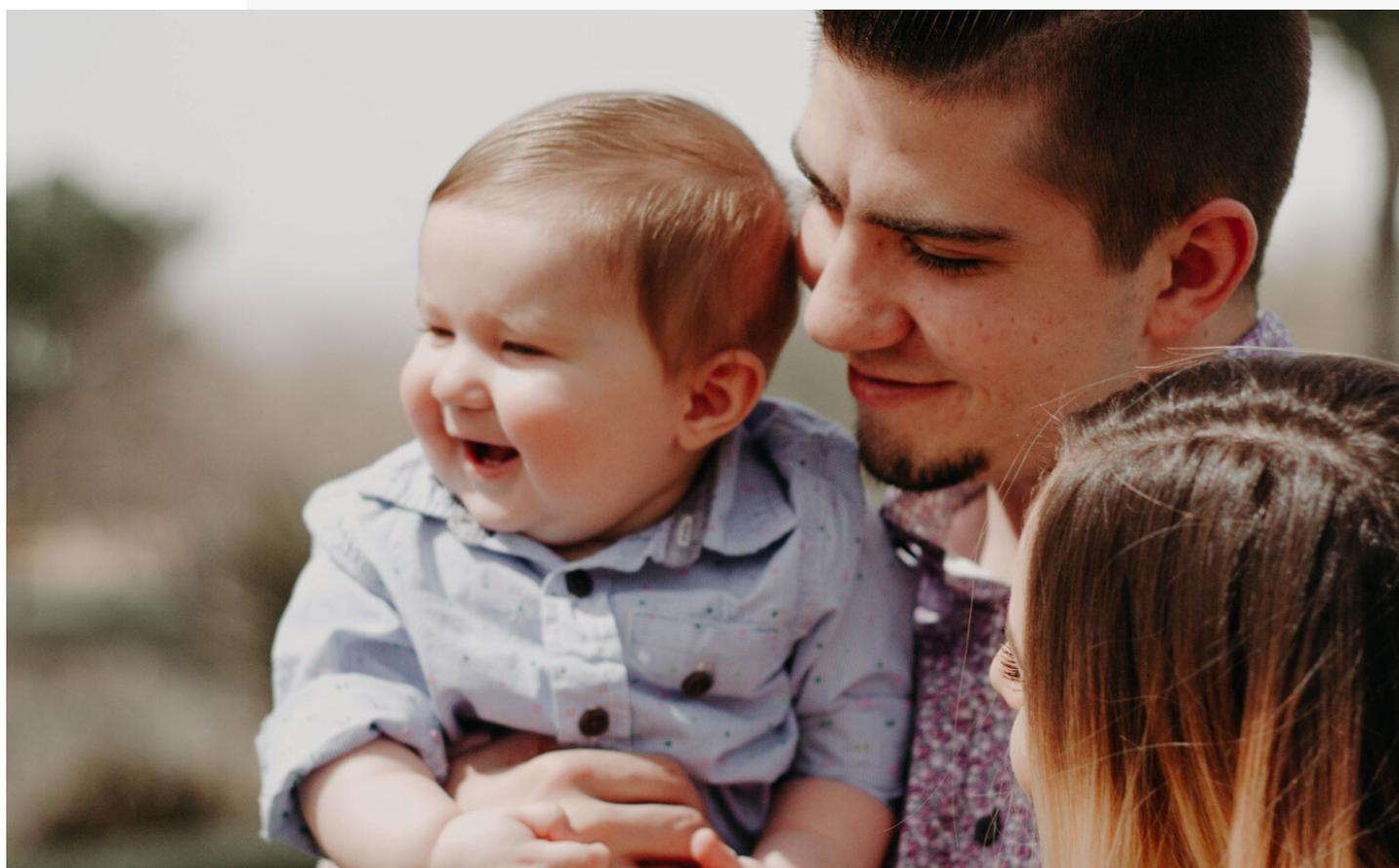


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YOUNG PARENTS SPEAK OUT: BARRIERS, BIAS, AND BROKEN SYSTEMS



PREPARED AND PRESENTED BY

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INTRODUCTION

Founded in 1883 as a social justice advocacy organization, National Crittenton has been dedicated to the needs and potential of girls, young women and women facing violence, poverty and injustice across the country for more than a century. Additionally,



