

MUNICIPAL LEADERSHIP FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN SMALL AND MID-SIZED CITIES



About the National League of Cities Institute for Youth, Education and Families

The National League of Cities (NLC) is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. Working in partnership with the 49 state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource to and an advocate for the more than 19,000 cities, villages and towns it represents.

The Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute), a special entity within NLC, helps municipal leaders take action on behalf of the children, youth, and families in their communities. NLC launched the YEF Institute in January 2000 in recognition of the unique and influential roles that mayors, city councilmembers, and other local leaders play in strengthening families and improving outcomes for children and youth.

Through the YEF Institute, municipal officials and other community leaders have direct access to a broad array of strategies and tools, including:

- Action kits and other publications that offer a menu of practical steps that officials can take to address key problems or challenges.
- Technical assistance projects in selected communities.
- Peer networks and learning communities focused on specific program areas.
- The National Summit on Your City's Families and other workshops, leadership academies, training sessions, and cross-site meetings.
- Targeted research and periodic surveys of local officials.
- The YEF Institute's monthly webinar series.

To learn more about these tools and other aspects of the YEF Institute's work, go to www.nlc.org/iyef.

CASE STUDIES

Rapid City, South Dakota

Overview

Since 2007, the Rapid City Task Force for Strengthening Families has made steady progress in its efforts to improve the lives of children, youth and families throughout the city. Some of the most notable achievements are a new 24/7 mental health and substance abuse crisis center, a pilot initiative to expand access to high-quality pre-kindergarten, a model youth civic engagement initiative, South Dakota's first "Bank On" program to reduce reliance on high-cost check cashers, new reentry services to reduce recidivism among formerly incarcerated residents, and a sharpened focus on the root causes of truancy and failure to graduate from high school.

Even more impressive is the Task Force's ability to foster these achievements on a shoestring budget as it coordinated the work of eight committees that each set goals for their chosen topic areas. The extraordinary dedication of elected officials and senior municipal staff, close collaboration with local foundations and community organizations, and consensus around a common family strengthening vision are among the key ingredients for the Task Force's success. Rapid City's experience reveals the vast potential for local governments in small cities – working hand-in-hand with other community institutions – to make a difference in the lives of children and families.



Some of the most notable achievements of the Rapid City Task Force for Strengthening Families are a new 24/7 mental health and substance abuse crisis center, a pilot initiative to expand access to high-quality pre-kindergarten, a model youth civic engagement initiative, South Dakota's first "Bank On" program to reduce reliance on high-cost check cashers, new reentry services to reduce recidivism among formerly incarcerated residents, and a sharpened focus on the root causes of truancy and failure to graduate from high school.

What Challenges Motivated City Leaders to Act?

With a population of 68,000, Rapid City is the second largest municipality in South Dakota. It serves as a gateway for South Dakota's most visited tourist attractions, including Mount Rushmore, Crazy Horse Memorial, the Black Hills and the Badlands. Major employers in this metropolitan community's largely service-based economy include Ellsworth Air Force Base, Rapid City Regional Hospital, the Rapid City School District, city, state and federal government, and the South Dakota National Guard. Local citizens elect the mayor separately from the rest of the Common Council, which is composed of two aldermen representing each ward; all officials serve two-year terms. The mayor presides at Common Council meetings but only votes to break a tie, has the power to veto Council ordinances, resolutions and budget line items, and appoints agency heads with Council approval as the city government's chief executive officer.

In its application for an NLC technical assistance initiative, municipal officials highlighted several unique demographic and socioeconomic challenges that affect the community and its families, particularly among the city's Native American minority. Currently, eight of the nation's 32 poorest counties fall within the community's market service area, including the Pine Ridge, Eagle Butte and Rosebud Indian Reservations. With few employment opportunities available on the reservations, many of these residents move to the city, but find themselves unable to afford relatively high housing costs on low-wage jobs. City leaders described a "revolving door" cycle in which families move back and forth between Rapid City and the reservations, with some children pulled out of school or transferred to new schools up to five or six times per year. Families' lack of transportation and communication breakdowns between Rapid City and reservation school districts have also contributed to interruptions in schooling.

Economic conditions have exacerbated many of these challenges in recent years, as an increasing number of individuals and families in Rapid City have struggled to find stable housing. The Black Hills Regional Homeless Coalition, which conducts an annual homeless count, found that the region's homeless population swelled between 2007 and 2010. Many of the homeless are children. Out of a school district with about 13,500 students, more than 600 children were homeless during the 2010-11 school year. That number grew to more than 700 in the 2011-12 school year.

Rapid City's poverty rate was nearly 16 percent between 2007 and 2011, according to U.S. Census data.¹⁷ Within Rapid City proper, Native Americans comprise 12 percent of the population but a disproportionate number of residents who lack homes, jobs, and high school educations. Nearly half of Native American students do not graduate from high school on time. Drug and alcohol addictions, higher suicide rates, and discrimination impose additional hardships on this segment of the community.

City leaders had already begun to focus more attention on children, youth and family outcomes before the recession occurred. Alderman Lloyd LaCroix, whose uncle served as Rapid City's first Native American mayor for five terms between 1975 and 1987, took the first step in initiating the city's family strengthening agenda after participating in NLC's Congressional City Conference in March 2007. There, Alderman LaCroix interacted with youth delegates from cities across the country who participate in this annual convening, learning of the many positive youth engagement activities in their communities. Motivated by a deep commitment to ensure that Rapid City youth have more opportunities than he had when he

was younger, Alderman LaCroix asked then-Mayor Alan Hanks to form a Task Force for Strengthening Families and Improving Outcomes for Children and Youth. Guided by NLC's *City Platform for Strengthening Families*, which was adopted by the Rapid City Common Council in July 2007, and led by Alderman LaCroix and Alderman Malcom Chapman, the Task Force would determine what services were available for children and youth, identify gaps, set priorities, and develop a plan for achieving annual goals.



“My personal experience is that many people in our community struggle with the pressures of work, family and addictions that affect their home life and their children’s development,” said LaCroix at the time. “It is crucial that we provide the community with the information and resources necessary to assist parents and children in strengthening their family bonds and developing the skills needed to set personal goals and achieve them.”

Local leaders described some of the most pressing problems at several forums held throughout the spring. At an annual community “listening session” hosted by United Way of the Black Hills, State Circuit Court Judge Merton Tice, Jr., expressed concern about new state legislation affecting local youth. Emphasizing that truancy is often a symptom of deeper problems such as bullying or mental health issues, Judge Tice directed attention toward a South Dakota law that would take effect in 2009 requiring young people to be in school until age 18 or graduation. To prevent more young people from entering the juvenile court system for truancy charges, he urged stronger collaborative action to keep these youth in school. During an early task force meeting, Circuit Judge Janine Kern noted that children were being brought to juvenile court for truancy and drug charges at younger ages. Social service agency leaders underscored the higher dropout rates for Native American children, a lack of awareness of existing programs combined with service gaps in other areas, and the need for better cross-agency communication and city and community involvement in developing solutions.

Another primary source of information was a community needs assessment conducted by the local Chiesman Center for Democracy’s Institute for Educational Leadership and Evaluation in 2006 at the request of a consortium that included the city, United Way, school district and nonprofit agencies. The foundation designed separate questionnaires for local residents and service providers. By working together to support a single, comprehensive needs assessment, the city and agencies saved money in identifying unmet local needs and developing long-term plans. To delve deeper into housing issues, the

Mayor's Task Force on Affordable Housing and Black Hills Regional Homeless Coalition developed its own separate assessment. Strategic plans for the city, school district and the Youth Serving Organizations Alliance, as well as ongoing meetings of the Judicial Education Truancy Task Force and other existing groups, further informed the local goal-setting process.

The information gathered by these entities provided a basis for early discussions, but Task Force priorities evolved over time. Ultimately, Task Force members decided that the most urgent concerns included truancy and dropout rates, mental health and substance abuse, early childhood development and child care, youth involvement in the community and government, affordable housing and homelessness, asset building and poverty reduction, reentry from incarceration, and access to transportation for high-need residents. By concentrating on these areas, the Task Force would strive to improve outcomes for youth and better equip parents to meet their families' needs.

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- Former Rapid City Alderman Lloyd LaCroix

What Steps Did the City Take to Get Started and What Partners Did It Bring to the Table?

The Task Force used NLC's *City Platform for Strengthening Families* as a framework for its activities and exemplified the "essential infrastructure" for sustained progress on behalf of children, youth and families that the Platform calls on cities to develop. The Task Force itself represented the first plank of this infrastructure by bringing together leaders from the public, private and nonprofit sectors – as well as parents and other residents – to identify needs and priorities. Rapid City staff also transformed the Platform into a self-assessment tool to create a snapshot of progress to date in each of the Platform's action areas.

Building on strong working relationships across these sectors, local officials and foundation directors secured commitments from several key leaders to participate in the Task Force Board as the city applied for an NLC technical assistance initiative. Early board members included Mayor Hanks, Aldermen LaCroix and Chapman, Judge Kern, the school board president, United Way and foundation leaders, a retired police chief and state legislator, a county commissioner, school district administrators, the chamber of commerce president and CEO, the state's attorney office, and community organizations. Alderman LaCroix reached out to the community by giving presentations to other stakeholder groups. As word of the initiative spread, more people began asking to join the Task Force, which grew to 46 members by January 2008.

Barb Garcia, the city's community development manager, also served on the Task Force and played the central coordinating role for its family strengthening work. In addition to overseeing Rapid City's

affordable housing, homelessness and community development programs and its code enforcement services, Garcia convened Task Force meetings as well as most of the early committee meetings focused on individual topic areas. After narrowing down the list of priority issues, the Task Force established five committees (later expanded to eight), with agency partners asked to lead each committee's work. For instance, South Dakota Voices for Children spearheaded the early childhood group's efforts. Lifeways, a nonprofit alcohol and drug prevention program serving area schools, led the charge in engaging adolescent youth. Each committee agreed to implement evidence-based practices, avoid duplicating services, and set and accomplish one major goal per year.

