

THE YOUTH ACTION CREW PROJECT



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A Retrospective Case Study Evaluation

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THE YOUTH ACTION CREW PROJECT

A RETROSPECTIVE CASE STUDY EVALUATION

EVALUATION CONTEXT

Research demonstrates that involvement in high-quality youth programs benefits young people personally, socially and academically (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Yet many families—particularly low income and minority families—are unsatisfied with the quality, affordability and availability of options in their communities (Duffett & Johnson, 2004). In many communities there exists an opportunity gap that limits the number of youth who benefit from participation (Lochner, Allen & Blyth, 2009). The Youth Action Crew (YAC) project was designed to address this troubling gap.

This evaluation report presents a retrospective case study of the YAC project as a model for youth-led community mapping to increase awareness of and participation in youth development programs. YAC is a community-based youth engagement project designed to provide youth and adults with the resources to identify, promote, and develop youth-friendly programs and places. Its youth-led strategy involves youth interviewing other youth and adults and pulling together information from other existing local databases in their community about the availability of youth-friendly programs and places. YAC members then create and disseminate neighborhood maps of youth-friendly spaces throughout their community in order to promote participation in youth programs. Some crews work further to develop community activities, events and resources for young people.

EVALUATION APPROACH

This evaluation's approach was grounded in learning and improvement. Based on document review and stakeholder interviews, the case study offers a descriptive portrait that captures both accomplishments and barriers. In addition, it offers lessons learned and suggests implications for future directions and possibilities for work in this area.

Evaluation Purpose and Audience

The purpose was to gain a clear picture of the YAC project, its impact, as well as gain insights into what would be helpful for future YAC projects. The goal was to describe the YAC project, document its development and implementation, and summarize accomplishments and impact of the YAC projects to date. Further, the evaluation presents lessons learned and recommendations to inform and guide future YAC projects and related efforts.

The primary audience is the Extension Center for Youth Development staff and leadership team which provides organizational leadership and oversight. The secondary audience is community stakeholders (community organizations, funders) who are committed to youth.

Evaluation Questions

The four key questions to be addressed by this evaluation are the following:

1. **BACKGROUND.** What is the YAC project's history? What is its purpose or goals? What is its theoretical framework? What is its structure?
2. **CONTRIBUTIONS.** What have the YAC projects contributed? What are the project's strengths and benefits? What was accomplished? What was its impact?
3. **CHALLENGES.** What challenges have surfaced for YAC projects? What are the main barriers or limitations?
4. **IMPLICATIONS.** What are the implications and future directions for work in this area? What is the YAC approach's potential?

Evaluation Design

The evaluation provides a retrospective account of the YAC project since its inception in 2005. A literature review of youth involvement in community-based participatory research, community mapping and, social marketing was conducted to inform the evaluation's design and questions.

To address the evaluation questions, the evaluation included two methodological strands:

1. **DOCUMENT REVIEW.** The first strand was primarily a *descriptive account* of YAC projects. A review of documents, including reports, evaluations, presentations, program materials, training curricula, products and other documents provides a descriptive account of the history of YAC, the structure of the intervention, the various projects, and the resulting outcomes and impacts.
2. **STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS.** The second strand captured key *stakeholder perspectives* on YAC projects. Those involved in the development, training and delivery of YAC and a selection of funders and crew leaders were interviewed to capture issues, contributions and challenges in order to inform future strategy and directions (see Appendix A for interview protocol).

THE CASE: YOUTH ACTION CREW PROJECT

YAC is a youth-led research, mapping, marketing and community development project in which teams or "crews" of young people and the adults who support them canvas their neighborhood and interview community members, create a map of youth-friendly places, and distribute the map to parents and youth in order to promote youth participation in out-of-school time activities. Some YACs go further and work to promote the development of community resource to better serve the area's youth and families. Next, the history of the YAC project, its purpose, theoretical framework and structure are described.

