

***A PLACE TO GROW***

**EVALUATION  
OF THE  
NEW YORK CITY BEACONS**

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**FINAL REPORT**

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*In memory*

*of*

*Linda Pitts*

*whose commitment to youth*

*inspired this report*



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings from an intensive study of six Beacon centers, the second phase of an evaluation of the New York City Beacon initiative. Beacons are community centers located in public school buildings, offering a range of activities and services to participants of all ages, before and after school, in the evenings, and on weekends. Individual Beacons are managed by community-based organizations and work collaboratively with their host schools, community advisory councils, and a wide range of neighborhood organizations and institutions.

The New York City Beacon initiative was begun in 1991 with municipal Safe Streets, Safe Cities funding. By the time Phase I of the evaluation began in fall 1997, 40 Beacons served more than 76,000 youth and 33,000 adults. As of 2001, the program includes 80 Beacons, with at least one operating in each of the 32 local school districts in New York City and several in the city's poorest neighborhoods.

Individual Beacons offer children, youth, and adults a wide range of recreational programs, social services, educational enrichment, and vocational activities in four core areas: youth-development programming, academic support and enhancement, parent involvement and family support, and neighborhood safety and community building.

Funded and administered by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), the Beacons are an important example of a partnership between city government and a nonprofit agency. New York City has invested not only funds but also the expertise of DYCD personnel in supporting the development and operation of the Beacons, expanding the initiative to make it the largest municipally funded youth initiative in the country. In addition to DYCD, the initiative is supported by technical assistance provided by

the Youth Development Institute (YDI) of the Fund for the City of New York.

## THE BEACON EVALUATION

YDI commissioned an evaluation of the Beacon initiative to gain information and insights to improve individual sites and the initiative as a whole and determine the impact of the Beacons on youth, families, schools, and communities. The evaluation was conducted as a collaborative effort of the Academy for Educational Development (AED), the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, and the Hunter College Center on AIDS, Drugs and Community Health.

Phase I of the evaluation included an implementation study documenting and analyzing how the Beacon concept and theory of change were realized at the 40 Beacon sites. It also included an analysis of program elements to determine the extent to which the Beacons implemented activities, programs, and services in the four areas noted above related to youth-development programming, academic support, family, and community. The implementation study, released in 1999, found that although the Beacons varied in the extent of implementation, all sites had been successful in serving as a "safe haven," offering a range of activities for youth and adults, as well as some community-improvement activities.

During Phase II of the evaluation, an intensive study looked at how the Beacon initiative affected youth and their parents, the host schools, and the surrounding communities in six sites selected from the 40 Beacons. It also examined if and how variations in site and program quality affected youth attitudes and behaviors. Chapin Hall helped design the Phase II evaluation. AED and Hunter staff collected data during spring and fall 1999. AED analyzed the findings and produced this final report.

The intensive-study sites were selected through a stratified random sample to represent the full range of Beacons as then operating in New York City. Using information gathered during the implementation study, evaluators ranked the Beacons according to the completeness of their implementation in the four core areas of youth-development programming, academic support, family involvement, and community building. In general, the stratified random sample provided a good cross section of the Beacons, in terms of distribution by geography and type of lead agency. Evaluators designated the first four sites “qualitative-study” sites to be studied in greater depth.

The six sites were located in all five boroughs of New York City and shared characteristics common to many urban neighborhoods: a diverse population in terms of race and ethnicity; a high percentage of single-parent, female-headed households on public assistance; a high percentage of youth in the population; and high rates of teen pregnancy, school dropout, and youth violence and crime. Since sites participated in the study with the understanding that they would remain anonymous, they are not identified in this report nor described in ways that would reveal their identity.

The intensive study was designed to answer the following questions:

- How and to what extent have the Beacons provided opportunities for youth development, school linkages, parent/family involvement and support, and neighborhood safety and community building?
- Who participates in which Beacon services and activities, and what are the patterns of participation?
- What are the benefits of participation in Beacon activities and services for youth, families, schools, and communities?

These questions were answered through four substudies focusing on different segments of the Beacon population: youth, adults, host school,

and neighborhood. Each substudy used a different set of evaluation questions specific to the population. Methods included youth surveys and interviews; interviews with Beacon, lead agency, and school staff, as well as adults in the community; and site and activity observations.

The evaluation was not intended to provide a judgment on the Beacon initiative as a whole. The first phase of the evaluation found abundant evidence of the value of the Beacons. The purpose of the intensive study was to examine in greater depth how that value was manifest at different sites and for different groups of participants. Because the Beacon model has attracted national and international attention and investment, the primary focus of the second phase of the evaluation was an intensive examination of the practice of youth development within the Beacons, as well as a systematic documentation and analysis of the impact of youth-development practices on young people participating in the Beacons. This entailed assessing the quality of youth programming at the Beacons, particularly in terms of its educational value and its fostering of positive youth development in the four qualitative-study sites. Specifically, the evaluation examined the implementation and impact of the five characteristics central to YDI’s youth-development framework, asking to what extent youth had opportunities to (1) participate in stimulating and engaging activities; (2) develop caring and trusting relationships; (3) be challenged to grow by high expectations; (4) connect with and contribute to their communities; and (5) benefit from a continuity of adult support.<sup>1</sup>

The evaluation also examined levels of quality in youth-development programming. The different outcomes for youth at Beacons that more fully implemented good youth-development practice prompted the question of what constitutes high-quality youth-development practice and how it differs from practice of

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<sup>1</sup> *Networks for Youth Development: A Guided Tour of Youth Development* (New York City: Youth Development Institute, 1993).

lower quality. While observing Beacon activities, evaluators paid particular attention to how well the principles of positive youth development were incorporated throughout the organization and across activities. In addition to analyzing the overall quality of the activity, evaluators looked at characteristics typical of excellent youth-development practice, and in particular at the five characteristics listed above.

## MAJOR FINDINGS

Major findings are presented below for youth and youth-development practice, adults, the school, and the community.

### Findings About Youth

➤ **The Beacons offer young people a place to grow through challenging activities, caring relationships, and opportunities to contribute to the Beacon and to their communities.** Both survey and interview findings indicated that the majority of young people were taking advantage of these challenging activities and believed they were developing new competencies because of their participation at the Beacon. When asked why they came to the Beacon, young people most frequently responded that Beacon activities were fun. In fact, at first glance, many Beacon activities do not look very different from traditional youth activities. However, at the Beacon, adults lead participants in stimulating, engaging activities that combine fun with opportunities to learn and develop the different competencies that youth will need as adults.

➤ **The youth-development quality of the Beacon environment and the activities offered to youth make a difference in outcomes.** Evaluators looked at both general and youth-development quality. The former included safety, well-organized activities, consistent enforcement of the rules, and low staff-youth ratio. The latter included the five elements of good youth-development programming noted above as central to YDI's framework. Findings indicated that

youth-development quality—or the extent to which the principles of good youth-development practice were implemented—in the Beacon environment and activities made a difference in youth outcomes.

In sites with higher youth-development quality, young people were more likely to:

- feel better about themselves at the Beacon;
- believe that youth of all races and ethnicities were valued at the Beacon;
- perceive that staff had high expectations for their behavior and performance; and
- report that the Beacon helped them learn leadership skills.

They were also less likely to report that they had:

- cut classes;
- hit others to hurt them;
- deliberately damaged other people's property;
- stolen money or other property; and
- been in a fight.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> All differences were statistically significant after controlling for various external factors, including presence of adult support, participation in youth-development activities, and a composite factor measuring risk status, which included being from a single-parent home, getting mostly Ds and Fs last school year, getting suspended last year, cutting class this year, and being over-age for grade. For the cutting-class regression, cutting class was excluded from the risk factor.

Regression analyses showed that the quality of youth development was not correlated with overall school quality or neighborhood safety, and that the degree to which youth were potentially at risk was distributed across the intensive-study sites.

- **The Youth Development Institute (YDI) has played an important role in conceptualizing and promoting high-quality youth-development programming.** YDI offers a wide range of professional development opportunities for both Beacon directors and their staff who work with youth. These include monthly meetings of directors to help them incorporate a youth-development perspective into organizational behavior. YDI also provides access to training where Beacon staff can learn the principles and practices of positive youth development. However, attending YDI meetings for Beacon directors and taking advantage of YDI staff training opportunities are voluntary, and not all sites do so regularly. Those sites with staff most frequently attending YDI meetings and training activities had the highest-rated youth-development quality and the most positive youth findings. In addition, these sites were also more likely to send staff for other kinds of youth-work training. In short, the extent to which the New York City Beacons have become a model for youth-development programming owes much to YDI's capacity-building work.
- **Homework help and academic support are important and valued youth activities at the Beacons.** Young people of all ages frequently cited the availability of homework assistance in response to questions about what they liked most about the Beacons and why they would recommend it to their friends. Parents mentioned the homework-help activities as the second most positive aspect of the Beacons after the presence of a safe and welcoming environment.

## Findings About Youth-Development Practice

Analysis of evidence from observations of the Beacons and their activities revealed three levels of youth-development practice at the qualitative-study sites: basic, satisfactory, and exemplary:

- **Basic (participating):** Youth are participating—in the program, off the street, out of harm's way, forming bonds with peers and learning the basics of social behavior.
- **Satisfactory (engaged):** Youth clearly are engaged and interested in what they are doing and are more likely to return to these activities on a continuing basis.
- **Exemplary (generative):** Youth are generating new strengths and competencies in activities that stretch them and stimulate their growth.

The evaluators observed these levels in all five areas characteristic of the YDI youth-development framework, listed above. Those sites with greater implementation of youth-development in these five areas were those sites with better youth outcomes, as described above.

## Findings About Adults

- **The Beacons provide important services and activities for neighborhood adults.** Numerous adults from the local communities reported participating in sports and physical fitness activities, basic education, English-language instruction, GED preparation, and computer instruction. Survey and interview data indicated that adults valued the Beacon for what it provided both themselves and their children.
- **Parents of youth attending the Beacon praised its family-oriented activities and services.** Parents cited the Beacon's workshops and counseling for helping them learn to communicate better with their children and their children's teachers. More than half these parents reported attending meetings and activities in their children's

schools and credited the Beacon with helping them do so.

- **More than half of adults surveyed across all sites (54%) did not have children at the Beacon.** This suggests that the Beacon is casting a wide net and serving as a true community center rather than simply as an extension of the school.

### Findings About Schools

- **The Beacons have been successful in bringing community members into the school building, but less so in connecting the school and Beacon to one another.** Despite efforts on the part of the Beacons to make school staff aware of their presence and what they offer children, only a relatively small proportion of school staff felt informed about the Beacon in their building, and an even smaller group had participated in Beacon activities or worked for the Beacon.
- **There is an untapped resource in the Beacons to organize parents around school issues and provide information about working with individual teachers and the school as a whole.** Those staff who were informed about the Beacon were generally positive about its potential to help the school in the areas of student behavior and self-esteem, as well as to connect students and families to needed community resources.

### Findings About Community

- **Beacons play a role in their host communities as valued local institutions.** Community residents were well aware of the Beacon's presence, despite little advertising and its location within a school building.
- **Among those residents aware of its presence, the Beacon was very positively perceived.** Of those who had heard about the Beacon, more than half rated their neighborhood Beacon as good; an additional quarter rated it as excellent. Just under one-

third of them (31%) had heard about the Beacon from a friend.

- **Community residents who had heard about the Beacon had slightly more positive perspectives on the social cohesion of their neighborhood.** They were more likely to agree that the community was one where people looked out for one another's children and where people did not keep to themselves. This was the case even though their other perceptions of the neighborhood frequently were more negative than the perceptions of people unaware of the Beacon.

### OTHER FINDINGS

- **Beacon activities have the potential to help prevent risky adolescent behaviors.** By their nature, the broadly based youth activities at the Beacon differed from the kind of problem-focused prevention activities that have become common in recent years. At the same time, they did address some of the same prevention issues. In fact, the Beacons' potential as a platform for community-based health education was evident. The majority of young people reported that they had participated in discussions on drugs and alcohol and on sexuality, reproductive health, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Students who reported participating frequently in discussions on alcohol and drugs were significantly less likely to report having used marijuana in the two previous months. Moreover, the preventive messages of these activities were strengthened and legitimized because they were conveyed by adults and older youth who had already earned the respect and trust of Beacon youth.
- **Cross-age activities are a valuable part of the Beacon experience for many young people.** Most sites provided significant opportunities for older and younger youth to be together, and more than three-quarters of youth reported having helped someone



younger at the Beacon. Sometimes this occurred within an activity open to youth of different ages. In addition, older youth helped out with activities for younger children as either volunteers or paid staff. Overall, there was a good deal of informal interaction among different age groups. Whatever the situation, in interviews, older youth repeatedly mentioned that they felt responsible to serve as role models for younger children, and that seeing themselves in this way helped them avoid negative behaviors such as fighting or using drugs.

- **Youth leadership develops from opportunities to contribute at the Beacon.** Youth at the Beacons reported that they were learning leadership skills. Although young people had many formal opportunities to develop leadership skills, when youth were interviewed about what skills the Beacon helped them develop, they often described learning right from wrong and learning how to resolve conflicts, be independent, and help and teach others. These forms of moral leadership appeared to be more important to youth than other types of leadership skills.
- **The Beacons have benefited from the public-private partnership between the Department of Youth and Community Development and the Youth Development Institute.** DYCD has provided continuous fiscal support for the Beacons, despite changes in mayoral administration, and appointed a deputy commissioner for Beacon programs, in recognition of the need to sustain the growing number of Beacons as the initiative expanded. DYCD has also provided numerous supports benefiting both new and old Beacons, including a Beacon manual, contract-monitoring procedures aligned with youth-development principles, an automated contract-development process, and monthly directors' meetings for all Beacon directors. These meetings were used as a major vehicle for disseminating new information and as an opportunity to support Beacons around common challenges (e.g., structuring and running advisory councils), as well as to inform Beacon directors about

available training opportunities for themselves and their staff.

In summary, the evaluation found that the Beacons provided more than the usual "gym and swim" of traditional recreational programs for youth. By providing youth with a range of developmental opportunities and supports, they are, in the words of one evaluator, "not just a place to go, but a place to grow."

### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

Several issues arose from AED's evaluation of the New York City Beacons: some should be heeded by existing and new programs; others could benefit from further study. These issues include:

- Gender patterns in activities
- Effect of size on program quality
- Bullying and teasing
- Attention to entry of new youth into the Beacon
- Training of younger staff
- Training in youth work
- Staff hired from community
- Availability of opportunities for youth-leadership
- Attention to youth with severe academic difficulties
- Attention to risk-taking behavior
- Attention to youth-development and educational quality of programming
- Informing school staff about the Beacon

These are discussed briefly below.

#### ***Gender Issues***

Traditional gender patterns were revealed in responses to survey questions about youth participation in different activities, with boys outnumbering girls in athletic activities. Girls dominated homework help, arts and crafts,

creative and performing arts, family life/sex education sessions, and computer instruction. Some sites had begun to recognize and address these sex-stereotyped participation patterns, but this is clearly an area where more attention would be helpful.

### ***Group Size***

Group size emerged as a critical factor in effective programming. For example, small group size was a facilitating factor in staff's ability to incorporate elements of good youth-development practice into an activity. The smaller the group, the more likely evaluators were to see the development of caring and trusting relationships among youth; the availability of adult support—both in general and manifested in high expectations for young people's performance and behavior; and the flexibility to allow young people to contribute to running the activity. In addition, in larger activities, evaluators sometimes saw interpersonal conflict and bullying and teasing that were not well managed by staff. Lastly, there were some activities with large size and/or inadequately trained staff that did little more than fill time. Unfortunately, this was more frequently the case with educational activities than with other types of activity.

### ***Bullying and Teasing***

Bullying and teasing also posed a problem, particularly in large-group activities, and sometimes were not recognized or well addressed. In particular, while boy-on-girl intimidation was often seen as unacceptable, boy-on-boy intimidation was viewed as "boys being boys." These findings suggest that Beacon staff need additional training on how to create an environment in which bullying and teasing are not tolerated and in which differences are dealt with in a positive manner. Further investigation of the kinds of difference-related issues that underlie bullying and teasing behavior at the Beacons would be useful in designing specific training to help staff address these issues, both specifically in terms of bullying and teasing and also more generally in creating a supportive, tolerant, and emotionally safe environment for all children.

### ***Attention to Entry of New Youth***

Some younger participants reported problems making friends at the Beacon with youth who were not in their existing social circles or did not attend their elementary schools. Beacon staff may be able to bridge this gap with more attention to facilitating the entry of new youth.

### ***Training of Younger Staff***

Youth in all age groups complained in interviews about younger Beacon staff members who sometimes yelled and screamed at them and treated them with disrespect. Although some of this behavior may reflect an abuse of authority on the part of these staff members, it is likely that they have weaker group-management skills and need help building a repertoire of approaches to handling youth respectfully.

### ***Training in Youth Work***

Observation of youth activities and interviews with their staff leaders showed that the degree to which staff were trained in working with young people was reflected in the quality of the activities. Better trained staff were more "intentional" in their work with youth, particularly in the way they challenged them to grow, and better able both to manage groups and respond to individual needs. In addition, observations also revealed an uneven level of training among staff. More consistent investment in improving the skills of youth staff would increase the quality of experiences for youth at the Beacons.

### ***Staff Hired from Community***

Beacons have made an effort to hire staff from the communities they serve, which often means that young people see staff members with whom they share a common racial or ethnic background. This is different from the frequent practice in other afterschool programs of hiring teachers, who often are not from the same cultural background or residential area as the young people with whom they work. It would be useful to know the added-value of hiring community-based staff, particularly with regard to their ability to act as role models for youth. At the same time, for afterschool educational activities to have the maximum value, the presence of some teachers can also be valuable.

***Availability of Opportunities  
for Youth Leadership***

Survey data showed an uneven availability of opportunities for all youth to contribute and develop leadership skills across the sites. Some sites adhered to the philosophy that all youth have leadership potential, while, in others, there were clearly individuals who were being groomed for leadership. Given the demonstrated benefits of such opportunities to foster leadership skills among youth, it would be preferable if all youth were offered at least some opportunities to lead and received the support to do so.

***Attention to Youth  
with Academic Difficulties***

Despite the overwhelmingly positive youth responses about academic programs at the Beacon, a small minority of participants described homework help as not very useful because it was too distracting to complete homework with so many other youth around. These same participants reported that their schoolwork was not very good. This coincides with program observations noting that participants with serious academic deficiencies may need more substantial homework support and academic assistance. This suggests that Beacon education staff may benefit from additional training to help them identify youth with more serious academic needs, as well as linkages to other resources to help these young people.

***Attention to Risk-Taking Behavior***

Nearly one-fifth of young male participants at the Beacons reported using alcohol and marijuana in the previous two months, and almost that many young women reported recent

alcohol use despite a wide variety of substance abuse prevention programming at the Beacon. These numbers are still high enough to suggest that more young people at the Beacon need to participate in frequent discussions and prevention activities about drugs and alcohol.

***Attention to Youth-Development and Educational Quality of Programming***

Observation data showed some routine and unimaginative Beacon activities that missed the opportunity to support the development of young people. This was particularly true in large activities, as well as with some academically focused activities, such as homework help. A review of the evidence suggests that additional attention to how activities help young people grow, both academically and socially, would result in more consistent youth-development and educational quality across activities.

***Informing School Staff About the Beacon***

Only a relatively small proportion of school staff felt informed about the Beacon in their building, and an even smaller group had participated in Beacon activities or worked for the Beacon. However, those staff who were informed about the Beacon had largely positive perceptions of it and represent an underused resource, both in terms of student referrals to the Beacon and collaborations between school and Beacon staff to help needy youth.

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In summary, attention to these issues would ensure that the Beacons continue to play a pivotal role in the education and development of their young participants, as well as in the lives of their families and communities.

## INTRODUCTION

*They [the Beacons] play a big role in our lives—personal, emotional, everything, problems at school, home—there is always a person to talk to. (Beacon youth participant)*

*People who are learning together and playing together naturally get to know each other through activities. (Beacon adult participant)*

*The Beacon turns schools into something more than a building. (Principal of Beacon school)*

This report presents findings from an intensive study of six Beacon centers, the second phase of an evaluation of the New York City Beacon initiative. Beacons are community centers located in public school buildings, offering a range of activities and services to participants of all ages, before and after school, in the evenings, and on weekends. Individual Beacons are managed by community-based organizations (often referred to as “lead agencies”) and work collaboratively with school boards, their host schools, community advisory councils, and a wide range of neighborhood organizations and institutions. The Beacon initiative is funded and administered by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).

### Background

The New York City Beacon initiative is a complex and ambitious model of school-community-family partnerships. Created in 1991 with \$5 million of municipal Safe Streets, Safe Cities funding, the initiative originally enabled 10 community-based, not-for-profit agencies to create school-based community centers as “safe havens” providing “safe, structured, supervised activities for children, youth and families”<sup>1</sup> in selected New York City neighborhoods. Subsequent increases in funding led to four additional rounds of Beacons. By the time Phase I of the evaluation began in fall 1997, 40

Beacons and one “mini-site”(with 50% funding) served more than 76,000 youth and 33,000 adults. Over time, Beacons have gained an increasingly broad base of political support and legitimacy as a focal point for neighborhood improvement efforts. As of 2001, the program includes 80 Beacons, with at least one in everyone of the 32 local school districts in New York City, and several sites in the poorest of the city’s 59 community districts. With the initiative currently funded at \$35 million a year, the sites receive a base grant of \$400,000 and an additional \$50,000 to cover space and custodial fees paid directly to the New York City Board of Education by DYCD; many sites have raised additional funding.

Individual Beacons offer children, youth, and adults a wide range of recreational pro-grams, social services, educational enrichment, and vocational activities in four core areas: youth-development programming, academic support and enhancement, parent involvement and family support, and neighborhood safety and community building. Many Beacons also take an active role in the community by sponsoring activities—voter registration drives, clean-ups, and cultural events and celebrations—to make the neighborhood a better place to live.

The Beacons are an important example of a partnership between city government and a nonprofit agency. New York City has invested not only funds but also the expertise of a core team of DYCD personnel in supporting the development and operation of the Beacons, expanding the initiative to make it the largest

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<sup>1</sup> *First Request for Proposals to Operate School-Based Community Centers*, New York City Department of Youth Services, 1991.

municipally funded youth initiative in the country. DYCD brings Beacon directors together monthly, links them to resources, helps them work with other city and state agencies, and provides assistance to help them negotiate the regulatory and funding process.

With funding from various foundations, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) of the Fund for the City of New York has provided ongoing support and technical assistance to the Beacons since shortly after the initiative began. To help Beacon staff articulate and implement the vision of the Beacons, YDI has offered monthly meetings for Beacon directors; professional development activities for Beacon directors and staff; linkages to resources, such as funding and staff training opportunities; and grants to help individual Beacons develop in specific areas. Participation of Beacon staff in YDI activities is voluntary.

### **The Beacon Evaluation**

YDI commissioned an evaluation of the Beacon initiative to gain information and insights to improve individual sites and the initiative as a whole; inform decision making regarding the initiative; describe and analyze the impact of the Beacons on youth, families, communities, and schools; and inform efforts to implement Beacons in other cities nationwide. The evaluation was conducted as a collaborative effort by the Academy for Educational Development (AED), the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, and the Hunter College Center on AIDS, Drugs and Community Health.

Phase I of the evaluation included an implementation study documenting and analyzing how the Beacon concept and theory of change were realized at the 40 Beacon sites. It also included an analysis of core program elements to determine the extent to which the Beacons implemented activities, programs, and services in four core areas: youth-development programming; linkages with schools; parent/family involvement and support; and neighborhood safety and community building.

Findings from the implementation study were presented in three reports: *Evaluation of the New York City Beacons: Phase I Findings* (1999); *Evaluation of the New York City Beacons: Summary of Phase I Findings* (1999); and *An Oasis in This Desert: What Parents say About the New York City Beacons* (2000).

These reports contained much positive news about the Beacons. The implementation study, released in 1999, found that although the Beacons varied in the extent of implementation, all sites had been successful in operating centers that followed the original Beacon principles. Specifically, the report found that the Beacon initiative had accomplished the following:

- Beacon centers were successful in attracting a wide range of youth participants from all age groups, who came to the center frequently and over a number of years.
- Beacon youth programs were consistent with the core tenets of youth-development practice and offered a wide range of activities that helped youth develop positive behaviors and practices.
- The Beacons offered an array of activities for adults, including educational and immigrant services, opportunities for volunteering, and employment and intergenerational activities.
- Every Beacon served as a “safe haven” in the community, and many sites organized a range of activities to improve the life of the neighborhood. They improved security in the area around the school, served as a base for community problem solving, engaged local residents in community service activities, and housed a number of family and community events.

Phase II of the evaluation—the intensive study described in this report—looked at how the Beacon initiative affected youth and their parents, the host schools, and the surrounding communities in six sites selected from the 40 original Beacons. It also examined if and how variations in site and program quality affected youth attitudes and behaviors. Chapin Hall

advised the design of the Phase II evaluation. Data were collected by teams from AED and the Hunter Center on AIDS, Drugs and Community Health during spring and fall 1999. AED completed the data analysis and wrote this final report.

### *Site Selection*

The intensive-study sites were selected through a stratified random sample to represent the full range of Beacons as currently implemented in New York City. The decision to do a random sampling was based on the desire to study the outcomes of a range of Beacons and took into account the implementation status observed in Phase I of the evaluation.

However, to understand how variations in implementation might affect outcomes, evaluators needed to include at least one site where the core Beacon concepts were fully implemented. All sites had at least “minimal” implementation, but some had moved further than others along a continuum of activity.

The selection was stratified as follows. Using information gathered during the implementation study, evaluators ranked the Beacons according to the completeness of their implementation in the four core content areas: youth-development programming; school linkages; parent/family involvement and support; and neighborhood safety and community building. After every Beacon's score on the four separate content-area scales was converted to percentages (e.g., percentage of points earned out of total possible points for the scale), an overall percentage score was calculated for every site. Based on these percentages, the sites were divided into quartiles, with six sites in the first quartile, 11 sites in the second, 12 in the third, and six in the fourth. Evaluators randomly drew the sample of six sites proportionate to this distribution, with one site chosen from the first and fourth quartiles and two sites chosen from both the second and third quartiles.

Though the implementation rankings were not by themselves a measure of overall Beacon quality, they were clearly related to it. The sites were ranked with the understanding that some

Beacons had been operating for longer than others, some had raised additional funds while others had faced substantial organizational challenges, and implementation was not static. In general, the stratified random sample provided a good cross section of the Beacons in terms of distribution by geography and type of lead agency.

In every site chosen for the intensive study, evaluators administered surveys to youth, adults, and school personnel, and conducted a community poll. Using a range of qualitative methods, evaluators designated the first four sites drawn as “qualitative-study” sites to be studied in greater depth. In these sites, evaluators observed all Beacon activities regularly, and interviewed and surveyed youth and adult participants.

Although unique in many ways, the Beacon communities in the intensive study shared characteristics common to many urban neighborhoods: a diverse population in terms of race and ethnicity; a high percentage of single-parent, female-headed households on public assistance; a high percentage of youth in the population; and high rates of teen pregnancy, school dropout, and youth violence and crime. Although the neighborhoods varied greatly in terms of number of businesses and community-based organizations, density, and access to transportation, many were disadvantaged in these respects. In particular the area immediately surrounding the Beacon center was especially disadvantaged in terms of services, and many sites were located near high-density housing. In addition, many neighborhoods had undergone population decreases and increases in recent years—often the result of immigration—that sometimes put a strain on existing services.

The six sites were located in all five boroughs of New York City. Since the sites participated in the study with the understanding that they would remain anonymous, they are not identified in this report nor described individually in ways that would reveal their identity.

### ***Evaluation Questions and Design***

The phase II study was designed to answer the following core questions and subquestions:

- How and to what extent have the Beacons provided opportunities for youth development, school linkages, parent/family involvement and support, and neighborhood safety and community building?
- Who participates in which Beacon services and activities, and what are the patterns of participation?

- What are the benefits of participation in Beacon activities and services for youth, families, schools, and communities?

### ***Four Substudies***

These questions were answered through four substudies focusing on different segments of the Beacon population—youth, adults, host school, and neighborhood. Each substudy used a different set of evaluation questions specific to the population.

### **Substudy One: Youth<sup>2</sup>**

This substudy examined how youth benefited from participation at the Beacon by focusing on a cross section of youth between the ages of 8 and 18. Observations were conducted of all youth activities and the overall Beacon climate in the four qualitative-study sites. For elementary school youth (ages 8 to 10), data were collected through one-on-one interviews of 10 long-term participants in all four qualitative-study sites. The following areas were examined: sense of safety and well-being; sense of belonging and self-worth; general resistance skills; attachment to peers and adults; attitudes to homework help; self-reported educational improvement; and community service and civic participation. For middle school youth (ages 12 to 14) and high school youth (ages 15 to 19), data were collected through surveys of current participants in all sites and one-on-one interviews of 20 long-term participants (10 in each of the two age groups) at the four qualitative-study sites. In the 12- to 19-year-old group, all the areas listed above were examined, as well as risk behaviors; resistance skills and behavior (avoiding violence and other risk behaviors); and general youth development.

### **Substudy Two: Beacon Adults**

The second substudy examined the activities, services, and opportunities available for adults at the Beacon, and the perceived benefits associated with them. Data were collected through surveys in all six sites and one-on-one interviews in the four qualitative-study sites. The study focused on adults participating in Beacon activities, including parents of Beacon youth participants. It examined the following areas: acquisition of new skills, friends and contacts; freedom to work outside the home; parental support for child's education; perceived changes in children attending the Beacon; and participation in Beacon family and adult activities, as well as in school and community activities.

### **Substudy Three: The Host School**

The third substudy examined several aspects of the Beacon host schools, including overall school performance, teacher/principal relationship with the Beacon, and general opinions of school personnel about having a Beacon in their schools. This study sought to determine information about the relationship between the Beacon and the school. Data were collected through surveys of teachers at all sites and interviews with school principals. The following areas were examined: organization of family-centered activities; parental support for child's education; parental involvement in school activities; closer school-family relationships; and improved school climate.

### **Substudy Four: The Beacon Neighborhood**

The fourth substudy examined the neighborhood surrounding the Beacon by looking at the people living in areas around the Beacon and the relationship between the Beacon and the community. This study sought to determine the level of awareness and perceptions of the Beacon on the part of neighborhood residents, as well as the neighborhood outcomes associated with the existence and operation of the Beacon. Data were collected through a community poll and questions in the adult interviews with Beacon adults, including Beacon directors. The following outcomes were measured: perceived "safety zone" around the Beacon; awareness of the Beacon as a neighborhood resource; extent of community meetings; intergroup contact and relationships; community problem-solving efforts; and community improvement effort.

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<sup>2</sup> In order to have mutually exclusive groups in terms of age, 11-year-olds were not surveyed or interviewed since sites varied in terms of the age-break for participation in activities for elementary school and middle school youth.



## Major Findings

### *Introductory Comments*

In response to the national and international attention and investment the Beacon model has attracted, the primary focus of this evaluation was to examine the practice of youth development within the Beacons and systematically document and analyze the impact of youth-development practices on young people participating in the Beacons. This included an analysis of how well the core principles of youth-development programming were implemented both at the organizational and activity level, as well as an analysis of the relationship between the quality of youth-development practice at different intensive sites and youth outcomes.

The evaluation was not intended to provide an “up” or “down” judgment on the Beacon initiative as a whole. The first phase of the evaluation found abundant evidence of the value of the Beacons; the purpose of the intensive study was to examine in greater depth how that value was manifest at different sites and for different groups of participants.

Although it was clear that some Beacons were stronger than others in some respects, there were multiple reasons for these variations, ranging from the space afforded them by their host schools, their ability to recruit and retain youth staff, and the degree of fiscal, administrative, and conceptual support provided by their parent agencies. More important, even the more challenged sites had some excellent activities, and, conversely, at the more advanced sites, several activities lacked high-quality developmental opportunities.

This evaluation was not an “outcome study” in the traditional sense. Phase II was not long enough (approximately one and one-half years) to permit pre- and post-surveys to measure changes in types of youth-development experiences. Furthermore, because the evaluation took place several years into the overall program (all the selected sites had been operating for at least five years and some for as long as seven), it was difficult to obtain reliable

information about youth before participating in the Beacon.<sup>3</sup>

Instead, this evaluation focused on an in-depth comparison of the experience, perceptions, and behaviors of Beacon participants who attended the intensive-study sites regularly. This yielded data about the nature of high-quality youth-development activities and about how youth perceived them, and made it possible to examine the extent to which the quality of youth-development programming, manifest in both individual activities and the Beacon environment as a whole, was related to the way youth perceived the Beacon and the benefits they derived from participation.

Major findings are presented on the following pages for youth and youth-development practice, adults, the school, and the community.

### *Findings About Youth*

**1. The Beacons offer young people a place to develop and grow through challenging activities, caring relationships, and opportunities to contribute to the Beacon and to their communities.** Both surveys and

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<sup>3</sup> The original design included a comparison group for one part of the youth substudy to examine differences between youth who participated in Beacon activities and those who did not. In that plan, students from demographically similar middle schools located beyond walking distance from the intensive-study sites were to be surveyed about their activities, attitudes, and behaviors. However, finding such students became difficult when New York City announced the opening of 40 new Beacons and virtually impossible when the institutional review board with jurisdiction over the evaluation insisted upon active parental consent for all survey participants. The cost of securing individual signed consent forms for every youth to be surveyed (rather than only for those whose parents refused consent) in both Beacons and nearby schools was beyond the budgetary capacity of the evaluation. The evaluation did hire site-based staff to distribute, explain, and collect consent forms. However, the active-consent requirement still narrowed both the number and variety of participants included in the survey sample, skewing it toward youth who were daily or almost-daily participants of the Beacon.

interviews indicated that the majority of young people were taking advantage of these challenging activities and believed they were developing new competencies because of their participation at the Beacon.

## **2. The youth-development quality of the Beacon environment and the activities offered to youth make a difference in outcomes.**

Evaluators looked at both general and youth-development quality. The former included safety, well-organized activities, consistent enforcement of the rules, and low staff-youth ratio. The latter included the five core elements of good youth-development programming: opportunities for youth to develop caring and trusting relationships, participate in stimulating and engaging activities, benefit from a continuity of adult support, be challenged to grow by high expectations, and connect with and contribute to their communities. In sites with higher youth-development quality, young people were more likely to:<sup>4</sup>

- feel better about themselves at the Beacon;
- believe that youth of all races and ethnicities were valued at the Beacon;
- perceive that staff had high expectations for their behavior and performance; and
- report that the Beacon helped them learn leadership skills.

They were also less likely to report that they had:

- cut classes;
- hit others to hurt them;
- deliberately damaged other people's property;
- stolen money or other property; and
- been in a fight.

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<sup>4</sup> All differences were statistically significant after controlling for various negative and positive external factors. These included a composite factor measuring risk status—being from a single-parent home, getting mostly Ds and Fs last school year, being suspended last year, cutting class this year, and being over-age for grade. (For the cutting-class regression, cutting class was excluded from the risk factor.) Positive external factors included “presence of adult support” and “participation in youth-development activities.”

Regression analyses showed that the quality of youth development was not correlated with overall school quality or neighborhood safety, and that the degree to which youth were potentially at risk was distributed across the intensive-study sites.

## **3. The Youth Development Institute (YDI) has played an important role in conceptualizing and promoting high-quality youth-development programming.**

YDI offers a wide range of professional development opportunities for both Beacon directors and their staff who work with youth. These include monthly meetings of directors to help them incorporate a youth-development perspective into organizational behavior. YDI also provides access to training where Beacon staff can learn the principles and practices of positive youth development.