In deciding how to approach specific issues, Rapid City leaders worked with NLC to learn from other cities throughout the country. For instance, LaCroix and Garcia brought back ideas from San Antonio, Texas, after attending NLC's biennial National Summit on Your City's Families in September 2007 with a community team. They were joined by a state representative, city and school district staff, and the director of a local philanthropy called the John T. Vucurevich Foundation. At the Summit, the team learned about various strategies, such as a "poverty simulation" developed by the Missouri Association for Community Action that cities such as San Antonio and Savannah, Ga., have used to build public support for poverty reduction initiatives. The simulations help local officials, the business community and residents gain a better understanding of the day-to-day economic and bureaucratic barriers that families in poverty must overcome to make ends meet.

On many issues, Task Force committees first sought more information. When the newly-formed Rapid City Area Council on Early Care and Education worked with employers to survey working parents, they found that concerns about the cost and quality of child care were most prominent.



They also found that the city's lowest-income residents were much more likely to rely on family, friend and neighbor care arrangements compared with other families, and that three out of five respondents had missed work due to lack of child care. Focus groups of child care and pre-kindergarten education providers shed additional light on local needs.

Chaired by Lifeways Executive Director Paula Wilkinson-Smith, the youth engagement committee discussed ways to elicit direct input from young people through the schools. The transportation committee surveyed various transportation and social service agencies to assess the feasibility of creating a common van system so that counseling staff would not have to transport clients themselves to work sites and appointments for services.

In other cases, collaborative efforts that had emerged in isolation were brought under the

auspices of the task force. Jeff Norris, the deputy chief of court services for the state's Seventh Circuit Court, was one of several key players who had launched the Abolish Chronic Truancy Now (ACT-Now) program and worked with the police department, sheriff's office, Pennington County State's Attorney Office and Juvenile Diversion Program, schools, and social service agencies to form a truancy court. Deepening collaboration with elementary school principals, earlier reporting and intervention, and efforts to engage older youth in mentoring students who are making the transition to high school presented new opportunities to better understand and address the truancy problem.

Coalition work on affordable housing, homelessness, reentry of former offenders and poverty reduction were also added to the Task Force agenda. For several years, the 30-agency Black Hills Regional Homeless Coalition had been conducting annual homeless counts and sponsoring Project Homeless Connect days, in which agencies brought a range of services – health screenings, eyeglasses, dental exams, haircuts, family portraits, and access to housing and employment programs – to one location.

Foundation and government grants enabled the Task Force to build new capacity for staffing some of the work. With a \$100,000 planning grant and staff resources from the John T. Vucurevich Foundation authorized in May 2008, the foundation led a multi-partner collaborative to develop a community plan by breaking into smaller working groups on service infrastructure, service collaboration, prevention, and family advocacy. The Bush Foundation, which serves communities in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota, contributed nearly \$250,000 to build the collaborative's infrastructure through data gathering, evaluation, training, coordination and community engagement. In contrast, the Task Force's reentry work got off the ground with public funding. In 2009, South Dakota received a \$750,000, three-year grant through the federal Second Chance Act. Half of the grant went to support reentry efforts in Rapid City, and these new funds enabled the city to hire a reentry coordinator focused on reducing adult recidivism. The city provides supervision and space under its Community Development Division to support the reentry work.

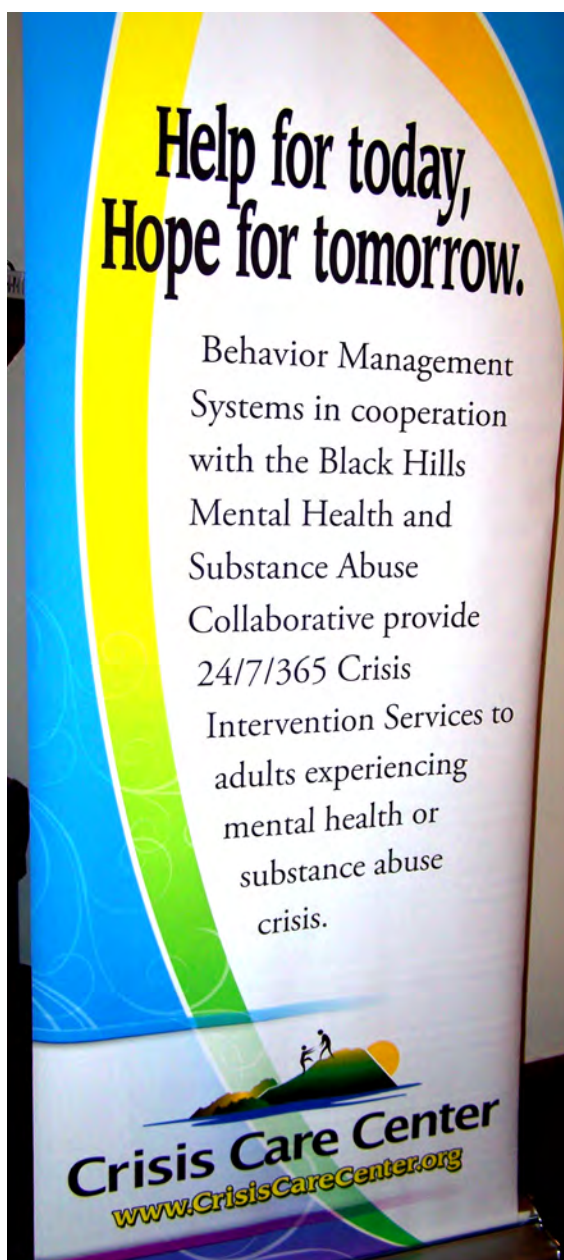
What Goals and Strategies Did the City and its Partners Develop?

Initially, different committees were able to move forward at different speeds, with some groups making more progress than others. The larger Task Force fostered accountability by working with committee chairs to ensure that each group set one goal per year, along with specific action steps and deadlines.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

Mental health, substance abuse and suicide prevention were among the top immediate priorities. In particular, Task Force members saw mental illness as an important root cause of family instability and the multitude of problems that can result. Improvements in substance abuse and access to mental health treatment would also benefit Task Force efforts to help the homeless and formerly incarcerated populations. Although work in this area was among the most difficult to advance, the hiring of a coordinator helped the new Black Hills Mental Health/Substance Abuse Systems Change Collaborative – chaired by John T. Vucurevich Foundation Executive Director Sandy Diegel – take concrete steps to build a coordinated, family-centered system of care.

The foundation brought together 36 agencies in October 2008 to create a Community Plan focused on empowering and strengthening families in Rapid City. Drawing on a service integration model used in Larimer County, Colo., and a crisis intervention system model from San Antonio, Texas, the collaborative sponsored regular networking and strategic planning meetings among service providers and sought to implement a community crisis system. They also reached out to the community to raise awareness of prevention resources and began offering a 12-hour mental health first aid training course. Training participants reported that it was useful for family members, service providers, school district staff, police, and others who may come into contact with people with mental illness. The city's police department has been heavily involved in the collaborative as one of the main sources of referrals, and officers have been trained to work more effectively with mentally ill residents when in the field.



The collaborative's most ambitious project was the development of a mental health and substance abuse assessment and crisis intervention center that is open 24 hours per day and seven days per week. The center helps residents receive urgently needed crisis stabilization support as well as counseling, case management services and referrals for post-crisis, follow-up treatment. It saves money by diverting patients from admission to inappropriate – and more expensive – hospital emergency rooms and psychiatric units, jails and detox facilities. In 2008, 82 percent of the nearly 1,400 individuals held through involuntary commitments were released in less than 24 hours, according to a John T. Vucurevich Foundation report. In 2012, there were 1,300 involuntary commitments but only 47 percent were released within 24 hours, reflecting progress in connecting residents in crisis with appropriate services.

The collaborative had hoped that their proposal to a national foundation for a three-year, \$1 million grant would enable the Crisis Care Center to begin operating, but in May 2010, they were notified that Rapid City did not make it past the second round of the application process. However, collaborative members were determined to press forward. They were ultimately successful when the city stepped in to contribute vital start-up funding. With unanimous support, Rapid City officials allocated \$500,000 in revenue from the city's Vision 2012 program, an existing, half-cent sales tax add-on approved by voters in 1992 to support long-range planning and infrastructure projects.

Youth Engagement

In 2008, adult representatives of the youth engagement committee began meeting with youth involved in student councils at school. These youth became part of an advisory council to offer feedback on efforts to include youth voices in local government and community decisions. Grants from the Chiesman Center for Democracy and the South Dakota Community Foundation helped the committee survey teens in public and private schools and conduct focus groups at high schools to review the survey results. Local leaders reported the survey results – including top youth concerns such as alcohol and drug abuse, violence and bullying, and the various protective factors in their lives – at a city hall event in October 2009. During the event, city officials publicly introduced the Task Force for Strengthening Families to the community and local media.



Youth engagement efforts gathered increasing momentum when Lifeways hired Richard Goll, a consultant at the Hampton, Va.-based Onsite-Insights who played a vital role in creating the nationally-recognized Hampton Youth Civic Engagement initiative and facilitating development of the Manchester, Conn., Children, Youth and Family Master Plan described in the next chapter. Goll worked with youth and adults in Rapid City to develop a plan for promoting “authentic” youth civic engagement (AYCE). He also gave

presentations to 75 different groups in the community, including the Common Council, to explain the AYCE concept, which goes beyond token youth participation to give young people a genuine leadership role in decision-making. AYCE not only seeks to promote positive youth development and skill-building, but is also intended to help communities make better decisions on a range of issues. Seventy-seven individuals representing the city, school district, businesses and youth attended a kickoff event in the spring of 2010. During that event, three youth-adult teams formed to design an AYCE framework that would encourage youth participation in local government, the schools and the community. With more than 13,000 students in the Rapid City Area Schools, all youth will have an opportunity to be heard. The youth who participated in the 2010 event were recruited from the YMCA, church groups, Lifeways programs in the schools, and Partnership Rapid City, which is a collaboration among Rapid City Area Schools, Rapid City Public School Foundation and the community. Partnership Rapid City creates alliances between businesses, nonprofit organizations, the city and schools to expand the walls of the classrooms.

