



Partners for Impact, LLC

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NextGen Career Center Redesign: Other Models

BACKGROUND

The Capital Area Workforce Development Board (CAWDB) hired Partners for Impact, LLC to contract services to improve the hub of career readiness services available to youth throughout Wake and Johnston County. The CAWDB has successfully been reaching a number of young people across both of these counties and providing them with job readiness skills and connections to employment opportunities. Yet there are still eligible young people not being served and there are gaps in the current services.

This document outlines the results of research on other models throughout the country and locally that can provide insights for the NextGen Redesign. This report is built on three interviews with national models identified by the Capital Area Workforce Development Board staff. Internet research reports on three additional models. It integrates information gleaned from a meeting of other providers within the Triangle area who are providing multiple services on one site. Based on this research there are some simple recommendations and questions that remain. Finally, this report serves as the second deliverable of the contract between Partners for Impact and the Capital Area Workforce Development Board.

INTERVIEWS

Representatives from three organizations were interviewed. This section contains background information and highlights of those interviews.

Digital NEST

Located in Watsonville, CA, Digital NEST was started in 2014 by Jacob Martinez, who Partners for Impact interviewed. It emerged from 8 years of work on grants from the National Science Foundation. Jacob and colleagues discovered that the tech industry was a growing industry, however, the workforce in San Jose (Silicon Valley which is less than 50 miles away) did not reflect the Watsonville community and youth who are under resourced in the local community. Digital NEST provides these youth and young adults, high school to age 24, with free access to computers, software, Wifi, and a full range of state-of-the-art digital tools and classes. They are very strategic in

identifying local students in high school who are the “C” students¹. Students who might be at the margin with regard to other post-secondary opportunities.

Jacob based the organization’s model on co-working spaces that were popping up across the region. They created a space where young people interact with each other, interact with staff, and interact with business mentors who volunteer in the space. They deliberately upgraded technology to reflect what was being used in Silicon Valley. You can take a [digital tour of the space](#). They have staff members whose purpose it is to work within the open space and engage youth. They also see this as a way of modeling professional behavior when in that type of work environment.

A very specific service that is co-located at this site is food. They have a kitchen where you can get and eat food. They have a small pantry. They bring a chef in every Wednesday for a cooked meal where participants can help with prep. It is designed just like a co-working space kitchen, except everything is free for the participants. They are only beginning to grapple with child care.

Youth are very visible in the space and are integrated into the staff. Some are volunteers and some get paid. For example, a young person runs the front desk. There are several young people who work a shift where they check out laptops and other electronics.

Philadelphia Youth Network

The Philadelphia Youth Network's (PYN) success in creating opportunities for young people is built on a collective impact model, grounded by intermediary principles and maintained by a successful convening of partners. PYN convenes diverse stakeholders - including employers, city agencies, youth-serving organizations, philanthropies and community members –to identify institutional barriers facing young people and build scalable solutions for youth that benefit the entire community. They have two overarching collaborative initiatives, Project U-Turn and Work Ready Philadelphia. In fact, Project U-Turn is part of the Ascend Community Solutions Network. They run a Pathways program which is connected to WIOA activities and have another set of “innovative” programs that are being piloted in the community.

Their E3 power centers² are neighborhood based drop-in centers throughout Philadelphia, designed to offer a holistic approach to preparing disconnected young people for success through education, employment and empowerment. They emerged out of the Youth Opportunity Grants in the late 1990s. There were 5-6 of these centers. When the funding stopped, the City and the Department of Human Services wanted to continue these in some form. They focused on young people who had interactions with the justice system and foster care system. They also leveraged TANF funding for some of the work at the centers. They use the three E3 centers as an engagement tool for trying to reconnect young people to education and employment. Some WIOA activities are in the E3 centers, but WIOA activities are also a part of the Philadelphia Youth Network direct services. They wanted E3 centers to be more flexible than WIOA activities/funding allowed.

