



Partners for Impact, LLC

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NextGen Career Center Redesign: Stakeholder Input

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 completed through group conversations with stakeholders. This report is built on three conversations with youth in Wake County, two conversations with youth in Johnston County, a combined meeting of providers and partners in Johnston County, a meeting of Wake County youth providers who are service partners, a group of Wake County employers, and executive leadership from four local organizations providing multiple services in one location for youth or adults. The report will summarize key themes gleaned from these group meetings and will provide specific recommendations about next steps.

This report serves as the third deliverable of the contract between Partners for Impact and the Capital Area Workforce Development Board.

YOUTH

Originally, we were going to hold at least two youth focus groups each in Johnston and Wake County. After meeting with partners in both counties and having them help define the youth we needed to engage, we decided to meet with youth when they already had standing meetings. We met with young people at the NextGen center for a lunch and learn in Wake County. The Hope Center at Pullen has a regular Wednesday group meeting that we attended. Haven House has regular activities at the end of the day for their Second Round participants, so Partners for Impact staff attended one of these.

In Johnston County, there was a combined meeting of LINKS participants (young people in DSS custody who are aging out of foster care) and Adolescent Parenting Program participants that was attended. There was a second meeting hosted by Johnston County Community College. Participants came from their early college program, their adult high school equivalency program, their legal

assistant program, and some participants from Johnston Counties NextGen Center were driven over to participate.

Barriers to employment

All the groups talked about the barriers to employment that they themselves or others they know have had when looking for employment. Some **basic needs** were identified up front. These included transportation (repeatedly), child care, housing, food and mental health care. Many young people acknowledged that they had difficulty in getting jobs because of their **age and lack of experience**. Some discussed the fact that they didn't know how to **market themselves**, that they needed training in **basic skills**, and that they needed to understand **professional behavior**. Some youth were very clear about **discrimination** they had experienced and mentioned disabilities, religion, and race that may be or have been barriers. Some of the Johnston County Community College students talked specifically about the fact that they had good experience in food service or retail, and that they were frustrated because this experience did not help them with a **shift in their career path**.

Balance was a challenge for young people. This came in the form of feeling like they really needed money to meet basic living expenses and that did not leave time for an education. Some also acknowledged the challenge of going to school, and not having a flexible enough schedule in order to get employment that would help them.

"The vibe"

All the participants were asked what would make them feel comfortable in a space and supported in achieving employment related goals. In two of the groups, young people all agreed that the **people were more important than the space**. They talked about the importance of people being friendly, smiling, saying hello, and being welcoming. Three of the focus groups talked about the "vibe" that happens when you first walk in and that you just have a sense of being welcomed or not. When asked to explain it, the young people did not have any additional language to explain the "vibe." One of the participants said, "The Hope Center doesn't have a lot, but the people make a huge difference."

Some participants wanted to see **consistency with counselors**. A couple of the focus groups talked about the **turnover** in staff and then not being known by people when they walk in. They also sense the stress and challenges of the staff. One young person characterized it in the following statement: "I have watched staff be caring when they start and when they burnout **they lose their caring for me.**"

Another overarching theme was **respect**. When asked what that meant, there were a variety of responses. All of them talked about experiencing **no judgement** from program staff. Two of the groups specifically talked about **eliminating any stereotypes and racism** within the organization. They indicated that it was important for people to understand issues of **race, gender, and sexual orientation** and all the challenges young people experience with these issues. Young people felt it was important for no assumptions to be made about them and that staff should take the time to talk with them and really **get to know them** in ways that demonstrated a commitment to supporting them. They appreciated feeling that program staff were going out of their way to help them. One young woman said, "I have a team of people and I'm not alone."

There were a couple of examples that were shared when they felt disrespected. For example, one young man talked about a **double standard** between him and staff. He was frustrated when he

would try to call a staff member 4-5 times and did not get a call back. When the staff member finally got in touch with him, he felt like the staff member was dismissive and that it was not a big deal that he didn't call the young man back. The young man went on to say, "But when I miss a scheduled appointment, it counts against me in my final evaluation. That doesn't seem fair." Other young people in the group nodded their heads.