National Crittenton convenes the 26 members of the Crittenton family of agencies providing direct services in 31 states and the District of Columbia to more than 135,000 girls, young women, and their families each year. Supporting young and single mothers was a core pillar in the founding focus for National Crittenton. Across the decades National Crittenton has advocated with and for young mothers, and the family of agencies has provided direct services in a diverse array of settings to young mothers and in more recent decades young fathers and multiple generations of families. For far too long, young mothers have been judged as “loose, irresponsible, immoral, etc.” and yet across the years we have watched them surmount incredible odds such as ending cycles of sexual abuse and poverty in one generation.

Yet, systems have turned a blind eye to the ways in which the “safety net” designed for adults is a “trap” for young parents. While advocates herald the decline in teen pregnancy we continue to see young women in Crittenton agencies at increasing rates – from 1883 to 2019. There is little data on young parents – neither child welfare nor juvenile justice have been required to report the numbers of expectant or parenting youth in their systems. It’s unclear how many homeless youth are expectant or parenting because the data is not collected. **Without data the issues remain invisible – without identifying the issues, no solution will be found.**

Despite the many barriers they face young mothers and fathers do succeed. Their drive to overcome system barriers and challenges runs deep and is profoundly humbling as they work to build a safe, healthy and prosperous life for their family. National Crittenton has long advocated that using a two-/multi-generational approach to support young parents and in particular (given the custodial rate of young mothers and young fathers) young mothers is an essential strategy in eradicating poverty in America. We have included in **Attachment A** a summary of information collected prior to this project through National Crittenton’s advocacy efforts listening to and working with young mothers as leaders for change, feedback received from Crittenton agencies and anecdotal sharing of common themes and trends from strategic partners who also work with young mothers and fathers around the country. National Crittenton is honored to work with the Annie E. Casey Foundation (Casey) to take a deeper look at the needs of young mothers and fathers through this project.

This research was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. We thank them for their support but acknowledge that the findings and conclusions presented in this report are those of the author(s) alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation.

BACKGROUND

Supporting the needs of young parents provides us with an opportunity to invest in two-/multi-generations simultaneously. If done effectively the returns will reverberate across future generations. Yet they face social, political and economic systems that do not effectively address or recognize their complex lives. Additionally, they face explicit and implicit biases related to race/ethnicity, gender, age, class, sexual orientation and gender identity, ability, mental health, and immigration status. Furthermore, varying levels of exposure to childhood abuse, neglect and family dysfunction also compound these challenges. Little data exists on the specific and complex needs of the diverse group we identify as young parents and on the ways in which they can be supported to heal, thrive and achieve economic security as families and individuals.

National Crittenton (Crittenton) received support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to directly engage young adult parents to help identify and advance advocacy for programs and policies that support their needs and potential. Core to the project was working with a Young Parent Advisory Committee (YPAC) of current and former young parents as advisors and active members of the project team.

The goals of the Young Parent Leadership Development project are to:

- Determine key areas of policy and program needs;
- Identify gaps in current young parent led advocacy efforts and determine interest/need for more young parent led advocacy; and
- Recommend a strategy to engage young parents, organizational leaders, advocates and/or field organizers in a national organizing and mobilization effort.

Note: The decision was made, in working with Casey, to focus this project on the needs of custodial parents living in low-income situations. As such the composition of the YPAC and of the participants in the listening sessions and survey responses mirror the national percentage representation of custodial young parents of roughly 75% young mothers and 25% young fathers. There is no question that mothers overwhelmingly bear the responsibility of parenting as single young parents. This percentage breakdown may vary based on a number of factors such as race/ethnicity, etc.

