



CLARK COUNTY YOUTH COMMISSION

2019 POLICY REPORT

Discussing Mental Health,
Transitioning Into Adulthood,
& Youth Homelessness



Table of Contents:

Chapter 1: Overview	4
What is the Youth Commission and what do we do?	4
Recommendation Themes	7
Prevention and Addressing the Root Causes	7
Stigma	7
Disparities and Cultural Representation	8
Voice	8
Education	8
Chapter 2: Mental Health	10
Prevention and Root Causes	11
Leading Factors in Mental Health Issues	11
Environmental and Sociocultural Factors	11
Biological Factors	13
Further Recommendations to Ensure Happiness and Mental Wellbeing	14
ACES: What are they?	16
Types of ACEs	16
Recommendation:	17
Stigma and its Reduction	19
Trauma-informed care and trauma-specific services	20
Youth Commissioner Opinions	20
Education	21
Chapter 3: Adulting and Transitioning Skills	22
Prevention and Root Causes	23
Healthy Living	23
Meals	23
Self Care	25
SMART goals	25
Career	25
Programs	26
Recommendations	27
(This section was compiled by Olivia)	27
Financial Independence	27
Budgeting for beginners	27
Open a bank account	27

Custodial Accounts	28
Applying for a credit card	28
Transitioning into Adulthood: The Learning of Life Skills	29
Communication	29
Leadership	29
Responsibility	30
Teamwork	30
Self-motivation	31
Stigma and its reduction	33
Voice - Making Sure People are Heard	33
Education	35
Ideas	35
Recommendation: Increased Education on Youth Autonomy	36
Recommendation: Free and personalized education regarding youth autonomy.	37
Chapter 4: Homelessness	38
Youth Homelessness	38
Homelessness Prevention and Root Causes	40
Disparities and cultural responsiveness	42
Conclusion	44

Chapter 1: Overview

What is the Youth Commission and what do we do?



The Youth Commission and Our Role: The Youth Commission is a group of around 30 young adults, ages 11-19, that serve as a youth advisory board to the Clark County Board of Councilors. Every year our group is assigned a topic or set of topics to research and create a report of recommendations to improve our county.

Methods of research: We meet together bi-monthly on Thursdays for two hours. During this time, we delve into our policy research, take notes, and brainstorm possible recommendations to include in our final report. We have a multitude of subcommittee meetings dedicated to furthering our research or preparation for the events we put on, as well as holding “deep-dive” meetings to get a better understanding of the heavier topics we handle. In June, we collate

all the notes we've taken throughout the year and create a report based on the recommendations we pull from them. We then present that information to the County Council.



Art Show: The Youth House Art Show is a collaboration between all the programs in the Youth House, including STASHA (Strong Teens Against Substance Hazards and Abuse), Options, and the Youth Commission. This year's theme was about perspective, with the title "Trading Eyes: A Youth House Art Show about the Way We View the World." We do a series of planning meetings and art labs in which we bond and create pieces to show and/or sell in the event.



YAC: Every year towards the end of spring, we host an awards ceremony honoring over 300 youth called the Youth Achievement Celebration (YAC). We host this event at Skyview High School and celebrate youth from everywhere in Clark County. Categories include Tolerance, Family Life, Arts, and Environmental Stewardship. Anyone is able to nominate and anyone from 5th-12th grade (in Clark County) is able to receive the award. This is one of the most influential events we hold, because it gives a chance to acknowledge the youth of Clark County who are often overlooked, and to remind them that their presence and achievements aren't unnoticed.

Personal development: Being a part of the Youth Commission is a wonderful experience for both those involved and those touched by its influence.

(This section was compiled by Ava.)

Retreats

What are retreats? Well, the Youth Commission has two retreats, one in the summer and one in the winter. The summer retreat allows us to get to know the new members who applied that year, while also working on that year's policy report, and we have more icebreakers and activities in the summer retreat than in the winter retreat. On the other hand, the winter retreat takes place in the beginning weeks of March and is more focused on the policy report while still adding fun into the mix.





According to Kevin, “I think the small group discussions help me express my ideas and agree with the other people in my group while also getting work done.”



Subcommittees

Subcommittees can discuss a variety of things, from planning the art show to interviewing applicants for the Youth Commission. The subcommittees can either be longer or shorter than the regular meetings and are more in depth.

(This section was compiled by Kevin.)

Recommendation Themes

Throughout the 2018-2019 Youth Commission term, members have been tackling the task of learning more about the subjects of Mental Health, Youth Transition into Adulthood, and Youth Homelessness. Starting from the very beginning, the summer retreat, we have broken up into small groups to analyze various works and use them to create recommendations that will be brought up today. Since the topic for our policy report this year encompasses many different ideas, it was important to define the general themes that came up very often in our deliberations.

Prevention and Addressing the Root Causes

Our research this year has been based on statistics of youth who are going through these issues. However, it is still important to consider prevention in addition to mitigating the effects of these topics on our county. Rather than evaluating the number of youth experiencing homelessness, for example, it is also crucial to note why they are in this position and methods to prevent them from being at risk. Through uncovering the root causes of youth homelessness, we are learning even more about these topics over a longer period of time, rather than simply noting the most crucial point in time. This can be compared to teaching a child various morals at a young age to prevent misdemeanors rather than teaching them once the problem has already occurred. In addition, analyzing the root causes will allow our county to note more individuals that are at risk and apportion our attention properly in terms of financial support and education. .

Stigma

Surrounding the topics of this year's policy report, there is a veil of stigma that prevents many from understanding the significance of these topics. Studying methods to reduce stigma will enrich our resources in research. Many youth going through these problems do not want to share their story because of the fear of judgement from society. Not only will this change the perspective of the youth undergoing these challenges, it will change the perspective of onlookers to further emphasize the importance of these topics in order to fuel prevention and action.

(This section was compiled by Katie.)

Chapter 2: Mental Health

We did research on prevention of mental disorders and we read a document on that topic. Its main message was about risk and protective factors that keep people from experiencing mental health issues. It covered various methods to prevent mental disorders such as improving nutrition, improving housing and living conditions, reducing economic insecurity, strengthening community networks, reducing harm from addictive substances, reducing smoking and other substances during pregnancy, preschool education of reading skills and socioemotional values, reducing child abuse and neglect, coping with parental mental health, enhancing resilience and reducing risk behaviors in schools, dealing with family disruption, intervening at workplace and supporting refugees. We were able to take the information we learned to develop recommendations and ideas for how we can apply this to our own community.

