

Ensuring all Westchester's children are healthy, safe, and prepared for life's challenges.

Youth Justice Expert Panel on Emerging Adults Draws Audience from the County and State

Over 85 guests joined us via Zoom and in person at Manhattanville College following CDC guidelines.

Our panel of experts included:



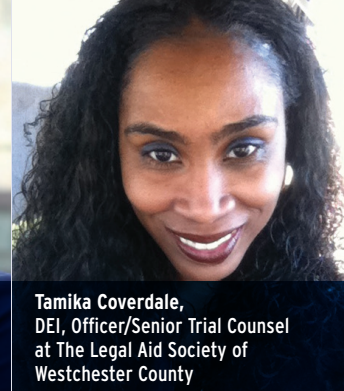
Hon. Edwina Mendelson,
First Deputy Chief Administrative Judge
and Head of NYS Office of Justice
Initiatives



Hon. Jared Rice,
Judge, New Rochelle City Court and
Founder of Opportunity Youth Part of
the New Rochelle City Court



Hon. Miriam Rocah,
Westchester County
District Attorney



Tamika Coverdale,
DEI, Officer/Senior Trial Counsel
at The Legal Aid Society of
Westchester County

On October 19th, WCA hosted a much-anticipated event where we pivoted from our focus on Raise the Age (RTA) legislation to a broader youth justice agenda. We are very thankful to the Westchester Women's Bar Association Foundation, Inc. for sponsoring a panel of state and county legal experts and advocates who came together during this free, hybrid event on emerging adults 18 to 25 years of age. While the data shows high rates of recidivism for this population, the research suggests they benefit the most from rehabilitative alternatives to incarceration. Building on the success of RTA, WCA is advocating for second chances for young people, helping them reach transitional milestones in education, employment, and personal growth.

Westchester County parallels justice trends seen on state and national levels. Emerging adults age 18 – 25 account for roughly 10% of state and national populations but represent nearly 25% of arrests in NYS. Black and Latino young adults make up 16% and 22% of their age group respectively, but made up 43% and 26% of young adults arrested in NYS in 2019. Furthermore, emerging adults have historically high rates of recidivism where over 75% of emerging adults released were re-arrested within a 3-year span.

There are several efforts across Westchester to provide rehabilitative, comprehensive support and services that address the root problems of education, poverty, and lack of social support particular to those involved with the justice system. The Opportunity Youth Part of the New Rochelle City Court and the Mount Vernon Emerging Adult Justice Court both aim to tailor court procedures to the needs of emerging adults on a case-by-case basis in partnership with service providers because, as Judge Mendelson emphatically said, "one size, fits one."

Our panelists highlighted the need to remove barriers to success for emerging adults and focus on responses that will reduce justice-system involvement such as housing, employment, mental health, wellness, life design and planning. Far-reaching community and program partnerships are essential to the creation of more positive support networks that many young adults lack. Judge Rice reminded us that "your network is your net worth," since adding positive mentors and role models added value for youth. Increased use of restorative justice is also critical to help repair damage caused by criminal activity through reconciliation between the offender, victims, and the broader community in pursuit of healing, mentorship, and life-changing opportunities that successfully rehabilitate individuals.

(Continued on page 5)

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Youth Perspective on the Panel

"As someone who has been in the criminal justice system, I was surprised to see how many important people and organizations from all over New York State care about youth justice. As a criminal justice major, WCA's youth justice event gave me plenty of insight into what it takes to make a change. I've always dreamt of becoming a police officer to help others, and this event helped me realize how much everyone works together for one common goal."

Jose Izazaga, John Jay College

Now is the Time for Expanded Early Childhood Home Visiting in Westchester

During the urgency of the pandemic, WCA connected with key partners across Westchester to facilitate improved access to early childhood home visiting services. We met with the County Department of Health and County Department of Community Mental Health, home visiting providers, and leaders of innovative programs across the county and state. Now, the timing is critical for us to act with increased urgency as policy makers in Westchester are seeking input on how to allocate funding provided through the American Rescue Plan.

As we have detailed in our “On the Home Front” report, home visiting is an effective, proven strategy for improving maternal and child health outcomes, promoting social-emotional bonding, and increasing school readiness. Professionals visit the home or host tele-visits, providing vital information, resources, and referrals on young children’s physical, emotional and cognitive development. They also help with breastfeeding and nutrition to reduce food insecurity among young children. They have the potential to improve outcomes and reduce racial disparities in maternal health and birth outcomes among African American mothers and babies, which is a major focus for Westchester.