METHODOLOGY

The project team included eight YPAC members, five Crittenton staff and Robin Katcher from Katcher Consulting. The team developed and implemented a research agenda to identify the specific needs and issues facing this population and to explore the viability of creating a national network of young parent advocates. The research/outreach process included one-to-one interviews; YPAC-led listening sessions and a survey.

YPAC members included eight custodial young parents: six mothers and two fathers ranging in age from 19-26. They are racially/ethnically diverse with self-reported identities of African American (including one father), American Indian, Multi-racial (Asian and White), Latino (including one father and one mother). They live in Mississippi, Montana, New York, New Mexico, California–Bay Area and Los Angeles.

LISTENING SESSIONS



A total of 44 young parents participated in YPAC member facilitated listening sessions and interviews. In terms of the age at which they became a parent: 16% became a parent at age 17 or younger, 50% between the ages of 18 to 21, and 10% at 22-23 years of age; the remainder of parents did not disclose.

Current ages of participants are relatively evenly distributed with the largest group currently being 21 years or younger, followed by 26 and older and then those 25 to 22 years of age. Participants were racially and ethnically diverse including Asian American/Pacific Islander, African American, Latino, American Indian, multi-racial and not disclosed. Roughly 50% identified as being child welfare or juvenile justice involved. Finally, about one-third is currently part of a young parent program.

YOUNG PARENT SURVEY



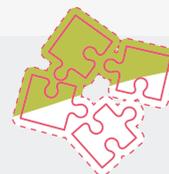
In addition, 21 young parents completed a survey using questions similar to those posed during the listening sessions. In terms of age they became a parent: roughly 45% became a parent at age 17 or younger, 47% between the ages of 18 to 21, and the remainder were 22 years or older and two did not disclose. Participants were racially and ethnically diverse including Asian American/Pacific Islander, African American, Latino, and American Indian, White and multi-racial. Nearly, 50% identified as being child welfare or juvenile justice involved. Finally, about 20% are currently part of a young parent program.

ORGANIZATIONAL INTERVIEWS



Robin Katcher, consultant member of the team, conducted 14 one-to-one interviews with staff representing organizations who are service providers, advocates and funders with an interest in or who work directly with young parents. Crittenton staff completed additional outreach and an interview. This report synthesizes the themes and trends identified through the listening sessions, online survey and the one-to-one interviews.

CHALLENGES



It is important to note the significant challenges faced in reaching young parents to participate in the listening sessions and respond to the survey. Even with existing connections between young parent facilitators and other young parents, the demands on parents' time, attention and energy made it difficult for them to find the time to engage. Moreover, work, school, transportation issues, etc. compounded the obstacles to their participation. This does not reflect a lack of interest or belief in the value of young parents' advocacy but rather represents the real life challenges they face balancing the many demands placed on them as young parents who may also be single parents. In fact, they feel the urgency and need for change passionately and want to engage in transforming systems, policies and services to ones that will be a value add rather than a barrier.

FINDINGS



The young parents we engaged in this research process want to parent their child(ren) well, provide for their families (whatever it looks like), and ensure that their own child(ren) are in good health, have a better upbringing and brighter hopes for their future than they themselves often experienced. They want financial independence, affordable and livable housing, good jobs and secure/healthy environments in which to care for their child(ren). **The bottom line – they want what is best for their child(ren).** Young parents fear not knowing what to do, struggle with breastfeeding, how to discipline and when a child becomes ill, are concerned for their child(ren)'s safety, and they can feel isolated. In short, not surprisingly, they want what we want for our own child(ren). Moreover, they share the same fears and hopes we have about parenting.

"[THE SYSTEM] IS SUPPOSED TO HELP YOU. IN REALITY IT FEELS LIKE IT'S WORKING AGAINST YOU."

- YOUNG PARENT

Even in the best of circumstances, parenting is a challenging and often a daunting process. Fraught with daily obstacles and surprising unexpected rewards—parenting challenges us to overcome our own fears, social pressures and expectations in order to meet our responsibility to our child(ren). Similarities aside, young parents, particularly those living in low-income situations have a wide range of complex needs created not by their own making but as a result of the core factors that shape the context of their lives.

