In Case You Missed This!

From the Director’s Desk

Thursday, February 21, 2013

Greetings,

Attached you will find two recent articles highlighting the work of YouthBuild, a nationally known youth development program. The Cornwall Center is studying the replication of this effort with support from the state’s Office of the Attorney General.

All the best,

RVA

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Our Vision

The Joseph C. Cornwall Center strives to be:

-A key resource in the production of “usable” knowledge for the public, private, and nonprofit sector development in Newark, the northern region of New Jersey and beyond.

-A central force convening key civil society individuals and institutions as they engage in and pursue the economic, political, and cultural revitalization of Newark.

-A forceful agent for the economic and administrative coordination and cooperation of Newark and its surrounding communities.

-A national model for what a university-based center can accomplish working with regional, local, and community partners.
In cities like Newark and Paterson, high school graduation rates are nearly 20 percent below the state average of 83 percent.

The Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies at Rutgers-Newark hopes to help change that.

For the past two years, the center has been studying New Jersey’s YouthBuild programs, a highly successful educational model for teens and at-risk young adults that includes both vocational and job training.

But its interest in the program, part of a national non-profit organization, is more than clinical.

The center’s goal is to present evidence to New Jersey policy makers that YouthBuild should be established statewide --there are currently nine sites -- and become part of city school systems, says Roland Anglin, director of the Rutgers center.

“We did a lot of research on young people who are disconnected and found that the longer they’re disconnected, the harder it is to bring them back. It’s about reaching our youth before they engage in criminal activity,” Anglin says.

Recommendations like these are part of the center’s mission: helping to resolve urban problems by promoting research and dialogue among scholars, local government and community-based programs.
That’s why, in addition to its research, the Cornwall Center has been working directly with state YouthBuilds to coordinate training assistance with staff and provide the program with valuable data on youth development and crime prevention. “The effort we’re taking is a little bit outside the academic norm,” says Anglin. “It’s a different way for universities to play a role in communities by addressing the core mission of an urban state university.”

At YouthBuild, which includes sites in Paterson, Camden, Trenton and Newark, students participate in a six-month program that offers support on multiple levels, such as counseling and leadership training in addition to vocational skills and academics.

The students learn construction skills and renovate or build homes in their cities, honing a sense of civic duty and expanding residents’ access to affordable housing.

According to the center’s preliminary research, 60 percent of New Jersey’s YouthBuild students remained in school or stayed employed a year after they graduated. The one-year recidivism rate for graduates who had been involved with the juvenile justice system was just 1.5 percent, and the median hourly wage was $8.78, compared to the state minimum wage of $7.25.

“They transformed my mindset,” says YouthBuild Newark graduate Shakia Preston, 21, who obtained both her GED and construction certificate and hopes to get an office job. “They taught me how to stay positive and not let the negative stuff bring me down.”

Most YouthBuilds are run with state and federal funds and are community-based. But establishing high schools based on the YouthBuild model would prevent more at-risk youth from dropping out or being incarcerated, Anglin said.

Several studies nationwide offer proof that education and job training are key to reducing recidivism and fostering the economic self-sufficiency of youth who live in poverty. YouthBuild provides a blueprint for how they can succeed, says Roland Anglin, director of the center.
For gang members who enroll in YouthBuild, the results can be especially dramatic. “The gang is replaced by a family called YouthBuild,” Anglin says. “They draw kids from across gangs, and when they start to get to know each other, they realize they all want the same thing: a future.”

Staffers at state YouthBuilds say the center’s work have not only strengthened their own programs but will help urban youth throughout New Jersey.

“Just being able to collect consistent information from all the YouthBuilds has been important,” says Mike Gowdy, chief program officer of New Jersey Community Development Corporation, which runs Paterson’s YouthBuild program. “We don’t always have a chance to get together and talk about best practices and share ideas and expertise.”

Robert Clark, executive director of YouthBuild Newark, which last year opened the Newark Leadership Academy in the school district, says the Cornwall Center’s involvement has been a “validation” that YouthBuild can change the way the state works with at risk young people. “The...center has a firm grasp on the issues facing urban communities and has done a fabulous job,” Clark says.