History

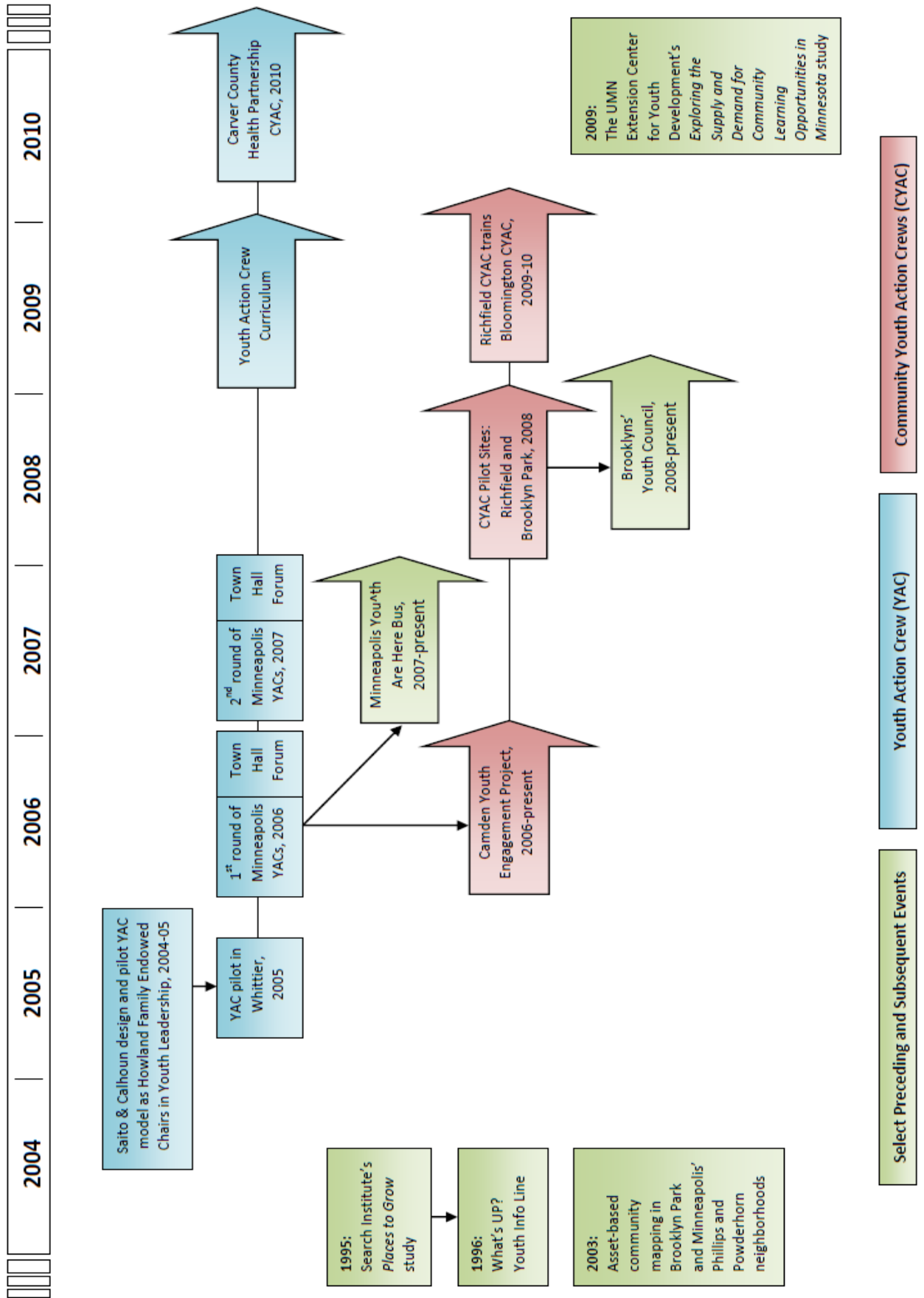
The concept of asset-based community development has a long history in itself. Further, in Minneapolis there were a number of events and activities that served as key precursors to YAC (see Figure 1 for timeline).

- ❑ In 1995, Search Institute conducted a study of youth development opportunities for youth aged 7 to 14 years in Minneapolis called *Places to Grow* (Saito, Benson, Blyth & Sharma, 1995). The study involved interviews with 60 program providers and key informants from youth programs, a survey of 187 program providers to assess perceived barriers and recommendations for improvement, and surveys of 600 students in third, fifth, seventh, and eighth grades, and their parents. The study demonstrated that half of Minneapolis' young people did not participate in youth development programs, largely because of lack of awareness of what was available and lack of transportation.
- ❑ The What's UP? Info Line was created in 1996 by the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board (YCB) as one response to the *Places to Grow* study. What's UP? was a youth-run phone information service providing young people ages 7-18 with information about free and low-cost programs, activities, education, employment and service opportunities in their neighborhoods, citywide.
- ❑ In 2003 Minneapolis' Phillips and Powderhorn neighborhoods and the first-ring suburb of Brooklyn Park conducted asset-based community mapping.

Building on the collective efforts outlined above, YAC began in 2005 as a pilot project developed by Beki Saito and Delroy Calhoun as part of their experience as Howland Endowed Chairs. Howland Endowed Chairs are distinguished practice, research and policy experts who are brought to the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development to contribute their expertise and innovation to a given topic. Saito and Calhoun created and piloted YAC in their own neighborhood in the south Minneapolis neighborhood of Whittier in the summer of 2005. Since then, the YAC model has been adapted and implemented successfully with more than 15 crews serving over 20 Minneapolis-area communities (see Figure 1 for timeline):

- ❑ With funding from the Minneapolis Youth Coordinating Board, The McKnight Foundation and the University of Minnesota, three other neighborhoods in Minneapolis embarked upon the YAC project in the summer of 2006. Seven more neighborhoods were targeted in 2007.
- ❑ One of the original neighborhoods targeted in 2006, Camden, developed the Camden Youth Engagement Project which took the model and further and emphasized Phase 3 (see sidebar, p. 7). This expanded version came to be referred to as Community Youth Action Crew (CYAC).
- ❑ Based on Camden's success, Hennepin County funded two first-ring suburbs, the Richfield Community Youth Action Crew and Brooklyn Park Community Youth Action Crew in 2008 (see sidebars, p. 9-10).
- ❑ In 2010, the Carver County Health Partnership Community Youth Action Crew launched the first county-wide YAC (see sidebar, p11).

