

**STRATEGIC PLANNING ASSESSMENT FINDINGS
FOR THE
CITY OF CAMBRIDGE YOUTH PROGRAM**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September of 1998, the City of Cambridge's Department of Human Services Program commissioned Technical Development Corporation (TDC) to conduct an assessment and develop a strategic plan for the Department's Youth Program. Through a series of meetings, internal and external stakeholder interviews, a review of prior assessment products, and our own research, TDC sought to establish a baseline of information and impressions of the Youth Program upon which planning recommendations could be based. The following is an executive summary of TDC's assessment findings.

Assessments are undertakings that provide a "snapshot" of where a program is at a particular moment in its development. This assessment report reflects back to the City the strengths and weaknesses of the Cambridge Youth Program, as perceived by key stakeholders. What follows, by the very nature of TDC's assignment, focuses primarily on the weaknesses of the Youth Program's current management structure, staffing, systems, and administration—identifying barriers that impede the full realization of the potential of the City's current, and planned, state-of-the-art facilities. In order to realize the vision that is beginning to emerge for the future of the youth center program, the City must resolve all of the issues identified in this report. The "moment" depicted in the full report represents one that is both exciting and challenging from a planning perspective.

In general, TDC's assessment findings were quite consistent with respect to stakeholder feedback, constituency input and our own observations of the program. At the most basic level, assessment findings can be summarized as follows:

- **The Youth Program's Centers have great potential, but are currently under-resourced, under-staffed and, as a consequence, under-utilized. As one person commented, "What good is a \$3 million facility that has no staff?"**
- **There is concern that, within the current available resources and organizational structure of the Youth Program, the Youth Centers are buildings that "hide youth", without serving them in a meaningful, enriching way—the Centers are perceived as being "facilities rich, but program poor."**
- **There is a considerable gap between the intentions of the Youth Program, and the implementation of plans, policies and programs. The Youth Program's intentions are well-conceived and appropriate, but available resources limit the ability of the Centers to carry them out.**

The Youth Program is uniquely blessed with two state-of-the-art facilities, with plans to build a third new facility. However, the promise embodied in these wonderful facilities has not been realized, leading to a sense of disappointment and frustration among many stakeholders. The situation is analagous to purchasing a wonderful new home, but not having enough left after the mortgage payments to furnish it in a way that makes it livable. It is these frustrations that set the tone of TDC's assessment findings.

The organization of TDC's full findings has been borrowed from a report produced by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) called *Safe and Smart: Making After-School Work for Kids*. In this report, the USDOE identifies the key components of Exemplary Programs. TDC's assessment of the City of Cambridge's Youth Program's strengths, weaknesses, challenges and implications follows this model. These components include:

- Established Program Mission and Goals
- Quality Programming
- Solid Organizational Structure and Management
- Quality After-School Staffing
- Attention to Safety, Health and Nutritional Issues
- Effective Partnerships and Collaborations
- Strong Involvement of Families

ESTABLISHED PROGRAM MISSION AND GOALS

The current mission statement of the City of Cambridge's Youth Program, is to "provide a range of recreational, leisure and personal development programming for preteens and teens ages 9-19." The mission has remained fairly constant over the Youth Program's life cycle, with the most dramatic change being the inclusion of the younger age group—"pre-teens" aged 9-14. Internal and external stakeholders most identified the Youth Program with the role it plays in providing Cambridge youth with athletic, or "recreational," programming—seeing it as a major resource and leader for sports-related activities. The Program was less identified by its efforts to provide "meaningful" educational and leisure activities.

Through our interviews with internal and external stakeholders, TDC heard the following comments and themes:

- There is a lack of consensus about the Youth Program's vision
- It is important for the Youth Program to establish and promote a clearer understanding of why it exists, for whom it exists, and how it intends to serve its target audience(s).
- There is a lack of clarity as to what programs should be offered, and to what ends.
- The Program operates in a reactive, rather than a proactive way

In recognition of the vital role that clear mission and vision play for an organization or program, the Youth Program Strategic Planning Committee, with the support of TDC, has taken significant steps toward clarifying both for the Youth Program. Through a series of meetings, the Strategic Planning Committee has identified approximately five "core values" that will guide the remainder of the planning process and the articulation of the Youth Program's strategic direction for the next three to five years. City Council members have also assisted in this important endeavor through a series of three round

table discussions. This work is continuing with progress being made toward the translation of core values into operating principles and programs.

QUALITY PROGRAMMING

In recent years, the City's Youth Program has taken a number of steps that demonstrate its understanding of, and commitment to, providing quality programming for the City's young people. Recognizing that programming was inconsistent across the five Centers, DHSP dedicated a centralized position—the Youth Program Developer—to design, develop and oversee more thoughtful and goal-oriented programming. This hiring decision has resulted in increased program consistency across Centers, the development of the “10-Point Program,” enhanced gender- and age-specific activities, and improved collaborations with law enforcement and community-based organizations.

While these steps and activities indicate a very positive shift in the Youth Program's approach toward programming, feedback from internal and external stakeholders indicate that there is still work to be done. From a variety of perspectives, the Centers continue to be viewed as “\$4 million babysitting centers” for the younger youth and pre-teens, and “places to just hang out” for the older teens. Administrators are frustrated by the gap between Program intentions and Center implementation of the same; staff find it difficult to plan for and carry out programming; external stakeholders see the Centers' programs as unstructured, directionless, and too recreation-oriented; and youth complain that the Centers are boring. Based on TDC's assessment interviews, these criticisms can, in great part, be attributed to the following challenges:

- The process of program design and goal setting may be too far-removed from the Centers, and the current staffing structure does not allow for full participation of part-time staff in program planning, design and implementation.
- The Youth Centers rely too heavily on sports programming.
- The age-range (9-19) is very broad, making it increasingly difficult to design developmentally appropriate programs.
- Youth seemingly have short attention spans for the more structured programs but also report being bored during unstructured leisure time.

SOLID ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND MANAGEMENT

The Youth Program has made numerous efforts to reconfigure its organizational structure and enhance job-performance. Notable changes include the establishment of the Youth Program Developer position, distribution of management responsibilities between the Youth Program Manager and Youth Program Developer, designation of “Assistant Directors” at the two larger Centers, and the recent decision to include program specialists at the Center level.

While many of these changes have generated greater consistency across the five Centers, there are still concerns about the structure as a whole. Comments by internal and external stakeholders indicate that the Youth Program, as it is currently structured, is a top-heavy organization that lacks clear lines of authority, accountability and administrative efficiency. The Program's multiple administrative layers are perceived to create a system that is cumbersome, and difficult to manage. Specific themes TDC heard pertaining to organizational structure include:

- Direct oversight of the Centers feels limited.
- Central office DHSP staff and management are "out-of-touch" with the centers, Youth Leaders, and Center members.
- The Co-Manager structure of the Youth Program is confusing.
- There is a breakdown in communication between central office policies and procedures, and their implementation at the Center level.
- Accountability for not following policies and procedures is limited.

An important benefit of the Youth Program's current organizational structure is the extent to which the structure is seen as flexible and responsive to the needs of each Center's individual community. Center Directors feel as though they have a fair degree of autonomy to tailor their Center's programs and activities according to the interests and requirements of their members. The central office is committed to the semi-autonomy of its centers, but struggles to engender a consistent level of adherence to policies and procedures.

QUALITY AFTER-SCHOOL STAFFING

According to the *Safe and Smart* chapter on exemplary program components, quality staffing is second only to a clear vision and organizational structure. However, it is on this dimension, quality staffing, that the Youth Program came under considerable criticism among internal and external stakeholders alike.

- Staffing was consistently cited, by virtually all observers, as the major weakness of the Cambridge Youth Program.
- The current staffing structure, with its reliance on part-time staff, is seen as grossly inadequate.
- The feeling of "safety" within the Centers is compromised by insufficient staff-to-youth ratios.

TDC repeatedly heard that the staffing structure and limitations imposed by the City impede the Program's ability to attract experienced youth workers. As a result of the City's hiring and staffing and professional development policies, a tension has developed between the kind of staff the Program would like to hire, and the compromises it has had to make to achieve even basic coverage of the Centers.

ATTENTION TO SAFETY, HEALTH AND NUTRITION ISSUES

The extent to which the City of Cambridge's Youth Centers feel safe varies according to which youth group is being considered. Internal and external stakeholders are concerned that the Centers are not particularly safe places for younger members between the ages of 7 and 13, and/or girls. The emphasis on athletics and predominance of male staff make the centers seem "safer" for older male teens who tend to dominate the gym and game room spaces within the different Centers. Moreover, the Cambridge Youth Program is not adequately responding to the nutritional needs of growing youth.

The Centers have taken some positive steps to counteract these criticisms—such as dividing the program day according to two time-slots (pre-teen hours and teen hours), and gender equity training for staff. These measures have met with varying success, however, and more thought must be given as to the best way to address stakeholder concerns.

EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

The extent to which the Youth Program has successfully established partnerships with the schools, other community-based organizations, law enforcement agencies and youth groups has varied over time, with different Center Directors and collaborators coming to different arrangements and levels of cooperation. With all of these groups, the greatest challenges for the Youth Program are its need to increase its marketing and outreach activities and to improve its internal systems of communication. Internal and external stakeholders alike recognize that the Program has not established a critical degree of visibility within the community and that staff have not been as active about going into the schools and approaching other agencies as they should be.

STRONG INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Some centers have benefited from the mobilization of active community residents and parent groups during the planning, design and construction/renovation of their facilities. The strategic planning process has demonstrated a commitment to engaging parents and community residents in the gathering of information, feedback and recommendations. However, as in the case of community-based organizations and youth involvement, meaningful partnerships with parents and community residents have not been fully realized.

