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Lessons Learned:

Community Perspectives on Supporting the

Path to Positive Outcomes for Youth

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by Rhonda Tsoi-A-Fatt
Senior Policy Analyst

In October 2008, CLASP convened representatives from eight communities around the country with high levels of youth distress; community leaders came from: Chicago, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Memphis, Portland, Oakland, Denver, and Los Angeles. The purpose of the meeting was to get from city leaders a grounded perspective on the challenges and opportunities associated with creating such a continuum of youth support in their communities at sufficient scale to change the landscape on youth outcomes. City leaders shared a wide range of information about their current work and most pressing needs. The day-long conversation included topics such as: the challenge of balancing the desire to provide comprehensive services with the large youth population needing services, specific barriers which hinder service provision or large-scale planning efforts, and how use of data would bolster their work. Finally, communities discussed the role that national policy organizations could play in helping communities to move toward a comprehensive youth delivery system. This brief highlights key points from the day's discussion.

Lessons Learned:
Community Perspectives on Supporting the Path to Positive Outcomes for Youth

Governance Structures

One of the keys to creation of a comprehensive youth service delivery system is effective governance. Communities must put in place a recognized entity charged with oversight, visioning, and action planning around the development and implementation of the system. This is most successful when the entity is created by someone in a leadership position (such as a mayor of city council) with both the resources and authority to ensure that the group functions as desired. Each of the communities represented in our discussion series are at varying stages in this regard. Some have established entities which have functioned for some time, while others are just beginning to develop their structures. Below is a brief summary of participants' community governance structures or plans:

- The City of Chicago created the Out-of-School Time Project in 2006; it is charged with building a citywide support system for after-school programming for all youth. This partnership is housed within the city's Department of Children and Youth Services, and brings together city services, schools, libraries, and community-based after-school programs.

- The City of Baltimore is at the beginning stage of engaging a group of strategic partners, with the mayor taking the lead on this process. Currently, partners such as Baltimore Safe and Sound and the Afterschool Institute are engaged, but Baltimore is seeking to expand this list of partners to include parks & recreation programs and facilities, Boys and Girls clubs, and recreation centers connected to schools.

- In Philadelphia, the mayor has issued the charge to cut the high school dropout rate in half in 5-7 years, and to double college attainment rates. Currently, each youth serving entity in the city has its own non-profit partnership entity, but no formal coordinating entity exists. This is currently being explored.

- In Memphis, the Youth Violence Commission has been reenacted, in hopes of addressing some of the issues around services for youth. There is not currently, however, active engagement on the part of the mayor or city council.

- Portland has strong mayoral support for youth services and youth engagement activities. Portland has crafted a strong youth master plan, and has a youth commission which functions well.

- In Oakland, the coordinating entity for youth supports and services exists outside of a single government structure. Safe Passages is a partnership table which includes the City of Oakland, the County of Alameda, the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD), philanthropy and community-based partners. An outgrowth of the Safe Passages work is the Youth Ventures Joint Powers Authority Commission, which is empowered to develop and assist in the implementation of cross-jurisdictional initiatives for the benefit of Oakland youth.

- The City of Denver has had great success in partnering with Denver Public Schools to provide services to students and their families after the consolidation and realignment of many schools. This is basis for new work to partner in other areas. The City of Denver is now embarking on the creation of a youth master plan.

- In the City of Los Angeles, the Commission on Children, Youth, and their Families is the coordinating body for services to youth and their families. Their charge, however, is a difficult one as the county has jurisdiction over many youth services. The city lacks the capacity or power to influence the direction of programming which is beneficial to its youth.

Comprehensive Services

In communities of high youth distress, the issue of balancing the need for comprehensive services with the large number of youth needing services is a delicate one, particularly when one considers the level of risk that the majority of youngsters face. It is impossible, with current budgetary allocations, for communities to provide the level of service necessary to all who need it. So how do communities make the tough choices about whether to aim for comprehensive service provision, and how to prioritize recipients of those services? What challenges do those choices present?