Another young woman talked about being **shamed**. She went to a local agency and asked one of the staff members she worked with for more diapers for her child. She reported that the staff person said, "You know you've already had diapers for this month, you may be taking from someone else who needs them, but I guess that's OK. I'll get them for you." She felt shamed and disrespected.

Participants in the groups, brought up the importance of having people who are part of the program who have **similar experiences**. "I want to see someone who is like me," was said in more than one focus group. They wanted someone who could **relate to their experiences**, including peers. They shared the importance of being able to talk to each other. One focus group talked specifically about wanting a **peer mentoring program** as part of their program.

Employment assistance

Interestingly enough, most of the help and support that was needed was associated with the sense of support, or "the vibe," they feel from providers. Not all of them talked about support with employment. However, when they did it was specific. They wanted help in being able to market themselves, including the resume, interviewing skills and professional behavior. Working with them to make the right match was important. They didn't feel it was helpful when they were sent somewhere just because "they were hiring." This was very important to young people who were trying to get out of food service or retail into more professional positions. Some said they wouldn't mind job shadowing or unpaid internships as long as they could fit it into the balance of the other activities, like working and going to school. They felt like knowing and understanding all the sources of support that could help them with school financial assistance was important. Finally, they wanted program staff to serve as advocates and be willing to write letters or recommendations for them when they were applying for specific jobs.

Physical space

While all groups talked about the importance of feeling supportive, they did have some comments on the nature of the physical space. They talked about the need for being accessible, including ramps and large doors to accommodate wheelchairs or other disabilities. They talked about the space needing to be vibrant with a sense of life. They wanted it to be bright and welcoming. They talked about natural light and having open spaces and private spaces. One young woman said, "I don't want to see three white walls and a zombie staring at me;" meaning that she didn't want staff who were disengaged and didn't care about her.

The group at Haven House talked specifically about safety from other people. They want a space that does not have gang related activity. They also wanted to know that it was a secure place if needed.

As part of this question, the youth participating at the EDSI focus group were asked to physically get up and walk around the space and to pay attention to what is important. As they looked around the space they discussed things they liked. They liked the diversity of the pictures of young people they

see on the wall. They also noticed the inspirational quotes on the wall. They appreciated the name tags on the desk and that the office was open and there were people ready to help them when they walked in. They liked the different options for young people to sit, including the couch and the tables and chairs in the center. They commented on the wall color and felt it was OK, but it might be different. They talked about wanting to see pictures on the wall of young people who have directly been through the program and succeeded.

Limitations

The most challenging youth conversation occurred with the participants in the adolescent parenting program. The majority of participants were high school age girls. Whether they could relate to the “old white guy” who was asking them questions or whether they were distracted with their children and each other limited the depth of the conversation. However, they did provide some answers that were consistent with the other groups.

LOCAL LEADERS

There are several local organizations that provide multiple services at their organization using different models. Executive Directors from the Oak City Outreach Center, InterAct, Life Skills Foundation, and the Chief Operating Officer from Haven House, met with staff from the Capital Area Workforce Development Board and Partners for Impact.

The Oak City Outreach Center has not started providing services to homeless individuals at this point. They will be a multi-service center. The organization will be providing the facility and the only service they will provide is a centralized intake process into the homeless services system. What is applicable to this project is the **categories of partnerships** they have created. There are three tiers. These tiers are based directly on how they support meeting the purpose of the center. Tier one partners are directly involved in crisis stabilization. They include physical health care and mental health care, and will have a permanent presence in the building. Tier two partners are gap related services that are needed before homeless individuals are enrolled in the community services they need. Finally, tier three partners are the large number of partners who provide temporary services and workshops for people staying at the center.

InterAct’s experience is in housing multiple agencies for services to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. It has served victims well, because of the one stop availability of victims’ services. However, the **business model between the partners** is being reconsidered. They went into their large project with partners paying rent to InterAct. This simply has not been an effective use of resources from InterAct’s perspective. They feel as if it is better for the partnership if the partners were not paying rent and were better able to focus on funding for services.