FIGURE 1. YOUTH ACTION CREW TIMELINE



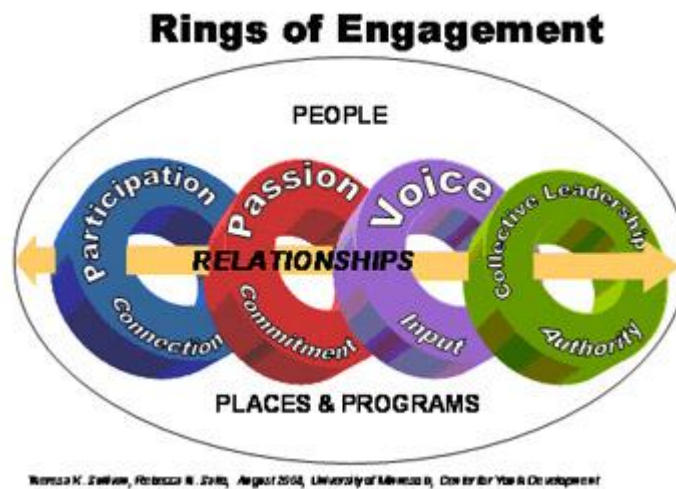
Purpose

The goals of the YAC project are to 1) increase awareness of services and opportunities, 2) create and disseminate marketing information about youth-friendly spaces, and 3) mobilize communities to promote youth-friendly programs and places. The aim is to find out what's happening locally that's good for young people, and help more youth get involved in those things. Its purpose is to increase awareness of existing opportunities and help promote the development of more options for youth.

Theoretical Framework

The YAC model engages youth in research, community mapping and social marketing and community development. It both informed and was informed by Sullivan and Saito's (University of Minnesota, 2008) model for youth engagement that is characterized by participation, passion, voice and collective leadership opportunities created by and with youth (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Sullivan and Saito's Model of Youth Engagement



YOUTH AS RESEARCHERS. YAC is grounded in participatory and action research which involves participants in the inquiry process with the aim of producing useful knowledge and action for social change. Engaging youth in participatory and action research can enhance the inquiry, benefit youth, and contribute to society (Walker, 2007). In YAC, young people conduct interviews and data analysis to assess community services and opportunities.

MAPPING & MARKETING. Community asset mapping is a data collection and communication tool that has been promoted as a participatory action research tool with youth (Amsden & VanWynsberghe, 2005). It is a strategy for describing the current situation or environment, identifying gaps, and envisioning a better future. The YAC model relies on community mapping to identify, promote, and develop youth-friendly programs and places.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT. This model is an asset-based community development approach that focuses on positive attributes that exist within the community. This approach engages people and leverages existing relationships among community members, businesses and institutions — the basic building blocks for developing healthy, safe neighborhoods.

Structure

The Youth Action Crew project is a process rather than a program. The YAC curriculum (Saito, McBride, Griffin-Wiesner & Gilgen, 2009) is flexible so as to be modified to each community that adopts it, but there are guiding principles that underpin the approach.

The YAC project is a youth-adult partnership that consists of 1) a crew of young people, ages 13 to 17, 2) an adult crew leader or team of leaders that mentor and supervise the crew, and 3) a planning team that offers support, oversight, and guidance to the project as a whole.

The crew members should be very familiar with their community (i.e., live, work or go to school in the neighborhood). The crew leaders should be adults in the community who have a history of effectively engaging young people and sharing power and authority with them. The planning team advises the crew leader and helps represent the project in the community.

The YAC project's structure parallels its theoretical framework. The curriculum takes crews through a process that unfolds in a 10-week or 10-month period. The 10-week model of YAC consists of Phases 1 and 2. The expanded 10-month model, known as Community Youth Action Crew (CYAC), focuses on Phase 3.

