



"LET'S TALK JUSTICE"

A Report Back to Community Big Ivy - September 2019

EVENT BACKGROUND

As part of the Safety + Justice Challenge, Buncombe County Government is creating opportunities for increasing community engagement in local criminal justice improvement efforts.



EVENT SUMMARY

"Let's Talk Justice," a series of listening sessions hosted by Buncombe County Government with the purpose of gathering community input on their experiences to inform change within the criminal justice system.

9.10.19 - FIRST EVENT

Community members shared their experiences, envisioned aspects of a safe community, and identified what is not working well within the criminal justice system.

7 key problem areas were identified by participants.



IMPROVEMENT AREAS

The 7 improvement areas that were identified are:

- Fear of retaliation for reporting criminal activity
- Roadblocks for putting life back together based on having a criminal record
- Confusion & lack of understanding of how the justice system works
- Poor or no communication of justice processes
- Different treatment based on race or wealth
- Neglect in the jail for people with illnesses who need medicines
- Negative behaviors in policing



FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:

buncombecounty.org/SJC

buncombecounty.org/JRC

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9.17.19 SECOND EVENT

The community members led a discussion of their identified problems and dug deeper into the contributing causes. Participants narrowed down the 7 items to 3 top priorities.

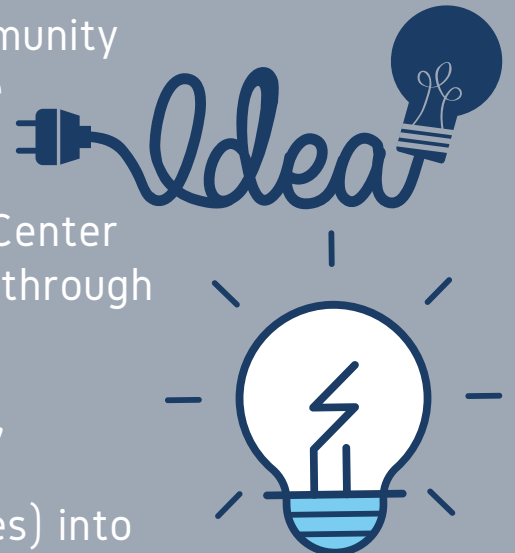


TOP 3 PRIORITIES

- Different treatment based on race or wealth
- Roadblocks to Restoring Life
- Confusion about how the Criminal Justice System works

SOLUTIONS

- Have traveling officers who can come to community centers rather than everyone going to Justice Resource Center in Asheville
- Give information about the Justice Resource Center through hubs and educating people in jail and through pretrial.
- Create incentives to lower barriers in housing, education, employment, for example:
 - Divert public monies (like fees and penalties) into solutions and link with corporate dollars.



NEXT STEPS



Input received from community at "Let's Talk Justice" is being shared with other members of workgroups and the Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council. These groups include members of local law enforcement, elected officials (e.g. Sheriff, Judges, District Attorney), defense attorneys, and Buncombe County Government leadership.

The information shared at Big Ivy will be communicated to other communities in an effort to discuss important changes within the local criminal justice system.

UPCOMING "LET'S TALK JUSTICE" EVENTS:

11/5/19 & 11/12/19 at Pisgah View Apartments

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:

buncombecounty.org/SJC

buncombecounty.org/JRC



“Let’s Talk Justice” Listening Session Report Back to Community

Big Ivy Community Center

September 10 & 17, 2019

Introduction: In September 2019, the Community Engagement Working Group from the Buncombe County Safety and Justice Challenge Grant conducted two “Let’s Talk Justice” Listening Sessions at the Big Ivy Community Center. Here is a summary of what we heard and how we plan to carry it forward.

Session I on September 10th

Sharing our Experiences, Identifying Visions & Problems:

The facilitation team gave a brief summary of the Safety and Justice Challenge Grant and the 7 strategies that are in place to work on improving the justice system and reducing the jail population in ways that support equity, justice and community safety.

Storytelling: Community residents shared their stories of encounters with the criminal justice system and how it operates.

Safe Community Envisioning: Residents shared what they believe makes a community a safe place to live and then identified positive things in the criminal justice system that they currently see occurring.

Learning and Improving: Residents then discussed the negative things in the criminal justice system that have kept the community from being safe. They identified aspects of the criminal justice system that are not working well and need to change. This included additional storytelling from personal experiences and observations. The list of identified problems or areas for improvement included the following:

1. *Fear of retaliation for reporting criminal activity in our community*
 2. *Roadblocks for putting life back together from discrimination based on having a criminal record (ex. Housing, employment, professional licensure, child custody, and poverty vicious cycles)*
 3. *Confusion and lack of understanding of how the justice system works (what are our rights? How to get information? How to access a Public Defender)*
 4. *Poor or no communication of justice processes (ex. Case continuance without notice, next steps in a case)*
 5. *Different treatment based on race or wealth*
 6. *Neglect in the jail for people with illnesses who need medicines (ex. Deaths in custody)*
 7. *Negative behaviors in policing*
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Session II on September 17th

Prioritizing Problems, Generating Solutions, and Prioritizing Critical Solutions for Action:

The facilitation team reviewed with the community the previous week’s session, the Safety and Justice Strategies, and the identified problems that call out for solutions. After discussing the identified problems further, the participants were given an opportunity to “vote” using color stickers for the three highest priority problems to be addressed. The top three priority problems became a basis for deeper exploration for root causes and generating solutions.

Prioritize Problems: The three identified problems receiving the highest priority from the community were:

1. *Different treatment based on race or wealth*
2. *Roadblocks to Restoring Life*
3. *Confusion about how the Criminal Justice System works*



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Dig Deep for Root Problems: For each of these three problem areas we kept asking Why? Why? Why? Digging deeper and deeper to discover the root problems that need to be addressed.

Generate Solutions: We brainstormed as many solutions as possible for these three top priority problems that had been identified.

Prioritize Solutions and Rate them for Easy (E) or Hard (H) to implement: The top three solutions were the following:

1. *Have traveling officers who can come to community centers rather than everyone having to go to the Justice Center in Asheville.* (H) Probation Officers, (E) Resource Officers & Case Managers.
 2. *Getting information out about the Justice Resource Center through hubs and educating people in jail and through pretrial.* (E)
 3. *Create incentives to lower barriers in housing, education, employment:*
 - a. (H) Have incentives drive solutions (ex. Small businesses hire ex-offenders, tax incentives, refunding property taxes, community members craft solutions)
 - b. Divert public monies (like fees and penalties) into solutions and link with corporate dollars. Buncombe County (E), Asheville City (H)
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Next Steps: The information provided by Big Ivy participants is already being communicated to the working groups of the 7 strategies for the Safety and Justice Grant, and the key summaries and recommendations are being sent to the Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council. As additional Listening Sessions of “Let’s Talk Justice” are held throughout the county, the Big Ivy information will be added to other communities to reinforce the push for important changes.

More Information Available Online:

Safety and Justice Challenge Grant and Strategies: <https://www.buncombecounty.org/law-safety/community-initiatives/safety-justice-challenge.aspx>

Buncombe County Justice Resource Center:
<https://www.buncombecounty.org/law-safety/community-initiatives/justice-resource-center.aspx>