

STRENGTHENING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT THEIR YOUTH



A publication of the
Fund for the City of New York
Youth Development Institute

STRENGTHENING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

INCREASING THE CAPACITY OF COMMUNITIES TO SUPPORT THEIR YOUTH

A publication of the
Fund for the City of New York Youth Development Institute
121 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10013
Revised May 2007

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Strengthening Youth Development describes strategies for building community capacity to support the development of their youth. These strategies were developed and carried out by the Youth Development Institute of the Fund for the City of New York (YDI). YDI was founded to support of the establishment of the New York City Beacons in 1991. Since that time, YDI has provided technical assistance to youth-serving organizations based on knowledge about what works in the field. The work has expanded to include a wide range of agencies and programs. An important step in this work was taken in 1996, when, at the request of the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds, YDI helped six cities across the nation establish Beacons. The expansion from local work to national led to a period of reflection in which staff at YDI identified and articulated the technical assistance strategies that had been most effective in New York City. During this period, there was an increasing recognition by policymakers of the critical role of intermediaries in creating local youth development infrastructure and supporting high quality programs. Since that time, intermediaries, government agencies and private funders, have sought to understand better what capacity-building strategies are effective.

Many people and organizations have contributed to this publication. First, we wish to thank the Ford Foundation for the financial support that made this booklet possible. Michele Cahill was director of YDI when this work began and led the development of many of the approaches that are described. Linda Pitts became director in 1999, further developing this work until her death in 2000, a great loss for YDI and the field.

Many YDI staff and consultants, past and present, have contributed to the work described in the monograph. Past: Dennis Carter, Sharon DuPree, Sabrina Evans, Katherine Whitney Luers, Jessica Mates, Marsha Milan, Pardeice Powell McGoy, Alicin Reidy, Arva Rice, Will Weeks. Present: Shannette Budhai, Kimberley Cambridge, Patricia Campbell, Nina Dibner, Sandra Escamilla, Theresa Greenberg, Janice Hirota, LaShaunette Honor, Sheronia James, Walis Johnson, Nichelle Jolly, Danny Kronenfeld, Judy Lorimer, Eileen Lyons, Annie Moyer, Kerry Odom, Abby Remer, Vivian Vazquez, TJ Volonis and Alfonso Wyatt.

Pamela Stevens worked with YDI staff and the participating organizations in the tough task of gathering their reflections on the technical assistance process retrospectively, and drafting this booklet. Jean Thomases, consultant, provided ideas and suggestions about the initial outline and the initial drafts. A list of the people and organizations that were consulted in the development of this booklet appears towards the end of this document.

Finally, I wish to thank Mary McCormick, President, and the staff of the Fund for the City of New York for their support to YDI.

Peter Kleinbard

Vice President, Fund for the City of New York, and Director, Youth Development Institute

May 2003

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Theory of Change	3
Building a Youth Development Infrastructure	5
Strategic Approach to Capacity Building	9
Profiles of Three YDI Initiatives	13
Networks for Youth Development	13
The Beacons	14
The BEST Initiative Grantmaking and Partnerships	15
Eight Tiers of Technical Assistance	17
Facilitated Exchange	17
Program Assessment	18
Staff Development	19
Structured Site Visits	21
Organizational Support	22
Program Development	22
Tools and Information Development	24
Advancing Public Policy	24
Conclusion: Making Change at Three Levels	27
People Interviewed for the Report	30
Resources	31
About the Fund for The City of New York	32
About the Youth Development Institute	33

INTRODUCTION

Established in 1991 in New York City, the Youth Development Institute (YDI) is one of a growing number of intermediary organizations throughout the United States that seek to create a cohesive community infrastructure to support the positive development of youth. YDI approaches its work with an understanding of and a respect for the complexities of young people's lives and the critical role of youth-serving organizations in supporting young people's growth and development.

YDI's mission is to increase the capacity of communities to support the development of young people. YDI provides technical assistance, conducts research, and assists policy-makers in developing more effective approaches to support and offer opportunities to young people. At the core of YDI's work is a research-based approach to youth development. This work is asset-based in focusing on the strengths of young people, organizations and their staff. It seeks to bring together all of the resources in the lives of young people: school, community, and family to build coherent and positive environments. The youth development framework identifies five principles that have been found to be present when youth, especially those with significant obstacles in their lives, achieve successful adulthood:

- * Close relationships with adults
- * High expectations
- * Engaging activities
- * Opportunities for contribution
- * Continuity of adult supports over time

This monograph describes technical assistance strategies and highlights some of YDI's successful applications of these strategies. While not a formal evaluation of technical assistance activities, the background research done for the report shows the multiple ways in which an intermediary's expertise and presence have strengthened youth services in New York City and other communities around the country. Information was gathered through several means:

- * Interviews with staff from community-based organizations in New York City and Minneapolis¹ who participated in different YDI technical assistance activities.
- * Review of materials written by and about the YDI initiatives, including the Beacons and the BEST Initiative (Building Effective Systems of Training).

¹ Minneapolis was one of the six US cities to participate in the 1996 national adaptation project to expand the Beacons model.

- * Interviews with funders and researchers who have had long-standing relationships with the YDI programs.

This monograph provides:

- * An overview of current knowledge about youth development intermediary organizations and their importance in building a youth development infrastructure.
- * Descriptions of YDI's technical assistance and capacity-building strategies and illustrations of its successes as a practitioner-driven capacity-building organization.
- * An exploration of the challenges faced by YDI in its future work.
- * A resource list of curriculum and supporting materials and tools that can be adapted for use by other local capacity-building organizations and their program partners.

BACKGROUND: THEORY OF CHANGE

Effecting change in organizations requires a multilevel approach incorporating both technical assistance and capacity building. YDI's approach, described in more detail later in this report, includes facilitating exchange of information and resources, staff development, structured site visits, organizational support, program development, resource identification, and supportive public policy. Collaborative partnerships with a range of organizations are key.

