

## Summary of Participant Contributions

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### Background

On July 10, over 40 community members and youth-focused professionals gathered at White Mountains Community College to participate in a day-long opportunity to learn about recent research coming out of the UNH Carsey School of Public Policy's Coös Youth Study. The Coös Youth Study is a ten year project exploring young people's decisions about their educational and job opportunities in Coös County and their plans to stay in Coös or move away. Over 800 youth from the region have participated in the study since it began in 2008.

North Country Listens partnered with the research team to facilitate discussions following presentations on substance use and depression, family atmosphere and parenting implications for teens' future plans, school and community connectedness, and adolescents' use of out-of-school time. Below is a summary of the critical information participants shared with the research team about what they are seeing in their work and how the data gathered for the study can inform their practice on the ground.

### Summary

#### Substance Use and Depression in Coös County: Making Sense of National and Local Trends

##### *Key Research Findings:*

- Stressed-out Coös youth are at elevated risk for alcohol and/or drug use problems.
- Lower substance use is reported among Coös youth who have strong attachments to the community and who are most involved in positive activities.

##### *What stands out...*

- Data makes sense, not surprising. The information reinforces what we are seeing on the ground.
- Percentages of incidence of use are higher than expected.
- The connection between substance use and being connected to the community resonated. We are always stressing getting involved, but some kids just don't get involved. Why not? There are "chicken or the egg" issues with whether or not they get meaningfully connected.

##### *Key implications for your work...*

- Can the connections between community programs and schools be strengthened in order to better connect youth with prevention and positive programming?
- There is a lack of information across sub-regions - or even within sub-regions - about what resources or programs are available.
- There are barriers to connecting kids with community activities to create that attachment, including personal money, program money, but even then - some programs can't fill empty spots. We should look at the role of early childhood programming to begin to build community attachment earlier.
- What about the boys? There is a need for programming for boys in particular to increase their attachment to the community.

### *Insights and ideas...*

- Create opportunities for different things to do, build activities that connect kids to what is available in Coös (outdoors), but also take a look at how to get there (transportation) and the funding needed. There are differences to note regarding what type of activities to offer, including activities for older youth (teenagers) and different needs or approaches with boys and girls.
- Resources are needed in schools to connect students with the support and programming they need, often outside of school.
- Programs should be aimed toward prevention, not only treatment after a problem develops.
- Create an opportunity for programs, schools, and services to talk with and get to know each other's work so referrals are more seamless.
- Parent involvement and home life plays a major role.

### *Further research questions...*

- What's the socio-economic status of those who are attached to community? Is it the wealthier kids who feel more attached to community?
- What about parent's employment status?
- Can we learn more about the effect of the prison workers population?
- Is there a way to track transience? The number of folks who move in and out of a community? Is this a significant factor?
- Is attending community college seen as a way to "stay" or "leave"? In other words, how is attending community college perceived by young people?
- What are the primary drugs being used other than alcohol?
- How might legalization of marijuana impact our communities?
- Should treatment plans include greater community engagement/attachment related programming? Are there successful models out there that work?
- New research is needed on the role of parents and how it affects the data. What about when kids are raised by neighbors/grandparents?
- Are we tracking parent abuse in any way?
- What type of family climate supports identity development?
- Is there a question in the Youth Survey such as, "how do you feel your parents feel about you?" and your relationship with your parents?
- What is the impact of the number of siblings in household?
- Coös County is big. Can we see data in three sub-regions in the future?
- What do we know about the kids we have "lost" data on? Response rate versus not knowing where they are?
- Have we looked at the early characteristics of the kids that have now been "lost"?
- Early childhood connections – In the future could the data catch an earlier cohort than 7<sup>th</sup> graders?
- How do we capture grass roots efforts that are getting youth/young people involved and build on those? Do we know what programs are successful?
- Can the study ask, "Do you feel like you have self-value and purpose in your life?"
- Are students interacting less face to face? Learning to read body language? What is the effect of technology on social skills and attachment?
- Try to connect the Youth Risk Behavior Survey with these results – teachers and police officers really look at and know YRB data. There are personalities to each class year and the data can reflect that.
- Do we know what interventions kids have experienced? Are there standard ones that occur across schools and communities?