¹ This was not necessarily the case early on. However, as their program has evolved they have recognized this group as the target group to work with.

² CAWDB staff will be visiting one of these centers in September 2018.

They have a youth council, but admitted it was new and not well established. When discussing their space, they talked about some specific strategies, like youth artwork and common areas for eating, but that was the extent of space planning. They do provide food and one of the centers is opening a pantry.

Kentucky Youth Career Centers

This is a project of the KentuckianaWorks, the Workforce Development Board for the Louisville, KY region. The Career Center emerged out a Youth Opportunity Grant in the late 1990's. This federal grant originally had few strings attached to it and allowed for the development of strong outreach, employment and education programs, and some support services. The funding was discontinued, and a consultant helped them develop standards for youth friendliness for the Federal Grant that didn't have strings attached. They realized as WIA funding became available that they needed a special youth center that was separate. Currently, it is in an office building, which is not the ideal.

They have their main center in Louisville, with outlying services in two other counties. In fact, WIOA funds the outlying centers and City and other funding are combined to allow more flexibility in their program services in Louisville. They contract out with adult education providers for the WIOA funding.

They discussed the challenges of the urban vs. rural settings. The rural program issues are related to isolation from resources. The young people graduate but they have no plan, no where to go, and have transportation challenges. They can get caught in a loop of not being connected to work. The staff have started meeting them where they are; libraries, the community colleges and places like Goodwill where they have adult education programs. The rural providers have had to get creative and tend to be more one-on-one with employers and young people.

Their urban program is cohort based, which takes advantage of the peer-to-peer opportunities. The focus is a 10 week internship that is subsidized. They spend four days a week working, with the middle 8 weeks with an employer. They integrate some sort of civic project as part of the cohort learning experience.

They have partners who work directly with the youth on housing and child care, when needed. They have a food pantry on-site for young people. They have some "casual" space for young people, but they wish they had more. Because many of their young people have a lot of chaos and have experienced trauma, they would like to integrate mental health services on-site in some way that minimizes the stigma associated with receiving these services.

LOCAL MODELS

As part of this assessment, we invited four agencies to the Capital Area Workforce Development Board to share their experiences with multiple services at one center, including local youth providers from Durham and Wake County. These agencies included: Haven House, InterAct, Life Skills Foundation, and Oak City Outreach Center.

The conversation started with how partners are being organized at Oak City Outreach Center. They are a new agency providing centralized intake services for homeless individuals. All the other services will be provided by current partners/agencies. They have a tiered system with Tier 1 being focused on

crisis health related services. Tier 2 are “gap” services that need to be provided while they are awaiting service spots in other programs. Tier 3 are things like workshops and activities the community brings in. Partners will have some office spaces and some cubicle spaces to work from. This led to conversations about who is the “leader” of the community services and perceptions as to competition between agencies that had to be resolved before moving forward.

InterAct worked to get 9 partners to be a part of their location on Oberlin Road. The original business model saw the partners paying rent as part of the revenue for InterAct. This was fine in the beginning and it was needed, but they are really reconsidering it at this time. InterAct staff agreed with the part of the conversation that we need to fund the overall collaboration and that is additional funding in addition to, not in place of, service delivery dollars.

As the youth providers discussed services from their perspective, they encouraged the NextGen Centers to look beyond the employment outcomes. Their perception was that when so focused on employment other important aspects of the young person are not dealt with, and that compromises long-term success. They also spent a lot of time talking about trauma informed care and the importance of creating space and situations that could be trusted. If young people do not trust an organization or the people in it, they simply will not go regardless of the consequences. They discussed the limitations of the “referral” culture and have discovered that success happens when young people are in the room with a variety of providers talking with them and supporting them.

The youth providers discussed the importance of having a hook and challenged the CAWDB staff when CAWDB staff indicated that employment was a hook. The youth providers reminded the group about the fact that brain development is not fully complete until the age of 24-26 and that a hook is not all about finding a job, especially if you are 18-20.