CORE FACTORS

The research conducted for this project highlights and validates a set of core factors that impact how young parents are seen and treated, and also how they see themselves and measure their own successes and failures. These factors shape the assumptions made about young mothers, fathers, and their child(ren). As such, these factors influence the design of programs and policies designated to serve them, in as much because they reflect the deficit attitude and implicit bias of those providing support and making policy about young parents. While these are not new core factors—the continued impact of them is well worth noting as the impact creates a powerful barrier against success for young families.



STRUCTURAL "ISMS" AND IMPLICIT BIAS



GENDER ROLE EXPECTATIONS



STIGMA AND MORAL JUDGEMENT

Structural “isms” and implicit bias of institutions and individuals based on race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, class, immigration status, geography, completed educational level, age, disability and more, has a profound impact on the context of young parents’ lives in all areas beginning with the generations who come before them. It cuts across all systems and fields, and shapes programs and policies theoretically designed to support young families. Using an intersectional lens, one can imagine the layers of oppression faced by young parents as a result of the many identities they simultaneously live and the unbeknownst “labels” prescribed by others.

All systems and its policies, and in many cases staff have attitudes that reflect narrow traditional gender role expectations for all young mothers and fathers. These expectations impact the perception of the roles they will play in filling specific needs of their child or child(ren). Mothers are expected to be the caretakers and fathers are the providers. Another social dynamic cited by young parents is that it often seems expected that young mothers and not young fathers, will parent their child(ren) and they are harshly judged by others who believe they are not “good mothers.” In contrast, fathers who are engaged with their child(ren) are often praised for their involvement whether they are custodial parents or intermittently involved. When they are not meeting these expectations the implicit bias is reflected in the “loose women/moms” and “deadbeat dads” assumption resulting in systems that pit them against each other blocking and interrupting their good intentions rather than supporting them in building a family structure that works for them.

Stigma and moral judgment of young parents results in punitive approaches to program delivery and policy-making. Gender role expectations about “good girls and bad girls” results in particularly harsh treatment of girls who “get pregnant.” This is in stark contrast to the “boys will be boys” social norm about having sex. Many interviewees spoke of the harm that comes from the social stigma young parents face and the assumption about young parents’ incapacity to care for their own child(ren). The net impact on custodial young parents is that they are in a constant state of anxiety about the threat of losing their child(ren) to the system and noncustodial parents live in fear of not having the opportunity to be involved in the lives of their child(ren).

CORE FACTORS CONTINUED



MAJOR THEMES

The complexity of the needs of young parents and their child(ren), and the diversity of their family structure, such as single parents, co-parents living apart, married couples, etc. results in a confusing web of needs, gaps, and policy and practice implications that cut across systems and fields. *As such, this report outlines **major themes** that apply across systems and fields. Though these themes may be similar in nature, the way that they are reflected in current practice varies from system to system.*

