

Youth Uprising: **A Community-Based Model for Serving At-Risk Youth in Alameda County**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In a continuing effort to improve and seek out new ways to better serve children in foster care, Youth Uprising provides a set of best practices that can inform current and future partnerships in Sonoma County. Youth Uprising is an integrated multi-agency, multi-service youth leadership development and community organizing center in Alameda County. The organization, while still in its infancy, is a model for community-county partnerships that address identified community needs.

Key components to the early success of the Youth Uprising model are:

- Strategic political and financial support from the City of Oakland and Alameda County, including the Board of Supervisors and Department of Health Care Services Agency;
- Implementation of a community-based planning process that was youth-centered, built community support, and identified community resources;
- Creation of a change model (i.e., program logic chart) which articulates the vision and goals of the organization and guides all programming decisions;
- Ongoing evaluation to assess program efficacy and the organization's ability to reach target populations; and
- Strategic location of facility to be accessible by youth.

Together, these elements have created an environment that is youth-centered and community-based. The focus on the change model and ongoing evaluation has created a system that ensures programming continues to meet organizational goals and the needs of youth in their community.

The philosophy of Youth Uprising is that through supporting the development of youth in three target areas: consciousness raising, personal transformation, and hard skills/leadership development, youth learn the skills they need to become positive agents for change in their community.

Similar to Alameda County, Sonoma County has also built partnerships between county government and the community to leverage resources to support children in foster care. Two good examples are the Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation, a private non-profit organization developed to support children living at the Valley of the Moon Children's Home, and the Sonoma Kinship Center, which supports relatives (e.g., grandparents) caring for children in a family setting. Of particular interest to Sonoma County is how the practices of the Youth Uprising model can help bring new ideas and solutions to serving youth that are aging out of the foster care system.

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Introduction

Youth Uprising was created in response to growing racial tensions at Castlemont High School in Oakland, California. Public officials became concerned about the potential for escalating violence and began looking for solutions to the growing disenfranchisement among youth. When asked about the root causes that lead to tensions and frustrations, youth pointed to inadequate educational resources, insufficient employment opportunities, limited health resources, and a lack of things to do.

As a result, an intense, youth-centered community-based planning process was initiated to clarify the issues and identify services necessary to mediate the problems facing youth in Alameda County. Out of this process developed the vision and strategy for what was to become Youth Uprising. By engaging the broader community and ensuring that the process was youth-centered, they created an organization that serves the multiple needs of at-risk youth in their community.

Background

Youth Uprising opened its doors in 2005 in a facility adjacent to Castlemont High School. It serves youth ages 13-24. The Center is open to all youth from Alameda County but a significant number of their membership is youth in the foster care system, on probation, and/or who have been incarcerated. Youth Uprising has a membership of over 2100 with an average daily attendance of 250. Services include:

- a health clinic;
- media arts program;
- career development and academic support;

- sports and recreation;
- performing and physical arts; and
- case management.

While the space is owned and operated by the county, and core staff are county employees, most of the programs and services are provided by other organizations. Youth Uprising partners with community-based organizations, universities, and individual youth development professionals to provide the majority of program services within the facility. These providers view their involvement in Youth Uprising as an opportunity to bring programs directly to their target audiences. In most cases their services are provided on an in-kind basis in exchange for use of space within the facility. For example, College Resource Zone, a program of University of California at Berkeley provides academic advising and financial aid to potential first generation college students. They approached Youth Uprising about providing services through their facility because it improved their ability to reach youth living in Oakland. Examples of other community partners include: Alameda County Office of Education, Bay Area Youth Consortium, Children's Hospital and Research Center in Oakland, Destiny Arts Center, and Global Education Partnership.

Community-Based Planning Process

One of the keys to Youth Uprising's early success is the time, attention, and resources that went into the planning for its eventual creation. A community-based planning process was used to bring together the experience and knowledge of youth serving organizations, youth development professionals, county

and city representatives, and local youth. This process created the vision, goals, and culture of the organization with youth playing a central role to ensure that the final strategies would meet their interests and needs. While the process was used to address an identified problem in the community (i.e., youth disenfranchisement and racial tension), its approach to solving that problem was asset-based. Drawing on the resources of community organizations and the knowledge of young people to plan for and provide services, a focus was developed on asset-based solutions.

