



The Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Children's Behavioral Health

Our Charge

On February 2, 2006, Mayor John Street provided us with a bold vision for transforming behavioral health services for children and their families. He challenged us to rethink our traditional ways of creating systems and charged us with being innovative, creative and most importantly, with being responsive to the needs of children and families in Philadelphia. As such, rather than revolving around identifying the systems needs and gaps, the planning process for the Blue Ribbon Commission on Children's Behavioral Health (BRC) will revolve around identifying strategies to increase our responsiveness, and ability to effectively address the needs of children. Specifically, the Commission is charged with developing a set of recommendations that can be used as a framework to improve our collective ability to promote wellness in all children, and to effectively treat children with a range of behavioral health needs.

Our Approach

The City of Philadelphia embraces a broad and inclusive view of behavioral health. Research indicates that all human competencies and problems are best understood by viewing people within their social, cultural, economic, geographic and historical contexts. This perspective is even more critical when working with children, as their ability to master developmental milestones is greatly impacted by the context in which they live and learn. The issues facing children and families in Philadelphia are complex and multifaceted. It is our belief that no single service system operating independently of others can provide the holistic and comprehensive approach that children and families deserve. We believe that change strategies are needed at multiple levels and across multiple systems in order to foster settings that promote competence and well-being for all children, as well as settings which are equipped to serve children with the most severe difficulties.

In order to ensure that the final recommendations of the BRC do not mirror the fragmentation that currently exists in many behavioral health systems, our planning process is guided by the following beliefs. First, in order to ensure that every child has an optimal chance for a healthy start in life, our approach to planning must include a broad group of stakeholders who represent the diverse needs of children in our community, with a particular emphasis on including the voices of parents and youth. Second, we believe that beginning the process with examining the needs of children will help us to redesign the service system in a way that is most effective for children and families, rather than most convenient for the service system. Third, as healthy children are most effectively cultivated by healthy communities, we are taking an ecological approach to addressing the needs of children. Rather than focus on the needs of children or families in isolation, the BRC will look at the context in which those needs are embedded in order to build on many of the natural supports that promote healthy child development. Finally, we believe that the planning process must be directed by a strengths-based approach. This means that children's needs are not merely defined by developmental deficits, community challenges, or gaps in our service systems. Instead needs are intertwined in a resilience perspective. As such, they are the opportunities, services and supports that are required to draw out and strengthen individual, family and community assets.