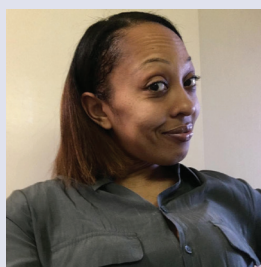
We recommended that the County Executive use Westchester’s share of the \$1.4 million set aside for home visiting in the American Rescue Plan to expand the capacity of existing home visiting programs, which currently only serves 1% of Westchester children ages 0 to 3. WCA testified at the County’s public hearing on American Rescue Plan funds with this recommendation and sent a letter to Westchester County Executive George Latimer with more detailed information on home visiting and the return on investment the County could experience. We also launched a home visiting public awareness campaign on our social media platforms to educate the community about the impact and gather support among community members.

As Westchester County looks toward the future to ensure better health for our young children, we have begun conversations with the Commissioners of the County Department of Health and the County Department of Community Mental Health about the possibility of providing universal, “light touch” home visiting services. This approach would make services available to all new parents and provide parents with at least one home visit on a voluntary basis. Those who participate would automatically be connected to a support system for themselves and their infant from birth until age 3. Similar programs are already in place in New York City, the Rochester area, and Oregon, while one is being developed in New Jersey. WCA is in contact with key partners from these regions to learn more about their best practices and explore ways we can develop a universal home visiting program to suit current needs in Westchester County.

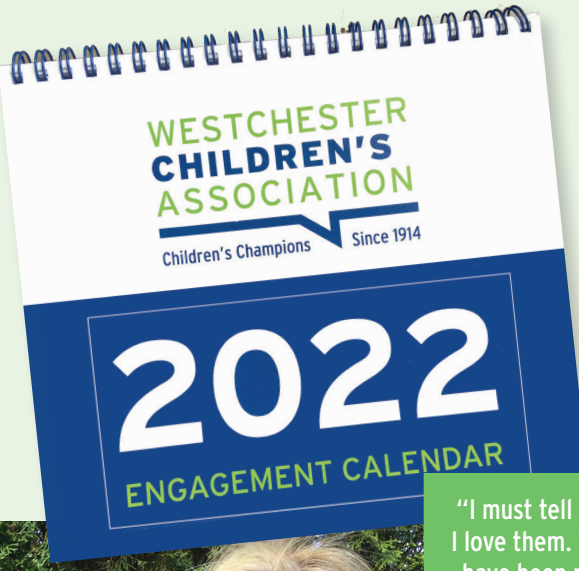
See more at wca4kids.org/homevisiting

Excerpts from WCA's social media public awareness campaign #WCAhomevisiting

new faces @ WCA



Sharee Quinn, a fourth-year student at Mercy College pursuing her Bachelor of Social Work (BSW), is well underway in her internship at WCA. Sharee chose to work with us to strengthen her ability to promote advocacy for at-risk and under-represented individuals, understand the roles of legislation and policy holders, and learn about leadership and engagement in non-profit organizations. Previously, she worked as a residential treatment counselor and has a lot of experience working with youth that are too often forgotten in the criminal justice system. Many of her clients included unaccompanied minors who had completed their court cases or had aged out of a program. Others lacked family support systems and were referred to shelters. Sharee was raised in Peekskill and received her Applied Science (AS) degree at Westchester Community College in 2018. She hopes to bring her experiences working with marginalized youth to her time at WCA and to focus on policies that support children and youth experiencing homelessness.



Why Are WCA Calendars Loved By Generations?

Days, weeks, months, years. Appointments, celebrations, birthdays, anniversaries. WCA Calendars have been organizing schedules and recording lifetimes of memories of donors for over 90 years!

Something about our unique calendars has attracted a loyal following since the 1930s. Even when publication costs rose and WCA tried to discontinue printing them, donors and their families stepped in to make sure they could get their annual copies.

"I must tell you how much I love them. Your calendars have been part of my life for many decades."



"I'd be utterly lost without that yearly diary and I know my daughter feels the same! It was instituted by my mother for her daughters a LONG time ago and now it goes to the 3rd generation!"

"As a new bride 56 years ago, my mother-in-law gave me the WCA calendar. Through the years, it has been a constant in our lives... a diary and journal of people and places."

Much like WCA itself, our calendar has evolved over time. Since our inception in 1914 when a group of concerned citizens gathered to improve the lives of vulnerable children, WCA looked for a way to engage the community in our advocacy. Thus, the calendar was born! WCA calendars were given to new mothers and community members who moved to Westchester as part of the "Welcome Wagon of Westchester" as a way to introduce them to our child advocacy while becoming part

of their daily lives. Although this package no longer circulates, the connections to WCA calendars remain strong.

We reached out to long-standing WCA Calendar Patrons to better understand its appeal. Many of them shared that the contents go beyond dates and daily reminders, but also represent lifetimes of memories and reflect a devotion to their families' needs.

WCA would like to deeply thank all of our calendar patrons who have donated and received calendars for decades or even more recently. You inspire us to see the big picture and remind us of how WCA is woven into the fabric of Westchester communities. Thank you for rewarding us with heartwarming stories and allowing us to be part of your lives.

