



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Evaluation of the Youth Development Institute's Beacon Young Adolescent Initiative, 2008-2009

### About the Initiative

Beacons are after school programs, operating in 6 cities and serving nationally about 150,000 people. They are distinguished from other after school programs in that they serve both adults and youth, provide opportunities for youth and community voice in program development, and encourage participation by young people from elementary school through adulthood.

Started in 2006, the Beacons Young Adolescent (BYA) Initiative, funded by Atlantic Philanthropies, is a four-year initiative of the Youth Development Institute (YDI). The initiative seeks to improve outcomes for young adolescents (ages 9-14) by improving the quality of Beacon after school centers in NYC and San Francisco (SF) and by increasing their participation, engagement, and retention in activities. The initiative is designed to address two key issues in the after school field, the need for high quality programs and the reduced participation of young people as they enter adolescence.

### Why OMG Did This Evaluation

OMG has been engaged to conduct a multi-year evaluation of the Beacons Young Adolescent initiative to document and assess changes in practice at Practice Development Beacons and their CBOs, as well as changes in the participation of young adolescents at the Beacons. As part of this work, YDI and OMG wanted to understand:

- 1) How intermediaries (YDI in NYC and San Francisco Beacon Initiative in SF) work together to share strategies in the BYA initiative
- 2) What BYA strategies are delivered by the intermediaries and how they affect programs
- 3) The impact of Beacon programmatic changes on adolescent participation, retention, and engagement
- 4) How Documentation Beacons inform the initiative and are influenced by the initiative

PRACTICE DEVELOPMENT (PD) BEACONS	DOCUMENTATION BEACONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Selected to address challenges with program quality and participation, engagement, and/or retention of middle school youth.</li> <li>- Receive coaching, training, and both on and off site technical assistance (TA) from YDI.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have expertise in some or all aspects of participation, engagement, and/or retention and serve as more seasoned, strong programming mentors for PD sites.</li> <li>- Document "Promising Practices" to share amongst BYA Network and more broadly.</li> </ul>

### What OMG Found

With some expected challenges, the complex, multi-faceted implementation of BYA continued to proceed effectively and to realize many important initiative outcomes. Most of the BYA Beacons achieved full involvement in the initiative. There were substantial approach and program changes since 2007-08, especially in New York where the initiative has been operational longer, and there were definite increases in participation.

- BYA now includes 10 Beacon partners actively implementing the initiative. In 2008-09, BYA supported six active Practice Development (PD) Beacons, three Documentation Beacons, and one PD/Documentation Hybrid. Three PD sites are in San Francisco; all others are in NYC.
- In both New York and San Francisco, the BYA Beacons enrolled substantial numbers of youth during 2008-09 (2,724 in NYC and 1,732 in SF). All seven of the NYC BYA Beacons served more than the Department of Youth and Community Development required 200 participants for 216 hours.
- Enrollment increased overall for the BYA PD Beacons in New York City by 18%.
- Attendance improved for all of the New York City BYA Beacons by 86% across sites. Attendance began to improve in San Francisco, as well. There was also a shift to greater intensity of participation in both cities.

The BYA Initiative focuses on the following areas: coaching and training for Beacon staff, cross-Beacon networking opportunities for BYA participating Beacons, and broad dissemination of findings. The findings below address these key areas of focus.

### **Coaching & Training**

- Important practice shifts occurred at four of the Practice Development Beacons with the longest and/or the most stable involvement in BYA. These appear to have come about, at least in part, as a result of an intensive and targeted set of supports from the intermediaries which both built infrastructure and supported new practices based on research and strong practice.
- YDI developed and conducted training regarding outcomes-based planning and staff supervision and meeting practices for BYA staff.
- YDI and SFBI continued to develop roles as intermediaries and to finalize internal clarification of staffing strategies as well as interaction structures for working with dual sites.
- All 10 BYA Beacons have formed teams to take on BYA challenges. The teams are expected to move BYA from a project to a concerted, integrated effort to modify and maintain practices so young adolescents are recruited, retained and better served. The BYA intermediaries have established extremely effective mechanisms for supporting this work, and all BYA Beacons enter the next phase of the initiative in a position of particular strength.
- Across BYA sites, staff and participants noted important positive changes in participant engagement in 2008-09. Beacon staff reported participants are: coming more regularly, more involved in what is happening at their Beacon and in the larger community, increasingly speaking for themselves, acting confident, forging connections with other youth and seniors in the community, and requesting opportunities to provide community services. Young people corroborated those sentiments consistently in focus groups.

### **Networking**

- Each of the three Documentation Beacons documented a promising practice which had been vetted by YDI to be consistent with research in youth development and reporting about it to other New York and San Francisco network members and affiliates. These reports are being finalized for wider dissemination in the coming year.
- YDI and SFBI continued to convene their BYA Beacons throughout 2008-09. BYA Directors in both cities cited that these meetings were especially useful in 2008-09.
- YDI developed and delivered the second national BYA Conference on Participation and Engagement of Young Adolescents. Conference participants described the event as transformative and BYA Beacon attendees all reported they implemented some actions based on their experiences.

### **Broader Dissemination**

- YDI, together with SFBI, continued to explore other opportunities for initiative expansion to a wider group of sites both locally in the two cities, and nationally via the major after school networks. Both intermediaries ramped up their focus on issues of initiative sustainability.

### **What OMG Recommends & Additional Information**

The BYA initiative moved from its final planning stages to implementation during 2008-09 and many initiative outcomes were realized. As the SF Beacons move toward full-scale implementation and both the NYC and SF BYA Beacons take on sustainability issues, ongoing careful oversight and direction continue to be needed.

Greater detail on the context for this evaluation as well as OMG's methodology, more detailed findings, full recommendations, and upcoming evaluation activities can be found in the complete report.

OMG is also conducting a cohort study as part of its program evaluation. The cohort study incorporates both survey and focus group strategies and includes data collection from youth involved at three different Beacon sites to determine:

- how participation by the target group at PD Beacons change over time in response to the initiative
- what influences participants' decisions to stay connected to or leave the Beacon
- who establishes new connections to Beacons and what influences their decisions