Because of strong community support, the AYCE initiative was recently funded by the St. Paul, Minn.-based Bush Foundation as well as the John T. Vucurevich Foundation. The latter foundation facilitated a conversation with key people in the community including city council representatives, school

officials, and chamber of commerce and United Way leaders to determine priorities and next steps for AYCE. Through this convening, stakeholders identified Partnership Rapid City as the appropriate organization to guide the development of AYCE, as it aligns closely with their goals.

Early Childhood Development

As the Rapid City Area Council on Early Care and Education was learning more about child care and pre-kindergarten needs in the community, it also sought to build public will for affordable, high-quality early care and education through public service announcements and presentations to businesses and civic groups. The publication of the survey results and the creation of the Bridge to Benefits website by South Dakota Voices for Children and the Children's Defense Fund both helped raise awareness. This website offers an online tool for screening residents' eligibility for child care assistance and an array of other benefits, including the Earned Income Tax Credit, Children's Health Insurance Program, energy assistance and federal nutrition programs.

The Council also formed a subcommittee staffed by South Dakota Voices for Children called the Rapid City Pre-K Pilot Task Force. This group has pushed for a Starting Strong Rapid City pre-kindergarten education pilot program for three- and four-year old children from low-income



families. In promoting this initiative, the task force has emphasized the success of a three-year pilot program in Sioux Falls, S.D., in improving children's literacy, math and language skills, as well as the extensive research on the high returns on investment from early childhood education. The Sioux Falls initiative received funding from the governor's economic development fund, the local United Way and an economic development partnership supported by the Sioux Falls chamber of commerce.

When the pre-K task force was unable to convince state legislators to back a statewide pre-K pilot program, it responded by turning to the community for support. Recently, the John T. Vucurevich

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- Rapid City Mayor Sam Kooiker

Foundation provided a three-year grant that will match funds raised from local businesses and residents on a dollar-for-dollar basis. By the fall of 2012, the Starting Strong task force was offering the pre-K program at no cost to 36 children through seven existing child care facilities that agreed to meet certain quality benchmarks, including staff education levels. The goal is to serve 50 students in the first year and 100 the following year, making a big dent in reaching the 150 Rapid City children on a Head Start waiting list. The task force has also partnered with professors at the University of South Dakota and Black Hills State University to track children's academic progress as they move from the pre-K program into the school system.

The program has been endorsed by city leaders including current Mayor Sam Kooiker. "Giving children at risk the opportunity to start school ready to learn makes the difference in their lives, the lives of families and our community," said Mayor Kooiker.

Truancy and Dropout Prevention

Consistent with a focus on reaching children at earlier ages, the ACT-Now collaboration among the courts, law enforcement, schools and social service agencies has reoriented the community's truancy abatement efforts toward a more preventive approach tailored to different age groups. ACT-Now is working more closely with elementary schools to identify children who are chronically absent from school, and connecting families with juvenile diversion staff to address barriers to attendance. The county is also partnering with Big Brothers/Big Sisters to provide at-risk elementary school students with mentors. Liaison officers from the police department and sheriff's office placed within middle and high schools engage students and connect individual families with counseling. In turn, schools are working with police to refer students with excessive absences to ACT-Now before they reach the court system.

One of the most significant changes has involved earlier reporting and intervention with truant students. In 2011, Rapid City Area Schools established a policy that five unexcused absences would result in a referral to the ACT-Now Task Force. Previously, principals might not begin working with families until the student missed 25 or 30 days of school. Earlier reporting has enabled the Task Force to assist students before they fall so far behind that failing their classes becomes inevitable.

The ACT-Now collaboration has reoriented the community's truancy efforts toward a more preventive approach tailored to different age groups.

With a jump in caseloads for the diversion truancy coordinator, it became necessary to change procedures for working with students. Currently, truant students and their parents are required to attend a Truancy Intervention Workshop where they hear from and meet individually with diversion staff and sign a contract agreeing there will be no more unexcused absences until the end of the school year. Students who continue to miss school unexcused are referred to a Truancy Intervention Conference (truancy court) for a hearing with a judge, school administrators, liaison officers, diversion staff, and parents. Together, they develop a plan to keep the student in school. If this plan is not successful, juvenile diversion staff provide extensive case management and daily monitoring to try to keep the case from going to the formal court system.

Other efforts have included an informal probation truancy class for truant students who have received diversion services in the past, a pilot program led by the Society for the Advance of Native Interests-Today (SANI-T) and the Center for Restorative Justice, and an attempt to change legislation to allow alternative education options for students who have dropped out. The city and school district have also partnered to enable students to ride city buses using their student ID cards, with the district covering the cost. The committee's goal is to reduce truancy rates by one percentage point per year over five years by addressing the underlying causes of school absence, which may include lack of transportation, a need for academic support, parental attitudes, and bullying.

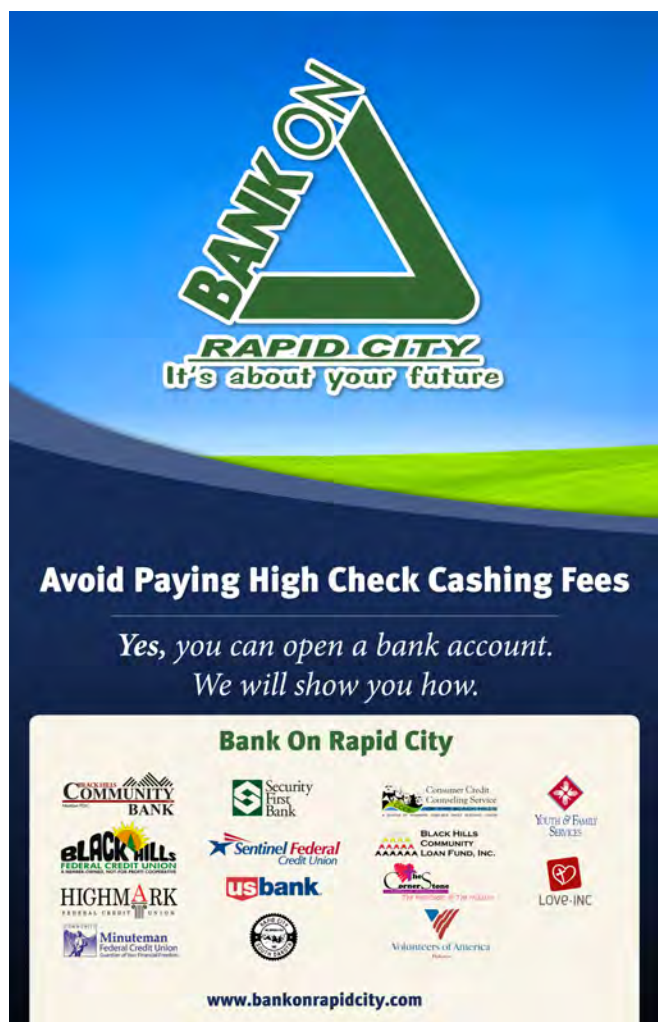
Reentry

Coordinated by the city's community development office and conceptualized by Rapid City Police Chief Steve Allender, the Rapid City Reentry Program set an ambitious goal of reducing recidivism rates of formerly incarcerated residents by 50 percent over five years. Like other Task Force groups, the program emphasizes the cost savings of its work – in this case enhancing public safety by preventing repeat offenses. Program leaders estimate that South Dakota spends nearly \$61,000 per day per individual housing the 45 percent of people released from state correctional facilities who reoffend and return to prison. These figures only reflect incarceration expenses; total costs are even higher when other impacts on public safety and victims of crime are taken into account. Nearly one in five inmates is from Pennington County, meaning that the Rapid City area bears a disproportionate cost of recidivism relative to its population.

With federal Second Chance Act grant funding via the state, the Reentry Program has offered comprehensive case management to ensure that adult residents transitioning back to the community from correctional facilities lead productive lives and do not continue to engage in criminal activity. The program currently connects participants with mental health and drug abuse treatment, housing, education, employment, and faith-based and parenting programs in the community. The city is also working to establish a mentoring component to serve at least 20 participants per year.

Poverty Reduction through Asset Building

Rapid City's first poverty simulation attracted 45 participants, two aldermen and 25 business executives. After participating, one of Alderman LaCroix's colleagues told him that the simulation was an eye-opening experience that offered a better appreciation of the stresses that low-income families encounter daily. The simulation boosted donations and community support for local anti-poverty initiatives that had been created prior to the formation of the Task Force. Among these initiatives is a collaboration between the AARP and other organizations to assist eligible families in claiming the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) at local Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites. Funding from the John T. Vucurevich Foundation and coordination by Consumer Credit Counseling Service of the Black Hills (CCCS) and the local AARP coordinator helped increase promotion of the VITA sites. The Bridge to Benefits website gives local agencies a new tool to further expand access to the EITC. Consumer Credit Counseling Service (CCCS) of the Black Hills provides financial education and counseling and a matched savings program.



After conducting a survey showing that 15 percent of residents lack bank accounts, the poverty reduction committee began work on creating a “Bank On” program. More than 50 cities across the country have replicated the innovative Bank On San Francisco model to steer low-income residents away from high-cost check cashers, payday lenders, and pawn shops. These fringe financial service providers can take a large bite out of workers’ paychecks through high fees and high-interest loans. Through a Bank On program, cities negotiate with financial institutions and community organizations to create new, free or low-cost checking accounts and financial education opportunities that give unbanked residents an opportunity to store their money safely, save for the future, and build credit.

