

**SEATTLE TEAM FOR YOUTH/MINORITY  
OUTREACH PROJECT**

**PROCESS EVALUATION REPORT:  
HOW IS THE PROGRAM WORKING?**

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## Executive Summary

The Seattle Team for Youth/Minority Outreach Program (STFY/MOP) is a collaborative effort between the City of Seattle Human Services Department, the Seattle Police Department, and eleven community-based social service agencies. In existence since the late 1980's, STFY/MOP provides case management and direct services to gang-involved and at-risk youth ages 11-24. Program goals include reducing gang involvement and criminal activity, enhancing academic success, strengthening positive identity and social competency, and increasing young people's constructive use of time. In addition to case management, other services provided by STFY/MOP include drug/alcohol treatment, employment assistance, leadership development, tutoring and mentoring, and recreation programs.

In February 2001, the City of Seattle Human Services Department (HSD) hired Barbara Gurley and Associates to conduct an evaluation of the Seattle Team for Youth / Minority Outreach Program. This summary outlines the major findings of the process evaluation, conducted between January and September 2002. (The findings of the outcome evaluation will be included in a separate report to be completed in December 2002.)

The process evaluation gathered information from all groups of stakeholders, including youth and parents, staff from participating agencies, staff from the HSD, and representatives of program partners such as the Seattle Police Department, King County Superior Court, and the Seattle School District. A total of 89 individuals participated in either individual interviews or focus groups. Interpreters were used as necessary. Three overall themes emerged from the data that reflect critical functions the STFY/MOP program must fulfill in order to successfully serve youth and families while still remaining true to its collaborative mission: 1) meeting youth and family needs, 2) building community partnerships, and 3) ensuring the quality of services and program processes.

### **Meeting Youth and Family Needs**

Overall, stakeholders believe the program is very successful in meeting the needs of the youth and families it serves. Many discrete activities contribute to this overall success; these include identifying and recruiting youth who need services, determining the best possible match for each young person, encouraging participation, finding the necessary services, providing ongoing support, and using effective case management practices. (See "What Works Well" below for more detail about these areas.)

The STFY/MOP program offers a unique combination of elements that, taken together, set it apart from many other youth programs and enhance its ability to meet youth and family needs. First, the program is designed as a collaborative endeavor between the Human Service Department, the police department, and non-profit social service agencies. Case managers and police detectives work in teams to provide services to

young people, and sometimes involve other professionals (i.e. school counselors, probation officers) in this team approach as well. Many interviewees attributed much of the program's success to this collaborative practice. Second, virtually everybody involved in the program places great emphasis on the importance of building trusting relationships with youth and families, understanding that meaningful change is difficult to achieve in the absence of strong relationships. Interview comments from youth and parents illustrate the program's success in this area. Third, the intent of STFY/MOP is to harness the resources of the entire human service system in Seattle in order to match each young person with the case manager and agency that offer the best possible service fit. Having a centralized referral system supports the program in accomplishing this, as does the collaboration that takes place among participating agencies. Finally, the program overall displays a significant level of competence in providing culturally appropriate services to its clients. Many of the participating agencies, in fact, were created specifically to provide services to under-served cultural groups. Again, comments from youth and their parents make it clear that this aspect of the STFY/MOP program is extremely important to them and greatly appreciated.

The success of STFY/MOP in meeting youth and family needs is reflected in the stories that interviewees shared about the strong, positive impact the program has had on participants. As one parent said, "There's been a complete turnaround for our child." Young people told stories about experiencing greater motivation in school, doing better academically, getting out of gangs, building positive relationships with peers and adult role models, and not dealing drugs anymore. The program's positive effects extend to whole families as well, with parents describing how they feel more supported and empowered, are better able to navigate the systems they encounter, and experience greater success in talking with and listening to their children.

### **Building Community Partnerships**

The second function of the STFY/MOP program is to build community partnerships in order to better serve youth and families. Process evaluation interviews revealed several specific aspects to this element of the program, including building program recognition in the community, coordinating resources to provide services to young people, ensuring that case managers receive adequate peer and program support, maintaining the web of relationships between individuals and institutions that make STFY/MOP work, and ensuring strong relationships and clear expectations between program partners and funders.

Overall, stakeholders perceive that the STFY/MOP program has been successful in building partnerships. Many interviewees identified the collaborative relationships between case managers and police detectives as pivotal to the program, and described the way in which these relationships had strengthened the institutional connections between social services agencies and the Seattle Police Department. More than one agency administrator commented that these strengthened connections benefited all agency programs, not just STFY/MOP. Other successes in the area of building

relationships include the efforts that case managers make to cultivate relationships both with each other and with other service providers such as school personnel, mental health professionals, drug/alcohol treatment specialists, and probation officers. These relationships contribute to smooth coordination of resources and services for youth.

Stakeholders also described some areas of concern related to building partnerships, one of which is the level of support for case managers. Different aspects of case manager support mentioned by interviewees include: strong supervision, positive feedback, adequate training, salary level, access to peers, and assistance with difficult cases. Almost everybody agreed on the importance of strengthening support for case managers, especially in the area of salary level. Case managers themselves requested changes to their regular meetings that they think would allow them to better support each other and collaborate on cases together. A second concern related to building partnerships raised by some interviewees is variation among partners in terms of quality of work and perceived willingness to work together. This seems to be true on both an individual level as well as a systemic level: some individuals said they would not refer to specific people based on past experience, and agency staff overwhelmingly described the juvenile justice system as difficult to work with.

The collaborative aspect of the STFY/MOP program enables it to have a positive impact on the community and on participating agencies themselves that would be unlikely in the absence of the partnership. Some of the positive benefits mentioned by interviewees include greater community access to comprehensive programming, enhanced expertise of all agency staff due to the knowledge and resources of STFY/MOP case managers, and stronger connections between agencies serving similar populations.

### **Ensuring Quality of Services and Processes**

The third critical function that the STFY/MOP program must fulfill in order to be successful and achieve its mission is to ensure that services and program processes meet high standards of quality. In terms of services, program stakeholders are in strong agreement that the case management services provided through STFY/MOP are working very well. People agree on the key components of high quality case management, which were identified as:

- ◆ Building trust and strong relationships with clients
- ◆ Meeting youth “where they are”
- ◆ Basing services on a thorough and individualized assessment
- ◆ Having thorough knowledge of resources available to help clients (or access to that knowledge)
- ◆ Working with partners to provide team support to clients
- ◆ Providing services that are culturally appropriate for youth and families

In essence, STFY/MOP case managers are not just brokers of services for their clients. While young people and their families receive the services they need, it is the combination of trust, respect, and individualized attention that young people experience in the program that seems to be the exact element that fosters growth and change in their lives.

While case management practices are clearly working well in the STFY/MOP program, stakeholders still identified some ways in which the partnership could work to sustain its success in this area and continue to ensure the high quality of services. These include strengthening support and supervision for case managers (mentioned above), and working together to develop stronger relationships with the juvenile justice and education systems.

Services are supported by key program processes such as decision making, role clarification, and communication, and there is greater disagreement among program stakeholders about how well these processes are working. Both participating agencies and HSD staff expressed frustrations related to these areas (see “Key Challenges” below for more detail), and offered several suggestions for how to address them. While it is not surprising for a collaborative program that involves several independent entities to experience challenges in establishing and maintaining clear and effective organizational processes, these areas currently drain energy and resources that could be directed to sustaining and improving services.

## **Specific Findings**

More specific evaluation findings related to program services, organizational processes, and partner relationships are outlined below, along with representative comments gathered from interviews and focus groups. These findings are organized into two categories: what is working well in the STFY/MOP program, and key challenges facing the program.

### ***What Works Well***

1. STFY/MOP has a positive reputation with families, youth and partner agencies.

“We’re having to do a lot less outreach than we used to – we’re known in the community now.” (ED)

- *Word of mouth, self referrals and direct referrals work well for most agencies as sources of clients (though self referrals are not a dependable source of clients when agencies are new or staff has changed).*
- *There are many strong relationships that case managers and partner agencies have built with each other.*
- *STFY/MOP has strong name recognition with some parts of the community.*

2. The matching process is working well – STYF/MOP has been successful building trust, understanding the unique issues each youth faces, and providing culturally appropriate services.

“We will take months to build trust with clients if that’s what it takes.” (Supervisor)

“Most [other programs] say go over there and look at that website, or get that information. It’s not specific to you.” (Parent)

“My kids really like their case manager. They feel like someone is on their side, listens to them, can see their perspective.” (Parent)

- *The importance of taking time to build trust is recognized within the program, and is a primary focus of the initial work case managers do with youth and families.*
- *Program staff are committed to understanding the unique situation of each client and using it as the foundation for services.*
- *Agencies take a variety of steps to ensure that services are culturally appropriate for youth and families.*
- *There is a high degree of trust and respect between families, youth, and program staff; many youth and parents express appreciation for the services provided by case managers and the commitment and respect they demonstrate.*

3. A particular strength of the program is the ongoing support provided: having someone who always believes in youth and families even when it gets tough, and helps clients deal with frustrating institutions.

“My case manager stuck by my side. He takes care of things even when it’s on his own time.” (Youth)

“My case manager makes it so teachers don’t just hear me out, they actually listen.” (Youth)

- *Youth and parents perceive STFY/MOP case managers to be more accessible and reliable than other programs they have experienced.*
- *Case managers provide significant support and advocacy to youth and families related to navigating schools, courts, and mental health and drug/alcohol services.*

4. Families and youth feel staff do an excellent job of finding support services to meet their needs.

“The employment issue is bad now – we’re seeing it more, and seeing it younger.” (Supervisor)

“I read a lot of STFY case files, and probably the common denominator is poverty.” (Supervisor)

“For the majority of my kids, drugs and alcohol are a big need.” (Case Manager)

- *Employment is a growing need, and services are becoming more scarce and harder to access.*
- *Many youth and families in the program have significant basic needs (food, clothing, school supplies, etc.).*
- *Additional services that are critically needed, and often difficult to access, include mental health services, drug/alcohol services, tutoring for high school students.*
- *Mental health and drug/alcohol needs have grown more acute over time.*

5. Overall, the program has been successful implementing effective case management practices.

“Staffing works best when we pull together all the key people in a kid’s life, and talk it out as a team.”  
(Partner Agency)

“Case managers have that rapport – not all counselors do. They genuinely care.” (Parent)

“What makes case management work is having the knowledge to refer.” (Case Manager)

“One of the assets of STFY is the expectation that case managers will go where the kids are.”  
(Supervisor)

- *In general, a flexible, individualized approach to case management is what works best for youth and families.*
- *Key elements of successful case management include: building trusting relationships, having thorough knowledge of available resources and how to make connections with services, and working with partners to provide team support to clients.*
- *Strengths of the program include its expectations that case managers will go out into the community to work with youth and that initial contact will be made within 72 hours.*
- *The program understands that change takes a long time for many young people, and allows that time to be taken.*
- *Staff turnover has a detrimental effect on clients.*

6. STYF/MOP has been making things work for clients by collaboratively problem-solving and finding community resources.

“I love the team aspect of STFY – with these cases, you need support. You need teamwork.” (Case Manager)

“Collaboration is important. If it’s not working, then fix it, don’t just throw it out.” (Partner Agency)

- *There is overwhelming desire among case managers for more opportunities to provide support and consultation to each other on specific cases; the regular case manager meeting is seen as an ideal forum for this.*
- *Some suggested that the responsibilities of the central referral function be expanded to include the development and ongoing maintenance of a resource and referral database.*

7. STYF/MOP has been making things work for case managers by providing adequate support from their agency and support from other case managers, but some improvements are needed.

