JJPOC Meeting Minutes

June 15th, 2023 2:00pm-3:30pm Legislative Office Bldg, Rm 1D Zoom Option Available

Attendance:

Anthony Nolan	Elizabeth Bozzuto
Gary Winfield	Rafal Matuszczak
Hector Glynn	Catherine Foley Geib
Martha Stone	Brian Hill
Robyn Porter	Deborah Rogala
Dawne Westbrook	Daniel Rezende
Gary Roberge	Maurice Reaves
Tais Ericson	Jackie Santiago Nazario
Josh Mitchtom	Laura Furr
Sharmese Walcott	Sunidiya Bhalla
Vinnie Russo	Amy Gentile
John Frassinelli	Kathleen Deschenes
Amy Marracino	Ron Schack
Stacy Schulman	Glen Worthy
Veron Beaulieu	Talitha Collins
Sarah Eagan	Eulalia Garcia

Geraldo Reyes Tammy Exum Lisa Sementilli

TYJI Staff

Bill Carbone Erika Nowakowski Brittany LaMarr Danielle Cooper Hunter Clark Sydney de Lannoy Paul Klee Nicole Kessler

Welcome and Introductions:

Sen. Winfield and Maurice Reaves gave introductions and presided over the meeting as cochairs; while Undersecretary Marc Pelka, and Rep. Toni Walker were unable to attend. Maurice Reaves asked for a motion to accept the May 20, 2023, meeting minutes. The motion was moved, seconded, and passed. Lisa Sementilli abstained from the vote adopting the minutes.

Overview of Meeting:

Erika Nowakowski introduced the agenda for the meeting and its panel format of community providers. Prior to the panel discussion, Laura Full will provide details for the JJPOC Orientation Training on June 29th, 2023. The meeting will wrap up with an overview of legislation that passed during the 2023 session.

Announcement: June 29th JJPOC Orientation

Laura Furr invited the group to the JJPOC Orientation being hosted on June 29th, 2023. The training is for all JJPOC members, and will be a three-hour, interactive session. The training will be led by Laura Furr, Rev. Dancy, Iliana Pujols, as well as some young adults and community leaders. The training is an opportunity to bring all the members together to teach and learn from one another. This session is also to provide a foundational level of understanding about the JJPOC, the system, and the lived experiences of youth and families who are impacted by the

system, so that hopefully by the end all members have a shared level of awareness and knowledge about pertinent issues. The training will be from 2 PM to 5 PM at the Capitol. All members are asked to RSVP. As a clarification it was added that if members have a designee or a staff member specifically working on JJPOC matters, it is recommended that they attend this training as well.

Panel Discussion: Community Providers

Brian Hill introduced himself and shared a bit about his history working with the JJPOC. He shared that today's panel will give the spotlight to community providers who are working directly with youth and be an opportunity to hear their perspectives.

Hill then introduced the panelists. The first was Deb Rogala, the Director of Operations at Community Partners in Action (CPA). She is involved in the strategic planning process, implementation of programmatic-strategic initiatives, serves as the liaison with CPA's external partners and supports the Executive Director in keeping the Board of Directors informed. The second panelist is Daniel Rezende, the President, and CEO of Connecticut Juvenile Republic (CJR), a non-profit organization with the mission of providing necessary therapeutic treatments to young people and their families to promote positive change, transform their lives and provide a residential wellness community and educational services. Rezende has spent nearly forty years working with CJR, joining the organization in 1984 and serving as the President since 2012. The next panelist Jacquelyn Santiago Nazario is the Chief Executive Officer of COMPASS Youth Collaborative and the Human Relations Commissioner for the City of Hartford. She provides a vision for COMPASS and is responsible for aligning the programming with the agency's mission and long-term strategy. She began her career as a youth organizer in the Hartford area and assisted school districts in the Hartford area in developing relationships with communities, families, and businesses. The following panelist is Sunindiya Bhalla, ROCA's Executive Vice President of Women and 2Gen, overseeing ROCAS s dual generation strategy for engaging highrisk parents at the center of urban violence as well as young mothers' program across Massachusetts and recently opened site in Hartford. She has over 17 years of experience in early childhood parenting development. There were two representatives from CT Renaissance. Kathleen Deschenes is the CEO of CT Renaissance, an organization that provides behavioral health and criminal justice services to adults and adolescents throughout Connecticut. She is a licensed social worker and has served as CEO for almost six years. They serve community programs and outpatient clinics in both Fairfield and New Haven County. Amy Gentile is a licensed clinical social worker that has worked with the adolescent population for over ten years. She has been at CT Renaissance since 2014 and is the current program director for the LYNC program in Waterbury. The final panelist was Ron Schack, the Managing Director of the Charter Oaks Group and serves as the Research Director at The Justice Education Center. He has served as a consultant on many federal, state, and local governments as well as non-profit organizations and his subject area of expertise includes workforce development, criminal justice, and early childhood education.