Rapid City was one of 18 communities that participated in NLC’s Bank On Cities Campaign in 2008-09. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Ford Foundation supported this technical assistance initiative, which served large and small communities throughout the country. Seven local banks and credit unions, the FDIC, a community loan fund, CCCS, and other nonprofit

organizations and financial education providers joined the city as partners in developing Bank On Rapid City.

Homelessness and Affordable Housing

In the fall of 2010 – the depths of the nation’s worst economic downturn since the Great Depression – an annual count of the region’s homeless population found that the number of homeless individuals had doubled from the year before to more than 800, adding new urgency to ongoing homelessness prevention efforts. Building on previous work, the Black Hills Regional Homeless Coalition hired a consultant to help complete a five-year plan to prevent and end involuntary homelessness. The plan draws on the evidence-based Housing First model that many cities have adopted in recent years to connect families and individuals with permanent housing and support services. The coalition’s plan incorporates ideas from its 30 member organizations and takes a three-pronged approach of creating an adequate supply of affordable housing, boosting family incomes and establishing emergency prevention programs. Coalition members recently amended the plan to focus more deeply on the needs of homeless youth.

Recent efforts include developing a strong referral system with agencies throughout the community, partnering with the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide information on assistance available for veterans, and creating a mobile food bank. Currently, the coalition, which has merged with a nonprofit health services organization called the Community Services Connections of the Black Hills to improve service delivery and expand their reach, is seeking to hire a coordinator to keep projects moving forward.

Transportation

The city's five-year transportation plan facilitated better coordination between schools and the city bus service. Previously, many students could not ride the bus without arriving at school too early or after the bell. In addition, as noted above, the partnership to allow student IDs as city bus passes has contributed to truancy prevention efforts. However, the transportation committee continues to explore options for better coordinating transportation for residents who have trouble getting to appointments or jobs.

What Did the City Accomplish?

On March 23, 2010, Mayor Hanks hosted a large press event at the civic center highlighting progress made by the Task Force for Strengthening Families. Members of the Common Council, the chamber of commerce and the larger Rapid City community participated, with Richard Goll invited as a guest speaker. Goll underscored the importance of youth-adult partnerships in making Rapid City a better place for youth to live and used the opportunity to actively recruit new participants for the youth engagement work.

While many cities interested in promoting youth participation in local government initially set up a mayor's youth advisory council, Rapid City took a different route. The youth engagement committee's "city team" chose to first build its reputation by working with the police and fire department, the civic center board and the state fair board. Recently, the civic center board agreed to give youth a voice in its process of expansion. The city team has also created a Community Policing and Youth Partnership to decrease juvenile crime and increase trust between young people and police. Ultimately, the team plans to establish a youth council and ask the city to appoint youth to municipal boards and commissions. The schools team is providing input into decisions by principals and the superintendent, and the community and neighborhoods team is working to place youth on United Way and nonprofit boards, promote volunteer opportunities, and get involved with the chamber of commerce. Taken together, the AYCE teams offer a choice of numerous shared leadership, input, and community service and engagement activities. Recently, the Task Force administered a citywide youth survey showing that a high percentage of young people want to stay in Rapid City.

In February 2011, city and county leaders celebrated the opening of the Crisis Care Center within the Regional Behavioral Health Center. The center offers access to 24/7 mental health crisis services as a more appropriate response to service needs than access through jails, detox facilities, or hospital emergency rooms and psychiatric units. In its second year of operation, the Crisis Care Center diverted almost 800 admissions from these services. In addition to on-site services by the Crisis Care Center, referrals for 597 individuals for follow-up care from the Crisis Care Center were made to partnering organizations for treatment and case management. Using its Vision 2012 sales tax add-on, the city

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joined Regional Hospital, Pennington County, the John T. Vucurevich Foundation, South Dakota Community Foundation, and other foundations, businesses and individuals to assemble \$3.6 million in funding for three years to support the center. Chief of Police Allender serves on the Center's steering committee with the Pennington County sheriff and representatives of Regional Health, Community Health Center of the Black Hills, Cornerstone Rescue Mission, Pennington County Health and Human Services, the John T. Vucurevich Foundation, and Behavior Management Systems, the Crisis Care Center's managing agency.

In the center's first year, mental health professionals helped 700 residents access needed care, services and post-crisis treatment. The number of residents served increased to almost 1,000 by the second year and is on track to reach 1,400, or around 120 individuals per month, by the end of the third year. Local police officers are showing their dedication to the project with nearly 40 officers taking part in intensive, 40-hour mental health crisis intervention team training. The opening of the



center demonstrates the benefits of cross-city peer exchange. Since 2010, Rapid City police officers, physicians and other stakeholders have visited San Antonio to learn from the Bexar County, Texas, Jail Diversion Program and a Crisis Intervention Training International Conference to learn how to foster collaboration among law enforcement and mental health agencies. Bexar County leaders visited Rapid City in early 2011 to further advise the collaborative team. Discussions around funding sustainability are currently underway with relevant agencies. In addition to the work to sustain the Crisis Care Center, the Mental Health/Substance Abuse Collaborative is working in conjunction with the Juvenile Diversion Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) Task Force and a Mental Health Systems of Care for Youth and Families Committee to establish a youth crisis system. Other next steps for the collaborative will be to work toward implementing a community case management system.



Bank On Rapid City was unveiled on November 14, 2011, at the Dahl Fine Arts Center. Residents can now open free or lower-cost checking and savings accounts at seven local banks and credit unions, providing an alternative to check cashing outlets. By opening Bank On accounts at participating financial institutions, residents can cash checks for free, saving hundreds of dollars per year. The program helps them save and build assets to invest in their future and weather financial emergencies. Even those who had banking difficulties in the past can open a second chance account if they complete the national CheckWise financial education program offered by CCCS.

Led by South Dakota Voices for Children, the Pre-K task force was successful in launching Starting Strong Rapid City, a scholarship program coordinated by Early Childhood Connections to provide three and four-year olds with high-quality pre-kindergarten at no cost to their families. After qualifying community providers and raising funds for scholarships, the task force began enrolling children in the fall of 2012. Thirty-six children currently participate, and partnerships with universities are in place to measure the impact of the program.

Launched in 2010, the Rapid City Reentry Program served 60 high-risk offenders in its first year – 30 from local jails and federal prison and 30 from state correctional institutions. The program has been helping these individuals obtain jobs, housing and other services to get their lives on a more positive path. As of



October 2010, only two had been reincarcerated. Since then, the state has only shared recidivism data for all of South Dakota, measured as the share of formerly incarcerated individuals sent back to prison within one year. From a baseline recidivism rate of 28.7 percent in 2009, the rate fell to 25.9 percent in 2010, surpassing expectations. The state's and city's goal is to reduce recidivism by 50 percent in five years.



The Pre-K task force was successful in launching Starting Strong Rapid City, a scholarship program that currently provides 36 three and four-year olds with high-quality pre-kindergarten at no cost to their families.

The ACT-Now Task Force has been reaching chronically absent students

at younger ages and intervening with older truant students when there is still time to help them get back on track. The school district's new policy of referring students to the task force after five unexcused absences led to a large increase in the number of referrals to juvenile diversion between 2010-11 and 2011-12. At the same time, Pennington County and Rapid City leaders have folded the truancy efforts into broader reforms to the juvenile justice system. The county hired a coordinator to adopt the juvenile detention alternatives initiative (JDAI) model in April 2011. Launched by the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 1992 and replicated in more than 100 jurisdictions throughout the country, JDAI has helped communities reduce the number of youth detained by providing more effective – and less expensive – alternative sanctions. The model has lowered average daily detention populations while also decreasing juvenile crime and racial disparities in the justice system. In Rapid City, JDAI will not only seek to reduce the negative impact of secure confinement on youth, but will also enable them to receive behavioral health treatment and other services to prevent future delinquency.

While struggling to move forward until a coordinator is hired, the homeless coalition has been successful in completing and beginning to implement its five-year plan to end homelessness; broadening its reach through the merger with a local health care services organization; and strengthening partnerships to assist homeless veterans. Other successes include continuing to sponsor Project Homeless Connect days that serve nearly 300 people per year and opening a new homeless drop-in center at a local church that provides afterschool programming for youth, referrals to services, mailboxes, and assistance in getting needed documentation to an average of 70 residents per day. However, the total number of homeless individuals remains high.

Task Force partners have also been working to bring services closer to their intended recipients. Staff from some government and nonprofit service providers now meet with clients at the Cornerstone Rescue Mission homeless shelter, which is more accessible for residents without transportation. The Community Health Center of the Black Hills has opened clinics at sites serving low-income and homeless clients, including the Rescue Mission and General Beadle Elementary School.

What Factors Contributed to the City's Success? What Challenges Did the City Face and How Were They Overcome?

Exercising Municipal Leadership

While municipal governments do not directly oversee many of the systems that impact children and families, the Rapid City Task Force shows why top-down support from municipal leaders is nevertheless essential for promoting cross-system collaboration and progress. In addition to convening the Task Force, the mayor and city aldermen brought credibility and energy to the family strengthening work. Local partners noted that “community members want to know the city supports and is behind the project.” The mayor convened key stakeholders, who are generally reluctant to say no to a mayor’s request for participation. Aldermen led Task Force board meetings, presented the initiative to civic groups throughout the community, and lobbied state legislators for supportive policies. Regular monthly meetings of the Common Council and school board members, county commissioners and other leadership groups helped foster a spirit of collaboration that bolstered Task Force planning. City staff played an integral role by organizing meetings, sharing information and ensuring committees moved forward in setting and achieving goals.