Youth development intermediaries operate as change agents. They create purposeful, practical interactions between public and private sector institutions and develop networks among local agencies. The overall goal – to build the youth development infrastructure in a locality – requires strategies that connect the interests of government agencies and community organizations with the skills and interests of youth. Intermediaries help the different players identify key gaps between their vision for supports for youth and their ability to implement that vision. A review of studies about technical assistance concluded that, at its heart, building local capacity is about organizing communities of action, facilitating connections to power, and providing the tools and skills for inventing effective strategies for change.²

YDI works in collaborative partnerships with settlement houses, faith-based organizations, after-school and recreational programs, multi-service organizations, schools, and youth employment programs. These networks of organizations that serve youth are linked by a common funding stream, purpose, population, and/or program strategy. YDI collaborates with networks interested in a practitioner-driven, technical-assistance system that will improve their practice and organizational support by embracing the research-based youth development framework described earlier. Its approach is consistent with the best available knowledge about youth development infrastructures and how technical assistance leads to change in organizations.

² *The Intermediary Guidebook: Making and Managing Community Connections for Youth*, (Boston, MA: Jobs for the Future, and New Ways to Work, May 2001). Available at <<http://www.intermediarynetwork.org/>>

BUILDING A YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

In recent years, creating an infrastructure to support the goal of positive development of youth has received increased attention. Several efforts to define and understand such an infrastructure have been initiated. The Center for Youth Development and Policy Research in Washington, DC defines a youth development infrastructure in relation to the following elements:

- * **Strategic planning:** intentional, structured process of defining goals, objectives, and outcomes; setting priorities; and developing action plans for implementation. Locales need commitment from a cross-section of public, private, and non-profit agencies that are willing to learn together, to work together, and to help establish a new political climate that serves as a catalyst for local change.
- * **Information collection and dissemination:** diverse baseline information coupled with developmental indicators and outcomes. This can help locales identify where they are starting, where they want to go, and whether or not they are getting there. Communities need to make a commitment to the collection, analysis, and dissemination of expanded baseline information.
- * **Space analysis:** identification of safe places where young people can go and grow. The community needs to be clear about its space needs and provide opportunities for their improvement.
- * **Financial investment:** knowledge and commitment to the creation of sustainable public and private funding sources. Local leaders from the government, business, community, and non-profit sectors need to understand what is spent on youth, where resources are being targeted, and the desired outcomes of local resource allocations.
- * **Capacity building:** intentional focus on increasing the effectiveness of individuals, direct service programs, organizations, and community systems. This requires a broad range of individuals and organizations that understand the principles of effective youth development and can put them into practice throughout the community.
- * **Informed/organized constituency:** Regular and meaningful opportunities for civic engagement. Communities can arrive at a common purpose

when individuals feel connected to each other, agree on which strategies to pursue, and offer clear messages and practical solutions. These include increasing the level of awareness of youth issues, promoting widespread mobilization and participation through a communitywide commitment, and generating support consistent and sustained funding.

- * **Research, documentation and evaluation:** chronicling the activities and initial outcomes associated with building infrastructure. Locales can learn how strategies are implemented; where strategies lead to the changes sought in information, attitudes, and involvement; and whether these changes lead to practices, policies, and resource allocations that support youth development.³

Intermediaries have an important role to play in developing this infrastructure. In a 2000 report on youth development intermediaries, Joan Wynn (Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago) identified seven roles played by these organizations:⁴

- * Convening and networking
- * Development and dissemination of knowledge
- * Identification and setting of standards
- * Training
- * Management assistance
- * Advocacy and representation
- * Accountability

Wynn's paper also put forth several distinct contributions of intermediaries that may provide a starting point for demonstrating their value and the outcomes for which they can be held accountable:

- * Performance outputs: such things as training provided
- * Participation: agency and staff engagement in activities
- * Penetration: percentages of the field engaged by intermediaries (as a measure of their reach)
- * Representation, advocacy, and policy impact: securing such things as increased funding or legislative initiatives
- * Outcomes: improvements in the field, contributions to quality of programs, or percentage of youth reached

³Based on an interview with Constanca Warren, principal investigator of the evaluation of the New York City Beacons. Warren, Constanca; Brown, Prudence; and Freudenberg, Nicholas, *Evaluation of the New York City Beacons: Summary of Phase I Findings* (New York City: Academy for Educational Development, 1999).

⁴Wynn, Joan, *The Role of Local Intermediary Organizations in the Youth Development Field: Summary*, (Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall Center for Children, 2000).

She concluded, “Local intermediary organizations are uniquely positioned to make a difference to the capacity and impact of youth-serving organizations.”

In 1998, Jobs for the Future and New Ways Workers launched the School-To-Work Intermediary Project to strengthen and raise the public profile of local, state, regional, and national organizations that connect educational institutions, workplaces, and other community resources. Funded by the National School-to-Work Office, a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor and the U.S. Department of Education, the study made the following conclusions:

...these intermediaries are essential to the operational success and long-term sustainability of communitywide efforts to connect youth to the workplace and employers and their workforce to the classroom. In both school-to-work and youth employment settings, these organizations or groups of organizations play key and critical functions in the local youth serving system, adapting activities to meet local opportunity and need. There are four strategic functions that must be fulfilled by one or more institutions in a local community if convening and connecting activities are to be effective and sustainable:

- * Convene Local Leadership: bring together the key leaders in a community and provide a forum for ongoing dialogue and decision-making relative to the implementation and long-term sustainability of School-to-Career (STC).
- * Encourage policies that promote and sustain effective STC practices: intentionally engage in activities that are designed to develop and influence policies that will ensure the sustainability of STC systems and pedagogy.
- * Ensure quality and impact of local efforts: serve as the internal evaluators of the operations and impact of local efforts. Regularly review program performance and adjust strategies as appropriate to ensure success.
- * Broker and/or perform key operational functions, e.g. create and strengthen demand among employers and workplace partners; promote and improve the quality of workplace experiences for all youth; connect youth to appropriate high quality learning experiences; build awareness and buy-in among educators and community partners; create and provide the communications link between all parties.⁵

Intermediaries help to define the youth development infrastructure while also facilitating change within the institutions, organizations, individuals, and policies that give integrity to the infrastructure. While the available research is consistent about the need for intermediaries, it is still difficult to quantify the results of their work. The agencies that receive assistance from intermediaries, such as YDI, attribute to them a variety of improvements in their operations as

⁵ Op. Cit. 2, *The Intermediary Guidebook*.

well as changes in local policies and funding. But more work has to be done to measure and analyze the results of intermediaries work, and, importantly, to convey the significance of both style and substance as essential to the success of intermediary interventions.