Each organization then was given the opportunity to provide a little more information into the work that they do. CPA is one of the oldest criminal justice agencies that runs two of the largest reentry community centers in the Hartford and Waterbury areas, helping individuals that are

transitioning from prison back into the community. CPA serves youth both in Hamden and Hartford. Deb Rogala emphasized that the most important thing to keep in mind during this discussion is that the individuals that they serve are human beings and that people can change if given the opportunity and the resources.

Dan Rezende spoke to the history of CJR. CJR is historically one of the largest residential programs in Connecticut, originally providing an 82-bed facility in Litchfield. Kids stayed in this facility long-term, from about 6 months up to two years. In 2009, CJR transitioned to a continuum of care model that focused on the kids in the community, adding more educational programming while still focusing on quality residential, and therapeutic care. Rezende noted that there needs to be differentiation between institutionalization and residential treatment, which CJR provides and has gotten national acclaim for, but they knew that they needed to be doing more. In the past few years, CJR has pivoted to building community systems in Waterbury, Torrington, and Danbury, growing their behavioral health services. They strive to use evidence based best practices, and today they service about 2,000 kids and family across their systems and exist in 21 different school districts.

Jacquelyn Nazario has worked at the organization for over twenty years, and COMPASS connects with Hartford youth living in a cycle of violence as drivers or victims of violence. They work to interrupt instances of violence in the city through a taskforce of peacebuilders, who are case managers that engage in relationships with youth to provide support and opportunities that will help youth break these cycles and become ready and able to succeed in education and employment. COMPASS serves youth sixteen to twenty years old for a period of four years, so if a youth is enrolled at twenty, they could be potentially working with COMPASS until age twenty-four. The target population of their program are youth that have been exposed to violence, either as a driver or a victim, gang or street affiliated youth, youth in the possession of weapons, or those with a previous criminal justice involvement. There are five main component of the work they do to drive behavior change, the first is responding to crisis and canvassing the community. They have partnerships with three of the hospitals in Hartford and they are responding at beside to provide services to youth and also deescalate issues in the hospital and prevent retaliation in the community. They also connect youth to education. They have two education specialists that help connect youth to traditional schooling or connect them with resources to get their GED, licensure, or trade school. They also have connection to employment to provide a safe space for youth to fail, rather than the emphasis been on career development. They also have two licensed social workers that administer CBT and address trauma. And finally, they collect data through a case management app called Navigator, that peacebuilders can use on their phone and updates in real-time. They have had over 2000 interactions per month with youth since January and at least 17% of youth have been victims of gun violence, 63% have known justice history, 67% have lost friends or family member to community violence, 75% are street or gang involved and among COMPASS youth aged 19 or younger, at least 50% have pervious or current charges. Nazario emphasized that the word "collaborative" is part of their name for a reason because it is critical for everyone to work together.

Sunindya Bhalla from ROCA spoke about the history and work of ROCA. ROCA is an organization that is headquartered in Massachusetts and Baltimore. ROCA engages youth and young adults, ages 16-24 at the Center for Urban Violence. ROCA works with about 1,500

young people across all sites, primarily with young women and young mothers involved in urban violence. Across Massachusetts and Hartford, they are working with about 350 young women, most of whom are mothers, with complex trauma, impacted by violence, and have multi system involvement because they are women, and they are mothers. They get referrals from probation and police; they work closely with the state attorney's office as many of these young women are victims of trafficking. ROCA is often a last resort, and often turned to by providers when they do not know what to do with a youth. Often these young women's issues are a result of control, coercion, instability, and intimate partner violence. As an example, over the past fifteen months, they have had fifteen women who have been victims on non-fatal shootings, over 50% are involved with the Department of Children and Families and many are at risk of losing their children. And when that happens, often they lose access to parenting programs because they are no longer considered mothers. We have also seen an increase in human trafficking which also means more incidences of drugs and intimate partner violence. ROCA's model is a four-year model that is grounded in adolescent brain development, they are able to retain over 90% of young women in their program across the four years. Bhalla emphasized that organizations really need to be showing up for young people before they can begin to change their behaviors this includes providing safety, mental health services, and reducing risk behaviors.

