



**BUSINESS OF THE CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND**

**AB 6595
January 7, 2025
Study Session**

AGENDA BILL INFORMATION

TITLE:	AB 6595: YFS Community Needs Assessment and 2023 Washington Healthy Youth Survey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Discussion Only <input type="checkbox"/> Action Needed: <input type="checkbox"/> Motion <input type="checkbox"/> Ordinance <input type="checkbox"/> Resolution
RECOMMENDED ACTION:	Receive report. No action necessary.	

DEPARTMENT:	Youth and Family Services
STAFF:	Derek Franklin, YFS Administrator Michelle Ritter, Prevention Coordinator
COUNCIL LIAISON:	n/a
EXHIBITS:	1. Mercer Island Community Needs Assessment (2024) 2. Healthy Youth Survey Results (2023) 3. PowerPoint Presentation
CITY COUNCIL PRIORITY:	4. Focus efforts and actions to be an environmentally and fiscally sustainable, connected, and diverse community.

AMOUNT OF EXPENDITURE	\$ n/a
AMOUNT BUDGETED	\$ n/a
APPROPRIATION REQUIRED	\$ n/a

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this agenda bill is to provide the City Council with the results from the 2024 Community Needs Assessment (Exhibit 1) and the 2023 Washington Healthy Youth Survey (Exhibit 2).

- The 2024 Community Needs Assessment and the 2023 Washington Healthy Youth Survey highlight the behavioral health metrics and demographics in the post-pandemic recovery period specific to the Mercer Island community.
- Staff will present Mercer Island specific information on community demographics, youth mental wellbeing, drugs and alcohol, parenting, community and connection, seniors and older adults, and basic needs.
- Considerations and opportunities will be discussed based on the data related to YFS programming for youth, parents, seniors, and community wellbeing.

BACKGROUND

In response to the 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic, the Department of Youth and Family Services (YFS) adjusted its service delivery model to adapt to the unique demands of that prolonged and unprecedented public health disaster. Delivery of outpatient mental/ behavioral health care moved from in-person to remote (tele-mental

health). The YFS Food Pantry ceased functioning and food cards were instead distributed with significant additional funding from the YFS Foundation and support from COVID relief funds. YFS summer youth volunteer programs ceased operations (VOICE and S.V.P.). School-based counselors joined classrooms remotely, limiting their ability to assess and understand student need via the milieu of the school facilities and classrooms.

As the pandemic progressed, YFS services adapted to the emergent issues and needs seen in the community:

- youth, families, and seniors facing social isolation
- exacerbation of symptoms related to dementia and thought disorders
- increased frequency of depression/ suicide/ self-harm
- internet misuse and addiction among youth
- increased drug/alcohol use among young adults and adults
- intimate partner violence and family conflict
- unemployment and housing instability

As the community entered the recovery phase of the pandemic, there was a need to understand the evolving needs of the community so the 2023-2024 YFS work plan included conducting a formal community needs assessment.

YFS had previously contracted with BERK Consultants, regional experts in municipal needs assessments, in 2015 and 2019. In 2024, YFS again contracted with BERK Consultants to conduct an enhanced Community Needs Assessment (CNA) of the Mercer Island community focusing on metrics related to behavioral health and basic needs. The cost of the assessment was supported by ARPA relief funds.

The 2024 CNA included an analysis of local and regional public health data, survey data, and census information. Expanding the modality of previous efforts, the 2024 CNA included the addition of five community focus groups, four of which were co-facilitated by BERK and YFS staff and one of which was facilitated by YFS staff alone. The focus groups allowed for the capture of qualitative data that added to YFS's understanding of the local impact of the pandemic. That there was little available information on long term pandemic recovery contributed to the need for YFS to seek support in better understanding the impact of the pandemic on the community.

One key source of data about community youth used in the 2024 CNA is the 2023 Washington State Healthy Youth Survey (HYS). The HYS is a youth self-report survey that was first implemented over 20 years ago. The HYS is administered every two years in all Washington State schools in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. The survey has reliability and validity measures embedded. The HYS includes information on mental/ behavioral health, substance use behaviors and attitudes, and other health and safety metrics specific to youth enrolled in the Mercer Island School District. The HYS also provides information on youth strengths and assets which are important to understanding the impact of the pandemic on behavioral health needs of students. Because the HYS is specific to Mercer Island youth and provides a high degree of detail about behavioral health metrics, this Agenda Bill includes specific results from this survey.

As the pandemic recovery progresses, YFS programs have adapted by returning to in-person mental health care, scaling food security efforts to match demand, maintaining an increase to rent assistance, and emphasizing support for post-pandemic behavioral health needs, such as depression, anxiety, family support, senior support, missed developmental milestones, and opportunities for community connection.

ISSUE/DISCUSSION

High level results from the 2024 CNA and 2023 HYS will be presented to the City Council to highlight and summarize current community behavioral health needs, statistics, and strengths during the post-pandemic recovery period. Staff will present from a slide deck with narrative (Exhibit 3). Key findings are discussed in seven categories:

1. Community Demographics
2. Youth Mental Wellbeing
3. Drugs and Alcohol
4. Parenting
5. Community and Connection
6. Seniors and Older Adults
7. Basic Needs

The following summary findings pertaining to these seven categories will be presented:

- Census data highlights demographic changes in age, income, and ethnicity among the population.
- Youth survey data (2023 HYS) find high rates of youth anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation as well as high rates of community support and hope for the future.
- Drug and alcohol data is primarily available for youth and finds that underage alcohol use, particularly binge drinking, and marijuana use remain high, but are on long-term downward trends.
- Less quantitative information was available about parents, but focus groups identified hidden struggles post pandemic and a reference to the Surgeon General's report on parent challenges is included.
- Community connections are found to be fewer and less meaningful post pandemic across multiple demographics.
- Seniors face challenges with transportation, linkages to enhancement/ support services, and finding community.
- Basic needs challenges for the community's most vulnerable include food security, rent assistance, eviction prevention, utility assistance, and employment support.

Results are summarized in terms of considerations and opportunities for YFS services in the following four domains:

- **Youth:** low barrier access to mental health needed, ongoing drug/alcohol issues, performance related stressors, youth/parent connections need attention
- **Parents:** education and support important, hidden parent challenges, immigrant family needs, community connections important
- **Seniors:** seniors feel isolated, support services for seniors aging in place, services for active/thriving seniors, access to transportation and senior-specific information
- **Community:** support for basic needs remain critical, marginalized groups isolated, opportunity for community connection for marginalized groups and immigrant families

Opportunity for discussion includes information on YFS current program adaptations including modified emergency assistance support, contracting with Hopelink to bring a Mobile Market (food) to the Island, new YFS senior support groups and communication plan, ongoing focus on mental health and prevention work in the schools, and new efforts to support parent/child connections via the 2024 Best Starts for Kids Parenting Mercer Island grant.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report. No action necessary.