YDI'S STRATEGIC APPROACH TO CAPACITY BUILDING

Successful capacity building is distinguished from training by support for multiple levels of the organization: executive directors, administrators, program managers, line staff, and youth. As the old social work adage says, “Start where the client is.” A key to success, reinforced over and over again in the interviews about YDI, is the ability to “read the tea leaves” about the state of the work and to work in tandem with local organizations on issues. The following strengths enable YDI to be an effective resource for the youth development community.

Remain close to practice. YDI draws on the experience of practitioners and maintains close ongoing relationships with them. Many of the activities described in this report exemplify ways that YDI has sought to engage the people who work directly with youth and provide a vehicle for them to articulate, organize, and disseminate their own knowledge about their work.

Be an honest broker. A research-based framework allows YDI to act as a translator and mediator between youth-serving agencies, government institutions, and funding organizations, help those groups come to common ground, and, in some cases, take collective action to resolve key policy issues.

Employ appropriate staff. Staff members must have a deep commitment to the practitioners in the community. They must have a respectful attitude toward community-based organizations, experience working with nonprofits, mature judgment, and the ability to build trusting relationships across the organizations. Staff members need tangible experience in some areas but don't have to be the “experts” in every situation. Agencies describe the importance of having YDI staff recognize the expertise of the community-based organization's staff, be skilled at tapping that expertise, and then complement it with knowledge from the intermediary or other specialists.

Serve as a broker of technical assistance. A small staff can be effective. Although staff members may bring a range of expertise to the work, their major role is to connect agencies to other resources available in the community. YDI uses its capacity as a matchmaker to help agencies take their strengths in programming and match them with new resources or adapt them for existing resources.

Connect agencies to new resources. YDI identifies trends and issues in the field and raises private funds to address them. A re-granting process is used in which YDI designs a request for proposals, seeks out organizations to apply,

and manages a selection process to award grants. Agencies that receive grants through YDI agree to participate in a facilitated network, which works collectively to address key issues.

YDI's re-granting efforts have focused on literacy, teen programming, young adults, community leadership, and other areas. These re-granting initiatives have served to strengthen programs at particular sites and have also contributed to the field, as the networks produced publications, held workshops, or reached out to other agencies.

Have a long-term commitment. Intermediaries must be willing and able to stay with the work over a long period of time. Many agencies have found that technical assistance is forthcoming in the early stages of a new initiative but is rarely available over time.

In the NYC Beacon initiative, YDI continues to provide a level of ongoing support to agencies — from the oldest sites to the newest — in a support system for helping organizations learn and grow over time.

Support advocacy. Endemic to the youth development field are the precarious funding and shifting policies in youth services. The priorities of public and private funders change frequently, leaving agencies scrambling year to year to find sufficient funds to run programs. In New York City, many agencies depend on city funding and a variety of private foundations and corporations. An agency setting out to change policies or funding requirements can become “a marked target” if it does this on its own. YDI has been a catalyst for action around common issues. This helps to diffuse the threat to any one agency for speaking out.

Ultimately, intermediaries like YDI must have a flexible and comprehensive set of skills that makes its work credible with the agencies and these other institutions. YDI frequently gets involved in education and advocacy efforts; it has supported local organizations as well as citywide advocacy groups to help contribute the information that builds the case for stronger programs.

One example of this role is YDI's work on summer jobs. When summer jobs (at that time known as SYEP) were first threatened with significant budget cuts, YDI worked with a group of youth agencies on an effort known as “SYEP Week.” This week focused public attention on the issue of summer jobs for youth, provided a vehicle for youth to get involved in the issue, and offered a series of

employment-related programming for youth. Each day of SYEP Week had a different theme: “Small Business Day” when youth visited the local merchants in their neighborhood and asked them to commit to hiring a young person in the summer; “Community Outreach Day” when young people distributed flyers that they had designed and explained the issue to community residents; and “Action Day” when youth planned and carried out a rally at City Hall. The week culminated in an employment conference at a Beacon site in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. The conference featured presentations and workshops by professionals in several fields, such as media, organizing, and health services. YDI played a central role in bringing people together, facilitating the planning process, and taking on specific tasks as needed by the planners.

In another situation, YDI facilitated strategy sessions with local agencies to dissuade the City’s Department of Youth and Community Development from its plans to cut funding to youth-serving organizations. With YDI’s help, executive directors contacted local government officials and organized young people to make presentations at city council meetings. As a result, the city abandoned its plan and the funding stayed at its current level. This was not only good for the agencies. It also established a level of credibility about the effectiveness of YDI within the nonprofit community. The consensus among agency personnel is that this turnaround in the city funding plan would not have happened without YDI’s intervention and leadership.

PROFILES OF THREE YDI INITIATIVES

Networks for Youth Development

YDI worked in partnership with 14 community-based organizations, over a six-year period, to develop Networks for Youth Development; this was a peer technical assistance project that worked to strengthen youth programs and youth work by integrating youth development theory into practices. Project partners worked to articulate, document, and assess best practices; build a youth development field based on competency and mastery; create a system of staff development; and foster dialogue with policy makers and funders to influence a shift from deficit- driven models to asset-based ones. Networks was committed to disseminating what had been learned and articulated by its members about best practices, outcomes, and core competencies of youth workers. It published its materials in formats that were readily accessible to youth workers and others in the field, and these have been widely distributed (see attached list of publications).