Setting Goals, Using Data, and Sharing Accountability

Although cities are often in a unique position to be a catalyst and coordinator, they can rarely go it alone in efforts to strengthen families. In Rapid City, an elected school board oversees education, and county and nonprofit agencies manage health and human services, juvenile diversion, and other youth-serving programs. Encouraging shared responsibility was an initial challenge for Rapid City since all agencies were stretched thin and Task Force facilitation was an additional duty for existing city staff. However, once other organization leaders agreed to co-chair each committee and report back to the Task Force, the initiative gathered momentum. The high-level officials on the Task Force Board accelerated this momentum by serving as the “mother ship” in addressing concerns raised by committees on funding, policy and legislation, and publicity.

Rapid City leaders chose to set aggressive one-year timetables for identifying and completing goals to build a sense of urgency and momentum. Task Force organizers recognized that “setting a five-year goal means no one will work on it until the fourth year” and that it is human nature to let other priority issues interfere with long-term objectives, however well-intentioned. This process was successful in energizing committees, some of which have attracted between 30 and 50 participants to their meetings.

Rapid City has also sought ways to gather and use data more effectively. The Black Hills Community Needs Assessment compiled by the Chiesman Center for Democracy’s Institute for Educational Leadership and Evaluation helps keep everyone on the same page and saves money, and local universities are assisting with evaluation of the pre-K pilot program. One key challenge is that state and local data systems are disconnected from each other and have different reporting requirements, making it difficult to identify realistic baseline measures and share cross-system information on individual

families. For example, it is possible to track recidivism rates but difficult to measure whether reentry program participants are maintaining stable housing. Going forward, local agencies are exploring ways to conduct intake for certain services through a shared database.

Developing a Financing Strategy

With limited funding and declining federal and state resources, Rapid City has been careful to emphasize fiscally responsible – and in many cases cost-saving – strategies that add little to the city’s bottom line. The Task Force benefited from in-kind staff support through the community development department. Foundation, state and federal grants have supported the mental health collaborative, youth civic engagement initiative, Starting Strong prekindergarten pilot program, and reentry program. The critical Task Force leadership provided by the John T. Vucurevich Foundation and United Way from the very beginning speaks to the importance of close collaboration between cities and major philanthropic partners to achieve community goals for children and families. The leadership and guidance foundations can provide goes well beyond funding. In Rapid City, they also helped avoid funding duplicate services, gather community input and break down silos across agencies. Funders are currently planning to be more targeted and collaborative in their support of key priorities such as mental health, housing and homelessness.

In addition, all of the Task Force efforts are designed to use existing resources more efficiently and reduce larger long-term costs borne by the community and the state through enhanced preventive measures. Agencies are co-locating services at local nonprofits and schools. The city’s Vision 2012 investment in the Crisis Care Center diverts residents with mental health crises from more expensive settings. By reducing recidivism, the reentry program will save money on public safety and incarceration. Early education, truancy prevention, and anti-poverty initiatives have the potential generate large returns on investment by enhancing self-sufficiency and strengthening families.



Leveraging Staff Capacity

The most successful Task Force groups – including the mental health collaborative, early care and education council, truancy task force, and the adult reentry and youth civic engagement initiatives – have benefited from staff capacity provided by existing organizations or newly hired coordinators. However, resource constraints affecting both public and private agencies have made lack of staff capacity one of the most significant obstacles to the ongoing progress of the Task Force.

The most successful Task Force groups – including the mental health collaborative, early care and education council, truancy task force, and the adult reentry and youth civic engagement initiatives – have benefited from staff capacity provided by existing organizations or newly hired coordinators.

Learning from Other Cities

Cities save time and money when they do not try to “reinvent the wheel.” Rapid City sought ideas from Manchester, Conn., and other members of the Platform for Strengthening Families Learning Community on the issues of curfews, truancy and bullying prevention. The Platform itself – created by city officials serving on NLC’s Council on Youth, Education and Families – provided a valuable framework for assessing strengths and areas of need. San Antonio, Texas, and Larimer County, Colo., served as models for the mental health collaborative. The city also learned about innovative housing programs in Denver that could be adapted in Rapid City. NLC’s Bank On Cities project and information sharing opportunities reduced the amount of time Rapid City needed to launch its Bank On initiative. According to city officials, “being able to learn from the efforts and ideas of other communities was and continues to be invaluable.”



Youth and School District Involvement

Finally, Rapid City learned that youth and schools must be part of the early planning process for youth-focused initiatives to succeed. Sharing ownership with youth was difficult at the beginning of the AYCE effort, and getting youth involved required understanding their motivations for participating as well as the competing demands on their time. Cities and schools must also show students that they are serious about giving youth a voice to overcome skepticism that youth engagement is inauthentic or that adults’ expressions of commitment are insincere. For Rapid City, early accomplishments by the city, school and community teams are keeping the AYCE initiative on track.

Looking Ahead

The Task Force for Strengthening Families had made substantial progress since it was formed, but many challenges lie ahead. For instance, the issue of aging and substandard housing has emerged as a growing concern for city leaders. With nearly half of the housing stock being more than 40 years old, the city is exploring strategies for identifying and improving properties with deteriorating water and sewer pipes, lack of running water, mold, needed sidewalk repairs, and other problems. Housing affordability and supportive services also remain high priorities, particularly with regard to single-occupancy residencies for homeless individuals. In addition to finding the staff capacity needed to coordinate multi-agency partnerships around issues such as homelessness, the city is also considering next steps for improving its use of data to measure outcomes for children, youth and families.

CASE STUDIES

Manchester, Connecticut

Overview

In 2009, the Town of Manchester, Conn., completed a comprehensive Children, Youth and Family Master Plan, marking the culmination of an inclusive process that began with the Town Board of Directors' adoption of NLC's *City Platform for Strengthening Families* in July 2007. Town leaders have since used the plan as a roadmap to reorganize town structures and



services and to engage residents at the neighborhood level. A new Office of Neighborhoods and Families works with other departments and agencies along with the Better Manchester Coalition to facilitate the plan's implementation. The first of several one-stop, neighborhood-based resource centers recently opened in a repurposed firehouse in the town's southeast quadrant. Residents can visit the center to access services and participate in community-based education courses on leadership development, neighborhood organizing and town government 101 offered by the new Manchester Neighborhood Academy. The first Livable Neighborhood Group is empowering residents at the grassroots to improve their communities. The development of *Better Manchester Magazine* is further strengthening the bonds that connect citizens and their municipal government.

The Town has also established new opportunities for youth leadership and input through the creation of the Manchester Youth Commission, and has created resources to help disconnected youth reenter the classroom or the workforce. All of these actions have been taken at minimal expense through the creative reassignment of municipal staff, a focus on system-level change and more effective community-wide collaboration. With inclusiveness as a guiding principle, local leaders are building on the many existing strengths of the town and its youth to fulfill a vision that "all children, youth and families thrive" in Manchester.

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What Challenges Motivated Town Leaders to Act?

Manchester is a growing, first-tier suburb located east of Hartford, the state capital and third-largest city in Connecticut. More than 58,000 residents call Manchester home, and major employers in 2011 included local government, Manchester Memorial Hospital, GE Aerospace, and the J.C. Penney Catalog Logistics Center. The local economy thrives on a mix of businesses that include manufacturing, retail, warehouse distribution, commercial printing, health care, and professional services. Every two years, Manchester voters elect a nine-member Board of Directors, which elects a mayor from its membership for each two-year term and appoints a professional general manager to oversee municipal agencies.

Several emerging challenges prompted town leaders to develop a family strengthening agenda. As Manchester has become more urbanized – with dramatic growth in housing and commercial development and increases in renter-occupied housing – it has also experienced rapid demographic change. The number of students receiving free or reduced price meals in Manchester public schools rose from 21 percent in 1994 to more than 37 percent in 2005, far outpacing the average statewide increase. The town’s youth population has also become more diverse: 44 percent of public school students were from racial and ethnic minority groups in 2005, up from 20 percent in 1993.

The town’s application for an NLC technical assistance project in 2007 cited increased crime and deteriorating property conditions in older, lower-income neighborhoods, along with increased gang and drug activity and several high-profile, criminal incidents involving youth gangs as motivators for local action. Municipal and law enforcement officials were aware that they would not simply be able to arrest their way out of the problem and that they would need to engage youth, families and neighborhoods in finding solutions.

In July 2007, Town Director Jason Doucette encouraged his colleagues to formally adopt NLC’s *City Platform for Strengthening Families* and use it as a framework for developing a comprehensive, results-driven youth master plan. In doing so, the town would build on many existing assets and substantial progress that it had already made in the platform’s seven key action areas. For instance, the community’s School Readiness Council had been successful in obtaining federal funding for a Manchester Early Learning Opportunities Project and brought together town directors and local school board members at a policy meeting on early care and education, which led to joint funding for an early childhood coordinator to improve transitions between preschool and kindergarten. The town had also partnered with the school board and state agencies to fund the construction of a new Head Start facility that resulted in a 45 percent increase in the number of children served. In addition, the school district and town worked together to share use of school facilities for recreation programming and assign school resource officers from the police department to the schools.

The Manchester Youth Service Bureau (YSB) is one of the 99 bureaus operated by one or more municipalities in Connecticut that receive matching state funding to coordinate services for children, youth and families. Youth serve on the YSB’s Youth Advisory Board and participate in its strategic planning process. The YSB offers a broad range of positive youth development programs for young people ages 0-18, including youth leadership, summer and year-round youth employment, mentoring and tutoring, service learning and volunteering opportunities, diversion programs for first-time juvenile offenders, a teen center, a strengthening families program and a “youth in transitions” program



for teens in alternative education settings. The YSB, recreation, library and police departments sponsor additional school- and community-based afterschool opportunities for children and youth.