“I’d like to pay case managers more money. I’d like to give them more, so they can stay.” (HSD Staff)

“Staff need to be in a structure that supports them...I try to make sure they have good supervision, manageable jobs, access to senior management to solve problems, recognition for doing a good job.”  
(Supervisor)

- *Most case managers receive strong support (training, supervision, positive feedback) from within their agencies; a few do not.*
- *There is strong agreement that case managers are underpaid; this contributes to burnout and staff turnover.*
- *Many administrators and parents made strong comments of admiration and respect for case managers, recognizing the hard work they do.*
- *Some agencies need additional support for case managers, including training for new staff.*

8. STYF/MOP has had success building relationships among partners, but the partnership could be strengthened further.

“We have a great relationship with the SPD...Schools are very opposed to us.” (Case Manager)

“If someone doesn’t call back or doesn’t show up, I don’t go back to them.” (Partner Agency)

“The best thing meetings could do is let us get help from each other, collaborate and get what we need from each other.” (Case Manager)

- *The program has allowed many agencies to build strong relationships with the Seattle Police Department. These relationships benefit young people in the program.*
- *Individual case managers also have strong relationships with some schools and probation counselors.*
- *One shared concern is the variation within partnership in terms of quality of work and perceived willingness to work together.*
- *Meetings are considered a great opportunity to build relationships, and are largely perceived to be ineffective in achieving this.*

## **KEY CHALLENGES**

1. There are differing opinions about the necessity and effectiveness of the central referral system.

“I like having a central referral place – it’s part of the glue that holds the partnership together.” (Executive Director)

“The City is not generating many referrals for us.” (Ex. Director)

“I don’t know why the position is needed. It seems a waste of money.” (Supervisor)

“The program wasn’t formed so that agencies could do their own recruitment, but so referrals could come centrally.” (HSD Staff)

- *Partner agencies, parents, and some participating agencies noted the importance of having one central referral number.*
- *Concerns related to the central referral process include:*
  - *belief that it is not necessary*
  - *misunderstandings about how it works*
  - *concerns about how the HSD is fulfilling its role in the process*
  - *lack of timeliness*
  - *generating adequate clients loads for agencies while ensuring service capacity for potential clients*
- *In general, agencies seem to have a less detailed understanding than HSD staff of the purpose and intent of the central referral system.*

2. There are significant frustrations within the partnership in the areas of contract issues, communication, decision making, and role clarity.

“I dislike not being able to duplicate core outcomes. I adamantly disagree.” (Supervisor)

“STFY is gang-related, works with police. MOP is intake and assessment, referral. It’s just two different philosophies.” (Ex. Dir.)

“No one in the City seems to know who has the authority or last word to give an answer to you.” (Ex. Dir.)

“Historically, loops haven’t been closed. I’m never quite clear on how communication is supposed to be flowing.” (Supervisor)

- *Confusion about role clarity exists in many areas: which HSD staff to call about what; appropriate roles of agencies and HSD in providing services; and confusion regarding the distinction between STFY and MOP.*
- *Frustration with decision making is related to confusion about who has final authority on any given issue and the length of the decision making process.*
- *Many people believe that communication is complicated by the number of HSD staff involved; some complain about mixed messages and the amount of communication they receive.*
- *Primary contract issues include frustration with the policy of only allowing compensation for one core outcome for each client and frustration with new paperwork requirements related to ongoing program evaluation.*

3. There is some confusion and disagreement about the appropriate target population for the program.

“Gang involvement used to be the primary factor for program involvement. Now poverty is.” (Supervisor)

“We do have to look again at our program intent – if we’re an anti-gang program, we have to look at who we’re working with.” (HSD Staff)

- *Some believe the focus is still on gang-involved youth or youth at risk of dropping out of school; others believe the emphasis has shifted to youth in poverty.*
- *The different origins of STFY and MOP contribute to this issue.*
- *There is general agreement that this question needs discussion and clarification throughout the partnership.*

## **Recommendations**

Overall, process evaluation interviews indicate that the STFY/MOP program is achieving considerable success in providing high quality case management services that lead to positive changes in the lives of young people and their families. The following recommendations are intended to sustain that success. Some of them are focused on issues of sustaining or improving service quality or service delivery, which are clearly tied to program results. Some of the recommendations are focused on improving key program processes related to decision making, communication, and role clarity. While these organizational issues do not necessarily have a direct impact on the

quality of services, they do at the least divert time and energy away from service-related activities and create inefficiencies in the system. (More detail about each recommendation is available in the main body of the process evaluation report.)

Prior to developing recommendations, evaluators held meetings with each of the program's stakeholder groups to share information about the findings of the process evaluation, facilitate discussion, and generate ideas for both sustaining success and addressing challenges. Some of the results of these meetings are incorporated into the recommendations below.

- I. Celebrate the program's ongoing successes.**
- II. Build up the collaborative team aspect of the STFY/MOP program.**
- III. Work together to institute measures in support of consistent service quality across the STFY/MOP program.**
- IV. Use a program-wide meeting (see next recommendation) to identify strategies for supporting case managers.**
- V. Restructure the meetings for case managers, supervisors, executive directors, and program partners in order to allow regular forums for both case manager collaboration and program-wide problem solving.**
- VI. Clarify the decision making roles and processes to be used throughout the program as a whole.**
- VII. Clarify decision making, roles, and lines of communication within each partner agency.**
- VIII. Use the future RFP process as an opportunity to further clarify roles and responsibilities.**
- IX. Explore possible changes to the current contract to address frustrations of agencies.**
- X. Consider a retreat to bring the partners together to build relationships and develop plans to address both organizational and service-related issues.**

## **Conclusion**

From the perspective of program stakeholders – including participating and partner agencies, the Human Services Department, and youth and parents receiving services – the Seattle Team for Youth/Minority Outreach Program is achieving considerable success. Case managers are able to establish effective, respectful, and trusting relationships with the young people on their caseloads. Youth and their families receive culturally appropriate services that are tailored to their specific needs and situations. As a result of their participation in the STFY/MOP program, young people and their parents report a variety of positive changes in their lives, including increased academic success, reduced criminal or delinquent behavior, and a greater sense of empowerment both as parents and teens. (See Outcomes Report to be released in December 2002 for more information about program impact.)

While many things are working well in STFY/MOP, stakeholders are clear that there are some challenges that need to be addressed in order to sustain the program's success. Some of these challenges are related to services, and include clarifying the program's target population, supporting case managers, strengthening the referral process, and addressing the systemic barriers to implementing a collaborative case management program model. Other challenges are related to organizational issues such as decision making, roles and responsibilities, and communication. As all of these challenges are addressed and resolved, a greater amount of energy and resources will become available to focus on continuing to provide excellent collaborative case management services to youth and their families.

We believe that the program will experience the most success if all partners share responsibility for addressing challenges and implementing solutions. Such collaboration around problem solving would mirror the collaboration that already exists in the arena of services, and strengthen the program overall. The STFY/MOP program has a solid foundation on which to build; given the expertise and knowledge that is shared among partners, we are confident that the resources for continued success are in place.

## INTRODUCTION

Seattle Team for Youth / Minority Outreach Program (STFY/MOP) is a collaborative project that brings together the City of Seattle Human Services Department, the Seattle Police Department, and several community-based agencies serving youth and families. STFY/MOP provides case management and direct services to gang-involved and at-risk youth ages 11-24, with the goals of reducing gang involvement and criminal activity, enhancing academic success, strengthening positive identity and social competency, and increasing young people's constructive use of time.

Eleven community-based agencies are currently partners in the STFY/MOP program:

- Atlantic Street Center
- CAMP
- Central Youth and Family Services
- El Centro de la Raza
- Filipino Youth Activities
- SafeFutures Youth Center
- Southeast Youth and Family Services
- Southwest Youth and Family Services
- United Indians of All Tribes
- YMCA
- YouthCare

Case managers from these agencies team with detectives from the Seattle Police Department to provide case management services to youth and their families. Case managers also often work with juvenile probation officers and school counselors. In addition to case management, other services provided by STFY/MOP include drug/alcohol treatment, employment assistance, leadership development, tutoring and mentoring, and recreation programs.

Young people are referred to the program in many ways: agencies self refer; agencies receive direct referrals from a police detective or other referring partner; and referrals come through a central referral system maintained by the Human Services Department. One of the goals of the collaborative effort is to provide better services to youth and families by tapping the resources of the larger human services system in Seattle, rather than leaving each individual agency to meet a myriad of needs on its own.

In February 2001, the City of Seattle Human Services Department (HSD) hired Barbara Gurley and Associates to conduct an evaluation of the Seattle Team for Youth / Minority Outreach Program. There are two types of evaluation being conducted:

- 1) Process evaluation – to determine how the program is working
- 2) Outcome evaluation – to determine the impact the program has had on youth and families

This report describes the findings of the Process Evaluation. The report describing the results of the Outcome Evaluation will be completed during December 2002.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sampling

Information was gathered by conducting interviews and focus groups with all the key stakeholder groups, including:

- Youth
- Parents
- Participating Agencies (including Executive Directors, Supervisors and Case Managers)
- Partner Agencies (including Police, Superior Court and Seattle School District)
- HSD Staff

Evaluators and HSD staff made every attempt to ensure that a broad cross representation of all the key stakeholders was included in the interview process. To identify youth for interviews, HSD staff provided each participating agency with a randomly selected list of clients. Agency staff then worked to schedule at least 3 of those young people for interviews. The goal was to include youth, parents, and staff at all levels for each participating agency, and for the most part this was accomplished. (See table below for details.) This breadth of participation was important to ensure that multiple languages and cultures were represented in the sample. Spanish, Cambodian, Vietnamese and Lao interpreters were used with parents as needed. Representatives from all of the partner agencies were also interviewed, although evaluators were able to successfully contact only one individual from the school district.

The total sample size for each stakeholder group is as follows:

Type of Stakeholder	Number Included
Youth	23
Parents	23
Participating Agencies	29
<i>Executive Directors</i>	<i>(5)</i>
<i>Supervisors</i>	<i>(9)</i>
<i>Case Managers</i>	<i>(15)</i>
Partner Agencies	10
<i>Police</i>	<i>(7)</i>
<i>Superior Court</i>	<i>(2)</i>
<i>Seattle School District</i>	<i>(1)</i>
HSD Staff	4
<b>TOTAL NUMBER INTERVIEWED</b>	<b>89</b>

Some of the parents and youth interviewed were relatively new to the program, having been involved for only a few weeks or months. However, many had been affiliated with the program for a year or more, some up to four years.

Staff interviewed from participating agencies also represented varying levels of experience. Some had been working with the program since it was created in the late 1980's, while others had been on the job less than two months. Representatives of partner agencies included individuals who helped create the program but are no longer a part of it, as well as current active partners.

Finally, those interviewed from the HSD also included newer staff as well as those involved with the creation of the program. All staff within the Human Services Department who are currently involved in the administration of STFY/MOP were interviewed either individually or as part of a focus group.

## **Measurement Tool**

In the beginning of the process evaluation, evaluators identified open-ended interview questions with significant input from stakeholders. Using these questions as a foundation, they then worked with HSD staff to create a focused series of key questions for each stakeholder group to be used as the basis for interviews. During interviews and focus groups, facilitators probed responses to gather more detailed information. The interview questions used for each group are provided in Attachment A.

Consultants conducted the parent focus groups (sometimes with the assistance of interpreters) as well as the interviews with representatives of participating and partner agencies.

Youth interviewers were hired and trained to conduct the interviews with program participants. Evaluators and HSD staff agreed that youth interviews would yield more in-depth responses if they were conducted by someone closer to the young person in age.

## **Data Analysis and Results**

Interview notes were entered into an ACCESS database, which was used to collate the data and generate reports relevant to the key interview questions. Evaluators then analyzed these reports and identified primary themes.

Three overall themes emerged that reflect critical functions the STFY/MOP program must fulfill in order to successfully serve youth and families while remaining true to its collaborative mission. These three critical program functions are:

1. Meeting Youth and Family Needs
2. Building Community Partnerships
3. Ensuring Quality of Services and Processes

There are multiple components within all of these program functions. The sections below describe the evaluation findings related to each.

## **MEETING YOUTH AND FAMILY NEEDS**

Overall, the stakeholders interviewed believe that the STFY/MOP program is very successful meeting youth and family needs, and see this as one of the greatest strengths of the program. They identified a number of components that go into meeting the needs of youth and their families, which include:

- ◆ Finding youth and families who need services
- ◆ Determining who's a good match for the program
- ◆ Encouraging youth and families to participate
- ◆ Finding support services needed
- ◆ Providing ongoing support
- ◆ Knowing what works best
- ◆ Making an impact

A summary and analysis of the sub-themes within these components follows, along with examples of stakeholder comments related to each.

### **Finding youth and families who need services**

Overall, stakeholders believe the program has been successful in actively identifying those who might benefit from services. This is the first step in meeting the needs and youth and families, and there are currently three ways this works within STFY/MOP.

- Spread by word of mouth / Self referrals

One particularly widespread method is word of mouth. When youth and families experience positive changes as a result of participation in STFY/MOP, they often spread the word within their neighborhoods and communities. Many of the youth and parents interviewed heard about the program from other youth and parents. Some individuals from participating agencies commented that they believe the program has established a positive reputation in their communities and is now a known entity. Agencies also use word of mouth to self-refer, proactively recruiting young people for STFY/MOP either from the community or from within other youth programs they administer.