However, attending YDI meetings for Beacon directors and taking advantage of YDI staff training opportunities are voluntary, and not all sites do so regularly. Those sites with staff most frequently attending YDI meetings and training activities had the highest-rated youth-development quality and the most positive youth findings. In addition, these sites were also more likely to send staff for other kinds of youth-work training.

## **4. Homework help and academic support are important and valued youth activities at the Beacons.**

Parents mentioned the homework-help activities as the second most positive aspect of the Beacons after the presence of a safe and welcoming environment. More important, young people of all ages frequently cited the availability of homework assistance in response to questions about what they liked most about the Beacons and why they would recommend it to their friends. They also reported that the Beacon had helped them do better in school. However, evaluators observed that some homework-help activities were better organized and staffed than others, and that some students needed more intensive help than Beacon staff were able to provide.

In addition to homework help, the Beacons also offer an array of academic enhancement activities for young people ranging from the availability of educational games to individual tutoring. Youth participating in academic activities (including homework help) were significantly less likely to report in their survey responses that they had cut class.

### *Findings About Youth-Development Practice*

Analysis of evidence from observations of the Beacons and their activities revealed three levels of youth-development practice at the qualitative-study sites: basic, satisfactory, and exemplary:

- **Basic (participating):** Youth are participating—in the program, off the street, out of harm's way, forming bonds with peers and learning the basics of social behavior
- **Satisfactory (engaged):** Youth clearly are engaged and interested in what they are doing and are more likely to return to these activities on a continuing basis.
- **Exemplary (generative):** Youth are generating new strengths and competencies in activities that stretch them and stimulate their growth.

The evaluators observed these levels in all five areas characteristic of the YDI youth-development framework, listed above. Those sites with greater implementation of youth-development in these areas were those sites with better youth outcomes, as described above.

### *Findings About Adults*

**1. The Beacons provide important services and activities for neighborhood adults.** Numerous adults from the local communities reported participating in sports and physical fitness activities, basic education, English-language instruction, GED preparation, and computer instruction. Survey and interview data indicated that adults valued the Beacon for what it provided both themselves and their children.

**2. Parents of youth attending the Beacon praised its family-oriented activities and**

**services.** Parents cited the Beacon's workshops and counseling for helping them learn to communicate better with their children and their children's teachers. More than half these parents reported attending meetings and activities in their children's schools and credited the Beacon with helping them participate.

**3. More than half of adults surveyed across all sites (54%) did not have children at the Beacon.** This suggests that the Beacon is casting a wide net and serving as a true community center rather than as an extension of the school.

### *Findings About Schools*

**1. Although the Beacons have been successful in bringing community members into the school building, they have been less successful in connecting the Beacon and the school.** Despite efforts on the part of the Beacons to make school staff aware of their presence and what they offer children, only a relatively small proportion of school staff felt informed about the Beacon in their building, and an even smaller group had participated in Beacon activities or worked for the Beacon.

**2. There is an untapped resource in the Beacons to organize parents around school issues and provide information about working with individual teachers and the school as a whole.** Those staff who were informed about the Beacon were generally positive about its potential to help the school in the areas of student behavior and self-esteem, as well as to connect students and families to needed community resources.

### *Findings About Community*

**1. Beacons play a role in their host communities as valued local institutions.** Community residents were well aware of the Beacon's presence, despite little advertising and its location within a school building.

**2. Among those residents aware of its presence, the Beacon was very positively perceived.** Of those who had heard about the Beacon, more than half rated their neighborhood Beacon as good; an additional quarter rated it as

excellent. Just under one-third of them (31%) had heard about the Beacon from a friend.

**3. Community residents who had heard about the Beacon had slightly more positive perspectives on the social cohesion of their neighborhood.** They were more likely to agree that the community was one where people looked out for one another's children and where people did not keep to themselves. This was the case even though their other perceptions of the neighborhood frequently were more negative than the perceptions of people unaware of the Beacon.

In summary, we found that the Beacons provided more than the usual "gym and swim" of traditional recreational programs for youth. By providing youth with a range of developmental opportunities and supports, they are, in the words of one evaluator, "not just a place to go, but a place to grow."

## **Organization of This Report**

This report contains 14 chapters and a conclusion:

- Chapter 1 describes the methods used to determine the quality of youth development at the four qualitative-study sites.
- Chapter 2 describes findings about youth-development programming at the Beacons.
- Chapters 3 to 6 describe what youth said about their relationships with peers and adults at the Beacon, as well as their feelings of safety, belonging, and self-worth.
- Chapters 7 to 9 present findings on youth leadership and educational programming at the Beacon and on the risk-taking and resistance behavior of Beacon youth.
- Chapter 10 describes quality in youth-development practice.
- Chapter 11 summarizes conclusions about the findings regarding Beacon youth and their activities.
- Chapters 12 to 14 present findings about adult activities at the Beacon and about Beacon schools and communities.
- The conclusion summarizes briefly what was learned about the Beacons and presents recommendations and issues for further study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### STUDYING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AT THE BEACONS

*Youth development must be seen as the process in which all young people are engaged to meet their needs, build skills and find opportunities to make a difference in all of the areas of their lives—personal/cultural, social/emotional, moral/spiritual, vocational, cognitive and civic. (“Our Ideas About Youth,” Forum for Youth Investment website: [www.forumforyouthinvestment.org](http://www.forumforyouthinvestment.org).)*

#### Introduction

Providing an attractive mix of activities for neighborhood youth has always formed the core of Beacon work. The development of these activities was informed by a vision of youth and their developmental needs that went beyond both traditional recreational programs and the increasingly common problem-focused prevention programs of the 1980s. Drawing upon their experience and that of other professionals in youth-serving organizations, the creators of the Beacons sought to provide youth-development programming that builds on young people’s strengths and strives to foster their resiliency, viewing them as resources in their own development rather than as “problems to be solved.”

According to the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, youth development is a “process” or “journey” involving everyone in a young person’s family and community. A young person will not be able to build essential skills and competencies and feel safe, cared for, valued, useful, and spiritually grounded unless his/her family and community provide the supports and opportunities needed. Youth development, then, is a combination of all the people, places, supports, opportunities, and services that young people need to be happy, healthy, and successful.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *What is Youth Development?* (Center for Youth Development and Policy Research website: [www.aed.org/us/cyd](http://www.aed.org/us/cyd)).

Beacon youth activities and programs are designed to provide young people with these supports and opportunities and strengthen the “protective factors” that help them “develop a sense of autonomy, learn how to solve problems creatively, tolerate frustrations, persist in the face of failure, resist being put down, and forgive and forget.”<sup>6</sup>

The evaluation examined the implementation and impact of the five characteristics forming the core of the Youth Development Institute’s framework, asking to what extent youth had opportunities to (1) develop caring and trusting relationships; (2) participate in stimulating and engaging activities; (3) be challenged to grow by high expectations; (4) connect with and contribute to their communities; and (5) benefit from a continuity of adult support.<sup>7</sup>

This chapter describes how the evaluation team studied the nature and quality of youth-development programming at the Beacons. Data collection occurred in 1999.

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<sup>6</sup> L.K. Brentro, et al., *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope for the Future* (Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> *Networks for Youth Development: A Guided Tour of Youth Development* (New York City: Youth Development Institute, 1993).

## Questions About Youth-Development Programming

In designing the intensive study, evaluators sought to understand in greater depth the ways that the Beacons promoted positive youth development. This entailed observing the environment for youth development presented by the Beacon center as a whole, as well as the youth-development quality of youth activities offered by the sites to answer the following questions:

- What kinds of activities did Beacons offer youth?
- How did the activities contribute to youth development?
- What other kinds of developmental experiences did young people at the Beacons have, beyond these organized activities?
- What was the educational value of Beacon youth activities?
- How did youth benefit overall from their involvement at the Beacons?

## Methods Used to Study Youth-Development Programming

To study the benefits for youth of participating in the Beacons, evaluators collected quantitative data, by surveying youth participants, and qualitative data, by observing activities and interviewing a sample of long-term participants. Based on findings from Phase I of the evaluation (the implementation study) that a substantial proportion of youth at the Beacons attend for multiple years, the evaluation sought to tap the reflections of long-term participants about how the Beacons contributed to their development. In many cases, interview questions were open-ended versions of the survey questions and yielded interesting insights into the patterns of response to survey questions.

### *Observations of Beacon Sites*

To determine the environment for youth development at the site, evaluators judged the extent to which:

- Beacon directors and staff were conversant with the central concepts of positive youth development;
- Beacon staff had received training in youth-development concepts and practices;
- youth had choices in selecting activities;
- youth input was incorporated into planning;
- youth had opportunities to contribute to the operation of the Beacon; and
- the Beacon offered informal and formal opportunities for leadership development;
- staff were perceived as respectful, accessible, and caring;
- Beacon staff fostered creativity and interaction among youth from different backgrounds; and
- the Beacon as a whole cultivated a sense of continuity and belonging.<sup>8</sup>

### *Observations of Organized Youth Activities*

Every scheduled activity for youth at the four qualitative-study sites was observed at least twice using a structured protocol; some activities were observed as many as four times when content varied significantly from one session to another, for a total of more than 100 observations. While observing Beacon activities, evaluators paid particular attention to how well the principles of positive youth development were implemented across activities. In addition to analyzing the overall quality of the activity, evaluators looked at characteristics typical of excellent youth-development practice. The observation included the following:

1. Staff interviews concerning the experience of the staff person, the staff member's training in youth development, and a review of the activity's goals.

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<sup>8</sup> These elements of practice were identified in the implementation phase as critical ways that Beacons reflected the organizational incorporation of youth-development principles.

2. Observation data detailing the number of participants, their ages, gender, ethnicity, the materials used, the physical environment of the room, participant and staff interactions, and a narrative description of the activity, including whether any problems arose and goals of the session were met.
3. Assessment of how the activity contributed to youth development. This last portion of the observation assessed the extent to which the activity fostered caring and trusting relationships and a continuity of adult support, provided stimulating and engaging activities that reflected high expectations, and gave youth opportunities to contribute to the activity, the Beacon, or their community.
4. Assessment of the extent to which the activity incorporated educational content.

#### ***Rating Youth-Development Activities***

The youth activities at the Beacon sites varied in terms of their contribution to youth development. To assess these variations, evaluators used 13 questions from the observation protocol assessing the extent to which the activity represented qualities that might be found across all types of activities and were reasonably within the control of Beacon personnel. This yielded a 39-point scale for rating activity quality. To assess the extent to which the activity incorporated the principles of positive youth development, the questions sought to determine whether the activity:

- was stimulating and engaging;
- fostered caring and trusting relationships between youth and with staff;
- provided a continuity of adult support;
- reflected high expectations for behavior and performance; and
- offered opportunities for youth to contribute to the activity.

In addition, the questions sought to determine whether:

- youth appeared to be engaged by the activity;
- youth showed interest in materials/discussions/activities;
- staff enforced rules consistently;
- staff offered youth feedback about their ideas or actions;
- the activity was well organized;
- the activity encouraged participants to think critically;
- the activity encouraged participants to ask questions; and
- the activity encouraged participants to make their own decisions.

#### ***Youth Surveys and Interviews***

The youth survey was designed specifically for the evaluation and administered in five of the intensive-study Beacon sites<sup>9</sup> to participants between the ages of 12 and 19 over the course of several days during fall 1999. Only youth whose parents returned signed consent forms could take the survey; the evaluation provided funds to the sites for a staff person to distribute, explain, and collect the consent forms. A total of 231 participants at the five sites completed the survey.

During the same period, interviews were conducted with a sample of participants who had been attending the Beacon for at least three years. Because of the longevity of their participation at the Beacon, these participants were asked to reflect on their activities and how they had benefited from them. As with the survey, youth whose parents returned consent forms were interviewed. A total of 120 participants at the four qualitative-study sites were interviewed.

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<sup>9</sup> The sixth site was scheduled for the survey, but organizational issues made it impossible to collect parent-consent forms, without which it was impossible to collect data.

**Table 1.1 Data Collection Methods Used in the Intensive Study Sites**

	<b>Elementary School- Youth (8 to 10 years old)</b>	<b>Middle School Youth (12 to 14 years old)</b>	<b>High School Youth (15 to 19 years old)</b>
<b>All Intensive Sites (6)</b>			
Site observations	✓	✓	✓
Participant survey		✓	✓
<b>Qualitative Sites Only (4)</b>			
Activity observations	✓	✓	✓
Participant interviews	✓	✓	✓

**Logic Model for Survey and Interview Development**

The logic model for developing the survey and interview instruments, developed by AED, reflects both the theory of change articulated by the Beacons’ founders and the framework for capacity building used by YDI in its technical assistance to the Beacons. It also reflects assumptions shared with AED evaluators during the first phase of the evaluation by Beacon directors and staff about the benefits of Beacon participation. In the logic model, the combination of “individual youth characteristics,” “site characteristics,” and “program characteristics” lead to “individual participation in stimulating activities,” which in turn foster three levels of “desired outcomes.”

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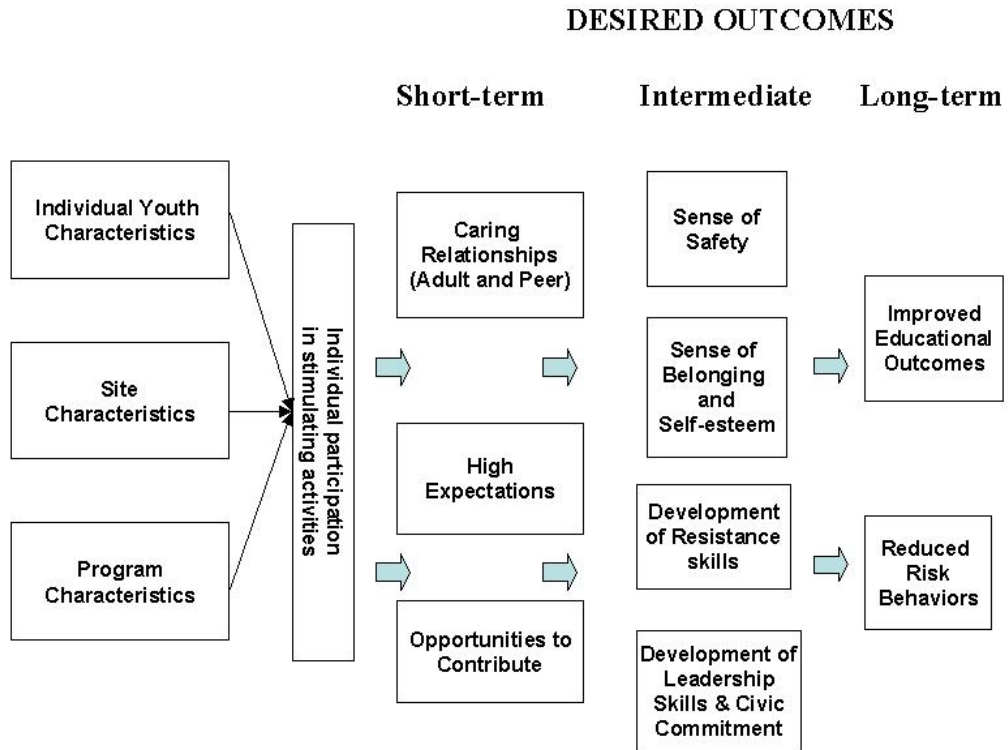
Individual youth characteristics” include age, gender, race/ethnicity, and grade in school.<sup>10</sup> “Site characteristics” includes the extent to which the Beacon director and staff have incorporated central concepts of youth development into everyday practice, giving young people a voice in planning and choosing activities, as well as opportunities to develop leadership skills and contribute to the operation of the Beacon. “Program characteristics” include the extent to which youth’s specific activities and general experience across activities reflect the principles of good youth-development practice. The dimensions of individual youth participation in activities at the Beacon—frequency of attendance and duration of participation over time—are seen as a product of combined individual, site, and program characteristics.

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<sup>10</sup> This last factor helped determine which students were over age for grade, a risk factor for certain unhealthy behaviors and outcomes.



**Beacon  
Youth-Development  
Theory of Change**



In the logic model, the first “desired outcomes” are the short-term outcomes of caring relationships, high expectations for youth behavior and performance at the Beacon, and opportunities for youth to contribute to the Beacon and the community. These lead to intermediate outcomes of an enhanced sense of safety, belonging, and self-esteem on the part of youth and to the development of risk-resistance and leadership skills, and civic commitment. Long-term outcomes are the development of positive educational attitudes and behaviors by youth and a reduced incidence of self-reported risky behaviors. These outcomes are discussed in chapters three through nine of this report.

The specific educational attitudes and behaviors studied through the surveys and interviews included youth expectation of high school completion and perceived importance of both doing well in school and attending college, as well as a lower incidence of cut classes. The undesirable risky behaviors included interpersonal youth violence and delinquency, and use or abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs. Civic activities and attitudes included participation in community volunteer work and perceived importance of being active in one's community.

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to gauge the exposure of young people at the Beacon to youth-development activities and practices and to enable them to reflect on their experiences at the Beacon. The survey was administered to all youth of middle school age and above, while the interview, which included many survey questions in open-ended form, was administered to a sample of elementary, middle, and high-school-age youth who had attended the Beacon for at least two years.

### **The Youth Sample**

This section describes the methodology used in the youth survey and interviews and presents profiles of surveyed and interviewed participants.

### ***The Youth Survey Sample***<sup>11</sup>

The youth survey was administered to 231 Beacon youth in middle and high school at five of the six Beacon study sites. All participants under the age of 18 were required to obtain active consent from their parents to take the survey. To maximize participation, the survey was administered over a period of three consecutive days at the five Beacons, and all youth from ages 12 to 19<sup>12</sup> who had returned signed parental consent forms were asked to participate. The survey was administered during several different kinds of activities to ensure a diverse group of respondents; efforts were made in selecting these activities to include comparable numbers of male and female participants and to ensure a mix of younger and older participants. Survey administration took approximately one hour.

The survey questions were designed to identify patterns of youth participation in activities. They

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<sup>11</sup> The original evaluation design called for looking at youth experiences and outcomes through a survey of all participating youth (with passive consent) and interviews with a purposive sample of long-term participants (with active consent). The interview questions were based on the survey items in order to probe the patterns observed in the survey. However, because active consent forms were required, evaluators could only survey youth who returned signed parental consent forms. Despite paying sites to hire staff to distribute, explain, and collect consent forms, this ultimately meant that the survey sample was much smaller and less representative of Beacon participants as a whole than had been hoped. The overwhelming majority (79%) of survey respondents attended daily or almost daily. Thus the evaluation's survey findings can only be generalized to participants who attend Beacons or Beacon-like programs on an almost daily basis. Nevertheless, among this group of youth who are most likely to benefit from participation at the Beacon, some interesting patterns emerged.

<sup>12</sup> Pre-tests of the survey revealed that it could not be adapted to younger youth without losing information critical to the planned analyses.

also targeted youth's perceptions of Beacon activities and of the Beacon as a whole, and their perceptions about how these activities contributed to their development and their sense of themselves as students and members of the Beacon community. Questions focused on participants' sense of safety and self-worth; their attachment to peers and adults; their access to and participation in homework help and other educational activities; their access to and participation in civic or community service activities; and their ability to resist engaging in risky behaviors.

### *Characteristics of Youth Surveyed*

Of the 231 participants who took the youth survey, 44 percent were between the ages of 12 and 14, and 56 percent were between the ages of 15 and 19.<sup>13</sup> Slightly more female than male participants took the survey; the racial breakdown of survey participants reflected the racial make-up of the larger Beacon. The number of respondents at sites varied according to the number of consent forms returned; evaluators sought to have at least 50 respondents at all five sites. As shown in table 1.2, three sites had roughly equal numbers of participants surveyed, while one site (B) had more participants than originally targeted and one site (E) had fewer.

As shown in table 1.3, a majority of respondents (62%) had been attending the Beacon for two years or more, but a sizeable minority (27%) had attended the Beacon for less than one year. Females were less likely to be long-term participants than males, with 34 percent of females reporting that they had been at the Beacon for under a year compared with 19 percent of males. Although females were newer to the Beacons, they tended to come to the Beacon more frequently, with 83 percent reporting that they came every day or almost every day compared with 76 percent of males. Older youth (ages 15 to 19) were more likely to be long-term than younger youth but slightly less likely to come every day or almost every day.<sup>14</sup> Males were more likely to participate in the Beacon over the summer than females, and older youth were more likely to report summer participation than younger youth. Many older youth in the Beacon over the summer were counselors or instructors in programs for elementary-school-age youth.

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<sup>13</sup> The 1998 implementation study found equal participation across these age groups. However, not all sites attracted equal proportions of youth from all age groups.

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<sup>14</sup> Although the participant data collected in the 1998 implementation survey showed 45% of youth attending on an almost daily basis, the extent to which the very frequent participants dominate the survey respondents is also a result of the requirement to secure active parental consent before conducting the survey.

**Table 1.2: Surveyed Youth: General Characteristics**

<b>Age of Participants</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
12-14 years old	102	44%
15-19 years old	129	56%
<b>Number of survey respondents</b>		
Beacon Site A	51	22%
Beacon Site B	46	20%
Beacon Site C	39	17%
Beacon Site D	70	30%
Beacon Site E	25	11%
<b>Gender</b>		
Males	109	47%
Females	122	53%
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>		
Black or African American	106	46%
Latino or Hispanic	102	44%
White or Caucasian	2	1%
American Indian	5	2%
Other or mixed race	16	7%

**Table 1.3: Surveyed Youth: Frequency and Longevity of Participation**

<b>When did participants first come to the Beacon?</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Ages 12-14</b>	<b>Ages 15-19</b>
Under 1 year	27%	19%	34%	40%	18%
Between 1-2 years ago	11%	12%	10%	9%	10%
2 or more years ago	62%	69%	56%	51%	70%
<b>How often do participants come to the Beacon?</b>					
Everyday or almost everyday	79%	76%	83%	85%	77%
1-3 times a week <sup>15</sup>	19%	22%	17%	14%	21%
<b>Summer participation</b>					
Participate in Beacon activities over the summer	58%	68%	53%	54%	63%

<sup>15</sup> The remaining 2% of participants responding to this question came to the Beacon only a few times a year.

### ***The Youth Interview Sample***

To study the effects of participation in the Beacon, interviews were conducted with elementary school youth (ages 8 to 10) and middle and high school youth (ages 12 to 18) who had attended Beacon activities for at least two years. Interview questions were designed to build on the survey questions and follow up on information that emerged in the implementation phase of the evaluation.

In spring 1999, all four qualitative-study sites selected 10 long-term participants of elementary school age for interviews, for a total of 40 interviews.<sup>16</sup> Questions were designed to gather participants' perceptions of the activities in which they were involved, the benefits gained, and their sense of themselves as students and members of the Beacon community. As with the survey, questions focused on participants' sense of safety and self-worth, as well as their attachment to peers and adults, access to homework help, and ability to resist risky behaviors.

In addition to elementary school participants, evaluators also interviewed older youth—middle- and high-school-age participants—who had attended Beacon activities for at least two years. All four qualitative-study sites selected 10 middle school and 10 high school youth for interviews, for a total of 80 interviewees. The middle school interviewees were 12 to 14 years old; high-school-age youth ranged from 15 to 19 and were in grades 9 to college.<sup>17</sup>

Interview questions for older youth were similar to those for the elementary school interviews, although older youth were also asked about their perspective on how the Beacon helped young people avoid risky behaviors, as well as about their participation in activities fostering youth leadership. In all age groups, 10 youth were interviewed at every intensive Beacon site, for a total of 30 long-term participants per site and 40 per age group, for a total of 120 youth interviewed.

### ***Characteristics of Interviewed Youth***

The 120 long-term participants interviewed were purposely selected to be equally divided by gender and across three age groups (8 to 10, 12 to 14, and 15 to 19 years old). There were proportionally slightly more Latino youth (49% versus 44%) and slightly fewer African American youth (41% versus 46%) than in the survey sample. A large majority of long-term interviewees attended frequently and participated in summer activities. (See tables 1.4 and 1.5.)

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<sup>16</sup> Beacon directors were asked to select an equal number of male and female participants in every age group (8 to 10, 12 to 14, and 15 to 19) who had attended the Beacon for at least two years. Although Beacon directors were given no other special directions, they picked youth representing a broad range of family background, academic status, risk factors, etc. and tended to select youth who were likely to be at ease in an interview.

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<sup>17</sup> Since the Beacon serves youth and young adults (and adults), some of the 18- and 19-year-olds are in college.

**Table 1.4: Interviewed Youth: General Characteristics**

<b>Age of participants</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
8-10 years old	40	33
12-14 years old	40	33
15-19 years old	40	33
<b>Number of survey respondents</b>		
Beacon Site A	30	25
Beacon Site B	30	25
Beacon Site C	30	25
Beacon Site D	30	25
<b>Gender</b>		
Males	60	50
Females	60	50
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		
Black or African American	49	41%
Latino or Hispanic	59	49%
White or Caucasian	0	
Asian	3	2.5%
Other or mixed race	9	7.5%

**Table 1.5: Interviewed Youth: Frequency of Participation**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>8-10 yrs old</b>	<b>12-14 yrs old</b>	<b>15-19 yrs old</b>
<b>How often do participants come to the Beacon?</b>						
Everyday or almost everyday	85%	76%	97%	75%	86%	90%
1-3 times a week	15%	24%	3%	25%	14%	10%
<b>Summer participation</b>						
Participate in Beacon summer activities	63%	60%	75%	67%	70%	57%

It would be easy to assume major differences in frequency of participation among surveyed and interviewed youth—the latter having been chosen because they were long-term participants. However, some interviewed students also took the youth survey, and as data in tables 1.3 and 1.5 show, differences in attendance between

the survey and interview sample populations are minor.

For example, while the proportion of surveyed and interviewed middle-school-age youth attending the Beacon daily or almost daily was virtually the same (85% and 86%), among high-

school-age youth, interviewees were more likely than surveyed youth to attend daily or almost daily (90% versus 77%). When these very frequent participators are disaggregated by gender, it becomes clear that this difference is almost entirely accounted for by the fact that nearly all (97%) of the older interviewed girls attended every day or almost every day. Again, middle-school-age long-term interviewees were more likely to participate in Beacon summer activities than surveyed youth (70% versus 54%). However, this was not the case among older youth: more surveyed youth participated in summer activities than did interviewed youth (63% versus 57%).

If there is a difference between the long-term participants and youth who come to the Beacon less often, it may be in the ability of these young

people to form a durable connection with the Beacon. Many long-term participants talked about having been involved in fighting before they came to the Beacon or about disrespectful behavior and bad language. Several others talked about serious problems at home and how they viewed the Beacon as a safe haven. Many referred to friends outside the Beacon and the potential for getting in trouble, indicating that they were choosing the safety of the Beacon over the temptations outside. Several discussed serious problems at school, including cutting class and being held back at grade level and a general lack of motivation. The quotes below are typical of comments made during the interviews of these long-term participants.

*I know how to control my temper more. I used to blow up any time someone said something to me. I used to have a big attitude. I still do but I know when to calm down. (13-year old participant)*

*The program helps you learn to reason and deal with people. It also helps you deal with fights and stuff that goes on at your house. (10-year old participant)*

*I like coming to the Beacon because I stay out of trouble. . . I know if I am with my friends outside, I'm gonna get in trouble. (14-year-old participant)*

*The staff helped me to transfer from one school to another because I was cutting classes and in trouble in the other school, as well as having bad influences. (17-year-old participant)*

## CHAPTER TWO

### YOUTH-DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING AT THE BEACONS

*I come to the Beacon to work, play sports, do my homework or hang out with friends in a relaxed, positive and safe environment. (Beacon high school participant)*

*You should come to the Beacon because they help you with your homework and it's really fun to play and you could learn new stuff and different stuff you haven't learned before. (Beacon elementary school participant)*

#### Introduction

The report on the implementation study (Phase I of the evaluation) concluded that youth activities and programs at most Beacons are consistent with the core tenets of youth-development practice, offering youth a “safe place,” a diverse array of activities, consistently interesting and engaging activities, and multiple opportunities to learn leadership skills, including community service activities. The report concluded that youth are encouraged to develop and grow at the Beacons, informally, through daily interactions with staff and peers, and formally, through participation in a wide range of Beacon activities. Some activities have much to contribute to youth development, while others are more on the level of supervised informal recreation. The latter has the benefit of keeping young people out of harm's way; however, such activities do not provide youth opportunities to develop important competencies they will need in the future.

This chapter draws on observations and interviews conducted during the implementation study and on data collected for the intensive study. In addition, the discussion uses data collected in the four qualitative-study sites to examine in depth the overall environment for youth development at these sites; the kinds of activities for youth offered at the sites; the levels of youth participation in activities; the extent to which youth-development practices were incorporated into youth activities; and the levels and patterns of youth-development quality in Beacon programming.

#### A Youth-Development Environment

This section describes the environment for youth development at all six intensive-study sites. The degree to which evaluators considered the environment as having incorporated youth-development principles depended on the factors listed in chapter one:

- extent to which the Beacon director and staff were conversant with and received training in the central concepts of positive youth development;
- extent to which youth had choices in selecting activities, as well as input into and opportunities to contribute to the operation of the Beacon;
- extent to which the Beacon offered informal and formal opportunities for leadership development among youth;
- degree to which youth perceived staff as respectful, accessible, and caring and as fostering positive interactions among youth from different backgrounds; and
- how well the Beacon cultivated a sense of continuity and belonging among youth.

#### ***Knowledge of Central Concepts of Positive Youth Development***

In interviews with the Beacon director and staff concerning youth activities offered at the Beacon, evaluators listened for the directors' ability to discuss different youth-development



concepts<sup>18</sup> and observed these concepts in practice through site and activity observations. These concepts included giving youth a voice in the operation of the Beacon at the organizational level; communicating high expectations for youth; designing and structuring activities to promote a sense of belonging; providing direct opportunities for youth to shape activities; designing activities that engage youth in participating on a lasting basis; and structuring activities to provide continuity over time.

In two sites (A and B), the Beacon directors and staff frequently cited all the youth-development concepts (both during the interview and in practice), provided examples, and showed a general understanding of how these concepts positively affected their youth. In two more sites (C and D), almost all the concepts were clearly well understood and formed the core of the discussion about youth programs. In the final two sites, these concepts had not penetrated throughout the site to the same degree. In one of these sites (F), only two youth-development concepts were in evidence at high levels, and in the last site (E), none of the concepts were evident in more than a limited manner.

### ***Training in Youth-Development Concepts and Practices***

YDI has provided a wide variety of training opportunities for both Beacon directors and their staff. The focus of YDI's capacity building has always been articulating the vision of positive youth development at the Beacons and then making the vision a reality. Directors were invited to monthly meetings addressing key issues concerning the four focal areas of Beacon programming: youth-development programming, academic support and enhancement, parent involvement and family support, and

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<sup>18</sup> In listening for the articulation of youth-development concepts, evaluators placed more importance on the extent to which the director's description of Beacon activities and their underlying logic was consonant with YDI's conceptual framework than on simple repetition of key phrases.

neighborhood safety and community building. In particular, YDI staff and the Beacon work to identify ways the youth-development perspective is incorporated into organizational behavior. In addition, YDI provides access to many opportunities for Beacon staff to develop and lead activities consistent with a positive youth-development framework.

These meetings and activities are voluntary, and some sites took advantage of them more frequently than others. Among the six intensive-study sites, only three directors regularly attended YDI activities. Given the variation in attendance, there was significant variation in the training of youth staff in youth-development concepts in the six sites. Across the six sites, only one (B) had sent all its youth staff to YDI training, and in two other sites (A and D), several—but not all—staff had taken advantage of YDI trainings. In one site (C), only a single staff member had participated in YDI training; in the other two sites, no staff had attended YDI-sponsored training sessions. In interviews, several Beacon staff members did mention participating in youth-service training through sources other than YDI—such as local universities and other youth-serving organizations—as well as in on-site training in topics such as violence prevention, adolescent self-esteem, conflict resolution, and peer mediation, all of which contributed to their knowledge of youth-development concepts and the extent to which they integrated these concepts into activities consistently.

Lack of training and understanding were not necessarily the only reasons that some youth-development concepts were not clearly manifest in a site. For example, several sites that had experienced high turnover in program staff showed less evidence of youth-development concepts.

### ***Youth Choice of Activities***

As children mature, the ability to make decisions wisely and experience the consequences of these decisions is an important aspect of development. Through environmental and activity observations and interviews with the Beacon director and other staff, evaluators rated the sites

on the level of freedom that participants had in choosing activities. The sites receiving the highest rating for youth development were those where youth had some degree of choice in activities, particularly as they grew older. This freedom varied both across the different sites and different age groups. Older participants had more freedom to choose activities than younger participants across all sites, and high school participants had the most freedom overall.

Only one site (E) offered youth of all ages the same degree of choice; at this site, all youth were assigned to homework help and recreation period, and then could sign up for other activities. In three sites, (A, B and F), elementary and middle school youth operated on the same basic schedule, although the degree of choice was not the same at all three: in one site, youth followed a pre-set rotation among different kinds of activities with no choice, while in a second, after a homework and recreation period, youth could choose other activities; in the third, after a homework-help period, youth could do other activities. Finally, in two sites, (C and D), middle and high school youth were free to sign up for any activities they wanted on a regular basis.

In all sites, elementary school participants received homework help in some form, but the degree to which middle and high school youth were required to participate in any form of academic activity varied. It should be noted that while all the younger students had homework help, this was only mandatory in the two sites where elementary school children had no choice in any activities (A and D). However, in the other sites, Beacon staff strongly encouraged all elementary-school-age youth (and sometimes all middle-school-age youth) to participate in homework help.

### ***Youth Input Incorporated Into Planning***

Evaluators also looked for evidence that youth were encouraged to make their voices heard in planning Beacon activities. There was a range in the types of opportunities for youth to plan activities from informal input to joint planning of activities with staff. In two sites (A and E), staff described opportunities for youth to

participate in planning both formally and informally, including some joint planning. In three additional sites (B, C and D), youth input was incorporated through both formal and informal means, but no activities were jointly planned. Site F offered youth the opportunity to contribute only informally to planning Beacon activities.

### ***Opportunities to Contribute to Operation of Beacon***

The implementation study identified eight ways that youth can contribute to the Beacon center.<sup>19</sup> In three sites (A, B, and D), staff reported that youth had many opportunities to contribute, ranging from volunteering or working in the center and organizing activities, to participating in staff meetings. The other three sites offered fewer such activities, although almost all reported having youth serve as volunteer administrative or program staff or participating on a youth council.

### ***Formal and Informal Opportunities for Leadership Development***

Part of positive youth development involves young people's learning to take active leadership roles in shaping the world around them. Many Beacons have a variety of approaches to formal leadership development, including training youth with leadership development curricula, formal youth representation on a community advisory council, and a Beacon youth council. In addition, Beacon staff also offer youth a range of informal opportunities where young people can develop the skills needed to lead others as team captains, group leaders, activity assistants, or in other helping roles. All but one Beacon (site E) employed either formal leadership development strategies or provided formal leadership roles for

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<sup>19</sup> Volunteering within the Beacon as program and administrative staff; serving as Beacon program or administrative staff; participating in the Beacon youth council; serving as youth representatives on the community advisory council; participating in planning meetings for regular events and activities; participating in planning meetings for special events and activities; helping organize and carry out Beacon activities; and participating in staff meetings.

youth. Similarly, all but one Beacon (site F) offered informal leadership development opportunities.

### ***Staff Perceived as Respectful, Accessible, and Caring***

During the implementation study, a convenience sample of youth, ages 10 to 19 in every Beacon site participated in brief intercept interviews. Among other things, the interview asked the extent to which young people perceived the staff as respectful, caring, and accessible. Youth responded positively<sup>20</sup> for all these three characteristics in five of the six Beacons. However, in one Beacon (site E), although youth perceived the staff as accessible, they had less positive perceptions of staff as respectful and caring.

