

"LET'S TALK JUSTICE"

A Report Back to Community Buncombe County Detention Facility - December 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," is 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. There are two sessions in each "Let's Talk Justice" event.

12.17.19- FIRST SESSION

Individuals in the Buncombe County Detention Facility "BCDF" shared their experiences, envisioned aspects of a safe community, and identified what is not working well within the criminal justice system.

18 improvement areas were identified by participants.



IMPROVEMENT AREAS

The following is list of themes based on the key improvement areas. The comprehensive list of improvement areas can be found on the BCDF "Let's Talk Justice" Executive Summary.

- Systems of poverty that are drivers of crime
- Reintegration back in community
- Access to medical attention in the BCDF
- Law enforcement culture that supports negative behaviors
- Lack of positive role model
- Lack of supportive resources
- Difficulty in accessing to public defenders
- Challenges with the probation system
- Lack of access to resources in the BCDF

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12.18.19 SECOND SESSION

Individuals participated in a discussion of regarding the identified problems from the previous session and processed the contributing causes. Participants narrowed down the 18 items to 3 top priorities.



TOP 3 PRIORITIES

- Increase public defense representation
- Improve medical care access in the jail
- Increase community centers, programs, and resources in the community

SOLUTIONS



The solutions developed for the top three priorities were:

- Improve communication to defense attorneys and opportunities for regular scheduled video conferencing
- Opportunities to connect with medical and mental health resources
- Community resources to improve services to demonstrate commitment to programs are important and the need for people in the community to value programs, community centers, and resources.

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 the Buncombe County Detention Facility 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:

Asheville Middle School, 2/6/2020 & 2/13/2020

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:

buncombecounty.org/SJC



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

Buncombe County Detention Facility
December 17 & 18, 2019

Introduction: In December 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 Buncombe County Detention Center. Here is a summary of what we heard and how we plan to carry it forward.

Session I on December 17th

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: Detention community members shared their stories of encounters with the criminal justice system and how it operates.

Safe Community Envisioning: Community members 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: Community members 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. Getting involved or being involved with families and communities where using drugs and crimes was “the norm”.
2. Getting “caught in a cycle” with charges and the bond system, court fees and fines.
3. Difficulty getting jobs, pressure to make money.
4. Lack of access to substance use treatment in the community and while incarcerated.
5. Lack of positive role models, and a lot of negative role models.
6. Not many Community Centers (Boys & Girls Club) Not knowing what programs and resources are available.
7. Problems with the probation system (changes in probation officers, quick to violate even when violations are related to substance use challenges/addiction)
8. Lack of access to support, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs after release, need for jobs/resources.
9. Problems with public defense representation (lawyers disappearing, not knowing names /cases, no legal advocacy), not having access to quality legal representation if you don’t have money. Public defenders having too many cases.
10. Accept plea deals because can’t discuss case easily with lawyer, which can result in more time.



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11. Problems with not knowing what resources are available in the jail, or how to access them. Need for jail orientation. Difficulty getting into programs when the same participants sign up for the programs each week.
 12. Problems with the Kiosk system, Kiosk not available due to lack of free time and use of Kiosk by others, or Kiosk not working.
 13. Problems of not having basic resources (enough food, hygiene, medical care) if indigent and don’t have funds for commissary.
 14. Medical care hard to access, poor quality, expensive (cost too much, takes too long, not getting necessary meds); Nurse comes while at work, then don’t get meds. But if you miss work, they’ll reclassify you.
 15. If going to have programs, make sure there are enough volunteers.
 16. Our issues in the jail are community issues; “it all impacts how we reenter our community”
 17. No accountability for the system, the Correction Officers - Need for consistency of treatment.
 18. In Community and in Jail – need for level-headed people we can talk with (regular groups) or call in crisis/emergency (not Police).
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Session II on December 18th

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

The facilitation team reviewed with the Detention community members the previous day 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.

Note: The Detention community members linked all of the eighteen problems identified with the prioritized problems selected.

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

1. *Problems with Public Defense Representation*
2. *Medical Care hard to access**
3. *Not enough Community Centers, Programs, and Resources**

**These two were tied with the number of votes*

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.



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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. *Direct Line to Defense Attorneys and Regular FaceTime*
Lower case load, allow them time to spend more time on each case; Better communication with lawyer, know what’s going on with your case; More Public Defenders; Meet with Public Defender in person – early on (in court or 1st day); Need a direct line to public defenders without collect call cost
2. *Direct Line to Medical and Mental Health Resources*
Increase resources for this; Full-time doctor on site 24 hours; Being able to access kiosk to sign up for sick call any time of day-separate medial kiosk; Reduce cost of sick call and/or change cost for different types of call; Partner with local hospitals, resources for medical care; Nurse who walks the floor for themselves 2 times a day to check for themselves on folks (already there to give meds.) Accountability for C/O.’s to report 1 or 2 times a day; Access to mental health more than 1 day per week; Direct Line to Mental Health Resources
 - a. *Having access to support (resume building, computer/internet access, job coaches, mentors)*
 - b. *Reducing stigma of Criminal Justice involvement among employers*
 - c. *Transportation*
3. *Need for people with resources to give back and commit that these programs are important and people in community to value these programs, community centers, and resources.*
 - a. *Positive opportunities for personal and professional growth for adults in the community*
 - b. *Supporting adults in being role models*

Next Steps: The information provided by Buncombe County Detention 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 Detention Center 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:



BUNCOMBE COUNTY
JUSTICE RESOURCE ADVISORY COUNCIL

*Leveraging best practices to increase system efficiency,
promote public safety, and community wellness*



Supported by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation

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

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