This specific method of finding youth and families who need services seems to be working well for most participating agencies. However, self-referrals are not a dependable source of clients when agencies are new or staff has changed.

*“We're having to do a lot less outreach than we used to - we're known in the community now.” (Executive Director)*

*“[The program] spreads by word of mouth by kids.” (Youth)*

*“Self referrals are working. Staff feel empowered that they can enroll.” (Supervisor)*

*“I followed friends here.” (Youth)*

*“[Things work by] word of mouth – we are well known enough to get our own referrals.” (Supervisor)*

*“Some agencies do a really good job at self referrals - others don't. We haven't made our numbers.” (Supervisor)*

- Building relationships with stakeholders

Another positive aspect of the program that helps identify potential clients is the web of relationships among stakeholders. The majority of participating agencies believe they get direct referrals from partners such as police detectives, school staff, and juvenile probation counselors because of the strong relationships they have built with these individuals. Referring partners also mentioned this dynamic, explaining that they tend to call case managers they know and trust when they have a young person who needs services. Most participating and partner agencies thought this method of hooking youth up with STFY/MOP case management services was inevitable and should be encouraged. However, there is minor disagreement on this issue from some HSD staff, who believe it is important to continue emphasizing a central referral process as the main method of intake in order to assure consistency and quality of services as well as equitable distribution of cases among all participating agencies.

*“Counselors at school said it was a nice place.” (Youth)*

*“We do pretty well with other people referring to us. The referrals we get are usually just from courts and police.” (Supervisor)*

*“I got to know the security officers at schools. They knew about the detectives, and call detectives directly if they need a referral for a kid.” (Partner Agency)*

*“We know certain case managers that we work with; so we tend to refer to them.” (Partner Agency)*

*“The intent is that all referrals come centrally. That's a necessity - we want to ensure that clients are served, and get into quality services.” (HSD staff)*

- Central referral process

There are differing opinions among stakeholders about both the necessity and effectiveness of the central referral process. For some, the central referral process is an essential component of the program. Some participating agencies, partner agencies and parents noted the importance of having one central referral number. Not only can one phone number be more easily spread among large numbers of potential referral sources, it is also, as one person stated, “the glue that holds the partnership together.” Another individual suggested that having one central number for people to remember increases the likelihood that referrals will be made. Another argument in support of the central process, articulated by a participating agency, was the need for the Human Services Department to “know the totals, especially because of funding sources.”

*“For the larger police force, it is important to have one central number everybody can call.” (Partner Agency)*

*“A lot of people see kids and think they might need help, and go the extra step to refer.” (Case Manager)*

*“I like having a central referral place – it’s part of the glue that holds the partnership together. It means somebody is looking at referrals and identifying them as STFY kids. It also means that all players are involved.” (Executive Director)*

*“It’s better to have a centralized resource for clients and referrals – ensuring smoothness of receiving communication and sending information.” (HSD staff)*

*“I think the referral system works just fine.” (Partner Agency)*

Others who were interviewed questioned whether the central referral process is necessary or how well it is working. Concerns about the central referral process that emerged from the interviews include:

- ◆ *Belief that a central referral system is not necessary:* Some people commented that they were not sure what the purpose of the central referral system is and what it accomplishes that direct referrals to agencies could not.
- ◆ *Misunderstandings about how the central referral system works:* Many people were unclear how the central referral process is supposed to work. As one person said, “I honestly don’t know how it’s supposed to work – we might be doing it wrong.” Other people mentioned it wasn’t clear who should receive the referral: sometimes supervisors receive the referrals, and sometimes it goes to the case manager. Another partner agency described receiving inconsistent information from the Seattle Police Department and the HSD about where to forward referrals, being told by both to send referrals to them and they would take care of passing it on. “Now,” this interviewee said, “I send it both places.” In fact, many people mentioned sending duplicate referrals to the SPD and the HSD just to make sure it got to both places.
- ◆ *Concerns about how the HSD is fulfilling its role in the central referral process:* While this concern was not widespread, a few people mentioned two issues in this category. The first is the perception that the HSD is not distributing cases equitably among all participating agencies. Of those who shared this perception, most expressed it simply as a matter-of-fact statement: “I’ve had two referrals from the city in 1½ years.” One person perceived this as an example of favoritism. The second issue mentioned by a couple of people was the perception that HSD staff get too involved in intakes, either by gathering clinical information or by becoming overly involved with clients.
- ◆ *Lack of timeliness:* Some people expressed frustrations related to the lack of timely action on referrals. One person described receiving referrals that were “backdated months.” Another commented that it “takes too long” for numbers to be assigned to self-referrals cases that are reported to the central referral system. (Since the new database automatically assigns numbers to cases when agencies enter them, it is unclear whether this last comment was referring to past frustration, or if there is still a misunderstanding among agencies about how the database works.)
- ◆ *Generating adequate client loads while ensuring service capacity for potential clients:* For agencies, the challenge is generating enough clients to meet contract requirements. Many do not receive enough referrals from either the central referral system or partner agencies to accomplish this without self-referrals. The problem arises when an agency reaches capacity with self-referrals and then has no space to serve centrally-referred clients. As one HSD staffperson said, “I don’t have a problem with agencies generating their own

referrals. The problem is striking a balance. If they self-refer, then when we refer to them, they're full."

Clearly there are differing perspectives about the necessity and effectiveness of the central referral system. While many participating agencies expressed frustrations and concerns about the central referral process, HSD staff and other partner agencies believe that the system is necessary and is working well. For example, the HSD believes that it uses only demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, location) to make referrals and not clinical information. It also does not perceive the time delays that others mentioned: "We receive referrals, inform the agency – it happens in less than two hours. Then case managers take over."

*"The City is not generating many referrals for us." (Executive Director)*

*"[The system is best] if it's consistent, with city checking with every agency, working with a list of kids, deciding 'think this one would fit.'" (Executive Director)*

*"Last year, the central system was time-delayed. It worked haphazardly. This year we don't have a central system." (Supervisor)*

*"It's better to have clinical people having the detailed conversation with families." (Supervisor)*

*"I don't know why the central referral system is needed. It seems a waste of money." (Supervisor)*

*"The program wasn't formed so agencies could do their own recruitment, but so referrals could come centrally – having referral sources that would make referrals to the city, with the city able to distribute them through the human services system." (HSD Staff)*

- Making Timely Contact

Making timely contact is another aspect of reaching out to potential clients, and overall stakeholders believe the program succeeds in this area most of the time. Regardless of how the referral initially happens, many interviewees mentioned the importance of getting back to people quickly once they call. Many people also mentioned the 72 hour response time written into agency contracts, and described that expectation as a particular strength of the program. A prompt response sets the tone for future relationships, communicates to families and youth that the program is dependable, and makes them more likely to want to participate. While the program seems to be doing well in this area overall, some stakeholders expressed frustration with delays both in the referral process itself (described above) and once a referral has been made. A small

number of parents and staff from partner agencies complained about the slow response they got from case managers. A few participating and partner agencies also expressed concern that the entire process from referral to contact is taking too long for some youth.

*"Follow through is really important." (Case Manager)*

*"Initial contact is taking too long - sometimes it is one week by the time the referral goes from the supervisor to the case manager. We at least need to let people know when someone will contact them." (Partner Agency)*

*"I'm frustrated with the case manager. It took over a month to hear from them. It's been another two months now and nothing has happened still." (Parent)*

### **Determining who's a good match for the program**

Once a young person has been identified as needing services, the second crucial step is determining if she or he is a match for the program. This can be a complex process. Considerations include being sure that youth meet program criteria, matching them to agencies based on demographics (gender, ethnicity and geographic location), and trying to find the best match with an agency and case manager given the particular service needs of each youth and family. This process is often complicated by the fact that an agency may have no space available to serve more youth even though it is the best match based on geographic location or cultural background. Safety is also an issue for youth who are involved in gangs, as it may not be safe for them to receive services at an agency located in enemy gang territory. All of these issues must be carefully balanced and considered.

*"Sometimes you sense a youth's personalities, tone, feel, rhythm and interests. You use it and capitalize on it. It is a complex puzzle and you have to try to find the best fit with a case manager." (Case Manager)*

Overall, stakeholders believe the matching process works very well. Youth and families feel comfortable with the case managers they are matched with. There are, however, a couple of fundamental questions in the minds of many interviewees. The first is, who is the target population for the program? Some believe the focus is still on gang-involved youth and kids at risk of dropping out of the educational system. Others believe the emphasis has shifted to young people in poverty where lack of family support, basic needs, and other issues are leading them to criminal activity and school problems. There was general agreement among almost everybody that this question needs discussion and clarification throughout the partnership.

A few people raised a second fundamental question: is there anybody who is not a match for this program? One person's view on this was, "There are two groups of people beyond the scope of the program – homeless families and those with extreme mental health issues." However, others thought that homeless families should be served, believing that the basic needs of these families could be addressed by the program.

Lastly, a few interviewees perceived some needs in the community that the program may not adequately meet. These include white youth who meet criteria for participation, new emerging ethnic groups, and youth in the North End of Seattle where none of the participating agencies are physically located.

*"People think we don't have gang problems, but we have serious local gangs. If you're born in the wrong neighborhood or area, you're in it." (Supervisor)*

*"Gang involvement used to be the primary factor [for program involvement]. Now poverty is." (Supervisor)*

*"Historically STFY was much more tailored to gang-involved youth – that's not the case anymore. Now it's general truancy and criminal behaviors." (Supervisor)*

*"We're seeing more youth who are chronically mentally ill or have long-term involvement with the system. [But we're] not hiring case managers with this kind of expertise." (Supervisor)*

*"We do have to look again at our program intent – if we're an anti-gang program, we have to look at who we're working with." (HSD staff)*

*"We need to keep an open mind to serving all kids regardless of color. All kids need help." (Partner Agency)*

*"I think the city thinks very well of STFY, but I'm not sure they have a clear understanding of what it is...Levy Oversight and the City Council might still think we're serving hard core kids – we're not." (Executive Director)*

## **Encouraging youth and families to participate**

This component of meeting the needs of youth and families is about what it takes to truly enroll young people in services. The program can go through the technicalities of referring and recruiting youth, but it cannot truly meet their needs if they do not feel secure and recognized. One of the unique strengths of STFY/MOP is its strong emphasis on and actual success in building trusting relationships, understanding the

issues of each individual client, and providing culturally appropriate services to youth and their families.

- Building trust

Parents, youth, case managers, and virtually everyone interviewed overwhelming stated the importance of trust and emphasized that they thought the program was very successful in developing trusting relationships with clients. When youth and families feel comfortable working with case managers it is because they trust them. Building trust is an important first step to providing services, and one that can take a long time with some youth. Not only is the importance of trust recognized within the program, interview comments suggest it is a central focus of actual work with young people and their families.

*“The important thing about our program and clients is trust and comfort. We become the listeners, put our credentials aside, and work with them as individuals...Our treatment is the heart – have to get them comfortable and develop that trust with us.”*  
(Executive Director)

*“[You have to] show respect to parents and build their trust.”* (Case Manager)

*“Parents trust [case managers] to work with their children. Parents trust to come to case manager with problems.”* (Parent)

*“[You have to] spend time with kids, listen to them, have a good day. When is the last time most of these kids had a good day?”* (Case Manager)

*“We will take months to build trust with clients if that’s what it takes.”* (Supervisor)

*“My case manager stuck by my side. He takes care of things even when it is on his own time.”* (Youth)

- Understanding the unique issues each youth faces

The majority of parents and youth expressed gratitude for case managers’ willingness to take the time to get to know them, to understand their specific needs, and to help them find solutions that work for them. From their perspective, this is a critical factor that encourages their participation and helps them to succeed. Case managers also see this as an important element of their job. They noted that identifying the unique issues that individual youth are facing should be the foundation for helping each young person create an action plan. Without the willingness and ability to recognize each young person’s unique situation, case managers recognize that they are likely to fail.