Life Skills Foundation is currently constructing “The Hub.” This will be a place where youth can come for a variety of services. They have successfully used a youth council to provide design feedback to the architect/designers. One of the most interesting things that young people seemed to reflect was the need for some privacy as they first enter the space, so they don’t feel as if they have to share their “business” with everyone else in the space. They have created that space up front, and then used an open floor plan in the back to promote different interactions and relationship building opportunities.

ADDITIONAL MODELS RESEARCHED

The agencies interviewed suggested other organizations for the Capital Area Workforce Development Board to consider. In addition, Partners for Impact staff also followed recommendations from these agencies when their website contained a listing of “national models.” This section contains summary information associated with these agencies.

SLATE

St. Louis Training and Employment (SLATE) is the workforce development agency for St. Louis. This was recommended by the Kentucky Youth Career Center staff we interviewed. They have both adult and youth programs. Their youth contract agencies are: MERS Goodwill, Alternative Opportunities, Employment Connection, Family and Workforce Centers of America (FWCA), and Better Family Life.

From what information is available through their website, it seems like a very traditional workforce development program targeting youth.

STL Youth Jobs

This is a neighborhood based approach to youth workforce development in St. Louis. With the exception of some City funding, they appear to be privately funded and do not directly receive WIOA funding. It appears to be a collaborative effort that includes one of the WIOA agencies. Its flagship program is a Summer Jobs program. In 2014, they created Ferguson Forward which targets youth in the north part of the city and focuses on innovation and entrepreneurship.

Aspen Institute Forum on Community Solutions

This was recommended by the staff we talked with in Philadelphia. The Aspen Institute Forum for Community Solutions promotes collaborative, community-based efforts that build the power and influence of those with the least access to opportunity. They support communities to come together to expand mobility, eliminate systemic barriers, and create their own solutions to their most pressing challenges. Throughout their history, they have done this work by focusing on supporting collaboration in communities, and on building community power and influence. In particular, they've supported communities to use these tools to support opportunity youth – young people who are disconnected from work and education.

The [Opportunity Youth Forum](#) was launched in 2012 to leverage the new visibility and momentum of the opportunity youth movement coming out of the White House Council on Community Solutions, which called for innovative, place-based, collaborative solutions to reconnect the 6 million opportunity youth in the United States at that time.

The Opportunity Youth Forum is a network of dozens of urban, rural, and tribal communities seeking to scale reconnection pathways that achieve better outcomes in education and employment for opportunity youth. The Forum for Community Solutions, with its partners, supports these communities through regranted financial support, twice a year convenings, technical assistance, research and other learning opportunities.

This site has several great resources. Of particular interest is that 5 of the 24 projects across the country are led by employment related organizations, including workforce development boards. Austin, TX and Hartford, CT are the two workforce boards that provide the backbone for these opportunity youth projects. The Philadelphia Youth Network, which was interviewed for this project, is also part of this network. In addition to their E3 Centers which are part of a larger strategy for employing out of school youth, their Project U-Turn is part of the Opportunity Youth Forum. This collective impact initiative focuses on improving the graduation rate in Philadelphia.

ADDITIONAL ONLINE RESEARCH

As part of this cursory environmental scan, Partners for Impact has identified some key resources that may provide additional insight into the work of reconnecting youth to employment, education and other services. Most of these are reports or papers that are available online.

MDRC's working paper, written by Louisa Tresken, scans evaluations done of programs that target disconnected youth. The report verifies many of the issues that are emerging in this project.³ Some of these findings include:

- Disconnected and under resourced youth are touched by multiple systems each with their own funding sources, program requirements and research making services appear fragmented and uncoordinated.
- Successful programs share some common features, including: “opportunities for paid work and the use of financial incentives; strong links among education, training, and the job market; the use of youth development approaches; comprehensive support services; and support after programs end.”
- Programs have common implementation challenges, including: “outreach and enrollment practices that may limit the populations they serve; difficulties keeping young people engaged in a program long enough to benefit from it; staff turnover; and difficulties addressing young people’s barriers to participation, particularly their lack of transportation and child care.”