(This section was compiled by Clara.)

Prevention and Root Causes

Mental health and illness has been a prominent and persistent issue among the global population, only becoming less stigmatized in recent years. Defined as by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community,” mental health refers to one’s psychological wellbeing, interdependent with one’s physiological health. While being mentally healthy is the positive use of the term, being mentally ill or having a mental disorder has become the stigmatized issue. While it is also detrimental to the adult population, youth are more prone than adults to having issues concerning their mental health. They constantly face societal pressure, at a time when their brains and bodies are developing. From a statistical standpoint, the prevalence of mental disorders is estimated to range from 17.6% to 22% among youth (Costello et al), and is estimated to be even higher among high-risk youth.

Leading Factors in Mental Health Issues

There is no single factor that contributes to the high prevalence of mental health issues among youth; instead, it is a complex combination of centuries-old “nature versus nurture” factors. The environment and community in which youth grow up are influences acting alongside the biological predispositions each individual has.

Environmental and Sociocultural Factors

The environment in which children grow up is a leading contributor to mental health or mental illness. Research has found that children growing up in poverty are more likely to suffer from mental illness, and socioeconomic status has also affected the likelihood and accessibility of receiving treatment for mental illness (CDC). Professor Katie A. McLaughlin, clinical psychologist and assistant professor of psychology at Harvard, reinforced the correlation between socioeconomic status and mental health. Lower subjective social status has been associated with higher rates of mental illness, meaning that particularly in adolescents, perception of social status is associated with rates of mental illness. The sensitivity of adolescents towards social status has also been well-documented, which, combined with lower perceived status, can lead to worsening mental health. (McLaughlin).

The role of race and ethnicity in mental health and illness is not to be ignored. While rates of mental health disorders are surprisingly lower in adolescents of racial minorities, mental illnesses in racial and ethnic minorities take a more chronic course. The American Psychiatric Association Working Group for Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Youth Mental Health has outlined a set of leading factors related to racial and ethnic factors in mental health.

These include:

- Socioeconomic status - This comes into play as children in poverty experience more potential stressors, poorer quality of education, insecurity in neighborhood and housing safety, and a greater perception of oppression and racism. These factors affect the social structure of still-developing adolescents, and destabilize their social networks, as they raise stress and lower self-perceived self-worth and efficacy. Parents may work multiple jobs to support their children, thus sacrificing time spent interacting with them.
- Childhood adversity exposure - Minorities living in low-income neighborhoods are exposed to a greater number of ACEs (adverse childhood experiences). These are commonly associated with and based around the experiences and consequences of single parenting, teen pregnancy, gang involvement, substance use, and more.
- Neighborhood-level stressors - The discrepancies in neighborhood safety, community network, and resource accessibility contributes to inequities in access to mental health help and wellness. Institutional bias, frequent exposure to racism, and increasing thought and prevalence of “stereotype threat” increase racial tension, and limit mental health service access, mental health help and treatment, and advocacy for such services.
 - Recommendation: Increased accessibility to mental health resources. Access to care and treatment should not be limited by socioeconomic status and neighborhood, especially as these factors contribute to a differing prevalence of mental disorders.
 - Recommendation: In schools, there could be an increased adoption of strengths-based programs, anti-bullying campaigns, ethnic and racial socialization workshops, trauma-focused curricula, and more intensive training of staff to deal with differing cultural influences.
 - Recommendation: Increase school-level mental health screening and education about mental health.
 - Recommendation: A greater community support network, or greater interaction between households and schools concerning the mental health of the children. The programs and measures above would contribute to this, strengthening connection within the community.
- Family structure. ACEs including maltreatment, domestic violence, and familial instability are more likely to occur in single-parent households, and single mothers of minorities have been found with a higher prevalence of depression. Maternal depression has been linked to worsened mental health in children and adolescents.

- Recommendation: The education of practitioners in dealing with the effects of single-parent households on children should be increased.
- Bias of practitioners and incompetence in understanding cultural differences - The bias of practitioners is often implicit, occurring below conscious awareness, yet it can severely affect the quality of care given to minorities. The disproportionate amount of mental disorder diagnoses or misdiagnoses has been partly attributed to the bias of practitioners, including the perception that minorities are more likely to engage in substance abuse, violent behavior, and treatment noncompliance. Since around 90% of practitioners identify as non-Hispanic white, there is a generalization surrounding the treatment of racial and ethnic minorities. The lack of diversity in the field of psychology and psychiatry has also vastly limited the challenging of implicit biases and beliefs.
 - Recommendation: The better training of practitioners in cultural competence and increased education about the cultural differences of racial minorities should be enforced. Those dealing with the treatment of mental illness should be able to understand each factor, and not simply resort to an overarching generalization about a group of people. These services must be clear of implicit cultural biases, and advertised as such. If treatments remain ineffective due to these implicit biases, it may affect the population's willingness to place faith and trust in clinical practitioners.
- (Valdez et al, 2 - 5)

Biological Factors

From the biological perspective, there are a number of contributors. A chemical imbalance in the brain may influence the progression or onset of a mental disorder, including how an imbalance in serotonin levels is associated with depression and anxiety disorders, or how the levels of dopamine in the brain may be associated with schizophrenia (Brisch et al). Family history and genetics have also been identified as leading factors. In a report prepared for the World Health Organization (WHO), the role of genes was found to be critical to the circuit maps and functions of the brain, whether it be through differences or mutations in the DNA code leading to subsequent differences in protein synthesis, or in the way that genetics affects neurons. These genetic factors are responsible for detailing bodily responses to diseases, as well as the body's susceptibility to certain diseases, including mental disorders (Hyman, 456). A few other contributing biological factors include substance abuse by the pregnant mother, traumatic brain injuries, and side effects of physiological illness.

- Recommendation: There are various ways to approach these factors. One would include action against familial substance abuse, particularly in pregnant women. Mental health help available to pregnant women could contribute to lower rates of substance abuse in mothers, and therefore lead to a lowered rate of mental disorders caused by maternal substance abuse.

Education about the substantial risk associated with substance use while pregnant should be enforced more heavily, and more action should be taken to ensure that everyone is able to access treatment for substance abuse. Access to treatment should not be based on socioeconomic status; instead, it should be accessible and affordable to everyone.