Networks was a working group of youth development organizations who, in partnership with YDI, worked toward the following goals:

- * Identify core competencies for youth workers and develop mechanisms to prepare direct service staff to use these competencies in their day-to-day interactions with youth.
- * Identify “best practices” within the field of youth development and actively participate in the dissemination of these practices.
- * Jointly define the expected positive results of participation in youth development programs (outcomes) and agree to use common assessment measures and instruments.
- * Promote the formation and acceptance of a curriculum of staff development that seeks to support the adoption of the core competencies and shared standards of practice for youth development.
- * Identify organizational supports needed to support youth development.
- * Identify barriers to the institutionalization of “best practices across the field of youth development and devise strategies to overcome these barriers.”⁶

Some of these ideas about competencies, best practices, and outcomes were published as “flip books,” small, sturdy, and handy booklets that are widely used

⁶ Proposal to the Altman Foundation from the Youth Development Institute. (New York City: Youth Development Institute, August 1999).

by organizations throughout this country and abroad.

In addition, Networks developed a set of program and staff development strategies that could be used in collaboration with community-based youth-serving organizations in New York City and elsewhere:

- * Specific goals for positive youth outcomes
- * Tools for measuring program performance
- * Principles of effective organizational structures and good program practices based on knowledge of “real-life” situations as well as theoretical writings and research findings
- * Effective models of professional development for youth and adult staff for use in youth development organizations

The Beacons

Perhaps the best known of YDI’s efforts comes from its role as the technical assistance provider to the Beacons. The New York City Beacons initiative is a school-community-family partnership initiated in 1991 with \$5 million of municipal 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” in selected New York City neighborhoods. As of 2002, the program included 80 Beacons, with at least one operating in each of the 32 local school districts in New York City, and several sites operating in the poorest of the city’s 59 community districts. All sites currently 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 Department of Education by the City’s Department of Youth and Community Development.

Individual Beacons offer children, youth, and adults a wide range of recreation 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. Many Beacons also take an active role in the community by sponsoring activities to make the neighborhood a better place to live.

The Beacons initiative is an important example of a partnership between city government and an external non-profit agency. YDI, with private foundation funding, has provided ongoing support and technical assistance to the Beacons since shortly after the initiative’s inception to help Beacon staff articulate their vision and make it a reality.

YDI has played an important role in conceptualizing and promoting high-quality

youth development programming. YDI offers a wide range of voluntary professional development opportunities for both Beacon directors and their staff members who work with youth to learn the principles and practices of positive youth development. One of YDI's contributions has been regular (at least monthly) convening of Beacon directors. These meetings offer a forum to address policy and practice issues, introduce new programming, and strengthen activities provided through the Beacons. Evaluators have found that sites with staff most frequently attending YDI meetings and training activities had the highest-rated youth development quality and the most positive youth findings.⁷

As part of a larger evaluation of the Beacons, YDI's role was assessed by the Academy for Educational Development. The evaluation findings confirm the substantial contribution to the Beacons initiative made by YDI's ongoing technical assistance. Two-thirds of directors reported attending most YDI meetings and almost three-fifths (59%) reported participating in YDI professional development activities. Two-thirds (68%) of directors also reported frequently sending staff to training opportunities arranged by YDI. Almost all directors (95%) had positive views of YDI's assistance, with 57% describing it as essential to the success of the Beacons initiative and 38% describing it as very helpful.⁸

The BEST Initiative

BEST (Building Effective Systems of Training) was funded by the Wallace Reader's Digest Funds and the Altman Foundation. Its overall goal was to build a coordinated system of staff development for youth workers in New York City that expands training available to youth workers. Its accomplishments were the following:

- * Establishing a credentialing program for youth workers grounded in the youth development framework at senior colleges of the City University of New York. This was accomplished by combining the BEST Collaborative with the Networks for Youth Development Core Competencies Committee. The program awards college credit.
- * Increasing youth development training available to youth workers and expanding the target audience of youth workers to be directly trained by YDI.
- * Expanding the cadre of practitioner-trainers through the "training of trainers" approach.

⁷ Warren, Constancia; Feist, Michelle; and Nevarez, Nancy, *A Place to Grow: Evaluation of the New York City Beacons: Summary Report*, (New York City: Academy for Educational Development, 2002). Report from the second phase of the evaluation of the Beacons.

⁸ *Op. Cit. 3, Evaluation of the New York City Beacons, Summary of Phase I Findings.*

- * Collaborating with the Partnership for After School Education, Lehman College's Institute for Literacy Studies, and the Human Services Workshops of Good Shepherd Services to infuse a youth development framework into relevant areas of training.
- * Working with service providers, government agencies, funders, higher education institutions, and other technical assistance providers to bring the Youth Development Practitioner Apprenticeship (recently approved by the U. S. Department of Labor) to New York City.
- * Continuing dialogue with public and private funders about the need for increased staff development opportunities and the evaluation of programs according to youth development principles.

EIGHT TIERS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Since its inception, YDI has worked to create a coherent system for providing technical assistance to youth-serving organizations. The interlocking components of that system are described below.

Facilitated Exchange

The first component of YDI's technical assistance strategy is bringing together organizational teams from youth-serving organizations in order to exchange ideas and strategies for strengthening operations. These exchanges connect staff across organizations to enable them to develop consensus on best practices. YDI uses this technical assistance strategy to strengthen initiatives, promote youth development among individual staff members and whole organizations, and share information and implementation strategies for best practices in agencies. In addition, facilitated exchange can be used to bring together individuals from organizations that are seeking ways to work together or to resolve larger issues in a community or field of work.

The strategy is exemplified by YDI's experience with the Networks for Youth Development project. In it, YDI accomplished the following:

- * Worked through committees with representation from all Networks agencies to examine issues particularly germane to improving youth development programs
- * Developed a core group of program sites that can be technical assistance providers to other agencies
- * Redefined assessment methodology based on best practices of youth development
- * Conducted peer assessment of best practices and developed peer recommendations for strengthening practice
- * Developed and implemented participatory evaluation of positive youth outcomes

Facilitated exchange was one of the activities cited by all of the agencies interviewed as having the most impact on them as professionals. The networks established by YDI provided a means for sharing information, strategies, and concerns in a safe environment; staff from different organizations related to one another in a cooperative rather than a competitive fashion. Many of them met for the first time through these exchanges, which they came to see as the places where beneficial new ideas could be generated.

Program Assessment

A growing part of YDI's work is supporting programs and organizations to assess and strengthen their work. This process requires them to become familiar with data collection tools and to integrate data collection and analysis into decision-making. YDI helps organizations answer two main questions: (1) Is their work making a difference for young people? (2) How do specific strategies and practices affect their success with young people?

