

"DEEP DIVE" CASE STUDY

Initiative: Helping Youth Transition to Adulthood -- the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative

Foundation: The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, Alicia Philipp, President

Category: Community Leadership/Public Policy

Summary Description: For the past eight years, The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta has been in active partnership with youth, statewide nonprofits and corporations, elected officials and representatives of the state's child welfare system to advance a comprehensive model for helping youth transition successfully from foster care to independence. One of more than 12 models supported nationally through the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative, the partnership, named the Metropolitan Atlanta Youth Opportunities Initiative (MAYOI), is first and foremost youth driven and powered. From its inception, MAYOI engaged young people currently or formerly in foster care to identify the supports and leadership they felt were needed and what system and policy changes were most critical. While most community foundations engage in community leadership work, this particular effort yielded lessons and outcomes for us that continue to grow in impact and leverage, with dozens of statewide, public, private and nonprofit partners and funders continuing to leverage resources and collaborate to support this population in key areas of housing, education, employment and health care. Even more, it has "re-shaped" our institution's core values and approach to collaborations in pursuit of specific outcomes. Our work with The Metropolitan Youth Opportunities Initiative has helped to place these vulnerable youth – their realities and needs -- squarely on the public agenda in Georgia and greatly improve the likelihood that they will successfully transition from state care to independence.

Outcomes: Major achievements include 1) amended state policy providing medical benefits up to age 21 (~\$1.5M estimated annual cost); 2) nationally recognized youth advocacy organization, Georgia EmpowerMENT; 3) \$675,000 in assets to 225+ youth; and 4) \$12M+ leverage from public and private sources (over and above that of the sponsoring foundations—including one Community Foundation donor who reopened his fund). MAYOI received the Council on Foundation's Paul Ylvisaker Award for Public Policy (2010) and the Harris Wofford Award for youth engagement (2007).

Learnings: The lessons are diverse and numerous: that sustainable change is best designed by those directly impacted, however this requires flexibility, patience and savvy leadership; that the combination of ideas generated by youth, and responsive actions driven by influential adults can lead to authentic, positive change; that early, consistent communication and connection between all stakeholders at multiple levels is both essential and taxing; that each stakeholders in a partnership must know its strengths and play to them; that documentation is key to replication; and that (our) community foundation is not best suited for direct program/constituent engagement.

More Tantalizing Details: The session will provide nuts and bolts on how to:

- mobilize youth to drive state policy from the "inside out" – both local and state
- develop solid programming built upon solid intelligence
- engage donors at multiple levels
- define leverage – its always more than you first think
- share lessons learned in ways that can be customized for communities
- mine lessons learned throughout the organization