With financial support from Alameda County and the City of Oakland, a team of consultants was hired to implement the community-based planning process. It took two years of intensive work and included:

- Creation of a youth council and work groups to guide and inform the work;
- Visits to local and national youth organizations to observe best practices (e.g. Harlem Children's Zone);
- Examination of philosophical approaches to youth leadership development, organizational structures, and evaluation practices;
- Assessment of potential space needs and uses; and
- Review of resource development strategies.

The Youth Council involved 30 young people recruited from the local community. They played an important role in creating the environment, culture, and framing of the center. The Youth Council decided what kinds of space should be included so the new Center would appeal to and draw in young people. The youth who participated in the Youth Council came from a wide range of abilities and knowledge, and they represented the diversity of the community.

Because it can be a challenge to keep youth involved in such an intensive and long process that required much of their time and attention, strategic steps were taken to strengthen their ability to stay engaged. Each Youth Council member had an adult ally from the community who would check in with them if they missed meetings. Adult allies also played

an important mentorship role when Youth Council members needed guidance in managing the various aspects of their lives in order to continue to stay involved. Youth Council members received a stipend for participation, transportation to attend meetings, and food at every meeting. In addition, youth were invited to voice their opinions at regularly scheduled meetings, which often occurred after regular business hours. This structure resulted in consistent participation from youth throughout the planning process.

The work groups were made up of representatives from local youth serving organizations (e.g., Youth Radio, Oakland Youth Advisory Commission). Their role was to create a program design and plan for the physical space. The work groups were divided into four program focus areas, identified by the Youth Council as being major areas of interest and need earlier in the planning process. These included: media arts, health and wellness, physical and performing arts, and career and education.

Through the community-based planning process, Youth Uprising began to build community support and commitments from potential partners. Representatives from other community organizations got involved, and stayed involved because they saw Youth Uprising as serving a major need in their community and funds were committed by the county and the city. Many partners, who participated in the planning process, became providers of services in the new center.

One of the important outcomes of the process was the creation of the Youth Uprising Change Model (see Appendix I). The change model was created through strategic planning with outside consultants, Social Policy Research & Associates, prior to the Center's opening. The change model encompasses the mission, vision, and core set of goals that guide programming and practices of the organization. It is a dynamic document that has already been revised twice since implementation. The change model is central to how the organization functions and how potential partners and staff are selected. It emphasizes the organization's focus on being youth

driven and articulates the skills that youth develop through participation in their programs.

Because the Youth Uprising Change Model guides programming, any organization interested in providing services must be able to demonstrate how they support youth in three target areas as identified in the change model. These areas are designed to help youth learn the skills they need to become positive agents for change in their community. They include:

- 1 Consciousness Raising
- 2 Personal Transformation
- 3 Hard Skills/Leadership Development

Evaluation

Beginning with the community-based planning process, evaluation has been a cornerstone of Youth Uprising. The change model was used to guide all aspects of their work and to evaluate program efficacy and ability to reach the target population. Social Policy & Research Associates, who had coordinated the planning process, were also hired to undertake the evaluation of programs and the center-wide assessment. The original evaluation plan had three major objectives:

- Document processes of implementing a comprehensive youth center at multiple levels (i.e., youth, programs, staff);
- Assess ways in which a comprehensive youth center can impact youth, staff, and the community, including changes in youth skills and leadership, youth roles within the community, youth's attitudes about social change, staff development, and community empowerment; and
- Document the challenges of and strategies used for implementing the change model to inform funders and other youth development programs.

At the present time the evaluation is focused on the process, documenting the Center's early stages of implementation. The transition to an outcome and impact evaluation will occur in years three to five of the Center's existence.

To evaluate these various aspects of the Center, and its development, the following methods are being used:

- Youth surveys (pre- and post-);
- Youth focus groups;
- Case studies (longitudinal); and
- Documentation of the history of the organization.

