



## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Snohomish County Council

**FROM:** Kara Main-Hester, Chief Recovery & Resilience Officer

**DATE:** June 16, 2023

**RE:** 2023 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Youth Spending Plan

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### Background

During the Office of Recovery & Resilience's (ORR) [pandemic recovery engagement](#), supporting youth emerged as an immense need among communities across the county. In response, Executive Somers proposed, and the County Council adopted, a significant allocation focused on youth programming. It's important to note that supporting youth remains a focus across all expenditures, as evidenced by recent [behavioral health facilities awards](#).

ORR engaged with a wide swath of community partners to develop programming recommendations for \$6.5 million of ARPA funds to support youth. During the conversations, some key issues were consistently elevated. Most notably, youth across Snohomish County are experiencing increased mental health challenges. Many youth and providers noted how difficult it can be to access mental health resources. This critical stage of life is a period of immense growth and development, shaping individuals' cognitive, emotional, and social well-being. Investing in the well-being and empowerment of young people during these formative years will yield long-lasting benefits for the young people, their families, and the broader community.

Additionally, community partners noticed an increase in disconnected youth, meaning young people who are not engaged in schooling, a training program, volunteer activities, or work. These youth are significantly more likely to experience poverty, less likely to complete high school, and more likely to be uninsured. Reengaging these youth will bring significant long-term positive impacts to Snohomish County.

Data supports the impacts cited by community partners. The [statewide Healthy Youth Survey](#) indicates that 10th and 12th graders in Snohomish County are experiencing significantly more anxiety compared to before the pandemic. Similarly, many more students are reporting they are unable to stop or control their worrying.

Countywide [high school dropout rates](#) are similar to [pre-pandemic rates](#). However, youth experiencing homelessness, youth who speak a language other than English at home, and youth in the foster care system have seen a 20 percent, 25 percent, and 40 percent increase in the dropout rate when compared to 2019, respectively.

This memo is meant to satisfy the ARPA Spending Plan required by the 2023 Adopted Budget Note No. 8.

## Focus Populations & Goals

To ensure children and young people have access to mental health and wellness supports that meet their individual needs, the County recommends (1) enhancing and expanding already established mental health and wellness activities and (2) investing in new strategies that provide mental health and well-being supports without relying on certificated or licensed mental health professionals who are in short supply.

Funding allocations will prioritize groups who may have greater mental health needs or historically have not had access to mental health care. This includes youth associated with the criminal-legal or criminal-justice system, youth experiencing homelessness, youth not engaged in any employment, education or training, foster youth, low-income youth, rural youth, LGBTQ+ youth, youth who are at risk of expulsion, and youth who have been identified as high suicide risk.

The objectives of the ARPA funds to support youth and young people are as follows:

- Increase access to mental health services for vulnerable children and young people, ensuring that they can easily seek and receive the support they need. This includes reducing barriers such as geographic and financial obstacles that may hinder access to mental health care and providing care that is culturally relevant and responsive.
- Expand the availability and range of mental health and wellness services tailored to the needs of young people. This includes increasing the number of qualified mental health professionals, developing community-driven specialized programs for different age groups, and addressing the unique challenges faced by specific populations, such as LGBTQ+ youth, BIPOC communities, and youth who are experiencing homelessness.
- Address disparities in access to mental health services reaching underserved and marginalized youth populations, reducing disparities based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other factors, and ensuring equity in the provision of mental health care.
- Provide opportunities for employment or continuing education for disengaged youth.

## Proposed ARPA Programming

Based on conversations with highly impacted youth, service providers, and educators, ORR recommends the following estimated appropriations for \$6.5 million in youth programming. Estimated funding may change as outreach continues and programmatic costs are further refined.

**Supporting Vulnerable Youth, \$3,200,000:** This funding supports the following strategies:

- *Enhancing or Expanding Existing Youth Mental Health Services:* Funding enhances existing programming such as increasing the number of times a young person can meet with a counselor or providing supports to increase access to services such as transportation assistance or increases the number of students the existing program serves.

- *Piloting Community-Driven Mental Wellness and Skill-Building Resources that Do Not Require Therapists/MSWs:* Snohomish County is facing a critical lack of mental health workers and an increasing number of disconnected youth. Alternative strategies to provide mental health and wellness would increase access to mental health services and meet youth where they are. These funds will support programs in Snohomish County that provide mental health and well-being supports without relying on certificated or licensed mental health professionals. While they do not involve direct clinical therapy or diagnosis, they still play a vital role in promoting mental wellness, prevention, and early intervention. Programming could include mentorship programs; journaling and meditation classes; peer-to-peer support; art, music, and expressive therapies; violence intervention programming and/or broad training and coaching in mental health supports for adults that support youth.

**Broad Access to Mental Health and Wellness through After School Care, \$1,500,000:** This investment continues the successful behavioral health supports started in the first round of ARPA funding. The existing partnerships with the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club of Snohomish County provide social-emotional development and mental health services for school-aged children and their families. The impact of the behavioral health supports in this program are far-reaching as the Boys and Girls Club and YMCA provide an estimated 80 percent of all after school care in Snohomish County. This program reflects the targeted universalism approach – families at all income levels will be able to access this resource via existing vouchers funded by previous ARPA investments.

**Onward Learning, \$1,200,000:** Everett Community College, Edmonds College, Housing Hope, Everett Public School District, and Cocoon House will collaborate to support students who experienced homelessness during high school as they transition from high school to post-secondary education. These supports include both basic needs support such as subsidized on-campus housing and access to food, as well as academic supports including career pathway identification and major selection. This program has already successfully supported student educational success and this expansion will increase the positive academic outcomes for some of Snohomish County’s most vulnerable students.

**CASA Sensory Room, \$100,000:** This funding adds a Sensory Calming Room to the Office of the CASA to support the special needs of abused and neglected children and youth. The Sensory Calming Room allows traumatized children to have comfort necessary in situations where they would otherwise experience fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Sensory rooms help alleviate the trauma of coming to court and reliving their cases while also serving as a safe place for supervised visitation between parents and children before and after court hearings when appropriate.

**Youth Career Exploration, \$500,000:** This programming would provide opportunities for students to learn about different industries and career options through activities such as job shadowing, internships, career fairs, and workshops. Career exploration can improve mental health and wellness by providing a sense of direction and purpose, increasing self-confidence, and reducing stress and anxiety related to uncertainty about the future. These programs are particularly important for underserved and low-income youth who may not have access to career guidance and resources.

## Timeline

Given the urgency of need in the community and ARPA’s compressed timeline, the County’s intention is to distribute the vast majority of funding by the end of 2023. Expenditures and outcomes associated

with all investments will be available through quarterly U.S. Treasury reporting and a public transparency dashboard ORR is currently developing in partnership with County departments.