## How Family Atmosphere and Parenting are linked to the Nature of Teens' Future Plans

### *Key Research Findings:*

- For Coös youth, a chaotic home environment is linked with...
  - ...perceiving more obstacles in the future.
  - ...placing less importance on graduating high school.
  - ...placing less importance on living close to family in the future.
- Over half of surveyed youth (54%) reported that their parents encouraged them or their sibling to leave the area; youths' future plans are often congruent with their parents' messages to stay or leave.

### *What stands out...*

- Household chaos as a compelling concept.
- We want to know more about the individual aspects of household chaos and its implications.
- Parenting/chaotic home life is seen as root of problem.
- It is good that parenting and household income are separate from whether a home is chaotic. This is hopeful because things can be done to minimize chaos.
- The finding that household chaos and being impulsive is correlated is interesting.
- Interesting that household chaos impacts mastery of self.
- Gender differences are interesting.

### *Key implications for your work...*

- Approach household chaos as part of the services or programming with youth and families. Integrate ways for reducing chaos.
- Interest in a collaborative approach working with parents and families to address issues of chaos.
- Also collaborate as providers across the field to assist families and youth to understand impacts of household chaos.

### *Insights and ideas...*

- Participants suggested initiatives to educate new and young parents on early childhood development and ways to reduce chaos in the home.
- The role of parenting is difficult and is a huge influence. Can there be more support for good parenting skills or overall good parenting?
- Share the list of what components make a chaotic home environment with providers to help them address how parents can reduce chaos without them feeling like bad parents.
- It was also proposed that offering childcare and dinner during these types of programs might allow busy, young parents the ability to attend.

### *Further research questions...*

- What is the impact of cell phones/screens on parenting? Parents on screens, while not Coös specific, we are interested in the impact?
- What are the predictors or characteristics of parents who are more likely to encourage kids to leave vs. parents who encourage kids to stay?
- Is anyone tracking the percentage of parents who are involved and connected?
- What is the role of kids helping their parents financially; how would that affect whether they stay or go.
- What contributes to rise in household chaos in middle and upper income households?
- How do chaos and self-mastery connect to one another? Chaos and attention issues?

## Tracking School and Community Connectedness among Coös Youth

### *Key Research Findings:*

- Youth with strong community attachments are less likely to believe that it is important to leave the area and are more likely to believe it is important to finish college.
- Youth who are more connected to schools are more likely to do well in school and also report fewer depressive symptoms and less substance use.

### *What stands out...*

- Interested in this idea of “high flyers.” Are we investing in connections for all young people?
- We are in a cycle where more of us tell kids to leave; then it hurts our economy.
- What contributes to out-migration?
- Seems like it’s partly the role of school connectedness, community connectedness, and job opportunities.
- Interesting that the positive role of a teacher contributes to youth leaving – makes sense.
- The students who are engaged and those less problematic are often more connected to teachers.
- We can’t just emphasize college, need to emphasize other options as well.
- Thinking of timing of when larger employers closed... are we seeing that impact?
- What is the rate of declining population in schools?

### *Key implications for your work...*

- Importance of activities to help youth connect to their community; outdoor activities are a fit with Coös.
- Connecting students with affordable future opportunities in the Region.
- Approach the stay or go question as providers and other adults *with* youth to help them achieve their goals (it is more complicated than stay or go).
- Spread the word throughout Coös County about activities in the North Country that will interest older adolescents and keep them connected, particularly activities that will attract boys.

### *Insights and ideas...*

- How common is it for individuals to return to Coös after leaving in their early 20s or after high school?
- Important to connect kids with resources that are available and expanding programs / education that build off Coös assets to help keep people connected and staying.
- Are there opportunities to address people leaving, but coming back, or moving for the first time to Coös?
- The camps are owned by outsiders--tourist attraction vs. the people who live here.
- Staying is not always good. Leaving is not always bad.

