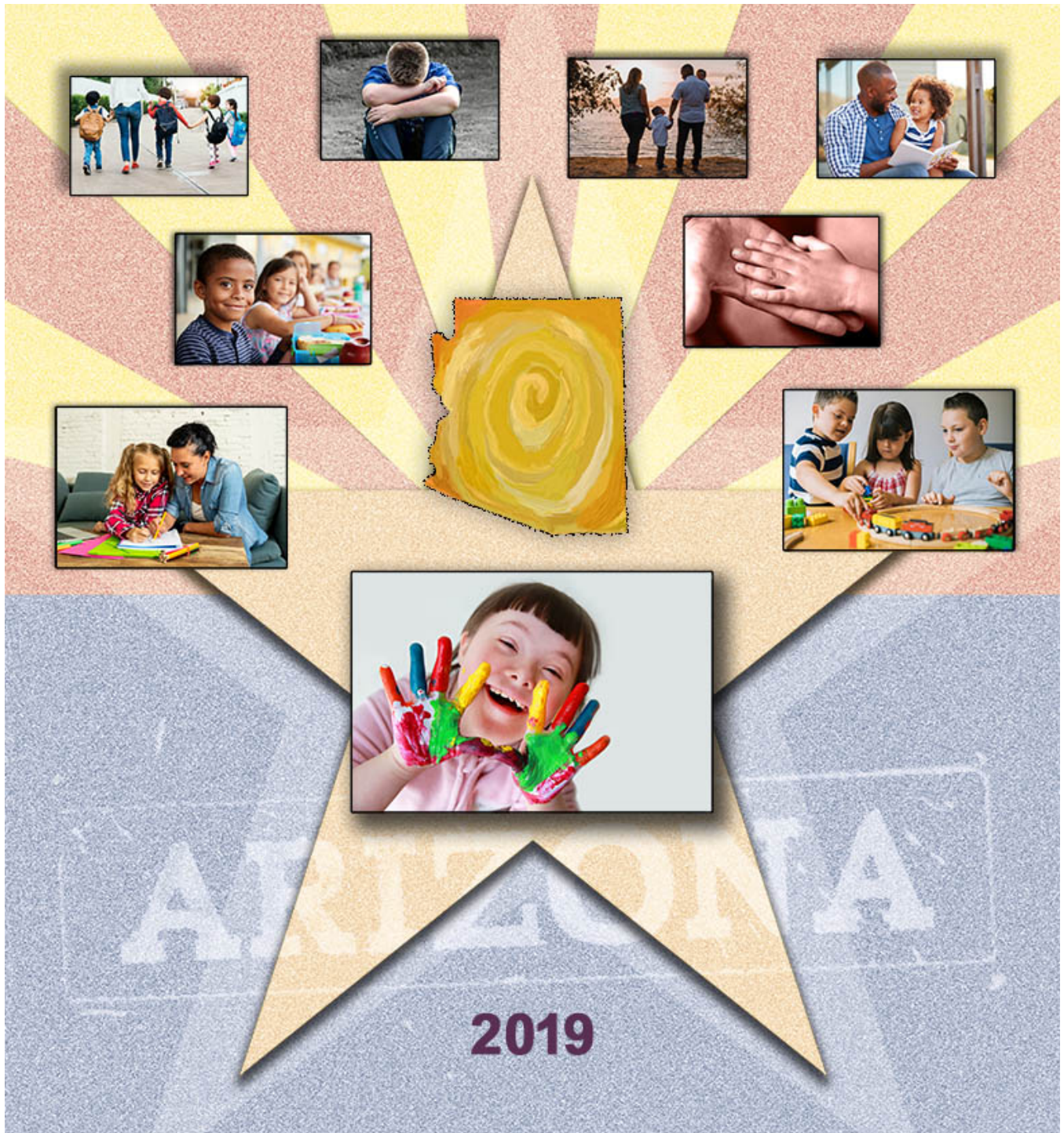


“Strong Families Thriving Children”

Lewis Facility Community Town Hall Report

Buckeye, AZ – September 25, 2019



STRONG FAMILIES THRIVING CHILDREN

Lewis Facility Community Town Hall Report Wednesday, September 25, 2019 – Buckeye, AZ

Participants of the September 2019 Lewis Facility Community Town Hall make the following findings and recommendations. This report reflects the consensus achieved through group discussions by Community Town Hall participants.