Further Recommendations to Ensure Happiness and Mental Wellbeing

The county must ensure that adequate treatment for an adequate amount of time is occurring. The early termination of treatment is prevalent among youth, though there is no clear universal indicator as to why it happens. The early termination of treatment could be due to cost or dissatisfaction with care received, but one problem is with the prevalence of many specialized treatment programs. Dr Dan Offord from McMaster University suggests effective universal and targeted programs in contrast to specialized children's mental health services, which could reduce the size of the population requiring clinical services.

Secondly, the county should focus on youth on a more personal level. Teenagers are at a period of time in their lives in which their minds are developing and assimilating new ideas into their existing schemas and changing their schemas to fit new information. In schools, there should be a heightened focus on mental health and the steps towards a happy life. Currently, many teenagers are left with a stigmatized or negative view on mental health. A number of Youth Commissioners have expressed the negative impacts of this stigmatization. To quote one Youth Commissioner, "being treated like this condition is just a 'phase' in my teenage years" has left a detrimental impact surrounding society's view of mental health. In the words of another Youth Commissioner, it is important to "realize that it is okay to not be okay," and to show that to other students and adolescents. Current stigmas on mental health include the belief that mental illness is not a true disorder, or is just a "phase." Many adolescents are left with the belief that there is something wrong with them, and that what they are struggling through is not acceptable in today's society. This has left the topic of mental health under a dark umbrella. However, if the county takes steps to show that the community is actively willing to help and listen to youth experiencing mental illness, and shows the youth of the community that there are many people who are accepting, it could result in decreased stigma in the future.

It is important to educate the county's youth about the importance of mental health, and how to achieve better mental wellness. According to an article reviewed by Lyness, Ph.D, there are many aspects to positive psychology, or the branch of psychology focused on improving mental wellbeing and happiness.

These include:

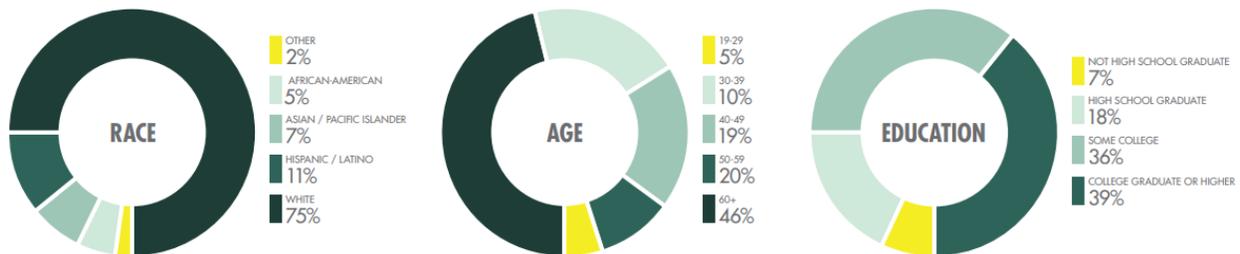
- Positive emotions
- Management of negative emotions

- Realization of strengths and practice of these strengths
- Good relationships - family, community, school
- Development of certain emotional skills
- Achievement - setting realistic goals and achieving them, whether it be academic goals, life goals, personal goals, etc.
- Enjoyment of activities

(This section was compiled by Jasmine.)

ACES: What are they?

ACEs is a term to describe types of abuse and neglect occurring during childhood (under the age of 18). The study that first used this term surveyed 17,000 people about their childhood and their health currently. The demographic that was surveyed consisted of individuals who were American and in the middle class, most of whom were a part of a minority group (Hispanic, Asian, African American) and educated until the college level.



Two-thirds of the surveyed people reported that they had experienced ACEs at least once in their life. 36% said they had not experienced ACEs. Those who reported that they had experienced ACEs commonly said that it occurred more than once. ACEs are linked to risky behavior, psychological issues, and serious illness in adulthood.

Those ranking in more exposure to ACEs were exhibiting more risky behaviors:



(larger bubbles = more risky behaviors)

In addition, life expectancies were shorter in people with ACEs by 20 years.

Types of ACEs

- **Family Dysfunction**

Diving deeper into ACEs, family dysfunction can be a factor that impacts youth mental health. Family dysfunction can include:

- Growing up in an environment with people who have mental illnesses
- Growing up in an environment where substance abuse was prevalent
- Growing up in an environment with domestic violence
- Growing up in an environment where your parents were separated
- Growing up with an incarcerated relative

- **Abuse**

Child abuse can be broken up into 3 categories:

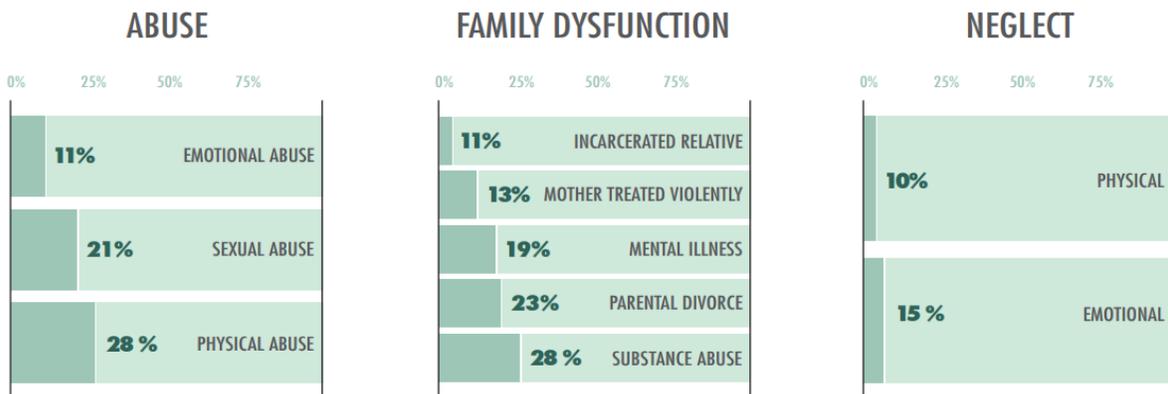
- Physical Abuse
- Emotional Abuse
- Sexual Abuse

- **Neglect**

Neglect can also be divided into categories:

- Physical
- Emotional

Overall, the ACE score is computed by counting the number of different types of ACEs a child has experience out of 10.