- 1.** It is important to note that the **definition of “system” as articulated by young parents is very broad and is most often equated with any government program.** When asked to identify “systems” they included schools, transportation, child welfare, juvenile justice, WIC, SNAP, TANF, adult corrections, Medicaid, housing assistance, health care, jobs/workforce development, child care, financial supports such as EITC, etc. Rather than identifying a service as connected to a specific “system or government program” their identification is based on the need that is being met. The use of the word “system” in the major themes found below reflects the terminology used by interviewees, listening sessions participants and survey respondents as a shorthand reference to the organizations that provide programs and services across an array of public and private entities.
- 2.** Not surprisingly, young parents **identify a diverse and complex set of needs** for themselves and their child(ren) that are not being met. The following are a few examples:
 - Access to education (high school, college, trade school/certification)
 - Health insurance/care (includes reproductive, physical and mental health care including trauma informed mental health services)
 - Early childhood education/child care assistance (quality, reliable, affordable child care)
 - Livable wage jobs including career/workforce development support
 - Safe, affordable short (shelter/emergency) and long term stable housing
 - Support in navigating the child welfare system from family support to foster care and reunification (if needed)
- 3.** **Lack of data about young parents** disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender identity, etc. For example, states are not required to report the numbers of expectant and parenting youth involved in the juvenile justice or child welfare systems. While legislation passed requiring states to report the number of expectant and parenting youth involved in the child welfare system, implementation has been delayed and therefore data on this population remains unavailable. Moreover, as few interviewees pointed out, the systems young parents engage in often have poor data collection and too few data driven solutions that focus on understanding and addressing the needs of young parents. As one interviewee said, “You can’t provide services if you don’t understand what the need is and, if after, you don’t know how well the service worked.”
- 4.** **A failure to understand and respond effectively to young parents’ developmental needs.** Interviewees report that systems and programs generally lack a full appreciation of the complex needs of young parents in the context of parents’ own cognitive development, need to heal from trauma, and growth as adults and parents. This may also be true for advocates who focus on a single issue or system without a focus on the developmental needs of young mothers and fathers and their child(ren). Many interviewees noted that young parents themselves are still growing and developing into adulthood. Newer research on the complexity and pace of human brain development doesn’t yet shape most of the programs, policies, and services for young parents, nor the set of expectations we hold for young parents often resulting in ineffective and often re-traumatizing “supports.”

5. The **nonprofit advocacy sector should and could be working with young parents as leaders and doing more collectively** across systems fields and issue areas to build policies and improve services and supports that remove barriers for young parents, learn from the bright spots, and advance enabling policies. However, interviewees note that advocacy groups themselves are often too siloed and lack coordination around efforts to address the needs and challenges of young parents. Young parents are still marginalized and largely invisible in policy considerations. This is particularly true for child welfare and juvenile justice involved young mothers.

6. The results of **policies not being directly shaped by the young parents they are designed to serve are unintended negative consequences and ineffective supports** for young parents creating additional barriers to progress. Even those programs that work most closely with the parents every day often lack the time and resources to center the leadership of young parents when and if they are able to engage in policy and program development and advocacy at either the national, state or local level. One example is the work requirement for the receipt of TANF benefits which forces many young parents to choose between furthering their education and working. Legislative solutions allowing young parents to substitute education for work has not yet found support from policy makers. The general consensus is that there is little to no true holistic young parent advocacy particularly at the national level.

7. **Public systems and programs do not recognize the unique challenges of young parents and do not support the economic stability, health and family structure of young families** whether they are single parents, co-parents not living together or couples living together. Universally young parent participants in the project strongly expressed the experience of being required to make difficult choices to access benefits to the detriment of their family stability and relationship with their child's other parent. One prime example is the requirement for custodial parents to prove they have sought

child support from the noncustodial parent in order to receive childcare assistance. Child support that is paid by, or garnished from, the noncustodial parents' wages goes directly to the state first and not to the custodial parent. Custodial parents shared experiences of receiving \$20 or less after the state is paid. This policy leaves less income to be directed to the care of the child by noncustodial parents. Additionally, in situations where a mother chooses not to associate with the father for safety reasons, she may be unable to seek childcare assistance. It is fair to say that neither mothers or fathers felt supported or understood by programs and systems, rather they believe the current structure is designed to pit them against each other.

8. The **current transactional and problem/crisis focused approach to supporting young parents is marked by little attention to prevention, family support and the root causes** of young parenthood and family instability. For example, an emphasis on access to reproductive health services to prevent young parenthood does not support the needs of young parents and families, often stigmatizes them as irresponsible and does not offer the support they need to be good parents and to break generational cycles of young parenthood. Another example offered is housing instability and the requirements of maintaining housing benefits for single mothers who are not allowed to have their child's father in the housing unit to care for their child while they are working or are in school.