When YDI works with an organization, it begins by conducting an assessment — examining their mission and goals, looking at what practices are in place and how these practices align with what we know about youth success. This assessment is done collaboratively with the program staff and involves both observation and discussion. It is also ongoing, as initial impressions will continue to be refined as the work moves forward. Part of the assessment focuses on what data is available and how data is collected and used. This information is important in shaping the work ahead. Information about the numbers of participants, their levels of participation, and their outcomes enables those who operate programs to determine if they are meeting the program goals, and building the strengths and addressing the needs of young people.

In one example of this aspect of assistance, YDI together with New York City Beacon directors created and implemented a self-assessment. YDI engaged Beacons in a process designed to help them collect information to enable them to reflect on and improve the quality of their work. YDI worked with Beacon directors to identify key components of a high quality Beacon program. The Quality Reflection Tool that was developed as a result of this process can be used by a wide range of afterschool and youth development programs to encourage assessment and reflection by staff. The tool includes questions designed to address both the management and programming of Beacons. YDI published a report, *A Look Inside Beacons: From a Practitioner's Perspective*, that discusses the process used to develop the tool, the features of the tool itself, and cross-site findings from the first round of completion and implications. YDI has used information from the report to frame technical assistance supports for staff and directors as well as look for public policy implications.

While numbers may seem easy to obtain, often the process of collecting and using data proves demanding. Staff must be trained, have systems, preferably electronic, though paper systems can also be helpful. Time must be allocated to collection and entry, and there must be a process for reviewing the data and assessing its value. Thus, the development of capacity to collect and use data often works in parallel with other types of organizational and program assistance.

Within the Young Adult Capacity Initiative, a program to increase the ability of community organizations to serve young adults who are out of school or at the margins, YDI worked with five organizations to develop and implement a system to track information about young adults in their programs. A database, developed by the Fund for the City of New York's technology unit, helped organizations manage the services they provide on a daily basis, to track young adults' progress toward meeting their own goals, and measure formal program outcomes, such as job placement and getting a GED.

Staff Development

Building the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes to work effectively with youth has become a hallmark of YDI's work. It has developed a succession of professional development opportunities for staff at all levels of youth-serving organizations and increased recognition of the need for a trained, professional workforce to deliver high quality services and programs.

When YDI began its operations, youth workers, administrators, and managers generally received little, if any, training for their jobs. The field had not yet made a commitment to workforce development in the same way as teachers or other professionals in the human services arena. YDI began by tackling skill building at multiple levels: basic training of staff using the Advancing Youth Development curriculum⁹; regular in-service workshops on specific topics such as literacy, teen outreach, parent involvement, and management issues; and training of trainers to make skills and information available to many more organizations

In an article for a journal on afterschool issues, YDI staff laid out a checklist for "youth development-based staff training," including elements for setting up caring and trusting relationships, engaging activities, opportunities for contributions from participants, setting high expectations, and establishing means for continuity and connections after the training ends.¹⁰ This article helped spread the best practices of training in a youth development setting for the agencies within its reach but also to other communities and organizations around the country. Through dissemination of promising practices, YDI influenced the establishment of a profession of youth work.

A particularly successful effort has been its collaboration with the City University of New York (CUNY). YDI's credentialing committee (which grew

⁹ The Advancing Youth Development curriculum was created by the Academy for Educational Development with funds from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. It was the first basic training curriculum widely used to prepare youth workers for their jobs

¹⁰ Mates, Jessica, and Rice, Arva, "Check It Off!: A Youth Development Approach to Staff Training," in *AfterSchool Matters: Dialogues in Philosophy, Practice and Evaluation*, (New York: Children and the Classics. Vol. 1, no. 1, Summer 2000: pp 52-54).

out of the Networks for Youth Development initiative) brought together youth program directors, training organizations, academicians, and CUNY administrators. YDI's skill as a broker among institutions was critical to getting this program off the ground. Its persistence and knowledge helped move the approval process through the university while marketing the program to funders, youth workers, and youth-serving agencies as a tool for improving youth work practice. Using the range of competencies needed for successful youth work that YDI developed in partnership with youth-serving organizations, the committee identified potential avenues for competency development, and wrote parts of the curriculum. This led to the establishment of the CUNY Youth Workers Certification program.

Fourteen youth workers graduated from the program's first cohort. The program is now in its second cohort, with two CUNY campuses offering classes (Lehman College and NY Technical College). YDI has an ongoing role in supporting and upgrading the program and providing technical assistance to agencies.

In YDI's other training, hundreds of youth workers have gained new skills and knowledge. They develop and use a common language with which to articulate their work practices. The impact of this cannot be overstated. Agencies use the training as a means of building consensus about the purposes and practices of their youth development programs and philosophy. Agencies report that their staff members who attend the training have more skills when designing youth programs and can implement them in a high quality manner. Training also prepares many staff members for promotion to managers and directors in their agencies or gives them the type of qualifications with which to make job changes to new venues.

YDI was also part of a larger national initiative to expand professional development opportunities for youth workers called the BEST Initiative, which is described earlier on page 10. Through BEST, YDI has achieved the following:

- * Increased the coherence and depth of training experiences for youth workers by involving leadership of training entities and youth-serving organizations.
- * Supported a system of staff development that continues to build on the work of networks of practitioners in defining effective practices, core competencies of youth workers, and positive youth outcomes through training of service providers as well as development of a cadre of practitioner-trainers.
- * Infused the youth development framework into other training institutes.
- * Incorporated a wide range of traditional and nontraditional, academic and experiential training methodologies and used practitioner-trainers in order to ensure that training is informed by the best practices available.

- * Improved access to and use of training opportunities for youth workers across the range of nonprofit and public agencies in order to increase the number of youth workers receiving training.

The training impact is now seen in how agencies interact with other organizations trying to improve their youth worker practices. For example, one agency where staff received training with the Advancing Youth Development curriculum incorporated it into its work in Budapest, Hungary, when asked to replicate youth programs in that country.