- ❑ **PHASE 1: YOUTH AS RESEARCHERS.** In Phase 1, youth gather and analyze data on the existence and awareness of youth-friendly opportunities in the community. Youth interview young people, employers, youth program providers, and other adults to find out about program awareness, participation, and interests and perceived barriers to participation. They also search out existing databases and sources of information about programs and resources for youth.
- ❑ **PHASE 2: MAPPING & MARKETING.** In Phase 2, youth design and market a community map of youth-friendly spaces (Figure 3). As part of the marketing campaign, youth provide youth-friendly places a sign that says, "You[^]th Are Here" (see front cover). They distribute these youth-created maps throughout their neighborhood, sometimes giving presentations about what the needs are for out-of-school time programs and opportunities for young people in their community. The map and signs aim to increase awareness of youth-friendly spaces among youth and families living in the neighborhood in order to increase participation.
- ❑ **PHASE 3: COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.** In Phase 3, youth identify unmet needs of neighborhood youth for programming and barriers to participation and work to promote the development of appropriate resources to better serve the youth and families. Youth mobilize adults to transform services and resource allocations to better meet the needs of young people in their neighborhood. Phase 3 is the hallmark of the Community Youth Action Crew (CYAC) model.

Figure 3. Sample Map



RESULTS

As the YAC project has evolved, it has accomplished and contributed to several significant successes. Just as the YAC project did not develop in isolation of other preceding and related efforts, there have been ripple effects where YAC and its offshoots sparked or contributed to other efforts. Without implying attribution, it is important to recognize these collective contributions connected to YAC.

Contributions

YAC projects were designed to provide youth and adults with the resources to identify, promote, and develop youth-friendly programs and places. Through the process, communities and adults were impacted. Several individual community YAC cases are featured in sidebars in this report. Additional contributions are outlined below.

Community Awareness. YAC projects have identified programs and places, and the resulting maps and marketing efforts have helped raise awareness of youth-friendly opportunities for young people.

- **MAPS.** The resulting neighborhood maps have proven to be a useful source of information for youth, parents and policymakers (see Appendix B for samples of maps). YAC data were combined to create a city-wide map that served as a powerful illustration of the gaps between where youth are and existing youth programs and opportunities (Figure 4). One stakeholder described how the maps “generate buzz” in the community and raise awareness of the importance of youth-friendly spaces and put youth “on the radar”.
- **MARKETING.** The You^Ath Are Here logo is a recognizable marketing tool. A 2008 evaluation of Camden’s project began to assess the impact of the marketing strategy. Intercept interviews with area residents found that over half (57%, N=23) were aware of the Camden map of youth assets.

CAMDEN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

IN 2006, THE NEWLY-FORMED COLLABORATIVE – THE *YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PROJECT (YEP)* – AGREED TO APPLY THE FIRST TWO PHASES OF THE YAC MODEL IN THE CAMDEN COMMUNITY OF NORTH MINNEAPOLIS.

WITH FUNDING FROM THE MINNEAPOLIS YOUTH COORDINATING BOARD (YCB), THE YEP’S CREWS IDENTIFIED COMMUNITY ASSETS AND PRODUCED AND MARKETED MAPS SHOWING YOUTH-FRIENDLY PLACES IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

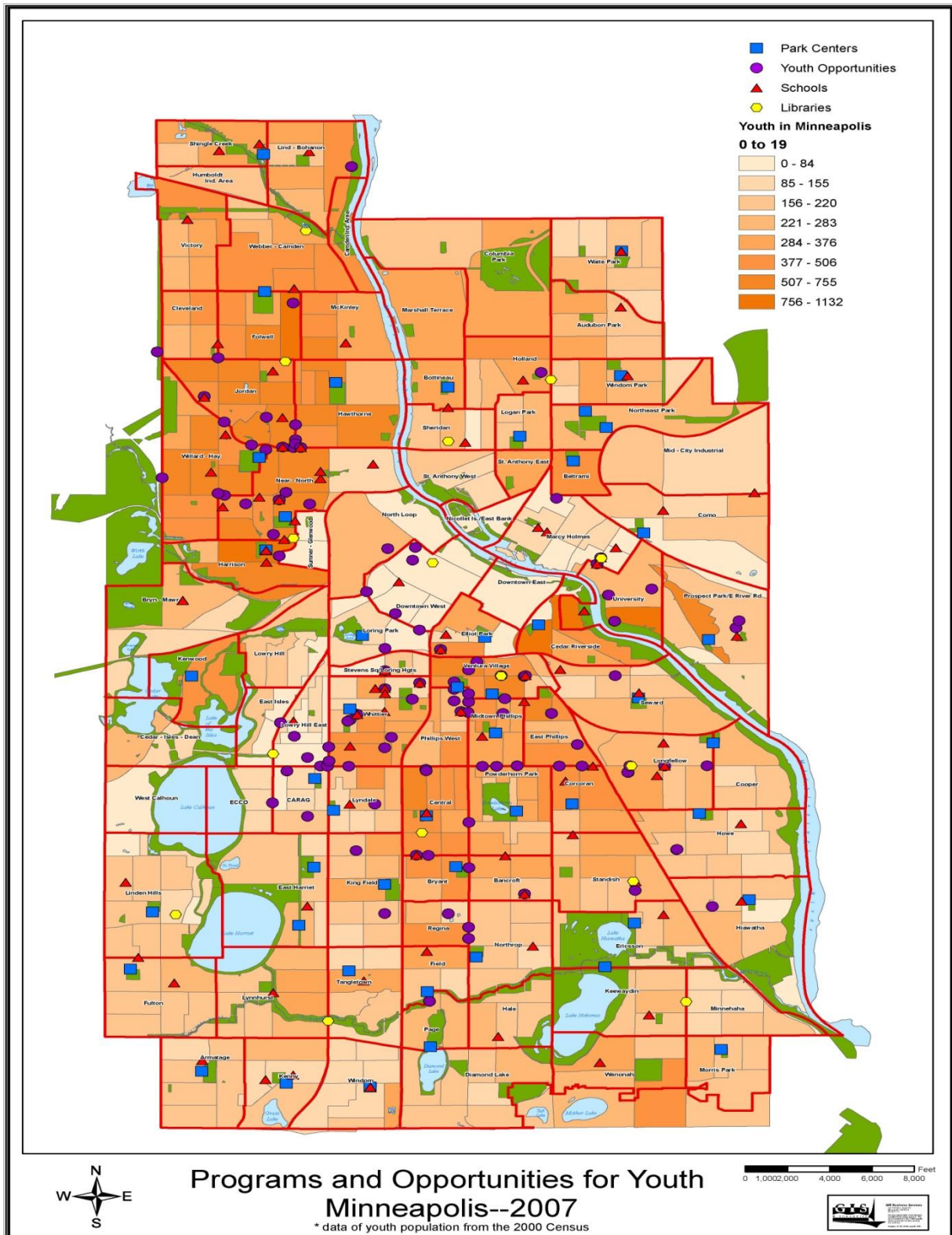
YEP EXPANDED ON THE YAC MODEL BY ADDING THREE NEW ELEMENTS:

