

Camden Youth Engagement Project

Evaluation of Phases 3 & 4

July 2008

A developmental evaluation of an emerging youth engagement strategy

Introduction

The Camden Youth Engagement Project (YEP) is a community development pilot project focused on building assets in the Camden community of North Minneapolis through youth and adult action. The YEP values collaborative youth and adult partnerships, the promotion of existing community assets, and youth engagement.

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. The YEP also produced and marketed maps showing youth-friendly places in the neighborhood. The map, like the YEP, continues to evolve as new partners are added.

Youth and adult participants in YEP have collaborated with Hennepin County staff to design a developmental evaluation of the project that captures multiple perspectives. Each perspective—youth, adult, community—provides texture, detail and clarity.

Together, these perspectives help to answer the following questions:

- What differences did the YEP make for youth and the community
- Did youth and adults use the asset map?
- What should the YEP focus on in the next phase and how can it grow?

This evaluation covers phases three and four of the project—from March 2007 to May 2008. The baseline data presented here will be used to develop a quality youth engagement program model. In addition, the YEP hopes to share findings with others interested in youth engagement.

Limitations

It is important to note that the data included in this report represents a snapshot in time in the Camden community. Findings based on these data should not be extrapolated to other communities. Also, while it is important to know what changes occurred in Camden, the nature of the data does not allow us to test causal relationships or directly attribute outcomes to the YEP.

Emerging Community Development Practice

Partners in the Camden Community of North Minneapolis and Hennepin County RPD have worked together over the past two years to develop a youth engagement program that develops assets for the community.

During this two year process several changes have occurred — due to evaluation results and the will of partners to improve this effort. These changes have led to a more focused project capable of greater impact.

- Phase 1 & 2**
- New partnerships & learning how to engage youth
 - Relationships new for adults and for youth.
 - No Action plan – Youth Action Crew Curriculum
 - Evaluation results focused the work on building assets of youth and adults and connecting them to one another.

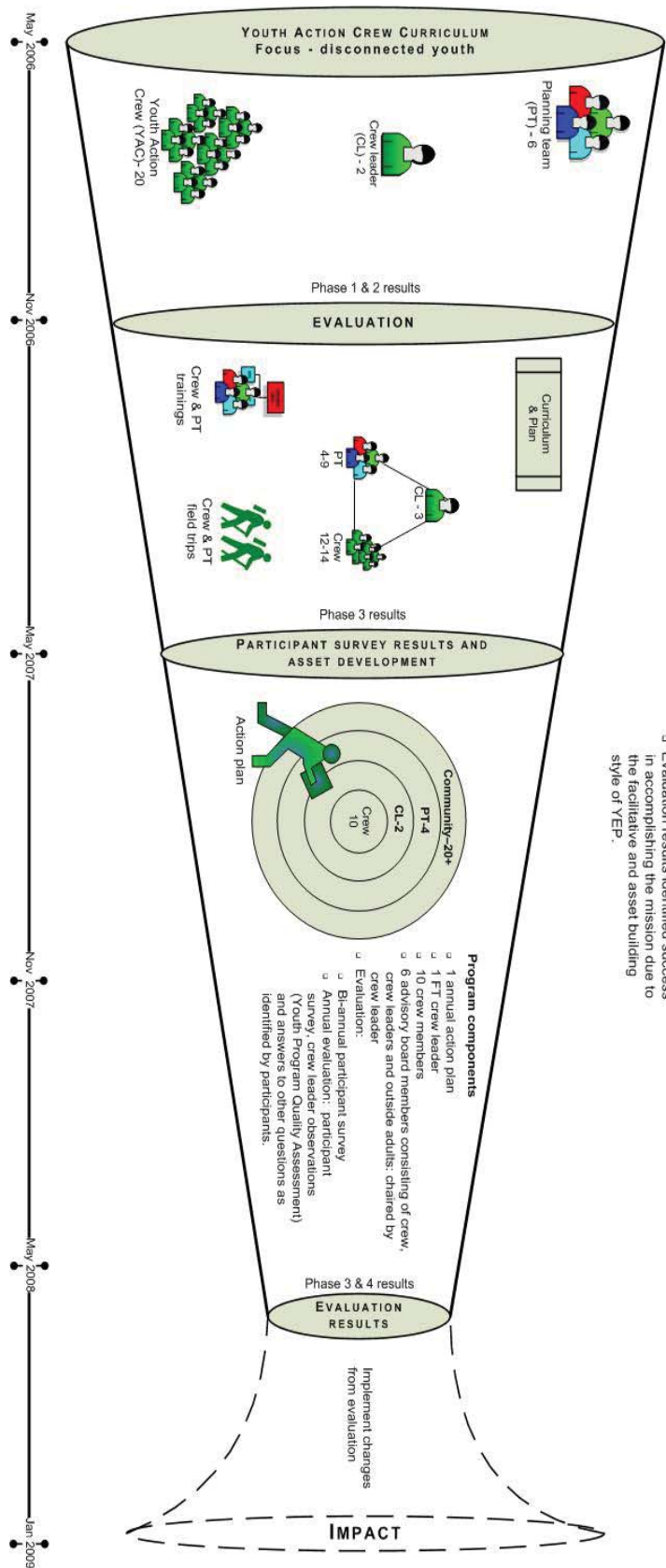
- Phase 3**
- Increased coordination
 - Relationships were strengthened by collaborative planning, trainings and field trips.
 - Action plan created separately, but in alignment, by crew and planning team.
 - Participant survey results directed the work of phase 4, and showed the value of building skills through experiential learning.