*“You have to have a willingness to figure out what the issues are for a kid. You have to create space and opportunity to talk, share things. You have to do the dance, bring issues up and let the youth respond. They need to know it won't be used against them. That they have your support.” (Case Manager)*

*“You have to spend time in their world instead of making them come to your world. Kids realize you don't have to be there for them, but are. They appreciate it and are more likely to do something in return, to give back.” (Case Manager)*

*“My kids really like their case manager. They feel like someone is on their side, listens to them, can see their perspective.” (Parent)*

*“Most [other programs] say go over there and look at that website, or get the information. It is not specific to you.” (Parent)*

- Providing culturally appropriate services

Virtually everyone interviewed noted the importance of agencies being culturally appropriate for the youth and families they serve, and interview comments suggest that the program is extremely successful in providing such culturally appropriate services to clients. For example, Native American families noted that the program is responsible for connecting them with their cultural heritage again. Without this sort of attention to culture, clients are much less likely to feel comfortable or respected and therefore less likely to participate in or benefit from the program. The success of STFY/MOP in this area makes it a critical resource for the families it serves.

People described a variety of factors that can contribute to making services culturally appropriate: case managers being from the same culture as clients and/or speaking the same language; agencies sponsoring cultural events; case managers taking youth and families to cultural or community events elsewhere; and case managers taking time to learn the culture of their clients (e.g., how to address people, who to address, sharing their food, understanding and respecting traditions and values). Many of those interviewed shared examples of how their agencies worked to incorporate cultural competency into their services, and parents and youth expressed gratitude for the culturally appropriate atmosphere they encountered in the program.

The one area of minor disagreement among those interviewed was related to whether or not a young person should always be matched with a case manager from the same cultural background. Some see this as imperative, while others see the need for all case managers to be able to work effectively with all youth.

*“People are comfortable with case managers when they are from the same culture. Case managers should reflect the communities they serve. It’s good to match a case manager with youth with the same background or work with a case manager who can build a good team to work with a kid.” (Case Manager)*

*“It is important for case managers to work with the people and cultures they feel comfortable with.” (Case Manager)*

*“Staff speak the language of parents.” (Parent)*

*“It helps that my case manager is from the same culture and background as me. She translates a lot of stuff for my mom.” (Youth)*

*“Activities are culturally related.” (Parent)*

*“There is misconception: even within race or ethnicity, people are not the same.” (Supervisor)*

*“Case managers need to resemble the people they’re serving...but we also need to provide training to case managers so they can work with variety of kids.” (HSD staff)*

*“It’s imperative to keep culturally specific programs alive...A one size fits all program just doesn’t work.” (Executive Director)*

*“It’s good that [my case manager] is from my culture, and can speak Spanish to my mom.” (Youth)*

## **Finding support services needed**

Once youth and families are enrolled in the program, helping them find support services is another major aspect of meeting their needs. This is another area in which most stakeholders perceived the program as being successful, particularly given that resources are currently scarce and services hard to find. While the program has met with success in its efforts to find support services for clients, most stakeholders consider the process time-consuming and challenging. Many of those interviewed suggested that developing a central clearinghouse of available resources would save a lot of time and effort for individual case managers.

Four themes kept recurring in the interviews related to the services most commonly needed by youth and their families. Some of these (such as positive ways to spend time) case managers are able to provide themselves. For others, case managers must create connections between their clients and other service providers.

- Positive ways to spend time

All the participating agencies, partner agencies, youth, and parents mentioned the importance of having positive ways for youth to spend time. They noted that in the absence of positive things to do, youth were much more likely to hang out on the street and get into trouble.

Many people expressed concern that budget cuts and reduction in funds for public services have resulted in decreased availability of after school, evening and weekend activities for youth. A few participating agencies mentioned that the youth in the STFY/MOP program tend to need alternative programs that are less structured than traditional after school programs. Youth, parents, and participating agencies all noted that youth in this program often have had no exposure to a variety of activities that other families may take for granted. Field trips to go kayaking, skiing, hiking, and camping, or to attend cultural events, are greatly appreciated, open youth up to new opportunities, and provide them with alternatives to delinquent behavior.

*“I was skeptical at first, but then started to enjoy the after school activities and realized the changes were good.” (Youth)*

*“I’m getting involved setting up activities. I look forward to another day here with friends. Now all my friends are here.” (Youth)*

*“I am going out more and having fun.” (Youth)*

*“You get self-esteem through success, and we want [youth] to do something, anything, that allows them to be successful...We take kids places – we want them to go places, to see things, to be part of groups, and know that they can do it.” (Supervisor)*

*“Funding cuts are hard. We used to have trips and events.” (Case Manager)*

*“My case manager has given me people to chill with and positive things to do.” (Youth)*

*“[Children] need to have constructive activities in the summer.” (Parent)*

- Opportunities for employment

Many parents, youth, and participating agencies mentioned that employment is one of the key services needed by many young people in the program. Employment offers a sense of purpose, the opportunity to build important life skills, and money that allows youth to afford what they want as well as, for some young people, to support their families. If needs are high and employment is not available, criminal activity is a tempting alternative.

As with recreational activities, many interviewees noted the decline in both summer and year-round youth employment programs. Many believe that the criteria for participation

in the existing programs are difficult to meet, applications are time consuming, and youth become de-motivated if they are not selected.

*“I struggle a lot – it’s very hard to buy food, to pay rent, to buy clothes. All this affects the children. My 16 year old has been looking for a part time job for the past year. They want to help when they see the situation, and when they can’t help they get in bad situations.” (Parent)*

*“There’s a big emphasis on jobs. We sign them up for everything – [our] kids get a lot of help with getting jobs.” (Supervisor)*

*“I would like to see jobs year round – it would stop vandalism.” (Case Manager)*

*“Youth need employment. They need a work option to make money, otherwise they find other ways to make money that lead to bad things.” (Case Manager)*

*“We need summer youth employment, but year round too.” (Case Manager)*

*“There’s not enough youth employment during the school year. They have to hit deadlines for summer and there are limited spots. There are too many criteria to meet to get into programs.” (Partner Agency)*

*“It’s good for them to practice earning money, [learn] how to spend it not too fast, before they have to manage it and pay bills.” (Case Manager)*

*“Employment is more a need this year than last year.” (Supervisor)*

*“The employment issue is bad now – we’re seeing it more, and seeing it younger. We’re seeing 13 and 14 year olds wanting jobs, taking care of their families and themselves...[but] they’re unemployable.” (Supervisor)*

- Basic needs

Many comments from parents and agencies make it clear that program participants need help obtaining services to meet basic needs such as housing, food, and clothing. Indeed, many are homeless or on the verge of losing their housing.

As a result, case managers spend a lot of time connecting families with resources to meet basic needs or buying items the youth need (e.g., school supplies, clothing, shoes, coats). Often case managers buy items for youth using their own personal resources. Though funds for this purpose used to be part of the program, the HSD eliminated them because of auditing and tracking problems. Many participating agencies mentioned this change, and noted that it would be a huge help to program participants if it could be restored. Clearly, unmet basic needs for many of these youth and families are enormous.

*"We need support for kids living in poverty. Money for GED tests, bus tokens, haircuts, clothing, food." (Supervisor)*

*"A big problem is homelessness, but there are no homeless services for gang-involved kids. So we assess them as substance use, or criminal activity." (HSD staff)*

*"I read a lot of STFY case files, and probably the common denominator is poverty." (Supervisor)*

- Other services

There was general agreement among parents, participating agencies, and partner agencies that some critically-needed services are difficult to find, access and utilize. These include mental health services (including psychiatric assessments for youth), drug and alcohol services (including drug testing and assessments), tutoring programs for high school age students, and functional family therapy that is done in the home. When these services are available, they are often not in a convenient location, clients do not have transportation to them, or clients need help with translation since the service only has English speaking staff. Many people noted all the hoops families had to jump through to get services and how difficult it can be even to find the actual service provider phone numbers. Finding and accessing these critical services is clearly an area of frustration for parents and participating agencies alike.

*"Mental health issues have become more and more acute over time." (Executive Director)*

*"For the majority of my kids, drugs and alcohol are a big need. Drugs have definitely gotten worse, that's a big change." (Case Manager)*

*"I'm seeing much higher mental health needs than ever came through the program before." (Supervisor)*

*"[There's a need for] family counseling because lots of times they are dysfunctional." (Case Manager)*

*"[Families need] more transportation dollars. More clothing vouchers. The City and County only provide so much." (Executive Director)*

*"We need tutoring after school. Existing ones are not willing to collaborate with STFY. They want to be on their own." (Case Manager)*

## **Providing ongoing support**

From the point of view of parents and youth, one of the program's greatest strengths is the ongoing support it provides. One of the critical factors that keep youth and their families working toward success instead of giving up is having ongoing support, whether it is someone who continues to believe in them even if things are going badly, or help dealing with the institutions in their lives.

- Someone who believes in youth

When asked what they thought makes case management work, the majority of interviewees described case managers who wholeheartedly believe in youth and convey that belief to their clients. Parents and youth both commented on how much it means to them to know that someone will be there in good times and bad, that someone will stick by, care about, and love them. Many noted how other systems had let them down, but STFY/MOP case managers reliably stood by them.

Participating agencies also stressed the importance of believing in the ability of young people to make positive changes in their lives, no matter what kinds of adversity they face. Many told stories of youth who "made it" against all odds, and credited the consistency of support from case managers as a contributing factor in their success.

*"Kids feel like someone is on their side, who listens to them and can see their perspective." (Parent)*

*"My case manager stuck by my side. He takes care of things even when it is on his own time." (Youth)*

*"You have to believe in kids. If you think the kids are losers, then it doesn't work." (Partner Agency)*

*"They don't let you give up. They believe in you and encourage you to keep going." (Parent)*

*"I have one overriding philosophy: it's not whether kids are particularly gifted, it's whether they have individual attention. The whole program is set up that way. It says, wherever you are, we're going to work with you and help you." (Supervisor)*

*"The case manager tries to find positives, even if my kid is acting out. They try to build self-esteem. They send a message to kids, 'I'm not giving up on you.'" (Parent)*

- Help dealing with systems and institutions

Parents who participated in focus groups expressed overwhelming frustration about dealing with systems such as schools, school districts, courts, mental health services, and drug/alcohol services. Part of the frustration comes from simply not knowing how to deal with these systems. When they do attempt to engage with these systems, many parents perceive the response as racist and are angered by that. In describing their experiences, many said they felt rushed along, pushed away, or sent on wild chases.

Among the parents interviewed, frustration with teachers and schools was particularly widespread. Most believe that schools either label their children as problems, or ignore them and fail to help them succeed in the classroom. Either way, they feel helpless watching their kids slip farther and farther behind academically. They feel they get no help from the schools, despite repeated efforts. School counselors were widely considered by parents to be ineffective in providing assistance.

Needless to say, this is an area where many youth and parents receive support and advocacy from case managers. Sometimes this assistance takes the form of simply attending school meetings with parents; other times it involves more active advocacy on the behalf of youth. For example, one supervisor told the story of a young African immigrant who had been expelled for telling another student, "I'll kill you," not understanding how seriously such threats are taken in these times. The case manager worked with the school to bridge the cultural misunderstanding, and the student was accepted back with alternative sanctions imposed.

Case managers themselves described greater variety in their experiences with schools, noting that they find some schools and school counselors great to work with while others are extremely difficult. There also appears to be some variation in the extent to which case managers work with schools on a regular basis: some routinely partner with school counselors to provide services and support to youth, while others may only contact school personnel if there is a particular school-related problem.

*"Their case manager goes to their schools, meets with counselors and teachers. He comes to my house, talks to me, talks to my kids. My life is overwhelming, and he takes time to come." (Parent)*

*"Our case manager is a mediator with schools. We were stonewalled by the school, not getting anywhere...Our case manager helped break down the wall." (Parent)*

*"My case manager makes it so teachers don't just hear me out, they actually listen." (Youth)*

## **Knowing what works best**

At the beginning of the evaluation, key stakeholders expressed a desire to know what was working best in terms of meeting the needs of youth and families. One specific question revolved around what duration and intensity of services young people seem to need in order to be successful in the program.

- Intensity and duration of services

Virtually every case manager and agency administrator who addressed this issue stressed that flexibility is critical when it comes to providing case management services to young people. As one supervisor said, “Even if you have two youth who are similar, the same approach may not work...Kids’ minds are so different.” Because of this, there was general agreement that the type, intensity, and duration of services will and should vary from client to client based on a thorough, individualized assessment. There can be no cookie cutter approach to case management.

That being said, there were some repeated themes in the comments of interviewees. First, many young people require a long time, sometime years, to change things in their lives, particularly those involved in gang and criminal activity. Second, regular access to and contact with case managers makes a positive difference for young people and their families. Based on interview comments, the STFY/MOP program seems to be succeeding in providing these elements of effective case management to clients.

