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Three Southeast Communities to Improve Quality in Youth Programming

Ready by 21 Awards Three Strong Communities with Quality Improvement & Asset Building Challenge Grants

Wicomico County, MD; Asheville, NC; and Ft. Myers, FL receive Technical Assistance Grants

The Ready by 21 National Partnership is proud to announce the awardees of the Ready by 21 Quality Improvement & Asset Building Challenge Grants (Q&A Challenge). Wicomico County, MD; Asheville, NC; and Ft. Myers, FL showed a broad cross-sector commitment building assets for children and youth and so were selected to be part of the Q&A Challenge first cohort.

The Q&A Challenge is a research-based technical assistance model designed to help communities systematically assess developmental assets in a population of children and youth and then improve the quality of out-of-school time setting where these children and youth spend time. The Q&A Challenge represents an advance in community level efforts to align out-of-school time programmatic resources with community-specific profiles of developmental assets. The funding for this Challenge was generously provided by the Altria tobacco operating companies: Philip Morris USA, U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company and John Middleton Company.

Out-of-school time (OST) providers – the range of agencies offering programs, supports and opportunities during the non-school hours – are a critical strategic resource in efforts to ensure all young people are Ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life. Two Ready by 21 National Partners – United Way Worldwide and the National Collaboration for Youth, and the local leaders they represent – are heavily involved in out-of-school time programming and have a vested interest in building local capacity for these efforts.

The Ready by 21 Q&A Challenge offers leaders a low-risk opportunity to pilot a scalable, evidence-based approach to continuous improvement in settings that serve children and youth and to engage local providers in critical conversations about service quality coordination with specific developmental goals in mind. The Q&A Challenge joins the Search Institute's Developmental Assets® measurement tools with the Weikart Center's *Youth Program Quality Intervention* to help out-of-school-time providers, schools, and other community organizations build Developmental Assets by systematically assessing and improving the quality of their programming. Each community will receive training and technical assistance from the Weikart Center to build the community and site level capacities necessary to implement the Q&A model in 10 pilot sites serving youth age 10 and up, including:

- Local intermediary organization capacity to administer standardized measures and develop diagnostic profiles of both developmental assets and program;
- Site and system level management skills related to continuous quality improvement;
- Front line staff capacity to deliver high quality relationships and instruction targeting specific developmental assets;

- Local United Ways, school districts and/or public and private funders will convene stakeholders to create a community-level plan to scale and sustain the efforts related to the Challenge.

Community Profiles

Wicomico County Partnership for Families and Children

Wicomico Partnership for Families and Children (WPFC) is a local governance board established by the State of Maryland for Wicomico County and the City of Salisbury. Wicomico County is the largest of nine rural counties on the Eastern Shore of Maryland wedged between the Atlantic Coast and the Chesapeake Bay. The leadership coalition that will champion the Q&A Challenge is made up of a diverse cross-section of leaders including local schools, local child-serving agencies, business leaders, community organizations and families that has implemented several innovative projects over the past 10 years. Wicomico County will be undertaking the mini-challenge in partnership with Wicomico 21st Century Programs in public schools, Salvation Army – Richard Hazel Youth Center, Wicomico Parks & Recreation’s Kid’s Clubs, and several other local community/faith-based organizations. WPFC was selected to participate in the Q&A Challenge because of its strong cross-sector ties and track record of successfully implementing major initiatives. In addition to the Q&A Challenge, WPFC plans to establish a network of Boys & Girls Clubs and will work with Americorp and VISTA to pilot the new GIRAFFE HEROES after school (civic engagement) curriculum in participating program sites.

United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County, North Carolina

United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County represents the largest county in rural western North Carolina. It seeks to mobilize local business leaders and community members in support of targeted community interventions in the areas of education, income and health, with a strong emphasis on expert oversight of grant-funded programs and the involvement of community volunteers. The Q&A Challenge will tie into an existing cross-network project called Middle School Success, which began after lengthy meetings with business owners, local philanthropists and elected officials to decide on an area of targeted community change. Middle School Success will involve Asheville City and Buncombe County schools as well as the YMCA and YWCA, the Boys & Girls Clubs of Buncombe County and several community-based organizations working to provide coordinated supports for middle school students. The United Way of Asheville and Buncombe County was selected for the challenge because it will incorporate the work into an existing targeted initiative with strong local support and experience in evaluation.

Fort Myers Youth Services Coalition, Florida

The vision of the Fort Myers Youth Services Coalition is to empower youth today for a better tomorrow. It was founded after a two day summit in which 16 youth serving organizations, including faith based, nonprofit and government, strategized to ensure the protection of the City’s most valuable resource- its youth. The Coalition has greatly increased inter-agency communication which has helped partners find creative funding sources and improved youths’ access to services. The Coalition will be implementing the challenge with the support of the YMCA, Boys & Girls Club of Lee County, The Bridge Teen Center, the City of Fort Myers Recreation Division, and several community and faith-based organizations. The Fort Myers Youth Services Coalition was selected for the mini-challenge because of its impressive track record for uniting a diverse coalition of youth serving organizations.

About Ready by 21

Ready by 21 is a set of strategies that helps communities prepare all youth for college, work and life. It taps the expertise and dedication of local leaders by helping them achieve better outcomes for young people. Using innovative and proven strategic planning tools, the Ready by 21 Partnership coaches, supports and mobilizes communities to better prepare youth for success. Ready by 21 is a unique, outcomes-focused planning approach that looks at children from birth to young adulthood, both inside schools and out. It empowers communities to develop plans that hold leaders and providers accountable based on shared local goals for young people.

About the Ready by 21 National Partnership

The Ready by 21 National Partnership is an unprecedented coalition of prominent national organizations from all sectors whose members touch the lives of more than 100 million children and youth across the country. Created in 2008, the partnership offers

leaders tools and supports to change the way they do business together, so that more young people are ready for college, work and life.