“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.

AN ARCHITECTURALLY DISTINCTIVE INDIANA COMMUNITY CREATES A BOLD BLUEPRINT FOR YOUTH

COUNCIL FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Bartholomew County
Columbus, Indiana

Case Study #2 in the Ready by 21™ Change Makers in Action Series
Download them all: www.forumfyi.org
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.

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

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

Council for Youth Development, Ready by 21™ Brochure. 2006
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.

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.