Structured Site Visits

Structured site visits are used for two purposes: to allow practitioners to see what others in the field are doing and to demonstrate the principles of youth development in action. Practitioners have opportunities to talk about and demonstrate their work and learn new strategies from their peers to improve programming. The site visits become a major vehicle for people to learn from and support each other on the ground level.

An important outcome of the Networks for Youth Development project was the creation of peer assessments by the Best Practices Committee. These tools were used to assess youth development practices within agencies and were based on the best practices guide (The Guided Tour of Youth Development). The Best Practices Committee developed a set of instruments (observation and interview forms) and structured a protocol that would facilitate an in-depth look at an agency. These tools can be adapted by participating agencies working with YDI to fit their particular needs and available time. Assessment teams included agency staff, both from the agency being assessed and other youth development agencies, YDI staff, and two young people. All team members were trained in assessment techniques and use of the tools. Two site visits were made to the agency; interviews were conducted with the executive director, site manager, four staff members (of which one had to be part-time and one had to be someone other than a direct service provider), and three groups of young people, divided roughly by age.

Peer assessments create a structure that guide what staff should look for during their visits. Youth workers who are part of the assessment team are excited by these visits, as they come away with ideas for changes they can make in their own work or in their own program. However, the peer assessments are mainly for the use of the agency being assessed. Agencies can benefit from the experience by using the assessment as a mechanism to focus specifically on youth development practices within their agency.

YDI collects the information from the observations and aggregates the written comments, producing a report for the assessed agency. Strengths and challenges are broken down by youth development principles: caring relationships, engaging activities, high expectations, opportunities for youth contribution, and continuity of supports. The reports offer suggestions for improvement or resources that may be helpful in addressing a particular challenge.

Organizational Support

Another component of YDI's approach consists of creating opportunities for managers and administrators to discuss issues within their organizations and how best to sustain stronger management systems. YDI formed an "organizational support committee" composed primarily of agency executive directors and youth service directors. The committee spent a great deal of time hashing out definitions and parameters for its work. It focused on the elements organizations needed to support youth development practices. The committee identified categories of organizational components based on existing research and practical experience. These categories included budgeting, staff development, program planning, and community connections. The committee then developed descriptions of ways in which these categories should be handled to best support youth development and supplemented the descriptions with particular indicators (e.g., budget developed with input from staff). The committee worked hard to ensure that work focused not on generic principles of good management but on those related specifically to youth development. YDI facilitated the discussions and provided written documents on the articulated organizational components.

The premises behind this component are that the entire organizational structure and climate must focus on youth development and that individual changes in worker practices alone cannot strengthen the quality of programs.

Another way that YDI provided organizational support was through its willingness to engage the entire staff or youth department at an agency in training or technical assistance. Interviewees routinely cited YDI's on-site training capacity as an important tactic for ensuring whole organization change, not just change at an individual level.

Program Development

The goals of the program development efforts are to identify gaps or weaknesses in the structure of supports and opportunities available to young people and to provide start-up resources and technical assistance. In addition, as program staff learn more effective ways to operate their programs, they become experts in particular program areas and can then act as mentors to staff in other programs within their agency or in other organizations.

YDI is sometimes able to provide grants to agencies to make changes in their

programming. In 1998, for example, YDI served as the intermediary for the Community Leadership Initiative funded by the Open Society Institute. This grant provided flexible funding to focus new program development on teen populations. The Community Counseling and Mediation Center received a \$40,000 grant for each of three years to create its Leadership and Education Attainment Project. To complement the grant funds, YDI staff helped the Center identify models for its leadership program and trained staff on new techniques for working with older teens. Out of this three-year pilot, the agency was able to expand the program into three components: a community service program funded by Americorps; the Career and College Circle funded with Workforce Investment Act funds; and the Assets Coming Together for Youth community organizing project funded by the New York State Department of Health. Staff members at the Center contend that their ability to work with the older teen population and to develop their offerings beyond the initial program was due to the ongoing technical assistance from YDI.

YDI also developed a youth leadership/employment model known as the Community Youth Employment Program (CYEP). Through this initiative, YDI works with a variety of programs and institutions in which youth are involved (foster care agencies, faith-based institutions, Beacons) to create a program in which teams of young people conduct community assessments and implement community action projects. Other features of the program include “community treasure hunts,” the distribution of mini-grants, writing projects, and culmination ceremonies. YDI designed this initiative, raised funds for re-granting, manages multiple sites, trains and provides technical assistance to management, line staff, and youth, and conducts documentation and evaluation at all sites.

YDI’s program development strategies have enabled it to create long-lasting relationships with organizations, bring to them the best knowledge available about effective practices, and act as a “supportive ally” rather than a monitor. Because of YDI’s connections with many different agencies working on similar issues (e.g. developing programs for older teens or out-of-school youth), it is positioned to disseminate best practices widely throughout the field. The resource list at the end of this report includes products created by YDI to share program practices.

Often, program development activities result in a variety of changes in agency services. For example, under Networks, agencies made changes like the following:

- * Reopened school space for middle school youth and partnered with a sports organization to develop sports and recreation programming geared to appropriate developmental competencies.
- * Reconfigured space so that there was room for both private counseling and

for youth to congregate during non-scheduled times.

- * Adopted an outreach strategy combined with a “club” format to increase participation by out-of-school youth who were not previously served by the agency.
- * Established a “primary person system” — a system for assuring that each participant had a close adult support and contact.
- * Restructured its youth programs so that they could be coordinated by a new position of “Youth Development Specialist” located at its Beacon program.

Tools and Information Development

An important part of YDI’s role is to locate, translate or interpret, and create information on a wide variety of topics that can be of use to youth-serving organizations. The goal of finding, sharing, and developing such resources is to support the improvement of practice.

The field has an ever-growing knowledge base that is still being converted into written documents, products, and/or tools usable by a wide variety of audiences. YDI translates materials into more useful formats. For example, it has designed one-page tip sheets of important information on schooling, community outreach, and professional development opportunities and has created resource lists on youth leadership, parent involvement, after-school education, and summer activities, to name a few topics.