To date, the first set of youth surveys have been collected and focus groups have been conducted. The initial results of the surveys and focus groups have already influenced programming at Youth Uprising. A key finding was that youth were self-reporting participation in skill-building activities but would often not be able to articulate what skills they had learned through their participation. For example, youth self-reported that they had participated in meetings with the Mayor and other public officials but would indicate that they had not had opportunities to be involved in civic engagement activities. These results highlighted that providing experiences for youth did not always translate into gained skills or knowledge. In response to these findings, a skill-building wall was created. Located in a public area of the Center the wall allows kids to articulate and document their learning by identifying skills developed through participation in various programs.

Another result of the evaluation was the awareness that in comparing initial results against other long-standing, single purpose youth organizations, Youth Uprising was reaching the same benchmarks as high performing organizations. These findings eased initial concerns that a multi-purpose youth center is more difficult to implement and reduces an organization's ability to be effective in reaching its goals in all program areas. The process of struggling to integrate services for youth in multiple areas (e.g., education, job preparedness, health) has pushed them to perform at a high level in almost all of their program services. The success has strengthened providers commitment and resolve to continue to provide programming that reaches multiple facets of young people's lives.

Budget

Youth Uprising was started with \$1 million in general funds from Alameda County to support the initial community-based planning process. An addi-

tional \$200,000 in Community Development Block Grants funds was received from the City of Oakland. The facility in which the Center is housed was owned by Alameda County and vacant when the County Board of Supervisors authorized the conversion of the property into the new youth center. It was an ideal location for the Center because it was located next to Castlemont High School. When it came time for renovations of the facility, the County's Health Care Services Agency designated \$3.4 million from Tobacco Masters Settlement Funds for capital improvements and programming.

The total annual budget for Youth Uprising is \$6.5 million. Of this total 54% are in-kind services provided by community partners. During its first year of operation, the Center was a fully-supported county agency. Alameda County funded the operation of the facility and the core staff positions (i.e., Executive Director, Deputy Director, Program Director, IT manager, Office Manager, Performing Arts Coordinator). In fiscal year 2007-2008, the Center will transition into an independent non-profit that will contract with Alameda County to provide youth services. The county has committed to continuing to manage and support the facility (i.e., maintenance, utilities) and contract to provide funds for some staff positions in the Center (i.e., Executive Director, Deputy Director, Finance Director, Program Director, Case Management Coordinator).

This transition to a non-profit will give the Center more flexibility in approaches to working with local youth. For example, they will be able to develop their own policies around working with incarcerated youth and youth on probation. The challenges of becoming an independent non-profit include the need to expand fundraising efforts and the management of human resources issues (e.g., risk management, processing new employees) which are currently being supported by Alameda County Human Resources Department. These responsibilities, along with the development of policies and procedures, will be transferred to the Youth Uprising administrative staff.

To date, the budget for the evaluation of Youth Uprising has totaled \$51,000. This has provided

funds for initial planning, creation of the change model, and the implementation of the first set of youth surveys and focus groups. In 2007-2008, it will cost an additional \$35,000 for the second set of youth surveys, focus groups, and implementation of case studies and documentation of the Center's history. Evaluation will be an on-going expense, but an invaluable one to ensuring that Youth Uprising is meeting its outcomes and providing services in an efficacious manner to its target population. Furthermore, on-going evaluation will provide good data to potential funders about program outcomes and can promote additional funding.

Implications for Sonoma County Human Services Department

With changes in leadership at many levels within the County of Sonoma Human Services Department, and the new program priorities of the Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation, the timing may be right for considering new strategies for supporting emancipating foster youth. The synergy created by change can open windows of opportunity for the development of new approaches to old issues or problems.

The Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation is finalizing a capital campaign, and, with the campaign's completion, their focus will shift to four new areas of support for children in Sonoma County:

- 1 Supplemental support for children residing at the Valley of the Moon Children's Home;
- 2 Support for emancipated children in education, housing, and employment guidance;
- 3 Support for children in foster care and for foster parents; and
- 4 Community child abuse prevention education.