Most communities selected priority neighborhoods for services. While this approach is seemingly the most logical, communities stressed the need for strong data to substantiate the decision of one neighborhood versus another in order to show impartiality and respond to anticipated constituent questioning of decisions or selections. Baltimore uses juvenile crime rate data to evaluate the priority placement of services in particular part of the city. Similarly, Portland looks simultaneously at juvenile crime data and school enrollment patterns. Philadelphia organizes its youth work by breaking down the city by its nine police districts and establishing targeted outcomes within those police districts. Chicago relies upon extensive research done by Chapin Hall to guide where services or emphasis should be placed. The administration has not tried to do comprehensive in one particular geographic area, but instead focuses on maximizing use of existing resources to provide services that data shows are most needed.

The tough choices around how and where to allocate a community's limited resources present several challenges. First, while prioritizing neighborhoods or geographic areas using data seems to be the most equitable means of disseminating services, one could certainly make the case that in our most troubled communities there are many pockets of high need, and this method only determines "the worst of the worst" within communities facing enormous youth distress. Another challenge is that once a particular issue is identified as priority in a particular neighborhood or community, it is not always an easy marriage with community-based organizations to ensure that services are provided. Long-standing community-based organizations (CBOs) with established missions and service populations are not always eager to expand or adjust their services based upon newly identified or different needs in their area. This will make the organization obsolete, so it becomes very important for city administrations to work with CBOs to understand the shifting demographics and changing needs within neighborhoods, and to adapt services accordingly.

Barriers to Creating a Comprehensive Youth Delivery System

The communities identified several barriers which impede their ability to successfully plan and execute a comprehensive youth delivery system. Their concerns centered around a few key areas: serving the ever-growing immigrant populations in their communities, disjointed governance, barriers to collaboration, data issues, and sustainability. The chart below summarizes the discussion.

BROAD ISSUE	SPECIFIC CHALLENGE	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
IMMIGRATION	Serving the undocumented population is challenging because the requirements for eligibility often preclude this population from participation. In addition, federal and state requirements often do not match, and differ across programs.	1. Current WIA reform efforts include a push for "presumptive eligibility." 2. On a federal level, changes to eligibility language in legislation can drive state policy change to expand eligibility and ease documenting requirements. 3. On a federal level, proposing universal eligibility across a set of youth programs that many young people simultaneously access will enable youth to receive services.
COLLABORATION	Federal requests for proposals often do not require real collaboration with a state/local youth-serving system. As a result, a community may establish a unified vision for youth, but organizations receiving federal funds may not have bought into community vision. This potentially creates a disjointed, eclectic group of providers without a strategic focus. In addition, the competition between CBOs or youth-serving systems in communities for the same federal funds impedes the collaborative process.	1. Require evidence of real, ongoing collaboration as a part of the application process, including the contributions of each partner at the table. The most successful federal initiatives have been those where ongoing collaboration was central to planning and implementation. For example, WIA discretionary grants should have the buy-in of the local workforce board. 2. Incentivize collaboration.

GOVERNANCE	In the federal arena, the field of youth development and programs doesn't have one "home." There are a number of agencies, each serving a segment of the youth population, but no place where all youth issues are housed. This lack of cohesion trickles down to the state and local levels, where in many cities there is a major disconnect between youth-serving entities, i.e. youth development agencies, and workforce agencies. Local cities are sometimes in a bind because they face local issues and solutions which require a state response or state waiver to make things happen.	1. Advocate for the establishment of a federal Office of Youth Services. 2. Advocate for federal funding to build infrastructure for a true comprehensive youth system. 3. In local communities, increase the communication and align youth outcomes across systems.
DATA	Data privacy laws seem to preclude the sharing of data which would benefit planning and programming. Of particular benefit would be the ability to conduct gap analyses to determine where systems are falling short and more services are needed.	1. Learn more about how states or locales have successfully created a means of data sharing. For example, the California state law to allow sharing of data with signed permission. 2. Assist communities in creating the will to share data.
SUSTAINABILITY	So much of the work done to provide services to youth is grant based, so sustainability is an issue.	1. The ability to demonstrate impact in comprehensive services opens the doors to continued funding. Communities need support to show positive outcomes in some of their small initiatives in order to garner funds for expansion and replication.