CONCLUSION

It is important to note that over the past few years, even in the face of a self-identified “staffing crisis,” the Youth Program has experienced a number of positive changes. A consistent programmatic framework has been developed, positive collaborations are being forged, and staff trainings on a range of relevant topics have been offered. However, the potential of these efforts has not been fully realized because of a complex and inadequate staffing structure that is fundamentally unsuited to the tasks at hand. On the one hand, the City’s commitment to the youth of the City is quite visible and real, in the notable investment in the youth center facilities. On the other hand, the lack of sufficient investment in staff to enable them to develop and realize programs that will truly make a difference in the lives of Cambridge’s youth is a problem that is in dire need of attention.

The Youth Program Strategic Planning Committee has taken significant steps toward clarifying the role of the Youth Program for the next three-to-five years. This work will be continued over the next few weeks, with an eye toward translating core values, mission and goals into the human and monetary resources and organizational structure that will support programmatic intentions.

I. INTRODUCTION

In September of 1998, the City of Cambridge's Department of Human Services Program commissioned Technical Development Corporation (TDC) to conduct an assessment and develop a strategic plan for the Department's Youth Program. Through a series of meetings, internal and external stakeholder interviews, a review of prior assessment products, and our own research, TDC sought to establish a baseline of information and impressions of the Youth Program upon which planning recommendations could be based.

Assessments are undertakings that provide a "snapshot" of where a program is at a particular moment in its development. This assessment report reflects back to the City the strengths and weaknesses of the Cambridge Youth Program, as perceived by key stakeholders. What follows, by the very nature of TDC's assignment, focuses primarily on the weaknesses of the Youth Program's current management structure, staffing, systems, and administration—identifying barriers that impede the full realization of the potential of the City's current, and planned, state of the art facilities. In order to realize the vision that is beginning to emerge for the future of the Youth Program, the City must resolve all of the issues identified in this report. The "moment" depicted in the full report represents one that is both exciting and challenging from a planning perspective.

To complete its assessment of the Youth Program, TDC undertook the following tasks:

1. Identified and convened a strategic planning committee made up of DHSP representatives, youth center managers and directors, collaborating partners, and school representatives to inform the planning process and begin discussions pertaining to the Program's core values, goals and mission. (A list of Planning Committee members is included as Attachment A)
2. Gathered feedback regarding impressions of the Youth Program and Centers from internal and external stakeholders—DHSP leadership, Program staff, past, current and potential collaborators and school representatives.
3. Solicited constituency feedback relative to the Youth Program and Centers—parents and youth who use the centers; parents and youth who do not (for full focus group summaries see Attachments B-E.)
4. Reviewed internal program documents pertaining to prior needs assessments, planning and programming efforts.
5. Analyzed Youth Program catchment area demographics.
6. Reviewed internal statistics pertaining to Youth Program membership, attendance and demographics.
7. Reviewed the efforts of other youth service programs within the City.
8. Reviewed national literature and research regarding after-school youth programming.
9. Collaborated with other City-based after-school planning initiatives—the Agenda for Children and Mills and Pardee's Extended Day planning process (and other youth-serving programs within the City.)
10. Reviewed the Youth Program's current budget and cost allocations.

In general, TDC's findings were quite consistent with respect to stakeholder feedback, constituency input and our own observations of the program. At the most basic level, assessment findings can be summarized as follows:

- **The Youth Program's Centers have great potential, but are currently under-resourced, under-staffed and, as a consequence, under-utilized.**
- **There is concern that, within the confines of current available resources and the organizational structure of the Youth Program, the Youth Centers are buildings that "hide youth", without serving them in a meaningful, enriching way—the Centers are perceived as being "facilities rich, but program poor."**
- **There is a considerable gap between the intentions of the Youth Program, and its implementation of plans, policies and programs. The Youth Program's intentions are well-conceived and appropriate, but available resources limit the ability of the Centers to carry them out.**

In the report that follows, TDC highlights and summarizes the specific comments, impressions and concerns of internal and external stakeholders and Program constituents. The organization of TDC's findings has been borrowed from a report produced by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) called *Safe and Smart: Making After-School Work for Kids*. In this report, the USDOE identifies the key components of Exemplary Programs. TDC's assessment of the City of Cambridge's Youth Program's strengths, weaknesses, challenges and implications follows this model, and dovetails with the work of the Extended Day Initiative consultants who are applying their findings and recommendations to roughly the same framework.

For all the issues presented in this report, TDC found Youth Program staff to be talented, committed, self-aware, thoughtful, and looking forward to a positive change. We wish to thank all of those interviewed for their time, honesty, and suggestions. With this information in hand, we look forward to continuing our work with the City of Cambridge's Youth Program and to developing a strategic plan for the next three-to-five years of the Centers' operations.

II. INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL ASSESSMENT FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This section combines the information TDC gathered during the stakeholder interviews, with our review of after-school youth programming philosophies and approaches. In reviewing literature and “standards” produced by various youth-related agencies, foundation initiatives, and regulatory bodies, certain themes emerged with respect to “quality” youth programming. The United States Department of Education publication, *Safe and Smart: Making the After-School Hours Work for Kids* succinctly summarizes these themes according to key components embodied by quality programs. These include:

- Established Program Mission and Goals
- Quality Programming
- Solid Organizational Structure and Management
- Quality After-School Staffing
- Attention to Safety, Health and Nutritional Issues
- Effective Partnerships and Collaborations
- Strong Involvement of Families

Each of the following sub-sections is framed by a quote from *Safe and Smart*, which is intended to provide insight into how each individual component is viewed by “the experts.” TDC then highlights the information shared during our interviews with internal and external stakeholders, identifying the Youth Program’s strengths, weaknesses, challenges according to each element.

A. ESTABLISHED PROGRAM MISSION AND GOALS

After-school programs should be clear about their intended goals and managed with an eye to meeting those goals. A clear set of goals lets families and community members know what the program offers to children and how they can help. These goals will influence and guide the allocation of funding, the structure and activities of the program, the overall size and staffing.

The current mission statement of the City of Cambridge’s Youth Program, is to “provide a range of recreational, leisure and personal development programming for preteens and teens ages 9-19.” The mission has remained fairly constant over the Youth Program’s life cycle, with the most dramatic change being the inclusion of the younger age group—“pre-teens” aged 9-14. Internal and external stakeholders most identified the Youth Program with the role it plays in providing Cambridge youth with athletic, or “recreational,” programming—seeing it as a major resource and leader for sports-related activities. The Program was less identified by its efforts to provide “meaningful” educational and leisure activities.

Below, TDC summarizes the themes that emerged during our internal and external interviews, regarding the Youth Program's mission, vision and goals.

- **There is a lack of consensus about the Youth Program's vision:** As pointed out by DHSP staff from the beginning of TDC's assessment, the Youth Program has experienced major changes in the last few years that have had significant impact on the way the Program thinks about its mission, target audience and program offerings. A small percentage of internal and external stakeholders with whom TDC spoke feel that the Program—its mission, target audience, vision and goals—are fine as they are. A larger percentage of internal and external stakeholders feel that the Youth Program and its purpose are either too broad or too ambiguous. **Both internal and external stakeholders agreed, however, that that it is important for the Youth Program to establish and promote a clearer understanding of why it exists, for whom it exists, and how it intends to serve its target audience(s).**
- **There is a lack of clarity with respect to whom the Youth Program should serve:** Internal and external stakeholders alike were concerned by the Program's broad definition of whom it exists to serve. Nearly all of the stakeholders with whom TDC met agreed that the Youth Program's current target population, youth 9-19, is too broad. Internal stakeholders voiced frustration about the difficulties that emerge in trying to serve both pre-teens and teens under the current staffing structure and resource constraints. External stakeholders worry about the safety of the younger age-group and the extent to which their needs are fully being met. Both internal and external stakeholder groups suggested that the needs of pre-teens and teens are not the same, but that the Program currently fails to acknowledge the differences in a meaningful way.

Other questions regarding the Programs' target population involved the issues of race and socio-economic status. Some stakeholders feel as though the Centers do and should exist to provide lower-income and minority parents and youth with an after-school child care or recreational option. Others thought that the Centers should exist for all youth of Cambridge, regardless of individual race, gender or socio-economic status. The former interpretation is viewed by some as too narrow, while the second interpretation (all Cambridge youth) is viewed by others as too broad.

- **There is a lack of clarity as to what programs the Youth Program should offer, and to what ends:** Stakeholders were unclear as to the programmatic goals of the Youth Program, posing questions like: Are the Centers simply places where kids can go to "hang out;" are they supposed to do more "enrichment-oriented" programming; and, are they day care for pre-teens?"

The current perception among most stakeholders with whom TDC spoke is that, despite efforts to provide some programming, the Centers primarily exist to "keep kids off the streets." The extent to which this is the best, or most appropriate model for the Program to adopt was a point of disagreement across stakeholders. Some feel that, by providing what is perceived as "drop-in" centers, the Youth Program fills an

important gap for families that cannot afford enrollment fees associated with the other youth-serving organizations throughout Cambridge. Many of these stakeholders see the “drop-in” model as a means of appealing to youth who are otherwise alienated from other City services and service providers—providing opportunities for youth to establish relationships with youth workers and engage in activities that lead to enhanced personal and social development. Others, particularly those who are also involved in youth work, and some parents, argue that the flexibility inherent to “drop-in” centers ultimately compromises the quality of the programs and the program experience as a whole.