With no county governments in Connecticut, Manchester's municipal human services department directs important local funding toward community-based agencies offering mental health and substance abuse treatment, child care, emergency assistance and services for people with disabilities. It also oversees the YSB

and School Readiness Council. The human services department has been a key player in local family economic success initiatives, including the Manchester Earned Income Tax Credit Coalition and establishment of a Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) site. Finally, the town health department has been at the center of many local collaborative health initiatives. For instance, it sponsors a reduced fee dental program for residents without dental insurance and collaborates with the recreation department on the community-based Healthier U initiative to promote nutrition and active living.

A cross-departmental team representing town police, human services, youth services, recreation and library departments had been providing leadership on youth service coordination and planning. Then-Mayor Josh Howroyd noted that the town's youth master plan would build on a long history of cooperation among town departments, the Board of Directors and local organizations. However, despite this track record of collaboration, town leaders, led by Director David Sheridan, believed that a comprehensive youth master plan could reduce remaining fragmentation among youth service providers. Through a close association with NLC, they took note of other communities that had successfully completed youth master plans to accomplish a similar goal.

At the same time as town leaders were developing and implementing a Children, Youth and Family Master Plan, the State of Connecticut's adoption of a results-based accountability (RBA) framework was encouraging a similar RBA focus in town governments, particularly among Youth Service Bureaus. Manchester leaders decided to institute a town-wide performance measurement system beginning with a few municipal agencies. The human services department was the first department to institute the performance measurement system. This shift fostered an emphasis on clear outcomes, indicators of success and lines of responsibility in plan implementation.

The Town of Manchester's children, youth and families master plan builds on a long history of cooperation among town departments, the Board of Directors and local organizations.

What Steps Did the Town Take to Get Started and What Partners Did It Bring to the Table?

As Manchester's initial lead representative in NLC's Platform for Strengthening Families Learning Community, Human Services Director Mary Roche Cronin participated in the learning community's bimonthly conference calls alongside members of her cross-departmental team. General Manager Scott Shanley, Parks and Recreation Director Scott Sprague, Library Director Doug McDonough and former Chief of Police James Berry were among the town staff who regularly joined the calls.

Early on, the team requested that NLC provide examples of comprehensive youth master plans created by other communities, as well as a list of consultants who had facilitated the development of these plans. They recommended, through the General Manager, that the Board of Directors hire a consultant and prepared to issue a request for proposals to potential candidates. Town Directors Kevin Zingler, Cheri Pelletier and Matthew Peak, along with Human Services Director Mary Roche Cronin, had the opportunity to explore the youth master planning idea in more depth at a March 2008 learning community meeting sponsored by NLC at its annual Congressional City Conference in Washington, D.C.

In July 2008, the town hired Richard Goll of the Hampton, Va.-based Onsite-Insights. In addition to being a key architect of Hampton's award-winning Youth Civic Engagement initiative with more than 40 years of experience in the youth development field, Goll had worked with Brighton, Colo., and La Plata County, Colo., to use the *City Platform for Strengthening Families* as a framework for comprehensive local children, youth and families master plans. Mary Roche Cronin and Assistant Director of Recreation Chris Silver were designated to work closely with Goll to conduct a similar process in Manchester, each allocating 50 percent of their time to the project over the course of one year. Together they helped Goll become more familiar with the Manchester community, including key players within town and school district departments and other local organizations.

The town's plan would build on the Platform's recommendations to establish the "essential infrastructure" needed for sustained progress on behalf of children, youth and families, including a task force or coordinating body to identify needs and priorities, effective city-school collaboration, youth engagement and leadership, and a mechanism to measure progress. It would also address the Platform's seven action areas: early childhood development, youth development, education and afterschool, health and safety, youth in transition, family economic success, and neighborhoods and community.

Throughout the summer and fall, planning process leaders collected information to gain a better understanding of the town's strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for additional progress in supporting children and families. In October, the town partnered with the school board and two private schools to administer the Developmental Assets Survey developed by the Search Institute and America's Promise Alliance to 671 randomly selected students in grades six through 12. The survey assesses the extent to which young people have the experiences and qualities that enable them to make positive choices and become responsible adults. Survey results showed that in many areas, Manchester youth have more assets than their peers in other communities who have taken the survey. However, it also highlighted several areas for improvement, including a perceived lack of useful roles in the community.



Also in October, members of the town's cross-departmental team and other YSB staff visited Hampton, Va., to learn about the city's youth commission and youth civic engagement structure. Meetings with Hampton's mayor, city manager, city staff and youth leaders provided the team with information that would help build public will for a similar initiative in Manchester. One of the first steps taken by the Manchester Board of Directors was to pass an ordinance creating a new Manchester Youth Commission, whose founding members were sworn in at a December 2008 Board of Directors meeting.

The establishment of the youth commission reflected several guiding principles for the planning process. Most importantly, the process would be as inclusive as possible, with proactive efforts to encourage all Manchester residents, including youth, to contribute to the plan. The town would also amend policies and reinvent systems to ensure there was an infrastructure that could sustain the work over time. Local partners would seek to build on existing resources and use them more efficiently rather than spending additional money. In addition, the plan's recommendations would focus on building on young people's existing strengths rather than treating youth as collections of problems to be "fixed." Town leaders would evaluate progress on "thriving" indicators, not just "deficit" indicators. Finally, town leadership established an overall vision for what they hoped to achieve through the planning process: "The Town of Manchester: where all children, youth and families thrive."

In addition to the survey and youth commission, the town used several other methods to gather information and engage residents. Goll and many of the committees that would be formed organized focus groups and interviewed 200 community leaders and residents, including elected officials, municipal staff, business leaders, school district officials and staff, law enforcement professionals,

nonprofit organization leaders, faith-based organizations and youth. The town updated its website and utilized local media to deliver a continuous flow of information to the community on the planning process.

Seven committees composed of youth and adults were formed to direct the planning for each of the Platform's action areas. Goll and town staff identified committed residents and staff who were willing and able to chair each committee. They used a December kick-off meeting and other public events and media communications to recruit a diverse group of members. The town also asked its youth commissioners to help recruit other youth for the initiative. As a result of these efforts, more than 120 youth and adult residents committed to serve on a committee for six months. Town staff and interns then helped organize and monitor committee meetings and worked with Goll to ensure each group had access to the Developmental Assets Survey results and other key data. Each committee was assigned one or two trained facilitators and asked to look at the current realities for its issue of focus, establish its own vision, determine the gap between the reality and the vision, identify one major recommendation and propose several associated strategies.

After the planning groups submitted their recommendations, the town formed a Core Team of elected officials, the general manager and town staff, committee chairs, faith-based organizations, community college representatives, and youth commissioners. This team was responsible for reviewing the committees' recommendations and identifying changes to the local "infrastructure" that could support implementation in the areas of policy, structure and organization, and connectivity and citizen coalitions. The team also ensured that committees did not duplicate existing services and connected the groups to each other's work. In consultation with committees, the Core Team completed the final planning document.

What Goals and Strategies Did the Town and its Partners Develop?

The Manchester Children, Youth and Family Master Plan was presented to the Board of Directors and the public on September 30, 2009. The Board's involvement in the planning process helped pave the way for their endorsement of a policy in support of the plan. To promote accountability, the document also contains an implementation scorecard identifying who is responsible for carrying out each recommendation, and which outcomes and indicators will be used to measure success.

Core Team and Planning Team members were invited to join the transition team called the Better Manchester Coalition. This transitional team engages 90 service providers and residents in implementing the plan, with three leadership teams focused on clusters of committee recommendations: 1) youth development, youth in transition, and education and afterschool; 2) early childhood development, health and safety; and 3) family economic success and neighborhoods and community. The most significant changes in the first two years of implementation involved the development of a new town infrastructure for neighborhood engagement and leadership.

Neighborhood Engagement

In July 2009, the Town established a new Office of Neighborhoods and Families (ONF) to continue engaging residents and neighborhoods in all aspects of the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan

without being burdened by other departmental missions or infrastructure. This helped to ensure a dependency on cooperation and leveraging of existing resources. The 2009-10 town budget recommended by the general manager and approved by the Board of Directors reallocated existing resources to fund the ONF director position. The town reassigned Assistant Director of Recreation Chris Silver to direct the new office and employed additional resources for a part-time assistant and operating budget. The office reports directly to the general manager. Its responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that the approved recommendations of the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan are implemented and revised accordingly;
- Providing access to timely and appropriate information, connections, support, skills and guidance to Manchester citizens;
- Increasing the ability of public and private citizen-related services to be fully coordinated and complementary;
- Creating or coordinating services, supports and opportunities to allow Manchester citizens to become increasingly more knowledgeable, skilled and capable of self-sustainability, and more capable and willing to act as positive resources to the overall vitality of their neighborhood and the community;
- Building the capacity within the neighborhoods to ensure that citizens can play a greater role in the management of their neighborhoods; and
- Bringing together professionals and citizens to build positive and proactive relationships and partnerships.

In partnership with the Youth Service Bureau, ONF works with the Better Manchester Coalition to facilitate the plan's recommended strategies. The ONF director also makes public presentations regarding the plan to town agencies, faith-based organizations, businesses, schools and other groups to continue raising awareness about the plan, encourage organizations to connect their strategies to the plan, and recruit new members of the coalition. Additionally, the ONF look for and promotes opportunities for collaboration between departments and agencies that serve the ONF mission. For instance, in the first year of implementation, ONF began working with the Manchester School Readiness Council to align the early childhood recommendations in the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan with the council's Early Childhood Community Plan. By infusing the plan into the fabric of the community, ONF has generated widespread support and buy-in, with residents now calling town offices to learn how to get involved.