We are especially grateful to the very special and generous donor who has sponsored our calendars in recent years, allowing most of the proceeds from donations to go to supporting our child advocacy work to ensure all of Westchester's

children are healthy, safe, and prepared for life's challenges. "For as long as I can remember, I have used the annual WCA Calendar," explained our special donor. "I so prefer it to having my plans on an electronic device. I love looking at a week at a glance with the days broken into Morning, Afternoon and Evening. My mom always used these calendars, and I have her old ones. I think she gave me my first one when I went to college, so that means I've been using one for 60 years. I just can't live without it... it fits in all my daytime purses, and it's such a wonderful diary. Yes, I have kept all 60 of mine!"

"When I was cleaning out my mother's stuff after she died, I found that she had kept all of her WCA calendars from the 1970s and on in a box. Those calendars were records of my nuclear family's life and it was a joy to flip through them. I have them now and always will."



Order a WCA Calendar today via phone at 914.946.7676 or online at wca4kids.org/calendars



Child mental health experts and providers discuss the needs and opportunities in Westchester County with WCA staff at the Morgan Stanley campus in Purchase, NY.

WCA Discusses Children’s Mental Health with County Partners at Morgan Stanley

On October 5, we hosted a Children’s Mental Health Roundtable focused on the needs of students returning to school this fall. We were joined in person by 15 agency partners, thanks to our host Morgan Stanley in Purchase, and another 10 virtually through Zoom. Our attendees included County mental health professionals, school personnel, government leaders, and service and support providers working directly with children and families.

A recurring theme that emerged from the discussion was the lack of consensus on key indicators for measuring mental health outcomes between public and private providers and in the industry as a whole. Anecdotal experiences and limited available data show that mental health support was a major priority before the pandemic and continues to be going forward, but there is a high degree of unmet need among children and families. Developing consistent indicators and investing in better monitoring can help our leaders to budget and respond to increased demand while facilitating collaboration to better support children.

While there is an urgent need for children’s mental health support, funding and tight, siloed budgets create challenges for mental health providers. From attracting and retaining a strong workforce, to expanding program capacity, to leveraging prevention, and building children’s resilience, mental health providers and administrators are struggling to manage many challenges. Low public and private insurance payments for mental health services limit clients’ abilities to

afford mental health care and, unfortunately, limit the ability of mental health service providers to meet the full needs of their clients. Furthermore, schools have limited budgets for mental health and social work support staff and, although there is increased short-term funding due to the pandemic, teachers have limited capacities to incorporate social-emotional learning into their curriculum.

Attendees agreed, a good thing is the changing stigma of mental health with young people. Social and emotional wellness is more readily out in the open and discussed amongst this next generation. This has also led to an increased demand for services. The Commissioner from the Department of Community Mental Health, Michael Orth, shared it is important for all children to have safety, connections and coping mechanisms. It was suggested, we all need to work on a vision of what it means to be a “healthy” young person.

There is also a significant need for support in navigating mental health services across Westchester that presents many barriers to care. A proposed solution was improved integration of primary and behavioral care with more fluid connections between mental health providers and pediatricians who can provide guidance directly to patients.

As nearly all Roundtable participants faced limitations that precluded them from meeting the full need of the communities they serve, the conversation gravitated toward ways to coordinate rather than duplicate their services to ensure they are reaching more children and families. Getting at the root causes and unearthing disparities will be important as we work towards solutions. One participant mentioned the need to change our language from “the social determinants of health” to the “social influencers of equity.” We are ready to take the next steps necessary to better serve the mental health needs of Westchester’s kids through increased funding, better data collection, and program development after the pandemic and beyond.



Polly Kerrigan shares her view with Jonathan Mergenstern and others.

Westchester's Criminal Justice System *(continued from page 1)*

While Westchester has several innovative programs in place, WCA and our fellow advocates know more must be done to support justice-involved, emerging adults. Kate Rubin, Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives at Youth Represent, provided an advocacy overview of NYS legislation that we and statewide partners are advancing called the "Youth Justice and Opportunities Act." This bill is currently in the NYS Senate and Assembly and would create additional occasions for judges to sentence young people to rehabilitative treatment as an alternative to incarceration and provide additional means to reduce recidivism such as

criminal record sealing which guards against social - and often lifelong - consequences and stigma for the offender.

There is a clear and growing local focus on supporting emerging adults in ways that have long-term effects and reduce the rate of contact with the criminal justice system. This was an initial conversation. Stay tuned as we begin this new chapter in WCA's advocacy and channel the momentum from our panel to focus on prevention, data tracking and outcomes, and growing County partnerships.