- **The Program operates in a reactive, rather than a proactive way.** Some internal, and a number of external stakeholders, indicated that the changes that have taken place with respect to the Program’s mission, target audience and programmatic initiatives have evolved in a reactive rather than proactive way. For some, this is seen as a strength of the Program, while others see the reactive stance as a barrier to providing “meaningful, enriching” programs and opportunities. Examples of the Program’s ability and willingness to positively “react,” or respond, to the community’s needs include opening the Centers up to younger youth and establishing mechanisms for community crisis intervention (e.g. the Jeffrey Curley case). The Program is viewed as being less responsive with respect to meeting the needs of its growing pre-teen membership.

When asked what the mission of the Youth Program **should be**, external stakeholders stressed that the Centers be:

- Safe places
- Focused on younger teens
- Preparation for “real world”—education, computers, job and life skills
- Responsive to community needs
- Programmatically diverse, offering a full range of classes and supports
- More girl friendly
- Places where all youth feel comfortable
- A combination of drop-in and structured activities
- Culturally sensitive

In recognition of the vital role clear mission and vision play for an organization or program, the Youth Program Strategic Planning Committee has taken significant steps toward clarifying both for the Youth Program. Through a series of meetings, the Strategic Planning Committee has identified approximately five “core values” that will guide the remainder of the planning process and the articulation of the Youth Program’s strategic direction for the next three to five years. City Council members have also assisted with this important endeavor through a series of three round table discussions. Many of the suggestions outlined above, mirror the list of core values identified through these efforts, indicating an important step forward greater consensus and clarity. The results of this work will be included in the final recommendations to the Youth Program.

B. QUALITY PROGRAMMING

“While there is no one single formula for success in after-school programs, both practitioners and researchers have found that effective programs combine academic, enrichment, cultural, and recreational activities to guide learning and engage children and youth in wholesome activities.”

In recent years, the City’s Youth Program has taken a number of steps that demonstrate its understanding of, and commitment to the “formula” identified in the above quote. Recognizing that programming was inconsistent across the five Centers, DHSP dedicated a centralized position—the Youth Program Developer position—to design, develop and oversee more thoughtful and goal-oriented programming. This hiring decision has resulted in increased program consistency across Centers, the development of the “10-Point Program,” enhanced gender- and age-specific activities, and improved collaborations with law enforcement and community-based organizations (see Attachment E). From an internal perspective, the Youth Program has experienced notable success with the following programs: the LEAP program—a women’s self-esteem and self-defense collaborative with Wellesley College, the Pre-Teen Club—a collaborative with the Community Schools, the Safety Corps and Youth and Violence Forums—collaboratives with community law enforcement agencies, and the Neighborhood Service and Computer Clubs.

While these steps and activities indicate a very positive shift in the Youth Program’s approach toward programming, feedback from internal and external stakeholders indicate that there is still work to be done. From a variety of perspectives, the Centers continue to be viewed as “\$4 million babysitting centers” for the younger youth and pre-teens, and “places to just hang out” for the older teens. Administrators are frustrated by the gap between Program intentions and Center implementation of the same; staff find it difficult to plan for and carry out programming; external stakeholders see the Centers’ programs as unstructured, directionless, and too recreation-oriented; and youth complain that the Centers are boring. Based on TDC’s assessment interviews, these criticisms can, in great part, be attributed to the following challenges:

- **The process of program design and goal setting may be too far-removed from the Centers and the current staffing structure does not allow for full participation of part-time staff in program planning, design and implementation.** Internal stakeholders—DHSP central office staff, Center Directors and part-time staff alike—indicate that current staffing structures negatively impact the extent to which part-time staff “buy into” centrally designed initiatives. Program Managers, Center Directors and part-time staff agree that the Youth Leaders are not properly trained on how to organize planned activities; nor do they have the time and incentive to plan thoughtful, structured programs.

- **The Youth Centers rely too heavily on sports programming.** The newer Centers, in particular, have developed a reputation of being “basketball palaces.” This perception seems to drive who comes to the Centers and what their expectations are with respect to programs and activities. As one external stakeholder complained, “the needs of non-athletic kids aren’t getting met”—a sentiment that was consistently echoed by community-based collaborators, parents, and youth themselves.
- **The age-range (9-19) is very broad, making it increasingly difficult to design developmentally appropriate programs.** Internal and external stakeholders are concerned that the Youth Program, as it is currently organized does not adequately meet the needs of its two distinct age groups—“pre-teens” and teens.
- **Youth seemingly have short attention spans for the more structured programs.** Both staff and youth argue that the current structured program offerings are boring, repetitive, and do not “speak to the youth.” At the same time, youth complain of being bored during periods of unstructured, “leisure” time. The tension between structured and unstructured programs is an important one for the Planning Committee and Program staff to explore.

When asked what programming the Centers should include, stakeholders and program constituents offered a number of suggestions. The majority of stakeholders and constituents with whom TDC spoke agreed that the Centers should offer more structured activities. At the same time, they seek a strong balance between structured programs and “drop-in” activities that provide youth with a wider range of options than is currently offered. To achieve this mix of programs and activities, stakeholders universally agreed that the Centers need to build greater capacity among staff to develop and carry out programs that engage the youth in more meaningful ways. Current part-time staff are seen as not initiating enough activities. A number of stakeholders also saw the need to more fully involve the older teens in program planning and implementation.

In terms of program content, there was less agreement. A number of stakeholders argued for more of an emphasis on academic programs. A handful of others were interested in seeing a continued emphasis on recreation and leisure activities. A small number of stakeholders went as far as suggesting a new programmatic structure that would entail either absorbing some of the Community School programs within the Centers or, restructuring the five Centers so that each Center has a specific programmatic focus. For example, one Center might be the “arts Center” another would be the “sports Center”, while a third might be the “education Center.”

C Solid Organizational Structure and Management

“...a successful governance structure combines hands-on, site-based management with regular oversight and accountability to all partners.”

1. Organizational Structure

The Youth Program has made numerous efforts to reconfigure its organizational structure and enhance job-performance. Notable changes include the inclusion of the Youth Program Developer position, distribution of management responsibilities between the Youth Program Manager and Youth Program Developer, designation of “Assistant Directors” at the two larger Centers, and the recent decision to include program specialists at the Center level.

While many of these changes have generated greater consistency across the five programs, there are still concerns among internal and external stakeholders about the structure as a whole. As one internal stakeholder said,

“The Youth Program is like a big ship with five little boats floating around it. Some of the little boats are closer [more similar] to the big ship than others.”

Supporting comments by other stakeholders indicate that the Youth Program, as it is currently structured, is a top-heavy organization that lacks clear lines of authority, accountability and administrative efficiency. The Program’s multiple administrative layers are perceived as creating a system that is cumbersome, and difficult to manage. Specific concerns TDC heard pertaining to organizational structure are summarized below.

- **Direct oversight of the Centers feels limited.** Center Directors feel as though they are stretched too thin, being pulled away from their supervisory responsibilities of the Centers and Youth Leaders to carry out administrative responsibilities and direct service. At times, their work schedules take them out of the Centers during hours of operation, requiring Youth Leaders to provide hands-on site management and on-going responsibility for the Center. Efforts to off-set these concerns include centralizing many of the Centers’ administrative functions under the direction of the Youth Program Manager and designating “Assistant Directors”; however, advantages of these structural changes have not been fully realized.
- **Central office DHSP staff and management are “out-of-touch” with the centers, Youth Leaders, and Center members.** Youth leaders feel excluded from decision-making in the Centers and worry that those making the decisions at the higher echelons of management are uninformed about the Centers, their membership, and their membership’s needs. Moreover, part-time staff feel under-involved and under-appreciated by the City administration despite efforts to institute recognition programs.

- **The co-manager structure of the Youth Program is confusing.** While the two Managers of the Youth Program have different titles and written position descriptions, in practice the distinctions between the two are unclear to internal and external stakeholders alike. Accountability among the Center Directors is at times diffused by the two positions, with Directors going to a specific Manager out of convenience or personal preference rather than as a result of articulated job descriptions. Internal and external stakeholders also complained of communication breakdowns that sometimes result from the dual structure.
- **There is a breakdown in communication between central office policies and procedures, and their implementation at the Center level.** Expectations and programs established or developed at the central office do not necessarily translate into operation at the Center level. Two commonly cited examples were reporting requirements, and expectations attached to the 10-Point Program. Collaborating partners were also frustrated by the lack of communication between the central office and individual centers, finding the experience of collaborating “frustrating and inefficient,” citing bureaucratic procedures, communication and accountability issues as key challenges to smooth programming.
- **Accountability for not following policies and procedures is limited.** There is a sense among internal stakeholders that not all of the Youth Center Directors and staff “carry their weight,” but are not equally reprimanded for failing to do so. Youth Managers report not feeling as though they have full authority to hold Centers accountable to the guidelines of the Program, while Center staff report not knowing what the guidelines are. At the same time, those who do “carry their weight” do not feel as though their efforts are recognized or appreciated by management. Concurrently, Youth Leaders report feeling as though they work beyond expectation, while others get paid the same, or more, for doing less.

An important benefit of the Youth Program’s current organizational structure is the extent to which the structure is seen as flexible and responsive to the needs of each Center’s individual community. Center Directors feel as though they have a fair degree of autonomy to tailor their Center’s programs and activities according to the interests and requirements of their members. The central office is committed to the semi-autonomy of its centers, but struggles to engender a consistent level of adherence to policies and procedures.

2. Allocation of Financial Resources

“What good is a \$3 million facility that has no staff?”