Recommendation:

In order to mitigate the effects of ACEs to wellbeing in adulthood, there should be more economic support for families. This way, parents have to worry less about providing food and housing for their family and can spend more time with their children. This tackles the issue of neglect in childhood. In addition, the CDC has published a technical package that includes strategies to prioritize the

prevention of ACEs. In this packet, the strategies are not only geared to the parents of the child, but to friends, family, and observers. The mode of prevention that the CDC is using ties back into the theme of education. In providing first-time parents and other members of the community with tips, it educates them on the impact of childhood experiences in later life. Although this information is made available, it is not readily used in the community. More advertising around the resources available provides a way for those who need to use them. Public spaces that these figures frequent should be the focus of this advertisement in order for it to be the most useful.

(This section was compiled by Katie.)

Stigma and its Reduction

https://www.ted.com/talks/nadine_burke_harris_how_childhood_trauma_affects_health_across_a_lifetime

Dr. Nadine Burke Harris: How Trauma Affects Health Across A Lifetime; TED Talks

Childhood trauma appears to be one of the most overlooked threats to a person's health. From a study at the Center for Youth Wellness, it was found that those with an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) score of 4 were 12 times more likely to attempt suicide than those with an ACE score of 0. To address the issue of overlooking childhood trauma as a public health threat, we must address the stigma surrounding ACEs. We must be able to discuss and speak freely about the issue rather than leave ACEs alone. People with childhood trauma deserve to get the correct treatment and diagnosis to prevent future threats to their health. One step locally we could take is to work with local hospitals, such as Legacy Salmon Creek Hospital, to ensure they are addressing ACEs the best way possible (i.e. look at their methodology to diagnose and treat people with childhood trauma).

https://www.ted.com/talks/malika_whitley_how_the_arts_help_homeless_youth_heal_and_build?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

Malika Whitley: How The Arts Help Homeless Youth Heal And Build

Malika Whitley's presentation is very inspiring, and shows the importance of giving homeless youth a voice in their community. Homeless youth face many issues, including a lack of care and a feeling of invisibility. One possible solution to these two issues is through the arts. The arts, including music, writing, etc, allow young people to express themselves and find who they are through this expression. In our area, we can take steps by working with the Clark County Music Teachers Association to give homeless youth in the county a voice, through free classes or concerts promoting education of youth who have not been exposed to the power of the arts.

The establishment of programs related to the arts or artistic outlets directly correlates with helping youth experiencing homelessness cope in a safe setting, and positive mental health. Even local art nights or days dedicated to music allow youth to express their creativity in a positive manner that promotes their wellbeing.

(This section was compiled by Aaron.)

Trauma-informed care and trauma-specific services

Two things that can make a critical difference to dealing with trauma are trauma-informed care (TIC) and trauma-specific services (TSS). TIC focuses more on the impact of trauma and where it guides you. And TSS include specific treatments for mental disorders.

Recommendation: Staff should be specialized to serve different mental disorders and should work with a patient for the entire course of their treatment in order to build a personalized relationship that facilitates their growth.

(This section was compiled by Krishneel and Drevon.)

Youth Commissioner Opinions

A lot was talked about during a Youth Commission seminar on matters including homelessness and trauma. Navon stated that there is a greater focus on preventing trauma victims from being homeless than on preventing trauma from happening. Josie talked about how interesting it was that the providers have experienced trauma in their past and are now trying to help trauma patients. Kevin and Navon discussed the way the help is being distributed among different experiences, and how to help every kind of trauma, including the trauma it is to be homeless. Katie suggested to start with supportive connections. Katie said that trauma-informed care is a system that helps youth and homeless people deal with trauma and how you need to be aware of the patients' triggers in order not to trigger them. Navon stated that homeless youth need someone to guide them to get help instead of putting them in jail.

(This section was compiled by Kevin.)

Education

As someone who's interested in preventing mental health issues before they start or develop, these different steps that showed how to prevent them interested me, especially the whole cognitive and socioemotional teaching. I think if we teach kids how to manage emotions when they're young and very susceptible to learning new information and developing rapidly, it could really change the outcome on their ability to cope later in life when faced with tough issues.

(This section was compiled by Clara.)

Chapter 3: Adulting and Transitioning Skills

Adulthood transition challenges are situations we see in our own lives extremely often. Our personal journeys may differ but, collectively, we have studied this particular topic all year. The transitions from secondary education to adulthood and, ultimately, self-sufficiency can be very tough. Those who struggle with behavioural/mental health challenges are at an even greater risk of experiencing homelessness at some point in their lifetime. At the base level, these are a few of our primary recommendations.

(This section was compiled by Jatin.)

Prevention and Root Causes

Many youth depend on their parents, whether that be to make their doctor's appointments, to go grocery shopping, or to tell them when it's time to go to bed. It can be difficult as a youth 'leaving the nest' to manage the responsibilities that come with being an adult. In order for a smooth transition into adulthood, it is critical that youth have developed a certain skill set and have knowledge in a few topics.

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Healthy Living

One of the hardest things when transitioning into adulthood is staying healthy. Once youth leave home, there isn't anyone to set limits. If during childhood, youth were not given the opportunity to self-limit, it can be easy to act without restraint. An expression commonly used in the US is 'Freshman 15.' This term refers to an amount of weight gained during a student's first year of college. Although this weight gain can be caused by a number of factors, it could be combated by some basic education concerning healthy living.

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Meals

As youth transition into adulthood, it is their responsibility to plan out their meals on a small budget. Members of the Youth Commission want youth to know "how to eat healthy on a budget." The words cheap and healthy don't usually coexist. Youth should know and be able to eat healthy without breaking the bank. Also, in order to choose healthy youth need to know what to look for on nutrition labels. In addition, youth need to know basic cooking skills. This includes, how to use various cooking appliances and how to prepare certain basic food items. Another important idea is meal prep. When preparing food, it's always a good idea to cook extra and save food for later meals.

(Olivia, with Ava, Eddie, Gelila, Kalyn, Taylor.)

Another thing to consider is that while living on a small budget it may be helpful for youth to know how to make certain items (such as bread) that are cheaper to make than to buy.

(Olivia, with Ava, Eddie, Gelila, Kalyn, Taylor, Jatin, Katie, Kevin.)

Self Care

Self care is a critical component of mental health. This could include...