The youth providers, including one of the adult providers who had been an Executive Director for an agency working with young people in foster care, were pretty strong in their sentiment that you have to have **multiple services for young people in order to see success**. Their argument is that the diverse needs of young people require support in one or more areas to be successful in another area. One of the participants indicated that some of these young people simply are not ready for work and if you focus solely on work, they will fail.

They also indicated that the **order of what the young person can accomplish** is important. The order has to be determined, in large part, by the young person, and that order has to make sense and feel doable to him/her. If you send them to a workforce development agency and they feel like they really need help with housing, they may never get to the employment related agency and also may not get their housing needs met. It may be that employment is the most important thing, but if they do not have the life skills necessary to sustain that job, they may not succeed.

They suggested that a young person has to be **engaged and looked at from a holistic perspective**. In addition, you have to find the strengths and places where they can succeed. This is important for two reasons. The first being the long term success of the young person and the second is the long term engagement of the young person with the service provider. If a young person feels like s/he is failing and it is the only service available, they are not likely to stay engaged or reengage if they have become disengaged from the agency's services.

Space matters in terms of trust and the ability for young people to feel successful. The youth providers talked about the importance of trauma informed care and trauma informed spaces. They talked about what the space looks like from a young person's perspective.

Imagine that you are a young person that was not successful in high school. You walk into a space that is set up in rows like a classroom. It looks like school; a place where you have experienced failure. There may be people who are behind you. It becomes an environment that may not feel safe to you. The spaces need to be untraditionally planned and comfortable for the young people and the people who work with them. The providers also emphasized the need for trained staff in trauma informed care.

Young people **need a "hook;"** a reason to come to an agency other than services. When asked if employment was the right "hook," some of the providers reminded the group about brain development. A young person's brain is not fully developed until 24-26 years of age. Twenty year olds may not be "hooked" by employment alone.

All of the participants felt that employment was crucial to the success of any under resourced young person. They acknowledged that financial empowerment led to general feelings of empowerment and success in young people.

PARTNERS AND EMPLOYERS

Originally, Partners for Impact proposed having a stakeholder meeting in each county that engaged employers and partners. However, as the project unfolded, and based on discussions with partner agency staff, we adjusted this number of focus groups. In Wake we had a meeting with service delivery partners and a separate one for employers. Johnston County was going to try to host two meetings in different geographies, but they decided to combine everything into one meeting and had employers and partners discussing the future of the Next Gen Center. This section will be reported on based on the individual county results.

Wake County

In Wake County, the staff of Capital Area Workforce Development Board and the staff at EDSI agreed that it would be beneficial to hold two groups. They split the group into partners and had one meeting and then a second meeting with employers.

Partners

The first meeting we completed was with partners from across Wake County who provide youth services. Between 8-10 partner agencies were represented from across the County. All of them worked directly with young people ages 16-24.

One of the first things we did with this group was to verify the things we had heard from the initial staff conversations (see Partners for Impact Report dated August 16, 2018 and titled, "NextGen Redesign: Initial Assessment and Engagement Plan). We went over some of the findings with regard to space, relationship, and services. The participants added some key observations.

The group did not have many additions to the findings associated with **space**. They reiterated that it had to be **accessible**. They encouraged that whatever space we choose that it be **fun and engaging** and that it not be like a library. Finally they did wonder if programs and the spaces they provided had everything that was really needed by a young person. However, there were no clear answers to that question.

They all agreed that **relationships were key**, especially to the retention of young people in programs. The group of partners felt like it was vital to let the **client lead** with what they needed and to really **listen to them**, get to know them, and understand their backgrounds. Some suggested that one hour a week (the time they spent with a young person) was simply not enough to build a relationship. Almost all of them agreed that it was vital for the young person to have **multiple relationships** with the staff of an agency/program because of changes in staffing. They also acknowledged that sometimes when documentation is poor, a new person must start over with getting to know the young person and this does not help a young person feel supported.