- COLLABORATION OF ADULT PARTNERS IN PROJECT DEVELOPMENT
- MONTHLY MEETINGS TO ADVISE AND SUPPORT CREW LEADERS AND YOUTH CREW MEMBERS
- FINANCIAL AND IN-KIND SUPPORT TO SUSTAIN THE PROJECT

LATER, THE YEP PILOTED A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PIECE FOCUSED ON BUILDING ASSETS IN THE CAMDEN NEIGHBORHOOD THROUGH YOUTH AND ADULT ACTION. YEP TRANSITIONED FROM A PROJECT TO A PROGRAM THAT PROMOTES AND PRODUCES ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY.

SINCE ITS INCEPTION IN MARCH 2006, THE YEP HAS IDENTIFIED GAPS IN ACTIVITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CAMDEN AND WORKED TO FILL THOSE GAPS WITH POSITIVE OPPORTUNITIES.

Figure 4. Minneapolis Programs and Opportunities Map



Community Development. A variety of efforts have resulted to better meet the needs, address the barriers, and promote more youth-friendly opportunities.

- **TRANSPORTATION.** Lack of safe and reliable transportation is a major barrier preventing youth from participating in youth program opportunities. This was especially true in Camden where there were thousands of teens without access to programs and activities in the evenings and on weekends. To address this barrier, the YCB created two You[^]th Are Here bus routes serving North and South Minneapolis. Circulating buses provide free transportation to Minneapolis parks, libraries, and other youth programs throughout the community. According to a summary of the inaugural year, during a 10-week period in 2007, 5199 North Minneapolis youth, and 1409 South Minneapolis youth rode the bus. The North Minneapolis You[^]th Are Here bus continues to this day and serves as a concrete and sustained outcome of the YAC project. Similarly, the Brooklyn's Youth Council raised funds to a purchase a van to help address the transportation barrier.
- **PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT.** With ongoing adult support, youth commitment, and additional funding, the Camden crew extended the original YAC model by continuing to employ a youth crew to plan and organize activities for youth in their community. A new fiscal agent and a new collaborative project of several neighborhood associations was established to develop a strategic plan, provide additional support, and provide funding to sustain efforts. This evolution from project to program is testament to Camden's sustained commitment to youth engagement.
- **CALL TO ACTION.** The Brooklyn Park crew identified a lack of opportunities which led to the development of the an action plan targeting six strategic goals to increase youth involvement and a stronger youth voice in the community and contributed to the creation of new youth-friendly spaces in the Brooklyns (see sidebar).
- **INVESTMENTS FOR YOUTH.** A new McKnight Foundation funding stream for youth engagement for older youth was established in Hennepin County. Stakeholders reported that Brooklyn Park tripled the funds invested in young people.

BROOKLYN PARK COMMUNITY YOUTH ACTION CREW

IN 2008, 20 BROOKLYN PARK YOUTH PARTICIPATED IN THE CYAC PROJECT, SPONSORED BY CHAMPIONS FOR YOUTH AND MADE POSSIBLE BY A GRANT FROM HENNEPIN COUNTY.