YDI staff members also fill the gap in information and resources by developing original products. The publication *Beacons* and *After School Education: Making Literacy Links* came about as a result of a demand for information on the ways literacy is addressed in *Beacons*. Another publication, *So You Want to Work with Youth*, assists youth workers in providing young people with supports and opportunities to develop skills and meet their basic needs. This book grew out of the need to assist organizations that wanted to help their staff work more effectively not only with young people but also with youth staff. A range of other products can be found in the Resource Section of this report.

YDI frequently identifies quality and relevant curricula for new types of programs and trains its own staff so that it can deliver the curriculum to practitioners. Examples of this include the TOP (Teen Outreach Program) curriculum, *Street Law*, and *Community Works*. (For this and other publications, see resource list on page 31.)

Advancing Public Policy

The goal of YDI's public policy work is to shift the funding climate from one based on deficit-drive models to one based on youth development principles. YDI's efforts in this area inform public policy and funding practices that effect how youth organizations carry out their work, clarify what types of resources and supports youth organizations have access to, and promote development of long-term funding streams to sustain youth programs.

YDI's parent organization, the Fund for the City of New York, plays a key role in New York City government through its close relationships at multiple levels, expertise, and ability to address a wide range of issues through targeted assistance without regard to the political party in power. The Fund's high level of involvement with government is an important factor in enabling YDI to gain the attention of key policy makers.

YDI participates in policy discussions on many levels. It communicates with elected officials at the state and city level and participates in several national efforts that generate public debate and advocate for strong youth programming. Some examples of the latter are the Coalition for Community Schools, Cross-Cities Network, the Center for Youth Development's Community-Building Intermediaries Network, and the National Training Institute for Community Youth Work's BEST initiative. YDI helps shape government policy through a strong relationship with the NYC's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD). YDI worked with DYCD and the NYC Department of Education to develop a series of dialogues between Beacon Directors and principals so that they could build relationships based on their common interest in supporting young people. YDI developed sessions, hired and trained consultants to facilitate meetings, and generally focused these conversations. The dialogues dealt with the issues of most importance to the quality of services and to overcoming the barriers presented by different professional training, pedagogy, and rules and regulations governing the use of educational resources.

YDI is often in the position of translating new requirements from DYCD for the Beacons. After DYCD required Beacons to write a policy and procedures manual, YDI developed a prototype and training for Beacons staff to help them in this process. The manual documented governance and operations of Beacons, including youth development principles for operational as well as practice aspects, such as involving youth in rule setting. Under YDI's direction, the manual had an expanded focus to address plans for staff development as well as relationships between the Beacons and the families and children who participated.

Another example of YDI's ability to turn policy into thoughtful program implementation involved the Beacons that manage foster care preventive service programs at their sites. Beginning in 1992, YDI worked with Beacons to help design and integrate a preventive services model into regular programming and

convened focus groups to help document the results of these programs. On a number of occasions funding was cut for these programs and YDI mobilized the Beacons' organizations and helped to inform government so that funding was restored.

Finally, YDI's policy-related work results in the creation of new entities, which often cross professional and organizational boundaries between government agencies, schools, and community-based organizations. For example, YDI was instrumental in developing the Partnership for Afterschool Education (PASE), which conducts extensive training programs for youth workers in New York City. It joined in the effort to develop an "afterschool work group" at the city's Board of Education to strengthen the relationship between the Board (now Department) of Education and community organizations that provide programs in the schools.

CONCLUSION:

MAKING CHANGE AT THREE LEVELS

YDI's work can be grouped together in three categories. The first is **change in individual staff members** who work in youth development organizations or are involved as funders, monitors, or researchers. Staff interviewed for this report identified the following key changes:

- * Change in their skills, which led to improving service delivery in their organization.
- * Recognition of their value, which was demonstrated by the number of people who have been promoted to increasingly responsible positions as a result of participating in various YDI training and other professional development activities.
- * Stronger connections to the field of youth development that allows them to see their role as an important link in resources for youth and their families.

The second is **change at the organizational level**. Agencies that received technical assistance from YDI made changes in their structures, goals, services, and program approaches as a result. YDI helped them to create expectations about outcomes for youth and increased the agencies' abilities to assess their program strategies against their goals for youth. Agencies that operated the Community Youth Employment Program, for example, often had their first experience in managing a program with such a high level of youth participation. Handbooks to guide their assessments, developed by YDI in partnership with local agencies, were effective only in conjunction with changed attitudes about the purposes of assessments. YDI changed the perspectives of both agencies and funding institutions about these purposes, advocating the notion of assessment as a process for improving program operations in addition to monitoring for compliance.

The third is the **impact on the youth development field** in New York City. YDI has added both to the strength of the service delivery system and to the policy and funding climate that supports that system. In fact, YDI has tackled nearly all the elements of the field's infrastructure to help move the work of various parties in a consistent, purposeful direction. The creation of the Partnership for After School Education to provide ongoing training for youth workers and the creation of the certificate for youth workers in conjunction with the City University of New York are good examples. These programs have added strength to the professional development opportunities for current and future youth workers.

Successful youth development intermediaries cannot operate in a vacuum.

The importance of having a means of applying what they know about connecting the various parts of the field are essential. YDI without the Beacons or Networks would have become just another training institution and likely have had little effect on the overall picture of what is available to support youth in the city.

YDI is successful in large measure due to its ability to tackle several areas in the field simultaneously, be proactive and attentive to multiple points of view when addressing issues, and continuously draw flexible and knowledgeable staff into its circle of hands-on provision of support to local agencies. YDI has successfully translated its youth development expertise into usable knowledge and skills across different arenas – the schools, workforce preparation, and foster care. In other words, YDI's expertise is relevant for any system in which children and youth are a major focus. Currently, YDI works with Workforce Investment Act contractors, using many of the same approaches used with Beacons and other agencies, such as professional networking and staff training. YDI also works with high schools, faith-based institutions, and foster care agencies.

The importance of an on-the-ground practice opportunity cannot be overstressed. In its partnership with the Beacons, YDI has a platform for increasing and strengthening its ever-growing repertoire of technical assistance activities that can be responsive to agencies over the long term.