Deschenes provided background on CT Renaissance. The organization was founded in 1967 and they are a criminal justice and behavioral health organizations. They operate three Community Work Release Programs in both Waterbury and Bridgeport, where they offer case management services and job development to men who are finishing their last 90 to 120 days of their sentence. They also have a fifty-bed substance use treatment program in Waterbury that helps men deal with drug or alcohol issue. They have a co-occurring residential program for twenty men, which is a 3.7 level residential program, or a step down from inpatient psychiatric unit. This is to help divert men from psychiatric hospitalization. They are one of three providers in Connecticut providing these services, and they accept referrals from all over the state. They also have TWI classes in the shoreline communities and a gambling program for those experiencing addiction or disordered gambling. They also have three outpatient behavioral health clinics, that serve adolescents as well. Through a grant from the City of Norwalk, they were able to hire an outreach social worker to bring in youth that may have been impacted by COVID. They serve about 5,000 people annually and over 16,000 visits to their outpatient clinic last year. They also run to two LYNC programs which stand for Linking Youth to Natural Community. Amy Gentile provided more information on the LYNC program as these are the programs that she runs. They have two sites serving Stamford, Norwalk, Bridgeport, New Haven, and Waterbury. The program aims to take referrals from probation for youth aged 12 to 18 and each client gets an individualized treatment plan. LYNC then provides evidence-based treatment including groups and case management in areas around reducing their recidivism rate and in areas for behavioral health. Youth typically stay in the program for 6 months and LYNC's goal is to connect youth with ongoing support around educational needs, pro social connections, and improve their influences. They also have a motor vehicle theft diversionary program that is currently running which has recently seen an uptick in referrals. This program aims to address youths' anti-social tendencies, empathy, and emotional regulation skills to reduce the number of car thefts in the state. CT Renaissance also runs a school violence prevention program that provides skills around moral reasoning, anger control and social skills to reduce the level of fighting and crime in

schools. Last year CT Renaissance received 350 referrals to these three programs and currently has 130 youth in programs at the moment.

Ron Schack presented on The Justice Education Center. The center is based in West Hartford and has been around for 47 years. Their mission has been to prevent and reduce crime, strengthen communities, and enhance public safety. The center has done a lot of different things over the years, but their two primary programs are Project Longevity, which is an gun violence prevention program in Bridgeport, New Haven, Waterbury and Hartford, and will be opening soon in New London and Norwich, and the Career Pathways Technology Collaborative, which leverages resources at technical high schools to bring youth from other high schools and ones that would not be able to get these services into take classes at night. Most of these individuals are over-aged and under credited, so throughout the program they earn extra credit towards graduation, but they also end up with a credential that could aid them in their careers. They are also just starting the Inspire program for elementary and middle school aged girls, which is a basketball program focused on youth development. They have also operated the ECHO youth development program for a number of years. They also have a Hate Crimes Diversion and Bias Employee Program.

Brian Hill's first question: what promising practices for serving youth and families are they aware of and if they could provide outcomes or emerging trends they have seen? Jacquelyn Nazario discussed the innovative methods of COMPASS, especially their peacebuilder model, meeting youth where they are at and not waiting for youth come to them. Peacebuilders are caseworkers that are out on the street trying to engage youth, focusing on self-regulation, building trust, living with reduced violence and no new criminal involvement, and encouraging education. On average, it takes 90 days for peacebuilders get youths' information, so peacebuilders need to take a relentless approach to reaching them. COMPASS's methods speak for themselves, out of the youth they serve, 79% of youth reduce their engagement in violence, 78% made gains toward educational attainment, and 76% made gains toward employment. COMPASS is currently serving about 200 youth across programs and have capacity to serve 250.