- Developing proper hygiene practices
- Avoiding substance use
- Avoiding media overuse
- Managing your time in order to avoid stress and get adequate sleep
- Learn how to make SMART goals

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

SMART goals

Specific- The goal is clearly defined; it's clear what needs to be achieved)

Measurable- You can track your progress toward the goal and know when it's been accomplished

Achievable- The goal is reasonable enough that it could be accomplished

Relevant- The goal is worthwhile and fits with your immediate and long-term plans

Time-bound- Set a date for when your goal needs to be achieved

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Career

Choosing a career is an important decision and a big decision that many youth struggle with.

According to research conducted by the Student Research Foundation, in partnership with the Partnership for 21st Century Learning, America's Promise Alliance, and SkillsUSA, participating students cited these as the influences on their career thinking:

- 36% cited their mothers
- 27% cited their fathers
- 17% cited a teacher

It's important that youth don't choose a job just to please other people or else they may end up choosing a career that doesn't satisfy them. It's easy to choose a career based on the fact that it's 'realistic' or that it pays the bills, but it's also important to teach youth to choose a job that will make them happy.

“The vast majority of 17,000 US workers in 19 industries who participated in a survey conducted by the nonprofit group Mental Health America and the Faas Foundation said they are unhappy with their jobs. They are so unhappy that 71% also said that they are looking to change employers.”

- Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-small-business/wp/2017/10/19/study-71-percent-of-employees-are-looking-for-new-jobs/?utm_term=.fa8598fc610e

The first step in choosing a career is to know yourself. This includes your strengths and abilities, your interests, and your personality. This will be the foundation for planning a career. Youth should use this information to expand their knowledge of career options that they might enjoy. In addition, it is important that youth participate in work-based learning. It's one thing to read about a job and another thing to actually do it. Before nailing down the right career, youth should try to get some real-life experience in that work environment. This could be through an internship, apprenticeship, work experience, community service, or other things. This way, youth have the opportunity to decide whether a job is really right for them before going too far down a specific career path.

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Programs

There are various existing programs that work to build the skills necessary for youth to transition into adulthood. One in particular that has had success is NewView. NewView in Oklahoma is a program that is targeted specifically towards low-vision and blind individuals. During the two-week summer program, participants stay in a local hotel. Andrea Hamen, NewView's program director for family services, says that during the program, “We bring in experts to teach them how to manage a budget; we teach them self-advocacy, the latest in technology and job readiness skills.” During the first week of the program, the participants go through a lot of training and talk about their goals. From there they have to figure out how to meet those goals, including meeting with instructors. In the second week, the participants participate in mock interviews and job shadowing situations (which they have to arrange and prepare for themselves). The participants have a checklist of things to accomplish, a budget and a suite to live in by themselves. Overall, the program teaches youth how to act independently, and how to figure things out by advocating for themselves and through communication.

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Recommendations

- Creation of a program similar to NewView
- Promotion of different work-based learning

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Financial Independence

Being comfortable with money is an important skill as an adult. As youth transition into adulthood, they need to know how to manage their money. Being able to cover expenses in a responsible fashion and know whether or not you need to cut down on your expenses will be a tremendous help for youth in becoming financially stable in the future.

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Budgeting for beginners

The 50-30-20 Rule

- 50% of your income should go to living expenses and essentials (rent, utilities, groceries, etc)
- 30% of your income should be used for flexible spending (shopping, movies, eating out, etc)
- 20% of your income should go towards your financial goals (savings, investments, debt-reduction payments)

For youth that are new to budgeting, the 50-30-20 rule is a good starting point. The steps for them to take are clear and will ultimately help them reach financial stability. There is some flexibility to the 50-30-20 rule. The percentages can be altered to make it work better for each individual. The main goal is to stay consistent in managing money every month and making sure that expenses are being covered.

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Open a bank account

Under 18

Joint Accounts:

- Youth are able to *use* the account (make deposits, withdrawals, purchases with a debit card, etc.)
- These accounts may have features that allow the adult to stay informed through text/email alerts concerning account activity, or they may even be able to set spending limits on debit cards

Overall: Youth are able to learn how to responsibly use a bank account while an adult can oversee/make sure they are spending money wisely.

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Custodial Accounts

- Youth are not able to *use* the account
- Any deposit made to the account is an irrevocable gift
- Money in the account can only be spent for the child's benefit (the adult cannot use the money to buy items for personal use)
- Upon turning 18, the youth owns the money in the account (they can do what they want with it)
- Overall: Funds in the account are used for the benefit of the child. However, youth are not able to use the account, so when they turn 18, they may not have the necessary skills to manage their money on their own.

(This section was compiled by Olivia)

Applying for a credit card

Getting a credit card and using it responsibly can build up a good credit score, which is necessary for when it's time to buy something such as a house or a car. But credit cards are a tricky business. It's easy to spend more money than you actually have or to simply not understand how a credit card works. It's important for youth to know that credit cards carry high-rate debt and that by just making the minimum payments, most of their money will go towards paying interest instead of paying away their debt.

(This section was compiled by Olivia.)

Transitioning into Adulthood: The Learning of Life Skills

Communication

Communication is essential to maintain relationships, whether it be pertaining to romance, family, or work. An article published by Stevenson University mentioned that “When verbal language and body language are congruent, this works to enhance the overall quality of the message and allow it to resonate with the individual receiving the message.” Even if there is an important message being discussed in a conversation, it is made vibrant through the use of appropriate body language. Without effective communication, your argument can be deemed not valuable even if it has relevant information. In adulthood, proper communication can get you the job you covet or maintain a relationship. Body language is a mode of communication that is nonverbal and often instinctive. The hand gestures that many naturally use during presentation, for example, put what you are saying into a different “language.” 65% of people are visual learners and hand gestures are a way to keep them engaged with the topic. In addition, it is important to actively listen to the opposing person. When you are speaking, you expect utmost attention from your receiver. Yet, this must be reciprocated in order for both sides of the conversation to accept the information. When you do not actively listen and respond, it tells the speaker that you are not interested in their topic. This may cause them to not listen to your side of the conversation as a return. Carrying out both positions of the conversation, both listening and speaking, will facilitate success as an individual in several different communities. Recommendation: In elementary school, the format in which information is taught is typically a teacher speaking in front of a task. A more active way would be encouraging students to research and teach a topic.

(This section was compiled by Katie.)

