

# "Putting Youth to Work" Series

Examples of Effective Practice in Distressed Communities

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## **Brockton, MA**

### **Overview**

Brockton faces the challenge of addressing barriers for a significant number of disconnected young people. To address these barriers, the Brockton's Blueprints Coalition, Brockton Area Private Industry Council (BAPIC), the local Workforce Investment Board and Community Partnership Project Advisory Board are all working to develop effective strategies to support young people in healthy and successful transition to adulthood.

Blueprints Coalition, co-chaired by the mayor and the district attorney, acts as the main youth-focused governing body that brings together the Plymouth County District Attorney's Office, Brockton Mayor's Office, BAPIC, Brockton Public Schools, Massasoit Community College, Department of Youth Services, Juvenile Probation Department, Department of Social Services and Brockton Police Department to maximize and coordinate community efforts and resources. The coalition sets goals for providing all youth with a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment and access to education and opportunities for economic advancement, community service, and civic engagement<sup>1</sup>. Blueprints Coalition has successfully attracted substantial resources to Brockton, including Department of Labor's Youth Opportunity Grant. There are 17,000 school-age children being served in Brockton, mostly by entities represented on the Blueprints Coalition, which receives close to \$300 million for programming. The Brockton Area Private Industry Council also focuses on youth workforce development in Brockton and collaborates with Blueprints Coalition.

The Community Partnership Project Advisory Board brings in the community- and faith-based organization voice. The board, along with the Blueprints Coalition, adopted the America's Promise model as a youth development strategy and in 2003 launched Brockton's Promise<sup>2</sup>. In 2006, Brockton's Promise was restructured to include a steering committee, with host agencies leading each team. There are five promises, each represented by a team along with a corporate sponsor. Individuals from state and local governments, social service agencies, youth organizations, and law enforcement partner in this effort. Brockton's Promise assures that all Brockton youth grow up with: safe places to live and play, caring adults in their lives, access to the resources they need for a healthy start, effective education that enables them to thrive in the workforce and opportunities to help others in their community<sup>3</sup>.

## ***Major Accomplishments***

### ***Cross-System Collaboration in Serving Vulnerable Youth***

Strong collaboration among several of the city’s departments and agencies focused on serving vulnerable youth allows key representatives to share resources, determine needs, and target spending based on need. For example, Brockton began serving court-involved youth in 2000 as part of the Youth Opportunity Grant initiative, which required systems to create partnerships to improve service to at-risk youth. Based upon the successes of the youth opportunity model, Brockton has garnered additional funding to continue cross-system collaboration to better serve youth. Examples of this funding include: the Department of Labor’s Young Offender Demonstration Project grant, Weed and Seed grant, the Project Safe Neighborhood grant from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Shannon Grant, and the Gateway to College grant<sup>4</sup>.

The state Shannon Grant is a grant offered to municipalities across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and requires a multi-disciplinary approach to combating gang violence through law enforcement initiatives. These can include targeting enforcement resources to programs that work to successfully reintegrate inmates released from juvenile detention, and to programs that provide youth with supervised out-of-school activities. In Brockton, the Shannon Grant brings together, law enforcement and juvenile justice systems, the mayor’s office and the school district to work with community-based organizations to provide education, skills training, employment opportunities and support services to at-risk youth<sup>5</sup>. Brockton District Attorney’s office serves as the fiscal agent and administers grants to multiple community and faith-based organizations.

To further support Brockton’s efforts in serving vulnerable youth, the Brockton Public School System, Massasoit Community College, and Brockton Police Department contributed resources to hire a full-time coordinator to work across systems to increase collaboration. Some of the outgrowth included establishing strong relationships with the court system, the juvenile justice system, the Department of Youth Services, and the Plymouth County House of Corrections<sup>6</sup>.

## ***Education***

In 2007, Brockton received a U.S. Department of Labor Multiple Education Pathways Blueprints Grant, which helps Brockton to “blueprint” and implement systems that can connect young people who have dropped out of high school to alternative learning opportunities in the form of pathways. Pathways offer alternative learning environments that engage youth in rigorous and relevant academic studies and workforce preparation, while preparing and connecting them to post-secondary education opportunities. Former dropout youth are better prepared to enter the labor market and career

pathways, particularly in high-growth, high-demand industries<sup>7</sup>. The grant has helped Brockton focus on engaging youth in career preparation and encouraging them to pursue postsecondary education. The goal of the funding is to serve as a catalyst and bring together community partners, similar to Brockton’s Blueprints Coalition.

Brockton, supported by the Workforce Investment Board and Shannon Grant dollars, is now using data and early indicator warning systems to track and follow students. The education system now focuses on nearly 200 sixth through eighth grade students that are on a “Whistle List” (those who have demonstrated discipline problems, have been truant for 20 percent or more of the school year, and are two years behind in math or English). This strategy demonstrates a turning point for the school system. Until this effort there had been no real policy for addressing and serving this student population. Along with the one comprehensive high school, there are a number of other alternative education initiatives in the school district. One alternative high school allows students to participate in project-based learning and vocational training within the school. The program also addresses past violence exposure in its curriculum. In addition, Brockton has a diploma plus school and is starting a health career high school.

Brockton also has a Gateway to College Program in Massasoit Community College, which is a Gates Foundation model that currently exists in 12 communities across the country and serves youth 16 to 21 who have dropped out or are at-risk of dropping out. Gateway to College is a partnership between the school district and community college and gives students the opportunity to earn a high school diploma while earning college credits and achieving college success. Students simultaneously accumulate high school and college credits, earning their high school diploma while progressing toward an associate degree or certificate. The partnership extends not only across systems, but across geography, as it serves both students from Brockton and Boston<sup>8</sup>.

**For more information, contact:**

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<sup>1</sup> CCRY Network Web site, <http://www.ccrnetwork.org/?q=node/11>.

<sup>2</sup> Brockton’s Promise, The Alliance for Youth web site <http://www.brockton-ma.gov/promise/>.

<sup>3</sup> Brockton’s Promise, The Alliance for Youth web site <http://www.brockton-ma.gov/promise/>.

<sup>4</sup> CCRY Network Web site, <http://www.ccrnetwork.org/?q=node/11>.

<sup>5</sup> Hastings, S., Harnessing the Power of Advocacy: Massachusetts’ Efforts to Increase State Resources for Youth, CLASP, December 8, 2008.

<sup>6</sup> CCRY Network Web site, <http://www.ccrnetwork.org/?q=node/11>.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Youth Services Division web site, [http://www.doleta.gov/youth\\_services/](http://www.doleta.gov/youth_services/).

<sup>8</sup> CCRY Network Web site, <http://www.ccrnetwork.org/?q=node/11>.