These priorities are in line with new initiatives to raise community awareness and support for children aging out of foster care.

While Youth Uprising grew out of a crisis in the community, and would be difficult to capture without the same urgency, there is much in its development and implementation to inform youth programming in Sonoma County. At the core of Youth

Uprising is the belief that youth can be empowered to be agents for change in their own communities. By taking the time and resources to engage youth in the planning processes and on-going evaluation to guide programs, other communities can develop programming that responds to the variety of issues facing at-risk youth. These practices increase the potential that programs or services will be used by the youth they are intended to serve. Although comprehensive and on-going evaluations can be costly, they help to ensure that programs are meeting the goals and needs of the clients. This can bring in new funds based upon evidence of program effectiveness. In Sonoma County, these best practices could be especially useful in informing programming to support youth aging out of foster care.

The outcomes for youth aging out of foster care are bleak. Statistics indicate:

- 65% of California youth leaving foster care face imminent homelessness as they graduate.
- Up to 50% of former foster youth experience homelessness within 18 months of leaving the child welfare system.
- Young women who have graduated from foster care are six times more likely to become pregnant by age 21.
- Barely 1% of foster youth who enter college are able to graduate.
- Nearly 60% of former foster youth live below the poverty line (i.e., earning income below \$9,000 annually).*

Outcomes for foster youth is a serious issue both locally and nationally and will require intensive work and commitment to find appropriate solutions. The early success of Youth Uprising shows that communities can be successful in creating multi-dimensional programs that reach at-risk youth populations.

Funding will likely be the main hurdle to implementing new programming in Sonoma County. However, if enough support can be built within the county, local community, and among foster youth, this support can help leverage new resources. The

Valley of the Moon Children's Foundation, in partnership with the Sonoma County Human Services Department, is well positioned to help build support given its positive reputation in the community and its track record of raising funds. Maintaining a youth-centered approach will be necessary to these processes. Besides developing programs that will better serve the needs of emancipating foster youth, it will also help to build leadership among foster youth who can often be the best advocates for seeking additional resources and funding.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Sonoma County include:

- Review any past or current efforts to involve foster youth in informing or planning programs in Sonoma County.
- Inventory community organizations that provide services for foster youth and emancipating foster youth in Sonoma County. Additionally, inventory youth-serving organizations that may not currently be providing programming for foster youth but have the potential to do so.
- Create a youth council using the Youth Uprising model of providing supports that encourage continued involvement (i.e., identify adult allies, schedule meetings at convenient times, provide transportation and stipends). Key stakeholders on a youth council would be current and emancipated foster youth. A youth council should identify unmet needs of foster youth preparing for emancipation, barriers to accessing currently available resources, current assets in the community, gaps in services, and also provide feedback on program design.
- Develop a work group to consider implementing a community-based planning process around services for emancipated youth. Key stakeholders in a work group would be city and county representatives, staff from community youth-serving organizations, foster parents, and youth council representatives. The work group should review current programs for emancipated youth in Sonoma County, review programs in other com-

*United Way of the Bay Area (2005), *Foster Youth Advocates Issue Report*.

munities, identify gaps in local programming, consider partnerships among organizations to fill programming gaps, and create a program logic model to guide new programming efforts and evaluation of these efforts.

- Consider funding options that would support the planning efforts of a youth council and work groups, implementation of new programs, and evaluation.

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YOUTH UPRISING CHANGE MODEL



*"Youth Leadership.
Community Transformation."*

Vision

The most effective means of building healthy and economically robust communities is to develop and harness the leadership of young people through creating safe and vibrant spaces that offer comprehensive, integrated programming.

Mission

Advancement of youth leadership development as a means to affect positive community change by ensuring that youth and young adults are supported in actualizing their potential as a result of:

- (1) Consciousness Raising** that exposes them to a broader set of realities to develop their capacity to think critically about personal and community experiences;
- (2) Personal Transformation** that builds their capacity to transform experiences of trauma and oppression into opportunities for positive personal and community change; and
- (3) Hard Skills/Leadership Development** that increases their creativity, strengths, and skills as effective leaders who are competitive in the marketplace.