Demand for YDI's expertise has gone beyond the City. It is viewed as one of the leading “thinking and doing” organizations in the country. As a result, it has been called on to help other cities create or strengthen local intermediary organizations as well as work on the development of Beacons.

Challenges for the Future

By all accounts, the Youth Development Institute is a premier example of how intermediary organizations can change the face of youth development in local communities. It continues working at the various levels of the youth development infrastructure and maintains its connections to the direct service agency partners it has developed over the years. Several challenges are a part of its current and future work:

1. Providing advanced levels of training and assistance for the more mature and experienced agencies while also providing support to less experienced agencies.
2. Maintaining neutrality while continuing its role as an advocate for youth, parents, and the organizations and institutions that serve them.
3. Strengthening its connections to city and state governments as these entities take on a more central role in funding and regulating youth-serving agencies.
4. Engaging policy makers in government and among private funders in

conversations about core issues of youth development and infrastructure as new interests and political pressures push them to focus on new concerns.

5. Maintaining a role for YDI as an incubator for new projects and segments of the field. YDI will continue to make decisions as to when it should move a specific function or project to another institution (e.g., the CUNY credentialing program) or help create a new evolving task.
6. Staying within a specified set of parameters to define the work and allow for concentrations of effort, expertise, and energy that support forward movement in the field.
7. Balancing the need for continued work in the arena of youth programs with the growing demand to bring youth development into schools.

PEOPLE INTERVIEWED FOR THE REPORT

Martha Cameron, Former Director of Youth Development, Childrens Aid Society
Theresa Greenberg, Assistant Executive Director, Forest Hills Community House
John Kixmiller, Director, Center for Family Life
Marie Louis, Program Director, Community Counseling and Mediation
Pablo Tejada, Program Director, Grand Street Settlement
Michele Cahill, Senior Counselor to the Chancellor,
New York City Department of Education
Constancia Warren, Senior Program Officer,
Academy for Educational Development
Doris Baylor, Director, YMCA of Metropolitan Minneapolis
Matt Kjorstad, Manager, Beacons Minneapolis,
YMCA of Metropolitan Minneapolis
Laurie Dien, Program Officer, Pinkerton Foundation
Joan Colello, Executive Director, Pinkerton Foundation
Chris Bell, Program Officer, Pinkerton Foundation
Howard Knoll, Manager of National Programs, Arbor Education Training
Jean Thomases, Consultant, Youth Development Institute
Jessica Mates, Deputy Director, Youth Development Institute
Constancia Warren, Senior Program Officer, Carnegie Corporation of New York

RESOURCE LIST

Training Guides

- * A Guided Tour of Youth Development, 2nd Edition, 1998
- * Beacons and Afterschool Education: Making Literacy Links
- * Beacons and Youth Development: So You Want to Work With Youth?
- * Core Competencies for Youth Work
- * The Handbook for Positive Youth Outcomes, 2nd Edition, 1998

Program Descriptions:

- * Beacon Profiles, 2001
- * Connecting Learning/Relationships: A Guide to Family Group, 2003
- * Ten Programs for Teens, 2001
- * Youth Building Stronger Communities: Community Youth Employment Program (CYEP), 1999

Research:

- * A Place to Grow: Evaluation of the New York City Beacons, 2002
- * Primary Person System: Symposium Report, 2000
- * Youth Development and Family Strengthening: A Study of Emerging Connections, 2001

For more information: www.fcny.org-YDIpublications.

To order contact: YDI publications

(212) 925-6675

ydipubs@fcny.org

ABOUT THE FUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The Fund for the City of New York was initiated by the Ford Foundation in

1968 with the goal of improving the quality of life for all New Yorkers. The Fund assists in the implementation of programs, practice, policy, and technology to advance nonprofit organization and government functioning.

Board of Directors

Robert Curvin

Chairman

Robert Abrams

Allen Boston

Robert A. Caro

David C. Chang

Dall W. Forsythe

Ester Fuchs

Robert G.M. Keating

Paulette LoMonaco

E. Leo Milonas

John M.B. O'Connor

Directors

Mary McCormick

President

Barbara J. Cohen

Peter Kleinbard

Alfonso Wyatt

Vice Presidents

ABOUT THE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Youth Development Institute (YDI), one of three units of the Fund, seeks to

improve the capacity of communities to support the development of young people. At the core of YDI's work is a research-based framework for youth development. This framework identifies the type of experiences that have been found to be present when young people, especially those with great obstacles in their lives, achieve successful adulthood. These guiding principles are: close relationships with caring adults, high expectations, engaging activities, youth participation and continuity of supports. YDI applies these principles through technical assistance, research, training and other activities. YDI assists public and private policy-makers to increase resources and to develop programs and policies that support young people.

YDI assists youth practitioners, locally and nationally, to build their skills and knowledge in youth development. This work is interdisciplinary and addresses youth employment, education, after-school and non-school hour programs. YDI engages youth workers from these and other fields in sharing and developing their ideas. YDI conducts training, provides organizational support, facilitates networks of youth workers, and raises and distributes funds to support special programs. YDI has also worked with the City University of New York to create a college course that provides 12 college credits and a certificate for youth workers. YDI's publications on youth development are widely distributed among government, funders and others to support their work with youth. YDI receives support from a wide number of private funders including:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| The Altman Foundation | The William T. Grant Foundation |
| The Lily Auchincloss Foundation, Inc. | The John A. Hartford Foundation, Inc. |
| The Booth Ferris Foundation | The Charles Hayden Foundation |
| The Louis Calder Foundation | The William H. Hearst Foundation |
| The Annie E. Casey Foundation | The W.K. Kellogg Foundation |
| The Citibank Community Fund | WBI I Fund/McCormick Tribune |
| The Citizens Committee for NYC | The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation |
| The Clark Foundation | The New York Community Trust |
| The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation | Open Society Institute |
| The Ford Foundation | The Philanthropic Collaborative |
| National Funding Collaborative for Violence Prevention | The Pinkerton Foundation |
| The Bernard & Alva Gimbel Foundation | The Daniel & Joanna Rose Fund |
| The Wallace Reader's Digest Funds | The Vivendi Universal Fund |