

Theory of Change – Youth Development

Youth Development

We believe that healthy, resilient youth¹ are capable of improving the social and economic conditions of our region if they are better prepared for post-secondary education, the workforce, and life's challenges and opportunities.

A. ULTIMATE GOAL(S)

Ensure that all youth in our 13-parish service area have access to high quality programming options that are capable of enhancing their formal education and providing the cognitive, social, and emotional skills and abilities required to become productive members of society.

B. OBJECTIVE(S)

- To ensure youth workers serve participants effectively and deliver high quality youth development programs, activities, opportunities, and services.

Rationale: Resiliency research examines the common characteristics of those youth who have overcome multiple risk factors such as poverty, chronic health problems, trauma, domestic violence, and racism.² Youth workers have used resiliency and assets research to develop a comprehensive set of strategies designed to help young people achieve their developmental goals. However, in the Greater New Orleans area many youth workers are not equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to provide this type of intervention. Moreover, research demonstrates that high-quality programming requires strong youth development professionals, and that participation in strong youth programs improves student achievement, reduces crime by and against youth, and promotes positive social development.³

- To support advocacy for the adoption of legislation, regulations, policies, and services that will promote positive youth development.

Rationale: Positive youth development is a policy perspective that emphasizes providing services and opportunities to support young people in developing into healthy, resilient youth.⁴ While individual efforts can make a difference, an advocacy approach works best when entire communities including young people are involved in creating opportunities, programs, services, policies, or systems that youth need to grow into happy and healthy adults. Moreover, advocacy

¹ Youth are defined as individuals 16-24 years of age.

² Restuccia, D. & Bundy, A. (2003). Positive Youth Development: A literature review. http://mypasa.org/failid/Positive_Youth_Dev.pdf

³ The Power of Afterschool Programs. (2007). Pennsylvania Statewide Afterschool/Youth Development Network.

⁴ Positive Youth Development, National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth (NCFY), Silver Spring, Maryland, 2001, available at www.ncfy.com

is speaking freely and fearlessly, drawing a community's attention to an important issue, and directing decision makers toward a solution.

- To support the development of a comprehensive, coordinated, sustainable system of services to meet the needs of youth.

Rationale: A comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable youth development system is necessary to create the conditions in which high quality programming options can exist. A comprehensive youth development system includes the complete array of programs, services, and organizations necessary to support youth. A coordinated youth development system links all programs, services, and organizations that support youth so that efforts are not duplicated, programs target the areas they are most needed, and resources are used efficiently. In these times of budget constraints and accountability at federal, state, and local levels, a comprehensive, coordinated youth development system has to have adequate financial support to be sustainable, as isolated funding mechanisms are not adequate to support such systems.

C. WHAT WE FUND

To most effectively meet these objectives, the Greater New Orleans Foundation will, through its IMPACT program, support organizations that:

1. Provide professional development services to individuals and organizations to improve the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of youth development workers in the areas of case management, mentoring services, tutoring, and other remediation services or programs.

Rationale: Successful, positive youth development staff are grounded in youth development principles; have genuine respect for youth and adult-youth relationships; have the skills to empower young people to be involved in decision-making processes; have self-awareness and understanding of program goals, strategies, and outcomes; and have the conviction and belief that youth are capable and can contribute to society.⁵

2. Help other youth-serving organizations define and measure program outcomes, and collect outcome and other data on participants and participation.

Rationale: Development of measures, identification of indicators, and program monitoring and evaluation are all important aspects in the delivery of high quality youth development programs and services. The data that are collected can give youth development workers an accurate picture of enrollment, attendance, and student demographics, which can help them identify service gaps, improve services, and monitor programs. This information can also help youth development workers understand what motivates kids to attend programming and helps them recognize when quality needs to be improved.⁶

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Taken from the City of New Orleans proposal to the Wallace Foundation OST System Building Initiative Round II. (2011).

3. Increase the advocacy power of youth-serving organizations.

Rationale: With the capacity to organize and advocate for legislation, regulations, policies, services, and funding, if successful, youth-serving organizations can improve the effectiveness of direct service efforts, and improve outcomes for youth and families.

4. Coordinate efforts to address youth needs and/or develop a coordinated strategy for addressing youth needs by engaging key stakeholders, promoting partnerships and strategic alliances, and creating a diversified funding base.

Rationale: By engaging key stakeholders such as youth-serving organizations, private citizens, and youth and families, problems and assets can be identified and strategies to address problems can be developed and effective approaches can be replicated. By promoting and facilitating partnerships among local service providers, schools, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies, communication among partners can be improved, and services among partners that provide services to or influence youth can be coordinated. By helping youth-serving organizations diversify their funding base, long-term organizational sustainability can be achieved.

D. OTHER WORK WE DO IN SUPPORT OF THESE GOALS/OBJECTIVES

- In 2011, the Greater New Orleans Foundation worked with Baptist Community Ministries, the City of New Orleans – Office of the Mayor, Greater New Orleans Community Data Center, Partnership for Youth Development, and the United Way of Greater New Orleans to develop a proposal for submission to the Wallace Foundation for its Out-of-School Time (OST) System Building Initiative. The proposal was not funded; however, the partners have vowed to continue their efforts to build a quality, coordinated, data-driven system of services that caters to children, youth, and families.
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