The same question was then asked to CPA. CPA has a Phase 1 and Phase 2 to their REGIONS program. Phase 1 is a locked facility, where youth do not have the ability to go out into the community whereas in the Phase 2, youth are allowed to go to schools in the community and engage in internships and work outside the facility. This system is a level system, as they move through these phases, youth gain more privileges. The site in Hartford is staff secure and the site in Hamden is secure, and both have clinical and medical staff on site, and reintegration mentors. Reintegration mentors now follow youth for 12 months during reintegration into the community and that has been a critical change to ensuring the youth has successful transition. Engagement of families and youth support systems are challenged during youth reentry, and these are individuals that are struggling financially, parents are working multiple jobs, and cannot fully engage with the youth. The challenges that are in the home environment are so great that the youth often feel like they need to support the family. In this conversation, Rogala would really love to explore how to support the family in a more meaningful way that is different than they are doing right now. CPA does have a new position called the family support specialist to engage that family, but the family has all kinds of barriers, that society and systems create that make life really challenging for not just youth but for the family as well. Youth do really well at CPA

facilities but there is a need to address systemic issues in communities and support families, so they are financially okay and ready to support this youth while they leave the program.

Hill asked if ROCA could speak more to promising practices specifically for girls and women that are part of this population. Bhalla commented on the fact that often, providers don't focus on women involved in the criminal justice system, or even those who could potentially be involved in the criminal justice system. What ROCA has learned over the past few years are that there are an increasing number of women and sometimes they are not formally touching the criminal justice system, but when situations like gun violence are looked at, women are generally at the periphery and present to these situations. Many times, due to relationships and partners, women are targeted because someone has issues with the fathers of their baby or their boyfriend. That is what ROCA is seeing often in Hartford, women are being targeted, shot at, and are starting to carry weapons themselves. Women show up very differently, then men. Young women are often only seen by their behaviors and not what is driving them. A lot of the funding that is out there for young people involved in violence, is not designed for women's programming, and understanding what young women are facing. Some of the issues ROCA is facing are systemic barriers for women. Programs not understanding the complexity of motherhood. ROCA is also seeing an increasing amount of Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence, that is driving a lot of young women's risk behaviors. This is not something that programs see because often young women are afraid to talk about it. There are a lot of services that women, especially young mothers, are expected to access that are not readily available, that includes Domestic Violence and parenting programs. These are the gaps that ROCA is aiming to cover. This is a population that Bhalla hopes to see a little more conversation around.

Hill presented the second question: what are their strategies or programs that are effective that are not being adequately funded or not funded at all; or if providers are aware of programs being operated elsewhere, globally or in another state, that Connecticut needs to explore. Hill directed the question first to CJR. Dan Rezende mentioned the credible messenger program that is slowly being launched across Connecticut. Credible messengers are people with life experiences that can act as mentors, life coaches, guidance counselors to youth. They have experience in the community, and they are able to form a relationship with the youth before helping them engage in programs. These relationships are long-term. They are seeing about a 70% success rate in a very small sample. There a currently about 14 active cases, and they filled the program in Waterbury withing about six weeks. What CJR has found is that it has been better to have full time people in this job, and limit per diem work, and they are planning to hire another full-time staff member. CJR called the Boys Village in the Bronx and spoke to the director about their great outcomes, and so they brought the program to Connecticut. Rezende would advocate to expand this program so that all youth have access to this program that want it regardless of where they live and said this would be a good investment for the state of Connecticut. The second program that Rezende spoke about was for the kids at the highest risk, and that was a Transitional Living Program. This is a program for youth that are in residential care that know that they should not go back home, due to issues of violence, or they knew they will not be successful, or they have no place to go home to. It is a voluntary program that went out to bid last year. CJR is launching a six-bed program that will open at the end of July, they a currently renovating a house in Wethersfield, set in a regular neighborhood. When these kids enter CJR programs, they make significant changes, but the community they came from does not forget and often it is not safe for them to go home and sometimes the family does not want the youth to come home either. Rezende commented that he feels very optimistic about this program and its success.