One of the office's primary initial objectives was to build neighborhood capacity and leadership through the development of a new, volunteer-based Manchester Neighborhood Academy offering a wide range of free, community-based education courses. The Academy brings together and consolidates several existing opportunities for residents to learn about municipal government, including a Citizens' Government Academy, Youth Government Academy and Police Academy. Academy partners provide opportunities in the areas of early childhood development, family economic success, community engagement, health, and safety. Through these programs, residents meet and interact with local officials, who discuss how they make policy decisions and how town agencies operate. In addition

to teaching residents about “local government 101,” the Neighborhood Academy offers new skill sets to youth and adults on financial education, leadership development, and neighborhood organizing. For instance, the Academy incorporates the Step Up to Leadership curriculum used to educate residents serving on local boards and commissions. Some of the skills taught through this and other classes include meeting facilitation, public speaking, working with diverse individuals, grant writing and building youth-adult partnerships. The ONF piloted the Academy’s first program on financial literacy 101 for both youth and adults in February 2010, which are now consistently full.

In addition to teaching residents about “local government 101,” the Manchester Neighborhood Academy offers new skill sets to youth and adults on financial education, leadership development, and neighborhood organizing.

Another major ONF objective was to engage local residents in leading the development of four neighborhood-based resource centers that would provide meeting space for community groups to build neighborhood capacity and offer one-stop access to various town government and community services. At each site, neighborhood youth and adult residents and service providers would guide each center’s activities. Local leaders explored the concept of using the centers as a hub for many of these services, with satellite locations offering additional supports and opportunities. Town officials also envisioned using the first neighborhood-based center as a future location for both ONF and the Neighborhood Academy. With federal, state and local funding (\$200,000 from federal economic development incentives and \$500,000 from the Connecticut State Department of Social Services, in addition to local funding), the town began renovating the vacant Spruce Street Firehouse to open the initial resource center in the town’s diverse and high-need southeast quadrant. Only when the pilot center is operating at full capacity would the town extend the resource centers to existing buildings in other neighborhoods, one quadrant at a time.



ONF was also given responsibility for developing a single catalog to more efficiently inform residents about the various community services, programs and opportunities available to children, youth and families in Manchester. In collaboration with other town agencies, ONF would help redesign the existing Manchester parks and recreation catalog into a more comprehensive *Better Manchester Magazine*. Finally, ONF would support the creation and expansion of neighborhood organizations. Livable Neighborhoods groups would help residents organize at the grassroots level and partner with town government, businesses and service providers to identify and address community concerns. Priority projects would focus on health and safety, neighborhood beautification and greening, resource sharing, and community building. Official town support of neighborhood organizations would add legitimacy to these groups, and ONF and the Neighborhood Academy would train them to solve neighborhood problems more effectively. Through all of its various neighborhood engagement efforts, ONF aims to strengthen the social capital that holds communities together.

Youth Engagement

Prior to the completion of the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan, the YSB and the recreation department began organizing and facilitating the Manchester Youth Commission. ONF provides additional support by connecting commission members to town agencies, businesses, committees and coalitions to help them share their perspectives on issues that affect youth. Yet the youth commission is also part of a broader Authentic Youth Civic Engagement (AYCE) initiative contained within the plan. An AYCE model goes beyond symbolic forms of youth participation in local government to ensure that youth are seen as valuable participants in the work of local government, are prepared (i.e., with appropriate training) to take on meaningful roles in addressing relevant issues, and work in partnership with adults who respect, listen to, and support them.¹⁸ AYCE offers all youth in a community a continuum of options for service and involvement, consultation, representation and shared leadership.



Although some town leaders initially struggled with the AYCE concept, the introduction of youth-adult partnership trainings – beginning with a March 2010 training for youth commissioners and town employees led by consultant and youth engagement expert Adam Fletcher of the Olympia, Wash.-based CommonAction – have transformed youths’ and adults’ perceptions of each other. Youth commissioners have since shared their input on the hiring of a new police chief, gave formal presentations to the Board of Directors, took a position regarding library expansion, and offered ideas on the town’s conservation and economic development plans. The town has also appointed youth to local boards, commissions and committees. Youth continue to play leadership roles in both the Better Manchester Coalition and the neighborhood-based resource center. In the meantime, youth-adult partnership trainings have been incorporated into the Neighborhood Academy’s course options and brought to existing community organizations.

To expand opportunities for youth voice and engagement, the youth development committee has explored several other potential strategies, including: a centralized, online database of all youth engagement opportunities; a school-centered service project competition; a micro-grant program in which youth allocate donated funds for youth-led local service projects; and the adoption of the Project Citizen civic education and service learning program by schools and community groups.

Disconnected Youth

Like Rapid City, Manchester was selected to receive technical assistance under a separate NLC initiative that ran concurrently with the town’s participation in the Platform for Strengthening Learning Community. Manchester was one of four cities chosen to join both phases of a project supported by the U.S. Department of Labor that focused on reengaging disconnected youth ages 16-24 in the workforce through creative use of American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds. The town’s Disconnected Youth Coalition – organized by ONF and the Humans Services Department and composed of municipal, school district, community college, workforce investment board and faith- and community-based organization staff – emerged from this project and sought to align its work with the youth in transition committee formed during the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan process.

Northeastern University’s Center for Labor Market Studies estimated that approximately 900 youth ages 16-24 in the community and the broader region surrounding Manchester were “disconnected” from school and work. To help more of these youth get back on track, the Disconnected Youth Coalition created a Results-Based Accountability Plan focused on education, social services and employment.

Early in the initiative, NLC contracted with Northeastern University’s Center for Labor Market Studies to estimate the number of youth ages 16-24 in the four project sites who were neither in school nor working. The Center estimated that approximately 900 youth in the community and the broader region surrounding Manchester were “disconnected” from school and employment. To help more of these youth get back on track, the Disconnected Youth Coalition created a Results-Based Accountability Plan, facilitated by Youth Services Director Erica Bromley, focused on education, social services and employment to reconnect youth. A Career Pathways Guide for the youth, service providers and the

business community was also created. This resource guide offers a handy roadmap featuring local organizations that offer job readiness classes, vocational training and job and internship placement. In addition, a Memorandum of Agreement was signed by the key stakeholders.

Early Childhood

At the other end of the age spectrum, the early childhood committee aligned its work with the Early Childhood Community Plan led by the Manchester's School Readiness Council to ensure that young children enter school ready to learn and read at grade level by the end of third grade. The committee focused its attention on increasing the quality of care provided by family, friend and neighbor (FFN) caregivers – the most common child care arrangement used by low-income families. After obtaining input from caregivers and key stakeholders, the committee's goal was to expand FFN care providers' access to educational information and professional networking and training opportunities at the neighborhood-based resource centers. Another first-year priority was to determine the type of early childhood courses that could be offered at the Neighborhood Academy.

Education and Afterschool

While town directors and school board members had worked together in many areas, there remained points of friction over local budgets, after-hours use of school facilities and other issues. The education and afterschool committee's focus on out-of-school learning opportunities and the administration of the Developmental Assets survey helped strengthen relationships between the town and schools. Underlying these actions was a shared understanding that the entire community is responsible for the educational development of its youth. The committee recommended creating a town-wide network of afterschool providers and volunteer mentors, tutors, interpreters and translators. Committee members also explored the development of a centralized online database of youth and family services and programs (similar recommendations were made by the youth engagement and early childhood committees) available in schools and the community.

Health and Safety

The Healthier U program run by the town health and recreation departments aims to improve the health and wellness of local residents. The health and safety committee recommended increasing the scope of the initiative by expanding the Healthier U Committee to include youth, parents, neighborhood leaders, town employees, businesses, and other local leaders, with meetings facilitated by ONF. The committee also shared ideas for reinstating, improving and aligning health education curricula in local schools in collaboration with the Healthier U initiative and the Early Childhood Community Plan.

Family Economic Success

The Manchester Human Services Department's existing volunteer income tax assistance program helps residents file their tax returns, claim the Earned Income Tax Credit if they are eligible and improve their financial knowledge. The family economics committee considered ways to broaden youths' and



adults' access to financial education resources in conjunction with the town's EITC committee. Their recommendations were closely intertwined with the development of the neighborhood-based resource centers and the Manchester Neighborhood Academy. ONF worked with local youth to see if high school students could receive academic credit for participating in Neighborhood Academy financial education classes. The office also partnered with local banks to open savings accounts with a \$25 credit for youth who completed the Academy's pilot financial education 101 course with perfect attendance.

What Did the City Accomplish?

By the end of 2011, ONE, Youth Services Bureau, the Youth Commission, local partnering agencies and organizations and the Better Manchester Coalition had been actively carrying out the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan for more than two years. Each of the coalition's three leadership teams were focusing on their top priorities, including the town's emerging AYCE initiative. The town's most prominent achievement was the successful creation of a neighborhood-based infrastructure for community engagement upon which to build in future years.

A wide array of town agencies and local organizations collaborate to offer skill-building opportunities through the Manchester Neighborhood Academy. The Academy's 2011-12 course offerings include an extensive selection of community education programs to strengthen neighborhood capacity and leadership, organized by the areas of the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan:

The town's most prominent achievement was the successful creation of a neighborhood-based infrastructure for community engagement.

- **Family economic success:** ONF and a local bank sponsor financial education 101 for youth in grades 7-12, and ONF partners with the EITC coalition to offer financial education 101 for adults. Both courses use the FDIC's Money Smart curriculum.
- **Community engagement:** The Manchester Human Resources Department leads the very popular Manchester Government 101 course for residents interested in learning more about municipal operations and services. ONF sponsors the Step to Leadership course for citizens who want to play leadership roles in neighborhood organizations and other local groups, and works with the East Side Livable Neighborhood Group (see below) to share its experiences with other residents on how to organize neighborhood projects. The Office of Emergency Management sponsors the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) trainings. The Police Department sponsors the Citizens' Police Academy.
- **Youth development:** YSB now facilitates many of its existing skills groups through the Academy, including Mother-Daughter Circle, Girls Circle, and Boys Council, and partners with ONF to offer the Project Citizen civic education program to students in grades 6-9.
- **Early childhood development:** Parents of young children can take part in programs such as the Bright Start workshop on healthy child development sponsored by Building Healthy Families, Inc., a motor skills development program for preschoolers offered at the Lutz Children's Museum by the School Readiness Council and Eastern Connecticut Health Center (ECHN) Family Resource Center, and a fitness program for preschool children.
- **Health and safety:** The town health department uses Neighborhood Academy to offer AED/CPR classes, asthma self-management classes for elementary school children, a Safe Patient Boot Camp to help health care consumers make informed choices, and a Kid Fit class for parents of children of all ages. Conscious Choice Life Coaching and a Manchester High School student group co-present a bullying prevention class for parents.