Leadership

In order to transition into adulthood, it is important to consider what type of leader you are. This includes how you facilitate, your audience, and the topic of interest. Becoming a leader in a new environment is a perfect way to assimilate into the environment and build a good reputation. There are no true guidelines that outline what a good leader is. However, it is important that a leader facilitates the growth of the group they’re leading. As mentioned before, voice is a key pillar in our policy report. Becoming an adult means that you vocalize your thought. It also entails that you allow others to share their thoughts. In addition, a leader is someone who is dependable in nature. This means that you can

be held accountable. Not only for yourself; you must take responsibility for the actions of your team members as well. According to an article published by Harvard Business Review titled *How and Why to be a Leader (Not a Wannabe)*, it “ isn’t about what you have, and how much — but what you do, and why — if you’re to live a life that matters. Leading is achieving that higher level in Maslow’s Hierarchy [a five-tier model of human needs], esteem and self-actualization. The transition to adulthood entails that you lead your own life and make your own decisions, therefore, on a small scale, you begin developing skills.

(This section was compiled by Katie.)

Responsibility

Relating to leadership, responsibility is also an important factor. In regards to work, you may not be hired if you do not display that you are responsible. The workplace requires a lot of teamwork. This means that each member must cooperate and be responsible for their share of the work. In addition, becoming an adult introduces the new aspects of doing taxes and paying for bills. You want to be responsible and pay your bills as this will impact your credit score, dictating other segments of your life like getting a car or buying a house. An article published by the Foundation for Economic Education discusses the idea that being responsible allows many of the people that interact with you to trust you. Since your youth, you continually say “It wasn’t me!” when you are caught doing something wrong. For this reason, you are used to evading responsibility. However, this must change as you transition into adulthood as it is detrimental to your reputation. Personal responsibility has been increasingly important. One must learn to prioritize and carry out the most important activities before indulging. Recommendation: There should be a stronger policy to enforce completing tasks, this puts responsibility on youth. However, in order to avoid this becoming overwhelming, the strictness at which this is tested should gradually increase with age. This could be employed through a small weighted grade.

(This section was compiled by Katie.)

Teamwork

In the workplace, tasks are accomplished through teamwork. When working with a large group, it is easy for some voices to be silenced, intentionally or unintentionally. However, a small group may allow others to vocalize their opinions if a person does not feel confident enough to share their thoughts to a larger group. In this, teams can be a place to build morale as it is a supportive space to improve

self-esteem. Effectively working in a team, like we operate in the Youth Commission, allows for various perspectives to be shared while we attempt to tackle an issue.

Recommendation: In order to improve how someone works in a team it is important to supply youth with the many opportunities to work in a group. This may include groups inside of school and outside of school. Voice is very significant to working well in a team. In school, there are many problems with dividing tasks equally amongst members. Therefore, youth tend to associate negative thoughts to working with a group. However, if more groups, like the Youth Commission, were available, youth would see that teams don't just have to work to complete temporary tasks. Projects assigned in school do not span a long time. Youth only focus on a small part of the whole, in hopes of completing the task. Yet, groups that focus on a broad issue over a long period of time allow for members to find how they function in a group. Emphasis on a long service project for high school graduation may also complement well with this recommendation.

(This section was compiled by Katie.)

Self-motivation

In Maslow's Hierarchy, you cannot achieve a level unless you have reached the one below it. Self-motivation can be associated with the tier on the hierarchy called self actualization and self esteem. You feel motivated when you are working on a task that you are passionate about. Yet, adulthood means that you may have to do some things that you do not find interest in. This is why a balance is needed between what you enjoy and what you have to do. To approach this, making goals allows for a more organized way of approaching a task. Often, when there is a large piece of work that needs to be completed, breaking up the task and looking at the subdivisions may seem more manageable. The line that divides work and fun can be very rigid, yet, at the same time it can be very loose. A task can become more interesting if you sprinkle in something that you enjoy. When Youth Commissioners face a problem, they have some modes of coping with it and becoming motivated:

- Talking to someone
- Journey
- Going over what they have already accomplished
- Listen to music

One of the reasons why the Youth Commission does so many icebreakers and activities before starting a task is to motivate members to focus.

Recommendation: Youth should be provided time to take a "mental break" before starting to tackle a task or after they have completed a large chunk of work.

(This section was compiled by Katie.)

Stigma and its reduction

In reducing stigma about mental health issues, which many find difficult to discuss, there are many ways to help. We believe that our ability to reduce stigma lies in our ability to include, support, and educate others. To be able to talk freely about these heavy topics, we have to also know the facts behind them. And in knowing the facts, we have to leave behind the prejudicial and discriminatory thinking all of us have grown up with, moving instead toward open-ended thinking, listening, and empathy. Furthermore, there can be a better focus on the positive. Too often we hear of all the negative stories related to mental health issues, when we could hear all the positive contributions those with mental health or substance abuse issues are making to society. We cannot let people be defined by one aspect of their humanity.

(This section was compiled by Aaron.)

Voice - Making Sure People are Heard

During the transition into adulthood, it is important to make sure people are heard. Everyone experiences different challenges as they mature. For this reason, it is often hard to advise a large group with a specific principle. However, it is easier to teach individuals a broad principle. With more vocalization in the community, a general trend can be made to improve the experience of youth. For example, our Youth Commission has sent out a survey to members in order to get their experience and voice in this subject. This survey was a way to determine if they were ready for adulthood and consisted of a list of skills that are typically associated with this stage in life. The results were:

- 25% knew how to do taxes
- 50% knew how to budget
- 56.3% knew how to cook healthy
- 62.5% knew how to cook affordably
- 12.5% knew how to insure
- 37.5% knew what insurance means to them specifically
- 37.5% knew how to buy a car
- 75% knew how to write a resume
- 62.5% knew how to apply for a job
- 43.8% knew how to write a cover letter
- 50% knew how to apply for a scholarship
- 62.5% knew how to find and maintain friendships

- 31.3% knew how to manage a household
- 87.5% knew how to manage time
- 50% knew how to find good banking
- 62.5% knew the benefits of finding a good job
- 31.3% knew about planning retirement
- 93.8% knew about leadership and teamwork

From just this data, general trends can be noticed that show how impactful voice is. By sharing one's experiences in regards to preparation to adulthood, gaps in the education system can be spotted which lead to further changes. Another way voice is seen in Clark County is through the YAC. In career development, which covers some of the skills in the survey, the category was of a decent size. In this, the nominaters vocalized their opinion on performance and the number of those nominated shows how readily available information is in regards to developing a career in our county. This data set also represents the importance of diverse voices. In the Youth Commission, members are allowed several opportunities to refine their leadership abilities, which is why many members thought they possess this skill. Diverse voices of youth from the county will allow for a better representation of this idea.