The group talked about issues of **cultural competence** in various ways. They talked about the importance of understanding **race, class, gender and sexual orientation**. They also acknowledged that young people want "**people who look like me.**" **Peer leadership** is important in demonstrating that young people are valued in an agency and their opinions are welcomed. The participants also acknowledged that they had to engage in conversations with young people about **equality and equity**, especially when young people felt like people were getting different treatment from program staff.

As the partners talked about **services**, they added specifics to some of the original challenges observed in the initial assessment and engagement plan. They identified some concrete service barriers like access to **mental health and addiction treatment** services, including dealing with the direct and indirect consequences of drugs. They talked about **language barriers** with some young people. Collecting and getting appropriate **identification** for the young people proved to be challenging depending on the program requirements. A large number of them talked about the importance of **trauma informed care** and the ways in which that can help with some of the

challenges experienced by these young people. They also suggested that **employers be engaged and trained** on the principles of trauma informed care.

One of the largest issues discussed was the varying **program requirements and associated funding** streams. They all acknowledged that many young people **did not fit the exact criteria** for certain programs that would make them eligible for assistance. Participants did not always know all the program options, let alone their various requirements. Some specifically mentioned the **inability for young people to access education services** within a year of dropping out of school. They also said the **inflexibility within the justice system** was noticeable. Interestingly enough, they acknowledged and appreciated the fact that the NextGen Center worked with young people with a criminal background.

The partners also discussed the importance of **finding and bridging services between the crisis and long term services/interventions**. They acknowledged that they could meet some of the needs of the young people in crisis. However, engaging in longer term support services was compromised by the young person's lack of skills in functioning outside of a crisis. As providers they found this place very frustrating because they would think they were making progress only for a young person to fall back into a crisis; simply because they didn't have the ability to behave differently.

As part of the services conversation, we encouraged more discussion on the notion of **peer support**. All the participants agreed that having a group of young people **own the program** was a key to success. This included strategies like making sure that a young person is at the **front desk**, is greeting and supporting young people who come to the space. The Interfaith Food Shuttle's Culinary Training Program created very **specific roles for young people to provide leadership** so that staff could help them learn these leadership skills. Specifically, they had a young person lead the grocery store tour and the activity of buying a week's worth of food with \$20. Some organizations have had young people **help interview for staff positions**. Regardless of the activity, all the participants agreed that **providing incentives, including financial incentives**, improves the engagement of these young people.

Haven House has had a **youth advisory board** for several years and it has changed over time. However the lessons the staff shared were important to capture. They understood the importance of making sure the **composition of the youth board** is consistent with the young people who are receiving services; having NCSU students may not work. Letting youth help in **planning activities, recruiting for activities and leading program activities** increases engagement and leaderships skills. Encouraging them to **volunteer** and helping them get to and from those opportunities encourages civic engagement. Finally, letting young people **suggest program improvements** and listening to them demonstrated that their opinion matters and improves the quality of the program.

The partners imagined a space where services were co-located and talked about the benefits and challenges. Some of the benefits were very obvious and included:

- Eliminating transportation barriers
- Keeping youth engaged as they moved between programs so that they were not lost between services
- Improving staffing efficiencies by making referrals and follow up much easier, and improving accessibility with scheduling of services in a place where young people are comfortable
- Keeping clients at the center of the various services
- Providing a consistent space for young people to go
- Improving preventive services because you could refer quickly

The participants were also quick to point out some of the challenges of co-locating services. These included:

- Cost, whether it be rent or capital construction
- Navigating the mindset of different program philosophies can be a tricky part of collaboration, especially when some agencies focus on high barrier young people, while others focus on young people with fewer barriers
- Confidentiality between programs, especially HIPAA and FERPA guidelines
- Young people still may need to be met in another place
- Program requirements and paperwork are not necessarily streamlined and may impact efficiency, especially from the young person’s perspective
- Deciding what services really need to be colocated

As the group began to wrap up, they seemed excited about this conversation. As is always the case, some walked away with new resources for the young people they served. They also believed that this type of collective thinking is important for the young people in Wake County. While they acknowledged the climate where programs were getting cut, they believed this conversation to be a step in countering their impact of those cuts. At the same time, they were concerned that many of them were not leaders or decision makers within their organizations and that they couldn’t change the system from their position within the organization. They also reiterated that because young people need meaningful work that it was vital to engage employers in these discussions within the community.