CHARACTERISTICS OF STRONG FAMILIES AND THRIVING CHILDREN

Strong families and thriving children have trust and support within the family and open communication. Having two parents in the home as well as encouraging and supporting families to stay together is very important. Strong families provide sustaining environments where there is healthy person-to-person dialogue, where bridges are built across conflict, and where there is patience and a commitment to unity in the family. Families and children are willing to ask for help, have access to parenting assistance and education, and have life coaches and other positive role models. Expressing love, demonstrating positive leadership, and having strong role models will help to instill responsibility and accountability within the family and restore value to children. Parents know what children are interested in, what they are doing, what they are watching, where they are at any given time, and who they are associating with. Having a stable, supportive network incorporating extended family, friends, faith, as well as connecting with community supports such as Boys & Girls Clubs, Big Brothers Big Sisters, and after school programs to keep children safe while their parents are at work. Other characteristics include:

- Unplugging from electronics and ensuring that entertainment is monitored (understanding what kids are connecting to online).
- Making time for meals together.
- Actively involving parents in their children's activities.
- Setting aside time for family-centered activities that will strengthen bonds and instill family values.
- Demonstrating positive leadership and mentorship in the home, building self-esteem among family members.
- Making space for meaningful conversations that delve into feelings beyond the automatic response of "I'm fine."

GREATEST OPPORTUNITIES FOR STRENGTHENING ARIZONA FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

- Reduce parental stress by providing resources to support economic security (childcare subsidies, supplemental nutrition, job placement assistance, etc.) as families work toward self-sufficiency.
- Provide access to good healthcare, proper nutrition and mental health treatment.
- Offer reunification programs that provide opportunities to learn skills that will keep families together.
- Construct pathways to good jobs that provide a way for parents to support the family.
- Ensure access to quality educational opportunities.
- Add more counselors rather than more resource officers in schools.
- Develop supports to strengthen protective factors to prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).

- Address issues related to poverty such as case management to help parents access workforce development services, affordable housing, affordable childcare programs, supplemental nutrition, life skills development, and other resources that provide economic support for families.
- Promote fatherhood involvement programs.
- Provide more and better programs for mental health education and family therapy/counseling.
- Teach skills for positive social interactions and the use of emotionally supportive language.
- Offer more counseling for trauma to reduce the fear of talking about problems.
- Incorporate programs that increase resilience for single parents.
- Recognize personal responsibility and instill positive values in children such as giving back to the community.
- Increase the availability of programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters and Boys & Girls Clubs.
- Develop mentorship programs with people who have had similar experiences and succeeded, using former inmates as mentors.
- Eliminate the stigma associated with mental illness, substance abuse, and a history that included incarceration.
- Expand drug treatment programs, focusing on substance abuse treatment rather than incarceration.
- Shift the perception that Department of Child Safety (DCS) involvement is negative and view DCS as a resource to get back to a healthy state.
- Provide more training for teachers and educational support staff in emotional health to help them better meet the needs of their students.
- Incorporate programs into schools that help young people explore career opportunities and develop a life plan to achieve their goals (including options for both college and vocational training).
- Improve parent/teacher communication and increase transparency between parents and school personnel.
- Develop interactive family workshops that build communication skills.
- Promote community-supported family events to bring people together in positive interactions and build a more cohesive neighborhood environment.
- Increase education about risky behaviors to help families recognize the signs of gang involvement such as clothing choices, language, and friends.
- Provide better information about available resources (use advertisements on buses, billboards, and light rail) and centralize community resources for easier access.
- Increase utilization of the services offered by faith-based and non-profit human services organizations.
- Promote programs for the families of incarcerated individuals that increase communication between parents and children (incorporate technology for face-to-face interactions) and increase the number of social workers in prison to help inmates and families reconnect positively.
- Increase opportunities for social activities in schools, in the home, and in the community, such as block parties and other events that encourage connections to the broader community that will help to remove social barriers and build a sense of community.

- Strengthen the ability of families to maintain contact while in prison, such as developing a program that provides transportation support for families to visit incarcerated individuals.
- Develop family reunification programs that build skills to support family connectivity.
- Offer programming for violent offenders as well as non-violent offenders.
- Increase access to vocational training in prison by expanding 2nd Chance Center services.
- Increase education regarding personal responsibility and the consequences of risky decisions to help children avoid getting into trouble.