9. **Systems are siloed and each of these systems comes with their own set of obstacles or negative impacts young parents must navigate.** Generally speaking, these systems do not appear to be designed to support young parents and their child(ren), holding both generations and both parents, and recognizing these families' particular circumstances and needs. Therefore, **the burden of accessing and coordinating services/programs/supports is placed on young parents** who are already overloaded.

“WE OFTEN FAIL TO CENTER THE FAMILY AND PULL ALL THE PROVIDERS WHO TOUCH THAT FAMILY TOGETHER. RIGHT NOW, THE PARENT IS RUNNING AROUND TO ALL THE AGENCIES AND PROVIDERS TO ORGANIZE US, SHARE THEIR INFORMATION EACH TIME, AND THE PROGRAMS AREN’T IN ALIGNMENT. AND IT’S EXHAUSTING AND IT MIGHT NOT SYNC UP AND THEY MIGHT MISS AN OPPORTUNITY.”

- 10.** There is a **lack of recognition of the depth of social isolation young parents experience and their need for connection.** This includes relationships with other young parents and with parents who were former young parents. Social connections are not well supported by public or private programs and their value is not recognized as an important factor in supporting young families to be stable and healthy. While mentor, coaching and case management relationships are beneficial they do not replace the need for connection with others who share similar experiences.



POLICY ISSUES

The prior section outlining major themes includes some areas that describe serious policy and practice issues that young parents experience. The delineation of specific policy issues was an intended part of this project. However, the complexity of the barriers and the number of systems involved and the number of issues identified makes it impossible to call out specific policy changes to be addressed in each system, much less across systems without additional research. This is compounded by the reality that young parents do not identify systems as discrete and separate entities. Furthermore, based on the research completed thus far, it is difficult to identify whether the “problem” is created by:

- Ineffective federal policy,
- Problems or inconsistency between different federal agencies implementation of federal policy,
- How federal policy is implemented at state level,
- Ineffective state law or practice/enforcement,
- Specific agencies own internal policies
- Issues with service provider misinformation,
- Poor communication between providers and young parents, and/or
- Discrimination against young parents.

Additional research completed in collaboration with young parents is needed to identify and prioritize specific policy changes that must be made in order for public systems and the “safety net” to effectively support young families.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our analysis of the information collected through interviews, surveys and our research of the field, the following recommendations are included as next steps to be taken.

- 1. Bridge the silos and build a networked long-term approach to changing policies and regulations impacting young parents.** Nearly all interviewees agreed that there is a need for more communication, coordination and deep partnership across policy advocates, direct service providers, researchers, strategic communication experts, technical assistance/capacity building providers, and youth organizers working to change the full array of systems and services impacting the lives of young parents. As one organizational interviewee explained, “we need more communication and coordination – more spaces and forum for people who are interested in working with this population. There isn’t a national network where we can exchange resources, collaborate, troubleshoot, [and] create new efforts.” Another organizational interviewee pointed out, “we still have organizations that are pretty siloed and true partnership can be challenging. We need a shared sense of values, responsibility and ownership.”
- 2. Center young parents and ensure they themselves are directly involved** in sharing their experiences, understanding research and trends, shaping policies/practices, and actively advocating for change.
- 3. Deepen research and understanding of the best policy levers to pull to create needed change.** Young parents spoke of ways policies and programs could be improved to better support their families. Yet given the vast number of systems and policies impacting them and the lack of research on this particular population within each of those systems, it was difficult to locate the specific set of policies and practices to change. While young parents and direct service providers offered important anecdotal data, it was difficult to determine if the problem was rooted in federal law, federal regulations/guidance, state implementation of federal law, state policy and funding sources, specific agency practices, misinformed or biased case workers, or miscommunication with a young parent. There is a significant need to tap the expertise of all those who know different systems and their policy frameworks best to –

research the underlying reasons for the barriers young parents experience. From that knowledge base, not only can policy/practice solutions be identified but young parents can also obtain information that aids them in seeking support.

