

## **STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH'S VISION for the NEXT DECADE**

Strategies for Youth, Inc. (SFY), is an independent, national leader in the movement to provide practical, effective solutions to reduce over-arrest and use of force on youth, with a particular focus on youth of color.

We promote a vision of 21<sup>st</sup> Century policing whereby law enforcement works in concert with community groups and families to strengthen the network of support for vulnerable youth, and uses arrest as a last resort, only when public safety is threatened. In SFY's vision, all law enforcement officers are trained in developmentally appropriate approaches to interactions with youth, in the effects of trauma on teenage behaviors, in de-escalation strategies, and are encouraged to partner with community-based organizations to develop effective alternatives to arrest and system-involvement for youth.

SFY provides direct services to law enforcement agencies and to youth, as well as research and policy support to advocates for youth and grassroots organizing. We seek pragmatic solutions by recognizing the challenges police, youth, and communities face, and by finding common ground among them.

Media coverage of violent flashpoints involving police and youth interactions is intense but generally only lasts a few days before the coverage subsides and the media moves on to the next viral moment. Once the media has gone, the families and communities impacted by the events are left reeling with the traumatic aftermath with little support and more often than not, there is little desire for change on a systemic level by decision makers and law enforcement.

The difficult work of changing the policies and practices that led to the incident must begin, using interdisciplinary approaches and the law to push for change. Instead of letting the issue be treated as an isolated incident by a "rogue" cop or a mistake, SFY examines the deep-rooted systemic issues and brings the expertise and advocacy to change policies and provide training needed to improve police/youth interactions and reduce violent confrontations.

After a decade of work, we have a strong track record of effective service delivery and policy advocacy, of reducing the number of unnecessary arrests of young people, while increasing the arsenal of strategies and resources available to law enforcement. We are well-positioned, with additional support, to expand our influence and increase our impacts at both individual and systemic levels.

## OBJECTIVES TO ACHIEVE OUR MISSION

- Ensure all patrol and school resource officers are trained in developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, racially equitable approaches to policing youth.
  - Make the training available to law enforcement at the recruit academy and in-service level, either by negotiations with state agencies or through state legislation.
- Create and ensure adoption of developmentally-appropriate, trauma-informed, racially equitable policies and practices to guide law enforcement officers and agencies interactions with youth.
  - Use such standards as a source of officer and agency accountability.
- Ensure young people and their families living in jurisdictions with high rates of arrest, detention, and incarceration, have access to *Juvenile Justice Jeopardy*, SFY's signature program for youth, including the street, school, trauma, probation, and incarceration versions of the game.
- Advocate, along with coalitions of like-minded organizations, to ensure that states and jurisdictions adopt mandatory accountability, oversight, and training requirements for all law enforcement officers. These requirements should reflect current and up-to-date understanding of the law and developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, racially equitable policies and practices, as well as routine updates of changes in juvenile justice case law.

## CONSTRAINTS on ACHIEVING SFY's VISIONS & OBJECTIVES

### Resistance from Law Enforcement

It took us four years, but we persuaded the Cleveland Division of Police that recognizing and responding appropriately to traumatized youth simultaneously advances the interests of the department, its officers, and public safety. The fact that it took us four years to do so, even after the shooting death of 12-year old Tamir Rice by a Cleveland Police Officer received national media attention, revealed the serious systemic flaws in the Department's operations, illustrates the level of resistance that we frequently experience in convincing law enforcement that they need our services. In Georgia, for example, it took us three years to overcome the objections of district attorneys on the state's Criminal Justice Coordinating Council to obtain funding for our law enforcement training program. In Sacramento, despite receiving federal grant to train officers, the former Police Chief refused to send patrol officers to the training. We spent three years in negotiations and discussions before we overcame Sacramento's resistance.

