



Supporting Maryland in Building a More Equitable Juvenile Justice System

Juvenile Justice Reform Council Meeting

December 17, 2019

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Objectives for Today

- Introduce Vera and the Center on Youth Justice
- Discuss the support Vera will provide to the JJRC
- Understand which issue areas are “top of mind” for Council Members as we begin this process
- Discuss adolescent development as one core feature informing system change

Vera Institute of Justice

Vera is committed to:



Securing Equal Justice



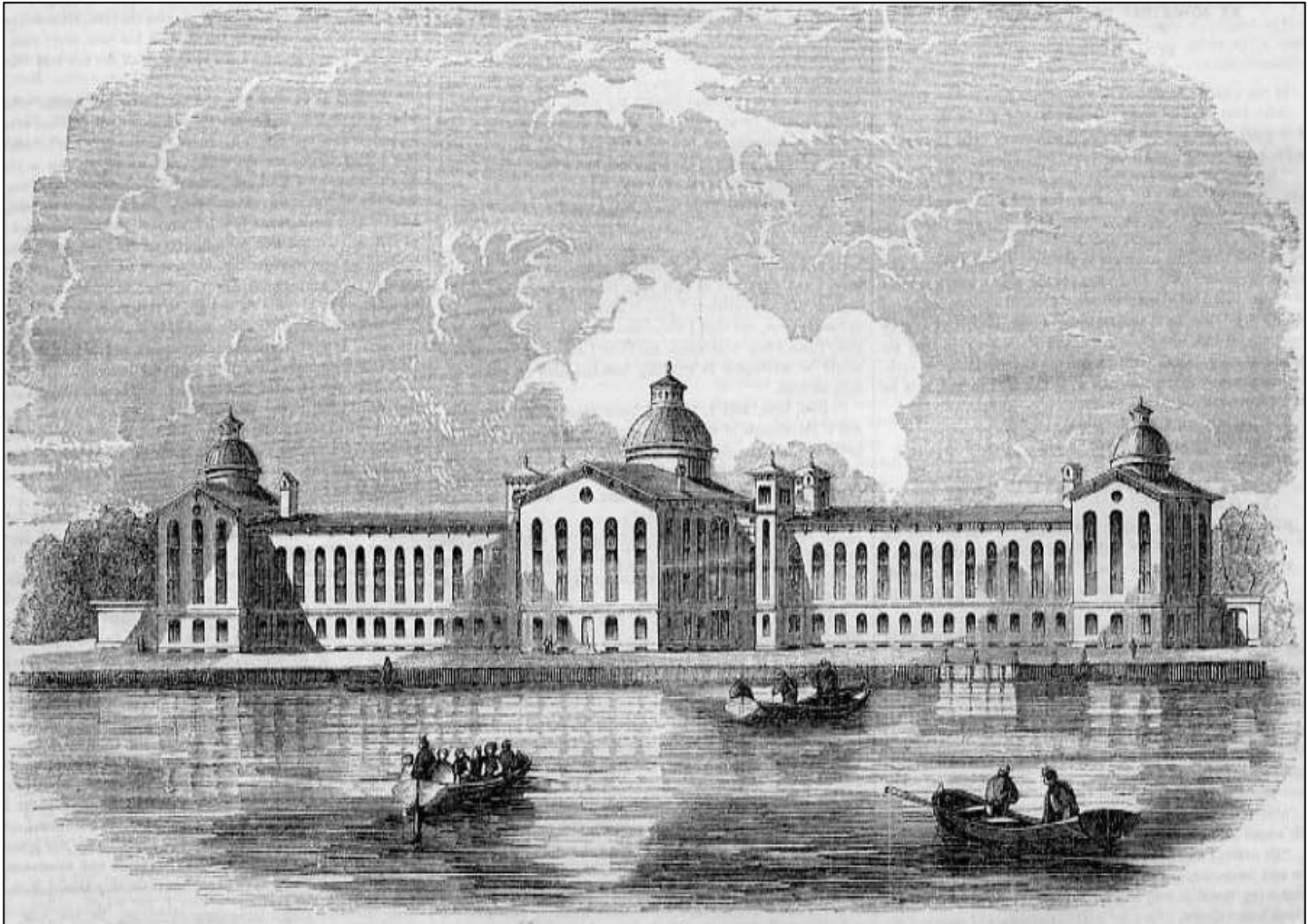
Ending Mass
Incarceration



Strengthening Families
and Communities

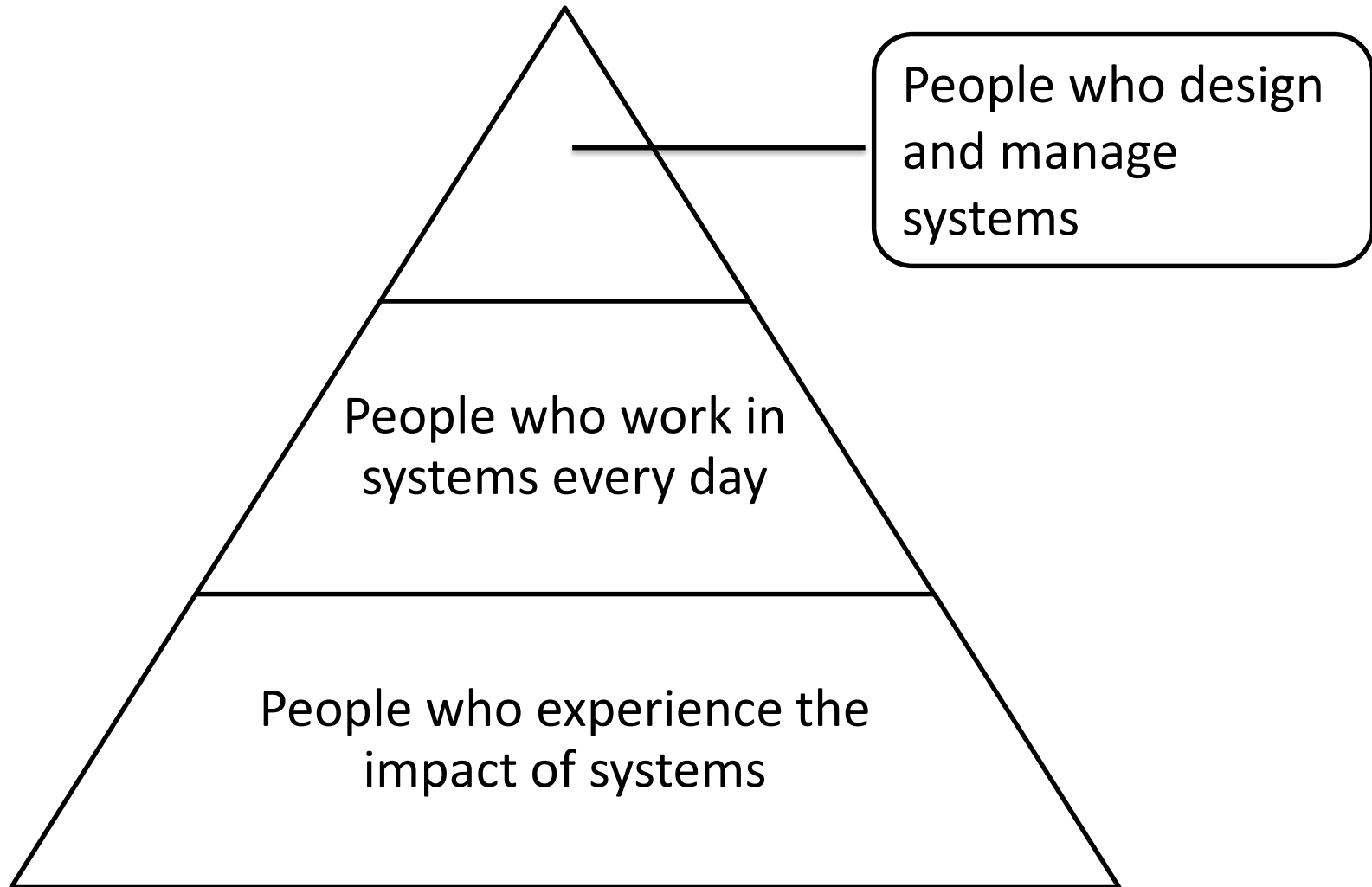


The past informs the present



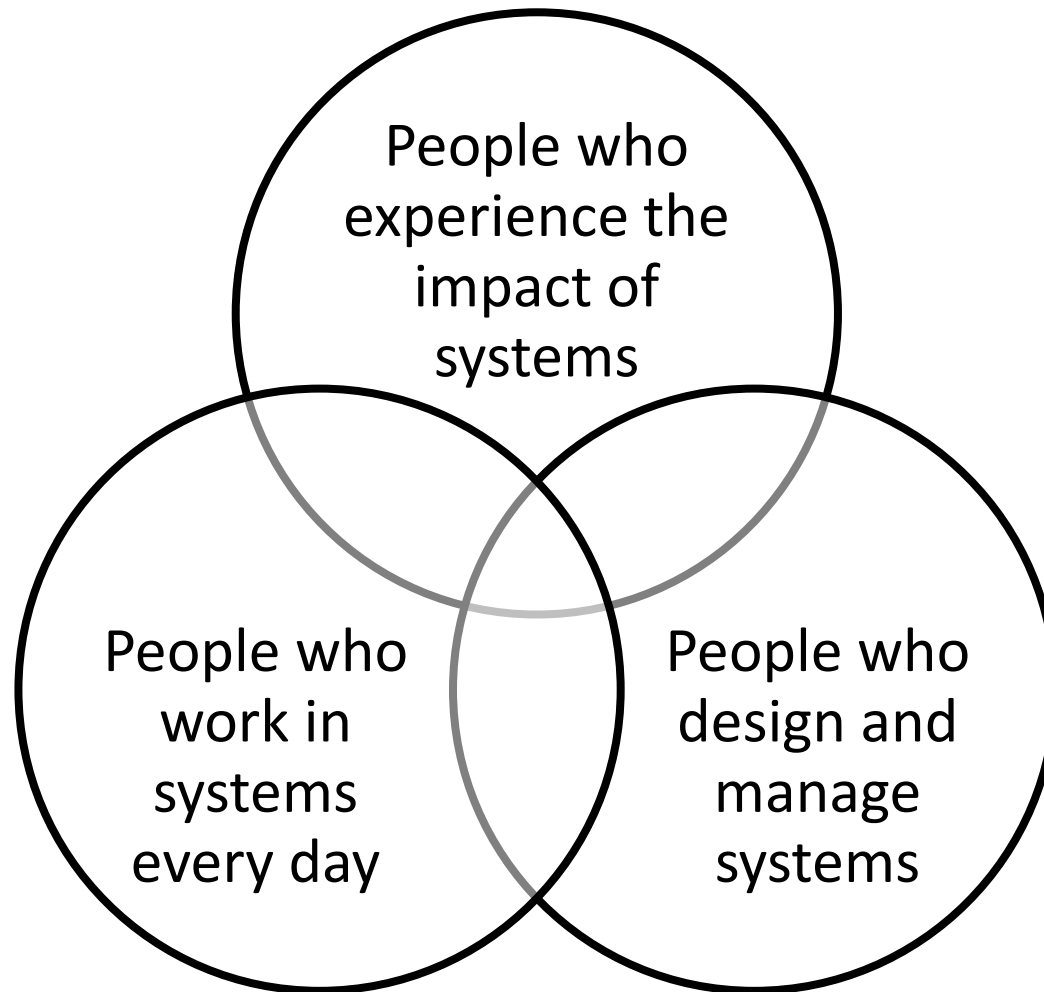


Top-Down Expertise



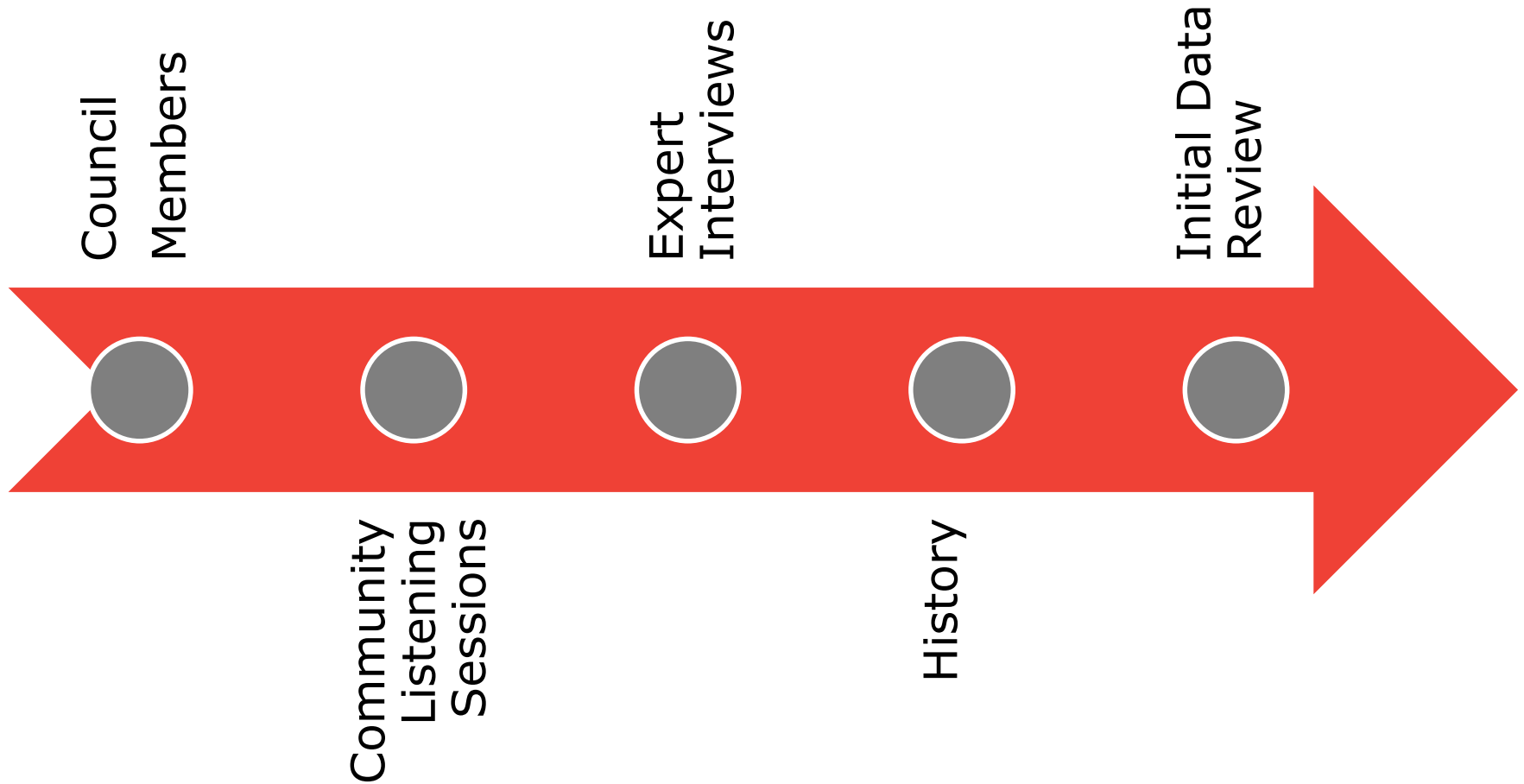


Complementary Expertise





Setting Priority Areas / Framing the Inquiry



Building Out the Analysis by Topic

- Data collaboration group
- Topical Interviews – Local and National Experts
- Policy analysis with a race equity lens
- Collaborative research methods to capture the impact of the systems under discussion

Initial Inquiry will Frame the Remaining Process

- Topics will frame the meeting agendas from April onward
- Specific topics may lend themselves to working groups
- Briefing materials, Vera presentation, expert presentation, and discussion of policy proposals
- Final drafted report

What's “Top of Mind” for Council Members?

Adolescent Development

The headline



The brains of young people are not fully mature at age 18, they continue to develop until at least the mid-twenties.



Adolescence rivals
early childhood in
the amount of
change and
development in the
brain.

