

# Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission

## Anti-Bullying Initiative

### Update Report August 2022

#### Background

Too many young people in California face discrimination, violence, and abuse, due to their race, ethnicity, language, culture, and country of origin. This negative treatment often is associated with bullying, hate and harassment. These experiences take a significant toll on victims and communities by impacting emotional and physical safety. No one should be subjected to bullying because of who they are, where they come from, or the bias of others.

In July 2021, the Asian Pacific Islander (API) Equity Budget authorized the Commission to allocate \$5 million to create and support a peer social media network project for children and youth, with an emphasis on students in kindergarten and grades 1 to 12 who have experienced bullying, or who are at risk of bullying based on race, ethnicity, language, or country of origin, or perceived race, ethnicity, or country of origin.

The strategy is to develop a peer-to-peer social media program of support through youth-designed content, to support healthy discussion of difficult topics that young people may not feel comfortable discussing with teachers or parents, and to support youth to connect with mental health staff, peer providers, or others. Ultimately, the goals of this initiative are to:

- Reduce risks associated with bullying,
- Bring collective awareness to the discrimination, violence, and abuse many young people face due to their race, culture, language, or country of origin, and to
- Improve youth resiliency for youth who are experiencing bullying.

#### Advisory Committee Development Process

In August 2021, an advisory Committee that included 20 youth and adult ally members, chaired by Commissioner Shuo Chen, was formed to provide insight and recommendations on the needs of the youth, the types of support they would seek, and the places and people whom youth trust. This Committee included a combination of youth and adult leaders across multiple organizations, including those with expertise in outreach to Asian communities, anti-bullying and anti-hate research, youth and media, public health and violence prevention programs and policies, mental health providers, and more.

During its public meetings on August 31, 2021, September 30, 2021, and October 29, 2021, the Committee reviewed data about bullying, social media strategies, and peer-networks from interviews and surveys with Committee members. To facilitate these conversations, the Commission contracted with Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) who helped engage committee members using icebreakers, Jamboards, and other tools to encourage creative conversations.

After these Committee meetings, Commission staff worked to establish a contract with Media Cause and YLI continued to engage the Youth Advisors to gather information about social media strategy (see attached report entitled *MHSOAC Anti-Bullying Advisory Committee: Youth Engagement Report*).

### Contract Recommendations from the Advisory Committee

On November 18, 2021, based on recommendations from the Committee, the Commission approved contracting for the following three strategies:

#### A. Peer-to-Peer Support

The online support will offer youth and adult allies the opportunity to participate and engage through peer-to-peer support, resources, and multimedia content on bullying. Contractor will provide a peer-to-peer support network (such as a hotline) to provide support to those youth who find their way to the program and are seeking immediate help or guidance.

#### B. Social Media Strategy

The social media ecosystem will meet the youth where they are through the creation of strategies across various social media channels. The strategies for the channels will be developed in partnership with those youth and support networks who would be the audiences and key participants in the program. Content such as videos, written testimonials, and visual shareables will be created for major social media networks such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The contractor who will guide this work and commission the content must have the following: editorial content creation experience, expert social media experience, rich storytelling abilities, knowledge of social media impact evaluation tools, and strategies to engage influencers.

#### C. Youth-Designed Content, Resources, and Cultural Ambassadors

Support for content creation must be guided by a contractor who has a cultural connection to the youth the program is designed to support and can bring diverse perspectives to the work. The contractor will create, promote, and host online idea labs (or similar youth engagement strategies) to center the youth voice in content creation and identification of local resources. The contractor would identify, recruit, and compensate a diverse range of youth and cultural ambassadors with lived experience to help youth access local resources.

### Current Activities

Media Cause was chosen as a general contractor for the initiative based on demonstrated experience with similar social media campaigns and strategies, skills and professional services, and their mission to “help those doing good do more.” They are working with YLI and other cultural ambassadors as subcontractors to incorporate youth and cultural voices.

Media Cause has begun work on the initiative and has already conducted several interviews, collected over 200 survey responses, and developed a broad competitive landscape overview and cultural analysis.

As a result of this work, they have garnered the following key insights that will be invaluable as the campaign moves forward toward overall strategy development and implementation.

### **Insights from the Initial Campaign Discovery Phase**

#### **Stakeholder Interviews**

- If parents are aware that their kids are being bullied, they often don't know how to help/support them.
- Establishing common definitions and vocabulary is critical in helping young people identify and process what they're experiencing.
- Youth are broadly interested in receiving anonymous feedback or input from their peers online
- The tone of our campaign and platform must be direct, authentic, and youth driven.

#### **Youth Survey**

- Bullying still mostly happens at schools. It occurs most frequently in 6-8th grades, making targeting middle schoolers (tweens) a priority for this project.
- Half of the young people we surveyed didn't tell anyone about being bullied primarily out of fear, embarrassment, and feeling like it wouldn't have made a difference.
- The teens we surveyed would have liked to have someone to listen to and support them, in particular someone their own age

#### **Competitive + Cultural Analysis**

- Bullying occurrences are linked to in-person activity and gatherings, but youth today live in a world where the lines between online and offline activity are blurred.
- Bullying can be and is a primary source of stress and anxiety—but most immediate support sources are focused on responding to how someone is feeling in the moment, not necessarily measuring how or why the person got there. There is a need for further data around bullying and cyberbullying.
- While there are several mental health organizations, and a multitude of mental health apps targeting youth, none focus on addressing bullying, racism, and hateful actions within the youth community. Additionally, most lack an authentic voice and gloss over any real issues, making them less effective in truly supporting youth audiences.

## Next Steps

Media Cause is currently finalizing its audience research by partnering with YLI to interview parents, educators, and young people across California to add qualitative insights to data compiled to date. This process has been slowed down by the summer school break. Media Cause's goal is to wrap up the discovery process by the end of September 2022.

This initial phase will serve as a steppingstone to develop the overall campaign strategy, and will inform platforms to build or leverage, what partnerships to activate, and how to best reach and engage key target audiences. Media Cause aims to launch the campaign in early 2023.