



What Works

A research packet with evidence-based approaches for guiding strategy development

How to Use This Packet

This packet is designed to support our upcoming work group session

When shaping activities to connect families to resources, use this packet to:

- Review evidence-based strategies
- Connect root causes, protective factors, recommended strategies from youth, and existing efforts
- Visualize the prevention system in Alexandria & map existing efforts in Alexandria
- Identify gaps and opportunities
- Begin identifying shared strategy directions



Barriers families face navigating supports

Evidence-Based Strategies

Build a “no wrong door” entry system

What this looks like:

- any school, library, clinic, rec center, or nonprofit can start a referral
- shared screening questions across partners
- coordinated follow-up tracking
- warm handoffs instead of passive referrals

Example action ideas:

- shared intake form across youth providers
- referral platform pilots
- school-based referral coordinators
- shared eligibility screening tools

Why it works:

No-wrong-door systems create entry points to multiple public and community supports through a single access pathway.

Source: ACL Administration for Community Living

What Works in Other Communities

Use family navigators

Navigation programs improve service engagement, follow-through, and treatment access across sectors.

Navigator roles typically include:

- explaining options
- helping complete applications
- coordinating across agencies
- troubleshooting barriers
- checking back after referrals

Example action ideas:

- embed navigators in schools
- place navigators in libraries
- youth-serving nonprofit navigator partnerships
- parent-to-parent navigators

What Works in Other Communities

Create neighborhood-based resource hubs

Family Resource Centers reduce risk factors upstream and increase service uptake.

Strong hubs provide:

- drop-in navigation
- benefits enrollment help
- parenting support
- workforce connections
- mental health referrals
- youth enrichment access pathways

Example action ideas:

- co-locate services in rec centers
- school-based family support hubs
- library resource desks
- mobile neighborhood resource teams

What Works in Other Communities

Improve resource directories using human-centered design

Most directories fail because they are built for providers instead of families.

Inform USA standards recommend:

- keyword and location search
- eligibility filters
- mobile access
- multilingual navigation
- visual search pathways
- text/chat access to specialists

Example action ideas:

- redesign youth resource directory UX
- add “life event” navigation (e.g., eviction risk, job loss)
- embed directory widgets on school websites
- integrate directory into texting platforms

What Works in Other Communities

Place access points in trusted youth pathways

Families engage more when services are embedded in places they already go.

Effective access sites include:

- schools
- afterschool programs
- libraries
- food distribution sites
- faith organizations
- pediatric clinics

Example action ideas:

- school counselor referral pipelines
- library “resource navigator hours”
- youth sports program resource ambassadors
- back-to-school service enrollment events

What Works in Other Communities

Use coordinated entry models for high-need services

Coordinated entry systems streamline access through:

- standardized assessment
- prioritization tools
- centralized referral matching
- ongoing navigator follow-up

Example action ideas:

- shared intake for housing supports
- centralized youth employment referrals
- youth mental health access pathways

What Works in Other Communities

Follow up after referrals

One of the strongest predictors of connection success:

- follow-up contact.
- Navigation standards recommend outreach if services weren't received and problem-solving alternative referrals.

Example action ideas:

- text check-ins after referrals
- case-closing confirmation protocols
- referral completion tracking dashboards

What Works in Other Communities

Normalize help-seeking (reduce stigma barriers)

Families are more likely to access services when systems:

- embed supports in universal settings
- avoid eligibility-first messaging
- include peer navigators
- involve family voice in design

Example action ideas:

- “support is for everyone” campaigns
- youth ambassadors
- multilingual storytelling outreach
- parent navigator programs

What Works in Other Communities

Place-Based Resource Hubs

These are among the strongest upstream prevention strategies communities are investing in right now.

What Works in Other Communities

Harlem Children's Zone – New York City

Model

A place-based cradle-to-career neighborhood support system.

Access strategy

Families encounter support through:

- schools
- early childhood centers
- parenting workshops
- afterschool programs
- housing stabilization supports

Why it works

Services are embedded in daily life instead of requiring navigation across agencies.