*“Each case is completely different; it's hard to pinpoint what works.” (Case Manager)*

*“You have to be really flexible, because there are different levels of need in different families.” (Parent)*

*“Case management has to be individualized – kids are all different.” (Supervisor)*

*“You have to be flexible and do what matches best for each kid. For some kids a monthly check in is enough. Others need daily and intensive interactions.” (Supervisor)*

*“You need services that are unique to each family.” (Parent)*

*“Even if you have two kids who are similar, the same approach may not work. Kids’ minds are so different.” (Supervisor)*

*“This is mushy work. There is no prescription for success. It’s all about how two people inter-relate.” (Executive Director)*

- Consistency of staff

Though consistency of staff was not a specific concern at the outset of the evaluation, it was an issue that was repeatedly mentioned when interviewees were asked what makes case management work. Youth and parents also described how important it was to them to have the same person to rely on over time. Staff layoffs or changes are hard on youth and parents once a trusting relationship is built. Many participating agencies, HSD staff, and some youth commented about the high turnover of STFY/MOP case managers in the last year and the challenges such changes present to a young person's success in the program.

*"They lost funding, and lost staff person. It was like losing a part of my community. (That person) helped me get back on my feet." (Youth)*

## **Making an impact**

The impact of the program on youth and families will be described in more detail in the Outcomes Report. However, interviews did generate many stories about the positive changes that young people and their parents have experienced as a result of their participation in the STFY/MOP program.

- Impact on Youth

Parents, participating agencies, and youth themselves had much to share about the difference the program has made for participants. Most believed that multiple changes have occurred for each youth. Some of the impacts noted include:

- ❖ Complete turnaround
- ❖ More mature
- ❖ Listens to parents now
- ❖ Going to school now
- ❖ Doing better in school
- ❖ Life is going somewhere
- ❖ Feel safer
- ❖ Staying out of trouble
- ❖ Not in gangs any more
- ❖ Not dealing drugs anymore
- ❖ Not involved in crime anymore
- ❖ Spending time with positive peers and adults

- Impact on Families

Similarly, there are many stories that youth, parents and participating agencies told about how families have changed. The major impacts for families include:

- ❖ Family members get along now
- ❖ Talk and listen to each other
- ❖ Can identify priorities
- ❖ Know how to navigate systems
- ❖ Feel more empowered
- ❖ Have help raising child
- ❖ Feel more supported
- ❖ Have basic needs met

Clearly, the stakeholders as well as program participants feel the STFY/MOP program has had a tremendous, positive impact on youth and families. While the nature of process evaluations is such that they cannot make any conclusive statements about program outcomes, the positive changes described anecdotally by youth and parents in this report do reflect the research that exists about “protective” factors in young people’s lives. These protective factors are outlined by the researchers who developed the Communities That Care model of prevention, and include 1) opportunities for youth to bond with adults and community organizations, 2) opportunities to participate in meaningful activities, and 3) opportunities to build skills and positive peer relationships. These protective factors offer a buffer against the risk factors that exist in many young people’s lives, and have been proven to reduce the likelihood that these youth will actually engage in delinquent or criminal behaviors. Future evaluations of the STFY/MOP program could be used to more thoroughly explore the connection between the protective factors of the Communities That Care model and the outcomes experienced by young people in the program.

## **BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

The second critical function that the STFY/MOP program must fulfill in order to be successful and achieve its mission is building community partnerships. The program was begun as a partnership and intended to be a collaborative venture, built on the premise that a consortium of entities working together could better meet youth needs than any one agency working alone. In order to remain true to this intent, the program has to have the capacity to continually build and maintain the partnerships that make things work.

The key stakeholders interviewed identified a number of components that go into building community partnerships, which include:

- ◆ Being recognized in the community
- ◆ Making things work for youth and families
- ◆ Making things work for case managers
- ◆ Building relationships with partners
- ◆ Meeting funder expectations
- ◆ Making an impact

### **Being recognized in the community**

Some participating and partner agencies noted the importance of the STFY/MOP program as a whole having a recognizable name in the community. Given budget crises in the public sector and looming funding cuts, a high level of name recognition was considered particularly critical to the long term survival of the program. Some people suggested resuming the practice of providing presentations about STFY/MOP to community leaders to increase program awareness. One MOP agency commented that it is beginning to use the term “STFY” to describe itself, in the interest of building a coherent program identity.

Some participating agencies, partner agencies, and HSD staff identified the outcome evaluation currently underway as another crucial vehicle for building recognition of the program. These individuals argued that having data to prove the program’s positive impact on youth will not only attract community attention, it will be critical to securing ongoing funding.

### **Making things work for youth and families**

The focus of the program is to make things work better for youth and families through coordination of resources. While many stakeholders believe the program is successful in doing this, they also identified ways such coordination could be strengthened further. Two specific areas of focus are agencies working together to find solutions to problems youth and families face, and developing a clearinghouse of services for clients.

- Finding solutions to problems faced

The challenges that youth and families face are complex and constantly changing, as are the services available to help them. While the program is able to help clients find solutions to most of their problems, many stakeholders believe that there are easier ways to do this work. Almost all of the case managers interviewed expressed the desire to have more time with their colleagues to discuss specific cases and support each other in identifying solutions (though one person did not want this). Most suggested using case manager meetings as an ideal forum for this sort of collaboration, seeing it

as a more productive use of their time and as an opportunity to build stronger relationships among themselves.

Some participating agencies also expressed an interest in further developing the current collaborative network so they can turn to each other for help with particular youth and draw on each other's unique strengths and specialties. (For example, a case manager from one agency could collaborate with another that can provide specialized services needed by a particular young person.) A few people stated that they do not think this sort of collaboration happens between agencies now, and a small number of people said they did not see the need for it.

*"I love the team aspect of STFY – with these cases, you need support. You need teamwork." (Case Manager)*

*"It would be great to have the meetings focus on sharing information, what services are available." (Case Manager)*

*"We need to spend more time together getting to know each other as people - we're more likely to access each other that way." (Case Manager)*

*"Let us get help from each other, collaborate and get what we need from each other." (Case Manager)*

*"We meet once a month – other than that we don't really see each other. I haven't found collaboration to be that good." (Case Manager)*

*"There's not much interplay between the agencies. It's not really needed. This is a straight case management model. The focus is on connecting [clients] to services needed." (Executive Director)*

*"Why do we need to collaborate with other agencies? It's not realistic, it's not part of the culture anymore." (Supervisor)*

*"Collaboration is important. If it's not working, then fix it, don't just throw it out." (Partner Agency)*

- Clearinghouse of available services

While case managers are usually successful in finding services for clients, many people mentioned that locating youth services can be a frustrating and complex process. Most thought it was impossible for individual case managers to be aware of all services that exist. Currently, many case managers gather information about available services either on their own or from each other at the monthly meetings. For greater efficiency and cost savings, some suggested that the responsibilities of the central referral function be expanded to include the development and ongoing maintenance of a referral

database of community services; case managers could then call the HSD and get referral information for their clients. This made more sense to people than having 24 case managers duplicating each other's efforts. They mentioned the Senior Information and Referral model as a good example of how information on available services can be organized quickly for clients.

Regardless of how information about available resources is gathered and shared among participating agencies, some interviewees believe that greater collaboration in this area would support the program in providing high quality and timely referral services to youth and families.

*"The [central referral function] would be great as a clearinghouse for us to find resources. Everyone could send or call information [there]. [They] could keep up on what is current and available. Otherwise, word does not make it around all the time."  
(Case Manager)*

### **Making things work for case managers**

It is abundantly clear that case managers are the heart of the STFY/MOP program and responsible for much of its success. The program achieves results for youth because of case managers who are knowledgeable, dedicated, and who receive the support they need to avoid burnout and continue to grow professionally. One of the responsibilities of the partnership is to ensure that all case managers receive such support.

- Salary levels

Participating agencies, partner agencies, and HSD staff agreed that many case managers are underpaid and that this issue needs attention in order to maintain the quality and integrity of the program. A few agencies have chosen to restructure their budgets and use additional resources in order to pay higher wages. Most case managers work very long hours and spend a lot of unpaid time helping their clients. Many often use their own personal resources to support clients as well. This, combined with complex and difficult cases, leads to burnout and high staff turnover, which can negatively affect clients.

*"I think the city can be more sensitive to what they're asking case managers to do, especially for the amount of pay they're getting. I think that's why people are so upset and vocal."  
(Case Manager)*

*"I'd like to pay case managers more money. I'd like to give them more, so they can stay. If the program is going to continue to be successful, we're going to have to address that."  
(HSD Staff)*

*“All the anger in meetings is from one thing: having too much paperwork and being underpaid...” (Case Manager)*

*“The economy also affects salaries we’re paying. The incremental increases from the city have been low. Turnover among case managers is connected to salary.” (Supervisor)*

- Support within own agency

The comments of many interviewees suggest that most agencies within the program are successful in providing strong support to their case managers, and that case managers need strong support in order to do optimal work with youth and families. Such support includes training, individual supervision, positive feedback, assistance with difficult cases, and enough autonomy to accomplish their work. A few people, however, shared the perspective that some agencies do not provide adequate support to case managers, who get little training, minimal positive feedback, and are not given the freedom to make contacts on their own.

It is worth noting here the strong statements of admiration and respect that some agency administrators made about the case managers on their staff. In fact, many people recognized case managers as the heart of the program’s success, and commented on the dedication and quality of STFY/MOP case managers as a whole.

*“Staff need to be in a structure that supports them to do best job they can. I try to make sure they have good supervision, have manageable jobs, access to senior management to solve problems, recognition for doing a good job. We need staff/professional development – we have lot of young staff at their first job.” (Supervisor)*

*“I can’t give case managers enough credit - they have a hard job.” (Supervisor)*

*“Case managers need support from their agencies - letting case managers know how valued they are - they do better work then.” (Supervisor)*

*“They (case managers) are the best. I’m very proud of the case management team.” (HSD staff)*

*“Case managers have been steady at some places, but there’s been a lot of turnover at others. It’s burnout. And, supervisors are not supportive of staff at some agencies.” (Partner Agency)*

- Support from other case managers

Some case managers commented that support from their peers is an important part of what keeps them going, but that the opportunity to get such support has been lost with the current format of meetings. As described in the previous section, they believe that spending more time in meetings talking about client cases, problem solving together, and just sharing time together in an informal way would allow them to better support each other.

### **Building relationships with partners**

The STFY/MOP partnership cannot provide quality services to youth and families without a strong web of relationships to support it. Three elements related to building relationships within the partnership emerged from the interview data.

- Establishing trust

Some participating and partner agencies noted that trust must be established with each other the same way it must be established with clients. As with clients, this takes time, commitment, and a willingness to understand the perspective of others. These interviewees expressed the opinion that the basics of spending time talking and getting to know each other is important, and that more time doing this should be built into meetings. One factor influencing the ability to establish trust that some people did speak to is the size of the partnership. The number of agencies involved has increased over the years, and for some this makes it more difficult to get to know one another and share expertise.

- Collaborator meetings

The majority of participating agencies shared the view that meetings are a great opportunity to build relationships, but that the current format of meetings does not achieve this. Some people expressed the opinion that current meetings are not an effective use of their time. They believe that meetings give them little useful information that can help them do their jobs day to day. Some commented that this has been particularly true since the evaluation process began; they believe that too much time has been given over to complaints from a few and meetings have deteriorated into arguing. As one person said, “It is exhausting and a waste of time for the rest of us to listen to.” Other comments identified a lack of shared understanding about the purpose of some meetings.

There are a number of changes to meeting content and structure that were suggested by participating and partner agencies during interviews:

- ◆ Participating agencies should set the agenda
- ◆ Facilitation of meetings should rotate among participating agencies
- ◆ The focus of meetings should be on client issues, how to resolve these issues, and resources available
- ◆ Complaints by a limited number of people should not be allowed to take up meeting time – they should be handled individually
- ◆ Trainings should focus on the issues case managers are currently grappling with
- ◆ Trainings should be practical and emphasize hands-on skill practice, not knowledge or lectures
- ◆ People should be invited to meetings who can give specific case consultation assistance, (e.g, Dr. Troupin at Children’s Hospital giving advice on dealing with mental health issues)
- ◆ Meetings should rotate among various locations, including partner agencies such as schools, police department, etc.
- ◆ There should be periodic joint meetings with case managers and supervisors to facilitate consistency of communication
- ◆ There should be minutes of meetings kept and distributed, with a clear record of what decisions were made

*“I question the worth of having separate meetings – it works against having all of us on the same page. Some supervisors are good at communicating, some are not.”  
(Supervisor)*

*“The best thing meetings could do is let us get help from each other, collaborate and get what we need from each other.” (Case Manager)*

*“Meetings have been a shouting match in the last three months...it’s been that way since we instituted new paperwork. People are so against it, it turned into ‘us against them.’ There needs to be a healing process.” (Case Manager)*

*“We’re going through the process now of defining meetings, what the case manager meeting is, what supervisors’ meeting is, how they can be most effective.” (HSD Staff)*

*“I think it would be great to include school staff in our meetings, perhaps rotate meetings through schools.” (Case Manager)*

- Working with Juvenile Justice, Seattle School District, and the Seattle Police Department

The majority of youth, parents, participating agencies, and partner agencies mentioned how important it is for case managers to be working and communicating with the courts, juvenile probation counselors, school staff, and police detectives. Many case managers have established personal working relationships with the key partners they need to help youth be successful.