WHAT I WOULD TELL ARIZONA'S ELECTED LEADERS

- Find ways to decrease the cost of education and healthcare, particularly for single parents.
- Increase funding for prevention, early intervention programs, and mental health services.
- Offer tax credits for families with children involved in performing arts and sports to support those whose families might otherwise not be able to afford their involvement in extra-curricular activities.
- Expand programs that provide housing and workforce development opportunities, as well as economic assistance to help families move toward self-sufficiency.
- Provide greater access to resources for mental health and substance abuse treatment, as well as other supports such as treatment for anger management to support family unity.
- Increase funding for the expansion of re-entry services to include more safe and stable environments for formerly incarcerated individuals to go to upon release.
- Improve the regulation of halfway houses to eliminate drug use and negative influences.
- Support, promote, and fund programs that will increase families' access to the resources they need to provide the safety and stability children need to thrive.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions at the Lewis Facility Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Continue to keep the information I learned today at the forefront of my mind. It is very important to me to allow my children to thrive.
- Find ways to help my community.
- I will provide for my family and stay close to my family by any means necessary.
- Thrive to be a positive peer worker and guide youth into making great decisions and look into ways to help.
- Provide healthy, stable halfway houses in all areas around the State. This way the formerly incarcerated have a real second chance.
- Commit to keeping government accountable for the services it provides; especially, more effective diversion and re-entry programs to assist families struggling with substance abuse disorders and mental illness.
- Be an active member of my community.

- Engage in community education projects in areas concerning mental health, substance abuse, and rehabilitation with an emphasis on re-entry and corrections.
- One day, work for a non-profit organization.
- Stay involved with Arizona Town Hall.
- Bring more people to Arizona Town Hall events.
- Continue to learn about the problems which impact my community and serve as an advocate.
- Spread the word about Arizona Town Hall and write about this meeting in my blog.
- Commit to hiring formerly incarcerated people to give them a safe paid employment and training in preparation for entry in to the general workforce.
- Continue to stay on this path to success and continue to gain as much knowledge as I can to better myself and my community.
- Share the insights and perspectives of the people I met today to help make a difference for young children and families.
- Focus on finding a solution to incarceration and stop locking people up for small things and try to help them.
- Look into ways that I can help my community.
- Practice resilience in my everyday life and encourage and support others to do the same. Everyone deserves support and everyone deserves support regardless of their situation.
- Become more involved in the betterment of my community and contributing to at-risk youth.
- Be more involved in my community and attend more Arizona Town Hall meetings.
- Be forever thankful for this second chance.
- Educate myself on how to be a part of a strong and thriving family and fight for more opportunities for others to do the same.
- Focus more time and attention on putting together community events at the school to create a space for bonding and connection among families.
- Continue educating children on social-emotional skills.
- Continue to provide support to my peers.
- Once I am released, become involved with Arizona Town hall to advocate for those who are considered disenfranchised.
- Help and volunteer with those who don't have anything to help their family and who can't feed their kids.
- Commit to donating 20 hours of my time to an organization promoting children, whether it's education or just good, fun after-school activities.
- Continue to find ways to make changes to the way we approach correctional programs.
- Be more proactive as a citizen.
- Be more involved in the betterment and success of our youth and their future.
- Help and aid my family as well as other families in my community.
- Attend Arizona Town Hall meetings.

- Engage myself in my community to provide help where needed and generally be involved in anything I can.
- Sponsor legislation to reduce the rate of evictions in Arizona, to help families be strong by keeping their homes.
- I will work to obtain inner strength so that I can positively influence my surroundings rather than being negatively influenced by them.
- Assist in facilitating more family-oriented activities in visitations to encourage family unification during incarceration.
- Write my legislators to advocate for a shift in funding from incarceration to prevention and treatment services.
- Work to elect legislators who support prevention and treatment programs rather than punishment as a way of addressing societal issues.
- Read and share the Arizona Town Hall report with my agency directors.
- Release the shame of being a child of a father who was in prison.
- Encourage others on the importance of family and do my best to pass on ideas and skills to help strengthen family ties and relationships.
- Be a productive member of my community.
- Not pass blame for the condition of my community, our world or my life. I will do what I can to make things better. I will believe and stand on the fact that we can do it together.
- Take what I learned and apply it to life – make a difference – educate myself.
- Start working on becoming the definition of what a real man should be so I can help myself and others.
- Run for office as an Advocate for sentencing reform, drug abuse prevention and family support programs.
- Maintain awareness of what's right and wrong.
- Receive and give family support to maintain a drug-free lifestyle.
- Focus on civil advocacy, render potential advocacies as requisite for developmental procedure.
- Be clean and sober.
- Help children with their lives to do well.
- Advocate regulation of half-way houses.
- Advocate for second chance centers.