



All youth ready for college, work & life.

CREATING LASTING COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS TO HELP CHILDREN AND YOUTH SUCCEED – AUGUST 6, 2008 – LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY

Across the country, too few youth leave high school ready for success. Community statistics and conditions vary, but there is no community across the country that is doing well enough by its children and youth. There is a need to do more. More to the point, there is a need to do better – to make bolder commitments, to create broader ownership and partnerships, to ensure greater returns on public and private investments.

The Forum for Youth Investment convened a group of key stakeholders in Louisville, KY at the Neighborhood House in an effort to assist these community and state leaders with aligning their youth efforts into a big picture framework. The group was comprised of state government and nonprofit officials, a range of Louisville stakeholders, The Bridgespan Group, the Forum and national funders (see attached agenda and participant list).

The Forum facilitated dialogue about how to link and increase the impact of the wide range of local and state efforts already under way to improve the odds for Louisville Metro and Kentucky's children and youth. Louisville and Kentucky stand out as models because of the work being done to build the data, monitoring and networking infrastructures to improve youth outcomes by tracking youth participation in school and afterschool programs, mapping the quality and reach of those programs, tracking the flow of resources into programs and creating policies and principles to support the work.

The dialogue focused primarily on one key question – **how does a community bring greater precision to its passion to provide all children and youth a chance to succeed?** Communities across the country are already doing good things for kids, but continuing to add on policies, programs and initiatives without adding up what's currently in place is not only ineffective, but uninspiring. The opportunity exists in all communities to use what is already in place for kids and make it better. And in Louisville, there is plenty of great work already being done.

Louisville and Kentucky leaders spent the first part of the day sharing examples of coordination and collaboration at both the local and state levels. For example, the Louisville KidTrax System, a partnership between Jefferson County Public Schools and after-school service providers, exemplifies the value of alignment. Several years ago, there was a push in youth development for greater out-of-school opportunities for learning and development. However, there was little information about the availability and impact of these programs, and little connection between the schools and after-school programs on strategies for improvement and identification of students in need of help. The school system worked with a number of community groups serving at-risk youth to connect the data schools keep on youth with participation data providers were collecting using the KidTrax system, a software application used to track membership and attendance in youth programs. The school system and the community organizations developed the capacity, using KidTrax and 'middleware' applications, to analyze participation information with school data to see the impact of programs on individual youths and target resources to those most in need.

Louisville utilizes this system, as well as others, to drive cross-cutting efforts to improve the lives of youth. Every 1 Reads is a community-wide initiative, led by Jefferson County Public Schools and Louisville Metro Government with critical support from the Louisville business community that aims to have every child in the school system reading at or above grade level. The initiative brings together a range of community wide stakeholders and has forced the city to reexamine how teachers are trained, how community programs are run and how to engage the business community in efforts to improve the lives of youth. In the three years since the effort's inception, the rate of students not reading at grade level has been reduced from 14.4 percent to 8.5 percent.

The city of Louisville has achieved a great deal over the last 10 years. There are many other efforts not mentioned here that have improved the lives of youth. The time is now to connect those pieces and improve their collective power to make all Louisville and Kentucky youth ready for college, work and life. This convening provided an opportunity for stakeholders to see their shared vision and goals and find a common framework for working together.

Several participants highlighted the urgency of this work. Louisville leaders have been working for many years to improve the lives of youth, but have not always been effective in linking change strategies and initiatives. Disconnected change efforts within a community or network may actually dissipate the energy for change. Participants highlighted the feeling that Louisville is at a critical point and any delays in alignment could lead to a loss of momentum. The response to lackluster change results should not be to focus in on smaller pieces, but to crank up the demand for a bolder vision and more connected city-wide vision. The two key needs for Louisville going forward are a city-wide vision for children and youth and a keeper for that vision. By acting together and keeping a consistent big picture approach, Louisville can look forward to a city where all children and youth are Ready by 21® – ready for college, work and life.

The Forum for Youth Investment is a recognized national resource dedicated to helping communities and the nation make sure all young people are Ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life. The Forum's research and ideas about youth development and youth policy have made their way into hundreds of organizations and communities across the country. The Forum has invested five years of field work, as well as, partnership and product development in the establishment of the Ready by 21 Challenge.

The Ready by 21 Challenge calls on states and communities to change the odds for children and youth by changing the way they do business to broaden the definitions of what it means to be ready, for schools and communities to be supportive and for all leaders to be engaged.

Working in partnership with the business, government, education and nonprofit sectors, the Forum for Youth Investment provides frameworks, coaching and tools to help leaders think differently, act differently and act together.

The Ready by 21 Big Picture Approach helps leaders – from young people to parents, program directors to policy makers – bring precision to their passion, ensuring that all young people are ready by 21 – ready for college, work and life.