These relationships support success in a number of ways. As mentioned previously, many parents and youth benefit from the links that case managers have to the educational and criminal justice systems. Case managers help clients, particularly non-English speaking families, understand how the system works and what they need to do. Some case managers also call together teams representing all the partners involved in STF/MOP. These teams work together to manage a young person's case utilizing the expertise and contacts of all members; this model for providing services to youth drew high praise from some people interviewed. Strong relationships between case managers and police detectives also support success. Many people interviewed described the benefits of having detectives available to provide safety, track down runaways, and join forces for home visits. Some case managers and detectives utilize a "good cop/bad cop" approach to youth, with the detective playing the "bad cop" while the case manager plays the positive, supportive role. They believe this combination works well.

The primary concern in this area that people voiced in interviews was the variation among these institutions in terms of quality of work and perceived willingness to work together. This seems to be true on both an individual level as well as a systemic level. Individually, case managers find some partners (both school staff and probation counselors) great to work with while others are challenging. Referring partners make the same observation about case managers, describing some as wonderful and others to whom they do not refer. A few interviewees mentioned that some detectives "have big hearts and love their work," while others just seem to be waiting to be assigned to another position. On a systemic level, many participating agencies praised the police department and described the partnership between social services agencies and police as one of the strongest elements of the program. At the same time, they described the juvenile justice system as very difficult to work with. The challenge for the partnership is not only to support case managers in building the individual relationships that benefit youth, but also to identify and implement strategies for building relationships between all of the different institutions and systems that are involved in young people's lives.

*"Relationships are very individualized. If you get along with the other person, things go well. If not, it's difficult." (Supervisor)*

*"I didn't have a great opinion of police officers, but I've really liked working with the detectives. I've had nothing but good relationships with them." (Case Manager)*

*"We have a great relationship with the Seattle Police Department...Schools are very opposed to us." (Case Manager)*

*“We’re lucky – staff here have relationships with city employees. We have a good history with detectives...It’s not as clear with juvenile probation. I’m not sure that, as a system, probation is as forthcoming as we might like...the system sometimes makes it difficult for us to serve kids who are incarcerated.” (Executive Director)*

*“Some probation counselors are utilize STFY, but a lot of them think in terms of the detectives only. They’re not aware of the case management piece.” (Partner Agency)*

*“If someone doesn’t call back, or doesn’t show up, I don’t go back to them. Some of the STFY case managers don’t want to collaborate...My experience with STFY agencies is variable – some are great, and some are pretty bad.” (Partner Agency)*

*“For us, connection with schools is a powerful part of the program. Our connection with juvenile probation is non-existent.” (Supervisor)*

## **Meeting funder expectations**

The services provided by the STFY/MOP partnership are partially funded by the Families and Education Levy, administered through the Human Services Department of the City of Seattle. As funders and program administrators, both the Levy and the HSD have certain expectations about what the program is and what it is intended to accomplish. Maintaining clarity about these expectations on the part of the HSD and meeting these expectations on the part of participating agencies are both important aspects of a successful partnership.

- Who is served

As described in a previous section of this report, almost everyone involved in the partnership believes that the program needs to clarify the question of who it serves. There are several facets to this question: What are Levy expectations related to the program’s target population? What are HSD expectations? Is the program still an anti-gang program? If so, to what extent does the current client caseload reflect that target population? If not, who is the intended target population? Who, if anybody, should not be served by the program?

In addition to the questions above, HSD staff as well as a number of participating agencies expressed concern about two categories of unmet needs that the program should be addressing. These include young people in the geographical area of Lake City, Ballard and North Seattle, and young people from under-served ethnic groups.

- Case management model

STFY/MOP is designed to be a case management program. The definition of case management that emerged from comments by participating agencies, partner agencies and HSD staff includes these staff behaviors:

- ◆ Identifying issues and services needed
- ◆ Not solving issues for clients
- ◆ Teaching skills/helping clients be empowered to solve problems themselves
- ◆ Teaching clients how to navigate through systems
- ◆ Being a broker of services (e.g., making phone calls, finding contacts for clients)
- ◆ Being a mentor/positive role model
- ◆ Offering support
- ◆ Listening/caring about youth
- ◆ Having a positive attitude/believing youth will make it

While most agencies and case managers are conducting their work according to this model of case management, there seems to be some uncertainty related to whether this service delivery model is used consistently throughout the program. The primary question broached by a handful of people was whether some clients receive services that more resemble long term counseling than case management. A related concern noted by a few interviewees was that some case managers have a tendency to do things directly for clients rather than teaching them how to do things for themselves, thus undermining one of the goals of case management.

This issue of consistent adherence to a case management model is complicated by the fact that agencies involved in the program have different orientations and are at different stages of organizational development. Some are relatively large mental health agencies with long histories, while others are smaller, grassroots, advocacy-focused agencies that were established relatively recently. These differences naturally lead to different ways of working and perhaps to different assumptions about what clients most need and even what “case management” means. As the program works to build and maintain the partnership, it will be important to continually clarify the program model and explicitly articulate any expectations that may exist about the form services take.

*“Case management is very tangible. It fills needs, we go to court, get meals. Some like to counsel, but case management should be left to dealing with issues with clients, getting them into systems, linking with other services.” (Case Manager)*

*“I think that agencies have a natural tendency to fill the programs they have – if an agency is mental health focused, they probably will provide mental health services. What we want them to do is very simple. Get them out of gangs. Get them to go to school. Don’t ask them to do mental health services.” (HSD Staff)*

- Agency contract issues

Every participating agency shares similar financial concerns. Budget crises exist at all levels of government. Funders are changing their guidelines and criteria for funding. Many agencies have to apply and compete for funding that once was guaranteed. For many agencies, the result of this financial uncertainty is a high level of stress.

Financial concerns and their related stresses have particular impact on program contract issues, and interview comments suggest that this is currently an area of significant frustration for a few participating agencies. One of the primary contract frustrations mentioned was the requirement that only one of the defined core outcomes can be met (and compensated) during the entire time a client is enrolled in the program. From the perspective of some agencies, this does not fairly compensate them for all the hard work they do on behalf of clients. Others worry because they perceive the annual contract timeframe as not realistic or adequate for successfully addressing the difficult issues that some of their youth face.

Additional contract frustrations have emerged specifically within the context of the current evaluation process. While many participating agencies see the ultimate value of the new requirements, some also expressed frustration with the new consent forms and additional paperwork connected to ongoing program evaluation.

*“I’m not happy with the new consent forms, or waiver to know data on kids. It’s making me sell out, as I see it...Also the new data system – they want case managers to meet with schools, juvenile justice, etc., and then come back and do what I consider an additional job of data entry.” (Case Manager)*

*“The hard part is the necessary component of getting consent forms...if I were a parent, I’d be unwilling to sign it.” (Case Manager)*

*“We would like to have a meeting with the City to understand the changes [with] the new forms and invoices. We want to be sure we do it right.” (Case Manager)*

*“I’m concerned that the evaluation is driving the way services are being offered. We’re spending too much time with data entry, and less and less time with clients...We need to be careful that contracts don’t encourage programs to cream the easy-to-serve kids to meet quotas.” (Executive Director)*

*“I dislike not being able to duplicate core outcomes. I adamantly disagree. Kids should be able to be successful with core outcomes more than one time.” (Supervisor)*

*“It must be frustrating for case managers not to be able to demonstrate small things: a kid sits still and talks to them, or feels trust. Small things that are hard to measure. For example, a kid leaves school after the case manager has gotten them back, and the case manager gets them back in again. Can you count it twice?” (Supervisor)*

## **Making an impact**

The collaborative aspect of the STFY/MOP program enables it to have a positive impact on the community and on participating agencies themselves that would be unlikely in the absence of the partnership.

- Impact on the community

While no question was specifically asked during interviews about the impact of the program on the community, several people mentioned the positive effect they believe it has had. Some commented on the fact that they are able to provide services to the entire spectrum of ages as a result of their participation in the program, and they believe this contributes to increased stability within the communities they serve. Communities also have access to more comprehensive services as a result of the program. Others interviewed attributed the overall decrease of gang activity in Seattle during the past decade to the work of the STFY/MOP program.

*“We’ve made an impact on the community in terms of the kids and families we’ve worked with.” (Executive Director)*

*“[The program] helps within the community – they know this is a program that builds on kids’ assets, without undermining the community. They see that community-based organizations can come together.” (Supervisor)*

*“We’re able to serve young people – we couldn’t without [the program]. That’s a benefit to us, in terms of building stability within the communities we serve. We’re able to provide more comprehensive services.” (Supervisor)*

*“As we’ve become more established, we’re going to court a lot less. Kids are not getting re-arrested, or we teach them how to work with the system. We’ve created some self-sufficiency in the community.” (Executive Director)*

*“I think we’ve had some impact on the recidivism rate, which is our goal.” (Partner Agency)*

- Impact on agencies

While some interviewees did not perceive any positive effect here, many participating agencies had several things to say about how their participation in the program has benefited them as an organization. Examples of these benefits are listed below.

- ◆ Agencies are able to provide a broader continuum of services, or provide services to additional populations they otherwise would not be able to work with.
- ◆ Agencies have experienced greater financial stability as a result of the program's longevity.
- ◆ The program helps agencies develop and maintain relationships with the police department, schools, and the juvenile justice system. These relationships strengthen other agency programs as well.
- ◆ The program has enhanced the reputations of agencies within the community.
- ◆ The expertise of all staff within agencies has been enhanced by the knowledge and resources of STFY/MOP case managers.
- ◆ Agencies have developed new programs as a result of their participation in STFY/MOP.
- ◆ Agencies have connections to other organizations in the community that they otherwise would not have.

## **ENSURING QUALITY OF SERVICES & PROCESSES**

The third critical function that the STFY/MOP program must fulfill in order to be successful and achieve its mission is to ensure that services and program processes meet high standards of quality. There are two questions related to this function: how are things working now, and what capacity does the program have to make changes when things are not working well?

The key stakeholders interviewed identified the following primary issues connected to ensuring the overall quality of the STFY/MOP program:

### How services are working

- Case management practices
- Supervision and support for case managers

### How processes are working

- Role clarity
- Decision-making
- Communication

### Making changes

- Identifying problems
- Finding solutions
- Ensuring follow-through

## **How services are working**

- Case management practices

All of those interviewed were in general agreement on what the key components of high quality case management are. The components most strongly emphasized by many as critical to success included:

- ◆ Building trust and strong relationships with clients
- ◆ Meeting youth “where they are”
- ◆ Basing services on a thorough and individualized assessment
- ◆ Having thorough knowledge of resources available to help clients (or access to that knowledge)
- ◆ Working with partners to provide team support to clients
- ◆ Providing services that are culturally appropriate for youth and families

Based on interviews done with all stakeholder groups, including youth and parents, the STFY/MOP program is demonstrating significant success in implementing these components of effective case management practices. Moreover, it is the combination of these components that contributes to the program’s success in helping young people turn their lives around, and makes the program somewhat unique in the field of youth services. For example, many interviewees commented on the program expectation that case managers should and will go out into the community to find youth and work with them there rather than wait for them to come to the case manager’s office (which many young people would never do). People identified this expectation as one aspect of the STFY/MOP approach to case management that sets it apart from every other program they implement. In essence, STFY/MOP case managers are not just brokers of services for their clients, and the combination of trust, respect, and individualized attention that young people experience in the program seems to be the exact element that fosters growth and change in their lives.

While case management practices are clearly working well in the STFY/MOP program, there are still ways in which the partnership could work to sustain its success in this area and continue to ensure the quality of services. For example, some of those interviewed expressed concern about inconsistencies among program staff (including both case managers and personnel from partner agencies) in terms of both skill level and commitment. Some described a reluctance to refer to specific individual or agencies based on past experiences. Supporting all agencies and individuals in providing high quality services seems to be a task best addressed by the entire partnership working together, whether that task is accomplished through training, mentoring, or other forms of professional development.