### ***Interaction Among Youth from Different Backgrounds***

In addition to the core principles of youth development, YDI training has worked to strengthen the extent to which Beacons foster positive interactions among youth from different backgrounds. An emphasis is placed on developing a sense of pride in one's own culture, as well as respect and appreciation for other cultures. Only two sites (D and E) placed a programmatic emphasis on diversity, but all six strongly encouraged youth to meet and interact with young people from other backgrounds.

### ***A Sense of Continuity and Belonging at the Center***

Some activities at the Beacon encourage youth to continue their participation over time by creating a sense of continuity in different ways. Evaluators looked for sets of activities for different age groups that were structured sequentially, as well as for activities that mixed youth of different ages in ways that created a positive image of future growth for participants. In two sites (A and D), continuity was deliberately encouraged by providing a “ladder” of involvement (e.g., from participant to

volunteer to staff), by offering mixed-age activities where participants helped one another (e.g., older youth tutoring younger youth), and by offering activities addressing the full age range of youth within one activity. In one site (B), no activities involving all age ranges were offered, while in two others, this was the only way the site encouraged continuity. Finally, in one site, although there were no mixed-age activities and youth had no opportunity to help one another, several activities built upon one another to form a ladder of involvement.

Taken together, these different elements of youth development in the Beacon's environment communicated important messages to young people about how they were viewed and what adults running the Beacons expected of them. Sites A, B, and D were most consistent in their implementation of positive youth development at the organizational level, followed by site C. Evaluators found fewer organizational components of youth development at sites E and F than at the other Beacons. The primary factor associated with high-quality youth-development practice at the organizational level was attendance by Beacon leadership at voluntary YDI monthly Beacon directors' meetings and training opportunities. Those Beacons with core staff participating regularly in YDI meetings and training opportunities were both more able to articulate a vision of youth activities incorporating the elements of youth-development practice and more likely to put these activities and practices in place, both on their own and by hiring staff who held views consistent with the youth-development principles stressed by YDI.

### **Youth-Development Activities at the Beacons**

The Beacons offer a rich array of specific youth activities after school, in the evenings, and on weekends. The major youth-development activities include academic support and enhancement; creative arts; computers and technology; cultural awareness; employment preparation; leadership; sports and fitness; and supervised relaxation. Table 2.1 lists Beacon activities in eight categories; appendix 1 describes these activities briefly.

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<sup>20</sup> The response categories chosen were either “most of the time” or “always.”

**Table 2.1: Activities for Youth**

<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>	<b>ACTIVITY</b>
<b>Academic support and enhancement</b>	Homework help Academic enrichment Non-school reading Small group study Tutoring	<b>Employment preparation</b>	Employment-preparation programs Entrepreneurship
<b>Creative arts</b>	Graphic arts Dance Theater/theater arts Chorus Performances Cooking Sewing	<b>Leadership development</b>	Counselors-in-training AmeriCorps “Club” Youth leadership team Youth council
<b>Computers and technology</b>	Computer classes Computer units w/in other activities Access to computers	<b>Sports and fitness</b>	Basketball Martial arts Open gym
<b>Cultural awareness</b>	Holiday celebrations Exposure to multicultural institutions	<b>Supervised relaxation</b>	Lounge Game room

**Youth Participation in Beacon Activities**

This section discusses the patterns of youth participation in the activities offered at the Beacon intensive-study sites. The survey asked youth to identify their current activities, as well as ones in which they had participated previously. Participation in specific activities differed by gender, as shown in table 2.2. When compared across sites, females had higher participation rates than males in homework help, cultural and performing arts, computer instruction, and family life and sex education. Males had much higher participation rates in most athletic activities, although it is interesting to note that this was not the case with martial arts instruction.

Participation also differed by age, as shown in table 2.2. Youth ages 12 to 14 were more likely to participate in game room and homework help, athletics, and arts and crafts, while 15- to 19-year-olds were more likely to be on the Beacon youth council and in career preparation activities. In some study sites, the 15- to 19-year-olds were also hired as activity staff. Therefore their responses to specific activities may reflect both their participation in these activities and their leadership in running these activities for younger participants.

**TABLE 2.2: PARTICIPATION IN ACTIVITIES BY GENDER AND AGE**

<b>Youth participating in activities since coming to the Beacon</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>12-14 years old</b>	<b>15-19 years old</b>
<b>Homework help</b>	58%	75%	73%	64%
<b>Game room</b>	63%	73%	72%	67%
<b>Athletics</b>	74%	60%	70%	66%
<b>Arts and crafts</b>	55%	67%	68%	58%
<b>Lounge</b>	57%	57%	56%	60%
<b>Martial arts</b>	50%	48%	53%	47%
<b>Computer instruction</b>	42%	54%	53%	46%
<b>Cultural/performing arts</b>	39%	57%	52%	48%
<b>Tutoring</b>	50%	53%	50%	54%
<b>Family/sex education</b>	43%	56%	46%	54%
<b>Career preparation</b>	47%	48%	44%	52%
<b>Youth council</b>	48%	52%	37%	60%

The most well-attended activities also varied by Beacon site. For instance, Beacon participants in site C were much more likely to take part in athletic activities, with those not in athletics in tutoring, game room, or arts and crafts. In contrast, at site D, youth were more likely to be in homework help and lounge (where they read or played educational games), followed by athletics and youth council. The most well-attended activities in site B were game room and martial arts, while participants at site A were more likely to be in arts and crafts, performing arts, with homework help and athletics falling below these activities. Finally, youth at site E were more likely to be participating in game room, homework, and lounge.

Youth at site A appeared to participate in a richer, more diverse array of activities than those at other sites. This reflects both the extent of activities available at the site as well as the use of a structured schedule, whereby all youth within a particular age cohort followed a regular

rotation through the full range of activities. Such an approach may not give youth much experience in making choices, but it does guarantee exposure to a wide variety of activities in which to develop their abilities and interests.

***Experiences and Opportunities***

AED’s implementation study had found that youth also benefited from experiences and opportunities beyond regularly scheduled activities; therefore, the intensive-study survey asked about participation in these experiences and opportunities. Most intensive-study sites offered a variety of musical and dramatic performances that engaged youth and attracted parents to the Beacon. As table 2.3 shows, youth participation in different opportunities at the Beacon followed gender-based patterns, similar to those observed in activity participation: girls were more likely to participate in creative and performing arts activities (e.g., plays, dances), and males were much more likely to report participating in sports contests.

**Table 2.3: Participation in Beacon Activities by Gender**

<i>At the Beacon, have you ever:</i>	Male	Female
Performed in a play, dance or musical show?	47%	57%
Performed in a sports contest or exhibition through the Beacon?	69%	38%
Participated in an academic contest at the Beacon?	25%	16%

Youth in all sites had these opportunities but in varying degrees, as shown in table 2.4. For example, almost all youth responding in site A described performing in a play or musical while

few participants in the other sites did so. In site C, more than two-thirds of respondents had performed in a sports contest or exhibition at the Beacon.

**TABLE 2.4: PARTICIPATION IN PERFORMANCES, SPORTS, AND ACADEMIC CONTESTS**

<i>At the Beacon, have you ever:</i>	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E
Performed in a play, dance or musical show?	98%	44%	38%	35%	42%
Performed in a sports contest or exhibition?	55%	60%	70%	45%	32%

### Levels of Youth-Development Quality

This section discusses variations in the quality of activities offered to youth at the Beacon intensive-study sites. While observing the Beacon program activities, evaluators paid particular attention to how well the principles of positive youth development were incorporated throughout the organization and across activities. In addition to analyzing the overall quality of the activity, evaluators looked at characteristics typical of excellent youth-development practice, as discussed in chapter one. In particular, considering the five characteristics forming the core of YDI's framework, they asked to what extent youth had opportunities to (1) develop caring and trusting relationships; (2) participate in stimulating and engaging activities; (3) be challenged to grow by high expectations; (4) connect with and contribute to their communities; and (5) benefit

from a continuity of adult support.<sup>21</sup> In addition, activity observations looked for indications of the educational “added-value” of Beacon activities.

Every scheduled activity for youth at the four qualitative-study sites was observed at least twice using a structured protocol; some activities were observed as many as four times when content varied significantly from one session to another. (The content of the observation protocol is described in chapter one.) Observation data were compiled and analyzed to determine how well activities incorporated the elements fostering positive youth development. The analysis revealed three levels of youth-development practice at the qualitative-study sites: basic, satisfactory, and exemplary. As can

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<sup>21</sup> *Networks for Youth Development: A Guided Tour of Youth Development* (New York City: Youth Development Institute, 1993).

be seen in table 2.5, at the basic level, youth participate in some form of collective activity; at the satisfactory level, youth clearly are interested

and engaged in the activity; and at the exemplary level, youth are involved in activities fostering new strengths and competencies.

**TABLE 2.5: LEVELS OF YOUTH-DEVELOPMENT QUALITY**

<b>Basic (participating):</b> Youth are participating—in the program, off street, out of harm's way, forming bonds with peers, and learning the basics of social behavior.
<b>Satisfactory (engaging):</b> Youth clearly are engaged and interested in what they are doing and are more likely to return to these activities on a continuing basis.
<b>Exemplary (generative):</b> Youth are generating new strengths and competencies in activities that stretch them and stimulate their growth.

***Variations in Youth-Development Quality***

Although youth programming at the Beacons is informed by core youth-development principles at all the sites, analysis of the observation data showed that the extent to which specific activities incorporated the core elements of youth-development varied considerably.

Tables 2.6 to 2.8 present the patterns of variation in youth-development quality by content/type of activity, size of activity,<sup>22</sup> and site. In every case, there were noticeable patterns of variation in the “youth-development quality” of activities.

Regarding the relationship between type or content of activities and their youth-development quality, those activities dealing with employment/entrepreneurship, leadership development, and the creative arts exhibited higher quality than recreation and homework help or academic enhancement activities, as shown in table 2.6. In employment activities, youth were expected to learn new skills and challenge themselves as they prepared to enter the labor market. Artistic activities often involved project-based learning, where youth collaborated on a specific endeavor, seeking to achieve a high level of quality in their finished product, with built-in opportunities to critique and evaluate their own progress. On the other hand, both academic and recreational activities, while not without value, often were characterized by a kind of “dailiness” and repetition, with some notable exceptions.

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<sup>22</sup> To gauge size, evaluators asked activity staff how many young people the activity was designed to serve.

**Table 2.6: Youth-Development Quality Ratings, by Type or Content of Activity**

Type	Number of Activities	Average Activity Size	Average Quality Score
<b>Employment/entrepreneurial</b>	2	18.5	33
<b>Creative arts</b>	5	12.6	31.6
<b>Leadership development</b>	6	27.0	31.2
<b>Performing arts</b>	4	21.3	28.3
<b>Academic activities</b>	9	24.7	25.7
<b>Sports and recreation</b>	6	44.2	23.8

The size of youth activities at the qualitative-study sites ranged from small, with as few as 10 youth in a group, to very large, with as many as 80 in a group. The average Beacon activity served 26 participants and had an average rating of 28 out of a possible score of 39. (See chapter one, p. 12 for a discussion of how activities were rated.)

The youth-development quality of activities was clearly affected by size, with larger activities receiving lower ratings from the observers than smaller ones, as shown in table 2.7. Small-group activities included creative and performing arts and employment-related activities and a few academic activities (both homework help and

enrichment). Whatever the content, the qualitative evidence indicated that smaller group size made it possible for staff to develop closer relationships with young people and to communicate their expectations for growth through feedback and support. Medium-sized group activities were also quite varied in content, including academic support, creative and performing arts, sports, and employment-readiness activities. Very large-group activities were mainly sports and recreational activities although a few homework-help activities were in this size range.

**Table 2.7: Youth-Development Quality Ratings, by Size of Activity**

SIZE	Number of Activities	Average Activity Size	Average Quality Score
<b>Small</b> (1 – 19)	9	12.6	31.2
<b>Medium</b> (20 – 34)	15	26.1	28
<b>Large</b> (35 – 49)	6	36	27.2
<b>Very large</b> (50+)	1	80	26



When activities are grouped by their youth-development-quality scores, the same relationship between size and quality appears, as shown on table 2.8. Those activities with the highest youth-development quality were substantially smaller in size than other activities,

with the average group having fewer than 20 participants. The remaining activities were very close to the same size, with only a marginal difference between those activities rated as very good and those rated only good or acceptable.

**Table 2.8: Youth-Development Quality Ratings by Size of Group**

<b>Rating and Score Range</b>	<b>Number of Activities</b>	<b>Average Size</b>
<b>Acceptable</b> (14 – 19)	3	31.7
<b>Good</b> (20 – 26)	8	31.8
<b>Very good</b> (27 – 32)	12	29.2
<b>Exemplary</b> (33 – 39)	8	18.3

To examine the average quality of activities available at the four sites, evaluators weighted the activity scores by size of the activity, as shown in table 2.9. They then compared average-activity quality across sites and found apparent site-specific variations. All sites had some excellent activities and some relatively weak ones. Part of the variation resulted from the content nature of the activities. However, it was also clear that the overall approach to youth development was manifest in the activities offered to young people. In general, caring

relationships and high expectations for positive youth development characterizing the Beacon site as a whole were translated into stimulating, engaging activities and opportunities to contribute to the Beacon and the community, as evident in the similar standard deviations for three of the four qualitative-study sites. In site C, however, as reflected in the larger standard deviation, evaluators observed larger differences between activities in the extent to which youth-development principles were reflected in practice.

**TABLE 2.9: YOUTH-DEVELOPMENT QUALITY RATINGS, BY SITE<sup>23</sup>**

<b>Site</b>	<b>Average Activity Size</b>	<b>Average Quality Score</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Weighted Average Score*</b>
<b>A</b>	26.9	25.8	3.8	26.6
<b>B</b>	34.4	29.1	3.6	28.8
<b>C</b>	28.4	25.6	9.1	22.2
<b>D</b>	19.8	30.8	3.7	30.2

\*Scores are weighted by group size to gauge the quality of activities to which the average participant is exposed.

<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that the sites' rank order in terms of the youth-development quality of their activities varied slightly from the rank order of sites by the youth-development quality of their organizational context as described in chapter one.

Although Beacon leaders reported different levels of staff participation at YDI-sponsored professional development opportunities for youth workers, data from the staff interview portion of the observations showed little difference in the effect of training on the part of individual activity staff. Many had participated in some form of training, sometimes offered by YDI, but more frequently offered by the lead agency or some third party, such as a university. Activities where staff participated in YDI training had a slightly higher average score than those where staff reported having participated in some other form of training (30.6 versus 28.6).<sup>24</sup> In the observations, however, it appeared that youth workers who reported more extensive training (either at YDI or elsewhere) were more “intentional” in their work with youth, particularly in the way they created a nurturing environment while challenging youth to grow, and in their ability to both manage groups and respond to individual needs as they arose.

## **Discussion**

### ***Major Accomplishments***

The Beacons studied offered youth a wide array of diverse activities including recreational, cultural, and educational opportunities. Educational activities ranged from simple homework assistance to literacy-based activities that fostered communication skills. The high levels of participation discussed in this chapter suggest that many Beacon youth are exposed to a wide variety of options that broaden their horizons during important years of their development.

All the studied sites also offered youth positive experiences, such as celebrations and performances, which fostered learning and development. These activities strengthened intergenerational communication by drawing

parents and other family members into the Beacons.

Although the types of Beacon activities themselves were not extraordinary—many could be found in most typical youth programs—they were distinguished by their youth-development aspects: these activities challenged youth to reach beyond their current abilities, to work cooperatively with one another, and to take responsibility for the quality of their experiences. These practices recognized that youth need adult guidance and support for their development, often in ways not addressed by schools.

The youth-development quality of the Beacons was greatly enhanced by YDI’s capacity building. YDI’s work focused on helping Beacon directors and staff create an environment fostering youth development, both through specific activities and organizational practices. Inherent in this capacity building is a commitment to developing activities that challenge young people, build on their strengths, and stimulate their growth. Such activities go beyond simple recreational activities (“gym and swim”). At their best, such activities give young people a supportive network of peers and adults and foster the development of their cognitive, physical, vocational, social, civic, and moral capabilities. During the time of the study, YDI’s work was complemented by monthly meetings of Beacon directors convened by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. These meetings addressed organizational and management issues and provided information on accessing other publicly funded and/or operated resources.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

Traditional gender patterns were revealed in responses to survey questions about participation in different activities. For example, boys outnumbered girls in athletic activities, and girls outnumbered boys in homework help, arts and crafts, cultural and performing arts, and family life/sex education sessions. This was not always the case; at least among survey respondents, martial arts was cited by as many girls as boys,

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<sup>24</sup> In some cases, youth workers were not clear who had provided their training.

and more girls than boys reported participating in computer instruction. Some sites had begun to recognize and address these sex-stereotyped participation patterns, but this is clearly an area where more attention is needed.

Group size emerged as a critical factor in staff's ability to incorporate elements of good youth-development practice into an activity. The smaller the group size, the more likely the development of caring and trusting relationships among youth; the availability of adult support—both in general and evidenced in high expectations for performance and behavior; and the flexibility for youth to share in leading the

activity. In addition, in larger-size activities, evaluators sometimes saw interpersonal conflict that was not well managed by staff.

For the most part, evaluators found that staff had done a good to exemplary job of incorporating principles of good youth-development practice into activities. However, some activities of large size and/or with inadequately trained staff did little more than fill time. Unfortunately, this was more frequently the case with educational activities than with other types of activity.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEERS

*I've grown up with these people. I have friends and I have support. They're like a second family.* (Beacon youth)

The literature on adolescent development shows that positive, supportive relationships with peers and adults play an important role in promoting positive youth development and helping youth avoid high-risk behavior as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood. According to the National Academies of Science:

By their very nature these programs [community programs for youth] create and support peer groups. By providing a setting in which youth in peer groups can be actively and regularly involved in social, productive activities, these programs likely can increase the positive and decrease the negative influence that peers can have in each other's development.<sup>25</sup>

The study's surveys and interviews sought to measure the quality of youth relationships at the Beacon, with both peers and adult staff. The instruments posed a series of questions about the kinds of supportive behavior that youth had experienced in these relationships, as well as with peers and adults outside the Beacon, to determine if there were differences between relationships formed at the Beacon and those formed outside.<sup>26</sup> This chapter describes what youth said about relationships with their peers.

#### Elementary School Youth

Although the Beacons offer a wide array of attractive activities for youth, the main attraction of the center for most young people is the presence of friends. During the intensive study, the 8-to 10-year-old interviewees were asked how many of their friends came to the Beacon, whether it was easy or difficult to make friends at the Beacon, and how youth at the Beacon treated one another. Many interviewees stated that most or some of their friends attended the Beacon, and many participants knew one another (usually from the neighborhood) before they came to the Beacon. More than two-thirds of participants reported finding it easy to make friends at the Beacon because they knew participants from school and the Beacon allowed them the time and space to make friends:

*I knew them from school. I became friendlier with them here.*

*It's better here because we have more time to talk to each other and get to know each other.*

However, a substantial minority (approximately 30%) of young participants said that it was not easy for them to make friends at the Beacon because they did not always know other participants who did not attend their schools, and other Beacon participants made them feel uncomfortable:

*It's not easy. At school most of my friends are there, and my brother and sister are there also. Here they aren't.*

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<sup>25</sup> J.A. Gootman, Ed., *Community Program to Promote Youth Development* (National Academy Press, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> In this chapter and throughout the remainder of this report, interview and survey data are reported and discussed for middle- and high-school-age youth. Since elementary school participants were not surveyed, only interview findings are presented for this age group.

*It's harder for me because people talk to people they know from school and if you're shy it's hard.*

### Middle- and High-School-Age Youth

Of adolescent youth who were surveyed, about half (49%) said that all or most of the “friends they hang out with” attended the Beacon, and 92 percent had at least some close friends at the Beacon, as shown in table 3.1. The Beacon gave youth an opportunity to form close friendships with peers not at their school or in their immediate neighborhood.

As might be expected, youth participating in Beacon activities for two or more years (a majority of those who responded) were more likely to have all or most of their close friends at the Beacon, as were those at the Beacon every day or almost every day. Younger adolescents (middle-school-age) were slightly more likely to have all or most of their friends at the Beacon, and females were more likely than males to have all or most of their friends there. The proportion of youth reporting that all or most of their friends attended the Beacon also varied from site to site, ranging from a low of one-third (35%) in site D to a high of nearly two-thirds (64%) in site C.

**Table 3.1: Friends at the Beacon  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>Of the friends you hang out with, how many attend the Beacon?</i>	<b>Those responding “all or most”</b>
Females	53%
Males	45%
<i>I come to the Beacon every day or almost every day.</i>	51%
<i>I come to the Beacon once a week.</i>	39%
<i>I have been at the Beacon for 2 or more years.</i>	55%
<i>I have been at the Beacon for 1 year or less.</i>	36%

Based on responses to survey questions, youth with all or most of their close friends at the Beacon reported different types of relationships with friends compared with youth with some or none of their friends at the Beacon, as shown in table 3.2.<sup>27</sup> The former were significantly more likely to say that their friends paid attention to them (69%); told them when they did something good (70%); and comforted them when they

were upset (75%). More than half (51%) of these youth felt they could ask their friends for advice on a personal issue, and 56 percent reported that their friends “got on their case when they messed up.” A more negative finding was that those with all or most of their friends at the Beacon were more likely to say that their friends got in trouble from time to time than those who had fewer close friends at the Beacon.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> This series of questions and those on the nature of relationships with peers, as well as the kinds of support youth received from adults (discussed in the next chapter), was developed by Public/Private Ventures, Inc. as part of its research on the importance of peer and adult relationships in youth development.

<sup>28</sup> However, this may be a function of the fact that the standards for behavior may be higher at the Beacon than in other settings where youth spend time. For instance, observations of the Beacons indicate that youth at the Beacon may get in trouble for using foul language or for inappropriate teasing or bullying.

**Table 3.2: Relationships with Peers  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>Of the people you hang out with, how many:</i>	<i>All or most of close friends attend the Beacon</i>	<i>Some or none of close friends attend the Beacon</i>
<i>Pay attention to what's going on in your life?</i>	69%	56%
<i>Get on your case when you mess up?</i>	56%	43%
<i>Tell you when you do something good?</i>	70%	56%
<i>Would you ask for advice about personal issue?</i>	51%	48%
<i>Comfort you when you are really upset or mad?</i>	75%	55%
<i>Get in trouble from time to time?</i>	33%	20%

Interviewed adolescents described peer relationships at the Beacon as different from relationships not at the Beacon, partially as a result of the vision at the particular Beacon site. For example, at one site accentuating a sense of family and unity, participants described their relationship with Beacon friends as familial and supportive.

*In the Beacon, we are like a big family. I get hugs and love from a lot of people. Outside the Beacon, it's "hello and goodbye."*

*Most of us have family issues, and so many people lose family members. When that happens the whole Beacon program will go to the funeral to support you.*

At another site, with a prevailing atmosphere of orderliness and mutual respect, participants distinguished between how their peers behaved inside and outside the Beacon:

*When we are outside and we see someone we don't like, we'll just hit them or bump into them, but we don't do that at the Beacon.*

*In the Beacon we get along well. Outside, things get out of hand.*

At another site, where safety and security were highlighted, participants clearly made a distinction between friends at the Beacon who conformed to rules and those they described as "wild and crazy" and thus did not attend the Beacon:

*At the Beacon they let you hang out as long as you follow the rules. They give you some freedom but it's not wild like in the streets. My other friends won't come to the Beacon because they want to act wild. To them the Beacon is boring.*

*My friends from the neighborhood don't want to come to the Beacon. They say it's boring, but to me it's fun. They just want to do negative things like smoke weed, and they know they can't smoke weed at the Beacon.*

These comments may explain some of the differences in outcomes that appeared in the survey between students with all or most of their close friendships at the Beacon when compared with those with some or none of their friends there. Adolescent participants with a denser social network at the Beacon were more likely to report that they had friends who provided them with support in different areas of their life.

In some cases, however, positive and supportive peer relationships were under-mined by gossiping and bullying behavior, observed in several visits at two Beacons, particularly in large-group activities. In interviews at these sites, youth raised the subject as the primary reason for negative answers to questions about safety. Younger children reported both physical and verbal problems, while older youth talked about gossiping and “attitude” or intimidation. In some cases, the bullying and teasing concerned differences between youth involving gender, ethnicity, or ability. Younger Beacon staff were less able than seasoned staff to address these behaviors and tended to treat them as individual disruptions rather than tackling the larger issues involved. At the two sites where participants did not complain about bullying and teasing, staff avoided programming large numbers of children in the same space and time. But more important, the site’s philosophy, known to all participants and enforced by adult staff, absolutely condemned bullying and teasing.

## **Discussion**

### ***Major Accomplishments***

Beacons offer youth the opportunity to make new friends and maintain existing friendships in a structured, supervised setting even though participants come from different schools and even different neighborhoods. Many youth in both the survey and interview samples reported that having friends at the center was what brought them there, and roughly half of surveyed youth reported that all or most of their friends attended the Beacons.

Youth in both age groups described the Beacon as a safe, secure, and orderly environment and illustrated the supportive nature of their relationships at the center with examples from their own experiences. Participants reported that the center felt like a family, often in contrast to their relationships outside the Beacon, citing times when their Beacon friends had stood by them in times of personal crisis.

Those young people with all or most of their friends at the Beacon were more likely than those with less than half their friends at the Beacon to report that they received support from their friends. In addition, the peer group at the Beacon provided important support for positive behavior: youth reported that their friends at the Beacons were less likely to encourage them to participate in risky activities, unlike some of their friends outside.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

Some elementary school participants reported problems making friends at the Beacon with youth who were not in their social circles or who did not attend their schools. Beacon staff may be able to bridge this gap with more attention to facilitating the entry of new youth.

Bullying and teasing also posed a problem, particularly in large-sized groups. On occasion, staff responses to bullying and teasing were gender-based, with boy-on-girl intimidation being clearly unacceptable, while boy-on-boy intimidation was viewed as “boys being boys.” These findings suggest that Beacon staff need additional training on how to create an environment in which bullying and teasing are not tolerated and differences are dealt with in positive manner.

Some degree of interpersonal conflict is normal when young people get together in groups. Many youth are learning how to act in an unstructured social context, and, as they seek to define their own identity, sometimes they do so in opposition to others. However, a conflict may reflect discriminatory attitudes toward other youth based on their gender, background, or ability. A body of research already exists on bullying and teasing in the school setting and on ways staff in schools and youth programs can reduce the incidence of these behaviors. Further investigation into the kinds of difference-related issues that underlie such behavior at the Beacons would be useful in designing training to help Beacon staff address these issues, both specifically in terms of bullying and teasing and also generally in creating a supportive, tolerant, and emotionally safe environment for all children.

## CHAPTER FOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS

*The staff shows me a lot of love. I've built a better family for myself here. (Beacon youth)*

Both survey and interview data attest to the depth and quality of youth friendships formed at the Beacon. Adults also contribute to the quality of youth relationships at the Beacon by providing engaging activities and support that further nurture youth friendships. Positive support from adults, particularly when these adults reinforce positive community and parental values, has been found to be an important influence on adolescent behavior:

Congeniality of values [among family members, relatives, neighbors, institutional settings and the adults who are part of them] and clarity and consistency in their guidance are essential to the adolescent, who is engaged in a search for structure, a set of believable and attainable expectations and standards from the community to guide the movement from child to adult status.<sup>29</sup>

Youth responded to questions about their relationships with adults at the Beacon, about the kinds of support they received from adults, and about whether they thought adults showed respect for them and had high expectations for their behavior and performance.

### Elementary School Youth

In interviews, elementary school youth were asked to describe how adults at the Beacon treated them, including whether they felt respected by Beacon staff. Overwhelmingly, participants reported feeling respected and protected by staff, some stating that Beacon adults treated them better than other adults in their lives:

*They treat me with respect and they make sure nothing hurts me.*

*They respect us, and when we play they look out for us and make sure we don't get hurt.*

*They treat us with more respect. Some of our teachers just yell and scream at us. Here they don't scream at us. They tell us to do the right thing.*

At one site where the adult staff emphasized and modeled a philosophy of familial and community responsibility, it was not surprising that several young participants reported being treated like family. This was also the site where the most participants declared that they looked up to and were close to various Beacon staff members:

*They treat me good—just like my parents and family. They treat me better than in school.*

*My mother knows some of the adults here. He [Beacon staff] treats us like we're his kids. He cares about us. It seems like he and my mom are brother and sister.*

When these young participants were asked which adults (out of all adults they knew) they felt closest to and respected most, they included Beacon staff just after their parents and other family members. Beacon staff mentioned by the youth included directors, instructors, group leaders, coaches, counselors, and coordinators:

*I am close to my group leader. She is always helping me with homework.*

*I am close to the people here because I know them and I can trust them.*

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<sup>29</sup> F. Ianni, *The Search for Structure: A Report on American Youth Today* (New York: The Free Press, 1989).



However, at sites employing youth staff to manage groups of elementary school youth, a few participants complained that staff were sometimes disrespectful, “yelling, screaming and having attitude.” Program observations supported these claims and further reinforced the need for youth staff at the Beacons to receive ongoing professional development and supervision.

### Middle- and High-School-Age Youth

An overwhelming majority of Beacon adolescents surveyed described positive relationships with at least some adults at the Beacon, and a substantial minority reported these relationships with most or all adults at the Beacon, as shown in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Relationships with Beacon Adults  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<b>Youth who feel that there are adults at the Beacon who:</b>	<b>Some adults</b>	<b>All or most adults</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Tell them when they do something good.</i>	68%	24%	92%
<i>They could go to for help with schoolwork or school problems.</i>	57%	30%	87%
<i>Pay attention to what’s going on in your life.</i>	58%	29%	87%
<i>They could go to for help resolving an argument.</i>	60%	26%	86%
<i>They could go to if they were really upset or mad.</i>	47%	38%	85%
<i>Get on their case when they mess up.</i>	56%	26%	82%
<i>They could go to for advice about personal things.</i>	40%	37%	77%

The numbers in table 4.1 were fairly consistent across gender and sites, although more females than males felt that there was someone at the Beacon who would “get on their case when they messed up” and felt they could go to Beacon staff if they had an argument. In general, the number of interviewed youth who felt they could

look to adults at the Beacon for different kinds of support was close to 90 percent and consistent across all sites. These youth indicated that Beacon adults paid attention to their “personal,” “school, and “home” lives, as illustrated in table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Attention from Beacon Adults (Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>Do adults at the Beacon pay attention to what’s going on in your life? What kinds of things do they pay attention to?</i>	
<i>My personal life</i>	<p>“If you walk in upset, the workers will ask you why you are upset. I feel good that they care.”</p> <p>“A couple of people that work here talk to me and tell me to do the right thing. They see I’m starting to go the wrong way and they point me to the right way.”</p> <p>“I trust the staff. They help me and don’t let the problem get out of control.”</p>
<i>My home life</i>	<p>“They pay attention to what I’m doing—does my mother know where I’m at and what time am I supposed to be at home?”</p> <p>“My parents split and I started acting out. The people here talked to me and told me not to blame myself and to talk to my mother. Things worked out.”</p> <p>“I used to be getting hit at home but the director intervened. My mother got help and now I feel safe at home.”</p>
<i>My school life</i>	<p>“Every time you have a report card you have to bring it here and show it. Some of the staff even come out to my school to check up on me.”</p> <p>“They look at our report card. They want to know what’s going on in school.”</p> <p>“They pay attention to our grades and how we are doing in school.”</p>

Interviewed youth also felt they could go to Beacon adults for support and help. They described trusting adults at the Beacon for various reasons, as shown in table 4.3.

**Table 4.3: Sense of Trust in Beacon Adults (Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>Do you feel you can rely on the adults at the Beacon for support and help with things going on in your life?</i>	
<i>Yes, because they know me.</i>	<p>“They care about me and come from my neighborhood so they’ll back me up and show me the right things to do.”</p> <p>“The people here know me and my whole family. It would be the first place to go.”</p>
<i>Yes, because it’s confidential.</i>	<p>“When we talk to the people here they don’t go and tell everybody like friends do. It’s different; it’s confidential.”</p> <p>“I have trust in the Beacon director and the adults here. They know when they have to talk to your parents and when they don’t.”</p>
<i>Yes, because they supported me in the past.</i>	<p>“I moved here because I had a fire in my house. Everyone here helped me. They bought me clothes.”</p> <p>“There’s someone I talk to all the time. That person has always helped me.”</p>

Adolescent participants also described trusting, attentive, and supportive relationships with Beacon adults. Participants felt they could speak openly with Beacon adults and receive support and encouragement. Participants also noted that Beacon adults paid attention to their school and home lives:

*The staff are cool. They’re easy to talk to.*

*The staff, they make me feel comfortable. I can talk to them about anything.*

*A lot of people have helped me here. They’ve given me guidance.*

The survey also asked about adult respect for youth in an effort to learn more about the nature of relationships between youth and adults at Beacons and to follow up on issues mentioned in youth interviews during Phase I of the evaluation. Specifically, the survey asked whether Beacon staff showed disrespect toward the young people. The response to this question

varied significantly by Beacon site, as shown in table 4.4. At one site, more than one-third of all survey respondents said that the Beacon staff always or often showed disrespect toward young people. The other Beacon sites had much lower numbers of youth reporting that the Beacon staff showed them disrespect, ranging from only 13% to 23% of respondents.

**Table 4.4: Staff Respect for Youth  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>How often do Beacon staff show disrespect towards young people?</i>	<b>Always or often</b>
<b>Site A</b>	20%
<b>Site B</b>	13%
<b>Site C</b>	34%
<b>Site D</b>	20%
<b>Site E</b>	23%

In interviews, participants generally reported that Beacon adults were respectful and supportive. However, interviewed adolescents, like younger participants, did report that some staff (those who were generally younger with less experience) yelled and screamed and “disrespected” them. They also felt that these younger staff members were less likely to address issues such as bullying, gossiping, teasing, and other situations when youth were disrespecting one another in activities.

In general, however, interviewees noted that, unlike their schools, the Beacons created and insisted upon “an atmosphere of mutual respect,” and when that respect was violated, it was addressed immediately, and confrontations between participants and staff were minimal:

*There’s no trouble here, you must show respect to one another.*

*We have a good, open relationship with the staff. There is no disrespect.*

Participants were asked if the Beacon staff had high expectations for their conduct and performance at the Beacon. Overall, as shown in table 4.5, 93 percent felt that staff had high expectations of them, with 74 percent saying that adults had these expectations always or often, and 19 percent that staff had high expectations sometimes. This varied by gender and age, with more females and older youth feeling that staff always or often had high expectations of them. In addition, perceptions varied by site, ranging from under two-thirds in sites B and C to four-fifths in sites A and D. In addition, multiple regression analyses of youth responses showed a significant relationship between the quality of youth-development implementation at the site and the degree to which youth perceived staff as having positive expectations for their conduct and performance. [See appendix 2, Regression Coefficients (Betas) for Selected Program Outcomes and Characteristics.]

**Table 4.5: Perceptions of Staff Expectations  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>The Beacon always or often staff has high expectations for my conduct and performance.</i>	<b>Total 74%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	67%
Female	79%
<b>Age</b>	
10-14	67%
15-19	78%
<b>Sites</b>	
Site A	80%
Site B	64%
Site C	65%
Site D	80%
Site E	72%

In their interviews, participants described high staff expectations of youth at the Beacon. Many youth reported that expectations for conduct were higher at the Beacon than in other settings where they spent time, including school and other similar programs. These expectations included not only appropriate conduct at the Beacon but also educational achievement and resistance to drugs, alcohol, and fighting, as reflected in youth comments about staff encouragement to “do the right thing” and work hard in school.