The City’s allocation of resources to its Youth Program is seen as unbalanced, with a disproportionate amount being spent on facilities relative to staffing and programs. The Program’s limited staffing budget came under attack from all Youth Program

stakeholders during TDC's assessment. While staff, collaborators, school representatives, community members and parents are impressed by the quality and design of the newest facilities—the Frisoli and Area IV Youth Centers—they are dismayed by the limited funds that are actually invested in the Centers' staffing, on-going operations and programs. The true "investment" in the youth that use the Centers is perceived as being inadequate and marginal. While stakeholders feel that Cambridge is fortunate to have a youth center in every neighborhood, they want to see a more of an investment in their day-to-day operations.

Specific budget-related comments stakeholders shared with TDC include:

- "The City needs to bite the bullet or not do anything. Come up with more money to restructure efforts and stop spending money on consultants. Money isn't getting down to the programs."
- "This budget (\$5,000/Center for programs) demonstrates that the City is not making an investment in youth."
- "The current budget negatively impacts what activities and programs the Centers are able to run."
- "The \$5,000 Center budget breaks down to less than \$20 per child a year."

Of note is the fact that more money is available to the Center's for programming (approximately \$2,000-3,000 per Center, above the \$5,000 base) through the Central office but few Center Director's take advantage of this resource in a proactive, thoughtful way, despite the Program Managers' urgings to do so.

3. Meeting Legal Requirements

According to the *Safe and Smart* article, adherence to legal requirements associated with licensing requirements, insurance coverage, and health and safety practices is another indicator of strong management. As a collection of "drop-in" Centers, the Youth Program does not claim to provide the level of supervision required of licensed childcare providers. However, a number of those interviewed questioned whether the youth centers should abide by recommended ratios for youth programming, and voiced concern that current operating practices may make the Centers feel unsafe and potentially susceptible to liability claims.

Both internal and external stakeholders worry that disproportionate staff-to-youth ratios negatively impact the supervision, sense of accountability, and perception of safety the centers engender in the community, parents and youth. Also of concern was the laxity of attendance records and the freedom with which youth, and potentially others, can enter and exit the Centers, negatively impacting the extent to which the Centers feel safe.

D. QUALITY AFTER-SCHOOL STAFFING

All programs need staff who are qualified and committed, have appropriate experience and realistic expectations, and can interact productively with regular school staff, whether or not the program is school-based.

According to the *Safe and Smart* chapter on exemplary program components, quality staffing is second only to a clear vision and organizational structure. However, it is on this dimension, quality staffing, that the Youth Program came under considerable criticism among internal and external stakeholders alike.

- **Staffing was consistently cited, by virtually all observers, as the major weakness of the Cambridge Youth Program.** Currently, the Youth Program employs seven full-time staff (two Youth Program Managers and five Center Directors) and approximately 30 part-time Youth Leaders to serve approximately 1200 pre-teens and teens. Internal and external stakeholders alike criticized the Program for its seeming reluctance to invest in appropriate staff to the same extent that it has invested in the construction of its newest facilities.
- **The current staffing structure, with its reliance on part-time staff is seen as grossly inadequate.** Internal and external stakeholders were quite clear and, at times, vehement in their recommendations that the Youth Program revamp and reconfigure its staffing structure. Stakeholders universally agreed that they would like to see a new structure that includes more full-time staff who are better qualified, more experienced and more committed to careers in youth work than they are to meeting the minimum requirements of a part-time job.

According to the *Safe and Smart* authors, a program's staffing structure should, "include a program administrator, teachers, paraprofessionals, and college students along with parent and community volunteers." In this section, TDC summarizes the extent to which stakeholders feel the Youth Program's staffing structure reflects these ideals.

1. Role of the Program Administrator

According to the authors of *Safe and Smart*, an after-school program director is responsible for ensuring that the program meets the needs of all of its constituents—youth, parents, staff—through relationship-building and collaboration. Within the City of Cambridge, it is unclear whose responsibility it is to fulfill these tasks or requirements. Depending on whom we spoke with, the "Program Administrator," or "boss" changed. For some, the Program Administrator is the Director of the Community and Youth Division. For others, it is one or both of the Youth Program Managers, or the individual Center Directors. At a minimum, responsibility for the Program is diffused among three of four key players—each Center Director, the two Program Managers and the Division

Director. However, the delineation between positions is unclear. Below, TDC highlights specific feedback we heard relative to the recommended roles of a Program Administrator.

Supervision

During TDC's assessment, supervision was often referenced as a "flaw" of the Youth Program.

- Parents worry that the youth are not adequately supervised by Center staff.
- Some Youth Leaders complain that they do not receive adequate supervision from their Center Director
- Some Directors find it difficult to "mentor" their staff because of scheduling conflicts, limited training and lack of empowerment to dictate rules and enforce accountability among their staff.

Center Directors also complained that expectations of their position are unrealistic given the Program's reliance on part-time staff and a limited program budget. Center Directors claim that so much of their time is taken up with the day-to-day aspects of the Center—scheduling part-time staff, attending meetings, meeting administrative reporting requirements, and providing direct service—that it is difficult to implement programs, and establish collaborations and relationships with other organizations or community residents.

Collaboration Building

Currently, the Youth Program works with a number of other Cambridge-based organizations to design and implement programs within the Centers. These collaborations are developed at both the central office and center level. In general, the ideas for collaboration are generated through the Central Office with the expectation that Center Directors will follow up with the collaborating partner and ensure that programs are carried out. Many positive collaborations have emerged (CASPAR, the Young People's Project, Tutoring Plus, and early release day collaborations with the Community Schools), however, there is some concern among both internal and external stakeholders that collaborative efforts are not as fully developed or effective as they could be. More specifically, TDC heard that:

- Collaborators are often frustrated by the gaps between their efforts to plan and design programs with the central office and the implementation of these programs at the Center level;
- Center staff sometimes fail to mobilize participants in time for a collaborative program; and,
- Accountability with respect to outreach, logistics and member discipline is vague and diffused across the Center staff, central staff and partnering agency staff.

(More information regarding collaborations is included in section F of this report.)

2. Hiring and Retaining Qualified Staff

“Children in school-age programs indicate that warm, caring, and stable adult relationships are important to their success in an after-school program...As such, programs should hire skilled and qualified staff who are experienced in working with [youth] on learning, enrichment, and recreational activities.” (Safe and Smart)

Staff members with whom TDC spoke self-identified a staffing crisis from the outset of this assessment, reporting particular difficulty with hiring and retaining quality staff.

The quality of the Youth Program’s staff and its ability to attract and retain qualified people were referenced a number of times throughout the assessment. **TDC repeatedly heard that the staffing structure and limitations imposed by the City impede the Program’s ability to attract experienced youth workers.** These limitations, as perceived by internal and external stakeholders include:

- the City’s resolve to staff the Centers with part-time workers;
- a cap on the number of hours part-time staff are allowed to work;
- the City’s unwillingness to offer benefits to its part-time employees;
- low hourly wages;
- limited opportunities for upward mobility or professional development; and,
- limited opportunities to employ teens as Center staff.

As a result of these hiring and staffing policies, a tension has developed between the kind of staff the Program would like to hire, and the compromises it has had to make to achieve even basic coverage of the Centers.

In describing what the ideal Program staff would consist of, both Program Managers and Center Directors describe a combination of full-time experienced youth workers whose work is supplemented by part-time staff, college and high school students who are interested in gaining experience in youth work and peer leadership. Instead, the Program relies on the dedication of a handful of part-time employees and the inconsistent participation of the remaining corps of part-time Youth Leaders who provide basic coverage.

Specific strengths and weaknesses of the Youth Centers’ staff, as articulated by internal and external stakeholders include:

Strengths

- The staff is committed to the teens and builds rapport with them.
- Staff recruited from the neighborhoods can relate to the kids.
- The Lesley College internship program has been very successful, providing a number of quality staff members.

Weaknesses

- Qualified staff seems to be lacking.
- The Program does not attract staff trained in program development and delivery.
- Part-time staff do not perceive their jobs as “real,” and they are motivated to only meet the basic, minimum requirements of their positions.
- There is no way to reward successful, above average staff members through professional development.
- The tiered Youth Leader system, Youth Leader I, II, and III is meaningless—everyone ends up doing the same work and having the same responsibilities; the only difference is in compensation.
- The staff is male-dominated, and at times insensitive to girls’ developmental needs and issues, creating a girl-unfriendly atmosphere.
- Centers need to hire more mature individuals—college and post-college age.

3. Professional Development of Staff

According to the *Safe and Smart* authors, professional development is a key component to building and sustaining a quality program. Within the last two years, the Youth Program has made significant improvements in its commitment to offering more training programs to its part-time staff. Where the program once offered basic training modules like CPR and first aid, the Youth Program Developer has designed a series of staff trainings that include nine modules ranging from planning an activity to recognizing mental health concerns in pre-teens and teens. However, as with other aspects of the Program, there is a disconnect between intent and implementation—few part-time staff take advantage of the opportunities made available to them.

When asked about staff development and training, internal stakeholders had the following to say:

- Despite a variety of efforts by Program Managers to communicate upcoming staff trainings, part-time staff report that they do not hear about them until after they have happened, and that trainings are repetitive, “out-of-touch” or burdensome to their already busy schedules.
- Youth Leaders in Centers that are consistently short-staffed have difficulty meeting basic coverage requirements and are therefore less inclined to consider or implement knowledge gained during training.
- Some Youth Leaders argue that some of the training topics, such as identifying mental illness, ask more of the part-time staff than is reasonable with respect to their experience, abilities and the scope of their responsibilities.

