



Executive Summary 2024

CPAN CENTER FOR
THE PREVENTION OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT

Prevention Education and Advocacy for Childhood Empowerment (PEACE)

Background

In Lane County, Oregon, over 24,000 youth are estimated to have experienced abuse and neglect, a figure likely understated and that does not include identity-based violence. This maltreatment persists due to a pervasive “culture of silence”¹. A 2019 pilot of the Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study found 47% of youth who had experienced abuse or neglect in Lane County had never disclosed their experiences to anyone².

Process

The Center for the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect (CPAN) aims to address the culture of silence surrounding child maltreatment by building programming and providing recommendations for community partners to better meet the needs of youth across Lane County. This summary, based on feedback from 62 Lane County youth and 21 adults who work with children and families, provides insights on the strengths, needs, and gaps of our community and offers key recommendations developed by CPAN’s Youth Advisory Council members.

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3796787/#:~:text=In%20the%20United%20States%2C%20child,Child%20Matters%2C%203%20among%20others.>

² Todahl, J., Barkhurst, P. D., & Schnabler, S. (2019). (rep.). *The Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study (OCAPS): High School Pilot Study Summary Report*. Eugene, OR: Center for the Prevention of Abuse and Neglect.

Key Themes

The key themes identified are drawn from both youth and related adult focus group questions and responses. Youth reported feeling valued through respect, representation, inclusion, and acceptance. When youth described the characteristics of a trusted adult, they highlighted authentic listening, reliability, and lightheartedness. Adults consistently highlighted amplifying youth voices, authentic listening, remaining consistent, and the importance of enabling youth leadership as tools to combat adultism.

When reflecting on their childhood, youth wished adults had modeled healthy relationships, allowed for learning from mistakes, and communicated patiently. Adults focused on the importance of modeling healthy relationships and highlighted the lack of resources and community spaces for youth, especially in rural areas.

While discussing the current reporting system, youth identified fear, not being taken seriously, the anticipation of negative repercussions on relationships, and inconsistency with reporting as barriers to accessing support. Adult responses focused on echoing the ineffective mandatory reporting system that does more harm than good with a distinct lack of accountability and timely intervention, and a need for clearer next steps with a focus on being more supportive than punitive.



Regarding the root causes of child abuse, both adults and youth named mental illness, substance abuse, and generational trauma as key contributing factors. Youth also named a lack of awareness around child abuse and adults named that parents and guardians lack support, the impact of economic instability, fear of social isolation, and judgment.

When asked about solutions to preventing child maltreatment, both youth and adults emphasized increasing access to family support and resources, adult and youth-focused prevention education, and changes to child abuse reporting policies. Finally, when youth were asked about the best ways to get messages to youth, they recommended school-based violence prevention education and social media as effective platforms.

Recommendations

After compiling the information from all of the focus groups, conversations were had with youth to create a final set of recommendations. This process was done intentionally and specifically rooted in the belief that authentic and genuine youth engagement is crucial in the prevention of child maltreatment. In collaboration with both youth from our Youth Advocacy Council (YAC) and youth from the Oregon Child Abuse Prevalence Study (OCAPS), the following is their recommendations. While we believe that centering youth voices is crucial and essential to our work, this section also includes a small portion from adults in our focus groups given time constraints to review all information from the focus groups. The ideas from adults were named numerously as possible recommendations.

from Youth To make youth feel more valued, they emphasize the importance of listening and engaging in meaningful conversations. At the individual level, youth want adults to advocate for them and genuinely consider their thoughts and feelings. In relationships, they seek open-mindedness and healthy communication from parents and caregivers, while at the community level, they suggest more educational events for families and opportunities for youth input in community decision-making. Societally, they desire greater representation in media and policies that appreciate their perspectives.

Youth also express a need for safety and trust in their relationships with adults. They wish for adults to set aside personal biases, respect their boundaries, and model healthy emotional skills. In community settings, they call for adequate representation and implementation of youth voice within their communities. On a broader scale, they advocate for lowering the voting age to enhance their involvement in policy making. To break down barriers to seeking help, youth request adults pursue education on help-seeking processes and support reforms to current systems that can feel intimidating. They want to establish trusting, equal relationships with adults and have access to supportive environments, such as mentorship programs. Finally, they stress the need for clearer policies regarding mandatory reporting and more resources outside traditional systems like law enforcement. Overall, youth advocate for concrete support systems that empower them to seek help and feel valued in their communities.

from Adults Although many adult ideas aligned with those of youth, adults expanded on the recommendations with regards to representation.

Developing culturally relevant partnerships and enhancing community collaboration can improve resource allocation and programming, effectively supporting traditionally excluded youth by creating spaces that address their unique needs.