

OHIO

SUMMIT COUNTY

Data-Driven Mobility Action Planning

The Summit County Upward Mobility Project is an interagency initiative of the Summit County Executive's Office. The project is intended to boost mobility from poverty and ensure that prosperity is shared by all residents. Through this project, the county will use a racial equity lens to address disparities in economic and social outcomes. This work focuses on the priority areas of mental health and juvenile justice.

A VISION FOR UPWARD MOBILITY

By expanding programming and resources for mental wellness, violence prevention, and mentorship, Summit County will improve the upward mobility of residents in the short and long term. Fostering good mental health will help residents gain education or employment and maintain relationships with family and friends. By promoting Mental Health First Aid training for employees, providing programs for younger and older residents alike, and facilitating connections between mental health organizations, Summit County will provide robust support for mental health care. Summit County also seeks to prevent violence and provide safe neighborhoods for residents, which are also crucial components for fostering wellness, specifically through stronger families. Lastly, by offering mentorship and career pathways programming, Summit County will continue to empower younger residents by connecting them with older residents. Ultimately, these actions will help residents build autonomy and trust in the community, and by working together with local organizations to create and implement the Mobility Action Plan, the process will reflect the intended outcome of empowerment.

SUMMIT COUNTY GOALS

MENTAL HEALTH

Reduce stigmas associated with mental illness, promote existing mental health services that address mental wellness, eliminate barriers to accessing services, and educate our citizens to promote supportive and safe communities.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Continue (1) reducing the number of youth who engage in criminal activity, specifically those related to gun violence; (2) supporting youth through rehabilitation; and (3) connecting families with existing resources to promote healthy family structures and stability.

WHO IS INVOLVED?

The County Executive convened a core group of internal staff to oversee the project and communicate with the community. To support project focus groups and community engagement, the County contracted with Synergy, a local marketing, strategy, and research firm with significant experience in building community trust. The Center for Marketing & Opinion Research, a local public opinion research firm known for its expertise in community data collection, was engaged to perform two community surveys. The first survey focused on baseline data; the second focused on getting feedback on the strategic actions. Finally, Summit County recruited mental health and juvenile justice professionals along with people who had experience with poverty and the juvenile justice system to serve on the Upward Mobility Coalition that set goals, cocreated strategic actions, and built a plan to ensure sustainability.

UPWARD MOBILITY INSIGHTS

- **Mental health:** In the 2022 Community Survey conducted by the Center for Marketing & Opinion Research, residents reported having poor mental health for an average of 3.76 of the past 30 days; for residents experiencing poverty, that number nearly doubles, to 7.11 days. When asked what barriers prevent people from seeking help, an overwhelming 81 percent of residents cited embarrassment or social stigma, and 73 percent said treatment isn't affordable. Further, when asked about big or moderate problems in the community, 55 percent of residents and 68 percent of impoverished residents cited the stigma surrounding mental illness. For residents facing poverty and inequities in their community, poor mental health is hindering their ability to care for their loved ones, to find a good paying job, and to feel hopeful for the future. Without the self-empowerment that comes with good, resilient mental health, residents are less likely to access other economic and social services.
- **Juvenile justice:** Summit County identified concerns regarding its rate of juvenile arrests, measured as the number of arrests per 100,000 juveniles. Compared with the other counties, Summit's juveniles, especially Black youth, are arrested at an alarming rate. (However, note that this mobility metric is rated as marginal quality). Further, Akron, the county's largest city, saw a spike in homicides in 2020. Most of these were the results of gun violence, and the victim or perpetrator were often young Black men. Clearly, Summit County's youth, especially Black youth, are in need of support and resources. Although good work is ongoing, that work does not seem as unified across sectors as it will need to be for significant impact. Failing to support the youth of Summit County and provide the resources they need to achieve lifelong success will have long-term effects on the entire community.

KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS

MENTAL HEALTH

- 1 Continue to prepare residents for conversations about mental health by partnering with employers to offer annual Mental Health First Aid trainings and Question, Persuade, Refer Suicide Prevention trainings through a partnership with Love Akron and Greenleaf. (Short-term goal; 6-12 months)
- 2 Assess existing mental health programming at Akron Public Schools' I Promise School and pilot a program in additional public schools to educate families about mental health to reduce its stigma. (Medium-term goal; 12-24 months)
- 3 Advocate for existing community organizations to adopt an intergenerational mental health program developed by the Age-Friendly Advisory Council to educate youth and families about mental health, reduce stigma, and build relationships across ages. (Medium-term goal; 12-24 months)
- 4 Work with existing agencies and organizations to reinvigorate the Change Direction initiative and break down barriers to mental health services. (Long-term goal; 24 months or more)

JUVENILE JUSTICE

- 1 Collaborate with stakeholders to increase awareness of existing services and assistance programs offered by local agencies and nonprofits, with a focus on supporting families before a youth engages with the justice system. (Short-term goal; 6-12 months)
- 2 Collaborate with community partners to explore and expand diversion tactics that prevent youth who interact with law enforcement officials from entering the justice system. (Medium-term goal; 12-24 months)
- 3 Align community support from the County Executive's Office with the City of Akron's Youth and Community Violence Prevention Taskforce's efforts to promote community violence-prevention programs and reduce the number of youth involved in gun violence. (Medium-term goal; 12-24 months)
- 4 Collaborate with partners to explore the feasibility of a qualitative and quantitative data-collection program to assess youth interaction with law enforcement. (Long-term goal; 24 months or more)

MENTAL HEALTH + JUVENILE JUSTICE

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Increase the number of youth connected to mentors and professionals that offer personal development or early exposure to career pathways. (Short-term goal; 6–12 months)

WHAT'S NEXT?

Summit County is integrating the findings from a set of focus groups with juveniles involved in the justice system and their parents and is awaiting the results of the second survey from the Center for Marketing & Opinion Research that asks questions about the strategic actions. The results of both will shape the implementation of the strategic actions. Most of the strategic actions are connected to stakeholders and will require close collaboration, the foundation of which will be built over the next few months. As these strategic actions are carried out, Summit County and its partners will measure their success and continue to collect data

