

Agenda for Children

Healthy Children Success in School Strong Community

Approximately three years ago, the Agenda for Children was launched in the City of Cambridge. Oversight of the Agenda for Children is provided by the Kids' Council, a policy advisory committee of elected and appointed officials, human service providers, parents, academic advisors and community foundations.

In order to determine what residents of the City thought were the priority agenda items for Cambridge's children, a significant process of engaging the community was undertaken. Over several months, more than twenty people organized and conducted community meetings in every neighborhood in the city. Some 643 community members participated in over 50 meetings, which reached as diverse an array of citizens as possible. Demographically, the participants "looked like Cambridge". (White, 57%, Black, 21 %, Asian 11%, Hispanic, 10%)

The process reached pre-established groups such as School Improvement Councils, neighborhood and church groups in an effort to "go out to the community," rather than asking people to come to events. To reach residents less likely to be found in pre-established groups, staff partnered with community organizations with strong neighborhood roots. Residents were asked to identify priority areas on which they would like to see the city as a whole focus its energies. Additionally, information and data from recent community based research around welfare reform and access to services was incorporated into the information gathering phase.

From this extensive community based work, nine priority goal areas for children and their families emerged. The Kids' Council undertook the task of selecting two goals to bring forward from the list of nine while acknowledging that work must continue on the remaining seven. In addition, four universal strategies were identified to be applied to the implementation of the goals

Using a thoughtful and deliberative process, the Kids' Council selected two goals to elevate for city-wide action. Those goals were: *Children and youth need access to supervised activities in nurturing and safe environments at all times;* and, *Children and their families need to be able to read.*

Following the adoption of the two goals, Action Teams were assembled to formulate Action Plans for the achievement of each goal. The plans have been accepted by the Kids' Council, a Steering Committee has been formed to oversee the implementation of the Action Plans, a coordinator for each goal is being hired and an advisory committee for each goal area is being formed.

The level of sustained collaboration involved in carrying out the Agenda for Children is unprecedented. Leadership for the Agenda has been unwavering among the City's Health, Human Services, Schools, Police and Library departments together with non-profit providers and the Cambridge Community Foundation. The City is poised to make a significant difference in the lives of its children and families.

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UNIVERSAL STRATEGIES

- ❖ *Continuous community engagement is essential throughout the process.*
- ❖ *City institutions need to be more supportive of cultural and linguistic diversity.*
- ❖ *City institutions need to be more supportive and responsive to families.*
- ❖ *Available services need to be coordinated and publicized in such a way that families can access them more easily.*

PRIORITY GOALS

1. *Children and youth need access to supervised activities in nurturing and safe environments at all times.*
2. *Children need comprehensive health care, which addresses physical and emotional well being.*
3. *Families need to be informed and supported to advocate for their children.*
4. *Children and youth need adequate housing and an economically secure environment.*
5. *Young children need supports to be physically, mentally and socially ready when they first enter school.*
6. *Children and their families need to be able to read.*
7. *Children need to be physically fit, physically active, and eating well.*
8. *Children and youth need to be free from alcohol, tobacco and drug use.*
9. *Children need to be safe from violence in their homes, schools, and community.*

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Community input on priority items
for the Agenda for Children

Roundtable Meeting for
November 13, 2000