*The Wallace Foundation funded and completed a report entitled “Engaging Older Youth.”*⁴ It examined how youth programs retain participants, especially those who are out of school and as they age. This report identified five program characteristics that led to successful retention. These characteristics are:

- Providing many leadership opportunities to youth in the programs
- Having staff keep informed in several ways about youth outside of the programs
- Being community-based
- Enrolling 100 or more youth
- Holding regular staff meetings

The report continues to go into depth about both program strategies and city-level strategies that can make a difference in both recruiting and retaining young people.

*The Urban Institute completed a report in November 2016 of the implementation of the Opportunities Project.*⁵ The Department of Labor funded pilot projects in Baltimore and Boston that were designed to improve the long-term employment outcomes of youth who were already, or at-risk of, being disconnected from education or the labor market. The Urban Institute and Chapin Hall completed an implementation evaluation as these pilots grew. The report identifies three key activities of a strong program: a caring adult, education and job training, and contextualized learning as it relates to an actual job.

³ <https://www.mdrc.org/publication/what-works-disconnected-young-people>

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<https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Engaging-Older-Youth-City-Level-Strategies-Support-Sustained-Participation-Out-of-School-Time.pdf>

⁵ https://www.dol.gov/asp/evaluation/completed-studies/Opportunities_Youth_Implementation.pdf

*The Urban Institute just last month released a report on the role local workforce development boards can play with regard to child care.*⁶ It provides a cursory glance of the issue based on interviews with five workforce development boards. The report provides valuable insights and says that local workforce development boards have a role to play. However, they also acknowledge that local workforce development boards “are constrained by funding limitations and an inadequate child care market.”

There are two local reports that need to be added to this list of resources. The first is MDC’s report, *Disconnected Youth in the Research Triangle Region: An Omnibus Problem Hidden in Plain Site.*⁷ Sponsored by the GlaxoSmithKline Foundation, the report gave rise to [Made In Durham](#) another organization that might be good to visit in the near future. It provides data and information about the challenges of opportunity youth in the Triangle.

[Youth Thrive](#) is a collective impact initiative in Wake County designed to ensure that all youth become thriving adults. They created *Wake County: A Strategic Planning Blueprint.*⁸ This plan outlines six overarching goals, two of which are in line with much of the work associated with NextGen Career Centers. These two goals are:

1. Opportunity youth will have the necessary supports to enable them to develop their confidence, skills, and self-efficacy; obtain a postsecondary credential or certificate with labor market value; and meaningfully connect to sustainable careers.
2. Wake County youth will be prepared for lifelong, meaningful, and gainful employment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These are recommendations that Partners for Impact believes that the Capital Area Workforce Development Board should consider as part of this project.

1. Integrate WIOA activities with other services focusing on youth employment.

Different communities have different relationships between youth providers and WIOA services and agencies that provide those services. There is an interesting dynamic in St. Louis where it seems that the agencies that are providing the WIOA services are separate from other youth serving organizations, including organizations designed to employ youth. In Philadelphia, some WIOA activities are integrated into the E3 centers, but the E3 centers are clear about being more than WIOA services. Finally, there are workforce development boards who are taking the lead in collective impact initiatives targeting opportunity youth across the country. This recommendation stems from the fact that when integrated with other services, employment outcomes are likely to improve as you are able to address other key outcomes the young person needs to achieve self sufficiency. It also

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https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/98850/local_workforce_development_boards_and_child_care_2.pdf

⁷ <https://www.mdcinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/disconnected-youth.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.youth-thrive.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/YouthThrive-Master-Plan-for-web.pdf>

allows all participating programs to better leverage the resources they have that are available to the young person.