Moreover, staff training is just one aspect of professional development. Other key components include proper orientation to the Program and job requirements, upward mobility, and opportunities to mentor and be mentored. Currently, there is no formal staff orientation process or training manual. On paper, the Youth Program has tried to

address the issue of upward mobility by establishing a three-tiered hierarchy among the Youth Leader positions but, as noted above, these distinctions are not meaningful in practice. While the Program has taken steps to provide some of the Centers with “Assistant Directors,” these positions continue to lack the credibility of a full-time position in the eyes of the Youth Leaders who might aspire to taking on increased responsibility within their respective Centers. “Assistant Directors” are still limited as to the number of hours they are able to work and do not receive benefits.

4. **Low Staff-to-Student Ratio**

“For true student enrichment, the staff-to-student ratio should be low...ratios of 1:13 or greater are often associated with more time spent waiting in line and with staff exhibiting poorer behavior management skills.”

As a City-run, non-licensed “drop-in” program, the Cambridge Youth Program is not required by Massachusetts licensing standards to maintain specific ratios. However, youth program experts and licensing standards recommend that, for enrolled programs serving ages similar to the Youth Program’s, staff-to-child ratios should be between 1:10 and 1:15. Under these recommendations, smaller ratios (1:10) would be applied to younger age groups (7-12 years of age) and field trips, with larger ratios (1:12/15) being applied to older teens (13 and older). These recommendations are based on the belief that smaller ratios are vital to the development of meaningful relationships between staff and youth—that it is these relationships that determine the “safety” and quality of a program. To help maintain acceptable recommendations, the National Health and Safety Performance standards further suggest that the number of youth involved in any one activity or small group not exceed 24 participants.

Currently, the staff-to-youth ratios within the centers range from 1:10 to 1:50, with the average being one staff person to every 20-25 youth. As a result, it is extremely difficult for staff to establish relationships with youth because basic coverage takes precedence. Limited staff makes it difficult for “real programming” to occur and contributes greatly to the under-utilization of the Centers—many Centers complain about (and are accused of) blocking off entire rooms, opening late, closing early, or not opening at all due to understaffing. Parents with whom TDC spoke were also concerned about the safety of their children, wondering how much oversight there can actually be with so few staff supervising so many youth.

E. ATTENTION TO SAFETY, HEALTH AND NUTRITION ISSUES

“Programs should be safe, close to home, and accessible to all children and youth who want to participate. ...[Similarly,] good after school programs provide a nutritious snack, and other meals when appropriate, for relaxation and socializing and to promote sound nutrition for participants.”

1. Creating Safe Places

The extent to which the City of Cambridge’s Youth Centers feel safe varies according to which youth group is being considered. Internal and external stakeholders are concerned that the Centers are not particularly safe places for younger youth between the ages of 7 and 13, and/or girls. The emphasis on athletics and predominance of male staff make the centers seem “safer” for older male teens who tend to dominate the gym and game room spaces within the different Centers.

Some external stakeholders commented that the Centers seem “out of control” and unsupervised. Some of the younger youth with whom TDC spoke found the older teens “disruptive.” A number of external stakeholders had heard stories of older teen aggression toward the younger youth to the point of younger teens having to be escorted to the bathrooms to avoid incident. Furthermore, some external stakeholders were concerned about “turf issues” and the possibility that Centers are cliquy to the point of excluding other age-appropriate youth from participating in the Program.

Other challenges the Program faces with respect to engendering a sense of safety, as perceived by internal and external stakeholders include:

- Lack of structured programs within the Centers;
- Lack of accountability of the drop-in model with respect to staff supervision of participating youth— “Kids are free to come and go as they please”;
- Negative public relations as a result of prior incidents—fights and stories of sexual harassment;
- Inadequate monitoring systems for who comes in and out of the Centers;
- Loitering among youth and adults not using the Center in the parks and playgrounds adjoining a number of the facilities; and,
- Inconsistent disciplinary policies and procedures.

For all of the reasons listed above, external stakeholders and some of the youth with whom TDC spoke, indicate that parents do not feel comfortable sending, or allowing, their younger children or girls go to the City’s Youth Centers. As they are currently operated—with limited staff—the Centers do not feel like safe places for “everyone.”

The Centers have taken some positive steps to counteract these criticisms. These efforts include:

- Separating the program into two time-slots—2:00pm-5:30 or 6:00pm for younger youth and pre-teens and 6:00 or 6:30pm-9:00pm for the older teens;
- Initiating girls only programming like “Girls’ Night” and “Girls’Day”; and,
- Running gender-equity trainings for part-time staff.

These measures have met with varying success. For example, Center Directors have found it difficult to abide by the two time-slot model as some of the older teens have responsibility for watching their younger siblings and cannot be at the center without them or simply have nowhere else to go. Rather than have the teens out on the streets, Center Directors and their staff open the doors of the Centers to the older teens regardless of the time.

Efforts to do more “girls programming” have met with similar challenges. Many of the Centers have initiated “Girls Groups” that are supervised by a Center staff member and meet on a regular basis. Efforts to increase girls’ utilization of the Centers included “Girls Day” and “Girls Night.” Each reflects an effort to make the Centers feel and seem more sensitive to the different needs and concerns of boys and girls. Attendance at each has varied with Girls Day events drawing a fair level among girls from across the Program, and Girls Night drawing only small numbers of female members who complain that the Centers are boring without the boys. It is important to note, however, that this situation is not unique to the Cambridge Youth Program. Many of the other youth programs with whom TDC spoke experience similar challenges with respect to girls’ programming.

2. Meeting Nutritional Needs

The Cambridge Youth Program is not adequately responding to the nutritional needs of growing youth. In many cases, youth are in and around the Centers from the time they leave school at 2:00 in the afternoon until the Centers close at 9:00 or 9:30 p.m. They often approach the Center staff for vending machine money or money to go to local convenience stores. The assumption that kids go home for dinner during the 5:30-6:30pm Center break is false according to the older teens with whom TDC spoke. Instead of going home for dinner, they “hang out” until the Centers re-open.

The reality for the Center is that many of the kids that utilize the Centers do not benefit from positive eating habits. They often arrive at and leave the Center hungry. Almost all of the Centers have kitchen facilities on-site, but these are generally used for programming purposes such as cooking groups with the youths. They are not used on any regular basis to provide regular meals or snacks to the Centers’ members.

F. EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

Effective programs aim to draw on all of the community's diverse resources, including the participation of children and youth in program planning, in order to best address the concerns of an entire community.

Under the current organizational model and staffing structure, the Cambridge Youth Program depends on a number of outside agencies to plan, coordinate and implement many of the programs that take place in the Centers. Therefore, its ability to establish and maintain relationships with other community-based organizations is a critical aspect of the Centers' programmatic success. At the same time, a number of the Centers are geographically co-located in or near some of the City's public schools—a significant source of potential members and major source of information pertaining to members' academic needs. The extent to which the Youth Program has successfully established partnerships with these and other groups has varied over time with different Center Directors and collaborators coming to different arrangements and levels of cooperation.

Among the Youth Program's successful collaborative efforts are programs that have been established with the Community Schools, CASPAR, the Young People's Project and Tutoring Plus (at Area IV), law enforcement agencies and Cambridge Rindge and Latin. Both Program staff and their collaborating partners referenced the fact that collaborations have become more efficient in recent years, but that there is still work to be done. Below, TDC summarizes the Youth Program's "track record" with the range of collaborative partners highlighted in the *Safe and Smart* publication.

1. Community-Based Organization Collaborations

Currently, there are roughly 50 organizations serving youth in some capacity within the City of Cambridge. Of these, the Youth Program collaborates with approximately 10-15 on a regular basis.

During our assessment, TDC spoke with a number of former, current and potential collaborators to determine their impressions of, and interest in, cooperating with the Youth Program. As indicated in the section D1 of this report, reviews among this group of stakeholders were mixed. Again, all of the collaborators with whom TDC spoke, found the process of collaborating with the Youth Centers frustrating, disorganized and inefficient—blaming the challenges on inadequate staffing at the Center level. Other perceived barriers to successful collaboration include:

- Lack of clarity with respect to the mission and goals of the Youth Program, "I don't really know what they [the Youth Centers] do";
- Different philosophies and approaches to youth work—the Centers are more recreation and "drop-in" oriented which may run counter to the requirements of a collaborating partners' program goals and requirements;

- Operating inconsistencies from one Center to the next (i.e.some Centers are easier to collaborate with than others);
- It is difficult to communicate and plan with Center staff because of conflicting work schedules—Center staff work 2:00-9:00 or 5:00- 9:00pm whereas many of their collaborators work more traditional 9:00am-5:00pm hours.

As a result of these challenges, many of the community-based organization representatives with whom we spoke are only willing to collaborate with those Centers that are perceived as more receptive and cooperative partners.

2. Law Enforcement and Juvenile Justice Collaborations

In addition to establishing relationships with other community-based organizations, the after-school program design literature emphasizes the importance of youth programs collaborating with a community’s juvenile justice agencies and law enforcement groups. Currently, the Youth Program Manager meets with law enforcement officials, and school security staff, on a weekly basis, to discuss concerns, and flag potential problems among the youth. The Youth Program has also collaborated successfully with the police in developing sports leagues, and developing programs like Night Stop and the “Safety Corps” program.

The law enforcement and juvenile agency representatives with whom we spoke directly both qualified their own comments about the Youth Program/law enforcement dynamic because of the amount of time that has passed since they were actively involved with the youth programs. However, both commented that historically, the more substantive collaborations that emerged between law enforcement, juvenile justice agencies, and Youth Centers developed as a result of relationships between individuals rather than through institutionalized programs. These impressions have been addressed through the weekly meetings cited above and collaborations among these institutions continue to evolve and improve.

3. School-Based Partnerships and Collaborations

Every piece of after-school program design literature TDC reviewed, emphasized the critical nature of establishing close ties and working relationships with a community’s school system. To determine the Cambridge Youth Program’s success along this dimension, TDC spoke with a number of school representatives, both formally through telephone interviews, and informally during student focus groups at four of the City’s public schools.

