



Building the Youth Development Field in King County:

A Report on the November 2, 2010, Youth Development Executive Leaders Summit, “Harnessing Our Collective Power”

Executive Directors from nearly sixty community-based not-for-profit organizations in King County who serve children and youth in the non-school hours came together on November 2, 2010, to address the question:

Should the Youth Development Field in King County be better organized?

“YES!” was the resounding answer from the summit where 90% of executives in attendance committed their organization to continuing in the work of further developing the field.

WHY IT MATTERS:

- Local funders, legislators and decision makers get mixed and conflicting messages and information from youth serving organizations leading to a fractured, unsustainable infrastructure to support children and youth.
- 75% of youth development executives felt that local youth development organizations do not use a collective voice to influence decision makers and no one responded that we are doing this well.
- Participating organizations represent over \$500 million in annual operating budgets and employ over 20,000 people.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IN A FIELD:

- Effective Advocacy Efforts
- A Shared Identity
- Shared knowledge base, Information and Data Exchange
- A Trained Workforce & Leadership
- Standard Practice, Common Language and Best-Practices

NEXT STEPS:

The summit planning committee will morph into the King County Youth Development Leadership Taskforce, with a time-limited commitment through June 2010 to flesh out the vision and scope of work for building the Youth Development Field in King County.

The first meeting of the Taskforce will occur in late January, and the process will be led by an independent consultant to ensure the work moving forward is inclusive and collaborative. This work is being supported by a coalition of local funders interested in the efficacy of the youth development field with logistical support from School’s Out Washington.

Participating Organizations:

4C Coalition; Arts Corps; Arts in Motion; Ashoka’s Youth Ventures; Asian Counseling and Referral Service; Atlantic Street Center; Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound; Boys & Girls Clubs of King County; Camp Fire USA; Catholic Community Services of King Co.; CDSA; Center for Career Alternatives; Center for Human Services (Shoreline); Chinese Information and Service Center ; CIS Federal Way; City Year Seattle; CIS Seattle; Community Schools Collaboration; Ed Lab Group; Filipino Community Center; Friends of Children King County; Helping Link; Horn of Africa Services; Kent Youth and Family Services; Kids’ Co.; Lambert House; Mockingbird Society; Neighborhood House; New Futures; One World Now; Planned Parenthood of Western WA; Powerful Schools; Powerful Voices; PSKS; Rainier Scholars; Reel Girls; Renton Area Youth Services; REWA; SafeFutures; Seattle Education Access; Seattle Jobs Initiative; Seattle Young People’s Project; Solid Ground; Successful Schools In Action; Summer Search; Team Read; Technology Access Foundation; Treehouse; Urban Impact; Vietnamese Friendship Association; WA Asian Pacific Islander Community Services; Year Up; YMCA of Greater Seattle; Youngstown Cultural Arts Center; Youth Care; Youth in Focus; Youth Media Institute; and YWCA of Seattle-King-Snohomish.

Background on the Executive Leaders Summit

In the fall of 2009, a small group of local funders gathered informal feedback from youth development leaders on the potential benefits of greater organization among youth organizations and the potential value of holding a leadership summit. Leaders did see the value, noting a lack of widely agreed upon standards of practice or quality and the need for a more unified youth development perspective at key decision-making tables.

The funders then invited a planning group of leaders from six community-based organizations to define the goals, content and structure of a summit of youth development executive leaders for the fall of 2010.

After meeting bi-monthly for six months with logistical support from School's Out Washington, the planning committee hosted "Harnessing Our Collective Power: a Youth Development Executive Leaders Summit" on Nov. 2, 2010, at the Bell Harbor International Convention Center. Nearly 70 leaders from community-based youth-serving organizations in King County attended, out of roughly 100 that were invited.

The goals of the day were to:

- Understand strengths of individual organizations and how to build field-level strength;
- Generate ideas about what is needed to advance the field locally; and
- Form an action agenda to move the field forward.

Over the course of the day, participants engaged in rich dialogue about pressing issues in the field, embracing and building on the initial commitment of the funders and planning committee members to find better ways to understand, articulate and maximize the collective impact of individual organizations.

After being inspired by examples of how other communities have been successful in efforts to organize, the group identified several strategies they felt would help move this work forward in King County (see box.) Two tasks surfaced as top priorities:

- Developing a shared vision; and
- Mapping the work of existing services, networks, and coalitions.