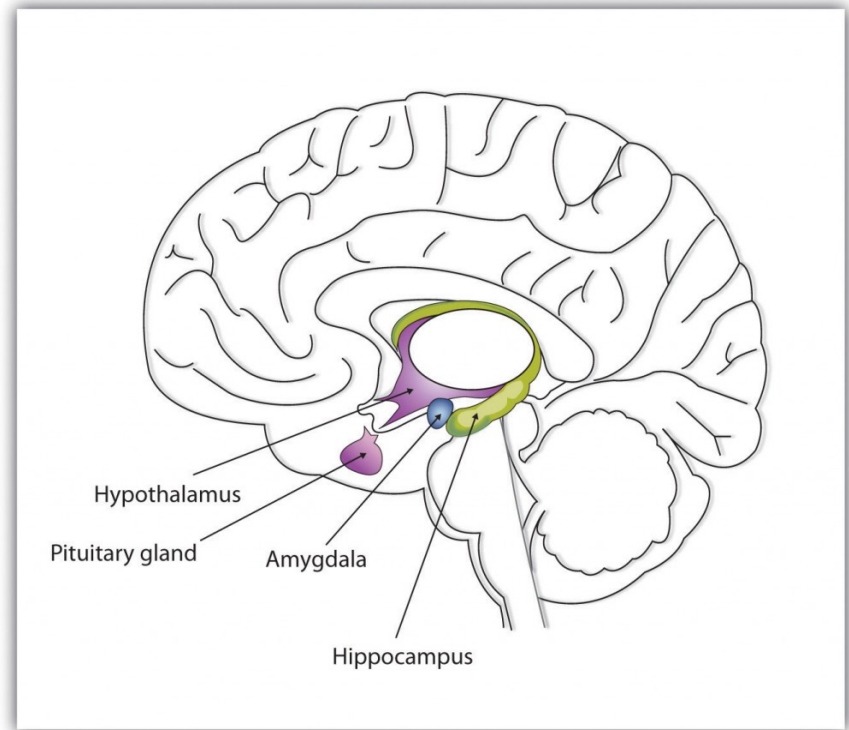


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Adolescence brings changes in the limbic system resulting in greater sensitivity to rewards, threats, novelty, and peers.

In contrast, it takes longer for the cortical region, which is implicated in cognitive control and self-regulation, to develop.



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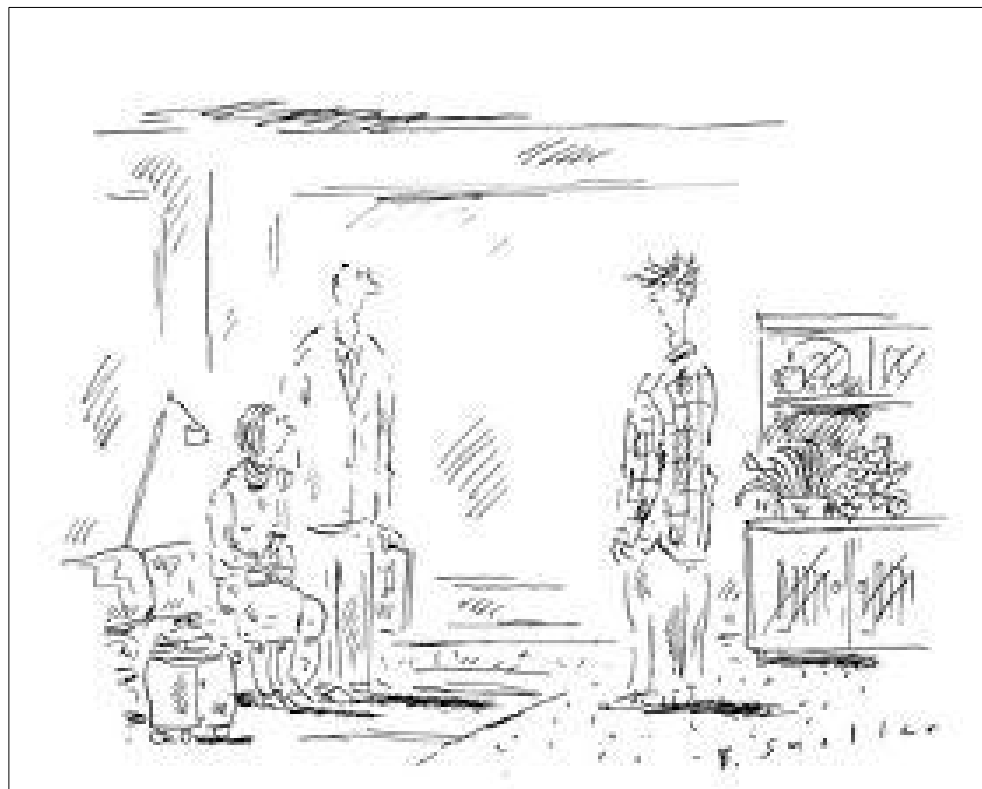


Brain development during adolescence

“These changes in brain structure, function, and connectivity mark adolescence as a period of opportunity to discover new vistas, to form relationships with peers and adults, and to explore one’s developing identity.

...Consequently, adolescent brains are not simply “advanced” child brains or “immature” adult brains, but have evolved to meet the needs of this stage of life.”

- *The Promise of Adolescence: Realizing Opportunity for All Youth* (National Academy of Sciences, 2019)



"Young man, go to your room and stay there until your cerebral cortex matures"

Their social context matters tremendously

Adolescents are **vulnerable**: they are affected by specifically toxic environments as well as pressures stemming from economic disadvantage and discrimination

Adolescents are **responsive and resilient**: investments and supports now can alter their life trajectory, even overcoming early adversity.

*When a flower
doesn't bloom, you fix the
environment in which
it grows, not the flower.*

Alexander Den Heijer



Thank you.

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