



ANOKA COUNTY
CHILDREN & FAMILY COUNCIL

Coffee and Conversation



The Community's Voice on Anoka County's Strengths, Challenges and Future

NOVEMBER 2021

AnokaCountyChildrenFamilyCouncil.org



The Anoka County Children & Family Council (ACCFC) conducted 35 interviews, called **100 CUPS OF COFFEE**, between January 21 and September 21, 2021. Also, two virtual Community Conversations were held October 27 to gather input from 42 participants about community challenges, strengths and recommendations for next steps to build a self-healing community.

Participants in both initiatives were sought from a cross section of cultures, ethnicities, socio economic, and other backgrounds spread across Anoka County. This was to ensure many voices and viewpoints were shared with the ACCFC Community Resilience Committee as it drafts a plan to address ACEs and build protective factors for youth in the county.

100 CUPS OF COFFEE HIGHLIGHTS

During the 100 Cups of Coffee Interviews, **28 women and seven men were interviewed from the following backgrounds:**

- Students
- Residents
- Parents (including those whose children have physical or mental health challenges)
- Parents that are survivors of domestic abuse; in danger of being homeless
- Religious leader
- Business leader
- Law enforcement personnel
- Medical-healthcare personnel
- School administrators
- School board members
- Teachers
- Early Childhood Family Educators (includes at-home visiting staff)
- Co-located providers helping students with mental health, social services, foster care, and more

In addition to identifying with specific neighborhoods, cities, school, or work communities, some participants connected most with their ethnic, cultural and faith communities. These communities included Somali, Oromo, Congolese, Native

American, BIPOC, Latinx, Muslim, 7th Day Adventist, and Christian.

Participants largely felt a sense of belonging in their neighborhoods and had people to turn to for help (median score of 4 out of 5). There is room to grow in providing community members access to policymakers, opportunities to discuss community strengths and challenges with other community members, and in providing adequate support services in the community for individuals and families (median score of 3 out of 5).

Roughly half of participants (48%) were willing to contribute their time, talent or treasure towards future community events that would promote self-healing communities. 73% of participants knew the meaning of ACEs before their interviews, while only 33% had attended an ACEs presentation. Almost all participants (94%) want to stay informed about the project through future communications.

The ACCFC thanks all who have made this effort meaningful through their participation in 100 Cups of Coffee interviews, Community Conversations and on the ACCFC Community Resilience Committee. We are excited about building on these partnerships to prevent ACEs and promote a self-healing community for all in Anoka County.

100 CUPS OF COFFEE KEY FINDINGS

DO:

- Provide youth with positive activities in Anoka County staffed by people of their culture and offer transportation to them. Support their growth, mental well-being and self-esteem.
- Do use trauma-informed practices and mental health initiatives to promote healing in the community.
- Host community conversations and information sessions on topics that build resilience in the community and promote self-healing through respectful relationship building.
- Address racism, examine racist policies and prevent discrimination of other sorts.
- Celebrate the compassionate and caring people in the county! Promote and support their collaborative efforts to assist community members with basic needs and other concerns in non-judgmental ways.
- Engage people in ways that are culturally relevant to them.

DO NOT:

- Use historical methods of communication to reach all groups.
- Duplicate programs in the different silos.
- Just study problems. Use data to identify solutions and act on them!

Q2. WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGES FACING YOUR COMMUNITY?

Participants most frequently mentioned that youth need jobs and positive activities and transportation to these opportunities. They also need to feel part of the community and heard by adults. Youth benefit when activities are staffed by people from the same background as youth being served **(14 people commented)**.

Other topics frequently raised were racism **(11)** and discrimination **(4)**, Covid impacts **(11)**, domestic violence **(8-9)**, mental health **(8)**, drug and alcohol addiction **(6)**, health disparities **(4)**, public safety concerns **(4)**, and lack of resource awareness **(4)**. Also mentioned were the needs of immigrant communities **(3-5)** and homelessness **(3)**.

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

Youth Needs // 14

Racism // 11

COVID Impacts // 11

Domestic Violence // 9

Mental Health // 8

Drug, Alcohol Addiction // 6

INSIGHTS FROM 100 CUPS OF COFFEE PARTICIPANTS

- “Youth need access to high quality programming, i.e., ways to get engaged in community-building, for social reasons and ways to grow.”
(provider serving youth)
- “Young people of color want to see someone that looks like them in these programs or where there’s something familiar to their cultures, languages. If they’re undocumented, these are hard to find in their own community of Anoka County.
(provider serving youth)
- See homelessness, trafficking, things that impact way students learn. Proud of our graduation rate, but these are still battles their community/students have to fight. Our population is diversifying but the voting community doesn’t reflect the diversity of the larger community and students.
(school board member)

- During Covid, families are stuck in small apartments. Parents want to take kids somewhere to burn off energy and build skills, but there are not many places to take them. Feel like I have asked for resources [like a soccer field], but nothing changes. Kids need positive activities like soccer to stay out of trouble.
(parent that identified with the Somali community)
- Lots of expectations to meet, because family migrated here solely for the reason of education. Student really wants to go to college. Her mother has very high expectations. Ever since she started school, she has had to hold a high GPA. Her mom is considerate, but some of her friends have pushed too hard.
(high school student)

Q3. HOW DO WE ADDRESS CHALLENGES?