The summit was just the beginning. To address these priorities, a task force will be convened in January 2011 consisting of some members of the summit planning committee along with summit participants who volunteered to help drive the work forward. A skilled facilitator will assist in developing the group's organizational structure and will help the task force make progress on the identified priorities between January and June 2011.

Ideas for Building the King County Youth Development Field

- Develop a shared vision
- Map existing services, coalitions and networks
- Determine key field-level data to collect to support priorities
- Define issues to include in a joint advocacy agenda
- Bring in the voices of youth served by youth organizations
- Broaden planning committee into a steering committee
- Approach funders to apply for a planning grant
- Identify common practices, map organizations along practice continuum
- Convene conversations around standards of practice
- Map and "gap" current professional development opportunities
- Expand use of the Youth Program Quality Assessment, both assessment and training

Highlights from the Summit

Both presentations and dialogue at the summit were anchored by a list of essential field building elements. This proved to be a useful framework for reflecting on the current state of affairs and for identifying and organizing potential strategies going forward (see box).

The day involved four primary components that are summarized in this report:

- Local Context
- Learning from Other Communities
- Discussing Opportunities and Challenges
- Identifying Priorities and Momentum

Local Context

Patrick D'Amelio of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound, who emceed the event, provided opening remarks about the current lay of the land and the reach and impact of the organizations represented in the room. Though the data presented were estimates (based on a survey conducted during the planning stages and other data gathering efforts), he was able to point out that collectively, the organizations represented at the summit and others whose leaders were invited but did not attend:

- Serve over 200,000 youth annually;
- Employ approximately 20,000 full-time employees and volunteers; and
- Have combined operating budgets of over \$500 million.

Other survey results reinforced the purpose of the summit:

- 94% of respondents consider their organization part of the youth development field (64% also consider themselves as a part of another field); and
- 75% felt local youth development organizations do not use a collective voice to influence decision makers.

Essential Elements of the Field: A Framework

Advocacy

A field has adherents who work to foster critical constituencies' support, garner good will, secure assistance, and ensure an appropriate policy context at all levels.

Identity

A field is based on a distinct and recognized practice that can be clearly described.

Knowledge Base & Information Exchange

A field has credible evidence of results, derived from research and practice, as well as ways for practitioners to obtain these results. It also has vehicles for collecting, analyzing, and disseminating information and knowledge.

Workforce & Leadership

A field has trained practitioners, researchers, and practitioner educators; the structures and institutions for training, credentialing, supporting, and retaining this workforce; incentives and organizations for leaders and leadership development; and ways of attracting a strong workforce.

Standard Practice

A field has descriptions of standard practice that meet an acceptable level of quality. Common language is used to describe practice. Best-practice demonstrates a capacity to achieve desired outcomes.

Adapted from the National Service Learning Partnership.
Available at: http://www.service-learningpartnership.org/site/PageServer?pagename=sl_fieldbuilding

Learning from Other Communities

The summit included remarks from two invited speakers who shared success stories and lessons learned from communities that have developed networks or coalitions of youth-serving organizations to strengthen the field and improve their collective impact.

Laura Shubilla described the “power of purposeful partnerships” in her keynote presentation about the Philadelphia Youth Network which she leads. She shared the network’s evolution and activities, emphasizing the critical role of aligned data collection, which has allowed youth-serving organizations across that community to have more coordinated conversations and tell a shared story about the challenges youth face and the impact of their work.

In Philadelphia, the galvanizing issue that spurred increased coordination across organizations was the dropout crisis facing young people and a recognition that organizations would need to operate in tandem for progress to be made. As a result of their collaborative efforts, an early warning system is now in place across the community, resources are spread more effectively through school-based Student Success Centers, organizations are reporting on a common set of metrics, and overall, there is a shared sense of urgency and joint accountability.

“In my experience, collaborations work best when organizations come together around a goal, crisis, or opportunity,” Shubilla said. “Partnership for the sake of partnership is not enough of a motivator. In this community, the education issue was compelling, and we knew youth organizations had to figure out how to work more effectively with schools if we were going to make a difference. A meaningful collaboration has to move the needle around outcomes.”