75% OF THE 1,000 YOUTH INTERVIEWED DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN ANY KIND OF YOUTH PROGRAM, AND THE MOST FREQUENTLY CITED REASON FOR NOT PARTICIPATING WAS "DON'T KNOW WHAT'S AVAILABLE."

CREW MEMBERS SHARED THESE FINDINGS WITH COMMUNITY LEADERS AT A SERIES OF SUMMITS WHICH LED TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE *CHAMPIONS FOR YOUTH CALL TO ACTION*, AN ACTION PLAN TARGETING SIX STRATEGIC GOALS TO INCREASE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT AND A STRONGER YOUTH VOICE IN THE COMMUNITY.

THE BROOKLYNS' YOUTH COUNCIL (COMPRISED OF YOUTH FROM BROOKLYN PARK AND BROOKLYN CENTER) WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2008. THE COUNCIL SERVES AS AN ADVISORY, PLANNING AND COMMUNICATING BODY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE BROOKLYN BRIDGE ALLIANCE FOR YOUTH AND EACH CITY'S ADULT COALITION.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN THE BROOKLYNS HAVE INCREASED. A NEW YOUTH CENTER OPENED IN 2009, STAFFED IN PART BY FORMER CREW MEMBERS AND WITH YOUTH DESIGNING MARKING TOOLS (E.G., RAVE CARDS) AND UPDATING THE ONLINE MAP.

Youth Development. While all stakeholders prioritized community development as the primary purpose of YAC, they also recognized the powerful impact participation has on young people themselves. When youth are involved as change agents, they gain important skills and competencies.

- **YOUTH EMPLOYMENT.** The YAC project is designed as a youth employment opportunity where youth are paid a stipend for fulfilling their commitment to the project, including participating in meetings, trainings and activities. As a youth employment model, the YAC helps young people develop 21st century leadership skills with real world application. Numerous stakeholders underscored the significance of the project being a youth employment opportunities that recognized the contributions of young people.
- **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT.** Sullivan and Saito's (2008) model for youth engagement is characterized by participation, passion, voice, and collective leadership opportunities created by and with youth. The YAC project led to increases across all these dimensions of youth engagement. Stakeholders described how YAC provided a vehicle for young people to lend their voice in a tangible way to make a meaningful difference in influencing their communities. In many cases the crews contributed as resources and advisor to inform and influence decisions and policies.

Adult Development. Another outcome of the YAC project is the impact on adults and how they perceive young people. Data – collected by and from youth – provided a powerful tool for youth to inform community leaders and help policy makers make strategic decisions: “It’s harder for adults to say ‘no’ when young people present quality data.” Minneapolis crews presented their findings to city leaders such as the mayor, police chief, and superintendant at two city-wide town hall forums. Similarly, stakeholders described how powerful it was when Brooklyn Park crew members shared their findings with community leaders at a series of summits. One stakeholder felt that the YAC project contributed to changing the culture of the city of Minneapolis and “how we do business with and for young people.”

Training Development. Based on lessons learned from the Minneapolis YACs as well as the subsequent CYACs that took the model even further, a Youth Action Crew Curriculum was developed by the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development’s Youth Work Institute and is currently being piloted with Carver County.

RICHFIELD AND BLOOMINGTON YOUTH ACTION CREWS

IN 2008, BLOOMINGTON PUBLIC HEALTH RECEIVED A GRANT FROM HENNEPIN COUNTY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RICHFIELD YOUTH ACTION CREW (RYAC).

OF THE 290 YOUTH SURVEYED, NEARLY A THIRD HAD NEVER PARTICIPATED IN YOUTH PROGRAMS AND NEARLY HALF DID NOT KNOW WHAT WAS AVAILABLE. THE RESULTING MAP RAISED AWARENESS OF EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES.

IN ADDITION, THE RYAC IDENTIFIED THE NEED TO ADDRESS HOW YOUTH ARE PERCEIVED IN THE COMMUNITY AND CREATED A VIDEO CALLED, “SEE US, HEAR US, ENGAGE US” THAT THEY SHARED WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS INCLUDING THE CITY COUNCIL AND SCHOOL BOARD.

WITH FUNDING FROM THE MCKNIGHT FOUNDATION AND THE SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION’S (SAMHSA), THE RICHFIELD MODEL WAS ADAPTED AND REPLICATED IN THE NEIGHBORING CITY OF BLOOMINGTON. RICHFIELD YAC YOUTH TRAINED BLOOMINGTON YAC YOUTH ON INTERVIEWING AND PRESENTATION SKILLS.