By far, participants thought it was important to connect community members to resources about ACEs, bullying, racism, discrimination, mental health, trauma impacts, and more (24). Ideas were offered to reach different communities (5), some of which could be included in future community conversations. Topics and tactics for successful community conversations were offered. Participants also raised themes about youth (15), basic needs (9), mental health (5), racism (5), and public safety (4).

- “Part of it is having that honest conversation. We tout being non-judgmental, but most professionals don’t have ties to have more than a superficial conversation about it. The person that makes a difference is the one that makes more investment in that person vs just having one conversation.”
(healthcare worker in county and former resident)

- We need education to dispel myths. There are too many misunderstandings about what causes poverty, homelessness, etc. We need to understand trauma in both kids and adults and issues of race and systemic discrimination. Racism isn’t a thing of the past. It’s a myth that people are homeless because they don’t work or if they want more money, they just need to get a job. They don’t understand the complexities of poverty.
(pre-K/12th grade staff providing social services and mental health behavioral support)
- Hold conversations/meetings so people could talk to the county and city. Invite other people and talk to them, especially mothers, and listening sessions specific to Somalis in their language. Maybe hire some people from among these community members, paraprofessional people that can act as cultural liaisons to communicate more. Hire cultural liaisons as county staff. Open up access. It would help get county initiatives explained to their populace better.
(school board member)

- Biggest challenge is youth being the care givers of younger siblings, relatives or neighbors. Could there be a community childcare center [in or near their manufactured home complex] to provide childcare? Parents don't always have transportation to get kids back and forth, or they work different shifts than childcare providers do. If childcare were more accessible, maybe it would lessen this problem of youth being the childcare providers.

(provider of youth services)

- “We need a network of community members willing to form relationships with youth that shows we are a community; we are one!”

(provider serving youth)

Q4. WHAT IS AT LEAST ONE THING YOUR COMMUNITY DOES WELL TO SUPPORT THE HEALTH, SAFETY, AND HEALING OF PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Anoka County is home to many collaborative partners who offer housing, mental health support, youth activities, and healing as noted by participants (19). Various medical supports such as free Covid testing, support for parents whose children have medical conditions, and mental health assistance were also mentioned (13). Families, friends and faith communities have provided food, clothing and other basic needs (9). Schools have also provided basic needs, as well as offered the Youth First program in partnership with public safety. In addition, they are supporting Native cultural teachings for students which include indigenous methods for mental health care (9 total school entries). Some felt Anoka County offers faster services than other counties. In addition, it has provided Covid-relief loans for small business, offers an Anoka County Mobile Crisis unit and gives assistance to people experiencing homelessness (4).

- Some service areas for families/children are doing well at identifying gaps/filling them. Having initiatives like the ACEs Collaborative is good step or classes like the one on domestic abuse that they just attended. These efforts are encouraging and potentially helpful.

(pre-K/12th grade staff providing social services and mental health behavioral support)

- Public schools are handling things well by making sure there are social workers available for students to talk to, helping people get food, and keeping kids safe.

(high school student identifying as biracial)

- People are trying to get the word out about Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS). They have a helpful Facebook page now. They are advocating for pediatricians to get CEU's and/or learn in other ways about this syndrome. Also fighting to get insurance to recognize diagnosis, get a diagnosis code and get insurance coverage.

(parent of children with rare, chronic medical conditions)

- The police chief has done a brilliant job of creating police advisory board, building relationships with teens, adding a PR person, and creating an app to interact with the police. They are looking at what's not working in other police departments, trying to avoid problems by using better strategies. Those positive police relationships help when they get called to a home for a problem because youth already know officers.

(school board member)

Q5. WHAT ARE THE VALUES MOST IMPORTANT TO YOUR COMMUNITY?

By far, the most frequent themes were about various communities caring and supporting each other in many ways (18). Several descriptive words and phrases like compassion, empathy, and non-judgmental acceptance were identified as values, too, and lend to the caring communities theme (15). Individuality and identity as an independent community were important values to several people (10). Safety (9), faith, family and traditions (9), and education (6), were frequently mentioned. Less frequently, comments were made about children, employment, the economy, hard work, productivity, integrity, being seen, and being heard.

