

## WAHKIAKUM NETWORKING CAFÉ

### JUNE 3, 2009

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June's Networking Café was held from 6:00 – 8:00 PM at the River Street Meeting Room.

Attending were:

Sara Niemela	Youth Representative: Private Education, Distance Learning
Mike Reardon	Southwest Washington Agency on Aging
Lauren Head	Children's Home Society Kinship Navigator Program
Kari Schillios	Wahkiakum High School
Abby Burns	Wahkiakum High School
Chris Gonzalez	Youth Guest
Matthew Harrison	Youth Guest
Kassy Burdick	Wahkiakum School District
Carole Lewis	Media
Aimee Pino	Washington State Work Source
Virginia Shofner	Washington State Work Source
Susan Schillios	St. James Family Center and Charlotte House
Erin Wilson	Wahkiakum County Commissioners
Blair Brady	Wahkiakum County Commissioners
Chris Holmes	Wahkiakum Health & Human Services
Tammy Peterson	Wahkiakum Community Network
Lia Sealund	Wahkiakum Community Network

Focus of Event: The goal of the Wahkiakum Networking Café is to answer two questions – are we doing the work *right*, and are we doing the *right* work. During the Café's held in September, December and March, services were reviewed to determine if the individual services are being delivered as intended by the funders. That answered the first question if we are doing the work *right*. To determine if we are doing the *right* work, data was reviewed to assess the health and welfare of our surrounding community and the needs of our families in Wahkiakum County for the following behaviors:

Child Abuse and Neglect; Youth Substance Abuse; Youth Violence; Teen Suicide; Teen Pregnancy; Dropping out of School; Domestic Violence

After review of rates of seven problem behaviors in Wahkiakum County, participants broke out into small groups to discuss the following questions. Their comments follow:

1. What emerging or past conditions (such as family needs, community assets, social and economic conditions, employment, community capacity changes, demographic changes, transportation) are influencing the changes in the trends (good or bad) of the behaviors above?
  - Building awareness in the community is contributing to improvements in outcomes by getting a larger segment of the population engaged in prevention.
  - The economy is contributing in both good and bad ways. Poor economy can bring the community together to collaborate for more effective programs, but the lack of funds can limit service availability or hinder ability to utilize services for families as well.

- Poor economy is driving down employment opportunities for youth and adults and increasing risk factors in several or all problem behavior rates. It also causes reduced services and stresses resources for support services. As adults have to work longer hours or commute farther, youth are left with less structured activities, less supervision at home and increased use of electronic communication, which could have long-reaching negative impacts in their lives if not supervised.
  - The absence of guidance and leadership and/or reduced funds directed towards schools may be limiting the opportunity to drive down youth violence rates, substance abuse and teen pregnancy.
  - Youth violence may be driven by increased electronic communications. A lack of face to face communication influences a lack of responsibility and awareness of the affects of youth behavior towards one another.
  - Teen pregnancy rates may be influenced by a lack of confidentiality when seeking contraceptives from public sources (not necessarily the lack of access to contraceptives). Youth are concerned there is little confidentiality when obtaining assistance in such a small community. Youth told of personal experiences where they attempted to obtain contraceptives but the information informally got back to their parents. They expressed this makes them resistant to obtaining contraceptives as a minor if they cannot get it from a confidential source or without their parents approval.
2. How might our community respond to the trends to improve to lives of children and families in Wahkiakum County?
- We need to expend additional effort on validating the numbers of youth participating in substance abuse treatment. The Health & Human Services agency will examine the state data on youth substance abuse treatments to determine why these data sources differ. Perhaps getting data from all grades rather than select grades and getting data annually rather than every two years may help paint a clearer picture, especially in light that some class groups may be more prone to certain behaviors than others. In addition, collecting youth data every other year and only even grades means we do not measure odd grades at all. With such small numbers in the schools, collecting a larger sector of the student body will be helpful at painting the bigger picture. Two events that occur in the community, the Cispus program for 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the 7-12<sup>th</sup> grade Healthy Youth Summit, might be an additional source of data to complement the existing biennial youth survey.
  - Additional mentoring opportunities may influence youth behaviors by reducing risk factors. Especially the older youth. In reference to youth suicide risks, the 10<sup>th</sup> grade students appear to be in need of mentors during this particularly challenging stage in life. Perhaps more youth-to-youth mentoring projects and roles for youth in the community may be helpful as well, but in light of the constricting budget cuts in the public schools, there is no supervision available to launch a peer-to-peer program. The current community adult to youth mentoring program might consider expanding its reach to older teens.

- Conceivably an activity or community center might be a positive setting for mentoring opportunities, youth informal supervision, a healthy alternative to youth isolation and a setting for more family activity opportunities.
  - With reduced financial sources, families and youth may benefit from better utilization of local resources and budgeting education. The public school system might consider incorporating financial education, credit, and budgeting into a broader spectrum of youth classes to emphasize this important skill rather than an optional elective. A community center might also partner with WSU Wahkiakum County Extension to host financial workshops for families.
  - The Healthy Youth Summit that is currently offered every other year for a select representative of each class in middle through high school might be expanded. Instead of a select representative of the student body, the Network can bring it into the schools to present the data to the full student body. It can be planned and implemented with a small group of youth Network volunteers to host this event. By reaching a larger audience, the youth can provide a broader base of feedback, break into small workgroups to discuss the data, and emphasize how valuable the survey tool is to the community. Small presentations can be hosted by agencies that utilize the data such as the schools, the health department, the network, the state and the federal government.
  - Parents may benefit from education on how to connect and talk “with youth”, not “to youth” to assess their needs. This may help the youth feel more connected to adults, build support circles, and increase the protective factors youth need to drive down problem behaviors.
  - By increasing youth summits (perhaps a Youth Town Hall, where youth are the experts), or hosting smaller events more often, the community can keep the communications between youth and adults continuous and ongoing, rather than just every two years at the Healthy Youth Summit. This may also serve to keep the adults educated on the issues of most concern in youth’s lives and help to address rates of youth depression, suicide, pregnancy and substance abuse.
  - Explore options to expand locations for free contraceptives confidentially available to youth. Locating resources at the Charlotte House and/or in restrooms at local restaurants may be an option.
  - Encouraging law enforcement and representatives of the legal system to be in attendance at the Networking Café will be beneficial in interpreting data such as arrest rates.
3. Based on the presented outcome measurements and your discussion this evening, which of the seven behaviors (listed above question #1) should Wahkiakum Community Network focus on in the next biennium?
- Youth substance abuse received the most votes, but it is noted that all seven behaviors received at least one vote. It was agreed that youth substance abuse was identified as a risk factor to all six of the other behaviors.