2. Build a relationship with Youth Thrive and provide leadership around specific workforce goals related to the Wake County Strategic Planning Blueprint.

Youth Thrive is Wake County's Community Impact initiative designed to ensure that young people in Wake County become thriving adults. Their work so far has focused on emotional well-being and educational success. Specifically, aligning with these local community goals can demonstrate to county leaders the important role that the Workforce Development Board plays in the context of Wake County's youth. It would also support the long term impact of building thriving adults.

3. At a minimum, consider having food and child care available.

Almost all of the programs talked about food as both an incentive for participation and, more importantly, as a means to prevent young people from being hungry. Many have or are exploring some sort of pantry. Pantry services may be an important means of reconnecting young people with services. Digital NESTs approach to having a kitchen comparable to what you might find in a coworking space is an intriguing idea and something to ask young people about.

Figuring out child care for parents was another essential component of success, but none seemed to have outstanding solutions that might serve as a model. Consider conversations with Child Care Services Association and the Wake County Partnership for Children if they do not exist.

4. Integrate the principles of trauma informed care in services provided.

While we do not necessarily know the demographics of the young people currently being served by the funded programs, barriers to sustainable employment may be related to some form of a past trauma experienced by the young person. The local youth providers recommended that this be a part of any program that touches any youth because the principles are applicable and supportive of all youth regardless of background. The local providers indicated that there are good resources and this may be an important part of staff development for funded agencies.

5. Work with young people to explore the possibilities of open space designs or coworking spaces.

Based on the interview with Digital NEST and the site design work that was recently completed by Life Skills Foundation, it seems that a more open floor plan that allows for staff to integrate into a common space with young people and for young people to interact with each other, may be an appropriate space consideration. It may be worthwhile to take a group of young people on a tour of "The Frontier Center," a coworking space in Research Triangle Park to see what they think of this type of space. It seems very important that there be spaces for staff to have a permanent spot that allows for individualized, private conversations. At the same time, for staff to model how work gets done in an open space may be a powerful example to young people who are trying to develop work skills and interpersonal relationships with employers and coworkers.

This process can only be accomplished if there is a strong youth voice in the culture of the work Capital Area Workforce Development Board is trying to support. It would require young staff members who reflect the experience of the youth being served to be employed by the programs.

Youth may need to be incentivized or paid for their participation in this process. A strong youth leadership component that is integrated into the effort would increase the success of all those seeking services and all of those served.

6. Consider not being the “entry point.”

We know that many young people say they “want a job” so that they can get money. We also know that employment is, in fact, a vital piece of a young person’s successful transition to adulthood. However, sustaining work and developing a career pathway are not likely the “hooks” that would actually attract participants to the program. It may be that these services could be provided in places where youth already go. This is a question to consider over the rest of the project that does not have to be answered immediately.

7. Build a theory of change

The current programs are doing well. However, this research suggests to us at Partners for Impact that the project could benefit from the development of a theory of change. From our perspective, a theory of change is really the short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes that result in youth becoming successful adults. It explains the big picture changes at the participant, staff, organizational and even funder level that lead to long term changes in our community. While Youth Thrive has done this for all children in Wake County, this project is creating an opportunity for the Capital Area Workforce Development Board to reposition itself with those who work with young people from 16-24. A theory of change builds a sound rationale for program improvements and future funding.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR EXAMINING OTHER MODELS

1. Connect with the funded projects in Baltimore and Boston to see if there any specific lessons to be learned from the initial implementation of the Opportunities Project. This may be a future opportunity for funding.
2. Look at some of the Aspen Institute sites, especially Austin, TX and Hartford, CT who are workforce development programs that provide leadership and backbone support for opportunity youth collective impact initiatives in their communities.
3. Search to find workforce development models that integrate trauma informed care.
4. Visit the E3 Center while in Philadelphia.