Employers

EDSI hosted a group of its employers who work with under resourced young people. There were five employers present, representing four different agencies. As part of the discussion, we asked them to estimate the **percentage of young people 16-24 years of age who are employed** by these employers. One of them said 10%, another 25%, a third 20-25% and the last one was less than 5%.

We asked these employers what **changes they have seen with regard to this population** over the last 3-5 years with regard to employing them. They all agreed to the fact that young people are **not staying with them** for long periods of time and that they seem less interested in training and development. Instead, especially if they needed an income, they were more interested in the “next thing” that paid more. They discussed how they experienced **some of these young people as not being connected to community or supports**. They also agreed that many of them approached them with a sense of **entitlement** that not only should they be hired for the job, but that they should be promoted immediately.

The employers were then asked to think about young people that succeeded and young people that did not succeed and they came up with this chart.

Successful	Not so successful
One had a goal of a career in nursing and while her schedule was challenging, we worked with	23/24 yo with a family, trying to support others and needed the income. They were more prone to look somewhere else, even for 50 cents more

<p>her. She is consistent. She communicated. Her employment was not about the pay</p> <p>We had one that anticipated needs, sought learning, actively supported coworkers, she was not easily offended, networked within the department, and eventually got a full time job without a degree or experience (just through her behavior on the internship).</p>	<p>an hour. They are really dependent on the income and they come and go</p> <p>Another in her early 20's, she didn't seem to comprehend the importance of her role. Her life had no structure and it seemed out of balance and there were times when that was brought to work. She was grasping for stability.</p> <p>Other problems identified by this group of employers included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When there seems to be no accountability for actions ● When work styles can't be figured out in order to support them ● Inability to adapt ● Basic communication skills - you have to tell someone you are sick, and maybe even more than one someone.
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Based on this we asked the employers **what they look for when hiring** this group of young people. They all look for some **experience**, but one said that they actually do not worry about that too much because they can train them and integrate them into the culture. They look at **attitude**, specifically the desire to work without a sense of entitlement. They try to **discern if this is a job or a potential career** path for the young person. One of the employers said, he did not really mind the answer as long as he felt that they were being honest with him. They looked for the **capacity to learn**. They sought out **self-starters** because they did not always have the time to “hand-hold” and the prospective employee needed to be confident enough to ask questions about the work.

We also asked the participants to think about **what is needed by the unsuccessful employee to be successful**. **Training** was a broad category and when they began to discuss this they talked about **skills** for the job, and they talked about attitudes and values such as **integrity, discipline and respecting coworkers**. They all agreed that building relationships with co-workers was crucial to the success at any of their workforces and they all believed that it was a skill that could be learned. They even suggested that **office etiquette**, including appropriate dress, is something that training could improve.

They discussed the instability challenges and believed that **case management** to help these young people meet their basic needs was a key component for certain young people. Making these services available through programs, including emergency financial assistance was something the group supported. They all discussed **mentoring**, especially peer mentoring for this age group seemed to be an element that could improve the success of young people with regard to employment. Finally, **being clean and sober**, especially with regard to marijuana was critical, particularly to those who were working with equipment and people.

These employers recognized that EDSI did some of these activities. They actually wondered if they could get some of the assessments that EDSI completed on the youth. They also said that if they knew that young people had this support that they were willing to take risks in hiring young people, if they came with some of the important attitudes and values that were discussed above.

As the conversation wound down, the group agreed that they would be interested in talking directly with the young people about opportunities. They also agreed that they would be willing to be involved with helping train young people on some of the skills and values needed in the workplace.

Johnston County

Johnston County leadership decided to have a meeting that combined employers and partners. We divided the larger group into four groups. If there were two agency representatives we split them between groups and we split the employers so that they were in each of the groups. The first activity was to identify the assets available in Johnston County for under resourced young people. Then they added the challenges that these assets were designed to address. The four groups reported out to the large group and as they reported out all participants were instructed to begin thinking about the common threads they would hear.