- Phase 4**
- Consensus and action
 - Relationships changed: the planning was integrated with the crew, crew leaders and the planning team.
 - Adults stepped back and crew worked more independently.
 - Action plan created jointly, with crew, crew leaders and planning team present.
 - Evaluation results identified success in accomplishing the mission due to the facilitative and asset building style of YEP.

Camden Youth Engagement Project

MISSION

- To produce and promote positive youth activities
- support community-based learning
- create new leaders in Camden



Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all of the project participants, particularly the neighborhood organizations and North Minneapolis youth that made this youth and adult partnership not only possible, but truly an organic collaboration between the county, neighborhoods, schools and youth.

Special thanks to Lily Voravong, Susan Yang, Jeri Ezaki, Amy Luesebrink and Debbie Nelson for their edits and clarifications on this report.

Participants would like to thank Hennepin County for their commitment and investment in building community assets in Camden.

Background

Since 2006 the Camden Youth Engagement Project (CYEP) has mobilized youth and adult partnerships to promote and produce positive youth action in Camden. Simultaneously, throughout the city of Minneapolis, Mayor R. T. Rybak and Police Chief Tim Dolan have called for efforts to fight the root causes of crime by increasing the number of summer jobs for youth, expanding youth recreation opportunities, and out-recruiting gangs with aggressive outreach to disconnected youth.

The challenge is substantial, as there are over 16,000 youth in the Camden area of North Minneapolis under the age of 24 (2000 Census), and focus groups of Lucy Laney students in North Minneapolis show that most Northside youth are unaware of opportunities available to them.

With this information in mind, a group of adults and youth set-out to find ways to connect youth to assets — especially to opportunities already available. Representatives from Cleveland, Lind-Bohannon, Shingle Creek, and McKinley neighborhood associations; Jenny Lind and Lucy Craft Laney Community Education; and Research, Planning and Development Department of Hennepin County joined together to form the CYEP planning team.

The planning team agreed to use a strategy implemented in other neighborhoods — the Youth Action Crew model (Appendix 1). This model is an asset-based community development approach.

Summary of Findings

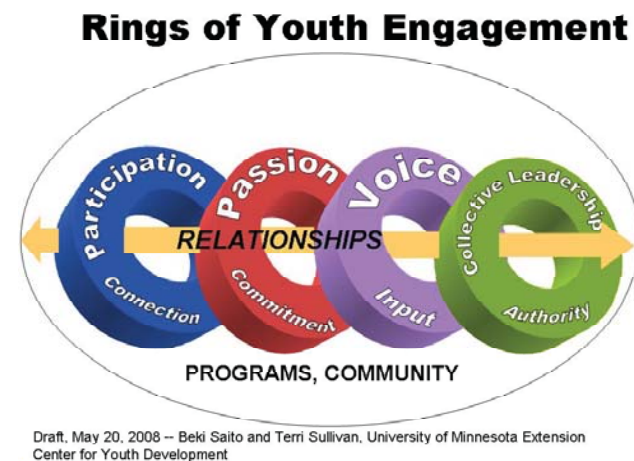
To complete this evaluation, we interviewed adult crew leaders, surveyed youth crew members and community members, and held consensus workshops with project participants. Through this process, we found that all participants in the YEP—youth and adults—learned how to work in a complex and iterative process, challenging the roles of young and old and learning through action.

