

Promising Practices in Afterschool

NIOST is one of six national organizations across the country that has been funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation to collect promising practices in afterschool. Each organization collects practices from different geographic areas and program auspices.

NIOST's focus is identifying system building and infrastructure practices from the 20 cities across the country participating in the Cross-Cities Network. Practices are collected on an ongoing basis and are submitted to the AED Center for Youth Development and Policy Research where a review team evaluates the practices to ensure they are valid. Once practices pass successfully through the review process, they are posted to the www.afterschool.org web site so that others may learn from them.

To learn more about the Promising Practices Initiative or to submit your own practice, please visit www.afterschool.org

Or

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Promising Practices in Citywide Afterschool Initiatives

Building Organization Capacity for a Focus on Youth Development

Community Network for Youth Development – The Youth Development Framework

Community Network for Youth Development (CNYD) has served the San Francisco Bay Area for the past twelve years as a youth development intermediary organization offering support, training, and capacity building resources to youth-serving organizations and programs. CNYD has developed a holistic and effective approach to capacity building with the goal of transforming organizations that have historically been serving youth in the community into “youth development organizations.”

There are four keys to CNYD's capacity-building approach:

1. Adoption of a comprehensive “youth development framework” and translation of that framework into practical tools for practitioners;
2. Creation of learning communities within organizations that involve funders, policy-makers, and practitioners;
3. Introduction of a program improvement process, grounded in data from youth surveys;
4. Follow-up coaching, with fading leadership from CNYD as the partner organization builds competence.

Using a unique blend of toolkits, coaching, and supported learning communities, CNYD involves funders, top-level management, youth workers, and youth in the implementation of the “youth development framework.” This framework identifies organizational practices, youth development practices, developmental outcomes for youth, and early adult outcomes. It encompasses five domains for holistic youth development: intellectual, physical, social, psychological, and emotional. The developmental youth outcomes include learning to be productive, learning to be connected, and learning to navigate. In order to achieve these outcomes, CNYD advocates that youth programs

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constantly consider the following five supports and opportunities:

- Safety—emotional and physical;
- Relationship building—guidance, emotional and practical support, knowledge of youth and what’s important to them;
- Youth participation—input and decision making, leadership opportunities, sense of belonging;
- Community involvement—ability to impact community, knowledge of the community;
- Skill building—challenging and interesting learning experiences, a sense of growth and progress.

The foundation of this framework is that organizational practices and program practices must be responsive to the needs of children and youth—as determined by children and youth—as measured in youth surveys.

A Case Study – YMCA of San Francisco

In the Fall of 2000, the YMCA of San Francisco and CNYD embarked on a long-term project to build the capacity of the YMCA to integrate and sustain youth development practices at every level of the organization. The YMCA has historically been in the business of serving youth, addressing three dimensions of the health of their young participants: mind, body, and spirit. However, as research began to demonstrate that surrounding youth with positive supports and opportunities can have long-term impacts on their life trajectories, the YMCA of San Francisco sought to become more intentional about embracing a youth development approach to serve its young members.

An Organizational Shift

CNYD and the YMCA of San Francisco created The Youth Development Project in the Fall of 2000, to explore how CNYD could assist a large youth-serving organization with the integration of

principles and practices from the “youth development framework” into the YMCA’s staff training and organizational practices.

The Youth Development Project used three core strategies: (1) the YMCA hired a Youth Development (YD) Specialist, (2) CNYD created a Learning Network at the YMCA, and (3) CNYD introduced a program improvement process to the YMCA.

The Youth Development Specialist was to serve as an internal champion and to oversee the project. A coach from CNYD worked with the YD Specialist to set up staff training and organize the work of the project. CNYD mentored the YD Specialist and built her skills and knowledge of the YD Framework so that the capacity to lead staff training, policy analysis, and evaluation would be embedded within the YMCA.

The Learning Network, which was created at the YMCA, consisted of youth workers, stakeholders, branch directors, and association executives. CNYD adapted their Learning Network training series to meet the needs of the YMCA. The Learning Network training lasted for nine days and focused on the five supports and opportunities in the framework for youth development including safety, relationship building, youth participation, community involvement, and skill building. Two participants from each YMCA branch reflected on current

practices, ideas, and strategies for implementing the YD framework in their branch, and organizational barriers to their success. Following the training days, the YD Specialist provided fifteen hours of coaching to individual branches on implementation of the supports and opportunities.

CNYD introduced a program improvement process to help the YMCA identify ways of making the organization itself more conducive to the development of positive adult/youth relationships.