Transportation was identified in all the groups among all the participants across the county. As the discussion about transportation continued, the group brainstormed three key strategies that should be considered. First is **advocacy** with Johnston County government officials, other partners and key stakeholders about the need for transportation. They talked about the need to begin thinking outside the box and thinking about **innovative/entrepreneurial solutions** that have never been considered. Finally, they played with the notion of “flipping” the solution. In other words, instead of having young people come to them are there ways to **increase Wi-Fi and access to computers** for these young people in a way that allows them to interact with service providers in a different way.

As transportation was discussed it was agreed that this was a large systemic challenge for all people in Johnston County. In part, because **Johnston County was growing faster than its capacity** to support that growth. There were no solutions identified, but it was important to identify that there were other potential allies who could help advocate for transportation across the county because of the systemic nature of the problem.

All the groups talked about the **need for a support system**. This included helping young people find family that they can use for support. However, they acknowledged that family may not be the appropriate support and that it was crucial for the young person to identify those adults including providers and employers who they consider supportive. In addition, that team of supporters really needed to communicate with the young person and each other.

All the groups agreed that **mental health** and **affordable housing** were two critical needs that needed to be met. **Child care** and the long waiting list for subsidies was a barrier that these young people needed to overcome. Finally, they talked about the need of **basic financial management** skills in order to meet their basic needs and balance the cost of those needs.

Employers' perspectives

At some point, **the employers** were asked to really speak from their perspective about what they believed were important elements to the success of these young people. They talked about the importance of encouraging those young people to **stay in school**, especially if they are not going to college. They argued that it was important to share with students the options that were available to high school graduates. While most of them wanted to see some **experience** from the young people, one employer was quick to say, “We’re different, we prefer them to not have skills or what turns out to be other bad habits, we like to train them from the beginning about what we do.”

Employers felt like **communication was a key skill** and that communication with providers was helpful so that they might also know and understand some of the resources that were available to the young people. They also said conversations with providers about what the program covers and what it doesn’t cover is key. For example, can a program provide the insurance for an internship? Does the program support the completion of certificates that could actually help the young person be an employee, even if the young person started work without that certificate? The employers want to help these young people, and they need to know that they can actually afford to help them, especially with the assistance of other programs.

As the conversation with employers continued, they discussed the fact that the most successful young people had a **good work ethic and attitude**. They all agreed that these two elements were important. However, they went on to say that those with **family support and/or other reliable supports** were more successful.

Some next steps

As the conversation shifted towards ending and thinking about next steps, the participants talked about the importance of engaging young people and businesses in the process of letting each of these groups know about the other. Information about the possible employment opportunities and career paths should be shared with young people. The potential workforce needs to be shared with diverse employers. The group talked about planning being underway for JoCo Works in October of 2019, and that there was a “manufacturing week” scheduled for October 1-5 of this year.

While providers agreed with this, they shared their concerns about capacity. They realized the importance of being able to meet the demands of both young people and employers. They also recognized that based on the current funding streams, there may be limitations to the services. They all agreed that there needs to be some unrestricted, flexible funding to fill in crucial gaps. As they talked about this, they talked about the need to have a matrix of revenue sources that are available to young people based on the different agencies that may be involved with the young person.

NEXT STEPS

As with projects of this nature, original plans and proposals may need to be adjusted. These adjustments are based on information and the discovery of a community’s strengths and challenges. It is also imperative to determine the capacity for a community to take on the next steps. Based on the work completed to date for this project, including the staff conversations, the review of other models, and the conversations with stakeholders. Partners for Impact has identified some immediate

next steps and some longer term planning. These recommendations are largely based on substantive differences between Wake and Johnston County that were observed in the stakeholder meetings.

Johnston County

Johnston County has some interesting strengths and challenges that make it different from Wake County. These observations include:

- Strong communication between partners around under resourced youth.
- There is a strong network of support services that are aligned and available to young people who are currently part of the NextGen Center.
- The current NextGen Center has an open space plan and with capital support and it could easily be adapted to create a multi-service center.
- Some of the largest challenges faced by young people are associated with more systemic county-wide challenges that include a growing population with inadequate capacity to keep up with the service demands, limited human services resources, limited affordable housing options, and transportation within the county.
- They have a manageable size, in terms of numbers, of youth who should be able to engage with the Next Gen Center and improve their overall success.