IMPORTANT COMMUNITY VALUES

Care and Support // 18

Compassion // 11

Individuality / Independent Community // 10

Safety // 9

Faith, Family, Traditions // 9

Education // 6

- “We help each other. We’re there for each other and help each other in any way we can.”
(parent of two children with disabilities, one a cancer survivor, speaking about the neighborhood support)
- Education, relationships, collaboration, meeting needs of all students, i.e., caring.
(PreK-12 school staff/teacher)
- “We need to value our children. They are our most important resource. Too often they’re looked at as a burden, but they’re an asset.”
(healthcare worker in county and former resident)
- “People are fed, have a home, everyone is thriving and there are opportunities for everyone to succeed.”
(technical college faculty and resident)
- Safety and getting her kids help as they heal from what they went through during domestic abuse, empathy from those that are in your life. Also, compassion, patience and understanding.
(community member, parent and domestic violence survivor)

Q6. WHAT'S SOMETHING YOU KNOW THAT YOU WISH PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY KNEW AND PAID ATTENTION TO?

There is a need to understand the impact of ACEs and trauma on youth, as well as the cost of not addressing socio-emotional work to address ACEs (10). On the flip side, youth respond to protective factors like positive programs and caring adults who communicate effectively with them (4). A common wish was for the community to recognize and appreciate differences amongst us without negative judgement (6), and to inform people on various topics, including domestic abuse (10). Several people celebrated the hope and strength they see as community members come alongside to help each other (5)!

- “Wish the general public could understand the scope of what kids are experiencing (not just some kids) [in our community]. Especially people of privilege who tell themselves that most kids have what they need, but they don’t understand how trauma affects mental and physical health. It’s hard for students to fully utilize mental health support

because other ACEs consume their attention and ACEs impact affect them later in life, too. Wish the public didn’t just think you had to pull yourself up by the bootstraps and that they understood trauma better.”

(mental/behavioral health services staff serving in local schools)

- We don’t need to be afraid of what we don’t know. Just because people are different than us, it doesn’t mean we need to be afraid of them. Fear stops our growth. Let’s get to know people and remember that challenging behaviors come from a need that’s not met. Let’s come around struggling families and support them. People look at students in class who are withdrawn or acting out. They need to remember that’s coming from a need not being met. Need personal actions to make the change vs developing big programs.

(preK-12 school staff/teacher)

Q7. WHAT'S ONE THING THE COMMUNITY COULD DO RIGHT NOW THAT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR YOU OR YOUR FAMILY?

Participants of all ages want to support positive growth and self-esteem in youth (10). Community members also want to get to know each other while putting aside judgments, learning about their differences and about topics of interest like ACEs, trauma, abuse, foster care, various communities (Asian, LGBTQ+, BLM), and more (9). Other themes mentioned at the same frequency (6 times each) include providing basic needs for domestic abuse survivors and others, and keeping communities safe in various ways. Residents from immigrant and other groups want to create safe spaces inside their cultural communities to learn about teen addiction and mental health affecting friends and family (4). Perhaps included in basic needs, affordable housing (3), healthcare access (3) and a need for jobs (3) were on several people’s minds, too.

- “Just get out and be part of the community and be a positive presence.”

(provider of youth services)

- My rent is pretty cheap, but because my income isn’t the right threshold, I can’t get a lease for my mobile home lot, even though I own the trailer. The property manager won’t even consider it until my income goes up. So now, I can only be in the trailer during day—I can’t stay in the trailer full time. My children and I have to live with my father at night. So technically, I’m homeless.

(parent of two children with disabilities; one a cancer survivor)

Q8. WHAT IS ONE THING WE COULD COLLECTIVELY ADDRESS THAT WOULD HAVE THE GREATEST IMPACT ON CREATING HEALING IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Participants saw addressing racism and related policies (10) as a way to heal, closely followed by the desire for building relationships to strengthen the community (7). Mental health and housing and shelter to prevent homelessness and its related stressors on families were each raised 5 times. Themes related to public education and educating the public about trauma and its impacts were each raised 4 times and often go hand-in-hand, as educators increasingly use trauma-informed practices to help students succeed. Students also want to be heard and supported by their community (3). Less mentioned topics included providing basic needs, health needs, helping the community understand domestic violence better, and making libraries friendlier for diverse communities.