According to school representatives, their relationships with Youth Centers are improving, but there is still considerable room for further improvement. By the same

token, the DHSP has found it difficult to pursue collaborations with the School Department's complex bureaucracy. Presently, contact that does exist between the schools and the Program occurs out of the Central Office, rather than at the Center level directly, with the exception of the West Cambridge Youth Center, which is located in and works closely with the Haggerty School. To date, communication between the schools and Centers has focused more on disciplinary problems and mediation than on academics. Representatives with whom we spoke would like to see relationships become more in-depth and well-rounded—involving Youth Center staff in curriculum planning and design discussions.

One point of concern is the limited extent to which other school representatives (with whom TDC spoke informally during the student feedback groups) were aware of the Youth Program. Principals and teachers that helped organize the groups were either not familiar with the Centers at all, or had only a limited understanding of their scope and services. This suggests that the Youth Program has fallen short in its outreach efforts to this critical source of not only members, but also collaborators, potential staff and other school-related resources. The limited interaction between the Youth Program and schools may impede the degree to which the Program can be a meaningful source of learning and enrichment.

4. Youth as Program Partners

Another recommended set of “collaborations” is the involvement of youth in the planning, coordination and implementation of program policies, projects and activities. Some Centers have involved youth more fully than others, but there seems little commitment to involve youth this way across the program. For example, hiring practices limit the number of high school students who are allowed to work in each Center to two students per center, one male and one female.

The Youth Council model that is now in place at Area IV was commended by internal and external stakeholders, as well as youth themselves as a positive change to the Program's operations.

With all of these groups, CBOs, law enforcement agencies, Cambridge schools and youth, the greatest challenges for the Youth Program are its need to increase its marketing, and outreach activities and improve its internal systems of communication. Internal and external stakeholders alike recognize that the Program has not established a critical degree of visibility within the community and that staff have not been as active about going into the schools and approaching other agencies as they have been in the past.

G. STRONG INVOLVEMENT OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS

The success of an after-school program depends on the involvement of both families and the community.

Some centers have benefited from the mobilization of active community residents and parent groups during the planning, design and construction/renovation of their facilities. The strategic planning process has demonstrated a commitment to engaging parents and community residents in the gathering of information, feedback and recommendations. However, as in the case of community-based organizations and youth involvement, meaningful partnerships with parents and community residents have not been fully realized. The most telling example is the disbanding of the Friends of Area IV which was created to help fund construction of the new facility. The group went as far as establishing 501(c) (3) status, only to dissolve due to a lack of continued interest.

Not only do community members and parents not actively engage in the on-going planning of the Centers and their activities, parents, agency representatives, and youth with whom we spoke conveyed the sense that some parents do not know about the Program, or actually discourage their children from attending the Centers. Other after-school options, the Youth Program's lack of structure, sports and recreation emphasis and safety issues mentioned above seemingly deter many parents and youth from taking advantage of the Centers. When asked for further explanations of why parents do not encourage their children to get involved in the Program, the stakeholders and constituents with whom we spoke offered the following:

- Lack of information about what the Centers are and what they do;
- Negative impressions of the Centers—"that's where the 'bad' kids go";
- Geographic inaccessibility;
- Limited availability of non-athletic programs; and,
- Children's feelings of intimidation or discomfort either because of male dominance, age differences, or structure of the sports activities (established, competitive teams rather than noncompetitive "pick up games").

IV. CONCLUSION

It is important to note that over the past few years, even in the face of a self-identified “staffing crisis,” the Youth Program has experienced a number of positive changes. A consistent programmatic framework has been developed, positive collaborations are being forged, and staff trainings on a range of relevant topics have been offered. However, the potential of these efforts has not been fully realized because of a complex and inadequate staffing structure that is fundamentally unsuited to the tasks at hand. On the one hand, the City’s commitment to the youth of the City is quite visible and real, in the notable investment in the Youth Center facilities. On the other hand, the lack of sufficient investment in staff to develop and realize programs that truly make a difference in the lives of Cambridge’s youth is a problem that is in dire need of attention.

The Youth Program Strategic Planning Committee has taken significant steps toward clarifying what the role of the Youth Program will be for the next three-to-five years. This is continuing, with progress being made toward the translation of core values, mission and goals into the human and monetary resources and organizational structure that are necessary to support programmatic intentions.

City Of Cambridge Strategic Planning Committee Member List

Patricia Bradshaw	Fletcher Community School
Steve Christo	Frisoli Youth Center
Michelle Farnum	Office of Workforce Development
Robert Goodwin	DHSP
Alexandra Lozada	Concilio Hispano—Ahora Program
Rose McMahan	CASPAR—Alcohol Education
Kristen Mehr	Area 4 Youth Center
Mario Morency	Cambridge Prevention Coalition
Janet Moses	The Algebra Project
Joe Petner	The Haggerty School
Andrew Spooner	DHSP
Hawley Truax	DHSP

CAMBRIDGE YOUTH PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY: YOUTH CURRENTLY USING THE CENTERS

TDC conducted a series of focus groups with youth at the five Youth Centers in Cambridge including, Frisoli, Area 4, Moore, Gately and West Cambridge. The goal of these meetings was to develop a clear understanding of the experiences of the youth who use the centers, what they look for, and what they expect from their centers. The groups selected represent a cross section of all of the population who use the centers throughout Cambridge.

TDC spoke with approximately 35 youth between the ages of 11 and 18 two mixed-gender groups and two all-girls groups. We asked the participants a series of questions about their experiences with respect to Center staff, activities, environment/safety, and facilities. We also asked questions pertaining to attendance patterns to determine what influences a pre-teen or teen's decision to attend the Centers and/or attend once Center over another. Following is a summary of their responses across these areas of consideration, as well as a separate section on Center and gender-specific issues that were raised during our discussions.

STAFF

When asked whether or not the youth like the Center staff, the majority said they did, with a few exceptions and complaints.

- A number commented on the need for more staff in general, and the need for more female staff specifically. According to the focus group participants, the current level of staffing limits the number and types of activities the youth can participate in because there is not enough supervision. They also said that current staff levels cause the Centers to open late or close early, again, because of limited supervision.
- Criticism of the quality of staff include limited initiation among staff to interact with the teens—"most of the staff sit around and do their homework"; inconsistent enforcement of Center rules; unnecessarily strict enforcement of rules; and prejudicial treatment of boys over girls;
- When asked what role they want staff to play in the Centers, and characteristics staff should possess, they said they want staff members who are role models, guides, friends, people youth can relate to and who can relate to them and their experiences. Staff members should treat youth with mutual respect and trust.

PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

Participants' comments with respect to programs and activities were often contradictory. They claim to be bored and complain that there is not enough to do. However, many do not participate in programs when they are offered, except in the girls groups that have been established in most of the Centers and the Area IV Youth Council, favoring

unstructured sports-related activities. More specifically, focus group participants had the following to say about Center programs and activities:

- There needs to be more games and structured activities, especially for the younger youth.
- Basketball is the most popular ATHLETIC activity and participants would like to see more emphasis on leagues. The girls would like more gender-equity in terms of court time and team assignments.
- HOMEWORK TIME is poorly enforced and unstructured. Not all of the Centers offer homework help and those that do provide the bare minimum of assistance. For the most part, kids would like tutoring/help available if needed but do not find the current staff or structure very helpful.
- Female participants like the idea of GIRLS' GROUPS, but complain that the activities and underlying attitude are too "girlie." Most girls don't like the activities involved with girls night, i.e. putting on make-up and doing each other's hair. They want real activities like computer stuff, sports, trips, movies, etc. This should be time for girls to bond, but not at the exclusion of the boys. While girls complain that the boys "are animals," they are totally opposed to girls only nights at the Centers. They want the boys to be around, they "just want them to behave."
- According to the participants (particularly the teens) the Centers do not offer enough TRIPS. Things they would like to do include skiing; visits to Centers in different cities, especially the leadership council; ice skating and college visits.
- Youth are not opposed to the Centers sponsoring LECTURES and SPEAKERS, but the older kids are tired of sex education and drug education speakers. All participants want to hear from speakers who have had real life experiences like pregnant teens or recovering addicts to talk to them. They want to learn about topics and from people about which, and with whom they can relate.

ENVIRONMENT

TDC asked questions pertaining to how "safe" or welcome the Centers feel to the youth who attend. Responses can be categorized according to three major categories:

- GENDER TENSION—Some of the tension between boys and girls seems to be age appropriate, but may be exaggerated by lack of supervision or interference from staff. Many girls feel excluded or bored at the Centers because the main focus is sports related and the "girls activities" that are offered are "too girlie"—particularly among the 11-12 year old girls.
- AGE TENSION—The Centers have tried to diminish the negative effects of having pre-teens and older teens in the Centers at the same time by dividing the Centers'

operating hours into two time slots—afternoons for pre-teens and evenings for older teens. However, younger teens complain that the older teens come to the Centers in the afternoon, while older teens complain that some of the younger teens are still at the Centers in the evenings. For the pre-teens, the presence of the older teens is intimidating and, at times, threatening. For the older teens, the presence of the younger teens is a hassle.

- SAFETY—For the most part safety is not an issue, but youth conveyed the sense that some Centers are more “in control” than others. Though rules exist in almost all of the centers, they are not consistent across centers nor consistently enforced within centers—sometimes creating an environment that does not feel safe or manageable. While the Centers feel fairly safe on the inside, areas immediately surrounding some of the Centers do not always feel safe. Some of the younger youth said it can be scary walking home alone at night in the dark, while older teens at Area IV complained about the older teens/young adults who do not use the Center, but loiter on the playground.