*They make us learn to talk out our problems and learn to get along.*

*They enforce the thought that we are not supposed to steal or do something that hurts other people. They talk to us about these things*

*I did nothing in school, but sit around. People here kept telling me I can do it. They motivated me. I even did extra credit for science.*

When youth in both age groups reflected on their relationships at the Beacon, they mentioned the supportive nature of participants and staff at the center. Participants in different sites mentioned establishing relationships that felt like a family in an environment that was safe, secure, and orderly. They also mentioned “mutual respect,” “unity,” and “having fun.”

*When I was 14, I lost a family member. The kids and the people here, some came to the funeral. They sent cards and they offered to be there for me. It’s like family. We are respectful and we care about each other.*

*Everyone feels close. This is like my second home.*

## **Discussion**

### ***Major Accomplishments***

The overwhelming majority of youth responding to both survey and interview questions described Beacon adults as offering support, encouragement, and guidance. In interviews, adolescents said that they could rely on Beacon adults for help with home, school, and personal issues because the adults knew them, kept their problems confidential, and “had come through for them in the past.”

Youth in all sites also reported that Beacon adults had high expectations for their performance and behavior. Furthermore, youth at Beacon sites where youth-development principles were well incorporated into both organizational practices and individual activities described more positive experiences in the areas of staff expectations than did youth in sites with lower quality youth-development programming.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

Youth in all age groups complained in interviews about younger staff members in the Beacon who sometimes yelled and screamed at them and treated them with disrespect. Surveyed youth in sites that employed more young staff reported higher numbers when asked if adults disrespected them. Although some of this behavior may reflect an abuse of authority, it is likely that these staff members have weaker group-management skills and need help building a repertoire of approaches to handling their charges.

Observation of youth activities and interviews with their staff leaders showed that the degree to

which staff were trained in working with young people was reflected in the quality of the activities. Better trained staff were more “intentional” in their work with youth, particularly in the way they challenged them to grow, and better able to both manage groups and respond to individual needs as they arose. In addition, observations also revealed an uneven level of training among staff. More consistent investment in improving the skills of youth staff would increase the quality of experiences for youth at the Beacons.

In some cases, staff turnover undermines the benefits of these training investments. It also undermines the stability of the bond between youth and staff and is particularly challenging for young people who have experienced loss and/or have unstable home lives. Some degree of turnover is common in youth programs, partly because of low salaries and because working with youth is sometimes a transitional job for young people while they complete their studies. However, those Beacons able to maintain core staff over a period of several years appeared better able to integrate new staff while maintaining continuity of an adult presence in the lives of youth.

Beacons have made an effort to hire staff from the communities they serve, which often means that youth and staff share a common racial or ethnic background. In contrast, many afterschool programs hire teachers who may not live in the neighborhood or be of the same cultural background as the young people with whom they work. It would be useful to know the value-added of hiring community-based staff, particularly in relation to their ability to act as role models for youth.

## CHAPTER FIVE FEELING SAFE AT THE BEACON

*I know nothing will happen because all the counselors are kind of like my parents.*  
(Beacon youth)

*Problems are stopped before they get serious. Fighting is rare.* (Beacon youth)

The issue of physical safety has always been paramount for the Beacons, designed as “safe havens” in otherwise unsafe neighborhoods.<sup>30</sup> A Beacon’s safe environment is created by the center’s lack of tolerance for violence and crime through both security measures and consistent enforcement of rules for appropriate behavior. As this chapter shows, the way staff work with youth to minimize conflict as it arises and the relationships that participants form with staff and with one another also foster a sense of safety at the Beacon, allowing youth to feel safe from destructive behavior and confident that staff have their “best interests at heart.”

### **Elementary School Youth**

The majority of elementary school interviewees (85%) reported feeling safe inside the Beacons, while only 45 percent reported feeling safe outside. When asked why they did not feel safe outside the Beacon, participants most commonly reported fear of being “snatched” or “robbed.” In addition, some participants described the area outside their Beacons as unsafe because of “too much drugs, fighting, and trouble.”

We asked these children to reflect on what made them feel safe inside the Beacon. The answers were similar, but slightly different for every site, reflecting variations among the sites in both programming and ways of handling security issues.

In one site with a strong security presence, participants described feeling safe because security guards kept strangers from coming inside the building; they described security as “watchful” and stated that the escort program made them feel safe while they traveled to the center. In another site with less visible security and more emphasis on group dynamics, participants described feeling safe because their group leader protected them; they also reported a sense of group camaraderie that led them to look out for one another. At a site with only one security guard, participants still reported feeling safe because they trusted staff and felt they could confide in them when trouble arose. At another site, with less visible security but heavy staff monitoring, participants described staff as protecting them and keeping weapons and other dangerous items out of the Beacon. Table 5.1 summarizes what 8- to 10-year-olds said about safety at their Beacons.

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<sup>30</sup> The location of the first 20 Beacons was based on neighborhood crime data; other variables have been added, but the need for a safe haven continues to be an important factor in determining the location of a new Beacon.

**Table 5.1: Sense of Safety at the Beacon  
(Elementary School Youth)**

<i>What makes you feel safe inside the Beacon?</i>	<p>“I am safe inside because of the security guards.”</p> <p>“My friends and my group leaders keep me safe.”</p> <p>“If somebody is bothering me, I can go tell.”</p> <p>“There’s people here that watch us.”</p>
<i>What makes you feel safe outside the Beacon?</i>	<p>“I know a lot of people.”</p> <p>“I live across the street and my mother is always home.”</p> <p>“I live close by.”</p>
<i>What makes you feel unsafe outside the Beacon?</i>	<p>“I’m afraid they’ll snatch me.”</p> <p>“It’s unsafe outside because people are drinking beer and they do drugs.”</p> <p>“There’s too much fighting, too much trouble outside.”</p> <p>“There are a lot of gangsters outside. It’s scary.”</p>
<i>Have you ever witnessed a fight at the Beacon?</i>	<p>“I’ve seen fights, but not really got hurt.”</p> <p>“I was in a fight. The Beacon staff told my mother. I got in trouble.”</p>

Fifteen percent of these young interviewees reported feeling only a “little safe” or “not safe” while inside the Beacon. When asked to explain why, participants’ reported that the number one reason for fighting was bullying and teasing. Across sites, participants reported having

witnessed fighting episodes, which they described mostly as “screaming and pushing,” and not entailing serious hurt to those involved. Table 5.2 shows young participants’ reasons for not feeling safe at the Beacon.

**Table 5. 2: When Youth Don’t Feel Safe (Elementary School Youth)**

<i>What makes you feel unsafe inside the Beacon?</i>	<p>“Kids try to beat me up.”</p> <p>“Kids treat me bad. They say they’re joking.”</p> <p>“I get into a lot of fights and arguments. Kids pick on me.”</p> <p>“Mostly kids fight because they are being made fun of or they can’t keep a secret.”</p>
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**Middle- and High-School-Age Youth**

***Safety Inside the Beacon***

An overwhelming majority of surveyed adolescents (86%) responded that they always or often felt safe in the Beacon, while only 2

percent said they rarely or never felt safe. This number varied by gender and site but not by age, as shown in table 5.3.

**Table 5.3: Sense of Safety Inside the Beacon**  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)

<i>I always or often feel safe inside the Beacon</i>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	80%
Female	91%
<b>Age</b>	
12-14 year old	85%
15-19 year old	86%
<b>Sites</b>	
Site A	88%
Site B	89%
Site C	80%
Site D	89%
Site E	77%

Interviewed adolescents described the factors, found across all sites, that helped them feel safe, including staff, security measures, conflict resolution practices within the Beacon, a strongly enforced policy of no tolerance of fighting, and the sense of respect permeating the Beacon:

*I have been coming to the Beacon for nine years. I have always felt secure.*

*All the people that work here make me feel safe.*

*There's no trouble here, you must show respect to one another.*

In addition to asking middle- and high-school-age youth if they felt safe inside the Beacon, the survey asked a series of questions about rules and fighting at the Beacon. Youth were asked if

they knew the Beacon rules about fighting and other behavior and whether rules were enforced consistently.

An overwhelming majority (95%) of surveyed youth said they knew the rules, as shown in table 5.4. A smaller percentage (60%) reported that rules were enforced always or often, and there was significant variation by site. For example, at site E, fewer than half of surveyed youth described Beacon rules as always or often enforced, which may help explain why participants at this site were less likely than at other sites to report feeling safe inside the Beacon. Youth in high-quality youth-development sites were significantly more likely to report that Beacon rules were consistently enforced. [See appendix 2, Regression Coefficients (Betas) for Selected Program Outcomes and Characteristics.]



**Table 5.4: Knowledge of Beacon Rules by Site  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

	Total	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E
<i>I know what the rules are at the Beacon.</i>	95%	94%	96%	97%	96%	92%
<i>The rules at the Beacon are enforced consistently always or often.</i>	60%	74%	56%	57%	59%	48%
<b>How participants know what the Beacon rules are...</b>						
<i>The rules are posted on signs in the Beacon.</i>		2%	41%	36%	36%	35%
<i>The Beacon staff go over the rules during activities.</i>		84%	54%	46%	64%	35%
<i>The Beacon staff told me the rules when I first signed up.</i>		68%	68%	39%	80%	65%
<i>I can tell from watching other youth what the rules are.</i>		52%	24%	15%	40%	31%

Interviewed youth were asked to describe the basic Beacon rules. Responses included “no fighting,” “no cursing,” “no hats,” “no weapons,” “no running in the halls,” and “showing respect to all activity staff and other youth.”

An analysis of the interview responses shows that there were several different factors contributing to the strong sense of safety reported by almost all youth, as shown in table 5.5.

**Table 5.5: Factors Fostering Sense of Safety at the Beacon  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<b>Youth feel protected by staff.</b>	<p>“The people here care about us and protect us.”</p> <p>“I feel safe inside because the people are there to make sure nothing bad happens.”</p> <p>“The staff are like our brothers and sisters.”</p>
<b>Security measures in place.</b>	<p>“The staff waits outside to make sure you’re safe.”</p> <p>“They block all the doors, plus we have security. We are never alone. We are always in a group.”</p> <p>“Security walks around. Nobody can just come in; you need an ID.”</p>
<b>Conflict resolution is practiced.</b>	<p>“If you get into a problem the security will get both sides to open up.”</p> <p>“If someone is bothering me, I know the staff is gonna do something. Nobody is gonna beat you up; the staff takes cares of the problem.”</p>

*Fighting*

The survey asked youth about the frequency of fighting at the Beacon as well as about their confidence in the ability of Beacon staff and security to control fights. Overall, fighting was not a frequent occurrence. More than two-thirds of the youth (68%) said that they rarely or never

witnessed fights at the Beacon where someone was hurt, as shown in table 5.6, while just 14 percent of youth said that they always or often witnessed such fights. Males in all age groups tended to witness fights more often than females, as did older adolescents.

**Table 5.6: Fighting at the Beacons**  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)

	Male	Female	12-14 years old	15-19 years old	Total
<i>I always or often witness fights at the Beacon where someone gets hurt.</i>	16%	12%	17%	14%	14%
<i>I rarely or never witness fights at the Beacon where someone gets hurt.</i>	58%	75%	64%	68%	68%
<i>I always or often feel confident that the Beacon staff and security are able to handle the fights that come up.</i>	72%	82%	76%	77%	77%

The number of fights witnessed varied considerably across Beacons, with 37 percent of participants reporting that they witnessed them always or often in site D and only 6 percent in site A, as shown in table 5.7. Youth confidence in staff's ability to handle fights always or often varied across sites, from only 68 percent of youth in sites C and E feeling confident to 84 percent and 83 percent in sites A and D. Except

for site E, youth in sites with fewer fights tended to be more confident in the staff's ability to handle them. Although the overwhelming majority of youth reported feeling safe in all sites, these percentages were slightly lower in sites C and E, where youth also expressed less confidence in the ability of staff to handle fights that arose.

**Table 5.7: Fighting at the Beacon, by Site**  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)

% who responded always or often	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E
<i>I witness fights at the Beacon where someone gets hurt.</i>	6%	16%	37%	9%	8%
<i>I feel confident that the Beacon staff and security are able to handle the fights that come up.</i>	84%	75%	68%	83%	68%
<i>I feel safe inside f the Beacon.</i>	88%	89%	80%	89%	77%

**Safety Outside the Beacon**

Asked in the survey about the safety of the area directly surrounding the Beacon compared with the safety in other areas in the neighborhood, 48 percent of respondents said that the area around the Beacon was safer than other areas, 46 percent said that it was about the same, and only 6 percent said that it was less safe, as shown in table 5.8. These numbers varied by Beacon site, with 61 percent of youth in site B feeling that the Beacon was safer than other areas in the neighborhood and only 27 percent feeling this way in site E. The site-by-site numbers may

reflect both Beacon efforts to create safe ways to reach the Beacon (transportation, walking escorts, people stationed outside the center) as well as the general safety of the neighborhood.

In total, 73 percent of respondents said that they always or often felt safe walking to and from the Beacon. These numbers were similar across gender and age group but varied a great deal by site. Youth in site A felt safest walking to and from the Beacon, with most reporting feeling this way always or often; participants in site C felt least safe.

**Table 5.8: Sense of Safety Outside the Beacon  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	All Sites
<i>I always or often feel safe walking to and from the Beacon.</i>	88%	71%	57%	70%	69%	73%
<i>Compared to other areas in the neighborhood, the area surrounding the Beacon is safer.</i>	55%	61%	43%	43%	27%	48%
<i>Compared to other areas in the neighborhood, the area surrounding the Beacon is as about the same as other areas.</i>	41%	34%	47%	51%	69%	46%
<i>Compared to other areas in the neighborhood, the area surrounding the Beacon is less safe.</i>	4%	5%	10%	6%	4%	6%

In interviews, youth reflected on factors that made them feel safe and unsafe outside the Beacon. Despite feelings of safety expressed by participants inside the Beacon, more than one-third of middle school interviewees (38%) reported feeling "unsafe" in the areas outside their Beacons, mainly because of fear of violence and, specifically, of gangs. High school interviewees also acknowledged that once they left the Beacon, the "safety zone is over," although only a small minority described feeling afraid walking to and from the Beacons because they knew "the people and the area."

When asked what made them feel safe or unsafe outside the Beacon, middle school interviewees indicated that bullying and teasing were more frequent outside the Beacon than inside and that this made them feel unsafe. In interviews, high school participants also reported feeling unsafe in their schools, primarily because of fighting and the fear of violence escalating into use of weapons. It is interesting to note that they did not report these same feelings at the Beacon even in cases where the school and Beacon center were in the same building.

## Discussion

### *Major Accomplishments*

It is clear that the Beacon centers have successfully created a safe haven for youth of all

ages. The overwhelming majority of Beacon participants reported feeling safe at the Beacon for a variety of reasons beyond the presence of security staff and the enforcement of security measures. Young participants felt safe because they were in an orderly environment with friends and adults whom they trusted and were "watching out for them." Staff cultivated a sense of group support, and it was this atmosphere of mutual respect and order, as well as the close interpersonal connections, that made young people feel protected.

Middle- and high-school-age youth felt secure because the Beacon's structure provided strict rules that did not always exist (or were rarely enforced) in other settings. Older youth also felt safe because of the Beacon's conflict resolution and mediation approaches and because they believed that people respected one another at the Beacon and were less likely to "act out."

### *Issues and Concerns*

As discussed in chapter three, some bullying and fighting occurred in two sites, and some sites addressed the problem more effectively than others. Within activities, bullying and teasing mainly occurred when the group was large and leaders did not have the requisite management skills. This area could benefit from more training of Beacon staff—particularly younger staff.

## CHAPTER SIX FEELING GOOD AT THE BEACON

*I like it here because I'm with my friends and we have fun. (Beacon youth)*

*I know if I get into a problem I have friends, the counselors and the staff are here to look out for me. (Beacon youth)*

The Beacons strive to strengthen the resiliency of youth participants and increase their self-confidence and sense of self-worth through the quality of interpersonal relationships and activities. In interviews and surveys, Beacon participants responded to questions about their feelings about themselves, including whether youth of all ethnic and racial groups were treated fairly, if youth at the Beacon respected one another, and whether they felt they “belonged” at the Beacon.

### **Elementary School Youth**

On the whole, elementary school interviewees reported feeling good about themselves while at the Beacon. Once again the issue of safety came to the forefront because, for these young participants, the sense of security—“No one here can hurt you”—is what allows them to feel good about themselves and feel free to play, do their homework, and learn. Furthermore, participants reported—as evidenced during program observations—that Beacon staff encouraged them and helped them with their self-esteem: “If someone says you are ugly, they [the staff] will convince you that you are beautiful.”

Participants described not feeling good about themselves at the Beacon for primarily two reasons—either because they were victims of

bullying and teasing or, from their point of view, were unjustly punished (for something they did not do or as a member of a group held accountable for one member’s behavior). As noted in chapter three, in two of the four sites, participants described bullying and teasing as a problem. Evaluators also observed this problem, especially at sites where large groups of children were supervised by young staff. Not surprisingly, at sites with reported incidents of bullying and teasing, participants indicated that some of their peers treated others of certain ethnic and racial background unfairly, by teasing them and using derogatory language.

Do youth at the Beacon respect one another? Across sites, the most common response was “sometimes.” Approximately half the elementary school interviewees indicated that they and their peers did not always respect one another and described cursing, shoving, and fighting. All interviewees stated that staff expected them to respect one another and that there were consequences when they did not: “We have to respect. If you don’t, you have to sit down and you are taken out of the activity. If you are really disrespectful, you have to sit out for the whole day.”

Table 6.1 presents reasons young participants gave about what made them feel good (or not good) about themselves at the Beacon.

**Table 6.1: Sense of Belonging and Self-Worth  
(Elementary School Youth)**

<i>What makes you feel good about yourself when you are at the Beacon?</i>	<p><b>1. Can play in a safe environment</b> “I know I am safe and I know I can have fun. I feel good.”</p> <p><b>2. Can do homework and learn</b> “I do my homework first then read a book—I learn a lot.”</p> <p><b>3. Get treated well by the staff</b> “They treat me like my parents, nice and kind. When I’m sad they cheer me up.”</p>
<i>Is there anything that makes you not feel good about yourself at the Beacon?</i>	<p><b>1. Bullying and teasing</b> “I cry because kids pick on me. Staff is too busy with all the kids to do something about it.”</p> <p><b>2. Being unjustly punished or punished as a group</b> “When one kid gets in trouble we all get in trouble.” “I got in trouble for running and I didn’t do it. I felt bad.”</p>
<i>Do you think youth of all ethnic and racial groups are treated fairly at the Beacon?</i>	<p><i>Yes: By staff</i> “Staff treats us all fairly.”</p> <p><i>No: By some participants</i> “Some kids like to make fun of kids in other groups.”</p>
<i>Do youth at the Beacon respect each other?</i>	“Some do, some don’t. Some call each other names or they push too much.”

**Middle- and High-School-Age Youth**

The adolescent survey asked older youth a series of questions about their perceptions of themselves at the Beacon, as well as their participation in activities celebrating their culture and heritage. Beacon participants answered very positively on questions relating to

their sense of self-worth, as shown in table 6.2: 82 percent of respondents said they felt good about themselves when they were at the Beacon always or often. This did not vary by age but did vary by gender, with females feeling good about themselves and that they really belonged more frequently than males.

**Table 6.2: Sense of Belonging and Self-Worth by Gender  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<b>% who responded always or often</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>I feel good about myself when I am at the Beacon.</i>	75%	88%	82%
<i>I feel like I can be myself at the Beacon.</i>	87%	90%	89%
<i>I feel like a really belong when I am at the Beacon.</i>	69%	85%	77%

These feelings also varied significantly across sites, with 96 percent of respondents in site A saying that they always or often felt good about themselves compared with 71 percent at site C and 68 percent at site E, as shown in table 6.3. There was a statistically significant relationship

between the quality of the youth-development practices at the site and the extent to which youth reported feeling good about themselves at the Beacon. [See appendix 2, Regression Coefficients (Betas) for Selected Program Outcomes and Characteristics.]

**Table 6.3: Sense of Belonging and Self-Worth by Site  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<b>% who responded always or often</b>	<b>Site A</b>	<b>Site B</b>	<b>Site C</b>	<b>Site D</b>	<b>Site E</b>
<i>I feel good about myself when I am at the Beacon.</i>	96%	87%	71%	80%	68%
<i>I feel like I can be myself at the Beacon.</i>	86%	89%	91%	88%	88%
<i>I feel like I really belong when I am at the Beacon.</i>	88%	84%	71%	73%	68%

Almost unanimously, interviewed middle school youth reported feeling good about themselves at the Beacon for several reasons, including spending time with their friends, feeling a sense of accomplishment, and getting support from

staff. High school youth also indicated that their longevity at their Beacons was a result of feeling familiar, at ease, trusting of staff and other participants, and free to express their opinions, as shown in table 6.4.

**Table 6.4: Sense of Belonging and Self-Worth  
(Middle- and High-School-Aged Youth)**

<b><i>What makes you feel good about yourself when you are at the Beacon?</i></b>	
<b>Friends are at the Beacon.</b>	<p>“I know a lot of the people here. They make you feel at home.”</p> <p>“I have friends at the Beacon and we do fun things.”</p> <p>“You’re always welcome here. The staff is very caring. It’s basically a big family.”</p> <p>“ I know everybody here. Everywhere I go I know somebody—that makes me feel better about myself.”</p>
<b>Get a sense of self-worth through accomplishments.</b>	<p>“Things I have accomplished through the Beacon make me feel special.”</p> <p>“They make me feel proud of myself. If I do good on a test and show Beacon staff, they’ll say it’s good.”</p> <p>“I feel good because I’m doing volunteer work and helping kids for their future so that they won’t mess up.”</p> <p>“You can be yourself. You won’t get yelled at for expressing your opinion.”</p>
<b>Beacon staff is supportive.</b>	<p>“The counselors are nice and friendly.”</p> <p>“The staff is always encouraging. They tell us not to give up.”</p> <p>“The staff challenges you to do better.”</p> <p>“We have a good, open relationship with the staff. There is no disrespect.”</p>
<b>I feel safe at the Beacon.</b>	<p>“It’s kind of like a protection. Grown ups protect children and children protect other children.”</p> <p>“I get to play here and it is much safer than hanging out.”</p>

When asked to explain what made them not feel good at the Beacon, adolescent participants, like younger interviewees, gave the following reasons: bullying and teasing and being unjustly punished. However, unlike the bullying and

teasing reported by younger participants, this group said that bullying and teasing were more verbal—gossiping and “attitude”—rather than shoving and pushing. (See Table 6.5.)

**Table 6.5: Reasons for Feeling Bad at the Beacon  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>What makes you not feel good about yourself at the Beacon?</i>	
<b>Bullying and teasing</b>	<p>“Sometimes I just get tired of all the gossiping. Gossip hurts.”</p> <p>“Some guys have attitudes. They feel they can do whatever they want and can boss us girls around.”</p> <p>“Young people like to gossip; there’s too much emphasis on he/she said.”</p>
<b>Being unjustly punished or punished as a group</b>	<p>“When you get blamed for something you didn’t do.”</p> <p>“I don’t like when the group gets punished because of what one person did.”</p> <p>“When kids do things they are not supposed to do and the whole group gets blamed. It pisses me off.”</p>

Interviewees were asked about changes in their feelings about themselves during their time at the Beacon and the Beacon’s role in these changes. Although a majority of respondents said that their opinion of themselves had not

changed, almost a third of the middle school participants reported that their opinion about themselves had changed for the better and credited these changes to their interactions with Beacon staff. (See Table 6.6.)

**Table 6.6: Changes in Sense of Self  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>Has your opinion of yourself changed since you started coming to the Beacon? In what way?</i>	
<b>Youth stopped fighting.</b>	<p>“Yeah, I’ve changed in that I’m not ready to fight all the time like before. I listen to my coordinator. She told me you don’t resolve things by fighting.”</p> <p>“When I first came here I was really rude and I was suspended three times for fighting. Now I can get along with everybody.”</p> <p>“I used to blow up for everything. I’ve learned to control myself. The staff talks to me when I have problems.”</p>
<b>Youth feel better about themselves.</b>	<p>“I feel better about myself. In the programs, people let me know that they really care about me.”</p> <p>“They make me feel good. Every time I talk to my grandmother about helping little kids in the Beacon she says I’m doing a good deed.”</p>
<b>Youth feel they have grown.</b>	<p>“I have grown here because they are teaching me about things that will happen in the future.”</p> <p>“I found the part of me that likes sports, what I like to do, who I like to hang out with, etc.”</p> <p>“I have incited trouble because I was angry, but I’ve learned to complain without starting trouble.”</p>

Several Beacon sites included activities designed to promote better understanding of different ethnic and racial groups, including celebrations and explorations of different cultures and their holidays. Both the surveys and interviews asked

youth to what extent all ethnic and racial groups were valued at the Beacon. Survey responses to this question varied by gender and site, as shown in table 6.7.

**Table 6.7: How Ethnic Groups are Valued at the Beacon (Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>All ethnic groups are equally valued at the Beacon</i> (% responding always or often).	
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	64%
Female	80%
<b>Sites</b>	
Site A	81%
Site B	61%
Site C	74%
Site D	79%
Site E	60%

Males were significantly less likely to believe that all ethnic groups were valued than females (64% versus 80%). Responses from participants also varied across sites, although at least three-fifths of participants at all sites felt all groups were valued at the Beacon. Further analysis of the survey data shows that youth in the higher quality youth-development sites were more likely to report that the Beacon center valued youth from all races and ethnicities. [See appendix 2, Regression Coefficients (Betas) for Selected Program Outcomes and Characteristics.]

In interviews, participants were asked if they got along with their peers, whether all ethnic groups were equally valued at the Beacon, and whether they had witnessed any ethnic or racial problems since coming to the Beacon. Overwhelmingly, they reported that all ethnic groups were respected and valued by the staff and by the majority of their peers. However, a small number (about 10%) reported having witnessed

ethnic and racial problems at their Beacons, almost always in the form of bullying and teasing. As one young participant put it, “Some kids like to make fun of kids in other groups.”

## Discussion

### *Major Accomplishments*

A large majority of youth described feeling good about themselves at the Beacon and described various ways in which the Beacon improved their self-esteem. In both surveys and interviews, youth said they felt good about themselves at the Beacon because they spent time with friends and had positive relationships with adults. These findings are consistent with the Beacon theory of change’s emphasis on the importance of caring and trusting relationships.

Youth also reported feeling good because of the safe, protected environment, the supportive nature of the staff, and the fact that they had learned new skills through their activities. This



was particularly the case with activities that involved helping others, whether younger children at the Beacon or the site in general. Some interviewed youth also reported that they thought they had changed in positive ways, both in their willingness to try new things and in a new-found ability to cope with their emotions. Participants in sites that more completely implemented youth-development practices were more likely to feel better about themselves; they also were more likely to believe that youth of all races and ethnicities were valued at the Beacon.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

A large majority of participants reported that all ethnic groups were respected and valued by the Beacon staff and most of their peers. A small number (about 10%), however, reported having

witnessed ethnic and racial problems at their Beacons, almost always in the form of bullying and teasing.

The issue of appropriate punishment for breaking Beacon rules arose in several cases. Some youth complained that it was unfair when the whole group was punished for the misdeeds of one or a few members; however, evaluators observed that this strategy led to better self-management by the group. In contrast, several youth mentioned that the threat of expulsion from the Beacon was a stimulus for improved behavior, but this is an extreme measure that should not be used casually.

## CHAPTER SEVEN LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION AT THE BEACON

*Everybody gets a chance to be a captain or teacher of reading. (Beacon youth)*

*When you are teaching another kid younger than you, it helps you lead. (Beacon youth)*

A central tenet of the Beacon theory of change is that youth need opportunities to contribute to the Beacon and develop leadership skills. This aspect of youth-development programming is grounded in the belief that, as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood, young people must develop a sense that they matter in the world<sup>31</sup> and build skills and competencies to enable them to take active roles in their own lives and communities.

### **Participation in Leadership Activities<sup>32</sup>**

The Beacons provide youth with a wide range of opportunities, both formal and informal, to assume different kinds of leadership roles. Such programming assumes that leadership skills can be learned by all youth through many day-to-day experiences.<sup>33</sup> The survey asked participants about their experiences with different kinds of formal and informal leadership at the Beacon. Tables 7.1 and 7.2 show the array of leadership development experiences available to Beacon youth and the proportion of middle- and high-school age youth who reported having these experiences.

Participation in such activities varied by age and gender, with older youth and females more likely to have taken part in these activities, as shown in table 7.1. Differences in age reflected differences in longevity at the Beacon since older youth were more likely to have been at the Beacon for three or more years and thus had more opportunities to participate in leadership activities. It is interesting to note that the most frequently reported leadership experience reported by youth was “helping someone your age or younger,” followed by “having been helped by someone your own age or older.” Recent literature on resilience suggests that experiences encouraging adolescents to feel helpful can also help them resist risky behaviors.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> John Mitchell, *The Adolescent Predicament*, (Toronto: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1975), discusses the problem youth face in fulfilling a developmental need to matter in modern societies, which have less need for youth labor and participation than did earlier societies and which keep youth segregated with their peers.

<sup>32</sup> Given time constraints, elementary school youth were not asked about leadership development.

<sup>33</sup> J. A. Van Linden and C. I. Fertman, *Youth Leadership: A Guide to Understanding Leadership Development in Adolescents* (Jossey-Bass, 1998).

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<sup>34</sup> R. W. Blum, *Risk and Resilience: A Model for Public Health Interventions for Adolescents* (Canadian Association for Adolescent Health Web site: [www.acsa-caah.ca](http://www.acsa-caah.ca), no date).

**Table 7.1: Participation in Leadership Activities**

<i>At the Beacon, have you ever:</i>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>12-14</b>	<b>15-19</b>
<i>Helped someone at the Beacon your own age or younger in an activity?</i>	83%	79%	77%	84%
<i>Been helped by someone your own age or older (but not an adult) in a Beacon activity?</i>	69%	72%	62%	77%
<i>Led a group discussion in a Beacon activity or led people your own age or younger in an activity?</i>	56%	68%	56%	68%
<i>Participated in planning special or regular Beacon events and activities?</i>	56%	62%	53%	60%
<i>Volunteered or been selected to work in or lead a Beacon activity or do administrative or office work?</i>	54%	59%	45%	64%
<i>Participated on the Beacon youth council?</i>	47%	41%	33%	52%
<i>Been paid to work in a Beacon activity or do administrative or office work?</i>	42%	53%	24%	66%
<i>Been elected by or elected one of your peers to a position at the Beacon?</i>	32%	26%	21%	34%
<i>Participated in community advisory council meetings?</i>	30%	36%	15%	44%

In all six Beacons, youth played leadership roles—working or volunteering in the Beacon office, participating on the youth council and in community advisory council meetings, and planning activities, as shown in table 7.2. The extent of leadership development opportunities varied by site, with youth in some sites participating in a much wider range of opportunities than youth in other sites. In site A, more than half the youth reported participating in planning Beacon events and activities;

volunteering, or being selected, to work in or lead a Beacon activity or do administrative or office work; and/or leading a group discussion or an activity for youth their own age or younger. Interestingly, nine of 10 youth in this site reported that they had helped someone younger or been helped by someone older than themselves. Other sites provided leadership opportunities but did not approach the participation levels at site A.

**Table 7.2: Participation in Leadership Opportunities by Site**

<i>At the Beacon, have you ever:</i>	<b>Site A</b>	<b>Site B</b>	<b>Site C</b>	<b>Site D</b>	<b>Site E</b>
<i>Helped someone at the Beacon your own age or younger in an activity?</i>	90%	78%	73%	82%	77%
<i>Been helped by someone your own age or older (but not an adult) in a Beacon activity?</i>	92%	62%	57%	71%	64%
<i>Led a group discussion in a Beacon activity or led people your own age or younger in an activity?</i>	79%	69%	51%	59%	46%
<i>Participated in planning special or regular Beacon events and activities?</i>	72%	53%	53%	63%	46%
<i>Volunteered or been selected to work in or lead a Beacon activity or do administrative or office work?</i>	75%	53%	32%	61%	46%
<i>Participated on the Beacon Youth Council?</i>	49%	47%	41%	44%	31%
<i>Been paid to work in a Beacon activity or do administrative or office work?</i>	57%	24%	27%	76%	19%
<i>Been elected by or elected one of your peers to a position at the Beacon?</i>	40%	18%	29%	30%	19%
<i>Participated in community advisory council meetings?</i>	36%	23%	27%	44%	23%

Similar to surveyed youth, more than 90 percent of interviewed long-term participants described having input into how the Beacon operated. Participants described both formal and informal mechanisms by which they presented their opinions and suggestions to the Beacon staff. Formally, youth reported that they discussed programming ideas at youth council meetings:

*We debate with each other and if we don't like something, the staff makes us propose something better and will implement it if it's good.*

*Every young person helps. We go to different meetings and everybody is listened to, especially if we want something to be changed.*

Informally, youth described trusting Beacon staff and feeling confident about speaking with individual staff members regarding any concern:

*I can make suggestions, tell my ideas and explain how I would fix a problem.*

*If I have any suggestions I can go to the coordinator or the Beacon director.*

*We can talk to the staff and ask them to change things and they would.*

### **Learning Leadership Skills**

By allowing youth to participate in a range of leadership opportunities, Beacons help develop a variety of skills: 92% of surveyed youth said that they were learning skills at the Beacon that would help them become a leader, as shown in table 7.3. Although this factor rated high at all the sites, a regression analysis of the survey data showed that youth who attended the higher quality youth-development sites were more likely to report that the Beacon helped them learn leadership skills. [See appendix 2, Regression Coefficients (Betas) for Selected Program Outcomes and Characteristics.]

**Table 7.3: Learning Leadership Skills**

<i>At the Beacon, I am learning skills that will help me to become a leader.</i>	<b>Total 92%</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	88%
Female	96%
<b>Sites</b>	
Site A	96%
Site B	93%
Site C	86%
Site D	99%
Site E	76%

Beacon youth also described staff encouragement as motivating them to succeed.

*They are always talking to us, telling us we could be the future leaders, telling us we could accomplish what we want to be.*

*They tell us that whatever you think you can do, you can do. They inspire us to do things.*

It was clear from interview responses that youth notions of leadership were broader than the exercise of specific leadership responsibilities. In interviews, long-term participants reflected on five ways that the Beacon helped them develop leadership and other skills, as shown in table 7.4.

**Table 7.4: How Youth Learn Leadership at the Beacon**

<b>Learn responsibility</b>	<p>“It teaches responsibility because you have kids under your care. They trust us enough to work with kids. It’s a huge responsibility.”</p> <p>“The Beacon is teaching me to be responsible. I’ve learned to finish my work before I can help others.”</p> <p>“They give us a lot of responsibility, so we believe we can accomplish.”</p>
<b>Learn right from wrong</b>	<p>“Beacon is showing me the right path to take in life; showing the right rules and helping me.”</p> <p>“Beacon is teaching us right from wrong and what to do if someone needs help.”</p> <p>“Because they try to teach us what to do and when it’s right to do it.”</p>
<b>Learn to be independent</b>	<p>“They taught us not always to rely on somebody. You can’t always go running to somebody.”</p> <p>“I don’t always go to the staff. Nobody likes whining. You have to learn to handle things.”</p> <p>“They teach us to be independent. The staff tells you not to follow the people, to follow yourself.”</p>
<b>Learn to resolve conflict</b>	<p>“I solve the problem first rather than go to staff. I had an argument with a girl. We worked it out, just me and her.”</p> <p>“If someone is about to fight, I stop it, tell them to chill and to think about it.”</p> <p>“Everyday, we break up arguments and fights. We talk to both people alone (separately) and then make them talk to each other.”</p>
<b>Learn active teaching skills</b>	<p>“Some kids in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade—they don’t know math—only know how to use calculators. I taught them how to do math.”</p> <p>“Beacon teaches me how to help kids instead of giving them the answers in homework help.”</p> <p>“If in my group somebody doesn’t understand something, I help them understand it, not give them the answer.”</p>

In addition, when interview responses were broken down by age, interesting differences emerged in how youth viewed leadership. For the younger adolescents (12 to 13 years old) becoming a leader involved learning to be independent and to control one’s impulses, knowing right from wrong, and teamwork. For the middle group of youth participants (14 years

old), the focus of the answers shifted to learning concrete skills and being exposed to the adult world. The responses of older youth (15 and above) to questions about leadership were more likely to touch on responsibilities they had shouldered and their sense of real accomplishment. Some of these age-specific responses are shown in table 7.5.