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Rutgers Today: Your Source for University News
TCNJ BONNER CENTER HOSTS STATEWIDE YOUTHBUILD SYMPOSIUM

EWING, NJ – The TCNJ Bonner Center for Civic and Community Engagement hosted the semi-annual New Jersey Statewide YouthBuild Symposium at The College of New Jersey on December 5, 2012. The Symposium was part of an effort to address the needs of young people in the State of New Jersey on the part of the Rutgers University Cornwall Center and the New Jersey Office of the Attorney General. The all-day conference welcomed over 100 YouthBuild program participants and program coordinators from across the state to the College. The focus of this year’s Symposium was furthering one’s education beyond YouthBuild and pursuing various forms of higher education or vocational training. The College of New Jersey was a great setting for the event, as it gave the YouthBuild students an opportunity to see one of the state’s most highly ranked public institutions of the higher learning.

The Symposium was set up so that YouthBuild participants spent the day immersed in a higher educational setting, giving them the opportunity to gain insight into various college majors, interact with current college students and faculty, as well as tour the TCNJ campus. The first half of the Symposium was held in the New Education Building, which was especially prevalent for the YouthBuild cohort as many of them receive green jobs training, and the New Education Building was constructed to meet LEED requirements. The day’s events began with a welcome message by Dr. Gail Brooks, Principal at the Isles YouthBuild Institute in Trenton as well as an introduction by Tamara Frater, a first year Bonner Community Scholar at TCNJ. Wanda Moore of the Attorney General’s Office also welcomed everyone to the day and helped kick off the first activity, a World Café session.

The World Café model engages participants in small group discussions prompted by questions to foster an interactive sharing and networking opportunity for the attendees. For the symposium, an adult from the community and a Bonner Community Scholar co-facilitated the discussion by asking the YouthBuild participants questions such as “when you think about the future, what are some goals you want to accomplish?” and “if you could change anything about your community, what would it be?” The World Café is a nationally recognized system that brings individuals together to create a living web of collaborative dialogue around matters of interest, such as greater community awareness. The Café concept is built on the assumption that through open and honest dialogue, individuals are able to discuss and explore issues with a deeper level of understanding and are better able to discover linkages to each other.
Following the World Café discussion, the YouthBuild participants enjoyed lunch in Eickhoff Dining Hall to show them what life is like on a college campus. In the afternoon, the attendees took part in interactive learning modules conducted by Bonner Scholars and TCNJ faculty. The workshops were designed to show the YouthBuild participants what types of careers or interests they could pursue at a four-year college, with topics ranging from starting a business, to nursing, to developing a lesson plan, and even crime mapping. Overall, the modules helped the attendees explore opportunities for inclusion, greater community awareness and respect.

The YouthBuild participants expressed a great deal of interest in the learning modules and thoroughly enjoyed seeing the TCNJ campus. Several of the students even mentioned an interest in applying to TCNJ in the following year. Bonner Community Scholar Kayla Simpkins, who co-led the nursing workshop, noted, “the students were interested in learning about what college could offer them. They wanted to know what kind of classes they could take, and [those interested in nursing] were excited to learn more about the opportunities they had in college. I really enjoyed working with them, it was such a great time!”

YouthBuild is a national network of programs for low-income young people, ages 16 to 24, who work full-time for six to 24 months toward their GEDs or high school diplomas while learning job skills. Emphasis is placed on leadership development, community service and the creation of a positive mini-community of adults and youth committed to each other’s successes. There are 273 YouthBuild programs across the country, nine of which are located in New Jersey in Vineland, Paterson, Camden, Trenton, Atlantic City, Elizabeth, Jersey City and Newark. The Trenton YouthBuild program is based out of Isles, Inc.

The Joseph C. Cornwall Center for Metropolitan Studies is a signature effort by Rutgers University to focus intellectual talent and resources of the institution in service to Newark and its surrounding region and beyond. Housed in the School of Public Affairs and Administration at Rutgers-Newark, the Cornwall Center encourages and conducts relevant research and hosts learning opportunities aimed at improving the cultural social, and economic development of the community, city, and region in which the Center resides.

The New Jersey Office of the Attorney General’s Office of Community Justice spearheads the implementation of community-law enforcement based crime prevention strategies for New Jersey communities. These efforts are designed to engage disconnected youth and promote and increase school graduation rates while reducing truancy and delinquency. The office is focused on providing greater coordination of educational and other social services to enhance integration back into the community and increasing support opportunities for youth offenders through system-wide changes.

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