



All youth ready for college, work & life.

America's Promise 2007
100 Best Communities
for Young People
Competition Winner!



"The Forum's Ready by 21 coaching has been wonderful. This is not cookie cutter training and technical assistance. They engage us in the principles, listen to our needs and then assist us in creating the tools to achieve success."

Jacque Douglas, Council for Youth Development

**AN ARCHITECTURALLY DISTINCTIVE
INDIANA COMMUNITY
CREATES A BOLD
BLUEPRINT FOR YOUTH**

**COUNCIL FOR YOUTH
DEVELOPMENT**

*Bartholomew County
Columbus, Indiana*

"We can have all the interstate access imaginable, all the tax abatements that a city council can offer, all the amenities of a cosmopolitan and diverse community, but without a skilled and adaptable cadre of young people to work in the businesses this city is trying to attract those other assets are worthless."

The Republic, Columbus



The historic Bartholomew County Courthouse stands as one of the many architectural gems in the city of Columbus.

Case Study #2 in the Ready by 21™ Change Makers in Action Series
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August, 2006

Articulating the Community Challenge:

“In the past we’ve been good at coming up with solutions among a limited group of community leaders, but the actual ‘solving’ part that gets us to long-term change requires reaching beyond that smaller group and engaging in an ongoing, broad-based community process where everyone has a role in the planning and implementation of efforts to support youth.”

- Community Stakeholder

With fewer than 40,000 residents, Columbus, Indiana—a small town an hours’ drive south of Indianapolis—appears an unlikely candidate for topping a list involving a world class distinction in any arena. Yet this town, home to Cummins Inc., Irwin Financial Services, and other Fortune 500 companies, ranks among the top five American cities known for architectural distinction. Six of its buildings are national historic landmarks, and more than 60 other buildings sustain the Bartholomew County capital seat’s reputation as a showcase of modern architecture.

Columbus’ architectural greatness reflects an ingrained determination among its business and community leaders to be the best in class in whatever they do. So it is not surprising that more than a decade ago, at the first signs of an emerging youth gang culture, leaders turned their attention from physical capital to human capital improvements, and set out to “fix” the problem by creating a blueprint for youth development. The current blueprint represents the third generation of recent community efforts to address the needs of children and youth.

The third time around, what makes this blueprint different? Community ownership. Past initiatives were the result of “top-down” approaches that represented considerable investments from the local civic leadership but after-the-fact engagement of rank and file community members. This time around, the leadership group took steps to shift the fact-finding and decision-making process from the board room to the community.

Decentralizing Planning Nets a Central Plan

Early in 2004, a core group of leaders began to engage a broader and more diverse group of citizens, service providers and administrators in discussions about the changing face of the community. Demographic and social shifts over the last decade—including a steady rise in the Hispanic population and the number of children in the school system that are eligible for free and reduced lunch—presented Bartholomew County with new challenges that required a new solution.

“More people are working lower wage jobs,” Beth Morris, director of the Healthy Communities Initiative

explains. “We really have a different community makeup than we did 10, 15 years ago.”

The community’s inability to quickly adjust programs and strategies to accommodate these changes was becoming apparent in the numbers: The number of expulsions doubled between 1999 and 2004. Teen pregnancies increased by 50 percent between 2000 and 2004.

Determined to do things differently, business and community leaders began convening a larger group of parents, service providers, and advocates to review the data and discuss why past efforts to address problems had gone astray. A few of the leaders had heard Karen Pittman, the Forum for Youth Investment’s executive director, speak at an Indianapolis conference. The big picture vision, big tent partnership, big impact planning process she described resonated with them. They invited her to spend a day in Columbus. By the end of the day, they were convinced that they needed to get where she challenged them to go. The only question was how.

“We know that every child needs community support to become a well-rounded adult. Now, we have the right framework, and we have the potential. It’s just time to come together and see how we can help each other.”

*- Jacque Douglas,
Council for Youth Development*

The leadership group decided that the key to success this time was to hire a local coordinator. The Forum agreed and worked with Bartholomew County leaders to create a coaching plan that fit their budget. Jacque Douglas, a long-time educator, was hired in October 2004. The magic began.

Douglas and the core group made a quick decision to decentralize the planning process. Community members who had been attending the large

discussion groups were invited to join one of five work groups, each focused on an age group (0-5; 6-10; 11-14; 15-18; and 19-21). Additional members were recruited to round out each group and ensure diverse perspectives.

Work groups were given common tools and a common charge:

- define “readiness” for their age group across each of five broad outcome areas (see below),
- engage the community to document their perceptions about child and youth outcomes, community supports and practical solutions.

The work groups took their jobs seriously. They reviewed data and research and deliberated on how best to word their goals. They decided who to talk to and involve in their action planning. As the work group members reached out to other rings of people, the community began to buzz.

Over the course of a few months, volunteers and a part-time staff person managed to mount the broadest based data-gathering and community

planning effort that Columbus has utilized in recent memory. More than 300 community members, including 150 young people, had been personally engaged in small group discussions.

The net result of this decentralized approach: a shared vision and a combined sense of community pride and urgency.