**Table 7.5 Variations in Notions of Leadership by Age**

<i>How does the Beacon help young people become leaders?</i>	
<b>12- and 13-year-olds</b>	<p>“They are always telling us, don’t be a follower, be a leader.”</p> <p>“Every time I have a problem, they tell me to walk away, don’t do the bad things, do the good things. Don’t follow what the other kids are doing if they do something bad.”</p> <p>“[They are] showing me the right path to take in life, showing right rules and helping me do what is right.”</p> <p>“They teach us how to be young adults, showing us the way the world works and how we can make it better. “</p>
<b>14-year-olds</b>	<p>“By being a CIT; it gives you a first job, helps you handle the office world with real skills; know the basic stuff. “</p> <p>“The Beacon is showing us how to handle jobs and how to treat people.”</p> <p>“It is teaching me a lot of stuff. [The director] puts me at his desk and has me stapling things and answering phones. It is like a test. I run errands. I like doing it.”</p>
<b>15- to 19-year-olds</b>	<p>“They teach us how to govern ourselves.”</p> <p>“I am responsible for 3 or 4 kids ages 10-13 and work with them individually.”</p> <p>“I planned the talent shows. I planned sports events. I planned a whiffle ball tournament—it was a one day thing. It went good because a lot of people came out.”</p> <p>“I help teach the white-belt students.”</p>

**Community Service and Civic Participation**

At the Beacon, providing opportunities for youth to contribute to the community is an important program element designed to support a young person’s transition from family and peers to community-oriented adulthood. The intensive-study Beacons offered opportunities for young people to serve their communities in activities like graffiti removal, tree-planting, and food drives for the elderly. Some Beacon youth were also involved in school- or church-sponsored community activities. The survey asked youth about the extent to which they were involved in volunteer activities and under what auspices, as

well as how important they thought it was to be active in the community.

***Middle- and High-School-Age Youth***

The overwhelming majority of Beacon participants gave high value to community activities: 88 percent stated that it was important to be active in the community. As shown in table 7.6, these numbers varied slightly by site, as did the places through which the youth performed community and volunteer activities. Of the participants who did volunteer or community work, those in sites A, B and D were much more likely to do this through the Beacon than participants in sites C and E.

**Table 7.6: Participation in Community Improvement and Volunteer Work by Site**

<b>Youth who:</b>	<b>Site A</b>	<b>Site B</b>	<b>Site C</b>	<b>Site D</b>	<b>Site E</b>	<b>All Sites</b>
Think being active in the community is important	92%	91%	85%	85%	88%	88%
Volunteer to work in the community:						
• through the Beacon	58%	61%	33%	57%	31%	51%
• through the school	30%	39%	33%	24%	27%	30%
• through a church	8%	15%	10%	14%	15%	28%
• through another organization	18%	22%	18%	11%	12%	16%
• on his/her own	48%	44%	28%	23%	35%	35%

Almost two-thirds of long-term participants (63%) reported in interviews that they were involved in volunteering and conducting community service. Participants talked about volunteering at school (on beautification projects, grading tests, cleaning up classrooms); in their Beacons (tutoring, helping with homework, looking after younger children, and answering phones); at their place of worship (food, clothing, and toy drives and helping in soup kitchens); and with community groups (food drives, clean-ups, graffiti removal, work with the elderly). High school youth involved in community service or civic participation through Beacon youth councils described this as a way to give back to their communities, helping them become aware of community issues and of the importance of being involved:

*Doing something kind is good. You should give something back to the community because it gave to you.*

*It's very important. Everyone helped me in my neighborhood when I was little so I feel I can help little ones, too.*

*It's very important. We are the next generation. If young people clean now, then the environment will be cleaner and healthier for us and for them.*

*I learned more about my community. Everyone can have a say in something. If we don't take initiative, nothing will get done.*

However, a few participants were not so civic-minded:

*Young people today don't like to volunteer. We don't like to work without pay.*

*We shouldn't have to clean up the neighborhood. We didn't mess it up. Other people messed it up.*

Interestingly, when asked to describe what they did to help their community, a large number of youth spoke about activities inside the Beacon (such as tutoring, looking after younger children, planning and carrying out activities, and office work). For them, the Beacon was part of the community, and they felt that helping the community did not require going outside the Beacon itself.



## **Discussion**

### ***Major Accomplishments***

The Beacons offer youth an array of opportunities to contribute and learn important leadership lessons. These included formal opportunities, such as leading activities and serving on the youth council, and informal opportunities, such as helping plan and carry out Beacon activities and helping run the Beacon office. Survey responses and data from observations in the qualitative-study sites indicated that these opportunities were widespread at most Beacons and reached a broad cross section of young people.

Equally noteworthy was the notion of leadership expressed by young people. In addition to having responsibility through leadership positions, young people talked about learning right from wrong, being responsible and appropriately independent, learning to resolve conflicts when they arose, and helping others. Beacon staff had both demonstrated and taught youth that leadership is often exercised in small, everyday acts rather than dramatic public behavior.

Helping other participants, particularly those younger than oneself, was a particularly important focus in most Beacons. It was clear from the responses of numerous youth that helping behavior was valued and that they saw themselves as role models for younger children and tried to act accordingly.

Giving back to the community was also seen as quite important by most youth, and for many, that community involved, or was defined as, the Beacon. Youth had developed a strong sense of responsibility for what went on at the Beacon and saw themselves as having an important role in making the Beacon a good and safe place.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

Survey data showed an uneven availability of opportunities for all youth to contribute and develop leadership skills across the sites. Some sites adhered to the philosophy that all youth had leadership potential, while others clearly groomed certain individuals for leadership. Given the demonstrated benefits of these opportunities to foster youth leadership skills, AED recommends that all youth be offered at least some opportunities to lead and receive the support necessary to do so.

## CHAPTER EIGHT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AT THE BEACONS

*I was in trouble in school, cutting classes and then the staff really talked to me about getting serious about my education. I listened.* (Beacon youth)

*Come to the Beacon because it helps you finish your homework and then you can play. It's a lot of fun.* (Beacon youth)

All the intensive-study Beacons offered educational activities designed to help support the academic progress of youth by creating an engaging learning environment. These included cultural programs, computer instruction, field trips, and experiences to help youth discover their talents and develop a stronger sense of themselves as successful learners. Many Beacon participants, particularly younger ones, received individual attention and a space to complete their homework or continue their studies beyond the school day.

It should be noted that not all students who participate in Beacon academic support and enrichment activities attend the host school. Beacons are located in both elementary and middle schools, as well as in one high school, and are open to all the young people of the surrounding neighborhood. Thus, unlike many other afterschool programs that exclusively serve the population of their host school, Beacon youth may come from many different schools, either because they are not in the grades served by the school or because they attend another school in the neighborhood. This means that Beacon staff are challenged to design and provide academic support and enrichment activities that are not built directly upon any particular school or class curriculum but instead provide support and stimulation for all students through homework-help and enrichment activities.<sup>35</sup>

Youth reported very positively on the academic aspects of the Beacon, including the available programs, as well as the high expectations of Beacon staff for youth's academic success. Some gave specific examples of ways that the Beacon helped them with their schoolwork. Even though Beacon youth come from several different schools and Beacon academic offerings were not aligned with any particular school program or curriculum, the focus on homework help and tutoring was highly valued by both youth and their parents.

### Elementary School Youth

For elementary school youth, having access to homework help was crucial for them and many of their parents. During program observations, homework help was the Beacon activity with the highest attendance, especially in this age group. Participant responses to many interview questions mentioned the availability of homework help. Participants appreciated having a place to do their homework, having someone who could assist them, and then having fun after completing it.

*The homework-help people make me understand it better than anyone else.*

*When I do my homework at home, my parents don't get it and they can't help me.*

Participants also credited the Beacon with helping them improve their overall reading and math skills because staff encouraged them to read, play literacy-based games, and participate in spelling and math drills. Participants gave

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<sup>35</sup> AED, *Evaluation of the New York City Beacons: Phase I Findings* (New York: Author, 1999).

specific examples of how the Beacon's homework program helped them improve their schoolwork and why they would recommend it to a friend.

*When I needed help with math, I got help. My teacher says I'm getting better.*

*We do language arts and my reading is getting better. My homework and grades*

*have improved. We learn new skills in math and reading.*

*They got all these activities and people to help us with homework.*

Table 8.1 shows the questions asked and the responses of participants regarding the Beacon's academic support.

**Table 8.1: The Value of Homework Help (Elementary School Youth)**

<i>Why did you first come to the Beacon?</i>	<p>“I needed homework help.”</p> <p>“My mother put me here to do my homework.”</p> <p>“I need help with my homework. My parents can’t help me.”</p> <p>“They help me with my homework when I don’t understand.”</p> <p>“They help me with homework and with stuff I need help with.”</p>
<i>Why do you continue to come to the Beacon?</i>	<p>“I still need homework help.”</p> <p>“I come to do my homework and have fun.”</p> <p>“I can do homework here and then go play with my friends.”</p> <p>“My mom can’t help me with homework.”</p> <p>“I have time to do my homework and to play so I don’t go crazy.”</p>
<i>Young people told us the Beacon helped them do better in school. Do you find this to be true?</i>	<p>“We play Trivia; I know more about history and geography.”</p> <p>“If you don’t understand your homework, your leader will help you.”</p> <p>“When the teacher asks me about homework, I know it because I did it here.”</p> <p>“They help you with vocabulary and division.”</p> <p>“The staff helps us with homework and they ask us to stay and read books.”</p>
<i>Has your schoolwork improved since you started coming to the Beacon?</i>	<p>“Yes, because you learn things you didn’t know.”</p> <p>“I didn’t know my timetables and a teenager taught me.”</p> <p>“I am doing better in math.”</p> <p>“It has helped me learn new words.”</p> <p>“My grades are 100% on spelling and math. I work on those subjects at the Beacon.”</p>

The enthusiasm for the Beacon's educational support activities was striking. When asked what was special about the Beacon, elementary school youth frequently mentioned homework help right after the presence of their friends at the Beacon.

When the same youth were asked if they would recommend the Beacon to a friend, one of the most often-quoted responses also related to homework help, as shown in Table 8.2.

**Table 8.2: Academic Support as an Attraction of the Beacon  
(Elementary School Youth)**

<i>What do you think is special about the Beacon?</i>	<p>“They have people to help us with our homework.”</p> <p>“I get help in math with the tutoring.”</p> <p>“Other programs don’t make you do your homework.”</p> <p>“They give us the attention we don’t get in school.”</p> <p>“They have a good staff that checks our report cards to see how we are doing.”</p>
<i>Would you recommend the Beacon to a friend?</i>	<p>“The Beacon is a great place to do your homework at.”</p> <p>“If you need help with your homework, you can get it.”</p> <p>“They help you do your homework right. They check it.”</p> <p>“It’s educational. You can have fun and you can learn a lot.”</p> <p>“The Beacon can help you learn and help you with math and reading.”</p>

Despite the overwhelmingly positive responses about academic programs at the Beacon, a small minority of participants found it distracting to complete homework with many people around and said they needed more time or more help with reading. These participants described their schoolwork as not good, which coincides with program observations that youth with serious academic deficiencies needed more substantial homework assistance. However, aside from this small group, all other participants attested to the importance of participating in the Beacon’s homework-help program and that it had helped them improve their schoolwork.

**Middle- and High-School-Age Youth**

The Beacon survey asked participants questions about their academic aspirations and performance. For example, when asked how often they completed their homework on time, 63 percent of the *total* respondents said that they did so most of the time, as shown in table 8.3. However, youth participating in homework help at the Beacon were much more likely to report finishing homework most of the time: 73 percent said that they completed their homework on time, compared with only 56 percent of youth not participating in homework help.

**Table 8.3: Homework Completion  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>I get my homework done on time most of the time.</i>	<b>Total 63%</b>
<b>Site</b>	
Site A	71%
Site B	60%
Site C	68%
Site D	64%
Site E	46%
<b>Participate in homework help at the Beacon</b>	
Yes	73%
No	56%

Asked how often they had cut classes in the past year, more than half of all surveyed youth reported cutting at least once in the previous

year, and one-third reported doing so on at least five occasions, as shown in table 8.4.

**Table 8.4: Cutting Class  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>In the past year, how many times have you cut one or more of your classes?</i>	
<b>1-5 times</b>	17%
<b>More than 5 times</b>	37%
<b>Total</b>	54%

Youth who reported frequently cutting class varied by gender, age, and site. Males were more likely than females to report frequently cutting class, and older youth were more likely to cut class than younger youth. However, across sites, youth who attended homework-help or other academic activities were less likely to cut class than youth who did not. There was also a statistically significant relationship between the quality of youth-development practices at the site and the extent to which young people reported cutting classes. [See appendix 2, Regression Coefficients (Betas) for Selected Program Outcomes and Characteristics.]

The survey asked Beacon youth about the importance of doing well in school and going to college. Overall, 85 percent of respondents felt it was very important to do well in school, and 78 percent felt that it was very important to go to college. These numbers varied by site and gender, with males more likely than females to think it was important to do well in school and go to college. It should be noted that the numbers here reflect only those respondents who marked the most positive response, “very important”; the overwhelming majority of respondents in all categories said at least that it was important to do well in school and go to college. (See tables 8.5 and 8.6)

**Table 8.5: Doing Well in School  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>It is very important for me to do well in school.</i>	<b>Total 85%</b>
<b>SITE</b>	
Site A	88%
Site B	91%
Site C	71%
Site D	88%
Site E	81%
<b>GENDER</b>	
Males	92%
Females	77%

**Table 8.6: Importance of College  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>It is very important for me to go to college.</i>	<b>Total 78%</b>
<b>SITE</b>	
Site A	87%
Site B	86%
Site C	77%
Site D	68%
Site E	77%
<b>GENDER</b>	
Males	83%
Females	72%
<b>AGE</b>	
12-14	87%
15-19	72%

The decline in the perceived importance of attending college from youth ages 12 to 14 to youth ages 15 to 19, seen in table 8.6, is disturbing. At the same time, it does not seem related to students' sense of their own potential for finishing high school: more 15-19-year-olds than 12-14-year-olds predicted they had a very good chance of graduating from high school (59% versus 53%).

Asked if, in general, they were doing things at the Beacon that helped them do better in school, 84 percent of all respondents felt that activities at the Beacon helped them in school. Responses varied by site, by the number of days in the week that participants spent at the Beacon, and slightly by the age and gender of the participants,<sup>36</sup> as shown in table 8.7.

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<sup>36</sup> **Note:** A higher proportion of girls than boys reported participating in academic activities.

**Table 8.7: Beacon Help in Schooling  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<i>I am doing things at the Beacon that help me do better in school.</i>	<b>Total 84%</b>
<b>Site</b>	
Site A	88%
Site B	80%
Site C	74%
Site D	93%
Site E	72%
<b>Gender</b>	
Males	80%
Females	87%
<b>Age</b>	
12-14	81%
15-19	88%
<b>Frequency of attendance at the Beacon</b>	
I come every day or almost every day.	87%
I come once or twice a week.	73%

The vast majority of interviewed youth indicated that coming to the Beacon helped them improve their schoolwork in a variety of ways. As shown in table 8.8, participants described the homework-help and tutoring programs as assisting them in specific areas. Moreover, it was that sense that the Beacon staff encouraged

them, set high expectations for them, would follow up on their educational progress, and even keep them from participating in certain Beacon activities that impressed upon middle school participants the importance of improving in school.

**Table 8.8: Improving Performance in School  
(Middle- and High-School-Age Youth)**

<b><i>What aspects of school do you think the Beacon affects?</i></b>	
<i>The Beacon's homework-help/tutoring program has helped my grades improve.</i>	<p>"I used to have 70s and now I'm doing better. I love math, now."</p> <p>"My grades improved; my average now is 85 and I am helping kids here with their homework."</p> <p>"Even though math is still hard for me, with tutoring my grades have improved."</p>
<i>The Beacon's homework-help/tutoring program has improved my attendance.</i>	<p>"My attendance has improved a lot."</p> <p>"They've helped me with coming to school regularly."</p> <p>"Sometimes in class, I was afraid to ask questions, but in homework help they encouraged me to ask so I could learn."</p>
<i>The Beacon's homework-help/tutoring program has improved my understanding of the work.</i>	<p>"When you don't understand something, they give you make up work so you can practice."</p> <p>"I am getting a lot of tutoring, because I have French and Spanish. They're helping me understand it."</p> <p>"Homework help was very helpful to me. My mom is up in age and can't help me with homework. The staff helped me a lot."</p>
<i>The Beacon's homework-help/tutoring program has improved my study habits.</i>	<p>"They teach you how to study, when to study, how to study before you have a test."</p> <p>"I go to the tutoring program and I actually sit down and study."</p>
<i>The Beacon staff set high expectations, followed up on educational progress and threatened exclusion, if schoolwork did not improve.</i>	<p>"I did nothing in school but sit around. People here kept telling me I can do it. They motivated me. I even did extra credit for science."</p> <p>"I had really bad grades. I didn't want to get kicked out of the Beacon so I went to the tutoring program."</p> <p>"They've talked to me about the importance of getting an education. After they talked to me I started doing my homework."</p>

Consistent with the youth-development principle of setting high expectations, Beacon staff encouraged youth to pursue higher education, both in general by praising school achievement and encouraging students to apply to college or job-training programs, and in particular by helping them fill out college and financial aid applications, write resumes, and practice interviewing skills:

*They give us information on colleges and the requirements for getting into a job training program. They teach us how to write a resume, fill out a job application, and the financial aid forms, and how to act during an interview.*

*They make you get serious about planning for college and setting goals for your education.*

As with younger participants, a small group described the assistance provided by the Beacon's homework-help or tutoring program as not beneficial. Similarly, this group tended to be the students who identified themselves as having serious trouble in school. As observed during several site visits, students with serious academic deficiencies needed more substantial and specialized academic assistance than Beacon staff were able to provide.



## Discussion

Educational support forms a valuable base for many afterschool activities offered by the intensive-study Beacons, even though many participants do not attend the host schools. This is even more notable since the Beacons have tried to resist the current pressure to turn afterschool time into an extension of the school day. The strength of the Beacon's educational programs is that they are part of a larger context that includes both a range of stimulating, engaging activities challenging young people to develop new skills (both school-related and otherwise) and staff messages about the importance of doing well in school.

### *Major Accomplishments*

Nearly three-quarters of middle-school-age youth (73%) and two-thirds of high-school-aged youth (63%) reported attending Beacon academic activities. Among elementary school students, for whom attendance at these activities is either mandatory or quasi-mandatory, the participation rates were nearly 100% with other activities offering admission only after youth completed their homework. In addition to homework help, the value of doing well in school was reinforced in multiple ways. Staff talked about the importance of taking responsibility for one's academic work, encouraged young people to aim for college, and provided assistance filling out applications and financial aid forms. Beacon youth who had attended college were recruited as staff because they served as powerful role models.

Young people attending the Beacon almost unanimously praised these academic offerings because they provided opportunities to get their homework done in quiet, with help if necessary. Some also spoke about receiving more intensive academic support, like individual tutoring, while others mentioned academic games as helpful in learning the facts in social studies. In discussing how Beacon academic activities were beneficial,

interviewees pointed to the impact of these activities on their attendance, study habits, understanding of schoolwork, and ultimately, on their grades. Some even mentioned that these activities had resulted in their liking school when they had not previously done so.

Youth who attended homework-help activities were more likely to have completed their homework than those who did not. In addition, youth who attended homework-help or other academic activities were significantly less likely to cut class than youth who did not. There also was a statistically significant relationship between the quality of youth-development practices at the site and the extent to which young people reported cutting classes. [See appendix 2, Regression Coefficients (Betas) for Selected Program Outcomes and Characteristics.]

### *Issues and Concerns*

Despite the overwhelmingly positive responses about academic programs at the Beacon, a small minority of participants found it distracting to complete homework with many people around and said they needed more time or help with reading. These participants described their school-work as not good, which coincides with program observations that youth with serious academic deficiencies needed more substantial homework support and academic assistance.

This suggests that additional training would help Beacon educational staff identify youth with more serious academic needs and linkages to other resources to help these young people.

Further, while some educational enrichment activities were offered, the Beacons were not very creative in offering project-based, hands-on academic activities that built on what young people learned during the school day. In addition, few sites offered useful academic activities to help high school students prepare for exams such as the PSAT, SAT and New York State Regents examinations.

## CHAPTER TEN

### QUALITY IN YOUTH-DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

*Youth-development concepts and ideas are very relevant to my daily interactions with the youth. They have equipped me with the proper tools and resources needed to make a positive influence on youth. (Youth worker)*

#### Introduction

The different outcomes for youth at Beacons that more fully implemented good youth-development practice prompts the question of what constitutes high-quality youth-development practice and how it differs from practice of lower quality. While observing Beacon activities, evaluators paid particular attention to how well the principles of positive youth development were incorporated throughout the organization and across activities. In addition to analyzing the overall quality of the activity, evaluators looked at characteristics typical of excellent youth-development practice, as discussed in chapter one, and in particular at the five characteristics forming the core of YDI's framework: the extent to which youth had opportunities to (1) develop caring and trusting relationships; (2) participate in stimulating and engaging activities; (3) be challenged to grow by high expectations; (4) connect with and contribute to their communities; and (5) benefit from a continuity of adult support.<sup>40</sup>

Data from more than 100 observations were compiled and analyzed to determine whether and how these activities incorporated the elements fostering positive youth development. The analysis revealed three levels of youth-development practice at the qualitative-study sites: basic, satisfactory, and exemplary. As can be seen in table 10.1, at the basic level, youth participate in some form of collective activity; at the satisfactory level, youth clearly are interested and engaged in the activity; and at the exemplary level, youth are involved in activities fostering new strengths and competencies.

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<sup>40</sup> Youth Development Institute, *Networks for Youth Development: A Guided Tour of Youth Development* (New York City: Author, 1993).

**Table 10.1 Levels of Youth-Development Quality**

<b>Basic (participating):</b> Youth are participating—in the program, off street, out of harm's way, forming bonds with peers and learning the basics of social behavior.
<b>Satisfactory (engaged):</b> Youth clearly are engaged and interested in what they are doing and are more likely to return to these activities on a continuing basis.
<b>Exemplary (generative):</b> Youth are generating new strengths and competencies in activities that stretch them and stimulate their growth.

Tables 10.2 to 10.6 illustrate what these levels mean in the five basic areas of youth development through evidence collected during observations. (Evidence at the higher levels assumes that evidence at lower levels is already present.)

It is important to note that not all activities lend themselves to all levels of engagement at all times, and that even the basic level may be adequate or even necessary, in some cases, as a starting point. For example, working together in a group without conflict is an important first step and necessary condition to a deeper group interaction and true teamwork, just as youth's

participation in a community clean-up is helpful for fostering awareness of community issues.

**Caring and Trusting Relationships**

Table 10.2 shows how different levels of caring and trusting relationships were manifest in youth activities observed at the four qualitative-study sites. At the basic level, participants spent time in a group without conflict; at the satisfactory level, participants talked and worked together; and at the exemplary level, participants shared ideas, cooperated and solved problems together, and were encouraging and trustful of one another.

**Table 10.2: Caring and Trusting Relationships**

<i>Did activity foster or provide the opportunity for youth to develop caring and trusting relationships with other young people?</i>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Participants interact peacefully.	Participants spent time together as a group without conflict.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Participants develop basic cooperation skills.	Participants communicated with one another. Participants cooperated with one another. Participants worked with staff.
<b>Exemplary</b> Participants develop collaborative social skills.	Participants were friendly and accepting of one another. Participants shared ideas. Participants encouraged one another. Participants solved problems together. Participants trusted one another.

What did caring and trusting relationships look like, for example, in an arts and crafts activity, such as building model planes? At the basic level, participants gathered all the materials and following the staff's instructions, each participant, individually, built his or her plane. At the satisfactory level, participants were encouraged to talk and question one another about building the plane—for example, why certain parts have to be completed before moving on to the next. Staff could ask one participant to demonstrate how he or she built the plane. At the exemplary level, participants were encouraged to share and accept one another's version of the plane; putting down another participant's plane was not acceptable.

Participants helped one another build their planes; and, if they ran into problems, they were encouraged to solve them collectively.

### Stimulating and Engaging Activities

Table 10.3 shows how different levels of stimulation and engagement were evident in youth activities at four sites. At the basic level, participants expressed themselves creatively; at the satisfactory level, participants were increasingly challenged by activities; and at the exemplary level, participants were able to change roles within the activity, and they experimented with and discussed what they had learned.

**Table 10.3: Stimulating and Engaging Activities**

<i>Did the activities appear interesting and engaging to the young people? Did the staff convey a sense of excitement about what they were doing?</i>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Activity involves youth.	Participants discussed activity, rather than became involved in it. Participants completed activity, but activity was repetitive. Participants chose the activity, but choices were very limited.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Activity involves choice, active participation, and cooperation.	Participants competed as a team. Participants chose activities. Participants did hands-on work. Staff provided supervision and structure, along with flexibility.
<b>Exemplary</b> Activity involves creativity, cultural exploration, and experimentation, and challenges youth to build on their experiences.	Participants expressed themselves creatively. Participants were increasingly challenged by activities. Some portion of activity related to participants' age, culture, language (music, dance, etc.). Participants had opportunity to rotate roles within the activity. Staff were creative in encouraging participants to complete the activity. Participants experimented with and discussed what they learned.

What did stimulating and engaging activities look like, for example, in word games, word puzzles, and spelling bees? At the basic level, youth participated in these activities by filling in answers. At the satisfactory level, participants were separated into teams, given different roles

such as spokesperson, researcher, and recorder, and encouraged to work together to find the answer. Staff also provided resources such as a dictionary, thesaurus, and vocabulary lists to help them research a response. At the exemplary level, staff increasingly challenged and rewarded

participants for higher order thinking. For example, participants could win five points for spelling a word correctly, 10 points for knowing the word’s meaning, and 15 points for using it correctly a sentence. In another type of activity—storytelling—youth listened to a story and answered simple questions about plot, at the basic level; they answered more complex questions requiring some interpretation at the satisfactory level; and they were encouraged to be creative, such as inventing part of the story, setting it in another time or place, or writing their own story, at the exemplary level.

### High Expectations

Table 10.4 shows the ways that youth activities reflected high expectations in areas such as academic enrichment, computer skills, and career exploration classes. At the basic level, staff provided a model for how something should be done, and participants followed that model. At the satisfactory level, staff helped participants arrive at the answers, partly by explanation and partly by making available learning materials—newspapers, magazines, and atlases, etc. At the exemplary level, connections were made between computer skills and the world of work, and the materials/curriculum reflected this. Staff established and encouraged professional language and behavior. Staff consistently motivated youth to learn and grow.

**Table 10.4: High Expectations**

<i>Did staff encourage young people to learn and grow through the activities? Did they ask youth to clarify their language, pose questions, improve their performance? Did they do so in a supportive and encouraging manner?</i>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Staff expectations are minimal.	Staff provided hierarchical instruction: “staff model, youth follow.” If activity was recreational, expectations did not appear to be high.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Staff explain instructions to youth and help them.	Staff guided instruction. Staff provided explanations. A variety of materials were made available.
<b>Exemplary</b> Staff consistently challenge youth to get the most out of the activity, to think about their involvement, and to behave in a mature manner for their age.	Staff encouraged youth to participate and stay “on task.” Staff reinforced participants’ ideas. Staff encouraged self-expression. Staff promoted higher order thinking. Staff brought something new to the activity. Staff had participants “do” rather than “tell.” Material/curriculum was at an advanced level. Participants were encouraged to act and speak in an adult or professional manner.

### Continuity of Adult Support

Table 10.5 shows how continuity of adult support was manifest in youth activities at the four sites. At the basic level, staff and participants shared an atmosphere of friendliness

and comfort. At the satisfactory level, staff and participants communicated freely; staff knew when participants needed support, guidance, and discipline and intervened when they believed it necessary, not waiting for appointments or for times when the participant was “in my group.”

At the exemplary level, having come to trust staff, participants sought them out to discuss personal problems, applying to college, and family and school issues. Often these interactions led to long-term mentoring relationships,

sometimes outlasting participants' stay at the Beacon. In addition, staff made efforts to support and motivate all participants, not just achievers (e.g., athletes or successful students).

**Table 10.5: Continuity of Adult Support**

<i>Did staff appear to foster and maintain caring relationships with young people? Were staff accessible to youth? Were they respectful and supportive?</i>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Staff relate easily to youth and vice versa.	Staff were comfortable with participants. Participants were comfortable with staff.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Staff are consistently present and pay attention to individual youth.	Staff established rapport with participants. Staff were accessible to participants. Staff attendance was consistent. Staff provided individual attention, when needed.
<b>Exemplary</b> Staff encourage youth to develop personal relationships with them beyond the activity and demonstrate that they can be trusted to be supportive.	Staff were supportive of group and of individuals. Staff developed a long-term mentoring relationship with participants (some stayed in contact after Beacon). Participants sought out staff. Staff were mindful to include and encourage all participants, not just achievers. Participants trusted staff. Participants looked for direction from staff.

**Opportunities to Contribute**

Table 10.6 shows how the Beacon provided opportunities for youth to contribute to the center and their community through various activities, such as holiday celebrations, performances, community fairs, and community rallies. At the basic level, participants decided on an activity (e.g., multicultural food festival) and helped in set-up (e.g., decorating and cooking) and clean-up. At the satisfactory level, participants created and donated their own artwork (murals, paintings, posters) to help beautify the Beacon and its community. Youth

also participated in community service projects, such as collecting clothes for the homeless, feeding the elderly and the needy, and cleaning up local parks. At the exemplary level, participants were involved from the beginning in envisioning, operating, and evaluating day-to-day programming (not just deciding on an activity). Participants also carried out civic activities (e.g., collecting petitions, leafleting, public speaking) to help engage residents in important community issues.

**Table 10.6: Opportunities to Contribute**

<i>Were there opportunities for youth to contribute to activities, to the Beacon, or to their community?</i>	
<b>Level</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Youth ideas and assistance are used in activities.	Participants expressed programming ideas. Participants helped in the set-up and wrap-up of activities.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Youth products are used in activities or youth do service projects.	Participants contributed their products and artistic creations. Participants were involved in community service/development projects.
<b>Exemplary</b> Youth help design activity and carry it out, and/or do community mobilization.	Participants helped develop and shape programming. Participants were instrumental to the Beacon’s operation. Participants reviewed activities’ strengths and weaknesses with staff. Participants were engaged in civic activities that mobilize community.

**Educational Quality of Beacon Activities**

From their inception, Beacons were intended to include activities for children and youth that reinforced their formal education. The founders believed that the Beacons could help support participants’ academic progress by creating an engaging learning environment. In addition to traditional academic activities (e.g., homework help and computer instruction), the Beacons would provide cultural programs, field trips, and experiences to help youth discover their talents and develop a stronger sense of themselves as successful learners.

Historically, the Beacons were developed before the current focus on afterschool programs and their potential to improve educational outcomes. The recent, wide-spread development of afterschool academic support and enhancement programs across the country raises the bar for educational quality at the Beacons, and, in particular, for expanding educational activities at the Beacons beyond homework help. Even before the current trend, YDI devoted

considerable resources to improving the educational quality of activities offered by the Beacons. Assistance in this area has included workshops and staff training, with a special focus on the use of themes for framing literacy activities. YDI also raised funds for Beacons undertaking special literacy development projects and produced a handbook on literacy-based afterschool programming.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to observing the youth-development characteristics of activities, evaluators looked at differences in the educational value of Beacon activities that were both explicitly educational and otherwise. The evidence about participants’ learning collected during observations revealed interesting variations in the educational value of academic activities, as well as the educational contributions made by ostensibly nonacademic activities.

<sup>41</sup> A. Rice, J. Mates, J. Colon, and C. Hall, *Beacons and Afterschool Education: Making Literacy Links* (New York City: Youth Development Institute, 1997).

The following sections summarize evidence from observations about how educational content and value were incorporated at the basic, satisfactory, and exemplary levels into the seven types of Beacon activities: academic activities, computers and technology; creative arts; cultural awareness; employment-related activities; leadership development; and sports and recreation. It is important to note that not all activities lend themselves to all levels of involvement; they also vary in the level to which they can be imbued with an educational “added-value.” However, even the least educational activities by their very nature—such as sports and recreation—can be made more educational in a variety of ways (e.g., the instructor provides feedback, students provide feedback to their peers and the instructor, and youth are involved in planning aspects of the activity).

**Academic Activities**

The educational value of academic activities at the Beacons varied, as shown in table 10.7. At the basic level, Beacon youth completed their homework in homework help and could not move onto another activity until they had done so. At the satisfactory level, participants were helped with their homework and received much encouragement and support. In addition, they played literacy-based games and took part in academic competitions. At the exemplary level, youth worked on projects enhancing their skills and complementing their schoolwork and were encouraged to read and write in general. Table 10.7 illustrates the three levels of academic activities.

**Table 10.7: Academic Activities**

<b>Homework help, enrichment, literacy arts, non-school reading, small group study, tutoring</b>	
<b>Levels</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Youth do their homework.	Participants were encouraged to complete homework. Participants were rewarded (can move on to another activity) for completing homework.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Youth receive help with homework and play games fostering analytical skills.	Participants received help with homework. Participants were involved in academic competitions. Participants played games that foster analytical skills (Scrabble, Clue, Trivial Pursuit, etc).
<b>Exemplary</b> Youth exposed to materials and assignments complementing homework.	Participants received assignments complementing their homework. Participants were exposed to a wide variety of materials and activities that encouraged reading and writing. As a group, participants worked on academic projects. Participants had access to staff who provided instructional support.

**Computer and Technology Activities**

Half of Beacon youth participated in some kind of computer-related activity. In this area, the levels are fairly simple, as shown in table 10.8. At the basic level, youth used computers for

doing homework and playing games; at the satisfactory and exemplary levels, youth learned increasingly advanced computer skills, including various software packages.



**Table 10.8: Computer and Technology Activities**

<b>Computer class, computer unit within activity, access to computers</b>	
<b>Levels</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Youth have access to computers for homework.	Participants had access to computers that allowed them to complete their homework. Participants played computer games that built academic skills.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Youth learn computer basics.	Participants learned the basics of a software program. Participants learned the basic operations of a computer.
<b>Exemplary</b> Youth hone advanced computer skills.	Participants learned advanced computer skills and work with software programs.

***Creative Arts Activities***

Popular with youth in all age groups, creative arts activities offered a range of opportunities for integrating educational value into different kinds of crafts and artistic activities, as shown in table 10.9. At the basic level, youth followed verbal instructions in a dance rehearsal, a recipe in cooking class, or directions from a textbook

while doing a project in a graphics arts class. At the satisfactory level, students attended a performance and discussed it afterwards, while at the exemplary level students were involved in creating a graphics art product or a performance—choreographing a dance, writing a skit, or designing a model of a building.

**Table 10.9: Creative Arts Activities**

<b>Graphic arts, theater, theater arts, dance, chorus, performances, cooking, sewing</b>	
<b>Levels</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Youth engage in basic reading and design.	Participants used calculations to build a design. Participants read instructions to conduct the activity.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Youth take part in some experience beyond the dramatic/art piece itself and engage in some aspect of the production.	Participants investigated the history/culture of the art/artist or the theatrical piece. Participants were exposed to a theatrical experience (e.g., acting, directing, choreography, scenery making).
<b>Exemplary</b> Youth engage in multidisciplinary approach to performance or produce their own piece.	Participants did the logistics (measuring, taping, canvas-priming) to prepare for doing artwork. Participants wrote accompaniments to their artwork. Participants used measurements, wrote recipes, and designed a cookbook. Participants worked in a multidisciplinary approach (e.g., designed arts and crafts for theater/dance performance). Participants created an arts product or performance.

