



POLK COUNTY

Family and Community

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March 25th, 2019

To: House Committee on Human Services and Housing
From: Brent DeMoe, Director of Polk County Family and Community Outreach Department
RE: Support for Pilot of Youth Development Hubs

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Noble, Vice-Chair Sanchez, and members of the committee, we are submitting testimony in full support of house bill 2644. This pilot would allow Polk County to expand the successful youth programs that are already available across the county. Polk County has youth programming efforts which are funded sparingly. There is dedication to youth programming throughout the county that helps keep positive youth development efforts strong. Polk County receives funding from Early Learning hubs to support development for children ages birth to five, but funding drops off to support the development of young people ages six and older. It is crucial that we support youth in all stages of development, not only in the first five years of life.

Polk County supports youth development in a number of ways. The first step towards understanding what young people are interested in, is to ask them. Polk County conducted the [Youth Activities Interest Survey](#) in 2017, asking young people what activities and extracurricular they wanted to be involved in. With nearly 2,000 responses in four districts, youth across the county were able to report on what activities were of interest to them. Through these responses Polk County's Family and Community Outreach department (FCO) in partnership with the Nyman Foundation, created a Youth Mini Grant program promoting the facilitation of these activities of interest. Of 33 applications, FCO in partnership with the Nyman Foundation had the capacity to fund 5 programs. This is an excellent way to engage community leaders to create programs that are interesting to youth in the county. With more coordinated funding, FCO could support larger scale programs, and engage more partners to facilitate these activities.

Polk County's Family and Community Outreach department also helps support the Mid-Valley Suicide Prevention Coalition. Youth suicide prevention is a huge focus area for the coalition. Over 800 youth have been trained in the evidence based suicide intervention training Question Persuade Refer (QPR). QPR is a gatekeeper training that empowers community members to be active in suicide prevention. The Mid-Valley Suicide Prevention Coalition had the opportunity to create five videos. Two of those suicide prevention videos were ideas directly from students in Dallas and Central High School. These videos took the creative concept of the students, student actors, and the local school building to create unique and relatable suicide prevention content. These videos were shown as a school-wide campaign that included guided questions, small group conversation, and data collection. Collectively, the five videos have been viewed over 500,000 times. With more funding for youth suicide prevention in Polk County, more students can be empowered through gate keeper training, and more youth-centered content can be created. For more

information on QPR and other training, as well as the Polk County media campaigns, visit the [Mid-Valley Suicide Prevention website](#).

Polk County has partnered with three school districts to bring mental health associates into eleven schools across Polk County. These mental health professionals are able to provide support to schools that are struggling to meet the needs of all of their students. This partnership has been instrumental in supporting students in Polk County. The needs of students across the county are great, and school staff are stretched to capacity. In many cases these mental health associates are able to support students in the gap who might not receive services. Since the school based mental health staff are able to see any students regardless of their insurance provider, they have the flexibility to connect with many of the students in each building. More funding could enrich mental health programs, helping to put mental health associates in more Polk County schools.

There are a number of youth development efforts supported by Polk County. There are strong programs, which could be strengthened with additional funding at the local level. The implementation of hubs for youth aged 6-19 would help coordinate and bolster these important community efforts. We encourage you to consider the benefits of implementing the youth hub pilot program in Polk County.

Sincerely,

Brent DeMoe - Director of Polk County Family and Community Outreach Department
Abby Warren - Prevention Coordinator, Polk County Family and Community Outreach Department