FACILITIES

The greatest issue with respect to facilities is the discrepancy in the quality of the various centers, with Frisoli being the “Basketball Palace” when compared to the run-down facilities of West Cambridge and Gately. Some of the participants also complained that the Centers are dirty and that they do not have access to all areas of the Center due to staffing crunches.

ATTENDANCE PATTERNS

In meeting with the youth who currently use the Centers, TDC was interested to see if there were any patterns in terms of the Center usage and attendance. What we learned is that:

- Youth go to the Centers because they are a place to hang out with friends and offer something to do after school
- Most of the kids that go, do so every night, some from opening to close, 2:30-9:00.
- Most of the older kids have been to more than one Center.
- Among the younger youth/pre-teens, determining which Center to attend has more to do with a Center’s proximity to home, than its proximity to school; whereas for the older teens the decision has more to do with where one’s friends go.
- Different Centers are popular at different times.
- Some go for particular activities like Girls night, Young Ladies Night or basketball leagues.
- Few youth go to the Centers on weekends.
- Fewer girls than boys use the Centers.

ISSUES PARTICULAR TO INDIVIDUAL CENTERS

FRISOLI (all girls 11&12)

- Too many rules- i.e. no gum chewing.
- Not enough staff.
- Would like longer hours for the younger kids.
- Would like more female staff and staff who can help them with problems.
- Would like some food to be available.
- Some girls say walking home at night alone is scary.

AREA IV (Teen Leadership Council)

- Would like activities relevant to teens including college guidance and trips to visit colleges, resume writing and job counseling.
- Visits to other centers to see what they are doing and meet other teens.
- Need more activities/programs.
- They believe that the Center has a bad image because of the teens who hang out in front of the Center but don't use the Center.

GATELEY (Girls Group, teens)

- Very little programming.
- Little supervision or rule enforcement, kids control other kids to maintain some order.
- Many of the kids go to the Center from opening to close, 2:30-9:00.
- During break between sessions the kids sit outside the Center and wait for it to re-open.

MOORE (11-14 girls & boys)

- The center has little order or structure.
- Little to no supervision from staff.
- Need more facilities, activities and interactive staff.
- Facility is dirty, has mice and roaches and the bathrooms smell.
- Racial tension.
- Fighting in Center. Not a safe environment.
- No real rules. There are rules for the Center but they are rarely enforced.

GENDER SPECIFIC ISSUES

GIRLS

- Feel excluded from many of the activities in the Centers because most of the activities are for boys and girls night is too "girlie."
- Girls can't be themselves in the center—boys make fun and use all of the space so it is boring for girls.
- Not as many girls at the Centers as boys.
- Would like more stuff for girls.

BOYS

No specific male issues.

CAMBRIDGE YOUTH PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY: YOUTH NOT (NECESSARILY) USING THE CENTERS

TDC conducted a series of focus groups with students at four of the City's Public Schools: Agassiz School, Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, Harrington School, and King Open School. We met with: three seventh-grade classes; a consolidated group of high school freshmen and sophomores; and, members of the Ahora Program, an after-school program at CRLS serving Hispanic youth. The goal of these meetings was to develop a clear understanding of:

- the Youth Centers' reputation among those not currently using the centers;
- students' reasons for not using the Centers;
- how students use their out of school time;
- the range of activities and elements that would need to be in place to broaden the Centers' appeal; and,
- recommended forms of outreach.

In total, TDC spoke with 62 students and only 15 currently attend the Centers on an intermittent or regular basis. Based on this admittedly small, unscientific sample, about a quarter of Cambridge Youth attend the Centers on a regular or intermittent basis.

- Of the 14 CRLS students, 6 go to the Centers
- Of the 14 Agassiz students, 4 go
- Of the 20 Harrington students, 4 go
- Of the 6 King Open students, 1 goes
- None of the 8 Concilio Hispana kids currently go. Some did, but stopped

Because some participants currently use, or have used the Centers in the past, comments reflect both personal experiences and general impressions.

YOUTH CENTERS' REPUTATION

General Comments

- Among youth that use the Centers on a semi-regular basis, the Centers are places where one can go to do homework, get help, play games, as well as places that keep kids off the streets. They like the fact that there are people at the Centers to help them with homework and that there are resources like computers, gym facilities and games.
- The most common adjective used to describe the Centers was "boring." According to focus group participants, there isn't much to do at the Centers and activities that are offered are repetitive and too unstructured. The Centers rely too much on the game room activities like pool tables and ping-pong, and when activities are organized, they are not necessarily interesting to the youth who are "forced" to participate.

- Another criticism of the Centers is that they are not welcoming places. Focus group participants complained that the Centers feel unsafe and unfriendly—staff doesn't deal well with bullies, no one keeps track of the kids that come and go, Centers' don't follow parents' requests in terms of supervision, and some feel cliquey. Moreover, some staff are perceived as being "rude," "racist," and antagonistic.
- Along the same lines, female participants complained that the Centers feel more tailored to boys than they are to girls. Some activities and sports feel exclusive of girls, girls feel left off of teams and staff does not intervene to make girls feel more included.
- Among older teens, there was the perception that the Centers are more tailored for the younger youth and pre-teens, complaining that there are too many little kids at the Centers. When asked if they would like a Center just for older teens, the CRLS group said they would because, as it stands, they cannot use the Centers until later in the evening because of the time split between pre-teens and teens. At the same time, younger focus group participants said that the presence of the older teens can be "disruptive," and think it is unfair that younger kids (younger than 9) cannot use the Centers. The seventh graders with whom TDC spoke said that they are most comfortable using the Center when the age concentration of participants is between 10 and 15 years of age.
- Food also came up as an issue for focus group participants who feel that food should be provided and that the available vending machines are too expensive. Some participants do not eat until they leave the Centers at 9:00 in the evening and few go home for an afternoon snack before going to the Centers after school.

Center-Specific Comments

In addition to impressions of the Youth Centers as a whole, focus group participants also referred to specific Centers in their comments. The Centers most commonly referenced were the Frisoli, Area IV and Moore.

- The FRISOLI generated the most passionate responses among participants. While participants' recognize the strength of the Center in terms of equipment and facilities, they are reluctant to use the Center because they think that the staff is too strict, unfair and inconsistent in terms of enforcing the Center's rules. The Center is perceived to have more of a "neighborhood" feel and is considered more "racist" than the other Centers. Of the 20 students who participated in the Harrington School focus group, only 4 use the Center despite its geographic proximity to the school.
- AREA IV was the second Center mentioned the most. For youth that go to Area IV, it is a safe place where "you know everyone." However, for those not attending Area IV, the Center feels cliquey and unfriendly. According to focus group participants, youth at the Center pick fights and disrespect the facility.
- Only a handful of students with whom TDC spoke were familiar with the MOORE Center. One student uses the Center on a daily basis after school because it is fun and he can get help with his homework. However, as one student said, the older teens at the

Moore are “disruptive” and the center is violent, with youth picking fights and little staff supervision.

REASONS FOR NOT USING CENTERS AND USE OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME

Some of the reasons Cambridge Public School students do not use the Centers are imbedded in their impressions of the Centers—boring, unfriendly, unsafe, male-focused and cliquey. Other explanations for why focus group participants do not use the Centers include:

- Did not know the Centers existed. Had not heard of them or know what kind of programs they offer.
- Involvement in other structured after-school activities: Community Arts Center; Cambridge sports leagues; swim teams; school-based sports programs like volley-ball, basketball and wrestling; other community and school-based programs like Concilio Hispano; YMCA sports programs; religion classes
- Parents do not let students use the Centers—too unstructured, not enough supervision
- There are not enough girls at the Centers
- Prefer to stay at home to do homework or “hang out” at friends’ homes, the mall, parks and around the City
- Baby-sit/work
- Attend day or overnight camps during the summer

WHAT WOULD MAKE CENTERS MORE APPEALING

To determine what focus group participants look for in a youth center, or expect of youth programs, TDC asked them to describe what an ideal Youth Program would look like in terms of facilities, activities, staffing and “frills.” Their responses according to each element are as follows:

Facilities

- Swimming pool (or access to)
- Game rooms with Nintendo, pool tables
- Places to hang out and “chill”—lounge
- Television with cable

Activities

- Homework help and tutoring
- Arts-related activities
- Youth-generated ideas planned and prepared for by staff
- Broader range of sports and athletics beyond basketball—football, volleyball, soccer, hockey (ice and street), tennis, racquetball, aerobics, dance, martial arts
- Trips—beach, skiing, amusement parks, movies, college athletic games, professional sporting events, ice skating, other City’s and neighborhoods (Greater Boston and beyond)
- Guest Speakers—celebrities and people who have actually gone through what they are talking about (drug rehab, teen pregnancy, prison/parole, etc.).
- Interactive educational programs, not just lectures

- Dances
- Opportunities to learn about different cultures
- College and job preparation and assistance

Staffing

- Young (high school and/or college)
- Nice
- Patient
- Fair
- “Friends” not disciplinarians
- “Urban” staff
- People who like to have fun
- Can relate to youth
- Coaches

Frills

- Open every day
- Food
- Music
- Library for research
- New computers, internet access and color printers
- Youth help to set the rules of the Centers
- Day-care for younger siblings
- Subsidized expenses for movies and trips

RECOMMENDED FORMS OF OUTREACH

One thing that became clear during the focus groups is that youth either do not know about the Centers at all, or have limited understanding of what the Centers offer. Therefore, TDC asked the groups for recommendations as to how the Centers might do a better job of “getting the word out.” Responses focused around word-of-mouth and outreach through the schools. Groups agreed that the most effective means of outreach is through their peers. Youth suggested that the Centers involve students in its outreach efforts by having them speak to classes, hand out flyers and talk to people informally during lunch periods. Students also suggested that Center staff become more of a presence at the schools with respect to outreach. The other major mechanism for spreading the word is the schools themselves—flyers on the walls, morning announcements and classroom announcements.