- 4. Build on the excellent work of other networks and organizations that have identified and evaluated innovative practices and consider what is needed to maintain, incentivize and scale what is working.** One organizational interviewee said it this way, “How are we going to get to practice? How are we going to do this? Good to cheer on those few good programs and parents who have made it. By practice I mean from the funders down to the people delivering the services with multiple doors for entry from the hospital where baby is delivered on through the young families’ entire lives.”
- 5. Create a unified policy platform that bridges across multiple agencies and systems, and propose changes that trigger long-term transformation as well as ones that are incremental and immediately doable.** As one organizational interviewee explained, “I would focus on policy development that is cross systems focused. Advocates can become gatekeepers and defenders of the system as is – rather than thinking outside the box about how it must be changed to more effectively support families.” Another organizational interviewee offered, “there hasn’t been a collaborative space for those working on the issues of young parents that supports organizations to coalesce and push through change. Having an overarching strategy and shared goals and outcomes enable for mapping what is happening within these different systems and finding the people within each of the systems that know and can share what is happening in that system for young parents.”
- 6. Increase direct advocacy with lawmakers and regulators focused on the needs of young parents.** Design advocacy strategies to advance the elements of the policy platform and build the collective power and influence of young parents, relevant advocates and allies so that concrete changes are made.
- 7. Sustain the work over the long-term** since the problems are systemic and the solutions aren’t likely to come quickly. As one organizational leader offered, “Lots of plans without any ways to make it happen. Good at identifying problems and it’s much harder to try to figure out how to make changes and I think we need more of that. The answers aren’t changing but the changes aren’t happening. We need the will to do it and maintaining that momentum is very hard.”



SUMMARY

It is clear from the information collected that no one organization alone has adequate capacity, depth of organizing with young parents, expertise in the full array of policy and practice issues, and political power to create the scope and scale of change that would be needed to address the obstacles young parents and their families face. Interviewees report a lack of coordination and communication among advocates across all the fields/sectors impacting young parents and they see a need to break down silos and think more holistically with young parents about their needs. In addition, many interviewees felt that while there are bright spots among service providers and programs, these have not reached scale and too little advocacy is focused on creating the policies that will support young parents, their families and those who seek to support them to succeed.

Also striking was the lack of coordination on advocacy issues between young parents, advocates seeking to improve the larger systems, and direct service providers. Few organizations that did advocacy or service provision actually involved these young parents in informing, shaping, and advocating for policy change. Nearly all of the policy advocates we spoke with had little regular contact with young parents. Nearly all of the direct service providers, who worked most closely with young parents, had too little time or capacity to work on advocacy. Moreover, of the young parents who participated in the listening sessions, interviews or completed surveys for this project, 90% reported that they would like to be involved in advocacy efforts around the issues impacting them and other young parents.

The results of this first phase of work clearly indicate a need for greater understanding, focus and advocacy on the part of service providers, policy makers and funders that centers the leadership of young parents and recognizes the unique challenges faced by young mothers and fathers. Likewise, the leadership of YPAC members and the expertise and input of young parent participants underscores the importance of investing in two-/multi-generation approaches to support them in reaching their potential and in achieving economic security, positive health outcomes, and civic engagement.



Members of the 2019 Young Parent Advisory Committee (YPAC).

CONCLUSION

After more than a century of work supporting young mothers we know that it is possible to break generational cycles in one generation, but it will require us as a society to focus on more than access to reproductive health services and preventing pregnancy. The reasons teens and young adults choose to parent are complex and influenced by social norms, cultural values and practices, exposure to adversity, the search for unconditional love and family history. It is not uncommon for the unique needs of young parents and their children to be minimized even by those whose work focuses on parents. This is reflected in statements that indicate that young parents' needs are the same as "adult or older" parents and require no specific focus. This is alarming and does not recognize the ways in which the complex context of young parents lives including their age, race, gender and other factors impacts their ability to secure effective services and supports.

