

I'm Greg Dunn, resident of Trumbull for 24 years

I'm also a retired City Planner. Worked 40 years in...Community Development, Community Organizing, redevelopment, economic development, public housing and affordable housing. All in the cities of Norwalk, Norwich, Bridgeport and Stamford

I'm also a retired Mall Cop. Spent 17 years working a weekend gig at the Trumbull Mall just down the street from here.

That's a combination you don't often see.

And that's what brings me to this meeting. I love this topic. I watched all the Commission videos and fully agree with the urgency and mission.

I call particular support for the recommendation that funding & efforts be person centric rather than program centric. I agree we need to "meet people where they are" and address immediate needs. If they are cold, give em a coat, if they are hungry, give em a sandwich, if they have too much time on their hands, give em hobbies. In addition to meeting immediate needs, this can also build trust, confidence, engagement and goal setting. I experienced this when I managed after-school and enrichment programs back at the Norwalk Housing Authority and in various housing developments in Bridgeport & Stamford.

That said, it's not enough. We can not keep kids "full-focused-engaged" on a 24/7 basis. We don't have the time, energy and money. The phrase "the hurrier I go, the behinder I get" comes to mind. We are only treating the symptoms, not the root causes.

Both as a mall cop and as a housing manager, I've witnessed emotional outbursts comparable to toddler meltdowns. In both jobs, I recall mentioning to coworkers that it felt like we were on the stage of a Jerry Springer show. I've intervened where words and fists were flying. I recall seeing a kid climb over the back of a trumbull cop to land a punch on another kid.

I'll never forget a kid who couldn't be more than 11 years old detained in the police substation after fighting. He was NASTY. Called me old and a Trumbull cop ugly while swearing up a storm. My mall cop coworker (who by the way was a young Mexican-American who I always thought would make a good cop someday) asked me...."You know what that kid needs?" I said "what".....and he said "he just needs a good cry". That's what this commission mission is all about.....get to the root causes, connect the dots, link the services being person centric not program centric.

By the way, this nasty kid intrigued me so when I wrote up the report and saw his address, it turned out to be a working class, moderate street a couple of blocks from Trumbull Gardens, a very troubled housing project. This kid proudly insisted he was from Trumbull Gardens. Likewise, I'll never forget a fighting, troubled hispanic teen who lived with her grandmom in our housing development on Bridgeports West Side. It's a neighborhood that got its share of troubles but it was nowhere near as bad as Marina Village project in Bridgeports south end. She wanted to move there and ultimately did so. I don't know whatever became of these kids but my sense is that it's not good. I have come to describe this phenomenon as "bad ass syndrome". This cycle needs to be broken.

So how do we do it? How do we get to the root causes of which there are probably 119 thousand. All the previously described programs to keep kids busy, keep them in school, and get them in jobs will work for some kids. However, based upon what I have observed, it will all be for naught because it's my humble prediction that within a short time a vast majority of them (especially the most troubled) will have tantrums bringing them right back to square one and society will once again say "see I told you so, it's nothing but good money after bad".

My recommendation: Intensive, sustained, mandated counseling and therapy for the child/young adult including whomever is in their support network, if there is such a support network. It's costly up front but in the long run it will be cost effective.

Lastly, I'm a big supporter of "tough-love" approaches. We need to infuse in the recommendations some attention to consequences if the youth do not "get with the program". I'm not advocating tossing them in jail or juvenile hall for minor disruptive offenses but somehow we have to "cut to the chase" getting to the root causes. Only then will we change their minds, touch their hearts and unlock the barrier that keeps them from achieving their full potential. Isn't that what this commission mission is all about?

BTW, if you enjoyed my story about the "nasty kid who needed a good cry", I authored a novel titled MALL CHILD where there's many more such stories, insights and cultural observations.