Shubilla also emphasized the messy nature of partnership development, noting that data can help bring discipline to the dialogue. She encouraged the group to not get hung up on determining the “right” starting place or the “magical” leadership structure. She also reminded us that race and place matter and because building trust is critical, it is important to not shy away from the difficult conversations.

Nicole Yohalem shared lessons learned from the Forum for Youth Investment’s Ready by 21[®] initiative, which has supported the work of many cities and counties across the country as they work to strengthen and align youth-serving systems and improve outcomes for youth. Nicole focused primarily on Austin and Travis County, TX where in 2004, local youth organizations began meeting monthly, articulated a shared vision for children and youth and began describing their work using a common developmental frame.

Since then the Coalition has built a Youth Services Mapping system to track availability and reach of services, adopted a common assessment tool for improving quality, and agreed on a set of shared outcomes and indicators to guide their work and track community progress.

Increased collaboration and coordination in the Austin/Travis County area has resulted in new resources, improved relationships between CBOs and schools, increased awareness of the work of youth organizations among community

Necessary & Enabling Factors for Partnership

- Trust
- Mutual respect and collegiality
- Shared principles
- Sound strategy
- Streamlined process
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities
- Nurturing climate for collaboration
- Shared data and analysis
- Communications system
- Flexibility
- Participatory process for determining activities
- Infrastructure with operational and strategic management capacity

*Laura Shubilla,
Philadelphia Youth Network*

leaders, an expansion of professional development opportunities and improved program quality.

The examples Laura and Nicole described vary significantly in terms of structure. The Philadelphia Youth Network boasts a staff of 52 full-time employees and a \$35 million budget, which includes running major service-delivery initiative like the summer jobs program. The Austin Ready by 21 Coalition is staffed by a part-time facilitator and specific projects are pursued using a decentralized approach with different members taking lead roles.

That said, commonalities of purpose, strategy and lessons are notable. To name a few, both field building efforts:

- Are anchored by a shared vision for young people;
- Used common goals and shared language to improve coordination and collaboration;
- Rely heavily on joint or aligned data collection;
- Use data to facilitate collaboration, inform community planning, create shared accountability, and improve the reach and quality of services; and
- Have raised and leveraged additional resources as a result of improved coordination.

To learn more about these and other field building examples, visit www.pyninc.org, www.readyby21austin.org, and www.readyby21.org.

Discussing Challenges and Opportunities

In the afternoon, participants selected specific field building elements to discuss with peers (see “Essential Elements” on page three.) Given the funders and planning committee’s commitment to not reinvent the wheel, each group began by identifying efforts already afoot in King County that could be expanded or built upon. Each group then generated specific action strategies they felt could help build the field (see box on page two.)

Identifying Priorities, Building Momentum

After groups shared their top action strategies, an informal poll was conducted to gauge momentum. The idea was not to identify “top” strategies or whittle down the list, but rather to get a sense of what logical next steps might be. This is where the group expressed a strong interest in developing a shared vision and mapping existing services, coalitions and networks.

The day ended with attendees filling out cards where they opted to 1) commit their organization to this work and/or 2) be involved in a leadership group to carry the work forward. In a powerful demonstration of momentum and buy-in, over 50 organizations committed themselves to the effort and nearly 40 individuals expressed interest in playing a leadership role.

Local System-Building Lessons Learned

- Recognize this is a leadership dilemma we all need to own.
- Linking provider coalitions to decision-makers or leadership structure is critical.
- Common language and good data are key to understanding collective impact.
- Some structure to support system-building is important, but it can vary a great deal.
- Build on what exists –add up before adding on!
- There is no right place to start – look for where there is momentum.
- Aligning all youth-serving systems around common goals requires time, effort and trust.

*Nicole Yohalem
Forum for Youth Investment*

Getting Involved

Early on, the planning committee developed criteria to determine who to invite to the summit. They decided to focus on CBOs providing direct services to youth (ages 5 -18) because it felt important to talk amongst peers first. They also targeted organizational leaders with authority to act. As this work moves forward, outreach to other organizations will continue.

Based on an overwhelming commitment from summit participants to continue the work, the planning committee decided to establish the King County Youth Development Leadership Taskforce to mobilize the youth development field in King County. The Task Force will convene in January and meet through June 2011 to develop a vision and an organizational structure to lead the youth development field building work in King County.

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