Key Messages for Advocates and National Policy Organizations

1. **A solid national agenda needs to be developed to highlight the need in communities of high youth distress and to advocate for specific legislative and/or policy actions to create of continuums of support which foster positive youth development. The agenda should span multiple levels of government, and including ALL youth-serving systems. The agenda should include the issues listed below. While this is not an exhaustive list, it is a good starting point for discussion.**

   - Reduce barriers to serving youth by establishing presumptive eligibility and a universal application process
   - Advocate for funding for summer youth employment
   - Establish a federal Office of Youth Policy
   - Increase WIA youth allocation
   - Mandate collaboration in RFP processes
   - Stress youth development as multi-partner outcome; make it clear education systems cannot deliver these services alone
   - Push for the creation of a youth development funding stream; recommend funding pipelines for these resources
   - Place emphasis on the underserved out-of-school youth population
   - Acknowledge and define a strong role for communities to play in elevating and implementing a national youth development agenda

2. **Some communities with high youth distress are making strides in their efforts to create sustainable comprehensive youth delivery systems. This is due, in part, to the technical assistance and support provided by key national organizations helping communities to engage in strategic planning and collaborative work. There are, however, many more communities of high youth distress than those currently being assisted by national technical assistance efforts. Leaders in communities outlined some specific types of assistance they need in order to move this vision in their communities.**

   - Convene groups of communities with similar demographic composition and encourage conversation and sharing of effective practice. Communities with high youth distress face problems of far greater magnitude that other more affluent communities, and benefit from consistent dialogue with leadership from similar locales.

   - Help communities with high youth distress overcome barriers to data sharing between systems. The territorial nature of data is natural. In these communities, this is often compounded by the fact that the data often isn't good news. Identifying ways to legally share data is one part, but helping communities identify ways to engender trust between agencies is also key.

   - Communities with high youth distress need assistance in two aspects of the planning process to create a comprehensive system for youth. First, communities need support to create genuine

collaborations between systems, state governmental entities, business, and local community-based organizations. Communities noted that the partnerships between youth development systems and the Workforce Investment System are particularly weak across the board. Second, communities are in need of expert knowledge to ensure that interventions they seek to implement have all the elements to be high quality, sustainable, and effective.

- Communities of high youth distress need to be supported to make the case for a more holistic look at youth development and outcomes for youth. Resources and support targeted to these communities seems to be frequently targeted at strengthening schools because of their historically unfavorable academic outcomes. Any significant impact on the youth problem will require more than an overhaul of the education system. No one agency/department/office can do it alone.

3. **There are many national policy organizations in existence that are concerned with youth issues. Their missions and areas of emphasis differ, and the work each does is seen as important. There is, however, confusion sometimes on the community level as to how the various models, messages, or offers for technical assistance complement each other. National policy organizations could be more effective in their community-level outreach if they sometimes combined similar messages and worked more collaboratively on issues.**

4. **There is a growing group of national policy organizations engaging in state level work concerning youth development and preparedness for the future. This important work, however, needs to be more aggressively connected to the work of leaders in communities of high youth distress to ensure that policies being promoted are most supportive of the needs of distressed youth in these communities.**

SPOTLIGHT ON CHICAGO

The City of Chicago's Out-Of-School Time Project is partnership between the Department of Children and Youth Services, After School Matters, Chicago Public Schools, The Chicago Park District, and the Chicago Public Library. The Project aims to strengthen the Chicago system of after-school supports by pursuing four key strategies:

- Increase coordination, access, and reach of quality programming by creating a citywide program and participant database that can be shared across agencies and program providers

- Increase teen participation through a citywide communications initiative

- Establish citywide common definitions of after-school program quality and increase supports for continuous improvement of program quality

- Continually build support and readiness for achieving sustainable, coordinated and dedicated funding

In September 2008, the Project successfully launched its citywide program and participant database, **www.afterschoolchicago.org.** It is a comprehensive database that updates in real-time and contains very diverse offerings of afternoon, evening, and weekend program options provided by hundreds of community-based organizations. Youth and their families may search by physical location or across various categories, including ACADEMIC, CREATIVE, CAREER, HEALTH, LIFE SKILLS, RELIGIOUS, COMMUNITY, and SPORTS. The Project plans to continually add more features to the Program Locator, and to engage in targeted strategies to increase participation for middle school youth, and for youth in underserved communities.

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