See more of WCA's advocacy at wca4kids.org/youthjustice

WCA's Child Homelessness Dashboard Centralizes Hidden Data

After months of data hunting and analysis, WCA published **The Westchester County Child and Youth Homelessness Data Dashboard (WCCYHD)** this September. This dashboard shows demographic, geographic, and racial trends among children and youth experiencing homelessness in Westchester County as a result of months of collaboration and analysis. Since releasing our 2019 report entitled 'Making the Invisible Visible,' we have realized that this group of vulnerable children are too often undercounted, and the lack of accurate, easily accessible information has hindered the efforts of service providers and advocates alike. Now, important information about the overall number of homeless students is available in one place for the entire county and its 40 school districts. The interactive platform also breaks down the larger group by age, race, special needs status, housing situation, and more to show snapshots and trends over time.

Important questions can be answered by the WCCYHD Dashboard. Members of the WCA Child & Youth Homelessness Workgroup were particularly interested in finding out whether the numbers shown on our Dashboard match what would be expected, given the socioeconomic trends and reports from those districts. We are all concerned that the inability of any school district to accurately and consistently report the number and demographic makeup of students experiencing homelessness or their relative risk of housing instability may result in an undercount for that district and a subsequent lack of appropriate financial assistance and social services provided.

HOW WE FOUND THE DATA

Much of the information contained in the WCCYHD Dashboard was not previously accessible beyond certain districts or not available to the public. Where breakdowns of the data by race were missing, WCA filed several Freedom of Information Act (FOIL) requests to the NY State Education Department.

Primary sources of homeless and population data include:

- NY State Education Department
- Westchester Continuum of Care Partnership to End Homelessness

Many thanks go out to:

- WCA Child Homelessness Workgroup
- Westchester Continuum of Care Partnership to End Homelessness
- Westchester County Department of Social Services (DSS)

MEET OUR DATA HUNTERS

WCA Director of Data, Operations and Finance, Limarie Cabrera, coordinated the collaboration, methodology, analysis, and suppression of sensitive data to protect children in smaller groups or districts.

Program and Policy Manager, Josh Prywes, worked along with MSW Intern from NYU, Jasmine Drew, for much of the data collection and statistical analysis.



The Child Homelessness Data Dashboard includes data that's hard to find. Here are some examples:

Children Receiving Services by Race and by Age

Homeless Status by Disabilities

Housing Status

Homeless Students by Age + Race (usually it's either/or)

Average Days of Homelessness

The pandemic and recent storm, Ida, made clear the need for safe housing for Westchester residents - especially our children. Our report, 'Making the Invisible Visible,' documented the impact of unstable housing on children where those experiencing homelessness were "two times more likely to experience hunger than children who are not homeless, three times more likely to have an emotional disturbance, and four times as likely to have delayed development."

Hard questions rarely come with immediate answers, but they are still worth searching for. Homeless children and youth in Westchester need us to keep pushing for answers to prevent further hardship that they must endure through no fault of their own.

See more at wca4kids.org/homelessdashboard

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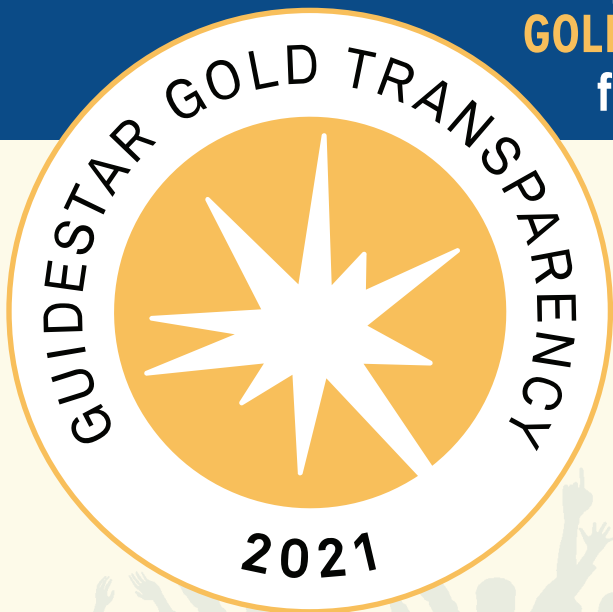
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Tell your friends and family why
you love WCA and invite them to
join our mailing list at

wca4kids.org/joinus



**WCA is proud to earn a
GOLD SEAL of TRANSPARENCY
from GuideStar!**



GuideStar enables you to make educated decisions about where to donate your money based on unbiased information about leadership, mission, programs, and donation usage. Less than 5% of nonprofits listed on GuideStar achieve their Gold Seal rating.

We are glad to demonstrate our commitment to fundraising transparency while helping Westchester's kids as best we can.

**Check out our profile #13-1740066
guidestar.org/profile/13-1740066**

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