Participants learned how to build relationships where youth and adults can share the responsibilities of work, including producing talent shows and drafting grants to fund the YEP. Evaluation results show that throughout this experience participants were engaged in the process of adapting to new scenarios, embracing new opportunities, and struggling with challenges.

Since its inception in 2006 the Camden YEP has had various partners, crew members and staff (see Appendix 2). It has employed 32 youth (unduplicated count) and provided positive activities for well over 200 young people in the community. And the YEP has done this using a new approach to youth engagement—an approach that builds on and contributes to the emerging statewide understanding of youth engagement.

The YEP model strives to affirm youth and adult participation, passion, voice, and collective leadership as key elements in all aspects of the project. As illustrated by Beki Saito and Terri Sullivan from the University of MN Extension Center for Youth Development, these elements serve as ‘rings of youth engagement.’

The YEP has discovered that through relationships a program can harness the energy and attention necessary to achieve both youth and community outcomes.



What differences did the YEP make?

Overall, youth and adults agreed that the YEP made a difference in Camden by:

- Increasing positive opportunities for youth
 - Crew members were invested in the YEP, as roughly 50 percent contributed six to eight hours per week.
- Building facilitative leadership necessary for the 21st-century
 - Crew members were capable and confident leaders, as shown by increases of 15-20 percent from phase three to phase four in self-reporting of leadership and facilitation skills.
- Increasing public willingness to support youth
 - A new fiscal sponsor for the YEP emerged: Lind-Bohannon Neighborhood Association.
- Creating space for youth and adults to connect and get involved
 - Overall youth were satisfied with the crew leaders while wanting crew leaders to provide more information that could help them complete tasks.
 - Crew leaders were successful at building relationships, using a collaborative structure and creating a space that uses facilitation rather than top-down decision making to accomplish goals.

The youth crew provided the community with the following:

- Produced 10 movie nights, engaging on average 20 youth per night
- Organized two talent shows, engaging on average 35 per show
- Volunteered with Lyndale Blooms, Toys for Tots, and the Lucy Laney School Barbecue
- Promoted the Camden Youth Map at 13 community events and distributed over 1,500 maps
- Sustained their effort by raising \$1,973 through car washes, grant writing, and selling snacks at Movie Nights and the North Housing Fair

Did youth and adults use the asset map?

Most community residents said they were aware of and would use the map. Overwhelmingly residents said they would attend the next YEP event. A larger sample would be needed to strengthen these findings.

- Over half of the surveyed North Minneapolis residents (57%, n=23) were aware of the Camden map of youth assets
- Residents stated they would use the map for the following:
 - 29 percent said they would keep the map in their pocket to help find places
 - 28 percent said they would use the map to find youth-friendly places
 - 23 percent said they would post or display the map
- Most surveyed residents (90%, n=36) said they would attend the next YEP event

What should the YEP focus on in the next phase and how can it grow?

All participants found strengths and challenges in the project, and everyone involved is committed to carrying-forward successes and facing challenges in order to strengthen the YEP.

During the next phase

- Everyone involved agreed that the YEP must have a consistent physical space for the project. This is essential.
- The planning team should include youth to help balance priorities, improve communications, and promote strategic decision making.
- Crew leaders should continue to support participants' development through intentional Youth-work.
- The planning team should identify strategies for ensuring safe passage to and from YEP activities.

For long-term growth

- The YEP will need financial support to sustain quality programming.
- The YEP will need to continue to build a program that allows for enough structure to build relationships, while ensuring that there is sufficient flexibility needed for engagement.
- The YEP must continue to learn from participatory evaluation