*“Staffing works best when we pull together all the key people in a kid’s life, and talk it out as a team. Case managers can play an important role in setting up team meetings which are very valuable and help define all the players’ roles.” (Partner Agency)*

*“We mentor them. We have knowledge of resources. Kids are sponges. They are out there looking for things but don’t know how to do it. So you do it with them. Show them how.” (Case Manager)*

*“[Case managers] have that rapport – not all counselors do. They genuinely care. There’s a difference between doing your job for the money and doing it because you genuinely care. Don’t ever put anybody in there who doesn’t care.” (Parent)*

*“What makes case management work is having the knowledge to refer. Knowledge to assess a client and their needs. Being able to communicate effectively with clients and understand them.” (Case Manager)*

*“The relationships I’ve built definitely help the process.” (Case Manager)*

*“You have to have a heart, love the work and have genuine concern for clients...It doesn’t work if you are just buying your time in a position. People know whether you’re real or not. What comes from the heart goes to the heart. You can tell which case managers have the heart for it.” (Partner Agency)*

*“One of the assets of STFY is the expectation that case managers will go where the kids are. That’s different from all other grants.” (Supervisor)*

- Supervision and support for case managers

This report has already described the importance of strong supervision and support for case managers at the agency level. While supervision can be viewed as a matter for individual organizations, the consistency and quality of supervision across the partnership does have implications for overall program success. Within STFY and MOP, there are currently different opinions on how well individual supervision is working as a tool for maintaining the quality of services. A few people interviewed believe that some case managers do not receive adequate supervision or support at the agency level; many others believe that individual supervision is working fine. A handful of interviewees expressed the opinion that the program overall is not providing sufficient training and skill development opportunities to case managers.

## **How processes are working**

While positive outcomes for youth and families flow directly from the actual services provided by the STFY/MOP program, there are also several key program processes that are necessary to support the quality of those services over time.

- Role clarity

As one interviewee noted, “It is important for all of us to understand our role.” This is especially true in a program such as STFY/MOP, where there are many different entities involved. For the most part, people do seem clear about the broad divisions of labor within the program: the HSD coordinates the grant, oversees contracts, and maintains the central referral process; participating agencies provide case management services and are responsible for outcomes; and partner agencies provide referrals and work in tandem with case managers to provide services.

Clarity about roles begins to break down, however, when people get into the details of how things work. One example of this relates to the role of each HSD staff person within the program. Many interviewees expressed confusion about who does what at the HSD, and frustration at not knowing who to call with what questions. Some requested having one contact person rather than many as a way to address this confusion. The central referral process is another example of lack of role clarity. While HSD staff can clearly articulate the purpose of that process and of the position that supports it, interview comments suggest that many participating agencies do not to share that depth of understanding, whether they support the central referral process or not.

A few people mentioned areas of role confusion that are related directly to how services are provided. For example, one individual at a participating agency described being asked sometimes by the HSD to make a cold call to a youth or parent, and said, “I’m unclear if this is a referral from the city, or a potential referral... am I the one to decide if it’s a STFY kid?” This individual and a few others also described confusion about how to make cross referrals to other agencies if a young person would be best served by somebody else. While this reflects, in part, lack of clarity about a particular procedure, it also suggests confusion about the roles of participating agencies vis-à-vis each other. Do all agencies share the commitment to cross refer when appropriate? If a cross referral is made, whose case is it? If agencies team up to provide services to one youth, how do they clarify their respective roles? While many people may have a clear understanding of the answers to these questions, others do not.

A final issue related to role clarity is the distinction between STFY and MOP. While the HSD and some participating agencies refer to one program and consider them folded together, other agencies clearly identify with either one program or the other. There were also several comments from participating agencies about the differences between the philosophies and target populations of the two programs, one person referring to them as “apples and oranges.” It will be important to define the relationship between STFY and MOP before addressing other critical issues such as clarifying the overall target population for the program.

*“It’s been rocky – people are insecure about their roles. It was really strained about a year ago – it’s better now because people know the parameters.” (HSD staff)*

*“MOP is different from STFY – there’s less connection to the police department, for example.” (Supervisor)*

*“The barriers between STFY and MOP are, in my opinion, in name only. They started out very differently, but for the last 7-8 years they’ve been the same. MOP gravitated toward STFY, and both now are getting closer to what we want.” (HSD Staff)*

*“We only work with STFY agencies, not MOP.” (Partner Agency)*

*“When we meet together, we’re just two different projects. STFY is gang related, works with police. MOP is intake and assessment, referral. It’s two different philosophies. We have not made referrals to each other.” (Executive Director)*

- Decision-making

Decision making is closely tied to the issue of role clarity. Indeed, one of the primary themes that emerged in this area was confusion about who the decision makers are within the program and what decisions are appropriate to which roles. For example, many people referred to past instances when case managers were allowed by HSD staff to make decisions at meetings about issues such as contracts or whether supervisors should be included in case manager meetings. Many supervisors and Executive Directors perceived these decisions as inappropriate to the role of case managers, and commented on the divisions these situations sowed within individual agencies. Despite the fact that the HSD has changed its approach to how such decisions are made, the frustration caused by these situations was still very much in evidence during interviews.

Interviews also revealed some additional challenges in the area of decision making, which include:

- ◆ Lingered confusion about who has final decision making authority for any given decision
- ◆ Frustration (for some) with the lack of influence they perceive they have over decisions that affect their jobs
- ◆ Frustration with the length of the decision making process
- ◆ Frustration (for some) that meeting time is taken up with ongoing complaints from a minority of people about decisions that have already been made
- ◆ Frustration (for some) with the directive style of decision making they perceive within the HSD (especially related to the evaluation process)

It should be noted that the HSD has recognized decision making as a problematic area, and has taken steps to clarify decision making processes and program responsibilities. These efforts can serve as a foundation for continued attention to this area.

*“It’s unclear who has the final say.” (Supervisor)*

*“My feelings about this are based on my experience of the evaluation process. Decisions were made, re-made, and made again. I never really knew what the bottom line was. There was so much time for agencies to give feedback – I started to tune it out.” (Supervisor)*

*“I need to point out that we call it a consortium, but...we bear most responsibility, and we have the money. Previously a lot of decision making was ambiguous, but in the past 1½ years we’ve been more clear. I think the lines are clear about how decision making happens, and I think there’s a leadership role we need to continue to provide and not be ashamed of that.” (HSD staff)*

*“It was not clear what the decision making process was for the evaluation. But it was an exhausting process. Our input didn’t matter. People weren’t heard.” (Executive Director)*

*“We’ve made clear to agencies what the decision making process is, who to go to. [In the past] it has been ambiguous.” (HSD staff)*

*“They’re trying really hard to involve people [in decisions], but in a way they’re involving too many people, and at a shallow level. We’re not getting into the meat of the issues.” (Supervisor)*

*“There are too many people responsible for decisions in the HSD. Lots of people you have to get answers from...No one seems to know who has the authority or last word to give an answer to you.” (Executive Director)*

*“The directors would like to have the City and the Executive Directors talk about which realms of decision making belong where. For example, when things come up at contract time, they talk to the case managers and we don’t hear about it, but the city’s position is ‘you’ve heard about this.’” (Executive Director)*

- Communication

Given the close ties between decision making, role clarity, and communication, it is not surprising that the views expressed about communication are similar to those described in the previous two sections. As with decision making, opinions vary as to how well communication within the program is working. One person commented that communication is “pretty good,” and one partner agency expressed appreciation for the effectiveness of communication between case managers and the police detectives. Many people, however, expressed a variety of frustrations with the state of communication between the HSD and participating agencies.

One view was that communication, like decision making, is complicated by the number of HSD staff involved. Some people described hearing slightly different information from different HSD staff about the same question, creating confusion and “mixed messages.” Others described feeling overwhelmed by the amount of communication they receive from the HSD. Another view was that the lines of communication throughout the program are inefficient, closed, or confused: “loops haven’t been closed,” information “trickles down” from supervisors to case managers, or case managers are “not being heard.”

*“Things trickle down from supervisors. As it passes through, you get too many people involved in passing messages.” (Case Manager)*

*“When we’ve wanted to bring issues to meetings, we’ve been told we can’t do that...I’ve talked to other case managers in other agencies – they have the same problems. They feel like they’re not being heard.” (Case Manager)*

*“Some agencies got meetings about the contracts, others did not. You have to be persistent in asking to meet with the City.” (Case Manager)*

*“Communication between the police department and case managers is impressive. I can go to either one of them, and get a good feel for what’s going on altogether.” (Partner Agency)*

*“There’s too much communication from the City. I feel overwhelmed by it – can’t process it all. They’re trying to be helpful, but I feel smothered by it.” (Supervisor)*

*“The more players at the City, the harder it is to communicate.” (Supervisor)*

*“Historically, loops haven’t been closed. I’m never quite clear on how communication is supposed to be flowing. Staff have been continually frustrated – they haven’t gotten information, and then are blamed for something they didn’t know about. The [program] model seems interesting and effective, but confusing doesn’t even begin to describe it.” (Supervisor)*

## **Making changes**

One key factor in any program's ability to offer and ensure quality services is its capacity to make changes when necessary. The capacity to make changes rests on two key skills: the ability to identify problems, and the ability to find and implement solutions to those problems.

- Identifying problems

There seems to be a fair amount of clarity within the STFY/MOP program about the key problems and challenges. This is true both for service-related problems (such as the lack of certain kinds of resources for youth and their families) and process-related problems (such as lack of decision making clarity). Participating agencies, partner agencies, and HSD staff all tend to identify similar issues in terms of what is going well in the program and what is frustrating. This consistency of view is a strength of the program.

- Finding and implementing solutions

Once problems are identified, the second step in making changes to improve programs is finding and implementing solutions. Clearly, the STFY/MOP program has a long history of doing this. The program has existed for almost fifteen years, and in that time has adapted to the challenges inherent in changing funding sources, a growing partnership, and constant shifts in the needs of clients and the community resources available to serve them.

However, the process evaluation interviews revealed one significant obstacle to the program's ability to find and implement solutions to its current challenges. This obstacle is the extent to which people seem to be entrenched in their views about current (and past) problems and disagreements. Even though the expertise within the partnership is more than adequate to solve many of the existing problems if people work together to do so, disagreement seems to have paralyzed the group and prevented forward movement. This in turn contributes to a growing level of frustration and deteriorating trust. Finding a way to recognize and shift the patterns of group functioning that keeps this dynamic in place will be essential for continued success in the future. The recommendations below offer some suggested first steps.

The final step in making changes is to ensure that chosen solutions to problems are actually implemented. The current capacity of the program to follow through in this way is unclear. Some people interviewed expressed frustration at the lack of follow through that they perceived on specific issues. At the same time, the HSD has already identified many problems as the result of the evaluation process that it intends to take action to change (e.g. altering the format of meetings). As any changes are implemented, it will be important to build into the process opportunities to reflect on progress and ensure continued forward movement.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, process evaluation interviews indicate that the STFY/MOP program is achieving considerable success in providing high quality case management services that lead to positive changes in the lives of young people and their families. The recommendations below are intended to sustain that success. Some of them are focused on issues of sustaining or improving service quality or service delivery, which are clearly tied to program results. Some of the recommendations are focused on improving key program processes related to decision making, communication, and role clarity. While these organizational issues do not necessarily have a direct impact on the quality of services, they do at the least divert time and energy away from service-related activities and create inefficiencies in the system. We believe that the program will become stronger by addressing these issues and allowing the energy that they are currently consuming to be directed toward working together to provide and improve services.

While some of the following recommendations are directed toward the program's participating agencies, many of them are directed to the Human Services Department. This is not because we perceive the HSD to be the entity primarily responsible for either creating the current challenges or finding and implementing solutions. We believe that all partners to the program share responsibility for these things. However, we do recognize that the HSD holds a powerful position in STFY/MOP as both funder and program administrator, and we believe that the program would benefit from HSD staff taking a leadership role in implementing these recommendations.

Prior to developing these recommendations, evaluators held four meetings during the month of September 2002 with different stakeholder groups: 1) HSD staff; 2) executive directors; 3) case managers, supervisors and partner agency staff; and 4) parents and youth. The purpose of these meetings was to share the preliminary findings of the process report, facilitate discussion, and generate ideas for possible next steps to both sustain program successes and address challenges. Notes from these meetings were provided to HSD staff, and some of the ideas generated in those discussions are incorporated into the recommendations below.