The Council for Youth Development (CYD): Keeper of the Covenant

Community leaders who had been through priority-setting processes before see the difference. “We’ve come up with solutions before—good solutions. But solution is not the same as ‘solved,’ one long-time community stakeholder noted, reflecting that “the actual ‘solving’ part that gets us to long-term change requires reaching beyond that smaller group and engaging in an ongoing, broad-based community process where everyone has a role in the planning and implementation..”

Community stakeholders are confident that this blueprint will have staying power. When asked why,

The CYD “Solution:” Five Core Beliefs and a Publicly Owned Blueprint for Development

● All children and youth can succeed and be Ready by 21. ● Success requires early and sustained investments. ● Some children and families need extra support. ● Everyone in the community has a role. ● Child development is multi-dimensional.

Age	Learning	Working	Thriving	Connecting	Contributing
0-5	Ready for school	Introduced to concept of work	Receive high quality health care and have their overall health needs met	Bond with at least one supportive adult	Introduced to good citizenship
6-10	Master Indiana State Standards	Identify and value all types of work by all ages	Thrive in a safe environment – shelter, clothing, nutrition and medical care	Feel good about who they are and develop positive relationships with adults/peers	Practice life skills, serve others and learn acceptable ways to shape the community
11-14	Succeeding in school	Aware of possible career paths that give them purpose	Develop proper nutrition, hygiene, exercise routines and personal safety	Engage in socially acceptable behavior, develop healthy interpersonal relationships, have a healthy self-concept	Demonstrate attitudes and behaviors of civic responsibility
15-18	Attain a high school diploma	Develop independent life skills using their talents and interests	Access to medical care and education resulting in healthy lifestyles	Healthy self-concepts through supportive adult and peer relationships and participation in constructive activities	Involved in meaningful community activities with opportunities to contribute
19-21	Pursue higher academic or vocational education	Opportunity for career success	Awareness and ability to be healthy physically and emotionally	Understand how their actions impact themselves and those around them	Positively involved in the community

Challenge

How does a community move from a traditional "top-down" process to a broad-based data-collection and community engagement process for monitoring progress and setting priorities for children and youth, and sustain broad-based momentum in support for all youth?

Solutions

- Establish an entity charged with tracking and monitoring efforts to support children and youth;
- Map community efforts across age groups and broad outcomes, noting populations requiring extra attention and gaps in what's available for youth;
- Engage the community in data collection, action planning and ongoing monitoring of community progress.

Results

- Priority areas for youth are rooted in a broad-based community data-gathering and input process, a departure from "top-down" approaches;
- Comprehensive report on youth status reveals priority areas and energizes the community for lasting change;
- Community has a data-driven process for identifying gaps.

they point to three things: the clarity and breadth of the vision, the power of the engagement process, and the potential of the Council for Youth Development to maintain community engagement, connect community resources and create small but steady wins.



A coalition of school, government, business and non-profit partners committed to:

- ❖ Activating sectors of the community;
- ❖ Energizing, expanding, and enhancing programs;
- ❖ Mobilizing young people to use their power as change agents;
- ❖ Engaging adults in building sustained relationships with children and youth;
- ❖ Influencing civic decisions;
- ❖ Monitoring and sharing current information concerning issues related to children and youth.

Year One Progress Report

The Council has had its low moments. Fundraising has been more difficult than expected. As a result, the Council has not been able to draw down the full amount of matching dollars awarded by the United Way of Central Indiana. One reason for the difficulty, suggests Jacque Douglas, was the Council's initial difficulty explaining what it was going to do after the "plan" was in place. Continued work groups meetings were a sign that the coalition was working. But it was difficult to explain what was happening to outsiders.

"Business leaders were enthusiastic about the level of community engagement we had achieved in the planning process," reported Douglas, "but had a difficult time understanding what the Council was going to do in the long haul. We weren't communicating well."

Convinced that they were on the right track, the

Council leaders focused on articulating the "glue" role that they were convinced they should play and demonstrating its value by creating an annual progress report to the community that provided very accessible responses to five basic questions answered for each of the five outcome areas:

- Why is this (outcome) important?
- How are children and youth doing?
- How is the community supporting children and youth?
- Where can I get more information?
- What can I do?

This year's report, in some ways, provided a baseline on child and youth progress and existing community supports. Next year's report will dig deeper, as the Council starts to announce specific goals and report on progress.

Producing the report, however, did the trick. The media picked up on it and ran a series of five stories, one on each outcome area. The community responded well to a fundraising campaign sponsored by the Council. The Council is now planning a major invitational event for the spring at which it will celebrate its successes, announce new goals, and share its story with other communities across the state.

Behind the Scenes Partnership with the Forum

Ongoing Coaching. The Council for Youth Development was a member of the Forum's first Ready by 21™ Learning Group. CYD contracted with the Forum to provide additional coaching supports to the CYD director as she developed the work groups, designed the community engagement process and prepared the first year report.

Youth Engagement Planning. In addition, the Forum has provided training and on-site support to CYD as it designs and implements the first county-wide youth engagement effort.

Leveraging. The Forum is now working with CYD to plan an invitational meeting to introduce CYD and the Ready by 21™ approach to the state.

Want to Learn More?

Contact The Ready by 21™ Team at the Forum: youth@forumfyi.org or Jacque Douglas, Director of the CYD: douglasj@bcsc.k12.in.us
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