THE BLOOMINGTON YAC HAD BOTH A BROADER TIMEFRAME AND FOCUS, ADDING A COMPONENT ON MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES AND QUESTIONS ABOUT CARING ADULTS. THEY SURVEYED 570 YOUTH, 52 BUSINESSES AND 22 ORGANIZATIONS AND ARE WORKING ON PSAs AND OTHER OUTREACH AND SOCIAL MARKETING EFFORTS.

Challenges

In addition to these notable contributions, key challenges or barriers have been identified. These challenges represent important lessons learned that have implications for future directions for work in this important area.

Data. One stakeholder in particular noted the potential for an online searchable database of youth-friendly opportunities. However, while the maps provide a useful snapshot of community-level information, there are limitations to the data. While some communities have put their map online and update it, the maps for other communities grow quickly out-of-date. Further, while there were some core questions asked across all communities, aggregating the data across communities is problematic since each crew used different processes and criteria for including youth-friendly opportunities on their map. The maps serve as a valuable local resource to raise awareness and as a useful educational tool, but there are limitations to the employing the data over time or across communities.

Crew Leaders. The YAC project is time intensive process that requires a commitment of dedicated staff time. Getting the right adults in place to effectively serve as crew leaders posed a challenge. In some cases, the project's responsibilities were added to already full plates, resulting in less committed staff. In other cases, staff members lacking a strong youth development orientation were not a good fit.

Funding. Lack of funding is regularly considered a barrier. Some YACs simply fizzled out when the initial funding was gone. Others, however, were sustained. While funding can certainly be a barrier, it is not an insurmountable one when other key elements such as community champions and key community partners are in place.

Adult Readiness. Adult readiness is often the biggest obstacle, for adults need to be ready to be receptive to and to act upon the data. One stakeholder described how the adults in the community showed "polite interest" but there were no community champions who stepped up to take action towards the identified need for a "hang out spot" for teens, for example.

CARVER COUNTY

MORE THAN 25 MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FROM ACROSS CARVER COUNTY GATHERED FOR THE FIRST COUNTY-WIDE COMMUNITY YOUTH ACTION CREW (CYAC).

CARVER COUNTY'S FIVE TEAMS HAVE A GOAL OF 1000 INTERVIEWS WITH YOUTH AND 250 INTERVIEWS WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTY, WHICH WILL INFORM THE CREATION OF ONE COUNTYWIDE MAP.

CARVER COUNTY IS INCORPORATING BOTH SUBURBAN AND RURAL YOUTH EXPERIENCES — WHICH VARY WIDELY IN TERMS OF RESOURCES, PROGRAMS, ACTIVITIES AND ACCESS TO TRANSPORTATION.

ONCE THE PROJECT IS COMPLETE, THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA EXTENSION'S YOUTH WORK INSTITUTE WILL INTEGRATE THE CARVER COUNTY HEALTH PARTNERSHIP'S FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO HELP CREATE A REPLICABLE MODEL FOR OTHER COUNTIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE. EVENTUALLY, THE GOAL IS TO MAP EVERY COUNTY IN MINNESOTA USING THE CYAC MODEL.

AS COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT THE STATE HELP IDENTIFY WHAT ACTIVITIES EXIST AND ESTABLISH NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE, THEY WILL NATURALLY HELP BUILD EXTERNAL ASSETS INCLUDING SUPPORT, EMPOWERMENT, BOUNDARIES, AND EXPECTATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO USE THEIR TIME CONSTRUCTIVELY. WITH THESE ELEMENTS IN PLACE, YOUTH AND COMMUNITIES LAY THE BUILDING BLOCKS FOR HEALTHY PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.

LESSONS LEARNED

Across the various iterations of YAC projects and the resulting efforts those YAC projects contributed towards, the stakeholders identified a number of key lessons learned that serve as recommendations for future efforts.

Selection and Support of Crew Leaders. It is essential to hire the right people: “a great crew leader is the glue.” Characteristics of a great crew leader include those of a strong youth worker, like strong relationship skills and critical thinking abilities. In fact, having a solid community youth development orientation should be an essential qualification. Clearly, staff need to be paid for time dedicated to their role as crew leader. To incorporate reflection and early identification of issues, it is recommended that sites use monthly process reports (as utilized for the CYACs). These reports also generate information that helps staff update supervisors and showcase their efforts.

Selection and Employment of Crew Members. Youth crew members need to be interviewed and selected, as for any other job. Having young people take initiative to seek out and apply for this opportunity appears to increase their accountability. Further, hiring youth who are from the community is considered key to increasing and sustaining their investment.

Youth and Data. Young people provide an important and legitimizing perspective on their communities and the programs that serve them, and their involvement can contribute to more valid and reliable findings. As later YACs did, in order for crew members to see results quickly and to facilitate their interaction with the data, crews should use online data tools like SurveyMonkey.