***Cultural Awareness Activities***

Cultural awareness activities attracted more than a third of participants. At the basic level, youth took part in cultural celebrations; at the satisfactory level, youth learned about various

cultures through museum visits, attending performances, and reading; at the exemplary level, youth designed projects or an event celebrating a tradition or culture or researched a particular aspect of a culture.

**Table 10.10: Cultural Awareness Activities**

<b>Holiday/cultural celebrations, exposure to multicultural institutions</b>	
<b>Levels</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Youth take part in or observe celebrations.	Participants celebrated various cultural traditions.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Youth explore other cultures.	Participants visited multicultural institutions. Participants read about and listened to music, and learned dance and poetry of different cultures.
<b>Exemplary</b> Youth engage in creative work relating to another culture.	Participants designed or created projects or artifacts revolving around a particular holiday or culture. Participants used multicultural institutions for research.

***Employment-Related Activities***

Employment-related activities were particularly popular among older youth, with roughly half the survey respondents reporting they had participated in them. As shown in table 10.11, at the basic level, youth worked in the center office doing filing and taking messages, and took attendance during activities. At the satisfactory

level, youth worked on their written and oral communication skills, participated in mock job interviews, and wrote resumes. At the exemplary level, youth worked on projects involving advanced mathematics and writing skills, learned about higher education and postsecondary training options, and participated in internships in the community.

**Table 10.11: Employment-Related Activities**

<b>Employment-preparation and entrepreneurship</b>	
<b>Levels</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Youth learn basic work routines and skills.	Participants worked in center office (e.g., took messages, kept attendance logs, filled in activity sheets, did filing). Participants were encouraged to maintain a certain grade level.
<b>Satisfactory</b> Youth improve communications skills.	Participants learned to communicate and write professionally. Participants learned business terminology and skills.
<b>Exemplary</b> Youth improve higher order thinking skills.	Analyzing, calculating, and writing were key parts of the activity. Participants were provided with academic supports, if needed. Participants were exposed to higher education options and experiences.

**Leadership Development Activities**

Through training provided by staff, leadership activities can help students improve their oral and written communication skills, as well as their awareness and ability to discuss community issues. The educational value of these activities lies in their emphasis on the importance of doing well in school and pursuing postsecondary education. As shown in table

10.12, at the basic level, youth were encouraged to do well in school and attend meetings on community concerns. At the satisfactory level, youth took on tasks such as recording meetings, doing agendas, and reading about and discussing community issues. At the exemplary level, youth spoke out on issues at meetings and designed projects to address community concerns.

**Table 10.12: Leadership Development Activities**

<b>CIT, AmeriCorps clubs, leadership team, youth council</b>	
<b>Levels</b>	<b>Evidence From Observations</b>
<b>Basic</b> Youth learn about community settings and issues.	Participants were exposed to venues where community issues were being discussed (public hearings, community meetings, etc.).
<b>Satisfactory</b> Youth explore relevant issues.	Participants read about issues and discussed them in groups. Reading and writing were built into the activities (keeping agendas, note taking, reviewing minutes, etc.).
<b>Exemplary</b> Youth take part actively in projects and meetings around community	Participants designed projects (fundraisers, ad campaigns, retreats) that enhanced their repertoire of skills. Participants were encouraged to speak publicly. Participants helped peers or younger students with school work.

**Sports, Fitness, and Recreational Activities**

For the most part, activities in this category, by their very definition, are strictly recreational and lack “educational” content. However, participation in a particular activity can be linked to doing well in school, and the activity itself can foster a certain discipline that helps students in school and other areas of their lives. For example, in a popular karate class at one site, youth had to complete their homework before they could participate in the activity; the instructor strongly encouraged youth to maintain high grades and followed up on their progress. At another site a study time was designated every day in the lounge. Participants could remain in the lounge during that period as long as they were involved in some type of educational activity: reading (books, magazines, newspapers); writing (letters, homework, research); or playing strategy games (chess, Scrabble, backgammon).

**Discussion**

**Major Accomplishments**

Analysis of observation data reveals fairly distinct levels of youth-development quality and the extent to which youth-development principles were incorporated into the organizational environment and individual Beacon activities. At the lowest level, youth were still participating in a form of positive activity that kept them out of danger. Somewhat better activities were visibly more engaging and stimulated young people’s interest in ways that provided a foundation for continued participation. The best activities were both fun and challenging, motivating young people to learn about themselves and one another and develop new skills and competencies. The observations found evidence of good youth-development practice in many Beacon activities, as well as a solid number of exemplary activities that fully incorporated youth-development

principles. An analysis of the educational value of Beacon activities also showed considerable educational potential in many activities, including those not designed to have an academic focus. This included both reinforcement of school-based skills and behaviors, and experiences that helped young people learn new skills and/or gain new insights into the world around them.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

A review of observation data shows that some Beacon activities were routine and

unimaginative and that they missed the opportunity to fully support the development of young people. This was particularly true in the largest activities but was sometimes the case with the academically focused activities, such as homework help. This finding suggests that paying additional attention to how activities help young people grow, both academically and socially, would result in more consistent youth-development and educational quality across activities. This is especially important, given the different youth outcomes in sites with high youth-development quality.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### BEACON YOUTH PROGRAMS: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings from data collected through observations, surveys, and interviews suggest several important conclusions about the nature of youth-development programming at the New York City Beacons.

#### Conclusions

**The Beacons offer New York City's young people activities and programs that are more valuable than traditional “gym and swim” recreational programs.** When asked why they came to the Beacon, young people most frequently responded that Beacon activities were fun. At first glance, many activities offered at the Beacon do not look very different from traditional youth activities.<sup>42</sup> However, the Beacons offer youth a place to grow through challenging activities, caring relationships, and opportunities to contribute to the Beacon and their community. Adults lead participants in stimulating, engaging activities that combine fun with opportunities to learn and develop the different competencies that the youth will need as adults.

**Beacon activities have the potential to help prevent risky adolescent behaviors.** By their nature, the broadly-based youth activities at the Beacon differed from the kind of problem-focused prevention activities that have become common in recent years. At the same time, they did address some of the same prevention issues. In fact, the Beacons' potential as a platform for community-based health education was evident.

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<sup>42</sup> In fact, positive youth-development principles were derived by studying the best work being done in youth-serving organizations and identifying and analyzing their underlying principles and practices.

The majority of young people reported that they had participated in discussions on drugs and alcohol and on sexuality, reproductive health, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Students who reported participating frequently in discussions on alcohol and drugs were significantly less likely to report having used marijuana in the two previous months. Moreover, the preventive messages of these activities were strengthened and legitimized because they were conveyed by adults and older youth who had already earned the respect and trust of the youth at the Beacons.

**Cross-age activities are a valuable part of the Beacon experience for many young people.** Most sites provided significant opportunities for older and younger youth to be together, and more than three-quarters of youth reported having helped someone younger at the Beacon.<sup>43</sup> Sometimes this occurred within an activity open to youth of different ages. In addition, older youth helped out with activities for younger children as either volunteers or paid staff. Overall, there was a good deal of informal inter-action among different age groups. Whatever the situation, in interviews, older youth repeatedly mentioned that they felt responsible to serve as role models for younger children and that seeing themselves in this way helped them avoid negative behaviors such as fighting or using drugs.

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<sup>43</sup> These opportunities were limited in one site by a combination of the small size of the host school and the strong desire of the community to protect younger children from what they perceived to be negative influences of older youth.

**The youth-development quality of the Beacon environment and the activities offered to youth make a difference in outcomes.**

Evaluators looked at both general quality—safety, well-organized activities, consistent enforcement of the rules, and low staff-youth ratio—and youth-development quality, as exemplified in the five elements of good youth-development programming—opportunities for youth to develop caring and trusting relationships, participate in stimulating and engaging activities, benefit from a continuity of adult support, be challenged to grow by high expectations, and connect with and contribute to their communities.

In interviews with Beacon staff and observations of the Beacon environment, evaluators found that the degree to which sites reflected youth-development principles in their everyday operations varied. Sites with staff who were conversant with these principles cultivated a sense of continuity and belonging, and they offered youth more opportunities to develop leadership skills and participate in choosing, planning, and conducting activities. Youth also perceived Beacon staff in these sites to be more respectful, accessible, and caring.

Through structured observations of more than 100 activity sessions, evaluators found distinct variations in the degree to which Beacon activities incorporated youth-development principles. At the most basic level, youth were participating in activities that kept them out of harm's way and helped them learn the basics of social behavior. At the intermediate level, youth were engaged in stimulating activities. At the highest level, youth were challenged to learn and grow and to develop social and civic competency.

Activities with smaller group sizes were more likely to reflect youth-development principles, though this was not always the case, and a few large-group activities were rated equally positively. In addition, activities that focused on projects with an inherent learning agenda (e.g., employment preparation) were stronger in youth-development quality than those that were characterized by a kind of repetitive "daily-ness."

Although it is clear that not all kinds of activities offer the same opportunities to incorporate youth-development principles, activities within the same category (e.g., homework help, sports) did vary in youth-development quality. These variations suggest that the less effective activities would have benefited from a stronger youth-development orientation.

These differences in youth-development quality of the Beacon environment and activities had important consequences. In programs with higher youth-development quality, participants gave significantly different responses to the survey in several important areas. They were more likely to feel better about themselves at the Beacon; believe that youth of all races and ethnicities were valued at the Beacon; perceive that staff had high expectations for their behavior and performance; report that Beacon rules were consistently enforced and that the Beacon helped them learn leadership skills. They were less likely to report that they had cut classes; hit others to hurt them; deliberately damaged other people's property; stolen money or things; and been in a fight.

**The Beacons have benefited from the public-private partnership between the Department of Youth and Community Development and the Youth Development Institute.**

DCYD has provided continuous fiscal support for the Beacons despite changes in mayoral administration. And recognizing the need for additional support to sustain the growing number of Beacons as the initiative expanded, the department appointed a deputy commissioner for Beacon programs. This enabled the department to provide numerous supports benefiting both new and old Beacons, including a Beacon manual, contract monitoring procedures aligned with youth-development principles, an automated contract development process, and monthly directors' meetings for all Beacon directors to focus on programmatic and contractual issues. These meetings were used as a major vehicle for disseminating new information and as an opportunity to support Beacons around common challenges (e.g., structuring and running advisory councils), as well as to inform

Beacon directors about available training opportunities for themselves and their staff.

**The Youth Development Institute has played a pivotal role in conceptualizing and promoting high-quality youth-development programming.** YDI offers professional development opportunities for both Beacon directors and their staff who work with youth to learn the principles and practices of positive youth development. Attending YDI meetings for Beacon directors and YDI staff training is voluntary, and not all sites do so on a regular basis. Those sites with staff most frequently attending YDI meetings and training activities had the highest rated youth-development quality and the most positive youth findings.

It is clear that training and capacity building can strengthen the implementation of positive youth-development practices. Since the earliest days of the Beacon initiative, YDI has provided a wide range of capacity-building activities to promote positive youth development. It has worked to raise the awareness of Beacon leaders about the core principles of positive youth development and how they manifest in practice and has provided training for youth workers to help them design and conduct activities that youth find engaging and stimulating. In addition, YDI has led Beacon directors and staff in discussions on how to incorporate high expectations for youth growth within the center and its activities and on how to provide youth opportunities to contribute to the operation of the Beacon and/or to their communities.

The challenges facing YDI have multiplied geometrically with the expansion of the Beacon initiative from 40 to 80 sites during the period of this evaluation. Moreover, while many of the early Beacon lead agencies had strong histories in the fields of youth service or community development, the agencies that have received more recent contracts do not have the same base of experience.

YDI meetings and capacity-building activities are completely voluntary. Nevertheless, the extent to which the New York City Beacons have become a model for youth-development

programming is due in large part to the capacity-building work of YDI.

## **Recommendations**

On the whole, the intensive-study evaluation found abundant evidence that youth are well served in the Beacons, both in specific activities and in the Beacon's supportive environment. During the study, evaluators identified the certain program areas that need improvement, as described below.

### ***Bullying and Teasing***

Evaluators observed some incidents of bullying and teasing and heard them described by youth in interviews. These incidents were particularly evident in two situations. First, in the highest-attended activities—and thus most overcrowded—there was need for greater staff sensitivity to issues of teasing, bullying, fighting, and roughhousing—all behaviors occasionally observed and not addressed, during site visits.

At sites where participants did not complain about bullying and teasing, staff avoided programming large numbers of youth together at the same time and location. But more important, the site's philosophy, known to all participants and enforced by adult staff, absolutely condemned bullying and teasing. Not surprisingly, in sites with incidences of bullying and teasing, participants indicated that although the staff treated all youth fairly, peers teased and used derogatory language with youth of certain ethnic and racial groups.

Second, bully and teasing were not always well handled by youth working in staff positions. These young people often saw the issues on a case-by-case basis, treating the problem as an individual disruption rather than recognizing the bullying as part of a behavior pattern that needed addressing. Such youth staff would benefit from training in effective ways of dealing with bullying and teasing among younger children.

In addition, in some cases, evaluators observed youth staff having difficulty managing relatively large groups of elementary-school-age children. Some younger participants also described

disrespectful treatment or “yelling, screaming, and having attitude.” This suggests that younger staff members need ongoing training and supervision.

### ***Gender Issues***

Despite the fact that girls only slightly outnumbered boys in the sample, they greatly outnumbered them in several Beacon activities. These distinct gender patterns were evident in youth reports of participation in homework help, computer instruction, creative and performing arts, and family life/sex education. Boys outnumbered girls only in athletic activities.

### ***Assistance in Building Caring and Trusting Social Relationships***

The majority of Beacon participants had connected with their peers at the Beacon, but evaluators observed and interviewed a small but substantial minority who needed encouragement and support in building friendships with their peers.

### ***Stronger Academic Support and Enrichment Activities***

Observations of homework-help and academic support activities showed that they provided a structured and consistent method by which hundreds of children completed and if needed, received assistance, with their homework. In some cases, however, evaluators felt these activities missed opportunities to provide better support.

Sites with better homework-help activities had trained staff available to work with the youth. The teens and young adults assisting with homework help sometimes needed more training and better supervision, especially given the number of young children under their care.

A small number of participants described homework help as not very beneficial because it was “too distracting” to complete homework

with so many other participants around, and they needed “more time” or “more help with reading.” In addition, observations revealed that participants with serious academic deficiencies required more intensive intervention than a high school or even a college student can provide. Homework staff should recognize that a student needs more help and know the procedures for notifying the school that a student needs more supportive services.

### ***Educational Enrichment Activities***

Although some educational enrichment activities were offered, the Beacons were not very creative in offering project-based hands-on academic activities that built on what young people learned during the school day. In addition, few sites offered useful academic activities to help high school students prepare for exams such as the PSAT, SAT and New York State Regents examinations.

### ***Smaller Group Sizes***

Often, smaller activities were shown to be more likely to incorporate good youth-development practice and less likely to have problems such as bullying and teasing. The fiscal pressures on the Beacons to increase group size are substantial, but the evidence clearly indicates that to do so would be unwise.

### ***Staff Training***

Finally, observations and interviews showed that staff who had attended training on positive youth development more consistently incorporated positive youth-development practices in their activities. Efforts to continue offering these training opportunities will increase the likelihood that activities at the Beacons will support young people’s growth and development. More training was needed in youth development concepts and more information on what good youth development looks like in practice.



## CHAPTER TWELVE ADULT PARTICIPATION AT THE BEACONS

*Children and adults are coming to the Beacon and getting to know each other and getting along. (adult Beacon participant).*

*Any time I have a problem the adults will help me to resolve it. I can get what I need at the Beacon. (Beacon adult participant).*

### Introduction

Although the Beacons are best known for services to youth, the concept of the Beacon always included services and activities for adults, as well as an array of multiage, inter-generational activities. The founders hoped that the Beacons would be able to attract adults in their neighborhoods, engage them in the life of the community, and strengthen the relationships between the generations, particularly in families strained by economic and social conditions. This chapter describes adults' perceptions of the Beacons in general, as well as their perceptions about specific Beacon activities and programming.

The most frequently attended adult activities at the six Beacons in the intensive study were recreational ones, similar to those that attracted many youth participants. In addition, most Beacons in the intensive study also offered adults a range of educational and social activities, highly valued by the participating adults. To better understand the patterns of adult participation and its benefits, evaluators surveyed participants in the six study sites. The surveys were administered to adults who met two criteria: (1) they were at least 18 years old, and (2) they were participants in an adult activity offered by the Beacon. In addition, some respondents either currently or in the past had a child or children participating in youth activities offered by the Beacon.<sup>43</sup>

As shown in table 12.1, the majority of adult survey respondents were women in all but one site. Many were also residents of the surrounding neighborhood. In four sites, fewer than half of respondents lived beyond a 10-minute walking distance from the Beacon. Further, in the two sites where only roughly half the adults participants lived close to the Beacon, the greater distance was primarily a function of the location of these Beacons in less densely populated neighborhoods, rather than an indication

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activities at each site. One strategy consisted of members of the survey team approaching adults entering the Beacon to participate in the survey at the security sign-in desk. Another strategy entailed the Beacon director's and staff's encouraging and escorting adults to the survey team to participate in the survey. Both strategies were important: often the Beacon staff's verbal "OK" to speak to "strangers" was critical in securing adult participation.

Before completing the survey instrument, the adult was given a consent form to read and sign stating his/her understanding of the survey's purpose, that the survey was anonymous, and that their comments to the interviewer would not jeopardize their involvement in the Beacon. Completing the consent form and the entire survey instrument took approximately 10 minutes. At the conclusion of the survey, the interviewer noted whether the adult had answered "yes" to Question #8, "Have you had children attending the Beacon?" If so, the adult was encouraged to participate in a discussion with the interviewer.

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<sup>43</sup> Two strategies were used to recruit participants for the survey according to the organization of adult

that the Beacon was attracting participants from a broader geographic community.

Table 12.1 also shows the percentage of adults responding to the survey with school-age children living with them, as well as those whose children attended the Beacon. Adults with children or youth in their households comprised half or more of respondents in all sites, but their proportion as part of those responding to the survey varied widely, ranging from 50 to 90 percent. It is interesting to note, however, that

while the majority of respondents had children or adolescents of Beacon age in four sites, in only two sites were the majority of adults responding to the survey the parents of current Beacon participants. This suggests that although most Beacons offer some opportunity for intergenerational activity, many adults are attending the Beacon for reasons not necessarily related to their parental roles.

**Table 12.1: Characteristics of Adult Beacon Survey Respondents**

	Site A (n=40)	Site B (n= 25)	Site C (n= 25)	Site D (n= 53)	Site E (n= 17)	Site F (n= 20)	All Sites (N=180)
<b>Male</b>	28%	12%	28%	30%	53%	35%	30%
<b>Female</b>	72%	88%	72%	70%	47%	65%	70%
<b>Proximity of participants to the Beacon: more than a 10-minute walk</b>							
	24%	29%	54%	33%	50%	40%	35%
<b>Respondents who have school-age (6-21 years old) children or youth in home</b>							
	90%	80%	60%	53%	76%	50%	64%
<b>Respondents who have children attending the Beacon</b>							
	77%	64%	40%	34%	41%	35%	46%

Table 12.2 shows the sources of information cited by survey respondents when asked how they first heard about the Beacon. There were three frequent sources: friends (the top source in four sites); word-of-mouth (tied for lead source in two sites); and the host school (lead source in

one site and tied for lead in two other sites). Relatively few adult participants reported having first heard about the Beacon from their children or from neighbors, and even fewer reported first hearing about the Beacon from the news or from social service providers.

**Table 12.2: Adult Source of First Information About the Beacon**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>From a friend</b>	35%	40%	39%	24%	18%	30%	31%
<b>Word-of-mouth</b>	10%	20%	35%	15%	35%	40%	22%
<b>From the school</b>	48%	20%	4%	6%	35%	40%	24%
<b>From family member</b>	13%	12%	19%	7%	18%	10%	12%
<b>From a neighbor</b>	8%	4%	12%	6%	12%	5%	7%
<b>From his/her child</b>	13%	8%	4%	0%	6%	0%	5%
<b>On the news</b>	0%	8%	0%	4%	6%	0%	3%
<b>From social service agency</b>	0%	0%	4%	4%	6%	0%	2%

**Experiences and Perceptions**

Adult respondents were asked to report the frequency of a series of possible positive and negative experiences at the Beacon. In general, as shown in table 12.3, participants reported overwhelmingly positive experiences. In all but site A, the majority of adults participants felt that Beacon staff were supportive of their ideas and suggestions, and in all but sites A and E, the majority reported having the chance to express opinions during a Beacon activity. However, while youth were encouraged to participate in

planning Beacon activities, fewer than one in five adults reported that they had done so in all but site, D, and even there, fewer than half the participants reported helping plan activities.

Adults had few complaints about the Beacons; the only criticism reported more than 10 percent of the time was overcrowding of activities at sites A and C. Adults reported experiencing only rare cases of disrespect from the staff (something more frequently reported by youth) and were rarely, if ever, disappointed with the activities they attended.

**Table 12.3: Frequency of Positive and Negative Adult Experiences at the Beacons\***

Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Positive experiences</b>						
Beacon staff supportive of ideas and suggestions.						
43%	96%	86%	67%	85%	63%	69%
Had chance to express opinions during Beacon activity.						
29%	87%	71%	66%	39%	52%	57%
Had chance to help plan activities at Beacon.						
16%	17%	18%	46%	0%	21%	23%
<b>Negative experiences</b>						
Could not participate in activity because it was too crowded.						
16%	4%	13%	6%	0%	11%	8%
Disappointed in activity at Beacon.						
11%	4%	5%	4%	0%	0%	5%
Experienced disrespect from Beacon staff.						
5%	5%	4%	7%	0%	0%	4%

\*percentage responding at least “half the time”

## Participation in Specific Activities

The challenge of involving parents in Beacon activities has been a difficult one in many communities. (This is a formidable task for many multiage and school-related programs, not just the Beacons.) Most Beacons were creative in developing programs addressing parents' interests and needs and encouraged them to participate in a range of activities related to sports and fitness, education, employment, health, family, school, and community, as discussed below.

### *Sports and Fitness Activities*

From the outset, the Beacons enjoyed the advantage of access to school facilities, which included a full-sized gym in most cases. In some elementary schools, the scale of the gym was less than ideal, but even Beacons located in elementary schools attracted substantial numbers of community residents by opening these facilities in the evening. Sports and fitness were

the most popular activities among Beacon adults responding to the survey. Sports and recreation activities usually included basketball and martial arts or weight-training in schools with the equipment. In some cases, these activities took the form of structured classes or organized team competition, but in others, the gymnasium was available for pick-up games involving the evening's attending participants.

Table 12.4 shows the proportion of respondents participating in sports and fitness activities at the six intensive-study sites. Among respondents, participation in these activities ranged from one-third of adults in site D to nearly three-quarters of adults in site C. Aerobics classes, popular among women, were started in response to participant requests but attracted fewer survey respondents. Even so, at site C, the majority of respondents had participated in aerobics classes, and more than one in four had done so at sites B and E.

**Table 12.4: Adult Participation in Sports and Fitness Activities**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Attended sports and recreation activities</b>							
	40%	29%	71%	34%	58%	32%	41%
<b>Attended aerobics classes</b>							
	NA	29%	58%	6%	29%	16%	18%

### *Educational and Employment-Related Activities*

Most Beacons have taken advantage of the New York City Board of Education's provision of English as a second language (ESL) and general education diploma (GED or high school equivalency) preparation classes in community locations to anchor their educational offerings. In some cases, sites secured additional funding to offer other educational activities, particularly those with a vocational focus. In addition to these classes, several Beacons in the intensive study offered specific employment-related courses and activities. Several also offered computer instruction, sometimes in an intergenerational class.

Table 12.5 shows adult participation in educational and job-related activities offered in the six intensive-study sites. In all six, survey respondents had participated in a variety of educational and job-related activities. Computer classes were the most popular, attracting almost two-thirds of respondents in one site and nearly two-fifths in another. Educational classes aimed at helping adults prepare for the GED exam also accounted for more than half the respondents in one site and more than two-fifths in another. ESL classes were offered in only three sites but drew as many as one-third of survey respondents in one site and nearly one-fifth in two others.

**Table 12.5: Adult Participation in Educational and Employment-Related Activities**

Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Educational classes</b>						
11%	18%	22%	51%	0-	42%	29%
<b>ESL classes</b>						
17%	0	35%	20%	0	0	14%
<b>Computer classes</b>						
22%	65%	26%	39%	15%	0	29%
<b>Job skills or career counseling</b>						
20%	27%	22%	29%	0	16%	21%

When asked about new skills acquired at the Beacon, participants most frequently mentioned computer skills; when asked what other skills they would like to learn, several adults requested additional computer classes.

*I am able to use a typewriter and this program made me computer literate.*

*I've learned computer skills that will help me find a decent job.*

*I need to become more advanced in computer technology.*

Some adults also wanted more activities to help strengthen their parenting skills.<sup>44</sup>

[I want to learn] *how to talk to kids about drugs and alcohol.*

[I want to learn] *parenting skills—at times I need help with my son when he acts out.*

***Health-Related Activities***

The study of Beacon implementation across all 40 sites found that many different kinds of health education activities were offered for participants of all ages, ranging from regular health education sessions on topics like nutrition to special health fairs; the six intensive study sites were consistent with this finding.

As shown in table 12.6, two of the six Beacons where adults were surveyed had involved substantial proportions of participants (two-fifths in one and more than two-thirds in another) in health-related programs or classes. In others, health-related activities were available on a more sporadic basis, but as many as one-fifth of participants reported attending them.

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<sup>44</sup> These comments do not necessarily mean that those particular topics were not addressed at the Beacons attended by these parents; more likely, they either wanted more on these topics or had not attended the particular sessions addressing these issues.

**Table 12.6: Adult Participation in Health-Related Activities at the Beacon**

Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Programs on men's and women's health issues</b>						
12%	14%	13%	40%	15%	11%	21%
<b>Health education sessions</b>						
68%	18%	17%	30%	8%	16%	17%

***Family-Oriented Activities***

Part of the original vision of the Beacons was to create a safe place in the neighborhood for families to gather and take advantage of an array of services and activities, strengthening both family and community life. At the six Beacons in the intensive study, these activities included family and community holiday celebrations, events honoring cultural traditions; movies, performances by Beacon participants, parent-support groups, and family counseling services. In some cases, Beacon staff provided family counseling; in one site, the Administration for Children’s Services out-placed social workers to provide family preservation support.

Table 12.7 shows the different kinds of activities offered by the six Beacons and the proportions of survey respondents who reported attending them. In five sites, at least one in five

participants reported attending parent-support groups, with nearly half doing so in site A; more intensive family counseling drew more than one in five participants in sites A and C. In all six sites, roughly one in five adult participants reported attending a Beacon family night or movie. In most cases, far more adults reported attending ethnic and cultural celebrations hosted by the Beacons, with more than half doing so in sites A and C. Adults were quick to compliment these activities:

*The Beacon brings kids and families together to enjoy life and what they [the Beacon staff] have to offer.*

*Children and adults are coming to the Beacon and getting to know each other and getting along.*

**Table 12.7: Adult Participation in Family-Oriented Activities at the Beacon**

Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Attend family nights or movies</b>						
18%	27%	25%	24%	22%	22%	23%
<b>Attend ethnic and cultural celebrations</b>						
52%	37%	63%	42%	38%	26%	44%
<b>Attend parent support groups</b>						
49%	27%	42%	28%	23%	0	31%
<b>Attend family counseling sessions</b>						
21%	14%	27%	12%	0	0	15%

**Participation in Beacon, School, and Community Activities**

In addition to providing a safe place for children and adults to gather, the Beacon was intended to act as a catalyst for greater parent involvement both within and beyond the center. As one lead agency director put it, “We want to see if coming to the Beacon will make parents from

our community feel more comfortable in schools and other institutions.” Adult participants were asked how often they had participated in volunteer activities at the Beacon and how often they attended PTA meetings in their children’s school or meetings concerning community issues. Table 12.8 shows the responses to these questions.

**Table 12.8: Adult Participation in Beacon, School, and Community Activities**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Volunteer in Beacon activities</b>							
<i>Often*</i>	33%	29%	46%	29%	8%	16%	29%
<i>Sometimes</i>	21%	14%	17%	16%	8%	16%	16%
<i>Total</i>	54%	43%	63%	45%	16%	2%	42%
<b>Attend meeting to discuss a community issue</b>							
<i>Often*</i>	15%	18%	13%	26%	---	10%	17%
<i>Sometimes</i>	21%	23%	26%	16%	31%	16%	21%
<i>Total</i>	36%	41%	39%	42%	31%	26%	38%
<b>Attend PTA meeting in child's school</b>							
<i>Often*</i>	8%	36%	18%	16%	6%	5%	20%
<i>Sometimes</i>	10%	19%	14%	10%	38%	16%	20%
<i>Total</i>	18%	54%	32%	26%	44%	21%	40%

\*Often includes both “a few times a month” and “a few times a week.”

As shown in the table, in four of the six Beacons, at least two-fifths of adults (42% overall) reported having volunteered at the Beacon. In sites A and C, more than half reported volunteering, with at least one-third saying they did so a few times a month. Close to two-fifths of adults (38%) reported having attended meetings<sup>45</sup> to discuss community issues, and in the one site with more frequent community-oriented activities, more than one-

quarter of adult survey respondents reported doing so at least once a month.

When asked how the Beacon had affected people working together to improve the neighborhood or solve a neighborhood problem, interviewed adults were hard pressed to provide specific examples of community improvement activities beyond community clean-ups and bake sales. However, many adult interviewees commented that the Beacon had helped people in the neighborhood get to know one another better and made the neighborhood “feel” safer.

<sup>45</sup> To gauge whether the Beacon fostered broader community involvement, the question did not limit the location of meetings about community issues to the Beacon.

*Guys help each other out after playing on the court every time. We get to know and respect guys from their basketball.*

*Any time I have a problem the adults will help me to resolve it. I can get what I need at the Beacon.*

*Community people and leaders are always acknowledged and are allowed to update at Beacon affairs.*

Two-fifths (40%) of adults reported attending PTA meetings at their children's schools. However, when only the responses of parents of children attending the Beacon were counted, more than half (52%) reported attending meetings in their children's schools, with 50 percent of this group reporting that they did so at least a few times a month.<sup>46</sup> Several parents reported that their participation in the Beacon had helped them become more active in the school:

*The Beacon helps me in this by making copies for my meetings, giving me ideas to do my letters, refreshments, money for graduation.*

*The Beacon helps through supportive feedback about the children that helps parents know what issues to focus on.*

*Beacon helps participation in school affairs because the Beacon is on the parent association agenda in the monthly meetings.*

### ***Usefulness of the Beacons***

The survey also asked participants questions to gauge their perceptions of the usefulness of the

Beacons to adults, rather than to children and youth.<sup>47</sup> Responses are shown in table 12.9.

Almost nine of every 10 adults (89%) agreed that the Beacons provided a safe environment where children and adults could gather, with very little variation in the strength of this view across the six study sites. The value of having a safe environment was evident in the second- and third-most strongly supported views of the Beacons' value: more than four of five adult participants (83%) agreed that they made new friends and contacts at the Beacon, and more than three-fourths (76%) agreed that the Beacon helped them appreciate other people's cultures. This last perception reflected the success of the many Beacon cultural celebrations and activities conducted to foster cross-cultural relationships and understanding.

A large majority of those surveyed (88%) agreed that the Beacon provided useful information for adults, although this opinion varied from site to site, with just more than half (56%) agreeing in site F to near-total agreement (97%) in site B. Nearly three-quarters of surveyed adults (72%) agreed that the Beacon provided parents with resources not found in the community. More than two-thirds described the Beacons as helping them acquire new skills and to volunteer (70% and 69%, respectively).

Regarding responses related to parental roles by only those adults with children attending the Beacon, 86 percent believed that the Beacon assisted parents in helping their children with homework; 81 percent believed that it helped parents understand their children better; and 80 percent believed that the Beacon gave parents the freedom to work outside their homes.

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<sup>46</sup> While we have no comparison data, typical complaints about the difficulty of engaging urban parents in school activities suggests that these levels are quite high.

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<sup>47</sup> These questions were derived from the comments of parents in the focus groups held during the implementation study.



**Table 12.9: Adult Participants’ Perceptions of the Beacon’s Usefulness**

Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site	All Sites
<i>The Beacon is a safe environment for children and adults.</i>						
86%	91%	92%	85%	88%	89%	89%
<i>I make new friends and contacts at the Beacon.</i>						
86%	87%	91%	84%	80%	72%	83%
<i>The Beacon helps me to appreciate the other person's culture.</i>						
78%	82%	70%	77%	80%	71%	76%
<i>The Beacon provides useful information for adults.</i>						
64%	97%	70%	88%	81%	56%	88%
<i>The Beacon provides resources to parents not found in the community.</i>						
70%	77%	74%	68%	75%	67%	72%
<i>The Beacon assists parents in helping their children with homework.</i>						
83%	73%	75%	62%	67%	61%	70%
<i>I learn new skills at this Beacon.</i>						
51%	91%	73%	71%	60%	72%	70%
<i>The Beacon gives me the opportunity to volunteer.</i>						
74%	67%	70%	77%	67%	61%	70%
<i>The Beacon promotes pride in one's culture.</i>						
65%	70%	74%	65%	80%	56%	68%
<i>The Beacon gives parents the freedom to work outside the home.</i>						
84%	59%	63%	64%	93%	44%	68%
<i>The Beacon helps parents understand their children better.</i>						
76%	74%	74%	58%	80%	56%	58%

**Findings From Parent Interviews**

Those adults in the interview sample who were parents were asked specific questions to explore their perceptions of the effects of their children’s participation at the Beacons, including a final open-ended question: “What do you value most about the Beacon?” The responses included child care, homework help and academic support, and other skills and support.<sup>48</sup>

The most frequently cited benefit of the Beacon was its value as a source of high-quality, low-cost child care. Beyond the childcare, parents were appreciative of the academic support provided by the Beacons. Many parents offered specific examples of how their children had benefited academically. Some parents also mentioned the other lessons that their children learned at the Beacon:

*There is more to life than just school education. The extra lessons they learn at the Beacon help to widen their vision, while feeding desire to learn.*

<sup>48</sup> Parents were interviewed by invitation after filling out the adult/parent survey. A total of 41 parents, identified during the survey process, accepted the invitation to participate in a brief interview

Adults also cited gains from their own participation and saw this as a value to the neighborhood. In some cases, participants simply complimented the overall environment

*They are constantly asking for parents' opinions.*

*The people and staff; everyone here is very helpful and understanding.*

*The Beacon is convenient and available for those in the community.*

Table 12.10 shows what parents cited as most valuable at the Beacons.