CAMBRIDGE YOUTH PROGRAM ASSESSMENT

FOCUS GROUP SUMMARY: PARENTS WHOSE YOUTH DO AND DO NOT USE THE YOUTH CENTERS

TDC conducted three focus groups with parents of Cambridge youth. Two groups involved parents of youth who currently attend the Youth Centers on a regular basis (parents representing the Frisoli and Gately Youth Centers.) The third group involved parents whose youth do not currently use the Centers (drawn primarily from parents associated with the Agassiz Neighborhood Council). In total, TDC spoke with 15 Cambridge parents.

The goal of these meetings was to develop an understanding of parents' attitudes toward the Youth Centers and their expectations of youth programs. Responses to the facilitator's questions were fairly consistent across groups with respect to the Youth Program's/Centers' strengths and weaknesses. Where groups most differed was in their expectations of the Centers. Parents whose youth use the Centers are basically pleased with the current structure of the Program, while parents whose youth are not using the Centers are looking for something more—particularly with respect to their pre-teen children. The three focus groups are summarized according to the following headings:

- Environment
- Staff
- Programs
- Outreach
- Expectations of Youth Programming

ENVIRONMENT

Perceptions of the Youth Centers' environments varied from focus group to focus group. Parents of youth who use the Centers, in general, found the Centers safe, comfortable places. They recognize the limitations of the Centers with respect to staffing (not enough staff), but are supportive of their youths' interest in using the Center. Important to note is the fact that many of the parents representing the Frisoli and Gately with whom TDC spoke are home during the hours their children are at the Center. Four of the parents mentioned that they might feel differently about their children using the Centers if they, as parents, worked outside of the home. While Gately and Frisoli parents would like to see some changes occur within the Centers, they are basically happy with the Youth Program as it currently exists.

There was a diminished comfort level among the parents whose youth are not currently using the Centers. In addition to their concerns about inadequate staffing, their impressions of the Centers are colored by a lack of information, and perceptions that the

Centers attract the “tough” or “bad” kids. They also see the Youth Program as designed to serve lower-income populations.

Both sets of parents are concerned that the Centers are potentially less safe for the pre-teen youth, seeing the limited staffing as a greater issue for this age group than the older teens. They would like to see more effort made to reach out to and design programs for the City’s 12-14 year olds.

Parents would also like to see the Centers become more responsive to their entire communities’ needs—open more hours during the day to non-youth groups, longer teen hours of operation during the summer, and longer hours during early-release days and school holidays.

Above all else, parents want the Centers to be “fun” places where their youth can go to relax. While the majority of the parents want increased structure for their pre-teens, they do not want “structure” to come at the expense of a relaxed atmosphere. Parents are committed to the idea that the Centers truly be places that are for kids and responsive to their needs and interests.

STAFF

The most common criticism of the Youth Program was the quality and structure of Centers’ staff. Parents are frustrated that sections of a Center, or an entire Center itself, are closed due to too few staff, and worry that the current pay scale and structure do not attract the most qualified youth workers. They feel that the City has failed to make appropriate investments in this area of the Program’s day to day operations. As one parent said, “These people are working with our children—doing something important. We need to pay people more to get qualified staff. Aren’t our kids worth it?”

Looking more specifically at each groups’ particular concerns, the two Frisoli parents with whom TDC spoke feel that some Center staff are too strict with the kids and not always appropriate. Conversely, parents at the Gately are pleased with the staff, seeing them as a strength of the Center. Parents of youth not using the Centers did not have specific comments about current staff, but were concerned by current staff-to-youth ratios and perceived the quality and accountability of current staff as being less than desirable.

Parents from all groups would like to see the Centers involve more college students and older youth as Center staff, and treat the part-time positions as important—offering better pay, training and benefits.

SATISFACTION WITH PROGRAMS

Parents’ satisfaction with the current mix of the programs within the Center varied quite a bit according to whether their youth did or did not use the Centers. In general, parents

whose youth use the Centers are happy with the current programs, offering the following suggestions for improvement:

- Less emphasis on assigned athletic teams and more emphasis on “pick up” games
- More structured programs for 9-11 year olds
- More programs for girls 12 years and older
- More community service opportunities
- More opportunities for older teens to socialize through dances, and planned events

These recommendations were echoed by parents whose youth do not currently use the Centers, emphasizing the importance of providing more structured activities for the younger age group (9-14 year olds), and more “fun” activities for the older teens—action oriented programs or events that engage their interest beyond “hanging out.” For example, they would like to see the Centers sponsor more community service programs and dances.

All parents would like to see programs become more youth-driven, reflecting what the members want to do. They prefer enrichment programs that focus on teen issues (like CASPAR) to more academically focused programs—seeing the current staff as unqualified to provide meaningful academic assistance. They would like to see more computer-related programs, but fewer computer games.

Concerns about current programs are that they are too male-dominated and recreation-oriented, and, do not offer enough variety for non-athletic youth.

OUTREACH

Outreach was a major issue for all of the focus group participants. Not only do parents not feel informed about what is available or currently in place at the Centers, they feel excluded from what goes on at the Centers on a regular basis. Parents would like the Youth Program to make more of an effort to involve them in the Centers and create more of a parental presence within the Program. As one parent said, “I would love to get more involved, but no one ever asks.”

Parents also feel that current outreach efforts are inadequate with respect to recruiting new members to the Program and notifying the community about the Centers’ resources.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE YOUTH PROGRAM

Across groups, different parents had different expectations. All parents expect the Youth Program to support Centers that are safe and comfortable, they want Centers that are staffed by competent, caring, invested staff; and, they want programs that appeal to a broad range of youth interests and talents. However, the two groups differed in their expectations of supervision, accountability and enrichment—particularly for their pre-teen youth.

Non-member parents are looking for more structured programs, staff oversight and program accountability, electing to enroll their pre-teens in enrichment programs or licensed after-school programs. Member parents, while supportive of a move to more structured programs for younger teens, or more accepting of the current structure, appreciating the Youth Program's flexibility and cost. Two of the member parents self-acknowledged that their expectations of the Center may be different than some of their peers. As one parent said, "I know the Center is used as day care, but I don't use it that way. If I needed day-care, I don't know if I would be comfortable using [the Centers] that way." This parent went on to clarify that because she is home after school, she does not hold Center staff accountable for the whereabouts of her child. If she were working, she would hold her child's after-school programs and staff to a higher standard that provides greater accountability to parents. This sentiment was echoed by non-member parents who work, and currently enroll their youth in other, more structured Cambridge-based programs—community schools and Community Arts Center, for example.

Expectations for older teens were more congruent across groups with parents envisioning a program that holds their teens interest and enthusiasm, engages them in meaningful activities, and provides them with opportunities to contribute to the health of the Center and community.

Despite criticisms and concerns, all of the parents appreciate the effort being made to support youth within the City. However, they feel that the City has not gone quite far enough with respect to its investment in staffing, program resources and outreach.

**Components of the Cambridge Youth Program's
10 Point Program**

Homework Help

GO! "Go Outdoors" wilderness program

Employment Assistance

Drop-in and Leisure

Substance Abuse Education

Sports and Fitness

Mental Health Support

Girls and Young Women-specific Programming

Anti-Violence Activities

After High School Programming



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8

EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
ROBERT W. HEALY
City Manager

RICHARD C. ROSSI
Deputy City Manager

March 1, 1999

To The Honorable, The City Council:

As you know, there have been major changes in the Cambridge Youth Program over the past eight years. We have built two state-of-the-art youth centers and planning is underway for a third in West Cambridge. In addition, we have expanded the Moore Center in Riverside, and renovations will be made to North Cambridge's Gately Youth Center in connection with upcoming renovation of the Fitzgerald School. During this period, we have also responded to community needs by expanding the population that the youth centers serve to include pre-teens, and we have increased our programming, especially for young women and girls. Currently, the program serves more than a thousand teens and pre-teens each year.

This expansion in facilities and programming has been achieved with limited adjustments in staffing. Recognizing the need for further investment in this area, I directed the Department of Human Service Programs (DHSP) to determine what form this investment should take and authorized funds for a consultant to assist in this process. Last fall, the Department retained a consultant, Technical Development Corporation, to conduct an assessment of the Cambridge Youth Program, determine areas in need of improvement, and develop both near- and long-term recommendation for staffing and program development.

Technical Development Corporation spent the past six months working in close collaboration with DHSP staff and a planning committee of Youth Program stakeholders established for this purpose. The attached report represents the culmination of that work. I have read this report with some care, and I find its conclusions compelling. I am prepared to recommend a significant budget increase to expand staffing and programming capacity for the City's youth centers in the FY'00 budget and over the next three years.

I am submitting this report to the City Council with a recommendation to refer it to the Human Services and Youth Committee. A series of recommendations that flow from this report are currently being finalized by Technical Development Corporation, in consultation with DHSP staff and the planning committee. I shall refer these recommendations as soon as they become available.

Very truly yours,

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

Consent Agenda #8

Cal. 1
S-153 ~~8~~

Relative to a report on
strategic planning assessment
findings for the City of
Cambridge Youth Program.

In City Council March 1, 1999

*Charter Right
exercised by
Councillor Reeves.*

3/15/99

*Referred to the Civil and
Human Services + Youth
Committee.*