Recommendation: From these statistics, one can deduce that skills like writing a resume, finding a job, and writing a cover letter can be improved. In Clark County, Cascadia Technical Academy (formerly Clark County Skills Center) is the perfect place to obtain and practice these skills. Further, advertisement that reach out to youth, is a great opportunity for them to practice being an adult. More advertising should be geared towards youth; one platform would be social media. For example, STASHA and the Youth Commission have social media accounts as their mission is to serve youth.

(This section was compiled by Katie.)

Education

Recommendations: Comprehensive plan for young people transitioning to adulthood because they need to be able to have options and we believe this would allow them to better contribute to their communities.

Ideas

- Have groups of youth who have experienced homelessness in the past tell their stories and provide insight to teenagers across the county (resilience training)

Different programs for people experiencing homelessness that got charges. (for police mindfulness group)

- Getting into programs that educate about adulting responsibilities.
- More opportunities for job training.
- Suitable jobs for people experiencing homelessness just starting out.
- Recognizing parental neglect in young people and being more accommodating.

(This section was compiled by Jatin and Samauri.)

Recommendation: Increased Education on Youth Autonomy

We recommend that there be an increased focus on the education of real-world skills in our schools' academic curriculum. Many of us in the Youth Commission have felt this lack in the education system firsthand, and we believe there is much room to improve young people's preparation towards autonomy. The teaching approach could be somewhat modeled after Liahona Treatment Center's five pillars on teenage independence: financial, healthy living, work ethic, social skills, and basic survival skills. For example, youth could learn about taxes, applying for jobs, writing a resume, keeping healthy, mortgages, insurance, and interpersonal skills in interviews. This focus on another part of education would improve student's maturity and their ability to handle themselves as they leave home and grow up quickly.

(This section was compiled by Aaron.)

Recommendation: Free and personalized education regarding youth autonomy.

Due to the importance of this information, we also recommend making this information free and/or as easily accessible as time and resources would allow. When attempting to implement this information into education, it must be considered that there is a substantial amount of the general population that is unable to access it due to their current situation, whatever that situation may be. Our recommendation is to provide this information in more public spaces, like libraries, schools, hospitals, online resources, or broadcast on network television.

Possible examples:

- Website resource modeled after the “iReady” site, which is a resource that allows for teachers to test a student’s abilities in math or reading, then automatically creates a personalized lesson plan for them to practice with. A similar method could be applied with autonomy, by providing informational video lessons/games (content dependant on the target audience), that is entirely customizable with different options to learn from. These may include interview skills/resume building, credit/loans/taxes/general monetary skills, general public safety, or anything else youth or otherwise may feel they need.
- Independence workshops available at set times in public locations, like libraries or community centers. These can focus on aspects of autonomy that would be hard to teach in a setting other than hands-on and face-to-face, like cooking, mending, and cleaning, or even skills regarding personal health and mindset. This allows for more community interaction and exchanges and relationships developed, which are also essential autonomy skills.

(This section was compiled by Ava.)

Chapter 4: Homelessness

Youth Homelessness

Clark County has a general Homelessness Plan that is being used to counter the growing number of people experiencing homelessness every day, but throughout this year, the Youth Commission has found some other ways that specifically tie to youth experiencing homelessness and how to prevent or counter it. One of the main things that we thought would be good for Clark County would be to create a Youth Homelessness Plan. It would be mostly the same ideas as the regular Homelessness Plan, but specifically targeted towards youth and how we would be able to help them. We also had many questions that needed to be answered inside of the Youth Homelessness Plan, in order for us to feel like it would be effective. These included how the youth experiencing homelessness would be able to continue to have access to education, and what the risk of becoming homeless for a second time would be. We also felt that finding, researching, and advertising services that can be provided are important. We also felt that there are factors that should not change the services that a youth can be provided with, and there should even be specific services for youth that are underrepresented or discriminated against. These factors include race, gender, disabilities, geographic location, and sexual orientation.

Some of our questions were:

- How homelessness ties into mental health but also the risk of addiction
- What factors make an individual qualify for access to services
- Look into what are the root causes
- How can it be prevented?
- How is
 - Overall physical & Mental Health affected
 - Quality of life affected
 - Substance use issues affected
 - Risk of physical and sexual victimization affected
- For individuals in the situation, what are they interested in having access to in order to get out of the situation?
- How can cost be managed?
- Approach to prevention:
 - Primary
 - Among general population
 - Housing
 - Overall welfare settlement

- Secondary
 - Focus on people at high risk of homelessness due to characteristics or situations
- Tertiary
 - Measures targeted at people who've already been affected
- Prevention and protection programs

(This section was compiled by Kalyn.)

Homelessness Prevention and Root Causes

In our time researching preventative measures for homelessness across the country and the globe, we found several recurring things that we, in Clark County, can take note of in our efforts to stop youth homelessness before it happens.

First: to recognize that youth who experience neglect, abuse from family members, a history of unstable housing, mental health issues or substance abuse have a much greater risk of ending up in situations where stable housing is an issue. These are not all of the root causes, but some of the examples where the correlation between introduction into a young person's life and future bouts with homelessness are highest.

Outside of the individual experiences that could potentially lead youth into housing insecurity, economic factors in their community can also have a significant impact. Research the Youth Commission looked into shows that rates of homelessness increase at rates almost identical to housing prices in the area.

The aforementioned root causes still lead to the most vulnerability but local housing affordability can make the fall into temporary homelessness much easier. As a community, we relish the strength of our housing market but must make a note of the effects it can have on our most vulnerable. "Housing First" models have been taken up by service providers recently with emphasis on getting those experiencing homelessness directly into subsidized and affordable housing before anything else. This is only possible if within our area there are safe and affordable options.

(This section was compiled by Navon.)

Building shelters that are safe, all-inclusive spaces, could have a positive (mental, physical, emotional) impact on the wellbeing of the individuals using said shelters, thus perhaps giving them both the motivation and clarity to help them continue to get back on their feet.