It is past time to develop and catalyze a national network that focuses on advocating with, for and by young parents and their families. This network would consciously center young parents, provide them with training and leadership opportunities, and listen to their expertise in an effort to bridge the variety of systems and policy frameworks that shape their experiences. Networks succeed when they emerge from the collective wisdom of those most impacted and other supporting players. The creation and formation cannot be scripted and formulaic. At the same time, without the right set of conditions existing on the ground it will be very difficult for synergy to be created and coalesced enabling momentum to be created. We must use a two -/multi-generational approach to build the public and political will to change our attitudes, practices, systems and policies, and meet young families where they are by listening to them as leaders for change in addressing the root causes of the obstacles they face. National Crittenton looks forward to working in partnership with young parent leaders, policy experts, allies including the Annie E. Casey Foundation to build a national young parent advocacy network.

National Crittenton thanks the members of the 2019 Young Parent Advisory committee for their expertise, wisdom, dedication, and willingness to share their own experiences in service of greater advocacy for the needs of young parents and their children:

- Latonia Brown - Jackson, MS
- Jazmine Banks - San Francisco, CA
- Maui Chacon - Los Angeles, CA
- Elmirah Garcia - Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo
- Sandy Martinez - Espanola, NM
- Jesus David Rivera - Espanola, NM
- Creeana Rygg - Helena, MT
- Coley Washington - New York, NY

ATTACHMENT A

SUMMARY OF NATIONAL CRITTENTON'S YOUNG MOTHERS ADVOCACY EFFORTS

This attachment includes information collected prior to the Young Parent Leadership Development project through National Crittenton's advocacy efforts listening to and working with young mothers as leaders for change, feedback received from Crittenton agencies and anecdotal sharing of common themes and trends from strategic partners who also work with young mothers and fathers around the country. This information grounds our work with young mothers, who are marginalized and facing significant obstacles not of their own making, but by the ability of systems and society, to meet them where they are free from implicit bias and judgment.

- In 2012, the Crittenton family of agencies conducted a pilot administration of the Adverse Childhood Experiences survey in 18 of the 26 agencies. Based on the results of the pilot Crittenton issued a brief on the results of young mothers in Crittenton agencies presented at a hill briefing in Washington, DC. A total of over 250 young mothers receiving services from Crittenton agencies participated, 61% had scores of 4 or more and 48% had scores of 5 or more, far higher than the national data from the original Center for Disease Control study where 15% of women had scores of 4 or more. Additionally, young mothers involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice system had higher levels of exposure to adversity with 63% and 74% having scores of 4 or more.
- The Rights and Responsibilities: Custody and Placement Handbook project funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2008 had two goals; to identify the laws and practices related to young mothers in care being placed with their child in foster care, and to provide information to young mothers on the reasons and causes for termination of their parental rights. Crittenton contacted the child welfare state agencies from each state to determine the law and practice of placing young mothers with their children in care. The project revealed that the law is clear – in cases where a young mother is in the custody of the state her child remains in her custody unless formal proceedings have removed her child from her care for just cause by the state. Staff in more than 85% of states contacted were not clear on the law but stated that the general perspective and practice was to see the child as “in state custody” and to separate the mother from her child to find them each a placement rather than to prioritize placing them together.
- Consistent anecdotal information collected during the last 13 years chronicles young mothers losing custody of their child(ren) to foster parents/families who they felt sabotaged their ability to effectively parent as a way to terminate their parental rights so they could adopt the child(ren). Crittenton agency staffs confirm that this does in fact occur in large part due to the lack of trained mother/baby foster homes.
- Additionally, far too many states encourage or require young mothers to put their child(ren) in temporary custody of the state in order for them to be placed with them in foster care placement. Crittenton agency and partner staff verifies that this does occur.

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- While the overall teen pregnancy rate has declined it is well known in the field of providers supporting young women who are survivors of domestic minor sex trafficking that once out of the life for about 18 months survivors become pregnant. The reasons given include: “to regain control of my body,” “to use my body for something positive, because it is better to be known as a young mother than a trafficking survivor,” and to find unconditional love by creating a family.
 - There is some evidence discovered through initial case file review of the differential standards used by courts in the termination of parental rights for young parents as compared to “adult” parents.