**Table 12.10 What Parents Value Most About the Beacons**

<b>The Beacon provides free high-quality childcare.</b>	<p>“They are like a second parent to my son.”</p> <p>“The kids can talk to anyone here about anything.”</p> <p>“I cannot afford a babysitter. The kids stay at the Beacon until I pick them up.”</p> <p>“I can work outside the home.”</p>
<b>The Beacon helps children with their homework.</b>	<p>“Homework help assists with problem areas.”</p> <p>“It improves grades by helping with homework daily.”</p> <p>“Kids are able to do homework and improve grades where in some places I don’t have time or understanding of what the work is asking for.”</p>
<b>The Beacon helps children with specific academic and behavioral issues.</b>	<p>“The Beacon is helping in math and reading because homework is different from when I went to school.</p> <p>“The Beacon helped with reading, spelling, math and penmanship.</p> <p>“The Beacon taught my kids how to study.</p> <p>“My child’s grades went up and her attendance is great.”</p> <p>“The fact that kids can work with computers and the other skills that they are taught.</p>
<b>The Beacon monitors school performance.</b>	<p>“They keep tabs on his performance in school. I provide them with a copy of his report card.”</p> <p>“They keep up with child school, grades and parent. If grades fall, they help.”</p> <p>“Some of the Beacon staff visit the school in the day and see the students in their learning environment.”</p>
<b>The Beacon also provides benefits for adults.</b>	<p>“I have learned to understand English better.”</p> <p>“The computer class, the entire Beacon center. It helps me help myself and my son in new skills.”</p> <p>“They help anybody, as long as you want the knowledge and help.”</p> <p>“It brings people together.”</p>

## **Discussion**

### ***Major Accomplishments***

Although adults in the intensive-study sites used the Beacons less frequently than young people, they participated in a wide range of activities and services—testimony to the creativity and responsiveness of Beacon staff and their continuing efforts to draw in parents and other adults from the surrounding community. The Beacons engaged a diverse set of adults in activities that offered both enjoyment and education. Although almost two-thirds of the adult sample were parents of school-age children, fewer than half had children attending the Beacons, suggesting that, for a substantial number of adults, the Beacon was seen as a neighborhood community center rather than an afterschool program with related services. Adults were particularly appreciative of the educational and career-oriented offerings, such as GED preparation, ESL instruction, and computer classes. The Beacons also took advantage of their neighborhood location and reputation to offer adults a variety of activities designed to improve physical and mental health.

Perhaps as a result of their participation at the Beacon, the adults who participated at the Beacons reported relatively high levels of participation in school and community meetings. This was particularly the case for parents attending the Beacon, where more than half reported attending meetings at their children's schools, and a quarter of the parents reported doing so on a frequent basis. Moreover, the

parents enthusiastically endorsed the quality of Beacon activities and services for their children, sometimes attributing positive changes in behavior and academic performance to participation in Beacon activities.

Finally, the Beacons brought together neighborhood families and individuals in a variety of celebrations and events. In ethnically diverse urban neighborhoods, there is particular merit in a community center's taking upon itself the challenge of promoting intergroup understanding. The regular opportunities for residents to meet on common ground and learn about one another in cultural activities, holiday celebrations, and in day-to-day interactions enrich the quality of life in the neighborhoods served by the Beacons.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

With the exception of occasional complaints of overcrowding in some of the more highly demanded activities, surveyed adults were overwhelmingly pleased with Beacon activities and services. Many wanted "more of the same," and interview responses suggested that it would be useful for Beacons to offer additional services in two important areas: more job-related activities, particularly with computers, and more information about child and adolescent development and assistance in confronting the challenge of raising youth in some of the city's most troubled neighborhoods.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN BEACONS AND THEIR HOST SCHOOLS

*The school is the hub of the community now. The Beacon contributes to the positive image of the school in the community.* (Principal of Beacon school)

*School is often seen as the enemy. Our reputation is as “the big bad wolf” but the Beacon has improved that.* (Principal of school with Beacon)

The Beacons were created to make use of the school’s facilities to serve the school’s host neighborhood. The Beacon’s architects hoped that the opening of these valuable facilities providing a wide variety of services and activities to neighborhood children, youth, and families would lead to a closer relationship between the host schools and their surrounding communities. The architects also hoped that this closer relationship, in turn, would reduce the distance between neighborhood parents and the school and support the education of local children and youth through increasing family support for the school and the frequency of family-centered activities in the school.

In general, the host schools were selected primarily for their geographic location in communities rather than for their educational characteristics or their expressed desire to host a Beacon. Under the first request for proposals (RFP), the lead agency could select a school in the designated area with which it wanted to work, but subsequent RFPs identified both the neighborhoods and specific schools where the Beacons were to be created. Although many Beacon participants attend the host school (roughly two-thirds among those in the age group served by the school), a substantial proportion of participants attend other schools in the neighborhood, including a small proportion who do not attend public schools.

The Beacons were not designed as a school-reform initiative and were not charged in the RFPs to undertake efforts to improve their host schools. Instead, the Beacons seek to support the educational progress of participants through their academic support and enrichment pro-

grams, and by facilitating better communication between schools and the families they serve. However, as the operating context for the Beacon, these schools help shape the lives of youth they serve and neighborhoods in which they are located.

During the intensive study, evaluators collected information on the schools where the study sites were located. This included general school data from the school “report cards” in all study sites on school academic performance, longevity of staff, number of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, standardized test scores, and teacher training. AED examined information previously collected in interviews with Beacon staff and the school principal during the implementation study, and conducted additional interviews with the principals (not always the same individuals previously interviewed). Finally, a survey of school staff was conducted regarding their perceptions about having a Beacon in the school and the benefit they thought the school or its students derived from the presence of the Beacon.

### Overview of the Beacon Schools

The schools in the intensive-study sample are representative of the New York City schools that house Beacons, as shown in table 13.1. Two sites are located in elementary schools, and four are in junior high or middle schools. The composition and characteristics of every school reflect the problems that face the population of students attending the school and the Beacon center. In two schools, more than 95 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, reflecting the general incidence of

poverty among students in these areas. Three sites have school populations approaching or surpassing 1,000 students (one elementary

school serving more than 1,700 students) in buildings built to serve far fewer children.

**Table 13.1: 1999 School Data from Beacon Study Sites**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F
<b>Students</b>						
Grades in school	PreK-5	6-8	PreK-5	7-9	7-8	6-8
Students arriving in country in last 3 years	10%	5%	2%	4%	8%	2%
Students in school for entire year	93%	88%	92%	92%	88%	93%
Caucasian	3%	0%	5%	1%	3%	50%
African American	4%	55%	63%	17%	91%	68%
Latino	75%	44%	31%	82%	5%	27%
Asian/Other	17%	1%	1%	n/a	1%	4%
Attendance	92%	83%	89%	85%	88%	89%
Suspensions	2%	12%	1%	14%	4%	8%
Police incidents	2	10	0	17	22	23
Students receiving free and reduced-price lunch	79%	96%	100%	79%	38%	77%
<b>Teachers</b>						
Teachers fully licensed/permanently assigned to school	87%	67%	100%	70%	69%	77%
Two or more years in the school	62%	65%	55%	57%	52%	75%
More than 5 years teaching experience	50%	69%	61%	70%	55%	77%
Master's degree or higher	84%	71%	82%	73%	77%	84%
<b>New York City Standardized Test Scores</b>						
At or above grade level in reading	41%	*20%	39%	*17%	36%	*47%
At or above grade level in math	43%	*13%	35%	*22%	31%	*56%

\*These levels are significantly different from the previous year's data.

All Beacon schools in the sample have poor academic performance in both reading and mathematics, and two of the schools have been scheduled to close down because of low academic performance. Several study sites have had frequent turnover in both teachers and principals. Across the six study sites, at least one-quarter of the teaching staff in any given year had fewer than two years of experience, and in two sites, almost half the teachers were new

to the school. There was substantial turnover in leadership in some of the sites as well. One school in the sample had nine principals in the first six years of the Beacon program alone, including two in the year of the intensive study. The rest have had more stable leadership, but all except one have experienced at least one change in principal since the Beacon came to the school. This has made it difficult for the Beacons to

develop stable relationships with the host schools.

Although the Beacon is located in the same building as the school and works with the same general population of students, it has created a different environment and climate for these students, as youth made clear in the interviews. This is due in part to the Beacon's strong emphasis on youth-development principles and highly personalized environment, as well as its ability to create an emotionally and physically "safe space." These characteristics are reinforced by the general stability of Beacon staff in these sites.

Previous chapters of this report described youth participants' and parents' reflections on the "safe" environment at the Beacon. This chapter explores the relationship between the Beacon and the school and the changes, identified by some school staff, brought about by the Beacon in relation to the students, the school, and the community at large.

### **Relationship With the Host School**

Beacon staff in the intensive-study sites described their relationship with the school as ranging from strained and separate to a friendly working partnership. In general, staff from both the schools and the Beacons described their interactions as positive; schools with more stable leadership were more likely to report this. Teachers reported that they approached Beacon staff to discuss problems that students might have outside of school. In addition, where Beacon-school relationships were stronger, the Beacon staff stated<sup>50</sup> that they communicated with teachers in the school regularly about the academic performance of specific students so that the Beacon staff could provide extra help after school. Both youth and adult interviews in the intensive study sites confirmed this.

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<sup>50</sup> The school staff survey administered during the intensive study included an invitation to participate in a brief interview; no teachers or other school staff volunteered to be interviewed. Data above were collected in interviews conducted in these sites during the implementation study.

In most of the intensive-study sites, teachers from the school did not work in the Beacon (as they did in many sites in the broader sample of Beacons), but many teachers reported that they referred students there. Some Beacon staff in the intensive-study sites reported organizing joint activities with the school, such as parent events. Further, the principals in these sites reported that Beacons generally had a good reputation in the school and community and that this reflected well on the school.

Even in schools with good partnerships with the Beacons, issues still arose between the Beacon and the school. Most problems concerned the sharing of space and space allocation by the school. At several sites, there were issues related to competing afterschool programs that not only took over space formerly accessible to the Beacon but also were offered to only a small segment of the Beacon population. The limited amount of space allocated to the Beacon constrained the breadth and variety of the activities that it could offer.

Finally, relationships were strained when school staff (who often did not live in the school neighborhood) did not appreciate the larger mission of the Beacon program as a community center. These staff felt that the Beacon was not a program for "their kids" since it was open to the entire community and attracted youth of different ages and from several different schools.

### **School Staff Survey**

#### ***Methodology***

The design for the intensive study called for collecting survey data from all six schools. To do so, evaluators asked the principal of every school for permission to distribute the survey during one of the school's full-staff meetings. To better understand what factors influenced how school staff perceived the Beacons, the survey explored staff perceptions about the general school climate and aspects of the school that have changed because of the Beacon. It also asked about the teacher's own relationships with families and beliefs about the community, as well as about their relationships with the Beacon

and their feelings about Beacon activities, staff, and role as a community resource.

### **Results**<sup>51</sup>

In total, 189 staff members completed the survey in five Beacon schools.<sup>52</sup> Of the survey respondents, 72 percent were academic classroom teachers; 6 percent were art, music, or gym teachers; 4 percent were special education teachers; and three percent were counselors. The remaining respondents were in other positions throughout the school, including assistant principals, reading specialists, librarians, teacher aides, and custodians. Forty percent of respondents had been working at the Beacon school for three years or fewer; 22 percent had been at the school for more than eight years; and the remaining 19 percent had been at the school for four to seven years.

***School Staff Uninformed About the Beacon.*** The survey asked school staff how well informed they were about the Beacon. Of the staff who responded to the survey, 25 percent felt not at all informed about the Beacon in the school; the remaining 75 percent reported varying degrees of knowledge about the Beacon: 33 percent said that they were not very well informed about the Beacon, and 42 percent said they were either somewhat informed or very well informed. The proportion of staff responding that they felt informed about the Beacon varied by site, but this variation may have been related to the sample of teachers who chose to fill out the survey and the ability of principals to solicit a more diverse group of teachers, rather than the degree of school-Beacon interaction at that site. For example, in one site with a smaller proportion of respondents, only 6 percent reported knowing nothing about the Beacon, while in a site where

the majority of staff responded, 54 percent respondents knew nothing about the Beacon.

Evaluators sought to learn which teachers were more likely to know about the Beacon and to participate in its activities. The survey responses showed notable differences in the attitudes of those teachers who knew of and were informed about the Beacon programs compared with other staff members who reported no awareness of the Beacon and its activities and services.

***Communications Patterns.*** As shown in table 13.2, school staff who considered themselves informed about the Beacons were more likely to have frequent communications with parents than those who described themselves as uninformed. Of those staff members informed about the Beacon, 66 percent sent a written correspondence at least monthly to parents, 64 percent talked to parents on the phone at least monthly, and 47 percent met with them in person. School staff informed about Beacon activities also were significantly more likely to report having had a personal conversation outside of school with parents during the school year; more than twice as many teachers informed about the Beacon and its programs (36% versus 15%) reported having these conversations. It is important to note, however, that this difference may reflect less what the Beacon did to connect teachers and parents and more that these teachers already were more oriented toward communication and activities outside their classrooms than their colleagues. Even in these cases, however, the Beacon made it easier for teachers to interact with students and parents in a more informal manner.

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<sup>51</sup> Despite multiple efforts to improve the response rate in the five cooperating schools, the distribution of responses by staff across the five schools was so uneven that differences in responses by individual sites are not being reported.

<sup>52</sup> The sixth site was scheduled for the survey, but the principal repeatedly refused to meet with evaluators about distributing the survey to staff.

**Table 13.2: School Staff Communications With Families**

<b>Types of Communications</b>	<b>Of Informed Staff, % Reporting at Least Monthly Communication</b>	<b>Of Uninformed Staff, % Reporting at Least Monthly Communication</b>	<b>Total</b>
Written correspondence (e.g., letter, memo)	66%	50%	56%
Telephone conversations	64%	58%	60%
In-person conversations at school	47%	36%	44%

*Staff Perception of School’s Role in Students’ Lives.* As shown in table 13.3, on topics that were related to social needs of students, staff members reporting themselves informed about the Beacon program and activities were less likely to feel that students’ problems were beyond the capacity of the school or that the school was unsafe. When asked if they thought the students had such serious needs that the school could not help them, 61 percent of teachers who did not know about the Beacon agreed with the statement, compared with only 24 percent who reported knowing about it. Similarly, informed teachers were less likely to agree that the “school should not be expected to deal with students’ health and family situations” (36% disagreed versus 42%). Of the informed staff, 90 percent felt that the school was a safe

place for students versus 53 percent of the staff who did not know about the Beacon.

When asked about the relationship between the school and parents, 68 percent of teachers informed about the Beacon felt that the school reached out to parents who were not typically involved in the school compared with only 25 percent of teachers who were not informed about the Beacon. More than four-fifths (85%) of staff who were informed about the Beacon felt that parents were comfortable visiting the school, compared with 54 percent of teachers who knew nothing about the Beacon. Finally, 97 percent of informed staff felt that parents and community members were welcomed into the school compared with 73 percent of staff who knew nothing about the Beacon in the school.

**Table 13.3: Staff Perceptions of School’s Role in Student Lives**

<b>Types of Perceptions</b>	<b>Of Informed Respondents, % Agreeing</b>	<b>Of Uninformed Respondents, % Agreeing</b>
<i>Student needs are so serious, school cannot help.</i>	24%	61%
<i>School should not be expected to deal with students’ family and health situations.</i>	26%	42%
<i>School reaches out to parents not typically involved.</i>	68%	25%
<i>Parents are comfortable visiting this school.</i>	85%	54%
<i>Parents and community members are welcome in the school.</i>	97%	73%



***Ways of Finding Out About the Beacon.***

Beacon staff regularly mailed flyers and gave presentations during staff meetings and other school events about the Beacon and its activities. School staff had different ways of learning about the Beacon program and what it could do for students. Many staff members heard about the Beacon through word-of-mouth from their students and other school staff. Of those staff members who reported being informed about the Beacon, more than 62 percent had students who participated in Beacon activities (another 27 percent were not sure whether their students participated), and 45 percent said that they communicated with Beacon staff about progress of individual students. In contrast, of those reporting not being informed about Beacon activities in the school, only 13 percent reported that they had students who participated, and fully 80 percent said they did not know whether their students were involved in the Beacon.

***Staff Participation in Beacon.*** Informed staff members participated in Beacon activities in varying degrees. Of this group, 44 percent had attended special events at the Beacon, 22 percent had taught in afterschool classes, and 21 percent had helped plan special events. Fourteen percent of informed staff members had attended a Beacon family night, and a small number of staff (5%) reported attending Beacon community advisory council meetings. These data suggest that there is a core group of staff who are more likely to be involved in the Beacons. They may represent an undeveloped potential in strengthening the Beacon-school relationship.

***Changes in School Due to Beacon.***

The survey asked school staff if the Beacon had changed different aspects of school life or affected individual students.<sup>53</sup> Among those staff who reported feeling informed about the Beacon, a substantial minority responded that they did not know the effect of the Beacon, as shown in table 13.4. However, a majority of those voicing an opinion felt that the Beacon had a positive effect on the school. The areas where these school staff were most likely to see an effect on the school concerned issues of student self-esteem and increased awareness of local resources. Staff were less likely to feel that the Beacon had improved parent involvement in non-Beacon-related school activities and student behavior.

***Perceived Value of the Beacon.*** The survey also asked school staff for opinions about the Beacon's contribution to the school. Among those respondents informed about the Beacon, an overwhelming majority felt that the Beacon was a valuable addition to the school, as shown in table 13.5. This included 87 percent who felt that the Beacon improved the relationship between the school and the neighborhood and 86 percent who felt that the Beacon helped bring parents into the school. Eighty-two percent of respondents felt that the Beacon brought resources into the school, and 81 percent felt that the Beacon offered valuable activities to children from the school and for parents.

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<sup>53</sup> These results exclude those who reported having no knowledge of the Beacon.

**Table 13.4: Perceived Beacon Impact on Students\***

<i>What aspects of school life have changed because of the Beacon?</i>	<b>Percent Saying Beacon Improved Outcomes</b>	<b>Percent Responding “Don’t know”</b>
Student/family awareness of local resources	76%	34%
Students’ self esteem	75%	32%
Community/parent support of the school	67%	39%
Students’ family situations	61%	50%
Students’ achievement	57%	35%
Students’ attendance	54	44%
Students’ physical health	53%	51%
Parent involvement in other school activities	51%	39%
Students’ behavior	44%	39%

\*Only staff members who considered themselves informed about the Beacons are included in this analysis.

**Table 13.5: Perceived Benefit of Beacon to School**

<b>Type of Benefits</b>	<b>Agreed (% of those with opinion)<sup>54</sup></b>	<b>No Opinion</b>
<i>Beacon improves the relationship between the school and the neighborhood.</i>	87%	29%
<i>Beacon helps bring parents into the school.</i>	86%	43%
<i>Beacon brings resources into the school.</i>	82%	36%
<i>Beacon offers valuable activities to children from this school.</i>	81%	9%
<i>Beacon offers valuable activities for parents.</i>	80%	47%
<i>Beacon offers valuable activities for children from other schools.</i>	75%	47%
<i>Beacon helps the school organize family-centered activities.</i>	73%	45%
<i>Beacon is well run.</i>	61%	36%
<i>Beacon staff are well-trained.</i>	49%	47%
<i>Most staff from the school are involved in the Beacon.</i>	25%	31%

<sup>54</sup> The remainder of the people in this category disagreed with the statements.

In some areas, however, opinions of the Beacon were less positive: 61 percent of school staff felt that the Beacon was well run, and 49 percent felt that the staff in the Beacon were well trained. Depending on the site, these negative opinions reflect differences in professional culture and/or real issues in how the Beacon and school personnel interact.

## **Discussion**

Analysis of the relationship between the school and the Beacon must begin with the recognition that each defines who it serves differently. The school's constituency is its students, while the Beacon sees all children in the neighborhood as its constituency, whether they attend the host school or not. To some degree, this difference weakens the extent to which the school invests in developing strong ties with the Beacon.

The evaluation's survey of school staff found an uneven awareness of the Beacon and what it offers to the students of the schools and their families, despite repeated efforts by Beacon staff to reach out to their host schools. In some cases, this may be due to the nature of the schools themselves; two of the four qualitative-study sites were so troubled that they underwent mandatory reorganization during the evaluation. This kind of turmoil severely undermines the development of strong Beacon-school relationships. The survey responses also suggested that some school staff may be less inclined to take an interest in their students, their families, and their community beyond the classroom.

### ***Major Accomplishments***

Despite the difficulty of building a strong relationship, most of the intensive-study sites enjoyed a strong working relationship with the host school and were appreciated for the activities and services they offered to students and parents from the school and surrounding community. In addition, those school staff who knew about the Beacon believed that it had helped strengthen the relationship between the school and the community and helped bring more parents into the school.

There is no strong evidence from this survey of teacher-parent interactions that may help strengthen school outcomes such as student achievement, attendance, and behavior, although it is encouraging to note that a slim majority of school staff did believe that the Beacon has had a positive effect on student attendance and achievement. In addition, school staff believed that the Beacon has been successful in changing perceptions of the school in the community.

While relatively small in number, school staff who interacted regularly with the Beacon expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the Beacon in almost all areas. These staff may represent a potential base of support for building stronger and broader Beacon-school relationships.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

One goal of the Beacon initiative is to bring more parents and community members into the schools. It was hoped that this, in turn, would allow parents and community members to feel more comfortable in the school, increase their communication with teachers and other school staff, and allow them to become more involved with the school community. The survey of school staff indicates that the Beacon program has been successful in bringing parents into the school building but that this does not automatically connect these parents with the life of the school.

Despite efforts to inform school staff about the Beacon, many staff remained largely unaware of its presence in the school. Even among those who were aware of the Beacon, there was a substantial proportion that knew too little about what the Beacon did to be able to express an opinion on the value of the Beacon in their school.

Evaluators also noted a tension created by the fact that the school sees its clientele as the students attending the school—and they constitute only a portion of the Beacon population—while the Beacon sees its constituency as the community at large. First, this means that the Beacon has a limited capacity to make a palpable difference in the

school, making it less likely that teachers would notice a positive impact unless they had many students who attended the Beacon. Second, since the Beacon youth come from multiple schools, sometimes the Beacon tries to do outreach to several schools at once rather than commit all its resources to establishing strong relationships with a single school.

The Beacons constitute an untapped resource to organize parents around school issues and to

help them work with both individual teachers and the school as a whole. The Beacons should provide more information to teachers about what the center has to offer students and work more closely with teachers to discuss students and their needs. Finally, the Beacons could increase their legitimacy in the eyes of teachers by introducing more academic programs that cut across all schools, such as literacy support programs and Regents, SAT, and other prep courses.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN BEACON COMMUNITIES

*By being embedded in the community, Beacons were seen as well positioned to take on a range of community-building functions: they could respond to the particular needs, interests, and backgrounds of youth and families from the community; they could contribute to the community's capacity to address its problems by creating opportunities for community dialogue, problem-solving, and action; and they could sponsor community service projects, foster leadership among both youth and adults, and participate broadly in the civic and social life of the community. In sum, Beacon architects envisioned that the Beacons—themselves and in collaboration with other groups and institutions—would have significant potential to make the community a safer and better place.<sup>55</sup>*

In 1991, the founders of the Beacons had high hopes that the new school-based community centers could spark a revival in many of the city's neighborhoods. The original budget for the Beacon included not only staff to work with children and families but also staff whose responsibility would be working to improve the neighborhoods surrounding the Beacons. However, because the anticipated per-site budget was cut in half, community development staff were rarely, if ever, hired by the Beacons.

Nevertheless, the implementation study found that Beacon directors uniformly endorsed a community-building philosophy defining one of the Beacon's roles as effecting change in the immediate neighborhood. The activities observed during the implementation study, however, suggested that there was a continuum of community-related activity in that immediate neighborhood. At one end, some Beacons worked very hard to create an internal core of high-quality activities and services for youth, creating a safe place where parents could send their children in the hours after school, as well as offering events, activities, and services for neighborhood adults.

At the middle of the continuum, some Beacons also made space available to individuals and groups from the neighborhood. In some cases, the space was used to house ongoing community

activities, increasing the interaction among different community groups and individuals. In others, Beacon space was used for meetings of local organizations, some of which focused on neighborhood issues. At the most externally oriented end of the continuum, some Beacons also took on a community improvement agenda, involving both youth and adults in activities to better local conditions. In some cases this involved specific projects, such as a park clean-up, while in others, it entailed a longer and more organized campaign to address local problems in the area surrounding the Beacon.

The Beacons selected for the intensive study fell in the first and second categories; several excelled at building a body of high-quality programs and activities to address the needs and interests of local youth and adults. This effort not only provided benefits to individual participants but also brought together community members in ways unlikely to happen without the Beacon. In addition, several of the lead agencies had a history of working to develop their host neighborhood, and at the Beacons run by these agencies, there was evidence of at least occasional civic participation (community service projects, voter registration, community meetings, demonstrations) in most sites. These activities involved mostly young people and were part of a conscious effort to instill in them

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<sup>55</sup> AED, *Evaluation of the New York City Beacons: Phase I Findings* (New York City: Author, 1999).

a concern for their neighborhood and a commitment to civic participation. Although no sites organized regular activities for adults or youth focusing on addressing neighborhood conditions as their central concern, most Beacons in the intensive study were recognized by community residents as a positive presence in the neighborhood. They described the Beacon as creating a safe place for children and adults and as fostering a level of social interaction among different residents that would have been impossible without the Beacon.

### **Beacon Communities**

To profile the communities in which the six intensive-study Beacons were located, data on the sites were collected through interviews with the Beacon director and staff, as well as the director of the lead agency,<sup>56</sup> in addition to the data from public sources shown in table 14.1. Appendix 3 contains descriptions of the six intensive-study Beacon communities.

### ***Similarities and Differences***

There are both similarities and differences in the six intensive-study Beacon communities. Five of the neighborhoods surrounding the Beacon are characterized by concentrated poverty, often in the form of high-density housing arrangements.<sup>57</sup> Even in somewhat more economically stable areas, staff report that Beacon youth tend to come from poorer families than typical of the larger area as indicated in demographic data. Many families served by the Beacons have very limited access to critical social and health services, and opportunities for employment, particularly for young people, are scarce in these areas.

There also are important differences between Beacon communities. Two of these communities have many new immigrants, while the others have a population of long-time residents, with a small immigrant population. One neighborhood has been discovered by real estate developers, leading to rapidly escalating housing prices. Although the schools serving Beacon neighborhoods are poor for the most part, two have managed to exceed the performance of schools with similar students. The lead agencies include two with a specific youth-serving mission, while the other four provide a range of social, educational, and recreational services to adults as well as youth. Five are based in the local community, including three with very long histories of serving their communities,<sup>58</sup> while the sixth agency works citywide.

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<sup>56</sup> New interviews were conducted with the first four Beacons as they were part of the qualitative sample; in sites E and F, the discussion draws on interviews conducted during the implementation study.

<sup>57</sup> Single-family homes, however, are frequently overcrowded as large extended families live in spaces intended for far fewer residents.

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<sup>58</sup> Even in these schools, fewer than half the students are meeting citywide academic standards.

**Table 14.1: Community Data from Beacon Study Sites<sup>59</sup>**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F
<b>Race/ethnicity<sup>60</sup></b>						
% households Caucasian	33.6%	.9%	65.2%	29.3%	34.5%	9.5%
% households African American	4.0%	54.8%	18.0%	8.3%	48.8%	47.9%
% households Latino	51.4%	43.4%	12.5%	32.3%	10.3%	38.4%
% households Asian/other	11.0%	.8%	4.3%	30.1%	6.3%	4.2%
<b>Economic status</b>						
Median income	\$25,992	\$10,934	\$36,652	\$20,325	\$45,915	\$20,700
% of households with incomes below \$10,000	22.0%	49.0%	15.0%	29.0%	8.0%	31.0%
% of population on public assistance	27.8%	54.0%		23.8%	9.9%	35.7%
<b>Youth statistics</b>						
% of population under age 18	26.9%	35.0%	25.0%	20.0%	22.9%	32.6%
% of children below the poverty line	36.0%	45.0%	25.0%	27.0%	11.0%	45.0%

### Community Poll

Evaluators conducted a poll in the six Beacon neighborhoods to study the perception of the Beacon in its surrounding community. To do so, interviewers approached passers-by on streets adjacent to the Beacon, within a 10-minute-walking distance from the site. Those who were residents were asked a series of questions to ascertain whether the Beacon was known to area residents and how it was perceived. In addition, residents were asked to give their opinions on the characteristics of their neighborhood and whether the Beacon had contributed to the neighborhood's becoming a better place to live. Those who said they were familiar with the Beacon were asked a further set of questions to determine how they had heard about the Beacon and which activities and services were familiar

to them. In total, 301 community residents were polled.

In all but sites C and E, at least half the community poll respondents had lived in the neighborhood for at least 10 years; in sites A and D, more than two-thirds were long-term residents. Respondents who had lived in the neighborhood for fewer than five years exceeded 30 percent of respondents only in site E, which has a large influx of immigrants. In all sites, at least half the poll respondents had school-age children; parents constituted nearly three-quarters of the sample in sites B, C and F.

<sup>59</sup> Statistics are based on community district, which is not always the same as the area from which the Beacon's participants come. However, the data presented for the community districts gives a generally accurate portrait of the Beacon neighborhoods with the exception of site C, where the Beacon serves a very economically disadvantaged neighborhood within a more affluent larger district.

<sup>60</sup> Race and ethnicity data were taken from 1990 census, as was the information on median household income. Percentage of households below \$10,000 comes from *Keeping Track of New York City's Children: A Citizens' Committee for Children Status Report*, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Inc, 1996. Percentage of population on public assistance comes from *Community District Needs*, New York City Department of Planning, FY 1999. Percentage of children below poverty level comes from the 1990 census.

**Table 14.2: Characteristics of Respondents to Community Poll**

	Site A N = 59	Site B n = 49	Site C n = 46	Site D n = 50	Site E n = 46	Site F n = 51	All Sites N = 301
<b>Residence in neighborhood</b>							
Fewer than 5 years	19%	22%	26%	12%	54%	29%	27%
6-10 years	15%	25%	35%	14%	15%	16%	20%
More than 10 years	66%	53%	39%	71%	31%	55%	53%
<b>Percentage with school-age children at home</b>							
	69%	71%	71%	52%	50%	73%	64%
<b>Have heard about the Beacon</b>							
	48%	50%	79%	51%	23%	37%	48%

Just under half of respondents indicated that they had heard about the Beacon in their neighborhood.<sup>61</sup> This varied by site, ranging from a high of nearly four-fifths of respondents in site C to a low of less than one-fourth of respondents in site E. Considering that the Beacon operates within a school building, usually has no sign of its own on the outside of the building, and often does only seasonal outreach, this is a high level of recognition. The two sites with relatively low-site recognition (E and F) were less densely populated than the other sites.<sup>62</sup>

As noted above, those respondents who did know of the Beacon were asked additional questions about how they knew about it; their responses are shown in table 14.3. The most-cited sources were informal, usually either word-of-mouth or friends, followed by children or other family members.

Respondents who knew of the Beacon were asked if any of their household members participated in Beacon activities, and if so, which ones. Table 14.4 shows their responses. In Site A, the most-known activity of other household members was homework help, followed closely by sports activities for young people. Site B was similar, but a substantial proportion of respondents also had family members in computer education activities. Respondents in site C's neighborhood had household members in homework-help activities and youth sports, but more than one-fifth of respondents also mentioned family members as participating in exercise programs. At site D, homework help, youth sports, and exercise programs led the list, while in site E only one-fourth of respondents knew of family members' participation in any single activity—exercise programs or youth sports. In site F, nearly one-half of respondents knew of family members in youth sports programs, but only one in 10 mentioned family members who participated in educational activities (computers, GED, or homework help). In summary, homework-help and youth sports programs were most frequently mentioned Beacon activities.

<sup>61</sup> At every site, this question also included, "located at . . .," with the school building's name or number.

<sup>62</sup> The site with the highest recognition was located in an area that was more densely populated but also lacked services in general, which made it easier for the Beacon to be recognized.



**Table 14.3: Sources of Information About Beacon**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Heard about the Beacon from</b>							
Word-of-mouth	23%	28%	23%	32%	34%	29%	34%
Friend	7%	21%	28%	28%	22%	18%	28%
Child	26%	14%	8%	9%	11%	4%	16%
Family member	26%	23%	13%	16%	22%	11%	23%
Neighbor	7%	9%	15%	6%	0%	4%	1%
Teacher	7%	5%	11%	3%	11%	15%	10%
Newspaper or flyer	0%	0%	2%	6%	0%	11%	4%
Social services	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	1%

**Table 14.4: Beacon Activities of Household Members**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Sports for youth</b>	29%	29%	27%	26%	25%	45%	47%
<b>Homework for youth</b>	32%	33%	23%	21%	12.5%	7%	36%
<b>Exercise programs</b>	6%	8%	21%	23%	25%	11%	26%
<b>Computer programs</b>	3%	22%	4%	12%	12.5%	11%	13%
<b>GED programs</b>	3%	4%	5%	9%	12.5%	11%	11%
<b>ESL programs</b>	9%	0%	2%	3%	0%	4%	5%
<b>Family counseling</b>	15%	0%	6%	3%	0%	4%	9%

**Table 14.5: Beacon Activities Known Through Neighbors or Friends**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Sports for youth</b>	19%	26%	23%	23%	30%	44%	20%
<b>Homework for youth</b>	35%	40%	21%	16%	10%	17%	18%
<b>Exercise programs</b>	4%	4%	20%	16%	10%	12%	12%
<b>Computer programs</b>	4%	17%	6%	16%	10%	3%	7%
<b>GED programs</b>	15%	9%	10%	18%	10%	15%	23%
<b>ESL programs</b>	11%	0%	5%	2%	10%	3%	8%
<b>Family counseling</b>	8%	0%	9%	2%	20%	3%	5%

Respondents also were asked if any of their neighbors or friends attended Beacon activities. These results are shown above in table 14.5. In general, respondents appeared to know fewer friends or family members' activities, but, in all sites, at least one in five cited sports for youth, and more than one in five cited homework for youth in sites A, B and C.

Those poll respondents who knew about the Beacon also were asked to rate its quality. Table

14.6 shows these responses. In sites A and D, more than one-third of respondents rated the Beacon as excellent, as did one-fourth of respondents in sites B and C. Adding together those rating the Beacon good or excellent, only one site had fewer than 70 percent of respondents indicating high regard for the Beacon. Interestingly, half of those residents interviewed in site E and nearly one-fourth in site F said they did not know how to rate the Beacon.

**Table 14.6: Respondent Rating of Beacon**

	Site A	Site B	Site C	Site D	Site E	Site F	All Sites
<b>Excellent</b>	36%	25%	23%	36%	12%	19%	27%
<b>Good</b>	48%	65%	55%	36%	25%	57%	51%
<b>Fair</b>	4%	5%	7%	14%	12.5%	0%	7%
<b>Poor</b>	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	1%
<b>Don't know</b>	12%	5%	12%	14%	50%	24%	12%

All respondents to the community poll were asked a set of question about the characteristics of their neighborhood to determine whether awareness of the Beacons had any effect on residents' perceptions of the neighborhood.

Tables 14.7 and 14.8 show total percentage of responses to these questions about the neighborhood from respondents who knew of the Beacon (48%) and those who did not (52%).

**Table 14.7: Positive Statements About Neighborhood\***

	Have <i>not</i> heard about the Beacon	Have heard about the Beacon
<i>This neighborhood is a safe place for children.</i>	58%	52%
<i>People who live in this neighborhood look out for one another's children.</i>	68%	76%
<i>Many parents in this neighborhood are actively involved in their children's schools.</i>	69%	59%
<i>People who live in this neighborhood often work together to make it a better place to live.</i>	58%	56%

\* Percentage responding agree or strongly agree

**Table 14.8: Negative Statements About Neighborhood\***

	<b>Have <i>not</i> heard about the Beacon</b>	<b>Have heard about the Beacon</b>
<i>Sometimes young people hang out on the streets and create problems in the neighborhood.</i>	70%	72%
<i>Youth gangs are a big problem in this neighborhood.</i>	40%	49%
<i>There is a lot of crime in the neighborhood.</i>	40%	48%
<i>This is a neighborhood in which people usually stay to themselves.</i>	52%	46%

\* Percentage responding agree or strongly agree

Community residents who had heard about the Beacon had somewhat more positive perspectives of the social cohesion of their neighborhood. They were more likely to agree that the community was one where people looked out for one another’s children and less likely to agree that it was a community where people usually “stayed to themselves.” This was the case even though their other perceptions of the neighborhood were frequently more negative than those of respondents unaware of the Beacon. While these differences are small, the

two areas where Beacon awareness appears to have affected responses—community concern for the welfare of its children and social isolation—were critical aspects of the Beacon initiative.

