

CECP Chair/Community Engagement & Crime Prevention Committee Chair Meeting  
Thursday, June 22 3:45 PM  
Kids Hope Alliance Board Room

Members Present: WC Gentry and Lolita Smith.

Subject Matter Experts Present: Dr. Connie Hall (Chair – Literacy Committee); Debbie Verges (former Project Director for the Jacksonville Journey during Mayor Peyton’s and Mayor Curry’s Administrations); Dr. Saralyn Glass (CEO of the Kids Hope Alliance and an expert in birth to 18).

Chairman WC Gentry called the meeting to order at 3:45pm.

Lolita Smith listed the following priority areas and persons leading the effort:

- Jack Meeks- Offender Recidivism
- Vicky Waytowich-Juvenile Delinquency
- Community Engagement - Ellen Glasser
- Offender Re-entry – Johnny Odom
- 16–24-Year-Old Out of School and not working – Derrick Mitchell
- Offender Mental Illness – Lolita Smith

Chairman Gentry stated the mental illness component is across the board. Lolita Smith responded the priority areas are connected.

Lolita Smith also shared a framework of where the committee is headed via the following areas:

- **Juvenile Delinquency** – The focus will be diversion. Jacksonville Juvenile Advisory Committee (JJAC) has a report that will be used as a foundation for the work. Dr. Vicki Waytowich will review the report to confirm if programs are doing what is stated or accomplishing what programs set out to do. Focus will also include:
  - Identifying gaps
  - Confirming if there are spikes in juveniles risky behavior
  - Holistic review

Chairman Gentry asked if the Sheriff’s office should come to provide information regarding what’s happening with juveniles. Lolita Smith responded the Journey review board is working on this. Chairman Gentry stated the full committee will work to confirm areas of focus between the Sheriff’s Office, the committee, and how well things are working. He will also ask the SAO and JSO on the committee to address juveniles.

Debbie Verges stated more juveniles are being diverted to civil citations. The Neighborhood Accountability Boards (NAB) were previously funded by Jacksonville Journey at \$40,000, increased to \$140,000. The NAB are now all over the county.

- **Offender Recidivism/Re-Entry** – Currently trying to identify programs:
  - JSO
  - Prisoners for Christ

- Funding needs to be reviewed

Chairman Gentry suggested funding be included in the Journey budget for ex-offenders, re-entry, and recidivism at \$750,000.

- **Cognitive Behavior Therapy** – This area is being researched for more information which deals with mental health/illness.

Chairman Gentry asked about pretrial detention. Lolita Smith explained the process, and what happens in corrections to prepare people to exit. Chairman Gentry also requested that Lolita Smith get information from Cindy Funkhouser regarding programs at Sulzbacher. Debbie Verges has a list of Sulzbacher programs regarding the mentally ill and homeless.

- **Community Engagement**
  - Safety and Crime Reduction Commission – Citizen led program that conducts in depth analysis of programs and make recommendations.
  - Have community members partner with agencies to ensure work is effective.
  - Utilize the Commission in the work.

Chairman Gentry explained the Commission began as a Task Force which is a City Council initiative that began with no funding. Currently, the Commission has staff, as well received funding in 2022. The Commission has been working with Frank Denton to forward reports to the Committee regarding work it has accomplished. Debbie Verges has already received many documents which will be available in the google drive.

Chairman Gentry reiterated the issue has always been a lack of funding or resources regarding the Safety and Crime Reduction Commission until recently.

- **Collaboration** – Focus on how to get all entities to work together, not in silos.
  - Push and share information together will make a difference.

Chairman Gentry suggested talking to Phil Perry (Chief of Communications) to understand new structure of City Hall and what's being done.

Debbie Verges stated next week a new website will be launched regarding who COJ provides funding to.

- **One Cop** – Officers are assigned to churches to participate in programs such as:
  - Community events
  - Community meetings

Lolita Smith stated she would like to see officers volunteer to do this work, as opposed to being assigned to churches. She believes this is a great opportunity for the community to connect with officers.

- **Mayor's Community Based Crime Reduction Program** – Program No longer exist.
  - Created Mayor's Community Based Crime Report
  - Report currently covers information the committee could use

Lolita Smith explained there should be a collective voice to talk to the community and show unification.

- **16 to 24 Year Olds (Out of School/Unemployed)**

Debbie Verges explained the following corrections:

- KHA ordinance restricts upper age for working, but in workforce the age limit is 22 years old. The KHA ordinance is being revised to reflect the change.

Chairman Gentry suggested the Journey may need to be responsible for requesting funding and RFPs for adult crime, or a new entity focused on adult crime.

Lolita Smith added there is no information available regarding influencing juveniles not to join gangs. Debbie verges stated there is someone working with gangs. She suggests finding out who's involved, community outreach, and how to address the issue for ages 16 to 24.

Chairman Gentry stated under Sherriff Rutherford, JSO had an instructional component regarding gangs and speaking with kids. Lolita Smith responded there may be a component for gang training for children done through Community Engagement. Chairman Gentry suggested finding out what's being done, if not, the committee need to find the best way to get information out to the community.

- **Street Smart Program** – Boys & Girls Club Gang Prevention Program
  - Debbie Verges suggest the committee learns more about the program.
- **Cure Violence** – Target or identify individuals to prevent crime
  - On the street talking to drug dealers
  - On the streets talking to kids
  - On the radar after JSO is involved

Chairman Gentry stated the 16- to 24-year-olds are still connected to juvenile programs, and there is an overlap with 18- to 24-year-olds.

Debbie verges stated the original Journey 2.0, included teen programs (16 – 24, not in school/not working), and 16- to 18-year-olds, which are two different groups. This is why the focus split. KHA could not serve this group. Debbie suggested doing a current landscape analysis.

Chairman Gentry asked who to contact in City Hall? He mentioned Dr. Charles Moreland may know how to obtain the information needed. Debbie Verges stated obtaining research completed by Dawn Lockhart, as well as working with Dr. Saralyn Grass, the committee can get the information that is needed.

Chairman Gentry suggested having a lot of townhalls or breaking up into subcommittees for community townhalls to avoid burnout. This will be discussed at the next full committee meeting.

Dr. Saralyn Grass will be reaching out to JSO Chief Rueben Bryant regarding JSO programs. She will include Lolita Smith in the email.

Leon Baxton stated the SAO formerly had a program called "Jail Juvenile". Communities in Schools had a case manager in the jail to work with juveniles for six months prior to being released. The program also held small groups. Leon suggested that the committee have a conversation with the small group to determine what they learned or what COJ can do better to prevent other juveniles from getting into trouble.

Lolita Smith will follow up with Chief Bryant to confirm if the program still exists.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:20pm.