Johnston County identified some concrete next steps and is convening a small group of organizational representatives to **begin building a systems map** of how youth move through the system for services, including employment related services. They have a wide variety of organizations that are serving as portals of entry and many of them have unique funding streams. As part of the **development planning process**, Partners for Impact is going to help them think about these revenue streams and the role that the Capital Area Workforce Development Board might be able to play in this process.

The partners at the table are also working closely with a wide variety of under resourced youth and are in a strong position to build a community theory of change that includes a combination of employment, education, health, housing, and life skills services that lead to a self-sufficient young adult. We would suggest working with these partners to **develop that theory of change** and build a **county-wide strategic plan** with **targeted employment goals** for Johnston County.

Convene a group of young people, employers and partners at JCI over the next month to begin **visioning the space**. This would be a great opportunity to continue the engagement of both employers and young people in designing the Next Gen Center. We also believe that this could be a step in beginning to identify and build a youth advisory council for the project.

Wake County

Wake County also has some unique and strengths and challenges

- A large and diverse population of under resourced young people who can benefit from Next Gen Career Center services.
- A need to redefine the space for the Wake County NextGen Career Center
- A large group of providers who are generally focused on their individual program success, unique target populations, and differing program philosophies.
- A small pool of engaged employers relative to the need for youth jobs and businesses that are present in the county

- A basic plan with goals for opportunity youth found in Youth Thrive’s Wake County Strategic Planning Blueprint but no leadership and participation in activities that could redefine and implement strategies to reach these County approved goals.

Based on the previous planning documents and these conversations there are two important steps for Wake County to consider. There is an immediate short term step and a long-term consideration. Immediately in Wake County, Partners for Impact would work with EDSI and Capital Area Workforce Development staff to come up with **a space design and key next steps**. As part of this discussion, thought needs to be put into the program values that are driving the space plan, including values and related strategies that improve relationships between staff and young people, support improved peer support and communication, and the role of trauma informed care within the organization and it’s space.

Partners for Impact would also encourage the Capital Area Workforce Development Board to consider a **longer term plan with regard to Wake County opportunity youth**. Wake County’s number of opportunity youth requires a more systemic solution than a space redesign for the NextGen Center. It requires leadership and support in refining already existing county goals for these young people. Our suggestion is to:

1. Explore the role workforce development boards/youth employment agencies have played in the Aspen Institute’s Opportunity Youth Forum. These boards have provided leadership and backbone support for a comprehensive approach to working with opportunity youth in at least two communities.
2. Work with the organizational leadership and staff of partner agencies providing youth services in the County to refine the goals for opportunity youth as outlined in Youth Thrive’s Wake County Strategic Planning Blueprint. A plan that builds a common agenda, thinks about how the system can improve efficiencies for 16-24 year olds, creates concrete objectives for the engagement of opportunity youth, and creatively thinks about how space may support a county-wide effort for these under resourced young people is needed.
3. Convene a series of meetings with partners, employers and young people¹ in order to educate each of these groups about the other groups, build specific strategies to engage more youth in employment related services, and increase the long-term success of young people as they build career paths.

Partners for Impact acknowledges that this may be a step outside of the original role the Capital Area Workforce Development Board plays with regard to opportunity youth. However, Wake County needs an organization to provide leadership in a way that engages multiple sectors, especially the private sector that can potentially employ young people. The Capital Area Workforce Development Board is the only organization really poised to do that within Wake County. Partners for Impact is willing to help support the Capital Area Workforce Development Board with this long term plan.

¹ We have changed our recommendation as to the timing of this convening and conversation. Providers need to improve their alignment with regard to the goals of opportunity youth, there needs to be a larger number of employers who are able to engage than has currently been demonstrated, and we need to identify youth leadership who can help lead and guide the session, particularly as it relates to employment.