- Young people living in poverty
- Children and youth who are impacted by the criminal justice system and/or who have family members who are incarcerated

Priority 5: Support Access to Basic Needs

The Community Needs Assessment identified that many Richmond and North Richmond children, youth, and their families were struggling and needed support with meeting one or more of their basic needs (e.g. housing, food, medicine, utilities, and transportation) for their families. For homeless participants, housing and wraparound support was identified. For TAY, the need for assistance in supporting their own household after they turned 18 was mentioned. For immigrant children, the need for financial support for families who were often barred from working full time was mentioned. Justice-involved youth suggested that they needed access to support that they said was often contingent on having been in Juvenile Hall. For some parents and youth who wanted to access particular programs, transportation was identified as a barrier.

Given that this planning work was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, basic needs issues were heightened beyond the norm. It is widely expected that many families will face ongoing economic hardship as the pandemic wanes and the economy moves toward recovery.

Options for supported programming

- Childcare support
- Meal and nutrition support
- Rental support
- Navigation of available basic needs resources
- Support for family resource centers
- Support for families with barriers to access
- Support for children and youth experiencing homelessness including coordination between after school providers and shelters

Priority populations

- Young people who themselves are homeless, or whose families are homeless or threatened by homelessness
- Young people living in poverty
- Immigrant and undocumented children and youth
- Teen parents and families, including single mothers
- Families with children and youth who are involved in or transitioning from the foster care, juvenile justice, criminal justice, or special education systems

Priority 6: Strengthen Access to Information about Resources Available for Children and Youth

For children, youth, and families, there were a number of voices across the spectrum of youth residents that reported on how difficult it is to navigate the Richmond and North Richmond environment of youth services. Almost all community engagement activities during the Community Needs Assessment identified the need for support that would assist community members in understanding what resources were out there and whether they qualified to access them. Many of those surveyed said they did not access services because they did not know about them. Young people expressed the need for help, including coaching or case management, in navigating the turn toward independence or the journey to college success. Case management, or at the very least guidance from a caring adult, is needed so that children, youth, and their families can understand and access the services available. Parents and guardians need more support with understanding what was offered and how to make the best use of these programs and services for their children. Information and case management was also mentioned as critical to individuals experiencing homeless successfully regaining housing. This information needs to be in multiple languages with extra effort to reach marginalized children, youth, and their families.

Options for supported programming

- Fund the creation and hosting of an inclusive web resource that can provide robust information on children and youth programming in multiple languages
- Fund navigation support or case management for children, youth, and their families who face complex challenges
- Support mentorship and guidance that helps disadvantaged children and youth with understanding and accessing resources that will move them forward on their path toward college and/or employment.
- Social media strategies and outreach
- Provide resources for guidance and case management to those who most need it
- Make sure that there is a case manager that looks like the clients

Priority populations

This priority will support children and youth across Richmond and North Richmond inclusive of all priority populations.

- System-involved young people
- Young people who have been pushed out of school
- Young people who themselves are homeless, or whose families are homeless or threatened by homelessness
- Young people living in poverty; immigrant and undocumented children, youth, and families
- LGBTQ+ children, youth, and families
- Teen parents and families, including single mothers; young people with poor physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral health outcomes, and children with disabilities; and
- Families with children and youth who are impacted by the criminal justice system and/or who have family members who are incarcerated; and/or are involved in or transitioning from the foster care, juvenile justice, criminal justice, or special education systems