

Welcome to The Healthy Youth Action Team!

**Healthy Youth Action Team Mission Statement**

Through a range of participation, this committed group of individuals seeks to find and utilize the stories, data and experience that connects all of us around healthy youth. With this connectedness, passionate team members will provide Laramie County youth with support, resources and unconditional positive regard. The team will use data, through numbers and narratives, to identify and fill gaps while searching for paths to create and maintain lasting change for improved health for all Laramie County youth.

**Description of The Team**

The Healthy Youth Action Team came to be after the Community Needs Assessment put out by Laramie County Community Partnership for Healthier Laramie County. The committee has used local data from the needs assessments and other sources to guide them in identifying and creating changes that support the growth and improved health and wellbeing of Laramie County youth. For the purposes of recent work, before COVID-19, the age of youth targeted has been teens and young adults, but work is not limited to this age group. We recognize that youth is a word that encompasses many age groups and needs and would like to work towards the health and wellbeing of all Laramie County youth.

Currently, due to the worldwide pandemic, many of our community needs have changed. While the team was focusing on restorative justice and the impacts it could potentially have for youth in Laramie County, the classroom became that of people’s kitchens, living rooms, offices or bedrooms. This change in setting has changed the focus of the team, for now.

A COVID-19 needs assessment was completed and through this gathering of information the team focused on an identified issue of a lack of parent support and a need for resources in these changing times. A social media campaign called the #ParentingCheckInChallenge was decided to be the best way the group could quickly and cost effectively affect change for Laramie County youth, through additional parent support. Laramie County residents were challenged to contact 2 parents/caregivers that were parenting through the everchanging time of the pandemic, December 7th – December 11th, to check in, offer words of encouragement and see if there is anything they could do to help. Highlights of community resources were provided daily through the Facebook event including general resources, mental health crisis resources, school resources, family support resources and holiday resources. People were encouraged to use the hashtag and create a ripple effect of parent/caregiver support through Laramie County. As this campaign has come to a close, the team is now working to gather data on concerns for youth during these changing times as the team refocuses on youth needs.

Before COVID-19 the team was considering Laramie County School District #1’s lower than state average graduation rate as a data point that needs to change. The team has shown concern around a lack of life skills in our exiting students, as well as recurring suspensions and expulsions contributing to the low graduation rate. Additional data is constantly being sought after to these ends. After some work on life skills solutions, the focus has shifted to Restorative Justice as a potential solution to low graduation rates and repeated suspensions/expulsions. How and where Restorative Justice practices might work for Laramie County will still be considered, but is on a slight pause as COVID-19 has drastically changed circumstances. It has been decided that this focus will be addressed in a sub-group of the bigger group which is currently being developed.

**History**

Originally this group of committed individuals worked with data relating to childhood obesity rates to assist early childhood workers in home and public daycares by implementing 5-2-1-0 and Mighty Moves. They provided a staff person and support through foods and equipment to these daycares to impact early health. Through staff changeover and other community initiatives related to the interests of First Lady Michelle Obama this programing faded out.

The next wave of the Healthy Youth Action Team chose to look at the data around high school graduation rates. Laramie County School District #1 has a high school graduation rate below the rest of the state and the neighboring district. This group of individuals also began sharing their concerns about students not possessing needed life skills when leaving our education systems as well as the recurring suspensions and expulsions of certain students and how that could be impacting graduation rates.

To those ends, the first project the team worked on was in supporting a community-wide Reality Town to address the concerns of a lack of life skills. Reality Town is an event through GEAR UP that is similar to a real game of life in which youth are given a career, income and life circumstances. They then visit tables staffed by community members to obtain housing, cars, groceries and other life essentials. At the community-wide event the team was able to help support a college option where youth, if they were dissatisfied with the career they were given, were able to “go to college” by learning about other careers and discussing options like the Hathaway Scholarship as a way to complete college. The event was a great success based on attendance and reflections by youth. In the meantime, GEAR UP were able to obtain funding to support continued Reality Towns for community groups outside of just the students they serve.

Next the team looked into the concern of suspensions and expulsions in Laramie County and how they could be contributing to our lower than desirable graduation rates. The potential solution of Restorative Justice practices within one of our child serving systems is being researched and considered. Restorative Justice principles focus on repairing harm rather than distributing punishment and how that may look in Laramie County was the next team focus. Due to changing circumstances this work has been placed on a brief pause as the team looks at new solutions to lighten the burden and fill gaps created by the COVID-19 crisis.

A needs assessment was conducted around areas of need in times of COVID-19. A few topics rose to the surface, but ultimately the topic that garnered the most interest is that of a general lack of parent support that was being experienced by multiple arenas of our child-serving agencies in Laramie County. Concern over losing track of youth, changing data due to less exposure of youth to reporters of abuse and neglect, and a confusion over what is available in the community at this time were some of the driving concerns around this topic choice. The team developed the #ParentingCheckInChallenge which is mentioned above and garnered a great community support. This event will be continued as an annual event of the Healthy Youth Action Team.