Law enforcement's resistance stands in marked contrast to the enthusiasm and support that we receive from so many youth-serving organizations that recognize the urgent need for our services and programs in their communities. However, with youth-serving community groups, we face the opposite. There is strong interest and weak funding supports. For instance, in Austin, Texas, it took the Austin Police Athletic League program

three years of behind-the-scenes-strategies to obtain funding to bring our *Jeopardy* games to its youth.

### Lack of Funding

The roll back of the Justice Department's oversight role in police reform investigations and consent decrees, and, in some instances, their active discouragement of reform efforts, has diminished many local departments' interest and motivation in reform. At the state level, federal funds that are the sole source of support to address Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) has been significantly reduced in recent years.

Foundations' interest in juvenile justice typically focuses on the system that affect youth *after* they are court-involved, and therefore few fund police reform efforts. Indeed, many foundations shy away from supporting any work involving reform of law enforcement.

The availability of funding for youth-serving community-based organizations, juvenile detention and incarceration facilities to purchase our *Jeopardy* games is limited as well. Many youth programs are interested in our *Jeopardy* games, but lack the funding to bring it to the youth and families they serve.

All of these developments have converged over the past several years to create major challenges to SFY's fundraising efforts. We continue to seek and secure foundation and individual funding, but it is not enough to cover the demand for our services from poorer communities. Unfortunately, the districts that need and want us the most are often the ones that can least afford our services.

**We persist because** we know how much young people need accurate information about their legal rights and responsibilities, need to understand the types of behaviors and actions that can threaten their futures. We also know that many police officers crave the tools, strategies, and information we offer them about adolescent development, and how to help young people access services without becoming court-involved. Many officers routinely thank us after trainings.

**We persist because** we have seen how the combination of our services and programs can positively transform communities, reduce the number of youth going into the juvenile justice system, and how individual officers and young people, while initially skeptical, become enthusiastic supporters of using strategies for youth.

### **STRATEGIES for OVERCOMING CONSTRAINTS**

Strategies for Youth was launched with no investment, no funders, and no bankroll. It started in 2010 with donated space, its founder's efforts, and two training contracts totaling \$22,000. Its annual budget over the last three years has hovered around \$850,000, with a staff of 3 full-time and 4 part-time employees, and a host of psychologists and law enforcement consultants to support our work; due to the ebb in interest and the

fact that our funding is restricted to jurisdictions, our recent staffing dropped to two full-time staff and two-part time staff. Then COVID hit.

Our current annual income derives from contracts (65%), foundations to work on site-specific projects (30%), individual donors, and consulting contracts (5%).

We use community-based approaches to locate private funding (which is working successfully in Macon, GA), state-based approaches to push for initiatives (working successfully in Idaho, Maine, and New Jersey) and are partnering with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's juvenile detention alternative initiative to reach sites where it works.

### Where We Struggle

Any flexible operating support that we receive from foundations or individuals is primarily funneled into policy and advocacy — aimed at reaching state legislatures, law enforcement officials, youth providers, and advocates. We are particularly in need of additional support to complete two reports that are in progress--one on the dangers of using conducted electrical weapons (e.g. Tasers) on youth and one on recent state legislation mandating training for School Resource Officers.

SFY's holistic approach to police reform and youth development is unique. We are providing a set of services and policies that are mutually reinforced and desperately needed across the country. We have accumulated years of expertise, programmatic development, skills, and on-the-ground experience that informs all of our policy advocacy. No other organization in the US is providing this array of direct services, expertise, and advocacy efforts.

In 2018, the Social Innovation Fund designated SFY a “high performing” non-profit in the field of “breaking the cycle of incarceration.” Our small, talented, and multi-tasking staff is knowledgeable, committed, and hard-working.

To increase our impacts, our goal is to secure sufficient resources to allow us to build on all we have accomplished over the past decade. With increased support, we could expand the reach of our direct services, advocacy, and do more to keep these issues in the public eye.

With increased support, the results we have achieved in individual law enforcement agencies and communities will become the foundation for comprehensive reform at the state level. These reforms will ensure our communities are safe and allow all youth to enjoy the fullest array of opportunities for success.