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Branches used the youth survey to measure young people's own experiences in five core areas: relationship building, safety, youth participation, community involvement, and skill building. Based on survey findings and an assessment of current organizational practices, branches developed an action plan. Youth were later re-surveyed to measure whether the steps taken in the action plan had in fact improved the positive developmental experiences of the program participants. This program improvement process is repeated yearly to create a continuous quality improvement culture within the organization and to ensure that branches are continuing to be as responsive to youth as possible. The YMCA found that staff were highly motivated to change programs in response to youth survey data.

Aside from the three core strategies, the YMCA also carried out a number of other organizational changes. For instance, they established a youth development advisory team that became part of their overall team network management structure. In addition they created an action plan that included changes in structure and policy at the association level and ensured ongoing funding for the YD Specialist. They created and funded an assistant position for the YD Specialist along with ongoing youth worker training, a youth worker certificate, a professional sharing network, a peer review and best practices assessment, and expanded opportunities for youth leadership at various levels within the association. There have also been significant changes in branch policies and staff practices.

Focus on Staff Development

CNYD's operating principle is that in order to deliver effective youth development services, agencies need to both improve staff skills and also realign organizational structures, policies, and resources to support service delivery. For example, young people's experience of the youth program as being a place where they are welcomed, safe, and

surrounded by caring adults is undermined if the front desk staff are not friendly and welcoming to youth as they enter the building. Moreover, if the agency fails to fund adequate staff-to-youth ratios, youth are not able to build meaningful relationships with adult staff.

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CNYD has translated the YD framework into in-depth training and a set of tools that help staff and organizations infuse the framework throughout their organization. CNYD creates learning communities for

implementation of the youth development framework by offering Youth Development Learning Network training sessions each year. The Learning Network consists of eleven sessions, seven of which are focused on staff training on the framework for teams of at least two staff from each participating agency. Three of the sessions add stakeholders from agencies in ensuring a focus on organizational practices. In addition to Learning Network sessions, each agency receives fifteen hours of follow-up coaching on-site from CNYD. The Learning Network approach has been effective because it addresses both individual staff skills and stakeholder buy-in to reduce the barriers to implementation of the YD framework. Teams of staff can support each other in planning and making program changes.

Underlying these youth worker practices are essential organizational practices. Some examples of organizational practices are: (1) low staff to youth ratios; (2) safe activities and spaces; (3) flexible resources; (4) a range of interesting activities; (5) continuity of care; (6) ongoing staff improvement processes; (7) youth involvement; and (8) community engagement. One of the core organizational practices in CNYD's approach is community engagement. Each youth development organization is encouraged to connect with the schools that youth attend.

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The YMCA developed ongoing staff training, a Youth Development Program Guide, opportunities for staff to network across the association, a process of ongoing assessment, and policies to ensure that branches are youth-friendly. They also implemented a Youth Development Certificate program (40 hours of training), which is linked to staff performance reviews. Thanks to CNYD's "partner and transfer" approach, the YMCA's staff are now able to assess the quality of youth development experiences they offer and implement improvement strategies to strengthen organizational and program practices.

Incorporating Youth Voice

CNYD's program improvement approach to program change strongly advises that youth are the best judge of whether or not a program is implementing the five supports and opportunities. This approach also assumes that organizations must continually be growing, changing, and testing their success by finding out directly from youth whether or not it's working. For example, youth are surveyed about their sense of safety and comfort in communication and relationships.

Based on the youth survey results, the program creates an action plan which specifies the goals and action steps, who is responsible, how it will be implemented/supported by program staff and management, and what organizational changes are needed. After the action plan is implemented, youth are again surveyed to determine if the improvement strategies in the action plan led to young peoples' increased experience of the five supports and opportunities. The youth surveys that were conducted at the YMCA demonstrated that at the end of three years youth were experiencing greater amounts of the five supports and opportunities. To further ensure the incorporation of youth voice in programming and organizational decisions, the YMCA includes youth membership on branch and association boards.

Key Ingredients for Successful Replication

In order for the partnership between the CNYD and the YMCA to be successful a number of project components had to be present including:

- Lead staff person within the partner organization who was given the "blessing" of the organization to lead the transformation process;
- Skilled coach from the mentoring organization who was allocated adequate time to spend supporting the partner organization staff and who knew when to fade her/his leadership and let the mentee take the lead;
- Simple, practical tools were used to transfer skills and know-how, such as workshop outlines, a curriculum framework, and sample activities;
- Buy-in from all levels of the organization;
- Willingness to listen to youth input, be responsive, and involve youth in meaningful ways;
- Commitment to ongoing quality improvement and evaluation.

Resources:

Sue Eldredge, Community Network for Youth Development, Executive Director, <http://www.cnyd.org>

The "youth development framework" and the program improvement process were developed in collaboration with Drs. Michelle Alberti Gambone (Youth Development Strategies, Inc.) and James P. Connell (Institute for Research and Reform in Education).

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