## **I. Celebrate the program's ongoing successes.**

The program has had many ongoing successes in meeting youth and family needs and building partnerships. It is important to celebrate these successes regularly and acknowledge the hard work it takes from everybody to achieve them, especially as the program turns its attention to addressing the challenges it faces. Such celebration can be one part of an effort to strengthen the support case managers receive.

## **II. Build up the collaborative team aspect of the STFY/MOP program.**

One of the strongest elements of the program mentioned by many interviewees is the collaboration that exists between participating agencies and SPD detectives. Some interviewees also mentioned their experience working with teams of providers pulled together by case managers, including school personnel, probation counselors, and other relevant providers (e.g. mental health or drug/alcohol specialists) as well as police detectives, and how effective this approach to case management is. We recommend that HSD staff work with agencies to identify ways that this collaborative team approach can be strengthened and spread through the program, so that it becomes the expected and accepted way that all young people's cases are handled. We believe that this would not only benefit individual youth who are currently in the program, but also build bridges and relationships between different systems and institutions involved in young people's lives that would benefit other youth and programs as well.

**III. Work together to institute measures in support of consistent service quality across the STFY/MOP program.**

Supporting all agencies and individuals in providing high quality services seems to be a task best addressed by the entire partnership. We recommend that HSD staff initiate conversation with agency directors to begin to identify strategies for both sustaining the high quality of services that currently exists as well as ensuring that quality of services is consistently high across the program. Options for accomplishing this might include external audits and case record reviews, strong individual supervision at the agency level, peer review teams, and regular discussion at collaborator meetings about how specific cases are going and what additional support case managers might need in order to apply effective case management principles. There may be additional options for ensuring quality services that can be identified through discussion within the partnership.

**IV. Use a program-wide meeting (see next recommendation) to identify strategies for supporting case managers.**

All partners within STFY/MOP recognize case managers as the heart of the program; maintaining the skill and commitment of case managers is critical to sustaining the program's success. We recommend that the partnership use one of the quarterly program-wide meetings (see next recommendation) to identify strategies for enhancing support of case managers. This meeting should include discussion of what supports currently exist, what case managers need that they are not currently getting, how the program can ensure that all case managers receive adequate support, what agencies can contribute, what the HSD can contribute, what case managers themselves can contribute, and what resources exist that can be directed toward case manager support. Then, we recommend that HSD staff and agency directors decide together which strategies to prioritize and test. If possible, it might be useful in this process to gather information from previous case managers who are no longer with the program about the reasons they left.

**V. Restructure the meetings for case managers, supervisors, executive directors, and program partners in order to allow regular forums for both case manager collaboration and program-wide problem solving.**

We recommend that program meetings follow a quarterly format, such that every three months there are two case manager meetings devoted exclusively to case consultation and peer support, and one program-wide meeting (including executive directors, supervisors, case managers, partner agencies, and HSD staff) devoted to information sharing and problem solving related to program operations or services.

For the case manager meetings, we recommend that responsibility for hosting and facilitating rotate among participating agencies. Responsibilities of the host agency would include:

- Providing food and space
- Facilitating the meeting
- Scheduling any desired speakers (chosen by the group at previous meetings)
- Writing meeting minutes and distributing them to all partners
- Tracking any challenges or issues that arise and communicating them to the appropriate HSD staff person for inclusion on the agenda of the program-wide problem solving meeting

We recommend that the quarterly program-wide meetings be three hours long, and focused on sharing necessary information, addressing ongoing issues that have been identified at the case manager meetings, problem solving any service or process-related obstacles that the program is facing, and identifying who is responsible for following through on any decisions made. We suggest that HSD staff facilitate these meetings (or use an outside facilitator), and be responsible for some bulleted items above as applicable.

We also recommend that the program use the quarterly problem-solving meetings to systematically tackle the most pressing topics that affect quality of services and service delivery. For example, an agenda item for one meeting might be clarifying the program's target population, improving the effectiveness of the referral process, or developing strategies for building a stronger relationship with the juvenile justice system. We want to emphasize again that it is critical that these discussions happen within a clearly defined framework in order to avoid the wheel-spinning that has characterized some past discussions: What is the purpose of the discussion? What question is the discussion meant to answer? If a decision will be made, whose decision is it and what process will be used to make it?

Finally, we suggest evaluating the effectiveness of these meetings on a regular basis. First, set aside five or ten minutes at the end of every meeting to verbally assess how the meeting went. Consider what worked well and what did not work well in terms of both content and process of the meeting, and record the discussion in the meeting minutes. Second, use a combination of anonymous survey and verbal discussion to

evaluate this new quarterly schedule for meetings after the first six to nine months of implementation. Are people getting what they need out of both case manager and program-wide meetings? Do the meetings support the success and effectiveness of the program? What changes should be considered?

**VI. Clarify the decision making roles and processes to be used throughout the program as a whole.**

It is the opinion of the evaluators that a vast majority of the frustration and misunderstanding that currently exists within the program could be decreased, if not eliminated, by establishing and using clear roles and processes for decision making. We recommend that HSD staff work with agency directors to develop a draft decision making matrix that outlines who is responsible for which type of decisions throughout the program (particularly considering any decisions that might be necessary in order to implement any of these recommendations), and what decision making processes will be used (i.e. consensus, majority vote, HSD decides, agencies decide, etc.). Present that draft to supervisors, case managers, and partner agencies with the purpose of getting input and feedback, finalize the decision making matrix taking their input into consideration, and share the final product with all partners.

Going to the effort of clarifying decision making roles and processes will be useful only to the extent that the end result becomes an ongoing working tool for the partnership. To that end, we recommend that all decisions made at meetings are tracked and recorded in meeting minutes, which are then made available to all meeting participants. We also suggest that those individuals in the position of facilitating meetings develop the habit of verbally clarifying the decision making process as often as possible, especially in situations when the group is bogged down in disagreement and unable to move forward. Finally, we recommend that both HSD and partner agencies guard against going around the system if there is a decision or action that they disagree with; nothing undermines decision making clarity quite as quickly as inconsistency.

**VII. Clarify decision making, roles, and lines of communication within each partner agency.**

We recommend that each agency director work with his or her STF/MOP personnel to clarify issues of decision making, roles and responsibilities, and communication among themselves. For example, what are the mutual expectations that directors, supervisors, and case managers have of each other when it comes to implementing the STF/MOP program? How does each communicate with the others about information and/or decisions that come out of program meetings that are attended? How are STF/MOP decisions made within the agency, and are the most appropriate people making them? Directly addressing these and other related questions and resolving any confusion that may exist will support all staff in directing most of their energy and resources toward providing program services.

## **VIII. Use the future RFP process as an opportunity to further clarify roles and responsibilities.**

The City of Seattle City Council has mandated that all human service program dollars must be put out to bid in upcoming years. When this happens, it will inevitably shift the relationship between the HSD and STFY/MOP participating agencies. We recommend that the HSD use this unavoidable development as an opportunity to clearly define what it wants that relationship to be and the specific expectations it will have of the agencies that are successful in their bids. Communicating these expectations clearly during the request-for-proposals process will ensure that all bidding agencies are aware of what will be asked of them should their bids be successful. This clarity should serve to decrease the amount of confusion and frustration related to lack of shared understanding of roles and responsibilities. We recommend that the following issues be specifically clarified in the Request for Proposals:

### Service Expectations

- What are the desired results/outcomes for youth and/or families?
- Are there any limits on the model(s) or method(s) of service delivery that participating agencies be able to use to achieve those outcomes?
- Will agencies be asked to engage in any specific program-wide process to ensure the quality of services?

### Administrative/Organizational Expectations

- How will agencies be compensated for their work with clients?
- Will agencies be asked to work collaboratively together to provide services? What would such collaboration look like?
- What resources will be available to support collaboration?
- What will be the roles of staff at all levels of participating agencies?
- What will be the role(s) of HSD staff?
- What program and/or administrative decisions will be made by HSD staff? Which will be made by agencies? Which will be decided jointly? What decision-making process(es) will be used?
- What will be asked of agencies in terms of data collection and program evaluation?

## **IX. Explore possible changes to the current contract to address frustrations of agencies.**

Because there have already been several conversations between the HSD and agencies about frustrations related to the current contract, and nobody seems to feel heard, we recommend the following structured approach to this issue.

1. HSD staff put in writing their understanding of the primary frustrations agencies have with the current contract. Make sure that the concerns behind the frustrations are clearly understood.

2. Share this document with executive directors and supervisors of all agencies, ask for any additional information that might be needed, and check to ensure that HSD's understanding of the issues is clear and complete.
3. Review the contracts, bearing in mind both agency frustrations and current Levy expectations, and identify any changes that can be made to address the first without compromising the program's ability to fulfill the second. Thoroughly explore the reasoning and assumptions behind current contract expectations.
4. Communicate (verbally and in writing) any decisions or changes made to the agencies, as well as the rationale for those decisions or changes.
5. Ask for commitment from each agency to move forward despite any lingering frustration they may feel if the decisions or changes are not what they wanted.

**X. Consider a retreat to bring the partners together to build relationships and develop plans to address both organizational and service-related issues.**

During the feedback meetings with agency staff, people were asked to suggest first steps for addressing the most critical issues facing the STFY/MOP program. Many people responded with some version of "just sit down and talk about it." The idea for a retreat surfaced in two of those meetings. We recommend that the HSD consider the possibility of a program-wide retreat to address key issues and challenges, with the following caution.

We believe that a retreat will be successful in moving the program forward only if certain conditions are first in place. These include:

- Clear, shared understanding about the purpose of the retreat, groundrules or operating agreements for the group's interactions, and the decision making process(es) that will be used
- Shared belief that all individuals will participate in good faith, with commitment to resolving rather than re-hashing the issues on the table
- Shared willingness to examine not only the program issues but the patterns of group interaction that block resolution of the issues
- Shared willingness to perceive and work to understand areas of disagreement through the eyes of others
- A strong facilitator from outside the program who is skilled in observing and effectively intervening in group dynamics (ideally, we recommend two facilitators)
- Adequate time for all issues to be addressed thoroughly (we recommend 2 full days)

Without these conditions in place, the partnership runs the risk of spending retreat time simply re-cycling through the same issues in the same way they have been discussed up to now, with no resolution and no change. Checking for the existence of these conditions could be done through discussion at a program meeting, a simple anonymous paper survey, one-to-one conversations, pre-retreat interviews with the retreat facilitator(s), or some combination of these.

## CONCLUSION

From the perspective of program stakeholders – including participating and partner agencies, the Human Services Department, and youth and parents receiving services – the Seattle Team for Youth/Minority Outreach Program is achieving considerable success. Case managers are able to establish effective, respectful, and trusting relationships with the young people on their caseloads. Youth and their families receive culturally appropriate services that are tailored to their specific needs and situations. As a result of their participation in the STFY/MOP program, young people and their parents report a variety of positive changes in their lives, including increased academic success, reduced criminal or delinquent behavior, and a greater sense of empowerment both as parents and teens. (See Outcomes Report to be released in December 2002 for more quantitative information about program impact.)

The program also has a positive impact in areas beyond direct services to youth and families. It has resulted in stronger relationships between the Seattle Police Department and the participating agencies, relationships that enhance the success of agency programs other than STFY/MOP as well. It has contributed to stronger relationships among agencies themselves, as case managers collaborate and provide support to each other in their work with youth.

While many things are working well in STFY/MOP, stakeholders are clear that there are some challenges that need to be addressed in order to sustain the program's success. Some of these challenges are related to services, and include clarifying the program's target population, supporting case managers, strengthening the referral process, and addressing the systemic barriers to implementing a collaborative case management program model. Other challenges are related to organizational issues such as decision making, roles and responsibilities, and communication. As all of these challenges are addressed and resolved, a greater amount of energy and resources will become available to focus on continuing to provide excellent collaborative case management services to youth and their families.

The recommendations in this report are intended to offer various avenues for sustaining and building upon the achievements of the STFY/MOP program. While some are directed primarily to HSD staff and others are intended for participating agencies, we believe that the program will experience the most success if all partners share responsibility for addressing challenges and implementing solutions. Such collaboration around problem solving would mirror the collaboration that already exists in the arena of services, and strengthen the program overall. The STFY/MOP program has a solid foundation on which to build; given the expertise and knowledge that is shared among partners, we are confident that the resources for continued success are in place.