### *Further research questions...*

- Potential research about the older people in their 20’s and 30’s coming back - how much can 18-year-old perceptions be an indicator?
- Info on why people leave is okay, but what is needed for them to come back?
- What contributes to out-migration decisions?
- More about the role of parents in shaping young people’s perceptions of Coös.
- What happens after college?
- What is the impact of parents’ economic and educational status on whether or not they recommend to their own children to stay or go?

- Will we see an increase in people staying as young people have more opportunities to work remotely?
- How would regionalizing schools affect community connection? Schools are large part of community. Schools can bring the young people back to the region.
- What do we know about the impact of summer learning loss? Summer social time?
- Does it all come back to parents? Are the kids with the involved parents the ones who also attach to teachers?
- What are the summer opportunities for students? Cost? Breaks down in terms of cost and economics; camps, sports, do scholarships get taken advantage of?
- Impact on unemployment rate and perceptions—do kids see their parents taking lower paying jobs?
- Kids around here do say it's boring— Need information on what is needed to not be boring.
- Bored kids: what do you do in your free time?
- What's the impact of Ride the Wilds? Can't afford the OHRV toys.
- What's the impact of the word "town" in the research questions? It's really the "region", might return to the region.
- How does this compare to urban communities?
- How is student debt or the idea of it impacting choices?

### **Helping Adolescents Make the Most of their Out-Of-School Time**

#### *Key Research Findings:*

- 30% of youth report consistently low involvement. Young males report much less involvement than girls.
- Coös County Youth who are most involved in positive activities report:
  - Higher grades
  - More belonging at school
  - More positive expectations for future
  - Less substance use
- Patterns of involvement are set in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

#### *What stands out...*

- 30% of kids=consistently low involvement (15% girls, 44% boys).
- 40% of kids=consistently average involvement.
- 30% of kids=consistently high involvement.
- Patterns set in 7<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Transportation and Cost.
- Low-income kids get scholarships or waivers/ High-income kids have money. It's the kids in the middle who lose out.

#### *Key implications for your work...*

- Importance of getting boys together to do things they like (video games, OHRV) with an organized group.
- Many boys are in a business-sponsored football league in Colebrook.
- Key Club is big in Colebrook – they encourage members to bring another member, so they are not invited by an adult but by a peer.
- Key Club is very active and they always welcome new members and they recruit new members very intentionally.

- Working hard with parents prior to 7<sup>th</sup> grade to emphasize the importance of activities and what is out there.
- Give knowledge of activities (for kids) to parents in kindergarten and all through the younger years before the 7<sup>th</sup> grade patterns set in.

#### *Insights and ideas...*

- Money, transportation, and time are barriers to kids being involved in activities.
- Bring back the “late bus” in areas where it has been discontinued and use online tools for ridesharing.
- Skiing is so expensive.
- The pool in Colebrook helps a lot and nice playground. No fee.
- Tubing club might catch another crowd – no gear and less athletic prowess needed.
- Need to address the difficulty of managing transportation for working parents.
- Need for more leaders and role models for youth, people who see youth engagement as positive.
- Need people who make time to lead the groups; hard to get teachers to do it – would a small stipend help?
- Need more male leaders of activities.
- Negative media can lead folks to perceive that a kid “hanging out” is negative; need to showcase the positive things youth are doing.
- Give positive messages at individual and community level, such as, “80% of Coös youth participate in outdoor activities.” Post around the community.
- Boys are in particular need of male role models.
- Barriers to getting involved include school performance, peer influence, money, pride, information.
  - The policy that you can’t be involved unless you have good grades can be counter-productive.
- Offer a waived fee, but many don’t take advantage of the opportunity. Pride?
- Peer influence... what is cool to do?
- Can we create a central listing of activities and opportunities?

#### *Further research questions...*

- Where are the adult volunteers coming from?
- What do low-involved students perceive as barriers?
- Tease apart barriers to being involved for just the low involved group so we know which the top barriers are for them.
- What about kids with disabilities?

#### **Thank you to our Supporters**

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