Transferable idea

Cluster services geographically around school catchments.

What Works in Other Communities

Community Schools Initiative

Implemented widely across districts including Oakland and Cincinnati

Model

Schools function as neighborhood service hubs.

Services often include

- mental health providers onsite
- food access supports
- family navigation staff
- housing referrals
- legal aid clinics

Why it works

Schools are already universal access points.

Transferable idea

Embed “family resource navigators” in middle schools first (highest youth-voice alignment).

Youth resource directories that actually work

Most cities have directories. Few are effective. These examples stand out because they are designed around how families search for help.

What Works in Other Communities

Aunt Bertha (FindHelp.org)

Used nationwide by hospitals, libraries, and municipalities.

Features

- zip-code search
- eligibility filters
- multilingual interface
- “life situation” search categories
- closed-loop referrals

Why it works

Search mirrors how people think (“I need help paying rent”).

Transferable idea

Integrate directory widgets directly into school and library websites.

What Works in Other Communities

NYC Access NYC

Model

Eligibility-screening + application navigation tool.

Impact

Helps residents determine qualification across multiple programs simultaneously.

Why it works

Removes guesswork about eligibility.

Transferable idea

Create a simplified “Am I eligible?” screener for local youth-serving supports.

What Works in Other Communities

King County Resource Line

Model

Centralized behavioral-health navigation support via phone/text/web.

Why it works

Combines directory + human navigator assistance.

Transferable idea

Layer live navigation support onto existing directories.

Placing access points in trusted youth pathways

This is one of the highest-impact and lowest-cost strategies available.

What Works in Other Communities

Multnomah County SUN Service System

SUN = Schools Uniting Neighborhoods

Model

Wraparound services delivered directly through schools.

Includes

- family support specialists
- housing referrals
- afterschool programming
- food access coordination
- youth mentoring

Why it works

Families already trust schools.

Transferable idea

Pilot school-based access coordinators in neighborhoods with highest affordability barriers.

What Works in Other Communities

Toronto Youth Hubs

Integrated youth service hubs located in youth-friendly community spaces.

Services

- employment supports
- housing help
- primary care
- mental health care
- education navigation

Why it works

Youth can walk in without appointments.

Transferable idea

Create rotating “youth help pop-ups” at libraries and rec centers.

What Works in Other Communities

San Francisco Wellness Centers

School-based access sites for coordinated supports.

Why they work

Students receive navigation help without leaving campus.

Transferable idea

Adapt model for middle school transition years (6th–9th grade).

Normalizing help-seeking (reducing stigma)

This is often the missing ingredient in access strategies

What Works in Other Communities

Family Success Centers

Model

Neighborhood hubs framed as welcoming community gathering spaces.

Key design choices

- no eligibility requirements
- no referral needed
- family-led programming
- strengths-based messaging

Impact

Increased early engagement before crises occur.

Transferable idea

Rename “resource centers” as family connection spaces.

What Works in Other Communities

FrameWorks Institute

Provides research-based guidance on messaging that increases service uptake.

Effective framing strategies

- **Instead of:** “families in need”
- **Use:** “support for every family navigating challenges”

- **Instead of:** “eligibility requirements”
- **Use:** “ways to get connected”

Transferable idea

Adopt shared messaging language across partners.

What Works in Other Communities

Boston Basics Campaign

Model

Normalizes parenting supports through universal messaging campaigns.

Approach

Promotes everyday behaviors rather than targeting “at-risk families.”

Why it works

Universal framing reduces stigma.

Transferable idea

Launch youth-informed “support is for everyone” messaging campaign.

What Works in Other Communities

Children's Cabinets

Model

Centralized navigation hub connecting families to:

- housing help
- food supports
- childcare
- education navigation
- behavioral health

Key feature

Families receive one intake → multiple coordinated referrals.

Transferable idea

Create a “single-door” youth/family intake pilot with YSCC partners.