

**Youth Assets Planning Meeting
September 26, 2003**

Next Meeting: Friday, November 14th at 12 p.m. in the boardroom at Virginia National Bank, Arlington Road, Charlottesville, VA.

Community Attendees:

Winx Lawrence
Lee Davis
Amy Smith
Relda Manuel
Timothy Sinatra
Harold Boyd
Kathy Dowd
Kala Somerville
Mike Murphy
Noah Schwartz
David Brown
Emily Dreyfus

Staff Present:

Saphira Baker
Gretchen Ellis
Jennifer Tweed

I. Welcome and Introductions

W. Lawrence welcomed everyone and asked attendees to introduce themselves. W. Lawrence described the intent of the meeting as a preliminary planning meeting for a potential new CCF work group to examine what assets for youth exist in the community, to understand barriers and solutions to participation of at-risk youth in productive activities and to make recommendations for community-wide improvements. Goals of the meeting included identifying community members who should be involved in such an effort, the issues related to youth activities that should be addressed, and particular youth populations that should be targeted.

II. Overview of CCF Work Group approach

S. Baker described how workgroups generally function. CCF brochures and a 1-page summary about work group membership were distributed. S. Baker explained that work groups are designated by the CCF to help explore an identified need for children and families in the community that would benefit from collective action and recommendations. Work groups typically meet for approximately 1_ hours once a month (generally for 1 year). Work groups have an opportunity to influence local policy by making specific action and implementation recommendations to CCF about the identified needs.

III. Review of background data and findings regarding activities for youth

J. Tweed briefly highlighted the information described on the 2-page summary of findings distributed to the committee prior to the meeting. G. Ellis provided a more in depth description of the data and findings from several CCF research projects. In general, involvement in work and after school activities makes a difference in the lives of youth. In addition to a host of

beneficial outcomes that result (e.g., increase in school attendance and performance) involvement in productive activities serves as an important protective factor for youth (e.g., decreased victimization, decreased involvement in crime and other risky behaviors).

Locally, CCF research indicates a high level of participation in extra-curricular activities. However, certain sub-populations of youth are less involved. For example, a local survey of nearly 900 households showed that 4 out of 5 lower income youth were not involved in a productive activity outside of school. Children from non-Caucasian homes were also much less likely to be involved in extra-curricular programs (with the exception of mentoring programs). In addition, the Juvenile Offender Study which examined the characteristics of juvenile offenders for the years 1997-1999 indicated that only 24% of the youth involved in the juvenile justice system were involved in productive activities, compared to a much higher rate of involvement (nearly 70%) for non-offending youth.

An informal survey conducted by CCF in 2002 revealed that out-of-school programs offered in the Charlottesville/Albemarle community are unevenly distributed by geographic location and by schools. While many after school services are offered in the community, a lack of before school and later evening programming was noted. Finally, in focus groups coordinated by the Needs Assessment work group, when asked about obstacles they faced in taking part in extra-curricular activities, parents and youth identified cost of the service, transportation, age of entry into the programs, and responsibility for taking care of younger siblings as some of the barriers to involvement.

IV. Roundtable Discussion

W. Lawrence opened up a roundtable discussion of the current status of youth assets in the community with the following questions: What are the assets that we have for youth? What barriers exist? Does the data sound right? Several reoccurring issues were mentioned in the discussion:

Transportation

Transportation issues were noted as important because many programs require youth to have transportation to and from the service to participate.

- While many services spend a considerable amount of money transporting kids to and from their programs, sensitivity to a stigma associated with taking a bus or public transportation should be considered (especially for older youth).
- Also, if transportation is provided, door-to-door service may be necessary given a concern expressed by parents (in focus groups) that their children are not escorted directly to their homes.
- It was noted that these transportation issues are even greater barriers for children in county/rural schools.

Parent Involvement

Many attendees agreed that parent training is an important part of parental engagement/commitment.

- A coordinated training or information session (across many community agencies) was suggested as an option to educate parents about what their kids are doing/can be doing and where their kids are spending their time.
- Finding a way to encourage parents to be supportive of the programs and encouraging commitment from their children was expressed (i.e., if coach yells at kid and kid decides to quit in a growing number of cases, the parent doesn't dissuade the kid from quitting).
- Access to parents is also an issue (whether via phone or in person).
- Given different program policies for parental involvement and varying levels of parental commitment, W. Lawrence suggested that we should be aware of three groups of kids with limited parental involvement: 1) those who are automatically excluded because they lack even the smallest amount of parental involvement required (e.g., just a permission slip); 2) those who are attached to an organization, and the parents have connected to the program, resulting in a small amount of parental involvement; and 3) those involved in one program who might benefit from another and the program (i.e., teacher, mentor, or physician) serves as the personal connection to another program..