CT Renaissance was asked the same questions, what strategies are you seeing, what recommendations do you have for programs that are underfunded and need more attention. Deschenes gave an overview of their programs, they operate three out-patient behavioral health clinics, in Waterbury, Bridgeport and Norwalk. They used to have one in Stamford as well. The reimbursement rate is low, and there is not a lot of funding for outpatient clinics. CT Renaissance does have contracts within their clinics, but they are very specific and may only fund administrative work or a clinician associated with the contract. CT Renaissance is committed to keeping clinics open because it is a continuum of care throughout their programs. They are seeing a lot of traumas, violence, gang affiliation. Generally, at least 50% of youth being referred to their clinics also have a co-occurring disorder or substance addiction. CT Renaissance would really like to bring in EMDR which is the gold standard treatment for trauma or bring in ART, Accelerated Resolution Therapy, which is an offshoot of EMDR. These are highly successful treatments, but they are very expensive. CT Renaissance faces the most difficulty in recruiting and retaining licensed clinicians. There is already a shortage of clinicians in the state, and CT Renaissance cannot compete with hospitals and for-profit businesses. CT Renaissance needs support in getting clinicians to stay with them, there is a lack of financial access, it is costly to train people in EMDR if they will be leaving, and clients want a consistency of care, so they can build a relationship with their therapist. Gentile spoke about the importance of focus on family engagement. There was a program that existed for one year that gave parents support in meeting basic needs, classes on parenting, and more. It is important to look at the bigger picture, the system the youth live in, a lot of youth programming is only focused on the individual and there is not enough funding for the family.

Ron Schack emphasized the need for alternative educational pathways for kids. For example, in Project Longevity, they operate across four cities, and the structure of the community and partners differ, but what is most important is to bring the partners together and focus on the individual participant. The Justice Education Center uses a case conference approach, they have a software that supports this. They are getting services to these participants that without the approach they may not have been able to get to them. The other thing Schack emphasized is the importance of follow up and the ability to check in with youth after they have completed the program. This is for data, but also to encouraging them to stay with whatever they are involved in. If providers are not touching base with these participants, they are going to fade away.

Hill spoke to one of the themes he has picked up during this discussion that agencies are not operating in a silo, they are engaging with partners and the community. Hill presented the final question and asked all participants to be brief in their response. The question was what is a challenge that your organization is facing, and what can the JJPOC advocate for to help you moving forward? Aside from the need for funding, CPA emphasized the need for programs and policy that emphasize family engagement and options for the families. CJR stated that their biggest challenge is the inability for state systems to work together. He knows that the government tries to do this, but on a case-to-case basis it does not happen. The biggest help the JJPOC can provide is to encourage integration among the government. Too often, their ability to

get help, depends on the person at the government and if they know people in other departments. There seems to be no access across governmental bodies if people do not have relationships. There needs to be bridges between systems. Nazario echoed agreement for both of the prior speakers, although if she was to choose something different, she would say more housing options are needed, especially for youth that have experienced violence. There is an also a desperate need for more intense collaboration. Bhalla spoke directly to needs of young women, for these women who tend to be in very unstable situations and have multi-system involvement, more collaboration is needed but also understanding of the unique issues that they face. But also, the lack of safety, family engagement is important for some youth, but many of the girls that ROCA works with have tough relationships with their family, who may have been trafficked or gotten pregnant by a family member and they cannot return to their family setting or engage with them. There needs to be more consciousness into their safety. CT Renaissance commented on the need for more clinicians, especially those that work with adolescents. There is no way to get around the workforce shortage at the moment, and this hurts CT Renaissance's ability to help their population. Schack spoke about the need for housing and employment, especially with the attitude of landlords and employers that do not want to work with justice involved populations. There is a need for providers to foster relationships with willing landlords, and change policies to ensure they have access to housing. He also spoke to the need for multi-year funding rather than short term funding. Also, the need for different types of funding beyond just programmatic to support non-profits to do this work.