In June 2011, then-Mayor Louis Spadaccini joined more than 100 town residents at a ribbon-cutting ceremony to celebrate the opening of Manchester's first neighborhood-based resource center, the East Side Public Safety Youth Center. Abandoned and used as storage space for more than a decade, the repurposed firehouse offers a new space for ONF headquarters, Neighborhood Academy courses, Better Manchester Coalition and East Side Livable Neighborhood Group meetings, afterschool programs, block watch meetings, the police athletic league, and other opportunities that bring together town government, organized community groups and neighborhood residents. According to town leaders, the redevelopment of the building "symbolizes hope for a region of town that has faced lingering challenges in recent years."

Town efforts to repurpose a vacant firehouse in order to create the East Side Public Safety Youth Center "symbolizes hope for a region of town that has faced lingering challenges in recent years."

The East Side Livable Neighborhood Group – the first of several neighborhood organizations that ONF is helping get off the ground – is another important building block in the revitalization of Manchester's southeast neighborhood. The group has three core area teams that work on beautification,

property maintenance, and health and safety. One of the group's first projects was to clean up the grounds and paint murals for a vacant building that used to be a NAPA Auto Parts store and had become a target for graffiti. The group commissioned a team of artists to paint the building through partnerships with ONF, Manchester Community College and the Manchester Art Association.



ONF published the first issue of *Better Manchester Magazine* in the winter of 2010. The office worked with the recreation department to build on the existing parks and recreation guide that it mails to every household in the community three times per year. The new magazine still contains a listing and description of all recreation programs, but also highlights local action to promote early childhood development, neighborhood revitalization, community engagement, youth development, health and safety, and family economic success. The revamped publication draws attention to a broader set of existing resources that many families may not have been aware of before the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan was created. In addition, the magazine not only highlights town government services, but also connects readers to community-based organizations and neighborhood groups and the ongoing implementation of the plan. Thanks to partnership with the local newspaper, the town only needs to work on content, design and layout. The newspaper handles advertising, printing and mailing, with the town covering postage costs.

Beyond the neighborhood engagement infrastructure, the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan has resulted in many less tangible accomplishments. Town directors, the general manager, department heads and staff, and school district leaders have all expressed their support and buy-in – a direct consequence of their participation in the planning process. The Board of Directors' formal adoption of the plan and policy changes creating ONF and the youth commission embed the work deeply into the way the town does business.

In turn, ONF lays the foundation for sustained resident engagement, organization and awareness of existing local resources through public forums and presentations to the community, local media, the town website, *Better Manchester Magazine*, the neighborhood resource centers, Neighborhood Academy and Livable Neighborhood Groups. Youth-adult partnerships are increasing the level of youth and adult engagement in the community and changing their perceptions of each other. Ultimately, the plan seeks to permanently enhance Manchester's social capital by strengthening relationships among neighbors, town government, schools, community organizations, businesses and faith communities.

What Factors Contributed to the City's Success? What Challenges Did the City Face and How Were They Overcome?

Exercising Municipal Leadership

Town directors, the general manager, agency heads serving on the cross-departmental team, and the director of ONF played central roles in leading the planning process from start to finish. The Children, Youth and Family Master Plan would not have become a reality if the Board of Directors had not adopted the *City Platform for Strengthening Families*, approved the hiring of a consultant, reassigned staff, and modified policies and town infrastructure to support the initiative. Early on, there was even some concern that the high level of enthusiasm of some directors would rush the process. By the fall of 2008, however, electoral politics at the state level and a set of referenda to amend the town charter had created some obstacles to setting a firm timetable – a cautionary message that other cities embarking on a youth master planning process must be sensitive to the timing of the political calendar.

Town officials exercised their power to convene key stakeholders and raise awareness of their planning goals through the media. They encouraged and empowered the cross-departmental team to lead early efforts. The town also chose not to bury the initiative too far down within a single town department, but instead to have ONF report directly to the general manager. The ongoing involvement of local elected officials, the general manager and town agency staff in crafting the plan guaranteed their support for its implementation over many years.

An Inclusive and Adaptive Process

Manchester's guiding principle was inclusiveness. According to ONF Director Chris Silver, "Because our plan is an adaptive plan, it requires the community's willingness to change, both the organization and the citizens. To do this, you have to have buy-in from both. They both must be included in the process of planning and implementation. They must have a clear understanding of what the change is, what the change



requires, and how the change will affect them and how the community will benefit from the change. Both must feel supported and empowered to make change happen. There needs to be a consistency of leadership over the long term and capacity-building efforts to grow new leaders both within the organization and in the community."

“Because our plan is an adaptive plan, it requires the community’s willingness to change, both the organization and the citizens. To do this, you have to have buy-in from both. They both must be included in the process of planning and implementation.”

- Chris Silver, Director of the Manchester Office of Neighborhoods and Families

As the work progressed, town leaders recognized that promoting inclusion and adaptation would be an ongoing challenge. In particular, local leaders would have to be proactive in securing the participation of non-town employees in coalition activities, training new leaders, and keeping momentum going after each summer when participation tends to sag. However, the neighborhood-level infrastructure that ONF oversees enhances the town’s ability to cultivate new neighborhood leadership and capacity over time. In addition, the Better Manchester Coalition and Livable Neighborhood Groups are each charged with ongoing recruitment of new members as one of their core tasks. ONF took the plan “on tour” in its first year to connect other local groups to the work.

Youth and School District Involvement

At the outset, the town had underestimated the ability of youth to participate in the process. Local leaders benefited from Richard Goll’s perspective and experience working with other communities that had created meaningful opportunities for youth involvement in youth master planning. It also took time for people in Manchester to learn what authentic youth civic engagement means and how it should be structured. There was a need to change perceptions among both young people and adults. Many adults saw youth as recipients of services rather than resources who could improve the community’s quality of life.

Several strategies helped the town address these challenges. First, youth were involved in every step of the process, from the planning committees to the Better Manchester Coalition. Their participation proved that youth had valuable input to contribute. Second, the town sponsored trainings to help youth and adults work in partnership more effectively. When they realized it would be difficult to encourage both youth and adults to register, they brought the training to existing community-based programs to benefit from a captive audience. Third, the youth commission is a permanent, visible presence in giving youth a voice in local government. Finally, the town government continually looks for opportunities for youth engagement. ONF and the human services department employ youth directly when funding is available and the YSB connects youth with useful summer and year-round employment opportunities.

The Manchester school system connects with the plan through committees, coalitions, programs and initiatives which include, but are not limited to, school-based youth services programs, collaborative out-of-school time (OST) programming, a Coalition to Connect Youth, OST meal programs, College Exposure Initiative, a community-wide youth art initiative, facility sharing and neighborhood-based parent/teacher conferences.

Developing a Financing Strategy

In creating the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan, town leaders communicated a funding principle that the plan should not increase the town government's bottom line. Instead, one purpose of the plan was to better coordinate and maximize existing resources and systems, and build partnerships to reinforce what already works and address what needs improvement. The Neighborhood Academy is a prime example of this principle in action. Through the Academy, town agencies and nonprofit partners bring free educational programs to the community, with volunteers teaching the courses. The town's reassignment of staff made ONF possible. Its renovation of an underutilized, vacant building paved the way for the East Side Public Safety Youth Center. *Better Manchester Magazine* builds on and enhances the existing parks and recreation catalog.

Learning from Other Cities

Like Rapid City, Manchester benefited from ideas from other communities facing similar challenges and used NLC's *City Platform for Strengthening Families* as the framework for its plan, as well as the Neighborhood Academy and *Better Manchester Magazine*. Richard Goll shared his knowledge and experience using the Platform to facilitate comprehensive planning initiatives in Colorado and elsewhere. He also organized the site visit to Hampton, Va., which was instrumental in shaping Manchester's AYCE initiative. The learning community enabled an ongoing exchange of ideas between Manchester and Rapid City. NLC shared best practices from other cities, including examples of youth master plans and its 2010 AYCE guide for municipal leaders. The NLC project on reengaging disconnected youth helped Manchester officials and staff network and learn from peers in Dubuque, Iowa, Rochester, N.Y., and Tucson, Ariz.

Setting Goals, Using Data, and Sharing Accountability

Because the town intended to implement various elements of the Children, Youth and Family Master Plan over a period of 10-15 years, a strong infrastructure was needed to make sustained progress. ONF and the Better Manchester Coalition share responsibility for moving this work forward so that the plan remains a living document. The plan contains an implementation scorecard that offers a blueprint for future actions, and the Developmental Assets Survey and state benchmarks for early childhood development are among the baseline measures that will be used to assess results. Town government itself has embedded a focus on outcomes into the way it does business by adopting a performance measurement system. In addition, the Coalition to Connect Youth developed a Results-Based Accountability Plan and human services staff adopted an RBA-based plan for their department.

Looking Ahead

Over the next few years, the Town of Manchester plans to build on its early accomplishments. Town leaders seek to sustain the Better Manchester Coalition and increase the number of Livable Neighborhood Groups. They will continue to increase the number of educational programs at the

Neighborhood Academy and will apply lessons from the East Side Public Safety Youth Center to establish additional neighborhood-based resource centers in the town's three other quadrants. The town also plans to create an out-of-school time (OST) network to better coordinate and promote existing OST opportunities for children and youth. It will continue moving forward on its AYCE initiative through community youth mapping, new program development and creation of a structure for maintaining the initiative over the long term.



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