Planning Team and Community Partners. Several stakeholders stressed the importance of having the right community partners on board. In the most successful instances, the planning team that initially established funding for the community mapping project continued to work together and sought additional funding to continue efforts to plan and facilitate activities for youth.

CONCLUSION

Without the Youth Action Crew project, stakeholders repeatedly stressed, the Minneapolis landscape would be different. Collectively the YAC projects and the related efforts raised community awareness of youth programs and opportunities, and contributed to the development of greater access to and support for such programs and opportunities. The youth involved gained important leadership skills and contributed to increases across the dimensions of youth engagement. Adult community leaders were impacted by and moved to act upon the findings of the YAC projects. Finally, lessons from the various iterations of the project led to the development of a Youth Action Crew Curriculum.

To build on and continue to learn from the Youth Action Crew project, several next steps for consideration are outlined below:

- ❑ Continued funding of Youth Action Crew projects around the region and state will provide better information about the availability of and need for youth programs and opportunities;
- ❑ Create a statewide plan for use of YACs Youth Programs and Opportunities (YOP) data;
- ❑ Provide training and ongoing support for youth engagement youth workers, including a varied product line of trainings blogs, and conferences;
- ❑ Invest in the technology to provide YACs with the ability to create google.com maps of youth programs and opportunities;
- ❑ Explore utility of future studies of YACs in terms of what works best, under what conditions, and what outcomes are impacted;

- ❑ Consider having a group of youth and adults conduct an electronic version of the Minnesota Youth Polls on an annual basis on topics of interest to young people; and
- ❑ Work with the out-of-school time intermediary to promote and support youth engagement in Minnesota.

Limitations. This evaluation relied primarily on adult stakeholder accounts and perspectives. While the evaluation would have been enhanced by the inclusion of young people’s perspectives, efforts to do so were unsuccessful. A draft of this evaluation report was forwarded to former YAC members, and no specific changes were suggested. However, in reviewing this evaluation report, a Brooklyn Park stakeholder offered to convene original members of their YAC to reflect on their experience and its impact and this opportunity should be explored.

Another limitation of this evaluation is that with complex issues like youth engagement it is nearly impossible to isolate the distinct contribution of an individual project. Community change requires long-term, multi-faceted investments and is inevitably influenced by many factors and forces. Nevertheless, it is important to reflect on what happens in the life of a project, and to capture markers or indicators of whether it is contributing to change, as well as to identify challenges to inform and guide future efforts.

RESOURCES

Below is a list of several key resources to support future efforts.

- ❑ Youth engagement presentations, reports, articles, documents and related websites can be accessed at <http://www1.extension.umn.edu/Youth/research/research-engagement.html>
- ❑ Youth Engagement Matters, a Youth Work Institute Course. Training based on the research framework, Rings of Engagement, which emphasizes the range of types of youth engagement and youth-adult partnerships. The series includes a deep dive into four ways in which we can engage youth:
 - through participation in programs,
 - by fostering individual passion through experiences and activities,
 - by creating space and place for youth voice in programs, and
 - through collective action to make change with youth and adults as partners.

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APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction

I am writing a retrospective case study of Community Youth Action Crew (CYAC) project and am interested in your perspective. I want to thank you for your time, and for sharing your thoughts with me.

Purpose

Again, the purpose of this interviews it to learn about your experience with and impressions of the Youth Action Crew project. The goal is to describe the YAC project, document its development and implementation, and summarize accomplishments and impact of the YAC projects to date. I'm interested in your ideas about what makes this model successful, its impact, as well as the challenges and your recommendations about future directions for work in this area.

I want to assure you that your name won't be attached to the things you share with me [i.e., your responses will be confidential]. However, if it's alright with you I'd like to record our conversation so that we don't lose any important information you share. Do you have any questions before we get started?

Questions

Involvement. How are you connected to YAC, and how did you get involved?

Probe: What has your role been?

Description. When you think of YAC, what comes to mind.

Probe: Think of three words that best describe YAC.

Contributions. What do you think the YAC project has contributed?

Probe: What are the project's strengths and benefits?

Impact. Looking back, what has YAC accomplished?

Probe: What do you see as the impact of YAC? (e.g., on youth, on communities)?

Probe: What do you see as key to YAC's success?

Challenges. I'm interested in identifying any challenges. What challenges have surfaced for CYAC projects?

Probe: What are the main barriers or limitations to the model?

Probe: In hindsight, can you think of any lessons learned?

Implications. What are the implications for future directions and possibilities for work in this area?

Probe: What do you see as the potential for the CYAC model?

Probe: What are potential policy implications for this work?

Others. Who else should I hear from to inform this case study?

Probe: I am interested in hearing youths' perspective on YAC. Can you think of a young person who has participated in YAC that I might interview?

Thank you. Thank you so much for taking the time to share your ideas and experiences with me. Your feedback will help inform the Center's future directions and priorities related to youth engagement.

APPENDIX B. SAMPLE MAPS