A JJPOC member asked what is the providers measure of 'success'? This was brought up multiple times during the panel. Also, for the legislative people watching, they may hear 'success rate' and believe something different than what it means, so it is important to define what 'success' is. The speaker also brought up the importance of explaining complicated therapies like EMDR, to legislators and how to speak to legislators about this so they fully understand. The speaker expressed that often programs are presented that seem to look like they work, and then they are implemented and don't work not because they are not good programs but because they did not have all the information needed to implement the program in the way it's meant to be. Rezende responded to the speaker, agreeing with them that programs need to start analyzing the outcomes and that also the measure of success is confusing. Some of the kids that the providers are working with are so high risk that sometimes the definition of success, is if we can keep that person alive. One of the things that CJR does is that in their programs they are trying to sell hope, and that is hard to define as well, because there are families that don't think their kid are going to make it to 25. How success is defined sometimes is very arbitrary, but we have to look at success as long term, and not just in the short term, sometimes it takes cycles for these youth to go through before they actually get it, show up, and internalize it and move forward. Rezende thanked the speaker and expressed interest in looking at the data together. Another speaker also wanted to comment on the question/concern. Often there is a discussion around time and length of program, but sometimes there is a great program, but it is not given enough time to play out how it is supposed to. The speaker asked for more information on the duration of programs spoken about here, and then continue to talk about family engagement and how can this be addressed. Nazario from COMPASS responded that their program is four years, because it takes that amount of time to begin the process of creating connections with youth, much less engage the youth. Relationship building has not set length of time. Nazario sees COMPASS as the starting point in building relationships, they are preparing them so that by the end of four years,

the youth is ready for a warm hand off to other agencies. Bhalla from ROCA jumped in that their program is also four years, and through their experience they have found that it takes 18-25 months for someone to sustain behavior change, so that length of time is needed, if not more. This is especially true for the 2Gen mother's program, they know that they will not have an impact on the intergenerational cycle until they stabilize the youth first, and they do that by trying to engage them in their programming. Once, they are stabilized then they can start building with the youth. They also work very closely with partners, including COMPASS.

A speaker noted that in the conversation of family engagement, the group needs to be careful to not minimize the capabilities of families. The work that needs to happen needs to strengthen families so that they can be part of this process and providers need to recognize their resiliency and work with them. Another speaker asked what does success and engagement look like over time? Does it mean that you are successfully reentering school? Also, how do we get youth excited about the services that are being talked about? No kid is excited about getting six months of MST. CT Renaissance responded that there are a lot of ways to measure success, and most important for their organization is asking the client and family what success looks like for them. It is not the place of CT Renaissance to define success. They have seen a significant increase in mental health issues over the past few years, especially due to COVID. Deschenes emphasized the importance of EMDR and how strongly she feels it is needed, it can be done in three to five sessions, and the families that are experiencing trauma could really benefit. They have also seen an uptick in kids enrolling in IOP which is three-hour sessions, three days a week, and families are traumatized but what is happening with their kids. Technology has also created significant issues, with social media, tech addictions, and allowing kids to further withdraw. Ron Schack jumped to add that as far as clear outcome expectations, it is important to calibrate the outcomes to the kind of programming you are doing. Short term treatments often do not show the same effects as long term treatments on things like self-esteem or youth development. Providers need to have realistic expectations for what can be achieved in the time frame of the program. The panel was then wrapped up, the providers were thanked for sharing their experiences.

2023 Legislative Update

Representative Nolan expressed his excitement to see HB 6888 pass during the 2023 legislative session, which was one of the things that the JJPOC had put together. Section one of the bill had to do with developing a plan for prearrest diversion of low-risk children no later than January 1, 2024. The bill also expanded the membership of the JJPOC, with the addition of two young adults under the age of 26 with lived experience in the juvenile justice system and the addition of one community member, and the addition of a member of the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe and one from the Mohegan Tribe. The bill also covered the development of a Reentry Success Plan by November 2023. Section 4 of the bill has to do with the implementation of a plan to securely house individuals under 18 arrested or detained prior to January 1, 2023 from the care and custody of DOC into care and custody of Judicial Branch. In addition, SB1: beginning July 1, 2024, and years following, local or regional board of educations with a high or disproportionate rate of in school suspension, out of school suspension and expulsions have to develop strategies to reduce these numbers and submit the strategies to Department of Education. CSDE will continue to examine data on exclusionary discipline and school-based arrests as a part of the strategic school profile report and all of this has to be done by July 1, 2024, and reports to JJPOC

no later than Jan.1, 2025. It talks about PreK-2 Alternatives in Section 82 and then Mental Health in Section 79-80. Senator Winfield clarified that there were two different pieces of legislation that included the recommendations of the JJPOC, HB 6888 and SB 1.

Next Meeting: Thursday, July 20th, 2:00 PM-3:30PM