To gauge the extent to which the Beacon was seen as contributing to improving the neighborhood, residents were also asked three questions about the Beacon’s impact on the neighborhood, as shown in table 14.9.

**Table 14.9: Perception of Specific Beacon Impacts on Neighborhood**

	<b>Site A</b>	<b>Site B</b>	<b>Site C</b>	<b>Site D</b>	<b>Site E</b>	<b>Site F</b>	<b>All Sites</b>
<b>Percentage who believe the Beacon has had an impact on</b>							
Making the neighborhood a safer place	60%	57%	56%	57%	63%	75%	60%
Whether people get to know each other and help one another out	50%	53%	53%	65%	37%	55%	54%
Whether people work together to solve neighborhood problems	10%	36%	23%	16%	4%	16%	13%

Respondents were asked for examples of how the Beacon had helped the neighborhood. A majority of respondents in all sites believed that the Beacon had helped make the neighborhood a safer place. Three-quarters of the examples that

respondents gave after answering this question involved the Beacon’s services for youth:

*It [the Beacon] keeps kids in a positive environment, off the street.*

*It keeps kids out of the street. If they are occupied, they stay out of trouble.*

*They help the children and keep them busy.*

In five sites, more than half of respondents felt that the Beacon also had helped people get to know one another and help one another out. Here, many responses referred to the Beacons' activities for adults.

*It helps people communicate better and know what is going on in the neighborhood.*

*It increases awareness of other neighbors.*

*It brings groups of people together.*

Some responses also indirectly involved the Beacons' activities for youth.

*It gives a common ground to parents.*

*It's about parents looking out for each other.*

However, when asked whether the Beacon had affected the extent to which people worked together to solve neighborhood problems, only sites B and C had a substantial minority of respondents indicating that this was the case (36% and 23%, respectively). Fewer residents responded to the open-ended request for examples, and the few that were given referred back to the activities for youth and the opportunities for adults to get to know one another.

*It teaches children to work together and learn to deal with problems.*

*They have activities for kids and neighbors get involved with games.*

## **Discussion**

### ***Major Accomplishments***

The Beacons clearly play a role in their host communities as valued local institutions. Community residents were well aware of the Beacon's presence, despite little advertising and its location within a school building. Most residents who knew of the Beacons were aware of its sports and exercise activities, but many also knew about the homework-help programs for children and the GED programs for adults.

Among those residents aware of its presence, the Beacon was very positively perceived. Of those who had heard about the Beacon, more than half rated their neighborhood Beacon as good; an additional quarter rated it as excellent. Community residents who had heard about the Beacon had somewhat more positive perspectives on the social cohesion of their neighborhood. They were more likely to agree that the community was one where people looked out for one another's children and where people did not keep to themselves. This was the case even though other perceptions of the neighborhood frequently were more negative than those of residents unaware of the Beacon.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

The Beacons clearly provide a platform for greater community involvement in efforts to improve their surrounding neighborhoods. However, they have very inadequate resources to address the issue of external community improvement while running a wide array of youth and adult services and activities.

## CONCLUSION RECOMMENDATIONS AND ISSUES FOR FURTHER STUDY

This final chapter summarizes the major findings of AED's evaluation of the New York City Beacons and makes recommendations about ongoing issues that Beacon programs (and effective youth programs in general) should address.

### **Summary of Findings**

Evaluation findings about youth provided evidence that the Beacons offer young people a place to develop and grow through challenging activities, caring relationships, and opportunities to contribute to the Beacon and to their communities. Both survey and interview findings indicated that the majority of young people were taking advantage of these challenging activities and believed they were developing new competencies because of their participation at the Beacon.

Findings also indicated that youth-development quality—or the extent to which the principles of good youth-development practice were implemented—in the Beacon environment and activities made a difference in youth outcomes. In sites with higher youth-development quality, young people were more likely to feel better about themselves at the Beacon; believe that youth of all races and ethnicities were valued at the Beacon; perceive that staff had high expectations of their behavior and performance; and report that the Beacon helped them learn leadership skills. They were also less likely to report cutting classes; hitting others to hurt them; deliberately damaging other people's property, stealing money or other property; and getting into a fight. Regression analyses showed that youth-development quality was not correlated with the overall quality of the host school or with neighborhood safety, and that the degree to which youth were potentially at risk was distributed across the intensive-study sites.

The safe and welcoming environment and the homework-help activities were the most positively mentioned aspects of the Beacons by youth and parents alike. Young people of all ages frequently cited the availability of homework assistance in response to questions about what they liked most about the Beacon and why they would recommend it to friends. Further, youth participating in academic activities (including homework help) were significantly less likely to report in their survey responses that they had cut class. For parents, the safe, friendly environment and homework help were the top two activities cited about what they liked about the Beacon.

AED's evaluation also provided evidence of the important role played by the Youth Development Institute in conceptualizing and promoting high-quality youth-development programming. YDI offers a wide range of professional development opportunities for both Beacon directors and their staff who work with youth to learn the principles and practices of positive youth development. Those sites with core staff most frequently attending YDI meetings and training activities had the highest-rated youth-development quality and the most positive youth findings. In addition, these sites were also more likely to send staff for other kinds of youth-work training.

In terms of adult programming, the evaluation found that the Beacons provide important services and activities for family members of Beacon youth, as well as for other neighborhood adults. Survey and interview data indicated that adults valued the Beacon for what it provided for both themselves and their children. Parents of youth attending the Beacon praised its family-oriented activities and services. Parents also cited the Beacon's workshops and counseling for helping them learn to communicate better with their children and their children's teachers. More than half these parents reported attending

meetings and activities in their children's schools and credited the Beacon with helping them participate.

In terms of schools, findings indicated that, although the Beacons have been successful in bringing family members into the school building, they have been less successful in connecting the school and community. Despite efforts on the part of the Beacons to make school staff aware of their presence and what they had to offer children, only a relatively small proportion of school staff felt informed about the Beacon in their building, and an even smaller group had participated in Beacon activities or worked for the Beacon. Nevertheless, those staff who knew about the Beacon had largely positive perceptions of its potential to help the school in the areas of student behavior and self-esteem, as well as to connect students and families to needed community resources.

Lastly, evaluation findings indicated that the Beacons are valued institutions in their host communities. Community residents were well aware of the Beacon's presence, despite little advertising and its location within a school building. Among those residents aware of its presence, the Beacon was very positively perceived. Of those who had heard about the Beacon, more than half rated their neighborhood Beacon as good, and an additional quarter rated it as excellent. Furthermore, residents who had heard about the Beacon had slightly more positive perspectives on the social cohesion of their neighborhood.

### **Recommendations and Issues for Further Study**

Various issues arose from AED's evaluation of the New York City Beacons: some should be heeded by existing and new programs; others could benefit from further study. These issues are listed below and discussed in the order in which they appear in this report.

- Gender patterns in activities
- Effect of size on program quality

- Bullying and teasing
- Attention to entry of new youth into the Beacon
- Training of younger staff
- Training in youth work
- Staff hired from community
- Availability of opportunities for youth leadership
- Attention to youth with severe academic difficulties
- Attention to risk-taking behavior
- Attention to youth-development and educational quality of programming
- Informing school staff about the Beacon

### ***Gender Issues***

Traditional gender patterns were revealed in responses to survey questions about youth participation in different activities, with boys outnumbering girls in athletic activities. Girls dominated homework help, arts and crafts, creative and performing arts, family life/sex education sessions, and computer instruction. Some sites had begun to recognize and address these sex-stereotyped participation patterns, but this is clearly an area where more attention would be helpful.

### ***Group Size***

Group size emerged as a critical factor in effective programming. For example, group size was a factor in staff's ability to incorporate elements of good youth-development practice into an activity. The smaller the group size, the more likely evaluators were to see the development of caring and trusting relationships among youth; the availability of adult support—both in general and manifested in high expectations for young people's performance and behavior; and the flexibility to allow young people to contribute to running the activity. In addition, in larger activities, evaluators sometimes saw interpersonal conflict and bullying and teasing that were not well managed by staff. Lastly, there were some activities with large size and/or inadequately trained staff that did little

more than fill time. Unfortunately, this was more frequently the case with educational activities than with other types of activity.

### ***Bullying and Teasing***

Bullying and teasing also posed a problem, particularly in large groups. In particular, while boy-on-girl intimidation was often seen as unacceptable, boy-on-boy intimidation was viewed as "boys being boys." These findings suggest that Beacon staff need additional training on how to create an environment in which bullying and teasing are not tolerated and in which differences are dealt with in a positive manner. Further investigation of the kinds of difference-related issues that underlie bullying and teasing behavior at the Beacons would be useful in designing specific training to help staff address these issues, both specifically in terms of bullying and teasing and also more generally in creating a supportive, tolerant, and emotionally safe environment for all children.

### ***Attention to Entry of New Youth***

Some younger participants reported problems making friends at the Beacon with youth who were not in their existing social circles or did not attend their elementary schools. Beacon staff may be able to bridge this gap with more attention to facilitating the entry of new youth.

### ***Training of Younger Staff***

Youth in all age groups complained in interviews about younger Beacon staff members who sometimes yelled at them and treated them with disrespect. Although some of this behavior may reflect an abuse of authority on the part of these staff members, it is likely that they have weaker group-management skills and need help building a repertoire of approaches to handling youth respectfully.

### ***Training in Youth Development Principles and Practice***

Observation of youth activities and interviews with their staff leaders showed that the degree to which staff were trained in working with young people was reflected in the quality of the activities. Better trained staff were more "intentional" in their work with youth, particularly in the way they challenged them to

grow, and better able both to manage groups and respond to individual needs. In addition, observations also revealed an uneven level of training among staff. More consistent investment in improving the skills of youth staff would increase the quality of experiences for youth at the Beacons.

### ***Staff Hired from Community***

Beacons have made an effort to hire staff from the communities they serve, which often means that young people see staff members with whom they share a common racial or ethnic background. This is different from the frequent practice in other afterschool programs of hiring teachers, who often are not from the same cultural background or residential area as the young people with whom they work. It would be useful to know the added-value of hiring community-based staff, particularly with regard to their ability to act as role models for youth. At the same time, for educational activities to have the maximum value, the presence of some teachers in afterschool programs can also be valuable.

### ***Availability of Youth-Leadership Opportunities***

Survey data showed an uneven availability of opportunities for all youth to contribute and develop leadership skills across the sites. Some sites adhered to the philosophy that all youth have leadership potential, while, in others, there were clearly individuals who were being groomed for leadership. Given the demonstrated benefits of such opportunities to foster leadership skills among youth, it would be preferable if all youth were offered at least some opportunities to lead and received the support to do so.

### ***Attention to Youth with Academic Difficulties***

Despite the overwhelmingly positive youth responses about academic programs at the Beacon, a small minority of participants described homework help as not very useful because it was too distracting to complete homework with so many other youth around. These same participants reported that their schoolwork was not very good. This coincides with program observations noting that participants with serious academic deficiencies may need more substantial homework support and

academic assistance. This suggests that Beacon education staff may benefit from additional training to help them identify youth with more serious academic needs, as well as linkages to other resources to help these young people.

***Attention to Risk-Taking Behavior***

Nearly one-fifth of young male participants at the Beacons reported using alcohol and marijuana in the previous two months, and almost that many young women reported recent alcohol use despite a wide variety of substance abuse prevention programming at the Beacon. These numbers are still high enough to suggest that more young people at the Beacon need to participate in frequent discussions and prevention activities about drugs and alcohol.

***Attention to Youth-Development and Educational Quality of Programming***

Observation data showed some routine and unimaginative Beacon activities that missed the opportunity to support the development of young people. This was particularly true in large activities, as well as with some academically focused activities, such as homework help. A review of the evidence suggests that additional attention to how activities help young people grow, both academically and socially, would result in more consistent youth-development and educational quality across activities.

***Informing School Staff About the Beacon***

Only a relatively small proportion of school staff felt informed about the Beacon in their building, and an even smaller group had participated in Beacon activities or worked for the Beacon. However, those staff who were informed about the Beacon had largely positive perceptions of it and represent an underused resource, both in terms of student referrals to the Beacon and collaborations between school and Beacon staff to help needy youth.

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In summary, the New York City Beacons clearly play a pivotal role in the education and development of their young participants, as well as in the lives of their families and communities. Attention to the issues discussed above would ensure that the Beacons continue to play this key role.



## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX 1

### BEACON ACTIVITIES

#### **Academic Activities**

Homework help was the dominant academic activity at the intensive-study Beacons, and its implementation varied from site to site. At one site homework help was mandatory; all participants had to do their homework for an hour and a half before moving on to the next activity. At other sites, homework help was programmed by not scheduling another activity during the same time-frame or by allowing youth to participate in other activities only after they had finished their homework. The number of participants involved in a homework-help activity ranged from 10 students working with a tutor in a classroom to 300 elementary school youth in a cafeteria.

In homework-help activities, the majority of participants were of elementary school age, with boys participating as much as girls and the ethnic backgrounds of participants reflecting the Beacon community. Homework help was available to youth in junior high and high school, but these sessions tended to be more sporadically attended. The quality of supervision and assistance during homework help also varied: some participants did their homework in the gym with minimal supervision and assistance; groups of children at lunchroom tables completed their homework with prodding and basic help from high school youth; and a few students in a classroom reviewed subject areas with a college tutor.

The intensive-study sites clearly provided a structured and consistent method by which hundreds of children completed—and, if needed, received assistance—with their homework. However, the structured observations revealed that participants with serious academic deficiencies floundered in this activity, requiring more intensive intervention than a high school or even a college student can provide. In addition, the teens and young adults assisting with homework help sometimes needed more training

and better supervision, especially given the number of young children under their care. Given that homework help was one of the highest-attended activities (and thus most crowded), staff must be sensitive to issues of teasing, bullying, fighting, roughhousing—all behaviors observed occasionally, and often not addressed, during site visits.

Other academic activities at the Beacons included academic enrichment and tutoring. During observations, these academic activities entailed educational games, such as Trivial Pursuit and Scrabble. Tutoring, both individual and in groups, was available, and small study groups were encouraged in larger-scale activities to help participants understand the material, rather than just finish the work. Often, after participants had completed their homework, staff encouraged youth to read newspapers and magazines.

#### **Creative Arts**

Creative arts at the qualitative-study sites included all visual arts media, as well as dance, theater, chorus, sewing, and cooking. Arts and crafts activities were well attended by children and teen participants and by boys as well as girls. Activities varied from site to site, with much of the variation linked to space constraints. Beacon sites without an art room had to simplify art projects; nevertheless, an art project was always in progress. Sites with access to an art room had a multitude of materials (paint, brushes, canvas, markers, glitter, color paper, pipe cleaners, etc.) for creative projects. At one site, the arts-and-crafts program incorporated trips to museums throughout New York City. At another site, youth created the scenery for a theatrical performance during their arts-and-crafts activity.

Dance activities usually took place at the gym or on the auditorium stage, and one site had an equipped dance studio. Dance was usually

modern, including hip-hop and step, and mostly attended by girls, with the exception of one site where dance was integrated into theater arts. Performances were extremely popular and well attended by Beacon parents and other community members. Young adolescents, ages 12 to 14, described dance and performing arts as their favorite Beacon activities.

Cooking was very popular with teenage girls, although teenage boys often lined up to sample the meals. The participants primarily learned to cook, but also wrote the recipes for their favorite meals and created a cookbook at the end of the class, giving the activity additional educational value.

### **Computers and Technology**

For the most part, participants at the four Beacon sites had some access to computers. Generally, participants had a designated time for computer use and either completed schoolwork, played games (most games were skill-building in nature), or learned the basics of operating a computer. At one site, a leadership group was involved in an advanced computer literacy course, learning how to do word processing and spread-sheets, and access the Internet. Across sites, computer activities were very popular with children and teen participants and boys and girls alike.

### **Cultural Awareness Activities**

Cultural awareness activities included celebrations of such holidays as Martin Luther King, JR's birthday and the Chinese New Year, as well as of various Latin American traditions. Most sites held international or multicultural celebrations, with children and their families sharing stories, food, and customs stemming from their different cultures; these celebrations might also include musical and dance performances. At one site, where strengthening participants' cultural awareness was an explicit goal, participants designed projects around different holidays or cultures, such as holding a peace vigil on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and visiting multicultural institutions, such as El Museo del Barrio and conducting research on Puerto Rican and Latino/a artists. At this site, staff made efforts to include a multicultural

perspective in all activities—for example, having speakers from diverse backgrounds on career day; reading authors of different nationalities and ethnicities in reading group; and watching movies that portray minorities in a positive light on movie night. Children, teens, families, and boys as well as girls enjoyed partaking in these celebrations

### **Employment and Career-Related Activities**

The four qualitative-study Beacons offered many employment preparation/job readiness activities, which were extremely popular with teens and young adults from the community. One site had a New York City Department of Employment-funded program where participants (15-18 years old) worked 10 hours a week during the school year and were employed for 30 hours a week during the summer. Participants worked as homework helpers, tutors, monitors, art apprentices, and office clerks, and received a stipend.

Another site had a job-readiness program for participants between the ages of 13 and 16, who helped out in the Beacon office and, if needed, received academic assistance. Participants, who received a stipend, attended workshops on such topics as conflict resolution and team building; other components of this program included job shadowing and career explorations. The entrepreneurship program at one site involved participants in creating their own business (for example, a candy store). Participants were responsible for all aspects of the business, including advertising, inventory, administration, and record-keeping. They did not receive a stipend but did have certain perks, such as field trips and recruitment for summer employment. One site had a unit within its career-awareness program that trained participants in customer relations; participants who completed this training could then move on to a paid internship.

### **Leadership**

Leadership development activities took place in both formal and informal contexts. Formally, the four Beacon sites had built-in mechanisms, such as the youth council or youth leadership team, in which leadership activities like program planning, problem solving, and decision making

were part of the process. Leadership development occurred informally, such as when a group of participants initiated a fundraising project to sponsor a retreat or when youth planning a performance decided, after much debate, not to perform a song because the lyrics were laced with profanity. In addition, certain types of activities at the four qualitative-study sites fostered youth leadership. For example, youth in employment preparation/job-readiness activities consistently made decisions, problem-solved, and modeled appropriate communication and behavior for younger participants.

### **Sports and Fitness**

Sports and fitness activities at the four qualitative-study sites included basketball, volleyball, double Dutch, and martial arts. All four sites had an “open gym,” some with more structure than others. For example, in one site, equipment (e.g., basketball, ropes, volley balls) was available and participants played sports at random, while at another site, structured team games were played, complete with uniforms and a referee. Given its nature, the martial arts program was very structured and disciplined, and it attracted boys and girls alike. Sports and fitness activities were very popular; interviewees between the ages of 8 and 12 and girls as well as boys, indicated that “gym” was their favorite Beacon activity. Adolescent males stated that the free organized sports, especially basketball, made the Beacon very attractive to them. Observations revealed that during early afterschool hours (3-6 p.m.), boys and girls participated in these activities in similar numbers; however, in the evening sports and fitness activities were dominated by young men.

### **Supervised Relaxation**

Supervised relaxation at the qualitative-study sites included informal activities in the game room at one site and the lounge at another. In the game room, participants chose from an array of games, including computer games (the most popular), and played under the watchful eyes of staff. In the lounge, participants congregated, had refreshments, and talked before moving on to another activity. One site designated a daily study time for the lounge, and participants could remain there as long as they were involved in some type of educational activity, whether reading a textbook or magazine, working on a school assignment, writing a letter, or playing chess. Teens of both sexes enjoyed having a space where they could just “hang out.”

## APPENDIX 2

**Regression Coefficients (Betas) for Selected Program Outcomes and Characteristics**

<b>Program Outcomes</b>	<b>Site quality</b>	<b>At-risk</b>	<b>Has adult support</b>	<b>Participation in youth development activities</b>
Cut class	.138*	-.119	.021	.052
Hurt someone physically	-.272**	.201=	-.109	.122
Damaged property	-.225**	.266**	-.102	.039
Stole money or thing	-.136*	.211**	-.173=	-.071
Been involved in a fight	-.137*	.292**	-.048	.116
		<b>At-risk</b>	<b>Has adult support</b>	<b>Participation in youth development activities</b>
Used marijuana in last 2 months	N/A	.204=	-.067	-.133*
<b>Program Characteristics</b>	<b>Site quality</b>			
Feel better about self at Beacon	-.196=			
Believe that all races/ethnicities are valued at Beacon	-.132*			
Beacon staff have high expectations for youth.	-.238**			
Skills learned at Beacon will help me become a better leader.	-.153*			
Confident staff are able to handle fights that come up at Beacon.	-.144*			

\*\* p<.001

= p < .01

\* p<.05

Note: At-risk is the number of risk characteristics youth identified, including: being from a single-parent home, getting mostly Ds and Fs last school year, getting suspended last school year, cutting class this year, and being overage for grade. For the cutting-class regression, cutting class was not included as a risk factor.

## APPENDIX 3

### PROFILES OF THE SIX INTENSIVE-STUDY BEACON COMMUNITIES

#### Site A

Site A is located in an ethnically diverse community with a large immigrant population. The population is roughly one-half Latino, one-third Caucasian, under 5 percent African American, and slightly more than 10 percent Asian or other. In recent years the Latino population has shifted from mainly Puerto Rican to a growing number of Central and South Americans; the Chinese population is the fastest growing ethnic group in the area. More than one-fifth (22%) of households have income under \$10,000, and more than one-quarter of the families are on some type of public assistance.<sup>1</sup>

More than one-quarter (27%) of the population in the community is under 18, and this population continues to increase at a rate that out-paces education and youth services in the area. There is a need in the community for more afterschool programs and vacation care for children with working parents, more GED programs for the large number of dropouts in the area who are unemployed or working in “low tech” jobs, and job training and ESL classes for new immigrants. Residents near the Beacon have access to hospitals, recreation, and gathering places but limited access to social service and multiservice agencies that respond to their complex needs.

The school housing the Beacon is a very large elementary school where more than three-quarters of students receive free or reduced-price lunch.<sup>2</sup> The leadership of the school is

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<sup>1</sup> According to Beacon sources, the families served by the Beacon host school have a higher incidence of poverty than the general community.

<sup>2</sup> This proportion is smaller than in previous years and may reflect the growing immigrant population, where parents are afraid to ask for government services if they do not have normalized immigrant status.

relatively stable with the current principal in place for six years and only the second to work with the Beacon.

The lead agency in site A opened more than 20 years ago to provide support services for children and families. It is an integral part of the community surrounding the Beacon and the school, and currently operates a number of different programs from afterschool and employment/vocational services to a thrift shop and foster care programs. The agency began working with the school a decade before the Beacon arrived and is very involved in operating and directing the Beacon center. The Beacon director speaks at least weekly with the head of the lead agency on all matters concerning the Beacon. These include future direction, budget, activities, problems, neighborhood issues, and Beacon/school relationship.

Beacon staff at site A are mostly residents of the surrounding area, including those who have been past participants in programs operated by the lead agency, including the Beacon. A core group of full-time professional staff leads and supervises part-time staff members.

#### Site B

Site B is located in a densely populated but isolated neighborhood; the population is roughly equally divided between African American and Latino residents, although, according to sources at the Beacon site, the area directly surrounding the site is approximately 85 percent African American and 15 percent Latino. More than half of the population of the community district is on public assistance and young single females head a large percentage of the households, with almost half (49%) of the households having incomes below \$10,000. Compared with other neighborhoods in New York, the community is in the highest-risk category for overall poverty (including children in poverty and unemployment), safety (including child abuse

and children's felonies), and education. The population of the community grew steadily throughout the 1990s, and this population increase has strained existing social services.

The immediate neighborhood of the Beacon in site B is made up of large public housing units, apartments, and a few business establishments. Many Beacon participants come from this area (less than a five-minute walk to the site). Services and programs such as child care and recreation, while available, are not easily accessible to residents because the only means of public transportation is a single bus line. The closest train station is a 10-minute bus ride from the Beacon.

According to the 1990 census, the under-18 population comprised more than one-third (35%) of the total population. Youth face many challenges including lack of safe, structured recreational and educational activities after school, substance abuse, high rate of HIV infection, illiteracy, truancy, and unemployment. The community district has among the highest dropout and teen pregnancy rates in the city.

The Beacon is in a middle school that now houses a middle and an elementary school with a bilingual program. Physically, the school is large and appears well maintained; the area around the school is well lit, with many people nearby during the day and early evenings. Almost all the school's students (96%) receive free or reduced-price lunch. However, the school has been under-going redesign for a number of years following a history of extremely poor academic performance.<sup>3</sup> Since the Beacon arrived in the school, the school has had multiple principals, including two in a single school year. Before the Beacon, the school did little work in the community and did not work with community-

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<sup>3</sup> In 1999, fewer than 15 percent of students in the school scored at or above grade level in math and only one-fifth scored at or above grade level in English. These numbers are even significantly lower than other schools with similar demographic challenges.

based organizations. The principal of the school reports that more parents are active as a result of the Beacon program.

The lead agency for site B is a youth-serving organization with a long tradition of providing afterschool education and recreation programs in the adjacent community.<sup>4</sup> Its mission is to help youth grow and choose wisely on their way to adulthood. The lead agency offers a fringe-benefit package to Beacon employees as well as professional development through retreats and workshops and assistance seeking additional resources to fund the Beacon. About half of the full- and part-time Beacon staff are from the neighborhood. Most have worked in the community previously and a majority of the staff have been at the Beacon since it opened.

#### **Site C**

Site C is located in an area of mostly single-family homes, with a median household income of \$36,000; only 15 percent of households have incomes under \$10,000. The area's population is 65 percent Caucasian, 18 percent African American, 13 percent Latino, and four percent Asian/other. However, the area immediately surrounding the Beacon has predominantly low-income housing units and is largely African American and Latino, with a majority of families receiving public assistance.<sup>5</sup> This neighborhood remains largely segregated with inadequate access to basic services and good schools. Social service agencies and childcare providers are available only if residents can travel to reach them, inadequate to meet the demand, and generally unaffordable to most residents. However, there are strong neighborhood churches and many lifelong residents.

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<sup>4</sup> The lead agency has changed once since the Beacon. The original organization was an employment agency.

<sup>5</sup> The school population is almost two-thirds African American and almost one-third Latino. Almost all students qualify for free and reduced-price lunch.

Youth under 18 make up at least 25 percent of the community district population with a higher percentage in the area surrounding the Beacon. They grow up surrounded by drugs, lack of employment, the threat of gangs, and limited public transportation to take them to areas with employment opportunities for youth or to youth programs and services. Most youth using the Beacon live within a 10-minute walk to the Beacon due to inadequate public transportation.

The Beacon operates in an elementary school located on its own block directly across from a large housing project and adjacent to another; most of the students who attend the school live in these units. The school building is clean and contains many positive educational messages, Afrocentric depictions of African American leaders, and student work are on display. School leadership and staff are very stable—the principal has been in place for more than 10 years and almost half the teachers for 12 years or more. However, in 1999, only slightly more than one-third of students scored at or above grade level in reading and math on the required New York City standardized tests.<sup>6</sup> The school offers additional afterschool activities to children who attend the school.

According to the principal, before the Beacon, parental involvement in the school was minimal, and the school worked with few community organizations. Since the Beacon, parent involvement has improved and several new community organizations have become involved in the school.

The lead agency for site C is a youth organization; it has several different projects in the area and had run youth programs before the Beacon. The agency is well respected and highly visible in the community. Its mission is to provide youth with positive alternatives to idle time and substance abuse by developing a safe

environment for them to participate in recreational and educational services and giving them structure and clear limits to support their development. The lead agency has committed a part-time staff person to the Beacon site, who oversees day-to-day activities, assists in grantwriting and budget matters, and provides a direct link to the lead agency. The agency also provides funds for additional programs, as well as services to Beacon participants and professional development for Beacon staff. One in four full-time staff and over half of part-time staff live in the Beacon community. The Beacon has several subcontractors and partners within the community who run programs for Beacon participants both on and off site. However, the Beacon's operation is constrained by a shortage of space because the school is small and has increased its own afterschool programs. As a result, the Beacon now has no access to classroom space and must conduct all activities in the hallways and other common areas such as the gymnasium, cafeteria, and auditorium. This is not the typical space allocation for the Beacon and presents severe challenges to implementing the full range of Beacon activities.

#### **Site D**

Site D is located in an economically and ethnically-mixed community, with about one-quarter of the population on public assistance. The population is 29 percent Caucasian, 8 percent African American, 32 percent Latino, and 30 percent Asian or other origin. The area contains prime real estate; the median household income is \$20,325; and 29 percent of households have income under \$10,000.

There is a wide range in population from rich to poor and young to old. Specifically, 20 percent of the population is under 18, and more than one-quarter of this population receives public assistance. There has been a decrease in the number of students in the local school district because of the chronic low performance of many schools. Concerted efforts to improve public education in the area have yielded varying results. The area also has its share of crime and drug problems. However, the area does have good access to public transportation and benefits

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<sup>6</sup> It is an indication of the socioeconomic conditions in the neighborhood served by school that these scores put the school slightly above other similar schools in both subjects.



from a wide range of service organizations that have been in the neighborhood for many years.

Site D is housed in a junior high school where academic and physical conditions in the school are not conducive to learning. There are few books or desks for students still in the school, and it is clear that both the district and community have little confidence in the school. In 1999, 79 percent of students received free and reduced-price lunch, and there had been three principals in the previous three years. In 1999, fewer than one-fifth of students scored at or above grade level in English, and fewer than one-fourth scored at or above grade level in math on the New York City standardized tests.<sup>7</sup>

The lead agency is a multiservice community agency in operation for more than 80 years; it runs 22 programs, including summer camp, career exploration, counseling, and Head Start.<sup>8</sup> Its mission is to provide educational, cultural, and recreational services to community residents. The lead agency and the Beacon communicate frequently on all aspects concerning the Beacon and occasionally on the Beacon's relationship with the school. The lead agency provides staff for the Beacon, as well as funds for additional programs and services, professional development for Beacon staff, linkages to additional resources, and assistance with planning. Beacon staff reflect the ethnicity and culture of the participants; most of the part-time staff live in the neighborhood.

#### **Site E**

Site E is located in a racially diverse community where lower to upper-middle class families live largely in one- or two-family homes. Median household income is \$45,915, and fewer than 10 percent of households have incomes below \$10,000. The population is 35 percent Caucasian, 49 percent African American, 10

percent Latino, and 6 percent Asian or other. In 1998, fewer than 10 percent of residents were on public assistance. Those working with the Beacon describe the people in the surrounding area as largely second- and third-generation African Americans and immigrants of African descent (mostly from Haiti, Jamaica, and other Caribbean countries). Home ownership is common, and residents feel safe and know one another. Youth comprise almost one-quarter of the population in the community district around the Beacon; more than 10 percent receive some type of public assistance.

Site E is housed in a junior high school next to a large parkway and a large public park. Services are available to community residents, but many are not easily accessible, with the exception of some childcare providers. There is no hospital in the neighborhood; residents often use one in an adjacent area, although it is not generally affordable for lower income residents. Health care providers and social service agencies are available but also are not very accessible.

The school building is very large, well maintained, and pleasant. Roughly two students in five receive free and reduced-price lunch. The average teacher age in the school is 33 (young compared with other city schools), and teacher turnover is high; however, there have been only two principals in the school since the Beacon arrived. In 1999, one-third of students scored at or above grade level on the citywide reading test, and slightly fewer scored at or above grade level on the math test. These numbers are very significantly below schools with similar demographic conditions.

The lead agency is a diversified human service agency with programs that reach many New Yorkers throughout the city.<sup>9</sup> It conducts a variety of programs, including educational services, career guidance, skills training, and mental health services. The mission of the lead agency is to enable people to achieve their

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<sup>7</sup>These numbers are very significantly below schools with similar demographic conditions.

<sup>8</sup> The current lead agency is the second to run the Beacon.

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<sup>9</sup> The current lead agency is the second one in charge of the site; the first left early in 1996.

highest level of social and economic self-sufficiency with the help of programs enhancing their social and academic skills. The lead agency plays an active role in the Beacon and provides a number of additional services including staff, additional funds, services for participants, and linkages to additional resources.

#### **Site F**

Site F is located at a busy intersection in an area of mixed residences and small businesses. Many buildings in the immediate area are abandoned, city-owned buildings, used as “drug dens.” Increasing prostitution, concentrated in several neighborhood areas, and crime, economic instability, and unemployment continue to affect residents of the community. However, there is a growing awareness of the need for economic revitalization on the part of residents and an increased sense of community.

Median household income in the district is \$20,700; almost one-third of the households have incomes below \$10,000. This population consists of renters rather than homeowners, and single parents head a majority of households. Almost half the residents are African American, while almost two-fifths are Latino. According to those who work in the Beacon, the population served by the center is closer to 90 percent African American and 10 percent Latino.

One-third of the neighborhood population is under 18, and almost half receive some type of public assistance. Compared to other districts in New York City, the youth of the community are in the highest-risk category for teen births, dropouts, and youth arrests for felonies and misdemeanors. The youth organizations in the community cannot meet the demand for services, and youth-on-youth violence is a serious problem. The area has the second highest number of juvenile felony arrests of any neighborhood in New York, and drug and alcohol abuse, gangs, and lack of employment opportunities continue to affect community youth negatively.

Site F is housed in a middle school built in 1954. It is spacious and well maintained. The school serves roughly 900 students in grades 6-8 and includes a gifted-and-talented honors program and magnet program. In 1999, more than three-quarters of students received free or reduced-price lunch. The school has had an influx of African American and Latino teachers just out of college who provide new energy to the school. In 1999, just under half of students scored at or above grade level in the New York City reading test, while slightly more than half scored at or above grade level on the math test.<sup>10</sup>

The Beacon lead agency is a community development corporation created in the late 1960s. Its mission is to stabilize and revitalize the community in the areas of housing stock, education, and primary-care services. The Beacon director and the head of the lead agency communicate frequently on all Beacon matters. The lead agency provides staff, funds for additional programs and services, linkages to additional resources, and assistance with planning and program development.

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<sup>10</sup> The scores are equal in reading and slightly higher in math than schools with similar characteristics.

The **Academy for Educational Development** (AED) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to addressing human development needs in the United States and throughout the world. AED's Center for School and Community Services uses multidisciplinary approaches to address critical issues in education, health, and youth development. To achieve its goals, the center provides technical assistance to strengthen schools, school districts, and community-based organizations. It conducts evaluations of school and community programs while striving to provide the skills and impetus for practitioners to undertake ongoing assessment and improvement. The center also manages large-scale initiatives to strengthen practitioner networks and accelerate systems change and uses the knowledge gained from this work to advocate for effective policies and practices and disseminate information through publications, presentations, and on the World Wide Web. For more information about the work of AED's Center for School and Community Services, contact Patrick Montesano or Alexandra Weinbaum, co-executive directors, 212-243-1110, or visit the department website at [www.aed.org/scs](http://www.aed.org/scs).

The **Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago** is an independent policy research center, the mission of which is to bring sound information, rigorous analyses, and innovative ideas to the debate about policies and practices affecting children and the families and communities in which they live. Chapin Hall is a national leader in policy and programming for youth and community development. The **Hunter College Center on AIDS, Drugs and Community Health** of the City University of New York has worked extensively with community-based organizations and schools in New York City to promote the health and well-being of adolescents. The center has assisted community organizations, schools, and health and social service agencies to plan, implement, and evaluate interventions designed to improve the well-being of New York City's poorest neighborhoods.



*Academy for Educational Development*

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