Cost

Attendees wondered about the role cost played in accessing services.

- What is the threshold for current program providers? If additional spots were available in the existing programs, could they accommodate additional kids?
- Also, while many programs that have a membership/service fee offer scholarship programs, they often require parents to provide a lot of personal information. Pride was noted as a potential barrier to service use if cost was an issue (e.g., youth/parents may forgo involvement if they are embarrassed of their inability to afford program fees or need to apply for a scholarship).
- It was suggested that organizations may not gain much from charging a fee if they are not able to serve the youth in need of their service (e.g., limiting/eliminating fee altogether was shown to vastly increase service use in some CA localities).
- It was emphasized that program costs are serious barriers for children in county/rural schools.

Including Youth in the Planning/Research Process

While several attendees indicated a willingness to survey the youth involved in their services to gauge the kinds of activities they like and are interested in participating in, the importance of having youth involved in creating the questions and potentially even surveying their peers was emphasized.

- All agreed that the activities offered need to be high-interest and engaging, further highlighting the need for youth input in program planning.
- There was discussion of including youth in the work group, but many members felt that the group may be too intimidating to allow youth to participate meaningfully. Alternatively, there were suggestions for youth focus groups or a separate youth committee.

Need a Comprehensive Menu of Opportunities

Marketing, outreach and coordination of services were raised.

- Information about how, when, and where to get involved in many activities is lacking/hard to find. Some mentioned coming across kids with abilities/talent who didn't know that certain programs exist (e.g., community sports leagues) or didn't know how to get involved.
- The method of reaching kids was cited as an important consideration (e.g., a flyer in kids' backpacks hasn't been very effective).
- More "cross-fertilization" was suggested, such that program providers more often recommend additional service programs for youth in their activities.
- A comprehensive list/menu of activities, including program specifics (e.g., times offered, where located) and qualifications for participating was suggested.

Target Population

Most agreed that the proposed focus on at-risk youth in middle school and high school was appropriate.

- Given the need for parental support and involvement it was suggested that adults be added to the target populations.
- Focusing on early childhood was also suggested, although it was mentioned that service to very young children might overlap with an existing CCF work group.

Additional discussion points:

- The need to take into account the environment that the target youth are coming from and the need to impact that environment to make an overall difference was expressed (e.g., YMCA & public housing project in CA).
- The need to focus on the fundamentals of relationship building in the context of the activities was emphasized.
- Some felt that program providers should be better about educating parents about their roles and what each professional does. The importance of communication among service providers (across multiple organizations) was also mentioned.
- Friendship Court hired a coordinator of services for that area who has knowledge about programs available. It was suggested that the idea could be used as a model for other parts of the community.
- It was mentioned that activities could be created to address a concern that local businesses have identified. Businesses have noted that youth are not prepared to enter the workforce, including issues with ethical practices, basic skills, and work behaviors and attitudes.

Additional Barriers mentioned:

- Engaging non-English speaking youth
- Ability to find/identify those who can't afford to pay for the service
- Fewer and fewer homes have phones; difficult to contact youth and parents

- County schools: place to hold programs and interest in programs travelling to rural areas to provide their activities

V. Next Steps

The group voted unanimously that collective action would be beneficial and there was a consensus of those in attendance to continue as part of the work group.

The second Friday of each month at noon was chosen as the regular meeting time for the work group. The next meeting will be held on November 14th at noon in the boardroom at Virginia National Bank, Arlington Road, Charlottesville, VA.

Organizations and/or individuals that could be contacted to join the work group:

- Region 10 (Bob Taibbi)
- Other community players (non-agency, i.e., Music Resource Center, community sports leagues, etc.)
- Youth football (Jean Wears)
- Little League (Baptist Partners)
- Charlene Green (Public Housing Association)
- Karen Waters (QCC)
- Lighthouse Studio (produce videos with kids)
- William Whitney (Drumming group)
- Sibley Johns (Music Resource Center)
- Carl Brown (youth basketball)
- Weed and Seed (Ayana Conway)
- Attendees also felt strongly that an effort should be made to find a way to represent the voices of parents and youth (with representation from kids who aren't always the outspoken ones).

At the next meeting members should determine a name for the work group (e.g., Assets for Youth, Youth Assets, Productive Activities for youth, etc.).