TOP ISSUES TO ADDRESS

Address Racism // 10

Build Relationships // 7

Mental Health // 5

Housing // 5

Education on Trauma // 4

- “Need to celebrate our differences. Not necessarily make them your norm but recognize that everyone is different; it can be cool. More opportunities to have people have those moments to build relationships.”
(provider serving youth)
- “The greatest need collectively is to continue to have conversations about diversity. Needs to be a safe space for people to talk. We want to treat everyone equally, but not everyone is at the same starting place. Having the same opportunity doesn’t mean you can start at the same place; people may need some help to get to the starting place in the first place and use the opportunity that’s offered.”
(pre-K/12th grade staff providing social services and mental health behavioral support)
- “Outside communities could try to empathize and try to understand traditional values and how different it is for Somali kids compared to generational American kids. It’s very taboo to discuss mental health and drug abuse compared to in American cultures.”
(high school student identifying with Somali culture)



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS HIGHLIGHTS FROM Oct. 27, 2021

QUESTION 1: WHAT BARRIERS DO PEOPLE IN YOUR COMMUNITY EXPERIENCE?

- **Accessibility shows up in many ways (39 entries related to accessibility):**
 - Affordable housing, homelessness and transportation (vehicle, insurance, repairs, busing within the county to programs) were raised most frequently. Related issues such as safety concerns for homeless youth and the intolerance of “homed” people towards those that are homeless were among the comments.
 - Access to basic needs (food, clothes, etc.).
 - Language barriers and a lack of self-advocacy skills prevent our youth and immigrant residents from knowing about available services, how to engage in programs, how to explain their needs to program staff, etc.
 - Culturally relevant staffing, coordination and common program access points to help youth who are already struggling **(9)**.
 - Jobs **(2)**.
- Racism, equity, and systems preventing people from diverse background to take on leadership roles or build leadership capacity in local government or community organizations. Perhaps related to this were a number of comments made about existing power structures creating conflicts for people **(19)**.
- Mental health and related topics were on many people’s minds **(18)**.
- Youth are struggling and need additional or more effective supports **(9)**.

QUESTION 2: WHAT VALUES ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOUR COMMUNITY?

- Accepting and supporting each other as we come from diverse backgrounds, ensuring equal access, and being inclusive **(23)**.
- Feeling part of a community (safe, welcomed) **(16)**.
- People value having options and access to resources **(7)**.
- Family values and traditions are very important to people **(7)**.

QUESTION 3: WHAT CAN WE DO TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OR CHALLENGES OF YOUR COMMUNITY?

- Nurture our increasingly multi-cultural community:
 - Listen and learn from people experiencing barriers. Let them drive the narrative and include them in decision-making. Remember: “Don’t make decisions about me without me!” **(30)**
 - Come together as a multi-cultural community to plan for resilience and build a self-healing community. Go to where the people are to meet and learn **(8)**.
 - Increase diversity, equity and inclusion **(6)**.
 - Support creation of community connections of various sorts **(10)**.
- Provide various supports—both tangible and emotional **(10)**.
- Evaluate education and outreach efforts to improve access and information provided throughout the county **(6)**.

POST SURVEY: BEFORE COMING TO THE CONVERSATION, HAD YOU SEEN A PRESENTATION OF UNDERSTANDING ACEs: BUILDING SELF-HEALING COMMUNITIES?

50% Yes
35% No
15% Unsure



POST SURVEY: WHAT WAS THE MOST HELPFUL THING YOU LEARNED FROM THIS CONVERSATION?

Participants' awareness about ACEs was raised both at a local level and as compared to the state. They appreciated hearing each other's perspectives on issues and expressed a need for community members to connect and support each other to solve problems. Interest was also shown in local improvement and addressing racism, inclusion and equity.

QUESTION 4: MAKE UP OF PARTICIPANTS IN COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS
(CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- 37% Community Member
- 26% Social Services
- 21% Faith Community
- 21% Local Government
- 21% Youth-serving Organization
- 16% PreK-12 School Staff / Teacher
- 16% Parent / Caregiver
- 11% Other
- 5% Business
- 5% Civic / Volunteer Organization
- 5% Student



POST SURVEY: HAVE YOU, OR SOMEONE YOU'RE CLOSE TO, BEEN PERSONALLY IMPACTED BY ACEs?

Of those in attendance, **84.21%** said they or someone they knew had been personally impacted by ACEs. Only **15.79%** indicated they had not been impacted.

POST SURVEY: WHAT IS ONE NEW STEP YOU PLAN TO TAKE, IN YOUR WORK, COMMUNITY, OR PERSONAL LIFE, AS A RESULT OF THIS CONVERSATION?

Attendees appreciated receiving ACEs information during the Community Conversations and wanted to share the information out. Participants want to listen for needs. Variations on that theme were echoed, such as listening more to residents facing challenges and people from various cultural groups that were not in attendance at these events. Participants also wanted to connect and work to fill identified gaps as they learn from each other.