When talking about housing solutions for the homeless community, Youth Commissioner Josie suggested something like "PodShare," except living (sleeping quarters) themselves would have the ability to be more closed off when necessary (and would perhaps be larger depending on if it were to be long-term or short term housing). Bathrooms, kitchens, and living-room/lounging spaces would be communal, hence the coined term "Co-Living" used by the PodShare organization. There would be many logistics to consider when creating something like PodShare, including the need for security, cleaning services, and perhaps even on-call therapists and/or trained professionals. An additional suggestion would be the ability to purchase personal hygiene products at reduced prices (this being through vending machines for both personal privacy / convenience). When applying to something like this, those who are checking in should have the ability to have sleeping quarters that are tailored to

their comfort zones (i.e. an (for women) all-women's section/floor, co-ed/gender neutral floor; an (for men) all men's section/floor, co-ed/gender neutral floor.)

(This section was compiled by Josie.)

Statistics given to the Youth Commission during the winter retreat showed a staggering 50% of arrests made by Portland police being persons currently experiencing homelessness. The reason for arrest consisted mostly of misdemeanors and petty theft. Law enforcement that work in and around these communities should be adjusting conduct to fit the realities of the trauma these citizens face while living on the streets. They're in need of services that tend to their needs ranging from addiction counseling to job placement. Officers in our county can be the first to get people in touch with services that get them back into stable living conditions in which they'd have no need to commit harmless petty crime rather than incarcerating them which only acts as a means to further exacerbate their problems. Incarceration for small nonviolent crime does more harm than good for these individuals who with a criminal record will now have doors closed to them when canvassing opportunities with service providers to get out of homelessness-opportunities such as federal housing and for other public assistance. When law enforcement put assistance for the most vulnerable in our community first it aids in making the transition back towards autonomy easier, whereas in the lack of this we see the creation of an atmosphere that essentially criminalizes being homeless in our own community.

(This section was compiled by Navon.)

Disparities and cultural responsiveness

The disproportionate representation of minority groups in the homeless population shows that concerted effort and attention is needed for these underrepresented populations. Prioritizing programs that are both culturally competent and specific can help to make our system more inclusive and effective for people of all backgrounds. In youth commission conversations with multiple service providers we were given examples of areas where efforts have been made to integrate cultural responsiveness into our system -specifically in resource allocation- but we've also been made aware there is still room for improvement in this endeavor.

- **Ethnicity and Race:** African-Americans comprised 42.6% of the sheltered population, while only representing 12.7% of the total U.S. population. People who identify as Hispanic were slightly underrepresented within the sheltered population (16.9%) compared to the total U.S. population (17.6%). White, non-Hispanic people were underrepresented, comprising 37.5% of those who experienced sheltered homelessness compared to 61.5% of the total U.S. population. The inequitable representation of African-Americans was greatest for families with children—51.7% of people in families with children who used shelter or transitional housing programs identified as African-American or black, 3.8 times higher than the representation of African-Americans among all families with children in the U.S. (13.6%)
- **Gender:** Men outnumbered women among adults who experienced sheltered homelessness by 63% to 37%, although this gender representation varies greatly across sub-populations. For instance, more than two-thirds of adult individuals who experienced sheltered homelessness were men (71.2%). Further, 91% of Veterans who experienced sheltered homelessness were men and 9% were women, representing a continued increase in the representation of women Veterans, up from 6.7% in 2009. In contrast, more than three-quarters of adults experiencing sheltered homelessness as part of families with children were women (77.6%).
- **People with Disabilities:** 42.9% of adults who experienced sheltered homelessness were people with disabilities—up from 40.6% in 2015. One in 85 adults with disabilities experienced sheltered homelessness compared to 1 in 344 adults without disabilities. The representation of people with disabilities was significantly higher among individuals (47.3%) than among adults in families with children (21.9%), but the rates for both populations far exceeded the representation of people with disabilities among the U.S. general population (19.6% for

individuals; 8.4% for adults in families) and among people living in poverty (30.5% for individuals; 15.0% for adults in families.)

- Geographic Location: People experienced sheltered homelessness primarily in principal cities (74.6%) compared to suburban or rural areas (26.4%), while only 35.2% of the U.S. population lives in principal cities and only 39.7% of people living in poverty in the U.S. live in principal cities. The number of people who experienced sheltered homelessness in suburban and rural areas declined 12% (50,991 fewer people) between 2015 and 2016, accounting for 80% of the total decline (63,380 fewer people) between years, a change in the longer-term trend of growth in sheltered homelessness in those areas.¹

¹ Doherty, Matthew. “Who Accessed Shelter or Transitional Housing in 2016? HUD’S AHAR Part 2 Report Tells Us.” *Homelessness Statistics by State | United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)*, United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), 18 Dec. 2017

Conclusion

It is crucial to continue to address mental health, transitioning into adulthood, and youth experiencing homelessness. These issues are affecting youth today, and in turn, continue to affect the community. The work of the Youth Commission has culminated in this report, a collection of extensive research and recommendations for the county. By identifying the root causes of each of these problems, the Youth Commission has been able to view them through a longitudinal lens, rather than a cross-sectional approach, allowing for more useful and effective recommendations. Addressing the various stigmas surrounding these issues has enabled Youth Commissioners and the county to raise awareness, increase positive and productive discussion, and conduct research with no pre-existing biases. By bringing to light the disparities among differing populations and cultures, recommendations were made to promote the equality of services offered, and to address the needs of different people in the county. By incorporating the many voices of youth and the surrounding community, the Youth Commission has been able to view the issues at hand through several different perspectives and advocate for change. By highlighting the importance of education, the community and the Youth Commission have become able to research, discuss, and report on these issues with extensive knowledge and unique perspectives.

Each of the sections in this report has been written and researched by members of the Clark County Youth Commission. The recommendations stated are the views and perspectives of Youth Commissioners, who feel that these are possible steps to take to improve the quality of life for youth and the community. The mission in mind remains the same: to improve the county. The Youth Commission hopes to do so by bringing attention to mental health, transitioning into adulthood, and youth experiencing homelessness. While these issues still persist, there are several measures that can be taken to solve them, including the recommendations above. In the end, each small step taken in good intent brings the path to a brighter future for all.

The Clark County Youth Commission would like to thank our community and supporters, as this report would not be possible without the many voices and information offered by others. Also special thanks to the local community experts who gave of their time and expertise including: Kate Budd, Executive Director of the Council for the Homeless; Michael Torres, Community Housing and Development Manager, Clark County Community Services; and Kristina Goodman, Housing Manager at New Avenues for Youth.

A full list of sources consulted for this report is available on request.

(This conclusion was compiled by Jasmine.)

